

## The problem

Since GCSE resits were made compulsory for English, pass rates have been low, with only 33.1% of students, aged 17 or above sitting these exams, gaining that elusive grade 4 (TES 2018). One of the core factors that has been commented on as contributing to this, is the lack of motivation these students have towards the subject. This research wished to tackle this issue and looked at one concept that has been linked to increasing motivation; differentiation.

"one of the main challenges for providers is to cultivate more positive student attitudes in order to improve their motivation" (Dof 2017).

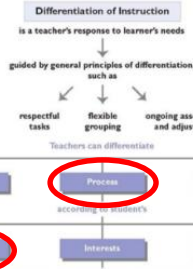
## The theory

### Differentiation

The definition of differentiation is a hotly debated topic, but has been associated with an increase in student motivation. However, the area is broad. This research wished to narrow it down to examine one specific area of differentiation exploring the impact of this on motivation and overall achievement within the classroom.

"effective use of differentiation has been associated with increased learner motivation" (Barthorpe and Visser 1991:60)

Diagram 1



Tomlinson, C.A & Allan, S.D (2000:3)

### Narrowing down the concept

One comprehensive model of differentiation that has been proposed, and widely used, is by Tomlinson & Allan (2000)(see diagram 1). One of the ways this model proposes practitioners can differentiate within the classroom is through differentiating the 'process', which is essentially the activities students complete (Tomlinson & Allan 2000). It also distinguishes three core characteristics of students. The one this research will focus upon is readiness, which refers to students undertaking activities that are at a level that matches their ability and current knowledge of the subject being taught (Tomlinson, & Allan 2000, Tomlinson & Moon 2013). This can be linked to motivational theory, in particular Self Determination Theory which argues that one factor that can increase student intrinsic motivation is their perceived competence at a subject Anderson & Peart 2016).

One method proposed to accommodate students readiness at a process level is that of 'tiered tasks' within the classroom, with students completing tasks at differing levels depending on their perceived ability.

## The question

Does the use of tiered tasks with classrooms improve the motivation, confidence and overall achievement of GCSE English resit students?

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3+

## Tiers of joy?

Researching the impact of differentiation through tiered tasks on GCSE English resit students.

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### Literature cited

Anderson, N. & Peart, S. (2016) 'Back on Track: Exploring how a Further Education college re-motivates learners to re-sit previously failed qualification at GCSE'. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 21 (3), pp. 196-213.

Barthorpe, T. & Visser, J. (1991) *Differentiation: Your Responsibility*. Stafford: Nare.

Department of Education (2017) *Effective practice in the delivery and teaching of English and Mathematics to 16-18 year olds*. Available from: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/64119/16-18\\_year\\_olds\\_effective\\_teaching](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/attachment_data/file/64119/16-18_year_olds_effective_teaching) [Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> November 2018]

Tomlinson, C. A. & Moon, T.R. (2013) *Assessment and student success in a differentiated classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Tes (2018) *GCSE Resits: English and Maths pass rates drop*. Available from: <https://www.tes.com/news/gcse-resits-english-and-maths-pass-rates-drop> [Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> October 2018]

Tomlinson, C.A & Allan, S. D. (2000) *Leadership for differentiating schools and classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

## Putting it into practice

You now need to decide why you agree/disagree

In groups highlights quotes that support if you agree or disagree with the statement or both (each group will be asked for different viewpoints on this)

At least 3 quotes to support you agree  
At least 1 quote to show some disagreement  
For each quote you agree you must have a counter argument about it may disagree

Diagram 2

For the research two sets of learners were compared. Within my practice I had 3 classes which were given tiered tasks, and 2 classes where these tiered tasks were not used.

At the beginning of the year students were assessed and from this their level for each exam question was decided. Each lesson had a focus on a particular exam question, with students doing tasks at their set level. These tasks would be clear to the student with the different level tasks appearing as different colours on the PPT (see diagram 2) in the lesson, and they would have a post it on their book at the level they were at. It was always made clear to students that they could work above the level they were assigned if they wished to.

## The methodology

This research aimed to look at the effect of three things: **confidence, motivation, and achievement**. Consequently, a mixed method approach was used.

**Student questionnaires** – These were completed at the beginning, and end of the year. Within these were 2 questions asking them to rate their **confidence** and **motivation** (separately) on a scale of 1-5 at the beginning and the end of the year. The average results of these two questions were calculated and compared to the tiered classes, and the non tiered classes. There were additional questions that also were used for a more detailed understanding

**Class interviews** – At the end of the project the classes who had tiered classes were interviewed with questions focusing on whether they thought tasks completed in class were achievable and how they felt it affected their confidence and motivation.

**Analysis of achievement data** – at the beginning and end of the year student completed an assessment. The average difference in marks from the beginning and end of the year were collated for students who were in tiered classes and students that weren't. These were compared to see if those in tiered classes showed a greater level of achievement.

"I did more in lessons than I did in schools because I felt more able to do it at my preferred pace so I didn't switch off"

"I just did whatever level my mate did"

## The preliminary findings

- Classes that were non-tiered appeared to show more of an increase in achievement than the classes with tiers
- Students assessed as higher level improved more than those at a lower level, however this increase was much greater in non-tiered classes.

Motivation and confidence increased with tiered classes and decreased with non-tiered, however this was only a very slight change.

- Interviews suggested the majority (not all) of students found the tiered tasks a positive experience, helping them focus on what they wanted to in class and helping their confidence on tasks as they could do it at a level for them

## Possible future research

- **More rigorous methods** of measuring confidence and motivation of students following this method is needed
- **More research is needed to examine a more holistic approach on the overall benefits this increase in motivation can have on students overall, over the course of a more longitudinal study.**
- **More "probing projects"** such as this could be done to investigate the impact of isolated areas of differentiation and assess which would be most impactful in the classroom.

**Puzzle research has raised.**

Tiered tasks showed an increase in motivation and confidence, but non-tiered task showed a greater improvement in achievement on assessments. **So why is the increase in motivation not leading to an increase in achievement?**

Tentative suggestions to be explored – do the students on tiered tasks feel motivated because the tasks did not challenge them? Did the non tiered tasks challenge students knocking their confidence but overall have a benefit on their capability in the subject?