Tiers of Joy? Researching the Impact of Differentiation Through Tiered Tasks on GCSE English Resit Students.

Abstract

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Since the introduction of compulsory GCSE English resits the achievement and experience these students have is often discussed as a cause for concern (Tes 2018). One of the core problems cited by the teaching profession is low-motivation with these students (DofE 2017). Differentiation is often discussed as being effective teaching practice to improve motivation and achievement (OFSTED 2019, DofE 2017, DofE 2011). However, what differentiation is, and which method is effective, is often debated with mixed results (see Taylor 2017). This research aimed to focus in on one aspect of differentiation know as tiered tasks, with students studying the same topic in lessons, but with students' tasks differing depending on their current skills and abilities. This model of differentiation is one of the widely debated methods with some arguing it is beneficial (Richards and Omdal, 2007; DofE, 2017) and others suggesting the impact is actually minimal (Hattie, 2011; OFSTED, 2019). In order to evaluate this model within my research, classes completed tasks at different levels depending on their competence of the topic assessed at the start of the research. These were compared to classes without these "tiered" tasks. The motivation, confidence, and achievement of these students were measured through mixed research methods (questionnaires, group interviews, and assessment results).

Findings suggest that there are some positive benefits of these tasks to students' confidence and motivation; however this is not reflected in the students' achievement. These conclusions, however, are made cautiously as the difference in motivation and confidence between the two groups is small, as too were the size of the classes researched. Despite this it did appear to be a method that indicated some benefit towards student motivation, something that could be measured more robustly in future, to evaluate whether this is a reliable finding,

and the overall benefit an increase of motivation could have. Furthermore, research could utilise a similar approach to assess the effectiveness of other aspects of differentiation. All this would need to be done with evaluative reasoning on why these methods may be successful, and exploration of reasons why it may not always transfer into an increase in student achievement, as my research indicates.

1. <u>Introduction</u>

> Monday afternoon at 1pm. A 16 year old student, fresh from spending the last 2 hours in a practical construction session walks into a GCSE English room. The first thing he says is "I'm not being funny, but I can't be arsed today so don't take offence if I do nothing". Friday afternoon and a Performing Arts Level 2 class walk into the room, sigh almost en-masse. "Can't be bothered with this", "How long until we finish?", "Can we just finish early?"
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> As a GCSE English resit teacher within an FE college these comments as students walk into the room are common, and when speaking to colleagues I am not alone. The general consensus amongst many students is that coming to English is something they just have to do and really don't want to. This is reflected in the daily struggles of trying to get them to complete tasks in class with some level of enthusiasm, and stay motivated to complete work, any small piece of work, within the lessons. It's no secret motivation in these students is low, but the question all those in the profession grapple with every day is "how do we improve this?" Moreover, can finding a way to tackle this demotivation help them to achieve their allusive grade 4, and stop the cycle of the continual resits they end up doing year upon year.

Since 2015 students up to the age of 19 have been required to resit their GCSE English until they achieve a grade 4. However, student outcomes are often discussed as a cause for concern with results low and the student experience poor (Tes 2018). One of the core problems cited is low-motivation (DofE 2017). Differentiation is a topic that is often discussed, as effective teaching practice, linked to increasing motivation and achievement (OFSTED 2019, DofE 2017, DofE 2011). One aspect of differentiation that has been debated is tiered tasks with students studying the same topic in lessons, but with students tasks differing depending on their current skills and abilities. Some argue this method can be beneficial (Richards and Omdal, 2007, DofE, 2017) and others argue the impact is minimal (Hattie, 2011; OFSTED, 2019). With these mixed results this research aimed to address the question: Does the use of tiered tasks with classrooms improve the motivation, confidence and overall achievement of GCSE English resit students? It aimed to critically evaluate the impact of this method and whether it can improve outcomes for these demotivated students.

Different classes within an FE college completed different tasks at different levels depending on their assessed competence. This was compared to classes without tiered tasks. The motivation, confidence, and achievement of these students was measured through mixed research methods (questionnaires, interviews, and assessment results). Findings suggest benefits to the tiering on students confidence and motivation, but not their achievement. This raises questions about why the impact wasn't beneficial for achievement, and also the wider debate opened about whether the benefits in motivation of these students could still be argued as a positive 'outcome', with other benefits, not linked to their short term grade achievement.

2. <u>Literature Review</u>

2.1 Student motivation: What is it and why does it matter?

It is first important to establish what this study means by motivation. As discussed by Fredricks and McColskey (2012) motivation is a concept closely associated with student engagement in a subject, based on students asking the questions of "Can I do this task?" and

"Do I want to do this task?" (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998), essentially a psychological process. Engagement is more concerned, in simplistic terms, with the actions following from motivation (Fredricks and McColskey 2012), with disengaged students being those "who do not participate actively in class and school activities" and "do not become cognitively involved in learning" (Finn & Zimmer 2012, pg. 9). Following from this it could be argued that a lack of the motivation could lead to disengaged students, which has further been linked to lower levels of student achievement (Finn and Zimmer 2012). This is a simplistic overview of motivation, engagement and achievement, with there being a wide variety of debate about definitions (Fredricks and McColskey 2012, and Finn and Zimmer 2012). However, this argues demotivation could contribute to the low achievement, through the disengagement of students. Consequently improving students' achievement is arguably dependant on improving students' motivation and engagement. Differentiation is one method that has been put forward as effective practice to improve student motivation within the classroom (DofE 2011, DofE 2017, OFSTED 2019). Below theoretical reasons behind this link are discussed.

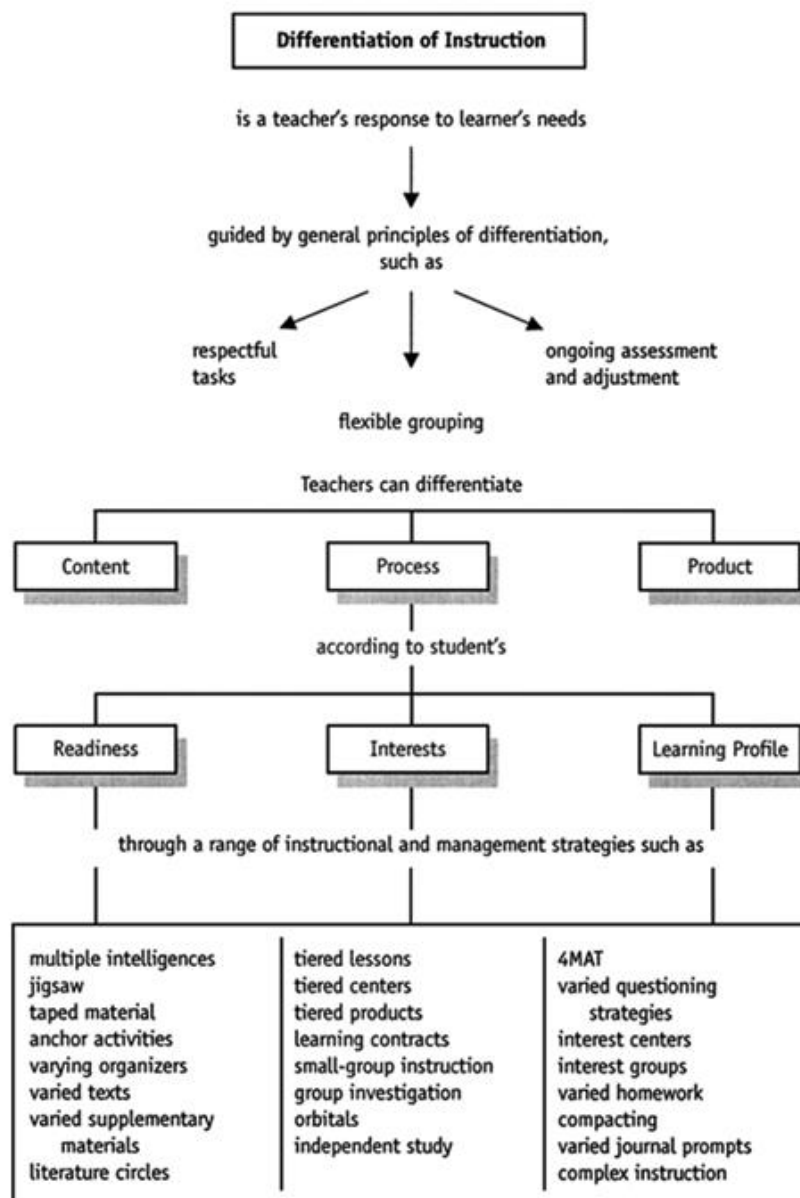2.2 Differentiation: What is it and how does it increase motivation?

Differentiation is a topic that has led to a great deal of debate, for example a recent article in TES presents the argument that differentiation should be 'ditched' altogether (TES 2019). Within the confinements of this short research project it would not be possible to discuss all the various conflicting definitions and concepts, however, below is an outline of the link between differentiation and motivation, and the core principle this research will be focusing on.

Within the teaching standards constructed by the Department of Education (DofE) it states that teachers should "adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils". This includes knowing "when and how to differentiate appropriately and use approaches which enable pupils to be taught effectively" (DofE 2011, p.11). From this it can be argued that the concept of differentiation, as proposed by the DofE, is related to a style of teaching which adapts to the individual student (by teaching to their strengths and needs). This is the key

concept of differentiation philosophy, with the individual student being at the centre of the classroom and a teacher facilitating their learning by responding to their needs moving "away from teaching to the whole class in the same manner and addresses the needs of all learners" (Thakur, 2014, pg.10). How people have interpreted how to do this has led to conflicting definitions. Some interpret it as grouping, streaming and tracking students' progress to allow students to work at different levels of competence (Terwell 2005). Others feel "implementing differentiation is difficult to achieve due to the almost impossible task of accommodating for the range of variables to meet individual learning needs" (Bathorpe and Visser 1991, pg.63), interpreting differentiation more holistically than just allowing students to work at a level appropriate to them.

In addition to these conflicting interpretations, the benefits of differentiation are debatable. Various studies have argued that "effective use of differentiation has been associated with increased learner motivation" (Bathorpe and Visser 1991, pg.60). However, with so many definitions and interpretations of the concept this statement leaves open questions about what specific area and interpretation of differentiation leads to supposed increased motivation, and is this true for all students? This study will examine one specific model of differentiation and analyse if it does indeed increase motivation, specifically for GCSE English resit students.

One comprehensive model of differentiation that has been proposed as a practical model for practitioners to use is by Tomlinson and Allan (2000). This model breaks down the different elements of differentiation, allowing for specific factors to be focused on. Below is the concept map for differentiation as proposed by Tomlinson and Allan (2000, pg.3)

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                    │  Differentiation of Instruction │
                    └─────────────────────────────────┘

                     is a teacher's response to learner's needs

                                    │
                                    ▼

                  guided by general principles of differentiation,
                                  such as

               respectful                         ongoing assessment
               tasks                              and adjustment

                              flexible grouping

                         Teachers can differentiate

        ┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐
        │   Content   │      │   Process   │      │   Product   │
        └─────────────┘      └─────────────┘      └─────────────┘

                        according to student's

        ┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐
        │  Readiness  │      │  Interests  │      │ Learning Profile │
        └─────────────┘      └─────────────┘      └─────────────────┘

        through a range of instructional and management strategies such as
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multiple intelligences	tiered lessons	4MAT
jigsaw	tiered centers	varied questioning
taped material	tiered products	strategies
anchor activities	learning contracts	interest centers
varying organizers	small-group instruction	interest groups
varied texts	group investigation	varied homework
varied supplementary	orbitals	compacting
materials	independent study	varied journal prompts
literature circles		complex instruction

This research aims to focus on one specific way in which practitioners can differentiate, according to one student characteristic, and one strategy. This will allow for the effectiveness of a specific area of differentiation to be analysed, with the prospect of other areas to be analysed within future research. It will allow for a critical examination at each element to determine which, if any, is most effective. Below the specific focus of this research has been

outlined, with links to educational theory supporting why this particular aspect may be beneficial to improving students' motivation.

2.3 Tiered Tasks

One of the ways this model proposes practitioners can differentiate is through differentiating the 'process'; the activities students complete to help them to gain competence within the subject (Tomlinson and Allan 2000). Within the model it distinguishes three core characteristics of students that practitioners can adapt to. One aspect that can be linked to motivation is readiness, where students undertake activities at a level that matches their ability and current knowledge (Tomlinson and Allan 2000, Tomlinson 2001). This can be linked to Self Determination Theory which argues one factor that can increase student intrinsic motivation is their perceived competence (Ryan and Deci 2017) with research suggesting achievement is lower when students don't see themselves as competent (Anderson and Peart 2016). It therefore arguably suggests that if students feel more confident in their ability in the classroom, then their motivation will increase. This links with the previously mentioned concept of motivation as a psychological process addressing the question of "Can I do this task?" (Eccles, Wigfield & Schiefele, 1998)[1].Due to this link this research will focus on differentiation via students' readiness.

By assessing student's 'readiness' practitioners can produce differentiated activities within the classroom that allow students to complete similar tasks but requiring different levels of ability, skills or previous knowledge, matched to students' perceived readiness. Through utilising tiered tasks some studies have claimed students' achievement and engagement improved. For example, Richards and Omdal (2007) found improvements in scores when students undertook tiered tasks related to their assessed readiness level. Moreover Pierce and Adams (2004) used tiered tasks within a Maths classroom with comments made about how students were engaged throughout the session. However, others have argued that such a method of differentiation has minimal impact. Hattie's (2012) review of research concluded that ability tracking, grouping or streaming has low impact on achievement within the

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[1] This still leaves open the question of "Do I want to do this task?", however again within this research project the aim is to narrow down the concept to test one aspect at a time.

classroom. Moreover, Deunk et al (2018) commented that students completing different tasks, depending on their ability, had a low impact on the outcome of students.

Research around this practice of tiered tasks and its impact on student attainment is inconclusive. Moreover, the research examines the impact in a wide variety of contexts for example Deunk et al's (2018) research is concerned only with primary aged children). The context of GCSE English resit students could be argued as fairly unique, with observable demotivation of students from the beginning of the course, as previously mentioned. Consequently, it is currently not possible to draw clear conclusions about whether differentiation in this form will have a positive impact within this group of learners. Moreover the research often focuses primarily on achievement, not the more holistic view of the impact on students motivation, which is another focus of this research project.

3. **Methodology**

Profile of students with which research was conducted

All students aged 16-19.

3 x tiered classes – total of 45 students on Motor Vehicle, Media and Art courses.

2 x non-tiered classes – total of 24 students on Performing Arts, Business, Applied Science and Media courses.

Number of tiered students who completed assessments: 45

Number of non-tiered students who completed assessments: 24

Not all completed questionnaires due to absences in lessons, or questionnaires were handed in by students without being completed fully.

Percentage of those who completed questionnaires tiered: 78%

Percentage of those who completed questionnaires no-tiered: 67%

As commented upon by Fredricks and McColskey (2012), when it comes to measuring students engagement, which is argued as a consequence of their motivation, it is a multidimensional concept involving he students behaviour, emotions and interests. Quantitative data allowed for a measurable analysis of the difference between the two groups. As commented upon by Robson (2002, pg. 271) using qualitative data alongside the quantitative measures can "illustrate the meaning of the findings", in this case allowing for greater understanding of the reasons for possible increase in achievement, motivation and engagement from the participants perspective. Moreover, the research also utilised some narrative inquiry to further add the perspective of the researcher, and reflect the practitioner's experiences (Connelly & Clandinin 1990).

At the beginning of the year all classes completed a diagnostic assessment. The marks for each question correlated with levels. In tiered classes, students would have a coloured post it on their books representing the level they were at for the lesson content, based off their initial assessment. The tasks within the lessons were split into 3 levels of difficulty. Sometimes a level 4 task was used, but only when it was content those students were quite confident with

already. This was due to not wishing to present activities that are too hard which can have a negative impact on the students' confidence according to the model of differentiation being used (Tomlinson and Allan 2000). Within the non-tiered lessons, the content was the same, but the tasks were not tiered. Within these lessons students who were struggling or excelling on tasks, would be provided extra support or guidance from the tutor for support.

Example of tiered task used in lesson

In one session there was a task concerned with analysing language those working at level 1 may have been asked to merely identify a word or phrase that they think the writer has used for effect. Those at level 3 may be asked to explain the effect of the word or phrase selected and link it to another word or phrase within the text. The task was written on the PowerPoint in different colours depending on the level they were completing. This matched the coloured post it on their book. For example a level 1 task would be in green, and students who had a green post it would recognise they were doing that task.

Anonymous questionnaires were given at the beginning and end of the year, with some questions allowing for students to write comments. Whole class feedback was also taken using semi structured whole class interviews, with general feedback and comments recorded. The questionnaires were anonymous to tackle one flaw within questionnaires where respondents may not report their true attitudes possibly to be seen in a good light (Robson 2002). On the questionnaires there were specific questions related to how confident and motivated the students felt using a likert scale from 1-5. The average differences between tiered and non-tiered students were then calculated. This allowed for a comparable quantitative measurement between the two groups. One of the disadvantages of using the method of questionnaire is that they can have a low response rate, meaning that the answers may not be fully representative of all participants (Robson 2002). Also an issue with the class interviews as these were dependent on student attendance and willingness to participate. This needs to be considered when discussing the finding, particularly with such a small scale study.

Within the research the focus began with motivation, but engagement has been described as the 'action' or result from motivation (Fredricks and McColskey 2012). One aspect of this is

their behaviour, such as their active participation in tasks (Fredricks and McColskey 2012). As a consequence this study looked at the difference in the amount of homework that students completed that a quantitative analysis of the difference in the students participation outside of the classroom could also be assessed. This was done through a question, about the amount of homework students complete, on the two questionnaires given.

To assess achievement the difference between the students' marks on the diagnostic assessment, and final assessment were calculated. An average difference was then calculated for the tiered, and then non-tiered classes.

4. **Ethical Statement**

All students and staff who have participated within the research have consented to do so, with the understanding that this consent can be withdrawn at any point of the process, including the use of any data collected in reference to them. It is also understood by all participants that the focus of the research is on the teaching practice within the classroom. The research is being done within the normal standards of the teaching environment, meaning the level of teaching being accessed by all has not been harmed due to the research. Although there are two groups where different teaching methods are being used to analyse the effect of one particular teaching style, neither group is disadvantaged with the same resources being used in both sessions, one is just more visible to students than the other. All data will be stored within British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) ethical guidelines, with participants who take part in the research, and the institution in which it is conducted, remaining anonymous.

5. <u>Discussion of findings</u>

<u>**Observational notes about impact within the classroom**</u>

 They were a mix of students who were new to college and sitting their resit for the first time, and those who were on their third attempt. Motivation was clearly low from the start, with a constant need to address low level disruption such as phone use, talking, and not completing tasks. On first introduction of the levelled tasks most students were reluctant and confused. They were all told the colour of the post it was the minimal level task they could work on, but if they felt they could work at a higher level they could. It took a good few sessions before students would start to do this, with some still just doing whatever task their friend was doing. However, as the year went on it became more common to hear comments such as "I'm going to try and hit the pink level today", and "I'm just going to stick with green". In one Motor Vehicle class many, not all, students did require less prompting and guidance to complete tasks as they completed the level they were assigned. From the two extremes there was one student who struggled to stay on task in English, constantly making comments such as " I can't do it so why bother". He was often assigned the lower level tasks in lessons, until in one lesson it became music to my ears when I heard him exclaim "I get it. I know what to do" and then completed the task independently. There was also the example of another determined student who kept saying "I'm going to aim for pink today", pushing himself to do the highest level of task. Similar comments were made in other classes, such as a mixed group of Level 2 Art and Level 2 Media students, with one student in particular stating how each lesson he was going to do the level above whatever I gave him because he wanted to do well. In this group there was also a student who was difficult to keep on task throughout the year, but who would work more independently if they moved down a level of task first, and then built up to the level assigned. This is not to say all the classes were constantly on task, and motivated, and all students responded well to the different colour of tasks. "I just don't get it" was a comment one Motor Vehicle student made nearly every week, and "it's alright Amy I know I'm on green because I'm dumb", another more worrying comment. The reluctance to come into the classroom still existed for many students, as were the constant queries about how long was left, and whether they could leave early. However, positives, to me, appeared to outweigh negatives.

In comparison the students in the non-tiered classes started off the year in a similar mindset. One group were Performing Arts students who were constantly trying to get time out of lessons to rehearse or practice. The other group were much less disruptive Applied Science and Level 2 Business Students. In comparison to, for example, the Motor Vehicle classes I taught using tiered tasks, they began the year more focused with less time being spent tackling behaviour. What was observable for myself with the non-tiered tasks was that when all students were assigned a task to do some could do straight away, and some couldn't. Those that couldn't took up my time as I would go over and work with them to try and scaffold the task more so that they could achieve it. I became aware of other students completing work as I spent time with these students who needed more support, which then led to them going off task, more often than not with the help of their ever-present mobile phones. The negative impact of some students not understanding many tasks became apparent with one student in particular making comments such as "I don't know what to do" and " there's no point" nearly every week. This was not always the case with some students completing each task, and supporting each other when others struggled. The main difference I noticed with these classes was the increased pressure on myself constantly checking student understanding and how to further challenge students.

5.1 Confidence

The difference between the average increase in rating of confidence of students in classes showed more of an increase in non-tiered classes. However, the difference between two groups is only very minimal (see Appendix 2, Table 2). Nevertheless, responses to the questionnaires showed an increase in the amount of students confident to complete tasks, whereas the non-tiered classes showed a decrease. This difference between the tiered and non-tiered class was more pronounced (see Appendix 2, Table 4).

 This increase in confidence was further supported by qualitative data (see Appendix 2). Reasons tiered students gave for their increase in confidence included "[tasks] were at my level" and "not set too high so I couldn't achieve", and positive feedback that "I never felt like I was behind anybody else because I just worked at the pace I wanted to".   In comparison the non-tiered classes were more negative such as "went too quick on tasks", with tasks being "too hard" and "would have preferred easier tasks to do because I'd feel rubbish if I couldn't do them".

 It is important to note that the findings do not suggest tiered classes were unanimously positive. Negative comments were made about how tasks sometimes "would knock my confidence as I felt stuck at a level below what I knew I needed" and one student asking "Why do I have green? Am I stupid?" Moreover, non-tiered students stated they felt they "were pushed to achieve the best of my ability" and "they have allowed me to better myself". These comments could indicate a potential criticism of these tiered tasks, with students set specific level of task, indicating a teacher's their low or high expectations of them. This may be to the detriment of students if they are doing a low level task as they will only do the work to meet that level not pushing them further. This is something discussed by Hattie (2012) as being highly influential in students' performance, but also a concept that has been critiqued (Jussim and Harber 2005). More research would be needed to analyse this potential criticism further.

Although the responses are mixed the findings indicate that the tiered tasks do appear to show some positive impact on students' confidence. This is something that supports the concept that their confidence increases as they complete tasks at a level that matches their ability, i.e. their readiness level (Tomlinson and Allan 2000, Tomlinson 2001). This is something that arguably would then increase their motivation as mentioned previously in relation to Self

Determination Theory, with their perceived competence at the subject being positive (Ryan and Deci 2017, Anderson and Peart 2016, Eccles and Wigfield and Schiefele 1998).

5.2 Motivation and Engagement

The difference in the average change in motivation between the two sets of showed an increase for tiered classes, and a decrease for non-tiered. However, this is only a slight difference (see Appendix 2 table 3). Nevertheless, when analysing the qualitative data, comments related to whether the tasks increased motivation were broadly positive. These included how the tiering helped them see progression, which was motivating. For example one student stated that they "wanted to do the work, to work on the next level" and that they "could feel [themselves] progress". This was also clear in my own observations where students commenting they wanted to achieve the next level. This impact could suggest students see themselves reaching their goal and pushing themselves to progress further. Hattie (2012) discusses the impact of this in relation to students achieving learning intentions set out in class, but he also references students achieving their "personal best" which can aid motivation.

 Furthermore one student made reference to how they found classes more motivating stating "I did more in lessons that I did in schools because I felt more able to do it at my preferred pace so I didn't switch off" . This could support the concept that the increase in confidence due to their perceived competence made them more motivated to do the work, with students essentially answering in the positive to the question "can I do this task?" (Eccles and Wigfield &Schiefele 1998). This is further supported in non-tiered class comments where students stated motivation could be low because the difficulty meant they "got bored" or "switched off". This could be linked to the negative comments mentioned previously about their confidence being poor due to the tasks being "too hard". This supports Tomlinson and Allan's argument that students are not likely to improve if they "practice what they already know", nor will they improve if students "complete tasks that cause ongoing frustration" (Tomlinson and Allan 2000:23-24).

Engagement was measured as the level of work completed outside of the classroom. For both sets of groups there was a decrease in students completing homework between when they

were at school and college. However, this decrease was much smaller for tiered classes than non-tiered classes (see Appndix 2, table 5). This again supports the idea that tiered tasks have improved students' motivation.

In the majority the qualitative data does seem to support a positive increase in the students' motivation, like the positive correlation between confidence and tiered tasks. This could therefore support the concept that increasing confidence does increase motivation, and that tiered tasks have been successful in doing this. However, it is important to note that the quantitative data doesn't seem to show such a strong link with the increase in motivation here being small. This could possibly be a consequence of the methodology of collating the students' responses to their perceived level of motivation, with uneven number or students from the two groups compared, and also lower response rates on the questionnaire from the non-tiered groups therefore not accurately representing the beliefs of all participants who completed the assessment. A more robust methodology for collating data would be needed to add more reliability to these findings.

5.3 Achievement

The non-tiered marks showed a greater average rate of increase compared to tiered classes, (Appendix 2, Table 1). This shows an interesting conflict to the previously discussed impact on motivation and confidence. It opens the question of why the increased motivation and confidence is not being supported in student achievement. This is something which would need greater investigation; however one possible reason for this may be in relation to whether the tasks students were completing within the tiered lessons were at the correct level to allow for achievement. This is a concept discussed by Hattie (2012) who states that in order for there to be growth in students learning, material should be '+1' a level they can already do. As commented upon by Byrnes (1996) "if material is presented well at or below the mastery level, there will be no growth". It could be possible that in tiered classes students were not pushed enough, so although they felt confident and motivated to do the tasks, they were not pushing themselves to this higher level. This may have happened within the non-tiered task where all students were pushed to achieve this higher level, again a possible impact criticism of the impact of teacher expectation previously mentioned.

6. <u>Conclusion</u>

This research study indicates a positive correlation between using tiered tasks in class and an increase in confidence, motivation and engagement. This suggests it could be a potential method that can be used within GCSE English resit classrooms to tackle the issue of de-motivation, with teachers considering students readiness and allocating tasks in sessions accordingly. The findings of this study are made cautiously due to the small scale. More research would need to be conducted to see if these results are replicable with other classes and further education contexts before this correlation can be considered reliable.

 The most interesting finding is the disparity between the positive impact of tiered tasks on motivation, but the negative impact on achievement. This may be a result of the level of tasks being given not pushing the students to a higher level to allow for growth, something that could be investigated further. Careful consideration would have to be taken with future research to ensure the tasks are always stretching the students above the level they work, to determine if this may be a cause of the lack of increase in achievement. However, there is a wider question to this about whether the achievement of students is the most important factor when tackling this issue, or could the increase in motivation and confidence be beneficial to students in other ways? For example, the concept of a Growth Mindset is concerned with breaking away from a fixed mindset that you have a limit to your intelligence and potential, to a mindset where you believe that effort can develop your current abilities. Consequently "The fixed mindset makes you concerned with how you'll be judged; the growth mindset makes you concerned with improving" (Dweck 2012, pg.15). In students showing an increase in motivation in their lessons it could potentially reflect an increase in their belief they can improve, and so their mindset is adapting. This may not show for the achievement currently, but the question to be answered is if this could impact upon achievement at a later date as they continue to adapt their mindset? This could be a potential question for more longitudinal research.

It would also be interesting to investigate if this increase in motivation, confidence and engagement could be beneficial to these demotivated students in other ways than their

achievement of a GCSE. It may have changed their mindset meaning they have more self-belief, changing the way they see themselves. This allows these students a more positive view of themselves, something as a tutor I rarely see within a GCSE English resit classroom. As commented upon by Biesta (2007, pg. 6)

> being a student in FE does not simply result in the acquisition of knowledge and skills and a qualification, but that it affects the whole person [...] [it] helps us to see that learning can change aspects of people's habitus, it can change and/or reinforce what they know, what they can do, how they see themselves, who they are.

This is all speculation currently, but further research could examine possible longitudinal benefits of using tiered tasks to tackle demotivation. This research aimed to address whether tiered tasks improved the outcomes for GCSE English resit learners, and opens up another question of what is the biggest concern for a positive "outcome"; achievement, or their motivation and confidence which could impact on them in other ways (e.g. resilience).

As a final note there are aspects in this research that are yet to be examined. Positive comments made by students in non-tiered classes included how they felt more motivated when they did group activities, and in my observations I witnessed students supporting those who were struggling with the difficult tasks. The benefits of this peer support, and collaborative learning is an area that could be further examined. Moreover, this study isolated only one aspect of differentiation and similar 'probing projects' could be done to examine other aspects of differentiation on GCSE English students e.g. the impact of different tasks linked to their different interests.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire for students to complete at the beginning of the academic year

Questionnaire about previous experience of English

1. How many times have you sat your English Language GCSE?

2. What three words would you use to describe your previous experience of English lessons?

3. Did you previously feel supported to achieve in your English lessons?

   a. Why (could you give an example)?

4. Did you previously feel you were able to complete activities in English?

   a. If not why?

5. Did your English lessons let you work at different levels depending on your ability?

6. Did you complete any work outside English lessons?

   a. If yes how often?

7. How confident did you feel at achieving your target grade in English when you last sat your GCSE?

   Very   **Not at all**
    4   3   2   1

8. How would you rate your motivation to achieve your target grade in English when you last sat your GCSE?

   High   **Low**
    4   3   2   1

Questionnaire for students to complete at the end of the academic year

<u>Questionnaire about experience of English this year</u>

1. How many times have you sat your English Language GCSE?

2. What three words would you use to describe your experience of English lessons this year?

3. Did you feel supported to achieve in your English lessons this year?

    a. Why (give an example)?

4. Have you felt able to achieve the activities given to you in English this year?

    a. Why (give an example)?

5. Have your English lessons allowed you to complete tasks at different levels depending on your ability?

6. Did you complete any work outside English lessons?

    a. If yes how often?

7. How confident do you feel at achieving your target grade in English this year?

    Very   Not at all
     4   3   2   1

8. How would you rate your motivation to achieve your target grade in English this year?

    High   Low
    4   3   2   1

9. What do you think could be done in English lessons to help you achieve?

Appendix 2

Table 1: Difference in achievement

Difference between each student's marks in the initial assessment and assessment at the end of the year were calculated. The average of this increase in marks for the classes overall were then calculated.

Tiered classes	15
Non-tiered classes	22.15385
Difference in marks between tiered and non-tiered classes	**7.15385**

Table 2: Difference in Confidence Score

Based on the initial questionnaire, an average overall mark students gave for their confidence was calculated for the tiered classes, and then for the non-tiered classes. The same was done based from questionnaires at the end of the year. The difference between these two averages were calculated to show the level of increase in the students' confidence levels.

Average confidence level increase for tiered classes	0.384415584
Average confidence level increase for non-tiered classes	0.3333333
Difference in levels between tiered and non-tiered classes	**0.051082284**

Table 3: Difference in Motivation Score

Based on the initial questionnaire, an average overall mark students gave for their motivation was calculated for the tiered classes, and then for the non-tiered classes. The same was done based from questionnaires at the end of the year. The difference between these two averages were calculated to show the level of increase in the students' motivation levels

Average motivation level increase for tiered classes	0.095238095
Average motivation level increase for non-tiered classes	-0.1875
Difference in motivation level increase between tiered and non-tiered classes	**0.282738095**

Table 4: Difference in confidence to complete tasks

On both the initial and end of year questionnaire students were asked whether they felt confident completing tasks in class. The percentage of students who answered "yes" to these questions were calculated for tiered and non-tiered classes. The difference between these percentages at the start and end of the year were calculated.

Percentage increase of those in tiered classes who were confident to do tasks in class	19.58%
Percentage increase of those in non-tiered classes who were confident to do tasks in class	-37.5%
Difference in percentage increase between tiered and non-tiered classes	**57.08%**

Table 5: Difference in engagement in both classes (linked to homework completion)

On both the initial and end of year questionnaire students were asked whether they completed homework. The percentage of students who answered "yes" to these questions were calculated for tiered and non-tiered classes. The difference between these percentages at the start and end of the year were calculated.

Percentage increase of those in tiered classes who did homework	-5.71
Percentage increase of those in non-tiered classes who did homework	-31.25
Difference in percentage increase between tiered and non-tiered classes	**-25.54**

Table 6 – Group interview data

Comments made by tiered classes following group interview		
	Positive comments	**Negative comments**
Did the levelled tasks improve your confidence?	"gave me the confidence to do tasks, but also made me want to work to achieve the next level up" "I know where I'm working at and exactly where I'm going wrong" "it directed me on what to do in lesson" "it made me know what I don't know" "if I felt I wasn't doing well it helped me slow down to a pace I wanted to" "I felt comfortable to do a task because I feel I work differently to other people sometimes" "I never felt like I was behind anybody else because I just worked at the pace I wanted to"	"sometimes it would knock my confidence as I felt stuck at a level below what I knew I needed" "Why do I have green? Am I stupid?"
Did levelled tasks improve your motivation?	"I wanted to do the work to work at the next level" "I can feel myself progress, because if I completed 1 level I'd move onto the next one" "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"	
Did you find levelled task in lessons useful?	"I felt I improved as I would complete a level" "it was really confusing at first, but once I knew what it was I understood the benefits" "I knew what to focus on" "I knew the standards expected of me for the exam every time" "I would start high, but then move down if I couldn't do it"	"I couldn't be bothered with it" "I just did which ever task my mate did"

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Comments made by non-tiered classes following group interview		
	Positive comments	Negative comments
Did the tasks you did in class help your confidence in English?	" I felt I could do the tasks in lesson so it was fine" " If I did struggle I got help, so it was fine"	"I would have preferred easier tasks to do because I'd feel rubbish if I couldn't do them" "too hard" "they were just boring, because English is boring"
Did tasks improve your motivation?	"it depended what tasks we did. If it was short it was fine" "i just liked it when I got to work with other people on tasks"	"I wanted harder tasks sometimes. I just felt bored" "tasks at the start of the lesson were too easy and I'd just switch off" "if I had to do things on my own I'd just switch off" "not really. I just don't like English"

Table 7 -Selected qualitative feedback from questionnaires related to confidence to achieve in tasks

	Those who responded yes	Those who responded no
Tiered classes responses **Question:** Have you felt able to achieve the activities given to you in English this year?	"they were at my level we're given enough time to understand and complete the tasks" "because I could see progress Lessons were broken down so tasks and activities were efficient" "I was more motivated to do the work given to me as I could work at my own rate" "easy and understandable tasks" "Not set too high so I could achieve" "we were given work suited to our level"	"some questions are harder than others" "didn't do enough work"
Non-tiered classes responses **Question:** Have you felt able to achieve the activities given to you in English this year?	"the questions are well presented" "because I was pushed to achieve the best of my ability" "because we talked through it" "They have allowed me to better myself"	"went too quick on tasks" "just don't get English" "they're too hard" "some are too hard" "Don't get it"