

‘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.’

Within pedagogy, critical incident analysis has been described by Francis, (1997) as “illuminating the way” for teaching professionals, enabling them to inspect and refine their practice. Identifying critical incidents as a methodology was developed by Tripp (1993), where he described it as the observation and subsequent interpretation of an unplanned event, usually during a school lesson or if not, within the confines of a school, which becomes critical after reflecting on the causes and outcome of it. Once identified, this can then lead to suggested improvements for best practice. This can be achieved through studying the incident to identify something hitherto unnoticed and then applying relevant theories and methodology or as Francis, (1997) says, “using critical incident analysis as a way of scaffolding for reflective practice”. The event itself is seldom anything beyond the usual routine and does not have to be negative but the process of critical reflection uncovers an underlying issue which is of significance to the teacher or class (Tripp 1993). He goes on to suggest that once any changes to practice have been implemented, the process becomes cyclical as it is then observed again, giving rise to further critical reflection and thereby restarting the process. Therefore, this essay is based on the critical analysis of an incident which occurred during our PTE bridging period and once reflected upon, provides possible suggestions for a subsequent change to teaching practice, and a review of those suggestions and a critical evaluation of the theoretical basis for them.

Critical reflection is now widely regarded as an essential tool by which we can analyse critical incidents (Liu, 2021). Tripp (1993), borrows the term ‘critical incident’ from history and says, without critical reflection, the incident could be considered quite routine as it is the subsequent analysis and reflection of what may have initially seemed a rather mundane occurrence that turns it into something critical. The concept of reflection as a tool for learning originated from the work of Dewey (1933) with his seminal work, *How We Think*, (Fook 2007). The subsequent work of Schön (1983), highlighted the importance of reflection to a teacher’s professional development. He proposed two levels of reflection: ‘reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’. Schön’s proposal was that teachers reflect while teaching, (in-action) and after teaching, (on-action). He suggested that ‘in-action’ reflection encourages experimentation which can then be assessed through ‘on-action’ reflection (Sellars 2014). Therefore, as Fook, (2018), says, “we are all both teachers and learners”.

Harrison and Lee, (2011) note that active critical reflection raises awareness for the student teacher as it questions accepted practice and the hidden processes behind the incident, potentially challenging accepted norms or what was previously held to be true. It allows deeper learning to occur and, if the incident and changes to practice are significant enough, could result in a decisive turning point in the student teacher’s career. Schön, (1983) posed that critical reflection closes the gap between theory and practice by studying what teachers actually do rather than what they say

they do. When used in this way, reflection forces the teacher practitioner to take a step back from their teaching and analyse their actions to confirm that they are still aligned with their intentions. Reflection can be difficult (Sellars 2014), especially for novices such as student teachers. Therefore, constantly reflecting on teaching episodes is a vital part of all teachers learning and professional development (Saric and Steh, 2017). A study by Korthagen (1999) as noted by Harrison & Lee, (2011), said that the student teachers who were unable to reflect or identify an incident for reflection, were students that tended to fail their studies.

The school education system in Wales is currently undergoing a major reform with the implementation of Donaldson's "Successful Futures" (Donaldson 2015). The previous curriculum, which had been in place since 1988, was declared "no longer fit for purpose" by the Welsh Government (Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill 2020). Underpinning Donaldson's "Successful Futures" are "The Four Purposes". It will be important for any teaching practitioner to link these to any critical incident analysis to ensure that any change in practice is aligned with the aims of the new curriculum.

The Four Purposes set out in Successful Futures have been designed to give teachers a framework for how they teach, (Wilson & Miller, 2016). A teacher needs to foster a suitable classroom environment with a culture and social norms where learning is recognised as being important and the norms create the conduct necessary to achieve this (Bennett, 2020). This is the bedrock for the Four Purposes, as without a solid foundation from which to build on, the learning to achieve the purposes will not take place. Creating "ambitious, capable learners" who are "enterprising, creative contributors" (Donaldson 2015), would be very difficult in a poorly managed environment not conducive to learning.

Supporting the transition to the new curriculum are 5 professional standards which have been designed for NQT's (newly qualified teachers) and experienced teachers alike and form part of an NQT's induction, (Professional standards for teaching and leadership, 2019). Behaviour management is of particular relevance, as one of the "overarching values and dispositions", which are at the core of the professional standards, is the "rights of learners", i.e., every pupil has a right to learn, it is not simply a desired outcome but a basic right.

The critical incident observation took place at a semi-rural 11 to 18 school in South Wales. BERA guidelines state that anonymity is the norm for any research, therefore the school, staff and pupils will remain anonymous. It has 1521 pupils, of which 335 are in the sixth form. Instruction is carried out through the medium of English and most pupils are from a white British background with 2% of

pupils speaking English as an additional language and very few speaking Welsh at home. 4% of pupils qualify for free school meals, well under the 16.4% national average and 4% of the pupils are from the 20% most deprived areas of Wales. Of a national average of 19.2% of pupils who have special educational needs, the ratio at this school is nearly 8%. 2.5% of pupils in Wales as a whole have statements of special educational needs, whereas the number for this school is lower at 1%, (Estyn, 2019).

The incident to be analysed took place in a Year 9 English class during period 4, which was the lesson just before lunch. The teacher opened the lesson with a question and answer session to recap on what had been covered in their previous lesson, the themes of which were to be carried through into this lesson. After about 3 minutes, while the teacher was still conducting the recap, a pupil walked in late, stating that he had been with an achievement assistant, who had sent the teacher a note. The teacher stopped addressing the class and waited for an apology from the pupil for arriving late, pointing out that no such message had been received. The pupil, believing that there was no need to apologise as the teacher should have been sent a note, was reluctant to give one. After a brief stand-off, the pupil duly apologised and as he went to take his seat, glanced at the other pupils to make sure the fact that the teacher had been made to wait for an apology had been noticed. The pupil then took his seat and instruction resumed.

The whole incident took no more than 15 seconds but caused a disturbance in the class at a critical moment of the lesson. Petty, (2009), suggests that “the first 5 minutes of any lesson are crucial in setting the atmosphere for the rest of the lesson”. This important period had been disrupted by the late arrival of the pupil and was further exacerbated by the delay while waiting for an apology. Small classroom disturbances, also known as low level disruption, are a very common occurrence, but they are an important factor in the wider issue of classroom management as they disturb the lesson’s momentum, thereby preventing a positive classroom environment that is conducive to learning being maintained. A distinction can be made between general low level disruption within the classroom, which is regarded as internal, and interruptions from outside the classroom, which are external. A teacher can help prevent internal disruption with the environment and culture that they create, keeping the class engaged with effective lesson planning and being proactive rather than reactive to the threat of disturbances. External unplanned disruption, such as a student arriving late or another teaching coming in to borrow something, are beyond the teacher’s control, and it is these external intrusions that will be the focus of this essay.

Marzano et al., (2003), conducted a meta study of over 100 reports and found that in a disorderly classroom, “effective teaching and learning” won’t occur. They argue that teaching and learning “flourish” in an environment that is competently managed and if this is not the case, both teachers

and students are adversely affected. They exemplify this by showcasing a study by Haycock, (1998) which shows the difference in student achievement over the course of a year when taught by an ineffective teacher compared to an effective teacher. Her estimate is that students taught by effective teachers gain 52 percentile points over those who are not which, according to Petty, (2006), equates to a one grade improvement at GCSE or 'A' Level. Hattie, (2012), takes this further by stating that appropriate behaviour in the classroom improves student grades by 71 percentile points, or a grade and a half at GCSE or 'A' Level. He also talks of the importance of "flow" in a lesson and how "the climate of the classroom" was one of the more "critical factors". By climate of the classroom, he is referring to the atmosphere which he says needs to be "positive, caring and respectful" with a "degree" of control.

As mentioned, interruptions to the classroom environment cause disruption and affect teaching quality. However, the reasons for disruptive behaviour are not limited to a pupil walking into class late, although 83% of teachers experience this at least once a week, and for 11%, it happens every lesson, (Williams 2018). There are a plethora of other reasons, such as using mobile phones, chewing gum, listening to music and talking over the teacher. Before addressing any theory and techniques for tackling external, unplanned disruption, we first need to understand why it is so important to do so. Kraft and Monti-Nussbaum, (2020), found that the average achievement of schools with higher levels of classroom disruption was lower than those with less disruption. In a 2016 study by the NASUWT, 72% of teachers believed there to be a problem with behaviour in schools, (Bennett 2020). A 2018 study by the Policy Exchange (Williams 2018), found that 75% of teachers thought that low level disruption occurred in their class often and it is regularly cited by teachers as one of the main reasons for leaving teaching, with 72% of teachers knowing someone who has left the profession as a consequence of bad behaviour. Teachers also believe that 71% of people are discouraged from entering the profession due to bad behaviour, (Williams 2018). As the main issue here is behaviour, it is hard not to relate it to psychology and indeed, much of the work that has been done on classroom behaviour has referenced psychologists such as Skinner and Bandura.

Low level disruption, argues Petty, (2006), must be tackled as, if it is not dealt with, it could snowball into greater disruption and have a 'ripple effect' through the class indicating that such behaviour is acceptable. He references the work of Kounin (1970), and his phrase 'withitness', to describe a teacher who is aware of everything that is happening in their classroom and can subsequently respond quickly to any potential disruption. Suggestions for achieving this are for the teacher to make their presence felt in the room by being mobile, walking around and making eye contact with the students. When the teacher is writing on the board, they should stop frequently and scan the

class. Being proactive to any potential disruption and thereby preventing disruption from occurring is much more effective than being reactive to an incident once it has arisen, (Bennett 2020).

Having established that it is necessary to have an environment that is conducive to learning for effective teaching and learning to take place, and that disruption is a major obstacle to learning, it is necessary to evaluate some of the theories and strategies put forward as ways to achieve this. There is an enormous amount of literature on classroom management and low level disruption, perhaps more than any other pedagogical topic due to its prevalence and effect on learning. As Marzano, (2003) mentions, classroom management has been one of the main concerns for teachers ever since they have been in the classroom. Literature on disruption caused by lateness to lessons is "quite limited", (Kraft and Monti-Nussbaum 2020), even though it has recently been cited as the most common form of low level disruption in UK classrooms, (Williams 2018). In fact, there appears to be only one significant study carried out recently, that of Matthew Kraft and Manuel Monti-Nussbaum (Kraft and Monti-Nussbaum 2020).

Their study concentrated specifically on 'external interruptions', i.e., interruptions to instruction that had a disruptive effect on learning but were beyond the control of the classroom teacher. They calculated that, typically, a student experiences 15 such incidents every day, which adds up to over 2000 interruptions over the whole school year. They found that the 2 most common causes of unplanned external disruption were pupils arriving to class late and teachers interrupting the lesson unannounced. They estimated that for every 60 minutes of instruction, 7 were wasted to interruptions. Scaling that up equates to a loss of more than 20 days per year of teaching time, (Kraft 2020). It is worth pointing out that not every incident of lateness created disruption, some students arrived quietly and immediately began working. The study was carried out in Providence, USA, where in a number of the schools, classroom doors are locked. Therefore, any late students had to be let in by the teacher, meaning interruptions were unavoidable. Of course, classroom doors in the UK currently have to be left open to enable sufficient airflow due to covid regulations. This could be both a benefit and a hinderance. If, for example, the student knew the class door was likely to be locked, they may make an extra effort to get to class on time. It may also prevent unwanted disturbances from people other than students, such as other teachers asking for paper etc. Conversely, having the door always open may mean that there is less disruption from those who are tardy, but it may also signal to students that they can simply wander into class whenever they feel like.

A pupil arriving late also means that the teacher has to reiterate what was being taught for the benefit of the late arrival, disrupting the flow of the lesson. This may be done in a hurry without checking for adequate understanding. Kraft and Monti-Nussbaum, (2020), observed several

instances of late students distracting other students because they were unclear on the task at hand. Another common observation was when a student arrived late and took a few moments to explain to the teacher the reason for the lateness. This sometimes developed into a short conversation, eating into precious teaching time and proving a distraction from the task at hand for the other students. They found that, on average, teaching time lost to each interruption and the disruption it caused was 78 seconds. Any interruption gives students the opportunity to start off-topic behaviour while the teacher is otherwise engaged dealing with the interruption. When students then recommence their work, there is a further delay in them refocusing. This loss of momentum often requires the teacher to repeat some previous instruction or requirements that were set.

Even though Kraft and Monti-Nussbaum found that the most common form of external interruption was pupil tardiness and unplanned visits from other teachers, they also found that intercom announcements and calls to classroom phones were the second and third most common. These would not be issues faced by teachers in the UK as most UK classrooms do not have telephone and intercom systems, such as those used in the USA. They recommend using email or text messages instead of these which are measures sometimes used in the UK, along with a similar system (SIMS) which has the ability to message teachers. However, in the critical incident mentioned, the teacher had actually been sent an email, informing them of the pupil's lateness but had not had time to check her email before the start of the lesson. So, while this would be a much less intrusive way of notifying the teacher, it is reliant on the teacher receiving the message in time.

A study by (Leonard 2001), acknowledges that there very few published studies showing the effect of external classroom interruptions. He cites Lysiak (1980) as categorising external disruptions into unplanned and planned, of which late arrivals are unplanned. Lysiak, according to Leonard, expounded that the higher the grade level, the longer the amount of time the interruption took. Leonard posed that instructional time should be considered sacrosanct and limiting interruptions would protect the learning environment. He said that every effort should be made, through policies and behaviour, to protect both students and teachers from interference. As the evidence that lateness to lessons suggests that it is becoming an increasingly important factor in class disruption, (Williams 2018) due to the paucity of research on the subject, there may be a gap in the literature that needs to be addressed.

As mentioned earlier, effective behaviour management and the creation or fostering of an environment that is conducive to learning is of paramount importance for learning to thrive, (Marzano, 2003). Many factors go towards creating this. Cowley, (2001), sets out a guide for practitioners to follow in which the differing elements are inter-related and therefore influence each

other. At the core of her approach is the notion of consistency. She argues that dealing with low level disruption calmly and consistently leads to better behaviour from the whole class and reduces the likelihood of any more serious incidents or disruption. This should be backed up by the behaviour policy of the school which above all, must be consistently applied. Marzano, (2003), argues that the setting of rules and procedures and ensuring that they are understood by all students, is important for actions that are likely to consistently re occur. Students should be given an opportunity to discuss the rules and ensure that they consider them to be fair and recognise the consequences of breaking them.

As part of reflecting on our own critical incident, it is important as Tripp, (1993) notes, to diagnose the root cause of an incident and not just deal with the symptoms, which is much easier as the symptoms are much more apparent and the results are usually immediate. However, by only addressing symptoms when they arise in class, the underlying cause of the symptoms remains. The pupil's lateness was the symptom, but the reason for the lateness is what needs to be discovered and dealt with. Therefore, applying a framework gives the reflective practitioner a structure and process to follow to help identify the root cause. There are many frameworks that can be followed so the following list is by no means exhaustive, but these are some of the most well known; Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning, (1984), Schön's reflective model (1991), Tripp's "Why?" Challenge, (1993), Brookfield's 4 lenses, (1995), Gibbs's Reflective cycle (1998), and Rolfe et al's 'What' model, (2001), (Fallin, 2021).

Tripp's "Why" challenge, is a very simple and effective way to reflect on an incident by asking "why?" and "why does this matter?" repeatedly. Why was the lesson interrupted, why was the pupil late, why did this matter? And so on. The reason for the lateness in this critical incident was genuine but it did serve to highlight the fact that persistent lateness is a common occurrence in UK schools that isn't being addressed. The evidence from the 2018 Policy Exchange study (Williams 2018) shows just how prevalent tardiness is and there is an apparent lack of any coherent policy or advice, either on a school or nationwide basis, to tackle it.

Therefore, clear rules are needed, perhaps now more than ever due to the measures in place post Covid, as anecdotal evidence suggests that some year levels lack confidence in making their own decisions. They need to understand the consequences of arriving late to class and if it does happen, what the procedure is. Kraft and Monti-Nussbaum, (2020), suggest establishing when being late is acceptable and when it is not acceptable into the school culture, routines and norms. They also say that parents being sent a letter is effective at reducing tardiness. The teacher-pupil relationship is a very important aspect in this regard, as strategies that help improve the relationship and respect between teachers and pupils has been shown to reduce low level disruption by over

30%, (Marzano et al., 2003). Positive reinforcement can also be used to tackle the issue.

Commending those who have arrived on time, or even better, early, will encourage the late arrivals to be more punctual in future. Once again, being proactive, such as reminding pupils to be on time for the next lesson, rather than being reactive and addressing the lateness when it occurs, could also be an effective strategy.

There are also instances or reasons why the lateness may not be the fault of the pupil. Having to transition from one class to another on a large campus, may physically take longer than the time allowed. Factoring in toilet breaks and other such delays could make it virtually impossible for students to transition from one lesson to another in the allotted timeframe. The advent of blended learning means that in many instances pupils are reliant on technology to attend class, which in some cases may be unreliable and therefore lead to lateness.

If the teacher enters into a discourse with a late pupil, the teacher is themselves contributing to the disruption by delaying the lesson and shifting the classes attention onto the discussion causing a “loss of instructional momentum”, (Kennedy, 2005). More time will then be lost by having to go over what had already been covered. Any effective strategy needs to ensure that as little disruption as possible is caused to the class and the late arrival. The teacher also needs to ensure that any work missed is caught up on. Every class could have a small form or post-it note which a late pupil picks up, and quietly finds their seat. At an appropriate time, the pupil can fill in the reason for the lateness and then hand it to the teacher.

This essay began by showing how important critical incident analysis can be for a teaching practitioner. The incident itself highlighted an issue, which on further investigation, shows that teachers are very concerned about how the effect of lateness disturbs their lessons. Williams, (2018), showed that lateness is now the most common form of low level disruption in UK classrooms, higher even than the use of mobile phones. There seems to be an attitude that, as lateness is considered low level disruption, then bundling it together with policies for all the other low level disruption is the best way to deal with it. But not all low level disruption is the same as lateness is the only one that does not begin in the class. A proactive “withit” teacher can anticipate disruption in class and tackle it, often before it starts This is not the case with lateness as, being external to the room, the teacher is only able to attend to it once it has happened. Reviewing what little literature there is on the specific topic of lateness, and there definitely seems to be a gap in this area, has shown that they all acknowledge that the issue is very costly in terms of instruction time lost, as much as 20 days per school year according to Kraft and Monti-Nussbaum, (2020) And yet, the relative scarcity of information may indicate that the issue is not being taken seriously enough.

The techniques suggested to deal with late arrivals are, as yet and from a search of the available literature, largely undocumented in their effectiveness. Kraft and Monti-Nussbaum, (2020), note in their study that school administrations massively underestimate the number of late instances and the consequences of the disruption they cause. As the rights of learners is one of the core principles of the new Professional standards for teaching and leadership, (2019), protecting these against disruption caused by pupil lateness is crucial. Until this is addressed, it is unlikely that the problem will be given the attention the data suggests it deserves.

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Appendix

OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES

22/9/21

Record 1

Date and time, year group: English Year 9
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context P3 - Split lesson - ended before lunch ↓ Lunch in middle of lesson!
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) - Child arrived 5 mins late because he had been with an 'achievement assistant'. He was reluctant to apologise for being late, stating that the AA had sent the teacher a note of explanation. When questioned, the teacher had not been able to check e-mail.
Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be "under the hood" in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? Up to that point. Class disruption while teacher questioned pupil. Pupil 'played to crowd' a little when finally apologised. Teacher doing quick recap of topic/previous lesson when child came in so that was disrupted. Recap important as was continuation of a previous lesson - seeking tone/scene for whole lesson
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) More robust method of ensuring teacher is notified. It's ok to be late for lessons ??? - does it set unwritten rule? Teacher didn't know if he was telling truth or not. - To check e-mail would have caused more disruption Is there a better time of day when Ad's could hold these meetings?

English 22/9/21.

Record 2

Date and time, year group:

P4 12.25

Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context

Lesson before lunch A3S

SPLIT LESSON WITH LUNCH IN MIDDLE (1/2hr).

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

One child turned up late - had been notified by another teacher but v. reluctant to apologise to teacher. Didn't have a book so teacher provided with paper. Didn't want to participate in class and seemed tired. Resting head on arm/chin on table. Only put glasses on at 12.45 - Already

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

*Completed one task which involved reading.
Returned from lunch - walked in after everyone else. Didn't put glasses on. Shouted out an answer but teacher didn't correct him.
Played around with maths compass instead of doing task.
Seems capable - Teacher asked some q's and he was able to answer them.
Reluctant to make contact when addressed by teacher.*

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)

Spoke to teacher. Only 3rd week of teaching him so still learning about him. Said he has poor attention - no diagnosis - and can be attention seeking.

9.33

- High praise 'EXCELLENT' when correct answer given.

- Emphasis of important point by stating e.g. 'NOT!' They do 'NOT' melt!

Record 3

Date and time, year group:

Y12 GEOLOGY

Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context

First lesson of day - 9.00 start promptly.

14 students in class, 2 of which didn't do GCSE Geology and 1 of those has only just switched.

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

QUESTION TYPES - 'Can anyone tell me?'

- 'What' (Open question)

- 'What do we know?'

- 'Anyone know?'

- 'What are we looking at?'

- 'Tell me what you see'

- 'What would you call this?'

- 'What is a?'

- 'How do we tell?'

- 'What do we see?'

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

- 'Where do these?'

- 'Why do we think that?'

- 'Is that unique ...?'

- 'What's happened to ...?'

- 'What's the difference?'

- 'How about that one?'

- 'What is this...?'

- 'Can we see any patterns...?'

- 'What can we see in the patterns?'

- 'Why do you say?'

- 'What is it that makes it?'

- 'Where was the?'

- 'What conclusions can we draw from this?'

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)

Creates questions by getting class to finish sentences.

'Such and such is?'

- Questions are all pertinent - draws out more information in logical sequence.

- pauses after important point to let info sink in

- Use of silence.