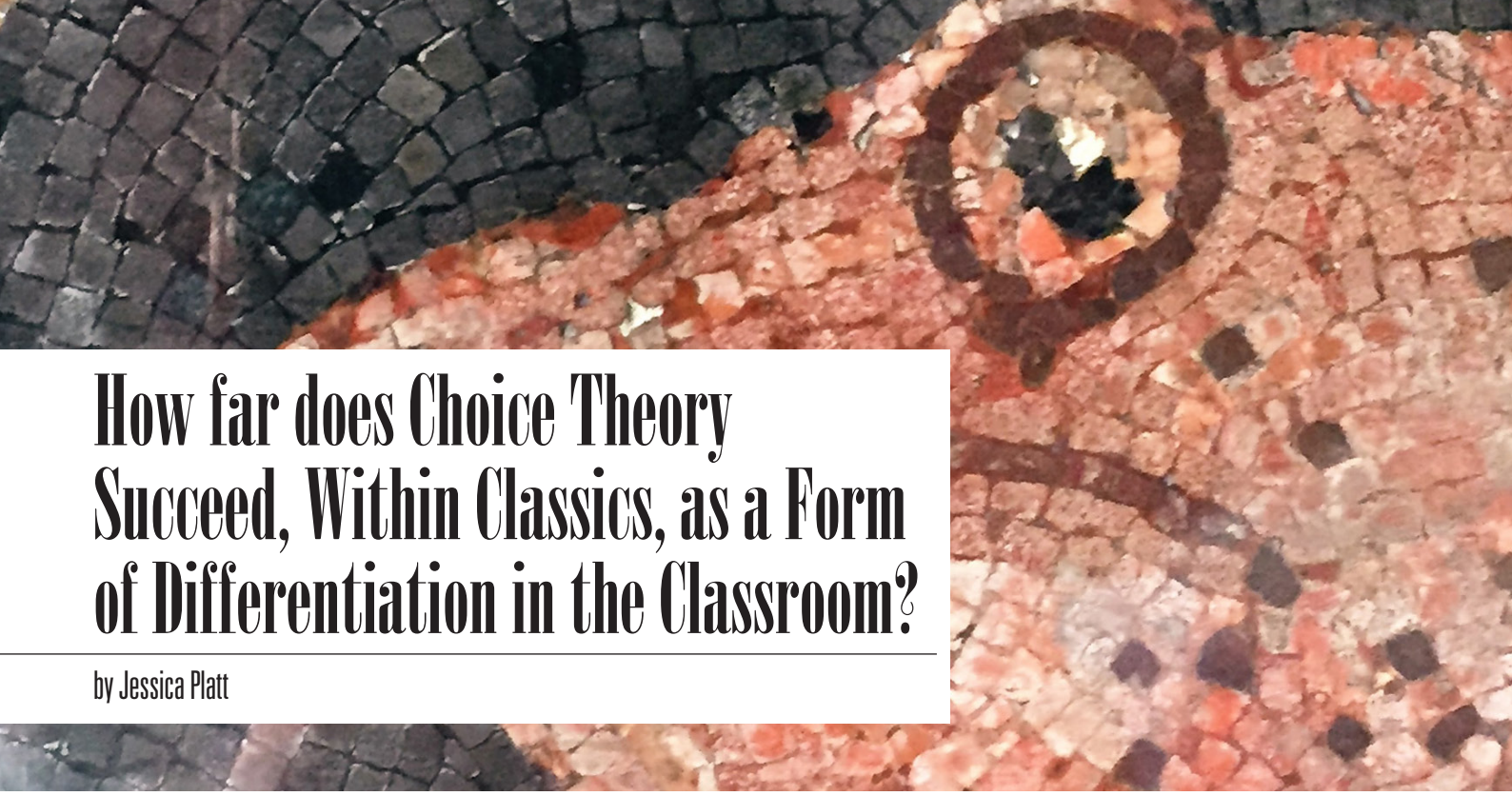

How far does Choice Theory Succeed, Within Classics, as a Form of Differentiation in the Classroom?

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Introduction

Choice in the classroom is heavily debated and there is a lack of conclusive results as to whether it is beneficial to students. In theory, choice in the classroom sounds ideal and very advantageous. However, in reality, it is more likely that choice in the classroom will be received differently depending on year group and on class subject. Therefore I have chosen two groups of students to explore choice theory for the purposes of this study. The first is a Year 11 Classical Civilisation class, made up predominately of boys, who will be studying ancient women. This class has a high percentage of mixed-ability students, and therefore will be of particular interest, as student choice should provide varying opportunities for all abilities. As this class is made up predominately of boys, the stereotypical expectation is that they will all opt for the more interactive activity. Martin (2004), in a study measuring the school motivation of boys and girls, found that while there was only a small degree of difference in motivation between genders, girls are

> statistically significantly higher in learning focus, planning, study management, and persistence, while boys are significantly higher in self-sabotage and self-handicapping (Martin, 2004, p.133).

This therefore suggests that the Year 11 class will not concur with studies to suggest that choice provides students with the motivation to achieve, rather that the boys are more likely to obstruct their learning by choosing the easier choice of task. The second class is a Year 9 Latin class, and there is a lower percentage of mixed-ability students in this class. Owing to this, the class will, I hope, further demonstrate whether choice in the classroom is linked to motivation and high performance. The reason why I have chosen two different classes and subjects is because, generally, the atmosphere in the classes and the preparation of lessons in each are very different from each other. It will therefore be worthwhile to determine how choice theory works in both instances.

The school is a 13–18 independent mixed boarding school in Hampshire. Students tend to come from the school's own preparatory school, which is on the same site, or from other preparatory and primary schools from across the South East of England. There are no pupil premium students, although a number of students attend the school on a means-tested scholarship. The school itself is very relaxed, both within and outside of the classroom; the school has its own internal qualification system and students are used to receiving informal and conversational classes. Therefore providing students with a choice of activity in the classroom is something that, in theory, should be well received. The scheme of work will provide students with a choice of activity during their lessons. These choices will be of varying difficulty, but will all encompass the same academic outcome. A majority of the students in the Year 11 class are predicted an A or a B grade at GCSE and in the Year 9 Latin class the majority of students are predicted to achieve an A grade, based on their data recorded from *MidYis*, which is the online database used by the school to predict students' grades. The students are very capable academically. However, in the Year 11 class a high proportion of students have dyslexia or dyspraxia.

Literature Review

Aims and Objectives: creating choice in the classroom:

Dyson (2001, p. 25) states 'All learners are different, however, insofar as they are individuals with distinctive learning styles, needs and interests'. Therefore, it is easy to appreciate that in every classroom there must be some form of differentiation. Often teachers react to these differences by placing students in different teaching groups and offering variations on the curriculum. However, in doing this, institutions are in 'real danger of creating a "ghetto" of students with

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more complex difficulties who have no real part to play' (Dyson, 2001, p.28). Choices in the classroom are a counterbalance to this because they do not involve grouping or banding students. The provision of choice provides students with an alternative activity, which differentiates between students but prevents the need to divide them by ability and their portrayal of having particular learning needs. It could be suggested that the best strategy for creating choice is by offering two or three variations of an activity which students have the choice of doing within the lesson. Gershon (2015) argues

> Personalising learning is…about finding effective and efficient ways through which we can ensure access and through which we can stretch and challenge the thinking of all pupils. (Gershon 2015, p.95)

By setting one set of activities per lesson but presenting the class with a variety of options through which to engage with the content, all students have the opportunity to learn in a way that suits them. The choices should be of differing difficulty, and often three choices of activity are presented. While Gershon (2015) also reiterates that it is clearly not feasible to personalise every activity to every individual, not only because it creates a huge workload but also because there simply is not the time, choices in the classroom nonetheless offer students a controlled form of differentiation to help aid productivity. Patall *et al.* (2010, p. 896) state, however, that while choice in the classroom seems beneficial in theory, little is known about how providing choices to students is beneficial in a classroom. Therefore, this study is intended to shed light on whether choices in the classroom can work successfully as a form of differentiation.

Analysis of choices as a form of differentiation:

Choices in the classroom are shown to be more effective as a form of differentiation than pupil grouping or banding. Ireson and Hallam (1999) suggest that pupil grouping is detrimental to students because 'there is a concentration on basic skills, work sheets and repetition with fewer opportunities for independent learning' (1999, p.351). In addition to this, streaming and grouping students for differentiation often promote a negative outlook for students, especially to those who are in the lower sets (Ireson and Hallam, 1999). In contrast, choice provides the opportunity for all students to showcase a number of skills whilst also being part of a mixed-ability class. Furthermore, choice in the classroom, according to Patall *et al.* (2010), creates a feeling of autonomy, which helps stimulate an effective learning environment. In contrast to this Hallam and Ireson have (2007) demonstrated that teaching mixed-ability classes also shows '…that teachers tend to treat pupils similarly, teaching at a whole class level to an "imaginary average" child…' (Hallam & Ireson, 2007, p.5). Therefore, choices in the classroom could potentially provide a flexible learning environment in which all students would be able to thrive. In addition to this, choice in the classroom does not segregate students from each other and thus in itself is beneficial to students' learning. Titchmarsh (2013) found that pupils gained social skills from working in a wide mixed-ability group, as it allowed students from various backgrounds, as well as abilities, to work together and this strengthened social cohesion. Ultimately, differentiation means matching work to differing capabilities of individuals to expand learning, entitlement to a full curriculum, and shaking up learning in the classroom. This is so that pupils have multiple options for taking in information and making sense of ideas (Titchmarsh, 2013). In contrast, Waters argues that differentiation should not be about 'providing individual programs of work' (Waters, 1995, p.81). Instead, he suggests that differentiation should be about focusing on the quality of learning to make learning as effective as possible within confined parameters. He goes on to suggest various forms of differentiation, such as, 'questioning', 'selection of resources', 'pace of learning', and 'pupil grouping within the class' to name but a few (Waters, 1995, p. 82). He does mention 'variety of approach' (Waters, 1995, p.82) but in a wider sense that over an academic year the tasks are different to accommodate all learners, whereas choices provide different tasks within one lesson.

At this point it is worth considering that choices in the classroom may not work for all classes and learners, simply because every class is made up of individuals and therefore individual personalities. Some studies have found choices to have no effect on a student's motivation to work and their performance. For example, Flowerday and Schraw (2003, cited in Patall *et al.*, 2010, p.898) gave students a choice of working on an essay or a crossword puzzle. However by offering this choice of task there was no effect on the student's engagement or task performance during the lesson. In further studies, Flowerday (2003) found that students who were not given a choice of task would write higher-quality essays compared with students who were given the choice. Moreover, it is also highly possible that a difference in subject and/or age group could make a huge difference in how effective choices are as a form of differentiation. In addition to this, Katz and Assor (2007) suggest that choice can only be successful when it satisfies a student's fundamental need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In consequence, having a choice alone is not enough to increase motivation and performance during a lesson. The choices instead need to be relevant to a student's interests and goals. Ultimately, since there have been few studies of choice carried out in a natural classroom setting, Patall *et al.* (2010, p.896) state that it is difficult to determine whether choices are effective in a practical sense, and it is additionally difficult knowing how to recommend teachers to use choice successfully in the classroom.

Intrinsic motivation

While there have been few studies on how choice benefits students in a natural classroom setting, those that have been carried out found that 'giving students choices helps to build other important skills, such as self-regulation' (Patall *et al.*, 2010, p.896). What is more, research has demonstrated that choice is central to supporting feelings of motivation and healthy functioning and therefore related to good performance (Patall *et al.*, 2010, p 896). Therefore choices as a form of differentiation will be explored to determine if it helps to facilitate better motivation and performance in the classroom, or whether students will simply opt for the easiest choice of task and consequently not expand their individual learning. The main class that has been chosen to explore choices has a high percentage of dyslexic and students with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD). Petty (2004) suggests that students with dyslexia are much better at verbal learning than writing. This study

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will conceivably demonstrate that a choice in the classroom helps to alleviate the pressure for dyslexic students to produce written tasks. Patall *et al.* (2010, p.896) use previous studies to build on their research concerning choice, and suggest that allowing students options is a popular method by which teachers 'attempt to enhance student learning and motivation'.

Students' perception of what they can do and of their own achievement is closely linked with the results they achieve (Gershon, 2015, p.39). If students have taken a task from a choice of tasks, it is possible that they will be likely to work harder because they feel more in control. It is also plausible that they will attempt the more difficult activity, and in theory students should feel more open and willing to do so. This theory is closely linked with intrinsic motivation, which is when people engage in something for its own sake. 'Intrinsic motivation has been linked with academic outcomes across various levels of education, from elementary school to college' (Patall *et al.,* 2010, p.897). The idea behind choice theory is that if we consistently choose something that is satisfying, we will choose it with less deliberation each time. However, Glasser (1986, p.21) states that 'we always choose to do what is most satisfying to us at the time'. With this concept in mind, Glasser (1986) claims that regardless of how good a teacher you are, students will not engage with learning if it is not what they want at that moment in time. This is why choice theory is promising because it, in theory, fulfils the needs of students in present time. Four intrinsic needs are linked to satisfaction, and therefore in turn to motivation. These are belonging, power, freedom, and fun (Glasser, 1986). This harks back to the concept that if students have a choice of activity in class they are more likely to push themselves because they feel in control, have freedom and have chosen the task which appeals to them and therefore incorporates fun, 'We tend to do far more *to* students who will not work than *for* them' (Glasser, 1986, p.13). By incorporating choice in the classroom, teachers provide scaffolding for students to work towards with the aim of achieving.

Conclusion

Perhaps differentiation in the classroom needs a new approach. Students do not seem to benefit from being banded or grouped by their perceived ability. Neither do students who are in mixed-ability sets benefit from current teaching methods where teachers are teaching an 'imaginary average child'. In fact it is strongly encouraged to avoid trying to give students of different abilities different resources or activities in a lesson (Harris, 2005). Therefore, choice in the classroom could be highly beneficial as it can be used under an umbrella of a particular task that all students need to complete. This avoids creating separate activities for individuals, but all students still have access to higher-ability content. Harris (2005) suggests that getting students enthused, creating curiosity and making content accessible rather than easier is the best way to differentiate.

While there have been very few studies on choice in the classroom, it has been suggested that when students are given options they feel more in control of their learning and therefore have more motivation which is related to good performance. By contrast, Flowerday and Schraw (2003) suggest that students worked better when they were not given a choice of task. It is highly possible that different classes, different subjects and also different age groups react either positively or negatively to choice. It is for this reason that two Classics classes will be used to explore choice in the classroom.

The first and main class will be a Year 11 Classical Civilisation class. During the first lesson students will all complete the same essay, which will focus on information from the lesson. Students' progress and the marks they receive from the following lessons will be compared with this first essay. For the purposes of this investigation, an essay (the harder option), a television-style documentary (a creative option), and a poster (by far the easiest option) will be presented to the class. It will be interesting to note whether students choose the easiest option, or whether they are willing to choose a more difficult and creative activity such as the TV documentary. Then during the third lesson the students will all be given the same task, but will be provided with a choice of how they answer the question. Therefore the best variation of how choice can be used in the classroom will also be explored. A second Year 9 mixed-gender class will also be used to compare how choice is received between age groups and subject areas.

Evaluation of Practice

The two groups, Year 11 Classical Civilisation and Year 9 Latin, reacted very differently to choice in the classroom. Whether this was down to the age of students, the difference of subject or the age group and individual class is unclear. The Year 9 Latin class, who are predominately predicted A/A* with a few expected to get an A/B, reacted very well to having a choice of task. The task was centered on the same grammatical feature or translation of text but students were given the choice of worksheet where the difficulty was rated by chilies. Each worksheet had images of a chili at the top depending on how difficult the worksheet was. For example, the easiest worksheet where students simply had to understand a Latin passage and translate the story into a grid had one chili. The second worksheet, where students had to answer comprehension questions on the Latin passage, had two chilies. And finally the third worksheet, which had more difficult comprehension questions and additional grammar questions on the Latin passage, was three chilies and therefore deemed to be the most difficult. The Year 9 class is predominately made up of high-ability students along with one student with mild dyslexia. In contrast, the Year 11 Classical Civilisation class, who are of mixed-ability with the majority of students having Special Educational Needs, and in which each student is predicted a B grade or above, did not react well with having a choice and would often opt for the easiest option. This reaction did not correspond with the studies that showed how choices in the classroom promote motivation and students' performance. However, this may be down to a number of things. Firstly, no difficulty rating was used with the Year 11 class and therefore no incentive or reason for motivation was made explicit. Secondly, the age of students may have had a bigger impact on choices in that students who are older may feel more inclined to take a 'backseat' during lessons and have less incentive to produce high-ability work. Thirdly, the Year 11 class was predominately made up of male students and studies such as Martin (2004) suggest that while there is only a degree of difference between boys' and girls' motivation, boys are statistically more likely to self-sabotage (Martin, 2004, p.142). This

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Lesson	Lesson objectives	Learning tasks centered on choice theory	Resources
Year Eleven: Classical Civilisation – Lesson 1	To identify different attitudes to women in ancient Greece. To describe how these attitudes shaped the lives of women in ancient Greece. To explain the different roles of women in ancient Greece.	For the purpose of this lesson all students had to write an essay answering the question "What were the attitudes towards Greek women and how did these attitudes affect their lives?"	Written sources taken from *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* by Lefkowitz and Fant. Picture sources taken from vases. Handout with a mind-map of information on it – summary of key topics spoken about in lesson
Year Eleven: Classical Civilisation – Lesson 2	To recognise how women in Greece approached religion To describe how Greek women practised religion To explain how Greek women incorporated religion into their everyday lives	Students were asked to create a piece of work using three of the sources they believed to be of the most important from the lesson. They had the option of: - writing an essay, - creating a TV documentary - a poster	Selection of sources Source table
Year Eleven: Classical Civilisation – Lesson 3	To recognise how Spartan women are presented in reality To describe how these representations compare with the Spartan image To explain why there is a difference	All students had to create a TV documentary but had to choose which worksheet they wanted to work from.	A worksheet with a grid structure to plan the documentary A handout with images to support the first worksheet A second worksheet that incorporated the images with supporting questions
Year Nine: Latin – Lesson 1	To recognise the key scenes within the passage of translation To identify the main sentences that illustrate these scenes	Students were given a choice of worksheet: 1 chili: plan the story in the grid from the translation 2 chilies: answer comprehension questions based on the translation for two of the characters 3 chilies: answer more detailed comprehensive questions with added grammatical questions	Three worksheets *CLC* text book
Year Nine: Latin – Lesson 2	To describe the story from the translation To recognise and translate the grammar correctly	Students were given a choice of worksheet, which worked through the translation based on the chili system.	Three worksheets *CLC* textbook

Figure 1. | Lesson Plan Overview Grid.

could imply that boys are more likely to choose an easier task rather than push themselves academically to achieve.

Motivation and Performance:

Choice theory is theoretically intended to enhance motivation and performance of students (Patall *et al.*, 2010, p.896). However, choice theory for the Year 11 class had the opposite effect. In fact, the Year 11s seemed to be considerably demotivated in the lessons where a choice was provided, compared with previous lessons. During the first lesson I had with Year 11 I made all students write an essay, and did not provide a choice of task. The essay was then used as a comparison to the work produced in the following lessons. Interestingly, students were very focused during this task and all students wrote the specified minimum requirement. This corresponds with the research done by Flowerday (2003), where students were shown to work better when they were all given the same task to do. During the second lesson students were given a choice of three tasks, an essay that evaluated arguments for and against, creating a television-style documentary, or creating a poster with bullet-point information.

In addition to this, the study of providing choice was also to allow for students' self-initiated learning; it is advised that students should not only demonstrate and analyse knowledge, but also 'evaluate ancient sources within their historical context to make judgments and conclusions' (Ofqual, 2016, p.7). Stipek (2002) also suggests that teachers should focus on active enquiry by the students, rather than informing students and having them writing it down. Such a view is corroborated by Wigfield *et al.* (2002), when they say 'Teachers serve primarily as resources to children's self-initiated learning' (Wigfield *et al.,* 2002, p.311). It could be argued that, by providing the above, choices allows for this as students can comfortably use the analysis and evaluation of sources from the lesson where students also completed tasks looking at ancient sources. Therefore the lesson was designed to allow the students to carry out self-initiated learning, either in groups or individually, and in theory to prepare them to choose a task from the choices provided. This should occur, providing that the three choices reflected

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a level of difficulty in terms of comprehension and analysis. The poster was designed to be accessible and achievable by all students, the documentary was directed at some more able students, and the essay was there to target the most able.

With hindsight, the poster exercise was directed at the wrong audience and was too easy a task in comparison with the other options. However, according to choice theory students should have been motivated to choose a more challenging exercise and would not have opted for the poster. In reality, all students, with the exception of four who completed an essay, opted for the poster. This corresponds with Katz and Assor (2007) who suggested that having a choice alone was not enough to increase motivation. Not only did the majority of students choose the easiest option and were clearly demotivated throughout the lesson compared to the last lesson, but the level of work produced was weaker with the exception of the essay. Csikszentimihalyi (1988, cited in Stipek, 2002, p.312) suggests that providing an option for more challenging work creates motivation, but that students must feel as if they are able to tackle that particular challenge. This suggestion recalls Glasser (1986) who suggested that motivation is linked to satisfaction, and so if a student does not see a need or does not have an incentive, the provision of a choice has little effect. This therefore suggests that there was not enough scaffolding throughout this lesson, and so students felt that the higher tasks were unachievable. Furthermore, Turner *et al.* (1998, cited in Stipek, 2002, p.313) found that students' motivation was higher when they were challenged provided that the task was not beyond their reach. This suggests that the challenge of the documentary and the essay were thought by the students to be beyond their capabilities at that time. Therefore a different approach was taken for the third lesson. Instead of providing three separate tasks, all students had to complete the television-style documentary exercise; but a choice of two worksheets was provided. When students were told to write an essay in the first lesson, and were not given a choice, they all performed very well and their motivation was relatively high. Therefore similarly, all students were told to complete the same task but had a choice of worksheet, in the hope that their performance and motivation would be of equal standard.

The first worksheet had a table on it with a number of scenes down one side, and students were given an extra sheet with pictures of artifacts on it that they could incorporate. The idea here was that the more able students did not need as much scaffolding and so could plan a documentary having only been given a structure to follow, with supporting images of artifacts to use if they wanted. The second worksheet had three boxes on it, and in each box there was a picture of an artifact related to the topic and students were asked to plan their documentary around this artifact. There were questions in each box that the students had to answer which helped guide them to plan the documentary. This form of choice certainly gave better results, although again the majority of students chose the easier worksheet, and again those who had chosen the harder worksheet quickly changed their minds and opted for the easier one. It has been suggested by Shunk and Pajares that self-efficacy (one's beliefs in one's capabilities to learn) greatly influences academic motivation, learning and achievement in the classroom (Wigfield *et al.,* 2002, p.15). Self-efficacy is integral to the success of providing choice in the classroom because it 'is hypothesized to have effects on task choice, effort, persistence, and achievement' (Wigfield *et al.,* 2002, p.16). Furthermore, Shunk expresses how self-efficacy can be affected by social comparisons and therefore suggests that there is a link between choosing the same tasks as everyone else despite being given an option. As expected, students who were capable of completing the harder worksheet but had chosen the easier one finished quickly.

It must also be considered that the Year 11 class is of mixed-ability, compared to the Year 9 class who are all high-ability. Therefore, providing a choice of task for a class that is heavily made up of SEN students may not be as beneficial as it sounds. It has previously been suggested in this paper that students with dyslexia may benefit from a choice of task during lessons. Interestingly, out of the four students who chose to do the more difficult task in the first lesson, the essay, only two did not have additional SEN needs, which corresponds with Petty's (2004) point that written tasks do not come easy to dyslexic students. Therefore, it is possible that students with dyslexia purposely chose the poster to correspond to their learning needs. However there is a greater possibility that the majority chose the poster because it was the easiest option, as all students had demonstrated they could write an essay in the lesson before. Although, saying this, the other two students had A.D.H.D., below average reading speed, processing speed and dyslexia and yet still chose to write the essay instead of the poster.

As providing a choice of worksheet rather than task worked better in the Year 11 lessons, the same principle was used for the Year 9 Latin class. Three worksheets were designed around the exercise of translating a particular passage in the *Cambridge Latin Course*. Each worksheet was given a level of difficulty using a chili, as discussed earlier. The worksheets built on the AO1 skill of demonstrating an understanding of the language and translation outlined in the Latin (9-1) GCSE specification (Ofqual, 2015, p.8). When the worksheets were presented to the class they were not described in any particular detail; students merely had to decide which one to do based on the level of difficulty. Most of the class opted for the second worksheet of two chilies, and some chose the hardest worksheet of three chilies. Not one student chose the easiest worksheet. This demonstrated a high level of motivation, and is in complete opposition to the Year 11 Classical Civilisation class. I believe that if the worksheets had been explained to the students, most of them would have opted for the easiest option, as it did not include any comprehension questions. This result had parallels with Glasser's theory (1986) that students are more likely to push themselves when they feel that they are in control and there is an element of fun, in this case friendly competition. Because students did not know what the worksheets entailed, most were open to pushing themselves. In the second lesson having marked their work I had advised a number of students to choose a three chilies worksheet, and three girls did indeed opt for a harder worksheet. This correlates with Gershon's point that students' ability is linked closely with what they believe they can achieve (Gershon,

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2015, p.39). In comparison, when I had given the class a worksheet as cover work, and there was no choice of difficulty or no incentive provided by chilies, the class did not complete as much of the worksheet as they had been doing previously. This further demonstrates that giving students a form of motivation, in this case chilies, helps to enhance performance.

Age:

Age may have had a considerable influence over the effects of choice theory, and therefore in turn the results of motivation and performance. Bugler *et al.* (2016) found that there were significant differences in age when it came to motivation in the classroom; the study suggested that there are differences between early and mid-adolescents, and early and late adolescents, but not between mid and late adolescents (Bugler *et al.,* 2016). Going back to the earlier point about how social pressures and students' reputations in a classroom can affect choice theory, this was more prominent in Year 11 than in the Year 9 class. For example, two students actually opted for the documentary exercise, but when they realised that the rest of their classmates were creating posters they promptly changed their minds. It is therefore possible that those few students who might have completed the harder and more demanding tasks were intimidated by the fact that the rest of the class was choosing an easier task. Therefore social pressures and a student's reputation in a classroom might also affect choice theory. Bugler's study continues to suggest that young adolescent boys actually 'have a tendency to lower their ability to succeed at school, admit failure, and portray helplessness (disengagement)' (Bugler *et al.*, 2016, p.1208). Wigfield *et al.* (2002) also suggest that a child's motivation and self-efficacy changes; as they get older a child's experiences will lead to a specific interest and motivation in some areas, or vice versa (Wigfield *et al.*, 2002, p.3). Likewise the levels of motivation change as children get older (Wigfield *et al.*,, 2002, p.4) and this correlates with the contrast in motivation seen by the two different classes in this study.

Gender:

An additional variable in the study was gender; the Year 11 class is made up of boys with the exception of two students. This coupled with their age might have made a difference to their overall motivation. Bugler *et al.* found 'significant main effects of gender on motivation where girls reported higher levels of adaptive cognition…' (Bugler *et al.,* 2016, p. 1201) resulting in better motivation in the classroom. Equally, a difference in gender was seen in the Year 9 class. The boys were more likely to choose a three-chili worksheet, demonstrating a competitive attitude to their work and their fellow classmates. However, in contrast none of the girls chose a three chili worksheet in the first lesson and this might be down to a lack of confidence in their own academic achievement. In short, girls are more likely to suffer from academic anxiety than boys (Martin, 2004, p.142). It has also been demonstrated that girls 'suffer from low expectancies and decreased achievement strivings, particularly in the face of failure' (Wigfield, 2002 p.273). This therefore might be why the girls in the Year 9 class did not choose the hardest worksheet but instead settled for the moderately difficult one. In this way, conscientiousness is closely correlated with school performance and therefore in turn conscientiousness can even be considered a facet of achievement motivation (Fischer, 2012, p. 531). While Fischer (2012) talks about conscientiousness as having a positive correlation on achievement motivation, it can equally be seen as having a negative effect. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that none of the Year 9 girls chose the more difficult worksheet in the first lesson and needed encouragement to choose the harder worksheet in the next lesson; going back to Wigfield's (2002) point they possibly felt afraid of failure. The boys in the Year 9 class also contrasted with the boys in the Year 11 class. The Year 11s showed little competition between one another and were stereotypically unaffected in their outlook towards work when given an option.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the success of providing choice in the classroom is quite variable depending on the individual class. The older students studied were less affected by the option of a task, and the more limited the choice the better they performed. For example, when they all had to write an essay all students were focused and dedicated to the task. Likewise, when all students had to complete the same exercise, but were given an option of worksheet, they were focused and worked well in that time period. This is a clear contrast to the demotivated lesson where students were offered three variations of task, which addressed the same enquiry question. Similarly, the Year 9 class also demonstrated that having an option of a worksheet proved more beneficial and motivating than the option of a task. Therefore, providing choice in the classroom through worksheets worked well for both Year 11 and Year 9 students. This shows that providing too much choice is actually detrimental to the motivation and performance of students. While gender, age and ability were very variable between the two classes taking part in the study, it can be said that all students were more focused, motivated and produced better work when given an option of a worksheet compared to when they were given an option of separate tasks. For some students making that decision of which task to complete was more complicated than choosing which level of worksheet they wanted to work at. By simplifying the choice students had to make in the lesson, especially for the Year 9 class, students actually pushed themselves further and often chose a more difficult worksheet.

The Year 9 class was more receptive to being given a choice of handout than the Year 11 class. It has already been discussed that age and gender may have had an effect on this. The Year 9 class is more evenly distributed between girls and boys, whereas the Year 11 are all boys with the exception of two. It has also been suggested that the younger a student is the more motivation and self-efficacy they have towards a subject. The Year 9 class was also given worksheets with an explicit rating of difficulty, whereas the Year 11 class was just given an option of a 'more difficult' worksheet. Therefore there was a sense of competition amongst the Year 9 class that simply was not there for the Year 11s. It has been mentioned that as students get older they are more aware of their peers and their decisions, and this may have been why the Year 11 students were less likely to push themselves, especially when the majority of the class chose the easier worksheet. In complete contrast, the Year 9s were very open to opting for the more difficult

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worksheet, especially if their neighbour had chosen an easier one. Interestingly, the Year 9 girls were quite conscientious and did not push themselves as much as they could have done. All of the girls chose a two chili worksheet and all of them are predicted an A/A*, so they were entirely capable of working on a three chili worksheet. This however, as previously mentioned, is not uncommon and girls are shown to have a lack of academic confidence in the younger years. The majority of the boys equally are predicted A/A* with the exception of some A/B grades and their competitive streak pushed them to choose the more difficult worksheets.

In conclusion, choice theory in the classroom can be effective, but it is also very dependent on the individual class. This study agrees with Patall (2010, p. 896) in that it is very difficult to determine whether choices are effective in a practical classroom setting. Although this study has demonstrated that students work more effectively when given a choice of worksheet, especially when the worksheet is clearly differentiated through its level of difficulty, nevertheless the best way it will work for each class is dependent on how that class is motivated. For example, for the Year 9s having a chili rating on the worksheets proved very effective. Therefore choice in the classroom, at times, has shown a degree of motivation and a good performance outcome in students, both in Year 9 and in Year 11. Overall however, choice theory is sporadic in its success.

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