

# **ECAD6007: The learner: who am I teaching?**

**Student number: 1501407**

## **Introduction**

This essay will include a critical evaluation of an incident witnessed by myself in a primary school setting. It will identify the next teaching and learning steps that will concentrate on a case study of an individual learner which is based off the critical incident that was observed. A critical incident is the understanding of a significant event which doesn't always have to be a negative occurrence (Liu, 2015, p.136). How we perceive a critical incident refers to a valuable judgment we make that highlights our assumption and beliefs that we associate in association to the meaning of the incident (Tripp, 2011). It is important for teachers to reflect on their teaching techniques to improve their practice and professionalism, and to be able to make a difference in children's education by giving them positive learning experiences and the tools they need to prepare them for real life experiences they will face once they have left school (ibid). This assignment will include key theories and research to support equality and diversity as well as testing views and our assumptions of different behaviours and beliefs. It will include a critical evaluation of strategies and approaches to benefit both pupils and teachers by challenging barriers to child development and their learning. This essay will also concentrate on the holistic development of pupils and how it relates to children and young people's progress.

## **The role of critical reflections**

Kolb's 1984 reflection model suggests that learning occurs in a cycle, where 4 processes are met for learning to be effective. He believed that concrete experience, followed by reflection observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation had to be obtained to be able to reflect effectively (Svinicki and Dixon 1987, p.141-142). Using Kolb's model in reflection allows me to look back at ways to improve my initial teaching practice by taking what went well into other lessons and correcting mistakes I may come across. Gibbs' reflective model is similar to Kolb's model as they both believed that using their reflection models, it allowed the learner to take their findings and consider how to apply the knowledge it to future learning experiences and understanding the importance of learning by doing (Flecher, 2021). Gibbs expanded further by considering your feelings and looking deeper into how you can apply what you've learnt to different experiences, it suggests that it is not enough to just think about what we've learnt but that we learn through linking what we've thought about to the physical encounter such as participating in the classroom (Flecher, 2021).

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In recent years there has been drastic changes in the curriculum for Wales and it's still ongoing, the reform is putting the learners first by focusing on purposes and how we can get the children to achieve this. Previously the curriculum was based on coverage and the purpose of assessment was not feasible because assessment was used to deliver a result to distinguish if the a school was good or bad, rather than focusing on how we can use assessment to change pupil's learning so they excel in their education and allow the teacher to work collaboratively with the children in their class to work out how to help each other to come to conclusion on what works best for the individual child (Donaldson, 2019). The new curriculum focuses on the pupil's progression of learning as opposed to a range of standards young people should meet to show they've done a 'good job' by reaching targets in traditional education (Bannerjee, 2019). Professor Hayward suggest that the new curriculum is less prescriptive, and it allows teachers to be creative and adapt to different learning strategies in order to develop and understanding of our own work to suit the children in our school, therefore allowing the new curriculum to match local circumstance in Wales and create a liberating school experience for children and teachers. The curriculum reform highlights why the role of critical reflections are imperative because we as teachers must continue to change practice to adhere to the child so that they are receiving the best education and are not overlooked or dismissed when it comes to their learning. Initial teacher education is not enough to supply teachers with all the knowledge and skills that are acquired to meet the strong demands of education reform and social change, therefore the need to critically reflect on teaching practice must be met to keep up to date with new skills to benefit the pupils and our own practice (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2018). The new professional standards for teaching and leadership is relevant for newly qualified teachers and experienced teachers that complement our classroom and educational system, it focuses on 5 key values which are, pedagogy, collaboration, leadership, innovation and professional learning which outlines what highly effective practice should look like to support professional learning. This helps teachers to follow a guideline of what's expected of them and how they can improve their practice, which also helps reflecting on work in the professional learning passports by recording experiences and use them with the professional standards to check your progress on working towards being exceptional teacher and help improve how we educate children and young people (Hwb, 2020).

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## **Observation school and Class context**

The observation took place in a Primary School in the City and County of Swansea which had just under 400 pupils aged 3 to 11, 14% of children are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with eleven per cent speaking English as a second or additional language (Estyn, 2014). According to BBC news, the national statistics for children from BAME backgrounds is 12 percent. The number of children on free school meals is 39 percent compared to the national average of 19.9 percent were known to be eligible for free school meals (Welsh Government, 2020). The observation took place in a split Year 2/3 class with children of mixed abilities, in a bright and colourful open classroom. The children knew their daily routine which was to sit on the carpet once they arrived and start practicing their letters on whiteboards, they knew that if they had any questions, they needed to raise their hand and wait for the teacher to ask them to respond. The children knew to answer the register is Welsh but had the option to respond in other languages such as French and Spanish. The classroom showed signs of being a behaviourist school because the children were awarded with a class dojo for answering questions correctly. The teacher was inclusive of all children and praised them if they did good listening. Overall, the class context felt like was a safe environment for pupils, they were confident individuals that had a varied use of vocabulary, the children looked like they were happy to come into school ready to learn.

## **Critical incident linked to Donaldson's Four Purposes**

The critical incident took place in the morning during a physical activity play dodgeball session that was booked for the class in the hall. The children were excited and couldn't wait to start playing with their friends, Child A had recently started school after immigrating from Southeast Asia where he previously did not attend school. Although he spoke little to no English but was able to follow instructions of how to play dodgeball by looking at his peers and imitating their actions. Child A was very happy to play with the other children and was able to listen to others even though there was a language barrier. He would respond better to gestures and would nod his head if he understood, however if the child did not understand, he could rely on his friends to explain the instructions to him slowly with the use of gestures. This permitted his friends to use their skills to communicate with him another way by explain the instructions to him. He did not have a translator to help with his English and would have to learn English by practising it in school with support of teachers and friends. All the children were really engaged with the physical activity and did not want to go back to class because of how much they enjoyed the session. The critical incident in this

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observation is that there is a language barrier, and he would need sufficient assistance by using different learning theories to aid his progression with learning and how children who partake in physical activity benefits their overall learning and well-being. The Donaldson report in 2015 influenced the reform in the structure and purpose instead of it being focused on traditional educational knowledge, the intention for this new curriculum in Wales is to focus on the development of the whole child (Hwb, 2021). The 4 purposes of the curriculum are ambitious, capable learners, enterprising, creative contributors, ethical informed citizens and healthy, confident individuals (Donaldson, 2015). The critical incident links to ethical informed citizen of Wales and the world because the children understood that Child A was from another country and could demonstrate that they were aware that their new friend had little knowledge of English, and they wanted to help him in any way they could. The children showed that they were ethical informed citizens by adapting to different strategies to communicate with Child A and looking out for him if he needed assistance with anything, they knew he was from a different part of the world and required some guidance to comprehend the dodgeball instructions. They understood that they had a responsibility to respect the needs and rights of Child A and included him in their diverse society. They demonstrated that they had knowledge about different cultures and communities surrounding them and would use collaboration with each other in the morning and during their routine in the class. Child A would need this support from his friends and school staff to enable him to become an ambitious capable learner, he'll be able to set himself high standards and had already shown signs that he enjoys challenges. He can also use his prior knowledge to use skills to connect with different contexts as well as using his ability to problem solve any difficulties he may face. The children showed that they were healthy confident individuals by contributing to the activity with great joy and passion so that they'll become ready to live for fulfilling lives.

## **Literature Review**

A study has shown that children who have English as an additional language but are not fluent performed at lower levels needed to achieve the average literacy and numeracy skills in Key Stage 2 as opposed to children who were fluent in English, they were able to meet and exceed the learning outcomes for their age (Demie, 2018, p.643). This suggest that children who learn English as an additional language should have guidance to learn to speak it fluently especially when instructions given are not in their native language. (Smith-Khan, 2018). Children that speak a minority language face larger disadvantages in education

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which can have long lasting effects on their learning and in adulthood (ibid). For children to have the knowledge of the curriculum they need to be fluent in the language it's being taught in. (Demie and Lewis, 2018). If teachers cannot speak a child's native language where the child does not speak English, bilingual interpreters should be used because if the child starts developing the language but makes a mistake, how would the teacher know to correct the error if they're not able to communicate through language yet, leading the teacher to be at fault for unknowing teaching something that may not be correct (Watkins, Razee, and Richters, 2012, p130). However, English is the first language for many children in the UK, it's not feasible to employ teachers that can adhere to all languages that meet the children's needs, and by teaching a child how to speak English would develop their language skills and further their knowledge in education and everyday life outside of school (ibid). Children and young people can navigate through communication in forms other than language, children can communicate through play, gestures, pictures and many other ways, language should not be a barrier to communication, but it should be a bridge to it (Rymes, 2014). Teachers and pupils should work together to try different methods of communication that will result in the child being able to speak fluently in their additional language, children's ability to learn is not limited to language (ibid). Piaget believed that children were able to communicate during pre-verbal stages which is roughly the first 18 month of a child's life, where they are able to display practical knowledge which then forms into the substructure of representational knowledge (Piaget, 1964, p.179). Piaget showed that even in the early stages when babies are not able to communicate verbally, they are still able to make connections as language is not the only form of communication (ibid). Piaget described learning as an interactive journey that includes experiences, observations and actions to help develop the interaction of children's surrounding and their environment (Gray, and MacBlain, 2015). This further demonstrates that language is essential in learning, but children can still learn without it, so this should not be a barrier towards a child's education (Gray, and MacBlain, 2015). Claxton 1998 added to this by suggesting that children learn from each other, they learn through physical experiences and use their feelings to interact with others (ibid).

Children thoroughly enjoyed playing dodgeball and participating in physical activities in a different learning environment, they were enthused and extremely engaged in the activity. Physical education is so important in children and young people's lives as it can enhance learning and attentiveness, which assists with increasing productivity and success, and it gives children the opportunity to learn life skills (Jade, 2018). Physical activity in children benefits their cardiovascular health and their development of fundamental motor skills that

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help prevent childhood obesity (Nilsen et al, 2019, p.3). Wales has the largest rates of childhood obesity in the UK with an estimated 26 percent of children are overweight or obese compared to England's estimate of 22 percent (BBC, 2019). Being physical in school allows children to take ownership of their own learning which enables them to understand the importance of physical activity by making links to having a healthy mind and body leading to making connections with maintaining a healthy lifestyle as well enabling the learning to become more meaningful (Rose, 2016). If children are learning through play, they appreciate it more as it feels less like a chore and something fun that they'll enjoy whilst gaining benefits to their physical and mental well-being (ibid). The Daily Mile is an international foundation, it's aimed at schools to help children's physical, social, emotional, mental health and wellbeing despite their age and ability, by participating in running, jogging and sometimes walking if children need to catch their breath, but this is done at their own pace (Daily Mile Foundation, 2019). The Daily Mile wants children to live an active and healthy lifestyle by achieving 15 minutes of being active and they have reached 10,000 schools that have signed up to the programme affecting over 2 million children as young as 2 whom participate in regular exercise leading to happy children that appreciate exercise that will become part of their everyday life (ibid). However, reports show that children are not getting enough exercise in school with statistics show that the number of children getting the recommended exercise per day, which is 60 minutes, drops by 40 percent as figures show that only 20 percent of primary school children are meeting the requirements levels of activity (Public Health England, 2017). From these findings it shows that children are not receiving their recommended amount of exercise as it stands, but research has also shown that children are now more than ever are not exercising enough because of the effects of the pandemic due to many schools closing to stop the spread of the infection, many children didn't have the social interactions with other children and would stay at home with their guardians and spent more time indoors on devices instead of exercising (Xiang, Zhang and Kuwahara, 2020, p531). Experts have been extremely worried about how the implications of the pandemic has affected children's levels of physical activity with an estimated 2 million had failed to complete the recommended 60 minutes of exercise per day and children were not even taking part in just 30 minutes of activity (Roan, 2021). Schools play an enormous part in keeping children physically active and must do more to use their facilities to encourage children to partake in more frequent physical activity because it's imperative to the child's well being and school could be their only way to keep active if it's not being reinforced at home (ibid). Physical education needs teachers to remind children of the importance of exercising and provide an environment that allows an individual's physical literacy to

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develop, which research suggests that if children receive good quality of physical education in school, they'll appreciate it more and lead physically active lives in childhood and adulthood (Green et al, 2018, p. 277).

Physical literacy should be explored through play because it enables children to participate in active learning, developing their experiences by learning and interacting with their habit which would make assessing physical literacy easier by concentrating on these skills (Fletcher and Mandigo, 2012, p.367). The interaction improves cognitive and social development, therefore allowing children to develop confidence and motivation to part take in their academics(ibid). However, Steiner disagreed and felt as though children aged 7 and below should focus on being children and to enjoy learning through play and should not be taught about literacy and numeracy to avoid the stress it can cause on young people. He believed that children should only engage further with academic studies when they're mature so that that show initiative to learn and want to excel (Gray and MacBlain, 2015). A benefit to learning physical literacy is that children learn with a hands-on approach, Piaget believed that children learnt best with a constructivist approach where learning is based of children making their own knowledge through experiences and actively participating in their learning (ibid). Vygotsky believed that children learnt best through social interaction to help create the narrative for active learning and how it can help the communities and others, as social environments influence the learning progress. Learning occurs when children and young people and teachers interact with each other through inclusion, discussion and feedback (Gray, and MacBlain, 2012). Vygotsky also believed that children learn about culture through interacting with others, following rules and different abilities (ibid), this allows everyone to become ethical informed citizen of Wales and the world (Curriculum for Wales, 2020). The literature review shows that children develop and learn in multiple ways and that teachers should continue to use different strategies to adhere to each child, following this strengthens the relationship between teachers and students, gives pupils confidence to take their own initiative with their learning to build on their knowledge and allows teachers to reflect on which learning strategies work for the children in their class.

### **Reflection/ Evaluation and Next Steps**

The critical incident that took place was advantageous to witness as it highlighted how children can be nice to each other and the fulfilment they endured when they took part in dodgeball. Children helped each other and showed good listening to the dodgeball coach who was new to the school. Child A was able to learn how to play the game through social

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observation and was then able to play independently and uses his prior knowledge from the start of the game and applied it throughout the duration of the game. Even though Child A was able to understand the instructions that were being given out, it would have benefited him to have a translator in school in case he didn't understand something or wanted to communicate his feelings to his peers, he would have gained from clearing up any mishaps. If this incident happened whilst I was teaching, I would print off some flash cards in English and Child's A native language for him to comprehend. I would also try to learn some basic commands in the child's language so if he was unsure, those commands could be used to guide him where he needs to be. Critically reflecting my teaching is imperative for how I would develop a sense of professional judgement, without it I would not be able to progress if I continued to use existing patterns. I must critique myself in reflections to push my professional development further (Tripp, 2012). Dewey's model of reflection would be useful for me because it's reflective thinking in teaching clarifies the teaching process, which end goal is to improve the quality of teaching, it lets me plan accordingly and think towards intelligence. It would make me think about the methods that I use, are they suitable for the children in the classroom or does it need to be amended. Using Dewey's reflection model utilises the skills I already have and amplifies the ability to distinguish what works, how it works and what could have measure could have been taken to make it better for next time (Tauer & Tate, 1998, p.143). I would also find Gibbs' reflective model helpful in my own practice because Gibbs' model thinks about what happened, and how you felt and what you thoughts were at them time. I think by linking my feeling to the action will allow me to remember it better and reflect efficiently, and it's always good to look back to see analyse what you could do better if it arose again (Davies, 2012, p.11). Reflective learning helps toward my professional development because it will allow me to work alongside the professional standards and apply them to professional learning communities, I'll utilize my skill of collaboration through mutual engagement with children and their parents and take part in enterprising activities which will also affect my professional growth and development as a teacher (Zwozdiak-Myers2012).

Reflection would help with my personal development because it would challenge my perception of how I see things, it would give me another outlet to explore and not stay within my comfort zone. Also being a teacher would enhance my knowledge and develop it further by seeing what techniques children are using to further their learning specifically when it comes to numeracy and literacy. Being a teacher will be challenging as no day will be the same, but it will also stimulate my intellect. I'm looking forward to planning lessons and

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looking back on them to assess if they were effective and how it could be used in different age groups or differentiated between different abilities through school. Reflection will help grasp how I teach and why I teach, it will make me think about learning theories and the children's holistic development. I will think about how I can contribute to their well being and helping them achieve the purposes in the curriculum. I think children can also help towards the reflection so they feel like their being heard in regard to their learning and how they wish to learn should also be considered.

## **Conclusion**

Being out on placement and taking part in the bridging days helped develop teaching skills that can apply to all the learners in my class, it has opened my eyes to see that children in Wales are becoming more diverse and for all different background in life. Learning about the impact of the lack of physical activity has on the children had made me want to introduce learning styles that can incorporate physical activities and the new curriculum in Wales allows teachers to be more creative with how they plan their lesson if the children are still able to meet their learning objectives. The learning theories should always be considered when in the classroom to discover which one works best with the students and what might work one day, can change the next. The learning theories are extremely useful and beneficial to both teachers and pupils. The critical incident outlined key factors for me such as how inclusive the children were of one another and always offering to support their peers where help was needed as well how I can take what I've learnt from it into my classroom experience. The professional teacher standards in Wales will guide me through my teaching career now and in future though reflecting to my practice analysing what went well and what could have come better and following the guidelines to see if I am meeting the targets that have been set out (Education Wales, 2018). It will also help to build my confidence as a newly qualified teacher to work hard towards my targets as it will develop further teaching skills.

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## **Appendices**

### **Record 1**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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| Date and time, year group: 23/09/2021 afternoon Year 2/3                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Where and When:</b><br>The observation took place in a primary school setting. The classroom was bright and colourful with an open space. The environment had natural lighting with tables situated in the middle and the sides of the room with good visibility to the board. Other children were part taking in various activities whilst I was overserving Child B was reading.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>What happened:</b><br>Child B was reading a stage 3 book alongside the teaching assistant, I noticed that he had difficulty pronounce certain words. I could see what he wanted to read and tried hard, but he lacked confidence in his speech. The teaching assistant was helpful and differentiated her reading technique. She would get out a small whiteboard and write down some of the words Child B struggled with, she would also help sound out each individual letter to make it into a word. Doing this made Child B feel better and not so afraid to pronounce words incorrectly. The teacher's approach shows that she considered Child B's speech and shows inclusiveness. |
| <b>Areas of possible exploration:</b><br>Child B lacks confidence in his reading and pronunciation due to his speech, this might hold him back from being able to progress further in all aspects of his learning. He has great support in his classroom by friends, teachers and speech and language therapist.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Notes:</b><br>It was a busy environment and the children had just come back from lunch; the noise level was slightly high so this could make it hard for someone to concentrate on reading. The children were engaged in their chosen subjects, whether that was on the laptops, role play area or completely work with the teacher, each child was on task and doing what they needed to do. It is a welcoming environment with lots of colourful displays of work children have completed.                                                                                                                                                                                             |

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## Record 2

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| Date and time, year group: 23rd Sep 10am Year 2/3                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Where and When:</b><br>The observation took place in the hall, where children had a someone come in to teach them how to play dodgeball. The children were able to participate in the morning once the register had been done.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>What happened:</b> When the children were sat down listening to instructions from the instructor, Child A was looking around to his peers and copying their actions. Child A was unsure of what actions needed to be done at first, the instructor would say to skip with the opposite arm and the opposite leg. Once the children started carrying out this action, Child C would pause at first, watch his friends and then continue doing the action that was told. After speaking to classroom teacher, I was informed child was new to the school and had recently moved here from another country and spoke no English. He was able to communicate well by using gestures and short words. Before the child started school, the children were told there would be a new pupil starting in their class and that he spoke no English. The rest of the children in the class would help Child A by explaining things to him and they all enjoyed taking part in the physical activity. |
| <b>Areas of possible exploration:</b> Perhaps the Child A could benefit from pictures of actions like run, stop, skip for him to understand better. Avenues of research could be how children from other countries adapt to learning when they come to Wales, what challenges do they face with physical, emotional, social and well-being, what support is being offered in schools. How children come together and enjoy taking part in physical activities. The affects of physical exercise.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Notes:</b><br>The atmosphere felt warm, welcoming and the children were helpful in regard to assisting Child A if he didn't understand anything. The dodgeball activity was in the morning and the environment wad busy with the children running around and playing, they thoroughly enjoyed playing dodgeball and repeatedly said how much fun they had collectively. Children all listened well to instructions, the language barrier did not stop Child C from                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

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participating and having fun with his friends. Humanist school approach was used because he's feelings and emotions were taken into consideration throughout and the children displayed that they were ethical informed citizens.

## **Record 3**

Date and time, year group: 22/09/2021 afternoon year 4/5

### **Where and When:**

The critical incident happened in the classroom where children were participating in a literacy lesson learning about nouns, pronouns and the verb. The classroom was large, and children would sit on the tables that were spread out in the class and worked in their ability groups. The children were lively but also caring and kind to each other, they always helped and supported each other in all aspects of learning.

### **What happened:**

Teacher had given clear and concise instruction that children needed to make a poster called verb village and noun town, where they had to think of verbs and nouns to draw and colour in on their poster. Whilst teacher was talking, I noticed that Child X was disengaged and would not make eye contact with the teacher. Child X could have been experiencing cognitive overload and said 'Miss I don't understand...' but because he shouted out in a class that was already loud the teacher didn't hear him. When the work was assigned Child X would ask peers what he needed to do and happily engaged in drawing his poster. He was able to think of nouns and verbs of things he enjoyed doing such as riding a bike and going to the park. Child X lacked confidence in himself.

### **Areas of possible exploration:**

Different teaching techniques could help child engage with the lesson, some children would put their hands up, whereas other would shout out the answer could lead to confusion for child. Although concise instructions were given, child still didn't understand and could have received further help. Research could be does children being afraid to fail impact their learning

What learning theories are best suited to engage children in lessons.

### **Notes:**

Some children shouting out when others were putting their hands up could send mixed signals to the children. Environment is a positive, happy and welcoming. Children are capable ambitious learners, they always showed willingness and curiosity.

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