

JIHOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V ČESKÝCH BUDĚJOVICÍCH  
FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA  
ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

DEVELOPING YOUR OWN TEACHING STYLE: TEACHING ENGLISH TO  
CZECH L2 LEARNERS

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Studijní obor: Anglický jazyk a literatura, Španělský jazyk a literatura

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### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisor Mgr. Helena Lohrová, Ph.D. for her guidance and helpful suggestions she has provided me with. Secondly, I would like to thank the three respondents, who were willing to dedicate a large portion of time to the completion of the questionnaires and thus provided valuable opinions related to the topic of this bachelor's thesis. Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support.

## **Anotace**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je vysvětlit, proč je pro učitele anglického jazyka nezbytné rozvíjet vlastní styl vyučování namísto toho, aby se řídili pouze předepsanou či doporučenou metodikou. Čtenáři práce předkládá přehled nejdůležitějších faktorů, jenž rozvoj vlastního stylu vyučování ovlivňují. Popsána je také spojitost těchto faktorů s kroky, které by měl učitel promyslet, aby byla výuka co možná nejefektivnější. Bakalářská práce je rozdělena do dvou částí, z nichž první, na základě odborné literatury, představuje téma rozvoje jazykově zaměřeného vyučovacího stylu. Druhou část představuje shrnutí zjištění praktického výzkumu malého rozsahu. Podstatou výzkumu bylo dotazníkové šetření zaměřené na získání informací o rozvoji individuálního stylu vyučování v prostředí českých škol. Šetření se zúčastnili celkem tři zkušení, středoškolští učitelé anglického jazyka. Jejich slovní odpovědi a osobní zkušenosti byly analyzovány na pozadí poznatků z teorie vyučování, které byly představeny v úvodní části práce. Odpovědi přinesly praktický vhled do vybrané problematiky, a vytvořily tak paralelu mezi teoreticky zaměřenou částí práce a reálnou výukovou praxí. Práce je následně zakončena shrnutím problematiky a zaujetím vlastního stanoviska.

**Klíčová slova:** metodologie výuky anglického jazyka, rozvoj vyučovacího stylu, přizpůsobení metodologie, potřeby studentů, dotazníkové šetření

## **Annotation**

This bachelor's thesis seeks to explain why it is necessary to develop your own style of teaching English instead of following a prescribed methodology. It provides the reader with a presentation of the key factors that affect this development, and discusses the steps a teacher needs to take or issues he/she should think about carefully in order to make the lesson as effective as possible. The thesis is divided into two parts. Part One introduces the topic of the development of an individual language teaching style, based on the reference books. Part Two is represented by a field-study that consists of an analysis of questionnaires completed by three current English language teaching professionals expressing their opinions and personal approaches to teaching in the Czech school environment. The thesis concludes with the summary of the key factors that need to be considered when developing an individual teaching style.

**Key words:** Second Language Acquisition (SLA), English teaching methodology, teaching style development, students' learning needs, research questionnaire

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## Introduction

I have always been interested in language teaching. At high school, I often used to be asked for help by my classmates, to whom I willingly explained the English language matters they found problematic. Sharing the knowledge and watching people make progress has always satisfied and fulfilled me. That is why I seized the opportunity to give classes of English through the agency of the International Student Club at university. Thus, I spent two semesters teaching students of various ages, diverse fields of study, and even of different nationalities. Preparing lessons for such a miscellaneous group of people enriched me with invaluable experience and simultaneously inspired me in the choice of my bachelor's thesis. Having experienced both the pleasures and difficulties of language teaching, I wished to learn more about the issues of teaching; I wanted to expand my own views on teaching professionally as well as to be able to provide practical and helpful suggestions to those who might find themselves in the same teaching situation that I was in.

In the modern world we live in, English has a dominant status of *lingua franca* and its perfect command is therefore more than desirable. For this reason, not only is it immensely important to *learn* this language well; what is also of crucial importance is to *teach* English well. Nevertheless, making a decision about the teaching style is not a straightforward task, whatsoever. Given the fact that there is no single methodology that would guarantee success, teachers have to develop their own strategies with regard to various environmental factors, which are specific for every teacher's situation and have a great impact on what the teacher does. Via this thesis, I would like to clarify this issue more and familiarize the reader with what it means to develop your own teaching style.

The thesis comprises two parts: a theoretical and a practical one. Part One, which is called *Developing your own teaching style: introducing current debates*, presents a theoretical introduction to the issue of an individual teaching style development. Part Two, bearing the name *Developing your own teaching style: teaching English to Czech L2 learners*, presents the results of a field-study. By doing so, it completes the first part with practical examples of the development of an individual teaching style in the Czech school environment.

Part One and Two mirror each other, i.e., they follow the same structure. The first chapter in both parts has an introductory function: in the part One, it briefly explains four important terms related to language teaching, whilst the first chapter of the



part Two introduces the field-study. The second chapters are focused on the historical development of approaches and methods, and are followed by chapters *Limitation of prescribed methodologies*. These explain why the development of teacher's own methodology is necessary. The fourth chapter in both parts further elaborates on the issue of "developing your own teaching style". Split in several sub-chapters, it analyses the environmental factors and their impact on the development of an individual teaching strategy. The first sub-chapter, *Adjusting the methodology*, discusses various types of cultures the manifestations of which the teacher should understand and respect. The five subsequent sub-chapters present the steps and issues that the teacher needs to consider well when developing his/her own methodology. In both the part One and the part Two, the fourth chapter concludes with a sub-chapter dedicated to what an appropriate methodology should be like. The conclusion summarizes what was observed throughout the course of the thesis, especially in its second part, represented by the research.

## **I. Developing your own teaching style: introducing current debates**

Part One elaborates on the issue of an individual teaching style development. Before getting to the very topic, four terms related to the teacher's profession are defined.

### **1. Defining the terms approach, method, technique and procedure**

As the thesis is focused on the development of teachers' own strategies for teaching English, it is essential to clarify what *approach*, *method*, *technique* and *procedure* mean, as these terms and the concepts they relate to are crucial for the teacher's profession. For this reason, an explanation of the four concepts follows.

#### **1.1 Approach**

According to Edward Anthony, an American applied linguist, “[a]n approach is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning. (...) It describes the nature of the subject matter to be taught” (qtd. in Richards and Rodgers 19). In other words, it denotes our hypotheses, suppositions and beliefs about how language is structured, learnt and how it should be taught. These opinions have naturally evolved and altered from time to time. Each approach thus embodies the theory about language and/or its learning held at the time of its emergence. Every language teacher is in favour of a particular approach, which affects the way he/she teaches.

The following paragraphs briefly explain how language is seen and described by three different language theories: structural view, functional view and interactional view. At the same time, an example of how a concrete language theory may influence the teachers' job is provided.

According to Richards and Rodgers, exponents of the structural theory state that “language is a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning. The target of language learning is seen to be the mastery of elements of this system” (20). Teaching activities drawing on this approach are thus focused on a profound explanation and consequent mastery of phonological, grammatical and lexical units (21).

In contrast, the functional view sees language as “a vehicle for the expression of functional meaning” (Richards and Rodgers 21). In other words, it emphasizes its function to communicate. Those who support this approach therefore create classroom activities with emphasis put on the semantic dimension of the language.

The last one, interactional view, embodies a belief that language is “a vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social transactions between individuals.” It is seen “as a tool for the creation and maintenance of social relations” (Richards and Rodgers 21). The practical part of teaching originating from this theory then makes use of various types of conversational activities.

As to the presumptions concerning language learning, Richards and Rodgers divide them into two subcategories: process-oriented theories, being those built “on learning processes, such as habit formation, induction, inferencing, hypothesis testing, and generalization”, and condition-oriented ones, that “emphasize the nature of the human and physical context in which language learning takes place” (22). Hence, teachers who are in favour of the process-oriented theory based on the habit formation frequently employ drills in their lessons. On the other hand, those who follow the condition-oriented theories are concerned with the environment in which students are to learn the language and thus seek to create a pleasant, friendly ambience.

In sum, every language teacher follows a certain approach, i.e., a certain theory about the nature of language and/or its learning. The set of assumptions represented by a particular approach then affects the way of teaching. It is always reflected in what is called *a method*, which is the topic of the following chapter.

## **1.2 Method**

Following on the definitions set by Anthony, a method would be defined as “an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach” (qtd. in Richards and Rodgers 19). Subsequent paragraphs seek to explain what Anthony has in mind when providing such a definition.

The previous chapter suggested that *approach* has to do with the *theory* of language teaching. It is a set of certain principles that strive to explain the nature of the language system and/or its acquisition. This particular conviction then represents a base, a framework of the teacher’s strategy out of which everything else flows. What the teacher does in the classroom has its origin in his/her beliefs concerning the process of learning and/or the language system itself. In other words, the practical part of teaching is always adjusted to the theoretical one, i.e., to a particular approach chosen and followed by the teacher.

Nevertheless, before getting to the very practice in the classroom, the teacher is required to consider *how* he or she should implement the theoretical beliefs, i.e., how the linguistic theory of a concrete approach could be effectively put into school practice and made use of. This contemplation then leads to a plan of teaching, which interconnects theory with practice, being what Anthony calls *a method*.

### **1.3 Technique/procedure**

Having defined *approach* as a theoretical component of the teaching strategy and *method* as an interconnection between the theory and practice, what remains to be described is the practice itself, i.e., a particular implementation of a certain approach in a lesson, “that which actually takes place in a classroom” (Anthony, qtd. in Richards and Rodgers 19). This practical component of teaching is called *technique* or *procedure*. It is what a method leads to: a practical realization of an approach through a carefully-thought plan. Technique/procedure covers all the classroom activities ranging from the presentation of the subject matter through students’ tasks designed with the intention to practise the topic to activities providing feedback to the learners (Richards and Rodgers 31).

To conclude this, I will cite Richards and Rodgers, whose summary of Anthony’s scheme of *approach*, *method* and *technique* goes as following:

[A]pproach is the level at which assumptions and beliefs about language and language learning are specified; method is the level at which theory is put into practice and at which choices are made about the particular skills to be taught, the content to be taught, and the order in which the content will be presented; technique is the level at which classroom procedures are described. (19)

This quotation thus summarizes what the thesis sought to explain in this chapter: the three terms can be seen as referring to the transition from theory to practice in language education. While *approach* deals with hypotheses about language and its learning, *method* represents a ‘bridge’ between this theory and classroom practice, which is represented by the term *technique/procedure*.

## **2. The development of approaches and methods: the nature and necessity of the changes**

In the previous chapter, the essential terms a language teacher comes across were defined. By providing the explanations it was also implied that both approaches and methods have undergone serious changes throughout the course of the history. The bachelor's thesis will now look at this issue more closely.

One of the most prominent factors that drove the development of approaches and methods in the history was a change “in the kind of proficiency learners need” (Richards and Rodgers 3). Since the Middle-Ages up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the most widely studied language was Latin, the use of which was (with a few exceptions) limited to a written form: the majority of the early-medieval literature is restricted to this classical language and so were almost all the language studies through centuries; Latin was seen as a noble language of scholarships. For the reason of being a dead language, i.e., being no longer in use, there was no necessity for speaking skills; what was required was a perfect knowledge of the grammatical system and vocabulary enabling good comprehension of the text and its potential translation. The procedures used for teaching and learning Latin were still being employed even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when “modern languages began to enter the curriculum of European schools”, as well as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it “had become the standard way of studying foreign languages in schools” (Richards and Rodgers 4). This method is known as *the Grammar-Translation Method*.

A change came with the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century: increasing opportunities and the necessities of the European countries to communicate with each other, especially with commercial purposes, raised not only the requisites of command of foreign languages but also an importance of communicative skills, in other words, of oral proficiency (Richards and Rodgers 7). Practically, it meant a radical shift from the learning procedures used up to then. New teaching strategies were in demand as new needs for language proficiency were desired.

The newly required oral proficiency then motivated all the following innovations in language teaching and learning, beginning with attempts (changes that were not completely accepted in their time or not regarded as *a method*) later resulting in the so called *methods era*, the name of which marks the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century steeped with various methods proposed as the best way of the language education enhancement. Although all these methods seek to achieve the mastery of communicative skills (other

language skills, however, not leaving completely behind), they try to do so by various means. They differ one from another in other respects, one of which may be a different approach included (Richards and Rodgers 9-16):

Shifting presumptions of the language as such and/or of its learning represent another aspect that characterizes the development of approaches and methods, as Richards and Rodgers point out (3). Emergence of new linguistic opinions urged changes in the language education, implementing these fresh assumptions. Very famous is Chomsky's structural theory of language, not less influential were also various hypotheses based on the supposition that the second language acquisition follows the principles identical with the child language acquisition. These and others, as they were developed throughout the course of the history, then inspired the creation of particular methods in their time.

To sum up, teaching languages in the past centuries meant to follow and implement one, sole strategy based on the Latin studies as there were no other principles of language education known. However, with the emergence of various linguistic opinions concerning the language and its acquisition as well as with newly demanded dimensions of language proficiency, the number of teaching methods increased dramatically. Therefore, teachers have nowadays plenty of strategies at their disposal. *The Communicative Language Approach*, being the newest one, perfectly represents the emphasis on communicative abilities which have been demanded in the language education in the last decades.

However, and now the thesis is getting to its core, can a teacher just go through all the invented methods and select the one that appeals to him/her the most? This question will be answered in the following chapter.

### 3. Limitations of prescribed methodologies

To begin with, I would like to use the following quotation: “[W]e need to exercise caution before assuming that established English language teaching methodologies are or should be the ultimate aim for all classrooms” (Coleman, qtd. in Holliday 50). In other words, a teacher should never completely rely on any of the prescribed methods he/she can find in books. The question of why it is so will be answered in the following paragraphs.

As Adrian Holliday points out in the book *Methodology and Social Context*, all the methods of teaching English have their origins in English-speaking countries, i.e., Britain, Australasia and North America, for which he introduces general term BANA<sup>1</sup> countries (12). However, these methods are then made use of either by BANA teachers, on the one hand familiar with them but supposed to teach foreign students of English, or they are to be implemented in foreign countries (which is our case, the Czech Republic being one of those), which are referred to as TESEP<sup>2</sup> (12). Thus, an apparent problem comes up: either there is a teacher acquainted with the method facing foreign students, or there are both students and the teacher of the same nationality employing a foreign method, developed in a totally different environment (11). As far as the latter option is concerned, there is a particular danger of TESEP countries regarding the BANA methodologies as superior, unassailable and simply correct and appropriate, always and everywhere (102); this presupposition, however, is not true at all, as it will be shown later. As a result, a teacher using this foreign method without understanding it properly may end up with an “uncertain and routine teaching, characterised by a heavy reliance on the textbook” (Savignon, qtd. in Holliday 103).

Nonetheless, this is not the most serious problem. Kathleen Graves suggests that “[t]here is no set procedure to follow that will guarantee a successful course because each teacher and each teacher’s situation is different” (5). It has already been stated that no teacher should rely solely on a method prescribed in a book. Now the reason for that seems to be clearer: We could hardly find two identical teachers in terms of their personality, beliefs and the situation in which they are to carry out their profession. Therefore, no universal recipe that would ensure success exists as no theoretical description is ever capable of covering and taking into account all the possible matters

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<sup>1</sup> An acronym resulting from respective toponyms

<sup>2</sup> An acronym derived from *tertiary*, *secondary* and *primary*, being the stages of Education where English is taught as a foreign language

that characterize a teachers' job across the institution, country and the world. As Graves says, "there is no answer to give" as far as a fruitful teaching strategy is concerned, "but there is an answer to find" (5). What must be done is to adjust the proposed methodology to the teacher's own, specific circumstances. Thus, the thesis proceeds to the very topic: why it is crucial to develop *your own* teaching style. As Holliday explains, "[i]n order to be appropriate, English language teaching methodologies need therefore to be finely tuned to the various needs of individual classroom cultures: they need to be appropriate to local cultures in very specific terms" (53). This is what the next chapter deals with.



#### **4. Developing your own teaching style**

The chapter *Limitations of prescribed methodologies* suggested that teachers can never completely rely on a methodology presented in a book, which was developed by someone else. Instead, they have to become developers themselves and create a methodology of their own, which will be adjusted to their specific situation. This huge chapter further elaborates on the circumstances to which every teacher's methodology must be adapted (subchapter 4.1), it analyses the steps teachers have to take or issues they have to think over during their methodology development with regard to the situation (subchapters 4.2 – 4.6) and finally, it deals with the issue of appropriate methodology (subchapter 4.7). Hence, it addresses the topic “Developing your own teaching style”.

##### **4.1 Adjusting the methodology**

To define what a teacher's situation involves is not a straightforward task. In fact, there are myriads of factors that constitute the teacher's position and should contribute to the development of his/her own teaching strategy. Should I elaborate on Holliday's statement introducing the term *local cultures* to which whatever methodology is to be adapted, I will make use of his own explanations.

Holliday distinguishes between two social contexts that comprise the local cultures and thereby have a bearing on the teaching style development: micro context and macro context. The former relates to the classroom as such: it depicts the “socio-psychological aspect” of the environment in which the English language lessons take place (14). On the other hand, the macro context refers to “the wider societal and institutional influences on what happens in the classroom” (13). From what Holliday claims, it may be observed that not only outside the classroom but even outside the educational institution there are factors that affect teaching and the teacher should bear these in mind.

Holliday further develops this idea by introducing the terms *host institution*, “which could be anything from a state school, to a private language institute, to a university or college” (15) and *the host educational environment* which includes this particular institution. By the latter, he refers to a complex set of persons and socio-economic factors that must be taken into consideration during the teaching style development. These cover students' parents, teachers' colleagues, employers, the whole local community, ministry of education, national culture, and even market, which

strongly influences the private language institutions in particular (15-16). As it can be seen, the influence on teaching is thus not infinitesimal whatsoever. And it is even more complicated, as Holliday explains:

[I]t is important to point out that the classroom culture is not *completely* within the host institution culture. Neither is the host institution completely within the national culture, and so on. This is because they are influenced by elements within other, outside cultures, including international education cultures. Both the classroom and host institution cultures will be part of a larger educational system which will also have a culture which will itself be complex. Teachers bring tradition to the classroom, derived from professional-academic cultures. Professional-academic cultures derive influence from both within and outside the host institution, as well as partly from international education-related cultures. (...) Students, too, bring tradition to the classroom, passed from generation to generation of students and formed partly in the corridors of the host institution, partly through reference groups which may extend to other institutions, through the media and the family. (30)

The aforementioned quotation suggests that the teacher's situation must be considered to such an extent that exceeds even the national culture borders. Both teachers and students are very often influenced by factors that have nothing to do with the country as such. In reality, their origin could be attributed to professional-academic or international cultures. This fact reveals the complexity of the whole issue: cultures that affect the teaching style and to which the teacher should pay attention are interrelated and special caution is required when trying to interpret them. One factor could be easily misinterpreted and attached to a particular culture erroneously with more or less serious aftermaths.

The bachelor's thesis has expressed how vital it is to adjust a particular methodology to teacher's specific and unique circumstances being comprised by various types of cultures. This culture adjustment is what Holliday calls *culture-sensitiveness*. In his words, "to be truly culture-sensitive is to develop steps and procedures for each situation according to its needs" (180). Put another way, every single teaching situation, i.e., every single classroom, requires its unique teaching style as different cultures or their differing effects might be uncovered.

Having mentioned the problematic usage of BANA methods when teaching students from TESEP countries or their implementation in foreign countries as such, this problem can now be defined in terms of the *clash of cultures*. As already stated, even within the same institution one has to pay attention to different cultures being represented in a concrete classroom. These differences then increase with crossing the state borders, although these distinctions cannot be always attributed to the national culture, as it has already been claimed. Still, TESEP countries represent an environment absolutely dissimilar to the one in which the methods came to existence. If a teacher is to make use of them, not only is he/she required to understand well the methodology itself; what is even more important is to be acquainted with the surrounding culture and comprehend its connection with the method. “Only a person knowledgeable about his own culture, and secure in that knowledge,” explains Abou-Talib, “is capable of making value judgements about ideas from the rest of the world” (qtd. in Holliday 103). In other words, teachers “need to see beyond their methodologies to the social effects” (Holliday 103), they need to “estimate both the direct and indirect effects a proposed curriculum will have on the students, on the programs, and on other people in and outside the institution” (Pratt, qtd. in Richards 90-91), which cannot be successfully done without proper culture knowledge. And it is the disregard of the culture factors and social outcomes that make BANA methods so problematic when applied to TESEP students (Holliday 106-107).

To conclude this, it should be said that all the local factors should never be regarded as constraints. On the contrary: they should be treated as givens, “not as inhibiting, but as *central* to the design of appropriate teaching methodologies” as Holliday stresses (108). The influence of the single cultures and the issue of coping with them will be discussed in the following chapters.

#### **4.1.1 Investigating the classroom culture**

Students of every single class represent a unique grouping of people with various personal characteristics, beliefs, habits, interests, behaviour and socio-economic background, characterized also by “other influences on language learning from the society both outside and within the classroom” (Holliday 176). These factors play an important role within the walls of the institution and together constitute what is called *classroom culture*. This should be born in mind for students are no passive observers of the lesson, nor are they participants who would just accept and perform whatever they

are provided with or told to do without thinking about it, as if they were robots. The truth is that in a classroom, “more is going on between people than the transfer of knowledge and skills” (Holliday 31) and it is the aforementioned factors that contribute to these happenings. To investigate this culture is the teacher’s task, as he/she is the one who is in the closest relation with the class, seeing the students’ performance every single lesson. Neither theorists nor other researches could carry out this investigation better than the teacher; it is a matter of individual classes and learning about the classroom culture must be in progress during the lessons: during teaching and learning teachers are in touch with the students and interpret what is going on (Holliday 161). The importance of this investigation in the overall teaching style development becomes apparent in Holliday’s claim that “learning about the classroom is an essential aspect of finding out how to teach” (162). He, nevertheless, warns the teachers of being prescriptive, i.e., bringing some preconceptions from outside without allowing the “meaning to emerge from the situation” (Holliday 181) of a particular class.

Kathleen Graves calls this classroom investigation *needs analysis*. Subsequent paragraphs further elaborate on what is to be investigated in particular if we are to adjust our methodology to a concrete class.

Jack Richards defines needs analysis as “[p]rocedures used to collect information about learners’ needs” (51). If a teacher is to carry out a needs analysis, he/she is expected to learn about a wide range of characteristics that the students bring into the classroom environment. Graves, citing Richterich and Brindley, distinguishes between two types of needs that are to be revealed by the investigation: “objective” and “subjective” (13). As examples of the first group of needs she presents “information about students’ backgrounds – country and culture, education, family, profession, age, languages spoken” as well as “current language proficiency and language difficulties”. Last but not least, “student’s needs with respect to how they will use or deal with English outside of the classroom” (13) should not be excluded. On the other hand, subjective needs are comprised by

the cognitive and affective needs of the learner in the learning situation, derivable from information about affective and cognitive factors such as personality, confidence, attitudes<sup>3</sup>, learners’ wants and expectations with

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<sup>3</sup> Graves speaks about „attitudes toward the target language and culture, toward learning, and toward themselves as learners“ (13)

regard to the learning of English and their individual cognitive style and learning strategies. (13)

Teachers should be well acquainted with all these characteristics to which they are obliged to adjust their teaching style.

First of all, the objective needs that represent general features of the students are to be considered. Information about these can be easily obtained: each teacher is usually told in advance how old his/her future students will be, for the purpose of finding out the students' current language knowledge and skills various types of tests are used, the nature of the institution or particular language course often determines also the language needs as far as its usage outside the classroom is concerned, and students' nationality (excluding courses for foreign students) is nothing unknown to the teacher either.

Another step is learning about the subjective needs of the students that have to do with their personality and thus vary between the individuals. These characteristics are normally uncovered during the teaching process while the teacher gets to know the learners more with each lesson and each activity. It must be stressed, however, that teachers should be careful in interpreting and making judgements as far as the behaviour of their learners is concerned. They should be always well acquainted with the background of the students' reactions, as the reasons for particular manifestations may be of various origins, different from those to which teachers attribute them. Thus, what might be interpreted as indifference by teachers could actually be students' confusion as to a new type of activity they are supposed to perform (Holliday 145). Another important fact to mention is that although revealed later, subjective needs are of no lesser importance and must be taken into account at all costs, otherwise "objective needs may not be met" (Graves 14).

Apart from observation of the students, teachers can obtain the necessary information via interviews with the students or with making use of questionnaires (Graves 15). Other persons such as parents or colleagues could also be helpful in getting to know the students' needs (Graves 14). In some cases it is even requisite as "the students may not have any immediate perceptions of needs", as Richards points out and continues:

In many countries, the introduction of English or another foreign language in elementary or secondary school is based on what curriculum planners consider best for students to study at school in the same way that math, history, and physical education are included in the school

curriculum. Learners are not consulted as to whether they perceive a need for such knowledge. Their needs have been decided for them by those concerned with their long-term welfare. Needs analysis thus includes the study of perceived and present needs as well as potential and unrecognized needs. (53)

As one of the crucial personal characteristics of students, Richards also introduces *motivation*. “Why are the learners in the course and how will it affect their lives? What do they want from it? Which aspects of it are they most interested in?” (224) These are possible questions that a teacher may raise in order to define his/her students’ motivation. In the case of language courses for special purposes, this ‘driving force’ might be found quite easily: employers taking courses of Business English need to master particular language skills in order to perform well their job, immigrants seek to gain the basic language knowledge so as to fit better in the new cultural environment. However, the situation in a public sector of foreign language education is far more problematic, as Graves explains:

(...) many of their students have no target needs, no clearly anticipated use for the skills gained through study. English may be a requirement for an exit or entrance exam. It may be viewed as a subject like math or science, or it may be a social undertaking like the study of music. For these students, the notion of needs outside the classroom is tenuous. The focus of the needs assessment shifts to the learning needs or subjective needs of the students so as to increase motivation and to help students find purpose and interest in what they are doing in the course. (16)

It is, therefore, up to the teachers to consider possible students’ motivation, try to help them with finding it, maintaining and augmenting it. Given the status of English and the importance of foreign languages as such, it should not be so difficult a task. Thus, what might be helpful is an introductory discussion with the students considering the nowadays needs of English language mastery, their personal motivations and interests they can relate to the target language and its culture. The teaching style should then respect and reflect the findings the teacher came to.

An introductory discussion might be also used in order to determine the students’ expectations, which range from “expectations for the program” to “roles of teachers, learners and instructional materials” (Richards 102). The thing is that teachers’ and students’ expectations of the course management and its outcomes often

substantially differ. Teachers sometimes expect students to learn one thing, while the latter would like to learn something completely different (Holliday 143). Some students might be also more or less willing to participate actively in the lesson as they rather expect the teacher to pass the knowledge on during a presentation. An accessibility of the material, i.e., “learning resources” (Richards 102) plays also an important role in the expectations of both parties and in the course development. “Learners enter a course with their own views of teaching and learning and these may not be identical to those of their teachers,” explains Richards (223) and adds a few questions teachers should ask themselves considering the students’ expectations: “How do they see the roles of teachers and learners? What do they feel about such things as memorization, group work, the importance of grammar, and pronunciation?” (223) These and other issues should be carefully pondered over and/or discussed with the learners’, whose attitudes to the lesson can be formed by tradition and habits ranging from different types of cultures.

This chapter sought to explain what can be regarded as classroom culture and how an English language teacher, seeking to develop his/her own teaching style, should investigate it. The bachelor’s thesis now proceeds to another type of culture affecting the methodology choice and adaptation – the institution.

#### **4.1.2 The role of the institution**

The institution a teacher works in affects his/her teaching strategy on several levels. First of all, its nature determines the “mission” (Richards 202) of English language lessons it provides the learners with. A private language institute offering courses of technical or business English for factory workers will be focused on special language dimensions, e.g. speaking and reading skills, emphasizing specific vocabulary related to the profession. On the other hand, a university-preparatory secondary school, the students of which should attain general knowledge covering all subjects and also all language skills, will impose different demands on language teachers and their courses. A secondary technical school will again request a distinct methodology in language teaching as its requirements differ from the aforementioned ones. The purpose, goal of the institution thus set goals of the course and it is probably the most crucial characteristic of the institution-culture that dictates the teaching style development (Richards 202) along with what Graves calls “institutional philosophy, policy, and

curriculum” (34), being already set principles and habits of the institution to which teachers are to adjust their methodology.

Another important feature of the institution is its “physical aspect”, on which Richards elaborates and distinguishes between various class sizes, technology, “teaching facilities” and teacher resources (207-208). When developing his/her own teaching style, a teacher has to take account of the amount of students in each class as well as the size of the room itself: does it allow for a group work, discussion? According to Richards, “[c]urrent wisdom suggests that class size should not exceed fifteen for most language classes, though in many contexts teachers have to work with much larger groups” (208). A different strategy is then required. Whether the institution can boast with good and quality technical equipment such as computers and CD-players in classrooms, photocopiers and scanners also affects the teachers’ decisions about a proper teaching style (207). As to teaching facilities, what Richards has in mind is an opportunity of using e.g. “computer lab” or even “language lab” (208), which can contribute to the effectiveness of teaching and learning and provide the teacher with new possibilities as far as the lesson management is concerned. Teacher resources then represent materials teachers have at their disposal such as magazines and text-books (208) or their own language libraries.

What is more, some institutions also provide their employers with opportunities of professional development. Various courses or conferences held both in the home-country and abroad for which the institution pays so that the teachers could “update their professional knowledge and skills” (Richards 206) is one of them. And not only can these participants improve their language command as such, some of the courses can also help them with an appropriate methodology development.

As the last institutional factor that has a bearing on the teaching style development, flexibility and openness to changes will be mentioned. In spite of having certain policy and curriculum, each institution is open to possible innovations to greater or lesser extent. Some teachers are obliged to follow strictly set guidelines, traditions of the institution they work for, whereas others are given considerable liberty: while the purpose of the institution remains unchanged, the teaching styles used in the lessons are up to every single teacher. To give you an idea, they can decide independently whether they prefer textbooks or other materials, whether they want the students to participate in group-works, if their requirements will include obligatory reading or writing essays etc. Such a situation brings opportunities of a totally individual, specific teaching style



development. And that is desirable. Richards emphasizes that “effective schools and language programs are characterized by administrators who are open to change, flexible, and who encourage teachers to innovate” (204). If a teacher is to develop an appropriate teaching style, tolerant environment thus is needful.

#### **4.1.3 Other cultures’ influence**

As it has been said, apart from the classroom itself and the institution a teacher works in, there are far more other factors that influence the teaching style development. These might be particular groups of people as well as some beliefs and traditions resulting from the national or even international educational cultures. In the case of BANA and TESEP countries, the educational cultures’ very often differ one from another and the difference may bring serious problems if a teacher wants to implement one of the BANA methodologies in a TESEP environment.

One of the most relevant distinctions between the two is the nature of education as such: While schools of BANA countries seek to prepare their students primarily for the practice, i.e., they strive “to connect target skills with those outside the classroom in real life”, TESEP institutions are usually focused on handing over the theoretical knowledge, seeing “classroom skills as quite separate from real-life skills” (Holliday 60). Dissimilar expectations concerning students’ and teachers’ roles then go hand in hand. For different perceptions of lessons, Holliday introduces two terms originally developed by Coleman: *teaching spectacles* and *learning festivals*. The former one is defined as a lesson, “in which students are largely passive and behave like an audience watching the spectacle of the teacher’s teacher-centred performance” (36), this type being characteristic for majority of TESEP countries. On the other hand, in learning festivals, which are representative of BANA institutions, “students participate in the activity of learning” (36). According to Coleman, the teaching spectacles represent a certain *ritual* (qtd. in Holliday 36), something the students are used to and without which a lesson, in their opinion, could not work out or could not be even called *a lesson*. The thing is, they do not think they could learn something without a teacher that would be teaching, i.e., that would be “giving factual information” (Holliday 86). The BANA practices would be regarded by them as “learning by myself” or “learning without teaching” (Holliday 86). To introduce a methodology based on a completely different view of the education therefore imposes plenty of problems. Holliday himself experienced difficulties with an introduction of learning by discovery in classrooms

accustomed to didactic instructions, a preference “attributable to a common international view of education” (59). His students “seemed unsure about having to ‘think’ rather than reiterate what their ‘teacher’ had ‘given’ them” (59) and wanted “superficial ‘knowledge’ [to learn] for the examination” (Barjesteh and Holliday, qtd. in Holliday 60).

Although Holliday highlights students’ inability to “display their skills” unless actively involved in lessons (83), many TESEP teachers reject these innovations as they go against their traditional professional-academic cultures (87). Should they implement a BANA-designed learner-centred approach, some teachers are particularly afraid of a possible loss of their status the traditional view of education imposes on them, a status of great authority who has control over all that happens in the classroom (176). Moreover, they are convinced that their only role is to present the immense theoretical knowledge they can boast with, feeling no further responsibility for students’ learning. Students are then often expected to study on their own, later being tested on something they were *ought to* learn instead of what they experienced in lessons (Holliday 82-83).

The teacher’s respectable status can be, however, maintained if the learner-centred approach is rather substituted by “*learning-centred* approach”, being an approach “which acknowledges the social context of education” and “gives power back to the TESEP teacher” (Hutchinson and Waters, qtd. in Holliday 176). In other words, this variant of a modern BANA methodology is culture-sensitive; it respects students’ culture in a way that they are not completely free as far as classroom activities are concerned, they are still controlled by the teacher instead. Thus, a suitable combination of both is achieved: an innovation is implemented but the traditional expectations of the students are met as well. Put another way, a “balance between collaboration and teacher authority” (Holliday 187) can be found in TESEP environment, where BANA methodologies as such would not be appropriate as they would not be in harmony with local cultures.

What happens from time to time is that some TESEP language teachers are well aware of the innovations necessary in traditional education and strive to implement some BANA principles in their lessons. And the incomprehension they meet with does not come from the students; it has its origin in the group of his/her colleagues. The community of teachers might sometimes be what keeps another one from a successful teaching style development, as the reference group tends to maintain their traditions and commonly acknowledged conventions, that are “essential for the cohesion of the teacher

group, and provides the standard for the group's identity" (Holliday 90). Even more serious problem may then emerge if a BANA teacher is to work within a TESEP institution, thus within a distinct professional group, recognizing principles dissimilar to BANA environment. However, potential obstacles he/she comes across do not have to do only with colleagues. It has already been stated that BANA countries differ from the TESEP ones not in an infinitesimal way whatsoever. Another paragraph is, therefore, dedicated to the problematic case of BANA teachers in TESEP environment.

To start with, I would like to cite Holliday, who warns us about the fact that

[w]hen BANA teachers, who have been used to a particular host educational environment in the commercial sector, go and work in state education alongside TESEP teachers, they need to learn about a whole new host educational environment, and about the very different professional-academic culture of their new colleagues. They cannot rely simply on their methodological expertise. This is a source of much conflict at the interface between the two types of professional-academic cultures. (104)

It repeats what has already been stated at the beginning of the chapter dealing with the methodology adjustment: a careful culture analysis needs to be done and the culture understood, its factors then taken into account and respected at all costs. That is, however, what BANA teachers are often blind to. They just strive to make use of their 'western' methods regardless the TESEP environment (Holliday 101), which then becomes the source of many problems. Although the BANA principles may be "highly sophisticated and rationalised in terms of methodology" (Holliday 147), they cannot be found appropriate *everywhere*, nor are they superior to all other styles of education. Holliday quotes Pociecha's complaint about American teachers sent to Poland and their disrespect to Polish traditional education, being convinced that what is American is "automatically right, good, appropriate in the new situation":

Polish teacher training colleges are not – and aren't meant to be – imitations of American Liberal Arts colleges; nor are they language schools devoted to providing practice communicating with native speakers. ... Although the Polish education system is undergoing radical changes, it *does* exist, and the colleges are part of it. ... It *does* have aims, standards, procedures and regulations. These are not obvious to

many volunteers and must be explained to them. Volunteers, in turn, should try to understand and adapt to the system. (124)

In spite of the quotation treating the situation in Poland, similar conflict could be found in other TESEP countries as well. Both BANA teachers and their TESEP colleagues working within the same institution often complain about each other without trying to understand the core of the problem: a culture difference that must be acknowledged otherwise a successful lesson cannot take place.

Holliday also mentions “political factors” (66) as other cultures’ influence on education and therefore on the teaching style development as well. In the case of totalitarianism, not only can a certain regime dictate the conditions and principles of state education, it can also affect students’ behaviour, which then reflects citizens’ position to the dictator, government and suchlike (66). Nevertheless, government in democratic states has a significant impact on the education likewise. It might set educational plans for schools to follow, prescribe what final exams should look like and last but not least provide funds for institutions essential for good quality equipment, teachers’ courses for further career development and so on and so forth.

To sum this up, the development of teaching style is affected not only by the culture of the classroom and of the institution a teacher works in, but also by other cultures. These include professional-academic and international cultures; various traditions, habits and beliefs concerning education emerge out of them. Some factors may be also attributable to the political situation or the national culture as such. Groups of teachers and their principles represent the influence of other cultures as well. Hence, all these factors must be carefully thought through during the methodology development and the methodology must be finely adjusted to them. Special caution must be exercised by BANA teachers working in the TESEP countries, in which they face a completely different national culture and usually also a distinct professional-academic or international culture that has an impact on the view of education. Any potential intervention in the traditions must be carefully thought through.

#### **4.2 Setting goals and objectives**

“Setting goals and objectives”, explains Graves, “provides a sense of direction and a coherent framework for the teacher in planning her course” (17). What is it then and how should the teacher proceed in defining what the goals and objectives of a particular course look like? According to Graves, goals are “long-term purposes of the

course”, whereas “[o]bjectives express the specific ways in which the goals will be achieved” (17). In other words, goals represent what the students should accomplish at the end of the course, what they should be able to do when the course is finished, the reason for which they attend the English lessons. For instance, in the case of language courses for immigrants, the goal may be to prepare the students for everyday communication in the community and in their job. As to a university-preparatory secondary school, the goal of the English language course may be defined as preparing the students for a university studies; at the end of the course the students should thus demonstrate great knowledge of grammar as well as perfect command of other language skills such as speaking, reading and writing. In order to achieve these general abilities, lesser and more particular skills must be mastered, which then comprise the desired overall command. This is what is defined as objectives of the course. In the aforementioned examples, particular objectives for immigrants’ courses could be introducing themselves, managing a job interview, making an apology, talking at the doctor’s etc., whereas the objectives of a university-preparatory English lessons would be mastery of individual grammatical tenses, speaking skills to open, maintain and conclude a discussion and so on and so forth; put another way, objectives are “teachable chunks” (Graves 17) which must be gradually presented by the teacher and mastered by the students so the purpose of the whole course is achieved.

Graves further elaborates on the issue of goals and distinguishes between various types of them: Proficiency goals are represented by “general competency, mastery of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing), or mastery of specific language behaviors”. Cognitive goals have to do with “linguistic knowledge and mastery of cultural knowledge”. Affective goals “include achieving positive attitudes and feelings about the target language, achieving confidence as a user of the language, and achieving confidence in oneself as a learner” and the last category Graves speaks about is that of transfer goals, which could be defined as “learning how to learn” (17). Likewise, Richards points out that “[a] language curriculum typically includes other kinds of outcomes apart from language-related objectives” (133). This is mostly true of state education, where teachers are “primary source for socialisation” (Bernstein and Stenhouse, qtd. in Holliday 94). Their task is therefore not only to pass on the knowledge concerning the subject itself; they also prepare students for life in wider society. Language education then contributes to students’ attitudes and opinions about

the world that surrounds them. This purpose of education cannot be overlooked during the process of teaching style development.

Based on the examples above, it may be observed that purposes of the course are mostly determined by the institution. It can be, however, “influenced by an analysis of students’ needs” (Graves 17) as well. This investigation might be made use of especially when defining other types of goals apart from the proficiency ones: students’ motivation, as discussed in the chapter *Investigating the classroom culture*, may set affective goals and further analysis of the classroom culture may alter the transfer goals as the teacher becomes acquainted with students’ habits of how to learn.

The objectives of the course are then set with regard to the overall purpose of the lessons. As Graves points out, “[c]lear goals and objectives give the teacher a basis for determining which content and activities are appropriate for her course” (17). This is what the following paragraph is dedicated to.

#### **4.3 Content of the course**

When a teacher is to decide what the content of the course will be, he/she has to make decisions about “which aspects of language and language learning” will be included (Graves 19-20). This decision cannot be made easily and mindlessly, regardless plenty of other factors. Conceptualizing the content of the course is nowadays highly “context-dependent”, as Graves emphasizes. What must be taken into account is “who the students are, their goals and expectations in learning English, the teacher’s own conception of what language is and what will best meet the students’ needs, the nature of the course, and the institutional curriculum” (20). The previous chapter already suggested that the goals of the course further determine its content and that the purposes of the lessons are dependent on the institution or shaped by students’ needs analysis. Apart from that, however, the teacher him/herself contributes to the content of the course by adhering to a certain language approach, to which the teaching style is then adjusted. The opinions about the language and/or its learning have a bearing on what and how is to be taught as well as the social factors mentioned above.

The advent of the communicative approach which sees language as a tool for communicating with sundry purposes in various contexts covering diverse topics added several new dimensions as to the potential language course content (Graves 21).

Nonetheless, the scale of these dimensions<sup>4</sup> that have been defined through history and may constitute a language course content is nowadays immensely broad and “[i]t is not possible to teach a syllabus that explicitly encompasses all the areas” (Graves 24). Therefore, teachers are expected to “decide what categories make sense to them for a given course” (Graves 25).

#### **4.4 Materials and activities**

An English teacher has already set the goals and objectives as well as the content of the course resulting out of them. Another step to take is a decision concerning what activities and materials will be made use of during the English lessons. This choice should be shaped by two important factors that must be thought over: “their effectiveness in achieving the purposes of the course and their appropriateness for the students – and the teacher” (Graves 26). The first one might be explained as following: as goals and objectives of the course help to form its content, so do all these factors affect what activities and materials will be utilized. Should I use the example of the class of immigrants who are expected to master chiefly speaking skills in real-life situations, the content of the course will probably cover various situations and topics for communication as well as emphasize the pronunciation, for the purpose of which a variety of speaking activities will be employed, e.g. repetition, a role play simulating a job interview or asking for a direction, a group discussion about family, culture differences and so on. Materials suitable to these purposes might be some newspaper articles and adverts, audio records, maps or prescribed conversations.

The second factor mentioned above, however, is of no lesser importance: all the activities and materials must be suitable to various cultures that were discussed in the three sub-chapters of the chapter *Adjusting the methodology*. This means for example respecting the students’ age and language abilities as well as their interests, ideas connected with the national culture, and last but not least, accessibility to both the students and the teacher. Teachers could not, for instance, expect little children to participate in a discussion on global warming or, on the contrary, want elderly people in the course to sing an infantile song. Likewise, a classroom full of students coming from poor outskirts cannot be supposed to buy several expensive textbooks for a single course.

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<sup>4</sup> Dimensions of language course content can be looked at in Graves’ *Teachers As Course Developers*, p. 25

As far as the textbook is concerned, Graves emphasizes that it should not be followed thoughtlessly either, for “the text is not the course.” In her opinion,

[t]extbooks are tools that can be figuratively cut up into component pieces and then rearranged to suit the needs, abilities, and interests of the students in the course. The material in a textbook can be modified to incorporate activities that will motivate students and move them beyond the constraints of the text. (27)

Textbooks are thus no exceptions in making adjustments to local cultures. Although the type which is to be used in particular lesson is already selected according to many factors, it must furthermore meet many others.

As to types of activities, Graves distinguishes between *real-world tasks*, being situations requiring the foreign language use which might be experienced in reality, e.g. a dialog at the hotel reception, and *pedagogic tasks*, defined as those “that would not occur outside of the classroom but help students develop skills necessary to function in that world, such as information gap activities” (22). Holliday, on the other hand, focuses on the role of classroom activities which, according to him, should be dual: *transactional*, by which he refers to providing “opportunities for learning”, and *evaluative*, i.e., it should provide information about “the nature of the interaction – the student and hence the classroom culture – and the quality of the transaction – the degree to which learning is taking place” (188-189). In other words, each activity should serve not only for students to learn out of it, but also for the teacher to make an assessment. The issue of evaluation will be discussed later in more details.

#### **4.5 Organization of activities and content: sequence and scope**

Richards defines sequence and scope of the course as “the distribution of content throughout the course” (149). Put another way, once the content has been established, a teacher has to decide about “[w]hat range of content will be covered” and “[t]o what extent should each topic be studied”; this is denoted with the term *scope* (149). Equally, it is crucial to consider “which content is needed early in the course and which provides a basis for things that will be learned later”, that is, decision about the *sequencing* (150). There are six possible ways in which activities and content may be ordered, “based on the following criteria” suggested by Richards (150): *simple to complex* is probably the most commonly used one. *Chronology* represents sequencing “according to the order in which events occur in the real world”, Richards gives an example of “(1) brainstorming;



(2) drafting; (3) revising; (4) editing” in a course of writing. *Need* may be another criterion that decides about the distribution of the content. It copies the sequence of needs of particular language course content in real world, i.e., what “learners are most likely to need outside of the classroom” (150). *Prerequisite learning* works with a question concerning “what is necessary at one point as a foundation for the next step in the learning process”. A teacher following this sequencing has to contemplate the difficulty of objectives and activities and the knowledge that must be mastered so that they can be coped with successfully. *Whole to part* or *part to whole* can be imagined as reading a whole story before dealing with single parts of it, or, the other way round: practising writing single paragraphs putting them into a complex essay. And the last type Richards speaks about is *spiral sequencing*, being defined as “recycling of items to ensure that learners have repeated opportunities to learn them” (151). It might be repeated testing of particular grammar item as well as usage of the same vocabulary in different activities within a broader time scope.

From Richards’ distinctions of various criteria that determine the sequencing of the course content and activities, it can be observed how important it is to bear in mind other factors if a teacher is to decide about the organization of the lessons. Students’ current language command as well as their needs play an essential role. And not only as far as the sequencing is concerned: the scope of the course, i.e., the extension of various topics, must be also planned in harmony with the factors presented in previous chapters.

#### **4.6 Evaluation**

Evaluation represents another essential component of the teaching style development. Although teachers mostly interpret it as a way of finding out “student’s proficiency, progress, or achievement”, it can equally refer to assessment “of the course itself” (Graves 30). What is more, both these findings may be accomplished simultaneously, for as Graves points out,

student evaluation and test results can provide feedback on the effectiveness of the course. If the students do well on tests or are judged to have made progress, presumably the course has been effective. But if students do not make progress or do not demonstrate a certain level of achievement, the effectiveness of the course may be questioned. (30-31)

The results of evaluation thus should be a base for further methodology development or a reason for its change. After seeing bad results of the test, teachers may for instance

alter the way of presenting and practising new grammar. As each test also reveals the commonest mistakes, i.e., the most problematic language matters, teachers may discuss them more carefully next time.

However, Graves emphasizes that “[a]ny part of the process of course development can be evaluated” (31), not only the final outcome<sup>5</sup>. Teachers may immediately assess whether the chosen classroom activities were adequate to students’ age and language proficiency just the same as they can make an evaluation about successful addressing the students’ interests in the very lesson. They may, for instance, notice students having difficulties with a particular communication activity, for the reason of which a different one will be made use of next time, e.g. one containing easier grammar or more appropriate topic to talk about. Apart from observation, the assessments can be made by the usage of various questionnaires or chats with students, too. Valuable opinions can be also provided by parents or administrators (Graves 32).

#### **4.7 Appropriate methodology**

It has been claimed that language teachers should not follow any prescribed methodology as it is; instead, they are supposed to develop their own teaching style for every single classroom, as the methodology needs to be in harmony with various types of cultures and their manifestations, which may vary from one student group to another. In the previous chapters, these cultures were described and the methodology adjustment discussed. Individual steps in teaching style development a teacher has to take and carefully pondered were elaborated on as well: setting of the goals of the course, arranging its content, making a decision concerning materials, activities and their organization in the lesson. As it was shown, all these decisions are crucially dependent on the cultures in a way that they must be adjusted to them at all costs. If we were, therefore, to ask what an appropriate teaching style looks like, a response might be: it must be culture-sensitive in each detail. Put another way, an appropriate methodology could be defined as the one that respects all cultural factors and is adjusted to them in everything that constitutes a language lesson, as it has been discussed so far. In spite of this being true, the answer is still not so straightforward, nonetheless.

It is necessary to realize that cultures, and especially the classroom one, keep changing. Just as the teaching style develops, so do the cultures that affect it. And as it

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<sup>5</sup> Brown (quoted in Graves 31) calls this *summative evaluation*; the assessment taking place „during the development and implementation of the curriculum“ is referred to as *formative evaluation*

has been said, the teaching methodology must be adapted to all the circumstances. Consequently, if these circumstances keep changing, which they do, the methodology must do the same. The result of this is a constant development that never stops. It cannot, as the cultural circumstances never cease to change. As Holliday stresses, a teaching style development “never finishes and indeed should be a permanent, ongoing feature of the teaching methodology itself” (164). Given the inevitable constant adjustment and development, we cannot so easily speak about an appropriate methodology. In fact, it is “always a *becoming-appropriate* methodology” (Holliday 164).

## **II. Developing your own teaching style: teaching English to Czech L2 learners (a field study)**

This second part of the thesis presents an analysis of the questionnaires that were sent to three teachers who teach English as a second language in the Czech Republic. The questionnaires sought to determine why and how a teacher should develop his/her own teaching style and simultaneously provide practical examples resulting from the teachers' experience of working in the Czech school environment.

### **1. Introduction**

Considering the complexity of the topic, the written form of the questionnaire with open questions was adopted so that the respondents had enough time to think their answers through and had enough space to express their ideas.

The questions were arranged from broad to more specific ones: at the beginning, the overall familiarity with approaches and methods in language teaching and their development is investigated, then the focus shifts to the personal experience of each of the respondents and to their description of particular methodology/methodologies they have implemented during their career with emphasis on the success and potential alterations they have made. Subsequently, the issue of various cultures is addressed: the classroom (students), the institution and specific problems related to Czech school environment. The last part of the questionnaire is dedicated to the development of particular language skills: based on their own experience, all the respondents provided advice on how to make teaching and learning of the four language skills (plus grammar and vocabulary) more effective, with regard to Czech students.

The results of the questionnaires will be presented to mirror the theoretical part, i.e., following the same structure. Except the first one, all chapters in the practical part bear the same name and number as the theoretical ones. In each chapter, at least one reference is made to the corresponding chapter of the theoretical part. Thus, it begins with the discussion of ideas concerning the development of approaches and methods and their (in)appropriateness and necessity of adjustment. Then it deals with the teachers' answers related to classroom culture, in other words, students' needs. In the next part, their opinions referring to the institution are analysed and followed by their experience with other cultures' influence. The issue of the goals and objectives setting is another theme to present as well as the content of the course. Just like in the theoretical part, a further chapter is focused on the materials and activities selection.

The questionnaire results are then presented in terms of the organization and scope content and, last but not least, teachers' experience concerning evaluation is provided. The analysis is then concluded with the issue of appropriate methodology according to the teachers' responses.

Given the respondents' wish to stay anonymous, I neither mention their surnames here nor enclose the filled questionnaires to be looked at. All the answers are mentioned and discussed in the practical part. In the appendix, I enclose the original, universal form of the questionnaire, i.e., a questionnaire which is not dedicated to any particular respondent yet, so that the questions can be looked at without disturbing the respondents' privacy. The contributors are referred to here by their initials.

To introduce the respondents, the first one is a male of Czech nationality, 28 years old, qualified in economics, yet with 8 years of experience as an English teacher in the Czech Republic. He currently works in a secondary vocational school. I shall refer to him as Mr C.

The second respondent is a female of Czech nationality, 58 years old, qualified in English philology, with 34 years of experience as an English teacher in the Czech Republic. She currently works at a university preparatory secondary school. I shall refer to her as Mrs K.

Finally, the third respondent is a male of American nationality (USA), 42 years old, whose qualifications are Masters of Science in Education (teaching English as a first language, teaching critical reading) and TEFL Certificate. He has been working as an English teacher in the Czech Republic for 11 years and he currently works at the same university preparatory secondary school as Mrs K. He shall be referred to as Mr H.

Having introduced the respondents, it should be said that the two Czech teachers were given a choice to complete the questionnaires either in English or in Czech. Both of them decided to provide the answers in their mother tongue, for the reason of which I use English translations when analysing their responses in the practical part of the thesis.

## 2. The development of approaches and methods

In the chapter *The development of approaches and methods: the nature and necessity of the changes* of the theoretical part, the issue of why and how the approaches and methods developed throughout the course of the history was briefly explained. Two important examples of teaching strategies were mentioned: *the Grammar-Translation Method*, which is based on a traditional study of Latin, and *the Communicative Language Approach*, which represents the newest approach in language education, emphasizing the communicative function of language. Whereas *the Grammar-Translation Method* focused on the development of excellent knowledge of the grammatical system and vocabulary, *the Communicative Language Approach* reflects the worldwide orientation to those aspects of language that serve for successful communication, which has been typical for last decades.

Mrs K. mentions that she, as a member of rather elderly generation, experienced the usage of *the Grammar-Translation Method*, which immensely affected her attitudes towards the grammatical system: “I would say that our generation still puts greater emphasis on the grammar command. Also, I know precisely what grammatical structures the students are to master at particular language levels.” As to the historical development, she remembers the transition to textbooks based on the development of language skills that contribute to effective communication. Another novelty was the promotion of deductive approach, which supported learning by discovery, i.e., active participation of students who ceased to be mere observers and receivers of the teacher’s presentation. This significant change in language teaching, as far as the Czech Republic is concerned, took place after the Velvet Revolution, i.e., after 1989.

Mr C. experienced the advent of modern methodologies as well. Besides, he attended several courses where *the Communicative Language Approach* was proclaimed as an effective way of teaching, with which he agrees: “Modern methodologies, which emphasize the importance of successful communication, contribute to better mastery of all language skills. Students are capable of expressing themselves both in spoken and written discourse”.

Mr H., though not familiar with the names of the methods and approaches, mentions two crucial differences between the courses he attended: while one of them stressed the grammatical mastery, the other one shifted attention to vocabulary, the knowledge of which contributes to better expression of the students and thus to more effective communication, both in the written and spoken form.

What the answers of all the teachers have in common is the reflection of the transition from the grammar-focused teaching strategies to those oriented toward successful communication in the target language. As it was said in the theoretical part, the advent of modern methodologies was driven by newly demanded language proficiencies that became desirable in the last decades: the improvement of communicative skills replaced the perfect theoretical knowledge of grammar.

### 3. Limitations of prescribed methodologies

Although the teachers' responses concerning the advent of modern methodologies imply that they brought effectiveness to the language education, all three respondents agree that caution must be exercised if a teacher wants to follow a method or approach presented in a course or in a theoretical book.

As Mr H. explains, the theory always deals with ideals, i.e., situations that can never be met in reality. And it is the real conditions to which attention must be paid and any methodology adjusted. "There is no single method that would be appropriate for all the situations. As far as the teaching style is concerned, everything is driven by the circumstances." According to him, the danger of prescribed methodologies thus lies in their inappropriateness for real-life situations in which the teachers find themselves and which differ one from another.

Mrs K. adds that it is even possible to combine older and newer methodologies, i.e., *the Grammar-Translation Method* and the ideas originated out of *the Communicative Language Approach*, if the conditions allow for it or require such a combination.

The responses of Mr C. repeat the same conviction: "Although I mostly make use of *the Communicative Language Approach*, sometimes the principles based on *the Grammar-Translation Method*, such as strict drill, prove to be more effective." Everything thus depends on the teachers' interpretation of the situation.

The theoretical chapter *Limitations of prescribed methodologies* explained what all the teachers stated in the questionnaires: there is no prescribed methodology that could be followed thoughtlessly. Every situation in which the teachers find themselves is unique and the methodology which is to be used must be adjusted to the specific circumstances of that situation.



## **4. Developing your own teaching style**

The respondents' experience with the historical development of approaches and methods in language teaching as well as their opinions concerning the inappropriateness of prescribed methodologies have been presented. A huge chapter focused on the development of their own teaching style now follows, mirroring the structure of the theoretical part.

### **4.1 Adjusting the methodology**

As discussed in the previous chapter, all the teachers came to the same conclusion: the teaching style must be adjusted to a particular situation at all costs. Mrs K., who combines the grammatical and communication-based approach, explains: "I do so if I perceive that the situation requires it: for instance, if I feel that profound explanation of a problematic grammatical issue is necessary, I use a teaching strategy which has more in common with the traditional grammatical approach. Otherwise, I try to use the communicative approach as much as possible. There are several factors that affect such decisions of mine: what I am expected to teach the students, their reactions or previous experience, to list just a few."

Mr C. also claims that there are plenty of factors to which attention should be paid. His methodologies are similarly affected not only by his students but also by the institution he works in. Mr H. adds similar experience: "You always have to strive for the balance between the curriculum set by the institution and the students' needs and abilities. And yet you can face problems resulting from other factors that have not been taken into account carefully."

The opinions of all the respondents express what has been stated in the same chapter of the theoretical part: the teaching methodology must be adjusted to, so called, *local cultures*: the classroom culture, the culture of the institution and even to other types of cultures that can be met in the school environment. More detailed answers related to these cultures will be analysed in the following chapters, as it was done in the theoretical part.

#### **4.1.1 Investigating the classroom culture**

If it comes to the adjustment of methodology to the classroom culture, all the respondents mention the importance of respecting students' needs. In the theoretical part, the needs were divided into two categories: objective and subjective. Subsequent

paragraphs elaborate on the teachers' answers with regard to this distribution respectively.

Mr C. regards the age and language knowledge of the students to be the most crucial of the objective needs. "The first thing to be considered when you get a new class of students is their age and current language level. A group of children requires a completely different approach than a group of teenagers or adults: their mental capacities and general abilities vary and so do their needs and interests. Also, a course full of beginners sets completely different conditions from that full of advanced learners. As a teacher, you have to know where to start: what grammatical issues to teach, what the students already know. The same is true for vocabulary and other language skills." Nevertheless, he also stresses the teacher's familiarity with the students' needs as such: "I know that my students will need English especially for communication: with penfriends, on holidays. That means for practical purposes of everyday life. None of them is ever likely to need immense theoretical knowledge of grammar; that is something they find extremely boring. For this reason, I try to make the lessons as practical as possible, without unnecessarily long presentations of grammar, so that they prepare the students for effective communication."

Answers of Mr H. refer to the age of students especially in terms of maturity. Young students are, according to him, often too hyperactive. Practically, it means their attention span is short and concentration rather weak, which does not allow for any long presentations of subject matter or activities which require certain degree of seriousness, responsibility and cooperation, such as group work. Assessment of students' knowledge is, nonetheless, not less important for him. He even points out that "teachers at the beginning of their career often make mistakes of assigning too much material without first assessing what students already know". Another objective need he mentions is related to language difficulties the students experience. He has always strived for practicing especially those English language issues that cause specific problems to Czech learners, such as *false friends* or erroneous grammatical structures resulting out of the Czech language interference. Similarly, if he comes across a student who has difficulties with listening, he tries to make the activity easier by providing a script of the record. Drawing on his experience, Mr H. also suggests it is necessary to consider the financial situation of the students. Such factor may then affect the selection of materials the students are required to possess.

In terms of the objective needs, Mrs K. emphasizes the age of the students as an important factor affecting the teaching style development. During her teaching career, she has taught both young students and adult learners. She speaks about the differences between these two categories of learners as following: “In the case of adult learners, it is more about a psychological approach than about any special teaching strategy. These learners need to overcome their constraints and the teacher is to help them with that. Moreover, the practise of pronunciation and the complex language expression requires more practice.” Apart from that, she also mentions specific language difficulties as another factor to which attention should be paid. Just like Mr H., she often employs activities focused on English language issues that Czech learners find difficult or she dedicates a substantial portion of the lesson to a profound explanation of the problematic matter, such as prepositional phrases or the tense system. Students’ specific needs are not left behind by Mrs K. either. She has always tried to adjust the teaching style to what the students consider as important and necessary (of course, to some extent). If they asked for a specific vocabulary or a more detailed analysis of some grammatical features, she did not hesitate to fulfil these requirements.

The second category of needs presented in the theoretical part is that of subjective needs. Mr C. says that a teacher should get to know, understand and respect the personalities of his/her students. This may contribute to better interpretation of students’ behaviour and reactions, to creation of more appropriate conditions for their active involvement in the lesson, and it may also reveal students’ particular interest. Mr C. emphasizes the importance of adjusting the methodology to what students find intriguing: “The activities I prepare are often focused on topics that appeal to the students: they deal with music, movies, travelling, conversation with friends, American culture and other themes that comprise the world of today’s teenagers.” As a problematic subjective need, he mentions students’ confidence: “Many of the students are not confident enough to use English. They are especially afraid of speaking. Teachers’ task is to help them to establish the necessary confidence once discovered its absence. For instance, speaking in small groups can be implemented instead of speaking in front of the whole class”. His opinions referring to subjective needs are concluded with a statement that a teacher should try to show understanding and sympathy given the students’ mood or fatigue, at least from time to time. “There should be a positive relationship between the teacher and their students.”

The contribution of Mr H. represents almost identical opinions. He says that as a teacher, “you have to know who you are teaching”. Thereby, he refers to the cognition of individual personalities of students. When teaching Czech students, he has also encountered very little confidence as to the language use the students evince. And it had a particular impact on his methodology. At the beginning of his career as an English teacher in the Czech Republic, he used to correct the students a lot during speaking activities. However, the effect on their confidence was disastrous: they almost did not dare to speak any more. That is what led him to one of the alterations he has made in his teaching style: nowadays, he does not correct so much when the students speak; instead, he wants them to build up confidence in speaking. Once the confidence is established, he then focuses on the mistakes more than before. What is more, if he comes across a student who is extremely afraid of speaking, he supports him/her with a kind of activity in which the student can at least imitate the speech. Working in small groups instead of speaking in front of the whole class also belongs to Mr H. teaching principles based on the experience with students’ confidence. He even concludes this issue similarly as Mr C. saying that “there are benefits to being personable with students in order to build a rapport with them”, though it cannot be over-done. According to him, a teacher should show certain degree of friendliness, though carefully, with limits to that.

Mrs K.’s experience as far as the students’ confidence is concerned is not distinct from that of the other two teachers. She attributes that to the geographical position of the Czech Republic: “Czech students are not surrounded by English as much as the Dutch or the Scandinavian nations, for the reason of which they often do not feel comfortable with it: they are too shy and afraid to speak.” To change this, she always tries to support the students during speaking activities and lighten the atmosphere by making jokes or funny commentaries. Activities requiring employment of students’ fantasy also contribute to reduced anxiety: learners often forget about their fear and immerse themselves in an entertaining speaking. Mrs K. also encourages her students in reading English books, both the easier and original ones. “If a student succeeds in reading a book in English, you cannot imagine how it helps to enhance his/her confidence in the language.” Having discussed the confidence, she likewise mentions the interests of the students, to which attention should be paid. “If students do what satisfy them and if the activities are constructed around things they like, it may have a positive impact on the effectiveness of learning. By reading an appealing book, watching a favourite movie or listening to a popular song, they are likely to acquire new

vocabulary with ease, as the emotional factor plays an important role here”. Unlike the two other teachers, Mrs K. adds another subjective need of the students – particular learning styles. “Many times I have come across students with specific learning strategies of their own. I understood I was to respect them and adjust my teaching style to them.”

In the theoretical chapter *Investigating the classroom culture*, a special paragraph was reserved for the issue of motivation. Following the same structure, now I would like to present the teachers’ opinions related to this specific students’ need separately as well. During his career, Mr C. has met students, whose motivation for studying the foreign language was immensely high given their awareness of the worldwide importance of English, especially as far as the opportunities of the future job are concerned. On the other hand, many of his students have been just too lazy to participate in the lesson, not to speak of learning something. “They just showed no interest in the language education. I always try to help such students to find the motivation, to make the language lesson an intriguing event that has a meaningful purpose. But sometimes, all my attempts are in vain.”

Mr H. agrees that motivation and personal interest of the students is a big issue. “It can affect your teaching style a lot. Students’ disinterest, which emerges out of the absence of motivation, can completely bury all your attempts to provide them with a quality lesson. You inevitably meet someone like that from time to time.” However, as he also used to teach adults in a language school, he also experienced highly motivated learners, who did want to learn the language as they were all driven by the necessity of English so as to perform successfully and satisfactorily their jobs.

Mrs K., working in the same institution as Mr H., mentions similar experience. “Of course that in our preparatory school you can find plenty of students who like or even adore English, students who are hardworking and diligent, but the opposite can be found as well. As I see it, the problem lies in the nature of the institution: as it is meant to prepare the students for university studies in any field possible, it imposes extreme requirements on them as to the scope of general knowledge they are to grasp. Thus, it happens to me that some of my students are either not interested in English at all (all their interests embrace history, architecture, whatever, excluding the foreign language) or they would be, but they are terrified of their Maths and Chemistry teachers and so they try to spend my lessons secretly studying other subjects.”

As it can be seen, and as it was also suggested in the identical chapter of the theoretical part, teachers should always get to know their students well and get acquainted with both their socio-economic background and with their personal characteristics to which the methodology must be adjusted. Moreover, they should seek to strengthen students' motivation for language studies. Still, as Mrs K. explained, the lack of motivation can represent a serious problem in public school sector, difficult to cope with, as English language represents just one of many subjects the students have to deal with, the fact which was also explained in the theoretical part.

#### **4.1.2 The role of the institution**

In the same chapter of the theoretical part, the question of how the institution a teacher works in affects the teaching style development was elaborated on. Teachers' responses related to this topic will now be examined.

Both Mr C. and Mrs K. mention the nature of the institution as the most crucial factor for the methodology development. Mr C., working in a secondary vocational school, teaches students who will most likely never study English at universities; they head for technical specialization, craft or no higher education at all. Therefore, not only his students do not have needs for studying English profoundly, he is even not expected to teach them enormous amount of theory or high level matters. Mrs K., on the other hand, has to prepare students well not only for practical everyday use of English, but also for potential university studies of the foreign language. She thus sometimes dedicates whole hours to careful grammar explanations and practise. Moreover, she also pointed out that the overall preparation of students for various future careers the institution provides in some cases leads to lower motivation for language studies.

Both teachers also speak well about the institution equipment: "Our school provides us with quality material and technology: textbooks, magazines, PC rooms with projectors. It has a positive impact on the attractiveness of the lesson and its effectiveness," says Mr C. What Mrs K. especially appreciates is a whole library of English fiction books accessible to everyone. "Students are free to borrow them and thus acquire new vocabulary and grammar through reading a popular book. It also strengthens their confidence, once they read their first book in English."

According to these two teachers, their institutions are also open to changes, which contributes to the freedom of teachers as far as their unique teaching style is concerned. Mrs K. says that the school she teaches in is very flexible: "Some of my

colleagues even go without using a textbook. They make use of their own materials. No one tells you what you are to do. You just have to teach what you are expected to teach, but the means for achieving that is up to you.”

Mr C. and Mrs K. also mention the support of teachers as to their professional development. From time to time, they attend language courses and seminars that help them not only to improve the language proficiency, but also to enhance the effectiveness of the lessons they give. However, some of these courses take place abroad and there is not always sufficient financial resource to enable all the teachers to participate in them, as they explain.

Mr H. considers the nature of the institution as a critical factor too: “To some extent, the school you teach in sets certain guidelines which you, as a teacher, have to follow. It has some purpose and you cannot ignore it.” Nevertheless, what he regards as even more crucial in terms of the institution is the classroom and class size. “There is a great difference between a lecture hall at university with 200 students and a class of 15 students that I teach in our prep-school. A small number of students allows for group-work in clusters of 3-5 students with teacher’s monitoring. Moreover, I make use of many games or competitions that could not be done with a class of 30 students or more.”

Teachers’ opinions thus suggest that the institution they work in does not have a negligible impact on their teaching style: the purpose, mission of the institution is probably the most crucial factor, but the class size and equipment are also of crucial importance. The overall support to teachers and the flexibility with which they are able to deliver their lesson also contribute to encouraging teachers to develop more effective methodologies.

#### **4.1.3 Other cultures’ influence**

One chapter of the theoretical part, *Other cultures’ influence*, was dedicated to factors or problems resulting out of other cultures than those of the classroom or institution. The teachers asked provided various contributions to this topic. They will be analysed in the following paragraphs.

Mr C. is aware of a traditional lesson organization, in which the teacher speaks almost all the time (apart from asking students some questions), with the students as mere observers of the presentation, an example of what was called a *teaching spectacle* in the theoretical part. In spite of this common view of education that has deep roots in

the Czech school system and has its origins in some professional-academic or even international cultures, he seeks to make his English lessons rather a *learning festival*. “I encourage students to actively participate in various group activities or prepare some projects and presentations for others, so that they know they can contribute to the lesson as well. I also try to make everything as practical as possible, which is not typical here, I would say.” And he is right, for as observed in the theoretical part, lots of TESEP school systems are based on theory rather on practicality of knowledge. For this reason, he has often met with incomprehension or faced conflicts with other colleagues. “Some teachers, especially those of elderly generation, are not open to modern methods; they keep on teaching in the way they were taught themselves a long time ago. This, however, inhibits students in gaining the knowledge effectively.” He also adds that his colleagues affected by the older teaching styles, used during the communist era, are often too strict and authoritative, which does not contribute to a pleasant atmosphere of the lesson at all.

Mrs K. also admits she prefers a student-centred lessons. Although her lesson might be a *teaching spectacle* to some extent, e.g. if she explains a complex grammar issue, she mostly wants her students to actively participate, as the sufficient practice is the only possible way of how the language can be learnt. “It is also a good opportunity for finding out more about the students. The more active they are, the more they ‘communicate’ with the teacher and provide feedbacks.” However, some of her colleagues’ opinions about the role of the teacher and students differ from those of hers: “One colleague of mine is the typical example of a strict, authoritative teacher who literally rules the whole lesson. There is absolute silence, with the exception of her speaking, not allowing students to open their mouths until asked to. But it should not be this way; her students are then afraid of speaking and have almost no confidence. Of course the teacher has to emanate a certain degree of authority, but there should be a limit to that.” She furthermore mentions one more fact connected with other cultures’ influence: “The Czech educational system does not encourage students to express their own opinion. The response I usually hear is just simply ‘I do not know.’ Besides, they often do not even know how to participate in a discussion, how to disagree politely. It is then a task of us, language teachers, to teach them these skills.”

Mr H. is also a great supporter of the student-centred approach with teacher’s supervision, which comes from the BANA professional-academic culture and stands in opposition to the traditional Czech teacher-centred lesson. He believes that the less he



speaks, the more the students learn. He honestly says that as American, he experienced a real culture shock when he commenced his teaching career in our country. Probably the most serious problem he still cannot cope with is the impracticality of the Czech education. He gives an example of the final exam in English: “Students are required to memorize facts about English-speaking countries instead of showing great practical knowledge of the language as such. Likewise, they are taught about the lives of famous authors. It might sound intelligent, but it has nothing to do with practical literary skills. Such knowledge is, moreover, forgotten very soon after the test is taken.” He has also met with extreme submissiveness of the students who believed they were obliged to be totally quiet as long as the lesson lasted. Teachers were seen by them as great authorities who must be obeyed. “Of course, the opposite extreme would not be functional. There is something ‘authoritarian’ about a school, but Czechs are too quiet and obedient. There should be balance between the authority and collaboration.” Mr H. attributes these features of current Czech school system to the remnants of the communist era, which was characterised by the authoritarianism. He similarly complains about Czech teachers feeling no responsibility for learning: “They just present something and do not care about it more. If the students understood it or not is no business of theirs. Then they have them tested on something the students are simply expected to have learnt.” His opinions about a necessity of radical change have often led to several conflicts with his colleagues who are convinced that a teacher should have an unassailable status of authority whose task is just to pass on the theoretical knowledge and not to involve students in the lesson actively.

This chapter presented practical examples of what was discussed in the identical chapter of the theoretical part of the thesis and attempted to align these. It demonstrates how teacher’s work can be affected by factors emerging out of professional-academic or international cultures, such as a traditional view of education (*teaching spectacle*), which can get into a conflict with the modern approach (*learning festival*), or a traditional theoretical focus instead of practical skills development. The traditional authoritative status of the teacher and the lack of responsibility for students’ learning cannot be ignored among these factors. These features that can be found in the Czech school environment may be attributable to the political history of the country – the communist era, as two of the respondents suggested. Differing opinions concerning the aforementioned factors may then lead to conflicts between teachers, who, instead of being supportive of each other, discourage other colleagues and do not create a pleasant

environment to work in. The situation gets even more complicated when a BANA teacher is to work in the TESEP environment, where he/she may experience a real culture shock. Difficult as it is, the methodology must be adjusted not only to the classroom and the institution, but also to other cultures, the factors of which must be carefully thought through as well as the impact of the methodology on these.

#### **4.2 Setting goals and objectives**

Just as in the theoretical part, the focus of the thesis now moves from the analysis of types of cultures to which methodology must be adjusted to particular steps in teaching style development explaining how they are related to the culture adjustment.

All the respondents agree on the fact that the goals of their courses are primarily set by the institution. Given the public sector of education they all work in, their task is to teach and improve students' four language skills, i.e., reading, writing, listening and speaking, as well as to acquaint the students with the basic cultural knowledge related to countries where the foreign language is spoken. However, as the requirements of the secondary vocational and university preparatory school differ, goals of Mr C.' lessons are more focused on the practical language use, whereas Mrs K. sees the main purpose of the preparatory school in providing the students with profound grasp of grammar. Mr H. adds that students of university prep-school should master the language perfectly, for the reason of which he is sometimes too demanding, especially as far as the students' vocabulary requirements are concerned.

Apart from the institution, the classroom culture also affects the goals of the course. What should be taught does not have to be necessarily related solely to language skills as such. Once analysed students' needs, completely new goals may suddenly emerge. All three teachers mention experience with students' low confidence. Its strengthening thus becomes one of the goals of the course: teachers try to get the students to overcome their shyness and fear of speaking. All of the respondents lead their students to a successful participation in a meaningful conversation, by which they emphasize the importance of being capable to communicate, though with mistakes, instead of being focused on the correctness of the expression. Mrs K. and Mr C. also suggest that sometimes a teacher seeks to enhance students' learning strategy. "Some of my students only memorize. If they are to study phrases, there is nothing wrong about it. But language should be mostly learnt by practising: vocabulary should be used in sentences, grammar should be both understood and acquired from practical examples. I

thus have to prompt my students to more effective ways of learning,” explains Mr C. Similarly, Mrs K. tries to encourage students in reading and watching films, so that they acquire vocabulary, phrases or even grammar with ease. On the other hand, she tells them when memorization is inevitable.

A special type of goals is represented by socialization of the students. Mr H. admits he often makes social commentary so as to familiarize his students with the topic, which is to be worked with, in its real-world context. Likewise, Mrs K. helps her students to express their opinions and politely converse in various situations. Thereby, she teaches them how to deal skilfully with situations life can bring.

The results of the questionnaires pointed out to the fact that both the institution and students’ needs have an impact on the setting of the goals in the language course. These goals may then be related not only to demanded language skills but also to students’ personal characteristics or socialization, as also claimed in the chapter *Setting goals and objectives* of the theoretical part.

#### **4.3 Content of the course**

In the corresponding chapter of the theoretical part, it was said that a teacher always has to decide about the content of the course with regard to its goals; goals represent the purpose of the whole course and that determines the content a teacher is to deal with. In other words, content can be defined as what is to be taught in order to achieve the overall desired outcome of the course. And as the goals are dependent on the classroom and institution culture, the course content is actually determined by the institution and students’ needs as well. In the public sector of education, both the goals and content of the language courses are fixed. Yet, teachers can still make decisions about how the content will be delivered.

Indeed, Mr C. explains that the content of his lessons is practically set by the institution and ministry of education, which creates curricula for diverse types of schools. Thus, he has to follow certain guidelines that tell him what type of grammar or specific language skills he is expected to teach the students of particular grade of secondary vocational school. Still, he has a certain degree of freedom. “Although I follow a prescribed plan which dictates what the students should learn, I can choose the way of how to teach them that. To give you an idea, I am expected to teach them past tenses. However, as I know their passion for American culture and their need for rather communication skills than perfect theoretical knowledge, I can introduce the new

grammatical issues in relation to this real-world topic instead of spending hours with exhaustingly long, theoretical presentations, to which they would not pay attention anyway.” It may be observed that by doing so, Mr C. seeks to meet both the prescribed requirements and students’ needs.

Mrs K. and Mr. H. follow the same curriculum, the one set for the university preparatory schools. The ideas and experience they shared in the questionnaires, however, points out to different presumptions about the language as well as different beliefs in the purpose of their institution, which lead to slightly different content of their lessons. Regarding grammar as the most essential component of language, Mrs K. sees the mission of prep-school, as far as the language education is concerned, in providing the students with detailed explanation and flawless command of grammar. “Where else they should learn this? Speaking and listening can be practised on their own, if it comes to that: with friends, by watching movies. But grammar mostly needs profound explanation, especially the problematic issues. And without grammar, what is the vocabulary for? That is why I dedicate a substantial portion of my lessons to theory”. On the contrary, Mr H. puts the greatest emphasis on the vocabulary. According to him, it is its broad knowledge the language use stands on. Thus, although he teaches students what they are expected to learn with respect to the curriculum, content of his lessons is usually constructed around vocabulary.

As observed, teachers, when defining the content of the course, are mostly affected by the curriculum set by the ministry of education for particular type of school. It informs them about what is necessary to be taught and what the students are expected to learn in every single year of their studies. Overall, it then comprises the goal of the whole course. Apart from this, teachers also adjust the content to students’ needs, at least to some extent. And last but not least, as also claimed in the theoretical part, the content of the course also reflects teacher’s beliefs about the language: various teachers may still follow the same curriculum, whilst putting emphasis on different aspects of language.

#### **4.4 Materials and activities**

Just like in the theoretical part, the thesis now proceeds from general goals and course content to particular activities and materials which are made use of in English lessons of our respondents. All of them completely agree on the fact that the activities

they choose must be in accordance with the goals and content of the course. Practically, it means they make use of activities related to the topic taught; such activities serve for practising the discussed matter students are to learn and contribute to the achievement of the desired goal of the whole course.

For this reason, Mr C. often employs speaking activities requiring usage of new grammar, as his students should acquire especially good practical, communication skills. Mrs K. alternates activities focused on all the language skills students are to learn, but she admits the usage of grammar and translation exercises is frequent, as the students of prep-school should, according to her, gain perfect knowledge of grammar, which is essential for successful language use. Mr H., putting special emphasis on new vocabulary, often employs writing or speaking activities where its usage is required. He also thinks students should be encouraged in listening for specific information, not to be focused on detailed understanding. To achieve this goal, he uses listening activities leading students to get the important message instead of trying to understand every single word. Moreover, frequent usage of speaking activities in his lessons reflects his conviction that speaking English should become a habit for students. Another goal of the school is to familiarize students with cultures of the foreign languages. Mr H. meets this requirement by using various quizzes focused on English-speaking countries.

However, activities selected must simultaneously match students' needs, as the teachers stress. In the case of Mr C., they are usually chosen in order to suite students' interest. "If the writing skills are to be tested, students are often told to write a letter or e-mail to their pen-friend. From time to time, we listen to popular songs and students have to fill missing words in the lyrics. For reading, they sometimes bring Internet articles and we discuss them together. Their participation is more enthusiastic if the activities are focused on something they like or if they can even choose the topic themselves. Mrs K. mentions two crucial students' needs to which she seeks to adjust the selection of activities: the difficulties students' experience and their low confidence and shyness. "Czech students have troubles with specific English issues, which is why I often employ exercises focused on these," explains Mrs K. As for students' low confidence and fear of speaking, she employs pair or group speaking activities such as role play or discussions. "Students do not have to speak in front of the whole class so they are less stressed. Moreover, they have fun if they can use their fantasy and the fear of using English is suddenly left behind." Mr H. contributes with identical opinion and experience as to the group work. Apart from that, he adds that students' age is another

significant factor that must be taken into account when deciding about classroom activities. “You cannot use group activities with too young students: they are too hyperactive and usually not able to cooperate with each other as desired. If you let them free while monitoring other groups, they make terrible mess. Similarly, the discussions concerning problems of the todays’ world could not be used if I taught children at primary school, who are not able to participate in a discussion, not to speak of the serious topic which is to be dealt with.”

As to materials used in their lessons, all the teachers came to the same conclusion as they did with the activities selection: materials should be adjusted to the course goals and content as well as students’ needs. Mr C. uses a textbook, which is designed according to what the students are expected to learn, from grammar to vocabulary, containing activities for practice. However, he complains his colleagues rely on the textbook too much. “I try to employ also other materials such as magazines, books, Internet articles, so as to make the lesson more appealing for the students.” It thus can be seen that his colleagues apparently ignore students’ needs. Mrs K. and Mr H., though both using the textbook, make use of their own materials as well. “I prepare plenty of grammatical exercises with regard to the difficulties students experience,” says Mrs K. Voluminous vocabulary lists and paper sheets treating various culture topics are examples of Mr H.’ own materials. As to the textbook, he says that it is a good supporting material for students but its choice should be pondered carefully: “The danger of textbooks is that they are not appropriate for each country or age of the students. These factors are not taken into account by the developers. It is thus up to teachers to make a decision concerning their appropriateness and potential adjustments as far as the students’ needs or even the national culture are concerned.”

Teachers’ opinions thus showed what was discussed in the theoretical chapter *Materials and activities*: Materials and activities used in the lesson should reflect the goals and content of the course but at the same time, they should meet students’ needs.

#### **4.5 Organization of activities and content: sequence and scope**

The identical chapter of the theoretical part discussed the issue of how the activities and content of the course can be organized and to what extent a particular language matter may be dealt with. Now, the teachers’ opinions related to this topic will be presented.

As far as the content sequence is concerned, Mr H. stresses the connection of students' prior knowledge to new material. Alike, Mr C. says he always introduces more complex issues after the easier ones have been presented and managed, so that every piece of knowledge or skill constitutes a base for what comes next. Practically, it means following the textbook or the curriculum, both of which are constructed that way. Although the scope of the subject matter which is to be taught may be defined by the curriculum as well, it is mostly affected by students' needs and the decision about it is up to teachers themselves: "In spite of knowing what grammar I am to teach my students, I do not go into unnecessary details. They would not be interested. That is why I teach them only the essential grammar they should master at particular level and I provide additional material only if someone asks about it," explains Mr C. In contrast, Mrs K. often adds even more complex grammar to the language matter which is currently dealt with and is related to it, given her belief that students of prep-school should be well prepared as far as the grammar is concerned. Thus, she sometimes goes even beyond what the textbook introduces in particular unit. She feels her students might find the advanced grammar necessary and useful.

As to the activities and their organization, all the teachers say they try to alternate them so that various skills would be practised and it would be done so in distinct ways. For instance, Mr C. always follows a grammar presentation with a practical speaking activity so that the students do not get bored. Mr H. seeks to combine the activities so that the lesson gets interesting and the students do not spend extensive amount of time doing one thing. Still, the activities are usually logically interconnected both in terms of the topic and the knowledge necessary for their successful realization. He gives an example of a lesson thematically focused on travelling: "At the beginning, I let my students to discuss a few statements related to this topic. Then I make a brief, culture commentary considering the travelling in the USA and introduce some new, important vocabulary which then appears in a listening activity. Based on that, students are then required to speak about what they heard, using this new vocabulary." It is thus apparent that he tries to focus on distinct language skills, the mastery of which is a desired goal of his courses, and simultaneously on various tasks requiring the same skill so as not to get students bored. All the time, he has in mind the knowledge requirements for particular activities. He adds that he often employs assignments that provide students with an opportunity of correcting their previous mistakes. These tasks are

usually arranged according to the grammar issue which is required, which is exactly what two other teachers mention as well.

Given the teachers' answers, it may be said that the most common organization of the content and activities is what was introduced in the corresponding chapter of the theoretical part as *from simple to complex, prerequisite learning* and *spiral sequencing*. These terms refer to the presentation of simpler matter before the more complex one, to the introduction of what is going to be necessary later as a basis for newer matter, and to the repetition of activities focused on particular language matter serving for repeated application of knowledge, respectively. In the case of activities, their diversity was also stressed as crucial to meet all the goals of the course and also to match the students' needs, which is what also mostly determine the scope of the content.

#### **4.6 Evaluation**

In the theoretical chapter dealing with *evaluation*, it was suggested that there are two possible ways in which evaluation may be understood: either it is considered to be a test or exam which is supposed to check students' knowledge or it may refer to the assessment of the course. In any case, the evaluation of students' command of language contributes to the overall assessment of the course itself. Considering the problems students manifest in a test, teachers can make alterations to their teaching style. Evaluation can also be made in any minute of the lesson and appropriate changes taken. The respondents provided answers related to both examples. A discussion of these follows, commencing with the immediate evaluation and proceeding to the assessment via tests, exams or essays.

As to the immediate evaluation and following adjustment of the teaching style, all the respondents point out to the students' needs analysis. "You always have to adjust what you do based on the individuals in your classroom after you have assessed them and gotten to know them and their abilities," claims Mr H. What can be discovered immediately is, according to the teachers, students' low confidence and fear of speaking, problematic cases, as well as fatigue or bad mood. "Teachers should respect that and adapt the planned activities to the current situation in the class," says Mr C., "for instance by cheering up the shy students more or by altering the conditions for speaking, by providing a little help if they experience difficulties, or a completely different activity might be chosen for that moment. Next time, such an activity may not be employed at all. Instead, it may be substituted by what proved to be more



comprehensible and overall appropriate.” Mr C.’ contribution thus shows how the teaching style can be changed both for a moment and for the future; immediate evaluation may bring consequences for the further course development.

As far as the students’ knowledge evaluation and its impact on the course assessment are concerned, all three teachers admit that tests and exams students are to take do affect their methodology indeed. Mrs K. says she has always been inspired by the mistakes students frequently make and she dedicates more time to the language issues that have proved to be problematic for Czech students during her career. Mr H. provides an example of having had students write much less often and having had them write rather long essays, which did not prove effective. “Now I have them write more shorter essays,” adds Mr H. to explain how he has changed his teaching style with regard to the evaluation of essays. What is more, the tests he used to have his students take proved to be too complex. Hence, he now uses a different type of tests, based on multiple choice questions checking not only vocabulary but grammar as well. Mr C. says that the results of tests and exams have given him evidence of effectiveness of his style which combines friendly approach with strictness and drill.

All examples of the teachers’ responses showed how an immediate evaluation can be made and what impacts on the teaching style it may have, both short and long-term. Evaluation of students’ knowledge, as suggested in the theoretical part and now confirmed by the teachers, also affects the teachers’ methodology. Results of the tests and exams may indicate what is necessary to deal with more carefully next time and whether the whole teaching style is effective or not. The appropriateness of the test itself can be also questioned and after seeing the results, its form altered.

#### **4.7 Appropriate methodology**

Speaking about the overall development of their own teaching style, all the teachers express the same experience and opinion: it is a process that never ceases. Mr C. points out that innovative ideas about how to make the lessons more effective come to his mind all the time. Similarly, Mrs K. says she is in permanent search for the newer and better. And Mr H. adds: “It has been a constant adjustment process. I make alterations to what I do whenever I realize how to make things more effective.”

After analysing the responses of the three teachers asked, the bachelor’s thesis comes to the same conclusion as at the end of the theoretical part, which was written on the basis of reference books: even if a teacher does not follow any prescribed

methodology and develops his/her own instead, which is the way it should be, we can never speak about *appropriate* methodology. An appropriate methodology may be defined as the one that is culture-sensitive, i.e., adjusted to all types of cultures and their manifestations. However, as these can change even every minute, the teaching style must be in a constant development as well. Hence, we can always speak only about *becoming-appropriate* methodology, as it was stated in the final chapter of the theoretical part. Teaching style development is an on-going process that must not ever stop.

## Conclusion

This bachelor's thesis firstly sought to understand why it is necessary to develop your own teaching style instead of following thoughtlessly a prescribed methodology. Consequently, the aim of the thesis was to understand what needs to be taken into account when teaching English language skills to Czech secondary school students and to identify the key components required in order to develop an individual teaching style.

The research identified that teachers should never completely rely on any prescribed methodology. This may only be looked upon as a guideline that requires further development. Methodologies are constrained by the fact that they do not take into consideration all the possible situations in which teachers find themselves, nor could they be expected to do so. What they consider is *an ideal*. In reality, as the research data indicated, a teacher's job is affected by myriads of factors resulting from various types of cultures.

As observed from the results of the field-study, the requirement to understand and meet students' needs was the single most important factor to be taken into account when developing one's individual teaching style. Although all three teachers who participated in the survey work in the Czech Republic, two of them even within the same institution, their experience of developing their individual teaching style was different given the distinct groups of students they teach. Throughout the questionnaire, the three respondents kept highlighting the importance of the age of the students and their current language level, students' interests, motivation and needs as to the use of English. These factors crucially shape teacher's decisions concerning the selection of materials and activities implemented in the lesson. Moreover, as the research data pointed out, they also contribute to the setting of the goals and content of the course.

The field-study also identified curriculum as another factor that substantially influences a teacher's job. With regard to the type of secondary school, i.e., its mission, it specifies the goals of the language course and defines its content. Nevertheless, the research identified that although teachers are to respect the curriculum, the final decision about both the goals and the content of the English lessons can still be adjusted to students' individual needs.

Furthermore, the investigation revealed the influence of cultures other than those of the classroom or the institution. The development of an individual teaching style tends to be affected by beliefs and traditions embedded in the national school system. In

the Czech school environment, the modern student-centred approach may conflict with that of the traditional teacher-centred approach, as the research data implied. Similarly, a teacher who seeks to employ the western orientation towards practical skills development may experience troubles when opposing the Czech education system that prefers theory to practice. The traditional authoritative status of the teacher is another significant factor that can be found in Czech schools. It may be attributable to the political past of the country. Based on the investigation results, all these factors should be considered well before trying to implement a methodology that would oppose these traditions. Otherwise, it may lead to a conflict within the group of teachers, or to a misunderstanding between the teacher innovator and his/her students.

Based on the data obtained via the questionnaires, this bachelor's thesis suggests that the only recommendation that would guarantee an effective English lesson is to develop your own teaching style, which will be adapted to all the environmental factors ranging from professional-academic, international and national cultures through the culture of the institution to the most significant one – the classroom culture. Given the fact that these factors keep changing, the methodology must do the same, i.e., the development of an individual teaching style can never cease. Hence, the theory prescribed in books may serve as an inspiration which is further developed with regard to the cultures and their manifestations specific for every teacher's situation. To develop your own teaching style is not a straightforward task. Yet, it is absolutely necessary to do so if a successful delivery of the subject matter is to take place.

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## **Appendix 1: The questionnaire**

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for agreeing to complete the attached questionnaire that will assist me in collecting data for the purpose of writing my bachelor's thesis. As you know, the thesis is entitled "Developing your own teaching style: teaching English to Czech L2 learners" and seeks to understand how teachers develop their own style of teaching. Would you be so kind as to respond to the following questions concerning the development of your own strategy of teaching English in the Czech environment? Please, take your time when providing the responses as some of the questions consist of more parts and may be more complex to answer than others. The questions are raised in English. Nevertheless, if you find yourself more comfortable with responding in Czech, please, feel free to do so. The questionnaire is meant to be completed and sent back in an electronic way. For this purpose, I enclose my e-mail address: [veronika.pechancova@seznam.cz](mailto:veronika.pechancova@seznam.cz). Should you need some further information or clarification, please, do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Veronika Pechancová



**3) Which approaches and methods have you employed during your teaching career? Which approaches and methods did you feel were most effective and why?**

**4) What teaching approach/method do you currently use and how would you describe it?**

**5) How strictly did you adhere to the approaches and methods you have employed during your teaching career?**



**6) How strictly do you adhere to the approach/method you currently use? Have you made your own alterations? If so, why? Could you describe them?**

**7) When developing your English teaching strategy, which factors do you consider to be the most prominent when teaching in the Czech environment?**

**8) How did/do these factors affect your own teaching style?**

**9) How would you characterise the culture of the institution you currently work for? How did/does it affect your teaching strategy?**

**10) During your career, have you worked in different types of schools? If so, how did they differ in the way they affected your teaching strategy?**

**11) In terms of the classroom culture, to which factors should attention be paid when developing your own teaching style?**

**12) Which idiosyncrasies might you mention as being typical of the Czech students of English?**

**13) Which idiosyncrasies might you mention as being typical of the Czech educators teaching English?**

**14) What problems and troubles have you come across during your career in the Czech Republic, as far as your teaching style(s) is (are) concerned?**

**15) How did you cope with them?**

**16) Based on your own experience, how would you improve the teaching of English in the Czech school environment? Specifically:**

- **Speaking**

- **Reading**

- **Writing**

- **Listening**

- **Grammar**

- **Vocabulary**