

UNIVERZITA PARDUBICE
FAKULTA FILOZOFICKÁ

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

2016

Bc. Linda Sedláková

University of Pardubice
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Individualisation and Differentiation in secondary English classes: focus on
talented learners

Bc. Linda Sedláková

Master Thesis
2016

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Acknowledgement:

I would like to express my gratitude to PaedDr. Monika Černá, Ph.D. who provided me with valuable advice and feedback during the whole period of writing this thesis.

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to analyse and focus on individualisation and differentiation of high-level pupils in common heterogeneous English classes. Action research, carried in lower secondary school, aims to increase an inner differentiation in common English classes. The theoretical part focuses on defining the terms *talented* or *gifted*, with further focus on four most common types of conception of the matter. The part continues by specifying a closely related term *underachievers* followed by several possible ways of a reform, with the focus on inner differentiation. The final part of this paper summarizes practical teaching ideas for an individualisation and an inner differentiation of high-level pupils into common classes. The main idea of the inner differentiation is to extend the curriculum of talented pupils with the aim to develop and deepen their knowledge effectively in common English classes to its possible extent.

KEY WORDS

The talented learners, individualisation and differentiation in heterogeneous classrooms, talented underachievers

SOUHRN

Cílem této diplomové práce je zaměřit se na individualizaci a diferenciaci talentovaných žáků v běžných heterogenních třídách. Akční výzkum, provedený v ročnících nižšího gymnázia měl za cíl zvýšit míru vnitřní diferenciaci v běžné hodině anglického jazyka. Teoretická část se nejprve zaměřuje na definici nejčastěji používaných termínů talentovaný/nadaný, s následným zaměřením se na čtyři fundamentální definice této problematiky. Teoretická část se dále zabývá termínem selhávající talentovaní a možnými způsoby nápravy výuky, se zaměřením na vnitřní diferenciaci. Závěr teoretické části shrnuje několik možných způsobů vnitřní diferenciaci a jejich aplikaci v praxi. Zásadní myšlenkou vnitřní diferenciaci a individualizace ve výuce anglického jazyka je vytvořit a obohatit individuální vzdělávací plán pro talentované žáky, s cílem rozvinout jejich stávající znalosti v největším možném rozsahu.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Talentovaní žáci, individualizace a vnitřní diferenciaci v heterogenních třídách, nerozvinutý talent.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this diploma paper is to focus on education and a position of highly able or talented students in usual Czech heterogeneous high school language classes. According to Gaussian curve¹, the occurrence of the talented in our population is 2-3%² but further detailed investigations proved that 20-25% of highly able learners underachieve and stay abandoned in their educational process. Such percentage means that every fourth or fifth learner belongs to a group of the talented and it is mainly up to their supervisors, teachers and other social environment to help them find the right direction for their adequate future development. To direct any learner properly, either talented or not, should be the primary aim of every teacher.

A verbal questionnaire survey and an action research on this topic was conducted among high school teachers and high ability students in Dašická Gymnázium in Pardubice. Pupils of the school undergo high acceptance criterion³ thus the occurrence of the talented should statistically be higher in comparison to other high schools.

Surprisingly, 8 out of 12 teachers stated that an occurrence of the talented is not very frequent in their classes. Unfortunately, the identification of a talented pupil is often connected with the learner's high school scores which seems not to be the correct indicator. Many underachievers cannot reach high scores particularly due to the wrong identification and inappropriate teaching approaches and methods. Many a talented learner suffers, par excellence, by boredom during their school years, although they are naturally eager to learn. The literal suffering often develops into apathy, boredom, behavioural problems and many other negative aspects which greatly limit further development of a highly able pupil. In order to prevent the negative, life-long learning and teaching approaches, I would like to focus on individualisation and inner differentiation in heterogeneous secondary English classes, with the aim to prove that shortage of time in a teaching process and limited financial means, are not adequate reasons for not applying suitable teaching methods. We, the teachers and parents, should be more responsible

¹GAUSS, Carl-Frederich. [online] [cit. 2015-05-22]. Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Carl-Friedrich-Gauss>

²Speciální vzdělávací potřeby [online] [cit. 2015-05-20].

Available at <http://www.nidv.cz/cs/download/pzus/materialy/Specialni-vzdelavaci-potreby.pdf>

³High scores at entrance tests, in connection with high scores from the previous elementary school, are the only criterion according to which are the applicants evaluated. The number of applicants largely exceeds the number of possibly accepted students.

for our learners and their cognitive competences. We should be constantly trying to develop their educational needs to their highest possible extent, by using appropriate approaches and methods in our everyday classes. Such attitude, I believe, may be applied regardless the above repeatedly mentioned statements against such approach.

2. Focus on the Term gifted/talented – A Theoretical Part

It is necessary to point out that theoreticians do not agree on one particular term, covering the whole domain.

To describe a pupil, whose educational demands are greater than of an average learner, one comes across a great number of descriptions and definitions, concerning this phenomenon. When searching for a precise terminology, a talented, gifted or a highly able individual, are the terms which frequently occur in specialized literature. There exists a wide range of terminology that describes the talented individuals along with a variety of other terms used as interrelated synonyms.

From this point of view a researcher naturally fails to find one, detailed description of the phenomenon, as there is always a number of varieties that complement one another in many details.

2.1 Terminology used for highly able individuals

Generally, a talented individual distinguishes him/herself by a higher level of learning abilities and by a higher level of achievement in comparison to his/her peers⁴. Majority of teachers⁵ perceive the talented pupils according to Sousa's definition only. Such attitude excludes talented underachievers and other hidden talented pupils. We often rely on high scores of our pupils and rarely take other aspects into consideration. Such approach proves to be very limited perspective nowadays. On the other hand, there is also an indispensable need to speak for the defence of teachers. In order to recognize a highly talented learner, in contemporary learning process and its speed, we should also be aware of the existence of many technical devices that are often used by pupils, despite the teacher's awareness. Such devices may greatly help to

⁴ SOUSA, A, David. *How the Gifted Brain Learns*. Thousand Oaks, 2009. p.1-2

⁵ Majority of the teachers who cooperated in a questionnaire, suggested a higher level of pupil's achievement as the only criterion for recognizing the talented.

average pupils being able to perform very well, often exceptionally well. Plagiarism frequently occurs and it is very time-consuming to deal individually with such matter, proving the real ability. Projects or homework thus seems to be entirely unreliable tasks out of which the teachers cannot recognize any higher ability of the taught subject. Individual performance and variety of tasks performed individually in the lessons thus appear to be the most reliable practice to recognize a talented individual.

Concerning the terminology, authors often distinguish two major terms that describe an exceptional talent or a learning ability of learners. They converse two the following terms: the *gifted* and the *talented*. Both terms describe slightly different forms of excellence. Gifted is used in terms describing highly able individuals, while the talented is a term used mainly for the skills requiring some practice i.e. the art, music or dance.

Children, who at their early age, indicate an exceptional skill or several skills, may also be defined as *precocious* and *prodigy*⁶. Such terms occur only exceptionally but are mentioned for a completion of the terms.

Being different, in comparison to majority of the school population, the term *exceptional* is another reference. A combination of the terms gifted and talented came to use in the 70s, being often interrelated and used similarly.

Although the terms *gifted* and a *talented* are often used interchangeably by the lay public, Havigerová's⁷ definitions add further detailed descriptions. According to the author, both terms cover slightly different areas. The term *talented* is often being perceived as “*a quantitative, high-level talent*”, often describing a practical and a physical ability or some art potential. While the term *gifted* is often being connected to a developmental process of an individual's potential. It often covers wider range of general abilities⁸. According to *Hertfordshire Grid for learning* website⁹, the terms have recently been replaced by shorter and more general term *most able*, which covers also a wider range of abilities. Sometimes we meet the term *highly able*, suggested

⁶ SOUSA, A, David. *How the Gifted Brain Learns*. Thousand Oaks,2009, pg.3-4

⁷ HAVIGEROVÁ, Jana; KŘOVÁČKOVÁ, Blanka. *Co bychom měl vědět o nadání*. Gaudeamus, 2011.p.5-6, my translation

⁸ HAVIGEROVÁ, Jana; KŘOVÁČKOVÁ, Blanka. *Co bychom měl vědět o nadání*. Gaudeamus, 2011.p.5-6, my translation

⁹[online] [cit. 2015-04-24].Available at: <http://www.thegrid.org.uk/learning/gifted/policies/definition.shtml>

by Sutton Trust in the report on Educating the Highly Able¹⁰ or even *high learning potential*, preferred by Potential Plus UK website¹¹, an independent charity that supports families and their high learning potential children.

Despite the variety of terminology used by different authors, one identical aspect, the cognitive ability, is being focused on. No matter which lexical units we use for a description, each of the terms covers a learning quality, which is in other words extraordinary to a certain extent. The learning quality of a gifted individual is always outstanding, in comparison to a majority of other learners, in a heterogeneous class. The quality, as well as the quantity of the talented pupil's cognition, covers much wider range of knowledge in comparison to their peers. Each talented then performs exceptionally in different sphere of competence and thus more general term might seem to be the most suitable, without the necessity of detailed description of such competence.

In order to receive a precise notion of the exact qualities the terminology describes, we can meet further descriptions, developed into definitions, in which several different authors specify the gifted behaviour according to individual qualities of such a gifted individual. The aspects of giftedness are defined by the following authors.

Collins¹² summarizes the aspects of giftedness on the basis of the UK standards, according to which, the gifted learners are the ones:

- whose outstanding ability forces their teachers seek to develop particular strategies to cope with their high learning ability, regardless the existence of the school policy
- attaining high levels of achievement and benefit from a school policy focusing on the gifted and talented learners
- whose high learning ability is underachieved due to wrong identification

¹⁰[online] [cit. 2015-04-25]. Available at: <http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Educating-the-Highly-Able-Report.pdf>

¹¹[online] [cit. 2015-04-21]. Available at: <http://www.potentialplusuk.org/search.php>

¹²COLLINS, Rita Chalmers. *Developing the Creativity of Gifted and Talented Students in Inclusive Programs: Odyssey of the Mind*. In Grenarová, R., Vítková, M. (eds.) *Cizojazyčná výuka a nadaný žák*. Foreign Language Teaching and a Gifted and Talented Pupil. 1. vyd. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2010. p. 25 -39

Havigerová¹³ divides definitions of the talented into six groups, depending on the choice of the initial theoretical approach.

- *Ex-post-facto definition* which includes the high-ability people, who exhibit signs of extraordinary performance at any field.
- *Social definition* which perceives a talented individual as the one whose high potential enables them to perform in any valuable field of interest.
- *IQ definition* which recognizes a talented individual as the one whose IQ score is higher than 130.
- *Definition based on Gaussian curve* deals with the proportional occurrence of the talented individuals.
- *Focus on creativity definition* is the one which suggests the fact that the talented are identified on the basis of their inborn ability to create.

Definitions of the talented are based on theories that often state that not a single aspect but a set of interconnected features actually form the talented behaviour. A talented behaviour is closely connected with intelligence, which is another essential aspect. Intelligence is perceived differently by individual specialists. To qualify intelligence is not a simple, but fully arduous matter. Machů mentions that “*the most interesting aspect about intelligence is the fact that it is difficult to state what exactly the intelligence represents*¹⁴.” Plenty of definitions can be found in literature concerning the subject. The dictionary of pedagogy by Průcha et al., states that “*to define intelligence is onerous task, since its conception continually develops*¹⁵.” Sternberg

¹³HAVIGEROVÁ, Jana; KŘOVÁČKOVÁ, Blanka. *Co bychom měl vědět o nadání*. Gaudeamus, 2011, p.6, my translation.

¹⁴MACHŮ, Eva. *Rozpoznávání a vzdělávání rozumově nadaných dětí v běžné třídě základní*

školy: příručka pro učitele a studenty učitelství. 1.vydání. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2006. p. 14, my translation

¹⁵PRŮCHA Jan., WALTEROVÁ, Eliška., MAREŠ, Jirí. *Pedagogický slovník*. Praha: Portál, 2003.pg. 88, my translation

speaks about two interpretations of intelligence¹⁶. First defines intelligence as “*a functional adjustment of an individual in a real world context.*” The second, describes it as “*an aptitude of graphic and abstract thinking in spatio-temporal, numerical and other relations*”, which result in the ability to discover a solution to a certain problem. Such aptitude allows an individual to act successfully, and manage complex as well as specific types of situations. Unlike Sternberg, Wundt suggests another point of view. From his conception, the intelligence is a cooperation between the mind and the powers of imagination¹⁷. Landau summarizes the term as “*an ability to collect information, which can be subsequently used in a variety of different situations correctly*”¹⁸. All the stated conceptions have identical denominators, which appear between the lines of every definition. We can learn that intelligence is an on-going process between an above-average ability to accept new information or knowledge and the above-average, logical production of the context.

According to an American psychologist Howard Gardner¹⁹, the intelligence is not “*homogeneous quantity*”. His theory of human intelligence is based on multiple intelligences. He came to the conclusion that there exists a typology of seven mutually independent types of intelligence. He defined them as follows:

- *Linguistic intelligence* occurs in individuals who are usually responsive to the meaning of words equally as to the word order and function of a language.
- *Logical – mathematical intelligence* allows individuals to be responsive to logical approaches to solving mathematical tasks. They are well-directed in the world of figures.
- *Spatial intelligence* is closely connected with imagination. Such individuals are well responsive to outer space and visual adjustment.

¹⁶ MACHŮ, Eva. Rozpoznávání a vzdělávání rozumově nadaných dětí v běžné třídě základní školy: příručka pro učitele a studenty učitelství. 1. vydání. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2006. p. 16, my translation

¹⁷ HARTL, Pavel, HARTLOVÁ, Helena: *Psychologický slovník*. 1. vydání. Praha: Portal s.r.o., 2000. p. 233, my translation

¹⁸ LANDAU, Erika: *Odvaha k nadání* 1. vydání. Praha: Akropolis, 2007. p. 35, my translation

¹⁹ SEJVALOVÁ, Jitka: *Talent a nadání jejich rozvoj ve volném čase*. Praha: IDM MŠMT, 2004, p. 9, my translation

- *Bodily – kinaesthetic intelligence* is typical for individuals, who can well express themselves via body language. Such intelligence proves also in a great ability to manipulate with objects.
- *Interpersonal intelligence* is connected with the ability to detect and recognize mood, temperament, motivation or intention of other people
- *Intrapersonal intelligence* helps the individuals to understand their own emotions with the ability of controlling their own behaviour
- *Musical intelligence* enables the individual to perceive sound, melody, rhythm and tones.

The musical and linguistic intelligences are said to be language-related, since they engage both oral and auditory functions.

To summarize the terminology, it is possible to state that a gifted behaviour is formed by many aspects, inborn and obtained, which in practical life lead to an extraordinary long-term, recurrent, high-level performance. The term *gifted* is to be used in this thesis to cover the extraordinary, high-level performance of pupils at school, as it is being connected to a developmental process of an individual's potential. Learning languages is a developmental process that should lead to fluency in a foreign language or languages.

There also exists a wide range of typologies, covering the term and explaining how the gifted behaviour can be achieved. The most frequently quoted are the following four types.

Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Intelligence, developed in 1985, greatly contributed to the field of human intelligence and proved that IQ tests may as well fail in its objectivity. The level of intelligence is based on the old concept of IQ tests. Highly-able individuals are rather viewed from a more complex perspective. Their capability is continually based on the concept of intelligence, but it is interpreted in a more sophisticated way. Intelligence is not limited to IQ test solely but is formed by aspects such as the practical ability of solving challenging tasks, social or verbal competence to perform and others. Sternberg also claims that if a child suffers from anxiety of testing, the results cannot be valid. Such piece of knowledge can be proved by every teacher, as we are aware of the fact that testing itself is often very stressful and its results may often be distorted. It is essential to respect this fact. In order to recognize a talented pupil, we need to apply several methods, which is a time consuming process.

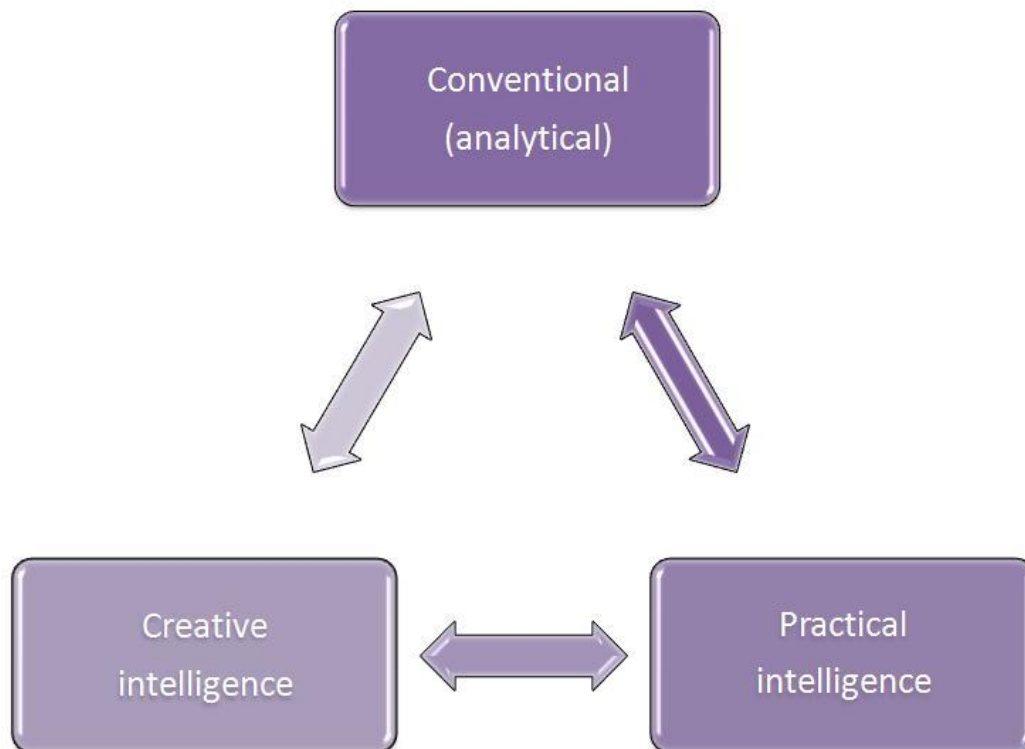
On that score he developed particular intelligence test that takes three types of intelligence into account, thus the term Triarchic Theory of Intelligence. The successfully intelligent people are said to keep all three levels in balance and consequently perform well. The “*successful intelligence*” is related to a real life performance rather than classroom performance.

According to Sternberg, to be “*successfully intelligent*” and perform well does not mean to be at high level in all three components of intelligence. To determine one’s strengths and weaknesses based on the three components, are the way to improve or compensate where necessary.

Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory of Intelligence represents three elements of gifted behaviour²⁰. They are practical, analytical and creative elements.

- *Analytical* (componential) intelligence is a process responsible for effective abstract thinking
- *Creative* (experimental) intelligence enables people being able to come with new creative ideas and make parallel connections
- *Practical* (contextual) intelligence enables to find “practical solutions” to real-life challenges.

²⁰ MACHŮ, Eva. *Rozpoznávání a vzdělávání rozumově nadaných dětí v běžné třídě základní školy: příručka pro učitele a studenty učitelství*. 1.vydání. Brno: Masarykova Univerzita, 2006.pg.11, my translation



²¹Fig. 1. Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Intelligence

To define a talented individual, Sternberg further developed his specification by other five essential criteria:

- **Excellence criterion**

Talented individuals must surpass their peers in one or more domains. Quality is the assessed standpoint.

- **Rarity criterion**

High ability level compared to their peers. Approximately two to ten percent of the talented occur in the population.

- **Productivity criterion**

An area in which the high ability pupil excel, must lead to some extend to productivity or at least to potential productivity. The attained productivity is classified by reached scores.

²¹ Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Intelligence,[online picture][2015-03-10] Available at internet: <https://psychlopedia.wikispaces.com/triarchic+theory>

- **Demonstrable criterion**

The pupil's performance and excellence should always be demonstrated and proved by valid tests. It should be possible to demonstrate the ability repeatedly to avoid the coincidental occurrence.

- **Value criterion**

An excellence of the talented individuals should be valued by the society in which they live. Utility of the talent is a positive contribution not only to the talented individual but also to the whole society.

Despite the fact that Sternberg does not directly include any other social criteria in the Triarchic Theory of Intelligence model, he still has the need to add some rather social aspects to complete the theory of gifted behaviour.

Second frequently quoted typology, describing gifted behaviour, is called *Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception of giftedness*²². Unlike Sternberg's typology, Renzulli directly includes an aspect of a task commitment, which is not based on measured quantity, but rather on social and emotional aspects. Its conception focuses on the following three principles which are demonstrated by a chart and further explained below. They are the following:

- A talent cannot be properly developed and revealed in the case of overemphasizing one ability to the expenses of the two other.
- A single ability does not form the talented individual but is entirely dependent on the other two to create a gifted behaviour.
- One of the principal descriptions of giftedness that form the basis for further research and understanding the matter is Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception of giftedness.

Renzulli claims that "*Gifted behaviour occurs in certain people, at certain times, under certain circumstances*²³" A well-known three ring conception, forms the basis of subsequent understanding of the principle. Renzulli mentions three crucial aspects of the scheme to attain

²² PORTEŠOVA, Šarka. Multidimenzionální modely talentu a nadání. [online] [cit. 2015-06-20]. Available at internet: http://www.nadanedeti.cz/index.php?stranka_id=16, my translation

²³ PORTEŠOVA, Šarka. Multidimenzionální modely talentu a nadání. [online] [cit. 2015-06-20]. Available at internet: http://www.nadanedeti.cz/index.php?stranka_id=16, my translation

gifted behaviour. No single criterion can be applied in the identification of the gifted and thus it is necessary to focus on several aspects that may lead us to most objective conclusion. All following aspects are based on both theoretical and practical research that led Renzulli to the complex view of the gifted.

Renzulli does not accept the dominant, conservative IQ measuring²⁴ as the sole criterion to recognize the gifted, but develops so called multi-criteria identification that perceives the process in broader context to gain more relevant indicators of the gifted individuals. He suggests to explore different dimensions, including the intelligence tests and cognitive ability tests, schoolhouse performance as well as the creative productivity , being all equally considered.

Background information including the social family status, economically disadvantaged or ethnic minority students, is also considered as one of the major aspects in the identification process. The diversity of our society and a specific qualities of an individual plays a crucial role in the whole process and thus it is necessary to take all the above aspects into consideration.

If a teacher is aware of all these components, the identification process may be close to being objective and successful. A meaningful measurement includes not only the typical “*teacher pleasers*²⁵” who are obviously above –average students, always ready and correct at their school tasks and tests, but also non-verbally gifted students having poorer results in their school performance.

The identification process should not lead to exclusion of the hidden gifted but to their revelation and further self-development²⁶.

²⁴ Frequently used in the past

²⁵ A term used by Renzulli [online] [2015-03-10] Available at <http://www.renzulliacademy.com/>

²⁶ Renzulli's *The three-ring conception of giftedness* [online][2015-03-10] Available at internet: http://www.gigers.com/matthias/gifted/three_rings.html

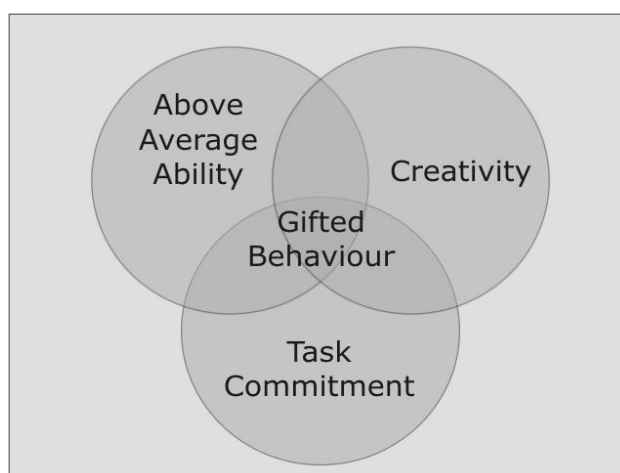


Figure.2.

The Above Average Ability, described in the first ring, defines and covers an ability to receive new information, and the ability to apply newly learnt knowledge. Generally, it is an ability to process the information and integrated experiences, which further result in the adaptive responses, in completely new situations i.e. an aptitude to engage abstract thinking, memory or spatial and verbal reasoning. Such ability is often measured by standard knowledge tests or general intelligence tests.

The Task Commitment ring represents, to a certain extent, kind of a form of motivation. In contrast with motivation, perceived as stimulating process that triggers a response of organism, the task commitment is viewed as a mental concentration on a particular area. It is a specific capacity to acquire knowledge or skill and perform in particularized, real-life situations. Many of the abilities cannot be measured by standard tests. They are viewed as “an upper-range of potential²⁷.” Some abilities are presented as endurance, a belief in inner self qualities, patience or the ability to manage a complex task.

The third ring called *Creativity*, covers three possible abilities in one term. They are the original way of thinking, represented by exceptional points of view or ways of solving some tasks, flexibility and fluency²⁸.

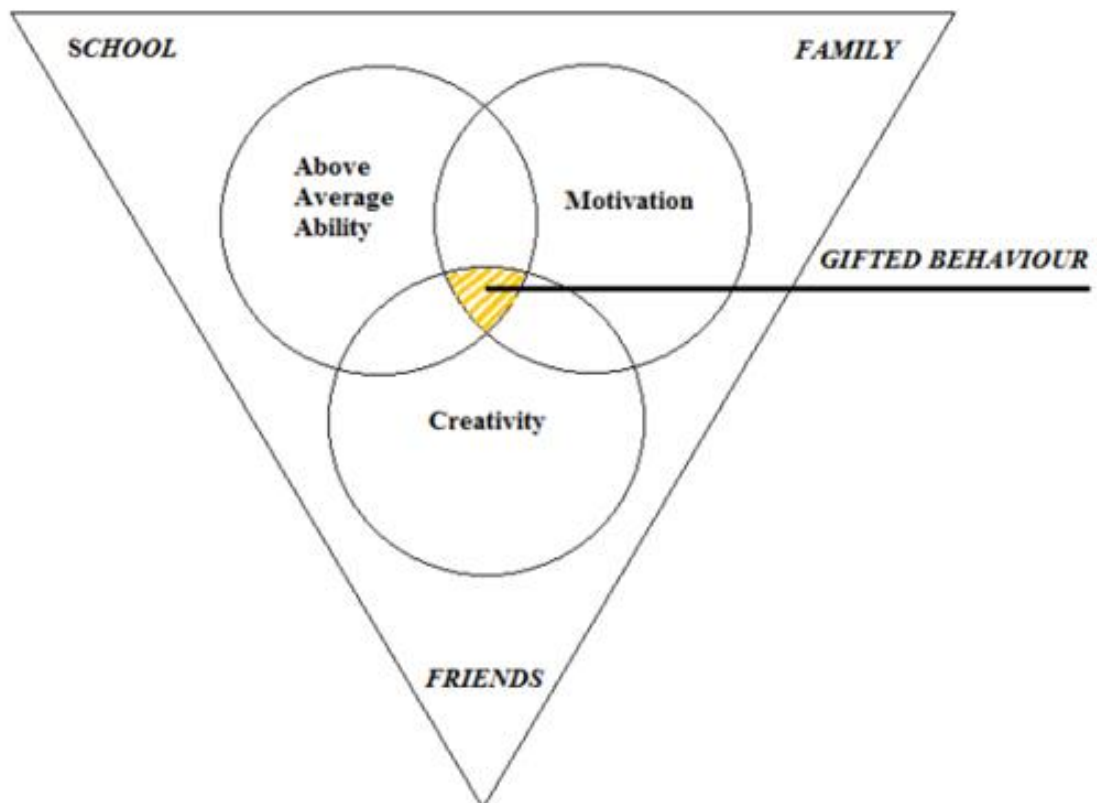
Renzulli’s Three-Ring Conception of giftedness was extended by J.F. Mönks²⁹. He included three interconnected social factors in his model: the school, family and friends, which formed

²⁷ PORTEŠOVA, Šarka. Multidimenzionální modely talentu a nadání. [online] [cit. 2015-06-20]. Available at internet: http://www.nadanedeti.cz/index.php?stranka_id=16

²⁸ Spoken and written with ease, [online][cit.2015-06-20] Available at internet: (<http://www.thesaurus.com/browse/fluency>)

²⁹ PORTEŠOVA, Šarka. Multidimenzionální modely talentu a nadání. [online] [cit. 2015-06-20]. Available at internet: http://www.nadanedeti.cz/index.php?stranka_id=16

and completed a new **Triadic Interdependence Model of Giftedness**. The task commitment was replaced by motivation, which further refers to the ability to take risk and plan the future. Mönks perceives the social factors to be the major aspects that modify the gifted behaviour. According to the Triadic Interdependence Model of Giftedness, the development of gifted behaviour greatly depends on the influence and support from the family, school and peers.



³⁰ Figure 3. Triadic Interdependence Model of Giftedness

³⁰ A conception of Triadic Interdependence Model of Giftedness modified by Mönks and Ypenburg. [online][cit.2015-06-20]Available at internet:<http://www.googlepictures.com>

Last model of giftedness was developed by A.E.Czeisel. Czeisel elaborated on the above conceptions by inner and outer qualifications of the gifted behaviour, which then formed the **4+4+1 Model of Giftedness**. He added social factors, general intellectual abilities and the luck factor. If the environment does not support a talented individual, it is demanding, almost impossible, to develop any inner quality. According to Lanizbatová, this is particularly the case of young learners for whom the support plays an essential role³¹. Convenient circumstances, in other words, the factor of luck, seem as well to be equally important as other factors responsible for giftedness or appropriate development of an individual. Such statement can be supported by generally known fact about, for example, the educational and economical system in developing countries in comparison to, for example, the school and economical system of European countries. Opportunities to develop learners' cognitive qualities are often interrelated with a financial factor or the environment into which an individual is born. Such aspects cannot be influenced by any mental quality but the factor of luck, of a good luck.

It is very demanding task for a teacher to recognize to which extent the social factors are fulfilled. Mönks as well as Czeisel enriched their models by the social factors which seem to form a complete picture of the talented individual. From much personal experience I can state that either the pupils themselves voluntarily uncover details about their family, friends and other social factors, or they completely hide the reality and modify their family situation in front of the public. It is almost impossible to uncover the social factors objectively. For the previously stated reasons, Renzulli's *Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness* appears to be the most suitable model for identifying the gifted pupils in the school environment, as it is formed by measurable aspects only. Naturally, we can suggest that a pupil is gifted on the basis of comparison to other pupils' results at school. For this diploma thesis, the gifted pupils were identified on the basis of Renzulli's *Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness*.

³¹LAZNIBATOVÁ, Jolana. Nadané dieťa: jeho vývin, vzdelávanie a podporovanie. 2.vydání. Bratislava: Iris, 2003. p. 66, my translation

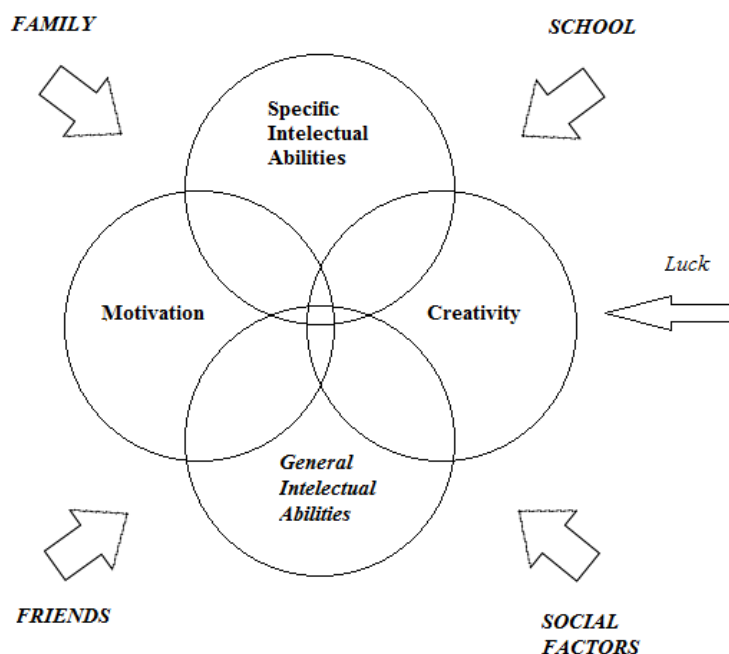


Figure 4. Czeisel 4+4+1 Model of Giftedness

2.2 Identification of the talented pupils

Concerning the identification process of the talented, we should bear in mind two fundamental aspects. To identify a talented pupil in a heterogeneous class, by their results and other visible factors, is only a partial victory of a teacher. More sophisticated task in the identification process is to identify hidden talented learners, the underachievers.

A survey carried by Hanušová³² disclosed very interesting facts about the occurrence of the talented in the traditional Czech schools. The survey was carried in the south Moravian region and the total number of teachers, who actively responded to the administered questionnaires, was 78.

Teachers who claimed that they never had the chance to teach talented pupils, were teachers without full English qualification, which was stated to be “*a possible reason of the wrong*

³² HANUŠOVÁ, Světlana. English Language Teaching to Gifted, Talented and Advanced Pupils. In Grenarová, R., Vítková, M. (eds.) *Cizojazyčná výuka a nadaný žák. Foreign Language Teaching and a Gifted and Talented Pupil*. 1. vyd. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2010. p. 90.

identification". Teachers without appropriate education may not have the opportunity to learn more about a great diversity of the talented individuals.

All the survey participants were language teachers, who in total counted the number of 115 of the gifted or talented pupils in their classes. According to the participating teachers, the identified pupils, exerted rather positive personal qualities than negative qualities. The teachers stated that the positive learning attitude and personal qualities predominated the negative qualities. In several cases the negative aspects were not found at all, which Hanušová³³ finds rather surprising and believes that the negative features perhaps remained hidden or unidentified.

Concerning the positive features, the teachers identically enumerated the occurrence of an exceptional interest in English language, an excellent memory and enormous fluency when dealing with a foreign language matters. On the other side, the occurrence of negative features of the gifted pupils, was defined in terms such as laziness, intolerance of the less talented peers or reluctance of a self-reflection. Such evaluation seems to be based purely on the empirical or subjective ways of identification. If not supported by some structured, official methods, such evaluation cannot be viewed decisive. Evaluation should be supplemented by objective methods used by psychologists or other experts. In a mutual combination with a teacher's notes, they can form fairly complete and precise methods of identification of a talented individual.

Perhaps the most contributing psychologist, in terms of the identification of talented individuals, was Lewis M. Terman, who conducted the most extensive research in this field. His first research group consisted of approximately 1500 talented children. To identify such a group, he used the Stanford-Binet's test from 1904, which he translated into English. In fact, it was suggested to be the first IQ test in practice³⁴. Nowadays the IQ tests in combination with standardized performance tests are considered to be one of the most accurate testing tools for the talented learners' identification.

³³ HANUŠOVÁ, Světlana. *English Language Teaching to Gifted, Talented and Advanced Pupils*. In Grenarová, R., Vítková, M. (eds.) *Cizojazyčná výuka a nadaný žák. Foreign Language Teaching and a Gifted and Talented Pupil*. 1. vyd. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2010. P. 91

³⁴[online][cit.2015-06-20] Available at internet: <http://www.britannica.com/topic/gifted-child>

Testing methods of identification, described by Fořtík and Fořtíková, may help in the prevention of a future underachievement, which is described as “*a provable disagreement between the real potential of the talented learners and their current performance*”³⁵.

Nowadays the testing techniques and methods measure not only the intellectual area, but alongside focus on the measurement of pupil’s maturity, motivation to learn, concentration, diagnosis of learning styles etc.

One of the most frequently used type of testing the knowledge level in our schools are the didactic tests. Didactic tests are used in different ways, often as subject testing at the end or throughout the school year, to establish whether a tested subject was appropriately managed by the tested pupils or not. In The Czech Republic, they are also the entrance³⁶ or school leaving didactic tests, in the form of the state school leaving exam³⁷. High scores of the didactic tests are often viewed as an indicator of a high - knowledge level. Considering all other aspects, such approach should only be a small part of a more complex mosaic. Concerning the entrance testing, a creativity test may also be applied to discover musical or art talent of the applicants. Such testing is frequently used in specialized Czech high schools, for example art or pedagogical schools, often for kindergarten teacher applicants.

Subjective methods, which are carried out with the support of variety of people around a talented child, may in combination with the objective methods lead to a precise identification of the talented. Many a specialist adds that such investigation is a process, which needs to be repeated in order to receive valid results.

Fořtíková³⁸ suggests six of these subjective methods:

- **Teachers’ nomination** is a strategy in which a group of teachers is asked to nominate potentially talented student. One teacher’s nomination might be biased thus group of

³⁵FOŘTÍK.V, FOŘTÍKOVÁ, J. *Nadané dítě a rozvoj jeho schopností*.1. vydání. Praha: Portál.s.r.o.2007, p.23, my translation

³⁶ Standardized CERMAT tests

³⁷ Known as Státní maturita

³⁸ FOŘTÍK.V, FOŘTÍKOVÁ, J. *Nadané dítě a rozvoj jeho schopností*.1. vydání. Praha: Portál.s.r.o.2007, p. 29-30, my translation

five teachers, to complete a questionnaire about a particular student, appears to be more objective. The nominating teachers should have personal experience with teaching the nominated pupils and know them well. In some situations, it might be difficult to fulfil the task i.e. when carried in small schools.

- **Classmates' nomination** as such, may be strongly biased, especially in elementary schools or lower secondary schools. The coherence of a class differs very much and a teacher cannot be certain about students' maturity and objectivity in expressing their points of view, regardless the aspect of age. Pupils often nominate a person who they regard being their friend or who is close to them. Such attitude may directly exclude the talented. The talented often do not have a standard class position nor similar school results, compared to their peers. Their peers, who may sense the difference in a negative way, might give strongly biased response to their teacher. Even small details may influence the given information and the teacher is not able to reveal the reality.

Different attitude to schooling and rivalry, may cause a great misunderstanding from majority of the class. Such data would not be relevant and one would have to be familiar with the class atmosphere, the relationships among pupils etc. which is almost impossible. Such nomination is disputable and the results must be read in a detailed context and in close familiarity with the class.

- **Parents' nomination** is nowadays perceived as an important feature in an identification of the talented. A research carried in The USA proved that parents have a great ability to diagnose their talented children. Teachers often judge their pupils according to school scores. Parents often pay attention to further and detailed circumstances such as personal characteristics and learning attitude of their child.
- **Self-nomination** is another option to nominate a talented learner. A pupil is supposed to define his/her own attitude to learning and to describe personal feelings about their gift/talent.
- **School work evaluation** is mentioned to be the most frequent and time-tested procedure. Tests, individual, pair or group work and projects, presentations and other various kinds of learner's valuable work, may be included in the section. On the basis of the work analysis a teacher can suggest or nominate a talented student.

- **Taking a part in various knowledge competitions or particular subject competitions**, is another way to prove an exceptional knowledge and self-attitude. Teachers may be the ones to nominate the contestant but very often the contestants themselves have strong longing to take part and prove their knowledge.

In order to receive an adequate result, it is necessary to apply as many as possible of the subjective methods alongside with a variety of individual specifications. They may contribute to a proper identification. Personality, particular social behaviour, emotional specifications, attitude to learning, the classroom status and other aspects, are all to be considered the individual specifications, which must be taken into consideration.

Identification of the talented is a long term, complex process. According to Hříbková's research³⁹, there exist three important aspects of determining the gifted child.

1. *“A child's performance is often compared to other peers and thus it is questionable whether the level of performance can be considered exceptional or not. In such case it is advisable to ponder the following two aspects along with other identification steps, in order to make the most precise conclusion.”*

2. *“A rapid development is considered to be the second most important indicator. Parents and teachers are often the ones who play the key role in the identification. They spend majority of their time with their child/pupil and thus are considered to be the ones who know the child comprehensively.”*

3. *“An exceptional potential is traditionally viewed as intelligence. Later, the idea was to recognize and uncover the potential, viewed as an exceptional ability, as earlier as possible, in order to modify and develop the child's potential to its possible extend.”*

All the mentioned aspects, when taken into consideration, may contribute to a proper identification of the pupils' talent.

³⁹HŘÍBKOVÁ, L. *Mimořádně nadané dítě ve škole a v rodině*. Ústí nad Labem.: Univerzita J.A.Purkyně,2010.,p.10-12, my translation

Proper and accurate identification is an essential step towards a successful teaching process. Such process is a first step towards the teacher's approach to the gifted pupils.

2.3 National Curriculum and the gifted pupils

“Exceptionally gifted or highly intelligent pupils exist in real life and they attend schools. It cannot be expected from such pupils to adapt to norms or to an average and limit their intellectual development⁴⁰.” Many a teacher is aware of such fact nowadays, but unfortunately there does not exist a coherent system of educating the talented in The Czech Republic yet. A teacher of the highly able pupils may consult official documents which suggest a number of recommendations, but in general, it is the teachers' responsibility to create an individual educational programme to contribute to the pupil's and also the teacher's personal satisfaction.

The official documents of the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, known as MŠMT, define the talented in the bill number 561/2004, articles no.17, 18 of the Educational Act and the articles no. 12, 13, 14 of the MŠMT regulations concerning the highly gifted children, pupils and students. Such students are further described as *“individuals of a high creative ability and of an exceptional level of knowledge⁴¹.”* Official Czech curricular documents are developed on two levels – state and school. In the system of curricular documents, the state level is represented by the National Education Programme (NEP), known as White Paper, and Framework Education Programmes (FEPs). NEP formulates the requirements for the education, applicable as a whole, while the FEPs defines the scope of education, applicable to particular stages, i.e. preschool, elementary or secondary education. In individual schools, the school level is applied in the form of School Education Programmes (SEPs), known in Czech as ŠVP. According to the principles described in FEP, the School Education Programme is created by each individual school.

There exist specialized schools exclusively for highly – able students⁴², but generally the gifted welfare school service is based on the integration of the exceptional students to common types

⁴⁰ MÖNKS, Franz J.; YPENBURG, Irene H. Naše dítě je velmi nadané: rukověť pro rodiče a učitele. 1.vydání. Praha: Grada Publishing a.s., 2002. s. 53

⁴¹ The full version č. 561/2004 Sb., o předškolním, základním, středním, vyšším odborném a jiném vzdělávání (školský zákon). Sbirka zákonů č. 317 [online] Praha: Parlament ČR, 2008. § 17 [online][cit. 2015-01-06]. Available on the internet: http://www.msmt.cz/uploads/soubory/zakony/Uplne_zneni_SZ_317_08.pdf

⁴²[online] [cit. 2016-01-05]. Available at: <http://deti.mensa.cz/index.php?pg=spolupracujici-skoly>

of schools. The Czech schools create their FEP for the talented on the bases of the official documents. Suggested modifications of the curriculum depend purely on the headmasters 'decision.

One of the possibilities is to enrich the curriculum of a particular subject or subjects. A headmaster may organize a tuition differently by transferring the talented pupil to a higher grade without completing the grade below. The talented pupil is obliged to manage the content of the lower year curriculum. The content and extent of the progress chart test is as well prescribed by the school.

To form homogeneous⁴³ classes with enriched curriculum, may be possible when there is a number of the talented pupils in the school. Groups of pupils may be formed for one or more subjects.

All individual changes are completed on the basis of an official request submitted by the child's official representative, often a parent, with the assistance and official report from the pedagogical and psychological counselling centre and the general practitioner.

Not only have the Czech official documents suggested recommendations for an individual curricular programme of the talented, but also the European Union deals with the talented pupils' issue. A Portuguese minister of Education Marie de Lurdes Rodrigues⁴⁴ declared in 2007 at the European Parliament that every European country faces three common goals in the field of education.

According to Rodrigues, it is necessary to stimulate effort to further education of teachers working with talented or special needs students. She emphasizes the need to improve personal and material conditions for the teachers working with special needs students and to rise a technological potential, pedagogical and educational tools, to a higher level.

⁴³ In terms of gifted students.

⁴⁴ RODRIGUESOVA, M. L., Výňatek z prezentace Marie de Lues Rodriguesové, portugalské ministryně školství. In: *Hlasy mladých: Vstříc rozmanitosti vzdělávání 2007. Evropské slyšení pro mladé lidi se speciálními vzdělávacími potřebami „Hlasy mladých: Vstříc rozmanitosti ve vzdělávání.“* Lisabon: Evropská agentura pro rozvoj speciálního vzdělávání, 2007., p. 9

From the speech of Rodrigues, the necessity of improvement in the field of education is great. Teaching gifted or special needs students is a contemporary issue, occurring in many European countries.

2.4 Individual differences

Hříbková⁴⁵ mentions several distinctive age groups that may appear among the gifted who face double crisis when not being treated properly.

One of the crucial groups of the gifted individuals are teenagers. Teenagers are of a main interest of this action research paper and form the examined group of pupils. They are at high risk of losing interest in their learning as the major interest at this age is to focus on their self-cognition. The whole personality of an adolescent undergoes extreme changes in search for their own identity. The danger of losing interest in matters that were interesting for them before certain period of time, may beside the negative aspects, also bring many completely new and positive aspects. It is a period of great changes which, if properly understood and “grasped” by a teacher, become a challenging period to a new start, new ideas, and new fields of interests⁴⁶. From this point of view, we as teachers of the gifted teenagers, should also perceive this complicated age as a challenge to new ways of motivation, enriching teaching strategies and positive forming of our students’ interests. Generally, it is found out that enthusiasm for any field of human doing is significantly “infectious”. Such attitude might help the teacher make teenagers interested in their subjects and develop their higher cognitive skills.

Concerning the communicative approach towards not only the teenagers, but the talented individuals in general, Havigerová⁴⁷ as well as Fořtík⁴⁸ state that friendly and positive attitude should be applied as the only way to succeed in meaningful conversation. The

⁴⁵HŘÍBKOVÁ, L. *Mimořádně nadané dítě ve škole a v rodině*. Ústí nad Labem.: Univerzita J. A. Purkyně, 2010., p.34-38, my translation

⁴⁶HŘÍBKOVÁ, L. *Mimořádně nadané dítě ve škole a v rodině*. Ústí nad Labem.: Univerzita J. A. Purkyně, 2010., p. 35, my translation

⁴⁷HAVIGEROVÁ, Jana. KŘOVÁČKOVÁ, Blanka. *Co bychom měl vědět o nadání*. Gaudeamus, 2011, p.14-20, my translation.

⁴⁸FOŘTÍK. V, FOŘTÍKOVÁ, J. *Nadané dítě a rozvoj jeho schopností*. 1.vydání.Praha:Portál.s.r.o.2007, p. 16-20, my translation

hypersensitiveness to any critical or authoritarian conduct from the teacher may destroy further essential willingness for cooperation.

The following chapters include a checklist of some typical personality features of the gifted individuals. Notion of the features which can lead to more accurate identification of the gifted individuals.

2.4.1 Positive features

The checklist of positive features, occurring in the gifted pupils' behaviour, provides a valuable source of knowledge to all who try to identify them. Positive features in general, may be used as a source for creative school work, beneficial not only to the talented but also to their peers at school.

According to Lanizbatová⁴⁹, the positive features of the gifted are divided into three major sections. Each section includes a description of the typical behaviour.

1. General features – The gifted individuals perform a great amount of energy and vitality. They have a wide range of interests, a wide vocabulary, they are early readers. They manifest an early ability to use abstract terms and understand the meaning of foreign words. They display an interest in the heart of a matter, have great memory and great concentration. Their interest in matters is challenging. The tendency to lead discussion about difficult matters is great and they hardly ever get tired by intellectual work.

2. Creative features – The gifted are intellectually playful with a variety of original ideas. They perform a flexible thinking along with an original way of solution. They have great imagination and a fine sense of aesthetics. They might be impulsive, having swift reactions, often emotionally vulnerable.

3. Didactic features – Early beginnings and fast pace of learning, easy learning and joy from every intellectual work, ability to recognize details, brightness when observing, tendency to structured problems, high level analytical and logical thinking, creative

⁴⁹ LAZNIBATOVÁ, Jolana. *Nadané dieťa: jeho vývin, vzdelávanie a podporovanie*. 3.vydání. Bratislava: Iris, 2007.p392, my translation

thinking, ability to find a variety of solutions, searching for new information, ability of self-criticism, perfectionism

A compendium of all the typical features, can be as well modified. Many other unstated features may exist and can be added to the list. Despite the typical positive features, Fořtík and Fořtíková⁵⁰ also mention several negative features, whose contribution to the matter change the point of view of the gifted individuals as being always perfect. The checklist of positive features is completed by the list of negative features. Being aware of the possible negative aspects, helps to general understanding of the gifted learner's individuality. Highly able or gifted individuals are often perceived as lucky people without any problems. The opposite may in some cases be the truth. Teachers generally perceive well-behaved pupils positively, unlike the troublemakers whose performance may be lowered due to their negative behaviour. Teachers are often biased, concerning the troublemakers' performance and often do not even accept the fact that a troublemaker may be a gifted, clever child whose needs were not fulfilled and respected.

2.4.2 Negative features

Negative features are often closely connected with the gifted pupil's misbehaviour. Some educational complications may often be manifested by the following aspects:

- Learners may be negligent in their work or refuse to work. They refuse to follow commands or set work. In such case, challenging tasks are the most suitable.
- They often become nervous due to slower pace of the classwork.
- They often protest against routine work and tasks, asking tricky questions to which they require justification why to follow a certain procedure.
- Talented pupils often dream during a day.
- They take an active part in classroom discussions and often lead it.

⁵⁰FOŘTÍK. V, FOŘTÍKOVÁ, J. *Nadané dítě a rozvoj jeho schopností*. 1. vydání. Praha: Portál.s.r.o.2007, p.17, my translation

- Such pupils might be authoritarian to their teachers or classmates and intolerant to their own or somebody else's imperfection.
- They may have hypersensitive reactions to criticism and easily burst into tears
- Gifted pupils often deny a cooperative learning or to subordinate themselves
- They frequently disturb their peers and play the role of a class clown.

Each of the factors serve as a signal to make a change in the attitude of a mentor. Such signals should be considered seriously and treated with a special care. Negative attitude towards the negative aspects will probably not bring any positive change and the relations among the pupil and their teacher, as well as the pupils and the schooling, will in all probability be devastated.

When modifying the gifted pupils at an early age, they “*in return reward their mentors with interesting, unusual and rapid development and originality of their behaviour*⁵¹.” In the opposite case, when the natural development is limited, “*the high abilities may burst into negative forces, regardless of any teaching methods*⁵².”

Hříbková⁵³ summarizes the typical negative features into three sections. They are resumed and described in further details.

Personal problems are said to be the result of the disagreement between the family, school expectations and the inner self of a gifted child.

The gifted pupil faces to many high expectations and is expected not to fail but succeed even in excessive demands of his/her parents who exert a great pressure on the gifted pupil. As a result of such pressure, a child may perform badly, may lose self-confidence and may become

⁵¹ FOŘTÍK, V, FOŘTÍKOVÁ, J. *Nadané dítě a rozvoj jeho schopností*.1. vydání. Praha: Portál.s.r.o.2007, p.18, my translation

⁵²FOŘTÍK, V, FOŘTÍKOVÁ, J. *Nadané dítě a rozvoj jeho schopností*.1. vydání. Praha: Portál. s.r.o.2007, p.18, my translation

⁵³HŘÍBKOVÁ, L. *Mimořádně nadané dítě ve škole a v rodině*. Ústí nad Labem.: Univerzita J. A. Purkyně ,2010., p.31-33,my translation

frustrated or even neurotic from any possible failure. The school reactions may then be obstinate and unsuitable.

In connection to personal, a second section refers to learning problems that may also accompany the gifted pupils.

Learning problems are said to be the most outstanding kinds of problems which the younger, gifted pupils have to face. The psychomotricity is typically unbalanced, in effort to synchronize the ability of an early reading and the ability of writing properly.

Coordination of the fine motor skills along with the high reading ability, may cause over-anxious endeavour of perfect handwriting which can lead to very slow pace of this process. Such circumstance may fill the pupils with frustration and further reluctance to writing or drawing.

Learning problems as well include the learning process which does not have to appear to be a problem until the time the talented student has to deal with upgraded tasks, often in secondary schools. The learning ability is not learnt properly, due to a natural ability of mastering the school matters without any difficulty from the time immemorial. The gifted individuals then, may not be able to succeed in the learning process. In other words, they do not know how to learn and how to handle the learning process itself, despite their high ability or abilities.

There appear two antagonistic tendencies in the social relationships⁵⁴ which the gifted create with their peers. They either isolate themselves or become dominant or aggressive in the classroom hierarchy. A self-isolation often occurs as the consequence of low self-confidence, caused by not being understood by their peers and teachers. Due to different, often higher, level of interests, they become isolated and very sensitive to denial from their peers.

The above mentioned aspects lead to socializing with older pupils or adults. If the intellectual capacity of the gifted is not fully stretched or properly developed, boredom, aggressive behaviour or personality disorders appear. Such are the consequence of not dealing with the matter professionally, not knowing how to view and understand the needs of the gifted.

⁵⁴ HŘÍBKOVÁ, L. *Mimořádně nadané dítě ve škole a v rodině*. Ústí nad Labem.: Univerzita J. A. Purkyně, 2010., p.31-33, my translation

2.4.3 Talented Underachievers

“Underachievement is a term used when the estimated potential of individuals is not realized in their achievements⁵⁵.” According to Montgomery, it is a widespread phenomenon that frequently stays unrecognized and undetected. Generally, underachievers are unable to sit still, stay on task or pay attention. Typically, they have very poor self-image and have tendency to focus on the negative aspects and become demotivated⁵⁶. There exist typical features of underachievement which are often viewed as laziness thus the major reasons of underachievement often stay hidden and abandoned. The common indicators are the following⁵⁷:

- There is a large gap between oral and written work, with poor literacy skills.
- They often fail to complete schoolwork and homework or even refuse to work.
- They have poor execution of work and low self-image.
- They may be dissatisfied with their own achievement, trying to avoid new activities.
- A typical feature is perfectionism and extreme self-criticism, along with setting unrealistic goals and aspirations.
- The gifted do not function well in groups and lack concentration.
- They generally have poor attitudes to school and may have difficulties with their peers.
- Performs satisfactorily in all areas at a level with peers.

It would be very difficult to find a pupil who never shows any of the stated characteristics but it mainly depends on the frequency of occurrence. The real indicators of underachievement aspects are said to occur in clusters. It also depends on the pattern of occurrence and whether it is a boy or girl. Such argument is supported by the following statement that “*many girls would work at a subject they dislike, while no healthy boy ever does.*”⁵⁸ Such difference is particularly obvious in the lower classes.

⁵⁵MONTGOMERY, D. Able, *Gifted and Talented Underachievers*. Chinchester: Wiley Blackwell,2009., p.3

⁵⁶ MONTGOMERY, D. Able, *Gifted and Talented Underachievers*. Chinchester: Wiley Blackwell,2009., p.4-5

⁵⁷ MONTGOMERY, D. Able, *Gifted and Talented Underachievers*. Chinchester: Wiley Blackwell,2009., p.6

⁵⁸ BRERETON, C. *Modern language teaching in Day and Evening schools*. University of London: London, 1990,p.34

Jurášková⁵⁹ outlines principal causes that support the statement why girls perform better in their early school years while boys don't and why it is the opposite way in the later school years. She indicates the girls to be a group in danger, especially due to the changing learning attitude and their perception from the outer society. In the early school years, the learning abilities of girls highly exceed the abilities of boys. In later school years the opposite phenomenon occurs. Such phenomenon happens not due to stagnation of the talented behaviour of girls, but it has deeper roots in the stereotyping behaviour of the society. It is the influence of differentiated upbringing of girls and boys that change the learning attitude to a great extent.

To the detriment of the case, girls are at their early age supposed to be fragile creatures. They are often limited in space of their creativity by being told to play properly, not to explore too much, not to get dirty during the play. Their environment often lead them to passive obedience while boys are allowed the opposite. They are expected to get dirty while exploring and playing. Boys are often supported to play with variety of toys, technical, logical or mechanical, that develop their brain potential. On the contrary the play of girls is expected to be much calmer and the choice of toys is often predetermined⁶⁰.

The equally gifted girls often excel boys in the tasks of their early school years, as they are able to adapt to a new situation more easily. Girls have higher scores in mathematics and in variety of other required tasks. Due to the stereotypical treatment of girls, they are later led to adapt the expected roles. Majority of girls prefer repression of their inner talent to obtrusion⁶¹.

Boys, on the other side, express their needs or dissatisfaction with an authority freely. While they are in the centre of the attention, the girls stay invisible.

In the case of disruptive boys, the teachers offer extra activities which may be viewed by the talented girls as unfair solution. In such case, boys are motivated but the girls stay unmotivated⁶². Such stimulating surrounding offers the "troublemakers" a variety of challenging tasks while the girls stay passive.

⁵⁹ JURÁŠKOVÁ, J. *Základy pedagogiky nadaných*. Pezinok: Formát, 2003. p. 38, my translation

⁶⁰ JURÁŠKOVÁ, J. *Základy pedagogiky nadaných*. Pezinok: Formát, 2003. p. 38-43, my translation

⁶¹ JURÁŠKOVÁ, J. *Základy pedagogiky nadaných*. Pezinok: Formát, 2003. p. 38-43, my translation

⁶² JURÁŠKOVÁ, J. *Základy pedagogiky nadaných*. Pezinok: Formát, 2003. p. 42, my translation

According to Jurášková, there exist three principal factors that highly contribute to girl's demotivation.

Low efficiency motivation – The gifted girls generally tend to self-underestimation. Gifted or highly intelligent girls in comparison to their peer boys, have the intrinsic feeling of a failure as women.

Low self-confidence factor – A different way of upbringing the girls may cause low self-confidence and inadequate self-perception. Generally boys associate their failure with bad luck while their success with their own abilities. In the case of girls, it is vice versa.

A Multipotential and perfectionism factor occurring in the gifted girls often establish very high goals. They work precisely and chose a complicated way of solution. The idea of their future life and career often contradicts. To decide between professional career and a family life may become a fundamental problem. Girls tend to be exquisite in every field of their doing and hardly ever accept any limited variant⁶³.

Able underachievers and the gifted learners may as well exhibit similar characteristics, having similar denominators. The most frequent are denial of low-level task and boredom that originates from the same reason.

It is necessary to state that the principal factor of a successful class setting is always connected to teacher's attitude and their willingness to change the orthodox routines.

2.4.4 Identification procedures

Despite the factors mentioned in a previous chapter, practical procedures need to be applied to identify the underachievers. Many factors stay hidden as they are concerning the pupil's inner qualities and feelings. Montgomery⁶⁴ suggests the division of formal and informal procedures with the aim to facilitate the precise identification of the underachievers.

⁶³ JURÁŠKOVÁ, J. *Základy pedagogiky nadaných*. Pezinok: Formát, 2003.p.38-43, my translation

⁶⁴MONTGOMERY,D.Able,*Gifted and Talented Underachievers*.Chinchester:Wiley Blackwell,2009.p.6-15

Informal Identification Procedures

It is an identification process, curriculum or performance based. A teacher sets more challenging curriculum and observes the responses.

Underachievers often display writing problems, thus it is advised to set an informal writing test and observe the learner's speed of writing.

Strategic approaches to Identification

Grids are often used for underachievers with SEN. A teacher writes information about the underachiever to a sheet.

Classroom observation is an approach, using wide range of verbal and non-verbal supportive responses and strategies for monitoring the interaction. Typical is an observation of a peer teaching.

Shadowing is a strategy, observing the 'daily diet' of the labelled underachiever.

Mentoring is an informal pupil voice, helping with learning difficulties

School council is a formal pupil voice. There is a pupil-staff involvement at all levels i.e. post box information.

Nurture groups should prevent low learning resources which cause constant boredom. There are formed groups with the teacher's personal involvement and intensive addressing in task.

The parent voice serves as an important contribution to the identification process. Parents are able to compare the ability level of their children.

2.4.5 Factors contributing to barriers in learning process

Motivation, encouragement and a positive, supportive system are the main factors that contribute to a successful learning process. A teacher is the primary source of all the factors for pupils in the classroom. If the pupils' intrinsic motivation is raised, the educational process is implied. If not a great damage occurs and the educational process fail.

Montgomery suggests two main groups of factors to be the principal cause of the able pupil's underachievement. They are divided into external and internal factors with further subdivision.

Any failure of the suggested issues may cause pupils' unwillingness to cooperate or participate in the educational process, with underachievement being the future result⁶⁵.

2.4.6 External factors contributing to Underachievement

Challenge and creativity, mentioned in the first place, is the external factor responsible for triggering the successful cognitive process or the opposite. "*Teachers have to become experts in a crowd control*⁶⁶" because teacher, as a class manager, faces variety of unpredictable situations that need an immediate reaction and rectification. Teacher is the main factor, responsible for a challenging design of the lesson in connection to curriculum. Montgomery suggests to provide underachieving pupils with relevant, interesting activities to develop their intrinsic motivation. Such attitude may function properly only the case the pupils stay on task. In the opposite case it is necessary to "*generate interest and maintain enthusiasm and keep pupils involved*⁶⁷." Active participation and personal involvement in the task matters, are said to be the prime motivators to keep pupils on task. Challenging questioning, thinking skills, open end questions and activities, problem based learning, cognitive challenge and creativity are the strategies that if incorporated to school curriculum, may in return bring the disaffected pupils to stay on task. A wider range of pupils stay involved and motivated if the cognitive stretch increases. It is necessary to implement the challenged tasks to ordinary lesson and in such a case, all pupils, regardless of their talent or gift, gain access to the enrichment of their knowledge.

Assessment in general, is an inseparable part of the learning process. Creative activities and challenging tasks provided, take the benefit from performing to the audience as well as from evaluation itself. Although feedback is an integral part of a teachers' job the pressure that rises from the amount of work to be assessed, teachers often chose the easiest way of evaluation, the mark. Unfortunately mark as the *summative assessment*, does not give much feedback on what to improve or how to improve the performance and knowledge next time. While the **formative assessment** gives forward and also the backward feedback.

⁶⁵MONTGOMERY, D. Able, *Gifted and Talented Underachievers*. Chinchester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009. p.6-15

⁶⁶MONTGOMERY, D. Able, *Gifted and Talented Underachievers*. Chinchester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009. p.11

⁶⁷MONTGOMERY, D. Able, *Gifted and Talented Underachievers*. Chinchester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009. p12

Self-assessment, if the pupils are being familiar with the established assessment criteria, may also help overcoming the over-elaborate assessment, as well as the perfectionist tendencies of over criticising. With the teacher being personally available to help, such form of assessment serves as the developmental positive cognitive intervention.

Culture is a factor we are born to. It determines many patterns that are later presented by an individual. Although difference should generally be enriching, our society is biased in many aspects. A different ethnical background is often viewed as a great potential of underachievement, which is at issue in The Czech Republic nowadays. Teachers have a great influence over their pupils, thus a positive and a friendly attitude towards different ethnic groups should be initially applied.

2.4.7 Internal factors contributing to Underachievement

Motivation is one of the most important factors in the educational process. To increase the intrinsic motivation, enthusiasm and interest in the educational process, functions as a great prevention of underachievement. Demotivated pupils often exhibit behavioural problems, become alienated and discouraged. A coercive system is not a mean of improvement but a supportive system must take the place instead⁶⁸.

Personality plays an important part as well. Concerning a pupil's personality, in connection to underachievement, there exist typical traits that are likely to occur. Being an extrovert or an introvert is a personality dimension that influences our life attitude and also the way how the outer world perceives us. Extraverts are often viewed as being social, while introverts are seen as quiet individuals, preferring to work individually. Some individuals are more vulnerable than others and their "*self-esteem is easily lowered by failure than the others*"⁶⁹.

Montgomery states the "*big five*"⁷⁰ personality features, typical for underachievers often mixed in the position.

They are the neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness.

⁶⁸MONTGOMERY, D. Able, *Gifted and Talented Underachievers*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009. p.9

⁶⁹MONTGOMERY, D. Able, *Gifted and Talented Underachievers*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009. p.10

⁷⁰MONTGOMERY, D. Able, *Gifted and Talented Underachievers*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009. p.11

It is also necessary to bear the question of a gender in mind, as it is also closely connected with the underachievement. The matter was already discussed in the already mentioned chapter.

Internal factors such as genetics, congenital, psychological or biological factors are said to result in the special educational needs (SEN) of pupils. Many barriers to progress in the educational process are connected to the internal factors whose negative impact on the learning process is large. Specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and social emotional and behavioural difficulties, are the most common aspects to cause underachievement. If not being counteracted at an early age, there is a continuous difficulty from mild to profound.

2.4.8 How to improve underachievement

According to Montgomery⁷¹, there exist five strategic principles evolved from a research on effective behaviour management, which may help to convert and improve teachers' effective skills to combat underachievement.

CBG is an abbreviation for "*Catch them being good*". We all generally learn more from our strengths than from weaknesses. The idea is to "catch" pupils on task and praise them. Support is more powerful than a negative approach.

PCI is an abbreviation used for a *Positive Cognitive Intervention*. The problem solving type of learning that engages the brain, is a higher-order study skill that develops the ability to learn how to exactly learn. The off-task attention behaviour diminishes the factor of a pupil's detailed interest of his/her work, including a positive and constructive comment upon it.

3 Ms stand for three phases a teacher should be aware of. The *Management, Monitoring and Maintenance*.

The management phase requires any signal a teacher uses, which the class recognize and respond to, in order to get the attention. It can be a verbal or nonverbal signal i.e. standing quietly, waiting. A short verbal general or individual instruction follows. When there is a quiet, the main theme may be introduced.

⁷¹ MONTGOMERY, D. Able, *Gifted and Talented Underachievers*. Chinchester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009. p.17-21

Monitoring requires the teacher's great involvement, closely monitoring the class. It may be short but frequent. Personal involvement and eye contact is another way to combat the underachievement.

When pupils begin to work, the *Maintenance phase* comes to show the teacher's interest and individualized attention to each pupil, to encourage them in their interests and efforts.

TLP, meaning the *Tactical Lesson Planning* is a typical, teacher-centred approach following the objective, introduction, method, contents, material and evaluation headings. Montgomery suggests TLP, instead of the traditional way, to help teachers become more successful in their teaching process. The initial phase is to introduce shortly the task, supported by Power Point presentation or pictures, followed by an activity change. The concept of an activity change means not to listen passively only, but perhaps a note taking activity, sharing the pupils' ideas, talking about their notes, role-play etc.

To improve the teacher's approaches and reflection methods, it is inevitable to include learning conversations into the teaching process. CBG, 3Ms, PCI and TLP help to facilitate the metacognitive processes, regardless of the mediator. Helping students engage their own reflective learning conversations should be the teachers' principal goal to prevent the underachievement.

3. Individualisation and differentiation in the classrooms

Individualisation and differentiation start when a gifted pupil appears in a heterogeneous class. Many a teacher, as soon as he or she recognizes the presence of a gifted pupil in their class, realizes that there needs to be done some particular change to fulfil the needs of all pupils properly. Gifted pupils either directly or indirectly ask for more than the majority of a class and thus it is up to the teacher to apply different and individual approaches and methods.

The process of differentiation begins when "*the teacher asks the student to stop listening or reading and to begin making personal sense out of information, ideas, and skills they have accessed*"⁷². In other words, the process starts when a pupil stops being a consumer and starts

⁷² TOMLINSON, C. A. *Differentiation for Gifted and Talented Students*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin, 2004, p.5

actively participate and create meaningful outcome of the learnt theory. This is the principal aim of the differentiation process.

From the historical point of view, we can regard the educational process from two major conceptions.

The primordial, was based on the amount of information the pupils gained in the educational process, despite the actual ability of using the knowledge properly, effectively or logically⁷³. While the second conception came to the light at the beginning of the 20th century when a Swedish journalist Ellen Key published her book titled *The Century of a Child* (1909), devoted to those parents and teachers who believed in creating of a new educational concept and upbringing of their children⁷⁴.

The ever existing struggle of both concepts can be traced up to nowadays, although the endeavour of individualisation of not only the talented, is an immediate issue.

Human beings have similar, but certainly not identical needs. Such fact is obvious mainly in the learning process, where the future failure, due to inappropriate understanding of the learners' needs, may cause a disposable future harm.

In the article by prof. Rýdl⁷⁵, we can find a detailed description of E. Key's concept, where a fundamental message to contemporary teachers was sent. It stretches across the period of time and is still relevant in modern schools.

Key emphasises the necessity of respect for children's rights at school as well as in their own families. She focuses on a great demand for children's creativity, supported by children's self-sufficiency. Such concept matches with most of the definitions concerning the individualisation of the gifted pupils. The title of her book *The Century of The Child*, along with the development of sciences, particularly of an individual psychology, triggered a new concept and generally progressive perception of education as a whole.⁷⁶

⁷³VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada: 2010. s.4, my translation

⁷⁴VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada: 2010. s.5, my translation

⁷⁵ [online][cit.02-30-2015] Available online at: <https://dspace.upce.cz/bitstream/10195/32580/1/CL2.pdf>

⁷⁶VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada:2010, p.4-6, my translation

From this perspective, Key may be viewed as one of the major personalities who contributed and referred to the matter of differentiation for the first time.

Much earlier it is possible to trace a prime entry to differentiation made by J. A. Komenský, whose idea of homogeneous classes brought many new aspects to the field of education. His then revolutionary division of pupils, for example in age class division, revealed many new aspects the educators had to face⁷⁷. Despite the willingness of forming homogeneous classes, each pupil from even a homogeneous group has his/her own specifications, calling for teacher's individual approach. From this point of view, is the individual approach along with differentiation, identical issue which a contemporary teacher as well as a hundred years ago teacher, have to face.

Homogeneous classes, viewed from the aspect of individualisation, become purely heterogeneous. The aspect of individual learning needs vs. teaching approaches, does not match with the criteria of a purely homogeneous class and needs to be modified in every case.

Vališová points out an attitude that gave rise to a new term the *individualisation*. It was viewed by reformers as a total form of differentiation, based on the individuals 'specific needs'⁷⁸. The fundamental question that was necessary to answer, concerning the specific educational needs, was how to teach individually in a heterogeneous classes. From the historical perspective, we can state that such a question is nowadays as well often asked by the teachers as they did centuries ago.

Kasíková considers the end of the 19th century and the beginning of 20th to be a fundamental turning point of the individualisation and differentiation concept that triggered the beginning of the second conception of learning⁷⁹.

The new conception could not be satisfied with memorizing the facts only, but rather changed the idea to a whole person development. The aim of education changed to an effective learner's communication, to the ability of solving problems and to the respect for learners' individuality and their needs. Pupil's learning styles differ thus it is impossible to successfully apply one teaching method or approach to all learners.

⁷⁷VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada:2010, p.154, my translation

⁷⁸ VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada:2010, p.154-155, my translation

⁷⁹ VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada:2010, p.6 my translation

Due to the contribution of A. Adler and L.E. Thorndike⁸⁰, the originators of an individual psychology, a different attitude towards teaching and learning came to existence. Despite the efforts to create homogenous classes, not only the variability of learning styles but also the divergent social background, different interests and other interconnected aspects such as the motivation, creativeness, social background and other, had to be taken into an account⁸¹.

The idea of individualisation started to develop into the strategy of a core knowledge, presented in a heterogeneous class, with its upper-level variants offered and taught to gifted pupils. Such attitude forms the basis of differentiation and individualisation, suggested by many specialists who deal with the terms.

Hanušová mentions that in the Czech schooling system, there is a great gap, concerning the differentiation and individualisation of the gifted in heterogeneous classes, which needs to be filled. She suggests further education of teachers by i.e. thematically directed seminars, post-graduate education, and a support from psychologists. It is important to develop an effective heterogeneous classroom management with the focus on the needs of the talented pupils⁸².

A research study by Hanušová revealed the fact that teachers do not have much source of information about the talented. Many teachers stated that they have only a little opportunity to educate themselves via corresponding seminars.

The legislative body of The Czech Republic defines the position of the gifted in the Act no.73/2005⁸³, and suggests several possibilities to differentiate. SEPs further elaborate variety of recommendations based on the legislative body, but the suggestions are rather general. According to research carried by Hanušová, teachers may perceive individual school strategies and classroom differentiation as too taxing⁸⁴. Such argument is most frequently stated by

⁸⁰ The originators of an individual psychology

⁸¹ VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada:2010, p.154 -155, my translation

⁸² GRENAROVÁ, R., VÍTKOVÁ, M. *Cizojazyčná výuka a nadaný žák*. 1. vyd. Brno: Masarykova Univerzita, 2010, p.91 my translation

⁸³ [online][cit.05-30-2015] Available at <http://www.msmt.cz/dokumenty/vyhlasaka-c-73-2005-sb-1> Regulation No. 73/2005 Collection of Law is a document which is available only in the Czech language under the title Vyhlaška MŠMT ČR č. 73/2005 Sb. Vzdělávání žáků mimořádně nadaných [online][cit.05-30-2015] Available at <http://www.msmt.cz/dokumenty/vyhlasaka-c-73-2005-sb-1>

⁸⁴ GRENAROVÁ, R., VÍTKOVÁ, M. *Cizojazyčná výuka a nadaný žák*. 1. vyd.Brno: Masarykova Univerzita, 2010, p.104, my translation

teachers but it is not objectively justified. The generalized apprehension may exist, due to general deficiency of time in a teaching process, where individualisation is viewed as a highly time consuming procedure.

It is necessary to realize the primary conception of a learner and of the educational process itself. Kasíková and Valenta perceive the major problem in the way the educators view their pupils and the educational system as a whole. They mention the inner deformation of the school climate, caused mainly by the conception of a pupil as an object, rather than a subject of the education itself.

Educators should pay greater attention to pupils' inner feelings, be tolerant to individual idiosyncrasies and to encourage their creative manifestation. Pupil's inner power is often measured by and compared to official standards, not to be developed to their best personal potential, which is the primary aim of education. They mention the original humanistic idea of "all people being equal" that changed to "we are the same"⁸⁵, which is not a correct way of processing of the idea.

Pupils, who underwent the outer differentiation by passing i.e. an entrance examination, proved to have a high or an expected level of studying capability. Such fact, should sufficiently guarantee the expected learning scores with approximately similar level of pupil's abilities. Yet, in their subsequent learning process they showed a different cognitive abilities which often changed and proved during their studies⁸⁶.

The above described, generally known facts, support the humanistic idea of being equal but invalidates the claim of being the same.

A Prague Pedagogical and Philosophical Faculty's research team, led by prof. Kotásek⁸⁷, proved that majority of teaching approaches and methods are nowadays based on a transmission of the so-called "completed products", which cause a great passiveness of the learners.

So called "completed products" put not only the learners to the position of a passive listener but may also put a teacher to the position of an 'automatic machine', similar to a CD player, who does not need any dialogue, nor cooperation or interaction. The absence of time is the main

⁸⁵VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H. *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada:2010, p.3, my translation

⁸⁶ From the empirical point of view, not all students manifest identical learning approach during their studying period of time.

⁸⁷ VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H. *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada:2010,p.4, my translation

excuse stated by teachers⁸⁸, whose teaching methods show the prevalence of frontal teaching, one way interaction, little cooperation and absence of a dialogue.

The following classification of possible ways of differentiation, is based on both, the homogeneous or heterogeneous groups⁸⁹ of learners, with the aim to form the most suitable learning environment. The same or similar learning ability pupils, learning in identical learning environment, represent less demanding classroom setting for the teacher. Such model forms easier, but in reality often impossible learning environment. It does not alternatively mean that a heterogeneous class or school setting cannot be beneficial to the learning environment. Cooperative learning, group work and other suitably applied teaching strategies are very enriching to both, teachers as well as to pupils.

3.1.1 Inner Differentiation

Inner differentiation is based on the changes within one school. The following taxonomies can be mutually combined, according to teacher's requirements and factual possibilities⁹⁰.

1. Setting of homogeneous classes is viewed as differentiation within one school, based either on quantitative or qualitative criterion.

2. Intra – class- grouping is based on division of pupils into two or several different groups, according to their identical qualities i.e. level of knowledge, similar interests in subjects and others. It requires teacher's individual approach, and an autonomous group work of the pupils.

A variety of approaches and methods in the learning process may be combined according to pupil's needs and their own individual pace of conducting the set tasks. A choice of the learning material offers a variety of topics and related tasks. Pupils can freely choose from the quantity

⁸⁸ Information based on personal interviews carried out with the secondary school English teachers

⁸⁹ To form purely homogeneous groups of pupils is a mammoth task. The aim is to form classes of pupils of similar abilities and differentiate to the most possible extent (gymnázia). Concerning the elementary school where the possibility of differentiation is very limited, an individual approach must be applied.

⁹⁰ VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada:2010,p.159-163, my translation

and content of the curriculum. Kasíková states three main types of individualisation within one class⁹¹.

1. Complementary instructions – The aim of the complementary instructions is to provide standard content of the curriculum, supplied with super structural tasks. The aim is to “*give something more*⁹²” to the pupils who are proficient in elementary tasks.
2. Content of the curriculum is summarized in several steps. Gifted pupils continue fulfilling set tasks according to their individual decision. The decision is based on assessment of what is the more advantageous strategy for them.
3. Individualised matching is a strategy based on the choice and connection of the most suitable teaching strategy to the pupil’s most suitable cognitive learning style.

3.1.2 Outer differentiation

To reduce heterogeneous pupils’ population, in order to lessen the variability and differences among students within one class, is the aiming point applied in the Czech school system. It is provided on several levels from which the school differentiation is most frequently applied.

According to Kasíková, the school differentiation is carried out on the basis of several different factors. Different schools serve to variety of different pupils who are classified according to similar criteria. The criteria may specify schools not only for the gifted pupils but may also form for example religious schools, sport schools, schools for pupils with SEN or high level schools for the gifted pupils. One of the most disputable form of differentiation of the Czech schooling system is the lower secondary types of schools⁹³ where the students are allowed to apply after finishing the lower elementary school. The benefit of such differentiation is frequently debated question with many opponents but also backers of this idea⁹⁴. One point of the view speaks in favour of such differentiation in order to guarantee greater knowledge development for the gifted pupils. Opponents of this strategy claim that separation at the age of 11 may form a caste system which may lead to antisocial behaviour from the side of the ‘chosen

⁹¹ VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada:2010, p.159-163, my translation

⁹² VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada: 2010, p.159, my translation

⁹³ The Czech term *víceletá gymnázia*.

⁹⁴ VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada: 2010, p.156-163, my translation

ones'. Generally the teachers complain about the fact that only 'problematic pupils' stay in the elementary schools, which is very demanding and frustrating for a teacher.

3.2 Strategies to differentiate

“A systematic approach to planning curriculum and instruction.... is a description of the differentiation process and the way of teacher's approach to effective instruction of heterogeneous pupils' population. Strategies and techniques are to help to succeed in this process⁹⁵.”

Tomlinson⁹⁶ states five classroom elements that can be differentiated or modified to increase the efficiency of the pupils' learning process. These elements are:

- **Content** – a term covering what and how we teach
- **Process** – is a strategy how to make students understand
- **Products** – is a demonstration of pupil's learnt competence
- **Affect** – shows the way how pupils link their thoughts and feelings in the classroom
- **Learning environment** – classroom feelings and functions

Vališová⁹⁷ states that any suggested differentiation system should be based on the following two individual principals:

- **A principal based on the ability to manage the content of the curriculum**
It enables gifted pupils to improve their knowledge and skills independently, while the rest of the class may continue working at their own pace.
- **A principal of continuous progress in the educational process**

⁹⁵TOMLINSON, C. A. *Differentiation in Practice*. ASCD.2003, p.3

⁹⁶TOMLINSON, C. A. *Differentiation in Practice*. ASCD.2003, p.3

⁹⁷ VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada: 2010, p.155, my translation

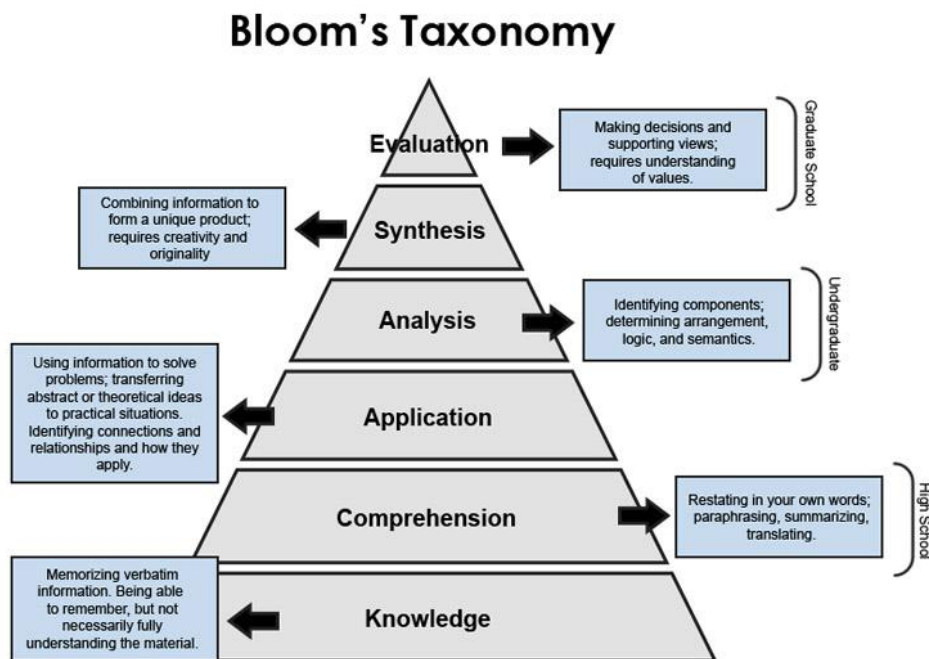
Suggests that each individual pupil should have the opportunity to learn continuously to aim at higher and higher targets in order to improve. There is no intention for the talented pupils to stagnate by waiting for the rest of the class to finish the task.

3.2.1 Mastery learning

Mastery learning, also known as *Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, proceeds on the assumption that “*the learning process and its outcome is interrelated with the amount of time available*”⁹⁸.

In order to differentiate, in accordance with the second principle of the continuous process, Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives may be followed. The taxonomy classifies objectives set by educators to learners in the learning process, following six cognitive levels of the process complexity.

It is applicable to all level learners with the aim to reach the maximum level of the learnt competence with further application in real life situations.



⁹⁹ Figure 5. Bloom's taxonomy

⁹⁸VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada: 2010, p. 159, my translation

⁹⁹[online][cit.05-30-2015] Bloom's Taxonomy, figure.
Available at: <https://www.google.cz/search?q=blooms+taxonomy+figure>

New terms are defined as:

- **Knowledge** - Remembering, Retrieving, recognizing, and recalling relevant knowledge from long-term memory.
- **Comprehension** - Understanding - Constructing meaning from oral, written, and graphic messages through interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, and explaining.
- **Application** - Applying - Carrying out or using a procedure through executing, or implementing.
- **Analysis** - Analysing - Breaking material into constituent parts, determining how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose through differentiating, organizing, and attributing.
- **Synthesis** - Evaluating - Making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing.
- **Creating** - Putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning, or producing. (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, p. 215).

Bloom's taxonomy serves as a great tool when designing effective lesson with the aim to activate all learners, regardless of the level of their knowledge.

Bloom claims that mastery learning process can be mastered if sufficiency of time and the feedback are provided.

3.2.2 FENI Model

FENI model is a flexible, four-level model of differentiation. The initial capital letters represent:

- **F** – a letter for seminar which supports and develops the pupil's learning
- **E** – for enrichment
- **N**- fundamental
- **I** – intensive support for low-ability pupils

Each of the group includes a number of pupils in accordance with their learning abilities. A number of teachers have to participate in FENI model as it can form huge flexible groups of learners, whose successful group work is assessed by a final test. According to their scores, the students may be rearranged to other groups with the aim to form homogeneous groups.

Low ability students receive help from SEN teacher, assistant or a high ability student. The initial phase of the FENI model is a mass instruction teaching, stating the aim of the learning process. Second step is to divide pupils into their mother groups, often consisting of 30-35 pupils. A teacher repeats and complements the teaching instructions and further divides the mother groups to smaller working groups of 5 to 7 pupils. These groups may be repeatedly reduced into smaller and smaller groups. After one or two hours, the pupils are tested from their learnt competence. Kasíková states that the process of the cognitive group learning is very effective¹⁰⁰.

3.2.3 Dalton Plan

Dalton plan learning, whose elementary learning strategy is based on the pupil's autonomous learning, was founded and developed by Helen Parkhurst.

The guiding principle of Dalton plan is based on the contract principle of autonomous learning. Pupils chose their own procedure method to attain the goal. Teacher's role is to be the pupil's consultant who supports the pupil and supplies them with feedback. Their cooperation is supported by new contracts every month¹⁰¹.

¹⁰⁰ VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada: 2010, p.161, my translation

¹⁰¹ VALIŠOVÁ, A., KASÍKOVÁ, H., *Pedagogika pro učitele*. Grada: 2010, p.161, my translation

Kasíková summarizes the elementary features of contemporary systems of individualisation. They are said to be closely interconnected with the following essential factors:

- **Teacher's management** – pupils are never left abandoned in their learning process, teacher's guidance is necessary
- **Written instructions** - a factor essential to pupil's autonomous learning process
- **Precise goal delamination** – there is a necessity to set a goal clearly
- **Means of the feedback** – which are often abandoned but crucial in the cognitive process
- **A number of peer, student assistants** – who play a major role in the cooperation process
- **Individualised learning process** combined with cooperative or small group learning

3.3 Challenging learners (creating a motivating learning environment)

As already stated, teacher- centred lessons may work for some students but the gifted are not the case. They need to develop their higher-level knowledge. They need to receive challenging tasks and practice their skills in a secure school environment. Mixed ability classrooms may not necessarily cause problems to the teacher, but could be rather challenging and the teacher should profit of the reality.

Sousa¹⁰² suggests several ways how to create a gifted learners' friendly learning environment in heterogeneous classes. The most important is a secure and flexible learning environment, which is described as:

- Student-centred environment should encourage pupils to use variety of resources, ideas and tasks. Students can pursue learning objectives individually while the teacher attends other students in the class.

¹⁰²SOUSA, D. A, *How the Gifted Brain Learns*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin,2009, p.220-228

- A place where a variety of learning styles and interests is accepted.
- A place that encourages students to be open to ideas offered by others.
- A place which supports pupil's autonomy and independence within reasonable limits, set by an authority.
- Such environment should be a place which is not limited by any subject boundaries or conventional curricular limitations.
- It is a place that encourages pupils to reflect on learning processes and factors that help them in making their progress

3.4 Organizing a supportive working environment

Majority of the gifted students spend most or all of their school days in heterogeneous classrooms. The following five rules, stated by Sousa, are designed to meet the potential of the gifted pupils at all grade levels in heterogeneous environment.

- Daily challenge and progressively more difficult curriculum is to be set.
- Pupils should face the opportunities to work independently in their areas of interest.
- Variety of subject-based and grade-based acceleration methods i.e. subject acceleration, university based programmes, individualized distance or online learning should be a part of their educational programme.
- Cross-graded classes is a system when a gifted pupil attend higher grades for particular subject of their interest.
- Advanced placement – college-level content provided to high school students
- Dual enrolment – gifted pupils should work at their next higher building level.
- Mentorship - connecting the talented learner to an expert who structures the learning is another possibility to offer adequate and enriching learning environment.

Despite the sporadic criticism of grade-based acceleration, Sousa states that “*the evidence of grade-based acceleration proves that the social impacts are very positive for options such as grade skipping.....Emotional impacts are small and positive throughout*¹⁰³.”

Practical Part

4. Action Research

To conduct an action research, the initial task is to be defined, with the focus on a fundamental research question. For this action research the initial question was the following.

Is it possible to differentiate both, the learning and teaching process of the gifted in heterogeneous secondary English classes, without any negative consequences to the concerned parties?

To receive an answer to the question, an action research was conducted within the school year 2014-2015, from October to June. The research was carried in heterogeneous English language classes of lower grammar school Dašická in Pardubice.

An action research is “*a professional development tool used with the aim to enhance the teacher’s professional abilities, in contrast to their practical applicability*¹⁰⁴.” For this reason an action research was chosen to be the most suitable research method for the thesis.

Kurt Lewin described an action research as “*a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action*¹⁰⁵”. For this type of research, he uses a model of “*a spiral step*” consisting of the planning, action and findings about the action. The action is a never ending spiral process, progressing in cycles. Such structure forms a continuous process that allows pupils to get to higher levels of their educational process in accordance with the school curriculum as well as with acceleration and enrichment methods.

¹⁰³SOUSA, D. A, *How the Gifted Brain Learns*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin, 2009. p.230

¹⁰⁴HLAĎO, P., *Úvod do Pedagogického Výzkumu pro Učitele Středních škol*. Institut celoživotního vzdělávání, Mendelova univerzita Brno. 2011, p.20, my translation

¹⁰⁵ LEWIN, K., *Action research and minority problems*, Journal of Social Issues 2.1946, p. 46

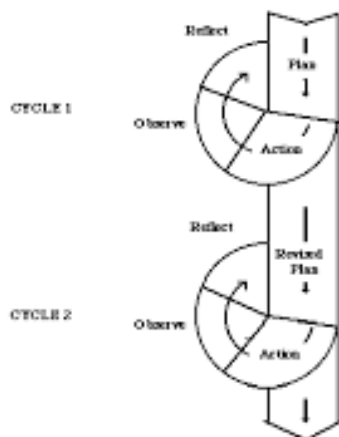


Fig.5 Lewin's model of a spiral step¹⁰⁶

According to Čabalová, an action research is “a type of research utilized by a teacher....it focuses on self-knowledge and reflections of a teacher's pedagogical effectiveness, in order to improve the teaching process¹⁰⁷.”

F.N. Kerlinger¹⁰⁸ states that “an action research is a systematic and a critical investigation of hypothetical assertions, with the result of a new explanatory theory.”

All three definitions, concerning the action research methods, state a positive outcome of the method, applied to a practical teaching. The only negative aspect that is often pointed out by many teachers is a long-term run of this type of a research and shortage of time to fulfil the method appropriately. All the interviewed teachers stated that they never applied any action research to their teaching process. The main reason and the only reason for such attitude, was the shortage of time and not sufficient amount of an extra personal energy. Teachers as one

¹⁰⁶ LEWIN, K., *Action research and minority problems*, Journal of Social Issues 2.1946, p. 46

¹⁰⁷ [online][cit.2015-03-24]. PhDr. Dagmar Čabalová, Ph.D. - *první část Studijní opora k předmětu KPG/PG1*
Available at:
https://fpe.zcu.cz/study/celozivotni_vzdelavani/nabidka/ESF_mistri/materialy2011/LS_podpory/kpg_pg1/KPG_PG1_c1.pdf

¹⁰⁸HARTL, P. HARTLOVA, H. *Psychologický slovník*. 1.vydání. Praha: Portal s.r.o. 2000, p. 236, my translation

claimed that all their school duties do not allow an ordinary teacher to apply any extra activities or methods to their lessons.

Seen from the interval of nine months, such aspects did not finally revealed as objective but rather rewarding in terms of the personal growth of a gifted pupils' teacher.

4.1 Initiation

To identify pupils for this action research, I have applied five of the subjective methods suggested by Fořtíková. Concerning a number of objective methods, I have had a very limited source. This category was limited to an entrance examination didactic test, which consisted of two parts, focusing on mathematical and Czech language skills. The standardized Cermat entrance tests were applied to select the best pupils' performance to enter the lower grammar school. There has been a notable trend in recent years to select gifted children in a grade 5 of an elementary school, at the age of eleven or twelve. Such selection is disputable. There occurred two opinions on the phenomenon. Some teachers argue that children should not be separated according to their knowledge at elementary schools, and the gifted pupils should attend heterogeneous classrooms with all its strengths and weaknesses that come out of the process. The opposing argument claims that such a division causes great problems, particularly to elementary school teachers who then are inevitably forced to deal with problematic pupils, whose studying attitude is very poor. Their teaching mission then becomes a problematic fight and a struggle on their professional journey.

We all, not teachers only, need to see a positive outcome of our doing, no matter what our profession is. We, the teachers, have the need to meet a positive outcome of the teaching process itself, as it is the primary aim of our doing. We need to see a positive outcome, in other words to see our pupils performing the knowledge we pass to them. Teaching problematic or low-intelligence pupils only, may cause a great professional frustration. Such an argument has also its counterargument expressed by parents and teachers of the gifted pupils. They state that the gifted need an individual approach and a wider range of much detailed education to make progress, adequate to their gift. In ordinary heterogeneous classes, teachers have to face to several aspects that may impede the progress of the gifted. The time limit finally seems to be the smallest problem. From a frequently very high number of students within one class, to pupils with special needs and to less gifted students who may demand more of the teachers' attention, the teacher faces to an extremely demanding task. In such a heterogeneous class, it is often

unrealistic to manage educational process well, fulfilling all pupils' special needs. Frequent occurrence of the above stated aspects may greatly limit the progress of the gifted. Although a teacher, as the class manager, is in charge of dealing properly and effectively with all varieties of obstacles, it is often stated by teachers themselves that such assignment is beyond them.

The primary intention that triggered my interest in this matter was to prove that individualisation and differentiation of gifted pupils, in an ordinary heterogeneous English classroom, does not have to destroy or limit ordinary English lessons or the teachers themselves. Instead, it was to prove that it is possible to support the gifted pupils and their teachers in their development to enjoy schooling process and receive some enrichment from ordinary English lessons. Enrichment that both parties involved may receive a benefit from.

Concerning the procedures of an action research, Skalková¹⁰⁹ suggests a taxonomy of six possible applicable methods:

- An empirical observation
- Experimental method
- A structured questionnaire
- Interview
- Content analysis of pedagogical documents
- Measurement techniques used in pedagogical research

For this action research I have chosen five of the methods:

- An empirical observation¹¹⁰
- Content analysis of pedagogical documents¹¹¹
- Structured Questionnaire
- Interview
- Content analysis of pedagogical documents

¹⁰⁹ SKALKOVÁ, J. *Úvod do metodologie a metod pedagogického výzkumu: vysokoškolská učebnice pro studenty filozofických a pedagogických fakult.* Praha: SPN:1983. p.204, my translation

¹¹⁰ The observation was taking place regularly in English lessons, throughout the school year 2014-2015.

¹¹¹ Content analysis of revision and progress tests.

An empirical observation method focused on several aspects to reveal the gifted individuals. The pupils were observed not only in English lessons but several other teachers teaching a variety of subjects, were involved. We all were observing identical factors such as: exceptional interest in a subject, an excellent memory, enormous fluency in language matters and positive responses to more challenging curriculum. The observations also revealed much enthusiasm in dealing with more challenging tasks.

Content analysis of pedagogical documents, helped me to collect objective data concerning the pupils' level of knowledge. School results from didactical tests were exceptional and the observed pupils received the best marks of the class. In some cases the evaluation was the possible best and no worse mark than A was given.

A structured questionnaire was used to receive the pupils' personal assessment of their improvement in English language classes. The observed pupils were also asked to assess their development, comparing the two school year semesters. A pre-questionnaire interview preceded to guarantee that all the questions are understood properly.

Data interpretation was nearly the last step to make in the action research. A detailed description of the data interpretation described by Hlad'o as a "*systematic analysis of a particular fact that results in consequences, which are further described and explained in a context. A researcher interprets and clarifies the sense and idiosyncrasies of new information and extrapolates conclusions*¹¹²." The data were processed statistically, by counting the occurrence of a similar, expected factors.

A Research report in the form of a final written document, included the newly discovered information and an outcome of the action research. It consisted of the theoretical part which defined the research problem, of a research question, hypothesis (in the case of a quantitative research), of a research method or several methods and finally of the data analysis¹¹³.

¹¹² HLAĐO, P., *Úvod do Pedagogického Výzkumu pro Učitele Středních škol*. Institut celoživotního vzdělávání, Mendelova univerzita Brno. 2011, p.26.my translation

¹¹³ HLAĐO, P., *Úvod do Pedagogického Výzkumu pro Učitele Středních škol*. Institut celoživotního vzdělávání, Mendelova univerzita Brno. 2011, p.27.

4.2 Preliminary investigations

In general context it is impossible to create homogeneous classes with the same level students whose needs are absolutely the same.

Pupils who became the main interest of this paper, study at secondary grammar school in Pardubice. They are admitted to first grades of lower and higher secondary grammar school on the basis of passing the standard Cermat entrance tests from mathematics and the Czech language.

Another aspect that plays an important role in accepting a student, is a high score of marks they reach at their previous schools.

The higher score of points, the bigger chance they have, to be admitted. Often one B mark from a minor subject may be crucial for not being admitted.

From the perspective of intelligence, it is obvious that majority of the admitted pupils are of very a high knowledge level, but in real there exist some great knowledge gaps in their learning process. Although being of the same age and coming from the same classroom, the students differ in the level of their knowledge and learning attitude.

Despite the detailed selection of students to enter the school, there is no guarantee of creating homogeneous classes where all students have excellent or identically similar school results.

An interview with English language teachers at first revealed an interesting, but fairly subjective fact of a lower occurrence of highly intelligent pupils in their classes. Such fact led me to a conclusion that the information may not be objective. The scores of grammar school pupils are required to be at a high level for a long term period, concluded that their abilities and intelligence are to be above average. Still their recent results were not, in majority of the cases. Only in some cases, the correspondence with their previous scores from primary schools was in agreement. Such pupils were immediately labelled as gifted, but there occurred a very small number of them.

A lesser research was carried out in a Secondary Grammar school in Pardubice, interviewing fifteen, not only language but also the form teachers, asking about the occurrence of the gifted in their classrooms. Surprisingly, not all teachers confirmed that they teach gifted or highly intelligent pupils.

Such information was assessed as a wrong identification of the gifted pupils, due to the fact that several years ago, they were viewed as an elite of the primary schools. Their later underachievement was fairly peculiar as there is not very frequent occurrence of such a rapid decline in intelligence unless caused by severe outer intervention. The suggestion was reinforced by a research carried by Hanušová and was already described earlier in this thesis. Although it is an interesting fact, it was only a marginal aspect that came to light while dealing with the matter of gifted pupils.

Twelve out of the teachers confirmed that there is an occurrence of 2 or 3 gifted pupils in every parallel English class¹¹⁴ they teach. Three of them stated that they teach 3 or 4 gifted in one class. Out of 15 classes, there were 3 classes with no occurrence of the gifted at all. The highest occurrence of the gifted pupils was in lower secondary school while the lowest was found in the higher secondary school.

Teachers agreed that lower secondary pupils have a higher learning attitude and are eager to learn new matters in comparison to the older ones. They agreed that the higher secondary class students' learning attitude might be interrelated with the teenage age difficulties and with the level of maturity of each individual.

The mini research also proved that the teachers stated identical characteristic features for identifying the gifted learners. They were a high learning attitude, fluency and a great memory. All identifying features were the positive.

Surprisingly, negative features were not mentioned. Boredom, misbehaviour, bad learning attitude and performance were not, according to all of the teachers, the manifestation of inappropriate choice of teaching methods, but rather features of a personality. Underachievement was never mentioned as the prime cause of the negative feedback.

Teachers, in general claimed that they hardly ever used different teaching approaches towards the gifted students.

It is necessary to mention the fact that all 15 teachers complained about a shortage of time for the teaching itself and such fact was stated as an explanation for not making any individual or differentiated teaching plans for their gifted pupils.

¹¹⁴ A class is divided to two language groups. Each consists of 16 students max.

Although the action research was purely my intention to make a reform of my own classes, the mini interviews with my colleagues made me realize that I am not alone in the ‘fight’ and further supported my intention to prove that such cliché does not have to be the truth.

After collecting and labelling the names of the gifted pupils, I consulted my suggestions with other colleague teachers who knew the pupils well from other lessons. The form teachers of the selected pupils confirmed the correct choice of the individuals, as they also excelled in other school subjects and competitions. Surprisingly, all the chosen pupils were viewed in a positive way only as polite, well-behaved children.

Neither of the selected pupils had any behavioural problems or showed any negative aspects of their personality. In the group of the gifted pupils, the ratio of genders was five boys and six girls. From the empirical observations, the girls were fairly submissive, while two of the boys preferred being in the centre of an attention and three of the boys did not. Due to their wit, the boys often performed as the classroom clowns. It is necessary to add that the intelligent, witty commentaries were not always disturbing but often spoken to the point with the respect to the classroom policy rules.

For the action research, I have collected data from eleven talented pupils out of three English classes. Their identification process was based on the criterion, drawn upon the official literature consulted and stated in a theoretical part of this paper.

To collect data for this thesis, a qualitative research was chosen as the most suitable tool. A regular collection of numerical as well as non – numerical data, was carried out in the school year 2014-2015.

First step to identify gifted pupils was to get a classroom as well as a teacher’s nomination of the individuals. Next was to prepare sheets with the following criteria and names of the nominated pupils. One assessment sheet with a name of one pupil.

Data collecting process was happening regularly, in every English lesson, for the period of one month, to make certain that the repeated occurrence of the observed qualities is constant and not only occasional. By putting points to the occurred features, teachers received fairly objective results.

Pupils were labelled talented according to frequent occurrence of the following criteria that were analysed on the condition of empirical observations in the English lessons.

- Very frequent or constant occurrence of the highest marks from English language
- A minimal or zero occurrence of mistakes in oral as well as in the written English competence
- Always being the first ones to know the correct answer
- Always having their set tasks done before the end of the limit
- Never being confused of or misunderstood the set tasks
- Very fluent and correct in presenting their answers
- Very creative, stating original replies
- Using varieties of possible answers
- Always asking for extra work
- Often lying on their desk, waiting for the rest of the class to finish the set tasks
- Asking additional questions
- Expressing their interest and active participation in difficult tasks
- Eager to deal with challenging situations
- Never willing to give up
- Using English only, in a communication with the teacher in English lessons
- Interested in many sophisticated matters, having a good view
- Able to support their statement
- Often being leaders in group work activities

Pupils who were naturally presenting the above qualities, were with no doubt exceptional in their classroom performance and deserved to be called gifted.

The identification took approximately one month before being certain that the above set points occurred regularly.

Content analysis of pedagogical documents happened every week to analyse the received marks. High score occurrence was recorded and analysed at the end of the action research.

A structured questionnaire was handed in to the chosen pupils to find out the information about their attitude at the beginning of the research. Before starting, we pre-read all the points to avoid misunderstanding them.

Interview, questions were asked personally at the end of the school term, in June. The difference was analysed to find out whether the intervention was a successful process.

4.2.1 Stating a problem – diagnosis of the initial situation

To understand the pupils' attitude toward their English lessons, a questionnaire was created. It consisted of six open – ended questions. To include the pupils' points of view to the initial phase, was an intended step.

A teacher may only guess what the problem is, from the visible and provable indicators such as facial expression or gestures, but the inside remains hidden.

Although the estimate might be correct, to involve pupils in the process help them in developing the critical thinking and expressing their opinion concerning the educational process. Further discussion about problems with no punitive consequences, supports a positive classroom atmosphere and the awareness of creating their own lesson together with their teacher.

Open and friendly discussion helps the pupils to realize that they are an essential part of the schooling process.

Majority of the asked pupils expressed their discomfort with learning pace in an ordinary English lesson. Despite their immense understanding of all the reasons why they are to follow the majority of the class and why the teacher leaves them behind the focus¹¹⁵, they felt anxious with their 'slower' schoolmates and became extremely bored and nervous, sometimes verbally aggressive and offensive.

Their favourite English lessons became a waste of their time. Their learning attitude rapidly declined and I could see from their facial expressions that they are getting 'far away' from the lessons, far away from being on task.

Sometimes they asked for or created an extra work for themselves. Via e-mail communication, some of them sprightly asked for more varieties of the task and criticised several aspects¹¹⁶. Despite their high score in English lessons, the pupils did not make any progress and identically claimed that English lessons do not bring them any gained benefits.

¹¹⁵ For example not enough time for an individual teacher's approach towards the talented learner

¹¹⁶ Criticism was mainly about the pace of the lesson and their boredom.

Another aspect that frequently appeared in the observed classes was the overestimation of outer discipline that predominated the learner's creativity and their individual attitude to the educational process. While observing several English classes, five out of nine observed teachers required silence during the pupils' individual work, which was often a mammoth task for them. It is essential to state that five teachers who required immense outer discipline were elderly teachers while the ones offering more freedom in pupils' way of expressing, were either native speakers or middle aged teachers.

More freedom did not lead to complete lawlessness but proved to attract pupils 'interest in the reasonably set matters. Owing to my colleague's observations in English lessons, I was able to realize that identical features also appeared in my English lessons. Such visible evidence helped me to reappraise my own teaching approach and start the intervention plan followed by the process.

4.2.2 Intervention

The intervention plan was finished in December 2014 and put into practice since January 2015 to June 2015.

The analysis of the structured questionnaire revealed the fact that all the questions were answered almost identically. Such outcome inspired me to create an intervention plan together with the gifted pupils. Together in a group, we discussed an intervention plan that was to follow. The gifted pupils actively participated in creating the intervention plan by adding suggestions on what they prefer and enjoy doing in the English lessons. Summarizing all the suggestions along with my own ideas, I created an intervention plan that consisted of the most frequently stated missing aspects. The aspects were chosen according to the need of the gifted pupils.

From the questionnaire analysis the most frequently stated answers and problems were the following:

What is your favourite subject?	English is my favourite subject. (identically stated)	
What is your favourite part of the English lessons?	Individual projects – 3 boys 2girls	Presentations of an interesting article of their own choice – 2 boys, 4 girls
Does a level of your English lessons correspond with the level of your English knowledge?	No, the level of my English lessons is below my English knowledge level. (identically stated)	
What do you miss in the English lessons?	Challenging tasks, I am bored most of the time, learning nothing new. (identically stated)	
What English competence and skills would you like to improve in your English lessons?	Speaking, grammar, vocabulary (identically stated)	
Could you state some strong and some weak points of your English lessons?	Strong – nice atmosphere, new vocabulary, interesting facts	Weak – I am bored most of the time, I learn nothing new, I cannot present myself.

A questionnaire presented to the gifted pupils of a lower secondary grammar school revealed that each pupil demanded similar learning and teaching approach. They all were bored during their English lessons and did not develop their knowledge to its maximum possible extend. English language was a subject that all of the gifted pupils preferred and were willing to improve. The initial attitude to improve their language skills was thus very positive, which along with the pupils' personal involvement formed a perfect setting for the intervention plan.

Three major aspects that came out of the questionnaire had to be redressed:

1. More challenging work had to be set.
2. Enrichment of the curriculum content is necessary.
3. Acceleration of their learning process needs to be implemented.

Challenging work

The pupils agreed to subscribe an Intermediate level English magazine of B1 level¹¹⁷. The aim was to use articles and present them¹¹⁸ to the rest of the class, often in a form of a project. The articles were to trigger the pupils' interest in a particular matter and then, they were to find as much information as possible and present it to the rest of the class.

Brain teaser activities¹¹⁹ were included in their individual work, as a voluntary part of their obligatory work.

Open-end questions were included, i.e. what is the most vivid memory of your childhood? They were often handed in, in a form of an essay. Written essays often corresponded with a particular unit theme of the textbook.

For any extraordinary work, the gifted pupils might have received a bonus mark. For assessing their creativity pupils' votes were used. The criteria were set in advance (i.e. the most interesting, enriching or challenging piece of work) and the other peers were the jury. Such assessment might be seen subjective but the class had to agree on one winner only, stating the reasons why. After the practice of several awards, the winners were chosen quite objectively.

¹¹⁷ They ordered Bridge magazine

¹¹⁸The rule for a presentation was to prepare it as a mini lesson for their peers (new vocabulary, explanation, challenging tasks etc.)

¹¹⁹ A great amount of inspiration, available online at: www.txgifted.org

Enrichment of the curriculum content

Pupils received so called “personal files”, which included tasks for a week. They were based on the content of the curriculum for lower secondary classes, in accordance with the content of student’s and work books of their peers. Mostly, they included enriched version of the work book activities along with some added challenging extra work. Often they were one level higher than the tasks set to the rest of the class.

Acceleration

Owing to the presence of the English native speaker in our school, we agreed on putting the gifted pupils to his regular classes. The frequency was once per two weeks. Pupils in higher classes were three years older than the gifted pupils. Pupils were asked to actively participate in the lessons but were not forced to. The only duty was to make notes during the native speaker’s lessons to make sure that new knowledge was passed to them.

When introducing new tasks and trying a new way of differentiated teaching in heterogeneous classes, a negative reactions appeared initially from the not chosen pupils. It was necessary to explain the exact reasons why there appears a differentiated way of teaching. My English language students, aged 14- 18 are allowed to contact me via e-mail address and state any reasonable, critical opinion about the way of teaching their English classes. As already stated, such objection can be raised on the basis of objective reasons. From the teacher’s side, the students are assured of not being punished or criticised in public but are rather praised for being brave and helpful in creating our mutual educational process. Such feedback is a very interesting source of the professional and self-development.

Concerning the final interview, the answers were analysed and used to conclude the intervention plan outcome.

The following table summarizes the answers, which the gifted pupils agreed on identically.

Can you generally describe the English lessons in the first and second term, can you see any difference, can you compare?	We work more and the work is interesting, we like it.
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Has your learning attitude changed over the school year?	Certainly, we are not bored anymore. We like the English lessons more.
Could you state three major positive aspects of the English lessons?	We are more independent, my English knowledge improved
Could you state three major negative aspects of the English lessons?	We want more activities and more work, and more presentations

The interview was conducted as a group interview and the answers we discussed by all of the pupils. The final interview proved that the gifted pupils' learning interest increased while they received useful and, according to their personal judgement and needs, meaningful new source of information which is acquired on the basis of an individual approach.

An individual approach was also proved to be one of the major missing aspects the pupils mentioned, regardless of whether being or not being gifted. All the asked pupils agreed on the fact that an individual approach supports their confidence and improves the teacher-pupil relationship while the opposite approach of being treated the same, causes many misunderstandings that may lead to total loss of interest in a particular subject.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this diploma thesis was to focus on the gifted pupils' learning process, in heterogeneous secondary English classes, with the accent on the inner differentiation. The primary intension was to prove that individualisation of the gifted pupils does not have to represent any potential interference with the curriculum content. All questioned teachers stated that they differentiate gifted learners by individual assessments only. Despite the fact that the gifted individuals are perceived positively, it is not the case when they demand an individual teaching approach from their teacher. They are often abandoned in their cognitive needs and left on their own. For my teaching career this fact was newly revealed and realized. Owing to this action research I personally became conscious of the fact that I am also the case.

The occurrence of gifted pupils in secondary grammar schools is much higher compared to other types of school. This fact challenged me as a teacher of the gifted pupils to change my approaches and methods towards the heterogeneous classes, in terms of highly able pupils. A fundamental goal of a teacher is to make supportive and challenging learning environment principally for the pupils and not only for the teachers themselves. Teaching and learning form a mutually interconnected process. Pupils are willing to fulfil their school tasks and cooperate with their teacher, on the basis of meaningfully set tasks and activities. In the opposite case, their learning attitude declines. Such decline in my own lessons, triggered the interest of any possible intervention.

Despite the fact that I believed in the possibility of individualisation in heterogeneous classes, I was not actively able to put the process in practice. Searching for new methods and strategies opened new possibilities in fulfilling the task. For the initial intervention three strategies were used. The challenging classroom activities, which arouse an interest of all pupils in the class and became an additional activity for the remaining majority of the class, became an approach number one. Two other strategies completed it to form fairly strong teaching attitude. They were the enrichment and the acceleration.

Enrichment of the curriculum content and the task acceleration was positively and naturally accepted by all the gifted pupils. All strategies happened on a regular basis and were successfully included to common English lessons. The conclusion of this thesis is the existing evidence of possibilities to differentiate gifted pupils' educational process into a common heterogeneous class. The process happened with a positive result on the side of the gifted, the teacher and the majority of the class.

6. Resumé

Cílem této magisterské práce, je nalézt odpověď na stanovenou klíčovou otázku, týkající se vnitřní diferenciaci talentovaných žáků v běžné heterogenní třídě. Záměrem bylo dokázat, že proces diferenciaci talentovaných nemusí představovat žádné potenciální narušení běžného chodu třídy a osnov daného ročníku. Dotazovaní učitelé připustili, že diferencují výuku talentovaných žáků pouze zadáváním individuální práce, často bez zpětné vazby. Navzdory faktu, že talentovaní jsou vnímáni pozitivně, při potřebě individualizace je tomu právě naopak. Jsou často zanedbáváni ve svých kognitivních potřebách a právě tato skutečnost byla nově zjištěna. Za pomoci metody akčního výzkumu, jsem si osobně uvědomila, že se řadím mezi ty samé učitele, kteří primárně vnímají talentované žáky, jako mírnou komplikaci a nevnímají je jako možný přínos pro celou třídu.

Četnost talentovaných žáků na gymnáziích je značná, v porovnání s ostatními typy škol. Tato skutečnost se pro mne stala výzvou ke změně v přístupech a metodách v heterogenních třídách s výskytem talentovaných žáků. Základním cílem učitele, je vytvořit podporující a inspirativní výukové prostředí, především s ohledem na žáky a nejen na učitele.

Procesy výuky i učení jsou vzájemně propojené. Žáci mají vůli plnit své školní úkoly a spolupracovat se svým učitelem, to však pouze na základě zadávání úkolů smysluplných. V opačném případě jejich učební morálka upadá. Takovýto úpadek spustil můj zájem o problematiku možné intervence. Přesto, že jsem si byla vědoma možnosti individualizace v heterogenních třídách, nedokázala jsem aktivně tyto strategie do své výuky začlenit. Při hledání nových metod a strategií, jsem se rozhodla aplikovat tři možné způsoby intervence.

Podnětné aktivity, aplikované v diferenciaci talentovaných žáků, vzbudily také zájem ostatních. Aktivity obohacují učivo pro daný ročník, spolu s akcelerací výukového procesu, byly naprosto přirozeně a pozitivně přijaty žáky ze zkoumané skupiny. Implementace všech tří strategií a následné využívání, se dělo na základě pravidelného včlenění do procesu výuky.

Závěrem této práce zbývá uvést, že zavedení diferenciaci talentovaných do běžného výukového procesu v heterogenních třídách, byl možný. Výsledkem je pozitivní přístup jak talentovaných a učitele, ale také většiny zbývajících žáků.

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8. Appendices

A list of Appendices:

Appendix 1 – A structured Questionnaire

2 – Interview

8.1 Appendix 1 - An interview form

- A structured questionnaire

An Interview

The following questions were asked personally with the aim to receive feedback on the applied intervention plan in English classes.

1. Can you generally describe your English lessons in the first and second term, can you see any difference?
2. Could you compare the two terms?
3. Has your learning attitude changed over the school year?
4. Could you state three major positive aspects of the English lessons?
5. Could you state three major negative aspects of the English lessons?

A structured questionnaire

The following questionnaire was to be answered anonymously to lessen pupils' anxiety and to increase an objectivity of the answers. The results were consulted in general, so the gifted pupils received feedback as a group.

Could you please specify your answers as much as possible?	
The questionnaire serves as a source of information for a diploma thesis research and on no account will be used for any other purposes.	
1. Do you enjoy your English lessons?	
2. What is your favourite part of the lesson?	

3. Does a level of the English lessons correspond with the level of your English knowledge?	
4. What do you lack in your English lessons? (i.e. what skills would you prefer to practice more)	
5. What English competence would you like to improve in your English lessons?	
6. Could you state some strong and weak points of your English lessons?	

Thank you for your answers. We can improve our English lessons to your needs together.

8.2 Appendix 2

The following table serves as an example of a possible month plan. First column summarizes work for one week. Second column is to be completed at the end of the week, with the aim to self – evaluate and to provide feedback to the teacher. The form is only a part of a month file which includes month tasks (usually copies with higher level tasks). Each student received the set of tasks for a week only, in order not to lose the rest of the copies. Pupils were free to complete their tasks according to their own personal plan but the completed file was to be handed in by the end of a week to a teacher’s office. Every month there were personal consultations held. Each lasted from 5 to 15 minutes, to receive studying results and feedback of the pupils’ work. The gifted pupils were able to use the key to lessen the amount of a teacher’s work and correct majority of their task. Pupils were able to objectively state whether the amount of work was sufficient for them and were able to ask for extra work if needed. Such attitude developed the pupils’ independence and responsibility for their work. A teacher functioned as a mentor and a guide on their educational journey. At the beginning, it was very important to set constant rules for the cooperation (i.e. consultation hours, deadline for the work etc.)

A Month plan January 2015

Name:	Date:	Class:	Unit:
Anna S.	January 2015	3.A.	3 Health and Safety
Week 1. You and your body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary (parts of the body) • Grammar (subject relative clauses) 			I can – I need to improve -
Week 2. Looking after yourself <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary (problems and treatment) • Grammar (should / could/might) 			I can – I need to improve -
Week 3. Sports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary (sport events) • Grammar (object relative clauses) 			I can – I need to improve -
Week 4. Biology: vitamins and minerals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary (healthy vs. unhealthy diet) • Grammar (revision + develop your writing) 			I can – I need to improve –