

Case Study of Critical Incident in Teaching within Higher Education

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Abstract: The aim of this brief paper is to provide a case study of reflection on a teaching critical incident within higher education. The case study is based on personal experience providing personal insights and feelings, and an action planning for further development in future similar scenario. Teachers in higher education may face different challenges during their teaching experience; this would worth reflecting upon to further understand the nature of the challenge as well as the associated aspects with it and enables opportunities of sharing experience and best practices with other academics, faculties, institutions and professionals internally and externally.

Keywords: Teaching, Critical incident, Higher education.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of learning and teaching in higher education reflection on different incidents can be considered as a highly important strategy for self-learning and development as it provides further areas of improvements with the consideration of different influencing factors during the learning and teaching process. Critical incident is viewed as a method of self-criticism with the aim to provide further areas of improvement at the personal, group, department and faculty levels. This would enable educators in higher education to share best practices and overcome different challenges. More importantly, this would enable educators to overcome barriers of delivering a fit for the purpose curriculum meeting the industry changing needs and conditions through continues personal reflection during the process of their engagement with learners [7].

Critical incidents during the process of learning and teaching should not be only associated with negative feelings, it can be associated with positive feelings as well as along as they are highlighting further improvement points at different levels. Furthermore, critical incidents' reflection should not be only taking place when something dramatic happens, it can be as simple as a personal reflection that made you think twice about possible solutions for a possible scenario that you have experienced as an educator. Critical incidents reflection can be very helpful in further personal development if they were approached in a very structured and systematic way to enable identification of different features and challenges of the experience or incident. Furthermore, the deeper the reflection can be the more as an educator you can get out of it as key learnings for the future [7].

Educators need to reflect on various experiences to be able to highlight further improvement points that can be associated with personal practices and feelings, curriculum and planning of sessions, assessment, time as well as the physicality of the place such as size of classrooms. Furthermore, it is important

for educators to identify the types of their learners whether they are active or passive as well as deep or surface learners leading to better identification of further improvements in the overall delivery [1, 6, 8]. Higher education institutions in general as well as individual educators more specifically always aim to enhance key skills development and to be embedded within the curriculum. However, there are different challenges arising during the process such as learning styles, moods of learning such as traditional and distance learning, and demography of the students' population [4, 5].

This critical incident reflection is based on the Gibbs's reflective cycle developed in 1988 [3] which has six different stages as the following:

- Description: In this stage the reflector has to provide an overview of what happened during the experience with the aim to answer the following question: What happened during this experience?
- Feelings: In this stage the reflector has to provide their own feelings that were associated with the actual experience with the aim to answer the

following question: What were you thinking and feeling during this experience?

- Evaluation: In this stage the reflector has to provide enough evaluation of the actual experience with a critical approach to be able to highlight where actually it went right or wrong with the aim to answer the following question: What was good and bad about the experience?.
- Analysis: In this stage the reflector has to critically analyse the situation in order to make more sense with the aim of answering the following question: what sense can you make of the situation?. The reflector can include different views supported by different valid sources and arguments in order to highlight best practices.
- Conclusion: In this stage the reflector has to summarise the key ideas based on the previous stages on what could have been done differently with the aim to answer the following question: What else could you have done during the experience?.
- Action planning: In this stage the reflector should plan based on the personal reflection on how to overcome similar scenarios in the future, this might highlight possible ways of improvement and further preparation with the aim to answer the following question: It this happened again what would I do?.

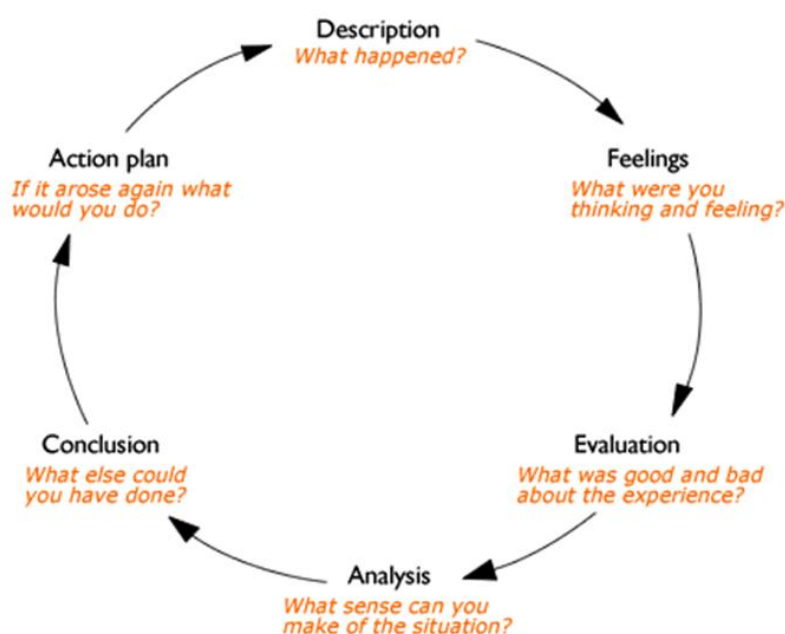


Fig-1: Gibbs' reflective cycle (1988); Source: [7]

Case study of critical incident reflection in teaching within higher education

Description

Skills class (week 1). The Critical incident was when one student was very unhappy about the whole module as he believed that he shouldn't do the module itself as part of his degree. The student himself came about 30 minutes late and asked this question just after about 5 minutes of his arrival (Why am I doing this module? It is not relevant). The student was on his second attempt as he failed the module's assessment the previous semester.

Feelings

The student's feeling: Needed clarification and expressed unhappiness about the whole module based on his previous experience of doing it as he failed in it previously. (It was just the first week)

Myself (The lecturer): Felt that I need to clarify it and keep the whole situation in control considering that there are other 20 – 25 students in the same class. I felt with the student, but I personally had to remember that there are other students in the class and there is a topic to be delivered. Therefore, I had to keep it short and simple to avoid any further development in the situation.

Evaluation

As a lecturer I had to overcome this incident in appropriate and timely manner otherwise it could have developed to disruption in class which can encourage other students to contribute to it considering the fact that this only was week one, and still there is no deep relationship built between students and the educator. Dealing with the incident: I spent about 5 - 10 minutes explaining the importance of the whole module and

how it links to the degree (made it general) and then approached the student saying that he can see me during the break or at the end of the session to help him with his issue. (Advice was given after the session).

Analysis

Reasons which lead to this incident: Firstly, as it was first week, it was something expected to have late comers who may be asking questions answered already prior to their arrival. Secondly, lack of clarification to the student (student services and advisory) on whether he should attend a module he failed or not. Thirdly, introduction to the module (week 1), it could be one of the reasons that it was just week one and students had some questions in mind which they expect them to be answered. Fourthly, the student's failure in the module during the previous semester.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion of the whole situation: Firstly, advice has been given to the student after the session which helped him to have clarification on what he does and what is expected of the module. Secondly, there was good class management as I realised as a lecturer that I had to cut the conversation in a timely and acceptable manner so it all can go as planned for. Thirdly, I made it general for all students as I spent about 10 minutes explaining the importance on the module and how it links to their degree.

Action Plan

In future incidents similar to this, as a lecturer I will manage it by being more proactive (Explaining the importance of the module prior to the start), asking students to share their personal questions in one to one conversation after the session ends (so I can provide further clarification on it), making it clear from the beginning that late comers are still allowed in class but they can ask questions at the end regarding what they missed prior their arrival or emailing me, directing students to different departments to know more about what they have to attend to (Student advisory in my case). I will have more consideration of possible methods to close the gap between learners in order to deliver a curriculum that is based on the needs and challenges of the group [1, 2].

CONCLUSION

Reflection on critical incidents in higher education during the process of learning and teaching can be viewed as one of the key strategies for personal development as well as would enable individuals within the academic profession to share their best practices across their academic peers, departments, faculties within their institutions as well as externally. Educators do face different challenges during their process of learning and teaching. However, there should be serious efforts to overcome them by various ways; reflection

during critical incidents is one of them as highlighted in this paper. The case study given in this paper has been based on Gibbs's reflective cycle providing opportunity to have deep and structured reflection on critical incidents as it has various stages during the process as the following: Description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action panning. As has been discussed in the paper that the deeper the reflection is the more useful it becomes as it would enable the reflector to highlight more areas for further development. Continues reflection in general by academics can further enhance the quality of the delivery within academic institutions, this would lead to have a fit for the purpose curriculum that meets internal and external expectations.

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