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The Learner: Who am I teaching? The Role of Critical Reflection.

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The past academic term has taught me the importance of being a reflective practising teacher. To gain understanding through the study of teaching theories and pedagogy. Considering both positive and negative teaching experiences and how reflection of this improves teaching strategies and planning. Wales now have a national initiative that uses reflection at its core for improving the educational system in Wales. Their objectives state that schools and educational sectors should be open to using experience as a guide in improving practice, including the experience from different perspectives in how this can be developed. (Hwb, 2022). The new curriculum for Wales was created, not only for the benefit of pupil, but are also for the professional leaders and educators to grow and learn alongside them.

This Initiative also highlights the usefulness of 'shared practice' in teaching, but its successful implementation is dependent on honest reflection, trust and a willingness to unpick and re-evaluate a problem or situation. Critical reflection can greatly help an educator consider their student's outlook to gain realistic insight into their independent learning needs, and the sharing of experience with other educators cannot improve student attainment but can be of great benefit to a teacher's professional development. It is crucial to develop pedagogy through self-assessment and reflection and honest reflection requires a degree of objective self-criticism. If a lesson taught does not achieve the outcome you had in mind, either through circumstance or misjudgement, then it is vital to critically reflect on your performance and on any outside factors that may have stopped you achieving your planned outcome, as it is through critical reflection and constant revision that you can become a better teacher. This reflective practice is something that requires three different kinds of judgement; practical, reflective, and socially critical, but all judgements require a thorough understanding of what is going on using diagnoses and a working knowledge of educational theory. (Tripp, 2012) In this report I will be analysing an incident that I observed in the classroom during my bridging experience, to examine how the decisions we make in the classroom can be improved by a greater use of reflective practice and how pedagogy, educational psychology and theories around educational sociology should be what informs our critical reflection. Developing

pedagogy through self-assessment and reflection states that critical incidents and their analysis is crucial to the progression of education. (Tripp, 2012)

The critical incident examined is one that resulted in a pupil being unable to engage with their lesson, leading me to research various teaching theories to examine what went wrong and see if a better outcome could have been achieved. The importance in believing that any situation can be changed for the better is emphasised by (Bassot, B. 2022) In saying that we focus on the experiences we have which are the most problematic and that we can learn the most. We need to take a positive outlook when using reflective practise as a guide, even though the nature of mankind and organisations is in ways intractable. (Osterman and Kottkamp, 2004) While understanding the constraints and limits that surround each critical incident it is important to have an optimistic approach to change in our teaching methods and the school environment. We as educators will never know a student's full story, and that incidents are merely snippets of a much wider perspective.

Before starting my writing process, I studied the guidelines of (BERA, 2018) and therefore anonymised this piece of academic writing to adhere. This is to retain the dignity and respect of my placement school, staff and imperatively the students. It states under code 40 "Researchers should recognise the entitlement of both institutions and individual participants to privacy and should accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity."

This observation took place in a comprehensive, mixed-ability, English medium school in South Wales with roughly 1,300 pupils enrolled from ages 11-18. They have a sixth form and an additional learning needs facility and 25% of students eligible for free school meals.

How educational environments could be a topic for research was a useful topic for research before observation began. It was beneficial to planning a structure of what to observe in my time on placement and tips for what to look out for during this experience. (Walker & Adelman, 1990) The school in which I was placed was very diverse and had a huge range of cultures, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds. This was a wonderful environment in which to learn as the school took great effort in diversifying the content of the curriculum and creating an inclusive environment for all. There was also an emphasis within the school on staff and pupil's wellbeing. Throughout the corridors, there are mural-sized posters depicting the four purposes of the New Curriculum for Wales with accompanying imagery to help illustrate its main aims.

The school's policy states that they expect all pupils to come to school being ready, respectful and safe and this message is reiterated throughout most of the classes I observed. Student welfare is also of priority with multiple wellbeing related topics discussed in the pupils' personal developmental studies. It is also worth noting the exemplary use of incidental Welsh being applied through the school across all subjects and spaces, which I truly feel encourages pupils to be proud of their identities while at a crucial age for self-awareness and mental development.

This incident was observed in a year 8 English class. The ages of pupils in this class range from 12-13. I arrived before the class began and greeted the teacher who was a young female, I mention her gender as I feel it could be of relevance to my reflections. I sat at the seat against the left wall in the middle row as the teacher advised. The classroom was relatively small in comparison to other classes in the school but there were roughly fifteen pupils in this class with around a 50/50 male-to-female ratio. This lesson was in the second period of the day at around 10.10 am on a Monday morning. It was the fourth week into the first term. It is worth considering the way this timescale may have affected the pupils as environmental circumstances such as socialising with peers may be a factor in their behaviour. The pupils came into the class individually in a relaxed manner. The teacher stayed at her desk greeting her pupils with a smile and addressing them by their names. Most of the students addressed her by her title and asked her how she was. There seemed to be a very clear sense of mutual respect and fondness within this dynamic. The pupils did not all have a directed seating plan as the teacher told me she wanted to instil a sense of maturity and responsibility in the class. This right had been taken away from two male pupils who sat individually at separate desks in the middle of the room. The teacher also informed me that she used a "no hands up" policy which the school has asked to be enforced. The lesson began. The room did not have much information displayed on walls or boards but the topic heading for the lesson was written on the board in a bold font. The class asked the teacher about the topic which was 'Betrayal; creative writing' and listened intently when she began to discuss the topic further. The student that I will be discussing is included in this and was engaged with the rest of her class. The teacher was implementing a direct teaching approach by staying at the front of the class for the entirety of the lesson and there was a policy in the school put in place after the Covid-19 pandemic that doors or windows should be opened to ensure good airflow. The door of this class was left open.

The pupil I will be discussing (Pupil A), was calm and invested in what her teacher was saying. She was prepared with her books and stationery and was sitting at the back of the class on her own.

A fellow pupil from another class came to the door (Pupil B) asking the teacher if she could speak to her peer, Pupil A.

The teacher stayed at the front of the class and refused the request from Pupil B saying that whatever she needed Pupil A for could be sorted out after class. The teacher directed Pupil B to go back to her class. Pupil B got very upset and shouted at the class and teacher before slamming the door. The students in the class looked very shocked and Pupil A sat back in surprise with her mouth open.

The teacher said nothing to acknowledge the situation that had just occurred and carried on with the lesson. All the pupils in the class seemed to carry on with the lesson without issue except for Pupil A. During the rest of the lesson, Pupil A shouted out repeatedly wanting to refer to the interruption using the topic of betrayal to express her frustration. The teacher did not implement a cold calling approach as the main activity had moved on to a group creative writing task. For this, the teacher provided the first sentence of an introduction and allowed pupils in the class to add the next sentence by calling out their ideas. There was a little bit of shouting over each other, but the class stayed respectful and they were able to complete the activity to a high standard which the teacher praised them for. The teacher ignored all of the remarks made by Pupil A. Some of the comments made by Pupil A during this activity were as follows:

Example one

Teacher: "Can anybody give me a good example of a betrayal?"

Pupil (A): "Miss, Pupil B betrayed you earlier, didn't she?"

Example two

Teacher: "Can anybody give me a good example of a betrayal?"

Pupil A: "Miss, you betrayed me by not letting me go. (Out of the class)"

Example three

Boy in the class interrupts the teacher as she is talking.

Pupil A: "Miss why are you letting him disrespect you that way?"

The lesson then continued with some individual work and the pupils in the class were motivated and studious for the remainder of the lesson, except for Pupil A who was disengaged and unproductive. The teacher sat at her desk and worked on her computer while the other students were working quietly, she looked up from her screen to check on everyone and she stopped and looked at Pupil A who had her head on her folded arms. The teacher studied the situation and decided to continue working, five minutes or so later the teacher thanked her pupils for working so well and for having great ideas. She directed them to pack away their things and get ready for the bell. The bell rang and Pupil A ran out before she was dismissed, she was called back in by the teacher who then dismissed her pupils in rows and the

class was over. The teacher did not discuss the incident with the pupil at any point in her lesson.

In this incident, the pivotal moment was the interruption which deflected the focus of the entire class. This interruption was unfair to the pupils who were enjoying their lesson and who wanted to learn, and I think that the teacher's primary aim was to diminish the disruption by ignoring it, in the hope that the majority of the class could continue to learn. The interruption was a pivotal moment in this scenario but the critical incident was the active choice of the teacher in this situation choosing not to acknowledge the interruption with her class. As (Tripp, 2012) talks about the importance of "Non-events" and how they can be a beneficial strategy for the analysis of an incident. In looking at the negative space of an incident we can examine what did not happen but what could have.

There are always a variety of strategies for handling pupil behaviour and there is always school policy to follow, but in saying this I feel there were alternative teaching strategies that better allow for inclusivity and equity, giving every student the platform, they need to fulfil their learning potential. The Curriculum for Wales defines why we are teaching and educating young people and that we want them to aspire to be "Healthy, confident individuals. Ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society" (Donaldson, 2022). I would argue that Pupil A was not feeling confident or ready to learn. Her insecurity about the situation that had unfolded made her feel frustrated as she was not being listened to and therefore consequently, she felt unvalued and unsettled.

The aftermath of the interruption is where the critical incident lay, the teacher in choosing to ignore the incident and the questions of pupil A, was making a practical judgement call, within the restraints of the existing situation, she appeared to be asking "what can I do and how best can I do it?" instead of making a reflective judgement and asking herself "what should I do and why ought I to do it?" (Tripp, 2012). Immediately following the incident, had the teacher chosen to address the behaviour of pupil B, explaining to the class the importance of treating others respectfully and how we learn and allow our peers to learn through respect the incident may have had a different outcome and the critical incident could have been used as an opportunity to learn valuable lessons about respectful engagement and group learning. This would in part answer the question "How can disciplinary, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches support learners to develop different knowledge, skills and experiences?" a question posed by 'The new Curriculum for Wales'.

It could also be argued that creating a safe learning environment for pupil A could have been achieved by a simple gesture of acknowledgement. Getting up and going to the door during the interruption may have controlled the situation and stopped Pupil B's outburst, if the teacher had moved around the room during the lesson she could have better engaged with the feelings of her students and she could have found a way to reassure pupil A.

There is a great amount of importance to be highlighted in the teacher's positioning within the room, in that it allows a teacher to understand the smaller dynamics within it and gives the pupils a better sense of safety (Cowley, 2010). The purposefully relaxed and entrusting approach in the class may also have unconsciously created a space that did not feel controlled. The interruption may have occurred in some measure because the class may have looked vulnerable and uncontrolled to an outsider. When the interruption occurred, the teacher could have changed her position to address the interruption as Cowley talks about "creating a physical barrier" and protecting her class from the interruption. After the interruption had occurred by physically moving around the room the teacher could have created a sense of safety. (Taormina & Gao, 2013)

A person cannot succeed in retaining new knowledge or information until their emotional state can be regulated and their human needs are met. (Maslow, 2019)

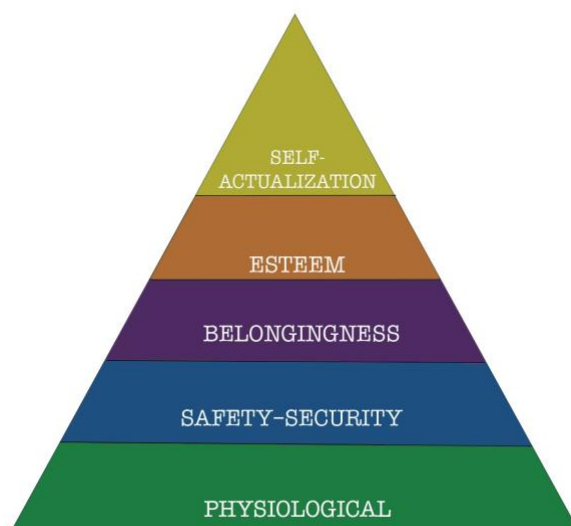


Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Taormina & Gao, 2013).

The safety and security of the learning environment are highly important when it comes to a pupil's ability to learn, as new knowledge is difficult to retain if you are feeling on edge or alarmed. (Fig 1) (Taormina & Gao, 2013). Pupil A and the other pupils in the class did not have this fundamental need met, there were no physical barriers to protect the class and even more importantly there was no sense of control from their leader and authority. This vulnerability caused Pupil A to lack confidence in their teacher, so they began to move up the hierarchy subconsciously by then turning to "Belongingness". Here pupil A attempted to participate in the group activity (while relating it to the interruption) but failed to align with her peers' responses and

attitudes. Pupil A aware of her misalignment with the rest of the class questions her position within the class dynamic. She would question why she did not belong, and whether this was a result of her own failure. This would diminish her self-esteem. The teacher as a role model and person of guidance had outcasted her thereby validating any self-esteem issues she felt. It was at this point Pupil A's head went down to the table and into her folded arms. This was the moment she disengaged with the lesson, seeing no point in trying as the activity was at this point irrelevant to her. Finally, at the pinnacle point of the hierarchy triangle, the pupil was not able to come to enlightenment or "Self-actualisation" therefore there was no urge or want to learn. The teacher during this critical incident was displaying a behaviourist approach that assumes emotional or sociological matters should not be relevant in learning of academic nature, hoping that (pupil A) would put the interruption out of their mind and focus on the task. (Winch, 2008) In not responding to Pupil A's line of questioning it may have instilled that her needs were not met and therefore unable to progress in her learning. In contrast, the other children in the class seemingly managed to learn efficiently and completed their work with interest and engagement. They might have gained a deeper ingrained knowledge and a more rounded schooling if the teacher had decided to take a moment to address the class and apologies for the interruption. Pupil A might have been able to move past the interruption if she had felt it was acknowledged and her emotional needs had been met.

Professors of neuroscience and cognitive science researching the brains of young female adolescents found that young women have not yet gained a full understanding of the new social responsibility handed to them, yet they are expected to control it (Brizio, 2015). The study talks about an adolescent girl as being cognitively overloaded with information particularly socially, as they are expected to handle themselves correctly and manage their time efficiently with very little time to grasp the concept. This is relevant to the experience of (pupil A) being unable to handle the emotional and social situation she found herself in.

(Collins & Drakeford, 2001) focus on children aged 4 – 9, which is younger than (Pupil A) but states that a teenage person should be treated at times as an adult but also respectfully as a child, by giving them the same patience in which we would treat a child with. This is a very clear instructional book, advising on how to teach children in a way that boosts their confidence. They talk about a constant acknowledgement of feelings about the situation. This is something that the teacher in my critical incident did not do but it is an approach that should be adopted and adapted in a way that would be beneficial to young adults in learning environments.

As I have shown the critical incident could have been prevented by using methods of progressive education such as advocated by (Schön, 2016) and (Dewey, 1938) in

their methods of holistic education which create relevance to a pupil's life and allow them to have a conducive opinion on how they want to learn. (Smuts, 1926) is a founder of the sociological approach to education and its holistic approach. This requires the educator to view each learner in their entirety and to put themselves metaphorically into the student's shoes. This theory in turn pathed the way for a new approach to education that includes an understanding of emotional literacy. "Every child is more than a future employee; every person's intelligence and abilities are far more complex than his or her scores" (Miller, 2000) This article explains how (Smuts, 1926) theory has evolved through time and led us to ground-breaking theories and findings. Including that of (Dewey, 1938) and the principles of Progressive Education (Koliba & Reed, 2003). (Onwurah, 2020) has made a full report on the lack of equity within the schooling systems in the United Kingdom and how this can be improved. It will only be possible for pupils to "self-actualise" (Maslow, 2019) and actively improve their education when their basic human needs are met.

(Holt, 1982) "*Why children fail?*" is of great value and insight into progressive teaching methods and child psychology, however, the language he uses is outdated and dehumanising. Holt's main objective is to be child-centric in his approach and nearly defames the objective of a school but, when talking in summary about a child's ability, I cannot help but feel uncomfortable with his method of comparing a "bright" child to a "dull" one. Though there may be truth in what he is saying, I feel this type of language and his recollections of personal experience are objectifying. He talks about children in a proximate way, separating children into categories or stereotypes. This is not a conducive attitude towards equity for all students and therefore in my view cannot be seen as holistic. In criticism of Holt's work Franzosa states that the foundation in which he has based many of his theories is ideologized and that there is little evidence of interaction with collective considerations on education and that his work disregards theory that learners' communities do not hold educational responsibility as not all communities can provide this independently. (Franzosa, 1984)

In the critical incident, I am examining, the constraints of time management and the overall needs of the school appear to have been given priority over the emotional needs of a single pupil. (Geijsel, 2009) talks about the relationship between a teacher and the organisation they work for and how this relationship can directly affect their teaching approach. A teacher is paid to complete a job each day, but what exactly that job is, is constantly changing to meet new demands from society. The Curriculum for Wales requires schools to find ways of answering these questions and find the time and structure needed to meet its four purposes. Meeting the pastoral

needs of each student demands time. Allocating time needed to meet the needs of the class holistically, either at the beginning, the middle or the end, could be an answer to the question of how we can prevent an incident of pupil disengagement and increase teacher fulfilment. As Geijsel states that when reviewing independently, educational facilities the needs of the teacher must be met in cohesion of the schools plans for development and aspirations to instil a sense of belonging and self-efficiency (Geijsel, 2009).

The Curriculum for Wales states that in deciding what, why, and how learners are to be taught, conversations need to be ongoing and include that of staff, pupils, and external sources. Giving teachers a chance to influence the design of the curriculum is an important recognition of the unique role teachers play in a pupil's educational development. The important role of the teacher in facilitating a pupils learning is a principle that Wadsworth highlights in Piaget's constructivist theory; stating that it is often misinterpreted in the thought it implies the teacher has no role when in fact he is showcasing that the teacher is the best judge of what a pupil is capable of or ready to learn (Wadsworth,1989).

The teacher as a facilitator of pupils' learning is a constructivists theory in opposition to the behaviourist view that classic conditioning. It aims to manipulate instinctual reactions in a way the educator wants, and behavioural conditioning aims to reward the person of (or eradicate) things the student cherishes according to the type of behaviour displayed. (Winch, 2008). This manipulation of learners is ethically unsound and a potentially emotionally damaging type of experimental approach, contrary to the legal regulations for Children's basic human rights. Under the Welsh Government and the United Nations. (Comisiynydd Plant Cymru, 2019) "Article 12 - Your right to say what you think should happen and be listened to."

The belief that certain aspects of behaviouralist theory are harming children and young people could not be more relevant than now, given the current climate post-Covid 19 pandemic and the direct effects this has had on the education of young people. (Minister for education, 2021). (Reitman, 1998) also argues how an intrinsic reward can be damaging to the growing mind of a student. That using methods of operant conditioning could show lasting detriment to the student's view on school. (Skinner, 1969)

These ideas are in line with Holt's theory that school can be detrimental to the lives of children. However, this only applies if the teacher does not put the emotional needs of the pupil before the need to change their behaviour. (Holt, J.C. 1982)

(Reitman, 1998) elaborates that for the pupil, the goal of their lesson and what their aim should be, is the gaining of subject knowledge and if you introduce operant conditioning theories you may be distracting your pupil from the true value of learning and hindering them in their academic journey. Reitman also speaks about how the reward system can create a need for goals and aspirations leading to an egocentric point of view and could ingrain a thought process of superficiality and materialism. His discussion on "rewards in other media" is particularly relevant to the generation of pupils we are teaching now in 2022, with a heavy focus on social media and the need for validation. Creating an ethos of bribing tactic, the pursuit of rewards may only contribute to this unhealthy mindset and obstruct the learning process.

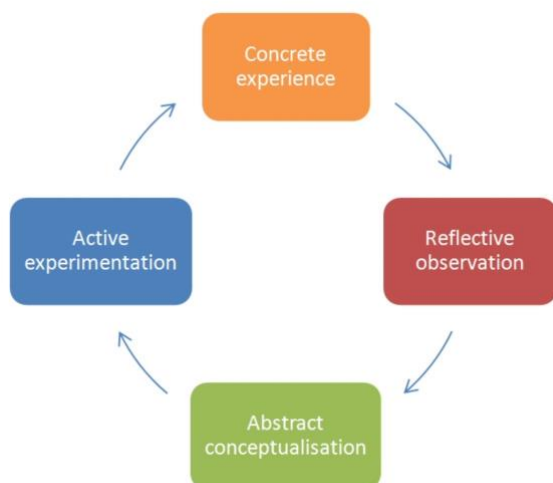


Fig 2, Learning cycle: (Kolb, 1984)

(Fig,2) shows a learning cycle created by (Kolb,1984), following this reflective model of self-assessment and reflection is vital to developing pedagogy. Teachers should be 'lifelong learners' and critical incidents and their analysis is crucial to the progression of education (Tripp, 2012). Using Kolb's learning cycle as a structure for this essay has led me to the conclusion that every critical incident is an opportunity for learning, educators must be progressive in their approaches to teaching, embracing new pedagogy theories in line with the goals of The New Curriculum for Wales. If as educators we are to guide pupils towards the four purposes of the curriculum and deliver a broad and balanced education we must move away from the old outdated punishment and reward mentality. If we want to help develop learners who encompass all qualities that the four purposes of the new curriculum

promote. (The Curriculum for Wales, 2022) We must use a holistic method in educating our youth to create a relevance to a pupil's life and allow them to have a constructive opinion on how they want to learn.

On examining 'the critical incident' in this essay and what Tripp calls the four kinds of judgement. I have examined what happened, what could have been done and what I think should be done if we had the ability to change structures in the teaching environment.

If in the moment of the critical incident, immediately following the interruption, the teacher had chosen to acknowledge the unacceptable behaviour of (Pupil B), apologised for the interruption of the lesson and explained why we should treat each other respectfully and allow our peers to learn. I think it would not only have had a better learning outcome for (Pupil A) but for the whole class. It is important that every child's voice is heard for their mental and emotional wellbeing. If a pupil has a question, it should be answered. If the class is steering attention away from the topic and back to the external incident, then explain to the pupils they need to learn from an experience wisely in the hope of becoming an "Ethically informed citizen" who is "Ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society" Donaldson (2022).

The key to teaching is the pupil-teacher relationship, through this relationship you can help a young person understand their value and why they deserve an education. The question posed in this essay is who I am teaching? And the conclusion to this is that pupils are always individual. The learner will always be, one of a kind. Each pupil needs their teacher to show a genuine interest in their journey, they don't want to feel you are their friend, but an ally and a role-model. A facilitator in their educational journey who they can rely on whether they are experiencing success, difficulty, or failure. The learning journey of any teacher should last a working lifetime, you need to be on the learning journey together. So, we must listen to pupils in telling us what they need to learn and work in collaboration with pupils to build solid foundations that allow our learners to feel valued as an individual. We must focus on what we can do for our young people in the nature of the world they are growing up in. (Wightwick, 2017)

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being open to others' reflections on how practice can be improved or developed.

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“If you think about the nature of the world our young people are going to become adults in then it is a very big question facing all of us thinking about what it is we can do best for them.” - Professor Graham Donaldson

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