

Module code: ECAD6007

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.

Student number: 2206875

PGCE Secondary Art
University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Word Count: 4065

Contents

Introduction	2
The Role of Critical Reflection.....	2
OBSERVATION School & Class context.....	4
Critical Incident Linked to Donaldson's Four Purposes.....	4
Literature Review	5
Reflection / Evaluation & Next Steps.....	9
Conclusion	10
Reference List.....	12

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to form a critical evaluation based on an observed critical incident to identify steps that will contribute to my learning towards becoming a teacher committed to the progress of learners' holistic development. The term 'critical incident' is used and understood in the manner defined by David Tripp:

...a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event. To take something as a critical incident is a value judgement we make, and the basis of that judgement is the significance we attach to the meaning of the incident.

(Tripp, 2011, p. 8)

Tripp expresses the importance of identifying critical incidents as they can be used to “develop an increasing understanding of and control over professional judgement” (Tripp, 2011, p. 24). However, Tripp does not clearly define professional judgement, and admits that “there is no developing literature on the nature of professional judgement in teaching” (Tripp, 2011, p. x). This puts one in an interpretive position concerning the terminology. Nevertheless, one gathers from Tripp's implication that professional judgement is regarded to be based on informed opinions - informed by practising teaching, observing teaching and critically reflecting, which, from his purview, cultivate the capacity for “expert guesses” (Tripp, 2011, p. I, p. 125).

From this conception, simply relying on my own pre-conceived ideas would be the result of what Tripp calls a “limited” reflection (Tripp, 2011, p. 12). According to Tripp (2011), to reflect critically, we must challenge our pre-conceived ideas instead of reinforcing them. Therefore, this essay will analyse the incident with the aid of educational-based theories that have attempted to expand on related topics. The hope is that this will act as sufficient source material to challenge my perceptions and inform my approach to teaching, hypothetically guiding the identification of learning steps towards enhancing professional judgement. This follows Tripp's suggestion that “professional judgement is based upon a scholarly analysis of our ideas and of the meaning of the incidents rather than on our experience of the incidents themselves” (Tripp, 2011, p. 28).

The Role of Critical Reflection

The perception of a teacher's duties is continuously changing and as outlined by the OECD – teachers are now expected to “have much broader roles” - accountable for their individual students learning, well-being and upholding the values of the school as a whole (OECD, 2005, p. 3). Teachers also need to be aware of how to create an inclusive environment where each student feels valued within this community. To meet such standards, as Zwozdiak-Myres conveys, many scholars have stressed that teachers must be researchers, theorists and practitioners (2012, p. 4).

These attitudes are also reflected in the development of the new curriculum for Wales. In *Successful Futures*, Donaldson has highlighted that in Wales, a large proportion of young people are underachieving in school, and in 2015 he stated that the curriculum must be “designed in ways that will engage the interest of all children and young people and enable them to achieve” (Donaldson, 2015 p. 9). Within this new framework, a teacher’s professional judgment could have a great impact on learners as teachers seem to have more agency over what they teach - schools now have to create their own curriculum with the aspiration of fulfilling defined goals, as stated in the new curriculum for Wales:

It is for schools and practitioners, drawing on guidance and resources, to decide what specific experiences, knowledge and skills will support their specific learners to realise the four purposes.

(Welsh Government, 2020)

The four purposes offer an interpretive framework for teachers to plan their lessons around - the fulfilment of which, hypothetically, will contribute to learners’ holistic development. Within-subject specialisms, the role of a teacher is to provide meaningful learning experiences, drawing from cross-disciplinary knowledge of other subjects (Education Wales, 2018). Furthermore, NQT teachers are assessed against descriptors within five main professional standards: Pedagogy, Leadership, Professional Learning, Innovation and Collaboration – teachers are expected to use these standards to help reflect on their practice (Education Wales, 2018).

Critically reflecting upon these standards seems important for developing professional judgment, as teachers not only have to reflect on what they are teaching but who, how and why in relation to individual students in order to provide them with an educational experience that promotes the values outlined by the curriculum. The challenge of transferring the curriculum’s values into teaching comes because both teachers and students are complex. Teaching methods that seem to work for some students or groups of students will not necessarily work for others, as Hattie explains:

...there is no fixed recipe for ensuring that teaching has the maximum possible effect on student learning, and no set of principles that apply to all learning for all students.

(Hattie, 2012, p. 4)

This is perhaps why the new curriculum for Wales gives more control to schools and teachers in designing lessons which are best suited to their students. If Tripp’s (2011) conviction about the importance of critical reflection should be taken seriously in relation to these developments, it is because teaching is progressively being seen as a continuous evaluation of classroom dynamics, the complexity of students, and how they relate to the teacher’s professional judgement.

OBSERVATION School & Class context

References to the school, teacher, and student's identity will here be anonymised in line with BERA (2018) guidelines. When referring to the school context, any characteristics that might make it easy to identify the school will not be highlighted.

The observed critical incident appeared about halfway through a year 9 Spanish lesson which started around 11.00 a.m.:

- Student A – a vocal student who had shown participatory enthusiasm from the start of the lesson by raising their hand a number of times had once again, raised their hand.
- The teacher acknowledges Student A, and they ask the teacher a question about the task presented and explained by the teacher.
- The teacher asks the student 'What is the answer to your question?'
- Student A answers and is correct – the student understands without the teacher telling them.
- The teacher positively reinforces this behaviour (bodily gestures) and addresses the class, 'Why do you keep asking me questions – solve it for yourself' (with a humorous/slightly frustrated tone, as if it is something the teacher has told them before).

This critical incident took place in what Estyn (2018) regards as a mixed-gender secondary school with a good reputation. It also reports that a sense of personal responsibility and high expectations play a significant part in the school's ethos (Estyn, 2018). Estyn (2018) reports that most students in this school are confident to participate in class, often to a high standard.

Critical Incident Linked to Donaldson's Four Purposes

In relation to Donaldson's (2015) four principles, there is significant appropriateness linking this incident to the fostering of "ambitious capable learners" who:

- set themselves high standards and seek and enjoy challenge
- are questioning and enjoy solving problems

and "healthy, confident individuals" who:

- have the confidence to participate in performance
- face and overcome challenge
- have the skills and knowledge to manage everyday life as independently as they can

(Donaldson, 2015, p. 30)

By stressing that students solve things for themselves, the teacher explained to me that they try to prevent unnecessary teacher-student engagement (especially when the teacher perhaps had an inclination that the student already knows the answer). The teacher further explained that they regarded preparing students for life outside school as a significant part of their role. Teachers will not always be around to answer student questions, and when they leave school, they will need the skills in order to think independently – this provides opportunities for students to “face and overcome challenge” (Donaldson, 2015, p. 30).

Many events that took place in this class seemed interrelated to the incident and these purposes. For example, Student B raised their hand and said they finished the task but was ‘not 100% sure’ if they were correct. The teacher answered by asking ‘Do you think I am ever 100% sure that what I think is correct?’ Student B reassuringly said ‘no’. The teacher was trying to express that it is OK not to be 100% sure when participating. Also, while the teacher monitored students, I often heard the teacher say ‘trust yourself’ – implying that the learners were expressing a lack of confidence or were trying to rely on the teacher too much.

The teacher also explained that sometimes students are more comfortable approaching peers for advice than the teacher. To accommodate this, particularly strong students in the subject are nominated to be ‘lead learners’. These students were responsible for attending to their peers’ enquiries in lieu of the teacher. The teacher’s encouragement and attitude towards class dynamics link strongly to fostering students’ “confidence to participate in performance” and the fostering of responsibility towards learning, both for themselves and for their peers, potentially equips them to “have the skills and knowledge to manage everyday life as independently as they can” (Donaldson, 2015, p. 30).

Overall, the critical incident and interrelated class events seem to be an attempt to foster students who “are ready to learn throughout their lives” and “are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society” (Donaldson, 2015 p. 31).

Literature Review

In ‘Encouraging Children to Learn’ Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs aim to teach encouragement. Written in 1963, they state that:

The process of encouragement is complex. It is not enough that one wishes to encourage a child. Much needs to be known about the method and even more about the prerequisites to the achievement of encouragement.

(Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs, 2000, p. 4)

The basis of their research is formed from the assumption that humans are “basically active and relatively free in the determination of his behaviour” (Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs, 2000, p. 7). From this conception, our behaviour is not pre-determined by influences that are outside of our control – we are “both active and responsible” for our behaviour (Dinkmeyer and

Dreikurs, 2000, p. 7). This concept, one of free-will, is much-contested. Murphy and Brown highlight some of the contested opinions, such as neurobiological reductionism, which claims that behaviour is largely biologically determined, whereas, they concur with their philosophical approach, suggesting that:

...free will be understood as being the primary cause of one's own actions; this is a holistic capacity of mature, self-reflective human organisms acting within suitable social contexts.

(Murphy and Brown, 2007, p. 306)

This conception accords with Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs' views, which claim that individuals are responsible for their actions and that "the social context is essential...for the understanding of behaviour" (Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs, 2000, p. 7). Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs (2000) discuss how people gain a sense of responsibility when social interests are taken into account – potentially heightening a sense of moral, personal and group responsibility (pp. 8-9). Even though our actions and behaviour might in part be biologically determined, fully relying on this notion would undermine the developing role of teachers, the four purposes of the curriculum and perhaps teaching or the idea of progress through learning. In contrast, the work of Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs is overall based on the belief that students' behaviour towards learning is somewhat in their control and subject to change.

From this conception, encouragement is a method in order to "initiate learning or development" (Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs, 2000, p. 47). Encouragement is set in contrast to discouragement, which is conceptualised as "a basic factor in all deviations, deficiencies, and failures, with the exception of brain damage and mental deficiency" (Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs, 2000, p. 42). It is a loss of confidence that comes from discouragement, and the implications seem to be manifold. According to Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs (2000), discouraged individuals might have such a negative self-image that they find their identity by choosing to act in a defiant/negative manner in lieu of trying to accomplish something that might be difficult, academically, socially - or otherwise; they might even be totally discouraged that defiance itself might seem futile.

From Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs' purview, it is the teacher's role to correct the student's mistaken/negative self-image, so that they can develop "courage... responsibility... industry... social interest... and contributions to the group" (Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs, 2000, p. 50). The first step to this, they suggest, is for teachers to resist being discouraged themselves (Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs, 2000, p. 43).

Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs summarise their methods of encouragement as follows:

The person who encourages:

1. Places value on the child as he is.
2. Shows a faith in the child that enables the child to have faith in himself.

3. Has faith in the child's ability; wins the child's confidence while building self-respect.
4. Recognizes a job "well done". Gives recognition for effort.
5. Utilizes the group to facilitate and enhance the development of the child.
6. Integrates the group so that the child can be sure of his place in it.
7. Assists in the development of skills sequentially and psychologically paced to permit success.
8. Recognizes and focuses on strengths and assets.
9. Utilizes the interests of the child to energize instruction.

(Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs, 2000, p. 50)

The emphasis of these nine steps seems to come from the good-intentions of motivating students to learn which seems inextricably linked to students' self-conception, as has been proposed by the likes of Bjork, Dunlosky and Kornell (2013) – learning is a complex process that can be greatly affected by concepts of self, personal motivations and implicit biases about how we learn or our capabilities. They write that:

Becoming maximally effective as a learner requires interpreting errors and mistakes as an essential component of effective learning rather than as a reflection of one's inadequacies as a learner.

And that –

To be maximally effective also requires an appreciation of the incredible capacity humans have to learn and avoiding the mindset that one's learning abilities are fixed.

(Bjork, Dunlosky, Kornell, 2013, p. 438)

These statements seem to be in accord with Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs (2000) views that behaviour or attitudes towards learning can change and that individuals do not have fixed capacities. It seems that in order to foster effective learners, teachers should encourage their students in a manner that promotes a particular mindset – that despite errors, mistakes and perhaps, an individual's self-conception, all students are capable of being effective learners. Thus, Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs' proposed methods of encouragement, specifically showing "faith in the child that enables the child to have faith in himself" (Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs, 2000, p. 50), hypothetically seems pertinent in promoting positive self-conceptions that can potentially foster effective learning – but is this true? – and what exactly is effective learning?

Effective learning for Bjork et al. (2013) can be understood and achieved by means of the conceptual framework of what is termed Self-Regulated Learning (abbreviated as SRL). As explained by Vosniadou, at the core of SRL is the belief that:

...learning can be improved and that it is more effective when students can control their motivational states, employ appropriate cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and reflect upon their learning processes and outcomes.

(Vosniadou, 2020, p. 95)

There are many reasons for the promotion of SRL, which is based on the idea that effective learners are those who conduct learning with the knowledge of how learning is effectively conducted. As Bjork et al. (2013) convey, most students are not taught how to learn in a manner that aligns with research findings on metacognition. This results in many assumptions about how learning should be conducted with potentially ineffective consequences. In lieu of this, Bjork et al. promote the idea that learners need to be aware of their own biases that might lead to ineffective learning and that learners need to align their learning strategies with the “general principles and practices” that have been delineated from metacognitive research (Bjork et al., 2013, p. 419).

However, as Ommundsen et al. (2005) suggest, there are strong relationships between students’ self-concept and their capacity or willingness to adopt self-regulated learning strategies. Their study shows that students who think their ability is fixed tend to respond negatively to the belief that adopting self-regulated strategies would be useful for them, and in contrast, those who think their ability is not fixed i.e. - think that their ability can be enhanced through learning or adopting certain strategies, are more willing to adopt/believe in the effectiveness of self-regulated strategies - They conclude that:

In light of such a line of reasoning, it would be of practical importance to strengthen academic self-concept, and to generate an incremental rather than a fixed conception of ability among students.

(Ommundsen et al. 2005, p. 471)

This would support Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs claim that encouragement can foster students’ positive self-concept and thus, as teachers, we might want to consider their methods if we want to potentially affect students’ willingness to adopt metacognitively approved self-regulated strategies. The objective of encouragement here would be to avert students from what is known as ‘self-handicapping’ – however, the means of this is potentially complex.

Self-handicapping can come in various forms and can occur for a multitude of reasons, and it is not only students with negative self-concepts that employ them, as purported by Midgley et al. (1996):

Individuals high in self-esteem used handicapping strategies in order to enhance their image by appearing to succeed despite minimal preparation. Low self-esteem individuals used handicapping strategies in order to protect their image when they perceived there was a likelihood of poor performance.

(Midgley et al. 1996, p. 424)

Although the research findings of, Midgley et al. (1996) came from a rather narrow source, that of adolescents from a particular school in what was described as a working-class community, it seems important to try and notice or understand why students might be self-handicapping in order to encourage them effectively. One aspect which seems significant regarding students' manner of self-handicapping is students' beliefs about knowledge acquisition or relation to learning, something perhaps linked to their self-concept, which Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs (2000) would view as intricately linked to how the students are encouraged/discouraged.

Reflection / Evaluation & Next Steps

As identified, appropriate lines of enquiry from the critical incident involve methods for encouraging students to learn, specifically independently. For a deeper understanding, I have reviewed the literature on encouraging students, but I would also like to explore how students manage to effectively learn independently. If one is going to encourage students to solve things for themselves, it seems appropriate to know what strategies students can use in order to do this. One assumes that some sort of scaffolding needs to be in place before simply encouraging students to learn independently, and as identified, a key line of inquiry concerned with this has been termed Self-Regulated Learning (SRL). If I attempt to encourage students to learn independently, I think I need to explore this topic more (SRL) to promote effective self-learning. However, I also need to be mindful that there are many self-regulated learning strategies and conflicting opinions within the field, as discussed by Pintrich (2000). Moving forward I think I should concentrate on the particularities of self-learning as it relates to my subject specialism, as different subjects might employ different strategies for different learning outcomes.

Something that also needs to be taken into consideration are the relations between the outlined critical incident, the context of the school it took place, the literature reviewed and the Estyn (2018) report of the school, which highlighted the confidence and high achievements of its students. This might suggest that students in this school are generally committed to the idea that their abilities are not fixed and strive to learn and succeed academically. Perhaps the academic self-concept of these students is generally positive compared to some students from other schools where there might be more pupils that have negative self-concepts or presumptions about fixed academic self-concepts.

Why might this be, and what can the teacher do to ameliorate negative-self concepts? Encouragement, as outlined by Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs (2000) seems to be a start, but if students are also lacking encouragement in their home environment, this adds further complexities to the teacher's role. How does encouragement/discouragement in the home environment affect students' self-concept/academic self-concept, and when is it time for a teacher or a school to discuss how a child is encouraged/discouraged at home?

Research into this topic would have to be sought, and I will have to keep mindful that both learners with positive and negative academic self-concepts can self-handicap, but for different reasons, as suggested by Midgley et al. (1996). Therefore, another pertinent research question here might be: To what extent do the expectations of a school influence students' self-concept

and what are the consequences of this in relation to students' self-handicapping, motivation to learn independently and/or motivation to adopt effective SRL strategies?

I am curious whether students will be more likely to have positive academic self-concepts if they were not merely encouraged, but also provided with strategies that are metacognitively proven to enhance learning/achievement. Would providing evidence to students that their abilities are not fixed and that there are effective learning strategies they can adopt in order to learn effectively foster their confidence towards being ambitious learners? Perhaps it is the teacher's role to provide such evidence, or it should be a school/government concern to provide students with lessons on how to learn effectively, which might hypothetically motivate them to learn and adopt those strategies, potentially fostering students that have the "skills and knowledge to manage everyday life as independently as they can" (Donaldson, 2015, p. 30).

However, I imagine that motivational issues might occur if students do implement apparently effective strategies and still fail to achieve. Research findings for this would need to be consulted for a professional judgement to be formed. Adopting some of Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs suggestions here seems pertinent, and it seems wise that "one must sincerely believe in the child's abilities and willingness...without recognising the good in each child, one cannot hope to encourage him" (Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs, 2000, p. 4). An initial step I might adopt is the practical attempt of practising Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs methods for encouragement and reflecting upon the consequences. However, without any fundamental knowledge of effective self-learning strategies (especially for my subject specialism) I might simply be encouraging a student to self-study ineffectively if, for example, a student has an ineffective learning bias.

Conclusion

This reflective essay has enhanced my awareness of the complexities of encouraging students, especially if one is encouraging students to do things or learn things independently. The observed incident's importance was partly influenced by the fact that what I thought the teacher was doing was inherently something positive. I was emotionally taken by the teacher encouraging students to be more independent, as I believe this to be important. When recording the incident, I was unaware of whether any self-learning strategies had been taught to the students before being told to 'solve it for yourself'.

The research confirms that encouraging students is effective, especially in encouraging positive self-concepts. However, the complexities around encouraging students to do something specific, such as learning independently merits deeper considerations. Since students often have biases towards what is effective learning, they might employ methods that may be ineffective or detrimental to learning. It seems plausible that schools/teachers understand what independent learning strategies are effective (perhaps in relation to specific subjects) and what their learners think is effective in order to highlight learners' biases.

From this reflection, it seems pertinent that students need to be aware of their biases and their potentially self-handicapping strategies in relation to learning and be provided with dedicated lessons on effective learning strategies before merely being encouraged to learn

independently. However, as some students think their ability is fixed, or for those with negative self-concepts, encouragement could be employed in the manner suggested by Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs and reflection on the consequences of this over time might reveal the effectiveness of encouragement in order to motivate students to adopt effective strategies, or to help them find value in learning – or learning independently.

From the literature review, one must be mindful that it is not only students who are discouraged that self-handicap. This means that if methods of encouragement are employed, it might also be useful to recognise that positive academic self-concepts can also be detrimental to achievement/learning, especially if students are not working hard enough because of an over-confidence/innate ability bias. This merits further research into how teachers can better understand their students' self-concepts – something that might have consequences when considering methods of encouragement.

Reference List

- BERA. (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. 4th edition, London. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018> (Accessed: 14 October 2022)
- Bjork, Dunlosky and Kornell. (2013) ‘Self-Regulated Learning: Beliefs, Techniques, and Illusions’, *Annual review of psychology*, 64(1), pp. 417–444. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-113011-143823> (Accessed: 16 October 2022)
- Dinkmeyer, D.C. and Dreikurs, R. (2000) *Encouraging children to learn*. Philadelphia, PA: Brunner-Routledge
- Donaldson, Graham. (2015) *Successful Futures*. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/successful-futures.pdf> (Accessed: 6 October 2022)
- Education Wales. (2018) *An Introduction to the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership*. PDF leaflet Available at: hwb.gov.wales/professional-development/professional-standards (Accessed: 6 October 2022)
- Estyn. (2018) *Reference anonymised to hide the identity of the school in line with BERA guidelines*.
- Hattie, John. (2012) *Visible learning for teachers: maximizing impact on learning*, London: Routledge.
- Midgley, C., Arunkumar, R. and Urdan, T.C. (1996) ‘“If I Don’t Do Well Tomorrow, There’s a Reason”: Predictors of Adolescents’ Use of Academic Self-Handicapping Strategies’, *Journal of educational psychology*, 88(3), pp. 423–434. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.88.3.423> (Accessed: 3 November 2022)
- Murphy, N.C. and Brown, W.S. (2007) *Did my neurons make me do it? philosophical and neurobiological perspectives on moral responsibility and free will*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ommundsen, Y., Haugen, R. and Lund, T. (2005) ‘Academic Self-concept, Implicit Theories of Ability, and Self-regulation Strategies’, *Scandinavian journal of educational research*, 49(5), pp. 461–474. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313830500267838> (Accessed: 10 October 2022)
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2005) *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers: An Overview*, Paris: OECD. Available at: www.oecd.org (Accessed: 8 October 2022)

Pintrich, Paul R. (2000) 'Issues in Self-Regulation Theory and Research', *The Journal of mind and behavior*, 21(1/2), pp. 213–219.

Tripp, David. (2011) *Critical Incidents in Teaching (Classic Edition): Developing Professional Judgement*, Taylor & Francis Group.

Vosniadou, Stella. (2020) 'Bridging Secondary and Higher Education. The Importance of Self-regulated Learning', *European review (Chichester, England)*, 28(S1), pp. S94–S103. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798720000939> (Accessed: 16 October 2022)

Welsh Government. (2020) *Introduction to Curriculum for Wales Guidance*. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/introduction/#an-integrated-approach-to-learning-and-teaching> (Accessed: 6 October 2022)

Zwozdiak-Myers, Paula. (2012) *The teacher's reflective practice handbook: becoming an extended professional through capturing evidence-informed practice*. London: Routledge.