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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.

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Introduction

The purpose of this assignment is to critically evaluate an observed incident taken place in a classroom environment, while applying Tripp's (1993, 2012) critical incident methodology. The phrase 'critical incident' identifies an event or circumstance that highlights a notable key moment in an individual's life (Tripp, 2012). A critical incident is not a previous structure waiting to be discovered, but instead the importance of an event that is influenced by our perspective (Tripp, 2012). An effective approach to direct teachers towards personal adjustments combined with school targets and suggest required structural change in connecting their teaching practices to bigger concerns through critical incidents (Tripp, 2012). It is suggested that gathering and sharing critical incidents will encourage change and log the progress of this action, in time becoming a technique for improvements in school (Tripp, 2012). Similarly, the success of critical incidents is highlighted by Mohammed (2016) for assisting teachers in finding solutions for challenges and gathering understanding into their observations, while also promoting reflection and exploration of beneficial pedagogical strategies. Both positive and negative events can be found when observing a critical incident, however it has been found that incidents are mainly negative (Megawati *et al.*, 2020). Nevertheless, the negative incidents are what drive change and encourage teachers to improve their teaching practice with more self-awareness (Megawati *et al.*, 2020).

The observed incident this assignment will explore occurred in an English medium primary school in South Wales, in a mixed ability and mixed gender year four classroom, with an attendance of around twenty-three learners, one teaching assistant and the class teacher. The use of mixed ability classrooms is supported by the DES (1978a, cited in Bartlett and Burton, 2007) as it enhances the likeness of prospect, grouping and similar understanding, it is believed that the teacher would have more control by fostering cooperation and healthier relationships. The incident noticed focuses on two of the learners at the front of the classroom, where one of the pupils does not share a resource with another pupil (Immersive learning space of Primary classroom video, 2023).

The incident recorded will be explained in further detail within the case study and appendices sections, providing a clear description of the setting. To gain further understanding of the incident, a review of literature will explore key aspects which will then be evaluated and discussed through learning and teaching methods. These sections will deeply explore theoretical views linked with the practice and the incident. Through exploring this critical incident, engagement with reflective practice will enable understanding towards the steps I would like to take forward into my teaching career.

Explanation of case study

When discussing the critical incident, it is vital that as the observer to follow BERA's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018). The guidelines clearly indicate that the participants observed, and the setting remain anonymous and all research confidential, by following this I will not be naming the learners, school and members of staff (BERA, 2018). Following the guidelines, the learners will be identified as child A, child B, child C and staff members will be identified by job role, for example teacher and teaching assistant.

As touched on above, the incident chosen occurred in an English medium primary school in South Wales. To gather a deeper perspective into the school, it can be found on the Estyn (2023) report that the schools current roll of pupils is 435, this figure was taken in March 2023. The percentage of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) was 12.4% and the English as an additional language was 10.7%. The recording took place at 9.30am and lesson was based on language, literacy and communication, the learning intention was to make inferences. To paint a picture of the setting, the recording starts with the teacher at the front of the classroom while all the learners were sat down in groups at their desks facing the board. One learner at the front of the classroom was visually impaired and used an iPad to assist, the iPad was aiding his learning so that he could zoom into his work. Throughout this assignment this learner will be known as Child B. Alves, *et al* (2009) discuss the importance of having access to assistive technology because it allows the learner to be independent by having control of their environment and communication. However, it is recently reviewed that some issues can arise when using assistive technology

such as set font sizing with certain materials and access to websites (Kocdar and Bozkurt, 2023).

The teaching assistant is sat on a table with six learners, helping learners with additional learning needs and some of the learners with English as an additional language. It is stated by Estyn (2023) that all ALN pupils are on track and making great progress through all lessons. The board had a picture on it with the title 'what inferences can you make?', each learner had their own white board and pen. Throughout the session learners have their hands up, some are writing their answers on their mini white boards and when they are chosen reading their answers out. Sanders (*et al.*, 2019) suggests that using mini whiteboards for student-centred tasks in classroom discussions allows the teacher to make formative individual assessments with thinking on the spot. However, it can limit the possibility for group work and collaboration (Sandison *et al.*, 2015). Nelson (*et al.*, 2023) builds on this by highlighting that using mini whiteboards is active learning by reviewing the idea, removing the content to include a scaffold, pausing and changing to a new idea, to then go back to the original content and replace what was missing. It is also noted that using mini whiteboards applies effective body language, by not having your back to the learners and standing directly towards the learners.

The incident noticed was when the teacher handed out a shoe to each table in the class, the learners were told to look at the shoe and answer the questions in connection to the shoe provided. The table at the front of the classroom which had four learners all facing the board in a line, the table contained two girls, one of the girls will be known as child A and two boys, one of the boys as mentioned above will be known as child B. The order of the table was girl, girl (child A), boy (child C), boy (child B), it was noticed that child C was not sharing or passing the shoe to child B. Child B asked for the shoe numerous times, however child C ignored him, so child A took the shoe and passed it to child B to make sure he had a chance to look at the shoe. However, before this incident it was clear that child A was very attentive and considerate of child B, child A would often get out of her seat and grab pens from the pot next to child B instead of asking him to pass them along and when putting the pens back she would make sure everything was put back tidy next to him. Ellis and Tod (2018) suggest that protective features are overall good sociability,

communication skills and positive peer impacts. It is clear from the incident that child A demonstrates these features by having a caring nature and concerns towards child B.

Literature review

Key areas acknowledged in the observed critical incident will be explored and linked within the review of the literature. The review will discuss theories based on how children learn through interactions which comes under the constructivism theory. Also, how children learn through observing behaviour and the importance of positive role modelling and learner's relationships.

Challenging teachers through the power of reflective practice can help produce strategies that can create constructive ways for them to engage in (Bruster and Peterson, 2013). When observing a critical incident, it states that it is important reflection is made instantly within the moment so that the teacher can reflect on prior experiences as an influence (Wieringa, 2011). Eckersley (2014) stated that connections were made by student teachers with pedagogical theory between the observed school and their personal practices, as they experienced present learning and teaching providing opportunities for sharing information and beliefs, engaging and reflective practice for new understanding. However, research by Tryggvason (2009, cited in Eckersley, 2014) disagreed, he believes that there are problems with merging theory into practice and that student teachers have weak previous perspectives on teaching and learning.

Montague (2003) identifies the constructivist approach as the social dynamic of learning and how children are engaged active learners that will build significance by connecting, organising, selecting and understanding ideas, information and perceptions as a impact of past knowledge and experience.

Constructivism highlights the need to allow learners to direct their own learning by leading their experiences and having control (Bartlett and Burton, 2007).

Halpenny and Pettersen (2014, cited in Rose, 2016) summarise the constructivist approach by Piaget, stating that it surrounds three features which are active, progressive and constructive. Pritchard (2018) would support this as he believes

individuals learn best when they build up their own understanding. It is also suggested that when an individual's current form of knowledge, understanding and skills are increased this is when learning is taking place. However, it is important that teachers initially assess their learner's knowledge by observing them in practice as an educational theory (Amineh and Asl, 2015). In addition to this, individuals with learning disabilities would require short but thorough direction to gain these strategies and processes, which will help them work alongside their peers and become better problem solvers (Montague, 2003).

Links can be made at the beginning of the constructivist perspective of learning and the research of Piaget (Pritchard, 2018). A range of views around peer collaboration are merged by Damon (1984, P335 cited in Slavin, 2004), he combines Piaget, Vygotsky and Sullivan to suggest a 'conceptual foundation for a peer-based plan of education'. To summarise, it is suggested that misconceptions and seeking developed solutions can be removed through debate and peer feedback, and learners can master cognitive processes, argumentation and participation (Slavin, 2004). The development of producing ideas can be introduced to learners through interactions and collaboration can encourage creative thinking and discovery learning (Damon, 1984, P335 cited in Slavin, 2004).

Vygotsky stated that a collection of social connections is the result of an individual's development not an individual process (Gray and MacBlain, 2015). In connection, he believed that it is important the social environment is considered in which a child develops in (Ang and Flewitt, 2015). Highlighting that children develop in a social matrix which is created by the interactions and social relationships between other pupils and themselves (Corsaro, 1992 cited in Gray and Macblain, 2015).

Muro and Jeffrey (2008, cited in Nabavi. 2012) note that the significant theory around learning and development is in fact social learning theory, often known as the bridge between cognitive learning theories and behaviourist learning theory.

However, Bandura (2006b, cited in Nabavi, 2012) stated that behaviour change is not always guaranteed from learning. Siochru (2018, p.149) highlights to reinforce and encourage learning rewards can be introduced as a 'reinforcement' to imitate behaviour. After an individual has observed another's behaviour typically if it is

positive and rewarded, it is possible that they will understand and copy the same behaviour (Nabavi, 2012). However, negative behaviour can also be copied which can impact an individual's learning and academic performance (Jiang, 2023). Although, focusing on Bandura's social learning theory it is stated that if an individual observes a positive outcome in the first stage it is more likely that the further stages of social learning, behaviour modelling and imitation will take place (Nabavi, 2012).

Similarly, Vygotsky's theory on the process of child development states that

'In the process of development, children begin to use the same forms of behaviour in relation to themselves and others initially used in relation to them. Children master the social forms of behaviour and transfer these forms to themselves ... It is through others that we develop into ourselves and ... this is true not only with regard to the individual but with regard to the history of every function.'

(Wertsch 1981, p.164 cited in Gray and MacBlain, 2015)

Language is introduced by Vygotsky as the main psychological tool as he believes individuals can control their behaviour through this (Amineh and Asl, 2015).

The pedagogical meaning of Vygotsky's work focuses on the significance of communication and planned intervention in the developments of thinking and problem solving, effectively when a pupil has a conversation with others regarding new ideas it will generate a deeper thinking between views facilitated (Bartlett and Burton, 2007).

It is highlighted by McGrath and Noble (2010, cited in Ellis and Tod, 2018) that having good peer relationships can benefit many aspects of school life, such as engagement, attendance, academic achievement, wellbeing and mental health, social and behaviour difficulties, to bullying. Research into peer relationships has concluded that having a close friend can boost self-esteem and peer group is also important for self-esteem (McNamara and Moreton, 2001). Ellis and Tod (2018) note that many learners' main purpose for attending school is to socialise, giving that learners are more likely to cooperate with collaborative learning activities than open responses given by the teacher. The theory between Piaget and Vygotsky's holds a

similar theme which is the success of an asymmetric relationship, which involves the transfer of knowledge between a more knowledgeable peer and less knowledgeable peer (Gray and MacBlain, 2015). It is thought by both theorists that there is no difference between the pupil solving a problem on their own than the pupils who possess similar levels of knowledge and Vygotsky had greater concern regarding the process than the results of higher order thinking (Gray and MacBlain, 2015). Taylor and Wood (2005) support this by concluding the importance of children's relationships through theory and evidence that it can have an insightful and long-term effect on their social, emotional and cognitive development.

Teaching and learning methods

Donaldson (2015) notes that teaching and learning methods must provide opportunities for pupils to be able to pick certain experiences and activities, in connection with the school's general approach. The four purposes are discussed in Successful futures by Donaldson (2015), closely examining the observed incident some of the four purposes main features are linked. Exploring the four purposes in further detail, those which can be linked to the observed incident are 'Ambitious capable learners, ethical informed citizens and healthy confident individuals' (Donaldson, 2015, P.30). The main incident that occurred when child A ensured child B had a chance to look at the object, ethical behaviour was demonstrated by showing empathy and thought towards their peer (Donaldson, 2015). Following that also demonstrating characteristics of being capable learners who can work together and collaboratively by supporting each other's learning (Donaldson, 2015). It is also noticed that child A is creating positive relationships around them, building on mutual respect and trust (Donaldson, 2015).

Looking closely at the incident recorded, they were conducting a group activity with discussion about the shoe provided on each table. Zwozdiak-Myers (2012) states the advantages of small group work instead of individually. Firstly, it can improve social skills which can be seen within the recording, child B may not have the confidence to ask but having that interaction with child A may encourage him next time. Empathetic abilities can also be developed, as working closely in small groups enables learners to identify other learner's strengths and weaknesses, as well as perspectives

(Zwozdiak-Myers, 2012). This incident may have enabled the other learners to notice that child B was not being included. McNamara and Moreton (2001) note that within peer groups empathy is possible, as learners share and express their feelings. Focusing on the Vygotsky approach, it is highlighted that pupils learn at different rates by following different directions, although there is a drive focused on upper than lower levels of ability (Bartlett and Burton, 2007). However, Gillies and Ashman (2003, cited in Bartlett and Burton, 2007) note advantages towards similar ability grouping have been discovered in the development of learning, especially if complicated ideas are shared and argued.

Using peer tutoring can be very effective in boosting learners' self-esteem, which is backed up by McNamara and Moreton (2001), the benefits of peer tutoring are that the learner may be struggling socially and emotionally so by working with a peer they do not have the audience. Shelton and Brownhill (2008) discuss that using peer and self-intervention it can support the fact that children learn from each other, and they can often be more open when working with their peers than with the teacher. By creating these environments learners can control their emotions and focus on building academic development. However, it is examined by Baunmann (1995, cited in Bartlett and Burton, 2007) that when pairing similar ability learners, they were able to work at a higher level and problem solve significantly faster than working alone. This suggests that the teacher should be encouraging pair work following strategies of separate partnership of learning (Bartlett and Burton, 2007). Rose (2016) discusses that Vygotsky's theory symbolised social constructivist understanding that states the significance of the social context of learning. It was acknowledged that some pupils are unable to complete tasks alone and some tasks they can and somewhere in between both there is a zone of Proximal Development (Bartlett and Burton, 2007, Rose, 2016). Berger (2011, cited in Rose, 2016) identifies this middle ground to be when a pupil can complete a task through the support of a more knowledgeable peer.

The term modelling can be referred to as 'teacher demonstration' this efficient strategy can be used to demonstrate how to do something or when pupils are engaging in something new (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2012, P.113). Additionally, modelling can also be recognised as when you want a pupil or pupils to model certain

behaviour, helping the pupils to understand right from wrong (Moreton and McNamara, 2012). It is referenced several times in the Teacher Standards' (DfE, 2011b, cited in Ellis and Tod, 2018) that it is the teacher's duty to encourage appropriate social behaviour in classroom and around the school, this is stated both directly and indirectly.

The term differentiation is defined by Visser (1993, p15, cited in Bartlett and Burton, 2007) as 'the process whereby teachers meet the need for progress through the curriculum by selecting appropriate teaching methods to match the individual child's learning strategies, within a group situation'. It is acknowledged in early childhood education that it is important to differentiate learning by considering the needs and different development stages of all pupils (McMahon and Dyer, 2018).

Discussion

Through this assignment further reflection into the critical incident has been critically analysed through literature. The twelve pedagogical principles are features of good teaching practice, (Donaldson, 2015) reflecting on the critical incident several of them are linked. Encouraging collaboration in the classroom is vital, through Hattie's (2009, cited in Donaldson, 2015) research it is highlighted that 'cooperative learning is effective' and through suitable planning and teaching this will be conducted.

Focusing on the support of pupils' social and emotional development and positive relationships, the OECD (2013, cited in Donaldson, 2015) advised that learning is not just about the cognitive aspect but also to be mindful of pupil's emotions. It can be supported by McGrath and Noble (2010, cited in Ellis and Tod, 2018) that good relationships in school can boost engagement and attendance. Through effective methods that support pupils socially and emotionally it can develop their emotional intelligence and metacognition, which can aid reflection on their learning and create understanding towards the positive impact on others (Donaldson, 2015).

When reflecting on the work of Vygotsky (1962, cited in Rose, 2016) it is noted that pairing can be very beneficial for certain pupils who work better with a more knowledgeable other. A more knowledgeable other would usually be expected to be a teacher, however a more knowledgeable other does not have to be someone older

or have a responsibility within the school setting (Pritchard, 2018). In contrast to this, Baumann (1995, cited in Bartlett and Burton, 2007) stated that it works better when pairing two pupils at similar learning abilities. However, reflecting on the discussion around group work, Zwozdiak-Myers (2012) notes that group work can support children's social development but also notes that it is important to allocate specific roles so that all pupils cooperate. It is important that as the role of teacher to facilitate wise grouping of pupils that involve discussions of critical importance (Bartlett and Burton, 2007).

Reflecting in the moment when in practice has been highlighted by Wieringam (2011), this is something which has been brought to my attention to bring forward in my teaching career. The benefits of reflecting in the moment and not exploring it later is that you can instantly connect to the situation and build on the observation or situation (Wieringa, 2011). I believe this is something which will build an experience log as my teaching career develops, as stated by Eckersley (2014) student teachers do not have that experience yet to be able to make in depth connections with theory and practice.

Considering planning and teaching for your pupils it is important to differentiate the learning for all pupils. Bartlett and Burton (2007) note that pupils will have different interests within a topic regardless of their ability or background and these differences will have an impact of their educational success, acting on this and making a difference by helping a pupil achieve where they should be.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The review of literature provided a deeper understanding around the critical incident and provided theory to back it up. The professional learning standards that are discussed under the pedagogical principles noted above link to the pedagogy refining of managing the learning environment. By ensuring that positive learning habits and behaviours are being portrayed and understood by the learners. Another standard would be innovation, developing new techniques by conducting new research into social, emotional, cognitive development to have a positive effect on the learners. Ensuring differentiation is maintained throughout every lesson is vital,

to be able to have the knowledge and understanding to be able to meet the needs of all the learners.

The teaching and learning methods that would be considered most effective is group work because learners are able to express their feelings and collaborate ideas between them, it is important to remember that pupils learn from each other. Another method is peer tutoring or working in pairs, having that one-to-one relationship can be a more comfortable space for some pupils who may not feel as confident in a group. It is vital to keep in mind that the most pressing matter is not the activity or task but to ensure positive peer relationships are being formed and maintained, otherwise it can affect their focus and engagement.

Overall, the critical incident methodology has created an understanding that through social learning theory, it is important to remember that rewarding or recognising positive behaviour can impact other pupils through modelling behaviour and observational learning. The constructivist approach being an active process allows pupils to lead their own learning in their own time through interactions and their environment.

Focusing on my personal teaching practice, some of the key elements I would take forward would be to encourage learners to take their learning into their own hands and support them socially and emotionally by building confidence to be able to achieve this on their own. I believe that mixed gender and ability group work and general classroom seating has its benefits as pupils can bring their own knowledge and understanding to the table.

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OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES

Record 1

Date and time, year group: 9.30am, year 4 classroom

Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context
Classroom - group table layout, mixed ability, mixed gender,
Subject - literacy, language and communication, inferencing
Staff - One teaching assistant and teacher.

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

Table in the center of recording, mixed gender, one pupil with visual impairment, iPad to assist uses it to zoom into his work and the board, teacher hands out a shoe to each table, one child has the shoe and doesn't pass it to the child with VI, another child gets involved and passes the shoe to the child with VI so he has a chance to look at it.

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

What avenues of research could you consider?

- VI child does not ask for the shoe. Why? – social or emotional difficulties
- Social learning theory
- Constructivism
- Peer relationships

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)

- Teacher is spread from table to table, unable to step in or doesn't notice.
- Teaching assistant sat with group of six pupils, some with ALN and EAL