



University of  
**Strathclyde**  
**Glasgow**

# **Student Teachers' Perceptions of Critical Incidents in their Professional Learning**

Raymond Soltyssek  
Dr. Aileen Kennedy  
University of Strathclyde

# Background to the study

- Largest provider of ITE in Scotland = data-rich context
- Study examines PGDE students' identification of 'critical incidents' in early placement experiences
- Critical incident analysis is 'an excellent way to develop an increasing understanding of and control over professional judgement; and... is a means of finding a focus for classroom action research' (Tripp, 2012, p. 24)
- Existing research focuses on analysis of experienced teachers' critical incidents (Rollett, 2001), highlighting issues such as:
  - Cultural differences
  - Focus on positive or negative incidents
  - Concern for pupil welfare
  - Curriculum issues
  - Management issues

# The context

The desirability of reflective practice in teaching is *assumed* in the literature – that it is good to be a reflective practitioner.

Moon

Donaldson and the requirement to reflect as a key aspect of the Standards for Registration.

# A dissenting voice

- Knowledge generated at a ‘descriptive, habitual level’
- ‘high on narratives’
- Low on teaching principles’
- Inability to ‘extract rules or artefacts’
- Done ‘in support of self-esteem

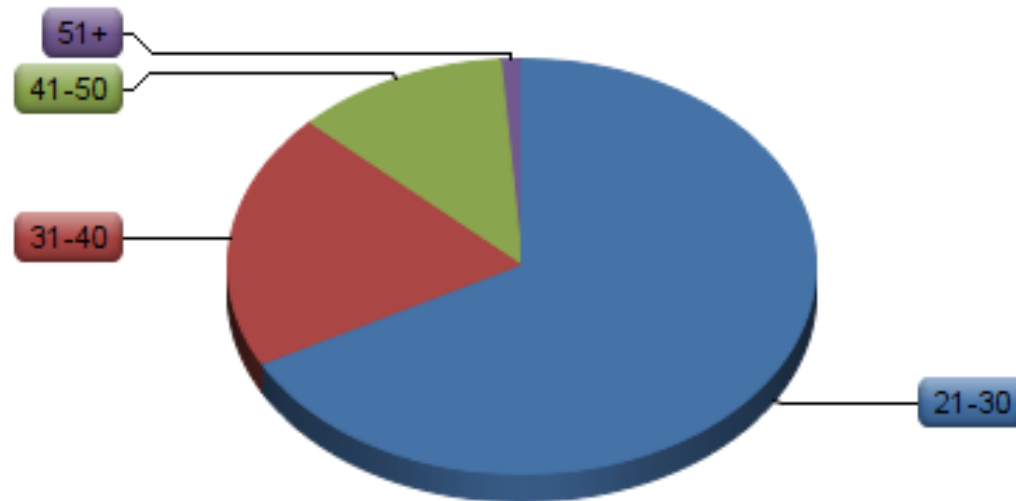
(Mena-Marcos *et al*)

# Study design

- Qualitative, interpretive design
- All PGDE students (n=600) invited to upload anonymised critical incident reports
- Coding framework:
  1. Who was involved in the incident?
  2. Where did the incident take place?
  3. Was the learning: bad thing to put right (BR) or good thing to repeat (GR)
  4. What did the student learn about?
  5. What aspects of the SPR did the student highlight?
  6. Other comments
- Item 4 analysed thematically using inductive analytical approach

# Participant demographics

- Respondents (n=85 )
  - 63 female/22 male
  - 29 primary/56 secondary
  - Age:

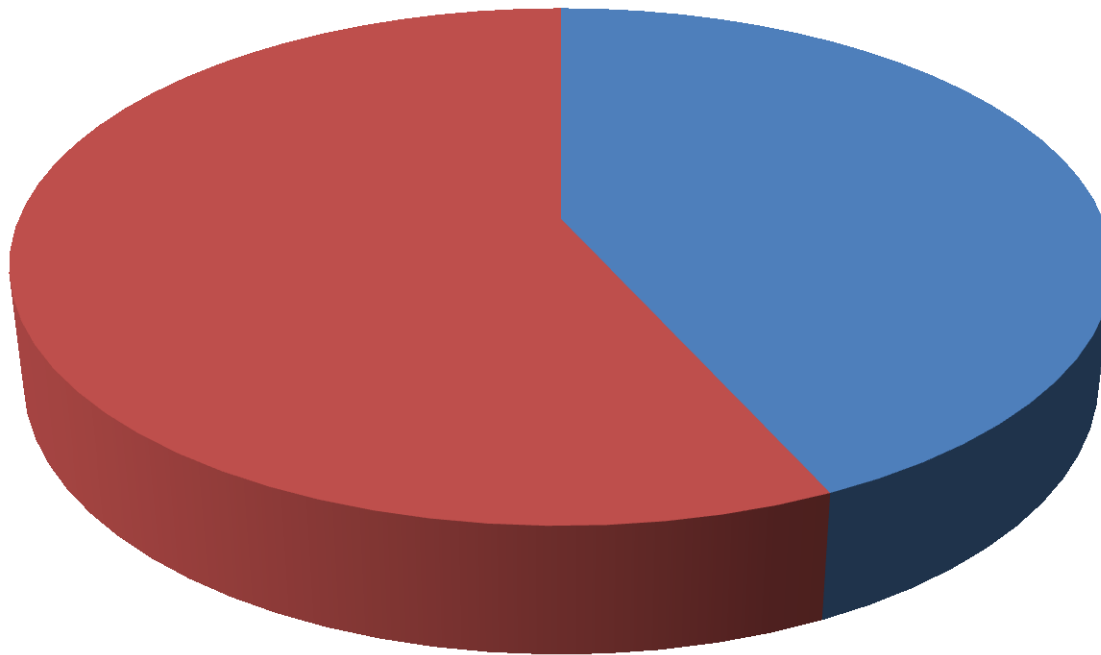


# Where do critical incidents take place?

- In the classroom – 60
- Others:
  - Departmental meeting
  - Mentor's office
  - Field trip
  - Outside classroom
  - After class / after school
  - Support bases



# Good things or bad things?



- Bad things to put right
- Good things to repeat

# Identification of previous failing practice

## Of the student:

- Unfortunately the kids couldn't create this effective imagery as easily on their own without having received a discussion from me beforehand. The class then fell apart as pupils were constantly raising hands to ask if they were doing things correctly or if the imagery was good enough. I returned the next lesson with a different approach to developing ... and sure enough they came up with very creative examples.

# Identification of previous failing practice

## Of the class teacher:

- When I had observed the grammar lessons before most of the class appeared to be disengaged and restless. Whilst most of the children were getting all of the answers correct... I did not feel that they were being challenged or taking anything away from these lessons... It became apparent to me that simply 'filling in the blanks' and working from worksheets continuously was not going to be effective in teaching the class what can be seen as quite a dull topic.

# Identification of previous failing practice

## Of the class teacher:

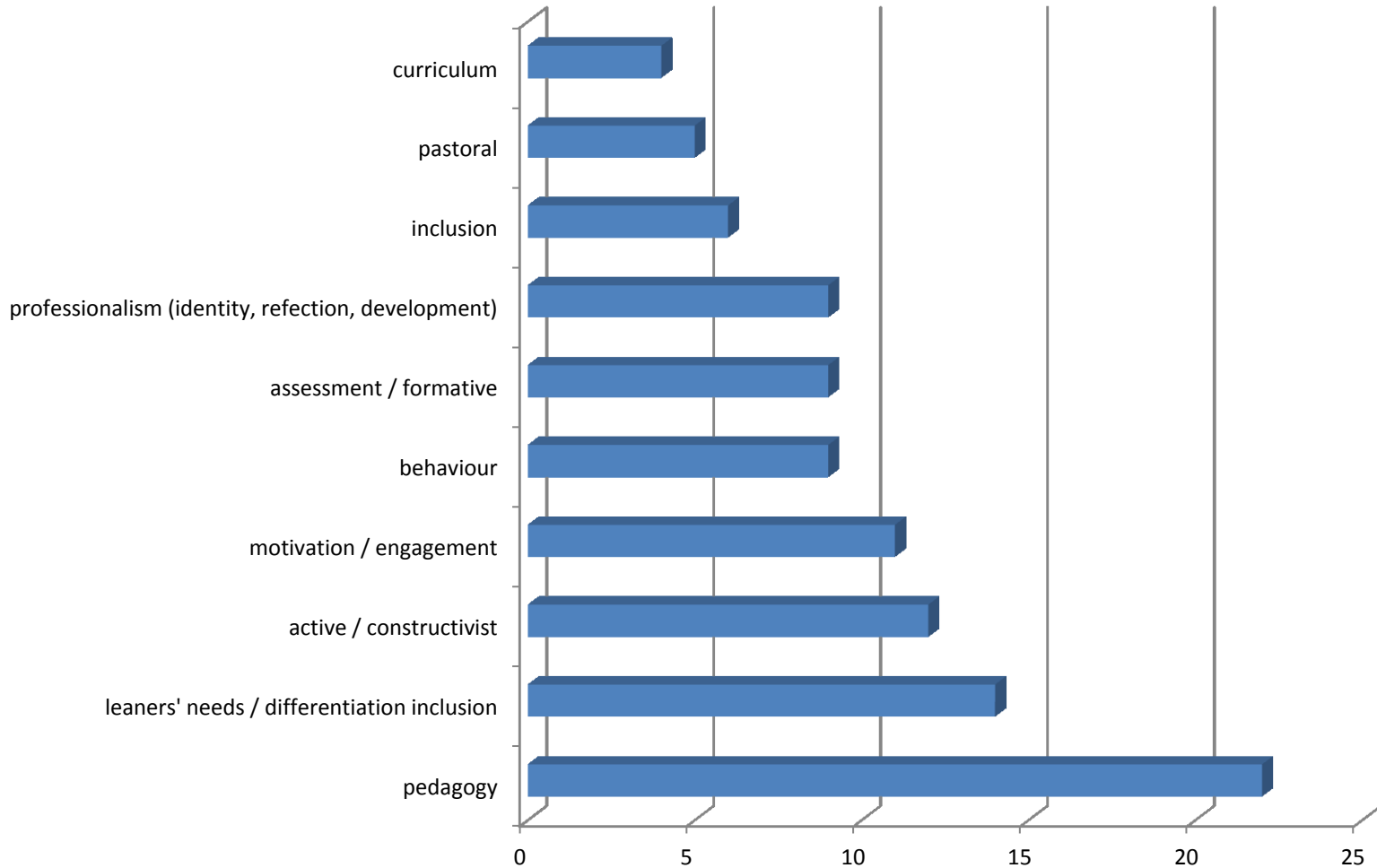
- I felt that R's needs were not met because Mr JC decided to disregard the context of her behaviour and her need to learn in spite of her behaviour, in favour of indulging in his own annoyance.

# Identification of previous failing practice

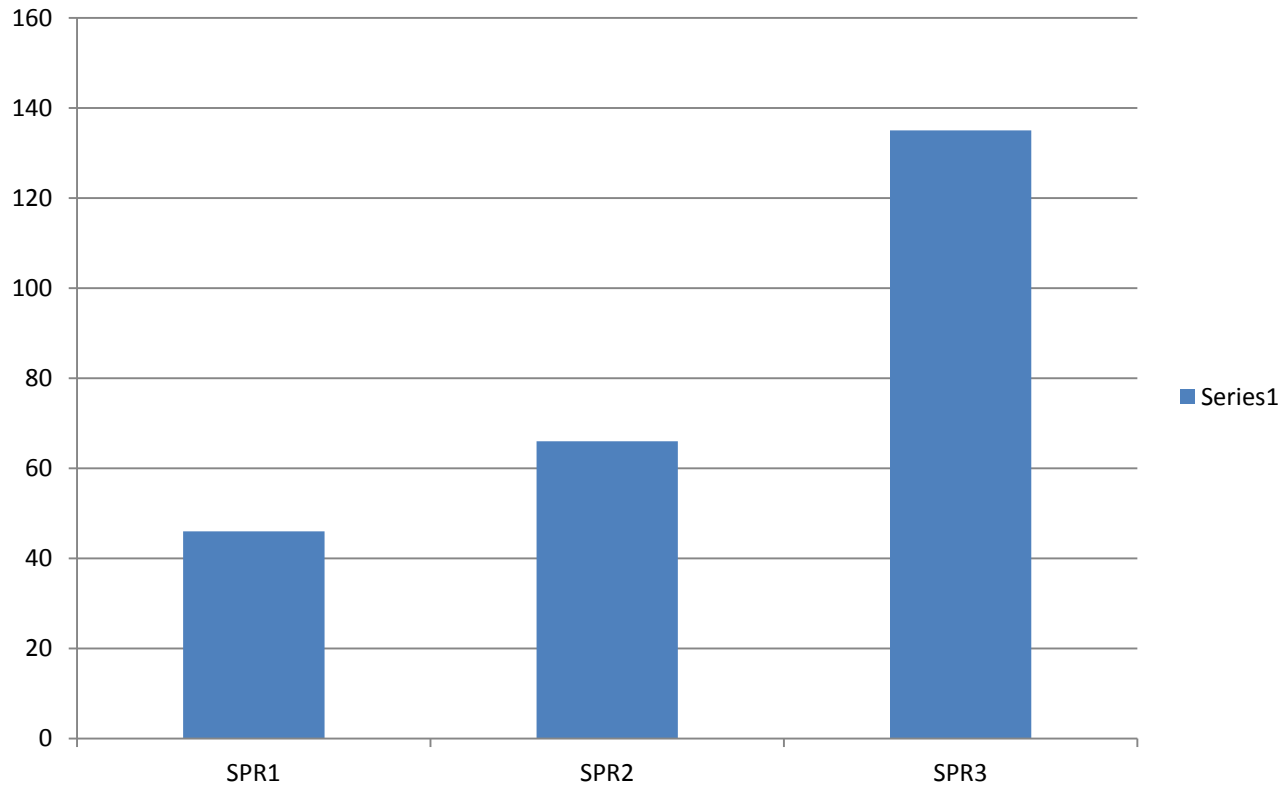
Of the education system, society and everything:

- I have been really shocked from the outset at the children's lack of competence (sic), the majority are 8 years old with some still aged 7. I was horrified to see that 4 of them couldn't write their own names and that 6 couldn't count to twenty with one child saying "triangle" instead of 15.

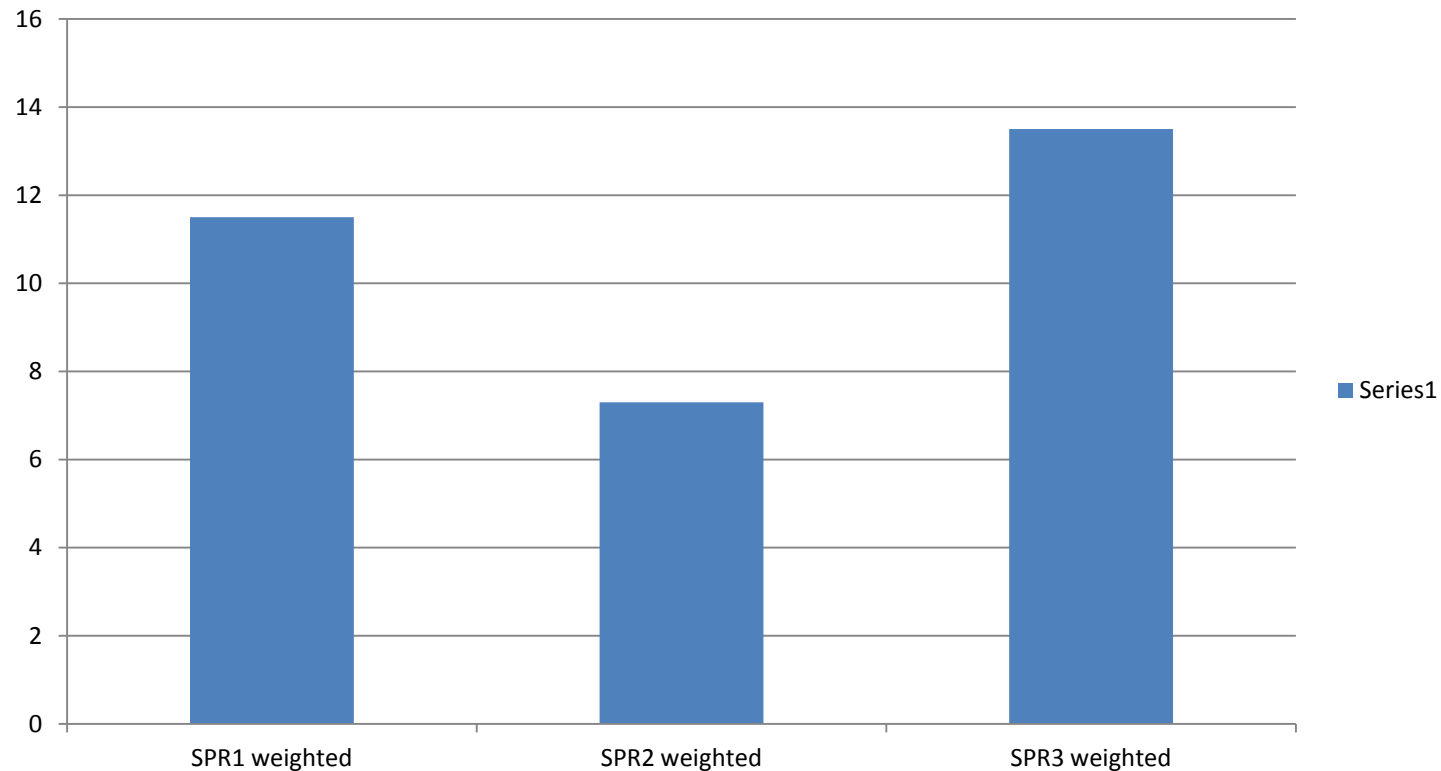
# Key themes arising



# Standards identified as key learning in incident.



# Standards identified as key learning in incident (weighted).





# Conclusions

- Where experienced teachers tend to focus on ‘atypical’ incidents involving individual pupils (Rollett, 2001), these student teachers tended to focus on more generic whole-class issues.
- Curriculum issues are less likely to feature in student teachers’ accounts of critical incidents
- Our student teachers’ critical incidents focus more on themselves as teachers than on the learners
- How much of this is influenced by the imperative to ‘perform’ teaching (as advanced by standards-based observed assessment), rather than to learn about learning?

# References

- Rollett, B.A. (2001). How do expert teachers view themselves? In F. Banks & A. Shelton Mayes (Eds). *Early professional development for teachers*. London: David Fulton.
- Tripp, D. (2012). *Critical incidents in teaching: developing professional judgement*. Routledge: London.
- Moon, J. (2001). Learning Through Reflection. In F. Banks & A. Shelton Mayes (Eds). *Early professional development for teachers*. London: David Fulton.
- Mena - Marcos, J., Garcia - Rodriguez, M., & Tillema, H. (2013). Student Teacher Reflective Writing: What Does It Reveal? *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 2013, Vol.36(2), p.147-163