

ECAD6007- Who Am I Teaching

A critical evaluation and the learning steps focusing on a case study of an individual learner or a group of learners, based on an observed critical incident.

Introduction

The aim of this assignment is to critically evaluate a case study of a learner in a classroom observed from a critical incident in a classroom. Tripp (2012) described that a critical incident is where an event occurs and can be described as to what happened during the incident. To add the criticalness to the incident you must look at the meaning behind the incident and what that means for the individual or group of learners. In comparison, Joshi (2018) described a critical incident as a hindrance or a problem that takes place during an everyday occurrence or routine, which then allows for the teacher to reflect back and examine why this might have happened. The critical incident which was observed was an interaction between a child with a visual impairment and their one to one teaching assistant who supports them to work independently. The critical incident was observed through an immersive room video. The video showed that the lesson observed during the critical incident took place during a year 4 class in a morning lesson, there was twenty three pupils in the class and the pupils were sat in mixed abilities across the classroom. At the time of the critical incident the class was taking part in a lesson on inferences where the teacher was at the front of the class engaging in class conversation and the pupils giving their answers to the class discussion. Once this section was over the learners were working together in their tables or independently to analyse the resources passed around and answer the questions provided to them. The learning theories which will be discussed in connection with this critical incident is the constructivism approach to learning alongside the sociocultural theory and lastly, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development.

Literature Review

This literature review will critically analyse different learning theories which apply to children with additional learning needs (ALN) being able to work independently in the classroom. The learning theories which will be discussed is the constructivist approach to learning, sociocultural theory and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. Pritchard (2013) defined constructivism as the process of adding new information or new learning to pre-existing knowledge and understanding. Piaget

believed that in order for children to learn there must be adjustments for environmental factors that affects a child's learning (Pritchard, 2013). Kalina and Powell (2009) explained that in order for constructivism to take place in the classroom educators must know what stage of development the learner is at in their learning or knowledge. Piaget stated that in order for children to learn and to be able to interpret information they learn through different stages of development (Kalina and Powell, 2009), whilst most children do tend to develop at they similar rates to those at similar ages this can't be true for all children as some have barriers in the way and challenges that prohibit them from working at the same level as other children. For instance, during the critical incident it was shown that a child with an ALN who had a visual impairment could not properly view the whiteboard in the class so in order to remove this barrier for him the teaching assistant provided support by setting up a magnifier for the pupil to use which in turn enabled them to work independently alongside their peers. This created an opportunity for the pupil to put their learning first and create an equal playing field so they could learn at the level as their peers.

The next learning theory that applies to this critical incident is the sociocultural theory built upon by Lev Vygotsky. Sociocultural theory allows for educators to create social interactions in the classroom that benefits the pupil whilst also enabling them to work independently, Piaget suggested that "the social dynamics of the situation would create a pressure towards resolution of differences" (Mercer and Howe, 2012, p.13). This suggests that when children are able to work together and communicate effectively amongst them they can get past any differences between them. This relates to the critical incident as during the case study the pupil is sat with his peers and working effectively with them, in some cases when a child has an ALN and has a TA to help assist them in the classroom they can become cut off from the class dynamic and not involved with their peers as they might be at the back of the class with their TA separated from their peers. But in the case of the critical incident this was not the case, The pupil was sit with their peers working together and when they were in need of assistance the TA came over and provided it before leaving the pupil to work independently again. John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) explained that in order for pupils to be able to learn they must

depend on each other for social interaction to gain experience but as time goes on they become self-reliant and take responsibility for what they need in the classroom. One way that this relates to the critical incident is because the pupil had previously relied on their TA quite a bit but as time goes on they became more confident in the classroom. As the critical incident shows the pupil was in a situation where they realised they could not see the board when they needed to and required their specialist equipment to be able to view the board in the classroom, they felt confident to take the initiative and attempt to set up the equipment for themselves. This shows that in this scenario the pupil felt comfortable in the classroom because of social interaction in the classroom and successful dialogue to take their learning into their own hands and use the equipment provided to them so that they can have equal learning opportunities the same as their peers.

Finally, the last learning theory that could apply to the situation is another theory from Vygotsky, the zone of proximal development. Silalahi (2019) described the zone of proximal development as not learning through self-discovery like Piaget but instead children can only learn through the assistance of around them. This learning theory applies to the critical incident because through time and plenty of support the pupil became confident in the classroom where they did not need their TA with them for constant support but instead were there to provide assistance when needed. Vygotsky believed that learning occurred through social interactions and a routine of learning through collaboration and then trying for themselves (Silalahi, 2019). This type of scaffolding was used in the classroom as the school provided the tools in the classroom such as the magnifier so that the pupil was able to learn at an appropriate level. Nyikos and Hashimoto (1997) described that there is a big significance and relevance to scaffolding and the zone of proximal development in the classroom this is because without the scaffolding in place there is only so much learning and development that can take place within a child. Although one negative to scaffolding or zone of proximal development is that there is no clear guide on how to effectively use scaffolding to properly support students in the classroom (Nyikos and Hashimoto, 1997). For some educators this may quite overwhelming as they might not know how to confidently implement it in the classroom but in the case of the critical incident, it was

evident that scaffolding had been put in place as the pupil had been given enough support to where they felt confident and independent within the classroom. These learning theories discussed show how through different strategies implemented throughout the classroom the teacher and teaching assistant were able to build up the pupil with ALN to feel independent and confident in the classroom whilst also keeping their support system in place.

Explanation of case study

The case study of the incident observed is the role the teaching assistant in the classroom plays and how they support the pupil with an additional learning need within the classroom whilst also enabling them to be confident and independent. Lots of times in classrooms across the country children with additional learning needs will be included in the classroom environment but they won't be integrated into classroom like their peers, instead often times they will be secluded at the back of the classroom with their teaching assistant away from any interaction off their peers. Additionally, something that can quite often happen is the teaching assistant will overcompensate and end up doing most of the class work for the pupil. Mand (2007) explained that often despite children with additional learning needs being in the classroom lots of time rejection will take place through lack of social interaction. A factor that may contribute to this is that some children may feel uncomfortable approaching a classmate if they are surrounded by their teaching assistant at every opportunity in the classroom. In the case of the critical incident the pupil was sat at the front and centre of the classroom this was less to do with integration and because the pupil has sight difficulties so they are sat as close to the whiteboard as possible. But at the same time it allows for the pupil to be able to mix and get involved with their peers and create bonds and friendships. Although the pupil is sitting independently without the reassurance and constant support without their teaching assistant, this was not always the case though instead over time the class teacher and teaching assistant worked towards helping the pupil feel confident in the class so that they could sit self-sufficiently with their classmates. The following part of the critical incident showed the pupil needing to view the board to

assist them in partaking in the class work so they try to set up the apparatus to help them better view the board like the rest of their classmates, whilst trying to do this the teaching assistant spots them from across the classroom struggling to do this so comes over and provide support to the pupil. This is a great example of scaffolding or the zone of proximal development being used in the classroom because it shows how through support the pupil has become self-sufficient within the classroom setting to take control of what they need but they also have the support system in place to help them when they need extra help. An example of this is when the pupil attempts to set up the magnifier so that they can see the whiteboard in the class and the teaching assistant seems them struggling and comes over to provide assistance. As the literature explained the pupil here is being supported through social interaction and bridging the gap between what the pupil can do and what they need support in order to do (Silalahi, 2019). The pupil is attempting what they think they can do and the teaching assistant is providing the help where it is needed.

Another part that the critical incident highlighted is the use of technological devices in the classroom to assist the pupil with the additional learning need. As mentioned the pupil has sight difficulties which means they struggle to see as well as the rest of the peers, so as to provide as much of an equal learning experience to the pupil they chose a seat at the front of the class where they could see the board and teacher the best. They were also provided with a magnifier device which can be positioned in front of the whiteboard and feedbacks to an iPad so the pupil can accurately see the board. Having assistive technology within the classroom creates an inclusive environment and allows for pupils with vision difficulties to feel confident within the classroom as they can see what they rest of their peers can see and do not feel left out or anxious about not being able to view what the teachers is explaining. Hasselbring (2000) backed this up as they explained that by including assistive technology within the classroom it meets a variety of different needs and grants the pupils the ability to be active learners within the classroom. Baker, Milne and Ladner (2019) explained that a barrier to using assistive technology in the classroom is the usability of the technology and if they pupil struggles to use the technology then they are less likely to want to use it. This usability issue was

demonstrated in the critical incident, during the critical incident it was shown the pupil struggling to set up and position their magnifier device but fortunately they had a teaching assistant who was able to come over and properly set up the device for them. If it was not for the teaching assistant being there to support them they might have given up and decided not to use the device, this would then result in their learning being negatively impacted because they would be unsure of what the task they were meant to be doing was and unable to view important information of the board.

Teaching and learning methods

The first learning method that I would use for the critical incident is the use of assistive technology in the classroom. This method was used during the critical incident as the pupil had access to a magnifier on an iPad, assistive technology is the key to making present day school a lot more inclusive and accessible towards pupils with additional learning needs. Netherton and Deal (2006) explained the importance of assistive technology in the classroom, they explained that not all children learn in the way same and by incorporating assistive technology into the classroom it allows pupils with additional learning needs to be given a chance to take part in something that might otherwise be unable to do on their own. It provides pupils with independence for their learning and the chance to learn at the same rate as the rest of their peers. Additionally, Merbler, Hadadian and Ulman (1999) consolidated this type of teaching method by explaining that assistive technology allows for pupils to be able to take part in tasks that would be impossible or difficult without the assistive technology. As mentioned previously a positive to assistive technology in the classroom is the independence it provides to pupils in regards towards their learning and development in the classroom. Bryant, Bryant and Raskind (1998) described how assistive technology can provide an independence in the classroom and can be used to play to the pupils strengths which results in more confidence in the classroom and independence towards their learning and social interactions in the classroom. This is true as through the use of assistive technology the pupil will feel less of a need to rely solely on their teaching assistant and teacher which can benefit their self-worth and their

academic performance. However, a negative to the use of assistive technology is that most often they require a certain level of training to be undertaken by the teacher or other teaching staff to be able to be used in the classroom. Ahmed (2018) explained that teachers who receive minimal training do not consider the use of assistive technology within the classroom. This means that if a teacher is not confident or aware of the positivity that could come from the integration of the technology in the classroom then this will rub off on the pupil who in turn will be wary of asking to use the device as they may sense that the teachers does not approve of its use in the classroom despite how it may benefit them. The inclusion of assistive technology can have a huge beneficial impact on a child's progression both academically and personally, Hunt (2021) depicted how the use of assistive technology can aid a child's progression by increasing their quality of life and their development. Assistive technology can benefit a child's progression as it gives them access to areas that they otherwise struggle to access, in the case of the critical incident the magnifier device allows the pupil to view what is going on in the classroom and view information they otherwise can't.

The next teaching method that I would implement is differentiated instruction. I would use this method because differentiated instruction allows for the teacher to develop targets, support and resources that best suit the pupils needs and abilities (Landrum and McDuffie, 2010). This is a personal method and caters best to the pupils strengths and weaknesses. Landrum and McDuffie (2010) further explained that differentiated instruction is a form of scaffolding because it can maximise a pupils potential in the classroom. A positive to differentiated instruction is that it is personal to every learner and avoids the notion that one size fits all and create opportunities to all learners (Subban, 2006). This is a positive because not every method of support is going to work for every pupils, depending on a pupils needs they will need varying levels of support to help them thrive in the classroom. A negative to differentiated instruction to support pupils with additional learning needs is that the teacher must be aware to what the home life of a pupil is like in order to best suit it to the pupil, there is also a certain amount of collaboration that must take place between the teacher and parents in order for it to be effective (Lue, 2017). This is true as a significant amount

of a pupils development also take place during the home, without parent/guardian co-operation it will make it a lot more difficult to tailor a method that will best suit them. Valiandes and Neophytou (2018) explained that differentiated instruction can benefit a child's progression by improving their academic success in the classroom. This is because the teacher is tailoring a method of teaching which best suits the pupil.

Discussion

My findings have influenced my pedagogical choices by illustrating to me how beneficial it is to build up the confidence of a child with additional learning needs so that they can be independent and grow within the classroom. Daulay, Saputra and Walidaini (2022) explained the importance of creating independence for children with additional learning needs, they said that independence is vital for success from a pupil and that a pupil's attitude can have a big impact on what they feel they can accomplish. Because of this when teaching a child with an additional learning need it will have a big influence on my pedagogical, I will focus on what they can do and how provide support and scaffolding to help them achieve goals and gain independence where they can over time.

Additionally, another method that I would take through to my teaching would be advocating for the use of assistive technology in the classroom for pupils with additional learning needs, whether this may be the inclusion of pencil grips for pupils with impaired motor skills or a pupil with impaired sight who needs a magnifier device to help them view objects in the classroom and school setting. The use of assistive technology empowers pupils with additional learning needs and provides them with the chance to be fully involved and take part in class activities that before would not be possible or they would require a certain amount of assistance from a teaching assistance which places a barrier to social interaction with their peers. Assistive technology means that the pupil gains a freedom that they necessarily do not always have access to and they no longer need to heavily rely on their support system around them (Adebisi, Liman and Longpoe, 2015). This means that it gives the pupil a new sense of independence which is a much needed attitude when the child is

approaching the transition into their teen years and adulthood (*Adebisi et al., 2015*) as having poor self-esteem is something that could have detrimental effects that last through their life.

Conclusion

To conclude, I think that the learning methods discussed previously would be very impactful and beneficial on a child with additional learning needs because as mentioned they provide a new sense of independence to the pupil but allows them to gain this independence over time at a pace that best suits them. Assistive technology allows the pupil to feel less reliant on the class teacher and teaching assistant and lets them learn at the same level as their peers. Furthermore, differentiated instructions creates a learning plan that is personal to the pupil and works with them to gain independence and confidence. I think the methods would be valid because during the video I viewed for the critical incident I could see the impact the assistive technology had on the pupil and the confidence it gave them in the classroom whilst also having support off their teaching assistant. I also think that differentiated instruction would be valid because it is designed for the individual and is devised to highlight their strengths and support their weaknesses. I would say that my view on learning theories has been changed as I have been able to see in practice how the zone of proximal development can work and uplift pupils. This links to the pedagogy section of the professional standards as differentiation is used to support the pupil with additional learning needs.

Recommendations

From this essay and analysis of the critical incident I would recommend the use of scaffolding and the zone of proximal development in the classroom to support and uplift pupils with additional learning needs. I would recommend these learning theories because they work with the pupil not against them and has long term affects as it helps their self-esteem and how they think of themselves in the classroom. In the future I will definitely use these in my classroom as they can be used on every pupil no matter their academic ability and needs they may have. Furthermore, I will also recommend the

use of assistive technology because they can change a pupil with additional learning needs perspective on school and give them a new confidence they may be lacking.

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Appendices

Date and year group: July 2023- Year 4

Where and When: St Thomas Primary School. The lesson in which the critical incident took place was a language, literacy and communication lesson. The lesson was on inferences.

What happened?

The lesson starts with class participation where they are analysing a book they have read and look for possible inferences. The teacher uses class participation to engage with learners and check for understanding. The pupils raise their hands to give their answers, not all pupils get chosen and get frustrated so choose to put their hands down. The door to the classroom is open so children who are sat near the doorway get distracted by what is going on in the hallway. After the class participation activity the children engage in group work or independent if they choose to where they look at objects and what inferences they could find from these objects. Some of the pupils do not want to share the objects and some snatching goes on. As the activity was going on I noticed a pupil at the front of the class with a vision impairment struggle to view the whiteboard so they try to set up their magnifier device but as they are doing this their teaching assistant comes over to provide assistance and set it up for them.

Areas of possible exploration:

- Use of whiteboard to participate
- Teacher using questioning techniques to develop pupils answers
- Teacher using call and respond techniques