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**PROMOTING LEARNER-
CENTREDNESS IN ELT**

THESIS

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**PODPORA VYUČOVÁNÍ
ZAMĚŘENÉHO NA ŽÁKA**

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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Abstrakt

The thesis deals with teaching English with the focus on the learner, it depicts recently popular trend called learner-centredness. In the theoretical part, major trends in 20th century English language teaching are presented and development of learner-centred principles is analyzed. Also learner-centred classroom is described, the role of teacher and learner, the management of teaching and learning processes, moreover advantages and potential problems are presented. The practical part introduces a research aimed at discovering the perception and realization of learner-centred principles by elementary school teachers. Furthermore, the influence of learner-centred principles on activation of pupils is verified. Results of the research are analyzed and evaluated.

Diplomová práce se zabývá vyučováním zaměřeným na žáka, zobrazuje moderní trend nazývaný "learner-centredness". V teoretické části je prezentován vývoj hlavních trendů ve vyučování Anglického jazyka ve dvacátém století a diskutován vývoj principů na žáka zaměřeného vyučování. Pozornost bude především věnována roli učitele a žáka, řízení a organizaci procesů učení a vyučování a v neposlední řadě také výhodám a možným limitům, souvisejícím s tímto typem vyučování. Cílem výzkumu, který je prezentován v praktické části, je zmapovat jak jsou principy na žáka zaměřeného vyučování vnímány a realizovány učiteli na základních školách. Dalším úkolem je zjistit, jestli výše zmiňované principy působí na aktivizaci žáků při výuce angličtiny. Výsledky výzkumu jsou analyzována a zhodnoceny.

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1. Introduction

The diploma paper is concerned with learner-centredness phenomenon and its promotion. The thesis is divided into two parts, theoretical and practical. In the theoretical part, major trends in language teaching will be discussed. Afterwards, the development of learner-centred principles will be described. This development is specified by introducing concrete language teaching methods and theories. Features of those methods will be analyzed in order to trace the learner-centred principles.

Next part is devoted to detailed analysis of previously mentioned principles, which will be divided into five groups. The principles will be examined from several viewpoints and the importance of their implementation into the teaching/learning process will be underlined and supported by many educators.

Detailed study of teachers' and learners' roles will be also delivered, as well as the discussion concerning advantages and possible problems of implementing the learner-centred principles into the classroom. The last chapter of the theoretical part will be devoted to management and organization of teaching and learning processes in the learner-centred classroom.

The aim of the practical part of the thesis is to discover teachers' attitudes towards learner-centredness and also the actual realization of the discussed principles in the English language classroom. Six elementary school teachers will be examined. I intend to use two research methods: structured observation and questionnaire. Self-designed observation sheets and questionnaires will be used to provide the desirable information. Five lessons by each teacher will be observed, which corresponds to total amount of thirty observed lessons. After gathering the needed data, the analysis will be done. One chapter will be devoted to illustrate the overall degree of learner-centredness in observed lessons. Furthermore, the results of observations will be compared with teachers' attitudes towards learner-centred principles and possible conclusions will be made.

The question, whether learner-centred activities influence pupils' active engagement, will be also examined. Total number of activities with high degree of active engagement will be analyzed from the viewpoint of learner-centredness to find out whether learner-centred activity may more influence the activation of pupils than teacher-oriented. Afterwards, activities with high degree of learner-centredness will be examined exclusively to discover

how many of them encouraged active engagement of pupils. The results will be then presented and discussed.

Finally, the whole thesis will be summarized and evaluated in the conclusion.

2. Major approaches in 20th century language teaching

In the first chapter of my thesis I would like to briefly describe the major trends and theories which appeared in the 20th century in language teaching. I intend to display the attitudes towards second language learning through the methods and ways of teaching that emerged during the previous century. I assume that it is very important to go through the development of language teaching in order to understand major attitudes towards it and to analyze the process of forming the learner-centered principles.

The requirements imposed on students of languages undoubtedly went through many changes throughout the 20th century. Attitudes towards learning languages are mostly reflected in teaching methods. This fact can be confirmed by the following citation saying that

changes in language teaching methods throughout history have reflected recognition of changes in the kind of proficiency learners need, such as a move towards oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension as the goal of language study, they have also reflected changes in theories of the nature of language and of language learning. (Richards and Rodgers 1986:1)

Principal method predominantly used during the 19th century, though still popular in the 20th century, was focused on learning grammatical structures. Stern says that

in the nineteenth century grammar-translation was considered by practitioners as a necessary preliminary to the study of literary works, and even if that goal was not reached grammar-translation was regarded as an educationally valid mental discipline in its own right. Grammar-translation lays little or no emphasis on the speaking of the language or listening to second language speech; it is a mainly book-oriented method of working out and learning the grammatical system of the language.” (Stern, 1991:454)

The focus was put on grammar and translating since the purpose of language study was reading. “Earlier in this century, the grammar-translation method was used for the purpose of helping students read and appreciate foreign language literature.” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:11) Therefore new language theories arose throughout the 20th century to satisfy new needs of second language learners. In spite of this fact

Grammar Translation dominated European and foreign language teaching from the 1840s to the 1940s and in modified form is continues to be widely used in some parts of the world today. (Richards and Rodgers 1986:4)

Translation techniques were still widely practiced and it should be also admitted that various principles and fragments of grammar-translation method are still used nowadays.

Significant development and move towards modernization of teaching languages is apparent already towards the end of the 19th century. Innovative attempts in language teaching

approaches come with the publication of IPA (International Phonetic Association) documents.

As Stern describes:

“The six articles of International Phonetic Association (henceforth referred as IPA articles) were a brief declaration of principles of L2 teaching which were formulated in the eighteen eighties at the beginning of the modern era and appeared on every issue of the review of the IPA, *Le Maitre Phonetique*.” (Stern, 1991:89)

This document brought a different view on language teaching and its principles “have remained an important strand of language teaching thought during the 20th century, particularly so in Western Europe.” (Stern, 1991:92) The contemporary significance of the IPA articles lies first of all in “the emphasis on the spoken language and the attention to pronunciation” (Stern, 1991:93) The introduction of phonetics into the language pedagogy is closely linked with the development of the Direct method, since both phonetics and the Direct method emphasized the use of the spoken language. (Stern, 1991: 457) The Direct method can be easily put into contrast with the grammar-translation method. “The Direct method has one very basic rule: No translation is allowed.”(Larsen-Freeman, 2000:23) The purpose of the direct method and the reason why it became popular is its aim: prepare the students to use the target language communicatively. (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:23) However, several limitations of this method were recognized, it was often criticized because it “failed to consider the practical realities of the classroom and it lacked a rigorous basis in applied linguistic theory.”(Richards and Rodgers 1986:10)

Another approach which appeared in the twenties of the 20th century and put the main emphasis on reading was called the reading method. A study called Coleman report

advocated that a more reasonable goal for a foreign language course should be a reading knowledge of a foreign language, achieved through the gradual introduction of words and grammatical structures in simple reading texts. (Richards and Rodgers 1986:11)

In spite of the fact that “this theory was advocated by some British and American educators” it was at the same time “criticized mostly retrospectively during the World War II when speaking languages became a national priority in the U.S.A.”(Stern, 1991: 461)

To continue through the century we come to another language teaching theory which was popular in the sixties. Audiolingualism or audio-lingual method has its origin in America, whereas “the principal methods of the first half of the century (the grammar-translation and direct method) had largely developed in the European school systems.” (Stern, 1991: 462) The audio-lingual method “has a strong theoretical base in linguistics and in psychology”, to

be more specific, “structural linguistics and principles from behavioral psychology were incorporated.”(Larsen-Freeman, 2000:35) When we are talking about the objectives of this method:

The dominant emphasis is placed on “the fundamental skills”, i.e., listening and speaking. While reading and writing are not neglected, listening and speaking are given priority and in the teaching sequence precede reading and writing. Like the direct method, audiolingualism tries to develop target language skills without reference to the mother tongue...and language learning, in the first instance, was viewed as the acquisition of a practical set of communicative skills. (Stern, 1991: 464)

The audio-lingual techniques are based mainly on drills and memorization since audio linguists tried to make language learning more or less a matter of habituation and imitation. They believed that “more often something is repeated, the stronger the habit and the greater the learning.”(Larsen-Freeman, 2000:43) The learners seem to have only a little control over the content, pace or style of learning (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 56), which may lead us to conclusion that prevailing tendency of this approach is teacher-centred.

After a period of time, the theoretical basis of audiolingualism “was found to be weak, but also in practical terms its hopes had not been fulfilled.”(Stern, 1991:465) According to Stern, the positive contribution of this method to language teaching is firstly the fact, that

it was among the first theories to recommend the development of a language teaching theory on declared linguistic and psychological principles. Secondly, it attempted to make language learning accessible to large groups of ordinary learners...Last, it developed the separation of the language skills into a pedagogical device. (Stern.1991:465)

Almost at the same time, audiovisual method developed in France in the fifties. To describe it briefly, it has to be pointed out that “the audiovisual method stresses the social nature and situational embeddedness of language.”(Stern, 1991:467) The language teaching is connected with the presentation of visual images, film strips and tape-recordings. “The visual presentation is intended to simulate the social context in which language is used.” (Stern, 1991:468)

All previously mentioned methods definitely contributed to the development of language teaching. However, they have two major weaknesses:

One is that they represent a relatively fixed combination of language teaching beliefs, and another is that they are characterized by the over-emphasis on single aspects as the central issue of language teaching and learning.(Stern, 1991:473)

In the sixties and seventies, further development in language teaching can be registered. New trends came to existence and new methods have aroused interest among

teachers and the general public. “Many free, open and ‘alternative’ schools appeared which were inspired by the theory emphasizing the internal development of a child.”(Bertrand, 1998:17) From this point on, we can recognize that the educational theories and trends became more learner-oriented.

2.1 The development of learner-centered principles

The new trends, beginning with the Cognitive Approach, brought many new ideas and attitudes towards language teaching and from this point forward it would not be so difficult to trace out the learner-centered principles among the new methods and theories. Cognitive theory which appeared in the early seventies “is principally a critique of audiolingualism in the light of changes in linguistic and psycholinguistic theory.”(Stern 1991: 471) Linguist Noam Chomsky claimed, that “language must not be considered a product of habit formation, but rather of rule formation.”(Larsen-Freeman 2000:53)

Cognitive Approach, as the name prompts, puts the emphasis on human cognition. Certain degree of learner-centeredness lies in the fact that

rather than simply being responsive to stimuli in the environment, learners were seen to be much more actively responsible for their own learning, engaged in formulating hypotheses in order to discover the rules of the target language. (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:53)

The learning process depends much more on the individual learner; the learner has the power and responsibility to influence his or her own learning. The cognitive approaches view the learner as an active and influential participant in the learning process whereas behavioristic theories are interested in the way how the environment impacts overt behavior. Behaviorism monitors the overt behavior of a person and does not take in account the inner qualities, the learner is viewed as a passive object adapting to the environment. As Bertrand claims:

Cognitive theories are more interested in the mental processes while behaviorists examine how the environment influences learning and particularly functional relations between pedagogical environment and human behavior. (Bertrand, 1998: 18)

To summarize it, the behavioristic principles and beliefs are more distant from learner-centeredness than cognitive theories. Then it is evident that the learner-centered principles could be traced in cognitivism rather than in behavioristic theories.

The Silent Way developed by Gattegno in the sixties “did not stem directly from the Cognitive Approach, but it shares certain principles with it. (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:53) The

basic principle of this method is “that teaching should be subordinated to learning.” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:54) The important fact is that Gattegno saw the process of the language learning from the position of the learner. As Larsen-Freeman claims:

Gattegno concluded that learning is a process which we initiate by ourselves by mobilizing our inner resources (our perception, awareness, cognition, imagination, intuition, creativity, etc.) to meet the challenge at hand. In the course of our learning, we integrate into ourselves whatever ‘new’ that we create, and we use it as a stepping stone for further learning. (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:54)

According to this information, The Silent Way involves many principles which are to a high degree learner-centered since “learners are expected to develop independence, autonomy, and responsibility.”(Richards and Rodgers 1986: 106) Looking at the learning process from the perspective of a learner seems to be a remarkable change which stands in contrast with the methods mostly used up to the middle of the 20th century.

Humanistic approaches provide another learner-centered aspect and it is a respect for students’ feelings. According to Bertrand,

personalistic theories which are also called humanistic, non-directive, organic, free or open are grounded mostly on concept of human self, freedom and autonomy. The person which is in the process of learning has to have a power over the education, the person has to manage the learning and use his/her inner energy. (Bertrand, 1998:17)

Humanistic approaches are also inspired by personalistic psychology which strictly refuses behavioristic theories. According to Pages, “the traditional approach makes learning improbable, maybe even impossible.”(Bertrand, 1998:44) The personalistic psychology promotes creative problem solving, self-evaluation. The learner should also participate on creating the curriculum, should work in harmony with his/her interests and state aims attractive for them. The learner is also guided to responsibility for his choice. (Bertrand, 1998:45)

I would like to mention two methods that follow the humanistic theory. They are called Suggestopaedia and Community Language Learning.

Suggestopaedia, which is “now called Desuggestopaedia to reflect the importance placed on desuggesting limitations on learning”(Larsen-Freeman,2000:73), provides learning in a pleasant environment. Lozanov, who is the originator of this method, says that:

we fear that will be unable to perform, that we will be limited in our ability to learn, that we will fail. One result is that we do not use the full mental powers that we have. We may be using only five to ten percent of our mental capacity. In order to

make better use of our reserved capacity, the limitations we think we have need to be 'desuggested.' (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:73)

During the learning process, the students must eliminate their negative feelings to facilitate successful learning. The students have to overcome the barriers towards learning which they may possess. To limit the stress during the learning process to the minimum, art, music and drama are incorporated into the lesson. It is believed that:

The fine arts (music, art, and drama) enable suggestions to reach the subconscious. The arts should, therefore, be integrated as much as possible into the teaching process...Music and movement reinforce the linguistic material. It is desirable that students achieve a state of 'infantilization' so that they will be more open to learning. If they trust the teacher, they will reach this state more easily. (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:80)

The main principle of Suggestopaedia is that learning must take place in a positive atmosphere and the students should overcome the unconscious barriers and negative feelings. What is important is that learners must feel safe and secure, which helps to provide adequate learning conditions. The relationship with the teacher is also very important, it should stand on a basis of trust.

It is evident that a high degree of learner-centeredness can be traced in this method, especially the emphasis on the learners' feelings and their inner state which expresses important function of social aspects in learning.

The other method based on humanistic principles is called Community Language Learning. This theory is influenced by Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology. This method advises teachers to

consider their students as 'whole persons'. Whole-person learning means that teachers consider not only their students' intellect, but also have some understanding of the relationship among student' feelings, physical reactions, instinctive protective reactions, and desire to learn. (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:89)

It is very important to build a relationship with and among students which is similar to the method previously discussed since both methods are derived from humanistic theory. In accordance with the theory, teacher should understand how students feel and simultaneously help them gain insights into their own learning process. As Petty confirms:

Humanistic psychologists as Carl Rogers strongly emphasize thought, that learning is not something what is applied on learners but something what learners create themselves. (Petty, 2004:52)

Importance of working together is also apparent, because while working in groups, “students can begin to feel a sense of community and can learn from each other as well as the teacher. Cooperation, not competition is encouraged.” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:97) Another aspect which can be labeled as learner-centered is that students, especially beginners, design the syllabus by themselves, since “students are more willing to learn when they have created the material themselves.”(Larsen-Freeman, 2000:98)

The aim of Community Language Learning Method is to make students to use the target language communicatively and be aware of their learning processes. Students should “learn about their own learning, to take increasing responsibility for it, and to learn how to learn from one another.”(Larsen-Freeman, 2000:98)

Humanistic theories seem to put learners’ needs into the centre of attention as well as the theories of constructivism. As Hanley describes

Students should be able to apply what they learn in school to the various and unpredictable situations that they might encounter over the course of their work lives. Obviously, the traditional teacher-as-information-giver, textbook guided classroom has failed to bring about the desired outcome of producing thinking students. A much-heralded alternative is to change the focus of the classroom from teacher dominated to student-centered using a constructivist approach. (Hanley 1998)

Considering humanistic and constructivist approaches as highly learner-centred seems to be very logical. Humanistic theories with understanding for learners’ inner conditions and feelings, constructivist beliefs that students have to build on the knowledge they already possess as well as social constructivist need of interconnection of learning with social contexts will be closely discussed and analyzed in the third chapter.

3. Analysis of Learner Centered Principles

The move towards learner centeredness is a phenomenon of recent years. The importance of promoting learner centered environment in ELT classes has to be stressed. This phenomenon is becoming an inseparable part of contemporary educational development. Teachers should be aware of the fact that:

The ineffectiveness of the traditional lecture and test approach has become ever more apparent in our rapidly changing world. Even in the traditional classroom, but particularly online, student-centered approaches to instruction are finding widespread adoption today. This paradigm seems to be inherently more suited to producing deep understanding because it is based on the principle that learning must be personally constructed. (McVay Lynch 2004)

The focus is put on the experience, beliefs and interests that learners bring to a class. This should support their learning and achievement better than traditional teacher directed environment. In the following chapter I would like to deal with the principles of learner centeredness, which are vital to understand and analyze the whole subject matter.

Learner centered principles focus on one hand on the individual learner and on the other hand focus on learning itself. It takes in account learners' experiences, perspectives, interests, background, needs and capacities. Considering the learning, it is very important to be aware of how it occurs and about teaching techniques that are most effective for learners' motivation and achievement.

The eventual set of principles should serve to the teachers and become a tool or a set of instructions for improving their lessons and teaching. The learner-centered principles offer a different perspective and new possibilities that should be examined by all teachers who are interested in their learners' successful development.

American Psychological Association created a Framework for school Redesign and Reform based on learner centered principles to support teaching standards and assessment. Each learner-centered principle developed gradually and was discussed and viewed from many perspectives, which is supported by the following statement:

The development of each principle involved thorough discussions of the research supporting that principle. The multidisciplinary research expertise of the Task Force and Work Group members facilitated an examination of each principle from a number of different research perspectives. (APA 1997)

According to APA these principles are divided into four larger groups: metacognitive and cognitive factors, motivational and affective factors, developmental and social factors and individual differences. To provide explicit depiction, I decided to use this division as a frame for the analysis of the principles. Chapter 3.5 was intentionally added since the area of evaluation and assessment deserves to be discussed in a separate unit because of its great importance.

3.1 Metacognitive and cognitive factors

The first one is gathering principles concerning metacognitive and cognitive factors. It suggests that learning is “a process of discovering and constructing meaning from information and experience” and that it is “filled through the learners’ unique perceptions, thoughts, and feelings.”(Delaney 1999) Also the importance of goals in the learning process is stressed. The learner seeks for “meaningful knowledge” and “links new information with already existing knowledge.” Furthermore, the learner also develops “creative and critical thinking.” (Delaney 1999) Of course, learning does not take place in a vacuum but it is situated into certain context. It is influenced by culture, technology and instructional practices. Here, the teachers play a major interactive role concerning both the learner and learning environment. (APA 1997) This principle is in accordance with the constructivist approach, as Hanley claims:

Constructivist teaching offers a bold departure from traditional objectivist classroom strategies. The goal is for the learner to play an active role in assimilating knowledge onto his/her existing mental framework. The ability of students to apply their school-learned knowledge to the real world is valued over memorizing bits and pieces of knowledge that may seem unrelated to them. (Hanley 1998)

Also cooperative learning, which is strongly advocated by Kasíková, is connected with constructivist models of cognition. She states that “so called didactic constructivism suggests interconnection of cognitive and social elements of education as a critical moment of effectiveness. (Kasíková 2004:59) This approach suggests that educators should consider the knowledge and experiences students bring with them to the classroom, so that they are enabled to develop this knowledge and experience by connecting them to new learning.

Considering previously mentioned facts, learners have to be fully implemented into the process of creating the lesson. Here, we arrive to another important factor, which should be taken in account, which is responsibility. In traditional classroom, the teacher is much more responsible for leading the lesson. However, in a learner-centered classroom the attention is put on the learner and what more, each student also shares the responsibility for

learning with the teacher. Putting the load of responsibility on the learner is another important factor which should be promoted and supported, since:

Language practice is doubled in learner-based teaching because learners are involved in preparing as well as using the practice materials. They are clearly interested in how others will use what they have prepared. (Kryszewska 1992)

The fact that learners are employed as creators of the lesson contributes to attractiveness and therefore supports students' motivation to learning. Learners are treated as co-creators in the learning process, as individuals with ideas and issues that deserve teachers' attention. The learner is no more just a passive recipient of knowledge. It is vital to create an environment in which the students have chance to become active participants.

Having in mind, that active involvement of pupils into the learning process is of vital importance. The usage of textbook, as a widely used teaching tool, has to be considered.. From the learner centered perspective, it is important to avoid the overdependence on it. Kryszewska expresses the intention in this way:

A pre-determined syllabus that underlines a course book can bypass the needs of students. Topic areas are pre-selected, which means that some will probably be of little or no interest to particular individuals. In some cases the information content is already over-familiar to students. In others it may be remote from everyday reality. (Kryszewska 1992)

To limit the usage of a course book seems to be a vital aim from the learner centered viewpoint since the lessons should highly correspond to the needs and interest of the learners. The overdependence on the book can make the lesson uninteresting and inadequate to fulfill the learners' expectations. Considering the topicality, the problem may arise when using only a textbook as well. The course book as the only source of teaching aid can go against the principle of learner centeredness. Having this in mind, the course book should serve only as a guide or a resource for the teacher and its usage has to be a matter of careful selection according to students' requirements.

3.2 Motivational and affective factors

The second group of principles includes motivational and affective factors. Here, the stress is put on motivation and its influence on learning. "Relevant, authentic learning tasks of optimal difficulty and novelty" are very important to arouse and maintain learners' motivation. (Delaney 1999) Learners' motivation fundamentally influences what and how

much is learned. In general, negative emotions and similar related thoughts may badly affect learner's performance and interfere with learning. (APA 1997) Therefore, teacher must use effective strategies to support learners' motivation, in order to achieve desirable result. These humanistic tendencies can be associated also with learning theories developed by Carl R. Rogers. He was convinced that:

Traditional learning is so impersonal, cold, and aloof that it really goes in one ear and out the other. According to him, we learn only what is really important and relevant to us as people. In his classic work *Freedom to Learn*, Rogers presents three necessary and sufficient conditions for the promotion of learning: empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence, or genuineness. (Sprinthall and Sprinthall 1990: 333)

Emotions and positive relationship are very important in learner-centred teaching. Rogers supposed that successful learning takes place only under certain conditions which maintain positive classroom atmosphere. As stated in Day, it is the affective component that guides a student's attention and is the primary determinant of achievement in school." (Oatley and Nundy 1996:258, cited in Day 2004:52)

3.3 Developmental and social factors

The third group considers developmental and social factors, which highly influence the learning of individual students. The individual limits, various abilities and disabilities among students must be taken into account to establish an optimal learning environment. "Individuals learn best when material is appropriate to their developmental level and is presented in an enjoyable and interesting way." (APA 1997)

When speaking about social influences we have to consider "social and cultural diversity" of learners. Of course, to maintain successful learning, the teacher must be aware of these differences among his/her students. According to this principle "learning is facilitated by social interaction and communication with others."(Delaney 1999) The teaching should be influenced by the fact that:

Positive learning climates can also help to establish the context for healthier levels of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Such contexts help learners feel safe to share ideas, actively participate in the learning process, and create a learning community. (APA 1997)

Sharing ideas and active participation during the lesson should become an inseparable feature of successful learner-centered teaching. Collaboration and interaction among students supports their thinking and social qualities. Positive influence of these aspects can be also confirmed by Kasíková who says that:

Temporary research suggests cooperative learning with its focus on collective aims as a resource of good-quality interpersonal relationships. Interaction in cooperative situations leads to open communication, to clearer understanding of other group member perspective, to differentiated, dynamic and realistic viewpoints on others, to greater self-confidence and to expectation of next positive and productive interaction. Forming of social skills for learning and work with others is productive within the frame of cooperation: cooperative learning is a base for social development of individuals, for effective prosocial education. Schools that applied cooperative learning are schools with positive climate. These schools reduced negative aspects as bullying, alcoholism, drug addiction and children criminality. Positive influence of cooperative learning in multiethnic environment was also approved. (Kasíková 2004: 70, own translation)

Considering these facts, cooperative learning as one of the principles of learner-centredness highly contributes to learners' positive and desired progress not only regarding language but also social development. The importance of cooperation among pupils is also confirmed by social constructivist theories. As Mc Mahon claims that "Social Constructivist paradigm views learning as a process of enculturation brought about through social interaction" and "the context in which the learning occurs as central to the learning itself." (McMahon 1997)

Previously mentioned facts underline the importance of cooperation and interaction of students, not only with the teacher, but also with each other, in pairs or in group. Kryszewska, similarly as Kasíková, points the fact, that pupils can enrich their learning enormously when cooperating in groups. The importance of cooperation and peer learning should not be neglected because:

Students in group often come from very different learning backgrounds. Even in groups with similar learning experiences there are always different levels of language competence. Learner-based teaching encourages students to work together and learn from each other...they can teach and correct each other. (Kryszewska 1991:9)

Cooperative learning is also advocated by Fisher who claims that "children can benefit from the cooperation with less advanced partners, more advanced partners as well as pupils equally advanced."(Fisher 2004:8) Student teaching other student seems to be a beneficial relationship having a power to make the learning even more effective. When talking about students enriching each other thanks to their individual differences, the cooperation does not have the only advantage. In this case, interactive communication appearing during peer learning supports not only the language learning, but also highly contributes to social development of each student. The pupils learn to communicate with each other, solve the problems and thereby develop their thinking skills. Interaction between both the learners and

the teachers, should occur in the learner-centered classroom because it is significant when the aim is to support the learning. It is essential to know, that:

By interaction with the teacher, the student has more influence on his own learning process and will take more individual initiatives to solve the problems. As they do so the students' self confidence develops, but also with this develops the students' own responsibility for his/her learning. (Rohner 2004:16)

3.4 Individual differences in learning

The fourth group is a matter of individual differences in learning. Everyone possesses different "beliefs and thoughts, which become the basis of individual interpretation of life experience." To summarize it, "heredity and environment" are the factors which influence particular learning strategies of each student. (Delaney 1999) To provide valuable learning environment, teachers should be aware that:

Careful attention to these factors in the instructional setting enhances the possibilities for designing and implementing appropriate learning environments. When learners perceive that their individual differences in abilities, backgrounds, cultures, and experiences are valued, respected, and accommodated in learning tasks and contexts, levels of motivation and achievement are enhanced. (APA 1997)

The possibility of more effective learning highly increases when teacher takes in account all these individual differences. Incorporating them into the learning process enables students to feel more comfortable and creates more positive environment in order to provide conditions for successful learning.

We can easily assume that the teacher creating the learner centered classroom must consider the differences of the learners and adapt the lesson according to their needs. When the pupils create the teaching material themselves, there is high probability that the product they create will be relevant to the needs of their classmates. The pupils in fact adapt the lesson according to their needs themselves because they are allowed to change and modify the lesson. Moreover, every student possesses different learning strategies which should be developed throughout the lesson. For a successful student, it is very important to be aware of the most effective ways of his/her learning. To know under what conditions pupils learn most successfully should become an inseparable part of learner centered classroom. Being aware of different learning strategies is necessary. To prove this fact I include the following description:

A learner-centered classroom is an environment that creates and fosters independent students who are able to take control of their learning. A learner-centered classroom must initially be created by the teacher and than accepted by students. It

does not occur automatically, but rather must be worked at so that all participants support the environment and are supported by the environment. Students whose learning abilities and strategies are acknowledged and encouraged will embrace strategies instruction as a way to further their own independence as active thinkers. (Chamot 1999: 53)

The importance of learners' strategies was underline by the previous citation. However, discovering them may not be easy as Chamot claims:

An important dimension in language learning is students' development of learning strategies. However, standardized and other traditional tests do not capture these mental processes. Because learning strategies are most often not observable phenomena, teachers need to rely on students' own reports about the strategies they have used. (Chamot 1999: 6)

There is a variety of ways how students can reflect and evaluate their own learning process, for example portfolios, class discussions, self-evaluation sheets and others. These tools should be definitely integrated into the process of assessment to enrich it and make it more complex.

3.5 Evaluation and assessment

Providing evaluation and assessment becomes an inseparable part of the learning process. It definitely should not be missing when we talk about learner-centered principles. According to American Psychological Association, assessment "provides important information to both the learner and teacher at all stages of the learning process." (APA 1997) Assessment of the learners' progress and of learners' outcomes offers an important message to all participants of the teaching-learning process. Moreover, "self-assessments of learning progress can also improve students self appraisal skills and enhance motivation and self-directed learning."(APA 1997) Therefore, self-evaluation seems to be an important factor, considering the degree of learner-centeredness. According to Petty, "self-evaluation supports reflection and meaningful activity proceeding to beneficial goals, moreover, leads pupils to take over responsibility for their own learning." (Petty 2004:257, own translation) Self-assessment is also promoted by Fisher who claims that

If we help children to evaluate the process and outcomes of their learning, we encourage their self confidence and we contribute to their self consciousness and awareness of the learning process itself. It requires searching for ways how to support self confidence and the sense of successful learning. We may achieve this by personalized learning, focused on learners' needs, recognizing the aims of learning, developing the ability of self-criticism. These skills may help pupils to form their self-awareness and many metacognitive instruments, which are needed for independent learning. (Fisher 2004:154, own translation)

In non learner-centered classroom, it is done primarily by the teacher. The teacher evaluates and assesses the learners' performance. However, in learner-centered classroom the learner, active participant, standing in the center of attention should take the responsibility again. "It is surely essential that self-evaluation must be integrated in the learning process. Opportunities for self evaluation give students more insight and understanding in their own learning processes." (Rohner 2004:16)

Roel Rohner (2004), the president of Dalton international organization in his article about portfolios emphasizes the importance of self-evaluation:

Not the teacher evaluating the work of a pupil, but the student together with the teacher, and sometimes even in cooperation with other students reflecting upon both the process and the product of their learning. (Rohner 2004:16)

The picture of the teacher simply marking the student without any previous discussion and cooperation seems to be an insufficient way of evaluation. Having in mind the learner-centered principles, it is necessary to implement and work on the self-evaluative and peer-evaluative techniques as well. Either to support the cooperation between students and teacher or to strengthen the awareness of students' learning processes. As Rohner (2004:16) suggests, "by thinking about their own learning processes the student discovers the strengths and weaknesses of their work, and is challenged to think about new learning goals." Another supporter of self-evaluation is Petty who claims that

It is not good when pupils are absolutely dependent on the teacher while evaluating their achievements. If they are never encouraged to evaluate their own experience, they never acquire neither a habit nor a skill to reflect on their performance and therefore they never develop an ability to improve themselves. (Petty 2004:257,own translation)

4. Learner centered classroom

4.1 The advantages of learner-centred classroom

When examining previously mentioned principles and all the attributes of learner-centered classroom, the advantages of it can be summarized. What becomes apparent is that learning is most meaningful when topics are relevant to students' needs and when they are active participants and creators of the knowledge. Pupils are allowed to experiment and discover and they are not just forced to memorize or repeat some information provided by a textbook or a teacher. The differences among students help to make the lesson more variable and enjoyable. The frequency of peer activities enables to develop social competence of the lesson participants, consequently their cooperative skills shall be increased during the learning process. Thanks to the possibility of choice and responsibility that students have, their motivation to learning can increase. Considering learning the language, the benefit of learner-centered classroom is evident. Student-directed approach is based on active usage of the language, on interaction and constant involvement of the pupil into the learning process. Language learners can definitely gain more, when actively producing the language, than when just hearing it and repeating.

4.2 Potential problems of learner-centred classroom

According to Kryszewska, the three potential limits when creating the learner-centered classroom are: learner resistance, external restraints and demands on the teacher. It is good to be aware of the fact that:

Problems may arise with groups of learners who have specific preconceptions about the learning process. Some learners feel that they are learning only when talking or listening to the teacher, and do not see the benefit of working with other students. Some may have competitive rather than cooperative philosophy. Other learners may have a low opinion of themselves and feel that they cannot contribute to the lesson either in content or in knowledge of the target language. Some learners may simply not be interested in one another. (Kryszewska 1991:10)

Paradoxically, on one hand the learners may be enriched by the individual differences among themselves, on the other hand, the very specific expectations of some learners and extremely different opinions about learning can lead to disruptive behavior. Of course, this fact would definitely make the establishment of the learner-centered classroom very difficult. Conflict about learning may arise between teachers and learners. Making learners responsible for their own learning may be very difficult and laborious process also according to Petty, who says that

Relatively a lot of pupils, particularly those with worse results, are frankly convinced that one can learn just by being present in lessons and more or less willingly work on given tasks. The pupils expect they will automatically learn this way. This approach to learning is dangerous and many contemporary pedagogical psychologists are concerned with possibilities how to change it. (Petty 2004:52, own translation)

Certain pupils' concept of teaching and learning may diametrically differ from that of teachers'. Obviously, this problematic aspect lies in learners' perceptions and expectations since "learners often have specific expectations as to how teachers teach and what their roles and responsibilities are." (Richards and Lockhart 1996:52) Pupils can suppose that teacher should always provide information, set an example or follow the book. Pupils can also possess different attitudes as regards learning strategies. What is appreciated by the teacher may not necessarily be accepted by learners. This problem clearly defines the following citation, claiming that

Language learners might value some language learning strategies which the teacher may try to discourage. For example, students from culture where rote learning and memorization are widely used may think that these are useful strategies in learning English. However, their teacher may come from culture where such strategies are not valued and may try to discourage their use by learners. (Richards and Lockhart 1996:55)

The solution of this problem lies probably in careful and gradual implementation of learner-centered principles into the classroom. It seems to be very important for teachers to be “sensitive to the opinions of their students before attempting to adopt a new way of working with them.” (Kryszevska 1991:10) In this case, all the changes in teaching should be done step-by-step, in order to establish a successfully functioning learner-centered classroom. This gradual approach in order to implement learner-centred elements into language teaching is also supported by Dickinson who says that

It is not desirable to thrust self-instruction and self-directed learning on the learners who are resistant to it, and it is very important that those of us who are enthusiastic about self-instruction do not confuse the idea, or our enthusiasm to introduce it, with learners’ ability or willingness to undertake it. I believe that the way forward is to introduce into the learning program elements which train learners towards: greater autonomy and aim towards a gradual development towards full autonomy. (Dickinson 1987:1-2, cited in Nunan and Lamb 1996:2)

External restraints such as exam preparation or following an external syllabus may also be a problem. However, Kryszevska (1991:10) admits that “it may still be possible to cover parts of the syllabus using learner-based teaching activities.” I assume that it depends on the teacher and learners themselves, whether and to what degree are they devoted to the learner-centered principles. Sometimes, it may be useful to skip to traditional ways of learning, just to compare and decide what is more suitable and beneficial. The degree of learner-centeredness may be lowered for a period of time with respect to current situation. Dealing with the external restraints may also remain a learner-based matter.

From my point of view, the most inconvenient aspect of establishing learner-centeredness seems to be the high level of requirements on the teacher. According to Kryszevska,

Teachers using a learner-based approach are faced with the responsibility for the sequence of events in the classroom, a role which is normally left to the course book in conventional teaching. It is essential to keep a record of all work done... (Kryszevska 1991:10)

The demands on the preparation are considerably higher than in the traditional lessons. The textbook seems to represent a very convenient tool and the teachers can be strongly convinced about its indispensability in the lesson. In spite of this fact, as was described in chapter 3.1, the course book should not be used permanently in the lessons and without teachers’ previous consideration of the content. Creating and using the learner-based activities requires proper planning. “The teacher must have a very clear idea of where the activity is leading, and how it is organized, and must give very accurate and precise instructions.” (Kryszevska 1991:10) From the previously mentioned remarks, it is obvious, that the teacher willing to establish the

learner-centered environment in his/her lessons is going to face high requirements, when preparing it. In spite of this fact, it is believed that incorporating the elements of learner-centeredness is definitely worthy and brings a lot of new and refreshing experiences.

Assuming previously mentioned facts, we may become apprehensive and doubtful about implementing the learner-centred principles into the classroom. High demands on the teacher may be the reason of their resentful and negative attitudes and unwillingness to promote learner-centred tendencies. However, teachers should be aware of the fact that:

They have the potential for enhancing the quality of education by bringing life to curriculum and inspiring students to curiosity and self-directed learning. And teachers can also degrade the quality of education through error, laziness, cruelty or incompetence. For better or worse, teachers determine the quality of education. (Clark 1995:3, cited in Day 2004:1)

4.3 The role of teacher in learner-centered classroom

Before I start to describe the position of the teacher in learner centered classroom, I would like to briefly depict the traditional one, or better to say non learner-centered classroom, to provide better comparison.

Non learner-centered teacher tends to become an instructor. The focus is put on what the instructor knows about the language. The teacher stands in the center of attention, talks most of the time, while students just listen (not necessarily all of them). Pupils work mostly alone and are continuously monitored and corrected by the teacher. The teacher is responsible for the choice of topics, in most cases, relying on the course book. The evaluation of students' learning or achievement lies again on the teacher. To conclude it, the teacher in non learner-centered classroom inclines more to be a controlling element in the lesson. In the role of controller, "teachers are in complete charge of the class." (Harmer 1991)

On the contrary, in the learner-centered environment teacher has to adopt a facilitative function. The learner-oriented teacher serves more as a model to his/her students. The accent is put on the interaction between the teacher and students, therefore students often work in pairs or groups. When questions arise, pupils may interact among each other, using the teacher just as an information resource, if necessary. At the same time, the teacher functions as a helper, "responding to learners' requests for help with the vocabulary and grammar. By providing what the language students ask for" (Kryszewska 1992) Moreover, the teacher may also become an active participant in some suitable activity. The danger of this role can appear when "the teacher will tend to dominate and the students will both allow and expect this to happen."(Harmer 1991) This problem may arise, when the students are more acquainted and

used to more teacher-centered lessons. Careful adaptation to learner-based principles may help to overcome it. It is important for the teachers to know that “all instruction should point learners toward self-directed learning because in the final analysis, it is the learners who have to do the learning.”(Nunan and Lamb 1996:156)

Considering cooperative aspects of learner-centred classroom, teachers have to be prepared to change the traditional role. According to Littlewood, teacher’s role is a “facilitator of knowledge.” (Littlewood 1981:92, cited in Wright 1987:51). Similarly, Kasíková suggests that:

The basic teacher’s role is changing: from a person who transmits the knowledge to a person who is responsible for creating the conditions for constructive activity of learners, for careful structuring of learning situations, and a person who facilitates pupils’ learning. (Kasíková 2004:88, own translation)

Some teachers may also admit that it is not possible to use the learner-centered activities when teaching for example grammar. However, they may not be right. In these cases, another frequent function of the teacher is a:

Monitor checking what learners have produced before they pass it on to other learners. This is especially desirable in, for example, grammar and examination practice activities. (Kryszewska 1992:6)

All previously mentioned roles are obviously changed during the lessons depending on the learners’ and teachers’ needs. In general, the teacher may become a collaborator and sometimes a learner as well. What remains important is the fact, that learner-centered approach “is aimed at narrowing the traditional gap between teacher and student and teaching and learning are taking place on both sides.”(Kryszewska 1992:7)

4.4 The role of learner in learner-centered classroom

The learner roles may be derived from what has been described regarding the teacher. Despite this, there are a few more additional comments that complement the previous chapter.

To achieve the most effective learning the main criteria is to enable the students to take responsibility for their learning. The learner must be aware of the fact that

Learning has to enable personal expression and individual originality...it means to offer a choice, supporting individual responsibility and approach the learning with creativity. (Fisher, 2004:8,own translation)

As well as teachers, learners must also adopt new roles. They may no longer be passive recipients of knowledge transmitted by the teacher. In order to learn as much as possible, they should actively contribute to the teaching/learning process. Pupils have to gradually take

control over their own learning and become responsible for choices they make as regards learning. As confirmed by the following citation, which states that:

The most extensive and prolonged period of classroom instruction can only provide a limited introduction to the chosen language. The self-directed learner is one who is able to make informed choices about what to learn and how to learn it. (Nunan and Lamb 1996:156)

Considering the social aspect of learner-centredness, the role of learner during the cooperative activities should be described. Kasíková confirms all previously declared opinions, when saying that “pupils should be self-confident as individualities, who learn important things and who can make decisions about their learning.”(2004:88)

4.5 The management and organization of teaching/learning processes

In spite of the fact, that learners are in the centre of attention, it is the teacher’s task to “organize the work in such a way that children individual and in cooperation with others are stimulated to take initiatives.”(Rohner 2005:13) The management of teaching and learning processes should be aimed towards learner’s autonomy as well as lead the pupils to cooperation. Having in mind, what has been discussed in chapters 3.3 and 3.4 the teacher should gradually lead pupils to responsibility for the learning process. As Plenter claims

Too much supervision leads to submissiveness, and in this fact, too, we find another argument for as far as possible leaving the supervision of the learning process to the pupil. Here again, the attitude of the teacher must be that of a coach, whereby errors are corrected without judgment, but with guidance and guidelines. (Plenter 2005: 21)

In terms of cooperative learning, the organization of teaching/learning processes obviously differs from the teacher-centred classroom where the predominantly used interaction was teacher-pupil.

The change of interaction in the teaching/learning process, focus on interaction pupil-pupil and group of pupils-teacher, brings also consequences related to the proportion of teacher-directed activities and self-directed activities of learners. (Kasíková 2004:114,own translation)

Comparing to traditional classroom, the teacher organizing the process of learning has to deal with specific problems concerning previously mentioned interaction patterns. It is very important to decide

whether to give equal tasks to different groups or whether to differentiate, how to create the group – how large should it be and what should be its structure from the viewpoint of pupils’ abilities, gender or other characteristics, whether to intervene into

the group work and under what conditions and many other problems. (Kasíková 2004:114, own translation)

All these questions has to be answered by the teacher in order to establish desirable conditions for pupils aiming at learners' development of cooperative and communicative skills as well as their enthusiasm towards independent learning.

Relevance of implementing humanistic aspects into the teaching/learning process has to be taken into account. Contributing to positive classroom environment and atmosphere in order to facilitate learning seems to be inevitable part of classroom management. Ginott claims that when dealing with pupils, teacher should adopt so called "congruent communication". According to Ginott, the teachers may improve the cooperation in the classroom through communication. When talking to pupils they should express themselves reasonably, avoid negative labeling of children, deal with pupils' emotions and feelings and not to overlook them, praise only concrete achievements of pupils and challenge pupils to create cooperative environment. (Pasch 1998: 327-330)

As regards evaluation and assessment, self and peer evaluative techniques have to be implemented into the learning process, such as portfolios or diaries, which help pupils to reflect upon their work. As Rohner describes, besides other benefits, portfolio is very valuable since "it gives a complete picture of the learning and the development of the learning process and it is also an authentic way of evaluation." (Rohner 2004:17)

5. The intention of the research

The research should answer several questions concerned with elementary school teachers' perceptions of learner-centered principles and also with their incorporation into the lesson. I would like to discover teachers' opinions and attitudes to learner-centeredness as well as the way they teach and whether they use these principles in their lessons.

The research is based on the theoretical background described in the previous part of this paper. In the theoretical part, the learner-centered principles has been examined, their advantages and potential problems. It was described that the tendencies of learner-centeredness are highly promoted in nowadays education and that they appear in many modern approaches. The aim of this paper is to find out whether and how are the learner-centered principles perceived and used in real life education. Subsequently, the influence of these principles on learners' activation during the lesson will be investigated.

I have summarized the aim of the research into two basic questions which should be answered in the following pages.

1. How are the L-C principles perceived and realized by the elementary school teachers?

2. Do the L-C principles influence the activation of pupils in the lesson?

5.1 The respondents

There were six teachers involved in the research. I observed five lessons by each teacher which resulted in total amount of thirty lessons. The length of teaching practice of the teachers ranged between one and thirty years. To inform the reader about the approximate length of teaching experience, I included Table 1.

I was aware of the teaching experience difference; consequently I supposed there will be a difference in teaching methods and different attitudes towards teaching and learning.

The age of observed learners ranged from eleven to fifteen years, which means that I observed pupils from 5th to 9th grade. In spite of my conviction, that learner-centered principles can be applied also on young learners I decided that it would be more suitable to focus the research on older pupils. I assumed that the teachers would implement the principles more likely with pupils who possess higher level of English. The observed lessons are arranged in Table 2, where the number of pupils present in each lesson is expresses by the number in brackets. Considering the number of students all the teachers seem to work under similar conditions, whereas there were approximately fourteen to sixteen pupils in each lesson.

As regards the gender of the teachers, five of the observed teachers were women and one was man. All the teachers were observed in approximately two months period. The

respondents were not announced the aim of my observation since I wanted to receive a true picture of their teaching and not an intentionally prepared lessons.

Table 1: Length of teaching practice

	Length of teaching practice (years)
Teacher 1	0-1
Teacher 2	more than 30
Teacher 3	6-10
Teacher 4	11-20
Teacher 5	more than 30
Teacher 6	1-5

Table 2: The distribution of observed lessons

	lesson 1	lesson 2	lesson 3	lesson 4	lesson 5
teacher 1	6th grade (15)	6th grade (16)	6th grade(16)	7th grade (18)	9th grade (15)
teacher 2	7th grade (13)	6th grade (14)	5th grade (19)	6th grade (13)	6th grade (14)
teacher 3	6th grade (17)	7th grade (20)	5th grade (18)	6th grade (14)	6th grade (13)
teacher 4	8th grade (16)	9th grade (17)	9th grade (16)	8th grade (18)	9th grade (15)
teacher 5	7th grade (14)	7th grade (15)	7th grade (14)	7th grade (15)	7th grade (15)
teacher 6	9th grade (18)	8th grade (13)	6th grade (15)	7th grade (13)	6th grade (15)

6. The perception and realization of learner-centered principles

To answer the questions stated at the beginning of my investigation¹ I used two research methods, observation and questionnaire. The first stage of my research was teacher observation focused on the use of learner-centered principles during lessons. Using the method of observation seemed to be quite obvious since

You could observe the classroom processes by sitting in the classroom and taking notes. To make your record more focused you may decide in advance what you are going to be looking for, make an observational schedule with the categories you consider appropriate, and that record what happens under those category headings.” (Allwright and Bailey 1991:3)

¹ See page 27, questions 1 and 2

The purpose was to discover the actual realization of the principles in the lesson. I used observation sheets² which I designed and piloted in several lessons as well. The tool contained a scale where I marked the degree of learner-centeredness in each sequence of the lesson and its duration in minutes.

Table 2: A scale of learner-centeredness

1. Learner-centered activity	2. Mostly LC activity	3. On the boarder of LC/TC	4. Mostly TC activity	5. Teacher-centered activity
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Division of observed activities according to this scale was done according to the criteria which are stated as following:

1. Learner-centred activity: Learners are given high degree of freedom during the activity. Teacher does not interfere, only monitors children's activity. The activity process and its result are in pupils' hands. They also have the chance to cooperate with other classmates.
2. Mostly learner-centred activity: There is a certain interference of the teacher but still the learners have possibility to influence the activity.
3. Activity on the boarder: The activity is managed fairly equally by teacher as well as learners.
4. Mostly teacher-centred activity: Activity is mostly in the hands of teacher. Pupils have only very limited chance to influence the process and result of the activity
5. Teacher-centred activity: Only teacher coordinates the activity. Pupils cannot influence the process and result of the activity.

All the observed activities were labeled according to these criteria. The number of activities in each lesson obviously differed, depending on the organization of the teaching/learning process.

Next task was to observe six learner-centered principles that resulted from the theoretical part of this paper. I examined whether the activity is dependent on the textbook, active engagement of pupils in the activities, relevance of activities to pupils' needs, presence of peer teaching/learning, ways of evaluation and assessment and involvement of interactive

² See Appendix 1,2 and 3

activities. These aspects were formulated into six questions which were supposed to be answered during the observed lesson.

Presently, I would like to comment on the aspects of learner-centeredness I observed during lessons. High dependence on the textbook is obviously not a learner centered principle as resulted from the theoretical part³. My intention was to investigate how often this device is used in the lessons and perhaps detect teachers' overdependence on it therefore unselective usage of the textbook can be in contradiction with learner-centeredness.

Following principle which was observed, deals with active engagement of pupils during the activity. I presupposed that higher degree of learner-centeredness would evoke the activation of pupils that means their interest, enthusiasm and greater commitment.

Principle of relevance to learners' needs includes three aspects: topicality of the content, differentiation of pupils with respect to their abilities, and lastly consideration of learning strategies of pupils.

Next principle observed in the lessons was the presence of peer teaching and learning. Here, I monitored whether cooperation among pupils appeared. In other words, I tried to record the occurrence of pair work as well as group work.

The approach to evaluation during the lesson was also examined. I focused mainly on the occurrence of self or peer evaluation.

Lastly I was supposed to notice whether interactive activities were involved during the lessons.

In the second stage of my research I intended to discover teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards teaching. I decided to use questionnaires⁴ which I produced in respect to previously mentioned principles. In order to avoid imposing of respondents' answers, I excluded the usage of multiple choice questionnaires. More convenient possibility arose in formulating so called unfinished sentences. I created a questionnaire containing eight unfinished sentences. Six of them were in accordance with the learner-centered principles observed during the lessons. Remaining two sentences (number 2 and 5) are focused on eliciting answers about the teachers' perceptions of learner-centred principles only indirectly. They are included in order to briefly outline respondents' general approach to teaching. I decided to use them only in case of need.

³ See chapter 3.4, page 16

⁴ See Appendix 4

The teachers were supposed to finish given sentences on the basis of their teaching experience and to characterize their personal attitude to teaching. I intentionally avoid concrete mentioning of the term learner-centeredness, in order to avoid preconception of gained responses.

Last note that should be made considering the questionnaire concerns the use of language. On behalf of the respondents I decided to provide them with the Czech version of the questionnaire to enable their authentic expression. In the analysis, my translations of teachers' responds are used.

6.1. Overall degree of learner-centredness in observed lessons

After collecting all the observation sheets, the analysis of the outcome should be presented. Before discussing the question 'how' the learner-centred principles are realized, it may be interesting to look at the observed lessons from general viewpoint.

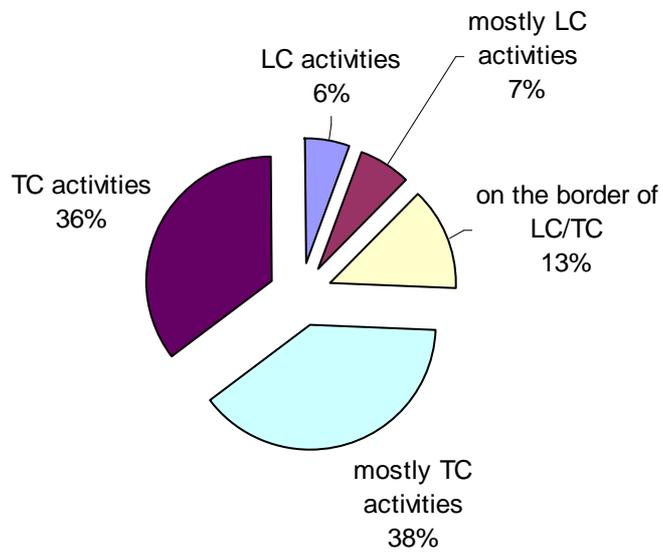
When considering the overall degree of learner-centeredness in observed lessons it became evident that most of the activities which appeared during the observations tended rather to teacher-centeredness⁵, as illustrated by Graph 1 and 2.

In approximately 74% of all observed activities teacher was in the center of attention, whereas highly learner-oriented sequences create only 13% and activities which are on the boarder constitute also 13%. Regarding individual teachers, the highest degree of learner-centeredness can be registered by Teacher 6 and Teacher 1. On the contrary, the lessons of Teacher 3 and 5 contain only minimal tendency to learner-centered teaching.

Graph 1

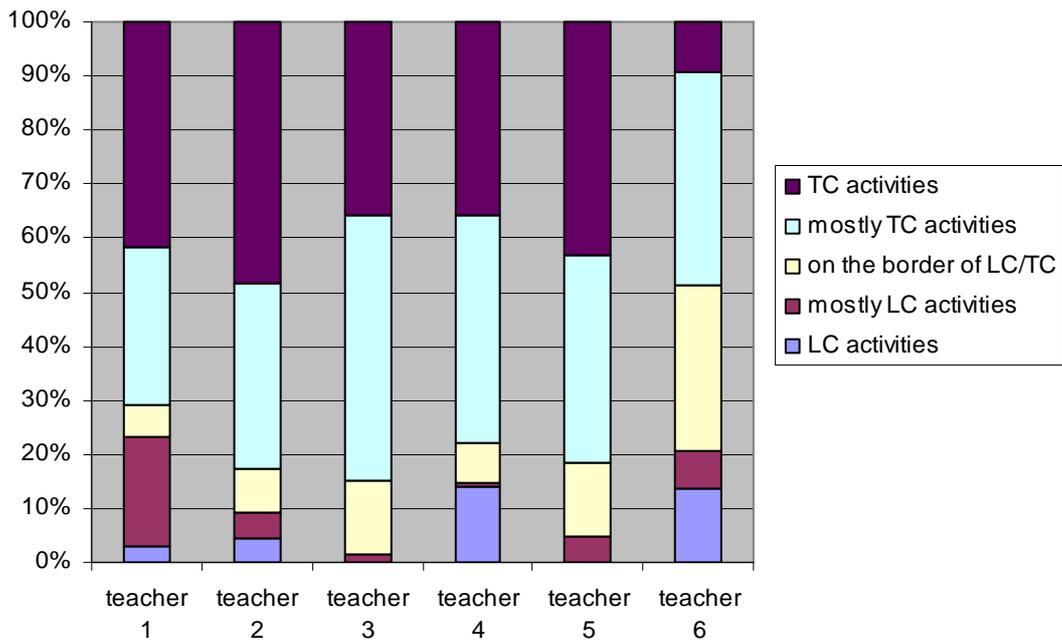
⁵ For graph 2 see pg. 33

Distribution of LC activities



Graph 2

Distribution of activities from the viewpoint of learner-centeredness



6.2 Comparison of observed lessons and teachers' questionnaires

In this chapter the observed learner-centered principles will be thoroughly discussed and analyzed in order to display teachers' perception and actual realization of those principles. The outcome of the research will be delivered in form of comparison of observed lessons and teachers' responds in the questionnaire. The results of observations will be confronted with teachers' answers; consequently possible conclusions will be drawn. In order to clearly illustrate the findings of the research, tables and graphs are provided. As regards graphs 4, 5, 6 and 7, I would like to clarify their structure. I would like to comment particularly on the vertical axis, which indicates time in minutes and is divided into segments corresponding to one lesson (forty-five minutes). The whole amount of observed time illustrated in graphs slightly differs by individual teachers. The reason is simple, the observed lessons rarely started or ended on time. Therefore the average length of one observed lesson equals 43 minutes.

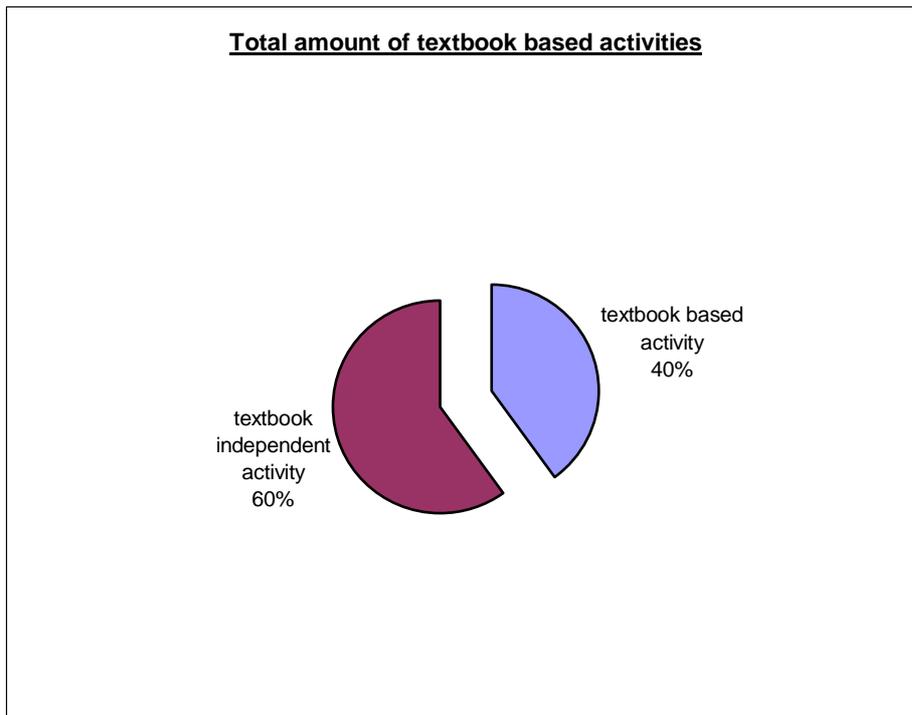
Individual principles are described successively in the same order as they appeared on the observation sheet. The order is the following: the usage of a textbook, active engagement of pupils, relevance of activities to pupils' needs, peer teaching/learning, evaluation and assessment and involvement of interactive activities. There is only one exception in previously specified ordering, that has to be mentioned. The principle concerning active engagement was excluded and will be discussed in the following chapter since it is concerned with the second question⁶ stated at the beginning of my research and it needs to be analyzed more thoroughly and deeply.

6.2.1 The usage of textbook

Significant area discovering the usage of textbook is important to describe. The following Graph 3 illustrates the distribution of activities according to their dependence on the textbook. In respect to the thought of learner-centeredness, the usage of the textbook should be decreased. Having this in mind, the overall result may be evaluated as quite positive, since 60% of observed time constituted activities independent on the textbook. On the other hand, his fact does not indicate that all the textbook independent activities were learner-centered.

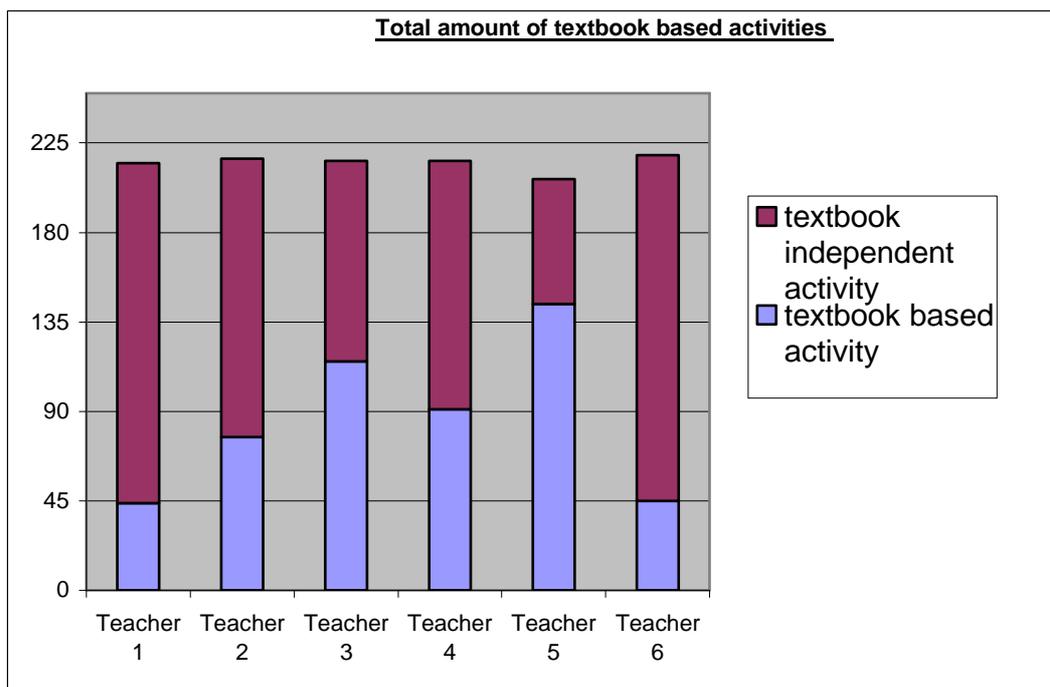
Graph 3

⁶ See page 27, question 2



Considering the individual teachers, we may observe that the usage of textbook based activities is quite reduced, particularly by Teacher 1 and Teacher 6. In comparison with the results shown in graph 2, the greatest amount of learner-oriented activities was observed in the lessons of Teacher 6, who seems to reduce the usage of the textbook the most. On the contrary, the results of Teacher 3 and 4 show more than 50% of time spent on textbook based tasks and at the same time the tendency to teacher-centeredness. We may then assume that decreasing the textbook usage and learner-centered tendency is interconnected.

Graph 4



At this stage, the occurrence of textbook based activities during the lesson is already described; therefore it should be mentioned how the teachers perceive the usage of textbooks in general. In the questionnaire, the teachers were asked to finish the following sentence:

(1.) I agree/**do not** agree with the idea that the content of a textbook is completely sufficient for teaching because ... All of the 6 respondents marked that they do not agree.

They gave the following reasons why:

“...because no textbook contains such material which would be appropriate to all pupils. That’s why I also use other additional materials. (for example: worksheets)”
(Teacher 1)

“...because some sequences in the textbook should be exercised more properly. Sometimes it is necessary to make it more interesting.”
(Teacher 2)

“...because there is a small amount of practicing tasks.”
(Teacher 3)

“...because there is a great choice of textbook in these days and in none of them can be everything what is needed, certain subject matter is necessary to be more exercised and extended.”
(Teacher 4)

“...because there is a small amount of conversational activities and extremely great amount of grammar.”
(Teacher 5)

“...because it is also important to look around and to hold up a mirror to ourselves, and this observation is something what cannot be found in any textbook.”
(Teacher 6)

In general, all teachers agree that textbook cannot be sufficient for teaching. However, they give different reasons. The respondents see the disadvantage of a textbook in small amount of tasks for practice, inappropriateness to the needs of all pupils, uninteresting sequences or small amount of conversational activities. According to their answers, it may seem that the teachers will tend to use additional textbook independent activities, which seems to be true by Teacher 1 and 6. In spite of this, several of the teaching performance that was observed seem to be in contrast with teachers' opinions towards the usage of textbook. The possible reason may be that teachers described their wishes and intentions rather than the real situation, in order to express what they expect to be appropriate. Teacher 1 and 6 also have relatively short teaching experience in comparison with other observed teachers and this fact may be the reason of different approach to the usage of textbook. Perhaps teachers who are at the beginning of their teaching career have more energy which can be devoted to creating additional activities for their pupils.

6.2.2 Relevance of activities to pupils' needs

Regarding the relevance of activities to pupils' needs, the research has revealed that the only factor which was apparent during observations was the topicality of material used in the lessons. The highest degree of topicality was registered in lessons of Teacher 1 where I observed an activity designed according to a current television competition for children. Teacher 1 also incorporated activities related to St. Valentine's Day before the current date. Other teachers also used topics relevant to their pupils, for example: school subjects, geography quiz or topics concerning fashion. However, only Teacher 1 seemed to pay attention to contemporary events as was previously mentioned.

Considering differentiation and different learning strategies of individual learners, no particular attention to these aspects was noticed during the observed lessons.

Comparing the observations and teachers' attitudes to different needs of pupils I did not notice any differentiation among pupils with different level of English therefore one question in the questionnaire was formulated to elicit teachers' attitude to this aspect. Formulation of the statement is based on my conviction that dealing with this problem should be an important challenge for every teacher. The unfinished sentence and teachers' responses are the following:

(7.) If there are some pupils with different level of English in my class I usually...

“choose more difficult tasks for more advanced pupils, I try to communicate with them more often. Pupils with “lower level” of English are given more time during the written assignments.” (Teacher 1)

“give them individual work or I manage collaboration among pupils, or I select the method of prolonged explanation.” (Teacher 2)

“cannot deal with it. If I have 24 pupils in the lesson I am not able to manage individual approach. I try to give easier homework, during group work the “weaker” pupil is put into the group of “better” pupils.” (Teacher 3)

“have lower demands on “slower” pupils. They are given more time to make the tasks. When certain pupil really cannot manage the given task, s/he receives easier work. I also encourage more advanced pupils to help the “slower” ones.” (Teacher 4)

“assume that the “slower” ones need to master at least the basic requirements on grammar, but I do not excuse them as regards learning the vocabulary.” (Teacher 5)

“try to pay more attention to them in my lessons (individual approach during activities), I offer the pupils more time to settle down. I also offer the possibility of extra classes. (Teacher 6)

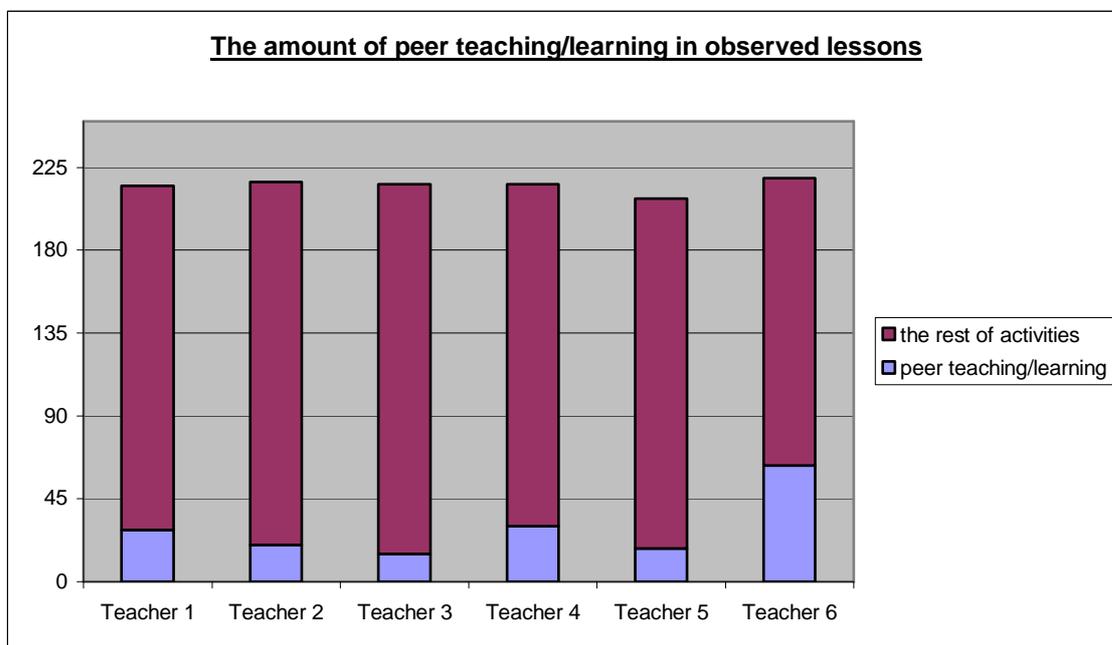
After processing the responds, all the teachers seem to express that they are aware of this issue and try to solve it somehow. Three out of six teachers claim that they can manage to offer tasks of various difficulties. Regrettably, this fact was not confirmed by the observation. Half of the respondents also stated that their demands differ according to the pupils' abilities. These relieves apply only to “weaker” pupils, they are given more time during the assignments or may be helped by others, mostly more advanced pupils. Teacher 3, as the only one out of six respondents, admits that it is impossible to manage individual approach to pupils with different level of English due to their high number in the class. This opinion seems to reflect lessons that I observed. Why the answers of majority of teachers do not correspond with the reality of observed lessons seems to be questionable. There was not any evidence in the observed lessons which can prove what teachers answered in the questionnaire. Teachers did not seem to differentiate among pupils as regards level of English or any other aspect. I assumed that teachers may differentiate among pupils as regards lower

demands, e.g. when pupils' performance (oral or written) is marked, when giving some pupils more time for the assignments or requirements of achievement are not equal for all children. This cannot be apparent from observation since teachers' train of thought is not visible.

6.2.3 Peer teaching and learning

The area of peer teaching and learning was another learner-centered principle examined during the research. When observing the lessons, peer teaching and learning occurred most of the time during group work and pair work, there were only two different cases. The first one appeared when one of the pupils functioned as a teacher during particular activity and the second one was individual work by which pupils were allowed to cooperate with classmates. The deal of activities where peer learning appeared can be labeled as low considering the total amount of observed teaching time. It is clearly illustrated in Graph 5⁷ which also shows that Teacher 6 was revealed to be the most successful regarding this aspect. Pair work and group work appeared in all of observed lessons of Teacher 6. The rest of the examined teachers seem to be on similar level in terms of cooperative activities.

Graph 5



Here, we shall compare the results of observations with teachers' opinions about cooperative activities. Let us examine their responses in the questionnaire:

⁷ For graph 5 see page 39

(3.) Group work and pair work among pupils appear in my classes...

“rarely because in classes with high number of pupils is very difficult to keep the pupils talking only in English and to fulfill the given tasks.” (Teacher 1)

“sometimes very often and sometimes rarely. It depends on the number of pupils.” (Teacher 2)

“often because there are a lot of pupils in the class and some of them would not have a chance to speak, in the group they have a greater chance to speak and they are not so afraid to communicate at the same time.”(Teacher3)

“differently. Group work appears in my lessons rarely because of the great number of pupils in the class and pair work among pupils appears in my classes very often because I think that pupils can learn from each other. (Teacher 4)

“very often because conversation is needed and the control of collective work as well.” (Teacher 5)

“very often because I find it the most important element for training pupils’ communicative skills.” (Teacher 6)

After comparing the results of observation with teachers’ opinions, it may be concluded that some answers reflect the reality and some not. In case of Teacher 1, 2 and 6, their answers seem to reflect what they actually do in their lessons. However, Teacher 3, 4, and 5 express overall positive attitude to cooperative work among pupils in spite of the fact, that the discussed activities are included in their lessons only very rarely. Three of six respondents also express their negative attitude to cooperative activities due to high number of pupils in the lesson. Most probably, they see the problem as a matter of classroom management. Pupils working in groups seem to be hardly controllable. Teacher 6 resulted as the only one who appreciates peer teaching in groups or pairs, respectively tries to involve these activities into the lessons as much as possible. Moreover, the observations merely confirmed what Teacher 6 stated in the questionnaire. Group work or pair work were involved in each of five observed lessons.

6.2.4 Evaluation and assessment

Next area to be discussed is concerned with evaluation and assessment. During the observations I paid attention particularly to self and peer evaluation, whether it is present in the lessons and how often. Integration of self and peer evaluation into the lesson seems to be quite neglected. Only two out of six observed teachers seem to use these evaluative

techniques regularly in their lessons. Moreover, two teachers did not included neither self-evaluation nor peer evaluation at all.

Table 3

	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5
Teacher 1	/	self-evaluation	/	peer-evaluation	/
Teacher 2	peer-correction	/	self-correction	/	peer-correction
Teacher 3	/	/	/	/	peer + self correction
Teacher 4	/	/	/	/	/
Teacher 5	/	/	/	/	/
Teacher 6	/	/	/	peer-evaluation	/

The unfinished sentence concerning evaluation of pupils was divided into two parts. Therefore, I decided to arrange respondents' answers to the following table⁸ to make the outcome clearly organized.

Teachers' responds concerning their perception of evaluation were mostly connected with assessment by the teacher, usually marking oral or written performance, evaluating pupil's activity during lesson or oral praise done by the teacher. Teacher 6 consults the pupils' performances with the pupils themselves, which can be regarded as slight inclination towards pupils' self-evaluation. But only Teacher 1, as the only one out of the six respondents seems to be aware of the importance of self/peer evaluation. This fact is confirmed by teacher's responds in questionnaire and the observed lessons which are in accordance. On the other hand, Teacher 2 claims that assessment is realized by marks and oral evaluation while during observations frequent occurrence of peer-correction was registered. However, these cases of peer-evaluation appeared in the lesson without any signal of regularity or intention.

After comparing and analyzing all results it may be concluded that general cognizance of self/peer evaluation is very low. The reasons may be very prosaic. Firstly, teachers do not seem to be aware of this kind of evaluation or at least they do not find it important since it was not mentioned in any of teachers' responses (except one). Secondly, the results of pupils are officially presented in form of marks, so that teachers are not pushed to use different techniques of assessment and evaluation.

Considering the self and peer evaluation that appeared during the observed lessons, in general, I would label those as random. Teachers sometimes ask pupils about their opinion, or

⁸ See page 42 Table 4

pupils can be asked to correct their own or their classmates' mistake. It is usually done unconsciously by the teacher. However, this important principle is not intentionally and regularly used during the lessons. Moreover, it might not be possible to speak about the usage of portfolios, diaries or other self-evaluative devices. Portfolios may become a source of additional work for teachers. Besides keeping records of pupils' marks, controlling' notebooks and vocabularies there would be another material that should be evaluated. I expect the teachers to find it very inconvenient.

Table 4

	<u>I perceive evaluation of pupils as...</u>	<u>and in my lessons evaluation is mostly realized ...</u>
Teacher 1	<i>“complete view of his/her knowledge and skills which should be developed during English lessons as well as at home...”</i>	<i>“by my own assessment. I also let pupils to evaluate their performance themselves or to evaluate their classmates quite often (especially in the lower grades).”</i>
Teacher 2	<i>“assessment of all pupils’ outcomes, their activity and approach to assigned work...”</i>	<i>“by marks and my oral evaluation during the lessons.”</i>
Teacher 3	<i>“assessing pupils with marks...”</i>	<i>“oral examination (reading, dialogues, activity during the lesson) and written examination (tests, completing exercises, translations, homework).”</i>
Teacher 4	<i>“the mark from an oral or written examination but also the oral praise or oral evaluation of pupils’ performance or performance of a group (class)...”</i>	<i>“as I previously mentioned.”</i>

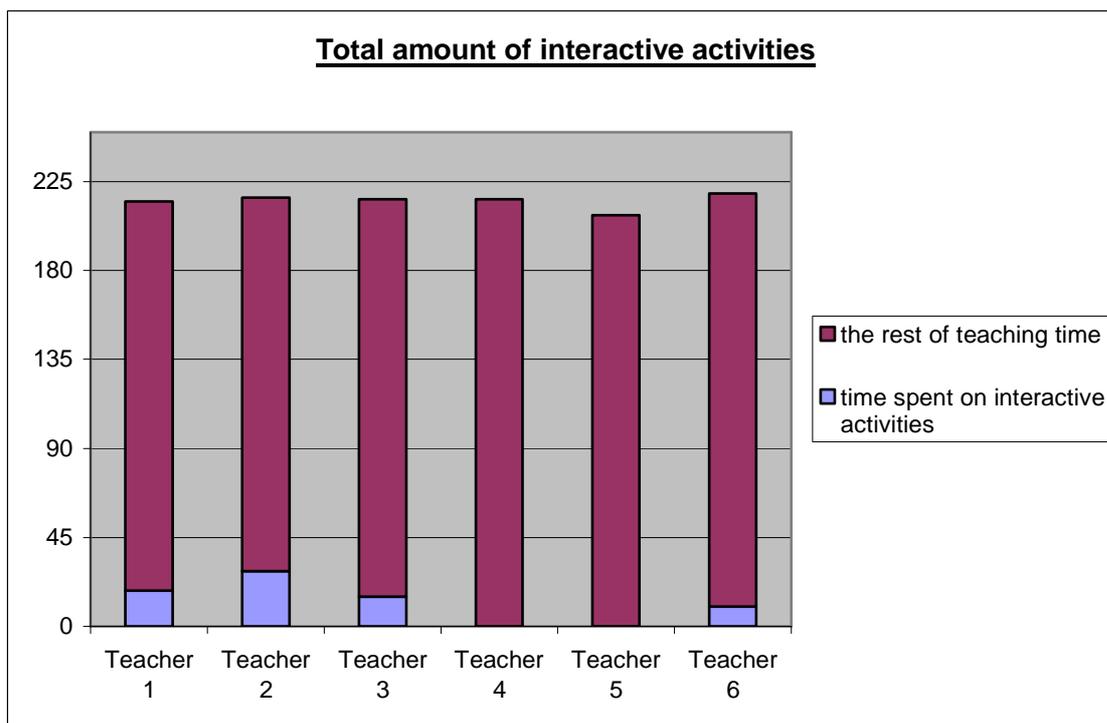
Teacher 5	<i>“encouragement, or reminding of limitations in the language...”</i>	<i>“oral or written examination.”</i>
Teacher 6	<i>“marks and oral assessment, comment upon errors or praise and criticism...”</i>	<i>“marks (1-5), oral praise or considerable reproof, or I note down positive and negative comments about pupils, which I try to consult with all learners.”</i>

6.2.5 Interactive activities

An important feature consequently examined by the research is related to the amount of communication in English. During observed English lessons I tried to notice whether and how often interactive activities are involved during the teaching process. Obviously, I focused on interaction in the target language among pupils as well as with the teacher. In general, the research revealed that the amount of spoken English is very low. The interaction was merely limited to questions asked by teachers or creation of structured dialogues.

The distribution of interactive activities is visualized in Graph 6. Not only the overall involvement of interactive activities can be labeled as very low, furthermore, no interactive activities were observed by Teacher 4 and 5.

Graph 6



In the questionnaire, the respondents were again asked to finish a statement concerning communication in the target language. Formulation of the sentence and teachers' responses are the following:

(4.) Communication in English (among pupils and with the teacher) appears in my lessons...

“often because it is very important for pupils to understand the spoken word. When I see, that pupils do not understand, I try to use another words or I call a pupil to translate for others.” (Teacher 1)

“very often because it forces pupils to higher concentration.” (Teacher 2)

“often because I think that the more English you hear the better. (Teacher 3)

“rarely because most of the pupils is not able to pay attention. There is a greater amount of Czech language used in my lessons.” (Teacher 4)

“rarely. It is important but there is not much time for it left.” (Teacher 5)

“very often because communication in English is a key principle for foreign language teaching.” (Teacher 6)

Teacher 4 and 5 (two out of six respondents) answered that they implement interactive activities very rarely. Their statements are in agreement with what was observed during their lessons. However, their reasons for not using interactive activities are different. Teacher 4 claims that when speaking English, pupils are not able to pay attention whereas according to Teacher 5 there is not much time for it. There possibly may be a hidden message behind these two responds since the reasons given by Teacher 4 and 5 are in contradiction with their following opinion:

(5.) The most important thing for pupils to take out from the lesson is...

“the understanding of grammar, widening the vocabulary but also to get acquainted with life and habits of English speaking countries. The 9th grader should be able to communicate in common situations.” (Teacher 4)

“the ability to apply their knowledge in real life, independence, ability to communicate without inhibitions and the interest in the language.” (Teacher 5)

Both teachers value communication and consider it one of the most important things pupils should gain during the lessons. Hypothetically, the teachers themselves may be afraid of speaking English during the lesson therefore they do not implement many communicative activities into their lessons and communication in Czech is predominant. However, this statement is highly speculative.

The rest of the teachers claimed that communication in their lessons appears often or very often. Teachers 1, 2 and 3, when giving reasons about the importance of communication in target language, seem to interchange communicative activities with giving instructions in English. They try to implement instructions in English often as they claim but the amount of interactive activities is very low. Attitude expressed by Teacher 6 indicates that teacher understands the principles of communication. Despite this, it did not reflected in the observed lessons.

7. Active engagement of pupils in relation to learner-centred principles

In order to answer the second question⁹ stated at the beginning of this research, active engagement and participation of pupils in the lesson is to be analyzed in this chapter. The following description will show during what activities the high degree of engagement was observed. The information about individual teachers and the activities where high degree of pupils' engagement was observed during the lessons is gathered in the following table.

Table 5

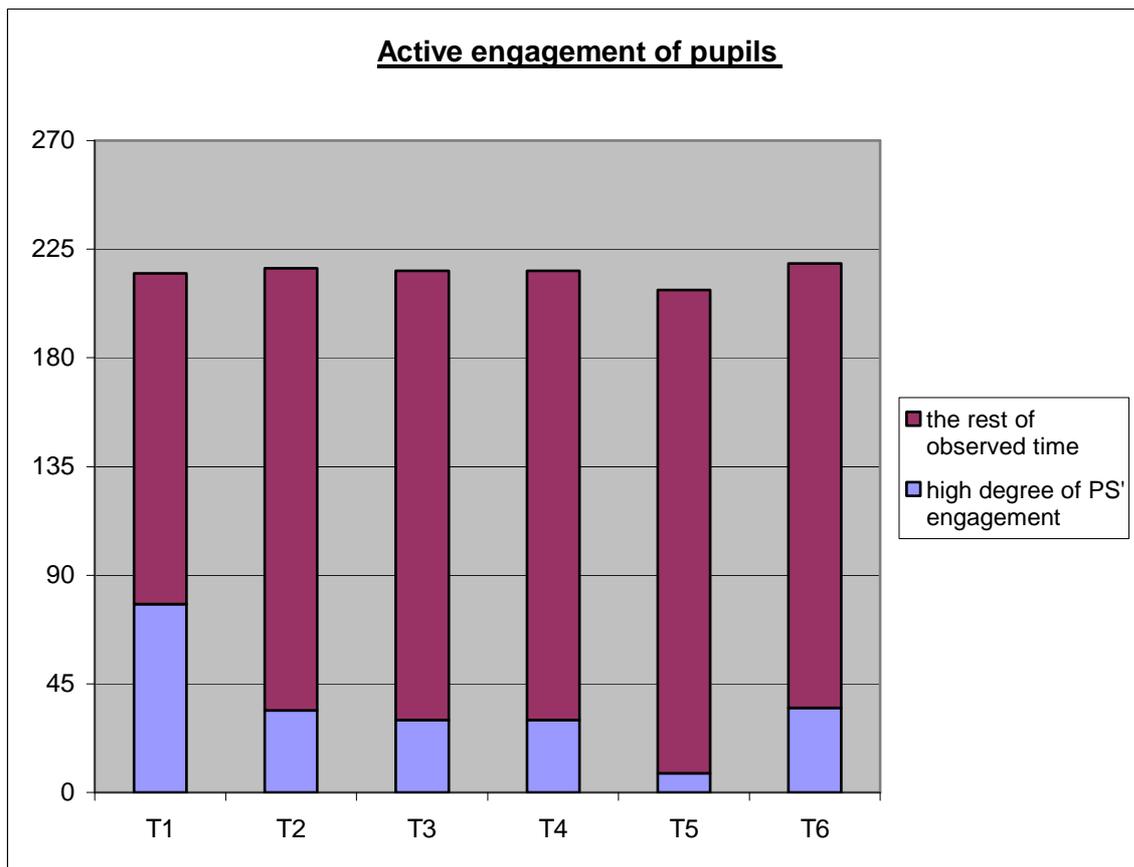
Teacher 1	competition, PS self designed crossword and its presentation to classmates, questioning technique directed by the teacher, conversation during which pupils express their opinions, pupils evaluating classmates' performance by voting for the final mark, teacher questioning pupils about their future, magazine quiz
Teacher 2	pupils in groups writing together about their future, questioning technique (warming up), teacher asking about time using the paper clock, pupils in pairs acting a dialogue, group competition.
Teacher 3	pupils acting a dialogue, playing criss-cross competition
Teacher 4	working with magazine, pupils creating a menu (cooperation allowed), pupils explaining what they answered in their homework

⁹ See page 27, question 2

Teacher 5	pupils in pairs putting sentences into correct order
Teacher 6	pupils in pairs looking for certain information in texts sticked on the wall, pupils asking each other questions in pairs, pupils creating a role play in groups

Table 5 contains a brief description of all activities which were successful from the viewpoint of learners' active engagement. This does not indicate, to what degree were these activities learner-centred. The table also corresponds with Graph 7 which clearly depicts how much were the pupils active in the lessons of examined teachers. The score of Teacher 1, in terms of active engagement of pupils, is the highest, whereas pupils in the lessons of Teacher 5 seem to be the least active. The rest of observed teacher is approximately on the same level.

Graph 7



Last unfinished sentence in the questionnaire was concerned with active engagement and should elicit how the teachers perceive evaluation and what do they do in order to encourage it. The sentence and teachers' responds are the following:

(8.) Active engagement of pupils during my lessons is encouraged by...

“giving pupils chance to create their own activities, which they present during the lesson to their classmates (crosswords, quizzes, competitions, in higher grades: projects and speeches about subjects which are close to them.” (Teacher 1)

“assigning projects (also according to pupils’ own proposals), by praising pupils, and by playing different games.” (Teacher 2)

“praise, calling pupils during the lesson. I try to make the lesson more interesting by using games and I praise again and again.” (Teacher 3)

“using different kinds of activities, older pupils work with the magazine, with the younger ones I use songs, drawing and games. If the pupils come with some new activity I try to involve it into the lesson.” (Teacher 4)

“changing different kinds of activities. I often involve competitions and singing during the lessons.” (Teacher 5)

“giving pupils a lot of space of expressing their opinions. I try to involve many activities focused on the learner and the development of communicative skills together with using different organizational forms, group work, pair work or whole class activities (e.g. discussions)” (Teacher 6)

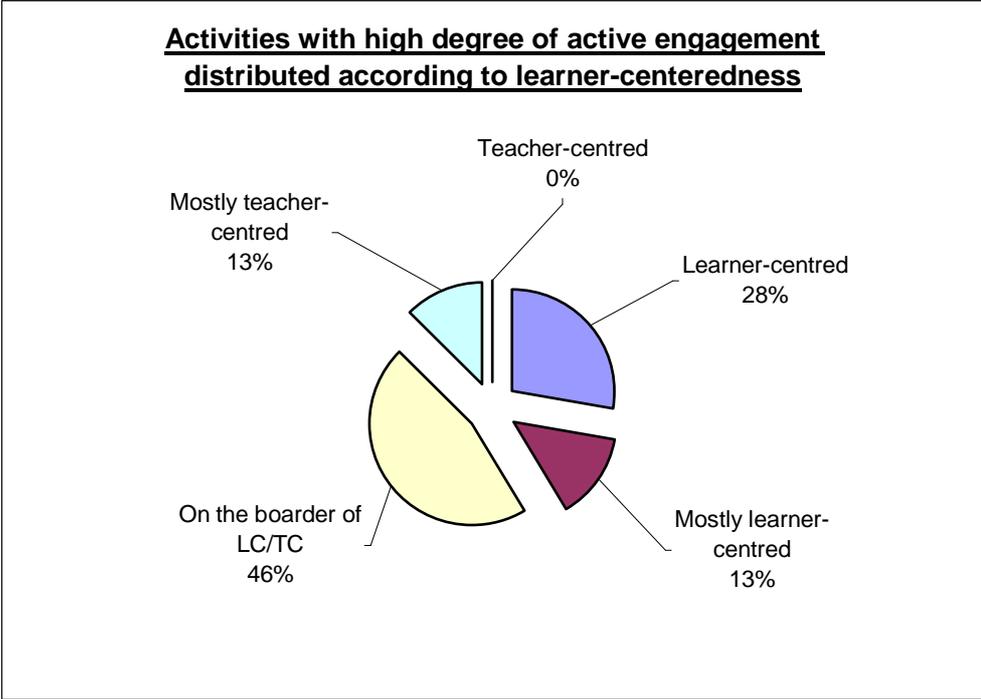
Five of six respondents claim, they support active engagement of the learners by implementing various games and competitions into the learning process. Four out of six respondents suggest that they give space to the learner and when s/he creates her/his own activity, it is employed into the lesson. Another aspect which appeared among the responds is concerned with changing different kinds of activities to encourage pupils’ active participation. In general, there can be traced learner-centred tendencies among the teachers’ responds, particularly considering Teacher 1 and 6. This fact corresponds with the observed lessons¹⁰.

None of the examined activities, in which high degree of active engagement was observed, was teacher-centred. Highly learner-centred activities create 41% and activities on

¹⁰ See Graph 7, page 47

the boarder constitute 46% of the activities with active participation of pupils¹¹. Having this in mind, we may conclude that learner-centred activities support learners' active participation more than activities teacher-oriented. However, there is still a high amount of activities on the boarder. The possible solution may be that in classroom where learner-centeredness is not fully established, the pupils still value and expect the teacher to control; therefore they may feel convenient during the activities where the influences of teacher and learner are balanced.

Graph 8



To be able to trace any connection between learner-centredness and active engagement of pupils I had to register all observed learner-centred activities and than to find out how many of them supported learners' active participation. When considering the scale of learner-centredness, I took in account the activities which were fully or mostly learner-centred¹². I counted the activities together and than I examined, how many of these learner-centred activities supported active engagement of pupils. The collected data are summarized in Table 6¹³, where the left column demonstrates number of learner-centred activities and the right column states how many of those activities promoted active participation. The table shows that more than 50% of all observed activities with high degree of learner-centredness did not encouraged active engagement of pupils.

¹¹ See Graph 8, page 49
¹² See the scale on page 29
¹³ See page 50

The results of observation did not fully prove that learner-centred activities significantly influence active engagement of pupils. However, the results have shown that in terms of active engagement, learner-centred activities were more successful in comparison to teacher-oriented activities.

Table 6

	Number of LC activities	Active engagement
Teacher 1	8	4
Teacher 2	2	1
Teacher 3	2	1
Teacher 4	2	1
Teacher 5	1	0
Teacher 6	6	1

8. Conclusion

The theoretical part of the thesis was designed to illustrate the development of learner-centredness, as one of the current trends in English language teaching. Consequently, the learner-centred principles are not new, they developed throughout the last century and thanks to the promotion of many educators, the importance in ELT seems to grow.

In the first part of this paper, I tried to record and quote all important aspects concerned with the learner-centred principles. Besides this, the significance of their introduction to the classroom was advocated. Establishing the learner-centred classroom in accordance with learner-centred principles seems to be very beneficial in many directions. To promote the learner-oriented environment, pupils should become active participants in the teaching/learning process. As pupils become co-creators of the learning activities, the relevance of the input increases and on this account their motivation is enhanced as well. Subsequently, the lessons become more variable thanks to students' differences and frequent use of cooperative and interactive activities, as an inseparable part of learner-centred classroom. Their regular employment strengthens learners' communicative skills and helps to enhance social development. Positive classroom atmosphere has to be maintained by the teacher in order to guarantee successful learning.

In spite of previously mentioned advantages, some problems may arise. It may be resistance on the pupil's side as well as on the teacher's. Learners with strong beliefs about learning and teaching may refuse to accept specific demands of the learner-centred approach. Consequently, high demands on teachers, when establishing the learner-centred classroom, may cause the discouragement. There is also a remarkable shift, considering the role of teacher and learner. The learner should be given a greater amount of responsibility than in the traditional teacher-centred classroom. The movement towards higher degree of learner-centredness and learner-autonomy should be gradual. Learners as well as teachers may have greater chance to build the learner-centred classroom successfully when changes in the organization of teaching/learning processes are introduced step-by-step.

The practical part is devoted to realization of the research for which the main learner-centred principles specified during the theoretical part of the thesis became fundamental. The investigation aimed at elementary school English teachers in order to identify their perceptions towards learner-centredness as well as observe the actual realization of the

principles during the lesson. Other task was to verify whether the usage of learner-centred principles influences the activation of pupils.

The results of the collected data showed predominant tendency towards teacher-centredness by all examined teachers. Respondents' attitudes and opinions toward learner-centred principles, which were gathered in the questionnaire, often stood in contradiction to what they did during lessons. From my point of view, the teachers may have responded in accordance with what they think would be right, but not in accordance with what they really do. They also may not be able to reflect upon their lessons, so that their responses regarding their teaching approach may be biased. Even though, the teachers are frequently not acquainted with the principles. Furthermore, the implementation of learner-centred activities appears randomly and unsystematically and quite rarely in comparison with teacher-oriented tasks. Teachers' restraints for not using individual principles differ. However, some of them were mentioned quite frequently, such as: high number of students in lesson or time deficit. Frequent case is also teachers' unawareness of some of the learner-centred principles, for example self-evaluation.

The second point of the research examines the activation of pupils in relation to learner-centredness. First outcome can be regarded as quite positive since higher degree of pupils' activation was registered during learner-centred activities in comparison with those teacher-oriented. However, as regards the whole amount of learner-oriented activities, more than half of them was not effective in terms of pupils' activation. In my opinion, the reason lies in unsystematic implementation of learner-centred activities into the learning process. Therefore pupils may sometimes tend to refuse those activities, since the responsibility requires more effort which may become inconvenient for some of the learners.

To evaluate the results in general, it has shown that the learner-centred principles are neglected to a great extent. The teachers tend more to the teacher oriented approach and the character of the observed lessons seems to possess traditional features in most cases. On the other hand, being aware of the fact that the area of learner-centredness should be more promoted may be a first step forward.

Resumé

Diplomová práce se zabývá problematikou vyučování zaměřeného na žáka, fenoménem zvaným „learner-centredness“. V teoretické části je nastíněn vývoj hlavních trendů ve vyučování jazyků ve dvacátém století. Samostatná kapitola poté ilustruje vývoj hlavních principů na žáka zaměřeného vyučování a konkretizuje tyto principy v metodách a přístupech k vyučování anglického jazyka. Zkoumané vyučování je ovlivněno především teoriemi konstruktivistickými, sociálně konstruktivistickými a humanistickými. Tyto teorie a

přístupy k vyučování jsou podporovány mnohými vychovateli a vzdělavateli. Tato práce má stejně tak za úkol hájit zájmy na žáka zaměřeného vyučování.

Výše zmiňované principy zaměřující se na žáka jsou podrobně analyzovány a rozděleny do pěti skupin podle jejich podstaty.

První oblastí, kterou se práce zabývá je oblast kognitivního a metakognitivního poznávání (učení). Při rozvíjení této oblasti je nadmíru důležité, aby si žáci osvojili nové vědomosti na základě svých předchozích znalostí a zkušeností. Je důležité, aby žák hrál aktivní roli při vytváření vlastních vědomostí. Tento konstruktivistický přístup podporuje atraktivnost daného úkolu a tím v nemalé míře přispívá k motivaci žáka. Zde je nutné se zamyslet nad přílišným a neselektivním používáním učebnice. Přílišná závislost na ní může být v rozporu s tendencemi zaměřenými na žáka. Žáci by se měli zodpovědně podílet na získávání a budování znalostí společně s učitelem. Při vyučování zaměřeném na žáka, si žáci sami materiály připravují stejně tak jako je poté používají, úspěšné učení je tak mnohonásobně podpořeno.

Další skupina zahrnuje motivační a citové faktory. Zde dominuje humanistický přístup k vyučování a jeho požadavky na upevňování pozitivního klimatu ve třídě, přátelských vztahů, poctivosti a kladného přístupu. Tradiční učení je v tomto směru považováno za neosobní. Z celkového pohledu mohou negativní emoce a myšlenky nepříznivě ovlivnit žákův výkon a být v rozporu s učením. Z tohoto důvodu by měl učitel dostatečně podpořit žákovu motivaci. Toho může docílit právě díky výše zmiňovaným humanistickým zásadám.

Důležité principy dotýkající se vývojové a sociální oblasti jsou připřizněny ve třetí skupině. Zde je důležité si uvědomit, že žáci se učí nejlépe v případě, kdy materiál odpovídá jejich vývojové úrovni, na což by měl být brán ohled. Rozvoj v oblasti sociální je podporován kooperativním vyučováním, jako jedním z principů na žáka zaměřeného vyučování. Učení se kooperativním dovednostem přispívá k rozvoji jedince a lepšímu sebevědomí, napomáhá otevřené komunikaci a podporuje pozitivní klima třídy. Bylo prokázáno, že školy, které provozují kooperativní styl výuky, zmírnily negativní tendence žáků jako je šikana, alkoholismus nebo drogová závislost a kriminalita mladistvých. Pozitivní vliv kooperativního učení je tedy zřejmý.

Čtvrtá skupina se zabývá individuálními odlišnostmi v učení. Pokud učitel bere v úvahu individuální rozdíly mezi žáky, vytváří tak lepší podmínky pro úspěšné učení. Učitel

by si měl být vědom toho, že žáci používají při učení různé strategie. Tyto by měl učitel pomoci odhalit a podporovat a vést tak žáka k nezávislosti a aktivnímu myšlení.

Hodnocení žáků je pátou a poslední diskutovanou oblastí. Tady je nutné poukázat na to, že je velmi důležité podporovat sebehodnocení a hodnocení žáků mezi sebou navzájem. Tradiční způsob hodnocení učitelem se nejeví jako dostačující z hlediska podporování na žáka zaměřeného vyučování. Sebehodnocení je důležitou součástí žákovy sebereflexe, přispívá k jeho osamostatnění a rozvíjí schopnost zlepšovat se. Tím, že žák přemýšlí o procesech učení, objevuje silné a slabé stránky své práce, zároveň je motivován přemýšlet o nových učebních cílech. Absolutní závislost žáka na učiteli z hlediska hodnocení je nežádoucí. Žák se musí naučit sebereflexi a samostatnosti v hodnocení sebe sama s cílem rozvíjet své kritické myšlení a schopnost zlepšovat se.

Zavádění principů zaměřených na žáka přináší mnoho výhod, žáci by se měli stát součástí vyučovacího procesu, spoluvytvářet učební aktivity, což vede k jejich zvýšené motivaci, časté kooperativní učení podporuje sociální vývoj žáků a zlepšuje komunikativní dovednosti. Pozitivní a vstřícná atmosféra ve třídě podporuje úspěšné učení.

Ačkoli má vyučování zaměřené na žáka mnoho výhod, při jeho zavádění mohou nastat problémy. Nechuť akceptovat nový způsob učení a vyučování mohou být jak na straně učitele, tak na straně žáka. Učitel může být odrazen vysokými nároky, týkajícími se přípravy a organizace učebních procesů. Žáci zase mohou být pevně přesvědčeni o správnosti odlišného způsobu učení a vyučování a z toho důvodu může dojít k odmítnutí akceptovat specifické požadavky tohoto nového přístupu.

V navazující kapitole jsou podrobně analyzovány role učitele i žáka. Zde dochází k významnému posunu v porovnání s tradiční výukou. Je nutné si uvědomit, že zodpovědnost za učení by měla být do značné míry přesunuta z učitele na žáka. Učitel se stává facilitátorem a pomocníkem, jeho intervence v průběhu vyučování se značně snižuje. Kromě přiblížení role učitele a žáka je dále věnována pozornost organizaci a řízení procesů učení a vyučování.

Praktická část diplomové práce je věnována výzkumu. Cílem šetření je zmapovat jak jsou principy na žáka zaměřeného vyučování vnímány a realizovány učiteli na základní škole v současné době a poté ověřit zda využití těchto principů působí na aktivizaci žáků v hodinách anglického jazyka.

V úvodu výzkumu jsou nastíněny podmínky za jakých probíhal. Bylo zkoumáno šest učitelů základní školy. Jednou z metod výzkumu bylo strukturované pozorování. Bylo pozorováno pět vyučovacích hodin u každého učitele, což dohromady činí 30 sledovaných

hodin. Pozorovací arch byl vytvořen na základě principů, které byly analyzovány v teoretické části. Při pozorování byl zaznamenáván stupeň zaměřenosti na žáka, dále pak četnost jednotlivých aspektů objevujících se ve výuce, jako je: závislost na učebnici, aktivní zapojení žáků do výuky, relevance aktivit, kooperace mezi žáky, evaluace a zařazení interakčních aktivit.

Druhou výzkumnou metodou byl dotazník. Byl učitelům předložen v českém jazyce a cílem bylo zjistit, jak učitelé principy na žáka zaměřeného vyučování vnímají. Dotazník se skládal z osmi nedokončených vět, které byly učiteli doplněny tak, aby vyjadřovali jejich osobní názor na daný jev. Anonymita dotazníků měla napomoci k větší otevřenosti učitelů.

Následující část práce se zabývala zaznamenáním výsledků výzkumu a jejich analýzou. Výsledky pozorování a názory jednotlivých učitelů byly shromážděny a následně porovnávány. Z celkového hlediska z výzkumu vyplývá, že všichni zkoumaní učitelé inklinují z velké části k přístupu orientovanému na učitele. Odpovědi respondentů, které byly získány prostřednictvím dotazníku jsou často v rozporu s tím, co bylo pozorováno v hodinách. Možné vysvětlení je, že učitelé mohli odpovídat v souladu s tím, co považují za správné, nikoli v souladu s tím, jak hodiny ve skutečnosti probíhají. Může to být způsobeno i sníženou schopností reflektovat na vlastní vyučovací proces, odpovědi poté nemusí odpovídat realitě a jsou zkreslené.

Zařazování aktivit zaměřených na žáka je náhodné a nesystematické, objevuje se zřídka, na rozdíl od aktivit, kde učitelova kontrola převažuje. Nezačleňování principů na žáka zaměřeného vyučování bylo učiteli nejčastěji zdůvodňováno nedostatkem času a vysokým počtem žáků ve vyučovacích hodinách. Některé principy, například otázka sebehodnocení, byly ve výpovědích převážně většiny respondentů zcela opominuty. Zdá se, že učitelé si důležitosti tohoto jevu nebyli vědomi.

Druhá otázka stanovená na začátku výzkumu se týká aktivizace žáků ve vztahu k vyučování se zaměřením na žáka. Šetření mělo prokázat, zda realizace principů zaměřených na žáka aktivizuje žáky ve výuce angličtiny. Učební úkoly, při kterých byl sledován vysoký stupeň žákovské aktivity, byly z větší části zaměřené na žáka. Počet aktivit, které byly orientované na učitele, byl z hlediska aktivizace znatelně nižší. Tyto výsledky mohou být hodnoceny jako pozitivní. Zdá se, že žáci jsou ve větší míře aktivizováni úkoly zaměřenými na žáka.

Další ověřování aktivizace proběhlo následovně. Byl proveden celkový součet aktivit zaměřených na žáka, a bylo zjištěno, že aktivizace žáků byla zaznamenána pouze u méně než poloviny z nich. Důvod může spočívat v nesystematickém zařazování výše zmíněných

aktivit do výuky. Žáci někdy mohou tyto aktivity odmítat, protože zodpovědnost, která je žákům dána vyžaduje, aby vynaložili při aktivitě více úsilí, než jak byli doposud zvyklí, což se pro některé z nich může stát nevýhodným.

Přes všechny výhody, které vyučování se zaměřením na žáka může mít se zdá, že zkoumaní učitelé tento způsob vyučování příliš nevyužívají. Naopak převažuje tendence k vyučování, které je orientováno na učitele. V pozorovaných hodinách značně převažuje tradiční způsob výuky.

Celkovým přínosem výzkumu zůstává fakt, že je nutné si nedostatky nejprve uvědomit, což může být samo o sobě prvním krokem k jakékoliv změně.

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Learner-centeredness in ELT
Observation sheet

Date: 2/3/2006
Class: 6th grade (14)
Time: 10-10.45

Teacher observed: TEACHER 2

Teaching experience: 31 and more

Appendix 2

TASK DESCRIPTION	LC	TC	TIME
1) T warming up PS with questions: about date, their age, & similar simple questions.		X	'5
2) PS are asked to open their textbooks and read the instructions to a listening exercise (=T/F statements) 1 P (chosen by a teacher reads the statements aloud + T translates.		X	'5
2b) T plays the tape two times + PS can follow the text in the textbook. They should work individually and decide whether the given statements are T or False.		X	'8
2c) Whole class check out. T asks individual PS and writes the correct answer on the BB		X	'5
3) PS are asked to make three groups. They are given the cards with letters of alphabet and cards with the phonetic transcription. PS should match the right pairs together. Winning group members gets 1 MARK.		X	'8
4) PS are asked to open their work books and fill in given exercises. PS work individually		X	'8
4b) T facilitates whole class correction - chosen PS read their answers.		X	'4

Appendix 3

- Is the activity dependent on the textbook?

② ④

- Were the pupils actively engaged? Were they participating on the activities?

③ remarkable engagement during group work activity

- Were the activities relevant to pupils needs?

- topicality
- differentiation
- learning strategies

- Was peer teaching/peer learning present in the activity?

- Were the pupils assessed/evaluated during the lesson? How? (self-evaluation, peer evaluation)

orally during the whole lesson by the T
④ encouraging peer-correction

- Were interactive activities involved?

1/30

Additional comments:

Dotazník učitelova pojetí vyučování T-1

Předkládáme Vám řadu nedokončených vět, které se týkají Vašeho pojetí vyučování angličtiny. Na základě vlastních zkušeností je doplňte tak, aby výstižně charakterizovaly Váš osobní názor na vyučování.

Dotazník je anonymní, ale pro jeho vyhodnocení potřebujeme znát o Vás alespoň základní údaje. Označte nám počet roků pedagogické praxe:

0-1 1-5 6-10 11-20 21-30 31 a více

1. Souhlasím/Nesouhlasím s tvrzením, že člověk vystačí s tím, co je uvedeno v učebnici, protože člověk učebnice nepostýhá, protože by byl vhodný pro všechny školy. Proto jsem i další doplňové materiály (pracovní listy)
2. Nové učivo obvykle prezentuji tak, že shodnou motivací přiměřu žáky, aby měli zájem o nové učivo. Poté pomocí vyprávěním, ilustrací, příběhy, kódy, atd. a konkrétních příkladů vysvětluji obsah učiva.
3. Skupinová a párová práce mezi žáky probíhá v mých hodinách velmi často/zřídka, protože se liším s velkým počtem žáků je velmi obtížné sledovat, aby mezi sebou komunikovali pouze v anglickém jazyce a přitom získali vědomí.
4. Komunikace v angličtině (mezi žáky a s učitelem) probíhá v mých hodinách velmi často/zřídka, protože je důležité, aby dokázali porozumět mluvenému slovu. Pokud mám, že žáci příliš nerozumí, pokusím se dát jim nějaké další jazykové slovy a nebo znovu nějakou s žáků, aby do rozhovoru přiložili.
5. Pro žáky je nejdůležitější, aby si z tohoto předmětu odnesli schopnost porozumět anglickým mluvením a dokázat vyjádřit své myšlenky a dokázat komunikovat
6. Pod pojmem hodnocení žáka si představuji komplexní pohled na jeho znalosti a dovednosti, které by mě rozvíjet pat v hodinách anglického jazyka, ale i při domácí přípravě a v mých hodinách je hodnocení žáka realizováno většinou tak, že hodnotím žáky písemně i ústně. Pomocí ústně probíráám žáky, aby svůj výkon hodnotili sami nebo aby aby rozhodli své přehledy (výmluva v místech hodnocení)
7. Pokud mám v jedné třídě žáky s různou úrovní angličtiny, řeším to tak, že žákům pokročilejším volám obtížnější úkoly a vypracují samostatně se s nimi komunikovat. Žáci s nižší úrovní mají méně úkolů při přemýšlení pracích.
8. Aktivní zapojení žáků do výuky podporuji tím, že mají možnost připravit si vlastní aktivitu, které při hodinách prezentují podobně (knižky, básně, plakáty - se výšších ročníků přejímá a připravy na témata, at. jiné jim bude).

Questionnaire
Teacher's approach to English teaching

The questionnaire presents a number of unfinished sentences which are concerned with your approach to teaching English. Please, fill them in on the basis of your experience to characterize your personal attitude to teaching.

The questionnaire is anonymous but for its interpretation we need to know at least some basic information about you. Please, mark the length of your pedagogical experience.

0-1 1-5 6-10 11-20 21-30 31 and more

1. I agree/don't agree with the idea that the teacher can be completely satisfied with what is contained in the textbook.....
2. When I present new subject matter I usually.....
3. Group work and pair work among pupils appears in my classes very often/rarely because.....
4. Communication in English (among pupils and with the teacher) appears in my lessons very often/rarely because....
5. The most important for pupils to take out from the lesson is.....
6. I perceive "evaluation of pupils" as.....and in my lessons evaluation is mostly realized by.....
7. If there are some pupils with different level of English in my class I usually
8. Active engagement of pupils during my lessons is encouraged by