

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.

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## Introduction

The purpose of this assignment is to analyse, evaluate and understand a critical incident using Tripp's (1993) critical incident methodology which would start engaging a conversation around reflective practices and the significance of a critical incident. In this assignment, I will have analysed a critical incident through my own classroom experience where a deep analysis of exploration will be required to understand what the next steps would be and even how this critical incident could've been supported better for future practice. Tripp's critical incident methodology insists that an essential part to the development of professional judgement is 'reflecting' (Tripp, 201, p.12), but we need to use this reflection as a way to challenge and critique our professional values. Tripp also states that critical incidents are created and that they are produced by the way we look at a situation. A critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event (Tripp, 2011, p.8). "To take something as a critical incident is a value judgment we make, and the basis of that judgment is a significance we attach to the meaning of the incident" (Tripp, 1993). Incidents appear to be 'typical' rather than 'critical' at first sight, but are rendered critical through analysis. The critical incident that was observed for the purpose of this assignment was derived from a classroom of 29 pupils, 15 of which were girls and 1 ALN student who had a TA assigned. In this incident, the observation will show how a pupil was showing no interest in the work due to not understanding and no prior knowledge of the task. This case study will be discussed further in detail explaining different methods of questioning and assessment for learning. The literature review will expand on the reflective practices that are used, identify some key areas for improvement and also to understand the importance of the critical incident. I will then summarise and outline some key steps that could be taken for future practice.

## Literature review

The literature review will be based around the critical incident that was observed during the observation period. The literature review will dive in deeply into three key elements that have been identified in the critical incident. Firstly, we will investigate the behavioural aspects of learning and the questioning methods used in this context. Child A was observed to not be paying attention in the assigned task but instead was doodling and distracting Child B. As stated in the *How to develop thinking and assessment for learning in the classroom* document (Welsh Government, 2010), an overriding feature of quality thinking and assessment for learning is the important of establishing group work in the classroom. The document also talks about behaviourism and how the material taught in class is important to the cognitive theory, and how behaviourism treats the organism as a black box. Secondly, we will discuss some key methods that Brookfield (Brookfield, 1998) uses in their book *Critically Reflective Practice* (Brookfield, 1998, p. 197-205) which are based around critical reflective practices and what teachers need to consider when reflective on their own teaching. Reflection is stated as one the most influential tools used by teachers to help them improve their methods and for pupils to learn more efficiently. Finally, we will reflect on the essay by Farrell (Farrell, 2012) which is *Reflecting on Reflective Practice: (Re)Visiting Dewey and Scho'n*, this also is based around reflective practice but uses research from two of the most influential contributors which are Dewey (1933) and Schon (1983). Here, Farell discusses the meaning of reflective practice and how it plays hand in hand for teachers.

Talking about reflective practice, the meaning of this term can be compromised from author to author. There is confusion as to what reflective practice means and how it can be handled and mishandled for teachers. Reflective practice can be easily highlighted of great significance of the understanding of justifying the teaching practice (Donaldson, 2015). Dewey (1933) and Schon (1983) are two of the first people to introduce reflective practice through theoretical ideals which was later backed up by Sellars (2017) which has a relatively more modern approach about reflective teaching practice. I will aim to use my own reflective practice around

the critical incident observed whilst using the reflective framework such as Gibbs (1988) and Blooms Taxonomy (1956) to promote critical thinking.

As stated in the published document (Welsh Government, 2010), a key feature in improving the quality of thinking and developing is through effective group work. Learners are to be coached in which reminds them of their expected behaviour and how pupils tend to learn more efficiently when working in groups. This allows for discussion within the group and how the teacher needs to establish the right climate in the classroom. A very important tool is through teacher-modelling (Welsh Government, 2010), which promotes values and learners are able to learn from the actions of their teachers. This will encourage learners to embrace the same attitude as the teacher. Vygotsky (1896-1934) states that when children are set to individual tasks, they are less effective than working in collaboration with a peer/adult. The process of engagement between the learner and peer/adult enables them to enhance on their think and in return improve their conceptual understanding. Vygotsky implemented the social constructive theory of 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) which is a tool used to differentiate what learns can and can't do at a certain point of time. The document also touches on the how questioning affects pupils learning. It can be defined as the driving force of developing thinking and assessment for learning (Welsh Government, 2010) and can be backed up by the hinge questioning techniques (Wiliam, 2014).

In the article *Critically reflective Practice*, Brookfield goes on to describe reflective practice as practitioners trying to 'discover and research' as a process of inquiry (Brookfield, 1998). He talks about how practitioners should look at reflective practice in four complimentary lenses: 'the lens of their own autobiographies as learners of reflective practice, the lens of learners' eyes, the lens of colleagues' perceptions, and the lens of theoretical, philosophical, and research literature' (Brookfield, 1998, p.197). Lens 1 can be merely described in ethical terms as learning from experience. Two people can have the same affect but with different experience which can't be related to one or another. Brookfield explains this simply as 'no one experiences the death of a parent in exactly the same way as anyone else' (Brookfield, 1998,

p.198). Lens 2 is reflecting from the learners' eyes. Its about seeing how your teaching practice and methods differentiate across different people. This can be from the point of view of knowledge, ethnicity, equality, learning needs and even from teacher differentiation. This is stated as surprisingly one of most consistent methods of reflection. Lens 3 talks about learning from our peers. Similarly, to previously mentioned by Vygotsky, collaboration or group work is one of the most effective methods of learning. By being indulged in a conversation with your peers regarding teaching practice, this will open the teachers' eyes to more advanced learning which will benefit the learners. Lastly, Lens 4 discusses the importance of continued research and literature reading to enhance the teachers learning. Through Donaldson, Vygotsky, Dewey, Tripp, Schon and many others we can learn about new reflective theories, understand critical incidents and improve our status as educators. Generations change and so do the learners; teachers need to adapt to the sociology of the modern pupil.

Reflecting on both Dewey (1933) and Schon (1983), Dewey starts talking about the actual meaning of the term reflection. He talks about how it is not just mulling over things that interests us but instead states 'active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends constitutes reflective thought' (Dewey, 1933, p.16) He goes on to talk about the process of reflection and how it is routinely thought of as impulse, tradition or even authority whereas reflective thinking actually comes from feeling of doubt or conflict connected to teaching. It seems Dewey has a sentimental feeling around reflection and treats it more as an emotion and a way to better yourself for society. Schon based his work around Dewey's theories therefore his consensus seems to be aligned with Dewey but elevated to match with the generational times. In the 1970's, Schon teamed up with Chris Argyris and designed a method of reflection called single loop and double loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Single loop learning is based around planning, teaching and testing whereas double loop learning is based around thinking, practice and problems. As Schon was interested in knowing how professionals know what they do, he goes on to describe two reflection theories.

Reflection-in-action is described more as 'thinking on our feet', this would indicate that the educator would be more diverse in the teaching as they may reshape the task or situation to suit the needs of the pupils. Reflection-on-action is reflecting on the experience after it has finished. Understanding why certain situations unfolded and what could be done differently. Both methods should be used by educators as reflection is there to improve yourself for the sake of the young learners (Schon, 1983)

Reviewing and analysing all the literature above, it can be seen that all theories are presented to produce the same outcome; better learning for the learners. In the critical incident that was observed for this purpose, it was identified that Child A was not engaging with that pre-set task but instead was showing signs of behaviour problems and lack of conceptual understanding. At the same time it can be argued that the teacher didn't present enough questioning techniques to engage the students, the work may have been better suited in group work for peer relationship enhancement and also reflection needed to be taken into consideration especially 'reflection-in-action' (Schon, 1983) which would've been the best process to use in this situation where the pupil was unable to answer the questions due to lack of prior knowledge.

### Explanation of case study

#### School context

The observed critical incident took place in an English-medium secondary school based in the Swansea Local Authority where the school consists of 888 mixed-gender pupils with ages ranging from 11-16 (Welsh Government, 2022). Key Stage 3 classes are mixed ability classes with Year 9 and above allocated into sets up to Set 8. The last Estyn inspection was carried out in 2018 where it was reported to have 16.3% pupils eligible for free school meals, 25.9% of the pupils have require additional learning needs which is higher than the national average of 22.9% (Estyn, 2018). The school also adopts 3.7% of pupils who have special education need compared to 2.2% for Wales. On the back of that, the school incorporates a specialist

facility to support pupils with moderate to severe learning difficulties. They also have a built in 'Alternative Provision' for pupils who are more interested in learning life skills.

### Critical incident overview

The critical incident, which is detailed in appendix A, occurred on the first day of observations during a Maths lesson for Year 7 pupils. The class consisted of twenty-nine pupils, fifteen of which were girls and one ALN student who had a TA present. It was the second lesson of the day and the pupils had just arrived after finishing PE.

The lesson starts as normal where the teacher uses the school's 'threshold' approach which is to stand at the door to let the pupils in. The pupils had been coming from PE first lesson, so they were all sweaty and full of energy. The pupils sat down in their allocated seats which is decided using a seating chart. The seating chart was made to have all the pupils sitting in Boy/Girl order. The 'Do It Now' task was already set up on the screen and the students know to start the work as soon as they sit down. The class is a year 7 mixed ability class and the 'Do It Now' task consists of nine questions using a noughts and crosses format. The questions are of a mixture of topics to assess the learners of prior knowledge. Child A arrives 4 minutes late whilst the teacher is taking the register. During the first 10 minutes of the lesson where the pupils are supposed to settle down and complete the 'Do It Now' task, I observed Child A not doing any of the work, they were doodling and distracting Child B at the same time. I spoke to Child A and asked them if they required any assistance, they replied with "I don't understand any of it, I was not in class the last lesson, so I haven't done this work." I helped them go through one or two questions by helping them break down the question to make it easier to understand. They understood a few things but only completed one question before the time was up and the teacher was starting to ask for the answers. The method that the teacher used for questioning was 'hands up', this method requires someone to put their hands up when the teacher asks a question and attempt to answer the question. During the 5-minute period where the teacher was going through the answers, due to shortness of time, the teacher used the approach of question and answer meaning that the opportunity wasn't used to ask the class

for different answers or by correcting incorrect answers. Instead, the teacher simply asked the question to one child and provided the answer. Child A was not asked once if they had the answer. Child A was not assessed for prior knowledge therefore went into the lesson already behind. Towards the end of the lesson, the teacher had asked Child A a question regarding the topic that was just taught, the pupil had responded with "I didn't understand it, I wasn't in the last lesson, so I didn't understand it", the teacher then replied with "well, you should've put your hand up and asked for help if you didn't understand". This caused the pupil to be slightly upset and embarrassed whilst all the other pupils were staring at them.

### Teaching and learning methods

Reflecting on the observation detailed above, according to Dylan Wiliam, the traditional method of using 'hands up' does not provide much useful information. It may even impede learning and only engage with the most confident students (Wiliam, 2014). By using the 'hands up' method, the teacher is only able to assess the learning of the handful of pupils who understand the work. When time is tight, teachers are often drawn to "the usual suspects" for a good strong response. This is why some sort of randomization device is helpful (Wiliam, D. (2014). The Right Questions, The Right Way, Vol. 71, No. 6). In this journal, Dylan Williams goes on to explain different types of methods to assess the learning of the classroom, one type is to call on students at random, this encourages students to pay attention during the task as they may be called upon for questioning. This can be aligned with one of the four purposes of the curriculum of Wales which is, 'are questioning and enjoy solving problems' (Welsh Government, 2015). By using a random generator method, pupils are encouraged to complete the task as they could be called upon for questioning. This method is good example for assessment for learning as the teacher can identify the level of the learners and the method of the teaching by asking questions around the classroom. Another method used is with mini whiteboards, students are encouraged to write down the answer and then hold up the boards to show the teacher. This is a quick and easy way for the teacher to scan the room to assess the whole class of the learning (Wiliam, 2014). This is can also be further supported by (Dillon,

1988), who talks about the way the questions are questioned. Rather than asking a generic question of “what is  $1 + 1$ ?”, a more effective question would be “why is  $1 + 1$ ?”. The research shows that these small changes can have a bigger effect on the understanding and the depth of the student responses (Dillon, 1988).

Effective questioning should've been used in this practise to understand the knowledge of the classroom. One deep thinking technique is called 'Pose-Pause-Pounce-Bounce' used in particular by Dylan Wiliam. This questioning method allows the teacher to ask around the classroom for the answer whilst teaching and correcting. Breaking this method down, the teacher would 'Pose', meaning they would stand up and scan around the room, they would then 'Pause' so all pupils are paying attention and causing a bit of a dramatic scene in the classroom. The teacher would then 'Pounce' on a random pupil and ask for the answer. Finally, the fundamentals of this method is to not only ask one pupil for the answer but instead 'Bounce' around the class to see what answers the other pupils have. In hindsight, one other alternative that could've been beneficial is the seating plan. It could be more beneficial if the pupils were seated in pairs with different levels of knowledge. Differentiation could play a key part in helping the weaker learners learn from their peers as pupils tend to be shy and not ask for help from the teacher.

Diving into the 12 pedagogical principles, the observations of the critical incident above sits very well into the principle of 'Good teaching and learning means employing assessment for learning principles.' This is a key principle when understanding and reviewing your own pedagogical views as the teacher needs to always put the pupil's interest and knowledge ahead of anything else. It is the responsibility of the educator to be able to provide learners with all the fundamentals when teaching and questioning is one of the most important aspects of teaching. Formative assessment and assessment for learning are key ways to capture the skill level of the class and very beneficial for the teacher as they are able to improve, modify and repeat their lessons based on the feedback. 'Good teaching and learning encourages collaboration', is another principle which is encouraged for learners to use with their peers.

Peer learning and group work ties in deeply with collaboration and allows pupils to see the thought process of their peers. This helps pupils expand on their knowledge and even look at questions in a different dynamic.

### Discussion

Critically evaluating the incident during my observation, my pedagogical views of nurturing young learners so they can be the best version of themselves stands strong, as an educator, your role is to help young learners expand their knowledge by teaching through critical thinking and understanding the term conceptual understanding. Once a young learner can grasp those terms, they will view a classroom in a different mindset than just an ordinary teenager. Reflection is a key part for both the learner and the educator, the literature around reflection is backed up by Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988), who states that reflection is way of learning from experience. The cycle helps people learn from mistakes, understand the mistakes that were made and reflect on their reaction. Other influential contributors are Dewey (1933) who talks about how situations or critical incidents occur daily for teachers. He talks about how it allows you to develop your skills in relation to decision making and problem solving in your specific educational context. One other important contributor in the field of reflective practice is Schon (1983) who wrote about the two different types of reflection. Reflection-in-action is described more as 'thinking on our feet', this would indicate that the educator would be more diverse in the teaching as they may reshape the task or situation to suit the needs of the pupils. Reflection-on-action is reflecting on the experience after it has finished. Understanding why certain situations unfolded and what could be done differently. Both methods should be used by educators as reflection is there to improve yourself for the sake of the young learners.

It can be easily observed from the critical incident that Child A required some attention from the teacher for the starter task. Child A showed signs of frustration by doodling and distracting Child B whilst expressing their feelings to me about why they had not completed the work. In the report, Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015, p.5), Donaldson talks about how children and young people only have a relatively short time at school, therefore we must use that time

judiciously and productively to help each one of them to grow as a capable, healthy, well-rounded individual who can thrive in the face of unknown future challenges. Donaldson identifies two key pedagogical principles that evaluate how this teaching should've been dealt with 'All teaching and learning should be directed to achieving the four curriculum purposes' and 'Teachers should apply the pedagogical principles identified in this report when planning their teaching and learning, to ensure that the activities relate directly to the curriculum purposes'. In the view of a teacher, the actions and tasks should be motivated around the four purposes whilst using the curriculum to design the activities around it in the best way to help young learners. Teachers should educate themselves on reflection year on year, as pupils develop over time and also there may be a time where you are involved with more challenged pupils than before. In this case, traditional methods of 'hands up' will be completely useless as there will be no assessment for learning around the classroom.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this assignment was to open a discussion around an observed critical incident in a school environment using Tripp's (1993) methodology. During the observation period, an incident was recorded which highlighted behavioural issues and subjective teaching methods to ensure pupils are being assessed on their learning. During the assignment, some of the key contributors in reflective studies that were used for literature were Dewey (1933), Schon (1983), Wiliam (2014) and Dillon (1988) who all discuss different methods of questioning and assessment for learning. As a teaching practitioner, reflection is a key element that should be used daily to enhance the resource and learning that's being provided to learners. Reflection is also a key part of the Curriculum for Wales and links heavily with the professional standards.

The analysis of the observed critical incident identified that due to lack of knowledge by the pupil, this caused disruption within the classroom as the pupil was unable to complete their assigned task thus was doodling and distracting other pupils. The incident also highlighted that due to the lack of questioning and assessment for learning by the teacher, this had impeded on the pupil's opportunity to learn. It was also identified through research of Wiliam

(2014) that the 'hands-up' method isn't the best approach to use in a classroom. This method actually has a negative impact in the classroom where you would tend to only assess the learning of the pupils that have their hands raised which are most likely the most intelligent or most confident. The reflection theories that were reviewed as literature in this assignment outlined the best next teaching steps that would've been more appropriate in this context. To conclude the observation, a more appreciative method would be to use a 'random generator' to decide which pupils are chosen to answer a question as this method ensures that all pupils are completing their task as they could be called up for questioning. This is proven to be an effective method for formative assessment (Wiliam, 2014). Another method would be to use mini whiteboards for the pupils to write their answers on and show the teacher. This allows the teacher to assess the whole classroom by glancing across the room.

For future practice, teaching reflections and effective questioning should be utilised to ensure that the pupils are given the best opportunity to learn.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

**Date and time, year group:** Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> October at around 10.10am during a Year 7 Maths lesson.

**Where and When:** After the teacher had completed the starter task and started questioning.

#### **What Happened?**

The lesson starts as normal where the teacher uses the school's 'threshold' approach which is to stand at the door to let the pupils in. The pupils had been coming from PE first lesson, so they were all sweaty and full of energy. The Year 7 Mixed Ability class pupils had sat down and started to work on the 'Do It Now' task as they do for every lesson. There were nine questions on the board in a Noughts and Crosses format where the pupils were attempting to answer as many questions as they can whilst the teacher was completing the register. The 'Do It Now' task is comprised of a mixture of topics to carry out Assessment for learning (Afl) on prior knowledge. Child A came 4 minutes late and sat straight down in their normal seat. The seating plan in this classroom is in 'Boy/Girl' order where also one TA sits with an ALN child on the right side. During the first 10 minutes of the lesson where the pupils are supposed to settle down and complete the 'Do It Now' task, I observed Child A not doing any of the work, they were doodling and distracting Child B at the same time. I spoke to Child A and asked them if they required any assistance, they replied with "I don't understand any of it, I was not in class the last lesson, so I haven't done this work." I helped them go through one or two questions by helping them break down the question to make it easier to understand. They understood a few things but only completed one question before the time was up and the teacher was starting to ask for the answers. The method that the teacher used for questioning was 'hands up', this method requires someone to put their hands up when the teacher asks a question and attempt to answer the question. During the 5-minute period where the teacher was going through the answers, due to shortness of time, the

teacher used the approach of question and answer meaning that the opportunity wasn't used to ask the class for different answers or by correcting incorrect answers. Instead, the teacher simply asked the question to one child and provided the answer. Child A was not asked once if they had the answer. Child A was not assessed for prior knowledge therefore went into the lesson already behind. Towards the end of the lesson, the teacher had asked Child A a question regarding the topic that was just taught, the pupil had responded with "I didn't understand it, I wasn't in the last lesson, so I didn't understand it", the teacher then replied with "well, you should've put your hand up and asked for help if you didn't understand". This caused the pupil to be slightly upset and embarrassed whilst all the other pupils were staring at them.

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

- Use of random generator to choose which student answers the questions. The teacher here only chose the students that had their hands up, this is normally the higher-level pupils or the most confident. This method does not effectively check for assessment for learning across the classroom. The use of whiteboards is also very effective as the teacher can quickly scan everyone's answers and then challenge the pupils who may have gotten a wrong answer.
- Child A was doodling and distracting Child B for around 5 minutes when they should've been doing the work, during this time it would've been very strategic for the teacher to walk around the classroom to see how the pupils are getting on and offering help. This would give the teacher a better understanding of the level that certain pupils are at.
- Effective questioning should've been used in this practise to understand the knowledge of the classroom. One deep thinking technique is called 'Pose-Pause-Pounce-Bounce' used in particular by Dylan Wiliam. This questioning method allows

the teacher to ask around the classroom for the answer whilst teaching and correcting.

**Notes:**

- The pupils had just come from first lesson which was PE, so their adrenaline is high and require some time to cool off.
- The classroom was calm and organised before the interaction between the teacher and the pupil.