

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

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Introduction

According to Brookfield's *The Skillful Teacher*: 'A critical incident is any unplanned and unanticipated event that occurs during class, outside class or a teacher's career but is "vividly remembered" (Brookfield, 1990)'. Therefore, a 'critical incident' is an unexpected event that teachers face and interpret as challenging in a particular situation. However, most of these 'dramatic' incidents – positive and negative – appear to be 'ordinary' rather than 'critical' at first sight.

The analysis of critical incidents is widely essential in the teaching practice because it helps teachers know more about themselves and their learners. It also helps them to question their teaching practice and enable them to develop professionally and critically.

Thus, this critical evaluation will begin by exploring the role of critical reflection and why it is vital to the development of teaching practice. Followed by information about the school, the context in which the incident occurred, and a description of the observed incident. After this, the literature review will focus on one area for potential research to provide meaning for the critical incident observed and then analysed. Afterwards, a reflection and evaluation about what I learned and how I am going to use this information to identify the following steps, discussing and demonstrating how it will apply to my professional and personal development. Finally, it will conclude with a summary of the approach, linking this with the role of the reflective practitioner in Wales and the new standards.

The Role Of Critical Reflection

In the past decades, the role of critical reflection has progressively become relevant in education. It recognises as a vitally important component of professional development, raising educational standards, maximising/differentiating each student's learning potential and preparing teachers for the obstacles and difficulties of the twenty-first-century classroom.

Critical reflection aims to help teachers analyse and evaluate what is going on – and what is not working – in their lessons. Learning to reflect effectively also enables teachers to make knowledgeable judgments based on evidence-based reflecting and acting upon their experiences to improve pupil learning and the quality of their teaching practice. Thus, according to Jank Fook's *Reflective Practice and Critical Reflexion*, 'reflective practice (model)' emerges primarily from the work of Donald Schön (Jan Fook, 2007). However, the two most accepted models are Schön's and Dewey's. Schön's model (1983–1987) tries to cut down the gap between theory and actual practice, using 'reflection in action (how to act when something is happening)' and 'reflection on action (reconsider and think what needs to change for the future)'. This model embeds what teachers do instead of what they say they do. On the other hand, Dewey's model focus on reflective thoughts and transformative action: 'reflective action based on the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it (Dewey, 1933)'. Dewey also says that to be an excellent reflective individual, a practitioner needs three main attributes: open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness (passion).

These reflective models require teachers who can decide what is relevant knowledge. Versatile practitioners and teachers who try new ways of working out to improve their effectiveness; who are creative, changeable, naturally curious and can demonstrate continuous learning by seeking new ideas and doubting/questioning the world where they live.

Therefore, schools and practitioners expect to: support the development of their learners' sense of identity in Wales, accommodating learners from diverse backgrounds with different languages, genders and cultural issues, promoting social unity and tolerance, incorporating assessment for learners' progression, responding to disadvantaged pupils and those with learning and behavioural difficulties and incorporating opportunities for the application of mandatory cross-curricular skills using new technologies. Teachers also must be able to prepare healthy, confident, ambitious and ethical learners for a society in which they should be ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

As we can see, reflective practice is a challenging and complex phenomenon. However, every teacher must develop a proper understanding of its core models because each plays an integral part in pedagogical knowledge.

Observation

The observation occurred in a mixed-gender English medium comprehensive school-based northwest of Cardiff. There are 1,263 pupils on roll from 11–18, including 295 in the sixth form. Pupils come from a wide geographical area, including Barry, Llantwit Major and Bridgend to the west and Llantrisant and Pontypridd to the north. However, the large majority come from the city of Cardiff.

Inspirational leadership, coupled with a strong focus on professional development has led to outstanding teaching, attainment and pupil well-being. A culture of extremely high expectations permeates all aspects of school life. The school has a strong Christian ethos and the staff consistently promote love, acceptance, responsibility and forgiveness. However, the school welcomes students of all faiths and those with no faith background, celebrating the diversity of the school community. Many develop the understanding necessary to become ethical, well-informed citizens of Wales.

Most pupils displayed highly positive attitudes to learning and developed a sense of resilience and ambition. Most pupils also developed their skills exceptionally well in lessons that capture their interest. It provides them with a very high level of challenge and support to achieve their full potential. Just under 16% of pupils have additional learning needs, which is below the national average. Just over 5% of pupils have statements of special educational needs, which is higher than the national average. There is an additional teaching facility for pupils with autism at the school called The Marion Centre. Just under 9% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well below the national average of 17%. Nearly all pupils have English as their first language. Around 18% of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Critical Incident

The critical incident occurred at the start of the day (period one) with a year nine group having a biology lesson. The class was lower ability with a range of ALN needs, such as autism, ADHD, processing and literacy/numeracy difficulties. A teaching assistant was present to support those needs.

Students have learnt the importance of health and BMI as a measure of health. They have looked at the issues surrounding obesity and the cost to the NHS in treating obesity-related illnesses.

They initially interacted with articles to extract relevant quotes to the question, but it was the first time students had to produce an extended piece of writing. However, the class has only had five previous lessons this year, and as such, the student's abilities and needs are still determined.

As the lesson started, the teacher's initial interaction with the learners began by questioning what students remembered from previous lessons. The teacher used a range of questions to encourage deeper consideration, making decisions based on the evidence from articles and own ideas and also connecting prior learning.

Then, the teacher explained clearly and widely what the lesson objectives were and let the students know what they would learn and why thus reminding students about the big question to focus the work. It helped students demonstrate a high quality of learning, ensuring that all students shared and understood the lesson objectives. However, regardless of the class structure, there were various ability levels. So, the teacher showed what high Standards mean by using different mechanisms to differentiate the student's level and set up different lesson objectives to give everybody the same opportunity to succeed. Thus, depending on ability, the paragraphs created will vary in complexity, allowing students who struggle the most to achieve the same quality/level of learning.

The teacher also actively encouraged the learners to reflect upon their learning by applying the new knowledge to real-life, authentic contexts and cross-curricular subjects. For example, following the English model of PEE to complete the paragraphs.

The students also worked together in small groups to complete the writing, sharing ideas and supporting each other. It provides a fantastic opportunity to provide feedback and critique criteria, allow progress without a written literacy barrier and also an excellent opportunity to practice literacy and oral skills. It also shows that improving student interaction is essential to their learning.

By the end of the lesson, the teacher asked for feedback to check how students progressed. Learners shared their ideas, demonstrating how to give for and against arguments and using a range of viewpoints and examples to provide a conclusion. Finally, the teacher told the students to swap books and read each other's work. It shows that gallery critique helps identify the proper success criteria, enabling some students to check for success criteria and suggest improvements.

Therefore, the teacher has demonstrated a significant knowledge of collaboration, innovation and understanding of relevant child development disciplines and learning theories (with an emphasis on constructivist theories), using a mix of them when needed.

Based on repetition, open-ended questions, peer-assessment and feedback for improvement, the teacher scaffolded the learning process by encouraging learners to recall previous knowledge from their last lesson. Thus, students demonstrated their understanding of it, and as a team, they collaborated to answer the teacher's questions, using the previous information retained in their short-term memory. Using these techniques provide the power of responsibility to the students and the freedom/choice to decide with whom they would do the written piece and how they want to do it. It enables learners to take control of their work, be capable and ambitious.

Literature Review

The observed critical incident shows how schools want to create a culture of success and, therefore, how teachers aim to model it, building a culture of critique in the classroom and ensuring that students know what they need to do to achieve high standards of learning and performance. This idea is reinforced by a study exploring how effective feedback can address students to reflect on what they have learned and provide them with appropriate activities to improve work and increase engagement.

This study discussed feedback as one of the most critical influences on student's learning and why it is a powerful way to improve learning. However, its impact can be either negative or positive. Alternatively, practical or ineffective, depending on the type of feedback given.

John Hattie described feedback as information provided by an agent (teacher, peer or parent) to develop particular attitudes. Feedback also aims to provide knowledge and skills related to the task to help students fill the gap between what is understood and what aims to be understood (Sadler, 1989). However, Winne and Butler (1994) argued that the student should be able to use the feedback to add, overwrite or restructure the previous knowledge. If feedback does not address any previous learning experience, it has no effect whatsoever. Earley, Northcraft, Lee & Lituchy (1990) also agreed, saying that feedback can only help reduce the gap between understanding and objectives if the current learning is sufficient. This is further supported by Kulhavy (1977), who went further against behaviourists' arguments when he said, 'feedback could not create change alone.' He also reinforced that if the context studied is unfamiliar, the feedback will not affect student performance because the information is not related to what is already known.

So, how can teachers create effective feedback? Hattie (2009) analysed more than 100 factors influencing achievement and it indicated that some types of feedback are more effective than others. The most effective form was telling students how to do a task more effectively. In contrast, the lowest effectiveness form of achievement relates to positive comments, rewards and punishment. Deci, Koestner and Ryan (1999) also agreed with Hattie's analysis, showing that rewards can negatively affect the student's performance because the amount of information contained is minimal, undermining engagement and self-regulation.

Therefore, feedback is effective when it gives information on correct responses and builds on previous knowledge. It also seems more effective when the aims are clear and specific, but the level of complexity is low (Kluger & Denise, 1996). A low level of complexity helps students' brains perceive low levels of threat and, consequently, increase effort levels, even doing more challenging tasks rather than just doing 'more'. However, some students may give up if the strategies to reduce the gap between previous and new knowledge are very challenging.

Sweller (1990) explained that goals could also be made more manageable by narrowing the range of reasonable hypotheses. Therefore, to effectively close the gap between previous understanding and future goals, teachers must reduce the gap between the actual level to the desired goal, providing appropriate, challenging tasks and specific goals. Locke & Latham (1984) proposed that specific goals are more effective than general, or nonspecific, because the feedback can be directed, including relevant information about what the student must do to get there.

Hattie went a step further, proposing a model and identifying three crucial questions: where am I going? How am I going? And where to next? The answers to these questions assess and evaluate students' understanding, enhancing learning and increasing effort and motivation.

The teacher must assist in identifying these gaps. An essential part of feedback is to provide students with the correct information to maintain the learning goals related to the success criteria. Black and William (1998) concluded that 'the provision of challenging assignments and extensive feedback leads to greater student engagement and higher achievements.' Challenging goals are practical in two ways: informing the student about their performance level and setting more appropriate challenge objectives for each of them. However, the success of these goals occurs in different dimensions. It can be direct, comparative, social or engagement related to specific goals. The last type can involve challenge and commitment in future actions and generate resilience when students face obstacles.

Locke & Latham (1990) proposed that goals are more effective when they produce an appropriate challenge, when students are committed to completing them and also when students know how well the students are doing can guide them to generate a more profound understanding of the task. 'It is closing the gap between where students are and where they aim to be that leads the power of feedback (Sadler, 1989)'. However, this is even more complex because commitments can generate by actual figures, peer groups, role models, rewards and punishment. Thus, achieving those goals will boost or reverse depending on the student and their situation. To reinforce this idea, Earley and Kanfer (1985) showed that modelling can be an effective form of performance. They experienced that when students observed high-performance models, they showed significantly high commitment than those who observed low-performance models.

Hattie's model also distinguishes between four levels of feedback: the task, the process, the self-regulation and the praise. The task level is commonly used to correct wrong answers and misunderstood knowledge. Thompson (1998) demonstrated that the task level is adequate when the correct information is stored. Thus, students know to cover a specific area of improvement. However, Natler (1979) argued that the information received is irrelevant if each student performs at a different level. The process level ensures that information is stored and how it can help create strategies to detect errors. Carver and Scheier (1981, 1982, 1990) also argued the effectiveness of this level when a student conforms to a barrier while pursuing an achievement because it will trigger that pursuit and the regulation level addresses how students monitor and regulate their actions towards the future goals, implying commitment and discipline. However, the level of students' confidence can affect their acceptance of progress too. Kulhavy and Stock (1989) noted that if confidence is high and the response is correct, little attention is paid to the feedback. Conversely, feedback is ignored if the confidence level is low and the response is wrong.

These three levels are very effective, but feedback at the personal level is rarely effective. Wilkinson (1981), Kluger and Denisi (1998) concluded that praise has no relationship to student achievement. It is ineffective in enhancing learning because it draws attention to the self, encouraging students to avoid trying challenging tasks to minimise the high risk of failure (Black & William, 1998).

The study concluded that providing and receiving effective feedback requires many skills by teachers, students and a high expertise in developing a suitable classroom climate to deal with complexities and also a deep understanding of the subject matters to be prepared to provide effective feedback before frustration takes over.

Reflexion, Evaluation & Next Steps

Reflective practice is often highlighted as a celebration feature of good practice in continuing effective learning. This practice is a self-reflection process involving teachers to find and discover

concepts that identify how they work. So, to achieve that, teachers use reflection models to structure their reflections.

Brookfield (1998) proposed that we can reflect our practice by seeing it through complementary lenses:

1. Reflecting on ourselves. Personal experiences have important implications for how we teach. Therefore, analysing ourselves will explain why we have preferences to do things and avoid others.
2. Seeing ourselves through students' eyes. It is vital to understand how students perceive what we try to communicate. So each time we do something, we learn from it.
3. Improve our practice with the help of our colleagues. We need people to help us know our assumptions and to help us change those to improve our practice.
4. Theory. It can help us to change our subjective assumptions so we can view a situation differently.

These four senses enable us to get a broader range of tools, vision and understanding of the positive and adverse outcomes we experience in the classroom. It also shows that reviewing our practice through these lenses makes teachers more aware of detecting critical incidents and identifying those invisible dynamics. However, Ixer (1999) argued that reflection is a significantly individualised activity, which makes it difficult to measure and generalise its outcomes due to students' situations. Hence, it isn't easy to assess its effectiveness.

This model helps educators to improve their perceptions of what is going on in the classroom. The reflective model will improve their professional and personal development and influence their teaching practice by wanting to create a culture of excellence, as the observed teacher did. The teacher showed that its heart was in its student's work, providing every student with the capacity to create astonishingly clever and mature work, overcoming individual weaknesses. Its attitude also showed a passion for the growth of its students and their ability to articulate it. Therefore, I will reflect in the future by learning/using strategies to help students create great work, identifying the benefits of critical reflection and persevering in finding ways to develop my reflective ability to improve my practice responsiveness.

However, there are other areas where I need to improve in order to help students to develop strong, readily accessible background knowledge. Learn how to review correctly to help students to create strong connections between previous and new knowledge. Learn how to present new information in small steps so students can process it and check for understanding by using questions to determine how well the information has been learned and whether there is a need for additional support.

Conclusion

This study provided how learning to teach and attempting to improve the quality of teaching practice is a significant challenge, especially in developing a new vision/mission for a new curriculum design in Wales. According to Professor Graham Donaldson, the main reason for this is that the levels of achievement could be higher than they were and should be (Donaldson, 2015). This study also provided some essential principles of effective feedback practice that can address a wide range of cognitive, behavioural and emotional aspects of learning and development. Therefore, provide a general acceptance of different feedback practices as essential learning tools in the classroom, making clear that now, more than ever, a teacher should re-think how they reflect on their practice and how the feedback provided can improve the students' learning. It shows that all students must know what, how and why they will learn, ensuring that all students share and understand objectives.

So, there is no doubt that reflective practice and effective feedback are elaborated, multiform phenomena. Teachers must teach and find alternative ways to nurture, encourage and motivate each learner to generate creative, confident, ambitious, informed and ethical citizens for the Welsh society and the world. In essence, twenty-first-century teachers are expected to take responsibility for their professional development and each child's future. Thus, a teacher should become an effective practitioner and an influential mentor, guiding their students correctly and ensuring that all learners receive the best teaching and learning they can get.

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