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**TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION
AND ITS APPLICATION TO A FOREST KINDERGARTEN**

Diplomová práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto práci vypracoval samostatně na základě uvedené literatury a pramenů.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis focuses on teaching English in pre-school education and its possible application to a forest kindergarten. The theoretical part first introduces the principles of teaching the English language to pre-school children, compiles the design principles of the English course and also deals with the concept of outdoor-based education. The end of this part is devoted to forest kindergartens, namely the one in which the course is held. The aim of the practical part is to design, implement and analyze 'English in Nature' course that has been held during the whole year in Bažinka Forest Kindergarten. This part provides the reader with the lesson plans of 'English in Nature' course with their content elaboration in detail. The main goal of the thesis is to point out the meaningfulness of teaching English language to pre-school children in the outdoor environment.

“The best classroom and richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky.”

– Margaret McMillan (Nursery Education Pioneer, 1914, p. 5)

INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that English language is considered to be the most common worldwide language through which people may communicate. However, the lesser-known fact is that English not only is being taught in elementary and secondary schools and universities but recently it also starts to widely appear in the forms of early childhood education – in kindergartens. In non-English speaking countries, more and more pre-school children have the opportunity to learn English, either through outside private courses or through the integrated courses provided by many kindergartens.

As the teaching English in pre-school education continues to build its momentum, so do the extraordinary kindergartens that take place solely outdoors and which are better known as ‘forest kindergartens’.

The aim of this thesis is to interconnect these two phenomena, both theoretically and practically, in order to examine whether it is meaningful to teach English to pre-school children in natural environment and throughout the year.

Having been a guide myself of pre-school children and a teacher of English course at the same time in Bažinka Forest Kindergarten for over two years, I have decided that the topic for my diploma thesis will be built on my personal teaching experience there. Therefore, the goal of this thesis is to provide the reader with principles of teaching English outdoors to pre-school children. However, the major focus in this thesis is to propose a set of methodically elaborated language activities that are modified into the natural environment. As a result of this, the samples of English lessons that were taught within the frame of the annual course ‘English in Nature’ are described and analysed in the practical part of the thesis.

Additionally, the thesis also largely aims at exploring the usage and impact of natural environment not only on teaching English language but also on children’s overall development which similarly relates to the appropriate learning conditions. This issue is broadly described in the second half of the thesis’ theoretical part.

The first part of the thesis deals with four main developmental processes. Subsequently, the general principles of teaching English to pre-school children were chosen in order to examine their relevance in the form of its advantages and disadvantages.

The next part of the thesis deals with recent phenomenon of English course in pre-school education. It focuses on its content via organization, length, size and structure as well as via learning environment in which the course may take its place.

The following chapter introduces nature as an environment for education and the terms connected with it. It also describes the impacts of natural environment on children's overall development.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the phenomenon of forest kindergartens. The main ideals and goals are presented together with teaching approaches and learning environment of one particular, Bažinka Forest Kindergarten.

Finally, the last part of the thesis, the practical part, introduces the samples of language activities that were designed and implemented within the annual course 'English in Nature' in the natural environment of Bažinka Forest Kindergarten. The result reveals whether it is possible to create adequate English course for pre-school children that is 'nestled' in natural environment.

The topic of the thesis was chosen in order to share the teaching experience that was gained during the preparation and leadership of the course that took place for one whole school year.

Nonetheless, knowing the fact that the area of outdoor teaching is still very much unexplored in this country, the thesis thus should serve as a guideline and a source of inspiration for all foreign language teachers that are interested in outdoor teaching and perhaps wonder how to integrate and exploit the learning environment that nature provides.

1 SPECIFICATIONS OF A PRE-SCHOOL CHILD IN THE CONTEXT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

The very first chapter of the thesis is dealing with developmental processes of pre-school children, especially with those that are seen as important when learning a foreign language.

In the context of the thesis, these developmental processes will be explained together with general principles of teaching English to pre-school children. Finally, the main advantages and disadvantages of teaching English to pre-school children will be shown.

1.1 PRE-SCHOOL CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The pre-school age is in many ways seen as the crucial period when many important skills are being developed (Kotátková, 2008, p. 13). As Reilly & M. Ward (1999, p. 3) fittingly confirm, more than the chronological age of pre-school children (which means 3 to 6 years), it is the children's developmental age what needs to be taken into consideration. Children at this age learn through direct experience and activities using all five senses. These activities involve kinetic, cognitive, social and emotional skills (see Subchapters 1.1.1-3). The role of a teacher is to help the children develop in all of these areas (Mertin & Gillernová, 2003, p. 10).

1.1.1 KINETIC DEVELOPMENT

It is a general fact that gross motor skills are significantly improved during the pre-school period (Mertin & Gillernová, 2003, p. 14). The limb movements are still poorly coordinated at the beginning of the period, but it is due to the intensive development of the cerebral cortex that movements become more accurate (ibid.). Walking is usually clumsy around the age of three years – but when children start to step on the whole foot, then it helps to develop the individual style of children's walking. At the end of the period children manage to perform activities demanding on motor coordination, e.g. running, cycling, skiing, skating or swimming.

Fine motor skills, e.g. the coordination movement of the fingers, are also significantly improved in this period. Children learn to cope with 'self-service activities' which are demanding on fine motor skills, e.g. dressing and its related buttoning or tying the shoelaces (ibid.).

1.1.2 COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Children of pre-school age are naturally very playful and curious. Using non-violent games they acquire new knowledge and experience (see Chapter 2.6). This can be used very well for their overall development (Mertin & Gillernová, 2003, p. 15).

Using games can also develop non-violent form of sensation and perception (ibid.). While individual sensations are already sufficiently matured in this period, children are able to capture even subtle details especially when their attention is attracted towards it. The perception is thus holistic – children carry an overall impression from the situation which is linked to the subjective experience of the situation (ibid.).

Furthermore, the first signs of intentional attention begin to already emerge in the early pre-school period (Vágnerová, 2000, p. 114). Moreover, this is the period in which children can maintain their concentration which is expanding through the time and its character is changing. However, the concentration is more or less non-intentional between the third and fifth years of age. Children focus on stimuli that attract them and pay attention to them only briefly until the point when the main interest is getting lost (ibid.).

The period in which children are able to maintain concentration is extending in the last year before attending elementary school. It is truth that the attention span constantly varies over the time but thanks to the intentional training and strengthening the concentration children may experience much easier transition to the elementary school (ibid.).

According to Mertin & Gillernová (2003, p. 16) memory in these early years has mainly mechanical character for remembering and storage. Nevertheless, this excellent mechanical memory enables acquiring a large number of new words. As noted in the publication (2003, p. 16), the intentional memory begins to apply until about fifth year of age.

It has been proven (Mertin & Gillernová, 2003, p. 16) that children of this age learn rhymes very easily, often without any focus on content and are satisfied with just the rhythm and rhyme – due to their memory skills.

However, teachers or adults should not be carried away by how easily children learn as potential overloading may be hazardous (Marxtoová, 2003, p. 158).

1.1.3 SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Apart from the adaptation of male and female social roles, children also receive new and different social roles with entering into kindergarten (Vágnerová, 2000, p. 114).

Every kind of social role forms the pre-school children's identities. The important ones are especially those that go beyond the family and indicate their position in a social environment, for example children's role in kindergarten or roles in children's group. These roles confirm achieving a certain position which is reflected in the self-concept – pre-school children perceive it in this manner. It is these roles that they are usually very proud of (Vágnerová, 2000, p. 115).

Moreover, if a teacher allows the children to participate in some extracurricular activities, they may obtain new social roles for which they will later become very proud of. At the same time, the children's position will grow in the peer group because children are special in something and other children who do not attend – for example a leisure activity or a course organized by kindergarten – can perceive it. Moreover, children receive the recognition from adults. Children are praised and appreciated by the teacher who leads the course as well as by parents and other family members (Mertin & Gillernová, 2003, p. 18).

Additionally, children's self-image and self-respect begin to form during the pre-school age (Vágnerová, 2000, p. 117). Both positive and negative experiences from this period may affect children for their whole future life. That is why it is so important for the teacher to know and understand their emotional and social development.

Vágnerová (2000, p. 117) thinks that due to the children's natural desire to please adults children are very sensitive towards negative appreciation – either teachers' or parents'. Therefore it is fundamental for children to receive positive feedback from both peers and adults (ibid.).

1.2 PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING ENGLISH TO PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

Pre-school age can be seen as a 'preparatory' period (Mertin & Gillernová, 2003, p. 164). In this respect, one of the kindergarten's purposes is to create the basis on which language skills will be further developed in a subsequent educational environment, particularly in the first class of elementary school. Therefore, one of its objectives is to develop positive attitude towards learning a foreign language. Moreover, it is important to show the children that English language is a means of communication and that it can be an instrument through which they learn other things.

1.2.1 PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Looking at the principles of teaching a new language to children in a natural way (by playing, listening and observing) and outdoors, it also depends on their previous experience with the

foreign language (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 3). For instance, the children who attend Bažinka Forest Kindergarten (see Chapter 4.3) usually attend other kindergarten too (predominantly the state one) on other days therefore they may come into the contact with English there as well. Some of them may attend English course in a state or private kindergarten or they attend kindergarten that is English-speaking-only. Eventually they may be attending private English course outside the kindergarten. Additionally, the groups in which English language is being taught may be either large or small. Moreover, the teacher there may even be a native speaker who uses minimum of Czech words and that would also reflect on children's language experience a lot (ibid.).

This may seem to be rather challenging at first since the language level of a whole group is not exactly identical but at the same time it may be seen as favourable in a way that those children (usually the older ones) who are more 'language-equipped' may become teachers themselves of those who are not at the same language level or have not had the experience with the foreign language yet.

1.2.2 MOTIVATION

It is important to motivate children from the very beginning and according to House (1997, p. 10), with pre-school children it is not too difficult. The advice is that the teacher should empathize with children's ideas, moods or problems and get as close to the child's soul as possible – this is the key to successful motivation (ibid.).

The main motivation for language learning, however, has to be the desire to communicate – children start to communicate if they have something that they want to say to each other (House, 1997, p. 10). Teacher should also be aware of the fact that there is nothing motivating about learning a language if there is only exercising or drilling and not playing. By varying the group dynamics and thus by various types of interaction teacher may create a strong motivating factor (ibid.).

Using dolls and puppets (see Subchapter 1.2.4) as 'characters' who only understand English is another efficient way to encourage children to speak English and help eliminate children's inhibitions. On the other hand, some children have no inhibitions at all and are always trying to show what they can do (Slattery & Willis, 2001, p. 24).

According to Hennová (2010, p. 11), another important way of motivating children is continual praise and encouragement coming not only from teachers but also from the family. Additionally, the space where the learning takes place should be motivating through play in a friendly and welcoming atmosphere (Lewis & Bedson, 1999, p. 24).

Finally yet importantly, teacher should always bear in mind that there may be a great danger of losing children's motivation when incorporating and using the language incorrectly – this may even have far-reaching consequences, especially when children begin to learn the language as a compulsory subject later in elementary school (ibid.).

1.2.3 USAGE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE

Naturally, the main intention is to use the target language (in this case English) throughout the whole course. However, in such early stages of development it is highly unlikely that using the mother tongue would be unacceptable. The reasons for this are as follows:

a) Language Security First

Children at this age need to feel safe in all circumstances, all the more during the process of learning. According to Reilly & M. Ward (1999, p. 4) learning a new language for someone may be a dreadful experience. In order to avoid the potential children's inner language block which might occur either because of the unskilled teacher or because of the children's immaturity, the following advice should be taken into account.

First of all, very young children are very sensitive and therefore feel more comfortable with people they already know. This requires some time for them to adjust to the learning environment and the persons who are engaged with it (meaning not only the teachers but also their assistants, not to say parents sometimes participating during the course).

Second, it is simply better to start speaking in children's own language (in this case Czech) and then gradually make them to use more and more English during the course (ibid.).

Additionally, teachers should speak clearly and grammatically correct in both languages (mother tongue and the target language) so that children may become accustomed to use both languages in safe and appropriate manner without language defects (Hennová, 2010, p. 12).

b) Proper Communication

Communication plays a focal role in the process of language learning (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 5). Regardless of the teacher's leading position in the course, it is essential for him or her to discuss the children's interests with them in order to better understand their personalities – finding out what they do and what they like at home or in the kindergarten eases not only overall atmosphere but also helps to come up with activities suitably planned exactly for them in their learning environment. However, this may be done only through their mother tongue as they cannot fully communicate through the foreign language yet.

As Schweizer (2009, p. 34) points out, learning through clear communication is more effective and beneficent when connected with particular and tangible things. This applies all the more when dealing with learners of this age. By great communication and observation skills may teacher accomplish the situation in which the children give useful feedback about the lesson going or about the particular moment in the lesson (obviously with using Czech or very simple English). However, this is a real mastery and can happen only 'once in a lifetime' as long as the teacher is really skilful, experienced and popular among children.

Hence, teacher must be still on the lookout when something unexpected is happening around. In this regard and within the context of this work, manifestations of nature are very much unprompted as well as sometimes the communication between the teacher and pre-school children (ibid.).

c) Clear Instructions

By setting clear instructions at the beginning, teacher shapes the overall running of the lesson. Whether it is a game, a song, a rhyme, a story, a pairing or an explanation of something, it always requires some kind of organization (see Chapter 2.2). As Reilly & M. Ward (1999, p. 5) advise, simple instructions should be introduced into the target language at first and afterwards into the mother tongue when necessary or when the task is more demanding.

However, for easier and overall better understanding of the lesson's activities, giving instructions in mother tongue is considered to be inevitable. Nevertheless, later on and with more lessons through, children adapt to the English course principles and start to accept the teacher's usage of English language for most of the time, even during setting the instructions in every lesson (ibid.).

d) Language Games

As Lewis & Bedson (1999, p. 14) accent, there are times when an explanation needs to be done in children's mother tongue even during games (see Chapter 2.6). This is especially true if there is a more complicated game or if the game includes some techniques that children have not learnt yet. However, a good attempt is trying to stick to English as much as possible in order to test the children's patience – sometimes it may happen that together with gestures, examples and clear instructions they begin to understand it in the end (ibid.).

It is suggested to play different games from lesson to lesson and to take notes of everything that children did not understand in order to try to improve the game for the next time (Lewis & Bedson (1999, p. 8). Alternatively, it may happen that children will ask for something in the mother tongue which is alright, however teacher's response should be in English then.

This should be clear especially with using gestures and/or facial expressions and responding to these questions with words like: “*Sorry? Try to say it in English...*” (Lewis & Bedson, 1999, p. 14).

1.2.4 AVOIDING THE MOTHER TONGUE

However, there always should be an effort of using English most of the times in order to make teaching as effective as it ought to be. This can be accomplished by using the following techniques that enable to reduce speaking in the mother tongue:

a) Gestures

Gestures are generally perceived like a great tool, especially with learners of this specific age (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 5). Children learn best by imitation so using gestures may facilitate the learning process because children primarily use their sight over hearing (Goldin-Meadow, 2003, p. 7). Obviously, children like to move a lot – their body language and facial expressions are sometimes more useful and can tell more than words themselves. Movements are also, even if different, types of non-verbal communication between the teacher and children. This is up to teacher’s layout of the course how much will gestures accompany lessons’ instructions, songs, games, stories or rhymes.

However, it is strongly recommended by Reilly & M. Ward (1999, p. 5) as well as Goldin-Meadow (2003, p. 9) to use it as much as possible in order to facilitate the understanding of what is trying to be said.

Some cultures use gestures in a wider scale than ours – it is actually allowed to little exaggerate our movements – children in a way enjoy adult behaving like a child similarly like children themselves are playing games that are adult-like (e.g. doctor or builder role-playing; see Chapter 2.5.1) (Suchánková, 2014, p. 12).

b) Using English Words That Are Similar to the Mother Tongue

Reilly & M. Ward (1999, p. 5) find it useful to work with English words that sound similar to children’s mother tongue: e.g. when learning about animals, children will typically remember those animals that are easy to pronounce and thus are familiar to them – a giraffe (žirafa in Czech) or a tiger (tygr in Czech).

However, the disadvantage of this inheres in children’s assumption that some English words that sound the same as in their own language have the same meaning – teachers should be aware of these foreign language features. This can be seen in the following example: in the Czech

context the words like ‘šíp’ (which sounds exactly like ‘sheep’ but has totally different meaning in English, i.e. ‘arrow’) or ‘ret’ (which sounds almost like the colour but actually means ‘a lip’). The latter example may be used to help children remember the colour easily because the teacher can point to one’s lips saying ‘ret’ is red and then explain what is meant by that (Henková, 2010, p. 13). Unfortunately, examples that facilitate learning new vocabulary in this manner are rather a rarity.

c) Using Hand-Made Objects

The experience of many pre-school language teachers suggests creating, preferably with children, something which will be always present in English lessons (Vale & Feunteun, 1995, p. 42; Slattery & Willis, 2001, p. 6). It is seen as the effective way of encouraging children to speak in English: e.g. teacher wearing a special hat or using a glove puppet give children a clear signal that from now on English course is going to start. This object should also hold a name – some typical English one. In case of ‘English in Nature’ course (see Chapter 5), the name Eric was chosen for crocodile puppet. The object, whatever it is, however, should always be the same during the whole course. Once it is there, it should be there – children may even build a strong relationship towards the object.

1.2.5 TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE

As already pointed out (see the introduction to Chapter 1), very young learners learn through direct experience using all five senses. Therefore, Total Physical Response (TPR) is, by many, considered to be the most suitable communicative approach during learning language, all the more outdoors with lots of free space (Vale & Feunteun, 1995, p. 39; Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 9).

In this approach, children do their tasks demonstratively with using movements. For instance, if a teacher says: “*Jakub, sit down, please*” and Jakub sits down, that is an example of TPR. Using this approach is very advantageous since it can be adapted for all kinds of teaching situations. TPR activities raise mood and interest of the group and are very enjoyable and dynamic for children who are able to remember the words associated with the accompanying action or physical response (ibid.).

The teacher’s role is to demonstrate the whole-body action – being always active, direct and leading part of the activities. From the simplest commands and instructions to more difficult ones, teacher should ‘act’ them using ‘colourful’ voice, face expressions, gestures and overall body language in order to lighten the language learning process (ibid.).

1.2.6 LEARNER'S AND TEACHER'S ATTENTION

It is true that small children are completely dependent upon their teacher and as much of they try to get the teacher's individual attention in all circumstances (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 6). This is highly individual as it affects the current children's needs. For instance, some of them may want to hold a teacher's hand or try to climb on him. As we can see, the attention – usually in the form of physical contact – is almost always present (Roth, 1998, p. 6). Nevertheless, as Roth (1998, p. 6) points out, children, little by little, separate themselves both physically and psychologically from their teachers and they become more and more independent persons.

When coping with children's unstable attention span, there are typical situations – and these are very frequent ones – that some younger children may leave during an activity or a song (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 7). Teacher should not take this too personally as children are sometimes attracted to the toy that they bring from home (ibid.). This usually happens in every kindergarten, whether the lesson is held indoors or outdoors.

However, as shown in Chapter 3.6, gaining children's attention requires a greater effort when learning outdoors. Additionally, a frequent changing of activities helps to hold the children's attention. Generally, these changes should be made every three or five minutes – it depends on their actual mood and interest in a particular activity. Shifting between each activities need not to be rapid, especially when it is clear that children enjoy a particular activity. It is also recommended to mix up various activities, naturally the energetic ones with quiet ones (Marxtoová, 2003, p. 158). Those that are successful and enjoyable can be repeated.

Moreover, it is good to make notes, either afterwards or during, of the things they really like and enjoy. Getting the children's attention is much easier with knowing of their mutual interest among the group as well (ibid.).

Similarly, teacher also pays attention towards each individual namely during the quieter moments of the lesson, for example when drawing, matching or colouring (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 7). It is suggested that at this point, a teacher can go around the group while talking about what they are doing and perhaps may elicit some vocabulary (ibid.).

1.2.7 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Teaching small children brings along not only enjoyment but sometimes also a difficulty. One of the main positive outcomes that come with teaching English to children is the absence of a strict syllabus, let alone tests or marking (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 7). In the still unanchored system in which the forest kindergartens (see Chapter 4) are taking its place these days, this

applies double time (Vošahlíková, 2010, p. 28). No extra pressure from the outwards therefore means that the learning can be enjoyable on both sides, the teachers' and children's.

Another advantage is that smaller children are very curious, imaginative, perceptive and willing to listen (if they are motivated well; see Chapter 1.2.2). They also do not come to the English course (see Chapter 2) with any preconceptions from the previous learning experience (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 7).

Among other things, Hennová (2010, p. 12) provides an interesting idea that when learning the language, children have the advantage that they can neither read nor write therefore they are not confused about the difference from the spoken and written word (see Chapter 2.5).

However, the coin has two sides and a number of possible disadvantages may appear in the course. First, children of this age can be very restless (see Chapter 1.2.6) and sometimes moody. For instance, when a child suddenly starts to be uncooperative or disruptive element in the course, it is suggested (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 8) to talk to the parents because the child may be affected by some particular event, e.g. a new baby in the family, a bad sleep the previous night, etc.

Another problematic part of teaching language to pre-school children is the continuity and cohesion between lessons. Due to children's frequent common illnesses, it is sometimes very demanding for them to follow the activity which is based on a vocabulary that is, due to their absence, totally unknown for them.

Nevertheless, even with these threats that were mentioned above and which are commonly on a daily agenda of the course, teaching pre-schoolers should be still perceived as challenging and motivational. Furthermore, leader of the course that is experienced should be aware of these unpredictable situations that may happen anytime in the future.

2 ENGLISH COURSE IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

The second chapter of the thesis deals with English course in pre-school education and with the concept for its functioning. It starts with an explanation of the term ‘course’ and continues with an overall content of English course, that is its organization, learning environment, size, as well as with its length and lesson structure. The next part is devoted to games due to their significant role within the frame of the ‘English in Nature’ course (see Chapter 5). The whole chapter then ends with the outline of teacher’s competencies that are needed for the appropriate leadership of the course.

2.1 COURSE DESCRIPTION

Parents often think that additional activities play an important role when choosing the appropriate kindergarten for their children. Therefore, many kindergartens nowadays provide a wide range of such activities, mainly within the frame of their morning or afternoon courses.

The following quote should give us an explanation of what is exactly meant by the term ‘course’:

“Courses in the form of leisure activity can be understood as certain and purposeful activities that are aimed at satisfying and developing certain people’s needs, interests and abilities within a certain group.” (Pávková, 2008, p. 92).

In other words, the main aim of these courses is to help to settle appropriate habits, to enrich one’s personality and to share the moments of experience with others at the same time. The latter should not be forgotten since socialization within a group plays a crucial role in everyone’s lives, all the more in a group that is composed of young people.

It should be clear by now that these courses may fall within several areas, e.g. religious, historic, IT, music, dancing, art & craft, fishing, tourist or language course. The latter one is the main subject of interest of this chapter.

According to research made by Vrkoslavová (2008, p. 10-11) English language course is the most popular one in Czech kindergarten plan and the most desired one by parents. Other favourite courses that are more and more included in the plan of many Czech kindergartens nowadays are art, drama, ceramics or flute course (ibid.).

2.2 LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND COURSE MANAGEMENT

The environment in which learning takes its place plays a crucial role. It is determining especially for the running of the course. Moreover, the environment which is suitably chosen may increase children's concentration and perception. Hennová (2010, p. 15) advises that the teacher should use all the possible traditional places, e.g. activities at table or activities on the carpet as well as non-traditional places, e.g. various parts of the room/building or outdoor spaces.

Course management is another part that is equally important. For instance, activities may be organized either for big or small groups of children. Moreover, the whole group of children may be further divided into many small groups according to their sex, abilities, knowledge, age or number. Clearly, there are many factors that may be taken into account when managing not only the structure of every lesson but also the overall group work. Teachers should therefore be very receptive and primarily patient because only mere organization of a group may not only be demanding but also tedious (ibid.).

During the course planning, it is necessary to bear in mind that activities should be varied, e.g. calm with the lively ones. Besides, children should be engaged with preparations of these activities, e.g. furniture moving, objects collecting, points counting, flashcards passing, etc.

Within a group, it is suggested (Hennová, 2010, p. 15) to use individual approach, however for a short period of time and with regards to the rest of group, only. Hennová (2010, p. 13) also adds that children may gain better English language level when the teacher is leading and managing not only the course but also the whole school day.

Sometimes it is also beneficial (usually at the beginning of the course) when parents come to see what their children do in the course, to simply get to know its form. For them it is great opportunity to cooperate and participate (see Chapter 1.2.3).

Vrkoslavová (2008, p. 11) thinks that the teacher's ability to manage the course should be important from the very beginning when all children meet together. Moreover, a successful group manager should be aware of the fact that some of the children might already know each other either from the kindergarten or from their neighbourhoods. Furthermore, teacher should know that most of the children are joining the course without any pre-concepts, they are like a 'blank slate' and are very curious and expectant of what is going to be happening there (ibid.).

2.3 GROUP SIZE AND LENGTH OF THE COURSE

Hennová (ibid.) together with Marxtová (2003, p. 158) think that when introducing the language to very young children, size of the group plays very important role. According to them (2010, p. 15; 2003, p. 158) the number of children per group should be about ten or less. However, the optimal is when there are five or six children (ibid.).

Concerning the length of the course, it is stated (Hofbauer, 2004, p. 72) that every course should be carried out at least throughout the year and at regular intervals, preferably. Regular and long-term attendance helps the leader(s) of the course to monitor not only participant's individual development but also the development of the whole group. Therefore, the longer the course is carried out, the better for both sides (i.e. leader(s) and participants; ibid.).

Concerning the length of the lesson units within the course, it is proposed to establish it at least once a week for 15-30 minutes. Marxtová (2003, p. 158) suggests that the organized activity should not exceed 10-20 minutes. Nevertheless, similarly like Hennová (2010, p. 13) she states that the ideal is when English extends beyond the kindergarten plan throughout the day in the form of games and fun activities, preferably every day. It is thus clear that meeting with English more frequently during the day in a playful and enjoyable way may bring very good results (Marxtová, 2003, p. 159).

2.4 LESSON STRUCTURE

According to Hennová (2010, p. 14) every language course should contain regular lesson units that are clearly structured and should contain certain order. By following the order in terms of the beginning, the middle part and the ending, teacher sets the conditions that are very important for children since they need to feel safe and joyful at the same time (ibid.).

2.4.1 THE BEGINNING

Hennová (2010, p. 14) describes that every English lesson should begin with some kind of ritual after which all the activities may start. This ritual can take the form of a clear signal for everybody involved that the lesson will soon begin. It can be either greeting in English, jingling with a bell or welcoming with English puppet.

After this short ritual, the following warm-up activity should be intended for revision of what has been learnt in previous lessons. It is recommended to use a well-known game or a song that uses vocabulary presented in the previous lesson (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 15).

2.4.2 THE MIDDLE PART

Since children are already familiar with English language thanks to the opening ritual and a very short but well-known activity in the beginning, next focus should be on the main aim of the lesson. Therefore, the middle part is the key part of the whole lesson.

The central topic of the lesson should be suitably chosen and the following activities should be based on this topic (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 15). As Hennová (2010, p. 14) advises, teacher must think through in advance when choosing the effective way of teaching a selected topic.

When introducing new vocabulary to children, teacher should be aware of the way how to demonstrate it – whether to speak slowly or fast, quietly or loudly; whether to control the voice intonation: to say it happily or sadly, in a deep voice or in a high voice, whether to accelerate the voice or to slow it down, whether to chant it together with children or to let children to repeat it individually; whether to use body language: hands clapping, knees flapping, fingers flipping, foot stomping, etc.

Moreover, if there is a presentation of new vocabulary, teacher should be properly equipped with a great amount of pictures, flashcards or real objects. The way of presentation is also very essential – whether doing it through a song, a game, a rhyme, a poem or as a kind of a secret, surprise, puzzle or dramatization, it always depends on the current topic and its possible demonstration (ibid.). Evidently, teacher has a lot of creative possibilities in presenting the new language, even if through the simple way (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 14).

2.4.3 THE ENDING

It is suggested (Hennová, 2010, p. 13) to finish the main activity while children are still enjoying it. Obviously, all games must be finished properly. Sometimes it may happen that the length of the lesson is exceeded while children are still playing a game. In this case, a teacher needs to make a promise that this game will be finished in the next lesson. The current status (e.g. single positions, score, number of players, etc.) of the game needs to be remembered by all participants in order to continue with it in the next lesson.

According to Hennová (2010, p. 14) the lesson should end in the evaluation, preferably in the positive one. Children should be praised by the teacher even for their attempts to respond to English. Everyone who participated should be evaluated, either individually or collectively (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 17). Moreover, children should be able of self-evaluation either by simple expressions, e.g. *It was OK* or *It was great* or by simple gestures, e.g. thumbs up for signaling it was OK. In this respect, it is recommended to always support children in their efforts (Hennová, 2010, p. 14).

2.5 LISTENING COMPREHENSION AND SPEAKING PRODUCTION

Since the children in pre-school age are unable to read or write (Reilly & M. Ward, 1999, p. 13), they may learn English language mainly through listening and speaking.

2.5.1 LISTENING

Listening is one of the difficult skills when teaching a foreign language. One study (Roth, 1998, p. 22) dealing with mutual communication within the group shows that children spend a large portion of the lesson by listening – listening to teachers or other children. Every time the teacher uses English language to explain something or when setting the instructions, telling the story or praising someone – by this he/she creates listening demands on children (ibid.).

Since children learn easily from what they hear, teacher's pronunciation and intonation should be at a very high level. Especially during questions, it is suggested (Hennová, 2010, p. 12) to not forget to intone properly, e.g. "*What is your name?*" "*What is it?*" etc.

There are many activities in which children practice their listening skills. These activities may range from filling, drawing, correcting to guessing, matching or composing words (Hennová, 2010, p. 14). However, one of the most popular listening activities is listening to the stories. Listening to the stories should be a part of children's development. Educators and psychologists have shown many times that stories are essential part of children's development and language development, above all (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990, p. 21).

When telling the story, it is recommended to make small breaks once in a while between the beginning and the end of a tale. Individual parts can be retold as many times as needed. Stories can also be interleaved with appropriate activities. This can be seen in the following example when children are asked to show the main characters of the story in pictures or to retell the keywords or phrases from the story e.g. "*Who is it here?*" teacher pointing to the picture, "*It's a squirrel!*" with children's reply.

It is good to remember that children do not have to be the listeners only since they very often like to exchange the role with their teacher. These ‘Role-plays’ are recommended by Hennová (2010, p. 14) as children may spontaneously learn more English words from each other than from their teacher.

Similarly, ‘Total Physical Response’ (see Chapter 1.2.5) belongs to the category of approaches that use listening activities. ‘Simon says’ (see Chapter 2.6.1), ‘Blindfold walk’ or ‘Listen and Draw’ are one of the many games that are based on this approach.

‘Blindfold walk’ belongs to one of the children’s favourite listening activity that is requested very frequently. This activity aims to test children’s knowledge of numbers and directions. In this activity, one of the children is blindfolded with a scarf while others are directing him/her towards a certain point. With using simple commands like “*Go straight*”, “*Turn right*”, “*Make two steps*”, children learn the language through enjoyable way.

Another popular type of listening activity is ‘Listen and Draw’. Drawing takes more time hence the pictures should be very simple. In this activity, the teacher tells the children what to draw. Using this activity, the teacher partially checks the knowledge of prepositions, colours and numbers (ibid.).

2.5.2 SPEAKING

Speaking in a foreign language is probably one of the most challenging tasks that a teacher can ask of very young children. It is quite possibly the most desirable skill, too. In their mother tongue they are able to express their emotions, intentions and motives, they can explore their language and it is enjoyable for them. Perhaps they may expect that it can be the same thing with English (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990, p. 34).

The form of speaking may be either individual or so-called ‘choral’, that is the situation in which children answer questions collectively or they repeat expressions after their teacher (Hennová, 2010, p. 14). Speaking can be trained in kindergartens through narration of a story or a fairytale – the books should be accompanied with big colourful pictures and with simple and short text.

If there is an effort to make children think about the English simply as a way of communication, there is an impossibility to predict which language children will use. Their choice is unlimited and one cannot decide what they say or what they want to say. Children also often use their mother tongue when they do not know the right word in English (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990, p. 34).

When working with beginners, it is important to find the balance between presenting the language through supervised and organized activities and at the same time allow children to enjoy their natural speaking. Many children do not get enough opportunities to practice speaking English outside the course so they need a lot of practice in the course (ibid.).

Organized activities are those that are preferably teacher-driven and have certain rules. During these organized activities there is an effort to ensure that children use language flawlessly. It means that if there is a mistake, it is usually corrected by the teacher.

On the other hand, during the unorganized activities which are child-driven and thus more spontaneous, the main aim is that children say what they want to say and express their personality, no matter how correct or incorrect their language is.

Nevertheless, this activity should be still monitored by the teacher, though the emphasis should always be on the content of speech – e.g. children’s thought (or topic in which they are interested at that moment) that can be further verbally developed by the teacher (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990, p. 35).

2.6 GAMES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

According to Suchánková (2014, p. 9) a game is the most common and widespread activity in pre-school childhood.

Games are activities where children naturally participate (Suchánková, 2014, p. 10) A key feature of the game is that it is an activity which is controlled by rules that clearly define the goals. By achieving these goals, the game is over (ibid.).

Before the third year of age, the game played in a group is usually parallel. Children always peek at each other, imitate each other, but each of them play on their own. However, children begin to cooperate when playing together in this period. They participate together in organising games in which every child has some role. The so called ‘role games’ also gained its importance during the pre-school age. The purpose of these games is that the child takes different roles and portrays them in a way as if it would be done in real life (Schweizer, 2009, p. 57). Similarly, we can also meet with the title ‘thematic games’. Children play roles of adult characters that are part of a particular situation, e.g. a doctor in hospital, a teacher in school or even some animals in a forest (ibid.).

With these games children can get into different situations which they experienced in real life. These games help them to better understand these situations and cope with the unpleasant moments by having the situation under control and also having the possibility of changing it in accordance to one’s will. They do not have this option in the real world because of their position

(Schweizer, 2009, p. 57). By using thematic games, children also learn basic social roles at the family level. These roles usually include members of family – mother, father and child. Therefore, these games give a pre-schooler opportunity to get to the superior position of the parent and make important decisions (ibid., p. 58).

2.6.1 USAGE OF GAMES WHEN TEACHING ENGLISH

Children need to play and want to play. They learn through play. When playing in a group, children cooperate together and during this cooperation they develop their language skills. Whether these games are simple, childish or creative, they enable the opportunity of trying out new situations in order to learn to cope with them. The main accent should be on the typical activities that children normally do in kindergarten, although adjusted to language learning (Vale & Feunteun, 1995, p. 222).

It is clear that the game – as long as the children want to play – must be motivating (Lewis & Bedson, 1999, p. 5). Children, however, need to be ‘drawn into’ the game and even need to be enthusiastic to learn effectively. Nevertheless, playing the game in this context means enjoying the competing alone or in group against other players and at the same time not thinking about a foreign language included within.

The involvement of children into games while they are eager to play can be a good way of creating a strong need to use the language (Lewis & Bedson, 1999, p. 6). Teachers need to consider which games to use, when to use them, how to integrate them into the course plan (ibid.) and in which ways these games enrich children’s development.

The good example of such language game can be one of the most popular TPR-activity called ‘Simon says’ (Lewis & Bedson, 1999, p. 130). A teacher explains the random activity starting the sentence with ‘Simon says’ and children should imitate this activity only when the instruction begins with the words ‘Simon says’, otherwise, they are out of the game. The winner is the player who remains as the last and becomes Simon (ibid.).

Nevertheless, there are infinite possibilities in usage of games while teaching English language. Some of these games are thoroughly described in the practical part of this thesis, in Chapter 5.

2.7 COMPETENCIES AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER'S PERSONALITY

Teachers or better known as 'guides' in forest kindergartens (see Chapter 4.3.2) should meet all the requirements that are placed on the teaching profession.

The abilities that foreign language teachers should possess are as follows (Dvořáková, 2011, p. 57-58):

- to speak fluently and grammatically correct in the target language,
- to pronounce clearly and correctly in order to become a good role model for children's imitation,
- to have positive attitude towards teaching foreign language,
- to control non-verbal communication in order to create 'the image of language' using body language to help children understand it easily,
- to be able to interconnect the lessons in order to make it more consistent.

Furthermore, the teacher should possess these basic didactical competencies:

- the knowledge of developmental patterns of different age groups and related methods and forms of work in foreign language teaching and the ability to apply them,
- the ability to teach artistically – it means shaping the education on a clear perception of pedagogical processes in teaching and direct contact between the child and the teacher,
- the ability to create a positive and creative atmosphere and to have a sense for good timing of the lesson,
- the flexibility, creativity and sense of humour.

Henková (2010, p. 13) states that the teacher of foreign language is exposed to high demands. Henková (2010, p. 11) also thinks that when introducing English to very young learners, it is not enough for a teacher to have good language skills but good teaching skills, too. Moreover, great knowledge of English is for such a teacher a real necessity because as Vrkoslavová (2008, p. 11) indicates, if children learn language poorly, they may have to face the language consequences in the future (see Chapter 1.2).

Teaching should be joyful, enjoyable and the teacher should be able to make use of the children's curiosity, creativity and imagination. Teacher should also have the ability to empathize with children's feelings. Within the frame of the course, the teacher should be able to use a large number of images, illustrative objects and be able to play games, sing or dramatize. Teacher's voice should be of a great colour and distinguished intonation (Henková, 2010, p. 13).

Dvořáková (2011, p. 58) believes that to achieve the necessary language fluency (and this is particularly true for the teachers of very young children), teachers should stay as long as it is possible in the foreign country where the target language is spoken. They should speak and work with the language artistically and with delight. Since there is a great usage of several artistic disciplines in kindergartens, it is seen as important that language teachers should be able to sing, play and dance, too (ibid.).

To sum up, teacher should be enthusiastic about sharing the language and should have the ability to transmit this enthusiasm to the children with whom he/she spends the common time.

“Come forth into the light of things, let nature be your teacher.”

– William Wordsworth (The Tables Turned, 1798, p. 4)

3 NATURE AS AN ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

This chapter is focused on the issue of nature as a potential environment for education and the terms connected with it. It also highlights the benefits and limitations of outdoor-based education as well as the impacts of natural environment on children’s overall development.

3.1 THE POWER OF NATURE

Nature is a powerful force. It can be awe-inspiring and breathtaking, tranquil and relaxed. It provides a place to play, learn or, simply, a place to be. It can encourage action, evoke emotions or bring calm to a hectic day. Nature is a source of healing and is innately entwined with health and well-being (see Chapter 3.5). Nature awakens our senses and illuminates our inner spirit. In these many ways, nature is essential to learning and to life:

“Unlike television, nature does not steal time; it amplifies it. Nature offers healing for a child living in a destructive family or neighbourhood. It serves as a blank slate upon which a child draws and reinterprets the culture’s fantasies. Nature inspires creativity in a child by demanding visualization and the full use of the senses. Given a chance, a child will bring the confusion of the world to the woods, wash it in the creek, turn it over to see what lives on the unseen side of that confusion. Nature can frighten a child, too, and this fright serves a purpose. In nature, a child finds freedom, fantasy, and privacy: a place distant from the adult world, a separate peace.” (Louv, 2008, p. 7).

For many people all around the world, ‘nature’ represents the source of materials or experiences, eventually. The respect and care that man used to have towards nature is slowly withering away. According to Keeler (2008, p. 14) this indifferent, ‘alienated’ attitude towards nature and its gradual destruction poses a major risk for the whole society because mankind is existentially dependent on nature, even though it does not look like it at first sight.

Similarly, Louv (2008, p. 9) notices that in eyes of many, nature is defined as “a landscape untouched by human influence” (ibid.). It can be understood as the regions beyond urban and agricultural development where natural processes are not hindered by human contact.

However, suggesting that nature simply exists where people do not would present a negative view of our role within the life cycles and ecosystems of the planet. Instead, humans are

embedded in nature and should not be seen as separate (Louv, 2008, p. 9) suggesting that these connections exist in all environments, both urban and rural.

In principle, nature can be viewed as the biodiversity and abundance of ‘natural wildness’ and can be perceived as anything from “loose parts in a backyard” to “a rugged mountain ridge” or a small flower or insect in the schoolyard to a forest filled with trees (Louv, 2008, p. 9).

To sum up, considering the fact that humans are inherently rooted in nature, young children should begin their educational journey surrounded by the natural world, having their holistic growth and overall development nourished by the wild and natural environment.

3.2 THE IMPACTS OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT ON CHILDREN’S OVERALL DEVELOPMENT

Children’s early experiences play a critical role in their overall development. The early years should be viewed as an important time for children to make connections with the natural world (Larimore, 2011, p. 9).

The widespread benefits of developing a relationship with nature not only include social, emotional, cognitive and kinetic development (see Chapter 1.1) but also encompass the encouragement and nurturance of overall health and well-being. The positive associations among nature, health and well-being may influence the extent to which people flourish in their private and personal lives as well as their public and social ones (Johnson, 2007, p. 298).

In addition, nature may help to increase self-esteem and mood as well as decrease anxiety, depression and stress among children (Wells & Evans, 2003, p. 319).

Furthermore, connections and interactions with nature tend to benefit children’s cognitive development (see Chapter 1.1.2) with outcomes ranging from improved cognitive functioning (Huggins & Wickett, 2011, p. 23) to the development of important academic skills that enable children to have greater success later in school and in navigating the world (ibid.). Moreover, frequent interaction with nature helps to increase children’s concentration and attention (see Chapter 1.1.2).

Outdoor plays are viewed as important for both health and well-being. The benefits of outdoor play may go well beyond kinetic development and fitness promoting social and emotional development in children through the maturity of social skills – e.g. social awareness, cooperation, fairness and altruism (ibid.), the growth of a sense of self – self-knowledge, self-confidence and self-reliance (Kane & Kane, 2011, p. 17). In this setting, outdoor play is understood to help nurture fantasy play, creativity, sensitivity to the Earth (Kane & Kane, 2011, p. 17) and an increasing awareness of a sense of place in the world (Larimore, 2011, p. 9).

Similarly, Maller (2009, p. 532) found that hands-on contact with nature was perceived by educators to contribute to children's sense of achievement and empowerment as well as improved self-esteem, self-confidence and connectedness with others. Maller (2009, p. 537) further supports the need for children to engage in outdoor free play suggesting that outdoor play should be enthusiastically promoted on its traditional merits – knowing that play allows children to experience the joys of movement, creativity and friendship (ibid.).

On the other hand, a lack of access to natural environments may lead to a sedentary lifestyle that can negatively affect children's health and well-being (Johnson, 2007, p. 297). Moreover, this type of inactive lifestyle may lead to childhood obesity and health-related problems associated with it. Furthermore, children may fail to develop their motor skills.

Nevertheless, access to natural environments and physical engagement with the landscape promote the development of gross and fine motor skills (see Chapter 1.1.1). Natural environments that provide a diversity of landscaping therefore create opportunities for children to be physically active (Larimore, 2011, p. 9).

Keeler (2008, p.12) points out that many children's activities are moving indoors including children's games. Apparently, children are losing their contact with the real world as they are gaining the knowledge about it indirectly. More importantly, very often they lack practical experience (ibid.). Staying in natural environment is thus irreplaceable for the proper development of an individual.

It should be clearer by now that experiencing nature is essential for children's balanced overall development (see Chapter 1.1) and that nature plays a crucial role in the maintenance of good health in the early years (Johnson, 2007, p. 298). In fact, some advocates claim that contact with nature is as important for children as good nutrition and adequate sleep (Louv, 2008, p. 5).

3.3 OUTDOOR-BASED PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

The idea of designing children's outdoor spaces as places for learning and teaching is not new. It can be found in one of the oldest educational systems, commonly known as the kindergarten (Brosterman 1997, p. 11).

In 1840, Friedrich Fröbel, who was a German educator, coined the term 'Kindergarten' or children's garden. He believed in the importance of outdoor learning, emphasizing that children should be outside as much as possible to enable proper growth and development (ibid.). Fröbel was one of the first educators to promote and place value on children's self-initiated activities, exploration and experimentation with the outdoor physical environment (ibid.).

While he formally integrated child-nature connections into his teaching and educational approach, the notion of uniting children with the natural world was not unique to Fröbel. In the 17th and 18th centuries, child-nature relationships were believed by scholars to help cultivate the development of moral values.

In the 18th century, Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau introduced a humanist view and the concept that education “should take place in a garden because it offered the opportunity to experience, through the body and the senses” (Wilson, 2008, p. 47). Sharing a similar philosophy, Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi sought to help children from poor families by employing a teaching style that engaged children in the arts and agricultural activities in the natural outdoor environment (Wilson, 2008, p. 51).

Influenced by Rousseau’s and Pestalozzi’s educational principles, Fröbel took children into the natural environment where they had the opportunity to collect and investigate artefacts from the natural world. Through these experiences, Fröbel further developed his teaching approach (ibid.).

As early as 1876, American educational reformer John Dewey expressed an interest in Fröbel’s ‘learning gardens’ by incorporating gardening and the notion of learning through experience into practice (ibid.).

While the original traditions of kindergarten embrace outdoor learning and child-nature connections, time has revealed a shift from the natural world to a primarily indoor school setting, a setting that is now considered as the norm.

In recent years, however, this norm is beginning to shift again. Because the natural world provides limitless learning opportunities for creative play and real-life experiences (Larimore, 2011, p. 8-9) in conjunction with the growing demand to foster child-nature connections, many schools and kindergartens around the world are beginning to integrate nature into everyday pedagogy and practice. By having children spend a large portion of their day (if not the entire day) outside in the natural environment, these kindergartens strive to provide children with daily, meaningful connections with the natural world through developmentally appropriate activities (ibid.).

3.4 PLACE-BASED EDUCATION

Guided by the idea that early education should prepare children with the skills and desire to sustain the cultural and also ecological integrity of the places they inhabit as well as enable children to connect learning to their own lives (Smith, 2002, p. 587), place-based education strives to dissolve the boundaries between kindergarten and the local environment.

Through hands-on experience and community involvement, place-based education strives to “ground learning in local phenomena and children’s lived experience” (Smith, 2002, p. 587). Consequently, these experiences serve to strengthen children’s connections to the places in which they live and to those with whom they share the world (ibid.).

Although place-based education can be considered a growing movement and a relatively new educational term it is not a new phenomenon (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008, p. 8). All education prior to the invention of the common kindergarten or school was ‘place-based’ (ibid.) suggesting that education practised in modern societies has led to a divide between learning and the local.

Traditional school learning has been transformed into something that is simply distributed through reading texts, listening to lectures or viewing videos rather than shaped through experiencing hands-on encounters with the world (Smith, 2002, p. 585).

Looking at the perspective of place in wider view, place-based education seeks to engage children in the history, culture and ecology of the local community and thanks to this, the children may be able better to understand distant and more abstract phenomena after first developing knowledge and skills in the local context (ibid.).

Furthermore, place-based education is inherently experiential and allows children to become the creators of knowledge rather than, merely, the consumers of knowledge created by others.

In addition, place-based education is reflective of an educational philosophy that is broader than ‘learn to earn’ where children’s questions and interests play a central role in determining what is studied. Moreover, place-based education connects place with self and community (Smith, 2002, p. 589).

With these mutual characteristics in mind, place-based education seeks to rearrange learning within the context of communities and the local environment (ibid.) inspiring in learners an appreciation of beauty and wonder through connections to and appreciation of particular place (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008, p. 9). In fact, Smith (2002, p. 594) emphasizes “knowing the local well enables children to become more skilful and confident about their capacity to shape their own lives in ways that will benefit themselves and their children and grandchildren”.

To sum up, place-based education seeks to help children develop knowledge and skills in the local context (Smith, 2002, p. 584). In this respect, the children at Bažinka Forest Kindergarten (see Chapter 4) are developing knowledge and skills through their lived experiences in the woods.

In the context of the thesis, the principles of place-based education permeate through the entire course ‘English in Nature’ (see Chapter 5) since it is completely held in one particular place with the focus on natural objects that are inherently connected with the place.

3.5 THE BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR-BASED EDUCATION

During teaching outdoors, nature suddenly becomes the object of inquiry and is the source of inspiration and tool for education. It provides sufficient space and stimuli for child's own exploration and experimentation (Keeler, 2008, p. 25).

Teaching outdoors increases the sensitivity of perception and develops child's sensory perception. The natural environment also allows holistic learning where children receive all the information through the levels of perception. Learning outdoors is thus much more effective and the information can be stored in long-term memory (Wilson, 2008, p. 46).

In the woods, not only the teachers but also children must think things through and plan them according to the situation. There is often a need to improvise and make do only with material that nature offers. Due to this, children may develop their imagination and become more creative (Wilson, 2008, p. 46).

Nevertheless, outdoor-based education encourages not only in lessons of natural science but also affords many options in which any kind of school subject can be taught (Keeler, 2008, p. 26). Similarly, Wilson (2008, p. 46) and Schweizer (2009, p. 41) both agree on the description how many academic goals and learning outcomes outlined within structured curricula can be achieved through outdoor teaching: e.g. numeracy skills can be developed through counting and categorizing rocks while scientific inquiry skills can be developed through encouraging children to ask questions about the natural environment.

From learning about life in the forest to pushing children's own physical limits while engaged in safe risk taking, from sorting stones according to shape and size to learning how to listen to one's own body, from reading stories about nature to learning about forest safety firsthand or from simply playing to learning – in the context of the thesis – English language while still enjoy playing.

Finally, in classrooms, children receive a lot of information but often lack connection and vision of the functioning of real life. Once the classes are held primarily outdoors, there is a better chance for children to truly experience the activity 'on their own skin'. What is important is the process of experience than the results coming from it (Wilson, 2008, p. 43).

3.6 THE LIMITATIONS OF OUTDOOR-BASED EDUCATION

As every coin has two sides, several limitations may occur during the outdoor-based education. In principle, it is necessary to count with the obvious fact that teaching outdoors places greater demands on teacher training, both physically and mentally.

Moreover, since the teaching outdoors is completely dependent on the weather, teacher should be prepared for an alternative in case of rain (Wilson, 2008, p. 47). Furthermore, teacher cannot use a variety of teaching aids, including technology. Additionally, one must expect a certain time for changing clothes and children's transfer to or from the forest (ibid.).

Similarly, with such organizational forms of teaching, this might not suit all children at once. Lack of discipline may also appear and some children may even be distracted from the environment. Teacher must also reckon with an increased risk of minor children's injuries when staying outdoors (Neuman, 2004, p. 45).

Teacher's skills to plan and improvise should be of a higher level which can be seen either as advantage for some (see Chapter 3.5) or as disadvantage for others in terms of a sudden change of particular situation and thus teacher's inability to react promptly towards it (Wilson, 2008, p. 47).

Finally, some teachers tend to avoid teaching outdoors due to the organizational demands. Many of them are also concerned that they would not go through the subject matter in a predetermined time but as Neuman (2004, p. 16) advises, teachers should try and accept the challenge of teaching outdoors and undertake the risk at any cost.

4 FOREST KINDERGARTENS

For a Children's Garden (Shortened Version)

*A place to sing and a place to play,
A place to build on a rainy day,
A space to dream and laugh and cry,
To skip and run, to chat and fly,
A place to hide, to climb and fall,
A world of beauty to charm us all*

(Schweizer, 2009, p. 78)

The chapter number four deals with the forest kindergartens phenomena and focuses on one particular named 'Bažinka'¹. First, the term 'forest kindergarten' is described together with its ideals and goals. The learning environment of Bažinka Forest Kindergarten is presented as well as its teaching approaches in order to introduce the place in which the 'English in Nature' course (see Chapter 5) is held.

4.1 INTRODUCTION, HISTORY AND PRESENT

The main vision that forest kindergartens share in common is the idea that the world of nature creates an appropriate place for children's overall development and early education (see Chapter 3.2). Forest kindergartens provide educational conditions that are completely outdoor-based – children are outside all day, throughout the seasons – whatever the weather (see Chapter 3.3).

These forest kindergartens focus closely on children's free play experiences while using the objects that can be found in the natural environment, preferably. Children are given unlimited space which is seen as opportunity for experiential learning – children learn best through experience of personal observation, experimentation and exploration of nature with all their senses (see Chapter 3.5).

Forest schools have a long history of popularity in several Scandinavian countries dating back to the 1950s (Knight, 2011, p. 14). It is estimated that there are roughly 300 forest schools in Denmark alone (ibid.). In Germany, Waldkindergartens or forest kindergartens have become especially popular since the 1990s (Kane & Kane, 2011, p. 17) with over 700 of them available (many of which are subsidised by the government) in the country.

¹ the name could be translated into English as 'The Little Swamp'

Nevertheless, the name ‘forest kindergarten’ has its origin in Denmark in 1950 where “woman named Ella Flatau formed a ‘Walking Kindergarten’ where a daily hike in the woods was part of the curriculum” (Stasiuk, 2013, p. 2).

The starting point for these types of alternative schooling can be seen in thoughts and methodology by American nature educator Joseph Cornell. He is considered to be one of the founders of the environmental education in the United States.

On a similar basis and in domestic conditions, Eduard Štorch built the first natural school in Prague (1926-1930). The Czech Republic’s first forest kindergarten was established in 2010, also in Prague. Since then, over one hundred of them have been developed throughout the country with providing more than 2500 children possible places for children to experience and learn from the natural world (Czech Forest Kindergarten Association, 2015).

In recent years, many surveys have been done in order to find out how well are children prepared for the subsequent form of education. Peter Häfner (2002) was one of the first who made a comparison investigating school attendance readiness of children from forest kindergartens with children of ‘traditional’ kindergartens in Germany. In all categories examined (the area of motivation, concentration and patience, the area of social negotiations, the area of cooperation during education, the area of musical skills, the area of cognitive skills, language skills area, motor skills area) children from forest kindergartens achieve better results compared with children of ‘traditional’ kindergartens.

Based on these results it can be assumed that children from forest kindergartens will, after the transition to primary school, show results at a very high level (ibid.).

4.2 BASIC IDEALS AND GOALS

These are the basic forest kindergarten’s ideals that Kořátková (2014, p. 236-237) together with Vošahlíková (2010, p. 16) mention:

- learning through experience via life outdoors; strengthening the interest in knowing; providing the new situations solutions; acquiring skills applicable in real-life situations; group accommodating in natural environment and being responsible for selves and for others,
- strengthening all five senses perception; expansion of emotional experiences; creative activation; kinetic, cognitive, emotional and social benefits,
- nature is viewed as a source of endless knowledge,
- strengthening the physical body through hardening; movements and natural persistence are important for children’s health development,

- outdoor activities should be based on natural changes in environment – the cycle of nature as an inspiration for both children and guides,
- a small group of children facilitate mutual communication and interaction among guides and children and children among themselves – it also ensures their safety.

Furthermore, Kotátková (2014, p. 237) mentions three main goals that forest kindergartens share in common:

1. developing basic competencies with respect to maintaining a quality environment,
2. supporting experiential and active learning in order to enrich children's personality,
3. developing creativity and skills with using natural materials and developing sensory perception through the direct experience.

In this place, it is appropriate to add that the cooperation with the family also belongs to one of the forest kindergarten's goals (Kapucianová, 2010, p. 47). It is assumed that when parents participate on the kindergarten's programme or its functioning, they will likely to be participating in the children's subsequent educational institutions, too. Moreover, every forest kindergarten usually offers a variety of feasts and activities into which whole families are involved as they provide opportunities for mutual interactions (ibid.)

4.3 BAŽINKA FOREST KINDERGARTEN

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the environment in which the course 'English in Nature' (see Chapter 5) takes its place together with the approaches that are used in order to make the practical part of the thesis more comprehensible.

4.3.1 LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Bažinka Forest Kindergarten was established in 2013 in a small village called Horka nad Moravou, approximately 7 kilometres from Olomouc and not too far from Sluňákov – The Olomouc Centre for Environmental Activities. Its setting in the form of caravan (see Appendix 9) is located in a place known as 'Horecká skalka – vodní park' (see Appendix 10 & 11) and only few meters from the entrance to nature reserve with floodplain forest called Litovelské Pomoraví Protected Landscape Area.

Thanks to this position, kindergarten's natural outdoor space may provide children with a unique learning environment consisting of trees, meadows, fields, ponds, cliffs, hills and open

grassy areas. In addition, numerous wetland areas are scattered throughout the forest providing children with access to several lakes, streams and marshlands (Bažinka Forest Kindergarten Educational Programme, 2014).

Wildlife in this landscape is also very wide-ranging: from the prominent beavers' occurrence near the streams, frogs croaking in small lakes, herons and storks wheeling in the air to squirrels jumping from tree to tree, hedgehogs hiding in the leaves or woodpeckers tapping in treetops, etc.

Through authentic interactions with place (see Chapter 3.4), the children at Bažinka Forest Kindergarten are constantly presented with open-ended opportunities and many authentic learning experiences throughout the year in order to explore the elements of nature and to learn about the natural world either through (and especially) children's mother tongue or through foreign language within the frame of the course 'English in Nature' (see Chapter 5).

Consequently, some of these places and animals mentioned above were the main source of inspiration for several English activities (see Chapter 5).

Within the learning environment of the course 'English in Nature', children not only have access to traditional school materials (e.g. paper, crayons and art supplies) but to natural objects unique to the surroundings. Objects including sticks and stones are as common materials, if not more common, within this learning environment as wooden blocks and toy animals used in 'traditional' kindergartens. Moreover, inside the caravan, the children have access to a large amount of storybooks, English books, atlases or encyclopedias (Bažinka Forest Kindergarten Educational Programme, 2014).

4.3.2 CHILD-CENTRED APPROACH AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

In forest kindergartens, teacher recedes into the background and becomes rather a guide for children – that is the main reason why teachers are better known as 'guides' in forest kindergartens. The relationship between children and guides is based on mutual respect and partnership. Children are led to cooperation among themselves and with adults (Vošahlíková, 2012, p. 12)

In connection to this, learning at Bažinka Forest Kindergarten is child-centred and is achieved through hands-on experiences and interactions with the natural world. Child-centred approach means that children lead the activities by themselves and plan what they might want to do. Nevertheless, when a guide does see an opportunity for going more in-depth in their learning, expanding their knowledge, he/she can kind of 'jump' in there and use that as a springboard to

move onto something else. Similarly, this is highly connected with ‘experiential learning’ approach (Morrison, 2009, p. 108).

However, within the frame of the course ‘English in Nature’, child-centred approach is used minimally due to the fact that the course is held only once a week and therefore needs to be fully organized in order to achieve its aims (see Chapter 5).

Nonetheless, some elements of the child-centred approach as well as experiential learning are being used during the course. This can be seen through the following example: in one day, children become attracted to the frogs they see at the pond and the guide may find it inspiring and later include the nursery rhyme called ‘*The Frog and I*’ at the end of the next English lesson.

According to this, it should be clear that experiential learning is highly exercised within the frame of the course ‘English in Nature’ since similar examples like this are very frequent. Whether this is being done through the simple language games, singing songs, learning rhymes or listening to the stories, with the usage of Total Physical Response approach (1.2.5), the children learn experientially and actively using both their body and mind for most of the time.

Similarly to this, other kindergarten’s integrated afternoon courses (‘Math in Nature’, ‘Music in Nature’ and ‘Art & Movement Course’) that are led by external teachers are based on experiential learning and support child-centred approach, however to a certain extent only.

Additionally, during the experiential learning, motivation (see Chapter 1.2.2) is seen as the driving factor in children’s engagement in it simply for the fun or challenge of it without any expectation of either rewards or pressure from his or her guides or peers.

In this respect, while striving to reach similar learning goals as in ‘traditional’ kindergartens, the children attending the outdoor-based kindergarten program engage in activities that are reflective of the unique learning environment of the forest and its natural surroundings with using experiential learning most of the time (Morrison, 2009, p. 110).

Lastly, the natural environment itself as well as the open-ended materials found within act as springboards for experiential learning experiences (Bažinka Forest Kindergarten Educational Programme, 2014).

5 'ENGLISH IN NATURE' COURSE

This chapter deals with the 'English in Nature' course that has been held during the whole year in Bažinka Forest Kindergarten. The aim of the practical part as well as the course description is presented below.

5.1 COURSE DESCRIPTION

In the practical part I take advantage of my own experience from teaching the English language at Bažinka Forest Kindergarten. The course bearing the name 'English in Nature' runs once a week for about 30-40 minutes – this may vary according to children's current moods and interests, hence sometimes it is slightly less than that. There are 10 children (6 boys and 4 girls) aged from 4 to 6 years that regularly attend the course (in the school year 2014-2015) and all of them attend the kindergarten, too.

Within the course itself, almost every activity is game-based since it is the most enjoyable and rewarding way of learning for children of this age. The inspiration for the following activities came from numerous literary sources however all of these activities have been adapted to the developmental abilities of pre-school children as well as to the material and natural conditions of the kindergarten and its surroundings. Furthermore, a number of these activities are based on my own experiences and ideas. The topics presented are sorted according to the four seasons (autumn, winter, spring and summer), therefore according to the school year (from September to June).

For every season, I have tried to include games and activities that are thematically connected with songs, rhymes and with topical vocabulary. Through the seasons, the topics include: Greetings and Introductions, Colours, Birthday, Christmas, Numbers, My Family, Parts of the Body, Animals, Nature All Around Us and Food. I found the chosen topics suitable for the children of this age. Moreover, I believe that the incorporation of topics with regard to the current seasonal events is natural for children since it is based on the present state of the outside world that surrounds them. Once they experience learning in the same environment for the whole year, they will have the ability to perceive the change of seasons more easily. Furthermore, nature – in one place – constantly creates new ideas for various activities.

For a better overview of each lesson, I mention the approximate time needed for its implementation together with a possible motivational introduction, the organizational demands, the material requirements and a brief workflow. Additionally, all these lessons are further analyzed at the end of each lesson plan.

5.2 THE AIM OF THE PRACTICAL PART

The aim is to provide a sample of twenty (half of the course) English lessons that were taught within the frame of the annual course 'English in Nature'. Therefore, the main intention is to show how the common English language pre-school activities (games, songs, nursery rhymes, stories, etc.) can be modified into the outdoor environment. This results in a set of methodically elaborated activities for children of pre-school age that can be used outdoors.

However, the examples shown in lesson plans below should not be seen as the only possibilities. Teachers should be aware that the different needs, skills, environments, ages and sizes of a particular group often require creating alterations to lesson plans, adapting them as appropriate.

Finally, with these English pre-school outdoor activities presented below, I see great opportunity to contribute the material not only for guides from forest kindergartens but for all foreign language teachers interested in outdoor teaching who perhaps wonder how to integrate and exploit the learning environment that nature provides.

5.3 'ENGLISH IN NATURE' COURSE ANNUAL LAYOUT

Location: the natural environment of Bažinka Forest Kindergarten, Horka nad Moravou, Olomouc Region, Czech Republic

Time period: 30-40 minutes approximately, once a week throughout the school year (from September to June, that is 40 English lessons or 20 hours of actual teaching)

Number of children: 10 (6 boys and 4 girls)

Age: 4-6 (pre-school)

Aims:

- to introduce the English language through an enjoyable, playful and communicative way using natural objects preferably in order to instil a positive attitude to learning languages and the environment (see Chapter 1.2 & 2.3)
- children are able to use basic vocabulary and phrases according to the given topics (see Chapter 2.5.1)
- children are able to understand and follow the instructions (see Chapter 1.2.3)

- children are able to understand the language in activities and games applied in the course (see Chapter 1.2.5)

Additional aims:

- to create a friendly and inspiring atmosphere (see Chapter 2.7)
- to build a good relationship with children (see Chapter 4.3.2)
- to motivate the children and show the importance of the English language (see Chapter 1.2.2)
- to use different teaching methods (see Chapter 2.7)
- to use a wide range of appropriate activities and materials (see Chapter 2.6.1 & 4.2)
- to support the current state of the children's overall development (see Chapter 1.1.2 & 3.2)

Skills: listening, speaking

Management: whole-group, pair-work, individual; the course takes place outdoors for most of the year, however during the winter months and/or unfriendly weather, teaching takes place indoors – in the Kindergarten's caravan (see Chapter 4.3.1)

Teaching methods: mostly teacher-centred, sometimes child-centred (see Chapter 4.3.2) but always season-based; verbal (storytelling, singing, giving instructions; see Chapter 2.5.1), non-verbal (gestures, facial expressions, body language; see Chapter 1.2.4 & 2.7), demonstrational (demonstration work with natural objects, flashcards, etc.; see Chapter 2.4.2), TPR method (see Chapter 1.2.5), Art & Craft (work with natural objects or art material; see Chapter 2.1), game-based learning (see Chapter 2.6), experiential learning (see Chapter 4.3.2), usage of motivation (see Chapter 1.2.2), revision and practice of vocabulary

Materials: *natural objects found freely in nature:* sticks, flat stones, leaves, rose hips, a chestnut, a flower, a cone, a piece of bark, a moss, a snail's shell, a bird's egg; *pictures/flashcards of/with:* a rainbow, Christmas symbols, family members, body parts, an ant, a snail, a dog, a cat, a fish, a snake, a spider, a beaver, black and white pictures of the ant and snail; *sound instruments:* wooden rattles, small drums, bongos; *food:* an apple, a carrot, a cucumber, an orange, a banana, a strawberry, a cherry, a tomato, a pear, a radish, lettuce; *others:* coloured and adhesive small pieces of paper, a wooden board, a balloon, toilet paper rolls, a black marker, a glue, a hand net, a small ball, a torch, a can, a dice, a hat, a scarf, a head scarf, a Christmas wreath, a small box without a lid, a pouch bag, a knife, a basket, a map of the world, coins, crayons, pieces of paper,

scissors, worksheets, ropes, matches, family photos, buttons, Eric – the crocodile puppet (see Chapters 1.2.4, 3.5, 4.1. & 4.2)

Seasonal topics:

Autumn – *Air* – Greetings and Introductions, Colours

Winter – *Fire* – Birthday, Christmas, Numbers, My Family

Spring – *Earth* – Parts of the Body, Animals, Nature All Around Us

Summer – *Water* – Food, Vocabulary Revision

5.4 AUTUMN

The autumn season is often seen as a period of windy and misty weather. The effects of the wind can be perceived through all senses. The wind in these days can be blowing, roaring, whistling or whispering. For this reason, all forest kindergartens consider this period as one of Air – one of the four natural elements. Many kindergarten activities are based on this element (flying kites, paper airplanes, making windmills, etc.). However, this period is also beautiful for its colours. Therefore, the topic of colours runs through the whole season.

In the beginning of the course, children should be able to greet as well as introduce themselves to the others. The first lesson is also very important in terms of knowing the group – either from the teacher’s or child’s point of view. Therefore, the overall pace of the first few lessons is rather slow for better familiarization within the group and with the language itself.

Key Topics: Greetings and Introductions, Colours

5.4.1 SEPTEMBER

5.4.1.1 LESSON PLAN I

Aims: to introduce the English language, to practice vocabulary, to practice question and answer formation (with an emphasis on intonation)

Activities: Performing the Dialogue, Hello Song

Materials: a map of the world, a puppet

Organization: whole group, pairs

Vocabulary: Hello, Goodbye, What’s your name? My name is, Nice to meet you

Motivation: Before the beginning of our first English lesson together, I call out to all of the children to gather at the meeting logs. Still in Czech of course, I ask them if they know any languages that are spoken in different countries. I am pleased with their enthusiastic reactions since most of them want to tell me that they know that German is spoken in Germany, Chinese in China, Slovak in Slovakia and English in England. I show them the map of the world and their task is to find these countries. As soon as we find all of these together, I ask them if they know some English words already. Two boys and one girl immediately say “*hello*” and the others start to laugh because it is similar to the Czech “*haló*”. I explain to them that English sometimes may sound a little funny to us but it is really useful to learn since it is spoken in many parts of the world (whilst pointing with my finger on the map in order to show the English-speaking countries). I ask the children if they want to meet someone who can speak English and perhaps can teach us a few English words. Since all of the children are very curious and excited, I open my backpack and take out Mr. Eric (see Appendix 1), the crocodile puppet.

Procedure:

15 minutes – With Eric in my hand, I start to speak English only using the simple word “*hello*” whilst moving around the children sitting on the logs. I repeat the word many times until the moment when the children are able to pronounce it loud and clear. “*My name is Eric*” says Eric emphasizing the rhythm of every syllable. In Czech, I explain to the children that Eric is a friendly crocodile who speaks English all of the time. Then I tell the children: “*Say hello to Eric – say hello Eric*” and everybody says: “*Hello Eric*”. Eric then continues: “*Hello, I am Eric and what is your name?*” with me pointing to him and the children to stress the words *Eric* and *your name*. If some children do not know what to do or say, I can help them by providing the sentence: “*Hello, my name is Ludvik and what is your name?*” As soon as the children start to answer in full sentences, it is good to shake their hands saying “*nice to meet you*”, – and the name of the child”. Then I recommend dividing the group into pairs (in this case it is five pairs) and enable the children to greet and answer with the other in the pair. This is the moment when I monitor the whole group and observe each pair in order to help them with the pronunciation or with whatever else they may find difficult.

10 minutes – Once they finish, we start to sing a song together that covers the lesson’s vocabulary. The melody is up to the teacher or it can be modified into some favourite traditional song (e.g. *Pec nám spadla/Our Oven Fell Down*). I suggest clapping with both hands to the rhythm of the song as children follow the text easily with what they hear and what they see. Moreover, children usually start to move when they hear a song so I advise to walk around the logs while still clapping to the rhythm. Lyrics for this short song are:

*Hello, hello, hello, hello,
What is your name? What is your name?
Hello, hello, hello, hello my name is...
Nice to meet you, nice to meet you...*

10 minutes – Once the song is learnt by the whole group and all the children’s names have been sung, I praise them with words like “*very good everybody, well done, great*” together with showing them my thumbs up for better comprehension. Then, in Czech, I tell them that Eric wants to teach us one more word today which we will be saying from then on at the end of each English meeting. I pretend that Eric whispered the word into my ear and my task is to whisper it to others. I walk around the group whispering “*goodbye*” and when I finish the circle I tell the children to shout the word together. Waving our hands, we say “*Goodbye*” “*See you next time*” may be added as well.

Evaluation: As with the beginning of anything, the beginning of the language course for pre-school children is important in many ways. Luckily for me, all the children had already attended both their Math and Music course in the preceding days so they knew what to expect a little bit. They already have a notion of what the “course” is all about. Perhaps it was partly because of this that our first lesson together was so successful. The children cooperated very well despite their spontaneous tendencies of drifting away (this has been observed especially among the youngest). In situations like these, I tried to avoid calling them to come back since I did not want to push them to follow my instructions. Instead, I tried to monitor them only and as in many cases throughout the course, the youngest children started to join us after some time. It is clear that they simply needed more time in order to engage with others. All in all, I think I managed to create an atmosphere that was friendly (“Meeting Circle” as a sign of friendship) and enjoyable (Eric as the children’s funny friend) whilst respecting each child as an individual with different language abilities.

5.4.1.2 LESSON PLAN II

Aims: to revise the vocabulary, to practice question and answer formation, to follow the instructions

Activities: Roll and Pass the Chestnut

Materials: a chestnut, a bongo, a puppet

Organization: whole group, pairs

Vocabulary: Hello, Goodbye, My name is, What's your name? Nice to meet you (vocabulary revision) + What is it? Sit down, Make a circle

Motivation: *“Children, I spoke to Eric this morning and he cannot wait to come and play with you again. He also told me that for today's lesson, we need to find something brown in colour and round in shape. It can be found usually on the ground under the tree near our caravan... Can you find it?”* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – revision of vocabulary: *“Hello, children! Hello, Eric!”* We sing the Hello Song while holding hands and moving around the logs.

10 minutes – After the song, children show the object they found according to Eric's instruction. He asks the question: *“What is it?”* Everybody's reaction is the same: *“kaštan!”*, *“Yes, it's a chestnut, very good”*. *“OK, everybody sit down on the ground now”* (pointing my hand at the flat ground). *“Make a circle”* (while holding our hands together) and I roll the chestnut to the first child and ask: *“What is your name?”* I supply the answer saying the name of the child first and then I get the child to answer. I also try to indicate (by gestures) that the child should roll the chestnut to another child. Then I encourage him/her to say *“What's your name?”* to the child who receives the chestnut. I look at the child who receives the chestnut and I repeat the question encouraging him/her to answer. It is important to ensure that all the children take their turns in this activity.

10 minutes – I take advantage of sitting within a circle and I introduce my small bongo (percussion instrument). I explain to the children that they need to pass the chestnut around the circle while I am playing the bongo. When I stop playing, their task is to introduce themselves in English (expressed in Czech). For example, I say *“Stop!”* and the child who holds the chestnut says *“My name is”* If the child does it correctly, everybody should clap their hands.

5 minutes – Since we already know everybody's names, the final activity is a Goodbye Song. The aim is to say goodbye to everyone and individually in the group. The melody is again up to the teacher. The lyrics are very simple:

Goodbye (someone's name)

Goodbye (someone's name)

Goodbye (someone's name)

Goodbye to you! (while waving our hands)

Evaluation: The pace of the second lesson was again adapted to the children's new experience with the foreign language in order to not overload them with too much of the vocabulary (see

Chapter 1.1.2). In this lesson, there is a clear example of using a natural object that can be found freely in nature. The advantage is that children find the object by themselves. In this case, a mere chestnut becomes “the subject of inquiry” and the natural aid in the lesson’s procedure at the same time. In other words, this is the part of experiential outdoor learning – children may associate the lesson’s vocabulary through this simple, local and natural object (see Chapter 4.3.2). The fact that it works was proven when, the following day, one of the boys suddenly came to me holding a chestnut in his hands while saying: “*Hello, my name is Štěpánek*”.

5.4.2 OCTOBER

5.4.2.1 LESSON PLAN III

Aims: to practice colours

Activity: What is in the picture?

Materials: leaves, a picture of a rainbow that has been cut into pieces before the lesson, a puppet

Organization: whole group, a meadow

Vocabulary: How are you today? happy/sad; instructions: Come on, follow me; colours: red, brown, yellow, green, blue, orange, pink, white, black; other: rainbow

Motivation: “*Children, have you noticed that all the leaves on the trees have started to change their colour recently? Can you bring two leaves that have different colours? Can you bring a leaf that has more than one colour?*” (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric – “*Hello, how are you today?*” using gestures and facial expressions when replying “*I’m happy*” (smiling) and “*I’m sad*” (looking sad and frowning).

5 minutes – We start to talk about the leaves and their colours – “*Oh, look what you found, this one is red and the other one is brown!”* emphasizing the names of the colours. “*This one is green and this one is yellow!”* while nodding my head to give them a signal to repeat it after me. “*Wow, look at this leaf, it has got three colours at once – brown, yellow and orange!”* I repeat the colours as many times as necessary.

15 minutes – What is in the picture? – I tell all the children to follow me to the meadow which is near to our caravan (instructions: “*Come on, follow me*” using a hand gesture). There are 11 pieces (for 10 children and myself) which have been cut into the shape of a “puzzle” beforehand. There, I give one piece of the still yet unknown picture to each child and I put my own piece on

the grass. Children are supposed to add the pieces and complete the picture. With each addition, they say the colour of their piece and at the same time can guess what is in the picture. After its completion, it is clear that there is a rainbow in the picture. I show them how to pronounce “rainbow” which is very enjoyable for the children.

5 minutes – we name all the colours on the rainbow and then sing “Goodbye Song”

Evaluation: The topic of colours seemed to be very popular since more than half of the children already knew some of the colours that were on the leaves. When I asked them how they knew them, some of them told me that they practice colours in English at home with their parents “a bit”. Noticing this fact, I decided to go on with the topic of colours in the next lessons in order to practice them preferably for those who are still unsure about them. It is worth mentioning that for the first time, we used a meadow as great space either for “lying down” or “moving” activities. Although it was a bit windy during the main activity, we managed to assemble the colourful pieces of a rainbow in the grass rather than on the table indoors – and that is the point, to be able to solve any problem that may appear in the outdoor conditions. To sum it up, together we were able to complete the picture despite these unfriendly conditions.

5.4.2.2 LESSON PLAN IV

Aims: to revise colours, to learn the game phrase

Activities: This is My Rainbow (nursery rhyme), Listen and Draw: The Colours of the Rainbow, Mr. Stork Lost his Cap

Materials: two sticks for every child, pieces of paper, crayons, a puppet

Organization: whole group, a lot of free space (e.g. meadow)

Vocabulary: colours revision: red, brown, yellow, green, blue, orange, pink, white, black; rainbow; new vocabulary: “Mr. Stork lost his cap, the colour was...” (nursery rhyme); instructions: Touch it

Motivation: *“Children, do you remember the last time when we made up our rainbow? Rainbow often indicates that the rain has passed. It rained all yesterday morning and when the Sun appeared, tell me, could you see the rainbow? Where was it? Which colours could you see?”* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric; I distribute two sticks for every child and I tell them what to do. Together, we learn a very short nursery rhyme about rainbows and while we say it, we also follow the rhythm of the words with our sticks drumming on our knees:

Green, blue, yellow

This is my rainbow

10 minutes – Mr. Stork Lost his Cap – children know this game already in the Czech version. However, I tell them that each of them can choose the colour one by one and then say it to others starting with a nursery rhyme: “*Mr. Stork lost his cap, the colour was...*” Their task then is to find anything that is of the particular colour. As soon as they find the colour, they have to touch it (instruction: “*Touch it*”).

15 minutes – Listen and Draw activity – I sing the Rainbow Song many times while children are supposed to draw the colours of the rainbow in the right order according to these lyrics (explained in Czech):

Red and orange

Yellow, green and blue,

I can see a rainbow, see a rainbow

See a rainbow, too.

10 minutes – At the end of the lesson, we collect the drawings (one of them can be seen in Appendix number 2) and the children come up with the idea of pinning the drawings together on the caravan’s platform in order to create a “rainbow exhibition” for their parents to see.

Evaluation: The theme of rainbow does not only serve as a means for naming colours but it also brings the children visible joy and creates a positive mood. The only problem in this lesson was the Listen and Draw activity (see Chapter 2.5.1) which seemed to be quite demanding at first but in the end, almost everyone used the colours that were included within the song. The end of this lesson is a good example of me staying in the background giving the children the opportunity to come up with their own idea. This is the part of child-centred approach (see Chapter 4.3.2), even if it only lasts for a while, and I am happy to encourage it.

5.4.3 NOVEMBER

5.4.3.1 LESSON PLAN V

Aims: to revise colours, to be able to sort the colours, to practice the opposites (boy/girl, good/bad)

Activities: Colour Song, Find Something Red, Blue, Green..., Coloured Forehead

Materials: natural objects found freely in nature: e.g. leaves, rose hips etc.; coloured and adhesive small pieces of paper, a puppet

Organization: whole group, a lot of free space (e.g. meadow)

Vocabulary: revision of colours: red, brown, yellow, green, blue, orange, pink, white, black;
new vocabulary: boy/girl, good/bad

Motivation: “*Children, look at the trees! All the leaves have turned into the colours of a rainbow finally! Before they all fall down, may Eric sing an English song for these beautifully coloured leaves?*” (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric; “Colour Song” – singing the song while pointing at leaves of these colours:

Red and orange, yellow, green

Yellow, green, yellow, green

Red and orange, yellow, green

Brown, blue and pink

10 minutes – organizational transfer to the meadow (“*come here, follow me*”) – game “Find Something...” – I tell the children to choose one particular colour (e.g. “*red*”) “*ok, find something red*” and they are supposed to run and bring any natural object they find of the given colour (a leaf, a rose hip, etc.). As soon as all the colours are completed, we collect the objects and sort them according to their colour (“*green to green, red to red*”, etc.).

15 minutes – I set the instructions for the next game called “Coloured Forehead”. I distribute adhesive small pieces of paper of various colours to everybody and tell them what to do with it: “*take a paper and put it on your forehead*” while showing them how to do it. If I say: “*catch the boy with the green forehead*” or “*catch the girl with the pink forehead*” they are supposed to catch him/her. I provide them with new words (*boy* and *girl*) at the same time.

5 minutes – I want them to give me some feedback so I ask them “*Do you like it?*” and I raise my hand for everybody to see and show them my thumbs up (saying “*it is good*”) and then thumbs down (saying “*it is bad*”). Most of the children then, without saying anything, give me the clear signal that they like it.

Evaluation: Both of these activities (Find Something Red, etc. and Coloured Forehead) belong to the category of active games during which children need to think and use their physical body to move at the same time (see Chapter 4.3.2). Naturally, this “active” lesson has been successful in every way since children in forest kindergartens enjoy and are accustomed to movement.

5.4.3.2 LESSON PLAN VI

Aims: to create a small picture of the kindergarten’s maple tree while using vocabulary from the previous lessons, to practice yes/no answers

Activities: Rain, Rain Go Away, Art & Craft activity: Our Colourful Tree

Materials: natural objects found freely in nature, e.g. leaves, a piece of bark, sticks; a wooden board, a glue, a puppet

Organization: whole group

Vocabulary: revision of colours: red, brown, yellow, green, blue, orange, pink, white, black; rain, new vocabulary: a tree, yes/no

Motivation: *“Children, it’s going to rain! Prepare your raincoats and I will go for Mr. Eric to ask him if we are supposed to be outside today or in the caravan”* – when I am back, I tell them this – *“children, Eric knows one little poem that makes the rain go away. Do you want to hear it? OK, stay outside then, we are both coming!”* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric; a nursery rhyme about rain – I repeat the verses until I am joined by all the children. Then we bend our knees according to the rhythm of the poem. I point to one child with my finger and his/her name is then included within the third verse of the poem:

Rain, rain, go away (while wiggling our fingers downwards like rain falling)

Come again another day

Little Kuba wants to play (all the children’s names are used)

20 minutes – The rain suddenly stops so we clap our hands (instruction: *“clap your hands”*) because it was clear that we were successful with reciting and performing the poem. I tell the children that since they all recognize the colours in English very well and autumn is almost over, we can create a picture of a tree similar to the one that we have near our caravan. I show them what is needed for this – *“a glue, a wooden board and you!”* pointing at those two things and them. Then I take a leaf from my pocket and say: *“Find a leaf!”* As soon as they bring me their

maple leaves, I ask them: *“What colour is your leaf?”* In a few cases, I need to correct them *“No, it’s not blue! No, it’s not white!”* When everybody replies, we stick them on the wooden board. *“What is missing there?” “Yes, a trunk of a tree!”* You can find a small piece of bark near the tree (while explaining it in Czech) *“Go and find it”*. *“Yes, that’s it! Now we have a whole tree!” “Is it a tree?”* I ask the children explaining what “a tree” means. *“Yes, a tree!”* children reply. One of the children comes up with the idea of creating fence and compost in the picture as well, like on the Kindergarten’s land. The result can be seen in Appendix number 3.

5 minutes – I praise the children for their efforts and cooperation in this activity: *“Wow, what a tree!” “Well done, everybody” “Eric, do you like the tree? – Yes, I do!” “Let’s take a photo of the tree!”* while showing with my fingers how to do the frame.

Evaluation: The creative activity that requires everybody’s involvement may be difficult to manage. In our case, however, this was not demanding at all. Thanks to the children’s mutual cooperation (especially with gluing) my function here was more of a supervisor since they had been totally drawn in to the activity from the beginning. Initially, all the children were speaking Czech while my aim was to stay true to English. However, during the process of creating a tree, children began to – by themselves – repeat the words after me. Again, this clearly shows that children’s active and mutual engagement in certain activity serves as the best motivational factor for learning the language.

5.5 WINTER

Winter season is often associated with snow and frost. Winter weather therefore provides a unique opportunity for observations and experimentations with snow and ice. Nevertheless, in these outdoor conditions that forest kindergarten creates, it is important for children and guides to feel warm in some parts of the day (especially after the morning programme that is held primarily outdoors). For this reason this period is viewed as the celebration of Fire – one of the four natural elements. Many kindergarten activities are based on this element (splitting kindling with a small hatchet, setting fire outdoors, experimentation with fire and snow etc.). Since many children that attend Bažinka Forest Kindergarten celebrate their birthday in this season, it will be one of the main topics together with counting numbers. However, this period is also significant for one of the biggest holidays of the year – Christmas. Therefore, the topics of Christmas along with My Family are included in this season as well.

Key Topics: Birthday, Christmas, Numbers, My Family

5.5.1 DECEMBER

5.5.1.1 LESSON PLAN VII

Aims: to be able to count to ten in English, to practice question and answer formation

Activities: Happy Birthday and Five Little Candles song, How Many Stones/Years?

Materials: stones, a pouch bag, a puppet

Organization: whole group

Vocabulary: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten; happy birthday; question/answer: How old are you? I am five

Motivation: *“Children, have you heard the great news today? It is Anežka’s birthday today. Do you know what that means? Anežka, can you tell us how old are you? Very good, you are five years old today. Let’s get Eric so we can wish you happy birthday in English, too!”* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric; *“OK, children, let’s sing a birthday song for our Anežka.”* *“Make a circle and hold your hands like this”* showing them how to do it. *“Anežka, you can sit here”* pointing at Anežka and the log placed in the middle of the circle. *“OK, everyone now listen to the song and then sing with me”:*

*Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you
Happy birthday, dear Anežka,
Happy birthday to you!*

(While we are singing the song, my assistant comes with a birthday cake)

15 minutes – *“Very well done, everyone”*. Now we know how to wish someone happy birthday in English. Anežka, you said you are five years old now. Everybody, do you know how many candles are on this birthday cake? *“Yes, there are five”* little candles stressing the word “five” and showing it on my fingers at the same time. Let’s sing a song together with Anežka:

*Five little candles (pointing at the candles)
On a birthday cake (pointing at the cake)
Let’s count them very carefully
So there is no mistake*

One-two-three-four-five (counting the candles while touching them)

We have counted five,

So there's no doubt

And now it's time,

To blow them out (with our mouth blowing)

OK, let's cut the cake into pieces and share it with others. *"Do you like it? Is it good? Yes? No? It's yummy, it's delicious"* while I am stroking my tummy.

10 minutes – While some of the children are still eating their pieces of the cake, I take my pouch bag filled with stones for a game that can be called "How Many Stones/Years?" First, together we pull out the first stone saying *"one"* then the second stone while saying *"two"* – this continues up to the number ten. Then I explain in Czech that one by one everyone can take as many stones as years that they have. I circle the group while having the pouch bag in my hands and the children start to take the stones out of it. Later, I ask each of them *"How old are you?"* and one by one they start to put down their stones on the ground. We count them together: *"Anežka, how old are you? Let's count: one, two, three, four, five stones! Yes, you are five years old. And what about you Vojta, how old are you? Everybody, let's count the stones: one, two, three, four. Vojta is four years old!* Once everybody is finished, I ask the children to show me their feedback by saying *"Do you like it? Show me your thumbs up"* (with using gesture) *"or thumbs down"* (with gesture) *"OK, I see some thumbs up* (while smiling and showing thumbs up gesture) *and some thumbs down."* (When asking what they don't like about the lesson, they told me afterwards that the cake was too small and that they are still hungry). *"And that's it for today – say goodbye to Eric"*.

Evaluation: Through the pre-school celebrations, children learn important traditions and habits. However, experiencing these celebrations in English may not be as effective as it may seem. Some of the children (especially the younger ones) focused more on the cake than my instructions which seems to me as absolutely natural now. Moreover, in situations like this (and I am able to reflect on this now), there are many perceptual experiences at once (e.g. bringing a cake, the focus on one person, eating a cake) that are so significant for them that learning English stays more or less in the background. Nevertheless, I must say that the last activity set it right. There were only a few exceptions in the form of three boys who did not want to cooperate with me but as mentioned above, too much was going on there so I can understand it now.

5.5.1.2 LESSON PLAN VIII

Aims: to practice Christmas vocabulary through its symbols, to revise colours

Activities: Find the Pictures with Christmas Symbols

Materials: a Christmas wreath, matches, pictures with Christmas symbols, a puppet

Organization: whole group in kindergarten's caravan, later moving outside

Vocabulary: Christmas, a Christmas wreath, a Christmas tree, a star, a bell, a candle, a present, a carp; other: a car, a doll, Thank you

Motivation: *“Children, do you know how many days there are until Christmas? Yes, only 8 days! Let's count with me: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight days and Christmas is here! Tell me, what are you looking forward to most on Christmas day? Christmas presents? I knew it. Let's prepare for Christmas with Eric.”* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric; *“Make a circle now” “Today, I have something special in my bag.” “What is it?” “Adventní věnec!” “Yes, it's a Christmas wreath, very good.” “How many candles are there?” “Yes, four – one, two, three, four, very good, Anička.” What colours can you see there? Yes, it is green and candles are...? Red, well done, Mareček. “Let's light them up! Who wants to do it?” OK, Štěpánek, take a match and try it. Be very careful!” Thank you very much, very good, now we have four lighted candles.”*

10 minutes – *“Now, let's walk around our Christmas wreath and sing this song with me”:*

*Here we go round the Christmas wreath
The Christmas wreath, the Christmas wreath
Here we go round the Christmas wreath
On a cold and frosty morning*

We talk about presents the children want for Christmas (in Czech). However, when someone says *“auto”* or *“panenka”* my reply would be *“OK, a car”* or *“I see, you want a doll under the Christmas tree”* etc. Children then repeat the words after me.

15 minutes – After all those fascinating wishes I could hear, I ask the kids (in Czech) to go outside to find something on a meadow that I prepared for them before. It takes probably two minutes for them to find seven pictures that contain Christmas objects. After their return, I praise them *“very good, everybody, let's look at how many cards you have.”* *“OK, you have one, two,*

three, four, five, six, seven cards, let's look at them now." "Let's look at the first one – what is it"? "It's a bell, repeat after me, a bell" "Well done and what is this? That's a star, next there is a present, a candle, a carp, a Christmas tree and a Christmas wreath." "Ok, now take these crayons on the desk and colour the cards together." "Good job, everyone!" I observe the class while asking the questions like "Is your bell blue, Tom?" "No, it's red, very good". "Everybody, what colour is Zuzka's star?" "It's yellow, yes!"

Now let's sing the final song before the holidays – this one is about wishing a Merry Christmas to anybody you like:

*We wish you a Merry Christmas,
We wish you a Merry Christmas,
We wish you a Merry Christmas,
And a Happy New Year!*

As we finish the song, we blow out the Christmas wreath's candles together.

Evaluation: Christmas is a very popular topic since everybody is looking forward to it, all the more children. In this respect, I was prepared for children to be very talkative about their Christmas wishes and traditions. After the first song, we formed a circle within which we shared our wishes (in Czech). This was the toughest moment of the lesson for me since everybody wanted to share it all at once*. The only thing that could calm the children down was a sudden change of activity in a way of moving them outdoors, even for a while. The following activities went according to the plan. *In order to avoid this in the future, I learned that the best way is to assign numbers (from one to ten) to children, always in different order so that they can start responding according to the number they were given.

5.5.2 JANUARY

5.5.2.1 LESSON PLAN IX

Aims: to practice the rhythm of English words, to practice numbers from one to ten

Activities: Ten Little Indians, How Many Fingers? Rhythmical Answer

Materials: sound instruments: wooden rattles, small drums, bongos, sticks; a puppet

Organization: whole group, around the small fire

Vocabulary: How many fingers? Show me! Revision: numbers 1-10, How old are you? I am (number of years)

Motivation: “Children, do you know what Indians used to do during a cold and frosty winter? They used to dance around the fire to keep their bodies warm. Let’s build a fire and pretend we are Indians for today, can you do the hand-over-the-mouth sound? Yes, it’s just like this: ‘awawawawa!’” (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greeting with Eric; “OK, let’s light our fire, make a circle and sing with me”:

One little, two little, three little Indians, (singing while walking around the fire)

Four little, five little, six little Indians,

Seven little, eight little, nine little Indians,

Ten little Indians shout together ‘awawawawa!’ (standing still while shouting together)

Whenever there is the word “Indians”, children are supposed to clap their hands.

10 minutes – “Is your body warm enough?” (while shaking hands and body) “Good”. Let’s stretch our fingers now: “count with me – one, two, three, four five fingers on my hand” Then I explain the following activity called “How Many Fingers”: I put one hand behind my back and children can guess how many fingers I have hidden. If someone guesses right, I show them that I really had the number of fingers hidden in my palm. Obviously, children want to be those who hide their fingers so I watch to make sure they do not cheat and correct the numbers if it’s necessary. Children use the following vocabulary: “How many fingers? Show me!”

Variation: It’s possible to use both hands. Moreover, children enjoy counting through different ways (e.g. slow and quick, happy and sad, quiet and loud counting, etc.)

10 minutes – Rhythmical Answers – This is a great game once the children need to be drawn into activity while still concentrating on the spoken word. I ask the children the following question: “How old are you?” and at the same time I stomp my feet according to the rhythm of the sentence. I point to one child and he/she is supposed to give us an answer using the similar rhythmical pattern – “I am four”.

Variation: Instead of stomping or clapping, any musical/sound/toy instrument may be used.

5 minutes – Since the fire was still burning, we decided to sing the Indian song once again, but this time backwards to make it more demanding – “Ten little, nine little, eight little Indians...”

Evaluation: Role-playing (in this case Indians) belongs to the children’s favourite activities. Very often, they are completely drawn into their “new” identity and play the role with certain importance. As for counting the numbers in this lesson, most of the children had no problems with it at all. The rhythmical activity, however, was quite demanding at first since not everybody was able to follow the rhythmical pattern and using different types of sound instruments made it

quite noisy. Overall, this lesson was one of those that were very successful in my opinion and it seemed to me that the children – according to their joyful reactions – were enjoying every minute of it.

5.5.2.2 LESSON PLAN X

Aims: to practice counting to twenty and to be able to distinguish numbers on coins

Activities: Counting with Ears, Magical Coins

Materials: a can, 20 coins, crayons, pieces of paper, scissors, a puppet

Organization: whole group

Vocabulary: numbers 1-20; other: coins, a can, close your eyes, open your eyes

Motivation: *“Children, do you know what it is? Yes, these are coins but look at them closer – are they the Czech ones? No, these coins were in Eric’s wallet, guess where they come from? Yes, these are the English coins that are used in England. Let’s count them all.”* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric; *“Do you know the number of this coin? Yes, it’s one. This has two on it.”* *“You are very good.”* *“Let’s try this activity with these coins”* *“Tim, can you see the can over there? (me pointing towards the can) “Can you bring it here?” (me showing him gestures with my hand) “Well done, Tim”.*

10 minutes – Children are asked to move inside the caravan to sit around the table. This activity can be called “Counting with Ears” – I tell the children to close their eyes (*“close your eyes, everybody”*) while I start to throw the coins one by one inside the can. Children’s task is to guess the number of coins inside the can by listening to the *“plink, plink”* sound. I always stop at a certain moment and ask *“How many coins are there?”* Children reply in English (e.g. *“five coins”*) and then we check if it is correct and start to count it together. This is repeated many times in order to practice all numbers from one to twenty.

10 minutes – Next activity is called “Magical Coins” and it can be characterized as an art activity with a surprise. First, all the coins need to be put on the table, always with the number at the top. I cover the coins with paper. Each child then chooses one coin and one crayon. The children start to draw the coin with a crayon, however on its reverse side. After a while, the number of a coin starts to appear on the paper. I suggest helping the children with holding the

paper. The children are then very surprised by the result – “paper coins” that can be further cut with scissors.

5 minutes – Once all the “paper coins” are being cut, children can – with each other – say the numbers that are on these coins in English.

Evaluation: In this lesson, the children (including the youngest ones) proved to be good “arithmeticians” since they were able to count from one to ten without any difficulties. This time, however, the aim was to learn to count to twenty inconspicuously through the game. Naturally, counting from ten to twenty takes more time as some of the words are difficult to pronounce (e.g. thirteen) or remember (e.g. eleven). Unexpectedly, the playfulness of the game “Counting with Ears” enabled children to encounter even with these “higher” numbers. However, the last activity “Magical Coins” showed that children’s curiosity has a big impact on their motivation in the learning process since they were very positively surprised by the result (“paper coins”) in the end.

5.5.3 FEBRUARY

5.5.3.1 LESSON PLAN XI

Aims: to practice new vocabulary (snowman’s equipment), to revise numbers

Activities: Dress up the Snowman! Snowman Song

Materials: snow, dice, a hat, a nose carrot, a scarf, 5 buttons, stick arm, worksheet, a puppet

Organization: whole group, individual

Vocabulary: snowman: a hat, a carrot nose, a scarf, a button, a stick arm; other: What is missing here? Short/fat

Motivation: *“Children, look at the snow, up and down, left and right, it’s everywhere! The snowman you started to build yesterday is looking good but he is looking very cold. Let’s find Eric and together we can dress him up. Be prepared for some snowy English today, then!”* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric; *“Oh, look at that, what is this? I know, it’s a snowman, say it with me a snowman, very good”. “But look at his head, what is missing here?”* (pointing at the snowman’s head), children reply in Czech while I use English only: *“Yes, a hat, say a hat”. “And what is missing here? Yes, a scarf”* Similarly, I continue with other pieces of snowman’s

equipment – “*buttons, carrot nose, stick arm*” while I have everything prepared in my bag and children don’t know it yet.

20 minutes – “*Let’s play the game*” “*This is a dice*” I explain the instructions for the game “Dress up the Snowman!” in Czech since it is little bit difficult to understand it at first. Children are supposed to throw the dice (“*throw the dice*”) and according to the number they throw (revision of counting from one to six), they are supposed to dress up the snowman with a particular item of clothing. I take out all the things from my bag: I tell them “*this is a hat, this is a button, this is a carrot nose, scarf, stick arm*” and children repeat after me. Then we start to play the game. One child throws the dice and must say the number he/she throws (e.g. “*one*”) – according to the worksheet (see Appendix 4) it means that the child must say “*a hat*”. Then he/she takes the hat and runs towards the snowman to place the hat on his head. In this way, it continues with all the things mentioned.

5 minutes – As soon as the snowman is dressed up properly with all those things mentioned, we start to dance around the snowman singing the following song:

I’m a little snowman, (pointing at the snowman with our hands)

I’m a little snowman,

Short and fat (demonstrating with gestures)

Here is my arm stick (pointing at the snowman’s arm stick)

And here is my hat (pointing at the snowman’s hat)

When it’s cold and icy (shaking our bodies)

I will stay

But, when it gets all hot

I melt away! (all children falling down in the snow)

As we say goodbye to each other, I tell children to bring a photograph of their family for the next lesson.

Evaluation: Meeting with a lot of snow is in the Kindergarten’s conditions rather a rarity. However, it is useful to use snow as a medium for English language since children love snow games. The main activity “Dress up the Snowman!” was a successful accomplishment of such game. Before that happened however, there was a strong need of rule explanation since the game requires more things at once – counting, words vocabulary, moving and the correct assignment of the objects in the end. In this respect, similar activities should be long enough (20 minutes at least) in order to make the task understandable for children (see Chapter 1.2.3).

5.5.3.2 LESSON PLAN XII

Aims: to practice new vocabulary (my family)

Activities: Fireflies, Pass the Secret

Materials: family photos, flashcards with family members (see Appendix 5), a torch, a puppet

Organization: whole group, individual, in the Kindergarten's caravan partly because of the very cold day but also because of the main activity that needs to be done in the dark

Vocabulary: my family: mum, dad, sister, brother, grandmother, grandfather

Motivation: *"Children, do you remember what you were supposed to bring for today's English lesson? Yes, a photograph of your family. Do you have it here? Yes? I can see that most of you have not forgotten to bring it, that's very good. In the meantime, keep it for a while and you'll see what we are going to do with it later."* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

15 minutes – Greetings with Eric; *"Now, make a circle so everybody can see"* while organizing the group to do it properly. *"Sit down, please"*. *"Now let's look at this photograph"* while placing the photograph of my family in the middle of our circle. *"Look, this is me, this is my mum, this is my dad, this my sister and this is my second sister"* while pointing to it. *"Now let's look at your photographs, one by one"* I let children, one by one, start to show members of their families in their photographs. There is the rule (explained in Czech) that only one may speak while others listen to him/her. When distinguishing each member in Czech, we say it in English as well, e.g. *"To je můj tatka"* *"I see, say 'this is my dad'"* and so on.

15 minutes – Fireflies – I take out the flashcards with family members and show them to children. Then I tell the children to sit down on the place where they usually rest after lunch. I explain to them that I need to close the window shutters and turn the lights out for a while (*"I turn the lights out now"*) and that they don't have to worry as I have a torch (*"Look, this is a torch"*) while pressing the power button on and off showing them that it's working. Meanwhile I hang up the flashcards around the room. I sit next to them and I use the torch to shine the light on one of the flashcards, saying *"Look, this is mum!"* while children repeating after me. I switch off the torch and point it to another flashcard *"Children, who is it?"* *"Yes, this is grandfather"* and so on.

Variation: Children are more motivated when they can use the torch themselves.

10 minutes – After the game, I open the window shutters and turn the lights on. Children move back at the table and I ask them if they can pass the secret. As we sit around the table I explain the following game called “Pass the Secret”. I whisper the two words e.g. “*brother and sister*” to the first child next to me and he/she does the same to the next child. As soon as the circle is done, I shout the words I could hear. The circle is repeated with “*mum and dad*” and “*grandmother and grandfather*” being the most demanding one.

Evaluation: The topic of family made the children more talkative (both in Czech and English) since everybody wanted to share and explain each of the family members in their photographs. Again, the rule of assigning the numbers (see 5.5.1.2 Lesson Plan VIII) had to be used. The “Fireflies” activity was unusual in many ways so the children were taken by surprise at first. However, using different ways (e.g. teaching in the dark with a torch) may elicit good outcomes. In our case, the children focused more on repeating the words since they did not have to use their sight as much as their hearing. Moreover, they tended to be more listening (see Chapter 2.5.1) thanks to the dark which made it more adventurous and therefore more enjoyable.

5.6 SPRING

In the beginning of springtime, nature is slowly awakening from the winter sleep – trees, flowers, animals and all living things are evolving, growing and moving in this season. The morning and evening daylight begin to extend and the earth is getting warm. For this reason, this period is viewed as the celebration of the Earth – one of the four natural elements. Many forest kindergarten activities are based on this element (digging the soil, herbs planting, insects observing, etc.). In this season, nature encourages children in its exploration (e.g. birds, frogs, snakes and lizards species etc.) and outdoors, at the same time, children explore their physical abilities (e.g. running through the forest, climbing the trees and hills, crawling in the grass, etc.). Therefore, the main English topics for this season are Parts of the Body, Animals and Nature All Around Us.

Key Topics: Parts of the Body, Animals, Nature All Around Us

5.6.1 MARCH

5.6.1.1 LESSON PLAN XIII

Aims: to follow instructions, to practice parts of the body (both verbally and physically)

Activities: Greeting to the Sun, Head and Shoulders, Body Circles

Materials: flashcards with body parts (see Appendix 6), two ropes, a puppet

Organization: whole group, on a meadow

Vocabulary: head, shoulders, knees, toes, hands, legs, eyes, ears, mouth, nose, finger

Motivation: “*Children, the snow and cold are already gone! Let’s welcome spring with Eric and with our whole bodies!*” (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

10 minutes – Greetings with Eric; warm-up activity – Greeting to the Sun – “*Make a circle, everybody*” I explain the words of the following poem in Czech and then we say and perform it together.

The Sun is coming up (we get up off the ground) “stand up”

The Sun is coming up (we get up off the ground) “stand up”

We thank you Earth (we kneel down on the ground) “kneel down”

For spinning round (we turn around) “turn around”

And being here for us (while looking at each other)

10 minutes – I place several flashcards (with parts of the body) on a meadow for everybody to see “*Look at this, what is it?*” pointing at one of the flashcards, “*hlava*” being children’s reply “*Yes, a head – say it with me, a head*” “*And what is this? This is a finger, let’s say a finger*” Once all the flashcards are demonstrated, we continue with the following activity.

5 minutes – “*OK, now, show me your head, now your shoulders, very good, now your knees, and toes*” while slowly moving into the performing and singing the following song:

Head and shoulders,

Knees and toes,

And eyes and ears

And mouth and nose

And legs and hands

Either mine or yours (pointing from me to them)

10 minutes – Body Circles – We stay on a meadow while I make two large circles out of two ropes. Children are divided into two groups (five and five). In each group, they are supposed to walk around the circle while I play on bongo. When the music stops, I shout “*hand*” and they need to touch the rope circle by their hand. In a similar way, I use the other parts of the body, e.g. finger, head, legs, knees, mouth etc. This game is not competitive as it may seem but it develops mutual cooperation and the sense of humour.

Evaluation: In this lesson, the children were introduced to many new words. My aim was to present the basic vocabulary for parts of the body (e.g. head, hands, legs, etc.) however, some of the children started to ask me about the other parts as well. Fortunately, I had a whole collection of flashcards for them to show and learn. As for the song, we used many different parts of our body then with constantly changing its tempo (see Chapter 2.4.2) which made it more enjoyable for everybody, especially for the youngest ones.

5.6.1.2 LESSON PLAN XIV

Aims: to practice simple active verbs, to follow instructions, to practice parts of the body (both verbally and physically)

Activities: The Walking Song, Simon Says, Two Little Eyes

Materials: a puppet

Organization: whole group, on a meadow

Vocabulary: walking, jump, running, tiptoe, swimming, sleep, touch; revision: head, shoulders, knees, toes, hands, legs, eyes, ears, mouth, nose, finger

Motivation: *“Children, are you curious about today’s Eric’s moving games? OK, let’s warm-up our bodies before he’s here! Everybody go up and down, left and right, back and forth, well done, I think we are ready now for some English!”* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

10 minutes – Greetings with Eric; gather the children in a circle (*“Make a circle”*) and start to sing The Walking Song while performing the movements that are in the lyrics:

Walking, walking, walking, walking

Jump, jump, jump, jump, jump, jump

Running, running, running, running, running, running

Now let’s stop, now let’s stop (place both hands out in front of you, palms facing forward)

Tiptoe, tiptoe, tiptoe, tiptoe (walking on toes)

Jump, jump, jump, jump, jump, jump

Swimming, swimming, swimming, swimming, swimming, swimming (making a swimming motion)

Now let’s sleep, now let’s sleep (lying down on the ground, pretending the sleep)

Wakey wakey, everybody (eyes opening and rising)

Variation: It is good to vary the tempo of the song as children enjoy it more in a faster way

15 minutes – Simon Says – A very well-known TPR activity – children imitate certain movement only when the instruction begins with the words “Simon says”, otherwise, they are out of the game. The winner is the player who remains as the last and becomes Simon. During this game, it is important for children to have a lot of free space around them. In our case, vocabulary of active verbs and parts of the body was practiced, e.g. “*Simon says touch your nose, Simon says jump, Simon says make a circle, Simon says open your mouth*”, etc.

10 minutes – Two Little Eyes – I tell the children to follow and learn this nursery rhyme with me:

Two little eyes to look around (while pointing at our eyes and looking from side to side)

Two little ears to hear each sound (while cupping our hands behind our ears)

One little nose to smell what’s sweet (while pointing at our nose and lifting our head)

One little mouth that likes to eat (pointing to our mouth and pretending eating)

Evaluation: First, it is worth mentioning that The Walking Song gained a big popularity from the beginning. The children learned the lyrics very quickly and soon more movements could be added. It is because its simplicity yet effectiveness at the same time that this song had been included into several other lessons since then. As for the ‘Simon say’s activity, there was a moment I let the children to play the game on their own for a while. Needless to say that child-centered approach (see Chapter 4.3.2) was again demonstrated in a way that the children started to exchange their roles and used different instructions (e.g. “*Simon says touch yellow*” or “*Simon says how many fingers?*” – see 5.5.2.1 Lesson Plan IX). Thanks to this observation, it is clear that some of the children either practiced English at home or they were able to remember some of the vocabulary from the previous lessons.

5.6.2 APRIL

5.6.2.1 LESSON PLAN XV

Aims: to follow and perform a story using pictures

Activities: The Ant and the Snail, Colouring the Pictures

Materials: a small box without a lid, lettuce, photographs of ant and snail, pictures of mum and boy, black and white picture of ant and snail (see Appendix 7), crayons, a puppet

Organization: whole group, in the forest

Vocabulary: animals: ant, snail; other: mum, boy, lettuce, box, crayons; revision: colours

Motivation: *“Children, do you like stories? I knew you do and do you like stories that have happy endings? Me too, let’s go for Eric so we can go to the forest to listen to an English story about two little animals.”* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric; *“Find ant and snail somewhere in the grass”* with showing them the pictures of these two animals while seeking for them in the grass. Once they are found, we put them in a small box that has no lid for easier observation.

15 minutes – The Story of Ant and Snail – I tell the following story to children while holding two photographs of the ant and snail (performing with them, pretending they are puppets) and observing their co-existence in the box at the same time.

The story goes like this:

Once upon a time there was a little boy who liked picking snails and putting them into boxes (while picking up the snail again and putting him into the box) One day, this boy found one giant snail in the forest and put him in the box. Few moments later when the boy stopped caring about the snail for a while, there came a marching ant who wanted to see what is in the box

(pretending to be small ant walking in the grass). “Hello Mr. Snail, what are you doing in the box?” said the ant curiously. “Hi, I was picked up by the boy because I am beautiful and big and now I am waiting for my lettuce to come, yummy!” said the snail proudly (miming beautiful and big with gestures and holding lettuce in hands). “Oh, you are lucky snail, children don’t feed us, perhaps because we are very small animals” said the ant in a sad voice (making a sad face).

“Don’t be sad, ant! You, ants, are smaller than us, snails, but on the other hand, you are faster than us!” said the snail comradely (racing with pictures of ant and snail to show that ant is the faster one). Meanwhile, the boy and his mum return with a green lettuce for the snail (showing the pictures of the boy and his mum). “Oh, look mum, there is a little ant who came to visit my snail’s house, go away, ant, this is not your home!” said the boy to his mum (performing the upset and throwing the picture of ant away). “Just leave him there, look, they seem to be friends – they are even looking at each other!” said mum happily (taking the picture of ant and giving it back to the box). “OK, I will give this lettuce to both of them, one piece for the snail and one piece for the ant” said the boy (doing this together with children – feeding these two animals in the box). “Look they seem to like it both, mummy, we have a new friend – Mr. Ant!” said the little boy cheerfully. “I told you, it doesn’t matter that you are small but sometimes it’s good to show yourself, that’s all!” summed up the snail (expressing joy with hands clapping to celebrate their friendship and the boy’s newly obtained attitude towards other animals).

10 minutes – The story is being told once again and children are supposed to perform it with the pictures of the ant, the snail, the mum and the boy.

10 minutes – If there is enough time, children may start to colour the black and white pictures of ant and snail (“*Take the crayon you like*”; “*Colour the pictures of ant and snail*”) or if there is a little time, they can finish it at home with parents.

Evaluation: First, I must admit that storytelling (see Chapter 2.5.1) was rather an exception in the course. The reason was the fact that creating authentic stories is quite demanding and time-consuming yet the story should be simple and easy to follow with lots of illustrative objects. Once it is coherent though, it may be highly effective. In our case, I tried to work with gestures and overall body language (see Chapter 1.2.4) as much as I could in order to facilitate understanding of the story. Of course, the children could not understand the every single word I used but I tried to emphasize and repeat the main ones in order to make the children “linguistically active”. My impression was that the children seemed to like what they saw (they were drawn into the observation of the animals) and were ostentatiously watching my “performance” although, the children’s language was more in the background this time and therefore more passive (see 5.5.3.2 Lesson Plan XII as the opposite of what happened in this lesson). Nevertheless, I would like to mention that in some cases I was glad that they were at least listening knowing that every lesson does not have to be as “verbally activating” as the others.

5.6.2.2 LESSON PLAN XVI

Aims: to follow instructions, to be able to name some of the local animals and to act out the way they move

Activities: The Animal Song & Nursery Rhyme, Animal Movements

Materials: pictures of local animals: a dog, a cat, a fish, a snake, a frog, a spider, a beaver, a duck, a mouse, a cock (see Appendix 8)

Organization: whole group, individual, pair work

Vocabulary: animals: a dog, a cat, a fish, a snake, a frog, a spider, a beaver, a duck, a mouse, a cock

Motivation: “Children, how many animals can you name of? Oh, crocodile, monkey, zebra, lion, elephant, I see, very well! And can you name any animals that we can meet here in our kindergarten environment?” (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric; the following song prepares the children for the lesson’s topic. “Everybody, make a circle” “Let’s sing this animal song” (while showing the pictures):

The dog says woof woof, (making the dog’s sound)

The cat says miaow, miaow,

The duck says quack, quack,

The mouse says squeak, squeak,

The cock says cock-a-doodle-do!

10 minutes – Show the children more pictures of animals and name them. This should be done twice at least. Place the pictures on the grass in the order of the lyrics for the following nursery rhyme. Children are supposed to guess the animals according to the lyrics of this nursery rhyme:

The beaver is very strong,

The fish swims in the pond,

The snake is very long,

A good watch is the dog

And who likes to play? Of course it is the cat

Look, it’s the spider who weaves a web

When the nursery rhyme is repeated, children can act out each animal – beaver is strong (showing muscles), fish swims (doing a swimming motion), snake’s wriggling in the grass, etc.

10 minutes – Animal Movements – Show the pictures of the animals once again, pick one and say e.g. “Kuba, act out a snake!” and Kuba performs snake’s movement. When all the animals are acted out their sounds may be learnt as well – e.g. dogs’ barking (haf haf in Czech x woof woof in English). The whole action is then repeated with sounds.

10 minutes – The whole group is divided into pairs. First pair is supposed to act out a cat (while others don’t know it), second pair is supposed to act out a fish, etc. Others guess in English the animals that each pair is acting out.

Variation: More animals or even wild animals may be added if the group enjoys the activity, e.g. crocodile, tiger, elephant, etc.

Evaluation: As stated in Chapter 1.2.4, children enjoy and learn best by imitation. In this respect, the topic of animals served as enjoyable and playful way for learning new vocabulary.

Of course, the children were livelier thanks to the movement and sounds they were asked to act out yet it does not mean that they were too “wild” to fulfil the task. Moreover, the youngest ones enjoyed this part too since they imitated the movements and sounds of the older children. The last activity was more communicative since the each pair needed to talk about it first. For instance, if the pair was asked to act out a fish, first they assigned their roles between themselves – e.g. one of the children does the swimming motion and the other does the mouth motion (like a carp). Since everyone understood the task, there were only few moments where providing a little help was needed.

5.6.3 MAY

5.6.3.1 LESSON PLAN XVII

Aims: to revise the vocabulary (animals, body parts, numbers)

Activities: All the Little Frogs, Stone Skipping, Stone Circle

Materials: a hand net, flat stones, a puppet

Organization: whole group, at the pond

Vocabulary: a frog, a pond, a hand net, a stone; revision: parts of the body, numbers, other: Look at that! Catch it! What is it? Throw it! Who has the stone? (Someone) has it.

Motivation: *“Children, can you hear the sound there at the pond? Do you know which animal produce this sound? Yes, it’s a frog! Let’s go for Eric so we can go there with him in order to explore how frogs look like from close up!”* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric; *“Let’s warm-up our bodies – hands up, hands down, sit down, get up and now jump towards the pond, just like this and sing this song”:*

5 minutes –

All the little frogs hop, hop, hop, (jumping towards the pond)

All the little frogs stop, stop, stop, (observing frogs on the bank of the pond)

We walk around the pond (walking around the pond while observing frogs)

We walk around the pond

15 minutes – As we are walking around the pond, I take out a hand net and show it to children. *“Children, this is called hand net – I hold it with my hand and this is net – a hand net!”* while

passing it around the group. *“Let’s catch the frog!”* When we manage to catch the frog, we make a circle and I hold the frog in the middle of the circle for everyone to see. *“What is this? A frog! And what about this part?”* pointing to the frog’s hands, *“hands!”* children shout. In this way, the body parts through the frog are described (e.g. fingers, legs, eyes, nose, mouth, head, etc.). *“Let’s put the frog back to the pond!” “OK, bye, bye frog”*

10 minutes – Stone Skipping – *“Everybody, find a flat stone, like this”* showing them the stone that is completely flat. *“Not this one, look at it again”*. Once all the children found the stone, we throw it across the pond counting how many times it bounces before sinking. *“One, two, three, four” wow, that’s a lot!” “The stone is jumping like a frog!”*

5 minutes – Stone Circle – *“Make a circle”* Children stand in a circle with hands behind their back. One flat stone is passed around the circle while everybody sings the All The Little Frogs song. As soon as the song ends, the stone passing ends too. One of the children guesses who has the stone, e.g. *“Oliver, who has the stone?” “Maruška has it!”*

Evaluation: In this lesson, there is clear example of using experiential learning (see Chapter 4.3.2) in the form of observing and describing parts of the frog’s body. Through this experience, the children were easily drawn into the process of learning as well as into the process of knowing and exploration. In the previous lesson (see 5.6.2.2 Lesson Plan XVI), we had a picture of a frog. However, by comparison with the real frog, the children’s interest (see Chapter 4.2) together with their attention (see Chapter 1.1.2) lasted much longer. It is evident that the pre-school children were more attracted (and therefore attentive) when encountering with real-life objects from the natural world. At the end of the lesson, I witnessed the children’s joy of sharing the experience with their parents. Some of them even share some of the vocabulary used within the lesson. These are the moments that made me happy and realize that it was worth it.

5.6.3.2 LESSON PLAN XVIII

Aims: to name natural objects around us, to revise numbers, to form a question

Activities: What is in the Box? Touch It, Forest Picture

Materials: natural objects: a stone, a flower, a cone, a stick, a moss, a snail’s shell, a bird’s egg;
other: a headscarf, a box, a puppet

Organization: whole group, in the forest

Vocabulary: a box, natural objects: a stone, a flower, a cone, a stick, a moss, a snail's shell, a bird's egg; other: Open it. Touch it. Close and open your eyes. What is missing? What is different?

Motivation: *“Children, have you seen the box in our caravan? It's near the Eric's resting place! Let's ask him what is inside.”* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric; *“Look at this box, let's see what is inside.”* *“Eliška, open the box, please”* *“Just like that, very good”*.

The content of the box is then emptied on the ground. *“What is it?”* *“Mech”* *“Yes, that's a moss, say a moss, well done”*. All the other objects are named as well: *“a stone, a flower, a cone, a stick, a shell, a bird's egg”*

10 minutes – Touch It – once all the children are familiar with these objects in English, one can shout *“an egg!”* and who touch it first, he/she may keep the object.

Variation: one can say two objects at once, e.g. *“touch the cone and the stick”*

20 minutes – Forest Picture – all the objects are placed on the ground and in a certain order. Children are supposed to look at them for 20 seconds (*“Let's count: one, two, three...”*). Then, these objects are covered with a headscarf. *“Close your eyes now”* while I either change the order of these objects or I take one object out. *“Open your eyes now”* and children guess what is missing, *“What is missing?”* or *“What is different?”*

Variation: Children love when the teacher plays the game as well. Therefore, it is good to let children to hide the objects for others to guess what is missing. The following nursery rhyme can be used after the “uncovering” the objects:

*One, two, three,
Look and see,
Something is not there,
That should be*

Evaluation: In this lesson, the main aim was to name the natural objects that the children can encounter with in this season. Again, experiential learning (see Chapter 4.3.2) is included in the lesson's activity since all the children could see, touch and smell the real-life objects in the box. The ‘Forest Picture’ activity was successful especially for older children as they wanted to “represent” their good memory skills (see Chapter 1.1.2). In a way, this activity was little bit competitive but not in a “fighting” manner whatsoever. However, the vocabulary for some of the children was very difficult to remember so when they said it in Czech, I tried to elicit the right

word from the others first. All in all, the older children cooperated very well together with the younger ones who observed the game with a particular interest.

5.7 SUMMER

Summer is considered by many people, let alone children, as their favourite season of the year. The weather is usually very hot and sunny, yet sometimes it can be rainy and stormy. However, thanks to this constant change of weather (one day sunny, the other rainy) may Mother Nature provide us with various types of children's popular fruits (e.g. strawberries, cherries, raspberries, etc.). If it weren't for Sun and rain, none of this would be growing. For this reason, this period is viewed as the celebration of the Water – one of the four natural elements. Many forest kindergarten activities are based on this element (plants watering, cooling down in the stream, water experiments, etc.). Nevertheless, in children's eyes, this season means "holidays" – travelling with families, visiting grandparents, making trips and having fun outside. Majority of schools and kindergartens are closed during this season, though the month of June can be already seen as the early hint of summer. Therefore, the main English topic for this month is Food and activities that revise the children's actual vocabulary.

Key Topics: Food, Vocabulary Revision

5.7.1 JUNE

5.7.1.1 LESSON PLAN XIX

Aims: to practice food vocabulary, to revise colours, to practice I like x I don't like

Activities: Taste Testing, Like It or Not

Materials: food: an apple, a carrot, a cucumber, an orange, a banana, a strawberry, a cherry, a tomato, a pear, a radish; other: a knife, a headscarf, a basket, two logs, a puppet

Organization: whole group, on a meadow

Vocabulary: food: an apple, a carrot, a cucumber, an orange, a banana, a strawberry, a cherry, a tomato, a pear, a radish; other: I like x I don't like, revision: colours, "What is it?"

Motivation: *"Children, look what I brought in today – a food basket! Can you name all the food that is here? Some of them are fruits and some of them are vegetable – let's go for Eric, I know he likes this food very much!"* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric; *“Let’s look what is in the basket – hmm, it looks yummy, what is it?”* *“banán”* being the answer. *“Yes, a banana – pass it around the circle and don’t eat it yet!”* *“And what is it?”* *“an apple, let’s say an apple, well done”* *“pass it around”*.

10 minutes – Once all the food is passed around the circle, we divide it into fruits and vegetable. *“Ok, put all the fruits here on the ground”* while explaining what fruits mean. *“a strawberry, a cherry, a banana, an orange, an apple, a pear, that’s all, very good”* *“now, put all the vegetable next to it”* while explaining what vegetable means. *“a carrot, a radish, a cucumber, a tomato, very well done!”* while taking a banana saying *“This banana is red, isn’t it?”* *“Nooo, yellow!”* being children’s answer. *“You’re right, it is yellow, good”*. In this manner, this is done with all the food in order to practice their names and their colours.

10 minutes – Taste Testing – One of the children is blindfolded with a headscarf. He/she is given a piece of fruit (it is suggested to cut oranges, bananas, etc. together with children before the activity). He/she puts the piece to his/her mouth and then guesses what it is. *“an orange!”* this child says (while I am looking at others if they agree or not) *“Is it orange, everybody?”* *“Yes, Jeroným is right! It’s an orange, great!”*

Variation: Children can also distinguish the food not only by tasting it but also by touching it.

10 minutes – Like It or Not – we take two logs and place them far from each other (approximately 5 meters). I take one piece of food (e.g. a cucumber) and say *“Hmm, a cucumber, yes, it’s yummy, I like cucumber”* while I am stroking my tummy and then I place it on one of the logs. Then I take one piece of another food (e.g. an orange) and say *“let’s try an orange, hmm, no, I don’t like oranges”* while I am doing a frowning face and then I place the piece of it on the second log. Children are supposed to do it in a similar way practicing the names of food and the phrase “I like x I don’t like”.

Variation: In the next round of the game, third log can be placed between the other two logs. This log would serve for those children who “don’t mind” certain food, e.g. *“I don’t mind carrots”*.

Evaluation: This lesson enabled the children to touch, see, smell and taste the food while using English vocabulary for most of the time. In other words, experiential learning (see Chapter 4.3.2) was used again. Apart from the youngest children who tried to take the food from the circle sometimes and wanted to either eat or play with it, I must say that the majority of children cooperated very well. Moreover, I found the topic of food together with animals to be the most entertaining one. The children enjoyed the pronunciation of words (e.g. cucumber, strawberry) as well as the word “yummy” while eating the food. The activity ‘Like It or Not’ was hard to

demonstrate at first but as soon as they understood its purpose, the children wanted to continue with it even after the end of the lesson. My focus however, was on children's proper usage of the phrases "I like" and "I don't like" – in a few cases, I needed to correct them when it was evident that they swapped the phrases. To sum up, I think that this lesson (together with 5.5.2.1 Lesson Plan IX) was one of the most successful ones.

5.7.1.2 LESSON PLAN XX

Aims: to follow the instructions, to revise the vocabulary (parts of the body, animals, food, numbers, my family, colours, etc.)

Activities: Touch the Balloon, Table Skittles, Goodbye Song

Materials: a balloon, a small ball, 5 toilet paper rolls, a black marker, crayons, a puppet

Organization: whole group, on a meadow – a flat ground

Vocabulary: a balloon, revision of some of the topics (parts of the body, animals, food)

Motivation: *"Children, are you looking forward to holidays? I knew it! Where are you going to travel? Italy? That sounds great. Don't forget, wherever you are, you can always say "hello!" to anybody. Now, let's say hello to Eric for the last time in this school year."* (expressed in Czech)

Procedure:

5 minutes – Greetings with Eric; *"Children, time is running fast, this is our final lesson, can you believe it?"* (expressed in Czech), *"This activity will test how many words you remember from English."* (expressed in Czech). *"This is a red balloon, come on, help me to blow it up"* while every child is supposed to blow up the balloon for a while. Once the balloon is complete, the warm-up activity may begin.

10 minutes – Touch the Balloon – *"I throw the ball up in the air and who touches it may say any animal he/she knows in English!"* (expressed in Czech) *"Let's try it, three, two, one, fly!"* In this activity, I monitor children's vocabulary, e.g. who says *"a dog"* may say it in Czech afterwards to the ones who did not remember what *"a dog"* means. There is the rule that every child may touch the balloon only once in order to give the opportunity to others.

Variation: topics may be changed in order to revise children's actual vocabulary: parts of the body, colours, numbers, my family, food, etc.

20 minutes – Table Skittles – 5 toilet paper rolls are numbered with a black marker (from one to five). These “table skittles” are then placed on a flat ground. Each number represents a task the children are supposed to do – draw a picture with instructions together with children:

Number 1 – *Sing an English song* (draw a music note)

Number 2 – *Touch your head* (draw a boy touching his head)

Number 3 – *Name three animals* (draw three random animals)

Number 4 – *Name the food you like* (draw one piece of fruit)

Number 5 – *Name your favourite colour* (draw a rainbow with an arrow pointing to one of the colours)

First, we explain all the tasks to children in Czech. Afterwards, children are, one by one, supposed to throw the small ball and hit the skittles. For instance, if someone hits the skittle that has number 3, he/she names three random animals while others check if he/she is correct. Older children may help the younger ones.

The aim of this activity is to practice vocabulary from various topics that run throughout the course.

5 minutes – “*Let’s sing the final song now*” while calling on everybody to sing the song with me:

Goodbye, goodbye, see you soon (while waving our hands)

But not until we sing this tune (pointing to our mouths)

We must part and we must go (turning one hand over on “part” and the other on “go”)

But we will be back to say “hello” (making a big wave with our hands)

See you later alligator (shouting very loudly)

After while crocodile!

Goodbye, Eric!

Evaluation: The last lesson before the holidays aimed to test the children’s actual vocabulary. First, ‘Touch the Balloon’ was the activity that tested the simple vocabulary from various topics that were included throughout the course. Secondly, ‘Table Skittles’ enabled to test their actual knowledge in-depth. This resulted in a useful feedback as I could observe if they learnt the vocabulary and are able to use it properly (with a focus on pronunciation). The majority of children (especially the older ones) showed that they were able come up with at least two words that can be included within a certain topic. Surprisingly enough, the most problematic part of the second activity was to name at least three animals. I noticed that only half of the children could do it. In the end however, together we were able to come up with most of the animals that were presented in the course – first in Czech and later they managed to recall the words in English.

5.8 COURSE SUMMARY

The annual course 'English in Nature' held in Bažinka Forest Kindergarten clearly indicated that it is meaningful, under appropriate conditions, to teach English to pre-school children even in the outdoor environment.

It has been shown in the evaluation parts at each of the lesson plan that the teaching was conducted through an enjoyable, playful and mostly communicative way with usage of natural objects, preferably. The children learnt most of the vocabulary and phrases that were practiced through games and other activities which covered various topics.

Every lesson had a similar structure containing motivation, greetings, warming-up activities, games, TPR activities, storytelling, nursery rhymes, songs, art & craft activities and closing up activities.

Before each lesson, the children were always motivated in order to follow the instructions with a certain enthusiasm and interest. As for their overall development, the children used their cognitive abilities (learning new vocabulary), social habits (interactions within group), emotional expressions (during storytelling especially) and kinetic abilities (frequent movement).

During the course, experiential learning served as a prominent medium through which memorizing of vocabulary has been facilitated. Apart from the traditional approach where a teacher is the main creator of the activities, there were several situations in which child-centred approach has been used. In this respect, the children had the possibility to create rules, game variations, role assignment, etc. However, it is good to mention that there was no problem with misbehaviour at all.

A strong and mutual relationship has been built during the course which was reflected in the form of a friendly and inspiring atmosphere. Therefore, the children felt secure and were always praised for their efforts which gave them confidence in what they have learned.

After the course, I managed to meet with their parents to discuss whether they practice English at home. Most of them told me that they practice some of the vocabulary used in the course at least twice a week. Moreover, they shared with me a few situations in which their children used English words from the course.

Finally, the main goals of the course have been fulfilled. However, in the context of the thesis, I can only hope that thanks to the course will these children maintain a positive attitude towards learning the languages as well as towards the learning in general. Considering the fact that nature did not serve as mere scenery but as a natural instrument for learning and teaching, I hope that this course led the children towards the appreciation of nature as well.

6 CONCLUSION

The thesis presented the seemingly inappropriate interconnection between the both phenomena of teaching English in pre-school education and forest kindergartens in order to explore whether it is meaningful to design and implement English course in outdoor conditions. The first four theoretical chapters introduced the terms that laid the foundations for the ‘English in Nature’ course described in Chapter 5.

The first chapter introduced four main developmental processes which were seen as important when learning a foreign language together with general principles of teaching English to pre-school children. In this respect, motivation, proper usage of mother tongue and target language as well as TPR approach were examined during the course.

The following chapter defined the term ‘course’ and, similarly to the first chapter, it described its general management and design principles. The importance of usage of proper language games within the course are described afterwards. Again, all of this has been examined during the ‘English in Nature’ course.

The next two chapters were devoted to the both phenomena of nature as a potential environment for education and forest kindergartens. The aim was to point to the fact that although the outdoor-based education is seen as beneficial for children of pre-school age, this type of education is still in its infancy. In our country especially, forest kindergartens as well as outdoor-based education are the issue of the last few years. Therefore, there is still not enough of appropriate methodology for teachers that would seek to help to create proper background to these phenomena in these days.

Nevertheless, the learning environment of Bažinka Forest Kindergarten served as a place for meeting with English language, always once a week throughout the seasons and despite its all natural conditions. Within the frame of the annual course ‘English in Nature’, it has been revealed that children enjoyed activities and games that were conducted preferably in English regarding the fact that they not only did become active participants from the very beginning of the course but they also remained so until the end of it. As simple as it may seem, this answered the question asked in thesis’ Introduction concerning whether it was possible to create adequate English course for pre-school children that is ‘nestled’ in natural environment.

However, the examples shown in lesson plans below should not be seen as the only possibilities. Teachers should be aware that the different needs, skills, environments, ages and sizes of a particular group often require creating alterations to lesson plans, adapting them as appropriate.

Although the thesis showed that learning in a natural environment is beneficial for children in many ways, the proper survey on teaching English outdoors has not been done yet. Nevertheless, children of this age may be introduced to English language through outdoor activities that are enjoyable, playful and communicative.

Finally, the thesis introduced the topic of outdoor-based education closer and showed that teaching English language to very young children may be, under certain conditions, meaningful even when held outdoors.

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APPENDICES

Appendix no.1: Mr. Eric – the crocodile puppet













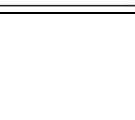

Appendix no.2: Listen and Draw – The Colours of Rainbow



Appendix no.3: Art & Craft – Our Colourful Tree



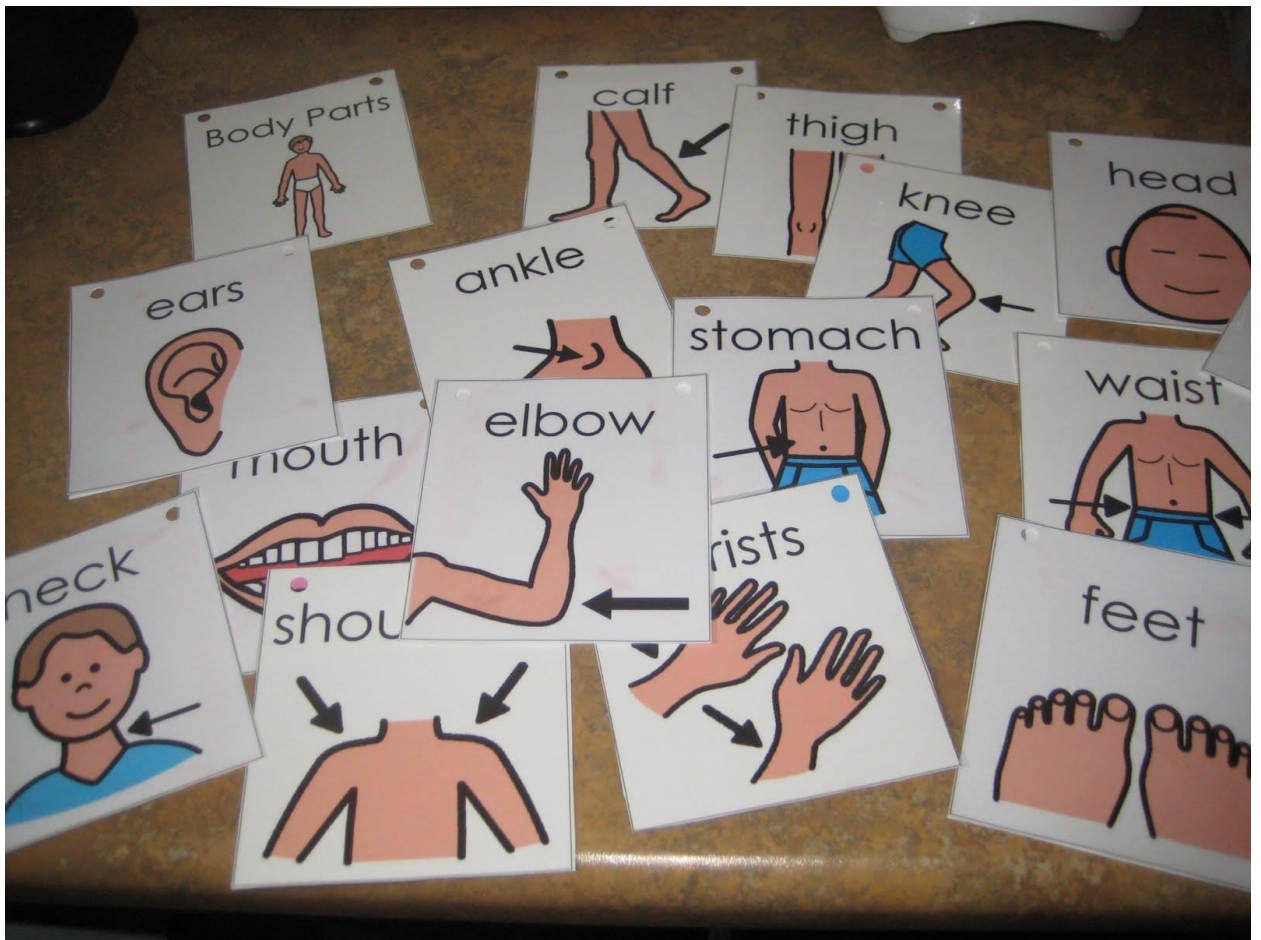
Appendix no.4: Worksheet – Dress Up the Snowman!

	<p>Hat</p> 
	<p>Scarf</p> 
	<p>1 Button</p> 
	<p>Carrot Nose</p> 
	<p>1 Stick arm</p> 
	<p>1 Button</p> 

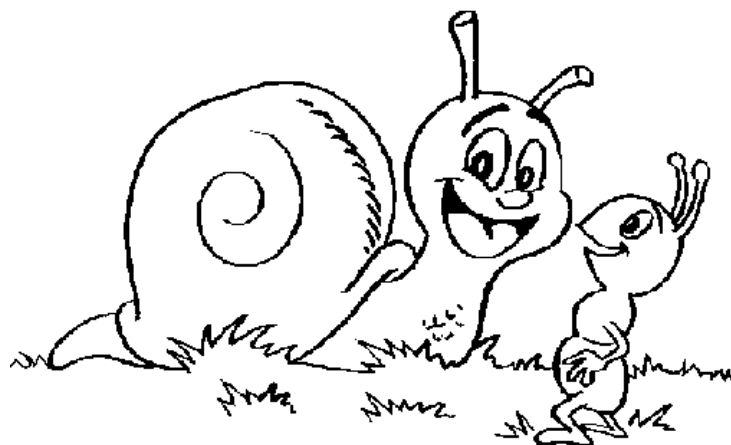
Appendix no.5: Flashcards – Family Members



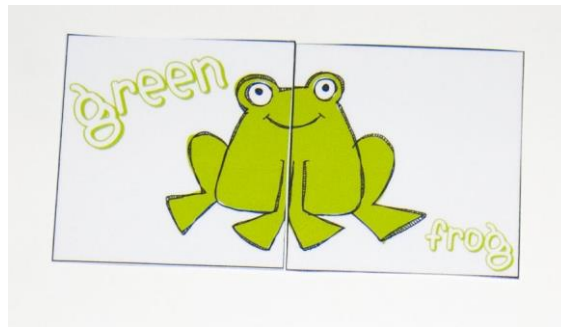
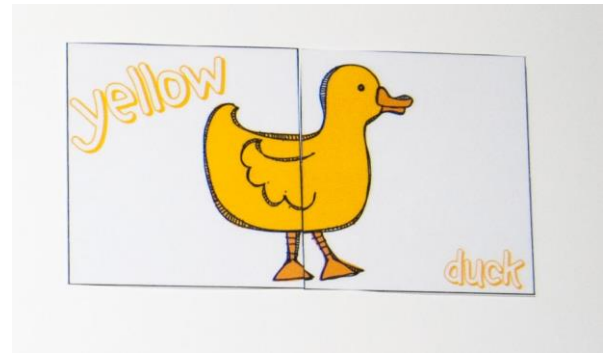
Appendix no.6: Flashcards – Parts of the Body



Appendix no.7: Black and white picture of ant and snail



Appendix no.8: Flashcards – Local Animals



Appendix no.9: Learning Environment – Kindergarten's caravan (the view from inside)



Appendix no.10: Learning Environment of Bažinka Forest Kindergarten in winter



Appendix no.11: Learning Environment of Bažinka Forest Kindergarten in summer



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

e.g.	exempli gratia (for example)
etc.	et cetera (so forth)
i.e.	id est (that is)
ibid.	ibidem (in the same place)

RESUMÉ

Závěrečná diplomová práce se zaměřuje na vyučování anglického jazyka v předškolním vzdělávání a jeho následné aplikaci v lesní mateřské škole.

Na základě uvedené literatury jsou nejdříve představeny principy vyučování anglického jazyka v předškolním vzdělávání, posléze jsou zpracovány zásady tvorby anglického kroužku, a taktéž je objasněn termín venkovní vzdělávání. Závěr této části se věnuje obecně lesním mateřským školám a poté konkrétně té, ve které je kroužek uskutečněn.

Záměrem praktické části je navržení, uskutečnění a analýza kroužku „Angličtina v přírodě“ vedený během jednoho roku v lesní mateřské škole Bažinka. Tato část tedy zahrnuje podrobně zpracovaný obsah jednotlivých lekcí tohoto kroužku.

Hlavním záměrem této práce je poukázat na smysluplnost vyučování anglického jazyka u dětí předškolního věku s využitím venkovního prostředí.

ANOTACE

Jméno a příjmení:	Ludvík Kalibán
Katedra:	Katedra anglického jazyka
Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Josef Nevařil, Ph.D.
Rok obhajoby:	2015

Název práce:	Vyučování anglického jazyka v předškolním vzdělávání a jeho aplikace v lesní mateřské škole
Název v angličtině:	Teaching English language in pre-school education and its application to a forest kindergarten
Anotace práce:	Náplní diplomové práce je na základě shromážděných poznatků navrhnout, realizovat a analyzovat kroužek „Angličtina v přírodě“ vedený během jednoho roku v lesní mateřské škole Bažinka. Teoretická část představuje nejprve principy vyučování anglického jazyka u dětí předškolního věku, posléze zpracovává zásady tvorby kroužku, a taktéž se věnuje pojmu venkovní vzdělávání. Závěr této části je věnován obecně lesním mateřským školám a poté konkrétně té, ve které je kroužek uskutečněn. Praktická část zahrnuje podrobně zpracovaný obsah jednotlivých lekcí kroužku „Angličtina v přírodě“. Jejím cílem je poukázat na smysluplnost vyučování anglického jazyka u dětí předškolního věku s využitím venkovního prostředí.
Klíčová slova:	Předškolní vzdělávání, lesní mateřská škola, anglický jazyk, jazykové hry, prostředí k učení, přírodní prostředí, venkovní vzdělávání, zážitkové učení, kroužek, vyučovací lekce.
Anotace v angličtině:	The aim of the thesis is to design, implement and analyze ‘English in Nature’ course that has been held during the whole year in Bažinka Forest Kindergarten. The theoretical part first introduces the principles of teaching English language to pre-school children, compiles the design principles of the course and also deals with the concept of outdoor-based education. The end of this part is devoted to forest kindergartens, namely the one in which the course is held. The practical part provides the lesson plans of ‘English in Nature’ course with their content elaboration in detail. The aim of this part is to point out the meaningfulness of teaching English language to pre-

	school children in the outdoor environment.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Pre-school education, forest kindergarten, English language, language games, learning environment, natural environment, outdoor-based education, experiential learning, course, lesson plans.
Přílohy vázané v práci:	Fotografie, obrázky
Rozsah práce:	93 s., 6 s. příloh
Jazyk práce:	AJ