

A critical incident analysis with further investigation into formative assessment to enhance my practice of teaching as a student teacher and to close the gap grade in music lessons whilst focusing on improvement and engagement

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Introduction

This essay will explore the concept of critical incidents in teaching and the development of professional judgment amongst secondary school teachers. As well as investigate how critical incidents can be used as a tool to improve a teacher's ability to teach effectively through reflective practice.

Critical incidents can encompass a wide range of scenarios and can occur consciously or unconsciously. The starting basis for a critical incident can come from an action or response from either a student/s or a teacher, they can be minor or major scenarios and they can also be positive and/or negative. But the teacher is the only person who can create the critical incident from observation and reflective thinking.

A good teacher with correct practice of critical incidents will allow themselves to think deeply about their teaching practice, as they serve as opportunities for reflection and growth. By analysing and reflecting on critical incidents, teachers can develop their professional judgment, make more informed decisions in their teaching, and get better understanding of the complexities and nuances of their profession. A teacher that handles a critical incident well, will adopt this method in their own pedagogy and teaching style.

Also, the positives and negatives of critical incidents must be defined to fully understand them.

Positives such as; opportunity for learning, improved preparedness, professional development, and enhanced communication. However, the negatives are just as important as the positives, such

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as; stress and burnout: dealing with critical incidents can be emotionally and mentally taxing for educators and it may lead to stress, and a reduced quality of life.

The incident I will be investigating and analysing occurred in a year seven music classroom of a class of around 30 whilst I was observing the lesson. The class seemed uninterested in the topic – notation. Only two students (Pupil-A and Pupil-B) were engaged and interested in the topic, as they were both practicing classic music in their own time.

Pupil-A and Pupil-B were answering every question asked by Teacher-X and continued to be engaged and they were answering most questions correctly and they were gaining a lot from the lesson.

However, not a single other student engaged in the lesson by answering questions. They simply avoided answering by not raising their hands, this lack of engagement could have stemmed from anxiety, uninterest and/or ALN. Therefore, in this essay will explore teaching methods and theories that would prevent this lack of engagement and what will stimulate learner to take responsibility for their own learning.

Literature Review

Not attempting to engage learners when questioning in the classroom has a significant impact on a student's grade when undergoing formative assessment (Wiliam, 2018). But, with reflection on the incident, teachers can form different approaches to question students in their classroom with academic reflective model (Kolb, 2014). There are various reflective models that could be used for appropriate reflection on a critical incident, and there are reasons for choosing certain ones, although some can be seen as outdated. For example, Schon's (1978) model lacks many of the steps required – by today's standard – to accurately reflect on a critical incident. Kolb (2014) and Gibbs (1988) approaches to reflection are more appropriate for formative assessment as they require more thought provoking reflection for the teacher. This is essential for formative assessment as a teacher must be able to act with certainty when questioning and grading students in this way (Wiliam, 2018).

Formative assessment however has its faults, as it allows for dips in a learner's wellbeing to be compared to their academic success (Laevers and Heylen, 2003). However, the same can be said for summative assessment but the key difference being that a learner's wellbeing could drop over time and gradually worse grades will not reflect their academia, only their wellbeing. Siegel (2010) defines wellbeing as a triangle with Mind, Brain and Relationships being the three factors that directly affect each other, showing the delicate balance of a student's mind. On the other hand, (Skinner, 1966) would disagree and claim that predictable responses to actions lead to positive changes in behaviour, his operant conditioning model would allow for formative assessment to undergo seamlessly, constantly improving a learner's behaviour. *"The constantly accelerated progress of civilization lays constantly increasing burdens upon us."* (Bagley, 1911, p. 6)

Literature Review - Continued

However, the needs for learners in the modern day are complex. Learners now thrive in a multifaceted world which is constant and overbearing (Bagley, 1911). Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs shows clearly that learners are too complex to be operantly conditioned and that self-esteem and self-actualization are fundamental parts of being healthy enough to learn. This ties back into formative assessment as a learner cannot be expected to be formatively assessed when their well-being is not taken into consideration.

Furthermore, a learner cannot be expected to be formatively assessed if their teacher cannot plan effective lessons that build upon previous knowledge learnt (Burn, Hagger, and Mutton, 2015) (Donaldson, 2015). Differentiation in formative assessment is crucial in today's learning environment, as it allows every student to improve. As per my critical incident example, students that are willing and want to learn often cast a shadow over students that are not willing to learn or have difficulties answering questions. The learner's emotions and relationships with their teachers directly effects their learning (Goleman, 1996) (Maslow, 1943). Therefore, respecting learners wishes when it comes to classroom questioning is just as important as getting them engaged in the learning, as Article 13 – freedom of expression - in the Rights of Every Child Legislation specifies that all learners have a right to their opinion (United Nations, 1989). This could be a hindrance to formative assessment as if a child refuses to engage then there is little can be done to sway them. However, learners must also take responsibility for their own learning (Donaldson, 2015). Therefore, allowing learners to have their say in what they would like to be taught is imperative for whole class engagement (Donaldson, 2015).

Nevertheless, learner led topics but still accumulate data for formative assessment, as a lack of data can cripple formative assessment (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

Literature Review – Continued

This is why the hands up rule in schools can be counterintuitive, as pupils that do not raise their hand do not give formative assessment data (Wiliam, 2018). There are devices that can be used instead of hands up – such as; lollipop sticks with names on – that eliminates non-participation (educationrickshaw, 2018). However, a random system does not ensure that a student will give a response and what is worse, it could give a learner with ALN an unexpected surprised which can be intuitively negative for their mental well-being. The problem with getting ALN students to participate in a whole group lesson, is that they often do not learn in those environments. Therefore, it is crucial to teach with various blend of teaching approaches and to formatively assess in diverse ways (Welsh Government, 2023).

Nevertheless, once the learners' needs are met, a lesson can be conveyed poorly can by poor teaching and planning (Burn, Hagger, and Mutton, 2015). And controversially teacher's subject matter knowledge equates to little according to Hattie and Klaus Zierer (2019), however this information was gathered from collected data in schools from 1987 to 2007. In this time schools across the country have undergone a seismic rehabilitation and using this data is fundamentally convoluted. Also, according to Tripp (2013) teachers that fall back on to how they were previously taught – in contrast with their own pedagogy, - is inherently negative. Therefore, it could be construed that if a teacher had been taught by a passionless teacher, then it is in their best interest to be passionate and engaging in their lessons. This all relates back to formative assessment and hands up questioning, as any lesson being assessed can feel boring for learners with little drive, therefore having a good pedagogy and good planning / resources for lessons is imperative to get those learners engaged and motivated.

Literature Review – Continued

Finally, music teachers face different battles to other subjects. In the critical incident chosen, learners were reflecting on their previous performances which is a fundamental part of learning in the expressive arts according to the Welsh Government (2019). This does not benefit the learners until GCSE as they are not competent on an instrument yet to be appraised properly, learners at this level should be self-assessed or critiqued to improve (Susan, Blum, Alfie, and Kohn, 2020).

Case Study

The critical incident chosen for this essay occurred early on a Tuesday morning. The lesson's success criteria were 'To understand how to read the treble clef notation for twinkle, twinkle little star in order to perform it on an electric piano.' Most of the class was uninterested, I questioned some of the students in the class to see what their opinions of the lesson topic was, and they were uninterested due to the song begin 'boring' and not understanding or caring about how to read treble clef notation. The incident itself, affected all pupils in the class apart from Pupil-A and Pupil-B. As Pupil-A and Pupil-B were already having lessons for their respective instruments outside of school and knew all the answers already and this – in turn – did not give the rest of the class a chance to learn.

The exact moment of the critical incident occurred during the start of the lesson, when the class was undergoing questioning on treble clef notation. Teacher-X was asking the students what certain notes were on the score, on the whiteboard. When the class was undergoing questioning, only two pupils were putting their hand up, Pupil-A and Pupil-B, and they were getting all the questions correct. Then, once Teacher-X was satisfied that the questions they asked were answered correctly, they told the pupils to give a thumbs up response to tell Teacher-X if they understood the notation and what was expected of them next – during performance. All pupils put their thumbs up and the lesson then progressed.

Then, when the pupils began to practice for their performance, most of the pupils simply looked back at the board to see what notes they had to play rather than looking in their booklet and reading the treble clef score.

The pupils' performances themselves went well, as the piece is well known and simple. Therefore, Teacher-X could mark the pupils positively and could say that they met the specification for the success criteria.

Case Study - Continued

The pupils were assessed individually by Teacher-X whilst other pupils were still practicing, and this took around 15 minutes. This also meant that some pupils got longer to practice than other pupils, however this did not affect their marks as the piece was easy.

The reason for this being a critical incident is that the pupils did not meet the success criteria as they did not understand how to read the treble clef notation for the piece. This meant that pupils were only formatively assessed through the medium of performance, which does require any understanding of theory / treble clef notation.

This relates to formative assessment literature as mentioned above, as the assessment in this lesson allowed students to be assessed for their understanding of treble clef notation with a simple thumbs up instead of questioning students during the questioning phase of the lesson. The reason for this being a critical incident is that Teacher-X allowed Pupil-A and Pupil-B to be the only pupil's that answered the questions. Admittedly, Teacher-X asked the class if anyone one else knew the answer to a certain question. But, when this was ignored, Teacher-X happily let Pupil-A answer the question correctly and move on. This was partly due to Teacher-X wanting to move the lesson on so that the class could get onto the electric pianos and perform. Teacher-X was also aware that some pupils had wellbeing issues and those pupils may take a turn for the worse if questioned and got an answer incorrect. Similarly, some students with ALN were vastly uninterested and Teacher-X was aware that questioning them could be seen as unnecessary as they would simply refuse to answer. This relates to the well-being models and United Nations legislation as mentioned above previously.

Case Study - Continued

Also, Teacher-X was aware that the What Matters Statements from the Welsh Government – as mentioned above – states that learners must develop artistic skills, appraise music and/or create. Therefore, Teacher-X decided to incorporate performance under developing artistic skill so that one of the ‘what matters statements’ was met in the lesson.

This also led Teacher-X to rush the music theory side of the lesson, as a lesson simply on theory would not meet the government specification for an expressive arts lesson. The lesson was also trying to incorporate teaching learnt and building upon learnt knowledge in the same lesson. This proved to be difficult as the learners had a lot to get through in an hour and Teacher-X also knew this and this in part was another reason Teacher-X was happy to allow only Pupil-A and Pupil-B to answer the questions. This however falls back to David Tripp’s statement – as mentioned above – in which Teacher-X has fallen into how they were taught, rather than adopting a new method for teaching rather than just meeting Welsh Government requirements.

Teaching and Learning Methods

One method that I would like to explore would have been to split the lesson into two, one lesson focused on the theory and the other on practice and performance. The first lesson could include analysing some basic scores and practicing different basic scores on electric piano so learners can understand how to read treble clef and then implement it.

This will encourage learners to take increasing responsibility for their own learning as they will then have the knowledge to read the treble and learn the piece, which links to Wales' Pedagogy.

This method could be valid by having the learners will be appraising as an audience which relates to the Welsh Governments 'what matters statements. The problem with this method is that the lesson content is now spanning over two lessons and music tends to be taught once a week or once a fortnight. This would mean that students would have to retain the previous knowledge learnt and implement it in their lesson in a week or a fortnight's time. In this case the knowledge previously learnt in this will simply be forgotten as the knowledge taught will not have been cognitively practiced in this time and therefore will not be retained. The rationality behind this method is that the learner would have full understanding of the success criteria in the case study. The lesson could even take three lessons but after it, the learner will have fully engaged in the lesson and will have met the success criteria rather than just meeting the specifications for the performance side of the success criteria. However, this could have a knock-on effect in the lesson plans for the term or year and lessons may have to be missed to build the correct foundations of knowledge for the learners to build on, it will also allow for other performance lessons will be more streamlined.

Another method would be to have an alternate method of questioning learners instead of allowing for some students to answer consistently. Instead, a of hand-ups, Teacher-X could have used the lollipop stick method, in which lollipop sticks are picked out of a container to select a learner at random. This prevents the same students from answering consistently and allows other students

Teaching and Learning Methods - Continued

to engage. However, this method does have its drawbacks, this could bring a level of anxiety to learners and this in turn will affect the mental well-being, and this will affect their learning and progression – which relates to the literature above. Nevertheless, this could be avoided or limited by removing the sticks that represent students' that have problems with ALN or have a poor well-being. However, then further teaching methodology must be implemented to formatively assess the learners that do not get picked.

Another method that I would like to explore is utilising Pupil-A and Pupil-B to help their peers with the theory. This would give learners more resources as Pupil-A and Pupil-B will have a different method of explaining the lesson content. And as they are of the same age, they may have a more understandable way of explaining the theory. Also, as they are in the same year group, the other learners and Pupil-A or Pupil-B may already have a repour that positively effects learning.

This would also encourage collaboration and would employ a blend of approaches including direct teaching, which are both pedagogical standards, and it would also give students an opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning.

Nevertheless, there are foreseeable problems with this method of teaching. Learners – although in the same year group – may not have a repour with each other or even view each other in a negative light. This will not allow for collaboration in the lesson, and it could also affect the learner's wellbeing which would then have a negative effect on learning. Another problem with this method is that it is not guaranteed that Pupil-A and Pupil-B can explain the theory as well as a teacher could as they have not studied the topic and they may still struggle with certain aspects of the taught theory.

Teaching and Learning Methods - Continued

The final problem with this method is that it will take time away from Pupil-A and Pupil-B's education, as they have the right to learn amongst their peers. This means that this method also does not support differentiated learning, as Pupil-A and Pupil-B should have appropriate scaffolding work to challenge them in the lesson even if the rest of the class is further behind in the topic.

The final method of teaching that could be explored would be to try and maximise engagement through the music learnt. 'Twinkle, twinkle little star' is very well known, but giving the learners options for their assessment piece from 'current' well-known music, may engage them more than a nursery rhyme. The problem with this is that that involves more preparation for the teacher which could then lead to poor assessment marking as there could be more learner confusion as the whole class is not performing the same piece.

Discussion

With regards to my own personal pedagogy, the methodology I found particularly interesting was the method of questioning using lollipop sticks. I mentioned previously that this could have a negative effect on a learner's wellbeing, but this approach interspersed with hands-up - to alleviate stress and anxiety - could help give a correct image of the class's current level of understanding. This also trumps the thumbs up method of teaching as many learners will not answer honestly, when asked if they understand the lesson so far. This supports my own pedagogy because I believe that when students undergo formative assessment cannot be allowed to go unnoticed and unheard as every learner has a right to education. This is also backed up by the United Nations legislation as mentioned previously. This will also paint a clearer picture of the class's formative assessment grades as there will be definitive evidence of every learner's knowledge on the subject / lesson.

Another method I found to be gripping, was the practice of 'current' or 'relevant' music in lessons. One of my pedagogical standards is to provide relevant and engaging lessons for students to provide an engaging learning environment. As mentioned previously, this would create a larger workload for the teacher, however this is deemed irrelevant due to my own pedagogy, as a teacher should be attempting to get the most out of their learners by making lessons as engaging as possible. This means that learners will have a purpose for learning, as learning a song/piece that brings them pleasure will be vastly more interesting to learn than a children's nursery rhyme. This – in turn – will boost formative assessment grades as engagement in a lesson is a large part of formative assessment, as mentioned in the literature above.

Conclusions

I have learnt that the method of teaching relevant music to learners can be very impactful on the learners' engagement in a lesson in the context of the lesson in the case study. I know this to be true as I questioned students during the lesson and the majority mentioned that they felt like the piece was for younger learners and as they have just moved up to comprehensive school they would like to be treated as such. I asked the learners what their alternative would be, they mainly replied with pieces that were either too hard or did not have a memorable melody and therefore could not be learned. But this still a building block for the teacher to go on when planning lesson and this will encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and create authentic contexts for learning which are both pedagogical standards.

I have also learnt that engagement is crucial when students are undergoing formative assessments. This is because most students do not take responsibility for their learning and do not do their if they deem the lesson irrelevant or boring. Finally, I believe that getting a firm grasp of a students' knowledge before moving on in a lesson is crucial to build the necessary foundations of learning to further a student's knowledge on a subject / topic. This will require using a blend of teaching approaches which is another pedagogical standard.

Recommendations

My further recommendations for the issue of engagement in lesson would be to research songs in the top of the charts from the past ten years and find relevant songs that students could learn and give them an option of three songs for them to practice and perform. As this would then allow for student to take responsibility for their own learning as they have made a choice on what to play during assessment. Another intervention I would like to try and put in place would be to find various questioning devices to formatively assess the class during questioning sections of a lesson. I would implement various devices to different classes to see which ones are the most effective as every class is different.

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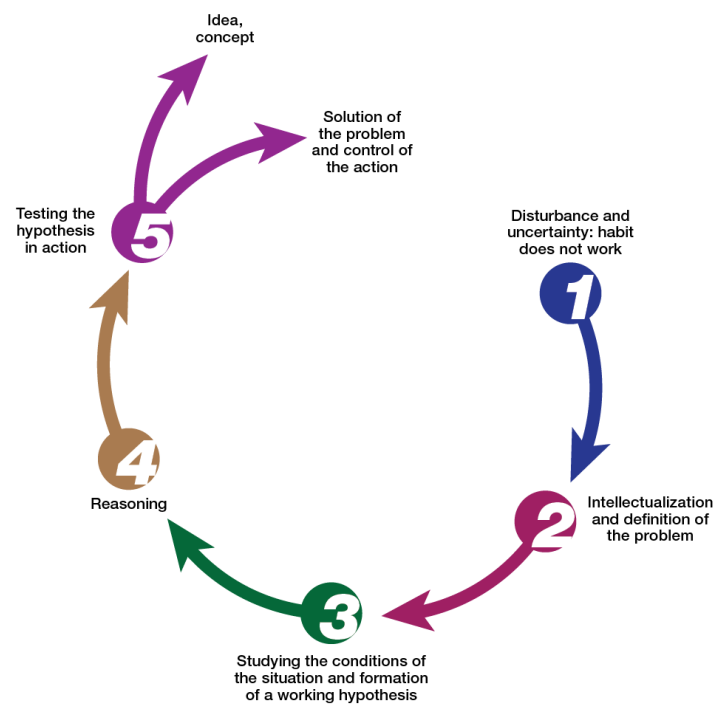
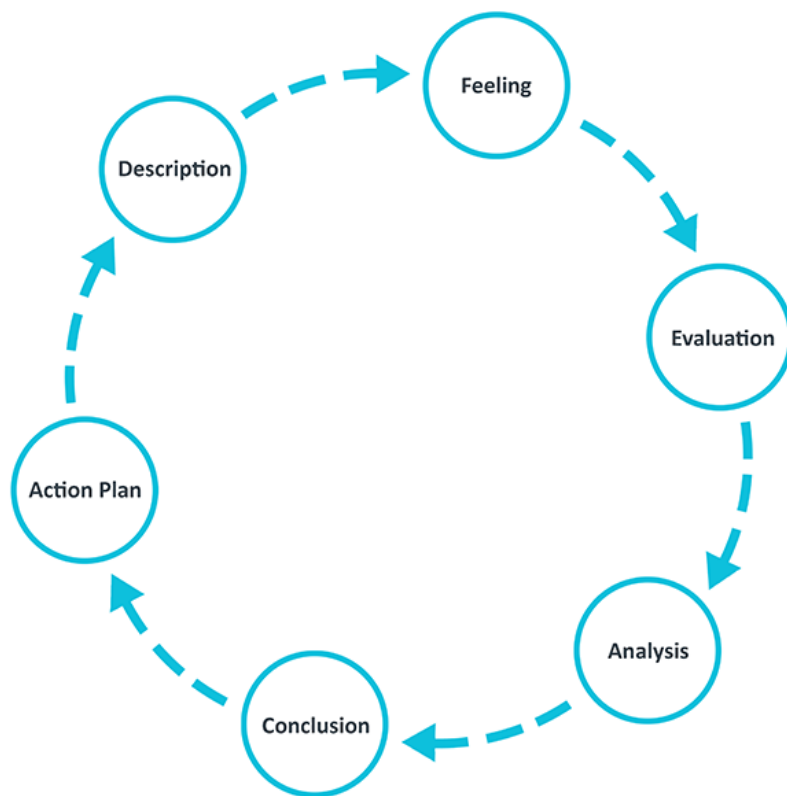
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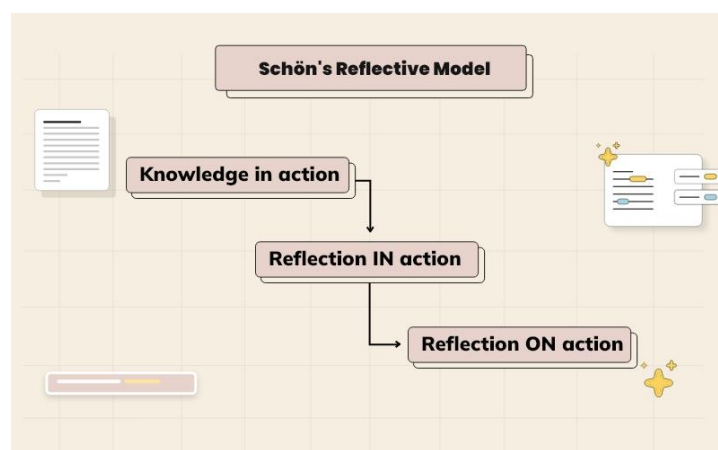
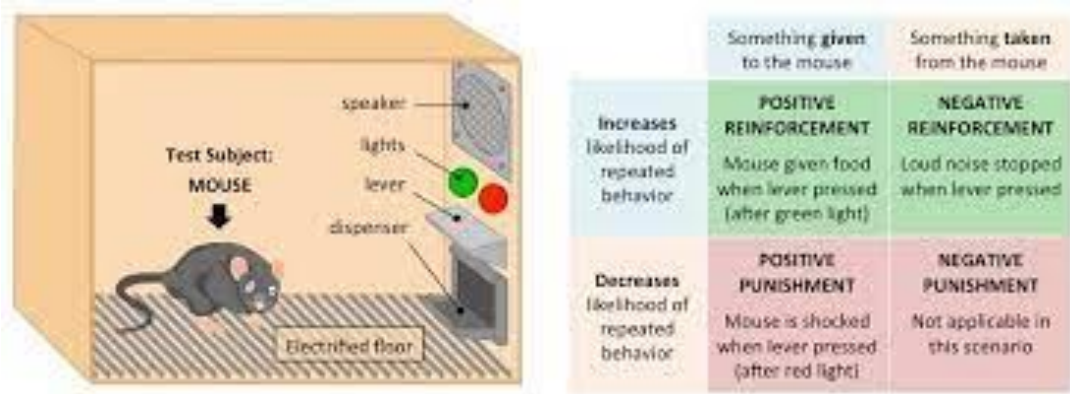
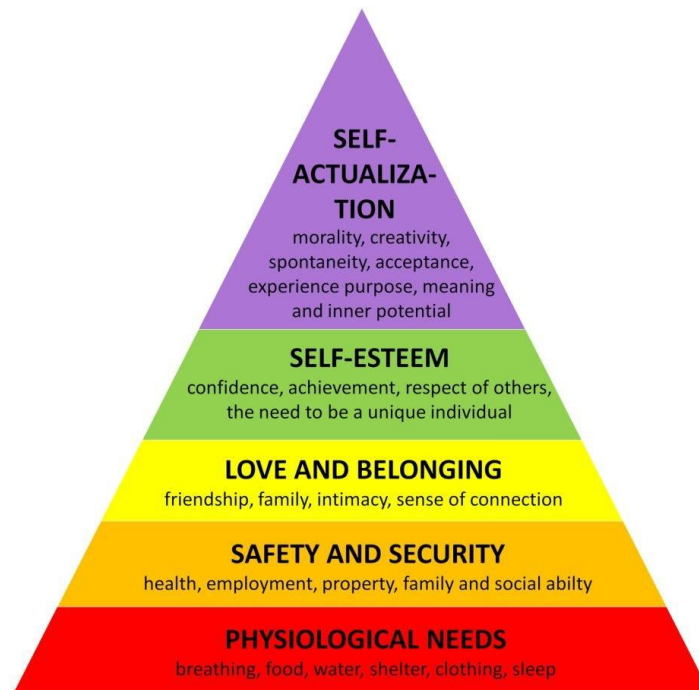
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Appendix

Appendix - Continued



Appendix - Continued**Triangle of Well-Being/ Resilience**