

**A critical evaluation and the Word count (or
Equivalent to 5000 identification of next teaching
equivalent): words. and learning steps focusing on a
case study of an individual learner or a group of
learners, based on an observed critical incident.**

Introduction

In this assignment I intend to critically evaluate and identify the next teaching and learning steps focusing on an observed critical incident of a group of learners. Tripp (2012) discusses that a critical incident is an incident, something that happens. The incident becomes critical by the way we look at it and the way we interpret the incident or event. The judgement we make on this incident is where we start to see it in a critical way, as Tripp (2012) states that anything we observe or see, we can see it in a “critical fashion”. Additionally, Brookfield (1990) as stated in Joshi’s (2018) journal discusses that a critical incident is an unplanned event that happens at some point within the school day, these incidents are personal to each individual teacher and is not something that routinely happens. Brookfield (1990) emphasises that these incidents are often “vividly remembered”. These events are an important part of teaching practice, Richards and Farrell (2010) as stated in Joshi’s (2018) journal, states that critical incidents lead to documentation and analysis which allows learning and improvement of practice, it allows for teachers to learn more about their teaching and their learners as well as themselves. Additionally, Richards and Farrell (2010) state that teachers make these situations critical because they learn from them, the incidents cause the teachers to ask why it happened and what caused it to happen, allowing them to learn. In addition to this, Tripp (2012) also discusses the importance of professional judgement and reflection in teaching and how incidents encourage this type of thinking, allowing teachers to “improve their professional judgement”.

The role of critical reflection.

Shandomo (2010) discusses the importance of critical reflection, he states that

“Critical reflection blends learning through experiences with theoretical and technical learning to form new knowledge constructions and new behaviours or insights”.

Additionally, Shandomo (2010) emphasises the importance of teachers writing about their experiences and creating self-reflections on these experiences, to allow them to develop their practice. Shandomo (2010) states that this is a constructivist approach to learning. TeAchnology (no date) discusses that Piagets theory of constructivism states that people learn through experiences, he says they produce new knowledge based on their experiences and learn to incorporate new experiences into their old experiences. Piagets theory agrees with Shandomo (2010)'s idea of self-reflection through acknowledging experiences, as teachers are reflecting on their previous experiences to see what went well and understand what they can do to make the next experience better, showing they are incorporating old experiences into new ones. These ideas also fit in with some of the stages in Gibbs (1999) reflective model, the six stages include description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusions, and personal action plan. As Shandomo (2010) states the importance of writing down their experiences, this makes a link with the description stage, additionally this will prompt the teachers to think about their experience and analyse in order to reflect and develop their practice. Dr Nicole Brown (no date) discusses that the main idea of the model is to reflect step by step so that we slow down the reflection process and don't jump to conclusions, and most importantly to acknowledge and isolate feelings. Regarding reflection and the development of teaching practice, the Welsh Government (2020) state that the professional teaching standards are set out to allow teachers to reflect on their practice and enable teachers identify areas for improvement to further their professional development and carry out effective practice. In addition to this, Mathew et al (2017) emphasises that reflective practice is the at the core of teaching and it plays a central role in professional development, allowing teachers to understand themselves and their impact on the students by constantly looking into their own actions and experiences, allowing them to reflect, resulting in professional development. Although there are a number of ways teachers can reflect, Markkanen (2020) carried out a study exploring the reflections of teaching staff in regards to challenging behaviours, and found that Gibbs reflective cycle was most useful when it came to the teachers reflecting on their feelings and thoughts regarding the challenging situations, suggesting that Gibbs model is a useful reflective model due to the inclusion of reflecting on feelings, as this is something not all models acknowledge. With the changing curriculum for Wales, reflection is key for teachers during this time. The Welsh Government (2021) states that in the process of the role out of the new curriculum, teachers will need to engage and understand the curriculum, which involves reflecting on current

practice, and looking into what needs to improve and what's working well during the reform, they should also share discuss their understandings reflecting on these to further develop additionally, reflect the effectiveness of the role out of the curriculum and use this to improve. After considering this, reflection is an everyday tool used in teaching and is an important tool in order to develop practice due to the forever changing role of a teacher.

Observation, School & Class context.

Referring to BERA (2018) guidelines for anonymity,

“The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants’ data is considered the norm for the conduct of research. Researchers should recognise the entitlement of both institutions and individual participants to privacy and should accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity.”,

the name of the school, pupils and staff observed will be kept anonyms throughout.

The observation took place in a small school of 180 pupils aged 3-11 years old in the village of Resolven in the Neath Valley (■■■■■ Primary, 2021). There are four single-age and two mix-age classes with six full time teachers (Estyn, 2014). Estyn (2014) identifies that around 18% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is below the national average and very few pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds, with no pupils coming from Welsh as the first language speaking homes. Additionally, around 19% of pupils have additional learning needs which is about average for Wales, and very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Finally, few very pupils are looked after by the local authority (Estyn, 2014). Estyn (2014) said the school has a very caring ethos, where all staff value pupils highly, and pupils’ wellbeing has a high prominence in the everyday life and work of the school. Additionally, the school has a good partnership with the local community.

Critical incident linked to Donaldson’s Four Purposes.

The incident I observed was emotion pegs. This was part of the morning routine. First thing in the morning when the children came in, they got their pegs and placed them on the ‘how are you feeling board’. The options for this are; calm, sad, happy, confused, loved, angry and fear. The children then had the opportunity to put their hands up and tell the teacher

why they were feeling this way. This meets one of the four purposes in Successfull Futures (2015) of 'healthy confident individuals' as the children are developing their confidence by discussing their emotions, and showing empathy for the other children. Additionally, they are making choices and thinking about their emotions promoting independence. At first, as the majority of the class had placed their pegs on the 'happy' picture, this led the incident to become critical for me, as I struggled to understand how it was beneficial as to me, all the children were following the crowd and putting it wherever their friend put it. This led me to discuss with the teacher why this was beneficial, so I asked the teacher why she chose to do this and she discussed that it is all about finding out how the child is feeling without directly asking them, especially after lockdown and covid she discussed that it is a really useful tool to find out if everyone is okay. More often or not the children are feeling happy, but sometimes children will put something else which then allows the teacher to pull them aside at a safe time in a safe place to see if everything is okay and see why they are feeling this way. After the register then the children will be asked if they want to discuss why they have chosen the particular pegs and the children will put their hands up if they want to discuss, there is never any pressure on children to share how they feel if they don't want to. In addition to this, the teacher discussed that it is a good way for children to explain how they are feeling if they do not like to verbally inform the teachers. This again is providing an opportunity for children to become 'healthy confident individuals' by respecting and listening to their peers (Donaldson, 2015). Additionally, the teacher would explain to the children the impact of how their feeling on their school day and how this strategy was a way of off loading any worries before they start their day with a clear head. This is allowing the children to understand and develop confidence in talking about these emotions which again Donaldson (2015) states is a key concept in children becoming healthy confident individuals. Children are also respecting their peers and respecting the different emotions and needs of the other children in the class, for example, one child was feeling sad because they were tired and didn't want to work. The children showed empathy for this and asked the child if they needed help with their work, and if they wanted to play with them to make them feel happy. This then falls in with the four purpose 'ethical informed citizens' as Donaldson (2015) emphasises that ethical, informed citizens "respect the needs and rights of others". However, although the class teacher explained the importance of the pegs, areas of potential research stood out to me after thinking critically about the incident.

Literature Review.

The critical incident observed led to the identification of three areas for potential research, one being the impact children's emotional well-being has on their academic achievement. A study carried out by Berger et al (2009) as cited in Gräbel (2017), found that emotional wellbeing correlated positively with academic achievement. However, although the study shows a positive link between well-being and academic achievement, the study states that the wellbeing monitored was 'school related wellbeing', which the critical incident observed does not relate to. As children placed their pegs on the emotion boards first thing in the morning, this was with the intention to off-load any emotions they were coming into school with. Additionally, Berger et al (2009) state that the state of the children's wellbeing was monitored by how they are 'thriving' in school, which does not take into consideration anything that may impact a pupil's wellbeing outside of the school environment. Additionally, in contrast to the positive correlation of emotional wellbeing and academic achievement Petegem et al (2008) as stated in Gräbel (2017) found no significant relationship between wellbeing and academic achievement. On the other hand, Public Health England (2014) as cited in Clarke (2020) advocated improving pupil wellbeing as an effective means of raising achievement, after the ongoing research into children's wellbeing and the impact on academic achievement, suggesting a link between well-being and academic success. However, Spratt (2017) as cited in Clarke (2020) actually discusses the implications on looking at children's wellbeing and academic achievement, as he discusses that this is a difficult concept, as asking children if they are happy at school may result in them providing a response such as 'I would prefer to work on my own terms as it would make me feel happier', which is then something that becomes complicated, as wellbeing is such a focus within schools (Spratt, 2017). However, although this is contrasting literature, Public Health England (2014) suggest "pupils with better health and wellbeing are likely to achieve better academically", proving the statement made in Clarke (2020)'s research. Additionally, University College London (UCL) (2019) suggest previous research between mental health and academic outcomes have shown mixed results, as we can see from literature already discussed. However, the study carried out by UCL emphasised a distinct association between educational attainment, absence from school and mental health difficulties. Although this study focuses on mental health, it states that mental health and wellbeing is a common focus in schools. This study supports the incident of the emotion pegs, as it shows the school are focusing on the wellbeing of the children and acknowledging their emotions. Additionally UCL (2019) emphasise the importance of acknowledging wellbeing in schools in order to overcome these effects on academic achievement, which is the only literature that has been discussed that actually states the importance of acknowledging children's emotions. However, although the research emphasises acknowledging the emotions, the research demonstrates the link between mental health difficulties and low attainment, linking

to persistent absence from school. This contrasts with the idea of the emotion pegs, as acknowledging the emotions would be difficult to pick up with the persistent absence, not being able to make a clear link to the academic achievements.

Another area of research the critical incident led to the identification of was the impact Covid-19 has had on children's wellbeing. This is something the class teacher emphasised when discussing the use of the emotion pegs. Res (2020) discusses that children take up approximately 28% of the world's population and COVID-19 has impacted the lives of these children all around the world, bringing a sense of fear and anxiety. Additionally, Res (2020) states that based on findings, children felt uncertain, fearful, and isolated during the in the pandemic and experienced disturbed sleep as well as nightmares and poor appetite. However, this research doesn't actually state that these uncertainties experienced by the children were a factor to their well-being. In addition to this, BMJ (2021) also states that there is limited research on the effect the pandemic had on the mental health of children and sometimes can be seen as contradictory. However, UNICEF (2021) state that globally, at least 1 in 7 children have been affected directly by lockdowns which is a concern for family health. UNICEF (2021) state that in China alone, it was indicated that around a third of respondents reported feeling scared or anxious. Although this is a negative factor, The State of the World's Children (2021) as cited in UNICEF (2021) urges breaking the silence around mental health and promoting a better understanding for children, which is definitely something the emotion pegs begin to introduce to children as they are acknowledging and discussing their emotions. On the other hand, Thakur et al (2020) discusses a link between covid 19 and children's mental health and well-being in relation to screen time. Thakur et al (2020) discuss that with lockdowns, children are more likely to spend more time Infront of the TV and internet which can lead to lower self-esteem, and additionally cyber bullying, which can affect their mental health. However, although this research suggests this link, there was no study carried out to back up the statements. On the other hand, research by Liu et al (no date) as cited in Thakur et al (2020) suggests that children who had to be separated from their parents due to illness did effect children due to the separation, which Lui et al (no date) discusses that attachment to caregivers is crucial for children's psychological wellbeing. UK Parliament (2021) additionally state the limited research about the mental health of children during the pandemic. Although they do state that most studies have found that children's mental health has worsened in the pandemic however, most children remained healthy and well. On the other hand, the UK Parliament (2021) state that after assessing NHS data, it has shown child mental health services are at a high. After considering the literature around the area of the impact of covid-19 on children's well-being, there is a clear gap in the literature and research looking at the impact specifically on

children's wellbeing. Although there are suggestions in the research, there are little studies carried out to prove this. However, this does not suggest that acknowledging children's mental health and wellbeing is not priority after the pandemic, as the Welsh Government (2021) emphasise the importance of educational settings reviewing their well-being landscapes and developing these to meet the needs of the population.

The final area of research the incident led to the identification of is the benefit of discussing wellbeing for children, do children understand the importance of well-being. Powell et al (2018) found that children stated that relationships with themselves, teachers, friends, and peers as central to their wellbeing. This study shows that children to some extent understand factors that contribute to a positive wellbeing. However, the study only involved 606 pupils who were both primary and secondary and all came from 3 catholic schools, so this research doesn't take into consideration other religions or all types of schools and doesn't specifically focus on younger pupils. However, the Office for National Statistics (2020) state that children were able to identify 5 main areas of on what they need for a 'happy life' and positive relationships was one of these, children discussed in depth the area of positive relationships and even suggested specific ideas, suggesting that children do understand what they need for a 'happy life' which contributes to their overall wellbeing (ONS, 202). However, a study by Dex et al (2012) found an implication with measuring children's understanding of well-being regarding subgroups. An in-depth examination was unable to be carried out with the subgroups, Dex et al (2012) states that hearing everyone's voice is important. On the other hand, Foley et al (2012) carried out research with 19 pupils aged 8-16 all with varying disabilities and found all children were able to contribute however some of the younger children gave simple responses due to their level of functioning. The pupils were able to come up with six themes of the meaning of wellbeing, describing some of these. This research shows that children with disabilities do understand the meaning of a good well-being suggesting it is an inclusive area, however a weakness to this study is the sample size being only 19 pupils. In contrast to the ONS and the wording of 'happy life' for children's understanding of wellbeing, Foley et al (2012) states that when carrying out a study with disabled children on their understanding of wellbeing, they abandoned the words 'happy life' as they state it is very limited and focuses on emotion, which suggests the study's findings could be interpreted differently. Instead, Foley et al (2012) used the words 'good life'. A study of 123 children by Fattore et al (2008) found that children discussed nine themes of wellbeing and children understood the experiences of wellbeing and how these are significant to their own wellbeing and emotional life. The children were also able to express fears and insecurities which they knew were negative experiences regarding their wellbeing. Another important theme the children identified was the link between physical health and

well-being, showing the children in this study had a good understanding of the different links to well-being. Most of the literature regarding children's understanding of well-being suggests children's biggest link is positive friendships as this is something that was identified in a lot of research discussed, although there were other areas of understanding, this shows children understand some of the positive impacts that result in positive well-being.

Reflection/Evaluation and next steps

Cimer et al (2013) states that by teachers reflecting, it allows them to consider and evaluate their ideas in order to help develop and improve their teaching practice. In addition to reflection helping teachers develop and improve practice, reflection aids in providing the best care and teaching possible for the children as you are reflecting on if children's individual needs are being met, along with reflecting on how the lesson/activity went and looking at how it can be better next time, ensuring you are providing high quality experiences for children (PACEY, 2016). Gibbs (1988) as cited in Manchester Metropolitan University (2013) emphasises the importance of reflecting upon experiences so that you do not forget what happened, and do not lose potential for learning from the experience. Gibbs (1988) states that it is through the acknowledgment of the feelings and thoughts that arise due from the experience that "generalisations and concepts" can rise to allow new experiences to be built upon and set about positively. By using the research I have discussed and Gibbs (1988) model it will allow me to reflect and evaluate upon the critical incident and identify my next steps and develop my own professional practice and personal development. The critical incident I observed was the emotion pegs, as discussed in detail in the above section and appendix 1. My initial feelings of the emotion pegs were unsure, I felt that although this was something the children had done as a routine since starting the school, I wasn't 100% sure that the children understood what the emotions meant and why they were doing this. I thought it might have been more of a routine rather than meaningful. However, after discussing my thoughts with the teacher I was able to evaluate and analyse the effectiveness as the teacher went on to discuss how COVID-19 impacted the children a lot, and by discussing their emotions and how they felt this is something that really brought the class back together and she could see positive friendships re-forming after coming back into school, resulting in me feeling more positive about the experience. Furthermore, upon evaluation, the children really enjoyed discussing how they felt and why they felt this way, in fact every child on the carpet had their hand up as they were excited about telling the teacher. This is a key element of the experience as discussing the feelings went well, they all showed an understanding of understanding the emotions they felt by discussing why they

felt this way. After reflecting and carrying out the literature review on the areas of research I identified whilst observing the critical incident, it has allowed me to develop a further understanding on the areas I was unsure about, for example children understanding the meaning of well-being and what impact this had on them. Upon reflection regarding the literature review, one suggestion I would make would be to discuss more in detail with the children how these positive emotions effect their well-being as well as their learning. As I discussed in Appendix 1, the teacher did emphasise to the children how their emotions and feelings would affect their working day and how it was good to offload these feelings which had a positive outcome with the children as they were more confident to discuss their emotions. However, to conclude the reflection, a possible suggestion to allow the children to begin to understand more in detail would be to discuss the well-being side to it. However, the children were only aged 5-7 so possibly would need to be researched and discussed with other teachers who may have done this previously. To develop my own professional and personal development, I will be able to use the literature I found to build on my knowledge of the experience, additionally I think I will benefit from discussing with different teachers and observing their ways of carrying out this experience to again build on my knowledge. Finally, I believe I could benefit from looking into well-being training to further expand my knowledge and understanding of the importance of children's well-being.

Conclusion

To conclude, most importantly I have learnt the importance of the role of reflection and critical reflection for teachers, it is a part of each day and helps practitioners develop their practice. Additionally, the research has shown what effective reflection looks like and the importance of being critical. The literature review has equipped me with knowledge and understanding around the areas of research provoked from the critical incident I observed. This research allowing me to improve on my professional and personal development by acknowledging next steps and taking on board research and studies. Being a reflective practitioner is vital to achieve each of the five professional teaching standards and the research I have discussed has led me to understand this. The aim of the professional teaching standards are to support teachers to achieve, and develop the best they can and they emphasise that practice should be consistent and guide with the new curriculum, research I have discussed proves that to progress and develop you must reflect upon experiences and due to the new changing role of the teacher with the new curriculum it is important that each of these standards are being met, and reflected on to ensure progress

(Hwb, 2019). This research has allowed me to gain knowledge and think reflectively and critically day to day, which will equip me to develop my practice as a student teacher.

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Appendix 1

Date and time, year group: 23/09/2021 - Year ½.
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context The observation took place first thing in the morning just as the children came into the classroom. This was a classroom set routine and the children didn't need to be told to do it.
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) First thing in the morning when the children come in, they get their pegs and place them on the 'how are you feeling board'. The options for this are calm, sad, happy, confused, loved, angry and fear. The children then had the opportunity to put their hands up and tell the teacher why they were feeling this way.
Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be "under the hood" in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? I asked the teacher why she chose to do this, and she discussed that it is all about finding out how the child is feeling without directly asking them, especially after lockdown and covid she discusses that it is a really useful tool to find out if everyone is okay. More often or not the children are feeling happy, but sometimes children will put some-thing else which then allows the teacher to pull them aside at a safe time in a safe place to see if everything is okay and see why they are feeling this way. After the register then the children will be asked if they want to discuss why they have chosen the pegs and the children will put their hands up if they want to discuss, there is never any pressure on children to share how they feel if they don't want too. In addition to this, the teacher discussed that it is a good way for children to explain how they are feeling if they do not like to verbally inform the teachers.
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) This was first thing in the morning and therefore was a busy environment, there were lots of distractions as children were entering the classroom at different times and sometimes choosing the wrong name peg which resulted in fussing. However, it has to be taken into consideration that it is only their third week, and they are still getting used to routine. There were a few children who forgot to place their peg, but after the word 'pegs' was instructed by the teacher, the children who had forgotten, instantly remembered by a single command.

Appendix 2

Date and time, year group: 23/09/2021 - Year 1/2 .
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context The observation took place in the classroom during carpet time after lunch time. General context of the classroom was quiet although the odd child was still chatting and wound up from lunch time.
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) At lunch there was an incident where a child was bitten. The teacher addressed this issue when the children were sat on the carpet after lunch in a calm environment. The teacher then asked the child why he made the choice to bite another child? then continued with leading questions like 'was this a good choice?' which prompted the child to understand he was wrong. This then led to a punishment of the child missing his next play.
Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be "under the hood" in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? I asked the teacher why she chose the punishment of missing play, and she explained that she chose this so that the child would understand that what they had done was wrong. I then asked if there was any other options instead of the missing play punishment and the teacher made me aware that she has in fact explored other options such as the removal of a dojo point, or maybe some time out or thinking time. However, with this individual the removal of playtime is the only option that worked for him.
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) Following the incident, the child had a really good afternoon completing really good work which the teacher paid a lot of attention to and gave a lot of positive praise and told the child 'See, this is what behaviour makes me happy' and the child was happy about this and continued the good behaviour as he knew this made the teacher happy.

Appendix 3

Date and time, year group: 23/09/2021 - Year ½.
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context The observation took part in a Welsh Lesson which was carried out after lunch time. The general context of the classroom was calm and quiet as they had previously had a story read to them which allowed them to calm down after lunch. However, there were a few distractions on the carpet.
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) So, the children were completing Welsh steppingstones during circle time. First, the teacher asked what number is un deg pump? A child shouted out the answer whilst other children had their hands up. The teacher acknowledged this and said 'Oh shouting out? I'm only answering children with hands up'. She then moved on to ask a child who was sitting nicely with their hands up, and positively praised them by saying 'well done, lovely sitting and you had your hand up.' Additionally, positive praise was used with Dojo rewards. In addition to this, the teacher asked who would like a turn of standing up and completing all the steppingstones, children were shouting out 'me', the teacher then said again, I'm only choosing super sitters, and then praised and the teacher continued to say 'I chose you because you were sitting beautifully' the chosen child and gave a dojo point again. This led to children sitting quietly with their fingers on lips as they wanted to be chosen and have the reward.
Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be "under the hood" in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? *Positive reinforcement theory*
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) Although the incident was after lunch time, the carpet was quiet with a few small distractions. However, these were acknowledged by the teacher who picked on that child and asked the child the question, who couldn't answer the question because they weren't listening. The teacher acknowledged this and said 'i know you don't know the answer, it's because you weren't listening' and then asked another child to explain what was happening. There were still a few children chatting on the carpet, distracting one and other.