

Teacher experiences of democracy in the classroom: does the increased demand for
“democracy skills” arise out of a vacuum?

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Tiivistelmä

Tutkielman tavoite on valottaa syitä kansallisissa opetussuunnitelmissa kasvavissa määrin painotettuun demokratiataitojen kysyntään. Tutkielma keskittyy kahden suomalaisen englanninopettajan haastatteluihin. Tutkielmassa käytetty data koostuu suomen kielellä nauhoitettujen haastattelujen pohjalta tehtyihin transkriptioihin, jotka käännettiin englanniksi. Demokratiaan liittyvistä aiheista kuten äänestäminen, syrjäytyminen, suomettuminen ja sosiaalinen media keskustellaan myös.

Tutkielma kokoaa valikoiman aikalaistutkimuksia ja -teoriaa demokraattisiin opetusmenetelmiin liittyen opettajien haastatteluiden analysoinnin mahdollistamiseksi. Tutkimusmenetelmä koostuu Givenin (2008) hahmottamasta temaattisesta analyysistä. Tutkimusdataa käsiteltiin ensin huolellisen lähiluennan avulla, jonka jälkeen sen sisältö jaettiin toistuvasti esiintyviin teemoihin. Lopuksi sisältöä analysoitiin aiemman demokratiataitojen akateemisen teorian kontekstissa. Analyysi nojautuu van Lierin (2004) artikkelin ja Bernsteinin (2000) luomiin teorioihin ja termistöön. Haastatteluita tarkastellaan demokraattisen pedagogian oikeuksien valossa. Nämä oikeudet ovat oikeus henkilökohtaiseen kehitykseen, oikeus sosiaaliseen inklusioon ja oikeus osallistumiseen (Bernstein 2000).

Löydökset osoittavat, että opettajat ovat hyvin perehtyneitä demokratian historiaan, ideaaleihin ja metodeihin. Heidän hypoteesinsa kasvaneen demokratiataitojen kysynnän suhteen ovat kasvava syrjäytyneisyys ja sosiaalisen median vaikutus yhteiskunnalliseen koheesioon.

Löydökset tukevat englannin kielen uniikkia roolia oppilaiden valmistamisessa kasvavan monimutkaiseen poliittiseen- ja mediaympäristöön, jossa demokratiaa käytännössä harjoitetaan. Demokratia ja demokratiataidot hyötyvät ilmiöinä valtavasti yhteisen globaalin kielen käytöstä, mikä tekee englannin luokkahuoneesta erityisen hyvän kontekstin demokratiataitojen harjoittelemiselle.

Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to gain clarity on the reasons for the increase in the demand of democracy skills, as they appear on the national Finnish school curricula. The study focuses on interviews given in Finnish by two English language teachers in Finland. The data utilized in the study consists of transcriptions made on the basis of recorded interview audio, which were then translated to English. Adjacent topics relating to democracy such as voting, social exclusion, Finlandization and social media are also discussed.

The thesis compiles a selection of contemporary academic research and theory on democratic teaching methods in an effort to analyze the interviews given by the teachers. The methodology of the study consists of thematic analysis as outlined by Given (2008). The data was subjected to a deep close reading, arranged based on the themes that appear and analyzed in the context of prior theory on democracy skills. The analysis builds upon the work of Leo van Lier (2004), and especially his work on the semiotics and ecology of language learning. The study leans heavily on Bernstein's (2000) taxonomy on the rights of democratic pedagogy: the right to individual enhancement, the right to social inclusion and the right to participate.

The findings illustrate that the teachers are well initiated into the history, ideals and methods of democracy. As for their hypotheses concerning the increase in the demand of democracy skills, the role of growing social exclusion among the Finnish youth is proposed. The effect of social media on the social cohesion of society at large is also proposed as a potential causal factor.

The findings highlight the unique role of the English language in preparing the students for the increasingly complex political and media environment in which democracy is played out. Democracy as a phenomenon and the development of democracy skills also benefit immensely from a shared global language. This makes the English classroom a particularly well-adapted context for practicing democracy skills.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this master's thesis will be to do its part in revitalizing the discussion surrounding Finnish democracy as a phenomenon, and more importantly to provide a venue for teachers already in the workforce to report their observations in an anonymous fashion. In addition, the recorded thoughts and ideas of the teachers will be frozen in time, and hopefully serve as a form of evergreen historical documentation for future generations to study. It is worthy of noting, that the timing and theme of the study coinciding with the opening shots of the Russo-Ukrainian war helped make the discussion of democracy uniquely tangible and vivid. The Finnish national school curricula have been the subject on multiple revisions in recent history, and among the most significant additions were notable increases in the amount of times democracy skills are mentioned. It is poignant to emphasize, that the apparent growing demand and need for democracy skills is likely not born out of a vacuum and it can be hypothesized, that developments in the areas of social interaction, global as well as Finnish national politics, and political culture as a whole have contributed to the experienced shift in the civilizational philosophies of our time. What is democracy then, and what are the necessary prerequisites a group of individuals need to adhere to in order for their collective to be called a democracy? Where are its roots?

An idea as abstract as democracy could be argued to arise out of the human need for co-operation, which has its basis in the millions of years of mammal evolution behind us. Although the phenomenon has likely manifested itself in innumerable smaller collectives throughout the unwritten as well as written human history, as a refined code of ethics and conventions it is most often seen to have had its genesis in the powerful city states that arose on the northern shores of the Mediterranean in deep antiquity. As a form of societal philosophy, democracy is most often attributed to the ancient Greeks, who outlined the most important aspects of the democratic arrangement as the rule of the masses — made possible by the right to opinion, debate and vote (Thorley, 2004). The original conception of Greek democracy however, allowed the vote for only males that had completed their military training — making their arrangement lackluster when compared to its modern implementation in hindsight, although it is not completely fair to impose our modern social etiquette on the ancients.

It is fair to posit that democracy has met a crossroads moment in the 21st century as evidenced by nations that formerly celebrated ideals of democracy sliding further towards authoritarian customs and attitudes — and that grassroots level democracy seems to be one of the few antidotes to the expansion of the state observable everywhere. Although democracy provides solutions to many of

the problems we face today, as a social and governmental phenomenon it relies almost solely on the virtuosity of its constituents, which means that the worldviews and attitudes of the citizens largely dictate the composition of social norms, venues of interaction and ultimately the values of their elected leaders.

This paper will start with a brief review of literature and classical authors detailing the understanding of democracy in past eras. Beyond this, the paper will compile and synthesize a selection of philosophical, societal and practical viewpoints from contemporary academic literature regarding the instillation of democratic values via the institution of public schooling. The largest portion of the thesis will consist of the analysis and comparison of two interviews, given by established English language teachers regarding the phenomenon of student democracy skills and how these skills are taught. In addition, adjacent topics resting under the umbrella term of democracy raised by the teachers are visited and expanded upon. These topics include but are not limited to; the modern sociopolitical atmosphere, social media, Finlandization, Soviet Union & Russia, the information economy and social exclusion.

The link between English language and democracy is a complex phenomenon. In addition, the nature of the symbiosis between the English language and democracy differs between populations, as well as first and second language speakers. It is fair to proclaim, that English has secured its place as the global language of our time and the world events that will be played out in its terms are likely to be historical. It is for this reason, that the teaching of the language should be approached with the nuance, respect and care it deserves — especially since foreign languages in general present us with a unique gateway into the cultural wisdom and wealth of other populations. In the modern global setting, it is an absolutely vital part of participating in some of the most important discussions and events of our era, and the seemingly rare opportunity to partake in the creations of a truly global language will help otherwise distant nations and cultures understand and appreciate each other. Co-operation in the fields of science, politics and economy represents the building of bridges between otherwise separate civilizations, although the golden days of this era seem to already be behind us.

2. Data and methodology

The process began with seeking out two English language teachers, who were interested in giving an interview relating to the topic of democracy skills and democracy as a whole.

The primary data, which was subjected to further analysis consisted of recorded material from the interview-sessions. The Microsoft teams interviews were recorded with a software called Open Broadcaster Software (OBS), which was utilized to capture audio during the live online meetings. There are numerous ethical and privacy concerns relating to the recording, storage and deletion of personal identifiers and data, but these will be described later in further detail. The data utilized in this study fully consists of the text transcribed from audio files recorded during the interviews.

Since the main effort of the study consists of close reading and analysis of the recorded interviews, the chosen methodology for this study ended up being qualitative thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a great fit for the study, since it is a flexible tool for organizing the interview material based on what kinds of themes appear in the data (Given, 2008, pp. 78, 80). Braun and Clarke elaborate on how “Qualitative content analysis is sometimes referred to as latent content analysis. This analytic method is a way of reducing data and making sense of them — of deriving meaning. It is a commonly used method of analyzing a wide range of textual data, including interview transcripts” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, as cited in Given, 2008, p. 121). There are two primary ways to conduct thematic analysis: inductive and theoretical (Given, 2008, p. 121). The inductive approach is characterized by what is organically brought up by the interviewees (Given, 2008, p. 121), and as such serves the purposes of this study better — although the analysis and breakdown of the interviews will be grounded in the theoretical framework of prior literature. Content analysis is well suited for identifying conscious, as well as unconscious messages communicated by the transcripts. It is especially adept at addressing what is stated explicitly, “as well as what is implied or revealed by the manner in which content is expressed. The results of a content analysis may reveal recurrent instances of “items” or themes, or they may reveal broader discourses” (Given, 2008, p. 122). The interview material was first subjected to a deep close reading in order to uncover contextual and latent content contained within the data. This was done in order to understand the phenomenon, as well as the participants’ experiences in the wider context of the Finnish schooling system (Given, 2006, p. 122). In the premise of this study, it is fair to argue, that the aim of the applied methodology is to extract information from the experienced teachers in order to understand the phenomenon of grassroots democratic behavior — with the hope that the synthesis of the data will help make the researcher and reader a better democratic educator.

The primary object of analysis in this study are two recorded interviews of veteran English language teachers. The interview format was semi-structured, meaning it was built around a selection of guiding questions with free-form discussion making up the majority of the session.

The five shared questions presented to both interviewees in the course of their interviews were the following:

1. What is your definition of the term democracy?
2. What are the boundaries within which collective and individual action has to take place in order for the given social organization to be called a democracy?
3. The Finnish national school curricula have (rather) recently described the need for an increased attention regarding democracy skills of the students. What are your thoughts regarding this change?
4. Have you observed any developments in the readiness or capability of students to engage each other in a democratic fashion during your career as a teacher?
5. What kinds of approaches would you wish were implemented in pursuit of such a goal? At what level of legislative authority and organization would you like these changes to be implemented?

The overarching aim of the questions is to leave as much of the stage to the teachers without leading on the participant on with suggestive questions. The list of questions was designed not to be too exhaustive, since it might have taken away from interesting organic discourse relating to adjacent topics and phenomena the teachers might have observed.

An interview-format study such as this, naturally has many kinds of nuanced ethical considerations that have to be undertaken. There are questions regarding the recording, storage and deletion of interview material, as well as questions related to anonymity of the participants, in an attempt to protect them from undue pressure within their social group or work organization. Furthermore, there are a myriad of interview conventions that could be considered to be in constitute what can only be called “good taste”. This is to emphasize, that the topic at hand is fruitful ground for personal beliefs and political commitments. As a first line of prevention, the questions of the interview will be phrased in the most open-ended and neutral fashion in order to prevent swaying

the participant answers. The goal is to provide a safe and neutral venue through which the teachers can express their views, hopes and fears regarding the Finnish school system as well as its constituents.

The teachers were provided with written consent forms and details of the collection, storage and destruction of interview material. Another key consideration is the way in which the recorded interview material is transcribed, translated and destroyed. Since the interviews were conducted in Finnish (in order to ensure the interviewees were able to express their observations and hypotheses in the most nuanced way possible). Following Song (2012), special attention was directed at the process of choosing which parts of the recorded interview are chosen to make it onto the final draft, since it was not sensible to transcribe and translate all of the recorded material.

Song (2012) posits, that transcripts, as secondary to the original recordings, dissect interaction into smaller and more manageable segments and present them according to the particular epistemological approaches to data analysis. Transcripts are used to represent, validate, accrue, or share features of the specific talk, dialogue, and conversation under investigation “(p. 2). This is a relevant consideration, since the data gathered from the interviews, will have to be transcribed from speech to text. Song (2012) goes on to describe, how “The definition of a transcript or what it should contain varies among researchers as well as across disciplines. Transcription involves two processes: an interpretative process (what is transcribed) and a representational process (how it is transcribed) (Green et al., 1997)” Song (2012) talks in further detail, how “Consequently transcription is selective, purposeful, political, and ongoing in nature. Transcription is selective because researchers decide to transcribe and analyze a particular phenomenon of talk according to specific research questions and analytical needs” (p. 4). In order to alleviate at least some of these problems, the interviewees were offered the opportunity to prepare written statements to the presented questions and the state of democracy skills in the Finnish school system. Neither of the participants however, provided long-form answers after the interviews.

3. Democracy skills in the Finnish national school curriculum

The most recent 2019 update to the national Finnish high-school curriculum features multiple allusions to the need to catalyze democratic behavior and attitudes as a comprehensive goal of all offered courses. Naturally, some school subjects provide more ample grounds for discussions regarding the philosophy of democracy, while others are more suited for the practical application democratic activities (such as voting, debate and compromise). In the interest of understanding the wide-ranging goals of the curriculum, a translation of the core tenets is warranted. The following extract is from the Finnish high-school curriculum of 2019, which has been officially implemented on the 1st of August 2021:

Opiskelijan monimuotoiset osallistumis-, vaikuttamis- ja työkokemukset sekä niiden reflektointi ovat yhteiskunnallisen osaamisen lähtökohtana. Opinnot syventävät opiskelijan ymmärrystä omasta roolistaan, vastuustaan ja mahdollisuuksistaan tukea demokratian monimuotoista toteutumista ympäröivässä yhteiskunnassa ja yhteistyössä muiden kanssa. Yhteiskunnallinen osaaminen tukee opiskelijaa hänen suuntautuessaan jatko-opintoihin, työelämään ja kansalaistoimintaan. Yhteiskunnallisen osaamisen myötä opiskelija sisäistää yritteliään ja uudistumishenkisen asenteen eri elämänaueilla. Hän harjaantuu suunnittelemaan tulevaisuuttaan avarakatseisesti sekä rohkaistuu ottamaan perusteltuja riskejä ja sietämään epävarmuutta, turhautumista ja epäonnistumisia. Opiskelija oppii ymmärtämään ja arvostamaan demokraattisen, oikeudenmukaisen sekä tasa-arvoon ja yhdenvertaisuuteen perustuvan yhteiskunnan toimintaperiaatteita ja rakenteita. Hän ymmärtää, miten yhteinen sosiaalinen pääoma muodostuu ja miten sitä voi kartuttaa. Opiskelija omaksuu aktiivisen kansalaisuuden ja toimijuuden taitoja. Hän motivoituu ottamaan kantaa yhteiskunnallisiin kysymyksiin ja tekemään aloitteita sekä viemään niitä eteenpäin yhteistyössä paikallisesti ja kansainvälisesti. Opiskelijan oman työn merkitystä hyvän tulevaisuuden rakentamisessa tehdään näkyväksi. (Opetushallitus, 2019, pp. 63–64)

The English translation of the curriculum section regarding overarching civic mentoring reads as follows. Note that these are not official translations, but rather ones made by the author.

Reflection on multifaceted participatory and influencing opportunities, as well as work experience act as the starting point for societal skills. The studies will deepen the students understanding of their role, responsibility and opportunities in supporting the

fruition of diverse democracy in co-operation with the surrounding society. These societal skills will support the students when they orient themselves towards further education, work life and civic activities. Internalizing these societal skills will help the students embody an industrious and regenerative philosophy in different aspects of their life. The students learn to better plan their future in an open-minded fashion, are emboldened to take reasonable risks and develop resilience to uncertainty, frustration and failure. The student learns to understand and appreciate the just and equal conventions, which characterize a democratic society. He/she understands how common social capital is generated and how it can be accumulated further. The students adopt skills that allow them to be active and constructive citizens. The students are motivated to voice their opinions on societal matters, as well as encouraged to organize initiatives on the local and international levels. The effort of the students in bringing about a better future are made visible.

In a section titled “interactional skills” the curriculum describes in detail the overarching customs and attitudes, which the Finnish school organization aims to instill in the way students interact with each other and the world:

Hyvän vuorovaikutuksen lähtökohta on myötätunto, joka mahdollistaa merkityksellisyyden kokemisen. Opiskelija saa kokea kuuluvansa lukioyhteisöön, ja hän tulee kuulluksi omana itsenään. Opiskelija kehittää vuorovaikutusosaamistaan tunnistamalla, käsittelemällä ja säätelemällä tunteitaan. Hän oppii myös kuuntelemaan, kunnioittamaan ja ennakoimaan toisten tunteita ja näkemyksiä sekä niiden ilmaisuja. Hän oppii käyttämään tunteita voimavarana vuorovaikutuksessa. Vuorovaikutusta opitaan yhdessä ja yhteistyössä sekä erilaisissa ympäristöissä. Samalla opiskelijat kehittävät kielitietoisuuttaan ja monilukutaitoaan. He ymmärtävät niiden keskeisen merkityksen tiedon tuottamisessa ja tulkinnassa sekä ratkaisujen etsimisessä. Vuorovaikutusosaaminen tukee opiskelijoita heidän asettaessaan tavoitteita opiskelulle ja muulle toiminnalleen. Lukio-opinnot antavat opiskelijalle valmiuksia rakentavaan vuorovaikutukseen. Hän syventää kykyään käsitellä ristiriitoja ja konflikteja rakentavasti ja myös sovittelun keinoin. Opiskelija saa kokemuksia toiminnasta viestien ja merkitysten välittäjänä myös kieli- ja kulttuurirajoja ylittävässä vuorovaikutuksessa. Vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittämisessä pohditaan sananvapauden merkitystä, sen vastuullista käyttöä sekä tiedonkäsitelmien ja tiedonvälityksen muuttumista

eri näkökulmista. Opiskelija hahmottaa rakentavan vuorovaikutuksen ja kulttuurienvälisen ymmärryksen merkityksen kestäväälle tulevaisuudelle, demokratialle ja rauhalle. (Opetushallitus, 2019, pp. 62–63)

The English translation reads as follows:

The starting point for quality interaction is compassion, which makes it possible to experience meaning. The student gets to feel like he/she is a part of the high school community, and he/she gets to be heard as themselves. The student develops his/her interactional skills by recognizing, dealing with and regulating their feelings. He/she also learns to listen, respect and anticipate the feelings of others and views, as well as different way they are expressed. The student learns to use feelings as an asset in interactions. Interactional skills are learned together and in co-operation in differing circumstances. At the same the students develop their language awareness and multi-literacy skills. They understand its key importance in producing information, interpreting information and finding solutions. Interaction skills support the students as they set goals regarding their studies as well as other activities. High school studies give the student the capability to interact in a constructive manner. He/she deepens his/her ability to handle contradictions and conflict in a constructive manner and also ways to mediate them. The student acquires experience as the mediator of messages and meaning in settings that cross lingual and cultural borders. When developing interactional skills, the meaning of freedom of expression, as well as its responsible use is explored. The changes in the internalization and transfer of information are also explored from multiple viewpoints. The student is to perceive the importance of constructive interaction and cross-cultural understanding to a sustainable future, as well as the preservation of democracy and peace.

These paragraphs dedicated to expanding upon what the national school board means with democracy skills, comprises a rather comprehensive set of goals and general life philosophy. Special emphasis is placed on the notion, that students need to be offered multifaceted opportunities to engage with their own community in the micro scale, as well as the larger society in its macro scale. In the context of the English classroom, especially the mentioned “importance of constructive interaction and cross-cultural understanding to a sustainable future, as well as the preservation of democracy and peace” stands out as an inherent strength. There are few things more powerful at closing the gaps between cultures, than investing in a common language. Possessing the ability to proficiently communicate in English will surely increase the amount of multicultural, and

multilingual encounters, which will in turn help bring more complete democracy into fruition. Many themes such as this, share a great deal in common with the ideas of the academics of democracy such as van Lier (2004), whose work will be visited in further detail in the upcoming section.

4. Review of prior literature

This portion of the thesis will contain the literature review, which aims to compile and present a selection of relevant prior research in the field of pedagogy and democracy. The articles contain ideas regarding the role of school and the teachers in embodying democratic values and modes of behavior in their everyday work, as well as useful exploration of the different approaches available to educators. Leo van Lier describes ideas connecting language pedagogy and democracy in his 2004 essay *The semiotics and ecology of language learning*. Ideas of authors who have previously considered the synergistic relationship of a language classroom and democracy will surely be useful in mapping out the dimensions of such a vastly abstract notion as democracy skills. Perhaps the primary contribution of van Lier's 2004 paper is the description of what he calls "a semiotic and ecological approach to language learning" (p. 79). The distinguishing features of a semiotic and ecological approach to language learning are the inclusion of context — physical, social and symbolic — which he argues are necessary components of in the creation of learning opportunities (p. 79). Van Lier's (2004) paper seems to be an attempt to synthesize key problems regarding the pedagogical processes discussed by intellectuals of pedagogy and democracy respectively. To begin, he raises the question of "What does it mean to aspire to, to advocate, and to implement a democratic education? And what does it mean to do so in a second or foreign language classroom?" (2004, p. 79). Van Lier begins by dividing the notion of a democratic education into two primary branches. The macro perspective refers to the project of educating democratic citizens so that they might partake in democratic societies — bringing about social change within the confines laid out by the philosophers and intellectuals of democracy and classical liberalism. The complimentary micro perspective refers to the pursuit of fostering democratic modes of behavior among students via the inclusion of democratic learning processes in the classroom. Van Lier (2004) posits, that the two perspectives are intimately related and even depend on each other in the formation on "the democratic personality" (p. 80).

Van Lier (2004) cites Westheimer and Kahne in dividing citizens to three primary classes: the personally responsible, the participatory and the justice oriented. The psychosocial profile of the personally responsible has him/her acting responsibly in the community, obeying laws, recycling and volunteering. A participatory citizen is characterized by his/her active role in the community and in organizing efforts. The justice-oriented individual turns his keen critical eye on the social, political and economic spheres of influence — seeking to bring about positive change with compelling rhetoric and social movements.

Van Lier (2004) argues against the dumbing down of language teaching via the removal of cultural context with the following four paraphrased tenets:

- 1.) “Language is always about something, so it might as well be about something of consequence” (p.82). The audience should naturally have a say in what kinds of topics are introduced to the classroom setting.
- 2.) The development of a proficient second language speaker requires the development of a parallel identity in order to act in the new “semiotic reality”. These in turn help create the new “voice”, which makes it possible to be heard and have “something of consequence to say” (p.82).
- 3.) Introducing topics of consequence makes gives language learning a more believable and multidimensional context(s) than traditional textbook settings would. This helps push the boundaries of linguistic and philosophical exploration.
- 4.) Actually using the language in unscripted exercises and conversations is key to developing a fleshed out sense of “true self-other dialogue and voice in the L2 [second language]” (p.82).

Van Lier (2004) refers to the democratic pedagogy taxonomy of rights created by Bernstein (2000).

Firstly *individual enhancement*, refers to the experiencing of past and future possibilities for growth, within the boundaries of curricula. This right is essential for the condition of confidence in the educational process (2004, p.84).

The second right, *social inclusion*, is the right to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally (this includes the right to autonomy within the system).

Inclusion is essential for the condition of *communitas*, and operates at the social level (2004, p.84).

The third right is the right to participate in practices with specific outcomes, i.e., the right to participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of order. This is the condition for civic practice, and operates at the political level (Bernstein 2000, pp. xx-xxi).

Van Lier (2004) then goes on to bring attention to the notion, that multiple disciplines of democratic behavior need to be instilled in the school setting for the grassroots phenomenon of civic activity to prosper. In layman’s terms: simply preaching about morals of the importance of abiding the laws might disregard important aspects such as “confidence, *communitas* and civic practice” (van Lier,

2004, p.84). In addition to this, it is reasonable to argue, that a healthy understanding of the role of civil disobedience in a healthy democracy should be elaborated on with the nuance it deserves. The rule of law is not always moral, and this can easily be highlighted with the examples of apartheid laws and segregationist laws from the past century among many other tragedies of history. The defining qualities of a democratic educator are described in the following way: “The democratic educator is one who instigates democratizing processes at the interactional level in the classroom, and who knows at the same time what the constraints are that operate in the setting in terms of power and control. In a sense, then, an ecological approach, coupled with an analysis of existing socio-political and institutional conditions, is a form of subversive pedagogy (see Postman & Weingartner’s (1969) call to arms, all of 35 years ago, for suggestions along similar lines).” (van Lier, 2004, p. 86)

Stray and Sætra (2017) present their theories regarding the teaching of democracy skills in the school system. The work originates from the Norwegian school curriculum update from the years 2016-2017 and focuses primarily on the problems in implementing the teaching of democracy skills as they are translated from theoretical frameworks to practical applications. The article seeks to address problems and disparities between the theory of teaching democracy and the practice of such an abstract undertaking. Much like the Finnish education institutions, Norwegian authorities of education have a lengthy history and interest in producing democratically minded citizens, which becomes evident via the school curriculum and the learning goals of individual subjects. In order to alleviate the shortage of democratic learning theory, Stray and Sætra (2017) propose a theoretical framework called “Transformative Learning Theory” (TLT) (2017, pp. 1-2).

To begin, the authors recognize a need to transfer key social values and modes of action to future generations, so that a democratic form of state rule and way of life could continue to persist. Democracy by its inherent nature, is not a phenomenon one can simply observe and support from the sidelines. If a certain populace wants a functional democratic societal mode to persist, individuals citizens are required to partake in the multiple grassroots phenomena in an active manner. According to Stray and Sætra (2017), the Norwegian educational authorities have identified the most important qualities of a democratic citizen as follows:

- 1.) The ability to communicate with others
- 2.) The ability to understand alternate viewpoints
- 3.) The ability to think in a critical manner (pp. 10–11)

In addition to these defining qualities of a democratic citizen, the school curriculum ought to mandate, that public schools train the students in skills of participation, co-operation and liberal skills and open-mindedness. The aim of catalyzing these values is to make the students willing to respect and defend the rights of others as well as their own — as these always go hand in hand.

A certain Norwegian Ludvigsen-committee founded in 2015 took aim at defining the most important aspects of democracy skills and the way they could be taught (Stray and Sætra, 2017). The committee elaborates on their term democratic competence, which consists of communicative and interactive competence and well as participatory competence. The committee posits, that democratic competence quite simply describes the ability of an individual to act, live and problem solve in a co-operative manner with other individuals in their community. In order for citizens to participate in such a social arrangement, they have to possess sufficient information on the political arrangements and human rights-conventions of their respective community. Democratic competence is understood to contain communication skills, the ability to articulate opinions and the ability to actively listen to the opinions of others. The Ludvigsen committee (2017) draws special attention to the ability of leading conversations in a way, that encourages the sharing of all viewpoints in hopes of reaching a compromise. Stray and Sætra (2017) recognize the complexity of reliably teaching the aforementioned skills and present testimonies pointing out how many teachers simply lack the time or training to transmit sufficient democratic ideals and skills. As an alleviation to insufficient teacher training the authors propose the implementation of “Transformative Learning Theory” pioneered by Jack Mezirow 40 years ago. The theory is informed by the work of John Dewey, Jürgen Habermas, Paolo Freire, Jeroma Bruner as well as others, and is based on the viewpoints of constructivism, humanism and critical theory. The core idea of the theory could be described as learning, which deeply alters the perspectives of the student in question, which in ideal circumstances leads to more open and justified viewpoints. According to Mezirow (1991), one of the most important aspects of humanity is the creation of meaning based on lived experience. Learning, according to Mezirow (1991) can be defined as a process, where previous interpretations are utilized to create new meaning based on lived experience, which is then used to shape the future actions by the individual (1991, p. 12). Transformative learning then, is the process with which students revise the reference frames they took for granted, making them more inclusive, discerning, open and reflective. With these new modes of behavior, the individual ought to be capable of forming more truthful and justified beliefs — as well as opinions — with which to navigate the world. Looking at the broad picture, the authors argue, that teachers should try to foster a positive, challenging, respectful and inspiring class atmosphere. This kind of psychologically safe

atmosphere lets students take risks with expressing their viewpoints, as well as replying to the viewpoints of others (Gravett, 2001, p. 32).

Interesting balance to the approaches highlighted by Stray and Sætra (2017) is provided by Johnson and Johnson (2016). In their article, the authors argue, that if future generations are to understand their rights and be committed to the responsibilities they entail, the school system needs to surround them with the core processes of democracy on a daily basis. Two of the primary ways of achieving are: 1.) the utilization of co-operative work methods at all stages of the school day, so that the students participate in democratic endeavors. 2.) The constructive utilization of controversial topics in order to develop the political discourse skills of the students. Looking at the broad picture, the article presents a conceptual argument about how surrounding students with the conventions of democracy throughout their school career will help them internalize the values, attitudes and behaviors of a democratic citizen (pp. 1–2). The authors also reference the insight of the enlightenment era French judge, historian, and political philosopher Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu:

De Montesquieu (1748), for example, concluded that while dictatorship survives on the fear of the people and monarchy survives on the loyalty of the people, a free republic (the most fragile of the three political systems) survives on the virtue of the people. Virtue is reflected in the way a person balances his or her own needs with the needs of the society as a whole. Motivation to be virtuous comes from “a sense of belonging, a concern for the whole, a moral bond with the community whose life is at stake.” This moral bond is cultivated by “deliberating with fellow citizens about the common good and helping shape the destiny of the political community. (p. 164)

Vinterek (2010) studied the day-to-day work of a Swedish lower-secondary school teacher, especially with the facets of democratic teaching and attitudes in mind. In her study, she followed a first-grade class for a year, all the way to their second year (p. 372). Vinterek (2010) concludes, that a democracy requires an accepting and respectful community and she presents multiple ways and situations with which the teacher shaped the attitudes and behavior of the students. The phenomena included the following:

- 1.) The willingness to express your own opinions. The study points out, that not all students were capable of expressing their views, or even directly answering questions (p. 374). However, the class teacher was able to encourage even the shy kids to participate in class activities by gently forcing them and providing encouraging feedback. These approaches

also had the effect of permanently increasing the confidence with which the children approached such interactions in the future.

- 2.) The tendency to listen to others. The ability of a teacher to create a respectful atmosphere is brought up multiple times. The most important impact of this approach was that when potential controversy or a conflict began to appear, it was relieved with the help of an open discussion and the aid of other students, who offered to help defuse the situations (p. 375). This type of co-operation and respect towards others seems to be key to democratic group action.
- 3.) Respect and tolerance. The manner in which the class teacher resolved conflict situation was always respectful towards the students — both as individuals and as a collective. These kinds of situation arise in the profession of a teacher on a continuous basis, and the example displayed by the teacher has a massive role in how the children behave in similar situation. With the help of a positive role model, the children learned to respect the classroom space as a whole, as well as other students need for a quiet working environment (2017, p. 376).
- 4.) The development of self-esteem and trusting your own skills. When delivering feedback or advice relating to exercises, the teacher always tailored it to the tendencies of individual students. By emphasizing that the students feel accomplished and happy with their work, the learning goals and level of proficiency were outsourced to the self-confidence and self-esteem of the students. This way the students feel encouraged, and their self-esteem is supported (2017, p. 378).

Among the main shared themes emphasized by these intellectuals of democracy, stands the importance of example and real, tangible contexts with which to practice with. The importance of constructive discourse etiquette, as well as the ability to listen and to accommodate the viewpoints of others — which was stressed by multiple authors. The theories and approaches highlighted by the aforementioned intellectuals play a key part in the upcoming analysis section of this study. Their ideas are revisited and expanded upon in order to draw parallels between them and the real-life anecdotes of the teachers — in the quest to highlight approaches with which to bring about democratic attitudes and modes of behavior at school.

5. Analysis

The following sections will contain the primary research material gathered from two foreign language teachers, who specialize in the English and French languages. They will be referred to as teacher A and teacher B respectively. Teacher A is a female with 10 years of experience in the Finnish school system teaching and teacher B is a male with 18 years of experience. The opposite genders of the interviewees provided an interesting contrast in their answers, although they seem to share a common vision for the future of Finnish society as a whole. They also seem united in their understanding of the importance of democracy skills and the role of the school in instilling them in future generations. The role of the teacher in modeling and displaying democratic virtues also seems to be a shared sentiment between them.

The following transcribed interviews of the two teachers will be presented in two languages, the original Finnish transcript will always be followed by an English translation. It is worthy of noting, that while some linguistic nuance, detail and humor always gets lost in translation, the English translations have been carefully crafted to preserve as much of the personality and spirit of the original as possible. Due to the free-flowing nature of the conversations, some specifying questions were presented to only one of the teachers, which means that the comparison of both answers is not possible. However, the teachers touch upon a lot of adjacent themes in their answers, so there exists some ground for comparative analysis.

5.1 Democracy as a phenomenon

The interview started out with a question seeking out the basic definitions of the phenomena under discussion: Teacher A was presented with the question “How do you define the term democracy?”, to which she answered: “No johan oli matalalla roikkuva hedelmä. Sehän on kansalaisyhteiskunta, jossa kansalaiset saavat osallistua yhteiskunnallisten päätösten tekoon äänestämällä ja monilla muillakin tavoilla.” The English translation reads as follows: “Well that is a certainly a low hanging fruit. A democracy is a civic society where the citizens can participate in societal decision making by voting and a variety of other ways too.”

Teacher A starts out with a basic, yet solid definition of the core processes of democracy, like civic activity and voting. An opportunity for a clarifying question immediately presented itself: “What do you think of when you say: “a variety of other means”?”

(1) Teacher A

No, siinä tulee sitten mieleen just tällainen aktiivisena yhteiskunnan toimijana oleminen. Osallistuminen ja vaikuttaminen monellakin eri tavalla. Esimerkiksi koulussa opettajana voi vaikuttaa aika monella tavalla siihen, miten demokraattisen yhteiskunnan arvoja välitetään. Sittenhän on tietenkin kaikenlaista vapaaehtoistyötä ja muuta aktiivista toimimista — ihan vaikka mielipidekirjoitusten kirjoittamista sanomalehtiin muun muassa.

Translation

I immediately think of being an active participant in your society. Participation and influencing in many different ways. For example you can influence how the values of a democratic society are transferred and realized when working as a teacher. Then of course you have all kinds of charity work and other activities like writing opinion pieces for newspapers for example.

Teacher A lays out some important ways in which to live democracy in the classroom. Among these, the writing of opinion pieces would fit magnificently into an English class as an activity. For example, the students could be asked to first ideate and vote on a selection of topics that they feel strongly about. Following this, they could write their opinion pieces and share them, if they so choose. An activity like this would touch the major bases of democracy skills, as the students would first be involved in constructive discourse and then participate in a vote. Lastly, the students would practice the act of civil participation by creating their opinion piece, which helps them grasp some of the tangible methods of getting their views accommodated in wider society.

Teacher B defined democracy in the following way:

(2) Teacher B

Demokratia. Aika tuota silleen hankala määritellä, että kaikilla on hyvin selvä mielikuva siitä mitä se on. Mutta pistäppä sanoiksi. No tuota tuota. Tietenki se on siis kansanvalta, mutta noin niinku ehkä laajemmin jos nyt ajatellaan koulumaailmaakin. Sen määritelmä ois melkeen semmonen että mitä siihen kuuluu. Siihen kuuluu niinku kaikkien osallistumismahollisuus ainakin päätöksentekoon ja ittee koskeviin asioihin. Tietynlaiset vapaudet niinku vapaus ilmaista mielipidettä ja vapaus nimenomaan vaikuttaa esimerkiksi nyt äänestämällä tai ilmaseamalla muuten mielipidettään.

Translation

Democracy. Quite hard to define, although most people have a pretty clear mental image of what it looks like. How to put it into words. Of course it is the rule of the people, but more generally speaking with the school system in mind the definition could consist of things that characterize it. It includes the ability of everyone to influence decision making and things that impact us. Certain freedoms like the freedom of expression and like I said, the freedom to influence things by voting or expressing our views in other ways.

Teacher A's approach of offering your own viewpoint to the public discussion and making it approachable for the students to express their views is a very wise and for her, a seemingly intuitive way of actively creating a setting in which the students feel free to speak their mind. The practices likely aid in the creation of a positive, challenging, respectful and inspiring class atmosphere, which is identified as one of the more important bits of teacher agency according to Gravett (2001). The importance of an accepting class atmosphere is emphasized by Vinterek (2010) as well. Teacher B's initial definition seems to be a more practical definition of the core phenomenon and its characteristics. Both teachers include in their definitions some tangible examples of ways in which democracy is acted out in their workplaces. It is highly encouraging, that both seem to have spent some time thinking about their responsibility as the model and educator of these virtues.

Teacher B was asked to define the term "democracy skills used in the Finnish national school curriculum:

(3) Teacher B

No justiin näitä asioita mitä mä oon tähänkin mennessä sanonu. Et niinku se lähtee ihan sieltä, että opetetaan siis selventämään omia ajatuksia ylipäänsä itseä koskevista asioista ja sitten opetetaan ilmaseen niitä ajatuksia, mielipiteitä ja opetetaan siihen, että minkälaisia niinku hyväksyttäviä, järkeviä, rakentavia keinoja niitä niinku ajatuksia ja mielipiteitä on tuoda esiin ja sit niinku vaikuttaa asioihin. Sit se ei riitä se, että okei sulla on mielipide ja sä voit sen ilmaista vaan sitten niinku myöskin se, että millä tavalla, mitkä on ne rakentavat tavat tehdä se. Vasta oli ysiluokkalaisten kanssa tästä puhetta. He niinku kritisoi hirveästi pandemian mukana saapuneita ulkuvälitunteja ja sitten halusivat tuota siihen muutoksen ja mä just niinku siihen sitten niinku ohjeistin sitä, että se ei riitä vaan että huutelee tästä asiasta. Pittää niinku ruveta vaikuttamaan tai viemään sitä asiaa eteenpäin ja sitten ne niinku ne vaikuttamisväylät, koska niinku tietyllä tavallahan me mallinnetaan kouluissa

yhteiskunnan laajempiakin vaikuttamiskanavia. Et millä tavalla asioihin voi vaikuttaa. Kaikki nämä siihen mun mielestä kuuluu.

Translation

It all starts with helping students clarify their own thoughts regarding things that influence them and then we teach them to express their thoughts and opinions. We also teach them acceptable, smart and constructive ways to bring forth their viewpoints and influence things. Again, it is not enough to just have an opinion that you can express. It is key to highlight avenues through which larger organized change can be achieved. Very recently we discussed this with my ninth graders. They aggressively criticized these outdoor recesses that arrived with the onset of the pandemic and wanted some changes. I gave them the advice that simply mentioning this in passing is not enough and that they need to start or advancing their agenda. Then the topic of proper avenues came up, because in a way we mirror the larger organization of our society in school. So all the ways one can influence things. All these qualify (as democracy skills) in my opinion.

Teacher B's ideas about the need to display and teach the students constructive ways to create change share many parallels with the approaches outlined by the 2019 national curriculum: "The student develops his/her interactional skills by recognizing, dealing with and regulating their feelings. He/she also learns to listen, respect and anticipate the feelings of others and views, as well as different way they are expressed. The student learns to use feelings as an asset in interactions. Interactional skills are learned together and in co-operation in differing circumstances" (Opetushallitus, 2019, pp. 62–63, my translation). This is important, since it vital that the school models avenues of civic activity present outside the school system, instead of simply giving the students the theory of democratic behavior and none of it in practice, as Johnson & Johnson (2016) point out.

Teacher B wanted to elaborate on the topic of national full-scale referendums, where every citizen would have the option to weigh in on individual political decisions.

(4) Teacher B

No kansanäänestykset, mulla on vähän ehkä ristiriitanen näkemys niinku kansanäänestyksistä. Et et, äänestäminen kyllä tärkeetä. Vaalit on tärkeitä, mutta määhän niinku enemmän ehkä oon niinku edustuksellisen demokratian kannalla. Minun

mielestä välillä on liikaa väläytely — otetaan nyt vaikka ajankohtaisista asioista vaikka NATO — niin on tuota ihan hyvä että ne päätökset tehdään edustuksellisen demokratian kautta, koska niinku tuota siinä on paljon etua. Kansanäänestyksessä on ehkä enemmistön semmonen jyräämisen mahdollisuus ja toisaalta siinä tulee vähän semmosta turhaa toistoa, että jos me on jo äänestetty niistä ketkä meitä edustaa niin mun mielestä heidän pitää pystyä silloin tekemään ne ratkasevat päätökset.

Translation

Regarding universal referendums I have some conflicting views. Voting is certainly important. Elections are important, but I tend to lean towards a representative democracy. I think referendums have been brought up too often – looking at for example a current issue like NATO — I think it is better that these kinds of decisions are made via a representative democracy since it has many benefits. A full nationwide referendum runs the risk of one side rolling over the other one and in my opinion it also introduces unnecessary repetition. If we have already voted for the people who are supposed to be able to represent us, then I think they should be able to make these key decisions.

The American historian, educator and broadcaster Richard D. Heffner foresaw this issue, and termed his critique “the tyranny of the masses” — which to be fair, is one of the better critiques laid at democracy. He makes his case with the example of the American social sphere (De Tocqueville & Heffner, 1956):

A perfect liberty of the Mind exists in America, said Tocqueville, just as long as the sovereign majority has yet to decide its course. But once the majority has made up its mind, then all contrary thought must cease, and all controversy must be abandoned, not at the risk of death or physical punishment, but rather at the more subtle and more intolerable pain of ostracism, of being shunned by one's fellows, of being rejected by society.

The general spirit of the critique posits, that since people in a free society are inherently tribal and tend to form collectives organically, their civic and voting behavior will follow the same lines. This is to say, that a significant number of the democratically eligible people will simply choose not to exercise their rights and responsibilities, perhaps because the weight of the fate of your civilization weighs too heavily on your shoulders. The schooling institution could alleviate some of this fear by offering the students the opportunity to vote on matters that concern them. This way, the students

would get subjected to a lower pressure environment, where they could train to carry out their democratic duties without large scale implications. Looking at the role of the English language for Finnish students it is worthy of noting, that working in the context of the anglophone-cultural sphere provides excellent opportunities for exploring the political history and thinkers of the west as a whole. The importance of providing the students with enough information regarding the workings and history of their respective political community is highlighted by the Ludvigsen committee (Stray & Sætra, 2016).

Teacher B's thoughts regarding direct democracy became highly interesting and worthy of further exploration. Next, he was presented with the thoughts: "You are referring here to the idea of the tyranny of the majority, which stands as somewhat of a good steelman of an argument against democracy — or this sort of potential downside. How about national referendums in this more of a "politician-informing role" with opinion polls for example?"

(5) Teacher B

Joo kyllä. En määhän niinku täysin oo niitä vastaan ja nimenomaan se voi olla semmonen joissakin tilanteissa ehkä tarpeen mukaan nimenomaan lisäinformaationa ja tukena sille päätöksenteolle. No toki siis niinkö jos aatellaan nyt siis jossakin vaikka Skotlannissa tyyliin kun itsenäisyydestä päätetään, niin kyllä se nyt ehkä siinä on järkevä järjestää kansanäänestys. Koska sit taas sen edustuksellisenki kautta voi olla väärinkäytön mahdollisuuksia ja nii eespäin, että kyllähän se niinku tiettyihin asioihin sopii.

Translation

Well yeah. I am not fully against referendums and in some situations, they can be necessary as extra information that supports the decision making process. Of course, now that we think about Scotland's independence vote for example, it might be smart to arrange a referendum because the representative system holds within it the opportunities for abuse and so forth. It fits certain situations.

From the viewpoint of the school, the implementation of polls and general votes could be a healthy direction in which to develop the system. This does not mean that the students should be given the authority to dictate all decisions by forming a majority, but rather the option to weigh in on decisions like: which new teacher to hire, or what kinds of technological aids to buy for the school. While it is understandable that giving this kind of power away to the students might seem

intimidating, it is quite likely that a class possessing “democratic personalities” — as defined by Van Lier (2004) — would treat their position with respect, as the decisions impact them the most. This kind of approach would certainly also be in line with Bernstein’s (2004) third right, or “the right to participate in practices with specific outcomes, i.e., the right to participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of order” (pp. xx–xxi). All in all, the inclusion of voting, the central process of a healthy democracy into the school system would be a great experiment to run, even if in a small scale at first. In addition, a ballot system for voting on school issues would be a great candidate for future research.

The teachers were then inquired about their thoughts regarding the fact, that the number of times democracy skills are mentioned in national school curricula has grown significantly in the last few renditions. Teacher A remarks:

(6) Teacher A

Minusta tuntuu. Toki meillähän on taas tullut se uus OPS tässä 2021 ja koko ajan tätä moniaineisuutta ja sitä niinku eheyttämistä, että opiskelijoita opetettais näkemään, elämään ja tutkimaan elämää yksittäisten aineiden niinku sillojen ulkopuolelta. Tai että ne oppis yhistään nää asiat keskenään ja sitten se että on ollut niin paljon puhetta syrjäytyneisyydestä ja sen kasvusta. Se oli Niinistön teemoja silloin kun se tuli vasta presidentiksi — niitä ensimmäisiä semmosia isoja teemoja. Mää luulen, että se syrjäytymisen ehkäisy on ollu siellä yks iso syy miksi sitten tätä osallisuutta ja yhteisesti toimimista ja kaikkia näitä mitkä on niinku tavallaan on niitä demokraattisen yhteiskunnan rakennuspalikoita niin miks niitä nyt sitten korostetaan niin paljon. Ehkä myös, tämä on ihan mun ommaa spekulatiota, mutta se että jos mä muistan oikein niin historian oppimäärään on vähennetty hirveästi lukiossa, niin se huoli tavallaan siitä opiskelijoiden tai nuorien historiattomuudesta tai siitä että ne kokis olevansa osa jotain isompaa kokonaisuutta niin siinä on varmaan jotain tällaisia huolen tynkiä sitten taustalla.

Translation

Of course we have seen the newest 2021 national school curriculum, which emphasizes multidisciplinary approaches and linking subject matters with each other, so that students would learn to see, live and research life outside the parameters of singular school subjects. The idea is that they would learn to synthesize the different things they learn about. Then there has been a lot of talk about social exclusion and its

rapid growth. This was one of Niinistö's main themes right after he became a president — one of those big talking points. I tend to think that the prevention of adolescent social exclusion has been one of the major drivers of why things like participation, co-operation and all these things that are the building blocks of a democratic society have been emphasized so much. Perhaps this is my own speculation, but if I remember correctly the amount of mandatory (high school/upper secondary) history has been reduced drastically. So there is this growing concern regarding the lack of historical awareness among students and the youth — the lack of the feeling of being a part of some larger whole. These are likely some of the worries that have shaped the new curricula.

The main thesis of teacher A seems to be, that these changes in the national school curricula are mainly aimed at preventing people from getting disaffected and excluded socially. When people become socially excluded, they tend to partake less in their civic activities and duties and this forms a danger to democracy — this sort of apathy towards democracy as a whole. Her answer has many common parallels with van Lier's listing of the rights a citizen of a functioning democratic community should have: "The second right, *social inclusion*, is the right to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally (this includes the right to autonomy within the system). Inclusion is essential for the condition of *communitas*, and operates at the social level" (2004, p. 84). This chain of ideas forces one to address an elephant in the room, the elephant being the proportionally large amount of Finnish adults and youths that are considered to be sidelined or otherwise excluded from society. Teacher A goes on to add: "In a way this sort of social disaffection is the literal opposite of civic activity and active participation. Naturally some people voice their concerns through social media for example, but this endangers real life co-operation skills somewhat." Surely such a statistic has implications for the state of the democracy? It is quite difficult to pin down exactly which societal and social factors increase the likelihood of social exclusion, but things such as the lack of economic prospects, welfare traps and a rather melancholic cultural slant most likely play their part in the case of Finland. It likely goes without saying, that it is not traditionally a sign of a healthy democracy if a significant portion of the population feels like they do not want to vote, or if they do not feel like participating in grassroots democracy in their everyday lives. It could even be argued, that it is not optimal if the people only engage with politics at the ballot box. The point about the decrease in the amount of history courses is one with many implications, and certainly must have an effect on how the upcoming generations view themselves in the world. There are very few things as corrosive to the foundations of nations,

than the lack of historical awareness. Not knowing where we have been and how our ancestors navigated through past eras will put all of collective humanity at risk of repeating some of the mistakes that could have been integrated as lessons. When looking at this from the point of view of the students, how inspiring would it be to learn about some of the real-life heroes and groups that were able to bring about change via peaceful means? In the absence of role models and individuals after which the students can model their approaches in civic society, it is quite likely that other modes of conduct might become more prominent. Teacher B's hypothesis for the increase in the demand of democracy skills reads as follows:

(7) Teacher B

No mun mielestä se on oikeasti hyvä ajatus ja niinku hyvä suunta ja varmasti semmonen herättely meidän koko koulusysteemille. Ehkä meillä kauttaaltankin on tapana liian vähän kasvattaa nuoria siihen nimenomaan mielipiteen ilmaisuun ja vaikuttamiseen ja siihen että on niinku mahdollista vaikuttaa. Onhan tietty aina ollu mahdollista vaikuttaa – otetaan vaikka jotkut oppilaskunnan hallituksen – tai oppilaskunnan hallitukset on aina ollu olemassa nyt ainaki kymmeniä vuosia. Mutta tuota varsinki semmosella ruohonjuuritasolla ehkä se niinku hoksauttamaminen siihen, että asioihin on mahdollista vaikuttaa ja niihin kannattaa vaikuttaa ja mielipidettä kannattaa ilmasta. Tietyllä tavalla esimerkiksi vaikka jossakin kurssin suunnittelussa mennään ihan sinne luokkahuoneen tasolle niin se että niinku kasvatettas siihen, että ittee koskeviin asioihin on mahdollista vaikuttaa ja niitä mahdollisuuksia pitää niinku tarjota, että sillä tavalla niinku siinä mun mielestä ollaan menossa ihan oikeeseen suuntaan.

Translation

In my opinion this is a good idea, a good direction and certainly a wakeup call for our entire school system. Perhaps we as a whole we do not bring up our adolescents with the notion of expressing their opinions and the idea that it is possible to influence things around them. Of course, it has always been possible to influence policy — let us take for example student boards which have existed for decades at least. At a grassroots level though, perhaps helping the students grasp the fact that it is possible and worth it to influence things around you and to express your views. For example, in planning course curricula, we should go to the level of a single class in order to raise the students to realize that it is possible to affect things pertaining to them. These

opportunities should also be presented and in that way, I think we are heading in the right direction.

Teacher B brings up what could be considered the existing democratic bodies active in the Finnish school system — those being students boards and other clubs. All of these are very accessible, and likely preferable modes to engage with the community for the participatory types, as laid out by van Lier (2004). His tendency to give his classes a clear opportunity to influence course content and grading is a brilliant example of actually handing out some of the power to the students, which shares many similarities with Johnson & Johnson's (2016) idea of surrounding the students with co-operative events throughout their day. This approach also shares many parallels with van Lier's (2004) idea on the third right, since it provides the students with the "Right to participate in practices with specific outcomes, i.e., the right to participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of order." (Bernstein 2000, pp. xx-xxi). Also taken into account, would be the notion that the audience should have a say in what kinds of topics are introduced to the classroom setting (van Lier, 2004, p. 82.).

Upon being presented with the second question: "In order for a form of rule to be called a democracy, what are the boundaries within which societal actors must stay without exception?" Teacher A remarks:

(8) Teacher A

No meillä on tuossa itärajalalla tietenkin aika hyvä esimerkki siitä mitä ei saa tehdä, mutta yhteiskunnan pitää olla sen verran avoin ja korruptiovapaa. Täytyy olla myös toimiva hallitus, parlamentti tai eduskunta, joka valitaan vapailla vaaleilla, joissa minkäänlaista vaalivilppiä ei tapahdu ja tosiaan yhteiskunnan toiminnot toimii avoimesti ja ilman sitä korruptiota. Siinä on nyt aika monta asiaa. Yhdelle ihmiselle ei saa keskittää valtaa loputtomasti ja sitähän varten meillä ne vaalit nyt on. Tuossa on nyt joitakin huomioita.

Translation

We of course have a great example of what not to do on our eastern border, but a society must be free of corruption and open enough. You also need a functioning government and parliament that is mandated by elections free of election fraud — and naturally a society which functions in an open manner without corrupting influences. That is already a quite a few defining things. Power should not be centralized to any

one person and that is what elections are for. These are some of the noteworthy considerations that come to mind.

When asked the questions:” What are the uncompromising boundaries within which individuals and collectives need to act in order for a society to be called democratic. What is an example of something that would immediately disqualify a society from being considered democratic?”, teacher B had the following to remark:

(9) Teacher B

No jos äänestys-oikeus poistetaan tai sitä rajoitetaan olennaisesti niin se ainakin sen tuhoais heti. Sama juttu ehkä, sanotaan niinku tämmöset perus — niinku sananvapaus ja mielipiteen ilmaisun vapaus — jos niitä olennaisesti rajoitetaan niin tota sinne mä ehkä vetäisin niitä rajoja.

Translation

Well if the right to vote is removed or limited in any significant way it would destroy it immediately. Same thing with basic things — like freedom of speech and the freedom of expression — restricting these is where I would draw those lines.

Examples (8) and (9) draw attention to the importance of voting, which is a rather self-explanatory requirement of any democratic arrangement. Providing the students with the necessary context regarding the constraints of democratically elected bodies and individuals, could be seen to fit van Lier’s ideas describing the “justice oriented” personality types, which are often naturally interested in the exploration of “Social, political and economic spheres of influence — seeking to bring about positive change with compelling rhetoric and social movements” (p. 81). Teacher A’s answer in example (8) also includes multiple mentions of corruption and a reference to the political state of modern Russia, as well as the risks of centralizing power in the hands of the few. Understanding real and unpleasant phenomena such as corruption, would surely count towards providing the students with a wholistic macro perspective on political life, as van Lier (2004) emphasizes. Both answers seem to concur on the most important facets of a democratic system, and their irrefutable importance.

While the interviews were most certainly influenced by the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war at the time the interview was conducted, one has to admit that the modern state of Russia provides a relatively good contrasting comparison to western countries that lean towards democracy. The modern physical and metaphysical state of Russia and its populace could not of course exist without

centuries of corruption and state oppression — which is to say that we are seeing a populace considerably far in its developmental arch of “non-democratic rule”. One defining characteristic of the Russian worldview seems to be a certain apathy towards statecraft and those in power, quite possibly because individuals and collectives that attempted to steer their civilization onto ethical tracks were simply jailed or liquidated — historically speaking. If there is one thing that the interviews of educated Russians fleeing from their military draft reveals, it is that most individuals of character simply deem the fight to restore a working government a hopeless pursuit. Simply put, they do not seem to think that their actions, whether individual or collective, could shape the future of their nation in any significant manner. It is feasible to argue that especially in the context of Finnish public schooling, the nuanced sociopolitical events of the Soviet Union/Russia should be visited often in order to provide the youth with an appreciation of the types of political attitudes that shaped Finnish society with their mere proximity. This would aid the students with media literacy and the creation of a multifaceted understanding of the political life and conventions of their community, as championed by the Ludvigsen committee (Stray & Sætra, 2016).

When asked “What would be a singular event or act that could happen in a previously democratic society, that would immediately make it undemocratic?” Teacher A answered:

(10) Teacher A

Nooh, tässähan nyt on näitä Unkareita ja USA:a ja vaikka mitä esimerkkejä—jos esimerkiksi lähetään rajoittaan median valtaa—lähdetään keskittämään sitä. Siinä nyt tulee yks tämmönen aika konkreettinen arkinen esimerkki, joka sit näkyy ihmisten elämässä aika nopeesti. Tai jos aletaan vaikka puuttumaan tavallaan lainsäätäjä alkaa puuttumaan, justiinsa jos puhutaan vallan kolmijaosta niin vaikka sitten tuomioistuinten toimintaan. Niin aika isot hälytyskellothan semmosessa toimii, että se on siellä aika tärkeenä taustalla — tai tärkeänä kehyksenä se vallan kolmijako.

Translation

Well, we have examples like Hungary, USA and all kinds of examples. For example if freedom of press comes under attack – or trying to centralize the powers of the press. Here we have a good concrete example which manifests in normal people’s everyday lives relatively fast. For example if the legislator or any legislative body starts to interfere with courts for example, that doesn’t really bode well with the idea of separation of powers. Such actions would ring alarm bells for me, so I consider the frame of separation of powers very important.

The notion of the separation of powers has been around for quite some time, and the oldest surviving description of this set of ideas comes from Polybius of ancient Greece (McGing, 2010), who was concerned about the checks and balances that ought to be placed on any governing body. It is easy to agree, that interference on the part of legislators or entire legislative bodies should be kept in check. There is however another more unintuitive scenario to consider, although it leans more towards the economical side of this argument. Consider for a moment a traditionally western society, which developed in a direction where the citizens held on to their right for private ownership but let the state apparatus expand in an uncontrolled manner. The resulting society would be one where individuals enjoy a degree of apparent freedom since they can own and manage for example their real estate. All of this would however be placed under the oversight of the state, which would eventually grow to legislate and bureaucratically manage almost every facet of the citizens lives. The issue of state size could be seen to be contained within van Lier's (2004) notion of preparing the students with the macro-perspective of the system in which they will conduct themselves. In other words, the students need to be given the tools and information with which to first understand, and only then navigate their respective political sphere.

The role of media as the now established "fourth estate" of power came up in the discussion, onto which teacher A added:

(11) Teacher A

Mediat tulee siksi ensimmäisenä mieleen, kun se on niinku kansalaisille hirveän näkyvä elementti. Jos siellä on jotain epäselvää tai epämäärästä, siis voidaanhan me ottaa esimerkiksi Suomikin Kekkonen aikoina, että tuota ei ees tarvi mennä niin kauas kun ollaan oltu tuonne itään päin vähän enemmän rähmällään. Hyvin paljon esimerkiksi venäjältä tuleviin uutisointeihin on luotettu sellaisinaan eikä oo tehty esimerkiksi kauheesti taustatyötä-tutkimusta siitä, että onko tämä uutinen tai viesti tosi. Suhtauduttu ehkä kritikittömämmästä. Semmoisia esimerkkejä on ihan lähihistoriastakin.

Translation

Media comes to mind immediately because it is such a visible element to the citizens, especially if there is any vagueness or lack of clarity there. We can look at for example Finland during the reign of Kekkonen. You do not even have to go far back in time to find a Finland that was slanted way more towards the east. We have had a very trusting approach to news and information coming from Russia without the

necessary source critique and vetting relating to whether or not this information or message is even truthful. We have examples of such lack of critique from recent past as well.

It could be argued, that in a functioning democracy, media should be front and center when considering matters of governance and the state. This is important, because what could be broadly referred to as “the media” acts as the primary conveyor of information, as well as the spotlight that highlights individual voice, anecdotes and lived experience. Traditionally the term “media” has referred to what could now be referred to as “legacy media”, which includes things like radio, newspapers, television channels and broadcasting agencies. The main point is that such branches of legacy media have often been state controlled or under the supervision of state-owned entities or boards (although there have naturally been exceptions). It would be rather safe to posit, that in the past the responsibility of challenging official narratives fell largely on independent journalistic agencies and often individual journalists, that were willing to risk damage to their personal reputation in search of objective truth — arguably the highest virtue of journalism. This point is a poignant one to consider, especially in light of how the nature of our media and information ecosystem has rapidly changed in the past decades. One might ask, who exactly is responsible for keeping governments accountable for the things they proclaim in the era of the internet and social media? In the spirit of grassroots-level democracy, it ought to be the citizenry, who ideally possess the necessary tools, knowledge and media literacy to be able to critically assess even traditionally trustworthy narratives. English as a subject — and as the modern lingua franca — is simply the most powerful tool with which to navigate the novel modern media environment. For this reason, the teaching of the language should be viewed in connection with media literacy skills, and the rich worldview it can provide the students with.

Naturally, in a society based on free will not everyone will choose to acquire such skillsets, which leaves the brunt of the agency and responsibility to citizens who understand the necessity, as well as what lay on either end of the spectrum — were a society to depart from democratic ideals. In addition to the citizens having to acquire such media literacy skills, the responsibility of speaking truth to power also falls on them. Speaking truth to power has come with its fair share of risks historically speaking, but it would be fair to argue that this is exactly the behavior required to keep the state and society as a whole from losing touch with the spirit of democracy and hence truth itself.

Teacher A hinted in her answer, towards the historical foreign policy of Finlandization. She was asked to define the term Finlandization and whether or not remains of this time period are still present in Finnish society and whether it left behind any social phenomena?

(12) Teacher A

Juurikin tämä että yritetään vahvempaa naapuria pitää rauhallisena, tai aisoissa (...) mikä tässä nyt olis asiallinen termi — sillä tavalla, että ei vahingossakaan ärsytetä. Sellaista hirvittävää tasapainottelua, mutta eihän se aina päivänvaloa oo kestäny se jos ajatellaan historiallisesti minkälaista se suomettuminen on ollu. Siinähan oli yhtenä osana tietenkin se, että vallanpitäjät oli henkilökohtaisissa hyvissä väleissä ja sitä edellytettiin muun muassa. Ihan vasta oli lehdessä juttua, vitsi ku mä en muista aihetta, mutta siinä just sanottiin että siis aivan tyyliin kymmenen vuotta sitten — Neuvostoliitot ja Berliinin muurit oli hajonnu jo ajat sitten — niin edelleenkin vielä niitä jälkimaininkeja, jälkikaikuja oli just näissä median kirjoituksissa sillä tavalla, että just mitä mä viittasin tähän kritiikittömään uutisten jakamiseen idästä ja semmoseen, että ajatellaan että se on ihan propagandaa niin se kritiikittömämmin uutisoidaan kuin jos se ois tullu jostain muualta.

Translation

Well, the act of trying to keep your stronger neighbour calm or under control (...) what would be the proper term here – trying not to provoke them even accidentally — this kind of reprehensible balancing act. Historically speaking, most of this era has not really been able to withstand the light of day, considering what Finlandization really was. One major factor in this was of course the fact that our leaders often had close personal relationships with the leaders from the east and it was even considered to be a must. Very recently there was a news article about how as recently as ten years ago, even after the fall of the Berlin wall and Soviet Union there were still echoes and influences in the Finnish media. Like I mentioned earlier, this unvetted sharing of news from the east. Considering that it was often purely propaganda, and it was often broadcast without the kind of critique that information from elsewhere would have gotten subjected to.

Likely due to the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the discussion gravitated towards Finland's own history with Russia and its effects on the Finnish political climate. The history of

Finland provides an interesting case study when it comes to the effect the proximity of an authoritarian regime can have on democratic rule. The phenomenon of Finlandization could be described as a policy of self-preservation in some sense, since in the big picture its primary purpose was to prevent another conflict with the Soviet Union. This often came at the cost of integrity. Bringing students up with the necessary information regarding the history of their political community is key, since “in order for citizens to participate in such a social arrangement [democracy], they have to possess sufficient information on the political arrangements and human rights-conventions of their respective community” as Stray and Sætra (2017) emphasize. Like teacher A points out, a lot of the politics of this era have not been able to withstand modern scrutiny. She refers to the notion, that numerous influential people and politicians in Finnish society co-operated and financially benefitted from Soviet investment or for example, large energy-infrastructure projects such as the Nord Stream-pipelines. Without losing sight of the goal, it could be generally argued that in a true democracy people should have access to as much information as they want. Let their critical reading skills do the rest.

While on the topic of the information economy, teacher B was asked whether or not the citizens of a democracy should have access to the maximum amount of information or rather, a limited and selected assortment of “established” information from “trustworthy” sources:

(13) Teacher B

No kyllä mä nyt kuitenkin oon sen kannalla, että mahdollisimman paljon tietoa ja luottaa siihen että jos meillä on oikea demokratia ja vapaa media niin sitä kautta se tietyllä tavalla myös suodattuu ja sieltä on niinku mahdollista löytää ne luotettavat lähteet.

Translation

Well at the end of the day I do support having as much information as possible and I trust that if we have a true democracy and free media, information should get filtered and it is possible to find these trustworthy sources.

The question of whether or not the citizens of a democracy should have access to as much information as possible is an important one, since it involves many facets pertaining to the social reality and dynamic of a nation. It would seem intuitive, that a true democracy can only emerge if we have access to all available information, although such an arrangement has probably not been an option before the time of the world wide web — and barely now. Forming a wholistic, nuanced

picture and worldview is certainly made easier by a wealth of available information, and it could be argued that it is nearly impossible to make political decisions which benefit the largest possible amount of people without access to the full context. In addition the role of legacy media is relevant here, since even here in the European Union we have interest groups which seek to legislate the blurred lines of hate speech on social media sites, and which have already banned or censored a lot of Russian news sites in the wake of the war. It is hard to see that the efforts of multinational organizations would conclude here. In my opinion, it is not the job of the state to patronize the citizens in the fashion of: “We know that you are not able to interpret reality as it is or with the information you have access to, and hence we have to ensure your well-being”. For this reason it could be argued, that per democracy’s core virtues the largest possible quantity of information made available would amount to the highest good — if there even is such a thing as too much information in a democracy. Furthermore, do all individuals in a given civilization at any given historical moment choose to consume the same amount of information or knowledge? After a while the solution to this dilemma seems quite intuitive, if we presume that humans are agents with free will, everybody should be allowed to choose how much they want to learn in their lifetime. This would also imply, that the constituents of a democracy ultimately choose with their everyday actions whether or not their voices and viewpoints will be heard. It is deceivingly easy to fall under the false assumption, that a once a society reaches a point where it could be considered a “true” democracy, it should remain unchanged until further acted upon. At this point one is reminded of Montesquieu’s remark on the necessity of civic activity undertaken by virtuous individuals (Johnson & Johnson, 2016). The core virtues of a democratic society are undeniably rooted in the responsibility of individuals to be active participants all the way up from their communities to the higher institutions of their civilization. The spirit of the whole “democratic virtues” notion could be summed up with the phrase “You do not have to, but it is worth it if you do” — which I find to be an excellent and proven way to explain these ideas to children especially.

5.2 Democracy as a practice

A multidimensional phenomenon such as democracy exists simultaneously on the levels of theory and ethics, as well its manifest aesthetic form. This is to say, that in addition to knowing the theory of how a democracy should organize itself, it is vital to also understand how it looks, sounds and plays out in the real world. The following section will contain analysis of the ways in which the teachers live out these democratic processes in their day-to-day life, as well as their thoughts regarding democracy as a practice.

Teacher B was presented with the opportunity to anonymously request and propose changes that they wish would be made to the Finnish public school as an organization. The question read: “What kinds of approaches would you wish were implemented in pursuit of democracy skills? At what level of legislative authority and organization would you like these changes to be implemented?”

(14) Teacher B

Se onki tuota haastava kysymys, mutta mun mielestä ollaan menossa niinku oikeeseen suuntaan sillä, että esimerkiksi OPS:issa on hyvin selvästi kirjattuna se, että oppilaiden/opiskelijoiden pitää pystyä vaikuttamaan ihan niinku opetuksen ja kurssin tasolla siihen et millä tavalla asioita opiskellaan ja miten niitä tehdään. Ehkä niinku siitä selkeästi kiinni pitäminen ja sen selväksi tuominen opettajille, että se on oikeasti näin eikä sinne muuten vaan kirjattu juttu, vaan että niinku oikeesti kun suunnitellaan kurseja niin opiskelijoiden pitää olla mukana siinä suunnittelussa jollakin tavalla ainakin. Heillä pitää olla mahdollisuus tulla kuulluksi ja esittää näkemyksensä että miten me tätä tehtäisiin. Sehän ei tietenkään tarkoita sitä, että aina tehdään just niinku mitä ne heidän ajatukset on, mutta he pääsee osallisiksi siihen keskusteluun. Muuten siellä mun mielestä niinku on tietyissä asioissa ihan selkeesti kirjaukset ja niin toimitaankin, että oppilaskunta ja opiskelijakunta pääsee oikeesti niinku ilmaseen mielipiteensä, mutta ehkä sitäkin niinku vaikuttamismahollisuutta vois vielä lisätä

Translation

This is a challenging question, but I think we are heading in the right direction with for example the fact that the national teaching curriculum very clearly states that the students should have the ability to have influence on the level of the teaching and course planning — also the way in which things are studied and how they are done. Perhaps holding on to the agreements and making it clear to the teachers this is what we have committed to, and these are not just written down for no reason. The students have to take part in some way when designing the course curriculum. They have to have to opportunity to be heard and to present their views about how we should do this. Of course this does not mean that we should always do exactly what they want, but they are included in the conversation. I do think that there are clear instructions on how to act under certain headings in the national teaching curriculum, and these are followed too as. This is evidenced by the fact that the student board and the student

body as a whole get to voice their opinions, although perhaps these influencing opportunities could be offered even more often.

Teacher B's feedback hinted at a positive development at the highest levels of school administration, as themes of democracy have made an increasing number of appearances on national curriculum documents. His comment on the freedom of individual teachers affecting the implementation of these goals is a very important one, and it deserves to get amplified. It is however a very slippery slope to start dictating the specific actions or approaches of teachers, since such an effort would likely prove to be very costly and create a rather dystopian atmosphere with inspectors that observe how our teaching professionals work. Teacher B's remark on holding on to the agreed upon teaching philosophies is a poignant one, and has many parallels with van Lier's (2004) third right of participation, as well as Johnson & Johnson's (2016) emphasis on co-operative learning methods and curriculum design.

Teacher A wanted to further elaborate on some of the changes implemented by the national school board in recent years:

(15) Teacher A

Se on sitä, että vois niiden oppilaiden kanssa tehdä täyspainosesti töitä niin sitä aletaan puhumaan just näistä ryhmäkokojen pienentämisistä ja siitä että ois paikat myös semmosille (...) vaikka oonki ihan niinku lähtökohtaisesti inklusion kannattaja, mutta kuitenkin et sitte jos on näitä lapsia tai nuoria, joilla on ihan oikeasti vakavia ongelmia niin että heille sitten löytys oikea tapa olla opiskelemassa ja pysyä mukana. Enemmän ne on varmaan tommosia jos mietitään niinku ihan opetushallituksen ja ministeriön tasoa, et mitä ne toiveet on.

Translation

In practice, in order for us to give the students the time and resources they deserve, we have to start talking about decreasing class sizes and that we would also have places for (...) even though I am principally a proponent of inclusion, there are still these children and adolescents who truly have serious issues. I wish that they were offered the right ways to study and keep up with the others. These wishes of mine would most likely be directed at the ministry of education.

Another much debated change to the organization of Finnish schools has been the removal of dedicated special-ed classes, where students with learning difficulties were placed together up until

the 2010's at least. The argument goes, that the exclusion of these students from the rest of the student population is unethical, and that they would likely fair better if placed into "standard" classes. As far as democracy skills are concerned, the described situation does not quite meet van Lier's "Second right, *social inclusion*, or the right to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally (this includes the right to autonomy within the system). Inclusion, [he argues], is essential for the condition of *communitas*, and operates at the social level" (2004, p. 84). It is interesting to note, that teacher A seems to be against inclusion somewhat, Whereas for van Lier (2004) it is essential that everyone is included — this is perhaps because there seems to be two different issues here — social inclusion is different from what is considered inclusion in the Finnish school system. Whereas the term inclusion for van Lier, represents the right of everyone to be included in communal processes, inclusion in the Finnish school system is most often invoked in connection with discussion on the needs of individuals with learning difficulties. Inclusion in the Finnish school system then stands for the idea, that students in need of extra support or specific study environments should be placed in with the rest of their peer group.

Teacher A provided us with a tangible example of democracy I action in the form of Gutsy Go, a democracy-themed school week sponsored by the likes of the Finnish justice ministry:

(16) Teacher A

Kouluissa tehdään ihan hirveesti sitä ihan arkityössä, ihan joka tunnilla sitä semmosta arkista yhteisten pelisääntöjen noudattamisharjoituksia ja kaikkia tämmösiä omia teemajuttuja ja muita. Mikä tämä meidänkin tämänviikkoinen Gutsy Go-viikko noille seiskoille on. Nämä kaikki puhaltaa siihen samaan demokratiataitopussiin, että koulussa tehdään paljon tämän eteen kyllä. Se on mun kokemus.

Translation

At school we train and do exercises relating to following these shared everyday social rules. We have these theme days and other things as well. For example this weeks Gutsy-Go event for the 7th graders. All things like this blow more wind to the sails of these democracy skills, so the school does quite a bit for the cause to be fair. This has been my experience.

The gutsy go startup describes themselves on their website in the following way:

Gutsy Go method is a tool for schools and cities to enhance participation, trust and confidence, and wellbeing within the society. The method was awarded with first

price in Finland's largest innovation challenge for solutions to help build a better future for young people. It gives the youth tools for building peace within their own cities. While working together to help others young people strengthen their own wellbeing and self-esteem. (Gutsy go, 2023)

Immediately, the Gutsy go project seems like a flourishing example of localized communal civic activity, and it incorporates some of the more important facets of Vinterek's (2017) approaches, namely the development of the student's self-esteem and trust in their own skills. The website further describes their method:

Gutsy Go starts off by shaking up one school week. The intervention challenges all 14-year-olds to create solutions to problems in their own city. The youth are guided by their own teachers who have been trained as Gutsy Go coaches. In collaboration with youth workers, legal officials, and community leaders students design and implement unique solutions to promote solidarity and "social peace," thus preventing polarization and tensions within their own communities. The week results in dozens of positive actions benefiting the entire community. (Gutsy go, 2023)

It is a great idea to employ teachers as the trained gutsy go-coaches, since this will help build up a trusting relationship that lasts into regular lessons after the themed week. It is highly probable, that engaging in a shared project like this will give the even the shy students more courage to express their opinions in a classroom setting — the importance of which Vinterek's (2017) first tenet highlights. In fact, the described gutsy-go method is so encompassing, that it also incorporates all three of van Lier's (2004) democratic rights, alleviates Stray and Sætra's (2017) concerns regarding teacher competence, as well as Johnson & Johnson's (2016) criteria for co-operative working methods.

Teacher A voiced thoughts on the topic of social exclusion and its connection to political radicalization:

(17) Teacher A

No mää rupesin tässä ite miettimään tätä asiaa, että siihen syrjäytymiseenhan sitten tietenkin liittyy valtionvallan näkökulmasta — mitä kaikkea siihen syrjäytymiseen liittyy. Siihenhan liittyy monesti se kouluttautumattomuus ja just se muista eristäytyminen. Monesti sitten ehkä myös tämmösellä henkilöllä saattaa ne mielipiteet — jos ne on oikeen niinku kovasti saanu potkuja päähänsä niin saattaa olla tietenki

vaara kaikenlaiselle radikalisoitumisellekin. Vaikkei meillä nyt suomessa oikeesti nyt semmosesti oo huolta, mutta maailman tapahtumia varmasti seurattu tarkalla silmällä tässäkin. Sillä tavalla mä nään sen syrjäytymisasian aika isona kokonaisuutena jos ajatellaan koulumaailmaa. Kaikki nää asiat mitkä liittyy demokratiataitoihin on tavallaan sitä syrjäytymisen ehkäisemistä sitten myös.

Translation

Well all this got me thinking of all the things that would be related to the social phenomenon of exclusion in the eyes of the state. It is often connected with a lack of education and especially this ostracization and self-isolation. Often times a person like this can be imagined to be more susceptible to radicalization — especially if they have gotten kicked in the head by life enough. To be fair we do not really have to worry too much about this in Finland, but the government must have kept a keen eye on world events in this case. I tend to see this phenomenon of social exclusion as a big topic in our schools already. All of these things that have anything to do with democracy skills, also tend to prevent social exclusion as well.

Teacher A raises an excellent point which synergizes with the right to social inclusion, as presented by van Lier (2004). Combating social exclusion is a sentiment that certainly deserves to be discussed more widely — especially since it is our capacity to address the tragic facets of life that defines us. Social exclusion as a social phenomenon is likely so ingrained in mammalian biology, that it will be with us for the rest of our journey. It could be argued that social exclusion is somewhat of a constant in the experience of humanity through time, and that 0% is a special value due to sheer the improbability of it. This makes it easier to understand how entire historical epochs have been defined by the actions of socially excluded and disaffected populations, which of course have had widely ranging sizes based on the unique nuance of their historical moment and social organization. Social exclusion could be considered to be the first step towards becoming disaffected with society as a whole. Furthermore, a large enough population of disaffected individuals — especially male — seems to be one of the more common symptoms shared between times of societal upheaval. It follows from this then, that the more disaffected or marginalized young individuals you have in your population, the more prominent the danger for polarization, violence and revolution is. This is the very risk democracy aims to address by giving as many as possible a voice in the voting booth, as well as a central square in which to express their views.

When further inquired whether or not the teachers “had noticed any changes in the willingness of the students to engage in democratic conduct and discussion during their careers. For example, how willingly do the students partake in discussions on topics that are polarizing or uncomfortable and share their opinions?”

(18) Teacher A

No tuota mulla on semmonen kokemus. Toki tää aikajana on pitempi kuin vaan mun oma ura. Mää ajattelen niinku vaikka minkälaista koulussa oli silloin kun itse olin koululainen, eli aika pitkälle taaksepäin. Niin minun mielestä koululaisissa on aivan mahtavaa nykyään se, että he ovat niin avoimia. Asiasta kuin asiasta uskalletaan keskustella, halutaan keskustella ja halutaan ottaa kantaa. Jotenkin ei pelätä välttämättä semmosta itsensä likoon laittamista. Hurjan paljon semmoisia tosi positiivisia juttuja on mun mielestä niinku ollu tässä viime vuosien aikana niinku oppilaiden semmosessa käytöksessä asiaan liittyen.

Translation

Well, in my own experience... While of course this timeline is longer than just my own teaching career. I think back on for example how it was like in school when I was in primary school, so pretty far back. In my opinion these new primary school children are awesome in how open they are. There is no topic that is safe from discussion, and they want to discuss and give their two cents too. Somehow, they are not afraid to put some skin in the game. A wild amount of these really positive developments have been observable in the students behavior in the last few years.

To the same question, Teacher B replied:

(19) Teacher B

No vaikee sanoa onko siinä [huomannut eroa], koska niinku oppilaiden ryhmät on aina niin erilaisia. Saattaa helposti peilata niinku esimerkiksi nyt oli tuommonen aktiivinen porukka, jotka sai tuon adressin aikaan ja saivat sitä vietyä eteenpäin. Sitä saattaa sitten herkästi vetää johtopäätöksiä, että ”Joo on tässä menty eteenpäin” (...) että kohtalaisen vaikee sanoo. Sanotaan nyt niinku somekulttuuri mikä nyt on monella tapaa niinku sanoitkin tuonu ikäviä piirteitä siihen keskustelukulttuuriin. Tietyllä tavalla se on taas tuonu semmosta mukanaan, että ehkä uskalletaan paremmin myös ilmaista. Et on siinä niinku hyviä puoliakin, että uskalletaan sanoa omia mielipiteitä.

Et kyllä siinä nyt tietyllä tavalla niinku korrektien tapojen osaaminen niin se on voinu jopa ottaa takapakkiakin — niinku nyt yhteiskunnassa muutenkin. Asiallisen keskustelun taidot on tietyllä tavalla ehkä vähän niinku hakusessakin. Vähän siis niinku sekä että toisaalta on otettu askelia eteenpäin ja toisaalta vähän niinku jopa taaksekinpäin.

Translation

Well it is difficult to say whether or not [I have noticed any change] because groups of students are so different from each other. I can easily reflect on for example an active group, such as the one that managed to gather the address and proceed with it. One can easily draw conclusions such as: “Yeah, we have progressed in this domain” (...) so it is relatively hard to pin down. Let us say for example the social media, which has brought in many ways — like you said — unwanted characteristics to the conversation culture. In a certain way it has also brought with it an increased readiness to express ourselves. So it has some good sides as well, having the courage to express our opinions. In some ways knowledge about correct manners have probably gone downhill — like in our society in general. The skills of courteous discussion seem to be somewhat lost. We have taken some steps forwards and on the other hand some backwards as well.

Easily among the most encouraging pieces of information sourced from these interviews, has to be the reported openness regarding political matters among the upcoming generations. It certainly speaks to the immense amount of good work that many generations of teachers have done in the school system — not forgetting the role of everyday encounters and interactions in our communities, of course. Interestingly, teacher B makes it a point to mention the role of social media in how we interact and treat each other. It is relatively fair to claim, that when the political life of 2023 is compared to how politicians and elected officials interacted in prior decades, the lack of courteous manners and basic civility stands out very prominently. Gone is the shared sentiment, that the opposite ends of the political spectrum need each other in order to pursue truth. In its place towers a culture of slinging ad-hominems, reputation destruction and the general goal of demonizing the opposition.

The opportunity to record and preserve an excellent real-life case study presented itself, and hence teacher B was requested to elaborate more on how the students behaved and carried the creation of a petition:

(20) Teacher B

No oppilaat teki näin että niinku; heillä oli hyvin selvä ajatus et mikä muutos siihen pitäis tulla — eli poistaa ne. Heillä oli selvät perusteet minkä takia ne pitäis poistaa ne ulkovälitunnit. He keräs adressin ja sitten niillä meni vähän sormi suuhun – ne oli vielä minun luokan oppilaita – meni vähän sormi suuhun että: ”Mitä me nyt tehtäis niinku”. No eli nythän se pitää toimittaa sitten nimenomaan niinku oikeita kanavia kautta. Nimenomaan oppilaskunnan hallitus on sitten se seuraava mihin se viedään ja he niinku vielä hioo sitä ja vie sen eteenpäin rehtorille. Juuri se niinku se eteneminen oli siinä se mihin he tarvi apua, mutta heistä se lähti itestään. Sen adressin he oli keksiny siihen ite ja sitten vaan tarvi vähän ohjausta siihen miten mennään eteenpäin. Sitten kun lopputulos oli vielä se, että toimittiin heidän tavoitteiden mukaisesti niin se oli mahtava esimerkki siitä että nyt me saatiin vaikutettua tähän.

Translation

Well, the students acted in the following way: They had a very clear idea of the changes they wanted enacted — which was removing these outdoor recesses. They had very clear reasoning for why these outdoor recesses should be removed. They gathered names for an address and then they kind of got puzzled... they went “like, what should we do now?”. Well, the next step is to deliver this via the proper avenues. Specifically, the student boards is the next place where this should be forwarded and they will refine the address after which it is delivered to the principal. It was precisely the process with which they needed help, but it all started with their initiative. They came up with the address themselves and they needed a bit of guidance with how to move forward with it. When the outcome ended up being that we acted according to their goals – it was a wonderful example in the spirit of: “Now we ended up having an influence over the decision making.

The school is in many ways a microcosm of the Finnish civic society when these students get together to sign petitions for change. Especially adressit.com stands out as a common medium of generating traction for democratic change online. The website has been the birthplace of many petitions that made it all the way to the halls of Finnish government after collecting 50 000 signatures verified with personal social security details. Teacher B brings up an excellent and tangible example of how to involve the students in the core processes of democracy. It is mentioned, that the students faced a moment of uncertainty after completing the initial stages of

their petition. This I believe, is the point at which most democratic activity stalls without the proper avenues of progression — or simply due to the lack of knowledge about said avenues. In the case of teacher B, benevolent guidance on the part of a trustworthy authority was beneficial – if not required in order for the plan to be brought to fruition. In the interest of elaborating on this topic, one cannot help but to ponder how does the same phenomenon play out in a scaled-out macro setting? Firstly, it is fair to say that the teacher in many ways acts as the proxy for the state and fulfills many of the roles of traditional authority. This said however, every single teacher in a truly free democratic society is an individual with their individual beliefs and vision for their community. This creates a unique dilemma, where a democratic society cannot truly enforce any types of “democratic re-education” on the populace, although the visibility some common virtues could be elevated with the power of example and discussion. Exactly like Montesquieu (De Montesquieu, 1989) remarked, a democracy relies solely on the virtuosity of the people, which means that at least most of the individuals that are brought up in such communities will presumably want to preserve the system which allowed them to become what they are. This is quite a profound idea and is worthy of more exploration. It could be argued, that the highest common good throughout the ages has been the preservation of a societal order, where individuals get to act out their free will. This naturally presumes rulers and governments generally act from a place of generosity and benevolence — which they of course do not. Many societies and governments have struggled with the same sociopolitical dilemma, and it is at this point that education and a general understanding of civic activity must be emphasized. As van Lier (2004) points out: “The development of a proficient second language requires the development of a parallel identity in order to act in the new “semiotic reality”. These in turn help create the new “voice”, which makes it possible to be heard and have “something of consequence to say” (p. 82). For this reason, the English classroom is a fantastic setting for gaining access to ideas, which might not be as widespread in Finnish society. This in turn helps foster a deeper understanding of the characteristics of the democratic social etiquette, and while it is a beautiful idea, it is highly unlikely that such democratic social code could be supported by a population that has not been initiated into its ideals, history and goals.

5.3 Democracy and social media

Social media has without a doubt presented us with one of the more impactful paradigm shifts of the past century, and its role as the chosen medium for dialectic, debate and civic activity has massive implications for the nature democracy and how we gather to discuss. Social media sites in

particular, are often referred to as the modern public square, referring to the physical town squares that used to act as the setting for democratic processes in past times. Although the list of interview questions did not specifically include mentions of social media, both teachers ended up discussing it in length — speaking to its importance. Teacher A was presented with the question: “What kind of role do you think social media has in how we act out the processes of democracy and gather to discuss?”

(21) Teacher A

Joo no siis sehän on laajentanu ihan hirveästi. Mää koen, että se on varmaan niinku lisänny ja kasvattanut ihan hurjasti sitä joukkoa joka pääsee ääneen ja tavallaan kansan syvät rivit pääsee sanomaan aika lailla suodattamatta omat näkemyksensä. Ja sehän on niinku, jos ajatellaan puhtaasti niinku demokratiaa niin tuota, aivan hirveän hieno asia. Että se on niinku kasvanu ihan hirveästi se joukko jotka saa mielipiteensä esille ja pystyvät sitten vaikka virtuaalisesti tavallaan luomaan porukoita ja samanhenkisten tiimejä ja ajamaan niitä omia asioitaan. Sehän on niinku ajatuksena aivan hirveän hieno, mut toki siinä on sitten tämä kääntöpuolensa minkä kaikki tietää, että sit se myös on meidän keskustelukulttuuria muuttanut aika barbaarimaiseksi. Että se ei oo ihan niin hienostunutta nykyään se keskustelu mitä se on ollu aikasemmin. Puolensa ja puolensa, mutta demokratian kannalta se on hieno asia, että kaikenlaiset äänet pääsee ääneen.

Translation

Well this is certainly a story of expansion. I feel like it has massively increased the overall amount of people that get to voice their opinions and especially the large demographics of our nations get to express their unfiltered views. That in itself — thinking purely in terms of democracy is a wonderful thing. The amount of people who can get exposure for their views and beliefs has grown a lot and they can network in virtual settings as well as further their political goals in groups of likeminded people. This is a wonderful phenomenon but of course it has its downsides, which are all too familiar for most of us. Our conversation culture has turned quite barbaric, so it is not quite as well-mannered as it used to be. Everything has its ups and downs but it is a wonderful thing for democracy, that all kinds of voices get to be heard.

It is quite straightforward to identify a maximized participating populace as a net good for any democratic system. Teacher A however, treats the subject with the nuance it deserves and points out

how not everyone will choose to exercise their democratic freedoms in a constructive manner. When it comes to the “barbarism” in the way we communicate with each other online in the modern day, it is not entirely clear whether or not humanity was ever that much better at straying away from ad-hominems. One would like to think that the common humanity in us is somewhat of a constant, while they environments and context vary. While the relative anonymity of users on for example social media sites makes it almost non-consequential to communicate in an unethical manner, available methods for identifying users based on their IP-address or other personal information makes this calculus a fair bit more complex.

The discussion moved onto the highly interesting topic of social media censorship, as teacher B was asked:” What do you think is the role and ethical responsibility of social media companies in preserving the freedom of expression in your opinion?”

(22) Teacher B

Se on ehkä hillittömän vaikee kysymys, mutta tuota kyllä mun mielestä tuntuu että ne firmat ja alustat sais kantaa vastuuta enemmän, koska tietyllä tavalla sosiaalinen media — tai niinku monellakin tapaa se on ottanu perinteisen median roolia ihan tiedonvälittäjänä. Jos ajatellaan perinteistä mediaa niin siellä on kuitenkin aika tarkat säätelet siitä mitä siellä voi sallia. Sen vuoksi pitäis kantaa enemmän vastuuta kuin tällä hetkellä kannetaan, mutta ihan älyttömän vaikea kenttähän se on siis ja sanotaan että monesti tietyllä tavalla nimettömyys mahdollistaa kaikenlaisen älyttömyyden. Mut kyllähän omalla nimellä ja naamalla ilmaistaan vaikka minkälaisia asioita. Tuota, vaikeeta on hirveen yksiselitteisesti lähtee niinku.

Translation

That is an immensely hard question, but I do feel like these firms and platforms could carry more responsibility because in a many ways social media has taken over the role of traditional media as the primary medium of information transfer. If we think about traditional media, they do have pretty strict regulation for what is allowed to air. For this reason they (social media companies) should bear more responsibility than they do at the moment, but this is an immensely tough space. Let us say that often times anonymity makes all kinds of stupidity possible. On the other hand, people do express all manner of things with their own face online. This is a very hard subject to tackle one dimensionally.

Although the average person enjoys this “relative safety” behind their username, social media in its modern rendition is far from anonymous to governmental actors and tech-savvy political activists for example. This is especially relevant for the younger generations and, essentially means, that there already exists a fair bit of self-censorship regarding culturally sensitive topics and social phenomenon. It is no overstatement to claim, that in this day and age the wrong hot take might cost the average person their job or cause them to get socially ostracized and excluded. However on the other hand, introducing topics of consequence gives language learning a more believable and multidimensional context than a traditional textbook setting could. This helps push the boundaries of linguistic and philosophical exploration, as van Lier (2004) points out. From this point of view, guiding students on how to interact in real online discourse with real examples might be the best course of action out of all. In addition, the utilization of English social media and the internet as a realistic setting in English classes would play right into the goals of media literacy skills as they appear in the national curricula.

As the conversation on the topic of social media grew lively, it became intriguing to find out what the teacher thought about the seemingly increasing tendency of large social media companies towards censorship. To the improvised question “What kinds of risks do you see in large social media companies reserving the right to act as some kind of censor or mediator in what people get to say?” She had the following to add:

(23) Teacher A

Onhan siitäkin ollu paljon keskustelua, että se niinku tavallaan Facebookin tai mikä lienee, miksi sitä haluaakaan kutsua Twitterit ja Google tietenkin, YouTube. Niillähän on ihan hirvittävä valta, että sitähän on amerikkain kongressissa moneen kertaan puitu et miten sitä valtaa saatas kahlittua, koska se saattaa käydä vaaralliseksi kun se mahdollistaa sitten myös tämmöisen niinkö, just näitten aika hurjien vastakkaisten mielipiteidenkin levittämisen ja justiinsa disinformaation levittämisen. Ja se justiinsa, että miten niinku nämä tosiaan nämä jätit omilla algoritmeillään esimerkiksi ohjaa tähän vastakkainasetteluun. Et sehän on jotenkin, noh häiritsevä asia. Hehän nimenomaan hyötyvät siitä, että siellä on sitä raflaavaa kommentaaria ja sitten sitä että ihmiset ajautuu semmosille sivustoille joissa ne ehkä törmää justiinsa sitten asioihin joihin ne ei törmäis muuten. Että, kaikista näistähän on käyty aika vakavaa keskustelua viime aikoina, et sitä pitäis suitsia sitä näitten jättien valtaa — tai sit

pakottaa sitä algoritmia siis muuttamaan. Mä en ymmärrä tän päälle mitään oikeesti, mutta että muuttamaan tavalla tai toisella sitä algoritmia sillain et se ei niinku ajais ihmisiä poteroihin ja vähentäis niitä vastakkainasetteluja, jotka monesti on vähän keinotekoisiaakin jopa.

Translation

There has been a fair amount of discussion about companies like Facebook, Twitter, Google and YouTube of course. They have terrifying amounts of power and they have gone to the American congress to work out how their power could be limited because it can become quite dangerous when even these wild opposing views and disinformation can be spread. Also the way these social media giants pit people against each other with their algorithms. This I find somewhat disturbing because they benefit from people saying inflammatory things, which directs people to sites where they get exposed to ideas and things they would not be exposed to otherwise. There has been serious discussion lately surrounding all these topics and how the power of these giants should be shackled somehow — or then force changes to the algorithm. I do not really understand too much about this, but the algorithm could be changed in a way that reduces the amount of people it drives to their foxholes and reduces those confrontations that are often artificial even.

Is it poignant to emphasize here, that of course truly unethical content like violence should be removed by social media sites, and the question was primarily directed at censorship which targets controversial, but perfectly legal speech. The reference to the North American court cases is in keeping with the spirit of the times, and one cannot help but see similarities between the 19th century robber baron monopolies, trust busting, and the current situation with large social media companies. It is beyond feasible to argue, that the amount of power social media companies like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have garnered is simply too much in too few hands. A monopoly in the information space is incredibly risky, since especially private companies are not under as much scrutiny when it comes to the ideologies that take hold among their organization or userbase. Doubling down on this train of discourse, the existential dangers of a monopoly on thought should not require elaboration. For this reason the democratization of our public media sphere is of utmost importance, and while the situation cannot exactly be called a monopoly, the concentration of power into the hands of two or three giants has a similar effect on a large enough populace — a duopoly of sorts. I believe these are all things that should be taught to students, and that the English

classroom presents a unique opportunity to study and integrate these lessons — all while helping the students further train the media literacy skills they already engage on a daily basis.

When inquired whether or not social media companies should take on more responsibility regarding the censorship of expression and unlawful content, teacher B remarked:

(24) Teacher B

Kyl mä sanoisin että enemmän, mutta sitten taas sekin on niin älyttömän vaikeeta että millä tavalla — mihin se vedetään se raja ja missä vaiheessa sitten ruvetaan rajoittamaan mielivaltaisesti ja milloin se ikään kuin menee vääränlaisen sensuurin puolelle ja tapetaan sitä sitten sitä vapaata ilmasua? Tuntuma on se että enemmän, mutta millä tavalla ja miten ne rajat vedetään. Se on semmonen mitä pitäis ihan valtavan paljon enemmän oikeesti — siitä pitäis kunnolla keskustella ja vaikka sitä tietyllä tavalla keskustellaanki kokoajan (...) mutta vielä enemmän.

Translation

I would say more, but then again it is immensely difficult to determine where to draw the line. At what point do we start to arbitrarily limit speech and at what point do we cross over to the side of the wrong kind of censorship and start to harm free expression? My feeling is that there should be more restrictions, but how to implement them is how do you draw these lines? This is a thing that should really be discussed much more frequently and in a comprehensive fashion — although these things are discussed at a certain level at all times (...) simply more.

It is noteworthy that both of the teachers would be in favor of more limitations to what can be published on larger social media sites. Teacher B in particular, hints at the notion of “right type of censorship” — which might sound like a bit of an oxymoron to people that see the issue of freedom of expression as a black and white matter. While every individual’s censorship sieve likely looks a bit different, it is fair to presume that most people would agree that things like violent, sexual or criminal content have no place on the social media feeds of adolescents at least. When it comes to censoring the speech, text, or political commentary of users — the slope gets infinitely more slippery fast. While things such as threats of violence and the agitation of violence against a part of the population should be forbidden, often times these decisions fall to automated content filtering software, trusted flaggers or hired review employees. If nothing else, Johnson & Johnson’s (2016) ideas on “the constructive utilization of controversial topics in order to develop the political

discourse skills of the students” (p. 1–2) are noteworthy here, since students of the internet-era will increasingly find themselves in controversial situations whether our institutions want or not. We might as well equip them with the tools needed to navigate such novel territory, sharpened by the use of believable and immersive learning environments.

Expanding on the topic of free expression, teacher A commented on the nature of the American social media sphere:

(25) Teacher A

Just mietin vaikka Amerikan tilannetta ja sitä oikeistoradikalismien tavallaan nousua, niin niin, niillehän on annettu niin paljon mediatilaaakin. Onko se tavallaan tarpeellista — tietenkin sitten Trumpin twitter-tilit ja muut jäädytettiin — sehän oli aika iso tämmönen mediateko, mutta just sitä mietin et ku siellä kuiteski on aika äänekäs se pieni joukko, joka on esimerkiksi siellä Trumpin taustajoukoissa ja nyt vaikka tukevat pro-putin henkisesti sitten tätä Venäjääkin niin. Et kuinka paljo heille pitää vaikka antaa tilaa? Pitääkö antaa 50/50, tyliin vastakkaiselle näkemykselle niin en ehkä usko että ihan sillä tavalla kuitenkaan.

Translation

I am thinking about the American situation and the rise of the radical right, especially the platform given to them by media. Of course the removal of Trump from twitter was a massive event in the media space, but at the end of the day it is a relatively small and loud minority behind Trump that are pro-Putin and support Russia in the same vein. How much visibility should be given to these marginal views? Should it be a 50/50 split between opposing views, because I do not think that is quite the right approach.

Teacher A brings attention to the rather to a somewhat “crossing the Rubicon” moment in social media history, which the banning of the president of the United States represented. In hindsight, it is quite easy to see how this shifted something in the general attitudes of the common folk. This is likely because most could not come to accept the idea, that someone as established and democratically vetted could be kept from communicating by a third party — a privately owned one at that. The media event as such could be utilized as a writing prompt for an opinion piece workshop in the setting of an English class, which would expose the students to the “constructive utilization of controversial topics in order to develop the political discourse skills”, as championed

by Johnson & Johnson (2016). This kind of exercise would also surely cover two of Stray and Sætra's (2017) main goals: 1.) the ability to communicate with others, and 2.) the ability to understand alternate viewpoints.

On a tangent, the teachers were presented with the philosophical question: "Has social media done something to us, or has it simply allowed us to be something we already were?"

(26) Teacher A

Siis kyllä mä ajattelen että on muuttanu, että tietenki niinkö jotakin se meidän aivoille on tehnyt. Jotenkin haluais ajatella että ihminen on pohjimmiltaan eläin ja pysyy tietyt asiat niinku muuttumattomina. Mut jotenki et miten niinku me koko ajan ollaan siellä somessa ja kaikki maailman tieto on koko ajan meidän ulottuvilla niin sehän — kaikki fragmentoituu ja jotenkin tuntuu että ihmisten niinku ajattelu on muuttunu semmoseksi lyhytjänteisemmäksi ja meillä on vaikeuksia – niin lapsilla kuin aikuisillakin keskittyä asioihin ja pitkäjänteisesti tehdä jotain yhtä asiaa. En tiä onko se tehny siis mitää sellaista meidän aivoille et me oltais muututtu jotenkin niinkö vaikka poliittisesti just erilaiseksi. Ei varmaan mitään sellaista, mut just nää tällaset kaikki ahistusasiat mitä on nyt niin paljon pinnalla nuorissa, noh ja aikuisissakin. Mulla on jotenki sellanen gut feeling että näillä kyllä on yhteys.

Translation

Well, I do tend to think that it has changed us. Of course it has done something to our brains. I would like to think that us humans are animals at the end of the day and some things remain unchanged. Somehow the way we spend most of our time on social media around information. All the knowledge in the world is at our fingertips all the time, which causes everything to become fragmented. Somehow, I also feel that people's thought processes are shaped by their shorter attention span. Everyone from kids to adults seem to have difficulties in focusing on long term undertakings. I do not know if it has done anything of the sort to our brains that would have altered our political leanings. I doubt anything of this sort is true. But especially all these anxiety disorders that are so prevalent among the younger generations — as well as in adults — gives me a gut feeling that these things are connected with social media somehow.

Teacher B answered the identical question in the following way:

(27) Teacher B

Varmaan sekä että. Mut jos otetaan nyt vaikka jotku rasistiset mielenilmaukset, niin tietyllä tavallahan niillä on nyt vaan enemmän väylää ja enemmän mahdollisuuksia tuoda niitä esiin. En tiä onko sitä yhtään sen enempää kuin ennen, mutta sitten taas kyl se tietyllä tavalla on sitte muuttanu myös sitä et semmonen kaikenlainen ryöpsähtely ja myöskin sitten taas kääntäen semmonen kaikesta loukkaantuminen on sosiaalisen median luoma ja mukanaan tuoma kehityskulku. Selkeä vastaus sun kysymykseen on siis sekä että.

Translation

Probably both. But if we look at for example some racist outbursts, then in a certain manner these have more ways to get visibility and more opportunities to get expressed these days. I do not know if there are any more of these today than in previous times, but then again social media has also changed the manner in which people overreact to things. On the other hand it has also brought with it the development of this culture of getting offended about everything. My clear answer to your question is therefore yes and no.

The teachers bring up an interesting point by hypothesizing, that the introduction of social media and smartphones has altered our brains to a physiological extent. The dopamine system and especially its vulnerabilities to our novel setting come to mind immediately. There is already plenty of discussion around the manipulative nature of social media algorithms, but this point is worthy of emphasis here as well. As far as the evidence is concerned, it is probably a good idea to limit or ban smart phone usage in schools. On the other hand, it might not be very wise to bring our students up in a way that teaches them to act in environments that are removed from the wider cultural context and real stakes, as van Lier (2004) argues. From this viewpoint, the utilization of mobile phones and real social media environments would be the most fruitful approach when teaching these skills to future generations, as modern children do not grow up in a political vacuum — quite the contrary.

Teacher B had a lot to say about the current “culture of getting offended”, which exists on social media platforms. When asked “Whether this behavior had more to do with genuine emotional distress or with wielding power”, he answered:

(28) Teacher B

Sanoisin ehkä että enemmän vallankäytöstä kun se on monesti vielä semmosta toisten puolesta loukkaantumista ja some tuo sen mahdollisuuden siihen että yhtä asiaa syvemmin pohtimatta sitten ilmaistaan se loukkaantuminen välittömästi eikä niinku mietitä ollenkaan että ”no mistä tässä oli täsmällään ottaen oikeen kysymys”. Eihän nyt voi sanoa yksiselitteisesti ettei ois koskaan syytä loukkaantua ja kyllä niissäkin kehityskuluissa on ihan hyviä juttuja mutta kyl se niinku paljon on semmosta – nimenomaan niinku sanoit vallankäyttöä ja sitä että kun joku sanoo jotakin mikä on päinvastaista kuin mitä mieltä minä oon asioista niin nyt on niinku helppo käyttää tätä loukkaantumiskorttia tässä. Niin ja mulla oli vielä siihen liittyen semmonen niinku et siitä vedetään ne johtopäätökset että esimerkiksi kaikki mitä tämä ihminen on aikasemmin sanonu ja tästä eteenpäinkin sanoo niin ne voi nyt sivuttaa täysin ja nollata. Se semmonen niinku, et ei anna edes yhen virheen mahdollisuutta.

Translation

I would say it is more about the ability to wield power since often times it is about getting offended on someone else’s behalf. Social media brings with it the possibility of expressing being offended without thinking about the topic too deeply instead of thinking at all along the lines of:” Well what was precisely being discussed here”. Of course you cannot simplify matters and say that there is never a reason to get offended and these developments have some good aspects as well. But is is — like you said — largely about wielding power over others and it is easy to pull out the “this offends me” — card, especially when someone says something that goes against what you believe. I also have another thing to add here: for example people draw conclusions based on a single take along the lines of “everything this person has previously said and will say from here on out can be completely ignored and nullified. This kind of notion, that people should not be granted the freedom to make a single mistake

This kind of sentiment, that people should not be given another opportunity or a “second chance” to reclaim themselves directly opposes the foundational ideas of our civilization. Individuals ought to be granted the freedom to make mistakes, and to learn from their mistakes in order to make themselves a better, more compassionate person and a more valuable member of the community. What kind of world would be born if we treated every person that made a mistake with the mentality, that anything they say or do in the future on out has no value, or that they lack the

potential to act in a virtuous manner? Such a hostile social atmosphere would be antithetical to Stray and Sætra's (2017) second rule: the ability to understand alternate viewpoints, van Lier's (2004) second right: the right to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally as well as Vinterek's (2010) third tenet: respect and tolerance. Especially tolerance seems to be a selectively applied virtue on social media sites, which speaks to the hypocrisy of the whole situation. Expanding on the topic of social exclusion and online bullying, it might be a good idea to offer special guidance and counseling focused on the digital realm, as more and more facets of our lives transfer over. From the teacher's perspective, it is sometimes immensely difficult to see digital bullying happening in the classroom, since it occurs on messaging apps and group chats. On occasions, telling a teacher about the happenings under the surface of the classroom façade is frowned upon by the peers, and sadly the whistleblower might risk reputational damage. A lot of this can be mitigated by teacher action, school culture and the establishment of a safe environment in which the students can inform the teacher privately and in an anonymous fashion. It is after all a defining characteristic of the democratic social etiquette to be able to highlight and defuse injustice without resorting to mob justice or violence. This too naturally relies on the virtuosity of the average individual, since the size and power of the state's monopoly on violence and surveillance ought to be restricted in a healthy democracy.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this research paper on democracy and democracy skills was to compile, analyze and learn from the interviews of two veteran English language teachers. It is my sincere hope that the recorded thoughts of the teachers will remain accessible indefinitely, since the ideas they raised will serve as evergreen material to learn from for future generations. In addition, the timing of the research paper on democracy coinciding with perhaps the greatest geopolitical upheaval of our generation makes for an interesting document for future historians to study. The study rationale was originally birthed by the simple observation, that the term democracy seemed to appear more frequently in the newer Finnish school curricula. The hypothesis was, that developments in the areas of social interaction, global as well as Finnish national politics, and political culture as a whole have contributed to the experienced shift in social cohesion and democratic attitudes. In addition to the central question of why the demand for democracy skills had seemingly increased, the study aimed to gain clarity on what the front-line teachers have observed in their line of work, and whether or not there had been noticeable change within their careers.

The early sections of this work aimed to synthesize an understanding of democracy skills based on philosophical, societal and practical viewpoints from contemporary academic literature. Perhaps the most comprehensive intellectual proved to be van Lier, with his thorough contemplation of democracy and the ways with which to instill democratic ideals in future generations (van Lier, 2004). Mandates of the Finnish national education board relating to democracy skills were visited and translated in order to make them accessible to a wider international audience, as well as to narrow down the focus of the interviews and their analysis. The academics Stray and Sætra (2017), Johnson & Johnson (2016) and Vinterek (2010) discussed many shared themes like discourse skills and teacher agency, which were correlated with the instillation of democratic values via the institution of public schooling.

The analysis finds numerous parallels between the ideas and methods of the aforementioned academics and the teachers, who had seemingly reached a number of the same important conclusions separately. In addition, areas of uncertainty which arose from the interviews were supplemented with the theory of these academics of democracy in order to create a more comprehensive and informative case study. The teachers were uniformly opposed to any corruption of the democratic system, and agreed on the importance of democracy skills for the society as a whole. Specifically, the teachers emphasized the role of school as the microcosm and training

ground for democratic interactions, as van Lier (2004), Stray and Sætra (2017, Johnson & Johnson (2016) and Vinterek (2010) highlight as well.

The teachers raised many points connected with democracy, among which were the modern sociopolitical atmosphere, social media, Finlandization, the information economy, social exclusion and democracy-themed school events. The topic of Finlandization was only brought up by teacher A and is very much a discussion still in progress. It is fair to argue that the effects of this era on the politicians and political culture still lingers on in some forms, and is antithetical to the spirit of democracy. Social exclusion was also only brought up by teacher A, and it is an important consideration especially for the Finnish society, since the percentile of excluded individuals seems to be growing with every passing year. Social exclusion and political apathy naturally is one of the most dangerous things to democracy, since the arrangement requires the goodwill and effort of as many as possible. This is highlighted by van Lier's (2004) second right, *social inclusion*, or the right to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally (this includes the right to autonomy within the system). Inclusion, as van Lier (2004) argues, is essential for the condition of *communitas*, and operates at the social level (2004, p. 84). Especially the Gutsy go-event brought up by teacher A stands out as brilliant example of civic activity and a program that should get more funding and attention (Gutsy go, 2023). Both teachers regard social media as one the biggest contributors to the changes in social cohesion, as was hypothesized. Teacher B brings attention to the notion, that existing teachers should internalize the responsibility in employing democratic teaching methods required by the national school curriculum.

Concerning the prospects for future research concerning democracy skills, I propose the implementation of more voting opportunities at all levels of school, so that the students have more influence on matters that concern them. For example, this social experiment could be initially conducted in one or a few pilot schools, after which the staff and students could be interviewed or polled on their experiences. The late 36th president of the United States Lyndon B. Johnson perhaps expressed it the best: "The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice" (Garrow, 1990), and while the Finnish school system has little to worry regarding injustice towards anybody, the importance of letting the youth know that they have a vote regarding the affairs concerning them is important enough. They will need to grow up with the understanding that only their actions will hold back the other archetypes of governance which have tainted the pages of history with tragedy. Among the many things one can conclude with the evidence in mind, is that the average Finnish teacher remains a highly educated professional, whose expertise should and can be respected.

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