Západočeská univerzita v Plzni

Fakulta pedagogická
Katedra anglického jazyka

Diplomová práce

VYTVÁŘENÍ AKTIVIT PRO TŘÍDY ŽÁKŮ S ROZDÍLNÝMI SCHOPNOSTMI

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Plzeň 2016

University of West Bohemia

Faculty of Education
Department of English

Thesis

DESIGNING ACTIVITIES FOR MIXED ABILITY CLASSES

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Plzeň 2016

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Hana Hrdličková

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to my supervisor Mgr. Gabriela Klečková, PhD. for her kind guiding, useful advice and inspiration that allowed me to complete this thesis and for her support and encouragement during my studies.

ABSTRACT

Bc. Hrdličková Hana. University of West Bohemia. June 2016. Designing activities for mixed ability classes. Supervisor: Mgr. Gabriela Klečková, PhD.

The diploma thesis deals with English language teaching and learning process taking place in mixed ability classes and with designing activities for this type of classes. The theoretical part provides explanation what the mixed ability class is, in what features it differs from the heterogeneous class and what advantages and disadvantages of the mixed ability class are. It also states problems which occur in these classes because of different language levels of the learners. Then, issues having influence on shaping individual learners´ difficulties and leading to differentiation in language levels within one class are described. The next part of this chapter focuses on seeking a solution for problems occurring in these classes, states strategies suitable for designing activities and tasks in mixed ability classes and the theoretical bases they rooted from. The practical part attempts to evaluate suitability and efficiency of differentiated activities and compares them with non-differentiated activities. The data were obtained during observations of sample learners during the action research. The results of the research imply the directions in English language teaching which should be taken in consideration and adopted in designing activities for mixed ability classes to cater to needs of their learners.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Most classes in Czech elementary or secondary schools can be considered mixed ability classes. This fact usually becomes evident when we compare individual students´ performances and outcomes. Some students are successful; some are not. At the first glance, we can notice that in one class there are learners who obtain excellent results and good marks grouped together with those who look desperate and hopeless in foreign language learning. The former ones speak fluently with excellent pronunciation, read with good comprehension, write with a high level of accuracy and receive relevant information during listening tasks. They have rich English vocabulary and good knowledge of grammar structures. They enthusiastically engage in all activities, finish tasks in a short time, and are even able to help weaker students. Some of them regularly participate in contests in English conversation at class, school, or district rounds. The latter ones have problems with forming a single sentence, struggle with texts having no idea about the topic or context, their writing does not respect any rules, and every listened speech is a sequence of incomprehensible sounds. Such learners are afraid of every English lesson and soon resign and give up any efforts to attain English language acquisition. They scarcely raise their hands to express their ideas, and for most time they hope that the teacher will not notice their existence in the class. Such situation in the class usually causes many problems.

The diploma thesis deals with this topic more deeply and tries to indicate possible solutions for problems in mixed ability classes. The Theoretical Background Chapter provides definition of the mixed ability class and distinguishes it from the heterogeneous class; it also describes challenges and advantages of this type of class. Further, it provides a survey of issues shaping difficulties in foreign language learning. Then, strategies and means of addressing mixed abilities in the class are presented to become a base for designing activities which would be an efficient tool for teaching of learners disposing different abilities and language levels. The thesis provides some useful tips for English language teaching connected with giving instruction, individual treatment of learners and assessment and feedback. Some space is also dedicated to the development of learners´ autonomy and responsibility.

The research section examines effectiveness and suitability of activities which were designed with regard to the findings stated in the theoretical chapter. There is the aim of the research explained, together with the description of participants of the action research,

examined activities and criteria used for the observation. The results are written down in tables and the findings are commented.

The chapter Implications tries to join the findings and results of the research with everyday praxis in English language teaching. It suggests some methods and strategies which occurred convenient in mixed ability classes from the point of satisfying different learners´ needs. There are some other directions of further research outlined. All the findings of the diploma thesis are summarized in the chapter Conclusion.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The purpose of this section of the thesis is to provide theoretical information about the topic of English language teaching and learning in the mixed ability class. At the beginning, mixed ability classes are defined, and compared with heterogeneous classes, possible problems and advantages of mixed ability classes are discussed there. The next section defines main issues which have a significant influence on students´ learning of foreign languages. After that, the attention is paid to efficient strategies and approaches which can accommodate needs of all learners in the class, and the main principles they are based on. The following part is focused on assessment and correcting errors. Building learner´s autonomy and responsibility is dealt, as well. The whole chapter frames the research that is further described in the practical part of the thesis

Mixed Ability Classes

We live in the world, which is full of diversity. The people are unique. We can hardly find two people who are completely the same. Even identical twins are not the true copies of their twin brothers or sisters in all their features. The same can be said about students in an English class. They are nearly the same age, boys and girls, all taught English language according to the same syllabus on the same level of proficiency. What they differ from is the level and type of their abilities. They are members of mixed ability classes. These groups are not exactly identical with mixed level classes, but there is a certain relation. Thornburry (2006) explains:

> Mixed ability classes should be distinguished from classes of mixed levels, where students with different levels of proficiency are grouped together. Of course, a mixed ability class is likely to become a mixed level class, over time. All classes are mixed ability classes to some extent. (p. 132)

Urr (2012) points that: "There is, of course no such thing as a completely homogenous class; all students are different, even if they have been put into groups according to ability or level" (p. 272).

Difference between Mixed Ability Classes and Heterogeneous Classes

For the definition of mixed ability classes we can refer to an expert in English teaching methodology – Scott Thornbury (2006) who explains that they are "classes where there is a marked difference among the learners in terms of aptitude, learning style and

motivation" (p. 132). It is necessary to distinguish between mixed ability classes and heterogeneous classes. Ur (2012) introduces the term heterogeneous class. She speaks about the differences in gender and age – in some cultures girls and boys are educated in a different way, and there can be learners who vary in the age and levels of maturity in one class. Knowledge is the next aspect because learners´ mother tongue and the previous experience with English play an important role in English learning, as well. From the perspective of abilities learners vary in intelligences and cognitive ability, which means that they are not all talented for the same things and that some are better and quicker in learning and attaining certain knowledge than their class fellows. The next aspect is the personal characteristics including personality – whether the learners are introverts or extroverts, learning style – visual, aural, physical or others, attitude and motivation – either positive or negative, and interest – there are various things that learners like and enjoy. The aspect of the different background and experience is related to particular cultural groups and different cultures of learning typical for countries where the learners originate from (pp. 272 – 274). We can see a similar conception of this issue in the definition of Carol Ann Tomlinson – another expert in the didactics of English language. Tomlinson (1999) uses the term differentiated classroom and described it as "students who span the spectrum of learning readiness, personal interests, culturally shaped ways of seeing and speaking of the world, and experiences in that world" (p. 1).

The main difference between the mixed ability and the heterogeneous or differentiated class embodies in the question which learners´ diversities we consider decisive for our purposes. Whereas the notion of mixed ability is concerned with the different ability to attain certain skills and knowledge, in heterogeneous classes some other singularities play the role – gender, age, social and cultural background. According to Thornbury´s definition, we can consider the following kinds of students typical representatives of mixed ability classes: so called normal or average students, learners with specific learning disorders, talented students, or students with a social handicap. The different levels of ability imply special needs which the learners have and which should be accommodated so that they reach the adequate development of their personalities.

Although there are some differences in the notion of differentness of learners within one class, there are some common features. These classes are a source of challenges both for students and teachers, because the same problems and advantages arise.

Problems and Advantages of Mixed Ability Classes

Learners make a colourful mosaic with the regard to their abilities to attain skills in a foreign language. Thornburry (2006) stated:

> Mixed ability classes become a problem when the diversity threatens the general dynamics of the classroom. This may be the case in large and potentially unruly classes. The problem is also compounded in situations where learners´ progress is frequently assessed, and where all learners are expected to achieve similar results. Mixed ability classes can be viewed either as a classroom management issue, or as a syllabus and material issue. (p. 132)

Some learners do not manage to fulfil assignments and are behind their more skilled class fellows, do not achieve desired results and marks, and learning is not enjoyable experience for them. They are perceived as rather disincentive elements in the group. On the other hand, stronger learners´ knowledge and skills outreach the requirements of the syllabus, and the activities in the lesson can be uninteresting or even boring for them, when they have to adapt themselves to the speed of weaker learners. In the future, these differences become bigger and the problems of the lower achievers are more significant. The lack of efficient English vocabulary and knowledge of grammar structures do not allow them to use the language. They do not dispose of firm fundamental skills which are necessary for their further English learning. These learners are frustrated by their constantly repetitive failures. Teachers assess their work with bad marks and the students themselves perceive that they do not understand the matters which are dealt in the lesson. Such students lose their motivation to learn gradually and at the end they resign. They differ in coping with this situation. Some of them try to attract their school fellows´ attention and reach appreciation by disturbing of discipline, the other keep their negative feelings for themselves and spend time daydreaming. And what is more, they give up the hope to attain efficient language skills for ever. This might be a big handicap at a higher level education, and it could influence their future career negatively. Ur (2012) points out that the main problems are connected with the difficulty of the tasks because most materials are usually targeted to only one level and do not suit to the requirements of mixed ability classes and therefore they must be adapted. Then there is a problem of active participation of weaker students because it is uneasy to involve all students and provide them opportunities. Different levels and different topics can cause boredom, which leads to discipline problems (p.275).

However, the image would not be complete if we did not see any positive sides on education in mixed ability classes. The common presence of pupils who are equipped with different abilities can be advantageous for all learners – stronger learners can be a pattern of correct answers for their weaker class mates. In a homogenous group this role is assigned to the teacher. More skilled learners are usually able to explain the matter to their equals in another way, maybe more understandably then the teacher does. Students communicate effectively, because they do not shy to ask if they do not know something. Ur (2012) talks about the issue as follows:

> The fact that the teacher is less able to pay attention to every individual in the class means that for the class to function well, the students must help by teaching each other and working together. Peer-teaching and collaboration are likely to be common, contributing to a warm supportive classroom climate. (pp. 275-276)

Stronger learners profit from teaching of their class fellows as well because during explaining things they revise and fix their own knowledge. They are less prone to forgetting it. The experience with mixed ability classes appears beneficial for the teacher´s development as well: "The classes can be seen as very much more challenging and interesting to teach, and provide opportunity for creativity, innovation and general professional development on the part of the teacher" (Ur, 2012, p. 276).

It is good if teachers are able to eliminate the negative features, and support and employ all the positive impacts in mixed ability classes so that all learners could experience success, and found a pleasure in English language learning regardless the difference of their ability.

Issues Shaping Difficulties in Foreign Language Learning

It is impossible to provide an exhaustive description of all learners in the class, or to try to divide the learners into particular groups and think that we have covered all aspects having impact on one´s language skills and knowledge. Here the focus is on the main issues which influence the development of the students´ English language competence.

Specific Learning Disorders

Learning a foreign language can be more difficult for learners with specific learning disorders – as for those who suffer from dyslexia, dysgraphia, or dysortography. Experiencing a new language code is more demanding and complicated for these students,

and they experience a lot of failure, and, after some time they drag behind their equals. According to Medina (2014):

> This developmental disorder involves difficulties learning and using academic skills. ......In contrast to talking or walking, which are acquired developmental milestones that emerge with brain maturation, academic skills (e.g., reading, spelling, writing, mathematics) have to be taught and learned explicitly. Specific learning disorder disrupts the normal pattern of learning academic skills; it is not simply a consequence of lack of opportunity of learning or inadequate instruction.

This group of learners can be viewed as less skilled students. Their bad success is not caused by their reluctance to attain foreign language skills; they are not lazy or uncooperative. Their bad results are caused by certain singularities, which the learners are not able to influence. As Medina (2014) explains:

> The biological origin of a learning disorder is likely an interaction of genetic and environmental factors, which affect the brain's ability to perceive or process verbal or nonverbal information efficiently and accurately. Key academic skills of deficit include reading of single words accurately and fluently, reading comprehension, written expression and spelling, arithmetic calculation, and mathematical reasoning (solving math problems).

Their brains simply work in a different way than the brains of the majority. It does not mean that such students are not smart enough to achieve certain knowledge and skills, among people whose life was affected by specific learning disorders there are many exceptionally talented people – scientists, artists, politicians, and other famous personalities.

Description of individual disorders. The dyslectics have got problems with reading. They read slowly, make mistakes, and struggle to comprehend the texts they read. The dysgraphics´ difficulties are connected with writing – especially with its graphic side. The handwriting is not neat; it is rather illegible; the forms of letters are not proper; they are either too small or too large. Dysorthography is a disorder affecting orthography. The learners are not able to use grammar rules although they know them. According to Zelinková (2005), the problems of the learners who suffer from dysortography root from insufficiently developed phonemic audition, among the other causes can be improper pronunciation, slow writing, or disability to coordinate various psychic processes participating in writing (pp. 16-17). The above mentioned disorders can occur individually

or can be combined. Zelinková (2005) points out that the individuals with specific learning disorders do not make a homogenous group. The disorder is found on various levels of seriousness from slight symptoms to significant difficulties (p. 48). They are often accompanied by inefficient development in audition and visual perception, deficiency of storing information and its recall, the lack of automatization, and disorders of concentration.

Zelinková (2005) stated that persons with specific learning disorders have the following areas of their mother tongue affected: phonology, morphology, grammar, syntax, and semantics. If there are more areas affected in their L1, the probability of difficulties in foreign language learning is bigger (p. 26). In the English language, it means that they have problems with association of spoken and written forms of words, pronunciation, word formation, identification of individual parts of speech, word order, grammar structures, meaning of words, distinguishing of different sounds and therefore different words or forms of one lexeme. Although they spend a lot of time with vocabulary learning at home, the next day they may not remember it. Sometimes, they are not able to repeat expressions after the teacher because they do not hear them properly. They struggle to fill in the correct verb forms even if they learn the conjugation and grammar rules by heart. It is not their fault when they make a lot of mistakes when copying a text written on the board. And of course, reading such writing is extremely difficult and using it as notes to learn e. g. vocabulary nearly impossible for them. These learners are not able to recognize an auxiliary verb in the question, or form a sentence whose words are in a puzzled order.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Attention Deficit Disorder. Another group of learners in the mixed ability class whose ability to attain English language skills is affected by their specific learning needs is made of students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Their problems are rather connected with disruption of behaviour than with defects in the cognitive processes. Again, it is crucial to be familiar with the character of their conditions and their display. Campbell (2000) described the symptoms of this disorder:

> The high energy level, constant movement, poor organizational skills, lack of persistence, poor social skills, lack of social judgement, and frequent shifting of attention that ADHD children display lead to a myriad of social and academic problems. Difficulties are evident at home, where ADHD children often have a hard time following rules, often create disturbances at mealtime, bedtime, or on family

outings, are in frequent conflict with siblings, and rarely complete homework without a struggle or in the absence of parental supervision. In the classroom, ADHD children often stand out because of their lack of concentration, failure to follow class routines, fidgetiness, inappropriate verbalizations and disruptiveness, and difficulty working independently. In the peer group, ADHD children are often avoided by others, may provoke fights, may disrupt other children´s activities by barging in or calling attention to themselves, or may act as the class clown, eliciting a mixture of amusement and disdain from other children. (pp. 383-384)

The main features of ADHD are inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. ADHD learners fail in English because they do not pay attention during grammar and vocabulary presentations and practice, forget to do homework, do not respect teacher´s instructions.

ADD is an acronym for Attention Deficit Disorder. These children are not affected by hyperactivity and impulsiveness. They have problems with paying attention; they are rather slow, often daydream.

Both ADHD and ADD cause a lot of difficulties to the learners. Their behaviour arouses misunderstanding. However, these learners do not act in this way deliberately. Zelinková (2005) recommends English teachers to be tolerant and consistent in their requirements on completing adequate tasks. Alternation of activities and inserting relaxation as part of the lesson contribute to better results of learners with attention disorders. Frequent feedback and positive reinforcement of their achievements immediately after accomplishment of a task together with establishing routines and cooperation with parents are important for ADHD and ADD learners (p.31).

Social Background

Unfortunately, learners from socially disadvantaged groups belong to the less successful and less skilled ones in the English language and they have got a lot of problems in other school subjects. They live and are educated in the majority society but originate in the minority society. Slowik (2007) claims that members of social, racial, ethnical, and national groups tend to encounter and communicate inside their communities and create minority subcultures. On one hand, it is positive because it eliminates social isolation of individuals, on the other hand, it deepens the barrier between the minority and majority society (p. 143). Consequently, Roma people do not trust majority society institutions, including schools, and are rather reluctant in their children´s school attendance. According to Šotolová (2008), education does not occupy important position in their value orientation

(p. 51). Young people from the Roma ethnics rarely achieve higher education; most of them finish their education at the elementary school level. Learners from immigrant families have to struggle with the language barrier, which together with a totally different environment makes learning English and other subjects difficult.

Cognitive Factors

Intelligence. Intelligence is another aspect of learners´ variation. It is generally perceived as a sum of mental abilities to perform tasks, solve problems, cope with environment, and process information. It is measurable by means of IQ tests. Lightbown and Spada (2006) point out that there is a consequence between results achieved in IQ tests and second language learning, and that good scores can predict success in second language learning. On the other hand, IQ tests are predominantly focused on measuring metalinguistic knowledge, not on the ability to communicate. Traditional IQ tests can be useful to identify learners´ success connected with language analysis and rule learning. However, this notion of intelligence is less important for oral production skill, communication and interaction (p. 57).

For English language learning, there is another, more corresponding conception of intelligence. Puchta and Rinvolucri (2005) prefer the Howard Gardner´s concept, which describes seven areas of intelligence: the intrapersonal intelligence, the interpersonal intelligence, the logical-mathematical intelligence, the linguistic intelligence, the musical intelligence, the spatial intelligence, and the kinaesthetic bodily intelligence (pp. 7 − 11). And Ur (2012) confirms: "According to Gardner´s (1983) theory of multiple intelligences, each student has a different combination of various types of intelligence. .... This is a useful way to look at and value the various talents and abilities of different students" (p. 273). Learners also differ in their favoured learning styles. Lightbown and Spada (2006) explain:

> We have all heard people say that they cannot learn something until they have seen it. Such learners would fall into the group called 'visual' learners. Other people, who may be called 'aural' learners, seem to learn best 'by ear'. For others, referred to as 'kinaesthetic' learners, physical action such as miming or role-play seems to help the learning process. (p. 59)

Cognitive factors are important prerequisites for a rapid development in second language learning. It is an advantage if learners are aware of their type of intelligence or learning style, and can use this knowledge to their benefit.

Aptitude. It is obvious that some learners achieve rapid development in second language learning more easily than the others. Teachers call them gifted or talented. Littlewood (1991) states: "... success in second language learning is related not only to general cognitive ability, but also to a more language-specific set of learning abilities which are usually called 'language aptitude'" (p. 62). Stern (2009) says that "aptitude is not a single entity, but a composite of different characteristics which come into play in second language learning" (p. 369). The constituents are: "the auditory capacity", "sound-symbol relations", "grammatical abilities", and "verbal memory" (Stern, 2009, pp. 370 – 372). Stern (2009) also points:

> Just as individuals, in spite of their common biological characteristics to acquire speech, differ in verbal facility in their first language, it is reasonable to suppose that there are differences in the capacity to accommodate to, and develop other phonological, lexical, grammatical, and semantic systems and to switch codes. (p. 372)

Williams and Burden (1997) suggest, "We can also excuse our lack of success in teaching some learners by pointing to their lack of aptitude for language learning" (p. 94). Lightbown and Spada (2006) develop this idea, "... we may hypothesize that a learner with high aptitude may learn with greater ease and speed but that other learners may also be successful if they preserve" (p. 57). This suggests that it is not possible to say that one can adopt language skills and knowledge if he or she disposes of aptitude and cannot achieve success if he or she lacks aptitude. There are other aspects playing a significant role.

Motivation and Attitudes

Motivation is a force which affects human effort to achieve goals. Thornbury (2006) identifies short-term goals as successful accomplishment of individual tasks and long-term goals as attaining a high language level. Short-term goals are connected with instrumental motivation (passing an exam or getting a job), long-term goals are connected with integrative motivation (identifying with the target language community) (p. 137). Skehan (1990) can see the following sources of motivation: "the activity itself" – learners enjoy learning, "the success experienced by learners" , "external influences and incentives, such as rewards contingent upon the learner succeeding or sanctions which influence performance (the 'Carrot and Stick' hypothesis)" (pp. 49 - 50). In classes, we can see learners who willingly engage in all tasks and activities, practise regularly, fulfil assignments, and consequently achieve very good results. They are motivated and have

positive attitude to learning. On the contrary, there are also learners who do not make any effort. The former ones achieve higher levels of proficiency in the English language; the latter ones´ low motivation determines them to failure in English language learning. Skehan (1990) highlights:

> Alternatively motivation might be influenced by the success experienced by learners (the Resultative hypothesis). Those learners who do well experience reward, and are encouraged to try harder; learners who do not do so well are discouraged by their lack of success, and, as a result, lack persistence. Motivation would be a consequence rather than a cause of success. (p. 49)

Ur (2012) confirms that learners can have a rather negative attitude to language and studying because they had previous bad experiences (p. 273).

Each learner is an original, and the class is full of such originals. They all have got one thing in common – the diversity. With regard to the above selected items which play a significant role in English language learning, we have to adopt efficient and meaningful strategies to increase chances of all learners of attaining skills needed for communication and creating conditions for their personal development.

Strategies and Means of Addressing Mixed Abilities in Class

Zone of Proximal Development

The theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) can be considered the basic resource and background for teaching and learning process generally. When we consider what strategies are suitable and efficient for English learning teaching in mixed ability classes it is useful to stem from it as well. The theory of ZDP was developed by the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. He described the crucial principles of education where the learner´s development is in the centre of our interest. McLeod (2012) stated:

> The zone of proximal development (ZPD) has been defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Vygotsky believed that when a student is in the ZDP for a particular task, providing the appropriate assistance will give the student enough of a "boost" to achieve the task. Vygotsky´s theory makes a useful platform for scaffolding and differentiation as means of addressing of a wide variety of English learners in one class. Although these two strategies

are not identical, they share a common point. Alber (2014) points out that "In order to meet students where they are and appropriately scaffold a lesson, or differentiate instruction, you have to know the individual and collective zone of proximal development (ZPD) of your learners". Rhalmi (2011) points out that:

> For English language teachers, the ZPD means that they should provide comprehensible input (the spoken or written language that learners are exposed to) which is slightly above their ability. Besides, they should be willing to assist their students only when necessary and taper off this aid when there is no need for it. The goal being to let learners build their knowledge of the language and take responsibility of the learning process. The role of the teacher is to give assistance, guide or only observe.

And he adds that the concept of the theory was later developed and modified by psychologists.

Scaffolding

One of the approaches most related to the ZPD is scaffolding. Scrivener (2011) defines scaffolding as "the way a competent language speaker helps a less competent one to communicate by both encouraging and providing possible elements of the conversation" (p. 227). Thornburry (2006) agrees that the term derives from the socio-cultural learning theory and explains that "children, even at an early age, are able to participate in conversation because of the verbal scaffolding provided by their caregivers" (p. 201). According to Rhalmi (2011) "....a teacher or more competent peer assists learners in their ZPD when it is necessary. This assistance becomes gradually less frequent as it becomes unnecessary, as when constructing a building a scaffold is removed."

Scaffolding plays a very important role in multilevel classes or groups where learners dispose different abilities to learn a foreign language. Alber (2014) extends the conception on the whole language learning and teaching process, and explains:

> Scaffolding is breaking up the learning into chunks and then providing a tool, or structure, with each chunk. When scaffolding reading, for example, you might review the text and discuss key vocabulary, or chunk the text and read and discuss as you go. ...Simply put, scaffolding is what you do first with kids, then for those students who are still struggling.

This strategy can address different needs of English learners. The amount of support which is provided by the teacher to more skilled students varies from the amount of support

which less skilled learners need. The latter ones will need more help. The teacher can divide a task into individual stages, supply relevant vocabulary or grammar items, provide more comprehensible language input, more assistance, explain possible problems when they occur, imply the solution, provide examples, encouragement, and guide the students during their assignment to achieve advancement in their zone of proximal development. Next time, the students may be able to work more autonomously.

On the other hand, learners whose development is rapid will not need teacher´s support in such extension and can work on tasks independently, and again they will achieve advancement in their ZPD. Their output will probably be more sophisticated and complex.

Scaffolding offers several principles which make learning more accessible. According to the British Council (2014) they are as follows:

- Planning for guided talk session in small groups

- Modelling and demonstrating language orally or in writing to the learner

- 'Recasting' language to develop the learner´s language and extend vocabulary

- Encouraging learners to use L1 ability on which to 'hook' learning in the additional language

- Activating prior knowledge about a new topic to create a context for the new learning

- Incorporating collaborative work into lessons

- Using visuals and graphic organizers as pictures, models, diagrams, grids, tables and graphs to support understanding

- Providing language prompters and frames for speaking and writing (Great ideas pages)

Scaffolding provides enough space for more advanced learners and enough opportunities for less advanced learners to reach success.

Differentiation

This strategy is based on the premise that learners who are engaged in class activities profit from this engagement, which becomes evident in their achievement. However, it is difficult to address all students in the class. This becomes even more demanding if the class is a mixed ability class. Differentiated teaching, which is "teaching different levels in a class through giving more/less difficult tasks and texts to different

students" (Ur, 2012, p. 289), offers a solution. As this approach enables to cater to needs of all, or nearly all students, we will pay more attention to this issue.

First of all, let us agree on what is and what is not differentiated teaching. One option is represented by dividing learners into groups within one class and teaching them discretely. This means that a group consisting of higher achievers will be assigned more demanding tasks all the time, whereas a group whose members are lower achievers will be constantly given easier tasks. Although group work is invaluable in English learning and teaching, if the class is permanently split, it may bring some negative consequences. According to Prodromou (1992), "Although group-work is flexible enough to allow different students to work on different tasks according to their individual abilities, the danger is that the class will break up into different factions" (p. 5). Such situations can result in decreasing of fellow feeling, and negatively influences the atmosphere in the class. Stern (2015) argues that such approach cannot be considered differentiated instruction (DI) and adds that the following approaches are not DI, either: "Creating an individual plan for each of my students", "teaching only lower-level students and letting the higher-level students teach themselves". On the other hand, Stern (2015) defines what DI is: "Students can be in groups based on skills, interests, readiness, or by choice. There is a "purposeful use of flexible grouping" while the lesson´s goals in mind. Teachers are "teaching up" and holding students to high standards".

Strategies and Principles of Differentiated Teaching

One of the possible approaches requires a wide diversity of materials which were designed exactly according to the learners´ singularities. If a teacher would like to address needs of all his or her students, theoretically, he or she would have to prepare a number of materials equivalent to a number of learners. Lindstromberg (2015) calls this strategy "radically individually tailored teaching" (para. 2), and he identifies pros and cons of this strategy:

> Pro: If your class is indeed very diverse in level of English (......), this option is the only one which offers, in principle, the hope of addressing in detail the needs of students of quite different levels. Con: The more students you have, the more problematic this option becomes, ... (para. 2)

The author points out that "materials-oriented differentiation" requires "extra preparation", you spend "more time marshalling of materials", "more time giving instructions" (and the amount of different instructions may be confusing for the learners), and "more time giving

feedback" (Lindstromberg, 2004, para. 3). The same opinion is supported by Prodromou (1992), who claims that "....they take too long to prepare, or require equipment and premises that are simply not available" (p. 73). As this approach embodies a very complicated and demanding way of differentiated approach which is not very practical to apply in everyday teaching practice, more sufficient strategies are discussed further.

Open-Ended Tasks

Tasks which are based on one correct answer are called closed-ended tasks. Among them there are some grammar practice exercises where learners are supposed to fill in the proper verb form, pronoun, or preposition, translations, or transformation exercises. They have a shape of gap fills, multiple choices, matching exercises. The cues usually imply the answer – the only one possible. Ur (2012) claims that this type of tasks cannot satisfy the needs of lower achievers nor higher achievers. She supports her view by comparing the impact of such activities on both groups:

> Students who are at a lower level and have not yet mastered the relevant verb form
> will either not respond at all, or are likely to get the answer wrong. ...... The more
> advanced students are also neglected, because the item is easy and boring, and
> provides them with no opportunity to show what they can do or to engage with
> language on an appropriate level. (p. 278)

The author also suggests that open-ended cues are more suitable for learners at different levels, because they offer more opportunities to answer (Ur, 2012, p. 270). According to Prodromou (1992), open-ending represents "a particular kind of exercise, which involves minimal preparation by the teacher, while aiming to achieve the maximum involvement of learners at all levels within the class" (p. 73). The following activities are examples of open ended activities: completing sentences according to learner´s free choice, students´ interviews, filling in questionnaires, jig-saw reading, split dialogues, making hypothesis, descriptions, spotting the difference, guessing, predicting (Prodromou, 1992, pp. 79-83). Open ended tasks represent a lot of benefits for the learners as Ur (2012) explains:

> The more advanced students can make up more sophisticated and longer answers.
> The less advanced can listen to other learners´ responses and use them as models
> before volunteering simple ideas of their own. Moreover, even a basic exercise ......
> allows for expression of personal experience and opinion. Finally, the increase in
> the number of learner responses to one teacher cue means an increase in the amount
> of learner talk. (p. 279)

Teachers can either use activities which were designed as open ended, or adapt some originally closed ended ones.

Work Load

This strategy is based on the premise that different learners are able to complete tasks in a different extent during a certain time limit. While more skilled students finish a task before the time limit and start getting bored, their less skilled classmates have work still in progress, which makes them feel under pressure. Prodromou and Clandfield (2007) point out that "The early finisher is already on the road to becoming a discipline problem. The slower student never finishes any activity and gets demoralized" and they add that both "the early finisher" and "the slower student" must be taken in consideration (p. 58). Ur (2012) suggests a solution:

> The idea here is to have a compulsory 'core' task which is easy enough to be successfully completed by all members of the class, and also an extra component which is longer and more challenging, but clearly defined as optional. In this way, all members of the class can succeed at the basic task, while there is enough extra content to keep the more advanced or faster-working students busy, challenged and learning at an appropriate level. (p. 279)

Similar ideas are expressed in the article of Lindstromberg (2015) who stated:

> The amount of language that students are asked to produce or process can vary. A corollary of this point is that *partial completion is OK*. That is, students who do less of a (sub-) task than other students do can still participate in later stages of the task sequence. E.g., The old activity 'Find someone who …?' which, although otherwise not outstandingly flexible, is flexible in that students can still usefully participate in the concluding report-to-the-class phase even if they have only managed to ask their question(s) to one person during the preceding mingling and interviewing stage. (para. 5)

This approach enables students of all proficiency levels to be engaged in class activities and to succeed in them. Although, they may not answer the same number of questions, write or transform the same number of sentences, they definitely spend the same amount of time on the task.

Learners should be aware that it is not their failure if they did not manage to complete all items of a task. The question is how to inform learners that they are required

to do as much work as they are able to, and avoid emphasis of their different abilities. Ur (2012) accentuates the role of instructions:

> The key phrase in the instructions is *at least*: 'Do at least five of the following questions (more if you can)'; 'Find at least five vocabulary items to put in each column (more if you can)'; 'Write a story of at least 100 words: if you can, then longer.' Sometimes an extra work can be added explicitly, with the instruction *if you have time*: 'Finish this exercise for homework; if you have time, do the next one as well. (p. 279)

Of course, some doubts can occur whether learners employ their potential fully when the instructions may provide some space for doing less work, but the actual experience is the opposite because learners rather prefer doing more work (Ur, 2012, pp. 279-280).

Level of Difficulty

Tasks based on one material can be too easy for some students and too difficult for others. The solution of how to cater to different needs in the class using the same material for all lies in tasks of various difficulty levels. This is less demanding for the teacher than using completely different materials according to the learners´ levels and abilities. As Prodromou and Clandfield (2007) stated:

> Any solution to meeting the diverse needs of students should involve a minimum amount of preparation and a maximum of 'pay-off', not only in terms of language practice but also in terms of building key factors in motivating a class: self-esteem and rapport. A basic principle will be to exploit, whenever possible, the same text but to vary the tasks students perform on that text. This principle can be applied to individual items of language or activities designed to practice the four skills: speaking, reading, writing and listening. (p. 57)

Linstromberg (2015) calls this strategy "sophistication", and implies the way how activities can vary in levels according to individual learners´ abilities. Some learners´ answers can be very simple – maybe one word, on the other hand, some other learners can give more complex and sophisticated answers and convey their thoughts and ideas (para. 5).

Harmer (2001a) suggests that "In a language study exercise, the teacher can ask for simple repetition from some students, but ask others to use the new language in more complex sentences (p. 128). Prodromou (1992) states some other useful tips which can be adopted in mixed ability classes:

Pictures are an obvious example of material which is on indeterminate difficulty and can be used by students at different levels. However, conventional techniques such as dictation and cloze testing can also be made sensitive to the needs of the mixed ability class by simple adaptation. Rinvolucri (1986), for example, suggests giving out two versions of the same dictation: in one, half the words are left out, and in the other, about a fifth is missing. High achieving students will write the dictation with no support, so in fact three different groups can work on the same task at levels which reflect their ability. (p. 5)

Another way of differentiated tasks in levels of difficulty is based on role play. Students are given different roles which match their proficiency levels. As an example, Lindstromberg (2015) describes an interview between a less experienced student and more experienced one. The former one asks questions in the role of a novelist, and the latter one answers the questions as an interviewee (para. 5). The 'interviewee' can use more sophisticated and complex language to express his or her ideas or thoughts, whereas the 'novelist' can use simpler structures which respond to his or her language skills. Both students use the English language for communicative purposes, and they do it in accordance with their abilities and proficiency levels.

Learner´s Choice

This strategy is based on individualization of language learning. Prodromou (1992) defined individualization as:

The teaching technique whereby the learner´s independence is encouraged, the teacher´s role being to provide material and tasks according to students´ individual needs. ... An important element in individualization is choice: it is the student who decides what to learn and how, and the student learns at his or her own pace. (p. 155)

This claim means that learners are given a choice which sub-tasks they want to do. They can decide on their own which items of an activity they choose. Ur (2012) explained: "It relates to students´ learning level and includes strategies which enable students to learn at an appropriate pace and level, even when they are doing a routine teacher-led or coursebook exercise"; she recommended the following strategies: "Start wherever you like" and "Set time not quantity" (p. 277). The former one allows learners to do sub-tasks which they manage to do first, in the latter one the teacher announces a certain time limit in which the class is engaged in a task. Lindstromberg (2015) gives an example of such task:

"students get a list of questions from which they can each choose which ones their partner should ask them" (para. 5).

This strategy can be successfully applied in other components of English language learning (e.g. self study or self assessment), too, and contributes to learners´ personal development.

Raising Interest

Enjoyable and interesting tasks arouse learners´ motivation to participate in class activities. Firstly, an interesting task can help avoid boredom and therefore prevent behaviour problems. Secondly, full learners´ engagement in language activities leads to better knowledge. Similarly, students´ attitude to English language learning becomes more positive. Ur (2012) explains the principles an interesting task is based on:

> An interesting topic does not help very much, because there are not many topics that all the class will find interesting. It is also, unfortunately, very easy to 'kill' an interesting topic by using a boring task. However, the opposite is also true: the most boring topic can be made interesting by using it in a stimulating task. Bottom line: it is the task rather than the topic which usually provides for interest in the classroom. (p. 277)

Prodromou (1992) introduces the term "pleasure principle" and affirmed its importance for English language learning, "This may take many forms: jokes and humour, performance and entertainment, games, puzzles and mysteries, ..." (p. 120). Some tasks become more interesting if we put certain constraints. For example, a time limit can make an ordinary task more exciting.

Personalization. It is another principle which significantly contributes to rising learners´ interest. It stems from the premise that when learners have an opportunity to connect their knowledge, interests, likes and dislikes, experience, or personal life facts with English learning, they work with bigger effort and concentration. Thornburry (2006) believes that "lessons are likely to be more interesting, and hence more motivating, if at least some of the content concerns the people in the room, rather than the characters in coursebooks", and he adds that some authors are convinced that personalization should be applied more often in English language learning than it usually happens (p. 160). Prodromou (1992) claims "If English is used to discuss pop music, computers or sport, an apparently unmotivated student may suddenly come to life. Students should wherever possible be wearing their knowledge, not their ignorance...." (p. 9).

This approach is very suitable for mixed ability classes. Their members represent a rich source of diverse personalities and interesting data. Learners can share information from their life beyond class and enrich one another. And what is more, learners who usually do not achieve much success in adopting language skills can show the others that they excel in other spheres of human life.

Group Work

Group work is a form of class management. The ideal number of members in one group is from three to five. It is useful to divide learners in the class into smaller groups. Group work offers many advantages to students. They get more opportunities to use the language than during whole class – teacher interaction; shy students are not anxious to talk. Thornburry (2006) stated:

> Groupwork is suitable for the preparation and performance of tasks such as discussions, roleplays and many games. Groupwork works best if there is a clear outcome to the task, such as making a decision, producing a text, or performing to the rest of the class. It could be a good idea to assign roles to individual members, such as chairperson, secretary, time-keeper. (p. 95)

Different roles can suit different learners´ abilities. Everyone can contribute to their group outcome according to what they are good at. Ur (2012) considers group work beneficial because "a large number of students will always get better results, regardless to their level. Brainstorming or memorizing activities are ideal for this: two or more students are likely to be able to think of or remember more items than a single individual" (p. 278).

Heterogeneous grouping gives space for peer learning. More advanced learners can help less advanced ones, explain some matter and be a model of language (Harmer, 2001a, p. 128). Harmer (2001a) points out: "However, this has to be done with great sensitivity so that students don´t get alienated by their over-knowledgeable peers or oppressed by their obligatory teaching role" (p. 128).

For some time it is possible to form homogenous groups consisting of learners of the same proficiency level and assign them different tasks. Harmer (2001b) says that teachers have some doubts about "streaming according to learners´ abilities", but he can also see it useful for certain purposes:

> This gives us the opportunity to go to a group of weaker students and give them the special help they need but which stronger students might find irksome. It allows us to give groups of stronger students more challenging tasks to perform. (p. 121)

However, if these groups are firmly established and learners work in them for most learning time, it can have a negative impact on the group cohesion. There are more ways of grouping learners. Their members can be chosen by chance, or teachers can apply some other cues to avoid having groups consisting of identical students all the time.

Another form of interaction in English language learning is pair work. It offers a lot of advantages similar to those of group work, but as Harmer (2001b) states pair work can be more problematic in the aspect of personal relationships than group work (p. 117).

Other Useful Tips

Giving Instructions

It is possible that some students fail in completing tasks, if the teacher speaks only English all the time, and uses more complex language for explaining grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, or giving instructions. Only high achievers understand what the teacher says, and are able to fulfil the task. Lower achievers do not know what they are expected to do and do not obtain sufficient language input. Lindstromberg (2015) suggests:

> Make your own talk more comprehensible by paraphrasing more than usual. Doing so can enable you to make your own classroom talk richer, which will be good for your higher level students, and help to ensure that your lower-proficiency students can also follow what you say. For the same reason (i.e., since they can make what you say more comprehensible to your less proficient students in particular), consider whether you make enough use of pictures, gesture, mime, and props. (para. 7)

The teacher can also use learners´ first language to explain things in class, or he or she can ask more advanced learners to translate his or her words. Scrivener (2011) recommends the use of L1 for summarizing content of a text, introducing new grammatical items, contrasting sounds in pronunciation learning, or just if it is necessary when giving instructions or explanations (pp. 298-299). Both approaches increase less advanced learners´ chances to complete tasks successfully.

Learning Environment

A friendly atmosphere in class makes learners feel relaxed and comfortable. This is an important condition for successful learning. All learners need supportive environment for their development. Tomlinson (1999) provides a guide for creating "healthy learning environment", and she claims:

> The Teacher Appreciates Each Child as an Individual....., The Teacher Remembers to Teach Whole Children ...., The Teacher Strives for Joyful Learning...., The Teacher Offers High Expectations – and Lots of Ladders..., The Teacher Shares the Teaching with Students: Teachers in healthy classrooms continually invite their students to be a part of teaching ...., The Teacher Uses Positive Energy and Humour", (pp. 31-34)

but the author accentuates that "The humour is never sarcastic or cutting" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 34). Another aspect that significantly contributes to good learning atmosphere is discipline. Prodromou and Clandfield (2007) claim that both overt and covert forms of indiscipline "are undermining the 'togetherness' or the group and the idea of working collectively towards common aims" (p. 39). Tomlinson (1999) adds that positive atmosphere in class eliminates or minimizes misbehaviour, "When there is a need to deal with a severe or recurring problem, respect for the student, desire for positive growth, and shared decision making result in understanding and learning, not conflict between adversaries" (p. 34).

In classes where the spirit of cooperation and preference of good relationships prevail over the spirit of competition, and where students help one another, and act mutually with respect to their diverse personalities, the learning environment is friendly and healthy. It brings many benefits to all the learners.

Individual Treatment of Learners

It is usually very difficult to reach all students in a mixed ability class. The time of the lesson is limited, and the number of learners in one class can be quite large. However, the teacher should make effort to get into interaction with individual students as much as possible. Ur (2012) advises:

> Find time to relate to students individually. This includes checking and commenting on their written work regularly, and having occasional chats outside the lesson. ... Students need to know you are aware of them as individuals, care about them and are monitoring their progress. (p. 282)

They are usually less advanced learners who need teacher´s individual help to keep pace with the class and amend gaps in their knowledge. Prodromou (1992) suggests:

> To recycle material by practising different aspects of it, using for example, a grammatical structure in different contexts, the same text first for listening, then later for reading comprehension, or first as a dictation and then as a cloze test; or reworking dull textbook dialogues as drama activities. Another solution is to give students extra work to do at home, either written especially for the purpose or extracted from available textbooks. As Scheibl suggests, 'You could make cassette tapes available for home use, perhaps with key-points, so they can go over the lesson at their own pace at home.'(p. 5)

Assessment and Feedback

Assessment is an important part of any learning process. It has got its invaluable role in English language learning, as well. Learners, their parents, teachers, and instructional authorities need to know what the result of the learning process is. Ur (2012) stated: "The main reasons for trying to assess English proficiency are as follows: ......to evaluate students´ overall level....., ...students´ progress........, ...how well students have learnt specific material during a course......, ... students´ strengths and weaknesses ('diagnostic' assessment)..." (p. 167). We can divide assessment into two main types: formative and summative. Formative assessment gives information about learner´s results during a certain period or unit, whereas, summative assessment summarizes learners' performances at the end of a period of learning. Typical tools of summative assessment are school leaving exams or international proficiency tests as TOFL, FCE. Ur (2012) claims:

> .... summative in nature: they provide only a grade, often expressed as a percentage, offer no specific feedback on aspects of specific performance, and are designed to summarize or conclude a period of learning. Summative assessment may be used as a basis for selection, ... In contrast, most of the assessment that we carry out during a course ......is formative in nature: it may like summative assessment provide a grade in the form of a number, but it happens in the middle of a period of learning rather than at the end, provides clear feedback in the form of error correction and suggestions for improvement (pp. 167-168).

This claim indicates which type of assessment should prevail in mixed ability classes. Tomlinson (1999) stated:

In a differentiated classroom, assessment is ongoing and diagnostic. Its goal is to provide teachers day-to-day data on students´ readiness for particular ideas and skills, their interests, and their learning profiles. These teachers don´t see assessment as something that comes at the end of a unit to find out what students learned; rather, assessment is today´s means of understanding how to modify tomorrow´s instruction. (p. 10)

The author also suggests some tools for realization of formative assessment. They are: "small- group discussion", "whole-class discussion, journal entries, portfolio entries, exit cards, skill inventories, pre-tests, homework assignments, student opinion, or interest surveys", later she claims that such assessment helps the teacher know how successfully his or her students are able to "perform targeted skills, at what levels of proficiency, and with what degree of interest". The teacher designs next lessons "with the goal of helping individual students move ahead from their current position of competency" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 10).

Some of the above mentioned assessment tools represent alternatives to traditional methods and strategies. However, even a traditional tool as a test can be modified for the needs of individual students in mixed ability classes. Ur (2012) recommends applying "the 'compulsory plus optional' principle to tests" and to offer some extra tasks to early finishers and also award their effort with extra points (p. 280). Learner´s effort should be taken in consideration because some learners do not achieve desirable results although they work hard. According to Ur (2012), students need to be praised if they deserve it because it increases their self-confidence. She warns against "over-frequent and unearned compliments", and recommends to appreciate good results which were achieved with a certain effort (p. 282).

Another component of assessment, no less important, is self assessment. Learners evaluate their performances with regard to clear criteria. It is useful if they are able to distinguish what their strong points are and where they should make more effort to achieve better results. However, they cannot do it without the teacher´s guidance, at least at the beginning. Self assessment supports building learner´s autonomy and responsibility.

Feedback

Anytime, we learn something new, we make errors. Errors and mistakes are inseparable parts of learning process, and they are natural. They do not mean any deviation from the correct way to achieving English language skills and knowledge. They help us

realize important things, or confirm rules. It is important to pay attention to them, otherwise they could fossilize. The question is whether it is necessary to correct all errors all the time. Prodromou (1992) points out:

> However, while correcting errors is undoubtedly an important part of language teaching, there is an appropriate time and place for it, and while there are ways of correcting which encourage learners, there are also ways which discourage them. In a mixed class, this distinction is particularly important, as students are often tongue-tied not because they have nothing to say, but because they are afraid of being made to look foolish in front of other students by a teacher who pounces on their every mistake. An obsession with accuracy ('errorphobia') will thus often develop at the expense of fluency. Both accuracy and fluency are, of course, important, but a balance between them is vital. (p. 21)

A sensitive approach to correcting errors leads to understanding errors as a natural stage in English language learning. Prodomou and Clanfield (2007) introduce the following principles:

- Use marks sparingly and judiciously and prioritize successful attempts at using language rather than completing formal success.
- Give verbal feedback rather than quantitative results.
- Avoid classifying the class into 'good, bad, worse, worst'. Some learning qualities are not easy to measure.
- Make testing a group activity with group results as an occasional alternative to the traditional 'lone ranger' approach to testing where the isolated student struggles alone in competition with other 'candidates'.
- Take every opportunity to make students feel they have achieved even a minor success. (p. 113)

Focus on what learners succeeded to accomplish rather than perpetual accentuating what was done with errors helps avoid loss of motivation and interest, and feeling of hopelessness.

Developing Learners´ Autonomy and Responsibility

At the very beginning, learners of the English language are dependent on their teacher to a great degree. The teacher presents new grammar or vocabulary, plans and organizes the whole teaching process, prepares activities, assigns tasks, homework, or self-study, applies suitable strategies, or supplies learners with studying material. However, not

all learning takes place in the class. Therefore, it is significant to develop learners´ autonomy and responsibility. As Thornbury (2006) states: "Autonomy is your capacity to take responsibility for, and control of, your own learning, either in institutional context, or completely independent of a teacher or institution" (p. 22). Scharle and Szabó (2000) claim "Some degree of autonomy is also essential to successful language learning. No matter how much students learn through lessons, there is always plenty more they will need to learn by practice, on their own" (p. 4). Thornbury (2006) states:

> It is also called *self-directed learning*, and it has been advocated as a way of addressing the fact that many - .... – learners have individual needs and learning styles that are not always easily accommodated in a classroom situation. Autonomous learning assumes that the learner has developed learning strategies, and the development of such strategies is the aim of learner training. (p. 22)

Teachers must equip their learners with efficient strategies for individual learning. Learners get ideas how to fix and automatize knowledge. They should also be taught how to record vocabulary, grammar presentations, fold useful materials and own works, work with dictionaries, or use computer programmes. However, this can be beneficial, if students are willing to make own effort to do these things. Students differ in the extent in which they are able to take responsibility for their learning, and the rate of autonomy. Students´ achievements are closely related to this fact.

Commentary

The Theoretical Background section defines the notion of mixed ability classes and describes factors which have influence on learner´s ability to attain second language acquisition. They are: specific learning disorders, learner´s social background, cognitive factors, motivation and attitudes. The next part mentions possible solutions how to cater to various needs of all learners in mixed ability classes, and presents some efficient strategies based on differentiated instructions stated. They stem from the Vygotsky´s theory of the Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding. The strategies include open-ended tasks, differentiation in amount and level of the work, learner´s choice, raising interest, or groupwork. Then, principles of effective giving instructions, healthy learning environment, as other are mentioned. Assessment and feedback as an important factor in mixed ability classes are discussed. In mixed ability classes, teachers should prefer formative and diagnostic assessment based on traditional but mostly on alternative testing tools. The

findings stated in the Theoretical Background section are used as basis for the research outlined in the next sections.

III. METHODS

As it was stated in the theoretical background of this thesis, learners in mixed ability classes are of different language levels. Differentiated instruction is an efficient tool which enables them to engage in lesson activities and tasks. This section outlines research methodology exploring the question to which extent differentiated teaching can involve learners in activities and tasks in comparison with teaching where the attention to individual needs is not paid in particular. At first, the observation was carried out during activities where differentiation was not applied, after that, the observation was realized during activities where instructions were intentionally differentiated. Both observations were conducted according to the same criteria. This section also includes information about the time dedicated to the observations, description of the sample learners and of the environment of the observations, description of both types of activities and tasks, a brief introduction of the observer. The teacher recorded her own experience and findings in the journal immediately after each lesson.

Research Tools

For the purpose of the action research, observation appears as a suitable tool. The observation was direct, carried out by an observer and a teacher. The first one was structured because it proceeded according to categories determined in advance, however, enabling some commentaries. The observer recorded her findings in a form. There were ten observable criteria stated and the observer chose the most appropriate degree of the feature. There were two, three, four, and five item scales used. For each activity and each learner there was one form. The form was in the Czech language because of a lower level of English language proficiency of the observer. Teacher´s observation was non-structured and the data were written down in the form of a journal. Both, the form and the journal are included in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

The data received during the observation were summed up in ten tables according to the criteria. They contain information about all three sample learners separately for non-differentiated and differentiated instruction.

Observer

The observer´s role was to watch the sample learners in the class during the activities according to the defined criteria and to record the data. The person who was

asked to do this task is a teacher´s assistant. She works in the 6th B class and helps pupils with learning disorders and assists teachers. The advantage of this choice is that she knows the learners closely. She also has experience with observing learners; it is part of her work. Her findings are very important for teachers.

During the action research, the assistant did not pay special attention to or support learners with difficulties, in order not to influence learners´ performances or acting, and to concentrate fully on the observation.

Criteria

It was essential to choose observable and relevant criteria in order to obtain credible data. The criteria were chosen with respect to their importance for evaluation of the activities from the point of view of their suitability for learners of mixed ability classes. Criterion 1 concerned learners´ understanding of instructions given before each activity. The scale was set yes – partly – no. Criterion 2 characterized the rate of learners´ engagement in the activities, whether they made effort to join in an activity or accomplish a task. The scale was set yes – rather yes – rather no – no. Criterion 3 predicated of learners´ independence, and it was rated yes – rather yes – rather no – no. The observer evaluated to what extend the learner was able to work on a task autonomously, without anyone´s help. Criterion 4 stated whether the learner completed whole the task during the given time limit. There were four grades: yes – larger part – 50% - smaller part – no. For written exercises, percentage results were used. Criterion 5 was concerned with exploitation of a time limit appointed to a task. It stated to what extent the learner worked for the whole time of an activity. There were two options: yes – no. Criterion number 6 dealt with the ratio of correctness with which learners solved the tasks. It was rated as yes – mostly – half of the items – smaller part – no. Criterion 7 was related to learners´ behaviour during the activities. The observer wrote down notes whether the learners disturbed or talked when completing tasks. The answer was either yes or no and the observer could add a reason for learners´ disruptive behaviour. Criteria 8 and 9 were determined for activities carried out with the whole class. Criterion 8 states whether learners gave the teacher correct answers. The possible answers were yes – mostly yes – mostly not – no – does not answer at all. Criterion 9 stated whether the learner joined in work of all the class. The options were yes, or no. Criterion 10 asked the observer to state whether she considered the learner´s work successful or unsuccessful.

Time Span

The observation was carried out for a period of three weeks. It included nine forty-five minute lessons, which contained ten non-differentiated activities and ten differentiated activities. The class has got three English lessons a week. According to the timetable, Tuesday´s lessons are from 10. 00 to 10.45, Wednesday´s lessons are from 8. 00 to 8.45, and Friday´s lessons are from 10.55 to 11.40.

Research Context

The research was accomplished in the 6th grade class at the Elementary School in Sokolov, Běžecká 2055, working compartment in Božena Němcová Street. The group was a typical mixed ability class made of the 6[th]A and the 6th B learners. The group consisted of seventeen learners: 10 boys and 7 girls. They are at age from 11to 15 (One learner finishes his 9th grade because of previous repetitious failures and other problems). The learners are supposed to have reached the level of proficiency A1 in the 5th grade, according to the National Curriculum for Elementary Schools. However, the learners are at different levels, in fact. On one hand, some of them are above A1, on the other hand, some do not dispose an elementary knowledge. For the purpose of the research, the learners can be divided into four groups: A, B, C, D. Group A is made of six higher achievers; group B is made of four learners who achieve good results but are sometimes uncertain and need a bit more time to adopt certain skills; group C is made of four learners who have some difficulties; group D is made of three lower achievers who can be seen as entire beginners.

Students in group A achieve very good results, have good knowledge, dispose English language skills above level A1, enthusiastically participate in all activities, self-study regularly at home, and have a responsible approach to fulfilling their homework. Students from group B do not differ much from those from group A. However, they are less confident, need more time to adopt new matter and automatize it. There are three learners suffering from dysorthography in group B. Members of group C have more difficulties, their proficiency level is below A1, and they need more help and support. Among them, there are three students suffering from various learning disorders – dysgraphia, dyslexia, suspect dysortography, other problems, and ADHD. One of them is educated according to a personalized learning plan and has an assistant to help him. Group C learners do not prepare at home regularly and are rather reluctant in doing homework. Learners from group D have very low or zero language skills. They are able to say what their name is, understand meaning of several individual words. They never prepare at

home and never do homework. They all come from Roma ethnic minority; they are absent from school very often. Two of them had to repeat one or two grades.

It is necessary to accentuate that the division of the learners into groups according to their language proficiency levels was accomplished only for the purpose of the diploma thesis, and it is not applied in the course of regular teaching. It was not stated anywhere else. And what is more, the learners were not informed about the existence of such division. Such categorizing appears incompetent and it could influence learners´ psychical development, self-confidence and self-conception in a negative way.

The class is a cohesive group, the learners have got positive relationships and act with mutual respect. More skilled students tend to help the less skilled ones. All learners are cooperative and willing to engage in class activities. There is good discipline and some slight disruptions occur only rarely. The atmosphere is friendly and supportive.

The learners were not informed about the observation because it was important to maintain natural situation not influenced by learners´ awareness of the proceeding research. Otherwise, they could act differently than during regular lessons. For the same reason, they were all assigned the same tasks either identical or varied in difficulty.

Sample Students

The observation was aimed at three students who are typical representatives of different levels in the class. The students were labelled AI, BI, CI, according to the groups in the class. There is no representative of group D because of the members´ deficient school attendance.

Learner AI is a 12 year old girl. Her level of English proficiency goes beyond A1. She actively participates in class activities, pays attention all the time, successfully completes assigned tasks, prepares at home regularly. She is ambitious and self-confident in a positive way, diligent, and assiduous. The girl is calm, but not shy. She often helps her less skilled classmates if they need it. Her performances in the first term of this school year were assessed with grade 1.

Learner BI is an 11 year old girl, her level of English proficiency is above A1. Her engagement in English language activities and tasks is rather active. She appears to be interested in language learning. She is calm and hard working. The girl shows good knowledge, but she sometimes shows some uncertainties and gaps. In comparison with learner AI learner BI usually needs more time for accomplishing tasks. Her performances in the first term of this school year were assessed with grade 2.

Learner CI is a 13 year old boy; his level of English proficiency is bellow A1. He suffers from ADHD and dysgraphia. The boy is not able to keep his attention for a long time and is easily distracted. During English lessons, he is rather passive, but if he is interested in the task, he joins enthusiastically. He rarely prepares at home and often forgets to do his homework. The boy does not have any discipline problems during English lessons; he is cooperative. He has a personalized learning plan. There is an assistant in the class to help him. His performances in the first term of this school year were assessed with grade 3.

Tasks and Activities

The language tasks and activities were designed with respect to the curriculum and the outline for the 6th grade. The tasks and activities both non-differentiated and differentiated include topics: Food and Meals, My Daily Programme, grammar structures: present simple tense, past simple tense, expressing future – going to, using determiners some x any, question forms. They also practised vocabulary and spelling, and were focused on these skills – reading, speaking and writing.

Non-differentiated Tasks and Activities

These activities were designed without any regards to the learners´ differences and needs. The tasks and instructions were identical for all groups of learners. For better identification they were labelled N-D 1 – 10.

N-D 1 was a closed ended task. It was a gap fill with 10 items, which the learners were asked to fill with appropriate forms of going to. They worked individually for 7 minutes. N-D 2 task was a Czech – English translation of a short text consisting of 11 clauses. The time limit was 10 minutes. The learners worked individually. N-D 3 task was a cloze test. There were 20 gaps in the text placed random. The expressions to choose from were presented together with the instructions. It was individual work, the timing was 7 minutes. N-D 4 was concerned with vocabulary on topic Food and Meals. The learners had to sort out 30 expressions into 6 groups. The timing of this task was 8 minutes. The learners worked individually. N-D 5 consisted of 5 questions about learners´ eating habits and preferences. It was a pair work. The learners were supposed to ask the questions their partners, they had to start with question 1 and then go on and take turns. The time limit for this activity was 10 minutes. N-D 6 was a reading activity. The text "Meals and Meal Times" was taken from the student´s book *Project II., 2nd edition* by Tom Hutchinson. The

task required learners to read the text and answer 8 questions which were created especially for the purpose of the research by the teacher. The time limit was 15 minutes; the reading was an individual task. N-D 7 was a dictation. It consisted of 17 clauses. The activity lasted 10 minutes. N-D 8 was writing. The instruction told the learners to write a text about their daily programme and daily meals. The timing for this activity was 15 minutes of learners´ individual work. N-D 9 was a match exercise, where it was required to match beginnings and endings of sentences. The time limit was 5 minutes; the learners worked on their own. N-D 10 was a class survey. The learners´ task was to ask their classmates about what they usually have for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They were announced that they have to ask all people in the class, because they needed all the answers to be able to accomplish the research. The time for this activity was 25 minutes. There was some extra time for preparation before or for feedback after each activity.

Differentiated Tasks and Activities

There were 10 differentiated activities. They were designed with regard to learners´ needs, different language levels, knowledge and mixed abilities. There were used some strategies that are effective to address mixed ability learners. They were labelled D 1- 10.

D 1 was a speaking activity; the used strategy was learner´s choice. The learners were given a set of 10 questions about food and eating. They answered the questions individually and wrote their answers down. The instruction said that they could start with any question. The time limit for this activity was 10 minutes. D 2 was a communicative activity. The strategy inhered in different load of work. It was similar to N-D 10, but it was not a survey; therefore, the learners did not need to ask all people in the class to accomplish the task. Higher achievers might have talked to more people, lower achievers might have talked to less people, but it did not avoid them to finish their task. They were supposed to make sentences about the people in the class, they asked. The timing of the activity was 25 minutes. D 3 was an open ended task. It was framed as a game with a time constraint to raise learners´ interest. The learners wrote down vocabulary on topic food divided into 5 kinds, then, they shared their ideas in their group. The time limit for this activity was 10 minutes. D 4 was a creative task. The learners were supposed to design a restaurant menu on different levels of difficulty. The most complex version required the learners a) to write two items for each daily meal, b) think up a name of their restaurant, c) add prices to the meals, d) write some sentences to attract customers. Learners A had to do all tasks, learners B were told to do a), b), c), and learners C were supposed to do tasks a)

and b). They all worked individually for 15 minutes. The tasks varied in difficulty. Some did easier tasks; some did more complex tasks. D 5 was a sort of picture description. The learners were given two pictures and were instructed to spot the differences and write them down either in words or sentences. They worked individually for 15 minutes. The strategy in this activity was based on different complexity of the answers. D 6 was a writing task. The learners were asked to write a text about their daily programme. Versions A and B contained writing a text of at least 100 words with a note that they could write more. For version C there was a table which helped the learners make their sentences. The strategy of this activity was based on different difficulty, different load of work, and personalization. The time for this activity was 15 minutes. D 7 was a speaking activity. The teacher asked the learners to try to guess what she was thinking of. They had to put various questions to solve the riddle. They were supposed to do it on a different level of complexity. Another strategy used here was raising learners´ interest. The time limit was 6 minutes. D 8 was a reading task. There was a text and three sets of tasks on different levels of difficulty. The learners were assigned the tasks according to their language level. They worked individually for 15 minutes. D 9 was a vocabulary gap fill. The items were chosen incidentally. Although it was a close ended activity, it was made multi level because there were three levels of difficulty. Version A did not contain any cues, version B had a cue for the whole text, in version C, the text was divided into three paragraphs and there was a cue for each of them. It was individual work of the learners and it lasted 10 minutes. D 10 was a dictation on different levels of difficulty. A version of this task required writing the text without any support; B version offered the text with gaps; C version contained the same text with minimum of omitted items. The time limit for this activity was 10 minutes. The learners were offered to choose the level of difficulty they would like to work on. There was some extra time before the activities dedicated to preparation and some extra time after the activities dedicated to feedback.

The following tables show a survey of the above presented activities in a more clearly arranged way. Detailed instructions for both types of activities and work sheets are enclosed in Appendix 3.

Table 1. Non-differentiated activities:

Designation	Activity	Form of work	Timing
N-D 1	Gap fill	individual	7 minutes
N-D 2	Translation	individual	10 minutes
N-D 3	Cloze test	individual	7 minutes
N-D 4	Dividing items	individual	8 minutes
N-D 5	Dialogue	pair work	10 minutes
N-D 6	Reading	individual	15 minutes
N-D 7	Dictation	individual	10 minutes
N-D 8	Writing a text	individual	15 minutes
N-D 9	Match exercise	individual	5 minutes
N-D 10	Class survey	whole class; S-S interaction	25 minutes

Table 2. Differentiated activities:

Designation	Activity	Strategy of differentiation	Form of work	Timing
D 1	Answering questions	choice of items	individual	10 minutes
D 2	Asking people	variation in load of work	whole class, S-S interaction	25 minutes
D 3	Recollecting vocabulary	group work, raising interest through time constraint	individual, group	10 minutes
D 4	Designing a menu	variation in difficulty	individual	15 minutes
D 5	Picture description: spotting differences	open ended	individual, whole class	15 minutes
D 6	Writing a text	variation in difficulty, personalization	individual	15 minutes
D 7	Guessing game: What am I thinking of?	open ended task raising learner´s interest	whole class	6 minutes
D 8	Reading	variation in difficulty	individual	15 minutes
D 9	Gap fill	variation in difficulty	individual	10 minutes
D 10	Dictation	variation in difficulty	individual	10 minutes

The data obtained during the action research were analyzed in the following way. Data for individual criteria and individual sample learners were summed up and counted up separately for non-differentiated and differentiated activities. The results of both types

of activities were compared for each sample learner. The comparison showed us which type of activities and which strategies appeared more suitable for learners in mixed ability classes.

IV. RESULTS AND COMMENTARIES

This chapter presents the data gathered during the action research. They were obtained on the basis of observations of performances of sample students in the course of individual activities according to the given criteria. The non-differentiated and differentiated activities were assessed from the point of view to what extent they filled the criteria. The results show whether the activities cater to the learners´ different needs. The data attained during the performances of the sample learners were summed up for both non-differentiated and differentiated activities. The results were compared.

The findings were also used for evaluation of the differentiated teaching activities and strategies from the point of their efficiency to address the needs of students in mixed ability classes. Further, findings concerning with the choice of the level of difficulty in differentiated tasks made by the learners are also presented in this section. The results are presented in tables and they are accompanied with commentaries, which root from the assistant´s and teacher´s notes.

Learners´ Performances in N-D and D Activities

According to the first criterion, the activities were evaluated from the perspective of learner´s understanding of the instructions which were given by the teacher before each activity. The results are presented in the table.

Table 3. The learner understood the instruction for the activity.

Learner AI	yes	partly	no
N-D activities	10	0	0
D activities	10	0	0
Learner BI	yes	partly	no
N-D activities	9	1	0
D activities	10	0	0
Learner CI	yes	partly	no
N-D activities	5	2	3
D activities	5	3	2

The data stated in Table 3 show us that as far as non-differentiated activities are concerned, learner AI understood instructions for all activities fully, learner BI understood instructions for 9 activities fully and for 1 activity partly, learner CI understood instructions for 5 activities fully, for 2 activities partly, but he did not understand instructions for 3 activities at all. With respect to the differentiated activities, learners AI and BI understood instructions for all activities fully, learner CI understood instructions for 5 activities fully, for 3 activities partly, but he did not understand instructions for 2 activities at all.

When we compare the results for both types of activities, it is visible that learner AI did not have any problems with understanding instructions both for N-D and D activities, learners BI and CI understood one more instructions if they were given before differentiated activities. Therefore, the comprehension of what to do was slightly better in differentiated activities. However, even before N-D activities the instructions were differentiated. With regard to the fact that the class is of the 6th grade, they were given at first in the English language, then in the Czech language. They were usually supplemented with gestures and miming. Otherwise, some learners would not have understood and could have been prevented from accomplishing the tasks. It is possible to say that for both types of activities, the explanation of what should be done was differentiated to help all the learners participate.

The second criterion was concerned with learner´s engagement in the activities.

Table 4. The learner showed effort to join in the activity or to accomplish the task.

Learner AI	yes	rather yes	rather no	no
N-D activities	10	0	0	0
D activities	10	0	0	0
Learner BI	yes	rather yes	rather no	no
N-D activities	9	1	0	0
D activities	7	3	0	0
Learner CI	yes	rather yes	rather no	no
N-D activities	2	7	1	0
D activities	4	4	1	1

According to the results presented in Table 4, the situation was the same for N-D and D tasks for learner AI. She was fully engaged in all activities of both types. Learner BI was fully engaged in 9 N-D activities and rather engaged in 1 N-D activity. The situation varied in the results of D activities. The learner was fully engaged in 7 differentiated activities and rather engaged in 3 of them. Learner CI was fully engaged in 2 N-D activities and in 4 D activities, rather engaged in 7 N-D activities and in 4 D activities, rather not engaged in 1 N-D activity and in 1 D activity and not engaged at all only in 1D activity.

After comparing of results of both types of activities, it is obvious that whereas learner AI made a constant effort to accomplish the tasks of both types, learners BI and CI made a bigger effort to accomplish N-D tasks than D tasks.

The third criterion considered the activities from the point of learners´ autonomy, and examined to what extent the learners worked on the tasks autonomously, without anyone´s help.

Table 5. The learner worked on accomplishing of the tasks autonomously:

Learner AI	yes	rather yes	rather no	no
N-D activities	10	0	0	0
D activities	10	0	0	0
Learner BI	yes	rather yes	rather no	no
N-D activities	5	5	0	0
D activities	5	5	0	0
Learner CI	yes	rather yes	rather no	no
N-D activities	1	1	6	2
D activities	2	4	3	1

The results of learner AI in ND activities were equal to those in D activities. The girl was able to work on her own all the time and even help her less skilled classmate. The results of learner BI for ND activities were identical for D activities, as well. Learner BI appeared autonomous in 5 cases of N-D activities and in 5 cases of D activities and rather autonomous in the other 5 cases. More differences were obvious in the results of learner CI. The number of tasks where he worked fully autonomously increased from 1 N-D

activity to 2 D activities, the number of tasks where he worked rather autonomously increased from 1 N-D activity to 4 D activities. Learner CI appeared rather not autonomous in 6 N-D activities, but only in 3 D activities, completely not autonomous in 2 N-D activities and in only 1 D activity. The comparison clearly shows that learner CI is more autonomous during D activities.

The fourth criterion of the research examined the extent of work the learner completed during the set time limit.

Table 6. During the time limit, the learner managed to complete work:

Learner AI	yes	larger part	50%	smaller part	no
N-D activities	8	2	0	0	0
D activities	10	0	0	0	0
Learner BI	yes	larger part	50%	smaller part	no
N-D activities	6	4	0	0	0
D activities	6	3	0	1	0
Learner CI	yes	larger part	50%	smaller part	no
N-D activities	0	1	2	6	1
D activities	4	3	0	2	1

The results show that learner AI managed to accomplish 8 N-D tasks completely and larger part of two N-D tasks. She managed to complete all the work in all 10 D tasks. Learner BI completed 6 N-D tasks entirely and larger part of 4 N-D tasks. The number of totally completed D tasks was the same as those of N-D tasks. Then, there are only 3 D tasks where the girl completed larger part and 1 D task where smaller part was completed. According to the results for learner CI in N-D tasks, it is obvious that he was able to accomplish larger part of 1 N-D task, 50% of 2 N-D tasks, smaller part of 6 N-D tasks and he completed nothing of 1 N-D task. However, 4 D tasks were totally completed; 1 D task was completed in larger part, 2 D tasks were completed in smaller part and one D task was not completed at all.

Comparison of the results of N-D and D activities indicate that learner AI was more successful in completing of D tasks; learner BI was slightly better in completing N-D

tasks and learner CI was noticeably more successful in completing D tasks than in N-D tasks.

The fifth criterion was concerned with exploitation of time set for the activities.

Table 7. The learner worked for all the time limit.

	learner AI		learner BI		learner CI	
	N-D activities	**D activities**	**N-D activities**	**D activities**	**N-D activities**	**D activities**
yes	10	10	10	10	7	8
no	0	0	0	0	3	2

According to the data stated in the table above, learners AI and BI worked for all the time limit of both N-D and D activities; learner CI exploited all time limit in 7 N-D and 8 D activities; he did not work all the time in 3 N-D and 2 D activities. There is no difference in AI and BI´s time exploitation in N-D or D activities; learner CI´ s results show slight improvement in D activities.

The sixth criterion explored how much of the work done by the learners was correct.

Table 8. The learner solved the task correctly.

Learner AI	**yes**	**larger part**	**50%**	**smaller part**	**no**
N-D activities	6	3	1	0	0
D activities	8	2	0	0	0
Learner BI	**yes**	**larger part**	**50%**	**smaller part**	**no**
N-D activities	3	6	1	0	0
D activities	5	5	0	0	0
Learner CI	**yes**	**larger part**	**50%**	**smaller part**	**no**
N-D activities	0	0	0	6	4
D activities	2	4	1	3	0

The observer evaluated rate of correctness of learners´ work together with the teacher who corrected written tasks and decided about assessment of learners ´ performances. Learner AI managed to solve 8 N-D activities without any mistakes, larger

part of 3 N-D activities correctly and 1 N-D activity with 50% correctness. She solved 8 D activities with full correctness and 2 D activities where larger part of the activity was correct. Learner BI correctly solved 3 N-D activities, larger part of 6 N-D activities, and 50% of 1 N-D activity. As for D activities, learner BI correctly solved 5 of them and larger part of other 5 of them. Learner CI solved smaller part of 6 N-D activities correctly and his solution of 4 N-D activities was completely incorrect. On the other hand, he solved 2 D activities with full correctness, larger part of 4 D activities, 50% of 1D activity and smaller part of 3 D activities. After comparison of the results obtained in N-D and D activities, it is obvious that all three sample learners´ performances were better in D activities. The divergence is more distinctive in learner CI´s results where the improvement was more considerable.

The seventh criterion examined learners´ performances with respect to discipline. The observer rated whether the sample learners behaved in a disruptive way or not.

Table 9. The learner disturbed during the activity.

	learner AI		learner BI		learner CI	
	N-D activities	D activities	N-D activities	D activities	N-D activities	D activities
yes	0	0	0	0	2	0
no	10	10	10	10	8	10

Learners AI and BI did not have any discipline problems during both N-D and D activities. Learner CI showed some slight disturbances only in 2 N-D activities; he chatted with his classmate. However, his behaviour was without any problems in D activities. Therefore, we can see some improvement in learner CI´s behaviour in D activities with comparison with N-D activities.

The eighth criterion deals with correctness of learners´ answers during whole class work, such as whole class communicative activities, preparation before tasks or feedback after tasks.

Table 10. The learner answered teacher´s questions correctly.

Learner AI	yes	mostly yes	mostly no	no	did not answer
N-D activities	7	3	0	0	0
D activities	9	1	0	0	0
Learner BI	yes	mostly yes	mostly no	no	did not answer
N-D activities	2	8	0	0	0
D activities	1	9	0	0	0
Learner CI	yes	mostly yes	mostly no	no	did not answer
N-D activities	0	2	5	3	0
D activities	0	4	6	0	0

Learner AI´s results in N-D activities show that she answered all questions correctly in 7 activities and most answers correctly in 3 activities. When D activities are concerned, we can see that the learner gave all answers correct in 9 activities and most answers correct in 1 activity. Learner BI´s answers in N-D activities were correct in 2 cases and mostly correct in 8 cases. Learner BI´s answers in D activities were correct in 1 case and mostly correct in other 9 cases. Learner CI´s answers were mostly correct in 2 N-D and 4 D activities, mostly incorrect in 5 N-D and in 6 D activities, only incorrect in 3 N-D activities. After comparison between the results of N-D and D activities, we can see that learner AI achieved slightly better results in D activities, learner BI achieved slightly better results in N-D activities, learner CI achieved better results in D activities in a more distinctive way than other two sample learners.

The ninth criterion examined the activities from the point of the sample learners´ joining in work of the class. Again, it was concerned with activities determined for whole the class and for preparation or feedback which were provided along the activities.

Table 11. The learner joined in work of the class.

	learner AI		learner BI		learner CI	
	N-D activities	D activities	N-D activities	D activities	N-D activities	D activities
yes	10	10	10	10	10	10
no	0	0	0	0	0	0

As the results show, all three learners joined in all N-D and all D activities. They all tried to participate in all activities.

According to the tenth criterion, the observer evaluated successfulness of the sample learners in the activities. Observer´s opinion whether the learners are or are not successful was based on overall impression and comparison with learners´ usual achievements.

Table 12. Learner´s work during the activity could be evaluated as successful.

	learner AI		learner BI		learner CI	
	N-D activities	**D activities**	**N-D activities**	**D activities**	**N-D activities**	**D activities**
yes	9	10	9	10	1	7
no	1	0	1	0	9	3

Learners AI´s and BI´s performances were evaluated as successful in 9 N-D activities and not successful in 1 N-D activity; all 10 D activities were considered successful. Learner CI was successful in only 1 N-D activity; other 9 activities were characterized as unsuccessful. On the other hand, 7 D activities were rated as successful but only 3 D activities as unsuccessful.

When we summed up all the above presented results for each sample learner, we came to the following findings. Learner AI´s performances were constant during the research and she achieved very good results both in N-D and D activities. According to 6 criteria the learner achieved the same results for N-D and D activities. According to 4 criteria the learner achieved better results in D activities. Learner BI´s performances were identical in both types of activities according to 4 criteria; she achieved better results in N-D activities according to 3 criteria and in D activities according to 3 criteria. She successfully worked during the activities of the research. Learner CI´s performances in N-D and D activities were rated as identical according to 2 criteria. Other 8 criteria evaluated D activities higher than N-D activities and what is more, 5 criteria showed the learner significantly more successful in D activities.

Efficiency of Applied Strategies of Differentiated Instruction

The research differentiated tasks and activities were based on the following strategies: choice, variation in load of work, variation in difficulty, personalization, group work, raising interest, or open-ending. Activity D 1 was based on choice; activity D 2 was

based on variation in load of work; activities D 4, D 6, D 8, D 9, D 10 used variation in difficulty; activity D 3 applied group work and raising interest by means of time constraints; activities D 5 and D 7 were based on open-ended strategy; tasks D 4 and D 6 also applied personalization and D 4 and D 6 could be considered as using strategy of different load of work as well. Therefore, some activities were based on more than one strategy and so it is not possible to determine unequivocally which of these strategies is the most efficient to cater to needs of all the sample learners.

The strategy of choice enabled the learners to choose which questions they wanted to answer. Learner AI answered all 10 questions; learner BI answered 7 questions, both with high correctness and learner CI answered 6 questions using simple answers. A similar speaking activity was accomplished in the rank of non-differentiated tasks, however, as a pair work. Learner CI was in interaction with a C group learner; they only answered the first question. The other two sample learners achieved the same results in a non-differentiated version and differentiated version of this activity. After applying the strategy of choice, learner CI´s performance was more successful.

Variation in load of work enabled the learners to ask different number of people during a whole class communicative activity. Learner AI asked 7 classmates out of 15; learner BI asked 8 classmates out of 15; learner CI actually did not ask anybody, because he tried to copy other learners´ charts. He adopted this method in a similar non-differentiated class communicative activity, a class survey, where as contrasted to the differentiated one, they needed to interview all classmates for completing the survey. Unfortunately, learner CI did not comprehend the instruction entirely and his effort was aimed to a hunt for information. Another occurrence influenced learners´ performance. Learner AI guided and helped a less skilled learner, a C group member, therefore, she did not manage to ask more learners. However, the task could be completed with any number of answers.

As a very efficient strategy appeared group work. At first, learners worked separately to recollect as many expressions as possible to sub-topics of unit food then they presented their results together with other learners in the group. All the learners contributed to the results of their group: learner AI with 20 items, learner BI with 24 items and learner CI with 17 items. The learners were motivated by a certain time constraint which added a spirit of game and competition to this activity.

Variation in difficulty required distributing instruction in three graded varieties. However, the question was how to convey the learners that the teacher decided that they

were given a certain variety according to their language level and not to arouse learners´ feeling of being underestimated or overestimated. The situation was solved as follows. All the class was informed that there are three varieties: a) the most difficult and complex, b) on an average level and c) the least demanding. They were invited to choose the most appropriate variety. The sample learners incidentally made a choice which was in concord with the teacher´s division them into groups. Most learners in the class made the same choice; a B learner chose a) variety and an A learner chose b) variety. They were all asked whether they were satisfied with their choice. All sample learners and nearly all their classmates were satisfied and decided to choose the same variety for next activities. Only one learner B decided to choose variety c) because she was absent for some time and was not sure whether she would be able to accomplish a more difficult task. In D 4 task, designing a restaurant menu, learner AI was able to complete all subtasks, learner BI completed the task according to her variety and learner CI not only completed his tasks, but he also continued in filling a higher level task. Similarly successful can be considered writing task D 6. Learner CI wrote 16 correct sentences according to a grid, learner BI wrote a text of 21 correct sentences and learner AI wrote a text consisting of 22 correct sentences. Learner AI decided to continue at home. All three sample learners were engaged in the activity and spent all time writing. As a very important power for learner´s motivation was personalisation in this task. Task D 8, reading, was also designed on three levels of difficulty. Learner AI succeeded to accomplish all her task, learner BI accomplished most of the task, but learner CI completed only smaller part of D 8. This result was very close to the result in N-D 6, reading. Therefore, in this case, the type of instruction did not play a crucial role for the learners´ successfulness. D 9 was a gap fill. Learners AI, BI and CI completed most of the task correctly, as contrasted to a non-differentiated gap fill exercise where only BI learner accomplished most of the task correctly, learner AI managed to complete 50% of the task correctly and learner CI´s solution was totally incorrect. The situation was similar in D 10 task, a dictation. Learners AI and BI wrote all sentences of the dictation with just only some tiny mistakes; learner CI was able to write large part of the text and do it correctly.

Activity D 5, spotting differences of two pictures, was an open ended activity. Learners expressed the differences according to their abilities. Learner AI described 14 out of fourteen differences using sentences, learner BI described 5 differences using sentences and learner CI found all 14 nuances using words. They were all interested and enthusiastically engaged in the activity. The same strategy was applied in task D 7 – a quiz,

where learners tried to ask the teacher relevant questions to come to the conclusion what the teacher thinks of. Both AI and BI learners put questions aiming to the solution of the quiz. Learner CI was fully concentrated and engaged in the activity, but he did not ask any questions.

Comparison of the sample learners´ performances in non-differentiated and differentiated activities together with the differentiation strategy analysis showed that differentiated instruction increased learners engagement in activities and positively influenced their performances during the action research. This fact is more accentuated in results of learner CI, where the distinction between his performances in differentiated and non-differentiated activities is more apparent.

V. IMPLICATIONS

This chapter consists of the following parts: implications for English language teaching in mixed ability classes, limitations of the research and further research. The first part elaborates results of the action research with regard to their application in English language teaching praxis. The second part defines limitations of the research. The third part tries to indicate the direction of the further research in the field of designing activities for mixed ability classes.

Implications for Teaching Mixed Ability Classes

Differentiated instruction is an efficient tool for addressing needs of learners in mixed ability classes. It provides opportunities to engage a wider range of learners in class language activities. Differentiated teaching targets activities to more learners than non-differentiated teaching, which is usually aimed to an average learner. It is usually too difficult for lower achievers and too easy for higher achievers. However, it is extremely complicated and demanding to design exactly tailored tasks and activities fitting each learner´s requirements. Such approach claims a lot of work, teaching materials and sophisticated logistic of the materials, time for explaining of different instructions. Nevertheless, it is possible to teach learners on different language levels in one class and cater to their needs in a less toilsome and time consuming way. When teachers adopt strategies of differentiated teaching, they will be able to design activities for their learners without extreme effort and differentiation will become natural part of their lesson planning.

There are some types of activities which answer requirements of learners of different language proficiency levels without any adjustment. They are open ended activities and they enable learners to solve the task according to their abilities. These activities do not need extra preparation. Among them there are such activities as completing sentences, guessing games, discussions and expressing ideas, picture descriptions, various activities where learners can display their creativity. Lower achievers´ solution consists of simple answers, higher achievers´ solution contains more complex answers. Open ended tasks provide learners enough opportunities for expressing their ideas. Their principle responds to nature of mixed ability classes.

Another strategy, which does not require special preparation, is learner´s choice. It stems from the supposition that learners can select sub-tasks they want to or are able to do. As it was shown in the research, if a less skilled learner is obliged to start from the very beginning, his or her results are worse because he or she can get stuck on items which are

too difficult for him or her and cannot proceed further. On the other hand, if a similar learner is given a choice of sub-tasks or questions, he or she can do more work than in the previous case. Apparently, we can reach differentiation in teaching in a very simple way. Another example of a strategy which can easily adjust activities for purposes of teaching in mixed ability classes is variation in load of work. Again, the principle inheres in informing learners that they should do a minimal amount of work but they can do more if they are able to. Sometimes, instruction need to be more specified. The main distinction between non-differentiated and differentiated version of a class communicative activity (ND 10 and D 2) embodies in formulation of the expected output. The output of ND 10 is shaped as a class survey, therefore, learners need to ask all their classmates to complete the task. But if the learner is supposed to write sentences about the classmates he interviewed, the input does not require all learners´ answers. Actually, all learners work for the same time limit, but the amount of completed work differs. And what is more, result of the class does not depend on individual learners. It can cause problems, if some of them fail.

Raising learners´ interest by means of personalisation or adding an element of competition strongly contributes to engagement of learners in a class activity. Putting some constraints, (e.g. time) can convert even an ordinary task into an attractive action. If the task is interesting or relates to learners´ personal lives, they are more willing to do and enjoy it. And, consequently, there is a big probability that they will gain a positive attitude to language learning.

Designing activities which offer learners different varieties of difficulty acquires a bit more effort. It is unrealistic to expect a special variety for each learner in the class. Two or three varieties are able to satisfy needs of learners in mixed ability classes. Designing varieties of differentiated instruction for a dictation starts from the text of the dictation. There are different numbers of deleted items for two varieties; more advanced learners write the whole text of the dictation without any support. A cloze test can be adjusted as well. The most challenging variety is a gap fill without any cues; the medial variety has a cue in one chunk; the easiest variety contains several cues divided to individual paragraphs. Designing differentiated instruction for a reading activity requires careful consideration of the multi level tasks to cover varieties from the easiest to the most sophisticated. Differentiated instruction in a writing task can consist of a grid for writing sentences for lower achievers and a direction to write a text of a minimal length and encouraging to continue writing if it is possible. The teacher can instruct learners to write a

text about their typical weekday and if they are ready, they can continue in writing about their typical weekend.

Talking of more varieties of instruction for one task, the question how to distribute the varieties to individual learners arises. According to the experience attained during the research phase, the most suitable method appears to let learners choose which variety they would like to work on. Then, the feedback should follow. The teacher should ask learners whether they were satisfied with their choice and whether they felt comfortable. However, learners should not get stuck on one level, they should be given opportunity to make another choice before next activities. This method is also convenient for learners, who were absent from school and need some time for recovery. They can work on a lower level version until they fill in everything they need. All this contributes to increasing learners´ autonomy. On the other hand, there is a problem what approach should be adopted to assessment of differentiated tasks.

Although all the above described strategies of differentiated teaching proved very efficient and useful, there is no need to repudiate non-differentiated instruction. There are situations where they are meaningful: grammar and vocabulary presentations, practicing, drills, teaching pronunciation.

Limitation of the Research

Some of the limitations which we have to take in consideration are related to the time span. The action research was carried out for only three weeks, which meant nine 45 minute lessons. Observations covering a longer term would enable to accomplish more non-differentiated and differentiated activities and therefore bring more data. The results would be more reliable. Otherwise, the results partly depended on the sample learners´ instant mood and conditions. Another limitation can be seen in number of the sample learners. Only one representative for each group did not provide enough information about the groups. The choice of the representatives was influenced by the need of their presence in the class. Therefore, learners who have good school attendance were preferred, although some others could be better examples of problems in mixed ability classes (boredom, disruptive behaviour). Another, important aspect influencing the research was related to the person of the observer. The observer´s role was demanding because she had to pay attention to three learners simultaneously. Although she approached her task responsibly and did her best, we have to take into account the rate of her objectivity.

Further Research

As it was mentioned in the part dedicated to limitations of the research, it would be beneficial to extend the observation for a longer time span and for more learners. It is desirable to include learners even in more classes and more grades. The research did not examine all existing strategies of differentiation, so introduction and examination of some other strategies and methods would contribute to enriching of sources of tools suitable for English teaching learners on different language levels and disposing different abilities. The research did not deal with assessment of learners´ performances in differentiated activities. This field provides a wide range of exploration. There are some disputable questions connected with testing and grading. Further research could be focused on this problem. It could be considered with different approaches to assessment, components of assessment and efficient assessment tools in mixed ability classes. Further research could find answers to a question, whether teachers should prefer evaluating of learners´ individual progress or use normative assessment.

VI. CONLUSION

The diploma thesis deals with mixed ability classes and ways of catering to their learners´ needs. Learners in mixed ability classes dispose various abilities and are of different language proficiency levels. Among the issues shaping difficulties in mixed ability classes there are cognitive factors, motivation and attitude, learners´ social background, specific learning disorders as dyslexia, dysgraphia and dysortography, behaviour disorders as ADHD and ADD. Learners with problematic socio-economic background, have a low motivation, do not have enough practice or suffer from specific disorders usually belong to lower achievers. On the other hand, learners who are motivated, dispose aptitude for foreign language learning or have enough practice are usually higher achievers. Higher and lower achievers are educated together in one class. Although this can offer some advantages as peer teaching or diversity of human sources, this can also threaten dynamics of the class, cause many problems as boredom, disruptive behaviour, de-motivation and resignation. The thesis explored ways to satisfy different learners´ needs in differentiated instruction. It stemmed from Vygotsky´s theory called the Zone of Proximal Development and the principle of scaffolding. Differentiated instruction is based on the following strategies: open-ended tasks, different work load, different level of difficulty, learner´s choice, group work, raising interest.

According to the results and findings attained during the action research, differentiated instruction is an efficient tool for addressing different needs in mixed ability classes. Particularly lower achievers´ performances were more successful in differentiated activities and the learners had more opportunities to experience success than in non-differentiated activities. Differentiated activities using the above stated strategies help raise learners´ self-confidence and engagement in class activities. Differentiation in the level of difficulty is connected with distribution of varieties of the tasks which offers learners to choose the most appropriate variety. This approach encourages their autonomy and responsibility. What is more, the free choice of difficulty enables indisposed learners to make a choice for the time of their recovery.

Both non-differentiated and differentiated instructions have their place and importance in English language learning. Teachers should try to differentiate as many activities as possible and pay attention to their learners´ needs. Differentiated teaching helps less advanced students to work on tasks which respond to their abilities, experience

success and improve their relationship to the English language. More advanced students are not limited in their development.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1:Formulář pro výzkum – Pozorování

Jméno žáka:…………………….   **Aktivita:...**
Kritéria:

1. <u>Porozumění instrukcím:</u> Žák rozuměl instrukcím k aktivitě: a) ano   b) částečně c) ne   Komentář:
2. <u>Míra zapojení žáka do aktivity:</u> Žák vyvinul úsilí zapojit se do aktivity a splnit úkol: a) ano b) spíše ano   c) spíše ne d) ne   Komentář:
3. <u>Samostatnost žáka:</u> Žák pracoval na splnění úkolu samostatně: a) ano b) spíše ano   c) spíše ne d) ne   Komentář:
4. <u>Rozsah práce:</u> Po dobu časového limitu žák splnil úkol: a) ano   b) větší část c) 50% d) menší část   e) ne   Komentář:
5. <u>Využití časového limitu:</u> Žák pracoval po celou dobu: a) ano   b) ne   Komenář:
6. <u>Míra správnosti:</u> Žák řešil úkol správně: a) ano b) větší část c) na 50%   d) menší část e) ne   Komentář:

7. <u>Kázeň:</u> Žák vyrušoval, bavil se:
 	
          a) ano: (důvod) ………………………………………………….
          b) ne

8. Žák odpovídal na otázky učitele: a) ano b) převážně ano c) převážně ne d) ne e) nedopovídal vůbec   Komentář:
9. Žák se zapojil do práce třídy: a) ano b) ne   Komentář:
10. <u>Úspěšnost:</u> Práci žáka během aktivity lze hodnotit jako úspěšnou: a) ano   b) ne   Komentář:

Research Form: Observation

Learner´s   **name:……………………….**
Activity:...
Criteria:

1. <u>Understanding to the instruction:</u> The learner understood the instruction for the activity: a) yes   b) partly   c) no   Comments:
2. <u>Rate of learner´s engagement in the activity:</u> The learner showed effort to join in the activity or to accomplish the task: a) yes   b) rather yes   c) rather no   d) no   Comments:
3. <u>Learner´s independence:</u> The learner worked on accomplishing of the task autonomously.   a) yes   b) rather yes   c) rather no   d) no   Comments:
4. <u>Extent of work:</u> During the time limit, the learner managed to complete work::   a) yes   b) larger part   c) 50%   d) smaller part   e) no   Comments:
5. <u>Exploitation of the time limit:</u> The learner worked for all the time limit: a) yes   b) no   Comments:
6. <u>Ratio of correctness:</u> The learner solved the task correctly: a) yes   b) larger part   c) 50%   d) smaller part   e) no   Comments:
7. Learner´s discipline: The learner disturbed during the activity: a) yes: (reason) …………………………………………………….   b) no
8. The learner answered teacher´s questions correctly: a) yes b) mostly yes c) mostly no d) no   e) did not answer   Comments:
9. The learner joined in work of the class: a) yes   b) no   Comments:
10. <u>Successfulness:</u> Learner´s work during the activity can be evaluated as successful: a) yes   b) no   Comments:

Appendix 2: Teacher´s Journal

Non-differentiated Activities and Tasks

N-D 1: <u>Gap fill – going to</u>

Time	7´
Organizational form	individual work
Instructions	English, Czech
Preparation before, feedback	yes, going to revised before
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour
Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners´ performances	AI: 10/10; correct: 5/10 BI: 10/10; correct: 7/10 CI: 7/10; correct: 0/10
Other comments	CI: hesitates at first, then starts work, the time limit is too short for him, AI, BI – work all the time (AI – absent for 2 weeks before the lesson); checking together after the activity, CI is not interested in correct answers, AI, BI want feedback, then corrected by the teacher

N-D 2: <u>Translation: Czech - English</u>

Time	10´
Organizational form	individual work
Instructions	English, Czech
Preparation before, feedback	yes, some x any, checking
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour
Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners´ performances	AI: 11/11 (2 mistakes: some x any); sits still after finishing BI: 10/11 (1 mistake: some x any; 2 mistakes: vocabulary, 2 mistakes: no subject in the sentence); sits still after finishing CI: 3/11 (many various mistakes: omitted expressions, some x any; not interested in correction AI, BI, CI work all the time limit, not enough time for BI, CI
Other comments	Checking together after the activity, C is not interested, plays with his glasses

N-D 3: <u>Cloze test – gap fill</u>

Time	7´
Organizational form	individual work
Instructions	English
Preparation before, feedback	checking the answers
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, engaged but not very interested

Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners' performances	AI: 20/20; helps her less skilled schoolmate after handing in the exercise, before it checks in the WB BI: all completed; correct:12/20 CI: 4/20 (only 13 items completed); distracted during the activity; does not know what to do and does not ask (found out when checking understanding); Czech instructions added to CI
Other comments	No feedback immediately after the task, however when corrected and given back, B tries to correct mistakes, C is not able on his own.

N-D 4: <u>Divide the expressions into the following groups.</u>

Time	8´
Organizational form	individual work
Instructions	English, Czech
Preparation before, feedback	checking answers
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, engaged, interested
Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners' performances	AI: 30/30; finishes before the limit, helps a less skilled girl sitting next to her BI: 30/30, works all the time limit CI: 17/30, but only 12 placed correctly
Other comments	CI is not interested in the results when checked together

N-D 5: <u>Ask your friend, take turns: (Q + A)</u>

Time	10´
Organizational form	pair work
Instructions	English, Czech
Preparation before, feedback	yes – answering the questions
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, some do not do the task, just chat in Czech
Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners' performances	AI + a C group learner: AI helps her, they cooperate and both answer all questions (AI correctly, they are first in the class, after finishing, the sit still BI + a C group learner: answers all questions with some mistakes (word order), BI helps the partner, who has a lot of difficulties CI + a C group learner: they do not cooperate at first, C looks at the questions but plays with glasses, after the teacher´s exhortation they start working, however, they do only 1st question, speak Czech
Other comments	

N-D 6: <u>Reading</u>

Time	15´
Organizational form	individual work
Instructions	English
Preparation before, feedback	checking answers
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour
Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners´ performances	AI: answers all questions right: 8/8 (words) BI: answers 6/8 correct (words) CI: answers 1st and 2nd question – correct (words)
Other comments	AI, BI work all the time, A is ready first, CI works at the beginning, then looks around, asks about the vocabulary, borrows a dictionary, not enough time for C

N-D 7: <u>Dictation</u>

Time	10´
Organizational form	individual work
Instructions	English
Preparation before, feedback	checking after the task
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, engaged, not very interested
Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners´ performances	AI: 16/17 + 2 words omitted, 4 words misspelt BI: 13/17 + 7 words omitted, 2 words misspelt CI: He did not write the dictation, he wrote translation, the result is unfinished sentences in Czech; looks anxious and desperate because he cannot manage to do it and other and other sentences are coming whereas he cannot finish the previous ones.
Other comments	

N-D 8: <u>Writing:</u> Write a text about your daily programme and daily meals.

Time	15´
Organizational form	individual work
Instructions	English, Czech
Preparation before, feedback	yes, ideas, possible solution, answering teacher´s questions
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, engaged but not enthusiastic
Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners´ performances	AI: writes an elaborate text with many details, 18 sentences, mistakes in articles BI: write a text consisting of 10 sentences – not finished CI: Starts from the middle, writes only about meals; incorrect word order, the teacher helps with the first sentence, because the boy does not know how to say

	that he does not have anything for breakfast, the teacher gave him a pattern how to write the sentences. Result: 4 sentences
Other comments	All actively contribute to the class work.

N-D 9: Match exercise

Time	5´
Organizational form	individual work
Instructions	English
Preparation before, feedback	checking answers
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, engaged, not very interested
Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners´ performances	AI: 9/9, helps her schoolmate after finishing BI: 9/9 CI: 3/9; no correct answer, problems to read it out, is not even able to match during collective checking, it is too fast for him 0/9
Other comments	checking with the class

N-D 10: Class survey

Time	25´
Organizational form	whole class work, interactions S-S
Instructions	Czech
Preparation before, feedback	questions trained in advance
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, some chat in Czech, most engaged
Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners´ performances	AI: 11 answers (14 people present) – makes English questions BI: 8 answers – makes English questions CI: 8 answers – Asks just: Breakfast? Lunch? Later: copies from other learners´ lists
Other comments	Instr.: Find out what your classmates have for a) breakfast, b) lunch, c) dinner; write down your findings in the chart and then make the summary for the class, pointed out that everybody must speak to everybody to get enough information for the survey.

Differentiated Activities and Tasks

D 1(choice): <u>Answer at least 3 questions. You can start with any question.</u>

Time	10´
Organizational form	individual work; written answers
Instructions	English + Czech
Preparation before, feedback	yes: answering some of the questions
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, engaged but not especially interested
Choice of variety	no – but choice of items
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners´ performances	AI: 10/10 – sentences (some errors) BI: 7/10 – sentences (some mistakes) 4th – 10th q. CI: 6/10 – 1 sentence (correct), 5 x words (correct)
Other comments	

D 2: (variation in load of work): <u>Ask as many people in the class as you can; write down their answers:</u>

Time	25´
Organizational form	whole class, S-S interaction
Instructions	Czech
Preparation before, feedback	ensuring that all learners understand the questions, reading sentences
Class atmosphere	no discipline problem, some chat in Czech, most engaged
Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners´ performances	AI: Asks 7 people (helps her less skilled classmate) BI: Asks 8 people CI: Asks about meaning of the questions, then asks Czech, copies other learners´ charts. After the work: AI, BI make sentences, not CI.
Other comments	Pointed out that it is not necessary to ask all classmates. CI – lost interest during the activity, does not pay attention. 15 learners in the class.

D 3: <u>Vocabulary food</u> **(group work, raising interest through time constraint)**

Time	5 x 1 min. + 5 min. for group work
Organizational form	individual work, group work, whole class checking
Instructions	English, Czech
Preparation before, feedback	checking answers
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, engaged
Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners´ performances	AI: 20 items; her group 31 items BI: 24 items; her group 37 items CI: 17 items; his group 32 items, fully engaged, enthusiastic

Other comments	All learners interested in results and what items had the others.

D 4: (Restaurant menu)

Time	15´
Organizational form	individual work
Instructions	English + Czech
Preparation before, feedback	ideas, sharing results of the work
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, engaged
Choice of variety	yes: the learners chose the same as in the previous task; (an A group learner – wants b, a B group learner wants a, a B learner who was ill chooses C)
Satisfaction with the choice	fully
Sample learners´ performances	AI – finishes all a), b), c), d) tasks – (4 sentences) BI – finishes all a), b), c), tasks CI – finishes all a), b) tasks (some spelling mistakes+ asks if he can go on → finishes c), 3 sentences: not perfect, but good, meaningful and intelligible
Other comments	Advised not to concern with a graphic layout. Eager to share their menu with the classmates.

D 5: Picture description, spotting the difference

Time	15´
Organizational form	individual work, then whole class – checking
Instructions	English, Czech
Preparation before, feedback	yes: prepositions, there is/ there are, checking answers
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, engaged
Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners´ performances	AI: finds 14 differences, writes sentences BI: finds 5 differences, writes sentences CI: finds 11 differences, uses words: some English, some Czech – fully engaged in the activity.
Other comments	All class enthusiastically work from the very beginning of the time limit, some ask if they must speak English.

D 6: Writing. **(varies in difficulty, personalization)**

Time	15´+ the learners asked for some more time, because they would like to go on; some insisted on finishing at home
Organizational form	class work, individual work
Instructions	Czech
Preparation before, feedback	ideas
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, engaged
Choice of variety	yes: according to the previous choice
Satisfaction with the choice	fully
Sample learners´ performances	AI: 22/24 (well elaborated text, weekdays + weekend); wants to continue at home

	BI: 21/25 (the same as AI)
	CI: 16/17 (simple sentences, covers all the day; a weekday)
Other comments	Motivated: I really look for your texts, try to write as a long text as possible. Even D group learners were engaged and working all the time.

D 7: What am I thinking of? Ask the teacher.

Time	6´
Organizational form	whole class – T
Instructions	English, Czech (however the learners are familiar with this activity)
Preparation before, feedback	possible questions
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, engaged, very interested
Choice of variety	no
Satisfaction with the choice	-
Sample learners´ performances	A I: actively engaged, asks relevant questions to narrow the
	range of possibilities and get to the solution.
	B I: actively engaged, asks relevant questions to narrow the
	range of possibilities and get to the solution.
	C I: watches and listens carefully, interested in the task,
	looks interested, but does not ask any questions
Other comments	

D8: three levels of difficulty

Reading – more or less tasks: Can you cook?

Time	15´
Organizational form	individual work
Instructions	Czech
Preparation before, feedback	checking answers
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, some try to cooperate with their classmates engaged
Choice of variety	yes; according to the previous choice
Satisfaction with the choice	fully
Sample learners´ performances	AI: 14/14
	BI: 6/8
	CI: 1/5 (messed up with the number of materials, needed teacher´s help to start work, started later, tried to copy his neighbour´s answers)
Other comments	encouraged to go on if they are ready with their task

D9: Gap Fill – for vocabulary:

Time	10´
Organizational form	individual work
Instructions	English, Czech
Preparation before, feedback	checking answers

Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, engaged
Choice of variety	yes
Satisfaction with the choice	yes
Sample learners´ performances	AI – chooses a) – 18/22 – first ready, all gaps filled BI – chooses b) - 18/22 – writes all the time, all gaps filled CI – chooses c) -17/22 – writes all the time, all gaps filled
Other comments	The learners were informed that there are 3 varieties of difficulty, they were asked to choose the level, nearly all learners in the class chose the level according to the level I divided them for the purpose of this research (of course, they do not know about it); a B girl who was absent for a long time chose C level (next lesson she chose B), an A boy chose C, a B boy chose A.

D 10: Dictation

Time	10´
Organizational form	individual work, T-S
Instructions	English
Preparation before, feedback	checking answers
Class atmosphere	no discipline problems, no disruptive behaviour, engaged
Choice of variety	yes, according to the previous choice
Satisfaction with the choice	yes
Sample learners´ performances	AI – 10/10 sentences (2 words omitted, 3 words misspelt) BI - 26/26 gaps (no word omitted, 8 words misspelt) CI – 16/18 gaps (1 wrong word, 2 words misspelt)
Other comments	Some other learners changed their previous choice

Appendix 3: Activities and Tasks

Non-differentiated Tasks

Non-differentiated task 1 (N-D 1):
<u>Gap fill</u>
a) Complete the sentences with appropriate forms of to be going to:
1. Mum .... to make potato soup. 2. We .... have a game of table tennis. 3. What .... you .... do? 4. .... Dad .... have pizza or a hamburger? 5. I .... have spaghetti with tomato soup and cheese. 6. Mum and Dad .... buy a new house. 7. Lucy .... read a book this evening. 8. .... you .... come to the party? 9. My brother and I .... bake some cookies. 10. They .... travel a lot during the holiday.

Non-differentiate task 2 (N-D 2):
<u>Translation:</u>
Já nemám žádné peníze. V ledničce je nějaké máslo, ale není tam žádné mléko. Máme nějaké banány? Potřebuji nějaký sýr. Maminka nemá žádný džem. Koupíme nějakou zmrzlinu. Nemám pro vás žádné jídlo. Máte nějakou zeleninu? Máme nějaká rajčata, ale nemáme žádné papriky.

Non-differentiated task 3 (N-D 3):
<u>Cloze test</u>
Fill in suitable expressions. Use the cues: a, a, and, any, at, at, at, doesn´t, don´t, don´t, drink,
from, have, in, is, likes, not, orange, to, with
Breakfast
Breakfast is .... very important daily meal. It .... the best start of your day. People .... breakfast .... the morning. You can eat .... home or out. My breakfast is usually................ 7 o´clock .... Monday .... Friday. .... weekends it is later. I like eggs, bread with butter .... ham, or jam. My favourite .... is cocoa and black tea .... sugar and lemon juice. I .... like cereals with milk. My mum likes coffee with milk and sugar, but she .... like .... juice. She .... mineral water. .... lot of people .... have breakfast at all. It is .... good, because they don´t get .... energy for the day.

Non-differentiated task 4 (N-D 4):
Divide the expressions into the following groups.
<u>Drinks</u>   <u>Fruit</u>   <u>Vegetables</u>   <u>Diary products</u>   <u>Meat products</u>   <u>Desserts</u>

fruit salad with cream, banana, Coca Cola, burger, broccoli, chocolate cake, tomato, butter, coffee, strawberries, cucumber, tea, apple, sticky toffee pudding, sausages, lemonade, yoghurt, carrot, cheese, orange, ham, cream, steak, milk, salami, cherries, pepper, juice, apple pie, ice-cream with hot raspberries

Non-differentiated task 5 (N-D 5):
Ask your friend, take turns:
1. What is your favourite meal?
2. How much fruit and vegetables do you eat a week?
3. How many milk products do you eat a week?
4. What did you have for breakfast, lunch and dinner yesterday?
5. Can you cook anything?

Non-differentiated task 6 (N-D 6): Reading

Meals and Meal Times

The first meal of the day is breakfast. The traditional British breakfast is very big: bacon, eggs, sausages, tomatoes, mushrooms, baked beans and fried bread! But nowadays people don´t usually cook a big breakfast every morning – they only have a cooked breakfast on Sundays, or when they stay in a hotel. Most people have a light breakfast. These are some of the typical things that people have for breakfast: toast with jam, honey or marmalade, cereal with milk and sugar, fruit (Grapefruit is very popular.), yoghurt, orange juice, coffee or tea.

Between 12 o ´clock people have lunch. This is often a light meal or soup, sandwiches, and/or salad. Most children have their lunch at school. They can take sandwiches from home or they can buy food at the school cafeteria.

The main meal of the day is dinner. People eat this between six and seven o´clock in the evening. A traditional dinner is meat or fish with potatoes and vegetables, but many people nowadays cook foreign food, and lots of people are vegetarians, as well. Pasta and pizzas are very popular, and Indian food, such as curry with rice. Chinese food is also a favourite. There are lots of cookery programmes on TV and people like to try new dishes. After the main course some people have dessert (also called 'pudding') – such as fruit, chocolate cake, or apple pie with icecream or custard. In some Areas of Britain 'lunch' is called 'dinner', and 'dinner' is called 'tea' or 'supper'.

(Taken from Project 2, 2nd edition, p. 77, Tom Hutchinson)
Answer the questions to the text.
1. What´s the first meal of day?
2. What is in the traditional British breakfast?
3. What do people have for breakfast nowadays?
4. What do people usually have for lunch?
5. What time do people have dinner?
6. What food is popular nowadays?
7. What is called 'pudding' in Britain?
8. What is supper?

Non-differentiated task 7 (N-D 7): Dictation

I wasn´t at school yesterday. I was ill. I head a headache and a temperature. I got up at seven o´clock and felt sick. I was at home, stayed in bed and watched TV. I didn´t eat anything, but I drank a lot of tea with lemon juice. Mum came home at 3 pm and gave me some medicine. I felt better. I was hungry. I had chicken with vegetables and potatoes. It´s my favourite meal. I eat a lot of fruit too. I like bananas and oranges. I don´t like mushrooms and I hate milk soup.

Non-differentiated task 8 (N-D 8): Text:

Write a text about your daily programme and daily meals.

Non-differentiated task 9 (N-D 9): Match exercise

Match the beginnings and endings of sentences.

Can I have a cup	with my family at 7 pm.
What can	anything to drink?
Do you want	of tea and apple pie with icecream?
Small or	our school canteen.
I am going	on my pizza.
I like ham, tomatoes and a lot of cheese	I do for you?
I have dinner	for my breakfast.
I have lunch at	to have fish and chips and tomato salad.
I usually have a roll with butter and jam, a cup of coffee and a glass of juice	large?

Non-differentiated task 10 (N-D 10):
Find out what your classmates have for a) breakfast, b) lunch, c) dinner; write down your findings in the chart and then make the summary for the class.

	breakfast	lunch	dinner
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

Differentiated Tasks

Differentiated Task 1 (D 1): (choice)
Answer at least 3 questions. You can start with any question:
1. How much fruit and vegetables do you eat in a week?
2. How many packets of crisps and sweets do you eat in a week?
3. How many milk products do you eat in a week?
4. What´s your favourite food?
5. What´s your favourite drink?
6. What food or meal do you hate?
7. What do you have for breakfast?

8. What do you have for lunch?
9. What do you have for dinner?
10. What meal can you make?

Differentiated Task 2 (D 2): (variation in load of work)
Ask as many people in the class as you can; write down their answers:
1. What´s your favourite kind of fruit?
2. What´s your favourite drink?
3. What´s your favourite kind of meat?
4. What´s your favourite kind of ice-cream?
5. What´s your favourite restaurant?
6. What´s your favourite kind of pizza?

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.

Write down sentences about the people: e.g.: David´s favourite kind of fruit is ....

Differentiated task 3 (D 3): (group work, raising interest through time constraint)
Try to recollect as many names of food as you can; share your ideas with your team.
a) vegetables
b) fruit
c) meat products
d) diary products
e) drinks
(1 minute for each topic), which team has got most items, wins.

Differentiated task 4 (D 4): (from easier to more complex task, variation in difficulty)
Version A.
Design a menu for your restaurant. 1.There should be at least two items for breakfast, lunch, dinner, drinks, and desserts. If you can, you can have more. 2. Think about a name for your restaurant. 3. You can also add prices to each items. 4. Try to write down some sentences to attract your customers.
Version B.
Design a menu for your restaurant. 1.There should be at least two items for breakfast, lunch, dinner, drinks, and desserts. If you can, you can have more. 2. Think about a name for your restaurant. 3. You can also add prices to each items.
Version C.
Design a menu for your restaurant. 1.There should be at least two items for breakfast, lunch, dinner, drinks, and desserts. If you can, you can have more.
(Navrhněte menu pro vaši restauraci. Uveďte alespoň dvě varianty pro snídani, oběd, večeři, nápoje a zákusky. Ale můžete i více.)

Differentiated task 5 (D 5): (picture description, spotting the difference, a type of open ended task, learners use language according to their level)
Describe the picture, spot the differences.

Differentiated task 6 (D 6): (varies in difficulty, personalisation)
Version A., B. Write a text of at least 100 words about your daily programme and daily meals. Of course, more is welcome.
Version C. Napište text o vašem denním režimu, tabulka slouží jako nápověda:

I Lessons	get up have go start do read play clean watch listen to	breakfast lunch dinner homework shopping a shower my teeth PC games TV, films music	out to school home	at ....

Differentiated task 7 (D 7): (learners make easy or more complex questions).
What am I thinking of? Ask the teacher. (warmer)
The teacher says: I am thinking of something. Guess, what it is.
Example: Is it a thing? Is it an animal? Does it eat grass? Does it live in Europe?

Differentiated task 8 (D 8): (three levels of difficulty)
Reading

Version A: Reading with both exercises to the text.
Version B: Reading with one or both exercises.
Version c: Reading with an alternative exercise (easier questions) + vocabulary:
Answer the questions about the text
1. What is the boy´s name?
2. What can he do?
3. What does he do from 5.30 to 6.30 from Monday to Friday?
4. What did the boy do yesterday?
5. Is his mum happy?

(Vocabulary: meet – setkávat se, something different – něco jiného, important – důležitý, skills – dovednosti, cookery book – kuchařská kniha, none of – nikdo z, difficult – obtížný)

Differentiated task 9 (D 9): variation in difficulty
Gap Fill – for vocabulary:
Version A
Fill in the gaps with appropriate verbs.
Every day from Monday to Friday I _____ at seven o´clock. I _____ a shower at 5 past 7. Then I _____ to the kitchen and _____ breakfast. It _____ usually a slice of bread with butter and jam, and a cup of tea. Then I _____ to school. Lessons _____ at 8 o´clock. I _____ school at half past two and _____ home. I _____ lunch here. Then, I _____ my room, _____ my homework, and _____ our dog for a walk. After that I _____ some shopping and _____ out with my friends. We usually _____ football.

In the evening I _____ TV or _____ Geography or History for the next day. We _____ dinner at about 7 p.m. Then I _____ a book or _____ to my friend on the internet. I _____ to sleep at 9 o´clock.

Version B
Fill in the gaps with appropriate verbs. Use the cue:
go   talk   take   do   learn   get up   watch   go out   finish   read   learn   is   clean   start   finish
Every day from Monday to Friday I _____ at seven o´clock. I _____ a shower at 5 past 7. Then I _____ to the kitchen and _____ breakfast. It _____ usually a slice of bread with butter and jam, and a cup of tea. Then I _____ to school. Lessons _____ at 8 o´clock. I _____ school at half past two and _____ home. I _____ lunch here. Then, I _____ my room, _____ my homework, and _____ our dog for a walk. After that I _____ some shopping and _____ out with my friends. We usually _____ football.
In the evening I _____ TV or _____ Geography or History for the next day. We _____ dinner at about 7 p.m. Then I _____ a book or _____ to my friend on the internet. I _____ to sleep at 9 o´clock.

Version C
Doplňte mezery v textu vhodnými slovesy. Nápověda je uvedena v závorkách. Začněte prvním odstavcem a poskuste se i o další odstavce.
a) Every day from Monday to Friday I _____ at seven o´clock. I _____ a shower at 5 past 7. Then I _____ to the kitchen and _____ breakfast. It _____ usually a slice of bread with butter and jam, and a cup of tea.
(**have, go, get up, take, is, have**)

b) Then I _____ to school. Lessons _____ at 8 o´clock. I _____ school at half past two and _____ home. I _____ lunch here. Then, I _____ my room, _____ my homework, and _____ our dog for a walk. After that I _____ some shopping and _____ out with my friends. We usually _____ football.
(**clean, go, finish, start, take, play, do, have**)

c) In the evening I _____ TV or _____ Geography or History for the next day. We _____ dinner at about 7 p.m. Then I _____ a book or _____ to my friend on the internet. I _____ to sleep at 9 o´clock.
(**go, learn, have, watch, talk, read**)

Differentiated task 10 (D 10): (variation in difficulty)
Dictation
Teacher´s version:
Do you like icecream? I do. My favourite one is strawberry. I also like chocolate, vanilla or banana. Icecream comes from Italy. People make it from milk, eggs, fruit, and sugar. You can make your own icecream. You need 250 g of strawberries, five spoons of sugar, half a litre of cream. Mash the strawberries in a bowl, add the sugar and mix it with whipped

cream. Put the mixture into the fridge. Wait for two hours and the icecream is ready. Icecream is good in summer.

Version A:
The learners write all the dictation without any support.

Version B:
Do .... icecream? I .... My .... one is .... I also ...., vanilla or .... Icecream .... People .... it from ...., ..., ..., and .... You .... your own icecream. You .... grams of ...., five ...., half a litre of .... Mash ...., add the .... and mix it with .... Put the .... Wait for .... and the icecream is .... Icecream is .... in .... You .... it with ...., ..., wafers and whipped .... You .... a lot of sorts in .... If .... too much icecream, you can ....

Version C:
Do you like ....? I do. My favourite one is .... I also like ...., vanilla or .... Icecream comes .... Italy. People make it from ...., eggs, ..., and sugar. You can .... your own icecream. You need 250 g of ...., five spoons of ...., half a litre of cream. .... the strawberries in a ...., add the sugar and .... it with whipped cream. Put the mixture into the .... Wait for .... hours and the icecream is .... Icecream is .... in .... You can .... it with chocolate, ..., wafers and whipped cream. You can .... a lot of kinds in supermarkets. If you eat too much icecream, you can have a ....

D5 Worksheet

Spot the Differences: Food in the Kitchen

Look at the two pictures of the chef in the kitchen. Circle as many differences as you can and then write the differences below.

(1) *In picture A, there is a jar of jam on the table.*
    In picture B, there is a jar of peanut butter on the table.

(2) _____
    _____

(3) _____
    _____

(4) _____
    _____

(5) _____
    _____

(6) _____
    _____

(7) _____
    _____

(8) _____
    _____

http://bogglesworldesl.com/spotthedifferences.htm

D8 Worksheet

LearnEnglish Teens
Reading skills practice: Can you cook? – exercises

Read the article about Tom and do the exercises to practise and improve your reading skills.

Preparation

Fill the gaps with the correct word from the box.

cook	teenager	skill	homework	difficult	recipe

1.   A _____ is someone who is between thirteen and nineteen years old.

2.   Teachers give you _____ to do at home before the next lesson.

3.   When you _____ a meal, you make hot food.

4.   A _____ is something you learn how to do, like using a computer.

5.   The instructions you follow to make a meal are called a _____.

6.   Some subjects are easy but others are _____.

CAN YOU COOK?

This teenager can — and his mum's very happy with him

Tom is like any other teenager. He goes to school, does his homework, meets his friends and enjoys doing sport.

But between 5.30 and 6.30 from Monday to Friday, Tom does something different. He cooks dinner for all the family: mum, dad, younger brother Joe and older sister Emma.

Tom in the kitchen

❝ I think it's important for teenagers to learn how to cook. Maths and English are important, of course, but they need other skills too to help them in today's world.

First I taught Tom how to cook easy meals like pizza or egg and chips. Then he started using recipes in my cookery books. Yesterday he made vegetable soup. It was very good!

Tom's mum

❝ I love cooking and I think I'm really good at it. None of my friends cook. I don't know why, it isn't difficult and it's great fun!

Tom

In the past, Tom didn't help out at home and his mum wasn't very happy with him. Today, things are different and she is very happy.

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1. Check your understanding: true or false
Circle *True* or *False* for these sentences.

1.	Tom does one thing that teenagers don't normally do.	*True*	*False*
2.	Tom is the only person who eats the food he cooks.	*True*	*False*
3.	Tom's mum was happier when he didn't cook.	*True*	*False*
4.	Tom's mum thinks learning to cook is good for teenagers.	*True*	*False*
5.	Tom learned some recipes from his grandmother.	*True*	*False*
6.	Tom's vegetable soup was not good.	*True*	*False*
7.	Tom says he is a good cook.	*True*	*False*
8.	Tom's friends like cooking too now.	*True*	*False*

2. Check your understanding: multiple choice
Circle the meaning of the word in CAPITALS in these sentences from the reading text above.

1.	Today things are different and SHE is very happy.	a. Tom's mum b. Tom's sister
2.	Maths and English are important, of course, but THEY need other skills too to help THEM in today's world.	a. Maths and English b. teenagers
3.	Yesterday he made vegetable soup. IT was very good!	a. Tom b. the soup
4.	He started using recipes in MY cookery books.	a. Tom's mum's b. Tom's
5.	I love cooking and I think I'm really good at IT.	a. cooking b. being a teenager
6.	IT isn't difficult and IT's great fun!	a. cooking b. doing homework

Discussion
What can you cook?

https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/sites/teens/files/can_you_cook_-_exercises_0.pdf

SHRNUTÍ

Diplomová práce se zabývá výukou anglického jazyka probíhající ve třídách, ve kterých jsou společně vzdělávání žáci disponující různými schopnostmi a vytvářením aktivit pro tento typ tříd. Teoretická část definuje tento typ třídy a vysvětluje, v jakých rysech se liší od heterogenních tříd a jaké výhody a nevýhody tyto třídy poskytují svým žákům i vyučujícím. Zároveň uvádí problémy, které se v těchto třídách objevují. Tyto problémy pramení z toho důvodu, že se žáci nacházejí na rozdílných jazykových úrovních. Dále jsou popsány skutečnosti, které negativně ovlivňují osvojování anglického jazyka žáky a jsou příčinou jejich obtíží. Další část této kapitoly se zaměřuje na hledání řešení problémů, které se v těchto třídách objevují, uvádí strategie vhodné pro vytváření aktivit a úkolů ve třídách s žáky s různými schopnostmi, dosahujících různých jazykových úrovní. Zároveň jsou zde uváděny vzdělávací teorie, které byly východiskem pro tyto strategie. Praktická část se snaží hodnotit vhodnost a účinnost diferencovaných aktivit a porovnává je s nediferencovanými aktivitami. Vychází z údajů získaných při pozorování výkonů žáků v průběhu akčního výzkumu. Výsledky výzkumu naznačují směr, kterým by se měla výuka anglického jazyka ubírat, aby byly uspokojovány potřeby žáků na různých jazykových úrovních v jedné třídě.