

Title of Essay – 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

A critical incident is defined as an event within teaching practice that caused thought and reflection as to why it happened and what effect it had (Brandenburg and McDonough, 2017). Sisson (2016) states that the importance of using critical incidents in research is paramount in developing teaching styles, re-enforcing knowledge and improving quality within the classroom. These observed incidents are pivotal in the way in which teaching has developed over the recent years (Woods, 2012). It is due to these incidents that teachers can constantly evaluate and reflect on what has occurred. It is further stated by Seden et al. (2021) that a critical incident does not necessarily have to be educationally based. They studied an example of this, which involved a child having a lack of nutrition at home, thus impacting their mood, learning and development. It is through identifying and being aware of these incidents that reflection can be used to aid this pupil.

This text will aim to enhance knowledge on theories behind critical incidents within the classroom. An in depth investigate the role of critical reflection and its importance in developing teaching practice. This will be followed by a description on the critical incident observed and a literature review which will delve into the current literature that links to the critical incident, why it may have occurred and what implications can come from it.

The Role of Critical Reflection

Reflection is fundamental in teaching practice (Baird et al., 1991). It is through reflection that the practice itself can continue to thrive and provide the best possible platform to develop and nurture pupils (Newman, 1996). Teaching should be informed through use of various literature and schools of thought (Abukari & Abubaka, 2018) which is a form of reflection.

Teachers must use it as a constant element to draw on evidence-based practice to best enable students to learn (Burton, 2019).

Due to the importance of reflection, various models have been produced such as Kolb (1975) and a later model in 1984. Further models include Schon (1978) and Gibbs (1988) which was found to be the most predominantly used model of reflection by Knowles et al. (2006), with the most recent models being proposed by Brookfield in 1998 and 2005 which proposed the four lenses (Brookfield, 2017).

These lenses help to organise reflection, so that a teaching professional can use these to understand critical incidents and input efficient reflection. The lenses are called: the autobiographical. This involves looking at oneself to understand the situation and the students' eyes to understand and reflect on the incident from the student perspective. Colleagues give a further insight of peers to see if similar situations have been experienced which will help gain a better understanding. The final lens is theoretical literature, this will provide opportunity to link what was observed and reflect on it using current literature to question and understand the incident in depth. The importance of all these models is that they can all be used to fully understand why and how different things can happen or have happened, with emphasis on different perspectives (Amulya, 2004).

A current example of reflection in practice can be seen in the new curriculum reform (Sinnema, Nieveen & Prieslty, 2020) in which a reflection has taken place to realise that a new style and direction of learning is required. Gibbs (1988) proposed six steps of reflection, these can be linked into the reasons to a curriculum reform. The answers to these questions lead to the final question of 'based on your reflection, what would you do differently in the future? Do you have an action plan?' Using this final point, Wales planned and decided that teaching must be done differently, based on Donaldsons four purposes (Taylor & Power, 2020).

This use of reflective practice is imperative for student teachers in developing learning within their profession (Slade et al., 2019). The ability to reflect is useful so that we can understand why a lesson went well or why a lesson did not, but the ability to use this reflection to make a change for the future is how we can improve our teaching and help our students learn better (Impedovo & Malik, 2016). This allows teachers to maintain and reach their professional standards.

Observation

The school visited was a community school, accommodating over 1300 pupils from year 7 to year 13. 22.16% of pupils are free school meal students, 9.77% with English as an additional language and 1.65% of these children in care (SchoolReport [REDACTED].PDF 2022). The specific class observed were year 7, on their third week within the school. Using BERA and ethical guidelines, the incident will be as anonymised as possible, with any reference an individual or school also anonymised.

The critical incident observed (appendices incident 1) involved a pupil behaving well and using Welsh within the classroom. In reward for their good behaviour, this earned them a place on 'the wall of fame.' The student reacted well to being put on the wall of fame and others then attempted to be added to it through working hard and interacting. Once the lesson was over, there were six names on the wall, these were then given the chance to win a mystery prize at the end of the lesson (sweets or a little toy). This seemed regular practice and involved a lot of engagement of the pupils, thus giving them something to strive for and a reason to work hard within the lesson. Although this was positive, there was a section named 'the wall of shame,' but when questioned the teacher confirmed that this had been used on one occasion throughout the first week, with no incidents since. Furthermore,

Donaldson's four purposes were sign posted above this wall, setting out targets of sorts in how the learners could gain access to the wall, whilst possibly reminding the teacher that they must guide them along to reach these.

Critical incident linked to Donaldson's Four Purposes

This critical incident can link to all the purposes and has shown the value of these and how they can be used to support both students and teachers (Furlong et al 2021).

Firstly, being critical, the use of a 'wall of fame and wall of shame' could negatively impact the healthy confident individuals as it could be a form of positive punishment that may damage their confidence (Gordan & Krishanan, 2014). This review stated that if a child is constantly berated for a behaviour, they may see it as a challenge or a conflict, which will in turn damage their confidence. On the other hand, this form of operant conditioning has received positive outcomes in creating healthy and confident individuals as they will strive to earn the rewards (Cherry, 2019). In this critical incident the rewards were sweets. Karabenick and Knapp (1991) argue that through these rewards, the pupils will become more comfortable and confident to ask for help as they feel they are in a safe rewarding environment. This shows that they are developing and learning, thus having a healthy wellbeing.

Moreover, through this critical incident, the purpose of ambitious, capable learners can be highlighted. Forman, Stosich and Bocala (2021) state that the conditions must be set for children to be ambitious to their own capabilities and beat their own targets. This critical incident links directly to this. A child who is not from a Welsh speaking background was praised for using a new language to them and rewarded. Through this exchange, it is very possible that they will set themselves new targets to speak more Welsh and continue to learn.

Forman and Kelly (2017) have voiced how school should adapt to a whole school learning approach and use the four purposes to set high targets thus creating ambitious learners. Knight and Crick (2022) reviewed the current guidelines and found that although the commitment to inclusion has increased, there is a disparity between the policy and guidance to approach this. This can be argued via Weicht and Jónsdóttir (2021) who reviewed enterprising and creative contributors. They argue that these new reforms have supported creativity, especially in entrepreneurial aspects in association with University of Wales Trinity Saint David. This argument can be used to state that teachers themselves are able to be creative, thus the creation of the 'wall of fame.' This creative idea then promotes the pupils to be create and think of their own ideas to gain a place on this wall.

The final point of ethically informed citizens will lead on to the literature review. The 'wall of fame and wall of shame' allows for ethical awareness through rewards and punishment (Langa, 2014). There are varying views on the best way to obtain classroom management and develop ethically informed pupils. Therefore, a review of the literature will help understand why there is such debate.

Literature Review

Through focusing on the critical incident, multiple areas of research were identified. One of these being behaviour management in a classroom and another being learning theory. Research on behaviour is extensive, along with reviews on which is the most effective form of management. There are vast amounts of ideas to best control behaviour, such as giving the pupils autonomy (Hargreaves, 2014) and control of their own learning (Hoffman, 2009).

Firstly, there are behaviour models that have been designed to aid practice. Reality therapy, as proposed by Glasser (1965) states that children choose their behaviour, therefore

implementing choice within the classroom will equate to improved behaviour. This states there are five needs to meet through pupil engagement. Survival, freedom, power, belonging, and fun. There is also assertive discipline which is defined as 'using a set of rules, balanced between positive and negative consequences, with their expectations clearly set out' (Canter, 2010).

A study by Atici (2007) followed nine student teachers throughout their first year of teaching. Atki investigated the common misbehaviours experienced and how they managed these. Furthermore, the results found that all but one of the students felt more competent following a year of teaching but would still require more training to feel competent. This was a qualitative study that used open questions to obtain maximum detail about the behaviour management and how they best dealt with misbehaviour or best avoided bad behaviour in the first place.

Atki conducted this study, and it was published into the journal of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Atki has high status as an assistant professor in the department of educational science at the Cukurova University, Turkey. Their submission within this journal uses a variety of research thus gaining value and reliability that this study can be trusted in terms of the results.

A further description of the results allows us to see that 8 out of 9 participants improved behaviour management approaches by 'talking to the pupils first,' this is supported by Jimenez and Rose (2010) who found by talking to the pupils and building relationships with boundaries, it accounted for better engagement and behaviour within their English lessons. Furthermore, 'giving freedom during lessons to let the pupils decide' (Atki, 2007) was given as a response by a student teacher. This reinforces the relevance of Glassers model (1965) model of pupils making their own choice in learning thus strengthening this area of research.

Interestingly, the student teachers had not been taught this area of research but had requested to undertake a course on it following this study. This links to reflective practice as they unknowingly used behaviour management, reflected on it, and found the literature to learn more (Rushton & Suter, 2012).

Limitations identified within this study though could be interviewer or participant bias (Williams, 1964) as the student teachers may want others to believe that they managed the class effectively but as they were not observed, there is no evidence of that. Thinking critically, we can question the accuracy and reliability of the answers given (Allmark et al., 2009), thus asking the question as to whether the practices used by the student teachers proved effective.

Following this, a link to the observed critical incident showed that behaviour management of the classroom was exemplary, with students working well and engaging within the lesson. The teacher used a strong emphasis on boundaries but had clearly built relationships and respect with these pupils (Helker & Ray, 2009) which is a key factor in behaviour management, even more important perhaps than behaviour models as without a mutual respect relationship these models may not work (Elmore & Huebenr, 2010).

Using Atki's research and the literature discussed, we can conclude that there are numerous factors and elements that play a role in the behaviour of pupils (Bru, Stephens & Torsheim, 2002). One of these being poverty (Garmazy, 1991) as further supported in Atki's paper by the various responses and opinions of the students, hence adding value to the point that there is no definitive answer on the best way to control a class.

A further area of exploration is learning theory, many studies have tried to find the best way for children to learn and retain knowledge (Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Walsh et al (2022) for example suggested that repetition at different time intervals equated

to improved retention, based on Watson's (1913) previous research. There are three schools of learning that are thoroughly researched and a review of the relevant school of learning will allow for an in-depth insight into the critical incident. The three schools of learning are Constructivist (Piaget, 1976), Behaviourist (Watson, 1913) and Humanistic (Holt, 1966). Although all three have their own respectability, a behaviourist approach was adopted during the critical incident, therefore a review into the literature is necessary to understand the incident further. A behaviourist approach to learning can be defined as 'learning behaviours through interactions and the environment' (Anderson & Dron, 2011).

Some examples of this include reinforcement for learning as close to desired behaviour as possible, achievable tasks, success is regular and using learning as a step-by-step approach (Boghossian, 2006). This can occur through methods such as classical condition, association or learning through consequences such as operant conditioning (Baharuddin & Suyadi, 2020). A study by Payne (2015) investigated the use of behaviourism in improving learning within the classroom. This was a case study and used a questionnaire to be completed by pupils in Year 7 and Year 11. This a strength of this study as it enables us to see how responses to similar learning approaches can differ based on the age difference (Schmidt et al., 1993). A further strength of this study is that it supports the literature in terms of using positive and negative feedback, along with reward systems (Reeve, 2013). This implies that teachers should be inclined to motivate students with rewards and use feedback.

A limitation of this study though is that only one approach was used which, by being critical, we are unable to fully take these results without finding literature that supports other uses of learning theories (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Although Payne found results that give us interesting implications, one of these being a difference in learning from year 7's compared to year 11's. Payne found that year 11's did not respond as effectively to a behaviourist form

of learning compared to year 7's. This is further supported by Csizmadia, Standl and Waite (2019) who found a very good learning response using a constructivist learning approach. Therefore, Payne could improve this study by implementing specific learning theories to see the most impactful for different year groups, such as Chan (2012) who has looked at Kolb's theory.

From reviewing the literature, a critical conclusion on these learning theories is that different teachers will find a better connection with each one, and some even use a mixture of these methods (Coffey & Gibbs, 2002). We can infer from Payne's study that maybe a behaviourist approach is more suitable for younger learners due to rewards and praise, as discovered by Pavlov, who found that the use of classical conditioning very effective in learning behaviours, hence the further use by teachers (Clark, 2018). This relates to the critical incident as a reward for using Welsh or working hard was given, therefore the students were inclined to work harder and behave.

A critical thought on this and room for further thinking would be to observe the effectiveness of this on older age groups, as Slavin (1987) suggests that a more humanistic and cooperative may aid in the effectiveness of learning for older pupils. Finally, a use of cognitive learning theory through the schema could be useful to involve in learning as it allows older pupils to solve misconceptions based on their past experiences (Jitendra, Hoff & Beck, 1999). Due to this analysis, learning from the critical incident and the review would be to incorporate and adjust learning theory based on the class, ability, and age (Michek, Cater & Varela, 2009).

Reflection

From using the literature, the critical incident is now more understandable and through reflection and evaluation future steps can be identified. Firstly, the incident was a positive occurrence, therefore it is reassuring that the teachers are using the new curriculum reform. Also, it was useful to gain insight into the learning theories that the teacher adopted to maximise his teaching with the year 7 class. The original focus of the incident was purely on how the children reacted to the offer of rewards, but it was more than classical condition. It was interesting to reflect and find the whole lesson used a behaviourist approach which in turn helped the pupils learn, but also ensured total classroom management.

The role of critical reflection is defined as 'thinking about what happened then examining it step by step' (Collin, Karsenti & Komis, 2013). Using this definition, it is important to understand that everything can be reflected upon and improved. Using a step-by-step approach, it allows us to cover everything from a range of perspectives. Furthermore, through further reflection and exploration on the incident, it opened the door to discovering the importance of setting boundaries and developing relationships. Perhaps a bias was experienced here due to this being a lesson that related with a favoured style of teaching, but the scope is not narrowed as the literature review has added insight into how learning theories must be amalgamated together to best teach and manage a classroom.

An evaluation on the focus of the incident led to increased knowledge of why the teacher interacted with the pupils in certain ways, such as greeting them at the door and asking what they had for breakfast. Evaluating this, the teacher is building relationships and subtly caring for them by gaining an insight into homelife and their readiness for the day. A continuation of further learning can be seen through revisiting the observed teacher with different classes, and revisit this class with a different teacher, to see if either variable changes their attitudes, learning styles and engagement within lesson. Also, further reading is planned

to understand how learning can differ to fully accommodate additional learning needs students, such as the incident referenced in observation two in the appendices. The importance of understanding this is vital for future development in inclusion methods of teaching, hence further reading will be implemented to better understand this as knowing how to adopt different methods at different times is a current weakness. A plan will be put into place to improve this.

Using Gibbs (1988) model of reflection, a description of the occurred incident is presented within this essay, no emotional response was based on this situation as it was observed as a third party. To make sense of the critical incident, a vast amount of reading was conducted to enhance existing and find new knowledge. This in turn has led to the general conclusion that teaching is fundamentally based on reflection, and in vague terms is a lot of trial and error. Justification of this conclusion can be linked to the curriculum reform in Wales (Conn & Hutt, 2020) as Wales is currently achieving results a lot lower to the rest of the world based on the standard assessment tests, therefore reflection occurred to attempt to improve this. This reflection led to the introduction of the reform which enables more creativity for the teachers and learners. Most importantly though, it allows for a greater use of the literature and its interpretations within the classroom.

Based on the reflection and review of the literature, it has become evident that the relationships with pupils highly influence the lesson structure and the ability to teach the pupil (Barnstein, 2004). In terms of what can be changed, with further research, it would be useful to know how and when to adapt learning theories to manage a class down to the individual. Furthermore, when observing, a good lesson was seen but it is important to realise that not all lessons would be as streamlined. Due to this, an understanding of how to manage such

lessons, and how reflect effectively on a 'bad' lesson will be important in developing own practice and will be the next steps.

A plan to ensure constant learning is to make full use of a teaching journal and a reflection book. Using the reflective models constantly, each day, each lesson observed or taught can provide information on how to improve practice. This can be done through identifying good elements and identifying the less effective elements. Moreover, the use of a mentor to observe lessons and provide experienced criticism to again develop practice and allow reflection.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay has described the role of critical reflection in school, with reference to relevant models. Through referencing these models, it was useful to evidence the critical reflection in relation to new curriculum reform in Wales. Moreover, this reform has brought with it professional standards of a teacher and the four purposes that the curriculum will be based off. To approach this, Gibbs model of reflective practice (1988) was used as this ensured an easy step by step approach to understand the situation and then how to best infer and learn how to take it into own practice and develop it.

Following this, an observation was carried out to identify critical incidents within a school. These incidents would contextualise this essay. The identified incident was described using BERA (British Educational Research Association) confidentiality. This incident opened possible areas of exploration just from a single observation. Linking this observation to the four purposes allows for implications as to whether the teacher was meeting the new curriculum aims, in this case they were. Interestingly, the pupils responded brilliantly thus evidencing how reflection is now benefitting the new year 7 pupils.

From observing the incident, a literature review was carried out to find studies that related to the areas of research identified. Via this review, vast readings took place to structure own learning and develop conclusions on what was observed. The amount of literature is astounding with many theories supported and targeted for weaknesses, but the use of all this together has allowed for own critical reflection.

An assessment of the approach taken is that it was successful. The reasoning behind this is that the areas identified for potential exploration provided new insight on the benefits of reflective practice, use of different learning theories and the different behaviour management styles that can be adopted depending on the situation. A further assessment is that the different reflective models can be useful for different situation. This leads to the final overall conclusion that teaching is situational. This is evidenced by the many different accepted theories, reflection models and literatures available. These are all relevant as all can be prescribed based on different classes, year groups, ability, or home life. There are many other factors that can influence this; therefore, teaching styles, theories and lessons must change based on who is being taught.

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