

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

This essay seeks to thoroughly examine a particular critical event concerning an individual student or set of students, review the details of the case study, and determine suitable future actions for instruction and education to build on the incident. Critical incidents and critical reflection are important concepts in the professional development and continuous learning of a teacher. A critical incident is an unplanned event that causes a practitioner or observer to pause and deeply examine their actions and responses (David Tripp, 1993). As per David Tripp, a critical incident can be described as an 'approach' that comes out when observing actions in a classroom whether it is in context to the teacher(s) or pupil(s) (David Tripp, 1993). Beautifully worded by Nin describing critical incident is "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are" (Anaïs Nin, Quotes Page, Seduction of the Minotaur, 1961). My understanding is that it necessarily does not need to be a positive or negative event, but something, that is 'critical' in the eyes of the observer. The rather important aspect is not just recognizing a critical incident but generating a Critical reflection from it which involves carefully analysing a critical incident to gain insight into one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Critical reflection is thinking deeply about experiences to find meaning. It helps us set goals, use past lessons, and see real impacts (Dewey, 1944; Schön, 1983; Rodgers, 2002). At the end of the day, it should lead to productive learning, in this case for an early career teacher.

Reflective practice is the ongoing process of continually examining one's actions, experiences, and beliefs to improve professional competence (Schön, 1983). Reflective practice involves learning through experience by looking back to gain new insights about oneself and one's professional practice to continually improve (Linda Finlay, 2008). The reflective process encourages teachers to think deeply about all aspects of a situation, including their perspectives and responses as well as the viewpoints of students. Structured reflection helps teachers make connections between theory and real-world practice to improve future performance (Godec et al, 2017).

Critical reflection and reflective practice are tied together as critical reflection is a tool to evaluate, inform, and enhance your practice as a knowledge provider. The discomfort of critical reflection is necessary for growth. Committing to the process leads to self-improvement despite the difficulties as it allows teachers to gain insight into their strengths and weaknesses. The reflective process is rewarding as it promotes thoughtful practice and increased competence. Reflective teachers demonstrate a commitment to continuous learning and development which is very necessary to achieve the 'four purposes' to be fulfilled as recommended by the curriculum of Wales. The critical incident I have identified is from observing an immersive room experience from a Maths class in a Welsh Medium School. The reflective process I shall be integrating into my critical reflection would be Kolb's model of reflective practice.

Critical Incident – Case Study

This analysis was conducted in alignment with the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). BERA promotes ethical, high-quality educational research that respects participants, builds knowledge, upholds democracy, and pursues

excellence. Participants should freely consent with full transparency into the reason and exercise of the research. Anonymity and privacy should be protected (BERA, 2018). The research methodology should demonstrate integrity in seeking validity while minimising bias or error. Studies should aim to benefit society and uphold democratic values (BERA, 2018). Quality standards for ethics, transparency, and reporting should be met (BERA, 2018). This critical incident analysis upholds BERA standards, as the school's video observation and background data were obtained ethically through the University. The anonymity of the students and teacher is maintained through the omission of identifiers. The analysis aims to provide constructive reflection to strengthen professional practice and quality of education.

The critical incident was extracted from an immersive 360-degree video observation of a classroom session at a Welsh Medium Comprehensive School in Llanhari. The University of Wales Trinity Saint David provided the 56-minute video to allow for a comprehensive observational experience from all angles. Due to a lack of recent reports, a pre-dated 2017 ESTYN report was referenced, which stated the school had a capacity of 631 pupils - 412 secondary students, sixty-three sixth formers, and 107 primary students. A potential minor limitation in the observation could stem from the predominant use of the Welsh language for instruction, as 90% of students are fluent Welsh speakers and 41% come from Welsh-speaking families. The linguistic context may create subtle restrictions in the observer's interpretation. Overall, the immersive video aims to enable a robust critical incident analysis despite the lack of an up-to-date report on the school site and student demographics.

Critical analysis of teaching incidents can serve as a meaningful learning experience for student teachers (Lee, 2005). Engaging in reflective examination of critical events promotes professional growth by connecting specific occurrences to broader principles and standards of quality instruction (Lee, 2005). The critical incident occurred in a Key Stage 3 mathematics class. The traditional classroom environment contained sixteen students and one math teacher. The instructional content focused on linear sequences, with the teacher presenting numerous example problems. As a prospective educator observing the video, several notable occurrences were evident throughout the class session, both positive and negative. According to Flanagan (1954), an incident is deemed critical if it significantly impacts the overarching goal of the activity, whether positively or negatively. The incident must be sufficiently substantial to warrant critical examination or analysis. This observed classroom incident met Flanagan's criteria for a critical incident meriting further reflection and critique.

The critical incident observed took place approximately 37 minutes into the lesson, upon reviewing students' work on the current math problem, the teacher noticed two male pupils in the front right row appearing confused. She approaches them. One student offered his mini whiteboard for her to clarify the solution. The teacher sat facing the students and utilized a whiteboard marker to walk through the problem step-by-step, referencing the projected example on the screen. After completing the explanation on the mini whiteboard, she continued engaging the two students in standing discussion and pointed back to her workings. The teacher proceeded to circulate the room, checking each row's mini-whiteboard work. She gave individual feedback to a female student in the back right row. Concurrently, the teacher provided whole-class commentary and guidance on the problem. Returning to the front left students, she began collaboratively working through the question on one female pupil's mini whiteboard, identifying or correcting an error. This complete practice continued for 3-4 minutes.

The teacher's actions in this incident connect to several of the key purposes within the Welsh curriculum. By noticing student confusion and promptly addressing it through individualized explanation, she supported learners in developing as "ambitious, capable" mathematical thinkers. The use of mini whiteboards enabled "creative contributors" as students actively worked through problems. Providing thoughtful feedback around the room contributed to "ethical, informed citizens" who feel valued. Scaffolding instruction to ensure comprehension meets the need for "healthy, confident" learners (Curriculum for Wales, 2022).

Better engagement with enthusiasm from a teacher is directly proportional to better outcomes from students. In a 2017 meta-analysis published in *School Psychology Review*, Roorda, Jak, Zee, Oort, and Koomen found that Students were more engaged in learning and achieved better academic results when their relationships with teachers were defined by caring rapport, support, and mutual respect (Roorda et al, 2017). In the "Successful Futures" education reform framework, Graham Donaldson advocated for personalized learning approaches that align with each student's skills, interests, and motivations to better engage them in learning based on their unique needs (Donaldson, G. 2015). He continues to mention the importance of teacher engagement and that students should be engaged as active learners through a curriculum that excites and stimulates them intellectually and academically. Donaldson highlighted that to achieve this, teachers must also demonstrate high levels of enthusiasm and engagement in their practice. (Donaldson, G. 2015).

Literature Review

The critical incident highlights several key instructional approaches utilized by the teacher, including engagement strategies, differentiated instruction, formative assessment and responsive teaching, and multimodal learning. This literature review will examine literature and research on these key observations to synthesize perspectives on effective teaching methodologies. Specifically, the review will analyse literature on the benefits and challenges of varied modalities for student-teacher comprehension. By evaluating scholarly perspectives on these critical incident observations, this review aims to inform a reflective analysis of successful pedagogical techniques evidenced in the vignette.

Student-teacher engagement describes the quality of the interactions and participation between teachers and students within the classroom setting. Student-teacher engagement entails the extent to which students feel encouraged to learn and believe their teachers are concerned with their well-being and academic achievement (Schussler, 2009). Educational researcher Rosenshine has highlighted the importance of student engagement as a key principle for effective instruction. In his 10 research-based principles of instruction, he advises structuring lessons in small steps with a high frequency of questions and guided practice (Rosenhine, 2012). He also emphasizes engaged supervision during seatwork, giving feedback, and asking students to explain their problem-solving processes to further enhance engagement (Rosenhine, 2012). The Curriculum for Wales positions learner engagement as essential, stating teachers should utilize positive relationships, enthusiasm, varied activities, and inclusive environments to motivate and involve all students as individuals in the learning process (Curriculum for Wales, 2021). The literature overwhelmingly indicates that positive teacher-student connections, student motivation,

and active learning are hallmarks of the critical instructional component of teacher-student engagement, which can be achieved through research-backed strategies including structuring lessons in small steps with frequent questioning, providing ample guided practice, engaged supervision during activities, eliciting student explanations, and utilizing varied and inclusive classroom environments (Schussler, 2009; Rosenshine, 2012; Curriculum for Wales, 2021). Challenging the concept, Hirsch (1996) argues against the predominant focus on teacher-student relationships and constructivist teaching methods, asserting these approaches often detract from building students' shared academic knowledge and rigor (Hirsch, 1996). He advocates instead for more teacher-centered pedagogy focused on standardized curriculum content and traditional academic excellence over individualized engagement strategies (Hirsch, 1996). While acknowledging the importance of positive teacher-student relationships, Kohn (1999) argues that engagement strategies like personalized instruction and frequent questioning do not necessarily equate to intellectual rigor and can undermine critical thinking (Kohn, 1999). He advocates for balancing meaningful rapport with high academic expectations, cautioning against positioning engagement as the primary educational goal (Kohn, 1999).

Implementation of differentiated instruction techniques such as tiered assignments, flexible pacing, varied assessments, and student content/activity choice have been shown to increase student engagement, motivation, and learning in college courses (Dosch & Zidon, 2014). Research indicates that differentiated instruction enabling faculty responsiveness to diverse learner needs through flexible, student-centered approaches can greatly improve undergraduate classroom outcomes (Dosch & Zidon, 2014). Researchers have provided compelling rationales for implementing differentiated instruction techniques tailored to diverse college learners, such as differentiating content, process, products, and learning environments based on student's differences (Pham, 2012). The scholarly consensus indicates that faculty should proactively modify their instruction and teaching strategies to align with learners' varying needs rather than expect students to adapt themselves to a one-size-fits-all pedagogical approach (Pham, 2012). The scholarly literature provides robust evidence that implementing differentiated instruction practices tailored to unique learner characteristics and needs, including varied assignments, individualized pacing, differentiated content, and processes, as well as student-centered pedagogies can empower college educators to boost engagement, motivation, and achievement across diverse classrooms (Dosch & Zidon, 2014; Pham, 2012). In a video commentary of Syed (2019), he mentions that intentionally diverse, randomly assembled student teams promote cognitive diversity, perspective-taking, interdependence, and collaboration skills better than ability grouping (Syed, 2019). While there is substantial support for differentiated instruction, some scholars like Subban (2006) argue that teacher training programs fail to adequately prepare educators to effectively implement differentiation in the classroom. Furthermore, Subban (2006) contends that additional research is still needed to establish definitive best practices for differentiated instruction to properly guide professional development and teacher education curricula (Subban, 2006).

Research demonstrates that formative assessment techniques such as clarifying learning intentions, engineering productive classroom discussions, and delivering forward-focused feedback can enhance student motivation and achievement (Cauley & McMillan, 2010). Scholarly work by Wiliam (2011) reviews core formative assessment techniques including clarifying learning intentions, engineering productive class discussions/activities, delivering

forward-focused feedback, and leveraging peer learning, providing compelling evidence that these practices can positively impact student motivation and achievement (William, 2011). The body of research demonstrates consensus that formative assessment techniques like clarifying learning goals, facilitating productive class discussions and peer learning, and providing forward-focused feedback serve to motivate students and boost academic achievement, as empirical work by both Cauley and McMillan (2010) and William (2011) illustrates. While formative assessment is widely considered best practice, Bennett (2011) contends the research supporting its instructional benefits is less definitive than often claimed, given limitations in study design and variations in conceptualization, arguing claims are likely overstated pending more rigorous empirical research (Bennett, 2011). William (2006) highlighted that mini whiteboards provide an interactive multimodal assessment technique through simultaneous visual responding that increases student participation, gives the teacher immediate feedback on understanding, enables peer/self-review, and adds an active element to instruction (William, 2006).

As per the critical incident, literature inclines towards two learning theories majorly being social constructivism and scaffolding. The literature describes social constructivist teaching as the facilitation of active, collaborative learning, with scaffolding techniques like individualized support and gradual removal of aids as student abilities develop serving as signature practices to propel constructivist classroom learners to higher levels of understanding (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Scholars like Adams (2006) make a compelling case for social constructivist teaching approaches, arguing these student-centered methods are inherently active, collaborative, intrinsically motivating, and well-aligned with natural learning processes while fostering the critical thinking and problem-solving skills students urgently need to develop (Adam, 2006). As the literature describes, scaffolding techniques operationalize Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) concept in practice, whereby socially supported, customized guidance empowers learners to reach beyond current skill levels (Vygotsky, 1978). Some critics, like Olfos and Zulantay (2007), contend constructivist assessments can lack reliability and validity, advocate balancing constructivism with more instructive approaches, and argue constructivism insufficiently addresses how power dynamics shape classroom discourse. While scaffolding can provide useful guidance, some scholars like Stone (1998) argue key challenges remain regarding vague conceptualization, limited empirical research on diverse learners, over-scripted curricula hindering creativity, properly timed removal of supports, and potentially ineffective fading techniques for students with certain disabilities (Stone, 1998). Supporting positive relationships with students creates an environment to learn more effectively. Dweck's influential work on 'growth mindset theory', Dweck argues that praising students' efforts and process of learning leads to greater motivation and achievement than praising innate intelligence alone. She advocates fostering a "growth mindset" environment that conveys intelligence can be developed through hard work. Feedback should convey that abilities can be cultivated through practice and teaching strategies should embrace challenges, effort, and resilience (Dweck, 2006).

Insight on the learning and teaching Methods

The teaching methodology, including aspects such as engaging with students, differentiating the delivery of information and knowledge using different teaching mediums, and

scaffolding knowledge through formative assessment in the critical incident are areas I will investigate in depth. These are methodologies that have proven successful for many years. As demonstrated in a study by Goodwin, Roegman, and Reagan (2016), interviews with new teachers showed observing experienced teachers provided exposure to effective strategies and served as a starting point for developing their style (Goodwin et al, 2016). The findings show new teachers benefit from witnessing veteran teachers' practices and gaining ideas for techniques to incorporate into their approach.

In the critical incident, the teacher pulling up a chair opposite two students exemplifies differentiation attuned to their needs. As explained by Dosch and Zidon, this increased the student's 'motivation'. As the video shows, they continued discussing the math problem with the teacher. Though limited by the video's language, even if the students required additional support, differentiated teaching should be based on individual differences, not a one-size-fits-all approach, as Pham (2012) notes. Other students did not need the same attention. Tomlinson (2014) states teachers should flexibly assess needs, differentiating via multiple modalities and scaffolds to optimize learning. As observed, the teacher used varied teaching methods, keeping students engaged (Tomlinson, 2014).

Many of Rosenshine's 17 principles were evident in the critical incident, including limiting material presented, asking questions to check understanding while circulating, and guiding practice while providing feedback. This was seen with selected students. As Baumert et al. (2010) found, teachers' knowledge and effective methods positively predict math learning gains. The teacher's step-by-step explanation on the mini whiteboard aligns with the Great Teaching Toolkit's emphasis on providing clear, structured explanations when introducing new ideas (Dimension 4, Element 2, Coe et al, 2020). Her checking of student work and individual feedback connects to the Toolkit's discussion of the value of teacher-student interactions and feedback (Dimension 4, Element 4, Coe et al, 2020). The teacher's scaffolding of the math problem and targeted support for struggling learners reflect the Toolkit's identification of matching task difficulty to students' needs (Dimension 4, Element 1, Coe et al, 2020). Her circulation and whole-class guidance, as students worked, relate to the Toolkit's dimension of maximizing the opportunity to learn through awareness of the classroom environment (Dimension 3, Coe et al, 2020). The collaborative interaction with a female student to identify and correct an error aligns with the Toolkit's reference to using dialogue for eliciting student thinking (Dimension 4, Element 3, Coe et al, 2020). More broadly, the teacher's responsiveness to student needs and misunderstandings demonstrates the knowledge of content and student thinking emphasized by the Toolkit (Dimension 1, Coe et al, 2020).

While the teacher provided individual support to the confused few students, this practice stands in contrast to literature emphasizing the importance of teachers equitably attending to the requirements of all students, not just a subset (Tomlinson, 2014). Research indicates that the practicalities of typical class sizes would make it "impossible" for teachers to individually conference "with each student in a class of 25–30 students daily" (Conderman, Bresnahan & Hedin, 2012, p. 391). I would not agree with the criticism as recognizing and understanding the needs of an overall class is what should be required of a teacher. Contrasting to her later belief, Tomlinson (1999) explains, that differentiated instruction involves "varied approaches to content, process, and product" tailored to clusters of learners with differing needs, not individual lesson plans for every student; the teacher's focus is on responsive instruction for the class (Tomilson, 1999, p. 10).

The teacher's methods in the critical incident align with research-backed practices and create a positive learning experience, as the literature illustrates through her differentiated explanation to struggling students, individual feedback, collaborative error analysis, and whole-class guidance. These practices exemplify responsive teaching that benefits all learners. While some references critique the teacher for not reaching every student individually, there is also literature that counters that differentiated instruction involves varied approaches tailored to the class, not separate lesson plans for each student (Tomlinson, 1999). Furthermore, the teacher cultivates an encouraging environment where students feel comfortable taking risks and learning from mistakes. Her caring approach makes students feel valued and empowered to progress. As the text argues, such responsive teaching enables quality instruction where students can thrive in their development. Given the supportive research presented, I believe there is a strong rationale affirming this teacher's methodology based on its incorporation of proven practices and fostering of a productive learning environment for students.

Discussion – A reflective approach

Experiencing the classroom incident highlighted the value of Kolb's model of learning cycles in practice. The teacher skilfully guided the students through learning activities of direct experience, thoughtful reflection, theory development, and hands-on testing (Kolb, 1984). Seeing this firsthand demonstrated how cycling through stages of doing, reflecting, understanding, and applying enables deep learning. The teacher structured activities touching all of Kolb's bases - from hands-on math problems to collaborative discussion and explanation to practice applying new knowledge. Her guidance allowed for an incremental yet immersive process. Like the teacher, I aim to leverage Kolb's framework to actively progress students from confusion to comprehension. This requires multifaceted lessons, building from engaging activities like mini whiteboard work to reflective dialogue, conceptual development, and applied practice. The incident exemplified responsive facilitation aligned with experiential learning theory.

In my subject of science, Kolb's model provides a useful lens, as the curriculum lends itself to authentic, interactive learning. Beyond Kolb, I can employ pedagogies promoting problem-solving, critical analysis, and making real-world connections to develop ambitious, enterprising pupils. Assessment too can actively engage students when approached as a collaborative learning process with peer interaction and forward-focused feedback (Carless, 2015). Given science's conceptual nature, dual coding theory also stands out. Paivio demonstrates the power of tapping verbal and visual processing simultaneously through multimedia activities and concrete representations (Paivio, 1971). Like using mini whiteboards, as Wiliam notes, multimodal strategies boost participation and understanding. In my practice, I will remember the mind's dual coding systems and integrate multisensory learning.

The literature underscores the immense influence teachers have on students through their relationships and mindsets, which can profoundly shape learning outcomes. Yet as Rogers underscores, many teachers neglect the power of a "you can" enabling approach over more authoritarian attitudes (Rogers, 2011). Bronfenbrenner's ecological model further contextualizes a teacher's central role within a child's ecosystem, with school and instructor

relationships impacting their innermost micro and mesosystems of social development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Seeing the teacher's compassionate authority in action highlighted the value of non-authoritarian control in promoting growth mindsets, as Dweck advises. I aim to develop classroom leadership that similarly provides supportive structure through caring relationships, so students feel empowered to learn through setbacks without fear.

Overall, observing experienced teachers is invaluable as I build my skills, as Goodwin et al. found. I will focus on how veterans apply varied pedagogies and use this to evolve my teaching practice. With guidance from robust frameworks, yet adaptable delivery, I can create stimulating lessons that not only teach content provide students with the knowledge and attributes to succeed. Seeing this research firsthand through classroom observations, I realized just how much my skills in cultivating positive, growth-oriented bonds with students can impact their self-efficacy and academic success.

Conclusion

The teaching methods observed in the critical incident would have a high impact, as research affirms practices like differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and scaffolding aid motivation and learning. The teacher's facilitation of Kolb's experiential learning cycle demonstrated its power for incremental yet deep comprehension. This critical reflection has expanded my perspectives on theories underpinning effective instruction. Kolb, Paivio, and Vygotsky's models reveal the importance of tapping multiple learning processes through cycles of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and doing. Bronfenbrenner underscores how child development is profoundly shaped by surrounding ecosystems, including teachers.

In my practice, I aim to uphold professional standards by employing pedagogies that develop creative, ethical, and motivated learners, per the Welsh curriculum's four purposes. My goal is to create engaging, relevant lessons that apply knowledge to real-world contexts. I will focus on building supportive teacher-student relationships to instil growth mindsets. Differentiating instruction, scaffolding, giving forward-focused feedback, and providing multimodal activities will be key techniques. Multimedia resources and concrete representations can aid dual coding. Assessment will involve student input and peer collaboration for active engagement. I plan to continually observe veteran teachers employing flexible frameworks like Kolb's to evolve my skills. Their expertise will help me balance evidence-based methods with adaptable delivery to meet learners' needs. Overall, critical reflection has enriched my understanding of impactful, research-backed pedagogies aligned with learning theories and professional standards. I feel equipped to apply these insights to facilitate meaningful learning experiences as I progress in my teaching career.

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