

**The Use of Critical Incident Analysis to Demonstrate
Experimental Learning and Evidence Based Practice**

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PURPOSE: To provide a means of demonstrating that students undertaking masters level courses were engaging in evidence based practice and that experiential learning was taking place (Hong & Payne, 1998). These are key learning outcomes of clinically related postgraduate education. **RELEVANCE:** Critical incident (CI) analysis has demonstrated how an assessment procedure can be a meaningful learning tool. The process has also been able to show how reflective practice can enhance the quality of patient care. **DESCRIPTION:** Tripp (1993) described the diagnosis and interpretation of CIs as a method of developing expert, professional judgment. To implement this students were instructed to analyse a number of CIs, over the span of their masters modules, which related to specific areas of the taught material, namely Manual Therapy and Injection Therapy. The strategy is based on Kolb's learning cycle and students were introduced to the procedure and paperwork in a module session. Firstly they recorded the identified CI and secondly evaluated, with support from relevant literature, what they had learned from the incident. Finally they assessed the impact of this learning and described how it would be applied to their future practice. Developmental feedback on completed CI analyses was given to the students on a regular basis. **OBSERVATIONS:** Students challenged their assumptions, values and norms of previous practice. However, reflection on CIs did not only centre on clinical practice but involved relationships with other health professionals and an awareness of ethical and political issues (van der Manen, 1997). With regard to completion of the analysis documentation, whilst students could articulate the learning process they had been through, many found succinct identification of the actual critical incident the hardest part. **CONCLUSIONS:** CI analysis assisted students to achieve course learning outcomes at masters level. The process demonstrated that clinicians could critically evaluate current practice and would incorporate newly acquired, evidence based skills into their future clinical practice