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DIPLOMA THESIS

Differentiation in English Language Teaching at the Elementary School

Diferenciace výuky anglického jazyka na základní škole

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the diploma thesis Differentiation in English Language Teaching at the Elementary School is completely my own work and that the only sources used in the preparation are listed on the works cited page.

Prague, 12 July, 2019

Martina Juránková

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ABSTRACT

This diploma thesis deals with ways to differentiate teaching of the English language in a certain fifth-grade class at an elementary school. The theoretical part focuses on the topics of language learning and teaching with an emphasis on the English language, the concept of differentiation, mixed-ability classes and learner differences. The final chapter of this part proposes ideas and example activities for differentiated instruction. The practical part uses action research to determine whether differentiated instruction was employed successfully. At the end of the practical part, the outcomes of the research are discussed.

KEY WORDS

Differentiation, differentiated instruction, mixed-ability classes, heterogeneous classes, effective learning, individual learner differences, young-school age

ABSTRAKT

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá způsoby diferenciací výuky anglického jazyka v jisté páté třídě prvního stupně základní školy. Teoretická část se zabývá tématy jazykového učení s důrazem na výuku anglického jazyka, dále tématy diferenciací, heterogenních tříd a individuálních rozdílů mezi žáky. V závěru teoretické části jsou uvedeny příklady aktivit vhodných pro práci s heterogenní třídou. Praktická část využívá akčního výzkumu, který si dává za cíl diferencovat výuku v již zmíněné třídě a sestává ze tří částí – před-intervenční, intervenční a post-intervenční. Poslední kapitola této části vyhodnocuje výsledky výzkumu.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Diferenciací, heterogenní třídy, efektivní učení, individuální rozdíly mezi žáky, mladší školní věk

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Introduction

'What we share in common makes us human. How we differ makes us individuals'

(Carol Ann Tomlinson).

'How can I adapt my teaching, so that both stronger and weaker learners acquire knowledge effectively? What is the key to balancing teaching and learning in a mixed-ability class? How do I attend to everyone's individual needs? How can I differentiate my lessons successfully?' These, and many others, were the questions that arose right after I started teaching for the first time in an elementary school. Very soon I realised I was dealing with learners of significantly different levels and decided to improve the troublesome situation.

Therefore, the overall aim of this thesis is to find ways to make stronger or faster learners sufficiently occupied during the lessons while weaker or slower learners do not feel frustrated by being left behind. To achieve this, I, as the teacher, must learn how to successfully differentiate my instruction.

The diploma thesis is divided into two parts – theoretical and practical. The theoretical part consists of five chapters. Chapter one serves as an introductory part where language learning and teaching are established along with factors and conditions that affect successful foreign language acquisition. It also deals with terminology matters regarding the concepts of second language learning versus foreign language learning and learning versus acquisition. Chapter two describes the term mixed-ability classes from several angles and explores the major causes of diversity in a classroom – the individual learner differences. It briefly mentions the stereotypes of a good and a bad language learner typically found in mixed-ability classrooms. Chapter three deals with the ultimate goal of the work, which is the concept of differentiation, its classification, characteristics, advantages and disadvantages, conditions necessary for a successful differentiation and the role of the teacher in a differentiated classroom. Chapter four proposes several tips on activities suitable for a differentiated classroom. Chapter five summarises the theoretical part.

Although, the work's title suggests a focus specifically on language classes, the studied literature typically includes information about both mixed-ability classes in general and about

language mixed-ability classes as such. For this reason, the diploma thesis combines both approaches and stresses the language classes peculiarities where necessary.

The practical part introduces an action research which I conducted in one of my classes. To collect enough data, I created an observation sheet for my colleagues, a post-lesson individual learner questionnaire, I made entries in my teaching journal after each lesson and I interviewed all learners and their other teachers to create a better idea of what needed to be done in order to improve the situation in the class. Apart from instruments of data collection, this section includes the school description and characteristics of the research group. It also talks about the action research organisation, establishes the research question and formulates three aims. Last but not least, it presents the outcomes and discusses them in the last, eighth, chapter.

I truly believe that this diploma thesis and particularly the action research I carried out will continue to help me improve the situation in the mixed-ability class I deal with and, at the same time, will help me grow as a teacher.

THEORETICAL PART

1. Language learning and teaching

‘Language is one of the most uniquely human capacities that our species possesses and one that is involved in all others, including consciousness, sociality and culture’ (Ortega, 2009, 1). According to Čermák, language is a system that serves as the basic communication tool among humans (2011, 13) to transfer meanings about concrete and abstract events or matters and it enables its users to produce both direct and indirect messages that may deliberately be made more or less obvious depending on the given situation and context.

Through a variety of language choices, we are capable of expressing our opinions, thoughts, emotions, intentions, desires and other ideas not only in addressing a particular audience, but also when involved in political speeches, internet discussions or even in self-talk (Ortega, 2009, 1). Performing these (and more) acts in one’s mother tongue is taken for granted and perceived as something completely natural, but the reality is that a considerable number of people are capable of similar accomplishments in languages other than their mother tongue or they at least have the potential. Although no data regarding the exact number of bilingual and multilingual speakers in the world exists (see Grosjean ‘How many are we?’) the estimates say that over a half of the world’s population is bilingual (‘How many are we?’).

In many parts of the world, children grow up speaking two or more languages at the same time, which is, in fact, the majority case as opposed to the minority of children who were raised monolingual as it is the norm in some places (typically in Western middle-class contexts). Once their first language(s) have been learnt and established, many begin the process of acquiring another language for various reasons – some must learn one as a part of their education, others take up basic phrases to survive in a new environment they relocated to due to religious, political or job-related reasons or they simply do it for pleasure. Whatever the reason behind is, most people eventually learn at least one foreign language later in life (Ortega, 2009, 1; Grosjean, 2010, 3-18; Grosjean, 2012).

Before we proceed and plunge into the topic of language learning itself, a few points regarding the terminology must be made. In fact, researchers are not unanimous regarding the terms

‘second language’, ‘foreign language’, ‘learning’ and ‘acquisition’ and they provide diverse definitions.

1.1 Terminology matters

A **second language** plays an institutional and social role. It is acquired by people from countries where more official languages are spoken. The second language is necessary to be acquired in order to be able to communicate with the rest of the population. Also, this term is used in situations in which people move to a country where a different language from their first is spoken. A **foreign language**, as well as a second language, is acquired after the first language, however it is one that is chosen voluntarily (or semi-voluntarily as it is the case of compulsory language learning at schools) (Dulay et al., 1982, qtd. in Eddy, 2011, 11-12). Besides, a second language is typically acquired in its natural environment – in countries where it is spoken by its native speakers, in everyday encounters as opposed to a foreign language which appears in a formal setting of a language classroom. It is true that these days the effect of formal settings is mitigated by the easy access to resources in the target language (music, cinematography, books and others) and by the possibility to be taught by a native speaker of the target language; nevertheless, the core still lies in the classroom instruction, which cannot sufficiently balance what the natural environment offers (Eddy, 2011, 14-15).

There are authors, though, who treat both terms equally, which means that both, whether they prefer the former or the latter term, are used equally and mean the same thing. Some authors (e.g. Dulay et al. 1982; Skehan, 1989, 2002) use also the label ‘language two’ (L2) for any language acquired after ‘language one’ (L1) has been mastered, which usually happens in later stages of life, in late childhood, adolescence or adulthood (qtd. in Eddy, 2011, 12; Ortega, 2009, 4-10).

For the purposes of this diploma theses, the term ‘foreign language’ will be used, since the work deals with Czech users of English.

The terms **learning** and **acquisition** are in some frameworks (e.g. Ellis, 1985) understood as synonyms. Krashen, on the other hand, is one of the examples of an advocate of the acquisition-learning distinction. He compares language acquisition to the way in which children develop their first language (but it does not mean there is no such thing as adult language acquisition). It is a subconscious process the result of which is competence, one’s certain feeling that what

he/she is saying is either correct, or incorrect without being aware of the rules. It does not presuppose teaching and the child controls the pace of it. Counter to acquisition, there is language learning, which is a conscious, intentional process of knowing the rules of the language, being aware of them and being able to apply them, which presupposes teaching and the teacher is in control of the pace (Krashen, 1982, 10). Eddy summarized Krashen's belief in the following words: 'Learning a foreign language means studying, in a conscious and active way, how it works, what the rules and principles are as well trying to act in the way these predetermine its correct and effective use to be. Acquiring a foreign language not only refers to the above-mentioned activities, but also includes subconscious receiving of information, knowledge and experience' (Eddy, 2011, 13).

1.2 Factors and conditions affecting foreign language acquisition

Within learning in general, there are certain conditions under which children learn best that teachers should be aware of in order to ensure effective learning. To begin with, there is the environment learners work in that must be positive and supportive. Secondly, learners must find the content personally meaningful. If they can relate to it and enjoy it, they are more likely to remember it, which means that teachers should individualise and personalise what they teach as much as possible. Furthermore, tasks need to be adequate to learners' levels, but also challenging and most importantly based upon what they already know. From time to time learners should be exposed to a change, something unexpected and they should be given a choice, so that they can temporarily take control over what they learn and how they learn it. Naturally, a helpful feedback has to follow. Besides, learners should put their theoretical knowledge, that should progress from the concrete to the abstract and be supported by a great deal of demonstration, in practice. Last but not least, effective learning requires a use of variety of strategies to approach learning along with numerous occasions for social interactions (Watkins, Lodge, Wagner, Whalley, 2002, 1-8).

As far as foreign language learning is concerned, there are several factors that might significantly affect the outcomes. Once again, there is the **environment** that learners work in. Not only does it have to be positive and supportive, but as mentioned in the previous subchapter, it should imitate the natural environment of the target language as much as possible, because formal settings, such as classrooms, foster primarily conscious learning, which is not desired. One way of achieving it at school is by having access to native speakers of the target language

who teach or have conversations with the learners. This person may either teach all the lessons, or he/she may alternate with another, presumably non-native, teacher. Learners must be encouraged to take an active part in communication, which will only happen after proper modelling and lots of exposure to the original resources such as newspapers, magazines, audio and video recordings.

Secondly, it is the **input**. Input is what the learners are exposed to (the teacher, other learners, material, etc.). Myles (2002) understands input as an important component in language learning and adds: ‘the cognitive and information processing models generally claim that language learning is no different from other types of learning and is the result of the human brain building up networks of associations on the basis of input’ (qtd. in Eddy 2011, 17-18). Related to this is Krashen’s comprehensible input. Regarding foreign languages, he is convinced that a message can be understood in spite of the fact that learners are not familiar with all the words and structures in it (Krashen qtd. in Prodromou, 13). ‘Krashen's input hypothesis (1985) states that foreign language (L2) input must both be comprehended and be at one stage above the learner's current level ($i + 1$) in order to be acquired’ (Krashen, 1985; for more see Lightbown and Spada, 2006, 36-37). All in all, in order to trigger a successful process of foreign language learning, learners must be exposed to input - useful, quality information that must be comprehensible. In an ideal case, input can trigger intake – ‘the linguistics data actually processed from the input and held in working memory for further processing’ (VanPatten, 2002, 757) – and further processing in language system development that results in output – the language produced (Eddy, 2011, 17-18).

Thirdly, **mother tongue** influences the way learners acquire foreign languages. There are inconsistent, contradictory opinions, because researchers cannot decide whether acquisition of a foreign language copies acquisition of a first language or not and whether one’s mother tongue has a positive or negative influence on the foreign language learning. ‘Identity hypothesis’ believes that the first, second, third or any following languages are acquired in the same way, governed by identical rules. ‘Contrastive hypothesis’ believes that acquisition of a foreign language is greatly influenced by the first language and is dependent on the positive and the negative transfer from the first language. Therefore, structures that are similar in both languages cause no problems to language learners as opposed to contrastive structures between the languages that tend to be problematic (Klein, 1986, 25).

Last but not least, **individual learner differences** represent a significant factor in foreign language learning (see Chapter 2.2) and will be, along with other concepts falling into the topic of diversity, discussed in the following chapter.

2. Diversity in the educational system

Diversity in the educational system is unavoidable nowadays – children come from different cultures, with wide-ranging tastes, preferences and habits, personal experiences not to mention their learning styles, motivation, language levels or even languages themselves. Every learner has a unique personality, which sooner or later meets the other unique personalities in the class they start to attend and they must function side by side, usually for several years, and it becomes a responsibility of us, teachers, to acknowledge the often so very diverse needs of our learners and occupy ourselves with the question of how to reach them as well as a balanced relationship between the educational system and the diversity in it (Cedrychová, Krestová, Raudenský, 1992, 1).

In order to achieve this, teachers should seek ways to help their learners become aware of their uniqueness, be able to understand it and draw on it to succeed in the future. Naturally, it would be much easier for teachers to approach their classes as homogeneous groups, provide them with identical materials and expect the same results. In reality, this happens and it probably happens more frequently than it would have to, since the concept of elementary school comes often with the notion of a unified programme for all that states equal opportunities for everyone. The fact is; however, that ignoring individual differences will, in all likelihood, result in mediocrity. Although average learners seem ideal for teaching practice since they do not deviate the standard and therefore do not require more demanding lesson planning, organisation and overall work on the teacher's side, it may result in issues (Příhoda qtd. in Cedrychová, Krestová, Raudenský, 1992, 1).

When teachers focus on the average learners only, they usually come to realise that besides the mediocre group, they must also deal with at least two other separate groups – learners who find learning very difficult and may become frustrated by their perpetual lack of success, and learners who find learning easy and get bored quickly (Kalinová, 2010, 7). Involved teachers, who are interested in their learners' well-being will sooner or later realise that they should not fight the individualities they come across in their teaching career. Learners' shortcomings should be accepted, but by no means accentuated, because their success resides in a positive search for strengths and their subsequent development (Příhoda qtd. in Cedrychová, Krestová, Raudenský, 1992, 1).

In their lives, children are also given a chance to express their individuality - they read stories they are interested in, they choose hobbies that suit their personalities the most and, as Tomlinson (2005, 7-8) describes with a metaphor:

‘they (children, learners) can choose from a variety of clothing to fit their differing sizes, styles, and preferences. We understand, without explanation, that this makes them more comfortable and gives expression to their developing personalities. In school, modifying or differentiating instruction for learners of differing readiness and interests is also more comfortable, engaging, and inviting. One-size-fits-all instruction will inevitably sag or pinch—exactly as single-size clothing would—learners who differ in need, even if they are chronologically the same age’.

This figurative pinching becomes clearer, the more learners of considerably distinct nature there are in one class. Such groups are referred to as ‘mixed-ability’ classes. The following sub-chapters introduce the term mixed-ability classes, their advantages and disadvantages followed by presenting the causes of diversity in the school context, namely learner differences and eventually, discussing the concepts of good language learner and struggling language learner – the two stereotypes of mixed-ability language classes.

2.1 Mixed-ability classes

‘Mixed-ability’ as defined in the Cambridge Dictionary means ‘involving learners of different levels of ability’. Such classes are undoubtedly very difficult to deal with and if not handled well, it results in both the teacher’s and the learners’ frustration. Teachers; however, often fail to cope with such a demanding and often tiring situation to everyone’s satisfaction and learners, whether stronger or weaker, lose interest. Unfortunately, teachers sometimes tend to think of their learners in terms of their weaknesses rather than strengths or they are convinced that their learners simply lack the desire to learn (which; however, might be the case). This belief becomes so strong and deeply ingrained that it affects the way learners approach learning (Prodromou, 1995, 3).

Some authors will argue that this term is not accurate. Penny Ur, for instance, believes that ‘**mixed-ability**’ primarily evokes a difference in the mixed group members’ learning ability or, in other words, the ‘immediate observable ability to perform’ (2002, 273) of the learners. In the context of foreign language learning, the observed issue indeed lies in the amount of language learners are able to produce and use, but it is frequently caused by factors other than linguistic, thus it includes the ‘potential learning ability’ as well. Hence, she prefers the term

'heterogeneous', because it simply points at the existence of groups of different kinds of people (2002, 273). The opposite, classes of similar learners would then be **'homogeneous'**; however, such classes do not actually exist since two learners are never really similar. From this point of view, all classes of more than one learner are always somehow heterogeneous then since no two people are the same. Nevertheless, there are classes with learners of significantly diverse (language) skills which in return require special teaching and planning skills.

For the purpose of this diploma thesis the two terms 'mixed-ability' and 'heterogeneous' will be understood as synonyms that describe classes consisting of learners of different (language) learning ability (due to various reasons that will be further discussed in Chapters 2 and 3).

2.1.1 Challenges and advantages of mixed-ability classes

Regarding **challenges** of mixed-ability classes, the considerable amount of diversity within such groups can complicate the teaching, but also the learning process in large measure due to several occurring issues that both teachers and learners come across on daily basis. Apart from individual learner differences (e.g. age, intelligence, motivation, learning styles) that represent a great deal of contrast and potential friction (see Chapter 2.2) there are other causes that complicate the class work in much the same way. This subchapter provides a list of obstacles that are likely to emerge, such as time, materials, progress, keeping the class together, participation, interests, discipline. In chapter 21, Ur suggests that all teachers categorise problems that arise in their classes into three groups – crucial, quite important and not important. She, herself, delivers a set of difficulties she encountered and ranks them in the following order: Effective learning for all, materials, participation, interests and discipline. Keeping track of progress and assignment correction follow since the author considers them easier to solve with some extra work (2002, 303-304). While this is true, besides the ones already mentioned, there are other challenges to consider including time, keeping the class together or keeping track of progress.

No matter the size of the class or the language level, **time** becomes an unavoidable issue in most teachers' lives. Time determines the length of lessons, in the length of tasks and even in the length of the school year. As it happens, all learners require an individual approach every now and then; however, teachers can only devote a certain amount of time to an individual learner at one moment, which typically is insufficient (Prodromou, 1995, 3). The larger the class, the bigger of an issue it becomes. Furthermore, every learner works at an uneven pace

and therefore tend to finish at different times, which, again, complicates the flow of the lessons. Aside from that, time plays a vital role in lesson planning.

As far as **materials** are concerned, most textbooks available at schools, and in fact any materials in general, are not necessarily suitable for everyone, so teachers are unable to use the same material with all the learners, because they do not learn at the same pace and. Creating graded material as well as devising differentiated lesson plans and correcting written assignments may become very painful due to its lengthiness. As a result, weaker learners often feel discouraged and do not want to take part in the lesson or contrarily, the stronger learners get bored if a task is too easy and the effectiveness of the lesson naturally drops (Prodromou, 1995, 3-4).

It follows that **participation** may stagnate, not only due to the materials, but also due to the fact that not all learners are programmed to be actively and voluntarily involved in the lesson. Some learners are more extroverted and participate in the lessons all the time, while others, who are rather introverted, seem completely uninterested and indifferent and teachers fail to activate them all. Whether their reason for avoiding participation results from their insecurity or laziness, teachers should detect it as soon as possible to be able to solve it, otherwise they may face stronger learner dominance. It is vital that teachers carefully choose between collaborative and individual work to increase individual learner participation and that they work out interesting incentives that will engage learners (Ur, 2002, 307). To be able to do so, teachers must be knowledgeable with regard to their learners' **interests**. What one person finds amusing, might annoy the other. It may come from their lack of familiarity with the discussed topic, it can reflect a learner's cultural and social background and many others, so it is advisable to draw inspiration from a variety of sources to make sure every child will identify with at least some of tasks. If this is not arranged for, **disciplinary problems**, such as disorderliness, noise, disrespect, aggression or defiance significantly complicate the whole situation (Ur, 2002, 303-304; Prodromou, 1995, 3-4). They are typically triggered by frustration, because if stronger learners do not feel challenged enough, they get bored and start to misbehave. Weaker learners' disobedience, on the other hand, may have its roots in their lack of knowledge.

Last but not least, teachers may struggle with keeping track of their learners' individual **progress** and it happens that classes are exposed to a lack of cohesion. **Keeping the class together** is by no means an easy task to do. It may be affected by poor relationships within the

group, but also by the content of the lesson or the way it is presented by the teacher (Ur, 2002, 303-304).

The language learning context itself deals with other specific challenges apart from those already mentioned. To name a few, they are, for instance, **language aptitude** and **language level** (see Chapter 2.2), but also the **limited opportunity to practice the target language** in the classroom, frequent **falling back on the mother tongue**, the increasing **occurrence of learners who are native speakers** of the target language. In the English language in particular, confusion between written and spoken English may appear, since the two forms do not correspond and pronunciation of sounds that do not appear in the learners' native language also represents a challenge (Johnson, 2019).

Besides a number of challenges, mixed-ability grouping also brings quite a few **advantages** that are enriching and motivating for both the teacher and the learner. Firstly, learners develop their **social skills**, because they must foster support, patience and understanding for other. Tolerance and willingness to help are key factors in everyday interactions with others, or in particular with other speakers of the target language (Hess, 2001, 3).

Secondly, they gain a **variety of human resources** they may get inspired by. As Hess mentions, 'in a multilevel class, there are a great many opinions, a great many points of reference, perhaps many cultural backgrounds, many temperaments, many world-views and values, many different experiences and many styles of learning. This wealth of dissimilarity can be used to our advantage in creating interesting, varied, meaningful, and learner-centred lessons. Learners can learn as much by finding out about one another as they can from reading a text, and the immediate interest that such personal contact engenders creates a positive classroom climate that promotes genuine language learning' (2001, 3).

Thirdly, in such environments, teachers cannot always attend to everyone. In that case, higher-level learners may replace their pedagogue and children learn from one another. **Peer-teaching** is very appropriate here, because this way cooperation is encouraged, learners help each other and by successfully explaining a certain issue the understanding of it is properly examined. In addition, it develops learners' **autonomy** (Hess, 2001, 3-4). At last, it is not convenient exclusively for learners, **teachers benefit** from such experience as well, since they are forced to be innovative in creating interesting and graded materials, finding better ways of setting up tasks and they are overall challenged in their professional development (Hess, 2001, 3-4).

All in all, the complicated nature of mixed-ability classes brings both challenges and advantages, which, when anticipated, may lessen the difficulties likely to occur and make the experience more pleasant. In order to cope with mixed-ability classes in the best way possible, teachers ought to acknowledge the existence of learners' various abilities, since every individual is endowed with sundry strengths and weaknesses and develops at non-uniform rates. Along with adapting and varying material, using visual stimuli and grouping, they are likely to avoid boredom and frustration, which typically leads to indiscipline and lack of interest.

2.2 Learner differences

For mixed ability groups it is typical that while some of the learners are cooperative and achieve good results, others do not perform well or even fail in some respects, meaning they might feel left behind and that their results are far from brilliant. Some learners pay attention in the lessons and fulfil their tasks whereas others seem to be less, if at all, interested. Consequently, teachers are concerned, because their requirements seem to be too easy for the faster learners and at the same time too difficult for others and it becomes an arduous task to create lessons that take everyone's individual needs and differences into consideration. In the context of language learning, it is natural that learners differ in many aspects. These aspects may be divided into two basic groups – internal and external factors ('Učíme se trochu jinak', 4; Ellis, 2008, 204). Some frameworks acknowledge a third group of differences – the affective factors which include self-esteem, inhibition, risk-taking, anxiety and empathy. Ellis also discusses the existence of four groups of individual difference factors – **abilities** that consist of intelligence, language aptitude and memory, **propensities** including learning style, motivation, anxiety, personality and willingness to communicate, **learner cognitions** about foreign language learning which equals learner beliefs and **learner actions** that cover learning strategies (2008, 530). The section below outlines the internal and external factors with a more thorough inquiry into the most frequently discussed internal factors.

Internal factors refer to those that concern the learners themselves. Authors within this field provide different views on what to include (see Lujan-Ortega, 2000; Skehan, 1989; Ellis, 1985). Among the most frequently observed and discussed belong **age, intelligence, learning styles** and **motivation**. Quite a lot of sources mention **personality, cognitive style/abilities, attention span, language aptitude** and **language level** as well (Eddy, 2012, 10). Heacox also mentions **readiness, learning pace** and **confidence in one's own learning** (2002, 10).

External factors are those that refer to the environment, not the learners and they include **context of the environment, cultural background, family background and support, first language, foreign language curriculum or social class** (Mirhadizadeh, 2016, 188-195). Additionally, previous **learning opportunities** and **teaching methods** that learners were exposed to contribute to the present state as well. Moreover, learners are affected by the language they use outside the classroom and their motivation will most likely depend on whether they use the target language or their mother tongue when they leave the school (Ur, 2002, 273).

The following section chooses to present six possible and likely reasons of differences among language learners, namely age (and readiness), intelligence, learning styles, motivation, language levels and language aptitude. Based on the studied literature, the first four were chosen as the ones most frequently quoted, the other two were chosen due to their direct connection to language. On top of that, all six of them are relevant in language classes.

2.2.1 Age

Age definitely plays a relevant role in both learning and teaching in general. Considering language learning, people at different ages acquire language differently and it is crucial to take this into account when planning lessons. Most elementary school teachers; however, do not need to have any concerns regarding their learners' different ages since within one group, they meet children of the same age.

A question that arises is when children should start with foreign language learning. The common belief is that the earlier the better, but 'both experience and research show that older learners can attain high levels of proficiency in the foreign language' (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, 73). Although there is evidence of limitation regarding maturity and language acquisition, at the same time it is a process that involves aptitude, motivation and appropriate conditions for learning. Furthermore, it requires time and as a matter of fact, children are frequently exposed to the target language more than adults, because they attend school and extra or private language courses and must do their homework (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, 73).

Nevertheless, 'it has been hypothesized that there is a critical period for foreign language acquisition. The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) is that there is a time in human development when the brain is predisposed for success in language learning. Developmental changes in the brain, it is argued, affect the nature of language acquisition, and language learning that occur after the end of the critical period may not be based on the innate biological

structures believed to contribute to first language acquisition or second language acquisition in early childhood. Rather, older learners may depend on more general learning abilities – the same ones they might use to learn other kinds of skills or information. It is argued that these general learning abilities are not as effective for language learning as the more specific, innate capacities that are available to the young child. It is most often claimed that the CPH ends somewhere around puberty, but some researchers suggest it could be even earlier' (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, 68).

Simply put, CPH means the optimal span to acquire a language after which further language acquisition may become harder. One of the first researchers who used this term were Penfield and Roberts (1959), who argued that foreign language is easier and quicker to learn for younger children in the first decade of their lives, especially through the direct method – the natural learning process through which the first language is acquired. They believed that 'for the purposes of learning languages, the human brain becomes progressively stiff and rigid after the age of nine' (Penfield and Roberts, 1959, 236). Others followed, for example Lenneberg (1967) who examined it in first language acquisition and popularised it. Researchers then worked with the CPH and based their research on it, e.g. Johnson and Newport (1989) found effects of maturation on language acquisition and stated that a late age of foreign language acquisition prevents native-like performance in it or Thompson (1991) concluded that in terms of pronunciation, learners who started at an earlier age, scored much better (Hurford, 1991; Abello-Contesse, 2009, 170-172; Moskovsky, 2001, 1-5).

Since this thesis deals with the young-school age, the following information will not exceed it by describing other developmental stages. The developmental stage of the age of approximately 8-9 to 11-12 years old is less dynamic than the previous ones. It corresponds to 3rd to 5th grade of the elementary school. Children are believed to have already adjusted to the school environment and acquired behavioural norms. Learners' thinking is more developed than in previous stages, yet it does not correspond to abstract thinking on the level of an adult person (Ptáček and Kuželová, 2013, 42-44; Ptáček and Kuželová, 2018). According to Piaget (1946;1951) this period belongs to the concrete operational stage of development; therefore, learners start being capable of using logic. Their thinking, though, is very literal and linked to concrete objects and events, because they still struggle with abstract and hypothetical concepts; nevertheless, they can tell the difference between fact and fiction. Also, relationships with peers become very important since learners start to search for social contact and they typically identify with children of the same gender. They are able to work with others and as a result they learn from their peers. It is also a time when differences in performance among children start

to emerge and individual strengths and weaknesses are recognized (Ptáček and Kuželová, 2013, 42-44; Ptáček and Kuželová, 2018).

Teachers should be aware of the characteristics mentioned above and prepare lessons accordingly. It must be remembered that this age group learn most effectively through games and active participation on a task, thus teacher-centred techniques such as presentations or explanations should be minimized and replaced by a variety of sources and materials that allow learners to experiment and manipulate them (Kargerová and Maňourová, 2013, 2-4). Teachers should let learners play with the language, introducing them to diverse rhymes ('Let's go – pets go), songs, storytelling (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990, 1-7). Another essential thing is that all activities should be based on learners' prior knowledge and their interests and the purpose of activities should be explained. Apart from that, they should be allowed to change positions and move around the classroom which also requires toleration of some noise (Kargerová and Maňourová, 2013, 2-4). Above that, variety is needed. Attention span and concentration of this age group is relatively short; therefore, they need to be provided with variety of tasks, pace, classroom arrangement, etc. Last but not least, they highly benefit from routines and so it is advisable that a system is developed into which familiar situations are incorporated and are used repeatedly (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990, 5-6).

A concept related to age and maturity is **readiness**. Schindler (1948, 301) claims that: 'Even the most skilful teachers working under favourable conditions may have a few pupils who do not learn what they are supposed to learn. 'There is some progress toward desired goals, but the learning is regarded as unsatisfactory. The real reason for this fact is that that the pupils have not attained the physical and mental maturity, the foundation of concepts, the command of language or the social and emotional adjustment necessary for learning at the level which the teacher is attempting'. Vygotsky (1978) believes that in order to respect the current level of learners' readiness, teachers should oscillate within children's **zone of proximal development** in their teaching practice. His theory is based on 'the distance between the actual development level and the level of potential development. Hence, the zone of proximal development links that which is known to that which is unknown' (Riddle and Dabbagh, 1999 qtd. in Subban, 2006, 937). The zone of proximal development can only be developed when learners are involved in social interactions with knowledgeable adults or peers (Subban, 2006, 937). Therefore, education should strive to provide learners with experience and situations that are in

their zone of proximal development to encourage their individual learning. Analogous to that is Krashen's input hypothesis (see Chapter 1.1.3).

In any case, even though Vygotsky himself never mentioned **scaffolding**, there is a concept that is closely linked to the zone of proximal development. Through the process of scaffolding, teachers give aid to learners in the zone of proximal development to guide their learning and to help them achieve autonomy. Teachers use techniques, such as pre-teaching, using visual aids, asking focused questions, tapping into prior knowledge, etc. to help their learners overcome barriers and provide them with support on their way to becoming more successful learners ('Zone of proximal development').

2.2.2 Intelligence

One of the relevant and frequently used classifications of intelligence that plays a role in classrooms is Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Initially, he described seven of them, but later, in the 1990s, he added a new one, naturalist intelligence, when he recognised it met the criteria to be identified as intelligence as well. The following elaboration of the eight multiple intelligences will use Gardner's framework as adapted in Mirhadizadeh (2016) and 'The Distance Learning Technology Resource Guide' by Lane with additions from 'Multiple intelligence activities' by Beare (2019) (for more information, particularly on the topic of learning activities according to multiple intelligences, see scholastic.com or thoughtco.com).

- 1. Verbal-linguistic** – learners of this type of intelligence are sensitive to spoken and written language, therefore they tend to think in words rather than pictures. They easily develop their auditory and speaking skills and usually become fluent language users. What works most for these learners is are, for instance, the following: teacher-centred explanations, essays and written reports, reading selections, grammar and vocabulary learning from textbooks, gap-fill exercises.
- 2. Visual-spatial** – learners of this type of intelligence perceive the world in images, therefore the best way to teach them is through pictures, videos, maps, flashcards, charts, graphs, mind maps, etc. They shall be encouraged to highlight texts in different colours and add pictures if needed. They are aware of the environment that surrounds them and they think in terms of physical space.

3. **Musical-rhythmic** – these learners are sensitive to rhythm and sound, not only regarding music, but sounds in general. They may prefer to study with some background music. They commonly think in sounds, rhythms and patterns.
4. **Logical-mathematical** – such learners are good at reasoning and calculating, because they are able to deal with abstract concepts and they have the capacity to connect piece of information, because they use logical thinking. Mostly, they need to grasp the concepts before dealing with details. In English lessons, learners of logical-mathematical intelligence perform best in inductive study of grammatical rules, error recognition, developing mind maps, vocabulary chart, etc.
5. **Bodily/feeling** – learners with this intelligence use body and movement to learn, since they have a strong sense of coordination. In order to learn, they need to use movement and touch things. Teachers should create situations that enable a combination of physical actions and linguistic responses, thus activities such as acting out, role-playing, pantomime vocabulary activities, facial expression games and generally hands-on learning are most suitable for them.
6. **Interpersonal** – these learners learn through interaction with others, due to their empathy and understanding for others, they easily make friends. They always attempt to put themselves in somebody else’s shoes. They learn the best through group activities, seminars, dialogues, etc. The most appropriate activities for this group of learners are small group work in general, team competitions, role plays or real plays using dialogues or peer teaching.
7. **Intrapersonal** – learners of this kind of intelligence are aware of their inner self – they understand themselves and develop a sense of self-identity. Such people learn the best through independent study, books, writing diaries, etc.
8. **Naturalistic** – these learners are interested in the natural world, are able to relate to it and understand it. The most suitable activities would be field trips where learners attempt to do the shopping in the target language, ask for directions or give them in the target language or, for example, collecting plants and learning their names in the target language, naming everyday objects they come across walking in the city, etc.

The fundamental idea that Gardner works with is that people have more ‘intelligences’, possibly all eight (or even more) at the same time; however, in different proportions (Gardner, 1993, 13-48). Therefore, there are people who are strong in learning languages, but fail in chemistry and others are brilliant mathematicians, but never learn to sing. The issue is that the traditional

education system prefers some of them (particularly language and logical intelligences) and neglect the rest (Gardner qtd. in Scrivener, 2005, 64). Closely related to intelligence, there are individual learning styles that must be dealt with.

2.2.3 Learning styles

The term ‘learning style’ is not particularly easy to define due to the various studies in different areas of research that were carried out in order to define it and classify it. It looks into the way learners perceive, process, comprehend and retain information. It might be defined as one’s specific and preferable way of taking on and processing information, which develops on the basis of one’s personality traits and determines according to what characteristics the learner approaches learning (Sitná, 2009, 36). It is an inborn quality as opposed to ‘learning strategies’ that are learned. Chamot (1987) describes them as ‘techniques, approaches, or deliberate actions that learners take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistics and content area information’ (qtd in ‘Learning strategies and styles’, 2018). Brown uses the learning strategies versus communication strategies distinction. Learning strategies deal with ‘intake, memory, storage and recall’ procedure and can be further divided into cognitive (e.g. deduction, recombination, imagery, contextualisation, transfer, inferencing, etc.) and socioaffective (e.g. cooperation, question for clarification), whereas communicative strategies involve the verbal and nonverbal mechanisms necessary for productive communication that are further divided into compensatory and avoidance strategies (2000, 122-130; for more see Brown, 2000).

Back to learning styles, Dunn and Dunn (1993) use five categories of factors that affect and describe individual learning styles. They are namely **environmental**, **emotional**, **sociological**, **physiological** and **psychological**. The first refers to the **environment** in which learning takes place in terms of the light – some learners prefer bright light when studying, some like dim light; the sound – while there are learners who require background music for studying, there are others who must study in complete silence; the temperature – some learners prefer colder, some warmer places to study; and design – learners have various preferences for seating and its arrangement, etc. **Emotional** factors include motivation (see below), persistence, responsibility and organisational skills. As far as **sociological** factors are concerned, it distinguishes learners who favour working by themselves and the ones who prefer studying in pairs or groups and whether they prefer following a certain pattern learning new things, act rather spontaneously or follow the teachers’ guidance. **Physiological** factors are about the body responses to a learning

task Some learners are fresher in the morning as opposed to learners who work better later in the day, some need to move while studying, some need many breaks and there are those who give preference to different channels of perception – visual, auditory (aural), kinaesthetic learners and the ones who prefer reading or writing (VARK profiles originally developed by Fleming, 1987). **Psychological** factors deal with the way learners process and respond to information. There are global learners, who see the big picture, they focus on the gist, the main ideas and may have troubles working out the details. Then there are analytical learners, who focus on the parts, the details and may be troubled trying to put the details together. Reflective learners tend to take time to think, whereas impulsive learners come to conclusions spontaneously (qtd. in Boneva and Mihova, 2012, 7-10; Fleming, 2012, 1-3).

Language classes are quite suitable for some changes that respect the many preferences in learning styles due to its lively nature that make frequent use of, for instance, pair work and groupwork, discussions and role-plays. Although it is not always easy to move furniture around the classroom, in many cases it will work and teachers will be able to even set up ‘areas’, each designed differently, in order to interest the learners and facilitate their learning. Some learners may sit close to the windows to inhale the fresh air and get as much light as possible, some may sit on chairs, some on pillows on the ground, etc. If no one is interrupted by it, background music may be used or teachers may bring learners to a school garden, park, etc. They also may let some learners work individually and some in pairs/groups and may allow restless children to take more breaks (Dunn and Dunn, 1993 qtd. in Boneva and Mihova, 2012, 7-10).

Since **visual** learners think in pictures, they need to view the graphic images of whatever they are learning. They prefer written instruction as opposed to oral, during which they at least try to follow the instructor’s body movement, gestures and facial expressions. Therefore, it is advisable that teachers use aids such as pictures, flashcards, maps, charts, graphs, diagrams, etc. They may also encourage learners to use colours in their notes (highlighters), mind maps and others. **Auditory** learners learn best from the ‘heard’ or the ‘spoken’, thus it is appropriate to provide them with lectures and presentations, debates, tapes, group discussions and so on. They should be encouraged to study out loud with classmates, record themselves and ask someone to quiz them verbally. Another way to approach these learners is by helping them create short poems or rhymes to remember information easily. Learners who belong to the **read/write** group learn from reading or writing. They are particularly drawn to all sorts of reading including books, magazines, journals, internet sources, dictionaries, lists or PowerPoint presentations.

They should be encouraged to study through re-writing their notes, writing summaries, diaries, creating flashcards, simply studying from their textbooks, etc. Last but not least, **kinaesthetic** learners learn via moving, doing, touching and overall hands-on experience. In lessons they like demonstrations, simulations, role-plays, etc. Songs they learn may be accompanied by a simple dance or gestures (Fleming, 2012, 1-3; Fleming, 2001, qtd in Alqunayeer and Zamir, 2015, 82). Some authors recognise **haptic** learners. Their dominant sense is touch. It is necessary for such learners to feel objects or touch as many things as possible in order to learn. Some haptic learners are able to form visual images of things, therefore hands-on experience is crucial for them ('Converger').

A term closely related to learning styles is 'approach'. Three approaches to learning are recognised – **surface**, **deep** and **strategic**. Learners who employ the **surface** approach to their learning take on information in a passive way based on memorizing, because they do not enjoy learning. They are driven by extrinsic motivation, since they are often afraid of bad results, their parents' or their teachers' reaction and so their main aim is to meet the requirements as quickly as possible. They do not focus on retention of their knowledge, nor can they recognize the important from the irrelevant. It naturally results in formal knowledge only with little or no comprehension, which they tend to forget in a short time. Intrinsically motivated learners tend to apply **deep** approach to learning that consists in the desire to indeed comprehend the subject matter. They are truly interested in what they are learning which means that they retain information longer and they understand it in a wider context, because they are capable of relating new information to their previous knowledge and they use additional sources to their textbooks, such as specialised books, internet websites, etc. The **strategic** approach can be described as a combination of the two formerly mentioned approaches that is preferred by learners whose main motivation is to achieve better results than others and get good marks. Learners applying this approach are competitive and often try to reach their goals in any way possible without making much effort. In some cases, learners prefer this approach as a way of protecting themselves against excessive requirements on the teacher's or the school's side or wrongful assessment. There are learners who will predominantly apply one of these approaches, but they might choose one according to the particular situation (Mareš, 1998, 38-40).

On top of that, there are learners who adopt the **serialist** approach and those who adopt the **holistic** approach. **Holists** tend to approach learning as a whole. They favour discovery learning that draws on their existing knowledge in order to discover facts about the new subject and

allows them to use their own judgment to make conclusions and sort information out on the basis of similarity and contrast. Nevertheless, one of the setbacks might be the fact that holists sometimes do not go to the depth and thus gain only superficial or simplified knowledge. **Serialists**, on the other hand, work systematically and give preference to processing information gradually, step by step after they have comprehended what they have learned before. Learners should be aware of both approaches and should develop them in order to be able to use them, or even combine them in the so-called flexible approach, depending on the specific task they are assigned with (Mareš, 1998, 25-27).

2.2.4 Motivation

The success rate of learning is always, to some extent, affected by learners' (lack of) motivation. It must be kept in mind, though, that it is only one variable that affects learners' success in language learning in combination with other factors (Čáp a Mareš, 2001; Pavelková, 2002). A motivated learner 'is willing or even eager to invest effort in learning activities and to progress' (Ur, 2002, 274). The important thing to realise is that not all successful learners come to a language, or knowledge in general, easily. For some it means more work than for others; however, the most successful learners have one thing in common – their motivation. Motivated learners are typically very ambitious, thus tend to accept demanding challenges they strive to conquer in the best way possible. Naiman et al. (qtd. in Ur, 2002, 275) characterise motivated learners as ambitious, goal-oriented and extremely persistent, confident in his/her abilities and achievement. Although they desire to succeed in order to maintain their own positive self-image, they are not discouraged by a temporary lack of understanding or confusion, because they believe that understanding will eventually come.

There are several kinds of motivation. In terms of language learning, Gardner and Lambert distinguish between **integrative** and **instrumental** motivation (qtd. in Ur, 2002, 276). The former expresses the need to identify with the target language culture, as opposed to the latter, instrumental motivation, that equals the need to succeed at school or work. Another distinction can be made between **intrinsic** (sometimes called primary) and **extrinsic** (sometimes called secondary) motivation. Intrinsically motivated learners engage in an activity for its own sake, which is very typical for younger learners. Edward Deci (1975) claims that 'intrinsically motivated activities are ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. Intrinsically motivated behaviours are aimed at bringing about certain internally rewarding

consequences, namely, feelings of competence and self-determination' (qtd in Brown, 1994, 155). Extrinsically motivated learners, on the other hand, are encouraged by external stimuli and expect a reward, such as marks, praise or positive feedback (Skalková, 1999, 159-160; Ur, 276). The third example distinguishes **global**, **situational** and task **motivation**. As for languages, global motivation means overall concentration on the foreign as such. Situational motivation is restricted on a specific context or environment (e.g. school, classroom) and task motivation is concerned with a specific task that must be fulfilled (Brown, 1978, qtd. in Ur, 276).

Lightbown and Spada (2006) believe that learners' motivation may be highly influenced by employing appropriate teaching strategies. It is advisable to develop a safe and encouraging environment to foster good relationships with learners and among learners and support their aspirations as well as use relevant and interesting resources with aims adjusted to individual learners' abilities. Then, with proper feedback and constructive criticism, learners will accept the significance of learning (languages) for their lives (194-195).

2.2.5 Language aptitude

In point of fact, there are learners who learn foreign languages without any problems and then there are learners to whom it never comes easily, some will never perform on a native-like level. One of the predictors of success in a foreign language is FLA – Foreign Language Aptitude, commonly called talent for languages. Thornbury characterises it as 'innate talent or predisposition for language learning' (2006, 15).

According to Carroll (1962), FLA is characterised by the 'phonemic coding ability' which means that learners are able to 'separate the stream of speech into phonemes to allow the recognition of morphemes' (Gráf, 2012, 42); 'sensitivity towards the grammatical functions that words fulfil in a sentence; the ability to learn inductively, in other words, discovering the rules and making up the bigger picture by noticing the patterns and exploring the examples; the ability to rote learn vocabulary items paired with their associated translations' (Carroll, 1962 qtd. in 'Foreign language aptitude', 2011; Gráf, 2012, 42).

Although there are tests that were designed to determine one's likelihood of success in the target language, for instance Modern Language Aptitude Test (Carroll and Sapon, 1953-1958) or Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (Pimsleur, 1966) they do not take other factors into

consideration, such as motivation, personality or exposure to the language, therefore the result is not always fully objective (Brown, 2000, 98-103).

2.2.6 Language level

Regarding language levels, teachers mention the following problems that frequently occur in language classes: big differences among learners' skills – some of them are very advanced, some of them can hardly greet in the foreign language. Many learners do not understand spoken English, so they cannot understand their teachers' requests and as a consequence their communication is rather poor (Prodromou, 1995, 3).

In a broader sense, language levels could be classified as **beginner**, **intermediate** and **advanced**. Although it is dependent on the context, 'beginners' generally refer to those who do not know any English at all, 'intermediate' are those who are capable of using the four language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) on a basic level and 'advanced' are those who can comprehend the English language in its non-simplified form (Harmer, 2001, 12-13).

Although, there are different classifications of language levels, the most widespread is provided by The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) that divides the levels into three categories, namely **basic user**, **independent user** and **proficient user**, each of which consists of two sub-categories. Basic user includes levels **A1** and **A2**, independent user **B1** and **B2** and proficient **C1** and **C2**. The following part introduces two (related to the young school age) out of the six language levels as described in CEFR taken from Council of Europe Portal (for more see Appendix 1):

Learners on the **A1** level 'can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. They can introduce themselves and others and are able to ask and answer questions about personal details such as where they live, people they know and things they have. They can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help. Learners on the **A2** level can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). They also can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. They can describe in simple

terms aspects of their background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.’

2.3 The good and the struggling language learner

In any classroom, teachers will, maybe even subconsciously, ‘typecast’ their learners, more often in mixed-ability classes where the differences among children’s performance may be striking. Although every teacher will use his/her own categories and labels, most of them will likely adopt the attributes ‘good’ and ‘bad’.

2.3.1 The good language learner

Categorising someone as good or bad language learners is quite intricate. Some learners may seem to be good at the beginning of the school year, but throughout the course they lose their lead, or conversely, they work their way up after a poor beginning. Some are good at reading, but struggle with listening, some write brilliant essays, but cannot produce a decent monologue on a basic topic. Some excel for a short amount of time, for others it is a consistent, even a lifelong matter.

Quite similarly, Prodromou looks into this issue and mentions a few points on what he calls a good language learner: The learning process of such learners involves knowledge, both explicit and implicit. They make decisions about their own learning, which can result in better and more successful learning strategies. Learners, based on what they already know, need to be taught to analyse their needs, which later makes them the best judges of their own learning. With their acquired autonomy their learning will become more effective not only inside the classroom, but also outside, especially if they use problem-solving strategies and are capable of assessing their own progress (1995, 7-13).

Wenden (1987) contributes by putting together what learners themselves feel is crucial in language learning. Firstly, they express the importance of learning English, or any language in general, in a natural way without being afraid to make mistakes and, moreover, to learn from them. Learners should practise by using the language as frequently as possible in order to start thinking in the target language. It follows that learners must be interested in learning about the language, in other words, in its grammar and vocabulary, but also the environment, in which the target language appears. Some also mentioned the importance of one’s feelings and

necessity to not be ashamed to ask questions. Lastly, some people simply have an aptitude for learning languages (qtd. in Prodromou, 1995, 19-23).

Harmer goes a little beyond these classifications by making his list a little more particular, since he talks about characteristics of good classroom learners. Such learners are willing to listen, not only in terms of paying attention, because they indeed listen to the subject matter of lessons in order to absorb as much information as possible. Secondly, some of these learners have no fear to experiment – they know that by taking risks they are more likely to get to the core of what they are learning. It goes hand in hand with their need for assurance and clarification, therefore they do ask questions if they do not understand something and they do not get offended when they have been corrected, indeed quite the contrary – they understand it as another way to learn (1998, 10).

Diversity in instruction plays an outsized role in teaching good language learners as its main function is maximizing learner capacity. If the teacher senses a potential, he/she decides to move at a faster pace or offers advanced opportunities to learn. It must be remembered, though, that even advanced learners need help to develop their abilities. Without proper coaching they do not realise their potential and might even fail.

There are many reasons for underachievement in terms of learners' full potential (Tomlinson, 2001, 11-12):

1. **Mental laziness** – human brain must 'exercise' by getting challenges. If it is not trained, it loses its capacity in a similar way muscles do when not used much. If advanced learners work successfully, but effortlessly, their potential decreases.
2. **Dependence on success** – some learners become overly dependent on grades and praise and neglect actual ideas, do not take intellectual risks and are not interested in new discoveries.
3. **Perfectionism** – being used to success and good grades, such learners typically assume it is the only way to pursue and they try to avoid failure at all costs. However, such behaviour may evolve into compulsive behaviour which is unhealthy.
4. **Lack of study skills** – in many cases, advanced learners make good grades without much effort. They never learn to work hard, because they do not need it; however, as a rule of thumb, success in life means a lot of hard work, taking risks and being tenacious. If not learned early in life, it may result in frustration in later life.

On the whole, advanced learners are like any other learners. They need their goals set high, but with the teacher's sensitive support and help. Teachers should seek a balance between challenge and joy while constantly raising the bar for expectations, so that advanced learners 'compete with their own possibilities rather than with a norm' (Tomlinson, 2001, 11-12).

2.3.2 The struggling language learner

The term 'struggling' evokes rather negative connotations and might bring the reader to the adjective 'bad'. Nevertheless, Prodromou believes there is no such thing as a 'bad language learner'. He is confident that learners by their nature want to acquire new knowledge and in general intend to become successful. Besides, he is convinced that learning can always be made pleasant and engaging, so that everyone, even struggling learners, can enjoy it and benefit from it. The truth is that no-one likes failure, thus weakness should be highlighted as the starting line for strength and success. We have to realise that 'learners usually evince a variable rather than a uniform linguistic competence. Every learner brings into the classroom a whole complex of personal characteristics which influence their approach to what is happening. It seems that the best way to create an antipathy to learning is to treat the learner as empty headed.' (Prodromou, 1995, 7).

The important thing that not every teacher realises is that even struggling learners often work hard and conscientiously, but they simply fail to deliver the expected results. Some struggles have roots in the family situation, some come from learning disabilities, others result from boredom and some learners simply do not know how to grasp the provided information. In a similar way to advanced learners, struggling learners may be experiencing only a tough period that sooner or later transforms into a flourishing one, or again, oppositely (Tomlinson, 2001, 12).

The following text offers some helpful principles that might maximize struggling learners' capacity (Tomlinson, 2001, 12):

1. **Positives** – there is always something every individual excels at or at least does well. It is important for the teacher to find these positive sides and strengths and let the learners use them in school tasks to find them easier and experience success from time to time. In addition, there are learners who become discouraged when teachers seem to be only interested in their flaws without reinforcing their strengths.

2. **Relevance** – learners in general work harder when they see the relevance in what they are doing. If they are only promised to make use of their effort in the future, they will find it insufficient. Teachers must pay attention to the purpose of activities and must make sure they are meaningful.
3. **Powerful learning** – if learners struggle to comprehend all the details, choose only the key concepts, the big ideas and most necessary items. This way they will not be overwhelmed and will grasp the information better.
4. **Self-efficacy** – the best way to gain a strong sense of self-efficacy is through being assigned a task that is slightly above the current level. With proper encouragement and support learners will feel more accomplished.
5. **Variety** – the more options to approach a language are provided, the more probable is the chance that they fit the various learning styles and preferences learners have.

All in all, teachers who work with struggling learners should pursue clarity not only in their instructions, but also in what their learners' goals are. Building upon that, teachers should contextualize whatever they are trying to present and employ scaffolding – successive levels of support that help learners achieve established goals. Last but not least, teachers should work with a variety of sources to reach every individual.

3. Differentiated instruction

Diversity in the educational system requires an individual approach more than ever. Although, it would be foolish to believe that one teacher can work with every single learner and provide him/her with an entirely individual approach, the truth is, that some strategies exist that enable every child to take as much as possible from the lessons. Therefore, to attend to everyone's needs, teachers should pursue what is called **differentiated instruction**.

In its broadest sense, by this term we understand dividing learners into homogeneous and heterogeneous groups that are created with a certain aim and according to criteria determined beforehand to facilitate learning for all learners involved (Kasíková, Valenta, 1994, 8). On a more specific note, Heacox sees differentiation as 'changing the pace, level or kind of instruction you (teachers) provide in response to individual learners' needs, styles or interests' (2002, 5). Similarly, Tomlinson sees differentiated instruction as a way of teaching that gives learners 'multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they have learned. In other words, a differentiated classroom provides different avenues to acquiring content, to processing or making sense of ideas, and to developing products so that every individual learns effectively (2001, 1).

Although differentiation has its place in every class, because, as said before, no two learners are really alike, there are classes of a greater number of learners of significantly diverse abilities that require careful, in-depth preparation.

3.1 Classification of differentiated instruction

The point of differentiated instruction is basically to assess learner needs, dispositions and inclinations and subsequently decide on procedures that must be taken, so that individual learner development is secured. There are several ways to classify differentiated instruction. Firstly, **qualitative/quantitative** and **internal/external** differentiation will be explored, which refers to grouping according to diverse criteria that will be followed by a further classification.

1. Quantitative and qualitative differentiation
 - a) **Quantitative differentiation** – learners are selected and grouped based on their performance and results, typically marks.

- b) **Qualitative differentiation** – learners are selected and grouped based on their interests, future-oriented plans, etc (Cedrychová, Krestová, Raudenský, 1992, 7-16).

2. External and internal differentiation

- a) **External differentiation** – stronger learners are separated from weaker learners or chosen on the basis of their interests and talents and put into **schools with different foci** (language schools, art schools, sport schools, etc.), **specialized classes** (with, for instance, extensive language teaching, extensive mathematics teaching, extensive music teaching, etc.) or simply **‘A and B’ groups**, A consisting of the stronger learners and B consisting of the weaker learners. Both groups follow the same curriculum with the possibility to choose different activities or pace. Such arrangement may be either permanent, for all subjects (known as streaming) or used for specific subjects only (known as setting), which is the case of optional subjects, seminars, etc.
- b) **Internal differentiation** – this kind of differentiation is established within a class. Learners work in **homogeneous** or **heterogeneous groups** into which they are selected according to qualitative or quantitative criteria and the groups are either permanent or the arrangement changes for different subjects (Cedrychová, Krestová, Raudenský, 1992, 7-16).

Within internal differentiation, there are authors who provide further classification on the basis of the content of the lessons, the process of learning and the products of learning. These three basic elements present in every lesson can offer various approaches by their differentiation. They are namely input (content), process and output (product), or in other words, what topics there are to learn, how learners understand and work with the gained knowledge and how they demonstrate it (Tomlinson, 2001, 45-92; Gregory and Chapman, 2007, 3-4; Heacox, 2002, 10-11). Some add differentiation of the learning environment that covers both physical and psychological elements. In other words, the arrangement of furniture in the classroom, assigning learners to pairs/groups and creating a safe and supportive environment with respect to learners’ individual needs and differences, which was covered in previous chapters. Last of all, differentiation of affect – how learners feel in the classroom – sometimes appears (Tomlinson, 2001, 45-92; Tomlinson and Strickland, 2005, 6).

a) Differentiation of the content of lessons

Content involves the topics, themes and concepts presented to learners. Therefore, apart from knowing their learners well, teachers must be familiar with curricular documents relevant for their educational system that delimit what knowledge learners should acquire and state what the overall aims for teaching and learning are. The binding document relevant for elementary-school education in the Czech Republic is the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education (Rámcový vzdělávací program), which serves as the base that places emphasis on the development of key competences (for more see nuv.cz). Based on this framework, schools create their School Education Programme, which allows them to find various ways to develop the key competences taking account of learners' specific needs (nuv.cz). Consequently, it makes it possible for teachers to state in what ways they are going to differentiate the content of lessons – whether via learner levels, interests or their learning profiles.

Thus, as Heacox (2002, 10) claims: 'You differentiate content when you pre-assess learners' skills and knowledge, then match learners with appropriate activities according to readiness' and learning styles. Also 'when you give learners choices about topics to explore in greater depth' (Heacox, 2002, 10). This way teachers enhance learners' motivation by making them aware of the connection between learning and pleasure. Having learners look at their duties through their avocation will most likely facilitate both the learning and the teaching process (Gregory and Chapman, 2007, 3-4). Heacox (2002, 10) adds: You also differentiate content 'when you provide learners with basic and advanced resources that match their current levels of understanding'. On one hand, this requires teachers' thorough preparation, especially concerning materials, since it may involve more versions than one due to a frequent lack of suitable exercises in textbooks (although textbook materials may be adapted as well). On the other hand, the more essential thing is the way the material is presented and what tasks are assigned to learners.

b) Differentiation of the process of the lesson

By process of a lesson, we mean the way a learner takes on a piece of information, processes it and makes meaning of it. In order to make the learning process effective, teachers should choose activities attractive to their learners, reflecting their preferences that, at the same time, correspond to their learning styles (Heacox, 2002, 10). Furthermore, teachers should offer a variety of ways to approach and work with the subject matter (e.g. different levels of assignments, an option to explore given topics from different angles, etc.) Once learners

collect their thoughts and find their own sense in the activity, they identify with it easily and will retain the new piece of information longer (Tomlinson, 2001, 79). The overall idea in employing differentiation of the process of the lesson is that while the content remains the same, the ways learners approach it and process the information is different (Heacox, 2002, 11). Here, the concept of ‘differentiation of time’ fits in. Although the content and product, likely even process, remain the same, learners are given different timelines.

c) **Differentiation of the product of the lesson**

Products are the results of learning. Their aim is to show how well learners understood what they have been taught. It makes them reflect on the subject matter, think about what they have learned and how they can use it and apply it in practice. It may be something tangible (essay, report, letter, etc.), verbal (dialogue, speech, debate, etc.) or more active (role-play, real-play, interactive presentation, etc.). The tasks that learners work on may be of a short-term or long-term character. Short-term tasks tend to be easier and not as time-consuming as long-term tasks (e.g. essay writing versus school magazine creation). Once again, while the content and possibly even the process of learning remain the same, the ways learners prove their understanding differ due to their preferences and the final product (Heacox, 2002, 11).

3.2 Characteristics of differentiated instruction

As a matter of fact, some of the characteristics of differentiated instruction overlap with teaching instruction in general. Therefore, not everything mentioned in this sub-chapter characterise strictly differentiated instruction; however, it is information that proposes pieces of advice that should not be omitted when applying it. Tomlinson (2001, 3-7; 47-49), Gregory and Chapman (2007, 3-10) and Heacox (2002, 5) state the few following points that characterise differentiated instruction in terms of what is desirable and what is inappropriate when making an effort to employ it:

What differentiated instruction should be:

- a) It should be **proactive** – it requires the teacher to actively search for ways to enable and facilitate learning in order to fit learners’ individual needs as opposed to planning a single approach for everyone.
- b) It should be **more qualitative** than quantitative – a common, yet quite wrong, assumption is that differentiating instruction means more work for advanced learners.

Such an approach will most likely be ineffective, since it might feel like a punishment. Rather than adjusting the quantity of a task teachers should attempt to adjust its nature.

- c) It should be rigorous
- d) It should be based on **assessment** – teachers should make use of every opportunity to learn more about their learners and get insights about their needs. It can be done in many ways – teachers may be present at conversations, set up classroom discussions, assign essays on topics that reveal something important about their learners, observe individual behaviour, etc. Tomlinson suggests that teachers begin to ‘think of assessment as a road map for their thinking and planning’. At school assessment typically equals a test. It is something that typically comes at the end of a unit or at the end of the term that reveals who understands the subject matter and who does not. In practical terms, assessment is more convenient when done at the beginning of the unit or along the way, since it shows a lot about learners right away and it can be used to differentiate tasks and immediately help learners succeed.
- e) It should be **varied** and provide **multiple approaches to content, process and product** (as mentioned above).
- f) It should be primarily **learner-centred**.
- g) It should use **different types of grouping** – whole-class work, group work and also individual work have a place in teaching classes of different levels. Some activities might be more effective with the whole class, whereas some will require a smaller number of participants, and some learners will even require an individual approach at times.
- h) It should be **organic** – teachers must continuously learn about how their learners learn and make appropriate adjustments in order to ensure their constant progress.

‘And while teachers are aware that sometimes the learner/learning match is less than ideal, they also understand that they can continually make adjustments. Differentiated instruction often results in more effective matches than does the mode of teaching that insists that one assignment serves all learners well. Further, a teacher in a differentiated classroom does not classify himself/herself as someone who “already differentiates instruction” and therefore has got the ‘recipe’. Rather, that teacher is fully aware that every hour of teaching, every day in the classroom can reveal one more way to make the classroom a better match for its learners. Finally, such a teacher does not see differentiation as a strategy or something to do when there’s extra time. Rather, it is a way of life in the classroom. He/she does not seek or follow a recipe for differentiation, but rather combines what she can learn about differentiation from a range of

sources to her own professional instincts and knowledge base to do whatever it takes to reach out to each learner' (Tomlinson, 2001, 5-7).

- i) It should be **relevant** and focused primarily on the **key concepts** – having to cover everything on a curriculum may be quite overwhelming for all learners – both stronger and weaker. By pointing the vital concepts out, learning becomes more structured and easier to approach by everyone.
- j) It should be **engaging**.
- k) It should **balance** the ratio of **learner-selected** and **teacher-assigned tasks** – there always should be a balance between the times when learners are given a choice and the times when they are assigned with level-appropriate tasks. Learners may be given opportunities in selection of topics, whether they want to work independently, with a partner or in a group.
- l) It should move from the **concrete** to the **abstract**, from the **simple** to the **complex**, from the **structured** to the **open-ended**, from the **dependent** to the **independent**, from the **slow** to the **fast**.
- m) It should be based on **standards** for the particular subject.
- n) It should **activate** learners existing knowledge prior to learning anything new. It will raise learners' anticipation and thrill of the new topic.
- o) It should be **flexible** in terms of adopting activities and even whole lesson plans to the immediate learners' mood and needs.
- p) It should be **complex** – learners of all levels should be challenged and encouraged to explore topics in depth in contrast to, to work hard and engage actively in search for answers in contrast to acquiring shallow and surface knowledge.

Furthermore, everyone should feel welcomed and respected by others as well as safe, and teachers should teach for success and help every individual find his/her path to grow.

What differentiated instruction should not be:

- a) It should not be just **another way of homogeneous grouping** – teachers should be competent enough to assess when it is more appropriate to work with all the learners at the same time, when to divide them into groups or when to focus on individuals. Hence the key to differentiated instruction is through flexible grouping with regard to learners' capabilities.

- b) It should not be just '**tailoring the same suit of clothes**' – teachers should not assume that adjusting a task to be more difficult or easier is enough. Although these modifications are not completely wrong, they might not be as challenging or as easy as teachers imagine. Tomlinson (2001, 3) uses a metaphor regarding this issue: 'Trying to stretch a garment that is far too small or attempting to tuck and gather a garment that is far too large is likely to be less effective than getting clothes that are the right fit at a given time'.
- c) It should not be **chaotic** – a frequent concern of many is losing control over the class. Unlike teachers who promote a single approach to learning, teachers who decide to differentiate instruction stand in front of a daunting task – directing and monitoring many activities at the same time. Setting ground rules and ensuring purposeful learner talking and movement is a necessity.

3.3 Advantages and disadvantages of differentiated instruction

Although differentiated instruction can solve many problems regarding the mixed-ability group issues, it also brings both advantages and disadvantages that must be realised beforehand and dealt with. Kozlík (1998, 10) mentions the following:

Among **advantages**, Kozlík (1998,10) includes the fact that stronger learners are occupied enough to avoid boredom and stay focused and motivated working on extra, or more difficult, tasks, whereas weaker learners are adequately occupied and do not feel frustrated or inferior, therefore, the pace and contents of lessons are appropriate to the group's as well as individual learners' abilities. Thanks to differentiated instruction all learners, even the weakest, get a feeling that they can succeed and get better as opposed to undifferentiated classrooms where they feel left behind. Naturally, failure is noticeably decreased since weaker learners are not pressured to rush, and thus they manage to learn and apply the essentials, which is more effective. Eventually, all learners become more active and involved in the tasks.

As for **disadvantages**, Lombardo (2015) talks about the demanding nature of it for teachers. Having to attend to every single learners' needs occupies teachers as much as having multiple full-time jobs. Kozlík contributes by saying that schools and teachers are not prepared to employ differentiation, therefore some of the potentially occurring issues might not be solved in the best way possible. One of the common problems Kozlík mentions is parents'

disagreement with their children's group placement, because being put into a weaker group may result in inferiority complex and it may trigger the stronger learners' contempt with their weaker counterparts and unfortunately, weaker learners often lose the role models they might have found in their stronger classmates and then prevent the class from moving on (Kozlík, 1998, 10; Lombardo, 2015). In addition, schools and teachers are generally not (well) prepared to face mixed-ability classes and apply differentiated instruction (1998, 10).

3.4 Conditions of successful differentiation

There is no wonder that successful differentiation is not a matter of course, nor is it easy. The class is suddenly not approached as one huge unit anymore, but as multiple smaller units whose needs should be taken into consideration. Failure of the system might be caused by teachers' insufficient professional development in this area, or the complexity of such instruction. Although it is a prolonged process that must be carefully thought about, there are certain precautions to follow that might improve the effort and the results. The following section includes pieces that the author of this work found pivotal.

First of all (and also above all), teachers must get to know their learners and their peculiarities. Without basic knowledge of their strengths and weakness, interests, their family as well as social and cultural background, they would not know how to work with the learners and how to adjust their teaching. One of the less demanding ways to gather information about learners in terms of preparation is observation during individual work, pair work, groupwork, when performing in front of the whole class, during the breaks. Moreover, learners' written assignments reveal a lot as well as their overall marks and results. Another means of data collection are tests and questionnaires that teachers might put together according to their areas of interests in terms of learners' intelligence, learning styles, evaluations of the lessons, etc. When none of these are enough, teachers may set a meeting or consultation with the particular learners in a more private setting (Gavora et al., 2010, 85-213).

When teachers know their learners well, they are more likely to set a positive and friendly classroom atmosphere, full of respect and trust. It should be a stimulating and inspiring place that has a positive effect on their motivation and ability to study. Learners should not compete but cooperate with each other and occasionally, every learner should experience success. In order to prepare learners for such a scenario, it is convenient to set up some rules in advance.

Gregory and Chapman (2002, 4) suggest, for instance, to encourage the notion that no opinion is bad, forbid mean behaviour towards others including sarcasm and insults, explain that everyone has the right to share and needs to be heard and get rid of the opinion that errors are unacceptable and something to be ashamed of. Differentiated instruction also requires collaboration with the whole school and other teachers, not to mention the ‘problematic’ children’s’ parents.

3.5 Role of the teacher in a differentiated classroom

Teachers, as well as learners, naturally play the central role in the teaching-learning context. Their role is crucial, because they must be very versatile as they are asked to handle several things at the same time to achieve satisfactory results. They must be aware of learners’ individual differences and preferences, specifics of mixed-ability classes and primarily of differentiated instruction according to which they create tailor-made lessons. Since teachers are the key to differentiated instruction, this section will introduce the role of teachers in a differentiated classroom.

According to Čáp, the success of teachers’ work is highly dependent on how well they know their learners. If one wants to have an impact on someone else, he/she needs to know this person well. Teaching in multiple classes and thereby working with many people leaves teachers incapable of knowing all their learners in detail. In some cases, though, it is necessary to get to know a learner closely in terms of his/her development, family situation, free time, relationships with classmates, etc. Teachers can obtain the information by having a conversation with the learners or assign them essays on topics such as free time, relaxation, chores, family, friends, goals, plans and many more. In addition, teachers typically tend to make ‘schemes’ to categorise learners in terms of their school results, talent, diligence and others based on the types of learners they have met before (hence the above mentioned good and bad language learner). It sometimes happens that teachers mistake learners’ temporary, momentous state with his/her qualities, even though it has nothing to do with their regular behaviour (2007, 365-368).

As a matter of fact, people naturally project their own psychological processes, states and characteristics onto other people. They expect that others’ thinking, abilities and endurance are the same as theirs. Many teachers wrongly assume that learners can understand things in the same way they do without realizing that their interests and motivation most likely differ

considerably. Following from that, some generally tend to see negatives in people, whereas others see the positives. Apart from that, prejudice appears whether related to a social group, social class or an individual learner. Teachers may learn about their learner's personality, abilities and behaviour from a colleague and they accept the prejudice and treat the learner accordingly. First impressions are also powerful; however, they are often incidental and do not present reality. Unfortunately, they may affect all future experience with the particular person. On the whole, teachers shall pursue objectivity and they must take into consideration that some behavioural manifestations may be random and completely atypical for the particular person and, in addition, he or she is still going to develop and most likely change over time (2007, 365–368).

Teachers in significantly diverse mixed-ability classes must apply the principles of differentiated instruction even more carefully and thoroughly to attend to everyone's needs. The issue usually lies in the fact that teachers quite frequently teach to the average child without realising it is unrealistic for all the individual learners to achieve the same goals. A mixed-ability class will be successful as long as teachers allow everyone to experience success and independent growth which will not happen until the tasks are properly differentiated based on individual capabilities and unless various learning techniques are developed. As mentioned above, setting goals for every lesson is important. It might be written on the blackboard or it can be said out loud at the beginning of the lesson. The achievement of the goals should be checked at the end of the lesson (Bremner, 2008, 2).

Tomlinson believes that those who are comfortable with employing differentiated instruction in teaching mixed-ability classes do not see themselves as 'keepers and dispensers of knowledge' (2001, 16), but rather 'as organizers of learning opportunities'. While content knowledge remains important, these teachers focus less on knowing all the answers and more on "reading their learners." They then create ways to learn that both capture learners' attention and lead to understanding. Organizing a class for effective activity and exploration becomes the highest priority' (2001, 16). These skills are; however, learned and developed over time. When pursuing differentiated instruction in their classes, teachers must accept their roles as facilitators and collaborators. As facilitators, teachers lead their learners to autonomy and responsibility for their own learning and make sure learners fulfil their commitments. They organise and focus curriculum on essential information, understanding, and skills and reflect on individuals as well as the group. They never stop searching for insights about individual

learners and are able to neglect first impressions and stereotypes. They are forgiving and encouraging. Additionally, they anticipate problems and try to avoid them, because they teach for success (Tomlinson, 2001, 17). They also offer a series of activities that challenge learners and provide them with variety and choice in both the process and product of learning. Furthermore, teachers-facilitators organise learners in terms of grouping and they use time flexibly. As collaborators, teachers attempt to partner with their colleagues and share their lesson plans, ask for advice and communicate regularly on the topics of education (Heacox, 2002, 12-13).

Regarding approaches and methods, teachers pursuing differentiated instruction are supposed to be familiar with plenty of them, so that they can choose and combine elements of different resources in order to meet their learners' needs as much as possible. This part will briefly mention the historical development of the main teaching methods. The Grammar-translation method, for instance brings the idea of using the mother tongue as a beneficial tool in teaching a second language. On the contrary, from the Direct method we learn that the target language should be used wherever possible. Structural approaches, e.g. Audiolingualism, suggest being overall more systematic and put stress on controlled practice. Humanistic approaches - Silent way and Suggestopedia in particular, see learners as individuals with feelings and encourage teachers to take it into consideration to ensure the physical and mental harmony of a person. The Communicative approach follows with its belief that language helps people exchange feelings and ideas as well as works as a tool for making people do things. Nowadays, the tendency shifted towards the 'post-communicative era' and approaches including task-based language teaching (TBLT) as well as content and language integrated learning (CLIL). TBLT focuses on the authentic language use and on meaningful tasks (e.g. giving directions, visiting a doctor, making a phone call, etc.) using the target language. The focus here is on fluency (of the target language) rather than on accuracy. CLIL, on the other side, focuses on learning the content through foreign language. Nevertheless, no one should randomly pick pieces of information from different sources. This must be a thoroughly thought out process and teachers must be realistic about what can be accomplished (Prodromou 1995, 10-11; Didenko, Pichugova, 2016, 1-4; for more see the Appendix 2; Harmer, 1988; Harmer, 1998; Richard and Rogers, 1986; Didenko, Pichugova, 2016).

In conclusion, it must be remembered that 'differentiation does not suggest that a teacher can be all things to all individuals all the time. It does; however, mandate that a teacher create a

reasonable range of approaches to learning much of the time, so that most learners find learning a fit much of the time' (Tomlinson, 2001, 17).

4. Teaching tips for differentiated instruction

In the following section, teaching tips for mixed-ability classes will be suggested and looked at from several points of view. Combination of Scrivener's (88-95) and Ur's frameworks will be enriched with some additions by Hess (2001), Hadfield (2010), Harmer (1988, 1998, 2007), Speck (2017) and Jones (1982). The author's intention was to study multiple sources in order to gather up tips on how to approach mixed-ability classes.

This chapter includes seventeen sub-chapters that are arranged as follows: Dividing the class; Early and late finishers; Split-and-combine workflows; Differentiated worksheet; Multilevel tasks; Letting learners choose what to do; Different time requirements; Homework; Testing; Peer-teaching; Brainstorming; Recall and share; Traffic lights; Mini-white boards; Role-play, real-play, simulation and Contracts, Textbooks and Differentiation of language skills.

It should be noted that the following list includes information that the author found relevant, based on studied literature and her own belief, but that is by no means exhaustive.

4.1 Dividing the class

One of the powerful tools of classroom management techniques is **groupwork/pair work**. If conducted well, learners benefit greatly from it. Not only do they get more opportunities to speak, but they also strengthen their sense of responsibility and self-reliance, learn from one another and overcome shyness more easily. Besides, the lack of motivation or concentration can be improved.

Unfortunately, not all classes accept groupwork without difficulties. As a matter of fact, many teachers are afraid of losing control or they simply cannot stand noise. On top of that there is a chance that learners will overuse their mother tongue and some teachers are just so uncomfortable with being unable to monitor learners' language at all times that they choose to avoid grouping (Ur, 2002, 232-233). As a consequence, learners are not used to working in such arrangements and they refuse to give it a try. Quite commonly, when made to work in a group, learners do not contribute much, yet assume the group's success to be somehow their own (Hess, 2001, 112).

In addition, ‘research in social psychology confirms what teachers know instinctively: a cohesive group works more efficiently and productively. A positive group atmosphere can have a beneficial effect on the morale, motivation, and self-image of its members, and thus significantly affect their learning, by developing in them a positive attitude to the language being learned, to the learning process, and to themselves as learners.’ (Hadfield, 2010, 10). When establishing good group atmosphere, teachers must consider learners’ differences, their strengths, weaknesses and even preferences. Many learners come to the class self-conscious, anxious about their capabilities and worried about what to expect. In some cases, learners might be meeting for the first time, but it typically happens at elementary school, that particularly English teachers come to an already formed group with, at least partly, developed habits, feelings and attitudes towards each other. In either case, it is advisable to make learners feel comfortable and relaxed, but also aware of what working in a group while learning a language means (Hadfield, 2010, 25).

Apart from establishing a positive atmosphere, teachers, in attempts to achieve more successful learning, must consider the importance of relationships within the group and should consistently work on improving them. In the days of teacher-dominated classrooms, the relationships between individual learners were rather neglected, but in today’s ‘learner-centred classroom’ where pair work and groupwork have become quite frequent, the success of most activities relies on how the learners get on with each other. Learners themselves function as rich resources for each other and if the communication stagnates and they are unable to cooperate, the teaching process is affected and might easily fail (Hadfield, 2010, 7-11).

The inability to cooperate often comes from learners’ territoriality. When asked to change their seats or work with a different partner, they become reluctant. It is, however, essential that the group composition changes from time to time, otherwise learners get to know each other so well that they only use a restricted amount of language and have only few information gaps left, and therefore they lack motivation to speak to each other and they are more susceptible to mischief or avoiding the target language by using their mother tongue (Hadfield, 2010, 2).

As for the actual dividing, teachers can choose to work with the whole class, bigger groups, smaller groups, pairs or even individuals. Scrivener suggests forming **short-term** and **long-term** pairs or groups that include a stronger learner who guides and supports others or dividing the class into two halves (or smaller groups). The latter enables the teacher to assign some

learners with independent work and provide help to others. For some activities it is convenient to create **homogeneous** groups which allow peers of a similar level to work together. Stronger learners feel challenged, are able to handle more work and therefore progress faster and are not held up whereas weaker learners work at their own pace. Furthermore, they are not ashamed in front of the faster classmates, nor discouraged by them. On the other hand, some learners might start to feel 'different', either superior or inferior and they may identify more with their subgroup than their class. Last but not least, learners may find it rather unfair that they get to work on graded, in some cases more difficult, tasks and may protest against it. In a similar way, keeping the class together as a single mixed-level group or separating it into smaller **heterogeneous** units also creates suitable conditions for learning. Weaker learners learn from the stronger and the stronger gain deeper insights into a topic by explaining it to others. However, there are also downsides to this approach. Faster learners may get bored easily solving simple tasks and waiting for their classmates to finish, they get frustrated with hearing wrong answers repeatedly, especially if they feel they already understand the issue. Their natural reaction might be to talk over or ignore their classmates. At the same time, weaker learners can feel left behind, thus they refuse to work and start to misbehave (2011, 88-89).

Kasíková and Valenta think it is convenient to assign roles to individual group members. Each learner then has his/her specific task, which increases interdependence among them and consolidates individual learner responsibility. Learners can be assigned roles including a record-keeper, a member who communicates with the teacher, a member who communicates with other groups, a member who controls the group's functioning, a member who provides answers and conclusions, etc. (1994, 53-54). To make it more attractive, teachers may try to motivate their learners by naming their roles in a more interesting way, such as a production manager, time manager, information manager, etc. (Gregory and Chapman, 2007, 98-99).

4.1.1 Whole-class work

Whole-class work typically evokes the image of a teacher standing in front of the learners giving them a lecture. Although the teacher-centred approach has been becoming replaced by the learner-centred approach, it is still the most prevalent teacher-learner interaction in many classrooms.

Advantages of whole-class work:

Generally, working with the all learners at the same time is relatively easy to plan. Teachers commonly create materials at one level for everyone, not taking learners' individual differences into account. It is especially convenient for the relationships within the group, since the sense of belonging is fostered in this arrangement. New friendships may come into existence and a variety of ideas may be exchanged. Since the transmission in this arrangement is mainly from the teacher as the source of knowledge to learners it works best for activities where the teacher's role is 'controller', for instance giving explanations or instructions, showing material such as pictures, videos, playing an audio or video recording (Harmer, 1988, 114-115).

Disadvantages of whole-class work:

Whole-class work is focused on the group, not on the individuals and their differences, strengths and weaknesses. Working on 'the same thing, at the same time and at the same pace' (Harmer, 1988, 115) may result in learners' frustration. The same applies to shy learners or less confident learners who will most definitely loathe being forced to participate in front of everyone.

4.1.2 Pair work and groupwork

Pair work and groupwork became very important and favourable in the 1970s with the rise of communicative methodologies. They are seen as very advantageous for language learning (see below). Learners work in pairs or groups of between, ideally, three and six people and perform tasks such as preparing presentations, discussions, role-plays, information-gap activities and many others.

Advantages of pair work and groupwork:

First of all, pair work, as well as groupwork, provides more opportunities to actively use the language and participate in a lesson than whole-class work. It naturally requires a considerable amount of cooperation and it increases the speaking time on all sides as well as experimentation with the language. By working in pairs or groups learners gain greater independence because there is only a small number of them involved in all the decision making. As for the organization, pair work it is comparatively easy for the teacher to orchestrate (as opposed to groupwork that requires excellent organization skills in order to be done quickly). It reduces Teacher Talking Time (TTT) and allows teachers to monitor their learners and help or

encourage those in need. Besides, learning becomes primarily the learners' responsibility. This responsibility; however, is shared, so they do not need to feel much pressure. Last but not least, learners may enrich their partners with ideas their teacher would not or did not think of (Harmer, 1988, 116).

Disadvantages of pair work and groupwork:

Both pair work and groupwork may become noisy, which many teachers cannot bear, because at that moment they are not able to properly control their learners' behaviour or the usage of their mother tongue. Moreover, pair work or groupwork are not favoured by many learners, because they either prefer to work on their own and relate only to the teacher or they do not feel comfortable working with certain classmates. Lastly, the seating arrangement in the classroom can make pair work or groupwork rather difficult, if not completely impossible, to perform (Harmer, 1988, 116).

4.2 Early and late finishers

In any class, not just mixed-ability, there will be learners that finish much earlier than others. If the activity itself is not adapted to it then teachers must make solutions ready in advance:

- a) **Extra tasks** – if there is not much time remaining, learners can create additional questions, write a summary, create a dictionary of words their classmates might be struggling with and so on. If there is enough of the remaining time, they can prepare a report or a presentation.
- b) **Helping others** – faster learners help individuals or groups who have not finished yet.
- c) **Ongoing individual projects** – when finished earlier than others, learners work on a project over several lessons or the whole semester. They may be reading a book, creating their own book of stories, working on a seminar paper, putting a collage about their hometown together, etc.
- d) **Self-study area** - a self-study area can be created in the classroom. A whole corner can be used for this purpose, a carpet, or a desk. Teacher puts additional material there such as photocopied exercises, language games, books, magazines, articles, etc. When learners complete the task that was set to the whole class faster than others, they visit the self-study area and choose something to work on while waiting for their classmates to finish (Scrivener, 2011, 92).

In contrast to early-finishers, there are learners who fall behind, the so-called 'late-finishers'. If they struggle, teachers can decide to reduce the amount of work they are supposed to accomplish (e.g. Answer only the first four questions.), assign the unfinished part as homework or pair them up with early finishers who may help them with their struggles (Scrivener, 2011, 93).

4.3 Split-and-combine workflows

Scrivener mentions another technique called 'split-and-combine workflow'. This means that the class starts to work on a task together, but later individual groups separate to continue in different ways. They may work on the same task, but at a different pace, they may be given a different set of activities, different challenges, etc. based on their capabilities. The groups then finish together.

Scrivener suggests the following model scenario: the teacher opens the lesson with a discussion followed by a grammar presentation. After that, the stronger learners group works on a practice exercise while the weaker learners group works with the teacher, reviewing and reinforcing the input. This phase is followed by a drilling exercise for both of the groups and subsequently, weaker learners start working on the practice exercise while the teacher attends to the stronger learners offering them challenging speaking practice followed by another practice exercise. Then all of them check their answers for the first exercise and at the end of the lesson stronger learners act as teachers helping the weaker with the second practice exercise (2011, 89).

4.4 Differentiated worksheet

Another helpful device is a worksheet that may be differentiated in many ways. Ur brings her concept of 'compulsory vs. optional' meaning there is always a minimum that must be done plus an optional part for 'early finishers'. There is either a certain number of obligatory items and the rest is optional or learners are asked to get through as much as they can within a set time-limit (2002, 307).

Regarding the worksheet design, Scrivener recommends creating a unified one with simple and more difficult questions that might be divided by a horizontal line. Questions above the line are for weaker learners while stronger (or faster) learners complete the additional questions, too. Another option is to create questions obligatory for everyone and follow-up questions only for

those who finish early. Learners might also be given a choice. Although assigned with the same task, they are provided with multiple versions to choose from. Some versions may be supplemented with support (notes, guiding questions, beginning of a text, important vocabulary, etc.) for weaker learners. Last but not least, teachers can prepare add-on tasks in advance for ‘early finishers’ (2011, 90-91).

4.5 Multilevel tasks

Multilevel tasks mean that learners work on the same assignment; however different outcomes are expected depending on learners’ abilities. Such activities are usually characterized by their open-endedness which means they do not require a single correct answer, but rather an infinite number of acceptable answers that are not necessarily of the same level. Most likely, stronger learners will respond in a more complex way which might function as a model for weaker learners who hopefully gain more courage through this process to participate in the lesson. Here, Scrivener (2011, 91) gives a few examples of multilevel tasks:

- a) **Making sentences** – learners are asked to create as many sentences as they can from a list of words, prefixes, suffixes, etc. The idea is that stronger learners will make the effort to make more sentences, whereas weaker learners will work at their own, presumably slower, pace. Two activities that in nature are very similar to this one is ‘brainstorming’ and ‘recall and share’ mentioned by Ur (2002, 312-313):

Brainstorming is simply generating spontaneous and immediate ideas on a particular topic that might be carried out as an individual work, in pairs, groups or as a whole-class work. There are many ways to conduct this activity. Learners can, for instance, say or write sentences about a picture, they can be asked to write associations on words, think of solutions to problems, etc. Ur suggests an activity called ‘How many things can you think of that are – sweet, square, made of wood...?’ where learners try to come up with as many examples that fit in as they can. Their answers may be written down and a time-limit may be set. No learners should feel intimidated since no answers are wrong in this activity and answers of all levels are useful.

In **recall and share** Learners are exposed to some material (a picture, a text, a song, a set of idioms...) that is later removed and learners write as much as they can remember of it. Then they make groups, share their answers and they are shown the original material again to compare their answers with it. One such example is a spelling activity.

A few words that are difficult to spell are written on the blackboard. After a few moments the words are erased and learners are asked to write correctly as many as they can recall.

- b) **Making stories** – learners make up stories on assigned topics. With proper guidance and resources from their teacher (that also might be graded), they create pieces that correspond to their own level (Scrivener, 2011, 91). Ur works with a similar concept called ‘five-minute writing storms’ – learners create short paragraphs on topics such as ‘My dream country’, ‘Family’, etc. within 5 minutes and are invited to read them out loud (2002, 313). Harmer mentions an activity called ‘picture stories’ which could also be used to support a speaking or a writing task. Weaker learners are provided with pictures that help them create a story whereas stronger learners are assigned with a topic only (2002, 334).
- c) **Poster-based tasks** – teacher places posters with various questions and tasks around the classroom. Learners walk around and complete information they know. The class then reviews the work together with the teacher.
- d) **Must – could – should** – in this method, learners work with three tasks. The first, basic, one must be done by everyone. The second task is meant for faster learners who had no issues completing the first one and the third task is for the most motivated learners and it is voluntary (Scrivener, 2011, 91).

Ur (2002, 309-311) adds a few more ideas:

- e) **Questions** – the teacher prepares a series of comprehension questions on a previous activity and asks learners to select which ones they want to answer first. This way learners can choose to answer what they are sure of with the possibility of stronger learners answering the most intricate questions. Alternatively, learners can be invited to erase some questions and make up new ones instead, create further questions or completely ‘out-of-box’ answers that shifts the course of the original topic.
- f) **Matching** – learners match items between two (or more) columns and justify their decision. Weaker learners can always turn to the more apparent choices (e.g. architect-designs houses, cook-prepares meals) whether stronger learners can get more creative and come up with unusual combinations (e.g. cook-attends a gardening course to be able to grow his own vegetables and flowers as decorations for his restaurant). Deleting one

of the columns and asking learners to come up with the matching items themselves would also be an option.

- g) **Slot-filling** – learners are given beginnings of sentences and they are supposed to finish them. They might be navigated towards the target language or let them express their creativity.

4.6 Letting learners choose what to do

Scrivener also expresses the idea of letting learners choose what to do themselves instead of deciding for them. This may be done through discussions and planning or by setting up a ‘marketplace’: the teacher rearranges desks and chairs and places several copies with activities at different levels of difficulty on them along with description of individual tasks and time estimation. When learners choose the most suitable activity for them, teacher sets the goal for the lesson (e.g. what they have to achieve or submit by the end of the lessons).

Similarly, teachers can make ‘pass-it-on’ tasks ready. Learners keep working on their exercises until the teacher stops them (rings a bell, knocks on the desk/blackboard...). After hearing the signal, they pass their exercise on to the classmate next to them and they receive a new one from the classmate on their other side and they continue working on this one. Apart from working on exercises, learners can create sentences about a certain topic, write words or phrases as associations, create a story sentence by sentence and many other. Learners can contribute in many ways – stronger ones, for instance, may add some information, vocabulary or grammatical structure that weaker ones can learn from or they may correct weaker learners’ mistakes (2011, 91).

4.7 Different time requirements

Stronger learners are expected to finish quickly, so their time limit may be shortened and they can manage more tasks before weaker learners finish the first one (Scrivener, 2011, 92).

4.8 Homework

Even homework can be differentiated. It is important for the weaker learners to repeat and revise what they have learnt at school. Stronger learners, on the other hand, need to feel pushed forward and therefore more challenging work is suitable for them. Another thing that might be

done is to give learners a choice by preparing sets of homework tagged by their level, e.g. easy, difficult, very difficult and let them pick one version (Scrivener, 2011, 92).

4.9 Testing

Testing should bring equal chances to everyone. The approach of ‘compulsory vs. optional’ can be also employed in this respect – the core stays obligatory but there are some additional sections for the faster learners that might be rewarded by a mark. Learners should also get the opportunity to take progress tests to see what they can do and not what they are not capable of (Scrivener, 2011, 92).

4.10 Peer-teaching

It is indisputable that teacher is not the only source of knowledge in the classroom. Learners benefit highly learning from their peers during pair work, groupwork and whole-class work. Stronger learners guide the weaker ones and function as models of good language.

Their role may be enhanced by making the stronger individuals the teacher’s assistants. They can help with organisational issues including distribution of materials, writing answers on the blackboard, monitoring others, but also with explaining (or even teaching) certain matters either within a smaller group or in front of the class. Doing so, they might be advised not to tell the right answers immediately, but rather act like real teachers and give clues that help their classmates arrive to the correct answers on their own.

Although this method is primarily beneficial for both sides (stronger and weaker learners), it shall be used sensitively, so that nobody feels isolated or excluded from the group by being categorised as the ‘stronger’ or the ‘weaker’ (Harmer, 1988, 128).

4.11 Traffic lights

Every learner gets three plastic or paper cups – red, yellow and green. At the beginning of the lesson the green cup is showing. Anytime a learner wants to signal to the teacher that the instructions are too fast or that he/she needs a certain piece of information or a part of the presentation to be repeated, he/she shows the yellow cup. If the learner is completely lost and needs to ask a question or get a more detailed explanation, he/she shows the red cup. It serves

as an excellent indication of learners' understanding and because teachers immediately know whether they need to slow down, stop or continue, the lessons run smoothly. Another key point to remember is that learners generally do not want to show any kind of weakness, which means they will not raise their hands to ask for repetition or clarification, because they would feel embarrassed. By using the cups, learners indicate the problem only to the teacher without drawing attention to themselves excessively ('The classroom experiment').

4.12 Mini whiteboards

Mini whiteboards are a very useful tool in language classrooms that actively involves all learners and allows for an immediate feedback and assessment from the teacher. When finished with a task, learners hold whiteboards with their answers up, so that teacher can quickly check them. Once again, by using mini whiteboards learners gain more courage, because they do not have to say everything out loud and therefore do not expose themselves to dreaded potential mockery by others ('The classroom experiment').

Mini whiteboards may be used in several ways – for spelling activities, dictation, to practise tenses (e.g. What did you do yesterday? Write at least 3 sentences.), to practise vocabulary (e.g. Use these words in sentences. Explain these words.) and many others. One interesting activity is 'Text message conversation' which is based on a written conversation between the learners, who chat as if they were using their phones or social media except for the device which is the mini whiteboard in this case. Another suitable activity is 'Write a line and pass it on' which represents a collaborative writing. Teacher writes an opening line on the mini whiteboard and gives it to a learner who adds another sentence and passes it on to another learner who adds another sentence. Each learner writes one sentence to finish a story, a recipe, a biography, etc (Speck, 2017).

4.13 Role-play, real-play and simulation

Using drama techniques in a mixed-ability classroom since they allow for a great degree of differentiation. They are generally quite popular among children, because they are fun and therefore motivating. Another great advantage is that they might be designed in a way that provides hesitant or shy learners with a support in the form of a script or a reduced length of their text. Teachers can purposefully choose easier vocabulary and phrases for struggling learners or they can supply them with visual aids and objects. Also, the present stronger learners

can be a big help for such learners – they can help them create their lines, they can read the in advance written lines for them or correct their pronunciation. Harmer (2007, 155-159) distinguishes the three following drama techniques:

- a) **Role-play** – in a role-play, learners typically receive cards with some information about a character they are supposed to act out. Then they get a little preparation time to rehearse their roles in groups before performing it in front of the class. Instead of a role, learners might be given a description of what to do, e.g. ‘Go to a supermarket and buy some carrots, an onion and a bottle of milk.’ Role cards usually include information about the name, job, sex, age, appearance, as well as clothes, character and interests, along with points that are necessary for the task such as information that the others possibly do not know, the character’s views on the issues, situations, etc., and useful phrases and vocabulary that ideally practise what was taught previously in the lesson.
- b) **Real-play** – a real-play is basically a variation on role-play where the situations are real and some of the characters play themselves. The aim of real-plays is to practise language they are likely to come across in their real lives. In this case, Harmer suggests using ‘a blank framework’ rather than a ‘role card’. At the beginning of a lesson, the teacher may give learners the option to choose an issue they would like to work on and then helps them to fill in their framework. Frameworks may include questions such as: Where are you? What are you talking about? Why are you talking about it? What happened before this? What other information is important? What conclusion would you like to reach? After that learners improvise conversations.
- c) **Simulation** – simulation is essentially a large-scale role-play with the intention to create a whole ‘world’, so that the experience is even more realistic, e.g. a company, a travel agency, an airport, an interview, etc.

According to Jones (1982, 4-7), for any of the three ‘plays’ mentioned above to work it is important that learners actually identify themselves with their character and do not perceive themselves as learners, but a participant of the simulated situation for that moment. Besides, they need to see the structure of the activity clearly in order to reach a decent result.

4.14 Contracts

One of the favourite methods in differentiated instruction are so-called ‘contracts’ or, in other words, written agreements between individual learners and the teacher. The contract includes goals that the learner commits to fulfil, the time framework and the form of assessment. The application itself is preceded by a diagnostic interview and the teacher’s thorough analysis of the learners’ strengths and weaknesses upon which he/she determines what the contract should include (Tomlinson, 2001, 76).

4.15 Textbooks

Of course, the most available are textbooks. All children must have them and they give the direction to teaching without too much effort creating new materials. Despite their pretty homogeneous nature, with a little bit of creativity, teachers may successfully differentiate this material. Listening or writing exercises may be taken and supplemented by additional questions depending on learners’ levels. Speaking exercises may be also enriched by additional, possibly more intriguing questions. Creative teachers may use the topics the textbook offers and search for related and graded resources from the internet, e.g. YouTube videos, audiobooks, articles, films. Another way is to search for the same topic in a different textbook – of more or less advanced level and assign learners with versions that suit their abilities the most (‘Ways to make textbooks interesting’).

4.16 Differentiation of language skills

In didactics of foreign language teaching, the four language skills, whether integrated or not, are involved in the communication process. Since successful communication can only be achieved by using these skills, it is evident that they are not only the goal, but also the tool in the process of foreign language teaching.

Language skills may be divided into receptive (i.e. listening and reading) and productive (i.e. speaking and writing) or into written (i.e. reading and writing) and spoken (i.e. speaking and listening). They should all be practised both separately and in context with one another. In teaching they are used either in activities that aim at acquisition of one of the language systems (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, discourse) or in activities focused on one or more language skills as such. In general, language teachers should pursue simplicity that allows to

build learners' knowledge gradually. They should get rid of unnecessary material that might distract learners and should focus on chunks of language that will later be built upon.

The following section includes a few suggestions on how to accommodate language skills to suit both stronger and weaker learners. Due to a lack of resources dealing specifically with the issue of language skills differentiation, I decided to adopt information from the website of the Faculty of Education at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (pf.jcu.cz), since there I found a systematic and consistent processing of the discussed concept and I supplemented it by my own ideas.

4.16.1 Listening skills

When working on a listening task, stronger learners, as opposed to weaker learners, are not provided with visual aids e.g. charts, transcripts, lists, etc., they rely solely on the recording. Furthermore, if possible, they are provided with a different, more complicated set of questions or just a few additional questions. At times, teachers might distribute a tape script the stronger or faster learners and they are in charge of the vocabulary that the weaker learners are likely to be unfamiliar with and create a little dictionary for them. The new words may appear on the whiteboard, they might be photocopied or the learners can dictate them, spell them and explain them to the group. When assigned with a true/false activity, they are supplemented by why/why not questions. Lastly, stronger learners are not provided with options for gap-fill activities.

Weaker learners, on the other hand, highly benefit from vocabulary pre-teaching and visual prompts such as lists of vocabulary, definitions on the whiteboard, flashcards, posters and other materials that are available to them for the duration of the activity. After they finish a task, they require extra time to discuss their answers in pairs before checking them with the teacher or the whole class. Besides, if they seem to struggle with the recording, they might be given a tape script, for example, for the second listening. As for gap-fill tasks, weaker learners could be provided with options to choose from.

4.16.2 Writing skills

Due to their advanced level, stronger learners may be assigned with more creative writing tasks. Teachers then do not have to correct their mistakes directly, but rather provide them with the correction code, so that they must figure out the right forms themselves. Consequently, they

will retain the information for a longer period of time. Apart from that, the word limit for stronger learners may be increased and they may work on more complex compositions, such as essays.

Weaker learners benefit from being allowed to make a draft first, then correct it (with a classmate, but preferably with the teacher) and then write the final product. It is advisable that teachers present a model text first for these learners to receive a better idea of what the requirements are. Furthermore, the word limit may be reduced and learners should be encouraged to work with dictionaries.

Last but not least, a weaker and a stronger learner can be paired up in order to cooperate. The stronger learners are able to handle the language part and the weaker learners learn from them. Besides, one of the two may be more creative than the other and may come up with interesting ideas to write about.

4.16.3 Reading skills

Regarding reading, stronger learners who finish early may choose difficult vocabulary from the text and write definitions on the whiteboard. Furthermore, they might be asked to rewrite certain parts of the text in different tenses or in a different person or they may write their personal view on the given topic. At times, they may come up with a few questions about the text they have just read or they can work as assistants walking around the classroom and helping struggling learners. Also, stronger learners may be provided with follow-up questions about the given text or other texts further developing the original task. Alternatively, graded (in this case more advanced) texts are given out to the stronger learners to work with.

Weaker learners, on the other hand, should be pre-taught new or difficult words that remain written on the whiteboard during their working on the task, so they can use it anytime they need. As far as vocabulary is concerned, learners should be encouraged to work with dictionaries or ask their more knowledgeable classmates. Another way to work with reading and weaker learners is to provide them with only a part of the text. This way they do not have to rush to complete a long text and may focus on a shorter part properly. Here, teachers may also use graded texts, but in this case the less advanced versions. To support the comprehension, the ‘weaker-learner texts’ may be enhanced with pictures. As always, weaker learners should be allowed to check their answers with their classmates before showing it to the teacher.

4.16.4 Speaking skills

In speaking exercises, learners, but particularly the stronger ones should always answer in full sentences and they should be encouraged to add extra information to their responses (e.g. Why/Why not?). Teachers could try to ban 'easy words' to elevate stronger learners' vocabulary. Another way of practising speaking is to record stronger learners' speeches, rewrite the recordings, correct what they have said incorrectly and then let them attempt to say it once more trying to avoid the mistakes they made before.

There are also weaker learners who should be given some preparation time to rehearse their speech, dialogue, role-play, etc. They also should be allowed to make notes and follow them while giving a speech or, to make it a little harder, learners choose and follow only a few keywords that are essential for the story. Alternatively, they could be provided with vocabulary and phrases they are supposed to use and the topics they are assigned with may be easier and rather basic.

To sum up, regarding language skills, it is desirable to motivate stronger learners to become better by giving them challenging tasks that are more complex while weaker learners should feel secure by being provided with a support in the form of vocabulary pre-teaching, dictionaries, extra time, word limit reduction and so forth (pf.jcu.cz).

5. Conclusions of the theoretical part

The aim of the theoretical part was to gather information about differentiation in teaching that served as the basis of the action research described in the practical part. Although the title of the work suggests its focus on the English language classes, literature typically combines specifics of mixed-ability classes in general and language mixed-ability classes as such, and so it is the case of this thesis as well.

The beginning focused on language learning; therefore, the concept of language was stated along with factors and conditions affecting foreign language acquisition. Right after terminology matters were discussed, attention was mainly paid to diversity in the educational system, which led to the concept of mixed-ability classes. To clarify the term, it was further discussed in terms of its challenges and advantages and particularly in terms of its main cause – learner differences.

Learner differences were described through internal and external factors and only the main ones were later selected to be described in detail. Among them there is age that also includes an explanation of The Critical Period Hypothesis and touches upon the concept of readiness; Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences – verbal-linguistic, visual-spatial, musical-rhythmic, logical-mathematical, bodily/feeling, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic and ways to approach learners having one of those intelligences as the dominant one; learning styles divided into five groups – environmental, emotional, sociological, physiological and psychological and further described; motivation, namely integrative and instrumental, intrinsic and extrinsic, global, situational and task motivation; language aptitude and language level. The next section describes two typical stereotypes of the good and the struggling language learner.

The third chapter proposed a solution to the challenges of mixed-ability classes by employing differentiated instruction. In this section differentiated instruction was classified into quantitative, that selects and groups learners based on their performance and results, and qualitative, that selects and groups learner on the basis of their interests and aspirations. Furthermore, it was divided into external, that includes schools with different foci, specialised classes or simply A and B groups, and internal that establishes homogeneous and heterogeneous groups within one class. The same chapter also mentioned differentiation of the content, the process and the product of the lesson. Moreover the chapter discussed what differentiated

instruction should and should not look like and shortly mentioned its advantages and disadvantages along with a selection of conditions necessary for successful differentiation, which are getting to know the learners, setting up a positive and friendly classroom atmosphere, letting every individual learner experience success, collaborating with the school and parents and encouraging the notion that no opinion is bad and eliminating mean behaviour towards others. Last but not least, the role of the teacher in a differentiated classroom was explored.

The final chapter of the theoretical part proposed teaching tips for differentiated instruction. It consisted of a selection of possible ways and examples activities suitable for a differentiated classroom. The final part concentrated on how to differentiate the four language skills – speaking, writing, listening and reading.

PRACTICAL PART

During the first year of my teaching practice I came across the issues of mixed-ability classes. Although I had expected issues to appear, I certainly was not prepared to master differentiated instruction, so the situation resulted in dissatisfaction on both the learners' and my sides. In order to improve the situation in this particular elementary school class, I chose to employ action research focused on differentiated instruction.

The practical part introduces three chapters in total. Chapter 6 describes the elementary school I teach at, its history, organisation, approach to English language teaching and the research group, its obstacles and the individual learners' characteristics. This chapter and its subchapters are mentioned at the very beginning, so that the readers learn more about the environment the research was carried out in and most importantly, get to the crux of the matter. Chapter 7 deals with the action research, introduces its aims, organisation and individual instruments of data collection - in-lesson colleague observation sheet, post-lesson individual learner questionnaire, video recording, teacher's journal, semi-structured interviews with learners, interview with other teachers and the outcomes; are discussed in the final, eighth, chapter.

6. Research samples

6.1 School description

The school in question is an elementary school under the Faculty of Education of Charles University located in Prague. The school was opened in 1902 and in 1998 it was affiliated with the nearby kindergarten and so it provides primary education to approximately 500 children and pre-school education to around 120 children.

Every grade in elementary school consists of at least three parallel classes, grades in the secondary stage of elementary school usually consist of two. The school is very well equipped. There are specialized classrooms for computer technology, music, art lessons and, of course, languages. Interactive whiteboards were installed in three classrooms and the majority of the rest are provided with a computer and a big-screen television. Also, there are two gymnasiums, a workroom and a training kitchen. On top of that, a few years ago, an outside sports ground was built and learners have an opportunity to visit the school library and study room as well as

the pottery workshop. Starting this year, learners can sign up to attend Spanish and French lessons, each once a week.

As for the organization, one class in every grade is focused on music education. Children are selected on the basis of a talent test. In these classes, the number of music lessons per week is four times higher as opposed to regular classes and learners are trained not only in music theory and history, but they are required to play a musical instrument and attend lessons of choir singing.

6.2 The English language lessons

Regarding the English language, starting in 2014 (and unfortunately brought to a standstill two years ago owing to capacity reasons) one class of each grade of the elementary school was made a ‘language class’ and the number of English lessons in these classes was increased from one to two in the first grade, three in the second grade and four from the third to the fifth grade. There are typically twenty-four learners divided into two halves of twelve children, nevertheless it is no exception that there are more or less learners within the class.

The standard classes follow a different set of textbooks and workbooks – first grades start with Happy house 1 and continue with Happy house 2, by Oxford publishing house, in the second grade. Third grades learn from ‘Angličtina pro 3. třídu’ (English for the 3rd grade), fourth grades have ‘Angličtina pro 4. třídu’ (English for the 4th grade), by Didaktis publishing house, and fifth grades follow Project 1, by Oxford publishing house. The language classes use more difficult textbooks. First graders start with Incredible English 1 and continue with Incredible English 2 and 3, published by Oxford, in the second and the third grade. In the middle of the fourth grade they switch to Project 1 and continue with Project 2 in the fifth grade. For extra practice, once a week all learners are offered conversation lessons led by a native American speaker.

6.3 Research group

6.3.1 Characteristics of the research group

The class in question is one of the fifth grades of elementary school. In 2014, 16 children passed the talent test and became the first language class. In the fourth grade, five new learners joined

the class – three classmates from another school and two from a parallel class. Learners commenced their fifth grade with a new class teacher due to some organisational changes and they welcomed another new classmate. Both teachers – the new and the former agree that especially before the new learners came, the class was unusually homogeneous and consistent and worked exceptionally well. Even now their results are, on the whole, above average, although there are a few weaker individuals. Exactly half of the class, eleven learners, applied to a grammar school and, according to their class teacher, the chances are that approximately fifty percent will probably be accepted and the potential success of the others is dependent on circumstances.

Interestingly enough, this class is extremely polarized in terms of the gender. Boys do not pursue any kind of relationship with girls and vice versa. They do not play together and they refuse to work together in pair work or groupwork. What caused such behaviour is not clear, but it is more than likely that the learners were simply not used to working in mixed-gender groups before.

Quite a significant disruption to the class functioning is caused almost daily by difficult and atypical behaviour of one of the learners. In compliance with a report from the School Counselling Centre, this learner suffers from dysgraphia, ADHD, anxiety, lack of concentration and shows signs of autism. Apart from that he experiences frequent bursts of anger that significantly disrupt the lessons.

6.3.2 Research group - English lessons

When I started teaching English at this school, I was assigned with what I was told was the weaker group. I did not see it as an issue until I discovered that I was in fact dealing with quite a serious case of a mixed-ability group. Right from the beginning it was clear that four learners out of eleven were ahead of the remaining seven that seemed to be left so far behind that I could not understand how they could have been accepted to a language class. A part of the problem was definitely caused by the arrival of new classmates (all of the newcomers belong to this group) and a part could have originated from the talent test having been set incorrectly.

Interestingly, the driving force that made me think about differentiated instruction were not the weaker learners, which is often the case, but the stronger, even though, they are the minority in this class. Somehow, I subconsciously managed to adjust my teaching to the weaker individuals

in the class and struggled with the advanced. As stated above, out of eleven learners, four learners excelled, two are average or slightly below and five are significantly below average.

Especially two learners stood out, both stronger learners – a boy and a girl. The boy meant quite a significant disruption to the class functioning due to his difficult and atypical behaviour. In compliance with a report from the School Counselling Centre, this learner suffers from dysgraphia, ADHD, anxiety, lack of concentration and shows signs of autism. Apart from that he experiences frequent bursts of anger that significantly disrupt the lessons. The girl joined the class at the beginning of the fifth grade and is possibly the most ambitious and motivated person I have ever come across. She has many hobbies and aspires to be the best at everything she does. According to a specialist, mentally she is about three years ahead of her peers and she indeed gives the impression of an adult person. Most of the time she does not care much for the joy of learning a foreign language, but she wants to move forward as much and as fast as possible. She gets bored during any revision or practice and she is not particularly fond of playing games. Every lesson she asks for a test or an examination and prefers it to be unannounced. She openly expresses her annoyance with her slower classmates and has a tendency to correct them. She welcomes homework and specifically asks for extra tasks in lessons (for more information about all the individual learners' characteristics see Appendix 3).

Regarding the organisation of the research group's English lessons, a few changes occurred. In the first-grade learners were taught by a different teacher than from the second to the fourth grade. Starting this school year, 2018/2019, their last English teacher decided to divide the class into two halves, each including eleven learners. One half consists of the advanced learners only whereas the other is a mixture of all the weaker learners supplemented by four advanced learners who did not get in the advanced group due to capacity reasons. Such organization was supposedly initiated by parents who felt that the weaker learners restricted the stronger ones from faster progress. This class followed the Incredible English textbooks (1, 2 and 3) from the first to the fourth grade where they switched right to Project 1 that was replaced by Project 2 in the fifth grade. This textbook and a corresponding workbook are suitable for levels between A1 and A2 (for details see Chapter 3.1.4).

I teach this group four times a week - on Monday and Thursday we have early morning lessons, thus I get quite a lot of attention from the learners and better results, as opposed to our Wednesday and Friday later lessons during which I can feel their distraction from having the

last lesson of the day. When I took over this class, we started the third unit in Project 2, since the first two had already been done in the previous year. As the third lesson introduced the past tense, I decided to check learners' existing knowledge of by a revision of what they had been supposed to know before jumping in the new subject matter and I was shocked to find out how much knowledge they were missing. For this reason, we are now delayed and far behind the other group that has already started the Project 3 textbook. Even though we have already moved forward into the fifth unit and I try to revise and practise older grammar and vocabulary on regular basis, I sadly do not seem to be achieving much of retention as far as the weaker learners are concerned.

7. Action research

As stated at the beginning of the practical part, the sixth chapter deals with the action research and the theoretical grounds it is based upon. Its sub-chapter deals with the aims and the course of the actual action research carried out in my English lessons during the second term the 2018/2019 school year. The data collection techniques follow.

In literature, action research is described as research carried out by teachers in practice in contrast to academic research realised by research workers. It brings the self-reflection needed for more thorough understanding of pedagogical situations, including learners' needs and teaching practice, and the overall improvement of the school environment (Nezvalová, 300).

According to Whithead, it is a cyclic process consisting of five successive steps: specification of the problem situation followed by the action research plan formulation and its application in practice with a subsequent assessment of the results and planning for the future (Whithead, 1993 qtd. in Nezvalová, 301).

Scrivener suggests dividing the process into three main steps: 'before', 'experiment' and 'after'. In the 'before' part, teachers at first choose the general area for their experiment. Then they do background reading and research to decide on the specific focus of the experiment and the assessment of results. In the next step, they conduct the experiment that is followed by the 'after' part during which the experiment is analysed and reflected on. The outcomes should serve as a starting point for the next action research. Basically, it is a never-ending story of improving one's teaching practice (379).

7.1 Action research organisation

When I found myself lost and clueless in front of a class of bored and frustrated learners, I decided to act. Before I considered my options, I answered these questions to collect my thoughts ('Učíme se trochu jinak', 6):

1. Can everybody in the class see me?
2. Can I see everybody?
3. Can everybody hear me?
4. Am I clear in my instructions?

5. Do I encourage all learners?
6. Am I patient enough?
7. Do I call on learners evenly?
8. Do I pay enough attention to all individual learners in the class?
9. Do the weaker learners sit closer or farther from me?
10. Do stronger and weaker learners sit together or not?
11. Do I provide learners with enough support (e.g. visual aids, pre-teaching, dictionaries, etc.)?
12. Do I attempt to employ any kind of differentiation?

After answering these questions and reading a number of books on the topics of mixed-ability classes and differentiated instruction, I chose to apply **action research** in my English lessons.

Firstly, I specified the issue and described the **problem situation** as follows:

After the language class in question had been divided into two halves, I, as a teacher, was assigned with the group of mostly weaker learners. However, at the beginning of the school year, a new and very motivated learner joined the group and expressed her annoyance with the slow pace of the lessons and very little progress in general. Therefore, I now face the problem of how to balance my lessons, so that the stronger learners, who are much faster, do not feel bored and the weaker learners, who need more revision and practice, do not feel frustrated.

Secondly, I established the **research question**:

What procedures can I employ to make my teaching in this particular mixed-ability class more efficient, i.e. more balanced and sufficiently interesting, motivating and manageable for all learners, both stronger and weaker?

Thirdly, I formulated three **action research aims**:

1. Stronger or faster learners will be sufficiently occupied during the lessons.
2. Weaker or slower learners will manage to achieve the overall aims through accomplishing the objectives of individual lessons.
3. The teacher will learn to successfully employ differentiated instruction in her teaching.

With regard to the stated aims, the **instruments of data collection** (see Chapter 6.2) were determined and I could proceed to creating the action research plan that consisted of three stages – the **pre-intervention**, the **intervention** and the **post-intervention** stage.

a) Pre-intervention

The pre-intervention stage consisted of four lessons that took place from 7th to 11th January 2019. These lessons were planned as regular lessons without any major attempt to attend to learners' individual needs. They fell into the week right after Christmas; thus, the main aim was to revise what had been forgotten over the holiday.

During the pre-intervention stage, the first round of data was collected and then reflected on. After the idea with video recording failed due to a harsh reaction of one of the learners, the same procedure was followed every time: Each lesson was observed by one of the two colleagues of mine, who filled in an observation sheet. Right after the lesson, learners were asked to fill in a questionnaire about the lesson and their impressions of it and I wrote an entry in my teacher's journal.

Furthermore, during the first week of this stage, I conducted semi-structured interviews with all my learners as well as other colleagues who taught in this class to obtain an even more detailed picture.

b) Intervention

The intervention stage stretched from 14th January to 29th March. This phase consisted of thirty-five lessons during which differentiated instruction was employed. Initially, before the action research started, I planned to choose and apply only a few means of differentiated instruction in teaching to be able to track the potential change easily. However, eventually I came to the conclusion that since I followed a textbook, the most logical and practical way seemed to base the lessons on that textbook and differentiate accordingly with necessary adjustments to the activities and exercises included there. Of course, I enriched the textbook activities and exercises with irregular additions of extra material which I created. The core of my lesson planning was based on suggestions from Chapter 4 of the theoretical part and, of course, on the outcomes of the data collection.

Throughout the intervention stage I employed several ideas including work with **mini whiteboards**, commonly for revision and practice at the beginning of the lessons, **‘traffic lights’** – using colourful cups to indicate comprehension or lack of comprehension, **role-plays**, **multilevel tasks** as well as extra tasks, such as reading books with comprehension tasks, and **differentiated worksheets**. I used several kinds of **dividing the class**, mostly short-term pairs and groups, nevertheless, considering the low number of learners in the group, some of the arrangements became so frequent that they seemed almost long-term. At times I **let learners choose** what to do setting up a **‘marketplace’** - a series of exercises, easier and more difficult, so that everyone could choose according to his/her abilities. What I found very useful was making faster learners my **assistants** who either helped others or taught them – the so-called **peer-teaching**. I also differentiated **time requirements**, **homework** and **tests**. Overall, in many activities I tried to work with the concepts of **‘open-endedness’** that allows for an infinite number of correct answers and **‘optional vs. compulsory’** which expects slower learners to complete the compulsory part only and faster learners to work on the optional part as well.

As for the four language skills, during the majority of **listening** tasks, stronger learners worked without any visual aids, i.e. lists of pre-taught vocabulary, tape scripts, charts or pictures; however, they were provided with additional questions for listening tasks and why/why not questions for true/false activities. Weaker learners, on the other hand, were supported by visual aids on regular basis. Before the listening task, they were usually equipped with pictures and lists of vocabulary that enhanced their comprehension as well as tape scripts that were typically provided before the second listening. They were also encouraged to discuss their answers in pairs before checking it with the whole group.

Most of the **writing** tasks were differentiated by word limit. Stronger learners were naturally capable of producing longer, and often more creative, forms, so I challenged them not only with an increased word limit, but also with specific vocabulary they were supposed to use in their writing, more tenses they had to combine or a different topic they had to think of. Furthermore, I never corrected their mistakes directly. Using the correction code, stronger learners attempted to figure the right forms out on their own. Weaker learners were always presented with the model text after which they were allowed to make a draft and discuss it, with me, as the teacher, or their classmate before writing the final product. I did not want to limit either group, therefore most of the time, both stronger and weaker learners had dictionaries at the disposal.

During **reading** tasks, I promoted stronger learners' autonomy by asking them to create follow-up activities for their weaker classmates. They either created dictionaries or follow-up questions. Both were based on the given text. Sometimes learners worked individually, sometimes in pairs or groups. After they grasped the main idea and completed exercises, they proved their comprehension by making up additional questions about the text or choosing words they believed were difficult or unknown to others and thought of their definitions. Apart from that, faster learners were sometimes asked to go through the text again, prepare a summary, in writing or speaking. Once again, before reading, new or difficult vocabulary was explained and weaker learners were allowed to check their answers in pairs or use dictionaries.

Speaking activities were the most demanding to work on since most of the learners were too shy or lacked necessary grammar and vocabulary. Speaking in lessons was conducted either as a whole class activity, in pairs/groups or one-to-one between individual learners and the teacher. Depending on the particular task and its difficulty, learners worked either in homogeneous or heterogeneous groups. For more challenging or demanding activities weaker learners were grouped with at least one stronger learner who functioned as a role model for the others. Stronger learners were always asked to answer in full sentences and encouraged to add any additional information they thought of. I also tried to encourage their creativity and spontaneity, so they worked without visual aids (pre-written dialogues, etc.) or they performed without any preparation time. Weaker learners, on the other hand, could make notes to follow during their speech and were always given some preparation time even though the topics they worked on were often quite easy. Besides, they were provided with useful vocabulary and phrases.

c) Post-intervention

The post-intervention stage consisted of nearly all the steps that appeared in pre-intervention to secure consistency and to reveal any potential change that appeared during the process.

Four lessons, which took place in the week from 1st to 5th April 2019, were once again observed by the two of my colleagues who filled in the observation sheet and the same lessons were evaluated by individual learners in the post-lesson questionnaires and by me, as the teacher, in the teacher's journal. During this last week of the research, I also conducted the semi-structured interview with the learners. Nevertheless, I did not repeat the teacher interview since I believed no surprising news would come out of it and I did not attempt to video record the lessons, either, as I did not want to stress that one particular learner.

Eventually, the outcomes of all three stages were assessed and commented on and suggestions for the future were generated (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 7).

7.2 Data collection techniques

I decided to use six instruments of data collection to receive feedback on my dealing with stronger and weaker learners in the mixed-ability class as precisely as possible. Firstly, I used an in-lesson observation sheet for my colleagues who observed four of my lessons before the intervention and four lessons after the intervention. Secondly, the same lessons were evaluated by individual learners in prepared questionnaires. Thirdly, there was an attempt to record these pre-intervention and post-intervention lessons; however, due to the reasons describe in the sub-chapter 11.3, only a part of the first lesson was recorded. Moreover, for the duration of the whole action research, I kept a teacher's journal to reflect on my lessons and my learners properly and more precisely and last, but not least, I conducted interviews not only with the learners but also with other colleagues who teach in this class.

7.2.1 In-lesson colleague observation

In order to gain as rich and as objective a view on the situation in my class as possible with focus on my handling the mixed-ability class and my learners' behaviour and reactions, I created an observation sheet for a colleague of mine who was willing to come in the pre-intervention and post-intervention stages to observe, in total, six lessons. When I did not manage to video record these three lessons as I had intended, I asked another colleague of mine to observe one more lesson just to get a more objective opinion. The feedback from both of them was very useful and it confirmed what I had already thought and noticed.

This sub-chapter describes the structure of the observation sheet and the type of questions used as well as the background and characteristics of my colleagues.

Structure of the observation sheet

The observation sheet is written in English since one of the colleagues is a native American speaker and the other is an English teacher, therefore no comprehension issues would appear. It is divided into two parts with a heading explaining the purpose of the observation and a concluding line where I thank my colleagues for their help. The first part focuses on me as the

teacher and the overall engagement of learners in the lesson. The second part is focused on a small group of the stronger learners, particularly on their participation in the lesson.

Types of questions

In total, the observers were asked to answer fifteen questions - ten questions in the first part and five questions in the second. Over a half of the questions were closed ended, therefore simple yes/no answers were sufficient; however, mostly they included a follow-up question to obtain a more precise feedback. Open ended questions, i.e. questions without any predefined set of possible responses, were necessary in some cases to provide a more detailed description that also allowed for self-expression. In addition, respondents could clarify their responses (Gavora, 2000, 123-129; for more see Appendix 4).

Characteristics of the colleagues

Both of my colleagues that I asked to observe my lessons are English teachers working at the same elementary school as I do. Before the observation itself, I briefly presented them with the situation and each learner's characteristics. We went through the observation sheet together to clarify any potential ambiguity and they were provided with a printed seating plan, so that they did not confuse the individual learners.

Colleague 1

The first colleague is a person for whom teaching was not an obvious choice at the beginning. At the age of thirteen she decided to go to a high school for medical professions to become a nurse, but soon after she started, she realised that it was not her path. She finished her studies anyway, but right after her graduation she left to try her luck in Great Britain where she worked as an au-pair. The few following years she spent travelling and working alternately in the Great Britain and in the Czech Republic where she worked as a nurse at the children's hospital department. However, she did not find working in health care fulfilling especially due to the lack of creativity. As a naturally agile and communicative person she began teaching Czech to foreigners which inspired her to pursue her new career goal. She was accepted to a theological faculty in Prague and passed the state exam from English which opened her the door to teaching children at the elementary school. Later she had to complete her pedagogical knowledge at the Faculty of Education.

She has been actively teaching for the last 23 years and she believes the key to success is creating lessons that are entertaining and interesting to both the children and the teacher and, at the same time, she enjoys fast-paced, dynamic lessons that enhances learners' existing knowledge.

Colleague 2

The second colleague is a native American speaker who comes from Seattle. He received his undergraduate education in history and drama at Seattle University of Washington and completed his master's degree in film studies at Colombia College in Chicago.

After his studies he worked as a documentary film maker for a few years and he taught film history and aesthetics at a university. He decided to teach English about eight years ago, but he specialized in education of adults. For the last six years he has been teaching primarily English conversation to children at the elementary school.

He believes that the success in teaching lies in making personal connections with learners, especially with little children, thus he attempts to get them excited through games that are based on principles of Total physical response (TPR), therefore the lessons involve a lot of physical activity during which children respond to the target language with whole-body actions. Although his conversation lessons are not obligatory, the majority of learners gladly join them.

7.2.2 Post-lesson individual learner questionnaire

The post-lesson individual questionnaires were created so that the learners could express their immediate feelings about the lesson, particularly their participation in it. From their reactions I could conclude whether I had taken the right course of action or not. Learners were asked to fill in three questionnaires after three pre-intervention lessons and three other questionnaires after three lessons in the post-intervention stage.

This sub-chapter discusses the structure of the learner questionnaire along with the types of questions used in it.

Structure of the post-lesson individual learner questionnaire

The questionnaire was not divided into any sections, it was created as a sequence of questions inquiring into learners' satisfaction with the particular lesson, their preferences in terms of the nature of various activities and their involvement in the lesson, their immediate impressions and other potential comments. Since they were told it was anonymous, everyone felt he/she could express himself/herself freely without worrying about sanctions for displeasing the teacher. At the beginning, learners were introduced to the aim of the questionnaire and instructions on how to fill it in. The instructions were also explained orally followed by concept-check questions to make sure every single learner understood what to do.

The whole questionnaire was written in Czech for three reasons - to avoid lack of comprehension, to respect most learners' poorer language skills and lastly to make it less time-consuming. I aimed to use as simple formulations as possible, thus I omitted any linguistic (and other) terminology to avoid any confusion. The questionnaire was quite lengthy; therefore, a considerable amount of time was needed for its proper completion. In order not to miss any parts of the lessons, learners were allowed to work on the evaluation during their breaks, for around ten to fifteen minutes, and got some free time in lessons with their class teacher who spent more time teaching them than I did. Before learners started filling the questionnaires in, I went through all the questions with them and let them ask for clarification.

Although the questionnaires were supposed to be the same in the pre-intervention and post-intervention phase, I decided to add a few more questions in the second questionnaire to get some feedback on the innovations I had utilized over the past few months.

Types of questions

In the pre-intervention stage, learners worked on seventeen questions that were enriched by seven more in the post-intervention stage. Closed-ended questions prevail, but in most cases, they are supplemented by additional questions to provide more specific responses. Answers for questions number two and number seventeen are based on a scale from 1 to 5 – 1 meaning the best and 5 meaning the worst as in school. Open-ended questions were used to provide learners with freedom in their responses (Gavora, 2000, 123-129; for more see Appendix 5).

7.2.3 Video recording

My initial intent was to record and analyse three lessons in the pre-intervention stage and three lessons in the post-intervention stage, basically, the same lessons that were also observed by my colleagues and evaluated by the learners.

The great technique of video recording is not only self-reflective, but it also has various advantages for the teaching practice. Firstly, the teacher can see himself/herself the way learners see him/her. Secondly, it shows undistorted reality and reveals all the good and bad habits and possible mistakes that may later be reflected on. Thirdly, it may be paused, rewound or replayed multiple times in order not to miss any important details.

Unfortunately, due to one learner's harsh overreaction to a video camera in the classroom, I only managed to record a part of the first lesson. This learner suffers from Autism Spectrum disorder, ADHD and a few learning disabilities, so after a proper reconsideration I came to the conclusion that it was not worth another scene and I left it out for the learner's sake. As mentioned earlier, I tried to make up for it by having a second person observe my teaching.

7.2.4 Teacher's journal

This sub-chapter is dedicated to the techniques I used in keeping the teacher's journal. It discusses the difference between the 'hot feedback' and 'cold feedback' as well as specific questions I was concerned with.

Keeping a teacher's journal is an extremely helpful device in everyday practice, not to mention the action research. I decided to keep the teacher's journal to recall and reflect on my lessons while my memories were still fresh (see Appendix 7).

Throughout the whole duration of the action research I spared a few minutes after every lesson for so-called 'hot feedback' (Scrivener, 2005, 377) to describe my immediate impression of the lesson in a few short sentences. Later, when it settled down and became clearer in my head, usually in the evening while preparing lessons for the next day, I employed a technique called 'cold feedback' (Scrivener, 2005, 377) and added a more detailed description. Firstly, I recalled the lesson comparing the lesson plan prepared beforehand with the actual course of the lesson. Secondly, I focused on reflecting on the lesson answering the following questions:

1. How did the lesson go overall?
2. What parts of the lesson/activities went well?
3. Why did they go well?
4. What parts of the lesson/activities went wrong?
5. Why did they go wrong?
6. How many learners seemed to be engaged throughout the lesson?
7. Were there any bored learners? If so, what is the probable reason behind that?
8. Did I differentiate any tasks or did everyone follow the same plan?
9. Did I hand out any extra tasks? Why?
10. What could I improve about this lesson?

Lastly, based on my reflective notes, I made plans for the future lessons answering the following questions:

1. What did I learn from today's lesson for my future teaching practice?
2. What would I do in the same way?
3. What would I change?

7.2.5 Semi-structured interview with learners

To give learners greater freedom to express their opinions about our English lessons. Although most of the questions overlap with the ones in the questionnaires, they were not aimed at a particular lesson, but rather at English lessons in general and in addition, I was able to ask for clarification. I carried out two sets of eleven semi-structured interviews with the individual learners, one during the pre-intervention and the other during the post-intervention.

The semi-structured interview is the most commonly used type of interview. The interviewer establishes a topic within which he creates areas of interest with a set of questions that helps navigate the conversation. The core questions are the minimum that must be discussed; however, these are typically supplemented by additional questions that are supposed to specify the respondent's answers. The sequence of these questions can be altered according to the immediate situation needs (Miovský, 2006, 79). The critical part comes right at the onset of the interview when it is important to gain trust and build it throughout the whole conversation.

For the pre-intervention stage, I prepared the following eleven ‘core’ questions in advance which were later, in some cases, supplemented by extra questions:

1. What is your favourite subject and why?
2. What is your least favourite subject and why?
3. On the scale from 0 to 10 where 10 is the most, how much do you enjoy English?
4. Do you use English in your free time?
5. What do you find easy in English?
6. What do you find difficult in English?
7. What activities do you like to do in the English lessons? Choose from the list and give each a mark as if at school.
8. Which of these (speaking, writing, listening, reading) do you prefer and why?
9. Do you think that I call on you enough?
10. Do you like working in pairs/groups or do you enjoy to work on your own? Why?
11. When you finish earlier than others, do you want to get extra work? Why/Why not?
12. Do you like to get homework? Why/why not?
13. What does a perfect English lesson look like in your opinion?

For the post-intervention stage, I prepared the following ‘core’ questions to get feedback on the changes I employed in the intervention:

1. If you compare our English lessons at the beginning of the school year and now, can you notice any difference?
2. Is there anything you really enjoy in English?
3. Is there anything you really do not enjoy in English?
4. What do you think about: mini-white boards, traffic light cups, extra tasks, helping others, teaching others, self-study area, role-plays, etc.?
5. What do you think about working in pairs/groups with your classmates? Who do you like to work with and why? Who do you not like to work with and why?
6. Is it ok for you to get more difficult tasks/worksheets/homework than the others?
7. Do you like to choose what do in lessons yourself or do you prefer the teacher to choose it for you?

To avoid any confusion due to the language barrier, the interviews were conducted in the Czech language during revisions lessons.

7.2.6 Interview with other teachers

To learn more about my learners and to see how they work in other lessons with other teachers I interviewed three of my colleagues that have something to do with this class – their class teacher, their Math teacher and their information technology teacher. They were asked to characterise the learners’ personalities as they saw them, describe their in-class performance and add any other information that they found relevant.

7.3 Outcomes

In the pre-intervention stage, I gathered information from my teacher’s journal, my colleagues, other teachers and most importantly, the learners. All in all, my speculations and observations (that stronger learners are not challenged enough while weaker learners struggle) were confirmed, whether I drew information from my notes, my colleagues’ observations, interviews or the learners’ feelings. The following part outlines a summary of outcomes of the observation sheets and questionnaires based on all instruments of data collection. Firstly, outcomes from the pre-intervention stage will be mentioned and summarised, followed by the post-intervention outcomes and a summary. Since interviews with learners and teachers rather contributed to the overall picture, they are not included here. For teacher’s journal entries see Appendix 7.

7.3.1 Pre-intervention stage outcomes

a) Colleague’s observation sheet outcomes

Both my colleagues answered fifteen questions in total and most of their responses were congruent.

Does the teacher manage to keep all her learners busy throughout the lesson? If yes, how? How many learners seem to be engaged throughout the whole lesson?

These questions were answered in the same way. Here, both colleagues agreed, sadly in every single lesson they observed, that I did not manage to keep all of the learners busy. Some seemed busy at times, but no one was occupied throughout the whole lesson. The least occupied learners were the stronger ones, who mostly tried to entertain themselves by drawing, chatting or sending each other letters.

Do any learners seem bored? How many? Does the teacher work with bored learners? How? What might be the reason for learners' boredom?

Both colleagues agreed that there were about half the learners who seemed bored the whole lesson and the rest alternated between being bored and being engaged depending on whether they were assigned with a task or whether they had to listen to their classmates' answers. One of my colleagues believed I did not try to work with bored learners, but the other one wrote that sometimes I managed to provide faster learners with extra tasks, yet they typically finished very quickly and got bored again since I was not better equipped. Both agreed that the reason behind the boredom was definitely the fact that I did not manage to distribute my attention equally to all learners and one added that I generally made the lessons too easy in order to attend the weaker learners' needs.

Does the teacher acknowledge faster learners? If yes, how? How does the teacher work with the faster learners? Does the teacher provide faster learners with extra work?

Here, my colleagues agreed that sometimes I attempted to call on the stronger learners raising their hands, but I waited too long giving chance to the weaker ones that the faster became bored anyway due to the lengthiness of the whole process. One of them added that the occasionally provided extra material was not challenging enough for the learners and that is why they finished it quickly.

Does the teacher seem to involve learners according to their abilities?

One of the colleagues answered that I did, because I provided learners with enough time to answer, I did not pressure them when they did not know how to answer and I prepared additional exercises, therefore, I was aware of the learners' differences; however, the other claimed that she could not answer, because she did not know the learners well enough.

The rest of the questionnaire concentrated on the three stronger learners:

Do they actively participate in the lesson?

My colleagues believed they did since they raised their hands whenever I asked a question and they immediately took the lead in pair work/groupwork.

Do they seem bored at any point of the lesson?

Yes, unfortunately they did, especially during revision parts and when checking the correct answers. Interestingly, one of them mentioned that one of the stronger learners seemed particularly annoyed during games we played.

When they finish before other learners do, do they get extra work? If yes, what kind of work? How do they feel about the extra work?

Both colleagues stated that learners were given extra tasks only sometimes. When this happened, it was only a short gap-filling exercise or some kind of a writing task. Generally, they did not look happy about working more, but one of them even kept asking for more.

b) Post-lesson individual learner questionnaire

In the pre-intervention stage, learners answered eighteen questions in total. Most of the answers were in accordance with my assumptions.

Did you like today's lesson?

The majority of learners chose option b) something I liked, something I did not and a few learners opted for c) I did not like anything. No learner chose a) I liked everything.

What activities did you like?

There were several options to choose from, depending on the activities that actually appeared in the particular lesson, and the learners were asked to grade them as their tests are graded at school (1 = the best, 5 = the worst). The result showed that work with the activity book was rated the worst – only one person liked it, others used the mark 5, the textbook followed -two people liked it, five people used the grade three and four people hated it. Learners were quite positive about vocabulary and grammar revision and work with mini-whiteboards and they loved role-plays, real-plays, working with songs and videos. Except for one learner, all of them mentioned games as their favourite activities.

Did you find the lesson difficult?

All in all, four learners found the lessons easy, they claimed they already knew and understood everything, so it was tiring for them to wait for the rest of their classmates to finish. Three

learners found them okay – not very difficult, not really easy, and four learners found the lessons very difficult, because they either did not understand the vocabulary and grammar or the spoken language, which was too fast or unintelligible in general.

What activities did you find difficult? What activities did you find easy?

All learners agreed that listening from the textbook was difficult, because they could not understand the speakers properly. Grammar and vocabulary revision followed. Although they liked English songs and videos, they considered it difficult from the same reasons they found textbook listening difficult. Working with books was found rather boring than difficult and they agreed that games were easy, because they were enjoyable.

Did you feel involved enough in the lesson? Would you like to be involved more? In which activity would you like to be more involved?

Seven learners mentioned they felt enough involved, two felt they sometimes were involved and sometimes were not and one learner felt completely uninvolved. This person was also the only one who wished to be involved more in all activities, others seemed to be satisfied with the frequency I called on them and assigned them with tasks. Two learners expressed they would love to be more involved during revision tasks and the rest wanted to be more involved during games.

Did you get bored during the lesson? During which activity?

One learner was bored during games, others mentioned activities in the following order, from the most boring to the least boring: working with the textbook, working with the activity book, vocabulary and grammar revision, new language presentation, songs, role-plays/real-plays, videos and games.

Do you like to get extra work when you finish before others? Do you like it when your teacher chooses it or do you want to choose it yourself?

Five learners said they would not want any extra work, four would agree with extra work if they could choose it themselves and two preferred to be given additional tasks chosen by the teacher.

In case you finish earlier than others and do not get extra work, what do you do?

One learner allegedly never finishes earlier, the rest mentioned they drew pictures, study for another subject or do nothing and watch their classmates.

Do you prefer working alone, in pairs or groups?

Two learners chose the option of working alone, because the others do not slow them down, the rest chose working in pairs or groups, because it made them feel more confident and they could discuss whatever they were not sure about.

What would you do in order to improve today's lesson?

One learner answered that an unexpected test would improve the lesson, one learner suggested watching a film, three learners wanted to skip the textbooks and the rest wanted more games.

To sum up, the pre-intervention stage brought the following information: Firstly, the teacher does not manage to keep all her learners busy throughout the lessons, and because she does not differentiate the instruction, it results in learners' frustration and boredom. Although, she tries to attend to the learners' needs, she rather fails in terms of having enough appropriate extra material at her disposal and in terms of distributing her attention equally. Learners find the lessons average or below average as far as the choice of the tasks and their difficulty are concerned. The activities they consider the most enjoyable are games and they are the least content with textbooks and activity books except for one, over-motivated, learner who claims to prefer everything, even tests, to games. The majority of them prefer working in pairs or groups and they are generally not very keen on getting extra work when finished earlier, with the exception of the over-motivated learner who demands more work.

7.3.2. Post-intervention stage outcomes

a) Colleagues' observation sheet outcomes

Both my colleagues answered fifteen questions in total and they agreed on most of their observations again.

Does the teacher manage to keep all her learners busy throughout the lesson? If yes, how? How many learners seem to be engaged throughout the whole lesson?

Both colleagues answered that not all the learners were engaged for the whole time; however, they felt a significant change in terms of the learners' work ethic, because most of them seemed to be more enthusiastic about the lessons than the previous time and really worked on their assignments, with a few occasional exceptions. There was no one, though, who would not work for the whole duration of the lesson or a major part of it.

Do any learners seem bored? How many? Does the teacher work with bored learners? How? What might be the reason for learners' boredom?

As for boredom, there was an agreement between the two of my colleagues. According to their observations, there were short periods when learners seemed bored, particularly the stronger ones waiting for their classmates to answer. Otherwise, due to extra work learners were given, there was not much time for the learners to have nothing to do.

Does the teacher acknowledge faster learners? If yes, how? How does the teacher work with the faster learners? Does the teacher provide faster learners with extra work?

My colleagues agreed that I was much better prepared this time than in the pre-intervention stage. Whether working individually or in pairs/groups, learners were always provided with additional or extra tasks when they finished early. On the whole, the activities were probably designed more appropriately and therefore corresponded to learners' actual abilities much better.

Does the teacher seem to involve learners according to their abilities?

Here, both colleagues said that they believed I did, because I provided learners with differentiated worksheets and differentiated tasks in general; however, since they had no thorough knowledge of them, they could not be sure.

The rest of the questionnaire concentrated on the three stronger learners:

Do they actively participate in the lesson?

Yes, they did. All of them, but especially one, raised their hands all the time and wanted to write answers on the blackboard. One of them even offered explaining the subject matter to learners who asked for clarification.

Do they seem bored at any point of the lesson?

One of the colleagues mentioned that learners seemed bored occasionally, when they were waiting for their classmates to answer, or possibly when they were not really fond of the tasks they worked on. However, the other colleague noticed that one of them showed signs of boredom/annoyance more often, whether she was waiting for her classmates to answer, being assigned with a new task or working in pairs/groups (it was the over-motivated learner).

When they finish before other learners do, do they get extra work? If yes, what kind of work? How do they feel about the extra work?

When they finished, they got extra work. Sometimes they worked on some additional exercises that were directly related to the original task, sometimes they were given a revision exercise that was different from the original task. They were also provided with English books and quite often they worked as assistants writing the correct answers on the blackboard, helping their classmates or peer-teaching. There was one learner who always asked for extra work when there was an opportunity, one asked occasionally and two never asked.

b) Post-lesson individual learner questionnaire

In the post-intervention stage, learners were asked to answer twenty-four questions in total. In fact, many answers indeed copied the answers from the pre-intervention stage, but in general, learners reacted quite positively towards the changes I employed; however, one of the stronger learners that functioned as the trigger of my action research, did not seem as satisfied as I had hoped for. The following part presents the most relevant questions and responses to them:

Did you like today's lesson?

All of the learners chose option b) something I liked, something I did not. No learner chose options a) I liked everything. or c) I did not like anything.

What activities did you like?

Once again, there were several options to choose from, depending on the activities that actually appeared in the particular lesson, and the learners were asked to grade them as their tests are graded at school (1 = the best, 5 = the worst). The results were almost the same as in the pre-intervention stage – the activity book was rated the worst, followed by the textbook – again,

two people liked it and used the grade one, five people used the grade three and four people used the grade five. Three learners mentioned they particularly do not enjoy listening exercises from the textbook. Vocabulary and grammar revision were again rated quite well, grades ranged from one to three. Learners did not forget to mention role-plays, real-plays, songs, videos and games as their favourite. Only one of them claimed not to like games and rated tests and examination very highly.

Did you find the lesson difficult?

Nine learners found the lessons okay, two found them rather a little difficult.

What activities did you find difficult? What activities did you find easy?

All learners found listening difficult, because they could not understand the speakers properly. Four learners mentioned grammar as difficult and two struggled with vocabulary. Games were easy for all of them.

Did you feel involved enough in the lesson? Would you like to be involved more? In which activity would you like to be more involved?

Nine learners felt involved enough, one said that sometimes he/she felt sometimes involved and sometimes less, but was satisfied with the frequency. One of them felt often uninvolved and expressed dissatisfaction with it. This person wanted to be involved more in all activities except for games that he/she considered useless.

Did you get bored during the lesson? During which activity?

Most learners found themselves involved enough; however, they did not enjoy working with the textbook and the workbook. They felt quite neutral about grammar revision, vocabulary revision and new language presentation and they enjoyed songs, role-plays/real-plays, videos and games.

Do you like to get extra work when you finish before others? Do you like it when your teacher chooses it or do you want to choose it yourself?

As in the pre-intervention stage, five learners would not want any extra work, four would agree with extra work if they could choose it themselves and two preferred to be given additional tasks chosen by the teacher.

In case you finish earlier than others and do not get extra work, what do you do?

Most learners mentioned drawing, talking to a neighbour, watching their classmates or preparing for tests from other subjects.

Do you prefer working alone, in pairs or groups?

Here, the answer also did not change compared to the pre-intervention stage. Two learners chose the option of working alone, because the others do not slow them down, the rest chose working in pairs or groups, because it made them feel more confident and they could discuss whatever they were not sure about.

What would you do in order to improve today's lesson?

One of the learners would improve the lesson with an unexpected test at the beginning of the lesson and then with a gap-filling exercises that practises grammar or vocabulary. The rest suggested watching a movie in English, listening to songs in English, playing more role-plays/real-plays. Four learners mentioned skipping the textbook and the workbook and ten of them wanted to play more games.

In a nutshell, many answers corresponded to what already appeared in the pre-intervention stage, for instance, the fact that learners did not start to be fond of the textbook or listening exercises, etc. Nevertheless, there was a positive shift in terms of learners' behaviour in the lessons, their participation and overall approach towards their learning. Although one of the learners was still not satisfied and wanted to work faster on more challenging tasks, the rest seemed content with the changes and the lessons in general.

8. Discussion

After the outcomes were collected, they were evaluated on the basis of the three aims stated in the practical part:

Stronger or faster learners will be sufficiently occupied during the lessons.

Based on my observations and my teacher's journal, the situation indeed improved, since the stronger learners seemed more engaged in the lesson. It was confirmed by the outcomes of both the observation sheets and the individual learner questionnaires, in which the majority of the learners felt okay in the lessons and rated them mostly successful. Three of the four stronger learners in question claimed to have felt involved enough and found the lessons generally okay, not very difficult, nor very easy. Although about a half of all the learners did not prefer any extra work when they finished earlier than others and it is not clear what group the stronger learners belonged to, I decided to make all of them busy and motivated by assigning them with challenging tasks and subsequent extra tasks. In order to fulfil the above stated aim, I worked on several improvements that contributed to the overall result.

To begin with, I made sure there were no or only occasional delay times, when learners did not work on any task, since it seemed to have been the most frustrating moment for more active learners, which led to boredom. When it happened, it was either due to my poor organisational skills and a lack of problem anticipation or rather slow pace of weaker learners' responses. I typically provided learners with additional tasks directly related to the original task or extra tasks that revised or practised an older or a newer subject matter. Furthermore, they were always asked to produce more examples (of sentences, phrases, words, dialogues, ideas, etc.), longer pieces (in writing, speaking) and their time limit was often increased.

In order to eliminate the delay times, I very often worked with grouping where I either put stronger learners together and created homogeneous groups, which allowed me to assign them with more difficult tasks and provide them with more demanding follow-up tasks, which enabled them to move ahead faster and be more creative. Moreover, their weaker counterparts did not slow them down. Despite this fact I sometimes put them in heterogeneous groups with weaker learners where they functioned as leaders or supervisors controlling the smooth progress of an activity and paying attention to their classmates' mistakes.

Apart from that, I strived to personalise activities as much as possible, so that learners felt more intrigued to work on them. From time to time I let them choose what they wanted to do setting up a 'market place', which supplied them with various activities and exercises many of which were quite demanding and as a matter of fact learners actually opted for the harder versions. In spare time, they were also provided with English books with follow-up exercises to complete. In addition, they were provided with less or no clues (e.g. Czech translation of new vocabulary, transcript for listening, script for role-plays, etc.) and were encouraged to figure out answers on their own, which developed their sense of responsibility and autonomy.

I believe the key was to always provide stronger learners with extra tasks when they finished early, demanding tasks that challenged them and to assign them with important roles (peer-teaching, being a group leader, etc.). This way they felt that they had an important role in the teaching-learning process and they did not give up easily. The only obstacle that was not overcome completely was the situation with the ambitious and over-motivated learner who still, in spite of all the changes, was not content and demanded harder and stricter lessons.

Weaker or slower learners will manage to achieve the overall aims through accomplishing the objectives of individual lessons.

The outcomes showed that weaker learners were more or less satisfied with the course of the lessons as far as the pace, materials and contents of the lessons were concerned. Needless to say, from the very beginning I was more successful in adjusting my teaching to the weaker learners. It might have been caused by the fact that the majority of the group consisted of weaker learners or I just naturally tend to opt for a slower pace when teaching. Out of seven weaker learners, five actually kept up with others, but two were permanently and noticeably falling behind.

In order to progress, these learners were typically supported with numerous clues (e.g. dictionaries, vocabulary lists, pre-teaching of grammar or vocabulary, transcripts for listening, grouping, etc.), they were given extended time limits to finish their exercises and they had a chance to consult their answers with their classmates or the teacher.

On the whole, the attempt was to not discourage the learners by extreme demands placed on them and to facilitate their learning by supporting them, providing them with clues and trying to make them feel safe.

The teacher will learn to successfully employ differentiated instruction in her teaching.

Although the answer to the last aim is rather subjective, I believe I was successful, at least to a certain extent, as the situation in the class improved and learners seemed altogether more involved and satisfied. It definitely did not change fundamentally, there was no sudden U-turn; the change was rather gradual. What I perceive as a flaw is the fact that I could not detect an apparent change in the behaviour of the strong learner who was unusually ambitious and motivated.

In order to acquire the overall picture of the whole situation and be better prepared for the differentiated instruction, learners expressed their feelings about favourite activities, preferable arrangements in the classroom and extra work and homework. The results say that although most learners were satisfied with the lessons, they were not fond of all activities. The learners' reluctance to work with the textbook and the activity book may lay in the fact that it includes a lot of gap-fill activities, which is rather boring for learners and at the same time, they were quite often forced to listen to the recording which they did not particularly understand. As for the extra work, about fifty percent of the learners did not require that, but the other half were quite neutral or positive about that. Regarding grouping, most learners preferred to be at least in a pair, because that made them feel more secure.

One thing that should be mentioned here is the possible distortion of the outcomes. I underestimated learners' attention span and made the questionnaires too long. Also, I noticed that they got bothered by having to fill in the same form in three or four lessons in a row. Therefore, some questions were answered quite superficially, some were not filled in at all.

Attempting to establish a balance in the class where I was teaching, I attained a combination of internal quantitative and qualitative differentiation, since sometimes it was more convenient to group learners according to their performance and results and sometimes it was more suitable to consider their hobbies and interests. Working with a mixed-ability class brings numerous advantages and disadvantages. In my experience, I saw the advantages primarily in my professional development as I had to spend a considerable amount of time lesson planning, creating versions of one material and thinking ahead. A good aspect was that all learners belonged to the same age group, so their developmental stages did not differ. Furthermore, I believe that I led the learners to develop their autonomy, for instance through peer teaching and working in pairs and groups as well as working with dictionaries and looking up information

on their own, because it was not possible to devote an equal amount of time to all the learners. Besides, grouping helped to gain a variety of human resources, because there are learners who are originally from different parts of the world, with different hobbies and diverse knowledge of the language.

Challenges occurred more often and were not easy to handle. Learners kept using their mother tongue and I was required to translate my instruction or at least ask one of the learners to do so. With some learners I had to overcome their shyness and consequent lack of participation. Although I taught this class four times a week, the limited opportunity to practise English inside the classroom as well as outside was noticeable.

Following from that, I dare to say that my differentiated instruction involved the ensuing positive characteristics: It definitely was proactive, since I actively searched for ways to facilitate learning for everyone, hence I spent a lot of time planning the lessons. To do so, I made use of any opportunity to get to know the learners better – when they were in the mood to share something about their lives with me, I took some time to listen to them and talk to them, I assigned them with personalised writing (e.g. their family, their weekend, their holiday, the worst day of their lives, etc.) and of course, I used examination and testing to keep track of their progress. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with them, their other teachers and completed it with questionnaires where learners expressed their opinions about their preferences and impressions of the lessons.

As for the curriculum, even though I aimed to finish the textbook, I chose the relevant parts and omitted or substituted the ones I did not find essential. However, I am not sure that the activities were always engaging, sometimes they were taken from the textbook and simply did not engage the learners and I am afraid that my efforts sometimes resulted in the approach being more quantitative than qualitative, which I believe improved during the research. Besides, as much as I aimed at the learner-centred approach, quite frequently I resorted to an undue teacher-talking-time and the lessons resulted in being rather teacher-centred.

Throughout the course, I used many ways to differentiate the content, the process and product of the lessons. I assigned learners with writing/reading/speaking on their favourite topics (e.g. your favourite film, your favourite actor/actress, your favourite free time activity), I let them choose what to do (e.g. gap-filling exercises, reading a book, writing an essay, etc.), I set different time limits for different (groups of) learners, I assigned them with different homework.

I even differentiated tests – I either created completely different versions or divided it in obligatory and optional parts. When working on role-plays, real-plays and simulations, they were either assigned with roles according to their difficulty or the weaker learners worked with a script. Alternatively, I created heterogeneous groups, in which the stronger learners helped the weaker ones. I also differentiated the four language skills according to suggestions from Chapter 4.

There were a few types of activities that I found useful for differentiation, yet did not manage to use them due to time constraints or preferences for other activities that seemed more suitable at the particular moment. In the future, I would like to employ some ongoing individual projects. My idea is that, depending on the grade, learners would be assigned a topic or they would rather choose one on their own (e.g. My favourite band, The worst day of my life, My family, My favourite film, etc.) and over the course of several lessons, or maybe the whole semester/school year, depending on the focus of the project, they would work on it in their spare time (when finished before others). Another idea I was very fond of was setting up a self-study area that would include dictionaries, photocopied exercises, language games, books, magazines, articles, etc. I did not create it this time, because the lessons did not take place in one class, so it would be quite problematic. In addition, I think it could be a good and interesting idea to create contracts between me and the learners that would include goals that the learners commit to fulfil and sanctions for violations.

All in all, the atmosphere in the class improved and so did learners' results. Apart from one learner, others felt sufficiently involved in the lessons and their participation increased. In the future, I would work on detecting issues in mixed-ability classes earlier. I would create a shorter post-lesson learner questionnaire and I would ask my colleagues to come to observe my lessons more times, because their notes would then be more precise. Last but not least, I would dedicate more time to learning more about learners' learning styles.

Conclusion

The purpose of this diploma thesis was to improve the situation in a particular mixed-ability class at an elementary school. I decided to employ differentiated instruction to attend to the needs of the weaker, but primarily the stronger learners as their dissatisfaction with the class' slow progress was the driving force that made me act.

The theoretical part deals with several concepts that are supposed to serve as the grounds for the practical part that uses action research as its tool. Firstly, it deals with a few terminological matters in distinguishing second language from foreign language and learning from acquisition and then it proceeds to what causes issues in both teaching and learning - the diversity in the educational system. In this chapter, readers learn more about mixed ability classes, their specifics and causes, namely learner differences. From all the possible reasons, the author chooses the ones that are most frequently quoted and relevant for teaching and learning in general as well as for language learning. The following chapter proposes the solution in the form of differentiated instruction, discusses its characteristics and suggests examples of work in a differentiated classroom.

The practical part introduces the research sample - describes the school, the way English lessons are conducted and characterises individual learners. The major part, the nearly three-month action research is discussed in the sixth chapter. Firstly, the problem situation is described followed by the research question upon which three action research aims are formulated. The overall aim was to employ differentiated instruction in order to balance the differences among individual stronger and weaker learners. In the pre-intervention stage, data were collected from in-lesson colleague observations, post-lesson individual learner questionnaires, interviews with learners and teachers and entries in the teacher's journal. Based on the outcomes of the data collection, the intervention stage was planned and lessons carried out and the post-intervention stage served as a reflection of the whole research.

Eventually, it turned out that the action research actually worked as it was evident from all the data collection results. The change was not sudden, though, it was gradual, but hopefully. The three aims were fulfilled, since, except for one person, stronger learners became more occupied and less annoyed with the course of the lessons. Weaker learners gained more confidence in

their abilities due to a slower pace of the lessons and I, as the teacher, learned at least a part of how to deal with a mixed ability class that requires differentiation.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

Although, there are different classifications of language levels, the most widespread is provided by The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) that divides the levels into three categories, namely **basic user**, **independent user** and **proficient user**, each of which consists of two sub-categories. Basic user includes levels **A1** and **A2**, independent user **B1** and **B2** and proficient **C1** and **C2**.

The following part shortly introduces the six language levels as described in CEFR taken from Council of Europe Portal:

- A1** Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
- A2** Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
- B1** Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

- B2** Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
- C1** Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expression. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
- C2** Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

Teaching methods and approaches - overview

With English having become the lingua franca, the demand for it has increased and therefore the concept of language learning and teaching has dramatically changed over time. This part will briefly mention the historical development of the main teaching methods (for more see Harmer, 1988; Harmer, 1998; Richard and Rogers, 1986). Back in the nineteenth century foreign language learning was brought into school-curricula, which gave rise to the **Grammar-translation method** that focused on explanations of individual grammar points through translations from the students' first language to the target language and vice versa. At the end of the nineteenth century, the **Direct method** was formed in response to the restrictions of the Grammar-translation method. This method omitted translations, but held on to the importance of accuracy still realized on the sentence level. For users of the Direct method it is important to use exclusively the target language. At the beginning of the 20th century, in the 1920s and 1930s it was replaced by the **Audiolingual method** that was based on behaviourist theories and its stimulus-response-reinforcement model. It favours drills and its 'purpose was habit-formation through constant repetition of correct utterances, encouraged and supported by positive reinforcement' (Harmer, 2007, 64).

During the 1970s and 1980s four rather alternative methods, that are hardly ever used in mainstream teaching, appeared. They are namely **Community Language Learning**, **Suggestopedia**, **Total Physical Response** and **Silent way**. Community Language Learning brings to our attention that teachers are the facilitators of learning who help students with their expression. Suggestopedia discusses the importance of affect in language learning, while during a lesson that employs Total Physical Response students are required to move around the classroom and the Silent way lets students discover and create language as opposed to making them remember parts of lectures. In addition to their unorthodox nature, they are all student-centred (Harmer, 2007, 64-69).

So is the **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)** whose main aim is developing one of the crucial competences – the communicative competence. People who acquired this competence use language for different purposes and are able to switch between registers in different settings with different participants and do not avoid communication due to their

limitations in the target language. CLT digressed from the earlier views on language teaching that emphasised the importance of grammatical competence acquired through mechanical habit formation, drills, memorizing, strict error avoidance and the deductive approach which provides students with explanations and practice as opposed to the inductive approach that promotes discovery learning (Richards, 2006, 4-23). CLT is based on the following assumptions: Firstly, effective 'learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in social interactions' (Richards, 2006, 22-23) that provide opportunities to negotiate meaning and to notice how language is used. Secondly, students must be exposed to relevant, purposeful, interesting and engaging content and must not be afraid of errors, which goes hand in hand with trial and inductive learning that is highlighted. Furthermore, CLT tends to focus attention on the learning process rather than on the final product which is always anchored within a given context. Last but not least, in the student-centred CLT classroom, students create their own paths towards the language due to their distinct motivations, interests and capabilities. Sensible teachers who see themselves as co-learners in these classes, notice individual differences and try to draw on them, which 'has led to an interest in action research and other forms of classroom investigation' (Richards, 2006, 22-26).

Nowadays, the tendency shifted towards the 'post-communicative era' and approaches including **task-based language teaching** (TBLT) as well as **content and language integrated learning** (CLIL). TBLT focuses on the authentic language use and on meaningful tasks (e.g. giving directions, visiting a doctor, making a phone call, etc.) using the target language. The focus here is on fluency (of the target language) rather than on accuracy. CLIL, on the other side, focuses on learning the content through foreign language (Didenko, Pichugova, 2016, 1-4).

Individual student characteristics

This part introduces the eleven participants of the action research. The first five students that are characterised in this section fall into the weaker group of students, whereas the rest belong to the stronger one. Students are characterised from the perspectives of their background, behaviour, preferences and performance with regard to the English language.

Student 1

This student is originally Ukrainian and he comes from a very strict family who demands great results and pushes him to a grammar school. However, his work ethic and his results in all subjects are average or below. He works in phases of being negligent of his duties and indifferent to his in-class performance on one side and trying hard with a lot of effort on the other after his parents put pressure on him. He is an easy-going boy who is well-liked among his classmates, often considered the ‘class clown’.

As for the English language he is below-average. He attempts to memorize rules and he tends to overuse them. He is also capable of learning vocabulary for an examination but he lacks confidence in his oral performance. Hardly ever does he understand spoken instructions and his listening skills are overall very poor. When provided with a dictionary, or another kind of support, typically translation of unknown vocabulary, he is able to produce a decent piece of writing and he can make sense of a written text. He definitely prefers to work in pairs or groups and he enjoys playing games and working with songs and videos.

Student 2

This student is originally Ukrainian as well and he is one of the three students that joined this class in the fourth grade. Together with the remaining two (who will be mentioned below), they have still been having problems to become integrated into the group, because they created an independent unit and do not allow anyone in. He inconspicuously teases and insults other students, but he shows a great degree of respect towards teachers and his parents. His performance across all subjects is very poor which goes hand in hand with his results.

Regarding English lessons, he is one of the weakest individuals in this group and, by extension, in the whole class. He mainly struggles with grammar, particularly tenses. He is unable to produce a satisfactory piece of writing and fails to understand almost any kind of spoken or written English. Furthermore, he lacks an adequate amount of vocabulary knowledge and thus he tries to avoid any kind of speech in the target language. He is more successful when provided with a Czech translation; English explanation does not help much. On a more positive note, he typically manages to meet his obligations such as homework. Even though he is not particularly fond of the English language, he likes to be successful and this feeling motivates him to go forward. He prefers to work in pairs or groups, since this way he gains more confidence; however, he tends to disturb others when collaborating with his friends.

Student 3

This student belongs to the group of the three students that joined this class in the fourth grade. He is generally a very quiet child who underperforms in every subject, Czech and English in particular. He apparently suffers from some learning disabilities, but since his former class teacher took the students' weaknesses into account without requiring a statement from the educational and psychological counselling centre, he does not possess any official documents.

During the English lessons he is usually inattentive and easily distracted and tries to avoid work. When necessary, he is able to memorize the subject matter, nevertheless the lack of comprehension is evident. Occasionally, he manages to learn a concrete fragment of language and apply it with success; however, he fails to interconnect the individual bits and pieces. He seems to struggle with all four language skills as well as language systems; however, writing tasks and vocabulary are definitely easier for him than the rest. In a pair work or groupwork he annoys his co-workers, but he feels more secure. Most of the time he requires translations into the Czech language as typically he is unable to put the desired meaning together.

Student 4

This student is the last from the already mentioned group of three that joined the class last year. She is a very lively, energetic and fearless child. She has a tendency to order her classmates around and her behaviour towards others is often fairly rude. Her results across the subjects are rather average particularly due to her careless home preparation and frequent lack of concentration.

Her results within the English lessons are altogether balanced. Her listening skills are at a good level, she understands instructions and often offers to translate them to her weaker classmates and she is able to express herself in both speaking and writing. When she struggles with reading it is mainly due to her poorer vocabulary. She is one of the few who are not afraid to answer any kind of question and she gets actively involved in the lessons. Nevertheless, she makes a lot of mistakes which I believe is caused by her need to do more things at the same time, thus she is always distracted by constantly playing with various objects or drawing pictures. She works much better when she is on her own since then she does not interrupt others by chatting with her group members.

Student 5

This student is extremely quiet and timid. Although she underperforms from time to time, she is able to force herself to work harder and improve quickly, possibly thanks to the supportive and stimulating family environment. Overall, she is very humble and dutiful. Since her classmate and best friend has fallen ill last year and is more absent than present, she has been even more reserved.

Regarding the English language, her results are average, but her work ethic is excellent. She always carries out all the assigned tasks, she never forgets to bring homework and she always prepares for tests. Her performance is stable as far as language skills and systems are concerned; however, as a shy person she does not feel confident speaking in front of others. She feels more secure working in pairs or groups. From time to time she has difficulties understanding spoken language including instructions, but she usually figures it out after a slower repetition or a proper demonstration.

Student 6

This student might easily be considered the weakest in the class. She is one of the students who originally started in the neighbouring class and was transferred at her parents' request. She is extremely weak in all subjects which is largely caused by her laziness and lack of responsibility.

In English her performance is catastrophic. Not only is she unable to understand the spoken language, but she is also incapable of reading in the target language with comprehension not to mention her results regarding speaking or writing. She does not respond well to any traditional

or unconventional methods, but she does not seem to even try. Irrespective of the number of times a certain subject matter is revised and practised, her understanding of it will be very little if any at all. She prefers pair work and groupwork to individual work, but she misuses it to chat with her friends and misbehave in general. Occasionally she decides to work harder; however, she only memorizes whole sections from a textbook or a workbook, which is not an ideal method in language learning.

Student 7

This student is one of the two that came last year from the parallel class. She is a shy and a very quiet girl who does not communicate much and hates to be the centre of attention. She belongs to the stronger students in this group and her performance in all subjects is quite balanced; however, from time to time she tends to be a little careless and inattentive. She gets easily distracted by her friend and frequent desk neighbour. They either chat together, send each other letters or draw pictures.

Regarding English, when she stays focused her results are very good. Her receptive skills surpass her productive skills, especially due to her shyness to speak in front of others. She definitely works better in a pair or in a group; however, she must be monitored carefully otherwise her pace of work decreases. Although she would definitely be capable of progressing faster, she does not seem to be bother with the slower pace of the lessons.

Student 8

This student is very dexterous and conscientious. She is very quiet and shy, but she excels in every subject. Unfortunately, her ill health prevents her from proper attendance since she spends most of the school year at home or in hospital.

Although she cannot attend school regularly, she manages to maintain her good grades. In English, for example, she is assigned with some homework and little projects that she brings when she is allowed to go back to school. Luckily, she is able to pick up new pieces of information in the target language very quickly, so she does not feel left behind. She is one of the advanced students and she manifests it in her balanced performance across all language areas. She hardly ever needs a Czech translation and if it happens, she does not hesitate to ask for clarification. She feels more confident working in pairs or smaller groups, yet she does well

on her own, too. Her only weakness is her often repeated absence and possibly her shyness that might stop her from producing the target language convincingly.

Student 9

This student is another one from the small group of stronger students. Her performance across subjects is above average with the exception of mathematics which she is not really fond of.

During English classes, she is very active, her hand is raised all the time in an attempt to answer questions her weaker classmates did not manage to. She is good at all four language skills, she has no problem with any of the language skills and moreover she is not afraid to improvise, therefore she is often capable of figuring out meanings she is not familiar with. She likes to explain vocabulary or grammar to her classmates and she loves to be assigned with writing literally anything on the blackboard. From time to time she seems to be bored, but the second she is given a new task, she becomes enthusiastic again. As far as pair work and groupwork are concerned, she performs better working on her own, otherwise she tends to disturb the lesson. Although her performance is very good, she does not feel the need to progress fast and is quite satisfied with her rather passive role.

Student 10

This student is one of a kind. She joined the class at the beginning of this school year after she had transferred from a different school due to personal reasons. She seems to have fit in quite well, although some students do not show much understanding of her behaviour.

This ten-year-old girl is possibly the most ambitious and motivated person I have ever come across. She has many hobbies and aspires to be the best at everything she does. According to a specialist, mentally she is about three years ahead of her peers and she indeed gives the impression of an adult person. She was also diagnosed with ADHD; however, her occasional manifestations of it feel rather pretended in order to draw attention to herself.

As for the English language, she was put into the weaker group, since in her previous school she was not attending a language class, thus it was assumed that her language level would not be very high. It turned out, though, she is one of the best in the group and that she could easily work in the stronger group. Right from the beginning she made sure that I knew she found the lessons too easy. At one point she even asked to be transferred to the other half since she wanted

to progress faster, so we started the preparation for her to catch up with the rest of the students, but eventually she decided to stay in my group.

It does not matter what activity I come up with, ninety percent of the time she expresses her dissatisfaction with the level of the task either orally or via a note she writes on a piece of paper, a mini whiteboard or her notebook.

Most of the time she does not care much for the joy of learning a foreign language, but she wants to move forward as much and as fast as possible. She gets bored during any revision or practice and she is not particularly fond of playing games. Every lesson she asks for a test or an examination and prefers it to be unannounced. She openly expresses her annoyance with her slower classmates and has a tendency to correct them. She welcomes homework and specifically asks for extra tasks in lessons.

Overall, her performance in the English language is great. She is good at all four language skills and her vocabulary and grammar knowledge are extensive. At times she struggles with proper pronunciation of some words or spelling. She is spontaneous and not afraid to improvise and ask for clarification. As I see it, she definitely prefers working alone or in groups with students she considers equal to herself in terms of their knowledge and abilities.

Student 11

This student was a big surprise for me and not in the most positive way, to be honest. Although I was informed about his condition, I could not imagine how severe it was until I taught the first lesson in this class. In compliance with a report from the School Counselling Centre, this student suffers from dysgraphia, ADHD, anxiety, lack of concentration and shows signs of autism. Apart from that he experiences frequent bursts of anger that significantly disrupt the lessons. He either yells at his classmates (whether he provokes the argument himself or not) or tries to explain why he cannot work and why he hates school. If his needs are not satisfied, he usually takes it amiss and hits things in his vicinity. His reactions must be handled gently with understanding since strict commands and bans are hardly ever effective in his case. He needs firm but gentle guidance with a broad range of activities that reflect his interests (possibly in computer games and superheroes). He works much better when he is under close supervision and for that reason, he would highly benefit from working with a teacher assistant who would devote his/her time exclusively to him.

In most subjects he is average or slightly above the average; however, he excels in English thanks to his favourite pastime – computer games that he plays on daily basis. He is the most fluent from the group and knows grammar and vocabulary that older students normally learn. He is brilliant at listening and speaking, but his reading and writing fall behind due to his learning disabilities.

Most of the time he tries to avoid work, because he finds it too easy, too boring or he is experiencing one of his anger bursts. As a teacher I must constantly make sure that he is on task, otherwise he immediately switches to do something he enjoys more. All in all, he is not fond of pair work or groupwork unless assigned with a 'role' he finds important or entertaining. Mostly he prefers to learn on his own and discuss his answers and ideas with the teacher. To win him over I often try to challenge him and make sure he wins over me, so that he stays motivated until the next time.

Colleague's observation sheet

Dear colleague, the purpose of this observation sheet is to discover how much the learners are engaged in my English lessons, so that I can make my teaching and their learning more effective.

I would appreciate if you could answer following questions with detailed comments.

- 1. Does the teacher manage to keep all learners busy throughout the lesson? If yes, how?**
- 2. How many learners seem to be engaged throughout the whole lesson?**
- 3. Does the teacher react to learners' individual needs** (e.g. Ss' slower/faster understanding, raising hands,...)?
- 4. Do any learners seem bored? How many?**
- 5. Does the teacher work with bored learners? How?**
- 6. What might be the reason for learners' boredom?**
- 7. Does the teacher acknowledge faster learners? If yes, how?**
- 8. How does the teacher work with the faster learners?**
- 9. Does the teacher provide faster learners with extra work?**
- 10. Does the teacher seem to involve learners according to their abilities?**

Jana, Magdaléna, Beáta

- 1. Do they actively participate in the lesson?**
- 2. Do they seem bored at any point of the lesson? If yes, when/during which activity?**

3. If they seem bored is it:

- a) at the beginning of the lesson during the revision part?
- b) during the reading practice?
- c) during the listening practice?
- d) during the writing practice?
- e) during the new grammar explanation?
- f) during games?
- g) when checking the answers?

4. When they finish before other learners do, do they get extra work? If yes, what kind of work?

5. How do they seem to feel about the extra work (if they get any)? How do they react to it? Describe what they do, how they (probably) feel, etc:

Thank you very much for helping me with my research.

Dotazník pro žáky

Milí žáci, účelem tohoto dotazníku je zjistit, co vás v hodině baví a co vás nebaví, které aktivity jsou pro vás složité, které naopak jednoduché, jestli si v hodině přijdete zapojení, či naopak. Zakroužkujte, prosím, nebo zodpovězte následující otázky.

1. Bavila tě dnešní hodina?

- a) bavilo mě všechno
- b) něco mě bavilo, něco mě nebavilo
- c) nebavilo mě nic

2. Které aktivity tě bavily? Označuj je jako ve škole!

- a) práce s tabulkami 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 - 5
- b) práce s učebnicí 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 - 5
- c) opakování slovní zásoby 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 - 5
- d) hra 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 - 5

3. Byla pro tebe hodina celkově složitá? Proč?

- a) ANO
- b) NE

Pokud ano, proč? _____

4. Které aktivity pro tebe byly složité? A proč? Vyber a zdůvodni!

- a) opakování časů (věty podle papírků)
- b) opakování slovní zásoby (a loaf, a bar,...)
- c) cvičení v učebnici
- d) poslech v učebnici
- e) hra
- f) jiné: _____

5. Byla pro tebe některá aktivita snadná? A proč? Vyber a zdůvodni!

- a) opakování časů
- b) opakování slovní zásoby
- c) cvičení v učebnici
- d) poslech v učebnici
- e) hra
- f) jiné: _____

6. Připadal/a sis v hodině:

- a) hodně zapojený/á
- b) tak akorát zapojený/á
- c) občas nezapojený/á
- d) často nezapojený/á
- e) úplně nezapojený/á

7. Měl/a jsi pocit, že bys chtěl/a být v hodině zapojený/á více?

- a) ano
- b) ne
- c) jen někdy

8. Při které aktivitě jsi chtěl/a být zapojen/a více?

- a) při opakování časů s tabulkami
- b) při opakování slovní zásoby
- c) při práci s učebnicí
- d) při kontrole výsledků
- e) při hře

9. Nudil/a ses v hodině?

- a) ano
- b) ne
- c) trochu

10. Pokud ses nudila/a – při jaké aktivitě?

- a) při opakování starého učiva
- b) při práci s učebnicí
- c) při hře
- e) při vysvětlování nové látky
- f) při opakování slovní zásoby

11. Doplně větu:

V hodině mě nebavilo _____, PROTOŽE _____

12. Doplně větu:

V hodině mi chybělo _____, PROTOŽE _____

13. Doplně větu:

V hodině mě bavilo _____, PROTOŽE _____

14. Čím bys dnešní hodinu vylepšil/a?

15. Když zvládneš úkol rychleji než ostatní, dostáváš rád/a úkoly navíc?

a) Ano.

b) Ne.

16. Pokud úkol navíc nechceš, co po dokončení úkolu děláš (čím se zabavíš)?

17. Jakou známku bys mi dal/a za dnešní hodinu? A proč?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Proč? _____

18. Pracuješ raději sám/sama, ve dvojici nebo ve skupině? Proč?

19. Je dobré využívat v hodině kelímky, abyste ukázali, zda rozumíte nebo ne? Proč?

a) Ano, je to dobré.

Proč? _____

b) Ne, není to dobré.

Proč? _____

20. Baví tě při hodině nacvičovat a předvádět scénky? Proč?

a) Ano, baví.

Proč? _____

b) Ne, nebaví.

Proč? _____

21. Máš radši, když si můžeš vybrat sám/sama aktivitu, na které budeš pracovat nebo máš radši, když to za tebe vybere paní učitelka? Proč?

a) Rád/a si vybírám sama, protože

b) Mám rád/a, když vybere paní učitelka, protože

22. Dostáváš rád/a domácí úkol?

a) Ano, protože _____

b) Ne, protože _____

23. Bavilo by tě někdy část hodiny učit svoje spolužáky?

a) Ano, protože

b) Ne, protože _____

24. Pokud máš nějaké další připomínky k hodině (pozitivní i negativní), poděl se 😊

Děkuji za pomoc!

Appendix 6

LESSON PLAN

Class: 5.B

Level: A1

Number of learners: 10

Date: Jan 28, 2019

Time: 8:00 – 8:45

Overall aim: Learners can recognize countable and uncountable nouns in the field of food.

Time needed	Activity	Material and aids	What a teacher does (+ instructions)	What do learners do
2 min	T greets, presents the aim of the lesson, checks HW – Kristýna, Jura, Viki.	Ls' HW.	T greets, presents the aim and checks HW.	Ls listen, hand in their HW.
5 min	<p>C and U nouns</p> <p>Ls get pictures of food and they have to find a classmate whose picture matches theirs to make pairs. T makes sure that it looks random, but a weaker S is paired up with a stronger S.</p>	Cards with pictures of food	T distributes cards and monitors.	Ls mingle trying to find their partner.

8 min	<p>Matching</p> <p>Ls, in pairs, get a set of nouns (food) and their task is to decide whether they are C or U. Then they write the same on the blackboard.</p>	Set of nouns, piece of paper with two columns (C, U), blackboard, chalks	T distributes the material, monitors, checks.	Ls work in pairs dividing C and U to groups.
5 min	<p>Study focus</p> <p>T asks: ‘What does countable and uncountable mean?’</p> <p>Hopefully one of the Ls explains, T then summarizes.</p>	Blackboard, chalks, notes.	T asks a question and tries to elicit the answer.	Ls answer and listen.

3 min	Textbook 44/4b	Project 2 - textbook	T monitors, checks the answers, addresses Ls.	Ls work on the exercises and check them in pairs. Faster Ls help others.
3 min	45/5b	Project 2 – textbook, printed exercises	T monitors, checks the answers, addresses Ss.	Ls listen to the exercise, fill in the blanks and answer questions.
15 min	45/6 – listening – stronger Ls work with the exercise in the textbook (might get it photocopied as well), others work with an adjusted exercise. The outcome is the same. Ls listen to the recording at least twice. The outcome is the same for both groups.			

	T summarizes the lesson. In the remaining time T assigns homework.			
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Homework: Project 2 – workbook: 34/1,2

Problems anticipated / Contingencies:

- a) Ls with extra homework will not bring it.
- b) Ls will not be able to find their partners successfully and T will have to step in.
- c) Ls will not remember the issue of countability.
- d) Ls will find listening too difficult.
- e) Ls will protest against homework.
- f) Excessive lesson planning.

How the lesson went (you may use the other side of the paper):

I was pleasantly surprised that all the three learners who were supposed to bring their homework really brought it. Then, as I supposed, I had planned too many activities. Learners managed to get in the heterogenous groups; however, no learner was able to explain what countable and uncountable meant, therefore I had to do it. In order to manage to do the listening task, I decided to skip exercise 44/4b and proceeded to 45/5b and then the listening task.

Nevertheless, I managed to differentiate several tasks, which contributed to a smoother course of the lesson. At first, I created heterogenous pairs/groups, since we dealt with a relatively new topic and I wanted to make sure that all the weaker learners would not get lost. Then I focused on differentiating the listening task. I found the one in the textbook quite demanding for the weaker learners, and so I decided to create an easier version for them.

I believe the results were quite satisfying.

Jana

- She seemed to be quite positive.
- The subject matter was quite new to her; therefore, she was not bored.
- She raised her hand all the time and looked very satisfied when she was called on.

Magdaléna

- She seemed okay.
- She seemed involved.
- She did not look bored.
- She raised her hand from time to time.

Beáta

- Not present in the class.

Václav

- He seemed exceptionally okay as opposed to his usual behaviour.

Listening – adjusted exercise

Carl

For lunch I usually have a _____. I usually have _____ in my sandwich. I like beef and _____ . I have an _____, too. I drink _____.

Sally

For lunch I have a _____. I have tomatoes and _____ in my salad. I usually have an _____, too, or sometimes cheese. I drink _____ with my lunch.

Hiro

I always have _____ for lunch. I have _____ or chicken with my rice. I normally have _____, too. I drink _____.

Teacher's journal

1. How did the lesson go overall?

I was surprised how well the lesson went. Of course, there were some weaker moments; however, in general the learners did not seem bored, they seemed engaged, raised their hands, tried to answer all the time.

2. What parts of the lesson/activities went well?

I believe the listening activity went very well.

3. Why did they go well?

Firstly, it was well prepared, I worked on it in advanced. Secondly, I differentiated it - I tried to facilitate learning for the weaker learners, which resulted in stronger learners feeling more challenged and motivated.

4. What parts of the lesson/activities went wrong?

The part where learners where supposed to recall what they knew about countability. I underestimated it, because I expected the stronger learners to take the lead, but it turned out, it was such a new piece of information that they had not managed to absorb it.

5. Why did they go wrong?

The subject matter was still not hundred percent clear to everyone.

6. How many learners seemed to be engaged throughout the lesson?

I would say that all of them, with occasional moments when they did not pay attention.

7. Were there any bored learners? If so, what is the probable reason behind that?

The stronger learners do not like when they have to wait for others to answer.

8. Did I differentiate any tasks or did everyone follow the same plan?

I differentiated the listening task.

9. Did I hand out any extra tasks? Why?

Yes, to one of the stronger learners, because she was faster than others and demanded more work.

10. What could I improve about this lesson?

Next time, I have to realise that I do not need too many activities.

11. What did I learn from today's lesson for my future teaching practice?

Do not prepare too many exercises. Do not rely on learners' knowledge. Differentiate as much as possible.

12. What would I do in the same way?

Putting learners in pairs/groups. Listening.

13. What would I change?

The delay times.