CRITICAL INCIDENTS AS TRAINING DEVICES IN UNIVERSITY TEACHING

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SUMMARY

Critical incidents, also referred to as "teaching cases," are teaching methods that start from the analysis of concrete cases, or those inspired by them, aiming to reflectively recall the chronology of events seeking to understand the decisions that made them inevitable. As means of apprehending experiences, critical incidents are cohesive with the paradigms of understanding. Through reflection, the presented dilemmas are problematized so that new angles constituting them can emerge and compose better-reflected and grounded interventions. I aimed to evaluate the potential of critical incidents as a method for pedagogical training of teachers to work in university teaching. In this article, I present the experience of didactic work with critical incidents in a class of the component "University Teaching" of the Graduate Program in Education and Contemporaneity (PPGEduC) at the State University of Bahia (UNEB) in the semester 2021.2.

Keywords: Critical incidents; Formative devices; University teaching.

The Technique of Critical Incidents as a Formative Device[1]

The Technique of Critical Incidents (TIC) was proposed by John C. Flanagan, an American psychologist, in the context of World War II, involved in research related to the selection and training of combat pilots for the United States Air Force. Flanagan aimed to develop effective methods to evaluate and understand the factors present in the performance of pilots in extreme or combat situations. In the challenging and dynamic environment of a world war, Flanagan (1973) observed, recorded, and analyzed the pilots behavior in extremely critical situations. In this scenario the conditions for the development of this research were created, leading him to develop and propose the technique of critical incidents as an approach to identify and understand spontaneous factors that can contribute to the success or failure of planned activities, rapidly adapted due to the impact of critical external agents requiring real-time decision-making.

The recognition that Flanagan's research received from the scientific community led the TIC to be widely used in the selection and qualification of pilot candidates—not only military pilots but also aircraft crew members—helping

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1   Text translated by Gabriela Fernandez.

to determine the specific reasons for failure in flight training as well as the sequence of events that caused impactful accidents, claiming thousands of lives and how they could have been avoided. The focus is on the learnings that can be produced from the analysis of events that had conflicting or catastrophic resolutions, which, due to this, provoked negative or unexpected effects to a greater or lesser extent. Describing the flow of such events for future analyses constitutes one of the first steps of the TIC.

The records of critical incidents, the second moment of the method, consist of the detailed description of events, situations, or specific behaviors considered particularly significant in a specific context, generated spontaneously, and presenting totally unexpected results (which can be positive or negative). These events, situations, and behaviors are analyzed simultaneously in a global and particular way to identify how each involved individual reacts and which person they choose as a privileged interlocutor, evaluating how each decision taken individually or collectively contributes to adding a link to the final outcome (Gremler 2004).

Critical incidents originally investigated in the context of pilot training have been incorporated into various fields, including Pedagogy and Teacher Training, due to their effectiveness in promoting reflection, learning, and professional development. This approach, based on the analysis of critical and challenging situations experienced during professional practice, particularly those complex and controversial, has proven valuable in helping education professionals improve their skills and competencies. Improvement develops in the process of detailed examination of incidents to identify both effective and inadequate actions taken by the involved professionals. Both technical aspects and the emotional and ethical dimensions of the attitudes taken are carefully observed. Conceptually, the technique's proposer John Flanagan (1954, p. 166) defines:

> [...] by critical incident is meant any human activity that is observable and sufficiently complete so that from it, one can make inferences or predictions about the individual performing the action. For an incident to be critical, it must occur in a situation where the end or intention of the action is clear to the observer, and the consequences of the action are evident.

Although the TIC has its roots in behaviorism, guided by observable behavior and the operational description of events (Almeida 2009), such a perspective has been expanded, adapted, and incorporated into comprehensive epistemologies that value a deep understanding of mental processes and subjective experiences. Critical incidents (CI) then configure as ruptures that produce effects in the life course—and not just in behavior—mobilizing forces from the subjects' living space. In this context, the emphasis on the analysis of observable behaviors is complemented by a broader approach that also considers the underlying meanings and social and cultural contexts. Thus, critical incidents present themselves as moments when individuals establish connections with the lived world and their "being in the world," with crucial moments determining their way of conceiving the world, things, and the senses they evoke.

Woods (1993) establishes an important difference between critical events, which are intentional, planned, and controlled in their execution (such as those occurring in various simulation situations common in case studies), and critical incidents, which are considered as:

> [...] energetic moments and episodes that have enormous consequences for personal development and changes. They are not planned, anticipated, or controlled. They are flashes that strongly illuminate at a moment some problematic aspect or aspects. (Woods 1993, p. 1).

According to the author, the study of critical incidents presents itself as an important tool for understanding professional development, achieved through the explicit description of critical events that establish changes, whether positive or negative, in facing professional

challenges. Such challenges inevitably mobilize emotions! Thus, comprehensive epistemologies have expanded the technique of CI, recognizing the undeniable importance of the affective dimension in decision-making and professional development, strongly considering not only cognitive but also affective and relational aspects. By incorporating the affective dimension in the analysis of CI, researchers can understand more deeply how emotions influence decisions taken. This implies recognizing that emotions are not merely subjective reactions but play active roles in interpreting and evaluating events. Reflecting on emotionally charged experiences allows professionals to identify their predispositions and innate beliefs, focusing on how to best conduct or transform them.

Critical incidents in comprehensive epistemologies are therefore emotionally influenced landmark events that determine decisions provoking changes or reaffirmations of directions in professional and personal trajectories. They are crisis moments that can provoke accommodation, transformation, or even regression. For Bolívar, Domingo, and Fernández (2001), critical incidents are part of the biographical-narrative approach to research and are ruptures provided by events referring to crises or critical events, having as main functions:

a. Delimiting critical phases. Assumptions, opinions, and ideas about someone or their subjective educational theory are questioned. Teachers often recall these moments as important for their professional development;

b. The appearance of critical people, individuals who had an important impact on their personal biography and about whom it is worth inquiring;

c. Critical phases and incidents condition/explain the changes that occurred (impacts caused) both at the level of professional action, formal professional career, and in the didactic and educational theory held at each moment (Bolívar 2002, pp. 190-191).

As unforeseen situations that occur in the personal and/or professional path, critical incidents allow revealing teachers' values, beliefs, and attitudes as well as an understanding of their training, the knowledge and beliefs guiding their pedagogical actions with students, and the relationships they establish with colleagues and the educational institution. Thus, the technique of critical incidents can become an important resource capable of stimulating teachers' self-empathy since it places them before their own emotions and feelings; it can also establish and strengthen bonds when carried out in a shared manner with colleagues.

According to Almeida (2009), working with critical incidents in the pedagogical and teacher training area has proven to be a potentially formative strategy. It can promote deep reflections and contextualized learning since teachers, when narrating events, recalling situations faced in real life, reflecting, and problematizing them, create conditions for the theory/practice articulation. A remembered episode offers the possibility of sharing experiences, perspectives, and insights, creating a conducive environment for the formation of a learning community. Critical situations often require teachers to make quick decisions in the heat of the moment. By analyzing such situations in the format of "teaching cases" during the training process, teachers have the opportunity to practice decision-making originally made under real pressure in a safe environment and receive constructive feedback on the choices they made.

Interpretative Agenda of Incidents (PANIC) in the Process of Constructing CI Narratives

In phenomenological inspiration of "returning to the things themselves," I take the classroom space as a complex relational phenomenon. When analyzed from a phenomenological

perspective, the classroom reveals itself as a deeply complex and multifaceted space where human interactions play a central role in the construction of knowledge and formative experiences. The space taken as a phenomenon does not refer to a delimited physical location but to a field of experience in which relationships and meanings are constantly constructed and negotiated. Not configured as a static teaching environment, the classroom is a living and dynamic space where individual and collective experiences intertwine and are re-signified in their own and appropriate processes of subjectivation. In such an experiential field, pedagogical intentionalities, beliefs, values, and emotions can manifest, not always rationally and consciously.

The IC device proposes as an analytical strategy a PANIC that presents the subjective configurations produced in the process of experiencing critical episodes to mobilize knowledge, feeling, and attitudes. Based on the premise of the indivisibility of these elements in acting, the agenda proposes to build a cartography of the crisis experience process so that it can be learned from it. Thus, crises are taken as unique opportunities for new learnings that allow transforming thoughtless actions into better-reflected and intentional reactions.

The development flow of critical incidents that allowed the construction of PANIC starts with the description of the context and scenario in which the incident occurred, as well as presenting the actors involved in the situation. Then, the problems and dilemmas are identified and a detailed description of the critical incident is made. Next, the focus shifts to identifying and describing the emotions involved and the results of each actor's action towards minimizing or reinforcing the conflict. The situation is reflected upon to analyze the issue from each involved perspective and the actions taken. Subsequently, alternative ways to resolve the conflict that could have been more productive and conciliatory are addressed. The final reflection closes the case with an indica-

tion of the learnings it provided to the group. PANIC was a resource used in the development of the discipline, bringing new openings for the group to think collectively, problematizing conflicting pedagogical situations in the classroom from narratives of situations experienced by each one.

Narratives for the Construction of Critical Incidents as a Didactic Activity

The activity of constructing critical incidents began in the third meeting with the students of the discipline "University Teaching in Contemporaneity: Epistemological, Political, and Methodological Presuppositions." The activity was proposed by the teacher and received total acceptance from the group, who felt challenged and motivated to develop the task.

The class consisted of 14 students, three men, and eleven women. Most of the class entered as special students through a selection process in which holders of a recognized higher education diploma could apply. Thus, the class had six regular program students, two doctoral candidates, and four master's candidates, and eight special enrollment students.

After studying what critical incidents were in previous classes, I asked the students to identify in their teaching experiences situations that, in their perception, could be configured as "dilemmatic situations" involving crises and that they proceed to record these situations to share in class. When rescuing such situations, the students (all teachers) should also record the contents mobilized for handling the situations or even the competencies and skills exercised in the referred context. The proposed activity aimed to promote a triggering exercise for the introduction of the discipline's programmatic content by rescuing lived experiences in teaching, identifying meanings and perceptions attributed by the teachers to such experiences. It also aimed to enable the

application of the IC methodology as a resource for identifying emerging contents and possible associations with planned themes based on elements identified in the presented narratives.

Initially, the experienced incidents and the context in which they occurred were described. After identifying the involved actors, reflections on the posed dilemmas and which pedagogical contents could be observed and required actions and interventions from the teachers began. In this initial reflective round, we sought to avoid value judgments that inevitably manifest when dealing with difficult situations. With the dilemmas visualized more clearly, a task for the next meeting was proposed, consisting of elaborating a detailed description of the problematic situation, accessing the memories of the events' chronology, people, emotions, and actions involved.

The narrative of the situations brought by each student was very interesting to connect with the "inhabitation" in the profession! Remembering critical and challenging episodes to be shared, shifting the focus to the emotions of the involved actors, helped perceive how our rationality is still predominantly cognitive and how this view imposes itself on the teacher's work in the classroom.

Beyond theories, we confronted ourselves with the dynamics and flows of life/living and recognized the dilemmas of the teaching profession that traversed the individual reports in some way. In this movement, the proposal was to recognize the similarities between the experienced incidents, identify the involved pedagogical contents, classify them by themes, and choose two incidents from each theme to work on in class. The following themes generating critical incidents emerged: Learning Evaluation, Attitudes and Values in Teacher Training, and Group Configuration. The students organized themselves into six working groups to produce narratives on the three themes, being four pairs and two trios. The task was requested by the teacher and well-received by the groups. Thus, two groups worked on the same theme, constructing the narratives presented below:

Table 1 – Critical Incident Narrative 1 on Learning Evaluation

This experience occurred with a student with a disability! He was a student with low vision. He was in the first semester of the administration course and had not been my student yet. He had dropped out and was making his second attempt to continue the course. His presence in the classroom worried me! His presence in the classroom was a challenge for any teacher, and I immediately thought of seeking information from my colleagues who had previously been his teachers and had already faced this challenge! That's it... I will consult them, and their experience will certainly be very valuable to me! My feeling shifted from great concern to some relief! Roberto, his teacher from the first semester, did not even remember having a practically blind student! How come?! To me, it was unbelievable that the teacher did not notice that the student had low vision! Disappointment! And so it was with the other colleagues from the other subjects! The many work demands, the pressure for production, guidance, and participation in events left little room for my colleagues to effectively dedicate themselves to teaching, and a student with a disability needs a lot of attention! This reality led me to seek knowledge on how to professionally deal with this student, how to help him. I mobilized efforts to familiarize myself with the student's universe. The student had given up the course because of

the evaluation and was trying to return. He felt frustrated with the little importance given to his disability by teachers and colleagues and felt that his constant requests for adapted material and for the teacher to orally repeat what was written on the board were received with some intolerance. People with visual impairments tend to suffer prejudice and even bullying. On his return to the course, I realized that the main issue responsible for his initial dropout was the evaluation. For him, it was very difficult to do the evaluation through interviews with teachers he barely knew. I then realized that he mastered computing and researched how this tool could contribute. We got close, and I invited him to join my study group. With this support, he empowered himself and formally requested the college for teachers to provide material compatible with his reading capacity. I supported his cause with the college and managed to get a voice typing app for the blind acquired. It was a great achievement for him and also for me as a teacher!

Source: Experience report of didactic work in a class of the component "University Teaching" of the PPGEduc-UNEB semester 2021.2.

Table 2 – Critical Incident Narrative 2 on Learning Evaluation

I had a student who I considered very good, dedicated, and polite. He prepared for classes by reading the texts in advance and was very participative. When at the beginning of each class, I asked who had read the indicated text, he was one of the students who always raised his hand and made a point of bringing his contributions, which effectively demonstrated that he had read and reflected on the text's content. As a teacher, I noticed that he had a great need to be in the spotlight, to talk a lot, not giving others the opportunity to respond to questions. I was very insecure about how to act, fearing what an intervention of mine could cause psychologically since I am not a psychologist and would not know how to handle a possible traumatic reaction, aggression, or signs of depression! He had a lot of difficulty interacting with colleagues and was extremely sensitive. For this reason, he refused to do group work, even with some colleagues insisting on including him despite these difficulties! When I proposed group work, he said he wanted to do it individually. Even if I argued that part of professional development was learning to work in a team and developing interpersonal skills, I could not change his decision to work individually. I kept questioning what was going on with this student. Did he think he was better than the others? Did he have psychological problems? Was he very spoiled? At the time, as a novice college professor, I feared that students would not recognize my authority and thought I had to enforce my authority in some situations. That's what happened that generated a crisis! A critical incident! In my planning, the first evaluation of the course was a group project. I presented the group with the evaluation content and informed them it would be in groups. I then said he had no option to do it

individually. That group work was part of the teaching methodology, and everyone needed to learn to work collectively. The student then raised his hand and, disregarding everything I had just said, asked if he could do it individually! The class burst into laughter, and I felt like a clown! My feeling was that his question was already mocking! I reaffirmed that the work was group-based. He then shut down and did not speak again during the whole class. During the project preparation, I supervised the groups, and he was not in any group. He did not approach me to discuss the matter and kept working alone in class. I did not know how to act! Why such resistance to working in a group? As I did not know how to act, I let it go! And the day of the presentations arrived. At the presentations, I was taken by surprise and did not know how to act! The class seemed more mobilized to see my reaction to this student than in the group presentations. The groups presented the work, and when I thought the presentations were ending, this student went to the front and announced he would present his work. He looked me in the eyes, and I did not know what to do! I froze! He then started presenting, and I was struck by the quality of his work. It was undoubtedly the best work in the class. He then finished and said he knew he should have done it in a group, but he felt lost in groups and could not collaborate, and could not stand being stuck and not participating. He admitted his difficulty and apologized. In conversation with other students in the class, they confirmed that the student had difficulty interacting not only in my course but in all! Pressured by the rest of the class, I did not consider his work, and he got a zero in that activity. From then on, he who was participative and regular in classes began to miss and be inattentive. Eventually, he dropped the course!

Source: Experience report of didactic work in a class of the component "University Teaching" of the PPGEduc-UNEB semester 2021.2.

The two critical incidents described above, although mobilized from the evaluation content of learning, brought various issues for debate in the classroom. The reflection on the knowledge of experience and the waste of this knowledge was a question that greatly mobilized the group: both in terms of the waste of teachers' experience who invisibilized the student and the teacher who mobilized, researched ways to intervene, invited the student to participate in his inclusion process but did not record the practical interventions or write anything about them. She realized this during the debate: "Now I realize that I could have written an essay or article about my remarkable experience with this student that mobilized me for professional life!"

We need to create a teaching culture of sharing experiential knowledge, the so-called practice epistemology, as a formative movement that articulates from within the profession, as Antônio Novoa (2017) constantly calls us to. Especially in university pedagogy, we have few moments of experience exchanges focusing on formative needs and pedagogical and didactic experiences! University teachers are more pressured by research and knowledge dissemination than by teaching practice, which ends up perpetuating the cycle of sameness. We end up not being able to innovate from our didactic practices, insecure and lonely, as recorded in the incidents above. This directly reflects on the evaluation.

Table 3 – Critical Incident Narrative 1 on Attitudes and Values in Teacher Training

The experience I bring was from the Physical Education course in developing the curricular component "Dance Methodology." This is a compulsory subject in the Physical Education course. The problem is that some students resist, especially male students. They preferred martial arts or weight training classes. On one occasion, thinking of provoking openness to new knowledge, I brought a guest to address the theme of Afro-Brazilian dance due to the need to mobilize students for new sensitivities and expressions of corporality different in each culture. I contacted the dance teacher colleague, organized a spacious and well-sounding area, and brought some African print cloths to decorate the place [...] anyway, I was very enthusiastic and expecting to have an excellent class. The day arrives! We received the guest who spoke about African dances and her experience as a dance teacher. The group was divided, one part focused and visibly enjoying the class, but the other, mainly composed of boys, was restless and uninterested! My high expectations turned into frustration, which I struggled to control not to cause discomfort to the guest. However, my efforts were useless when one of the students, who was evangelical, unfriendlily refused to participate in the class, claiming it was a manifestation of Candomblé. The guest and I tried to argue that African and Afro-Brazilian dances are not necessarily related to Candomblé, but it was useless, and the student left the space, threatening to take her discontent to the administration. It was a great embarrassment, mainly because of the guest teacher! I was very upset! Even so, the class continued, but I found it difficult to relate to this student from then on.

Source: Experience report of didactic work in a class of the component "University Teaching" of the PPGEduc-UNEB semester 2021.2.

Table 4 – Critical Incident Narrative 2 on Attitudes and Values in Teacher Training

The subject was labor legislation in the Law course. The class had about 38 students, and this class where the incident occurred was around mid-semester. The political scenario in Brazil was polarized between left and right, personified in the dispute between Bolsonaro and Lula. While I was developing the topic, writing some concepts on the board, I was interrupted by one of the students who harshly said he did not agree with what I was saying. He stated: "You are trying to influence the class!". At that moment, it was not about "school without party." I was addressing the foundations of work and labor relations, their scenario, and actors. Evidently, unions are one of the important actors in the power relations of labor relations. The other students were surprised and static! This student was usually very quiet. I affirmed that he had the right to have his own opinion and that I was not trying to influence, just bringing positions and presenting the scientific references for them! I gave the names of the authors, so and so! The student left the room harshly! The other students warned me that

he seemed to have a psychological problem. One of them said: "He is part of a Skinhead group [shaved head]." I was very fearful that he went to get a weapon and re-enter the room to attack me! The classroom space is very vulnerable! The teacher is very exposed, vulnerable!

Source: Experience report of didactic work in a class of the component "University Teaching" of the PPGEduc-UNEB semester 2021.2.

Reflecting on the attitudes of these students led us to read Felipe Trillo's text entitled "The attitudes of students: an indicator of university quality." The meaning of the concept of attitudes and its relevance to teaching practice was problematized, mainly concerning making better theoretically-based decisions. In this scope, attitude refers to: "an organized set of beliefs or convictions that predispose favorably or unfavorably to act concerning a social object." (Trillo 2000, p. 217).

Trillo defines "Attitudes" as experiential and interactive production, i.e., cultural and interpersonal relations perspectivized as a means through which the subject relates socially, with the specific focus in the study being the social environment of the university. What impacted the debate in the class the most were Trillo's arguments that attitudes, although having an implicit and unconscious dimension, also have a conscious and reflective dimension—and therefore can be re-signified in the face of new experiences and new knowledge! Learning is

the cognitive dimension of attitudes, which are composed of two more dimensions: affective and behavioral. This implies that in a given behavior, one of the three dimensions may be determining and overlapping the others. In the case of the critical incidents worked in class referring to attitudes and values, the affective dimension visibly overlapped the others, producing intolerant, reactive, and confrontational behaviors, consistent with attitude understood as a favorable or unfavorable affection towards a situation or object that manifests with varying intensity. The greater the emotional intensity mobilized in the attitude, the greater the resistance to change. However, as cognition is one of its dimensions, acquiring new knowledge can promote cognitive imbalances, allowing for the weakening of attitudes' strength based on previous experiences. This was new knowledge for the group working on the incident about 'Values and attitudes' and considered by the whole class as extremely relevant to teaching practice.

Table 5 – Critical Incident Narrative 1 on Group Configuration

The class was divided into groups; there were students in the right group and those in the left group. I noticed this division and thought it would be important to broaden interactions among students and provide opportunities for them to interact outside these initial groups. With this intention, I proposed an activity requesting that they form different groups with members who had not yet worked together. The idea was to mix the groups from both sides. The requested task was to create a story in which the main character was a person with a disability. There were many difficulties in developing the group work due to the disintegration of the people. The general atmosphere in the class was one of discontent, which made it difficult to focus on the task. One group was completely fragmented, with two students involved in the task and the others dedicated to tasks

unrelated to the request. I could not get the groups to work in a committed and supportive way. Realizing this difficulty, I felt very frustrated and acted emotionally, appealing to individual grades! I threatened to go through the groups and give a grade for each person's level of engagement in the group! My action generated even more conflict in the groups as they had to reallocate tasks and people who had already started the work individually felt disregarded. Since I had communicated this decision definitively and with some impatience, the students were afraid to bring these difficulties to light, and I realized that instead of helping to create greater bonds in the group, I contributed to its disintegration.

Source: Experience report of didactic work in a class of the component "University Teaching" of the PPGEduc-UNEB semester 2021.2.

Table 6 – Critical Incident Narrative 2 on Group Configuration

And this experience I will now report occurred later, now I am 30 years old with a class in basic education. An EJA class. Now I have experience with adults! So I will take over the class! I planned for ideal students. I imagined I would arrive in the class, and everyone would be very interested in listening to me! I planned for these ideal students! Adults thirsty for knowledge! The first shock came when I entered the class! Mixed group! There were people aged 16 to 60! Young people and adults! Well, I planned and needed to follow what I planned! But I will confess: I was so insecure! My strategy for dealing with this insecurity: I clung to the plan! I even knew the plan would not suit that situation! How to meet the aspirations of a 16-year-old and the motivations of a 60-year-old? I stuck to what I planned: followed the plan! And the first class was like this: A mess, students talking, me trying to follow the class! No one interacted; it was a disaster! It got so complicated that I kicked a student out of the class. Not knowing what to do, I resorted to the traditional! Look at the idea! I put a math problem on the board and asked them to solve it! At least with this strategy, it gave me time to think of something! The class happened! I continued with the class but sought support from the Institution! The coordination was very collaborative.

Source: Experience report of didactic work in a class of the component "University Teaching" of the PPGEduc-UNEB semester 2021.2.

The theme of group configuration in the classroom emerged as a need to reflect on the flow of meanings of interpersonal interactions in the university environment and especially in the classroom. The two narratives above brought important elements for reflecting on the difficulty teachers may have in improvising regarding prior planning and their implicit conceptions of teacher authority and social roles.

The group phenomenon, studied in depth in the field of Psychology, is extremely relevant to Pedagogy since the classroom is also a group. We can analyze the classroom from group theories, specifically using Kurt Lewin's and Enrique Pichon-Rivière's conceptions. Lewin, considered a pioneer in group studies, observes

that psychological, social, and cultural forces act in group interactions, promoting different subjective reactions of cohesion, rejection, resistance to change, projection, attraction, and balance.

Another important force to consider is the so-called "vital field" or "life space," which refers to the psychic energy distributed among the social roles composing a person's existence and that, when unbalanced, cause difficulties in social interaction. For example, the diversity of roles as a mother, teacher, daughter, church member, and pet tutor requires a balance of energy and time distribution among them. If one role is unbalanced, as in the case of a child's illness, the other roles are compromised, often causing psychic illness.

The first narrative about group configuration presented in Table 5 (student task with external imposition of reconfiguration of originally organized groups) mobilized the class for self-reflection on how their vital space was composed and how the interaction in the groups they belonged to was configured. The task brought to light the reflection on the importance of group cohesion being built processually and collaboratively in a dialogical relationship with students so that "the shot does not backfire," as was the case in the critical incident report in question. After consolidating cohesion, the group matures and can overcome conflict moments with less negative impact due to affective bonds. When the bond theme emerged, the class problematized the question of which processes could result in its constitution, leading us to Pichon-Rivière's theory and his elaboration of operative groups. For the field of Education, the contribution of the operative group lies in the sense that a group focuses on having a common goal, which is the task, and the need to create bonds of co-responsibility.

> The operative group technique, whatever the proposed objectives to the groups (institutional diagnosis, learning, creation, planning, etc.), aims for its members to learn to think in

co-participation of the knowledge object, understanding that thought and knowledge are not individual facts but social productions. The set of members as a whole addresses the difficulties presented at each moment of the task, achieving clarification situations by mobilizing stereotyped structures that function as both obstacles to communication and learning and control techniques of anxiety before change. (Minicucci 1997, p. 165)

We realized that in critical incident N1 (Table 5), the task was scattered and was not the group's articulating engine. On the contrary! The teacher's anxiety for the groups to be reconfigured to destabilize the "cliques" generated conflicts in groups that had already started the task. In the debate about this issue, the class realized that the operative group's lens changed the perception of the task's sense, not only as learning conceptual contents but also attitudinal contents. For Pichon-Rivière (1998), there cannot be a bond without a task, whether implicit or explicit; what is at stake are critical reflections on the task's realization and the relationships occurring around its development. Learning is achieved by the sum of contents produced by the group's members, the result of the dialectical process that produces changes, breaking with stereotyped patterns, allowing the group to advance to new creative processes. From this perspective of group co-belonging, groupality configures itself as a potent formative device for university students, as they share a formative space (university/classroom) for a relatively long time, allowing regular articulation of collective tasks and bond formation with colleagues and teachers.

Incident N2 (planning for EJA class, Table 6) reveals a dissociation between the reality of group configuration and the teacher's idealization. The conflict escalates when the teacher, upon realizing the mismatch of prior planning with reality, could not reorganize her action and make more assertive decisions. Her experiential and conceptual knowledge repertoire did not offer strategies for adapting to the situation, making her resist planning change, even

though perceiving its inadequacy for the situation. Although the teacher noticed the class atmosphere deteriorating regarding bonds and the task, her attitude of reinforcing autocratic authority led to communication breakdown with the class, culminating in expelling a student from the class. The fact that the teacher prioritized the lesson content over the group configuration in the initial contact with the class hindered a fundamental moment of first contact, which is bond creation. The teacher could have invested in this initial contact to better know the class, listen to their expectations, communicate hers, and jointly make didactic agreements collectively produced.

The work with critical incidents was positively evaluated by the students of the component "University Teaching in Contemporaneity: Epistemological, Political, and Methodological Presuppositions."

Provisional Considerations

The focus on critical incidents as a didactic device promotes a shift from teaching to learning, placing the teacher's attention on the student's thought movement and their mediation process. The perspective of traditional didactics with a more reproductive and memorization-oriented learning approach articulates senses of how to do, gradually assumed as subjective principles in the teaching process. These principles articulate force fields and a classroom space whose primary function is knowledge transmission over reflecting on the non-linear and complex process of knowledge production (González-Rey 2006, p. 30).

In interaction with students, the teacher accesses resources from various sources: experiential, existential, and theoretical, allowing for the production of meanings for their educational and formative action. This movement reveals no dichotomy between the internal and external worlds in the subjective and intersubjective configurations of reality, meaning that meaning is configured in the relationship with others and the world in interaction spaces. The class, from this perspective, becomes a field of creative and non-linear potentials that can produce openness to new meanings and new learning.

González-Rey and Vygotsky conceive the category "meaning" from different perspectives. For Vygotsky, the category "meaning" is related to language, meaning the word's meaning. For González-Rey, subjective meaning is the way a particular existence appears perspectively in a concrete activity through a multiplicity of symbolic productions in a given context. This view apprehends that there is an objective/subjective production of existential spaces without dichotomies. Subjective meaning integrates in an experience a set of symbolic, social, and historical processes perspectively, meaning in unity with the emotional dimension. The classroom becomes an individual and collective production: individually, each one brings their vital field to the class, family, social, and cultural relations; collectively, interactions and multiple listening and re-significations will generate other forces of meaning, mediated by the teacher from the perspective of the classroom as a group space.

In university teaching, critical incidents configure themselves as a valuable device that can mobilize various learning styles, providing students with the opportunity to become protagonists in decision-making processes related to professional issues that often need to be made in the moment's temporality. In my several experiences of teaching practices based on critical cases, analyzing the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting of the actors involved in dilemmatic issues, I have observed that it is a valuable device for promoting professional development in teaching.

The learning styles characterized by higher education didactics are categorized into reflective, active, collaborative, theoretical, and pragmatic, not being mutually exclusive. Regarding the relevance of the device for each learning style, it stands out that for the

reflective style, the critical incidents method encourages reflection on specific situations of teaching practice, provoking the development of a practice epistemology, valuing the teacher's person as a constituent of instituting rationalities with the potential to transform the epistemological field of university pedagogy. In the case of the active learning style, discussion, position change, and institutional role reveal the complexity of decision-making from various angles of analysis. The student is called to think, for example, about what decisions they would make in the teacher's, director's, or student's role, to perceive the always-present relationship between the totality and the parts and the imbrication promoting changes in the general situation from particular mobilizations. Regarding the collaborative style, the device's nature stimulates collaboration among students in the debate to reach the best solution to minimize or avoid the negative impacts of the incident from specific interventions. The exchange of experiences and perspectives during discussions aiming to reach the best solution promotes peer learning. The fundamental exercise of integrating theory and practice is mobilized in the theoretical learning style when students relate and apply abstract concepts to better understand real classroom situations and, in the opposite movement, concrete situations mobilize conceptual thinking. Finally, the pragmatic thinking style is the approach where students learn best when data and information are presented in practical contexts where they can visualize the real application of knowledge, with thought and interests strongly motivated by practical problem-solving contexts where knowledge's relevance is explicitly tangible. In summary, the critical incidents device is flexible and malleable enough to engage a wide variety of learning styles. By promoting reflection, action, and openness to listening in crisis contexts, it has the potential to contribute to the professional development of university teachers.

In university teacher training, the critical incidents technique has proven to be an enriching and essential approach for pedagogical and reflective development in the academic environment. By directing attention to specific moments that transcend routine, this methodology provides an unique opportunity for learning and improvement. The detailed problematization of dilemmatic situations, where the actors' decisions culminate in an irreversible point where the incident occurs, allows for identifying and analyzing the flow of decisions, values, and meanings that provoked the crisis, facilitating reflections on the other's actions and enabling the analysis of our own in similar situations. Therefore, analyzing incidents promotes identifying challenges and obstacles in classroom relationships in the teaching and learning process and highlights the possible collaborative practices to construct learning communities.

The ability to reflect on incidents, discuss them in a collaborative context, and extract relevant lessons significantly contributes to forming more sensitive university teachers committed to professional development. Additionally, the critical incidents technique fosters a continuous learning culture where educators are encouraged to seek excellence and innovation in their practices constantly. Sharing experiences, jointly analyzing challenges, and collaboratively seeking solutions promote a more dynamic, collaborative, and committed academic environment for students' political, cultural, and professional development. In this sense, I have experienced in my classes the critical incidents technique as a powerful teaching device that makes sense for an academic community that values reflection, dialogue, and mutual development. Finally, the positive evaluation by the students of the component "University Teaching in Contemporaneity: Epistemological, Political, and Methodological Presuppositions" suggests that this method can be a valuable device in the process of professional development in teaching.

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