

**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.**

I will be identifying and critically evaluating the next teaching and learning steps based on observations that were made of critical incidents within a classroom environment. Tripp (1993) affirms that a critical incident is not a serious or dangerous event, instead the use of the word 'critical' is to be interpreted as relevant or important. A critical incident requires in depth reflections. Farrell (2008) supports this view and states that a critical incident is any unplanned event that can occur during teaching and learning that could provide an opportunity for reflection on these critical incidents to improve understanding and practice. I have needed to be critically reflective during these observations. Critical reflective practice is a process of inquiry while trying to discover and research the assumptions that frame how they work (Brooke field, 1998). Shandamo (2006) argues that reflection becomes critical when it has two purposes. Firstly, understanding considerations of power undergrid, frame and distort educational interactions and processes and secondly, to question assumptions and practices that are convinient and easy but may end up working against the best, long term interests. In this assignment, I will be looking at the role of critical reflection as well as identifying a critical incident that I observed and critically analyzing literature that links to it while adhering to the BERA (2018) guidelines of ethical practice. I will be discussing the role of the reflective practitioner in Wales and how it links to the professional teaching and leadership standards.

Ayres (2017) suggests that an incident becomes critical as a result of critical thinking and it is important to commit to the analysis of a critical incident. Ayres (2017) argues that the point of critical incident analysis is to question what you already know to uncover something new, as improvement does not occur without change. Dewey's Reflective Practice Model (1938) cited in Brown (2022) suggests that we do not learn from experience, but from reflecting on experience and it is important not to ignore mistakes or alternative view points as practical knowledge and understanding models of reflective practice is paramount. Boud (1987) cited in Slessor et al. (2018) defines reflection as a conscious activity in which we engage to explore our

experiences and develop new understandings and conceptualizations. Slessor et al. (2018) acknowledges how learning from experience is one of the most important forms of learning. However, it has been less valued in education until recently. Kolb's model of experiential learning (1984) which was founded upon earlier work by Piaget, Dewey and Lewin, acknowledged that learning is a process where individuals reflect on their experiences to construct and reconstruct their knowledge, understanding and skills. The Welsh Government (2020) emphasises the importance of professional, life long learning in implementing The New Curriculum (2022). Slessor et al. (2018) argues that in professional education, the interest is not so much in learning in the short term, from a single experience but in a longer term, developmental process that embeds new knowledge and skills. Dewey (1933) cited in Brown (2022) suggests that professional development should be considered as a spiral and learning from one cycle, should be the beginning of the other which provides us with a process to reflect and learn from experiences. Welsh Government (2020) discusses the importance of reflective practice in its Curriculum for Wales (2022) implementation plan. Specifically in the evaluation approach, one of its main principles is to be reflective as it is important to continue professional development and to identify strengths and challenges to working together effectively and moving forward in teaching and learning approaches. Additionally, The new professional teaching and leadership standards (2022) acknowledges its commitment to continued professional learning and encourages structured engagement in action research to provide wider research and findings on a national and international scale. The Welsh Government's Professional Learning Communities (2013) has supported this by providing funded Masters in Educational Practice and guidance on Learning Wales to introduce practitioners to reflective practice and a systematic enquiry-based approach. Tripp (2012) acknowledges the value of analysing typical, routine events because habits can be adopted and unchallenged. Ayres (2017) argues that these events can derive from historical structures that could be outdated and unintentionally harmful. Therefore, by improving professional awareness and continuing professional development, this could result in improved thinking skills and opportunities for challenge. Gibbs' reflective model (1988) cited in Brown (2022) involves several stages which is meant to systematize reflections and isolate feelings by slowing down the thought process in order to prevent jumping to conclusions.

Similarly, Tripps (2012) 'The Why? Challenge' approach uses continuing questions to allow the dialogue to take it where it needs to be until a conclusion is reached and thoughts and feelings are challenged appropriately.

The BERA (2018) guidelines highlight the importance of respecting participants right to privacy and affirm that confidentiality and anonymity of the participants is the best practice for research, therefore the pupils, staff and school will remain anonymous throughout. Additionally, researchers must also comply to the General Data Protection Regulation (2018) where the participants are ventilated to know how and why their personal data is to be stored. All staff and pupils were made aware of the puprose of these observations and no personal data was stored to be used elsewhere. The observations were carried out in a mixed-gender, english medium Primary school in Bridgend in the local authority of Bridgend County Borough Council. There are currently 582 pupils on roll, between the ages 3 and 11. There are 18 classes altogether and the classes are mixed by age. According to ESTYN (2018), there are very few pupils who are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) and there are no pupils who speak welsh at home. Furthermore, ESTYN (2018) suggests that the three-year rolling average of Free School Meal (FSM) children is considerably lower than the national average of 19%, at only 6%. The school identifies 11% of pupils having Additional Learning Needs (ALN) which is also lower than the national average of 21%. The observations were carried out over two full days, and we had the opportunity to observe a range of classes from nursery through to year 6.

Following the two days of observation, I was able to identify a few incidents that could provide deeper reflection and study. However, there was one in particular observation that stood out the most. The observation was carried out in the youngest Year 1 class over a two and a half hour period. There atmosphere in the class was positive and welcoming and the pupils seemed comfortable and familiar with their learning environment. The morning was spent in a carousel of numeracy activites, and I was fortunate to see two rotations. I was able to spend time with all groups during both rotations. I observed that the focused and supported tasks were the same for all children and I noticed that some pupils were finishing the tasks very quickly, whilst others required more support. However, following the observations, I was able to have a discussion with the teacher and supporting staff and I asked

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about the activities. The teacher explained that the activities were the same due to it being their baseline period, which lasts 6 weeks. It provides the teacher with sufficient evidence to plan for the children and their individual needs for the rest of the academic year. Furthermore, this led to questions and further research surrounding how differentiation and scaffolding methods could bridge learning gaps and raise attainment. The Donaldson Review (2015) recommended four purposes to the Curriculum for Wales and suggests that they should underpin all teaching and learning in Wales. The Welsh Government (2020) suggest that using the four core purposes as the shared vision for every individual learner allows schools to set high expectations, promote wellbeing, tackle ignorance and encourage critical engagement. The critical incident that I observed links best to the ambitious, capable learner purpose. The pupils were engaged in the activities and by completing the baseline period, the pupils would be building up a body of knowledge and skills to apply in different contexts. It will also give the teacher the information they need to set high expectations and challenges to meet the children's individual needs. For some of the children who were more comfortable with the task, you could see they enjoyed asking questions and solving problems independently and for the children who needed more support, they were able to communicate effectively to the teacher and learning support officer, if they needed to. As discussed earlier, it was clear that the children were familiar with the classroom environment and were able to work independently when needed to. The children also demonstrated how they used their pupil voice by being given time during the instructions to ask any questions and reminded of the resources around the classroom to support them as well.

According to Kratochwill et al. (2016) classroom management is the main obstacle in promoting effective teaching. Slavin (2016) acknowledges that the lack of effective classroom management procedures is the leading cause for job burnout in newly qualified teachers. Oliver (2012) states that teachers who find classroom management difficult, experience high levels of stress. However, Oliver (2012) highlights some of the additional challenges that teachers have to manage, for example, an increased number of pupils entering school with behavioral competencies and a lack of training to prepare teachers to effectively manage an increasingly diverse student population. Additionally, pupils in classrooms with ineffective classroom management, typically perform lower academically as the level

of disruption leads to decreased instructional time. The Welsh Government (2018) highlight the importance of creating a well managed, structured classroom environment for effective learning to occur as a positive learning culture will increase attainment because the pupils know what is expected of them. Some suggestions made are, beginning the year with a set of rules and routines, positive reinforcements and awards, well planned lessons and set sanctions for misbehavior. However, it can be argued that encouraging respect and developing positive relationships could be the most important of them all. Harmon (2017) acknowledges that building positive relationships with pupils is beneficial to promote a positive learning environment that supports teachers ability to manage a classroom. Furthermore, Tereda (2019) supports this view and confirms studies have shown that classrooms where teachers have made meaningful connections and used a series of techniques that centre around establishing, maintaining and restoring relationships has increased academic engagement by 33% and disruptive behavior decreased by 75%. Therefore, the lead author in the study, Cook (2018) affirms that when relationships are damaged , student wellbeing could be affected which leads to academic and behavioral problems. Roffey (2012) acknowledges how the quality of the learning environment has been the focus of research for many decades, specifically behavioral issues. Such as the Elton Report on Discipline in Schools the UK (DES 1989) promoted a whole school approach to behaviour management that was based on positive relationships between all members of the school community. This still remains relevant nearly thirty years later, in The Steer Report on Learning Behavior (DES 2005). Murray-Harvery (2010) supports this view and acknowledges the multiple and interrelated outcomes that positive relationships have for pupils, such as academic achievement and mental health and wellbeing. However, Roffey (2012) highlights one of the main barriers to creating positive relationships can be a power struggle between parents and teachers. Galzaveld and Hosp (2014) acknowledge the importance of communication in building relationships with parents and it is fundamental to support the wellbeing and outcomes for pupils. Glazed and Hosp (2014) consider respect, empathy and trust as the key principles in developing a strong relationship between parents and teachers.

As part of the new curriculum reform in Wales, the guidance emphasizes the importance of supporting schools to design an inclusive school curricula and raise

the aspirations for all learners, (Welsh Government, 2020). Crick and Golding (2020) highlight the benefits of school being able to design their own curriculum it allows the learners to be actively involved in the planning. As well as the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) that aims to 'deliver a fully inclusive education system for Learners in Wales' (Welsh Government, 2018). UNESCO (2017) acknowledges that inclusive education is a key aim for education research, practice and policy globally. Even though the key message regarding how every learner matter and matters equally is simple, The United Nations (2006) argue that what constitutes as inclusive education is complex. Artiles et al. (2006) argues that there are contradicting perspectives of inclusion in relation to social justice and by teachers or other stakeholders, who come from a position of privilege, deciding who needs to be 'included' where contradicting the aims of inclusion. Solben and Alston (2021) acknowledge that pedagogy is the key to how inclusive the teaching is and relies on how skilled the teacher is in understanding and catering for the needs of all children. However, Solben and Alston (2021) highlight one of the main challenges of implementation in education as consistency. They argue that even though researchers should be making constant adaptations to meet the individual needs of the pupils, it is important that these changes should be communicated effectively to ensure the children are not faced with any anxiety about change. Solben and Alston (2021) also consider the importance of listening to the children, parents and participants when developing plans and structures to support pupils and meet their needs. Welsh Government (2018) state the importance of children's points of view on their school and classroom environment. However, they highlight the importance of taking a sensitive approach and to use the pupils preferred means of communication to establish understanding their needs or point of view. There are several possible barriers to communication, for example, speech and language difficulties, hearing, confidence and understanding. Pulis (2016) confirms that there have been various studies that show the benefits of using pupil voice, such as improved relationships between pupils and teachers, improved communication between the pupils and teachers and increased pupil engagement. Czerniawski and Kidd (2011) affirm that pupil voice can provide good conditions for the school to become an effective learning community. However, Fletcher (2012) argues that pupil

voice should not be idolized but considered as one of the voices to forge the way forward.

According to Tomlinson (2017), to foster a differentiated classroom, the teacher should assume that learners have different needs and proactively plans lessons that provide a variety of ways to express their learning. However, it is not as always straight forward as the teacher may still need to fine tune instructions to accommodate the varied learner needs within the classroom. Tomlinson (2017) argues that effective differentiation should be robust enough to provide challenge to the full range of learners in the classroom as no one size fits all and teachers should expect to change plans accordingly. However, the flexible approach to planning could add to the already large workload of teachers in Wales. The NASUWT Big Question Survey (2022) found that nine out of ten teachers (91%) state that their workload has increased in the last year and their mental health is being affected by working excessive and unreasonable hours. Furthermore, Marshall (2018) highlights other limitations in terms of attention, time and support for addressing students' diverse needs. Aftab (2015) acknowledges that teachers cannot do everything in a classroom of 20 to 30 pupils. Additionally, Godor (2021) supports this view and understands that teachers need to make difficult choices about distributing their scarce resources because they influence pupils' learning opportunities as resources can affect how successful a pupil will be in school which could influence their future. Sousa and Tomlinson (2018) argue that the focus should be on learners and it is important to plan with differences but the instructional model should remain the same in order to give all learners opportunity to cover the material and maximize their learning. However, it is important to understand the learners' readiness to learn (Sousa and Tomlinson, 2018), the readiness refers to the learners' current proximity to a specific set of essential knowledge, understanding and skills. It is acknowledged that if a teacher ignores the readiness of a learner and does not plan accordingly, the learner outcome decreases. New South Wales Government (2022) supports this view and also highlights the importance to identify the readiness of the individual learner. However, it is acknowledged that readiness does not just apply to academic ability but specific areas of learning and understanding their strengths and weaknesses across the board. Children in Wales undergo a statutory baseline assessment during their first 6 weeks in Reception which is used to determine their

stage of development and interests. However, this is subject to change going forward as part of the New Curriculum 2022 (Welsh Government, 2022). Geelan et al. (2015) acknowledge that understanding the difference between learners and treating the differences with resources rather than deficits, it's a powerful approach. Van Vijeijken et al. (2023) highlight the conflict between teachers own beliefs and vision against a school vision as a differentiation dilemma. Following a case study from a primary school with a well-defined vision on classroom differentiation. It found that teachers had varying ideas about differentiation. Some beliefs were in line with the school vision, where they had common learning goals and thought it was fair to support disadvantaged students. Whereas the other teachers believed all learners should have individual learning goals and the same level of support. Bright House et al. (2018) acknowledges how moral concern over a school's vision had consequences for learners and could affect their learning journey. Easel (2015) affirms this and suggests that a school's vision should unite teachers to achieve common goals. According to Gruley et al. (2015) there are several studies that highlight a missing link between the reality of daily classroom practice and the school's vision.

I found the entire experience to be beneficial towards my continued professional learning and it has influenced the ongoing critical reflection of teaching and learning, while promoting further professional growth. This critical incident related to my knowledge of differentiation in the professional standards, where a teacher should meet the needs of all learners and progression in learning by building on prior experience and knowledge. I learned the importance of being self-aware and to be especially mindful of unconscious bias when it comes to observing learning and teaching. How it is important to gather as much information as possible through time and how crucial it is to have conversations with both pupils and practitioners to ensure that the observation is as accurate as possible. It led to questions such as if the teacher used a range of techniques whilst providing appropriate levels of challenge and expectations for the ability of the pupil? Would it motivate them to want to learn, progress and achieve? Even though the teacher confirmed that the children all having the same work was for baseline purposes, it provided important questions to be asked about pupil progression, attainment and assessment for learning. This experience will allow me to share what they have learned though

carrying out wider research and findings that allows for better understanding of research and theories surrounding pedagogy, child development and the relevant daily planning and practice in an English medium primary school. Saric and Steh (2017) acknowledge that when a teacher is involved in active reflection and critical analysis of those events, that could lead to formulating new strategies for changing behaviours in the classroom for professional growth. However, they raise the concerns about whether teachers are appropriately trained or provided with adequate conditions in everyday pedagogical practice as it is unrealistic for teachers to take the time at their own initiative. Based on Dewey's reflective model (1933) who acknowledged that reflection is prevalent in learning from experience and can should lead to deliberate and intentional change. Sobel and Alston (2021) support this view and state that reflection is a process of self-examination and self evaluation which should occur regularly to improve professional practice. In carrying out wider research, the researcher found a case study carried out by ESTYN (2017) that used a teaching and learning strategy by Professor John Hattie (2008) called visible learning, which encourages pupils to use their voice and take more responsibility for their own learning and to become more capable to assess their own work. Through this approach, pupils can reflect on their own learning and articulate what they are learning and why, including their next steps effectively.

This experience has demonstrated the benefits of using critical reflection to improve teaching and learning. When using critical thinking to reflect on practice, it allows for questions and research towards improvement. Welsh Government's (2022) pedagogy for professional learning to suggest that providing opportunity to reflect critically on current practice whilst also being open to others' reflections can improve and develop professional practice, if it is a common approach across the school. This experience used a mix of Dewey and Gibbs models of reflection, by deliberately reflection on events but creating and action plan to map out the next steps going forward.

**OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES****Record 1**

Date and time, year group: 27.09.2022 9:30-10:30am

**Where and When:**

The observation took place in a Year 1 classroom with 30 pupils. The teacher explained that the morning was going to be spent doing maths rotations as part of the Mathematics and Numeracy area of learning and experience. The lesson started immediately after registration. The classroom had one teacher and one LSO and was made up of two U-shaped tables which allowed the teacher to sit in the middle to support pupils. There were also three tables in the independent area. There were two tough spots set up with resources and a large carpet area.

**What happened:**

During the first rotation there was one group that worked with the teacher, one worked with the LSO, one worked independently, and the other group were on challenge time/free choice. It was observed that all the tables had worksheets and resources laid out ready for the children to be sent off into their groups. I previously had a conversation with the teacher and LSO, where they confirmed that the children were placed in their math's groups based on their academic ability. It was observed that three children had completed their independent task in around 5 minutes and were unsure what to do next, when the teacher returned to the class with her group, she told the children who had finished their independent task to select a free choice activity. When the next lesson began, they rotated the groups around the class. However, the activities remained the same and there did not seem to be differentiation between the groups or activities.

**Areas of possible exploration:**

During this observation it was noticed that the focus and self-directed the tasks were the same for all children and some children were completing tasks very quickly without any further challenge. Even though the teacher confirmed the reasons for keeping the work the same, this led to questions and further research

surrounding how differentiation and scaffolding methods could bridge learning gaps and raise attainment.

**Notes:**

At the end of the observation, there was an opportunity to ask questions. It was confirmed that the activities during maths remain the same for all pupils during the first few weeks so that they can baseline the children and adequately challenge them, moving forward. It was also observed that the teacher was out of the class for the first 15 minutes of the lesson with their group and the LSO was working with their back towards the children working independently. The classroom was busy and the children who had finished early may have gone unnoticed.

## Record 2

Date and time, year group: 26.09.22 10:50-11:30am Year 3

**Where and When:**

A year 3 class were observed after morning break time during a lesson where they were designing rosettes about themselves as part of the health and wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience with healthy, confident individuals as the driving core purpose. The classroom was made up of 3 small tables and a U-shaped table where the teacher sat inbetween. There was also a book corner which included a two seater sofa. All the resources in the class were in one place and the children helped themselves when they needed them. The classroom was made up of 21 pupils and a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HTLA) was covering the class.

**What happened:**

During the input for the lesson, the children were all sat on the carpet where they came up with ideas for describing words that they could use for themselves. After a few children had the opportunity to share their ideas the HTLA then gave the success criteria of the class verbally and made sure everybody understood what they needed to do. The children then took their seats, there was some children that took a while to find a seat which prompted me to ask a child who has come to sit nearby, if they choose their own seats to which they replied yes. They continued to tell me how they can sit anywhere, even the sofa (with a tray) but if

they wanted help from the teacher, they should sit on the U-shaped table. It was observed that only 4 children went to sit on the U-shaped table. It was understood that there are sometimes two members of staff in this class. Therefore, there is a teacher sat at the U-shaped table during tasks. However, as this HTLA was alone, they needed to support the rest of the class as well. After around five minutes the other tables settled and were on task, which meant the HTLA was able to sit with the children who had chosen to sit on the U-shaped table.

**Areas of possible exploration:**

When most of the children grabbed the resources they needed, found a seat and began their task so easily, it led to questions around the classroom environment. It could lead to research around the benefits of flexible seating and the pupil choice when designing a classroom environment.

**Notes:**

This lesson was observed after morning break time, following a morning full of wellbeing activities such as yoga and a mile a day. The classroom was made up of different seating options and had plenty of space for the 21 pupils. There was a conversation had with two of the pupils which concluded that they enjoyed being able to sit with their friends and on the table just outside the door if they wanted to work in a quieter space. Unfortunately, there was no time for questions for the HTLA as it was time to move on before the lesson ended.

### Record 3

Date and time, year group:

26.09.2022 1:30-2:30pm Year 6

**Where and When:**

A year 6 class were observed after lunch time where they were learning about Rosh Hashanah in Judaism, as part of the Humanities area of learning and experience with the driving purpose to be ethically, informed citizens. There were 22 pupils in the classroom with a classroom teacher only. The teacher began the lesson with restorative practice by going over what they had learned that morning

in assembly, followed by a video and then a writing activity about what they learned.

**What happened:**

During this lesson the vast majority of the class were engaged. The initial input, which involved questions and answers, included a mix between a 'hands up' approach and random selection from the 'secret student pot', and lasted around thirty minutes. Approximately halfway through, a child towards the back of the class became fidgety and disengaged. The teacher soon noticed and tried to involve the child in the discussion while using supportive language and the child seemed more at ease. Before watching the video, the teacher summarised what they had just learned and then asked this child and a few others to give out the books. This child seemed to respond well to responsibility and settled into the written task quickly.

**Areas of possible exploration:**

During this observation, it was noticed how the positive language and actions used worked well to get this child to regain focus in the lesson which led to questions being asked about how positive classroom behaviour management could increase student engagement. This could lead to further study about how positive behaviour management could support pupil engagement while also supporting their social and emotional development.

**Notes:**

The lesson was observed straight after lunch time and it required the children to be stationary for one hour. The classroom was very calm and quiet, however there were many colourful displays, covering most of the classroom.

Unfortunately, the teacher was required to meet a parent at the end of the lesson, so there was no time for questions. There were a few questions that could have been asked, such as, Was this typical behaviour for this child? Do the children choose their own seats or is there a seating plan?

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