

To what extent do differentiated tasks have an impact on engagement in a key stage 3 class?

	Targed/Target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn. What I have done in this assignment.
Targed/Target 1	Consider ways to improve the precision of your expression. You frequently repeat vocabulary and phrases which occasionally limits the fluency and sophistication of your argument.	By proofreading my essay, I have identified places where I can improve expression and have been mindful to include a wide range of vocabulary too, therefore not limiting the fluency of various arguments.
Targed/Target 2	Try to engage more critically with the literature with more thorough investigation of competing perspectives.	I have expanded my range of literature by finding relevant texts in a number of places. I have included a range of literature that supports arguments I make within the essay.

Introduction

The subject that interested me was the correlation, if any, between differentiation and engagement in key stage 3 classes. During my first placement, I incorporated the use of differentiated tasks into a large number of my lessons. I have noticed that these tasks have an impact on pupils' ability to complete tasks with the appropriate amount of challenge. However, I had not paid particularly close attention to the link between these tasks and pupils' engagement during the lesson. The focus of this research was to determine whether the use of differentiated tasks had a positive, negative or no impact on pupil engagement. My research partner and I used the Lesson Study method to undertake our research. To briefly touch on this method, I taught one lesson and my research partner observed 3 case pupils within my class. Following this, we interviewed said pupils, discussed our findings and collaboratively planned a second lesson that my research partner would teach. We each observed 3 case pupils from each class to measure their engagement in the lesson as a result of the differentiated tasks presented to them. The names of pupils, staff, and schools will remain anonymous in this essay to adhere to BERA Guidelines (2018).

Research Context

The research was undertaken in School A and School B, both of which are situated in the South Wales area. School A is an English medium 11 to 18 comprehensive, with just over 1200 pupils on roll. Just over 24% of pupils at School A are entitled to free school meals (FSM) and 23% of pupils have an additional learning need (ALN) and 4% have a statement of ALN (Estyn, 2015). I taught the first lesson in School A to a year 7 class which was operating as a high set. There were around 30 pupils in the class, whose abilities were mostly A and B grades, with some pupils achieving C grades. School B is an English medium 11 to 16 comprehensive, with just over 1100 pupils on roll and nearly 7% of pupils are entitled to FSM. Just over 20% of pupils in School B have an ALN and 4% have a statement of ALN (Estyn, 2017). My research partner taught the second lesson in School B which was for a year 7 class with similar attainment grades. The question which we intended to answer through research conducted with these 2 class was 'To what extent do

differentiated tasks have an impact on engagement in a key stage 3 class?'. Through Lesson Study, we collectively drew conclusions which I aim to address in this essay.

Literature Review

When exploring for a precise phrase that defines excellent teaching, pupils, trainee teachers, other members of school communities, and excellent teachers themselves, produce considerably similar definitions. Many students agree that it involves having excellent subject knowledge, having a fair, friendly and approachable manner, being enthusiastic and realistic about expectations, and having excellent teaching provision that is purposeful and interesting (Keeley et al., 2016). The latter part of this broad definition that mentions 'excellent teaching provision' is a multi-faceted topic. Providing excellent teaching provision means that teachers can meet the needs of all learners successfully. Moreover, meeting the needs of all learners calls for differentiation in the classroom.

Kyriacou defines effective teaching as the ability for pupils to successfully achieve the learning intended by the teacher (2009). Nonetheless, pupils are influenced by several factors that affect whether or not they achieve the intended learning. In the first instance, it could be argued that ability is one of the main factors that contribute to a pupil's attainment. Ability is usually determined by a pupil's cognitive development and their capacity to be able to apply skills and knowledge to various learning experiences, activities and tasks in a lesson (Kyriacou, 2009). Kyriacou provides a generic explanation for ability but he also points out that attainment is influenced by further factors, not just ability alone; factors include motivation and aspirations, for example. Ability is something that varies within each year group. It varies largely within classes, bands, and sets, and changes with each cohort of pupils from year to year.

Differentiation is a strategy that when adopted in the classroom, aims to assist pupils in achieving the intended learning set by the teacher. It can more specifically be defined as the level of a task set to pupils based on their potential or performance level (Kerry, 1999). Often, pupils will be grouped by ability in a class and will be provided with differentiated work, based on which group they are in. Most likely, the teacher will provide differentiated tasks to facilitate pupils' individual needs. The

outcome of grouping and providing each group with differentiated work should hopefully show that pupils have made progress through the differentiated provision. Cooper and McIntyre (1996) claim that grouping pupils by ability has often been the response to dealing with differences in the classroom. However, they do point out that many drawbacks come with, what seems to be, the most obvious way of teaching a mixed ability class. They highlight that research on grouping by ability often proves that the gap in academic performance is expanded, pupils who are presented with the least challenging tasks suffer from low self-esteem, and by grouping, teachers are indirectly restricting friendships (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996). Furthermore, it should be noted that even when pupils are put into groups, their needs still differ within said groups, meaning that the teacher's role is expanded further; the only real benefit identified by grouping is the social side and friendships formed, according to Cooper and McIntyre. With regard to differentiation, the pair set forth the complaint of how not all teachers are differentiating effectively as many tasks do not meet the individual needs of learners.

Additionally, Creemers (1994) discusses Reezigt and Weide's 1989 study that supports some of Cooper and McIntyre's views on grouping. The study returned negative conclusions of the effects of in-class grouping based on ability, compared to a class taught through whole-class instruction. Pupils showed lower maths and language skills in the class that was grouped by ability. The grouped classes did not show higher achievement than the whole-class instruction classes. Creemers delves deeper into his claims that the results of grouping by ability, thereby providing differentiated tasks, provide disappointing results (1994).

Opposing this, in more recent literature, differentiation is widely encouraged. It is almost 'second nature' for teachers to employ differentiation in lessons. Pike (2004) claims that the assumption of 'one size fits all' is not recommended, especially in secondary lessons, specifically in English. Pike expresses that the key to providing the most effective differentiation is to provide it based on gender, ethnicity, and ability. He provides an encouraging outlook on differentiation, stating that it has a relation to establishing positive professional relationships with pupils by understanding their needs (2004).

Moving onto a relative topic, which one could argue is facilitated by differentiation, Griffith and Burns (2012) delve into the desirable concept of 'flow'. To summarise, flow gives a name to the time when you are able to lose yourself in an

activity (Griffith and Burns, 2012). It is based on the idea that the subject, or in this case the pupil, is completely focused and totally engaged in a task set by the teacher. Professor John Hattie communicates the importance of feedback and challenge as being imperative to facilitating excellent teaching and learning (*Visible Learning*, 2009). It could be argued that 'challenge' presents itself differently to different pupils in a class. It is also important to consider that what counts as 'appropriate challenge' differs amongst groups of pupils. Therefore, the argument supporting differentiation continues as, referring back to Pike (2004), teachers should possess the skill of being able to differentiate successfully for more-able-and-talented pupils, as well as pupils with an additional learning need, whilst bearing in mind their ethnicity, gender, interests and socio-economic backgrounds.

Lesson Study Design

Lesson Study is a research design that focuses on developing specific teaching practices in the classroom. It was first seen in Japan as far back as the 1870s and involves teachers collaboratively teaching, observing and planning together in order to improve their practice (Dudley, 2014). Peter Dudley brought Lesson Study to the UK in 2001 and is responsible for the improvement of achievement in an area of London. While Dudley defines Lesson Study as involving three cycles of research lessons, time only allowed for my research partner and me to conduct two cycles of lessons.

Dudley sets forth his methods for Lesson Study which my partner and I followed, except for the third and final cycle in his process. Firstly, I found another student who shared the same research interest as me and wanted to improve pupil engagement in the classroom. It was decided that in both lessons, we would provide 3 differentiated tasks. We determined that the tasks would be based on 3 groups of attainment; 1, 2 and 3. 1 being the most challenging task and 3 being the least challenging. We discussed which classes we currently taught in Schools 1 and 2, based on attainment, and were able to prearrange suitable classes to teach; we taught both research lessons to year 7 classes in order to keep this variable the same. On deciding who we would teach, we then collaboratively planned research lesson 1 (RL1), which would be taught by me. Before the lesson, 3 case pupils were

selected who would broadly represent each attainment group. My partner observed the 3 case pupils and measured their engagement whilst in the lesson. This was done using a table we created that acted as a checklist and is adapted from the Leuven Scales (originally designed by Ferre Laevers). The case pupils were then interviewed in a focus group directly after the lesson. My partner and I intended to ask the focus group 7 questions that would help us determine whether the differentiated tasks had, if any, a positive or negative impact on the pupils' engagement. After conducting the interview, we discussed our reactions to the lesson and the focus group. Collaboratively, we then used the research we had gathered from RL1 to plan research lesson 2 (RL2). The method was then repeated identically, except after the focus group and our discussion following RL2, we did not conduct any further research; our findings were discussed verbally then written out.

Methods in which we collected data took the form of observation checklists and notes (Figure 1 and Figure 2), responses to several interview questions (Figure 3 and Figure 4), and our own reflections of the data adapted from the Models of Reflective Practice by Gibbs, 1988 (Figure 5 and Figure 6). All data collected was hand-written and classified as qualitative data. Qualitative data can be defined as being 'descriptive, and regards phenomenon which can be observed but not measured, such as language' (McLeod, 2019).

The use of hand-written observation notes and using the checklist adapted from the Leuven Scales had various benefits and drawbacks to consider. When deciding on how to record our observations, my partner and I identified some of the drawbacks that a written account might present; the observer has to decide quickly what they will record and choose to leave out of their notes as time may only allow for a limited record of some instances observed. The observer may not see something or misinterpret something that happens in the lesson, therefore affecting the results. We also considered that the observer's presence could result in pupils behaving differently in the lesson (Wragg, 2012). This being said, the benefits outweighed the drawbacks when it came to using a written account to record observations; I was able to take notes whilst the learning was taking place and immediately after. This meant that I was able to use time efficiently and effectively as my notes were available for scrutiny and further discussion immediately after the research lesson. Furthermore, I was able to observe nearly all pupils at each point during the lesson; when instructions were being given and when the tasks had been

set. The collection of hand-written data also meant that once the research had been conducted, it was easily destroyed, therefore adhering to ethical responsibilities.

Reflections of both observations were captured using our own adaptation of Gibbs' Models of Reflective Practice (1988), which can be seen in Figures 5 and 6. This data is qualitative as it expresses both my own and my research partner's personal experiences, reactions, and interpretations of the research lessons. Collecting this reflective data allowed me to reflect not only on the research at hand; the measurement of pupil engagement, but also allowed me to reflect on further factors of the lesson such as behaviour management and other pedagogy. The reflection of RL1 allowed my partner and me to refine RL2 in more detail, therefore proved to be a useful tool in enabling the improvement of the second lesson.

The focus group was chosen as a sample based on attainment in the class. The 3 pupils would broadly represent each attainment group the aim was for them to bring representative views forward in the focus group.

Ethical considerations

Ethics, or being 'ethical' can simply be defined as the way we distinguish between right and wrong, and the rules that help us to distinguish this (David and Resnik, 2011). Before conducting any research in the classroom, my partner and I had a responsibility to consider if our research was ethical and what steps we had to put in place to make sure the research remained ethical throughout the process.

Since children would be the main subject of the research, as previously mentioned, their names, school names and other staff or students involved in the process have remained anonymous throughout the research and this essay. Furthermore, we considered that we must acquire consent from pupils' parents as they are under the age of 18, and required assent from pupils. An information letter was sent home to parents explaining the nature of the research and a consent form was attached which was to be returned a week later. It was made clear to parents/carers and pupils that they could withdraw from the research at any point, even at the focus group stage.

We carefully predicted the possible risks our research could pose to the participants. We considered that participants may have felt under pressure to answer

questions in a certain manner at the focus group stage; this was prevented as all participants were told that they did not have to provide 'correct' answers and that they were under no pressure to answer in a certain way; all answers were purely opinion based and this was communicated again before the focus group. We also discussed that in the very unlikely situation that a safeguarding issue was to arise, my research partner and I would follow the necessary policies and procedures outlined by School A and School B. The final risk we considered was the issue of data protection; we communicated to parents and pupils that all data would be stored in a safe and locked place, and would be destroyed after the research process had finished.

Lesson Study 1

I taught RL1, therefore my partner acted as a non-participant observer in the lesson; they did not partake in any activity during the lesson or act as support to any pupils, they merely observed and made hand-written notes. RL1 was an English lesson with the focus of analysing poetry; pupils were 'randomly' put into 3 groups across 6 tables, and given 3 different poems. The poems were the differentiated tasks as they were carefully selected as ranging from least challenging to most challenging. Pupils were not told that the poems varied in challenge. The aim of the lesson was to 'analyse unseen poetry using previous knowledge of poetic devices'. Dynamics of the lesson (much discussion and group work) allowed my partner to move around the classroom to conduct her observation most effectively. The written account my partner recorded during the lesson is shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Figures 1 and 2 refer to Child 1, 2 and 3. Child 1 was presented with the least challenging task, Child 2 with the second most challenging and Child 3 with the most challenging.

The checklist adapted from the Leuven Scales translates how Child 1 appeared to be relatively engaged, showing clear signs of involvement. Child 1 appeared to be not fully engaged in the activity at only one point during the lesson; it seems this was at the beginning of the lesson when Child 1 refocused after discussing the task with peers. Notes in Figure 2 show that Child 1 appeared to be listening attentively and was engaged in the activity whilst discussing it with peers.

They appeared to be challenged by the task, which was reiterated by the child in the focus group. On analysis of these notes, Child 1 seemed to benefit from working in a group and being able to discuss the task with peers. I think that this gave Child 1 confidence in answering questions and providing an appropriate response to the task.

The checklist displays how Child 2 appeared to have limited concentration, was easily distracted and had very little engagement with the task for the duration of the lesson. Observation notes make it clear that Child 2 was not participating in relevant discussion, was distracted by peers and was not showing any obvious signs of engagement. In the focus group, Child 2 also admitted they were not fully concentrating in the lesson because they were distracted by another pupil. During the lesson, I identified that Child 2 appeared to be off task. I approached the table they were sat on and addressed the group and reminded them to refocus on the task. On reflection of this analysis, as the class teacher, I would revise the seating plan so that pupils are placed next to someone who would mutually assist their learning. I realise that this is sometimes unavoidable as pupils who are usually well behaved will sometimes get distracted by their peers. Nonetheless, as a class teacher, I have the responsibility to be attentive at all times when dealing with behaviour.

As per the checklist, Child 3 appeared to be continuously engaged and completely absorbed in the lesson. The child also seemed focused without interruption. Further notes made express how Child 3 was discussing relevant points with other pupils, volunteered to be involved in an activity which meant coming up to write on the whiteboard and was assisting in others' learning in their group. Child 3 was given the most challenging task which poses the question of whether the level of challenge is the reason for the evident engagement, otherwise known as Flow (Griffith and Burns, 2012). Child 3's views expressed in the focus group further supported my partner's observations. However, Child 3 also articulated how they initially thought the task would be too challenging but after a discussion with peers, the child had a better understanding and was able to work independently.

Lesson Study 2

My research partner taught RL2 and I acted as a non-participant observer in the lesson. RL2 was a History lesson with the focus of learning about the Conquest of Wales. Pupils were in a prearranged seating plan which made it easier in identifying case pupils in the class when I had not met them previously. The class was unknowingly given 3 differentiated tasks; the same story which was presented in 3 different ways, ranging from most challenging to least challenging. Similarly to RL1, this lesson involved much discussion and group work so I was able to move around the classroom to get a full picture of pupil engagement. The written account I recorded in the lesson is shown in Figures 7 and 8.

Figures 7 and 8 refer to Child 4, 5 and 6. Child 4 was presented with the least challenging task, Child 2 with the second most challenging and Child 3 with the most challenging.

My written observation notes translate how Child 4 initially showed no signs of concentration, made no eye contact with the teacher or pupils, and seemed to be staring or daydreaming. Later, the child progressively appears more engaged as the lesson develops and the tasks change. The child seems to benefit from discussing the work with other pupils in the group and appeared to be supported by the pupil they are sat next to. When observing, Child 4 only appeared to make the effort to participate in group discussions when I was visibly observing; this was a drawback that we had predicted before conducting research. On analysis of the data and further discussion in the focus group immediately following the lesson, it was clear that Child 4's learning was promoted by the pupils in their group and a more challenging task would not have been suitable.

The checklist communicates Child 5's continuous engagement in the lesson. The child seemed focused without interruption and appeared to be completely absorbed in the tasks presented to them. As per the notes in Figure 8, the child appears engaged for most of the lesson but towards the end begins to show signs of losing focus. On analysis, my partner and I believe this was due to the nature of the last task which was group work; Child 5 had been extremely focused for the majority of the lesson but took part in conversation with peers in the group at the end which was not entirely related to the task. This presents a similar issue to RL1; we recognise that behaviour cannot always be perfect but pupils will become distracted by their peers at times. As teachers, we appreciate that we must be aware of all behaviour in our classroom and address it appropriately.

Child 6 appeared to be focused without interruption and appeared to be enjoying the task without the risk of being distracted. Nevertheless, Child 6 was not as vocal as other pupils in the class so appeared to be engaging with the task, yet could have not fully understood the task. Child 6's understanding was clarified in the focus group as they expressed how they felt about the task presented to them in the lesson and what they had learned. Similarly to RL1, Child 6 was fully engaged with the most challenging task which supports Griffith and Burns' theory of Flow.

Research Findings

After RL1 and RL2, my partner and I discussed our findings. We deduced that when pupils are appropriately challenged and have the pre-existing skills to be independent, they can achieve success and progress sufficiently in a lesson. Additionally, we discussed the positive impact of group work and discussions and how this seemed to benefit pupils, especially at the start of a lesson; in RL1 and RL2 group discussions seemed to assist pupils' understanding and learning. Nevertheless, we were also in agreement that not all pupils remain engaged when working in groups, especially in the latter part of the lesson. This was seen in both RL1 and RL2 with certain individuals. Moreover, if a task is too challenging, some pupils will opt out of asking peers or teachers for support, hence the lack of engagement seen in RL1.

For my classes, I believe it is wise to continue using differentiation as a strategy to promote engagement as each pupil has individual learning needs that have to be met in order for them to succeed in my class. As previously mentioned, I will also continue to make use of appropriate seating plans that have the best influence on learning. Group work and class discussions have proved to be a useful tool in assisting pupils' understanding and learning, therefore these will remain a feature in almost all of my lessons.

Even though the research has enabled my partner and me to draw various conclusions, there have been some limitations of the Lesson Study design. The main issue for me was the inability to conduct the third cycle. If time had allowed us to complete the third cycle, we would have had more accurate results and would have been able to identify a clearer pattern of behaviour and responses to differentiated

tasks. Again, if time had allowed, I think it would have been beneficial to trial this method on a different year group; this would have made results more reliable and again, we might have been able to identify clearer patterns.

Conclusions

Following the analysis of our results, my research partner and I have drawn conclusions from the process and its outcomes.

With regard to the process itself, the Lesson Study method had various assets. Conversely, I believe we needed to conduct another cycle of research lessons, if not another 2 or 3. This would have increased the likelihood of getting more reliable results. Additionally, it would have been beneficial to the process to have more than one research partner; in observations, I believe we would have had more detailed notes and therefore would have collected more accurate results. On the whole, the method made us more reflective and informed practitioners.

From my perspective, it would only be fair to broadly generalise our results if we had continued research with another few cycles of lessons. However, if we were to make generalisations, they would include the following; independent learners appeared to be consistently more engaged in both lessons; pupils who were given the most challenging task appeared to be the independent learners. These particular pupils showed that they were beginning to learn how to learn and using their initiative to ask others for help. They also used discussion as a tool to facilitate their learning and understanding. It is important to note that this is not something to be relied on in every lesson as independent learners will sometimes need support from a teacher too. Another generalisation we drew involved the distraction from peers; this causes low-level disruption and needs to be addressed firmly at the time to keep pupils on task. Finally, we deduced that pupils need differentiated tasks that meet their specific learning needs and ones that successfully facilitate their learning and progress. To do this successfully as a teacher, it is 'critical to have a clear understanding of the student's current position and the target position' (p. 38, Hattie, 2012).

Particular strengths of the Lesson Study method include the fact that we had a first hand account of how the lesson played out and initial pupil reactions; the context of a real lesson was imperative. Another strength worth mentioning was the

collaborative planning. This is something I have done only a handful of times whilst on my first placement. I was able to see things from a different perspective with my partner's help.

Methods piloted included the use of a focus group. This was extremely helpful in gaining the learner's opinion and allowed me to reflect on my teaching and informed my future practice.

Lesson Study has been an exceptionally useful method of research in informing my future practice. On my next teaching placement, I aim to take this research forward and will continue to use differentiation as a strategy to promote engagement in key stage 3 classes. I also aim to take this forward in key stage 4 classes, as differentiation does not have to be as explicit as the provision of differentiated tasks but can take the form of subtler differences such as the way in which we deliver instructions. Trying out various ways to incorporate differentiation into the classroom and reflecting on its impact is something I aim to take forward to improve my teaching provision.

Ultimately, through excellent provision, my goal is for every pupil to make progress in every lesson. I believe that differentiation is a key factor in providing excellent teaching.

Recommendations

In light of this research, I would recommend that differentiation is something needed in every lesson. It does not have to be as explicit as differentiated tasks but simply in the way instructions are given to different groups of pupils or the way teaching is displayed on a power point, for example. Each pupil has different learning needs therefore teaching should be presented to pupils in a way that meets their needs in the best way possible.

Findings from this research can be taken forward to inform further research into engagement, especially research into seating plans, where to place pupils in lessons and who pupils work best with. It is important to note that in both research lessons, pupils who were presented with the most challenging task seemed to thrive working in a group. The same could not be said for all pupils presented with the

other two tasks. Moving forward, I will remember that some of these pupils may need more support than those working on the most challenging task.

If I did Lesson Study research again I would ensure that time allowed research partners and me to undertake three cycles of lessons so that results were more accurate and therefore our teaching could be informed in the best possible way.

Conclusively, Lesson Study has allowed me to reflect deeply on a specific strand of my teaching and what this means for my pupils. It has made me think carefully about the individual needs of all my pupils and has clarified that there are no two pupils with identical learning needs. A differentiated task cannot be presented for each individual in the class but grouping pupils allows for discussion and further understanding as pupils have proved to have the skills to facilitate their own learning, with the right teaching provision.

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