

ECAD6007 - The Learner: Who Am I Teaching?

A critical evaluation 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 Department for Education has set plans to ban phone use in schools in England, in order to tackle disruptive behaviour and online bullying while boosting attention during lessons (Gov.uk, 2023). This has prompted a debate as to the pros and cons of phone use in the classroom. This essay aims to discuss the academic understanding of the impact of phone use and a comparative observation. The aim of this essay is to discuss the impact of mobile phone usage in schools and its impacts on the ability to learn and subsequently academic performance. This will be aided with a Critical Incident

A 'critical incident' is denoted as an event or situation that signifies a notable turning point or change for an individual. Incidents encountered by teachers in their daily practice attain a critical nature through reflection and subsequent analysis.

The concept of Critical Incidents were initially introduced by Tripp (1993), emphasising that recognising a Critical Incident doesn't involve searching for "things which exist independently of an observer and are awaiting discovery like gold nuggets or desert islands" (Tripp, 2011). Instead, Tripp's perspective underscored the importance of treating Critical Incidents as data to be managed and assessed, thereby highlighting their crucial significance. These could then be used to recognise future incidents and respond appropriately and accordingly to the outline management plan that was formed in the evaluation of the critical incident.

During the observation stage, three potential critical incidents were documented. Afterward, one incident was selected for in-depth analysis. Subsequent sections will explore theoretical concepts linked to reflective practice and their connection to the teaching profession. The chosen incident will be examined in relation to curriculum reform in Wales, preceded by a brief description of the school context. Following a literature review to grasp key areas, my reflection will outline future practice steps.

The aim of this essay is to break down a critical incident to highlight key areas and discuss them in the context of the wider literature, the educational agenda, and to add my own philosophy of education and opinion. This will enable others and myself to make better judgments in the future and improve future practice in the next teaching steps.

School Context

As an observer, it is crucial to ensure the following sections adhere to the BERA Guidelines (2018) regarding the treatment of observed participants. Consequently, the following actions will guarantee that the gathered data remains both confidential and anonymous, in alignment with the standards of educational research (BERA, 2018). This data includes the naming of the school, staff and pupils. (look at BERA source for an extra point)

The scheduled observation period occurred at an English medium sixth-form college based in the Swansea Local Authority. The college has 4000 mixed-gender pupils with an age range of 16-65+ years old (Welsh Government, 2023). For the purpose of this observation, the specific age range of pupils present were 16-18.

To provide context, the observation was on an A Level Business Studies class of 20 pupils. This course provides learners the opportunity to gain a holistic understanding of business in various sectors, markets and contexts, and explores core functions of business - marketing, human resources, finance and operations management. Success rates for vocational main qualifications in business, administration and law significantly improved from 70% in 2014-2015 to 83% in 2015-2016 (Estyn, 2018). This figure has notably improved from below national average to 3 percentage points above the national average between these years (Estyn, 2018). Based on a 2 year average, the successful achievement rate for vocational qualifications in Wales, including business, is 74% (Welsh Government, 2023).

The chosen incident for this assignment, as briefly mentioned previously, occurred during a lesson on Business Forecasting for A Level pupils. The number of pupils in attendance was roughly 20, with one class teacher. For context, all pupils were welcomed into the class by their teacher and told to open up their textbooks before they sat down at the tables, in order to settle them into the lesson. 3 pupils (A, B and C) begin to talk at the back of the class; the teacher acknowledges this without shouting or diverting the lesson and tells them to get their textbooks open. Pupil D, who is at the front of the class, goes on their phones and the teacher notices. They calmly tell pupil D to put their phone away, which they do, and continues with the lesson. In order to answer questions in their textbooks about sales forecasting, the teacher puts the class into pairs or groups of 3 to discuss the questions. As pupils are discussing the question, the teacher walks around the classroom to help those who need it. As this task is being completed, pupil A from the back of the classroom asks the teacher what they are doing as they were not paying attention beforehand due to being on their phone. Although pupils A, B and C eventually get on with the task, they still get distracted with each other and their mobile devices. After about 7 minutes, the teacher asked the class if they had completed the task before moving on to anything else. Some pupils around the classroom said they were not ready to

move so the teacher gave them more time before moving on. During this time, the teacher keeps an eye on and talks to pupils A, B and C to keep them on track with completing their questions. Once the time to complete the task is up, the teacher asks pupil B to answer a question from the textbook that was part of the task; as they were correct the teacher gives them praise - 'absolutely, well done'. After this, the teacher asks all of the class if they can give them answers to the questions from the textbook, explaining the answers and giving points as they do so. During this, pupils A and B were answering the questions being asked, despite being distracted and not fully engaged. Pupils D and E, who were quieter pupils situated in the front of the class also answered. When they got correct answers, the teacher also gave them praise - 'absolutely'. Although pupils A, B and C were able to give answers to questions, they were still frequently laughing between each other and going on their mobile phones - not fully engaged. As the teacher was about to move on to the next part of their lesson, pupil C let them know they had missed a question from the task; the teacher thanked the pupil and ensured they asked the class about it. While the teacher was talking, pupil A took out their phone which distracted pupil B. The teacher promptly told them 'no phones out please, guys', then continued. The teacher used an educational video linked to the lesson topic to try and engage pupils and give them an understanding of the next task, which would be a silent reading task. However, as soon as the next task was set for the class, boy A got back on their phone and was distracted throughout the task. The teacher noticed this and told the pupil to put their phone away; pupil A said they were texting a parent. Due to this, the teacher gave them the benefit of the doubt, but they didn't check if it was the case. In addition, pupils A, B and C were talking at the back of the class, with the teacher telling them 'you need to complete the task' several times. However, they continued to do so when the teacher was turned away. Considering this, it did not distract anyone else in the class during this task.

Literature Review

Considering the critical incident, several key areas can be highlighted and linked in a review of the literature. This review will analyse the constructivist learning theory and how this relates to the use of technology in the classroom and problematic phone usage, before discussing how this relates to academic performance and the education agenda.

The Constructivist school of thought, founded by Jean Piaget, refers to how the environment is built around the individual's learning (Isik, 2018). The approach is based on the assumption that students construct their own knowledge by using scientific methods, the richness of the learning environment and students' own cognitive thinking (Isik, 2018). Considering such opportunities of computer-supported

education as bringing real-life into the classroom, offering such animations, which combine sound and image, its enriching effect is seen. What one can confer from this is that rich learning environments that will form the basis of real constructivist approach can be ensured via computer support.

This approach would define a constructivist classroom with four main areas.

- The teacher acts to facilitate and/or guide to the students
- Students operate within small learning groups
- Knowledge is discussed and shared between the educator and the students
- Authority is split between the educator and students

Figure 1 below describes the constructivist classroom further.

Feature	Traditional Classroom	Constructivist Classroom
Objective	Provide accurate answers	Encourage discussion and ideas
Working Style	Students work independently	Students work independently, in groups, or with partners
Decision-Making	Instructors have the final say	Shared between teacher and students
Assessments	Assessments are part of the examination; they are separate from learning tasks.	Conferences, daily work, portfolios, and assignments
Study Material	Workbooks, worksheets, and basic readers.	Books, real-world scenarios, journals, and workshop methodology.

Fig 1. The Constructivist Classroom based on the Constructivist Learning Theory

In the opinion of a constructivist, technology is a natural part of the learning environment that facilitates learning. Technology should be collaborative, meet educational needs and promote critical thinking. Technology is also argued to be socially promotive and develop communication skills. In a generational context, technology is a natural part of the environment which cannot be ignored.

The author of a paper investigating the effectiveness of constructivist mobile learning environments (Al Hamdani, 2014) would argue the constructivist learning theory is an effective model for learning on the basis of their findings. In this paper, a case study is presented involving fourth year university students attending Sohar University. This study had 40 students completed constructivist learning activities of the course of 4-8 weeks including:

- Reflective tasks to use knowledge in real-life
- Complex ill-defined problems and investigations
- Access to expert performances enabling modelling of processes
- Multiple perspective tasks
- Collaborative social construction of knowledge tasks
- Articulation and meta-cognition reflection tasks

The findings of the paper discovered that mobile phone use in and out of the classroom were not significantly different when it came to being used for learning. Notably mobile phones were used to translate texts and check spelling. Students used their phone to read articles, access educational platforms (e.g Moodle) and access information. Thinking skills were beneficial for memorization and reparation and reported by students that mobile phones contributed to producing good works, with 37 students saying it helped some (13), quite a bit (16), or very much (8). Students also reported that mobile phones have been crucial for facilitating cooperation by being able to share information, develop new ideas, and communicate thoughts more effectively. The author notes the main points of the case study that students acquainted with technology and use them regularly were capable of accessing, facilitating and implementing the tools mobile phones afford to them. Many students reported that mobile phones helped them manage the course load and promote thinking skills (Al Hamdani, 2014).

On the contrary, a study conducted by Przepiorka et al (2021) discusses the impact of phone use on academic grades. In a study involving 427 school pupils between the ages of 10-14, the researchers investigated how social skills influenced Grade Point Average (GPA) via Problematic Smartphone Usage (PSU). The SmartPhone Addiction Scales was used to measure PSU, with other measurement instruments including the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale for children and adolescents, Children's Self-Report Social Skills Scale, Children's somatization Inventory and the reported Grade Point Average for each pupil was measured.

The findings describe how PSU mediates the relationship between social skills/social anxiety and GPA. In girls social skills were partially mediated with GPA via PSU. In boys alternatively observed parietal mediation between social skills and somatization via PSU. Overall, problematic smartphone use was negatively related to GPA. This begs into question what impacts problematic smartphone use affects the classroom setting. Social anxiety seemingly has a relationship with mobile phones and how it

subsequently impacts academic performance (Przepiorka et al, 2021) and thus asks how a constructivist approach to learning can manage this.

Liu et al (2005) add to this in a critical review explaining that constructivism isn't necessarily the most effective method of learning for everyone, especially if they have a learning difficulty and specific needs. Further, due to the lack of a set curriculum or standardised grading system, some students may suffer and fall behind the other students. Though the teacher is a guide in this constructivist approach some teachers may not be able to help due to lack of clear instructions. Finally, the authors highlight the focus on intellectual development which isn't a holistic approach and also means it may not be suitable for a group of students at differing developmental levels (Liu et al, 2005).

To consider the literature above together, it is clear to see the potential benefits and acknowledgement of technology as a real environmental factor that is present within and out of the classroom as well as important in the students social lives and not just purely an academic tool. In the context of the critical incident, a constructivist approach to manage the situation would be to re-engage the students at the back of the class into the course work by getting them to use their phones to complete a constructivist task. Hypothetically, the teacher could set a task whereby the three male students work together as a small group to research sales forecasting and work together to provide detailed answers to the question the teacher was initially asking, or alternative harder questions to promote critical thinking and cooperation. A critique of this would be however that if these students have problematic smartphone usage then this may be counterproductive and therefore fall behind their fellow classmates.

Teaching and learning methods

The recognition of an incident within the classroom provided an opportunity for extended reflection, enabling a critical analysis of the situation in a broader context. Engaging in critical reflection has underscored the importance of comprehending the broader justifications for teaching practice, as proposed by Donaldson (2015). Reflective practice originated from theoretical principles inspired by Dewey (1933) and the subsequent contributions of Schön (1983). Examining how these ideas shaped early perceptions of reflective practice allows us to see how they influenced early conceptions so that we can reflect on where we are today (Farell, 2012). I believe employing a reflective framework like Gibbs (1988) is advantageous for organising my reflection and determining subsequent actions, specifically in the context of future teaching steps. Figure 2 below describes the Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, which includes six continuous stages; Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion, and Action Plan.



Fig 2. The Gibbs' Reflective cycle (1988)

In the context of the classroom critical incident discussed earlier, Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) would describe what is being reflected on. Subsequently, the honest feeling regarding the incident would be shared. It is important that shared feelings are honest as it genuinely acknowledges what thoughts and focuses you are prioritising. This makes you more aware of the environment and realise what changes need to be made and would be discussed in the next stage, that being the evaluation stage. The evaluation would also include their own reaction and is generally an ideal place to bring in relevant theories and opinions. The Analysis stage involves relating the incident to other experiences in the classroom and deeper in-depth discussions of theories. The conclusion summarises what has been mentioned and acknowledges key parts. This then neatly flows into the final stage, the action plan. This details what you would personally do next time and how this would be an improvement.

A study conducted by Ikin et al (2020) implemented Gibbs' Reflective Cycle on university students who were to use this model when reading literary works. Nine Students produce Nine Reflective pieces over the course of three literary subjects. The authors analysed these pieces in order they were assigned. The authors found that over the course of practising this reflective process model students were more clearly emphasised in the content of the work they were to reflect on. Students were

found to have identified more in-depth meaning and improved literary comprehensiveness. The authors further discussed how the reflective cycle was able to draw out hidden intentions of the literary work. In the context of the classroom this could mean a more precise and better understanding of the catalyst of a critical incident and identify a more suitable action plan for the future. For example, a better understanding as to why the boys at the back of the class were really on their phones, with help from a reflective cycle, could hypothetically produce a successful action plan to mitigate this critical incident in the future. A further review of the literature would show many more case study examples of the successful implementation of Gibbs' Reflective Cycle.

Alternatively, many argue that Gibbs' Reflective Cycle can often lead to superficial reflections as the model does not stipulate critical thinking skills. This is what has been argued by Paterson and Chapman (2013) as they discuss how reflective discussion should categorically aim to improve professional practice, competency, and experiences. The authors point out that the Gibbs' model had little potential for personal or professional development as Gibbs' model results in learning through repetition which can be slow and non meaningful.

However, Gibbs' reflective cycle is considered a good starting point to encourage awareness and reflection so that you can ask questions and potentially change the reflective process model. Considering all educators/teachers have to start somewhere in their reflective process, Gibbs' reflective cycle has been demonstrated to provide insightful learning opportunities.

When viewing the observed critical incident through the framework of Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988), a thorough depiction of the incident has been previously provided. In brief, during a Business Forecasting lesson for A Level pupils, the teacher faced challenges with disruptions. Pupils A, B, and C initially talked at the back, while pupil D used a phone. The teacher calmly addressed these issues, engaged the class in group discussions, and provided individual assistance. Despite some distractions, the teacher praised pupils for correct answers. Pupils A, B, and C remained intermittently distracted, and pupil A continued phone use. The teacher employed an educational video, but pupil A remained distracted during a silent reading task, claiming to text a parent. Despite interventions, pupils A, B, and C persisted in talking and phone use, though the disruptions didn't affect the whole class.

Personally, the free use of smartphones during lesson time can be detrimental to a pupil's focus, thus affecting their grades and learning development. This can be linked back to Przepiorka et al (2021) and how phone use can impact academic grades and the classroom setting. I believe my stance on the necessity of limiting phone usage during lessons should align with prevailing teaching approaches in

schools. In recent years, and in line with the UK Government's guidance (2023), I advocate for schools to regulate mobile phone usage during lesson times. This approach aims to enhance students' concentration, boost engagement, and address disruptive behaviour effectively.

From contextualising the incident, I personally feel that encouraging this approach is important in benefitting pupils' learning development. However, I do not believe the complete banning of mobile phones in schools is the correct approach, as they can also be used as helpful tools during lessons. Linking back to Al Hamdani (2014) and his case study on positive use of technology on education aids my point, as mobile phones (when given regulated use in class) can help promote students' thinking skills, develop new ideas and communicate thoughts effectively with peers. Students also reported that mobile phones have been crucial for facilitating cooperation by being able to share information, develop new ideas, and communicate thoughts more effectively. The author notes the main points of the case study that students acquainted with technology and use them regularly were capable of accessing, facilitating and implementing the tools mobile phones afford to them. Many students reported that mobile phones helped them manage the course load and promote thinking skills (Al Hamdani, 2014). I wish to emulate the positive and regulated use of mobile phones in future practice more regularly throughout the school week, while also ensuring I keep restrictions where they need to be in place.

Discussion

After analysis of my Critical Incident and thorough research, my own pedagogical choices have been refined to help me tackle the specific approach of how to monitor and regulate mobile phone usage in classrooms.

Being able to employ a broad repertoire of teaching approaches is especially applicable in this scenario. In the context of appropriate and problematic phone usage, it is in the educators responsibility to maintain a suitable and appropriate environment. Whilst not all pupils work the same, by employing a constructivist approach of small groups working together you are simultaneously using a different teaching approach and secondly addressing an incident whereby there is an opportunity to re-engage the students in an appropriate and responsible way. Regarding how technology has become a part of the natural environment the recent generations have been brought up in, it is impossible to ignore the use of mobile phones within the environment and its impacts in and out of the classroom, namely social skills and mental health. Being able to gauge the appropriateness of using technology/mobile phones within the classroom can in part be determined by age and maturity as these determine motivation to learn and ability to engage in quality learning, as opposed to engaging in problematic phone usage.

Regarding learners taking responsibility for their own learning this responsibility can change over the course of the education system, gradually becoming more of the learners responsibility over time. The present case study observes an A-Level class whereby their level of engagement may determine if and what university they go to and consequently impacting their social life and socio-economic trajectory. Whilst this isolated incident in itself won't cause this, the pattern of behaviour may result in such. In my own personal case, the methods and style of teaching I implement has been shaped by the negative/problematic phone usage as seen in the case study. This is because I have been able to identify specific behaviours and responses from both the teacher and the students from an observation perspective. Using this analysis of information and the reflective cycle adapted by Gibbs (1988), I can implement a more positive approach for the use of phones in the classroom during my own teaching practices in the future. In doing so, I can make the classroom more engaging and allow pupils to progress their own learning development.

Using the constructivist approach in my teaching methods regarding this topic could be helpful, as they believe students use their own cognitive thinking skills to construct their own knowledge (Isik, 2018). Relating this to the case study at hand and the pedagogical principles discussed, this teaching approach has the potential to help pupils be motivated to re-engage in their own learning.

Exploring this has helped me identify how to get pupils to re engage in their learning activities whilst enabling the pupils to identify and take responsibility for their own learning. Specifically where phone usage is their own choice and can impact their learning environments. Consequently, as the role of the educator, it is my responsibility to use a broad range of teaching approaches to facilitate pupils to develop in their learning.

Conclusion

The assignment prompt involved an exploration of reflective practice, including the recording of an observed incident. Tripp's (1993) methodology was employed for in-depth reflection, utilising Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988) and recognising the influence of Dewey (1933) and Schon (1983) in the field. The imperative for educators to embrace reflection aligns with the reformed curriculum policy in Wales and Teaching Standards, emphasising the role of reflection in ensuring quality pedagogy.

The incident underwent contextualisation and analysis through academic literature, revealing diverse perspectives on the use of smartphones within education policy. The reflective process yielded actionable teaching steps related to the observed

incident. Despite advocating for restricted mobile phone use during lessons, the reflection acknowledged their potential as tools facilitating pupil knowledge, collaboration, and learning development.

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