Education towards Democracy

Implementation of democratic methods in primary school classrooms in Norway

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Education towards Democracy

Implementation of democratic methods in the primary school classroom

in Norway

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Prologue

The whole journey from starting to ponder to plan and then the actual work of creating something of my own has been a matter of endless interest, intellectual delight and dedication. It has also become a personal mission for outlining the necessity for innovation in education. When I started on this project one year ago, I did not know that this project was going to have such an overwhelming effect on my personal life, as well as my psychological well-being. Therefore, I would like to express here my gratitude and endless admiration towards Marey Allyson Macdonald. As a member of the staff of the School of Education, University of Iceland, she has taught me one of the biggest lessons in my life, namely that the good-hearted, generous, and caring personality of the good teacher, in my case supervisor, can inspire and change lives. Moreover, to me Allyson has been a role model of how to teach in order to achieve my idealistic goal for changing the world around me into a more just, tolerant, and welcoming place. As I finish this work the COVID-19 pandemic is racing around the world and democracy is being stretched to its limit.

I am grateful for the opportunities I have been given and I would like to thank my family – my husband, my son, and my mother – for their support and love. I would never have succeeded in my attempt to create such an intellectual piece of work if it was not for them.

This master thesis is written by me after I have acquainted myself with the rules in the Scientific Protocol of The University of Iceland. I have maintained the ethics of research and integrity in the collection and dissemination of information, and the interpretation of the results. I refer to all content that I have downloaded from other or previous works, whether it be tips, pictures, content or words. I thank everyone who has contributed to my work in one way or another, but I am responsible for what may have been missed. I confirm this with my signature.

Oslo, Monday, 11th May 2020

[Signature]
Abstract

Implementation of democratic methods in the primary school classroom:
A case study carried out in Nyskolen in Norway

The broad purpose of this project is to accumulate knowledge of the role of democracy in one Norwegian primary school and assess the importance of this approach for contemporary society. My goal is to carry out a case study and analyze how and why democratic methods are being implemented at a primary school level. My scientific aim is to find out more about how ideas of democracy make their way to children. Thus, the research question is: How are democratic methods implemented in the primary school classroom in Nyskolen situated in the capital area of Norway?

A literature review on different academic resources, including The Norwegian National Curriculum (2019), were used to construct a framework for the case study. According to the newest changes in this official document, the educational authorities have to monitor how well the schools adjust their local curricula to the new requirements towards sustainability, democracy and cultural diversity. A special place is assigned to the importance of practicing democracy on a daily basis. Data-gathering visits to the school were made from June 2019 until the middle of October 2019. I took in-depth interviews with the principal and four primary school teachers. These tutors are qualified, according to the Norwegian legislation, to teach students from first and up to the tenth grade.

The most immediate way for the teachers to channel democracy directly and on a regular basis to their pupils is through dialogical teaching. This form of teaching appears to be the necessary foundation for other democratic teaching in the classroom, as for example problem-solving and using an interdisciplinary approach. More teachers well acquainted with the dialogic teaching are needed. Also, political will is necessary in order to investigate how democracy can be implemented in education on a national basis and support schools and teachers to move in that direction. The existence of Nyskolen shows that to be successful democratic teaching needs to be well thought out as a working concept and as an ideology, and in order to cover all the aspects of the school day.

This study shows how democratic methods of teaching could be applied to existing schools. This becomes fundamental with the new Norwegian National Curriculum (2019),
which posits democracy as one of six educational values that have to be followed whenever
the primary school teachers make plans for teaching.
Ágrip

Innleiðing lýðræðislegra aðferða í skólastofum grunnskóla: Málsrannsókn gerð í Nyskolen í Noregi

Megin tilgangur þessa verkefnis er að afla þekkingar á því hvernig unnið er með lýðræði í einum norskum grunnskóla og meta mikilvægi þessarar nálgunar fyrir samtímhasamfélagið. Verkefnið byggr á tilviksrannsókn þar sem ég greini hvernig og hvers vegna lýðræðislegum aðferðum er beitt á grunnskólastigi. Markmið mitt er að öðlast innsýn í hvernig hugmyndir um lýðræði ná til barna í daglegu starfi skólans. Í samræmi við þetta er rannsóknarspurningin: Hvernig eru lýðræðislegar aðferðir útfærðar í kennslustofum grunnskóla í Nyskolen á höfuðborgarsvæðinu í Noregi?


Fljótlegasta leiðin fyrir kennara til að innleiða lýðræðislega kennsluhætti er að beita samræðukennslu. Þetta kennsluform virðist vera nauðsynlegur grunnur fyrir aðra lýðræðislega kennslu í skólastofunni, svo sem að leysa vandamála með þverfaglegri nálgun. Skortur er á kennurum sem þekka vel til samræðukennslunnar. Einnig er pólitískur vilji nauðsynlegur til að kanna ólíkar leiðir við að innleiða lýðræði í menntun á landsvisu og styðja við skóla og kennara sem vilja fara þá leið. Tilvist Nyskolen sýnir að til að ná árangri í lýðræðislegri kennslu þarf lýðræði að vera vel ígrundað sem vinnuhugtak og sem hugmyndafræði sem nær yfir alla þætti skóladagsins.

Þessi rannsókn staðfestir hvernig hægt væri að beita lýðræðislegum aðferðum við kennslu í núverandi skólum. Norska aðalnámskráin (2019) kveður á um að lýðræði í kennslu
sé eitt af sex grunngildum í menntun sem þarf að huga að hvenær sem grunnskólakennarar gera áætlanir um kennslu.
# Table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ágrip</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Introduction</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Personal motivation for choosing this topic</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Focus of the study</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Background to the study</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4. Possible problems</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5. Goals</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Methodology</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Democratic teaching at Nyskolen as a case</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 In-depth interview – specifics</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 In-depth interviews and my interviewees</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Benefits and disadvantages of case studies</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Ethics</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Techniques of gathering the results</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Theoretical framework</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Democratic education and sustainable developing society</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Democratic teaching methods and students’ cooperation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Democratic teaching methods and formation of political position</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 The negative outcomes of implementing democratic teaching methods</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Democracy in practice – The ideology of Nyskolen</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 The idea behind the first interview</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 The ideological platform of Nyskolen</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 An interview with the headmistress of Nyskolen – Sunniva Sandanger: Theory in practice</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Critical reflections on Sunniva’s interview</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Practicing democracy on a daily basis</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 The idea behind the teacher interviews</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Interview with Jonina Margret Arnarsdottir: Teaching democracy through practice</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Interview with Marit Lokke: Teaching democracy through dialogue</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Interview with Audun Wurgler: Democracy teaching and interdisciplinarity</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.5 Some reflections over the interviews .................................................................................75
6. Results ..................................................................................................................................76
  6.1 Dialogical teaching and democracy .................................................................................76
  6.2 Case meetings as a teaching method towards democracy ..............................................77
  6.3 Project teaching and democracy ....................................................................................77
  6.4 Interdisciplinarity approach as a democratic method of teaching .................................78
  6.5 Textbook and mixed-age group teaching. Which one belongs to the group of
democratic teaching methods? ...............................................................................................78
7. Discussion ..............................................................................................................................80
8. Conclusion ............................................................................................................................84
References ..................................................................................................................................85
Appendix .....................................................................................................................................88
1 Introduction

When it comes to democratic education, practices differ from one country to another. This can impede international communication and lead to unnecessary confusion. In order to avoid this and maintain one sustainably developing international society we need adequate democratic education. The feasibility of this task is evident by the state legislation of different countries, including Norway. The Norwegian National Curriculum (2019) states that all Norwegian students shall be taught about and according to democratic values. The legal necessity of implementing democracy in schools on a daily basis, combined with the importance of teaching pupils to express their beliefs and support these with adequate evidence, triggered my curiosity. That is why, the focus of this study is on how primary school teachers implement democratic methods in their teaching. Legislation in Norway has, for a long time, stipulated that the students should be taught about the significance of democracy for the contemporary society, and their basic human rights and voice of each and every student must be respected by all the different actors of the schooling system (The Education Act, 1998).

Another aspect that sparked my interest is the need for teachers to cultivate the ability of students to listen and respect the beliefs of their schoolmates (Sigurgeirsson, 2016). I was willing to take some action, using as a starting point the legal framework of Norway. I wanted to find out the extent to which contemporary school educators from first to the tenth grade succeed in teaching their students to become active members of a contemporary democratic society. The location of my study is in Nyskolen, the only school in Norway that openly embraces democracy ideology not only as a watchword, but as an active pedagogy and a mode of supporting children’s school experience.

In the first chapter I cover the basics such as personal motivation for choosing this topic, focus of the study, background, possible problems, and finally, but not least, the goals of the present work. In the second chapter, I explain the methodology. The third chapter is about the theoretical framework, targeting current academic field research on the theme of democracy in teaching, which relates to the fourth and fifth chapters of my academic work. In the fourth chapter the ideological platform of Nyskolen is scrutinized, combined with an interview, taken with the headmistress of the school. Further interviews with three teachers from the school are presented in the fifth chapter, and the sixth chapter lays out and
systematizes the results from the interviews, drawing inferences from how the primary school teachers at Nyskolen implement democracy in their classrooms. The seventh chapter is a discussion of the findings, and in the final chapter I present the conclusion of my thesis.

1.1 Personal motivation for choosing this topic

I have always been intrigued and fascinated by the idea of innovative education where the role of the teacher is considered in a new light. Democratic teaching plays a central role in changing education and it is a matter of necessity for primary school teachers to be well acquainted with this topic. Democracy in teaching is more than a legal form in the National Curriculum (2019). It calls for a new type of teacher, a teacher that has the capacity to see each and every student in his/her class as an individual that has equal chances to find his/her own way in life. When I grew up, my classmates and I did not get any sympathy from our class teacher during the first three years of primary school. We had to respect and obey our teacher, our voice was never considered as important, and every deviation from what the teacher accepted as normal was punished, including physical punishment. All of these changed the way we, as young students, perceived education. Since then I was convinced that one day, I would become a teacher, a teacher that would listen and believe in her students. I think that through democratic teaching I am going to have a chance to reach all my students, even those with different backgrounds and cultural affiliations. I am convinced that learning through dialogical teaching is going to help us learn something about each other and how we can live together as a society that accepts diversity as a benefit that we all can learn from and grow stronger.

1.2 Focus of the study

My study focuses on how primary school teachers implement democratic methods in their classrooms, in a primary school known to practice democracy on a daily basis. I will assess whether there is a discrepancy between teachers’ practice and The Norwegian National Curriculum from 2019 where it is stipulated that democracy is one of six educational values which should influence all teaching. Democracy in teaching is considered to be the pedagogy that assists students the most when learning about democracy. In learning about democracy, it is actually important to be part of a democracy. In Norway, democracy is
recognized as a form of communication, interaction and participation, which aims at developing students’ democratic competences (NOU, 2015). When democratic competences become stronger among the students, democracy should become stronger in society, but only when the cooperation between private and official institutions, and the society itself set up the standard for national and global cooperation (NOU, 2015). Consequently, in my research I look at how primary school teachers implement democratic teaching methods that stimulate their students to become more reflective, communicative and cooperative citizens. Citizens that not only participate, but influence and change their society towards becoming more tolerant and respectful of equal rights of human beings (The Education Act, 1998). These well-educated members of the democratic society are going to possess the skills that will not allow “reproducing the rationality of social control and class dominance” (Giroux, 1980). The essence of this quote leads me to the background to the study.

1.3. Background to the study

Before clarifying the background that inspired my academic curiosity on the topic of democracy in education, and how crucial this topic is for the very existence of the whole contemporary education system and our society too, I would like to quote Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s quotations from the novel The Brothers Karamazov: “much is said to you about your education, but a beautiful, sacred memory like that, one preserved from childhood, is possibly the very best education of all” (2003). The question here is how we, as educators, should channel our pedagogical efforts in the idealistic direction of reaching this sacred and well-preserved memory that Dostoevsky is referring to. Because only after achieving this goal can we be sure that the spirit and ideals of democracy are going to survive. This could happen through the mechanism of teaching and learning democracy (Edelstein, 2010), where pupils are taught to live in a democratically oriented cooperation with other members of society. This idea of Edelstein was one of the motivators that made me begin writing about democracy in teaching. This was the catalyst that triggered my interest to write about implementation of democratic teaching methods in primary school classrooms. Some of these democratic methods are cooperation, deliberation and shared decision making. Educating well-informed citizens is of benefit to the society as a whole,
which reflects on the idea of finding a more sustainable way to exist as one dynamic and culturally diverse society (Jónsson et al., 2018). Today, more than ever, we have to see whether our society is appropriately prepared to embrace the classical Greek definition of citizenship education. In the ancient days, education was meant for citizens of the world (Blaug & Shwarzwarzmantel, 2016) adequately prepared to take intelligent and politically motivated decisions that result in active participation in the civic community (Giroux, 1980). The question of why this more idealistic doctrine of citizenship and democracy has not been transferred into the day-to-day practices of schools (Giroux, 1980) is something that needs to be scrutinized.

This inadequacy of schools today to reinforce the Ancient Greek’s model of teaching democracy and citizenship can be a direct consequence of a lack of competences and political will (Dahlum & Knutsen, 2017) when it comes to the quality of contemporary education. Teaching students the alphabet of becoming active citizens and securing the pedagogical process of transforming them into intelligent and informed citizens (Bjerkaker, 2010) is of utmost importance. Thus, students have to be encouraged to explore and be aware of their own values, which will assist them in situations when social problems have to be identified and dealt with, either through the prism of their relevant social experience, or through the social problems of their daily lives (Barth & Shermis, 1979). Teachers have to use pedagogical methods focusing on nurturing more problem-solving and decision-making skills in their pupils (Giroux, 1980). The necessity of introducing and using more actively such teaching methods in the contemporary classrooms comes from the need to avoid placement in a social context where “the control exercised by voters on their elected representatives is a pure fiction” (Bakunin, 1870).

All of these excerpts and statements from the academic literature encourage my inner motivation and willingness to find the answers to how in practice the primary school teachers in Norway succeed in implementing various democratic methods in their daily teaching. Something that they achieve while reassuring their students’ legal rights to be trained in critical and creative thinking (Jónsson, 2012). During this process of managing democratic methods of teaching certain problems can be encountered.
1.4. Possible problems

Nurturing an atmosphere that stimulates and cultivates students’ critical and creative thinking is an important prerequisite for establishing democracy in the classroom. It is not just a legal requirement to be followed (The Norwegian National Curriculum, 2019; The Education Act, 1998), it is an inspiring principle of education that has motivated me during my studies at The University of Iceland. It is important for the students to come up with their own ideas, hear their own voices, see the nature of their mental development, and furthermore to have a chance to learn how to work together. Students should respect and listen to others. This may be the most important skill that contemporary educators have to be ready to teach (The Norwegian National Curriculum, 2019). That is why, I am going to look closer at how Nyskolen appears to the public as an educational institution that has been established to follow the democratic doctrine, implementing democracy in their everyday teaching. Even more, I intend to assess through open and in-depth interviews (Lichtman, 2013) with the teaching personnel from that school, whether they have professional training and the required central and local support, including the one granted by the school authorities, to make democracy flourish in their classrooms.

One concern that I have is that some of the teaching personnel could allow their professional allegiance to take control during the interviews. However, I am planning to document not only verbal speech and utterances, related to the interview’s topic, but I will also observe the interviewee’s non-verbal language in the form of pauses, after a question has been asked, omitting answering questions, and finally, but not least, how the whole interview proceeds from beginning to end. By thoroughly examining the theoretical framework for my research and making careful notes and recording of in-depth interviews I hope that my work will be a sound academic study, a study that follows stringent principles and aims for predetermined goals.

1.5. Goals

My goal is to investigate the implementation of democratic methods in primary school classrooms in Norway by committed teachers. I believe that it is only when primary school teachers begin to work on a daily basis with methods of teaching that take into consideration their students’ interests and voice that democracy begins to emerge in the
classroom. Only then can we refer to a school as an educational institution that cherishes democracy. Contemporary schools must get a chance to serve as a public institution constantly educating children on how to become good citizens and follow the spirit of the law (The Education Act, 1998). This is a prerequisite for legitimacy of the school curriculum and leads to my first aim for this study. That is to investigate how important central and local political support is for one school, in order for that school to provide an adequate democratic education to all its students. This leads me to the second aim which is to investigate teachers’ attitudes, preparedness, and alacrity of incorporate democratic teaching methods in their daily teaching. Is there a relevant link between the school’s ideological platform that initiated its foundation back in 2004, and the extent to which pedagogical personnel deliberately use democratic teaching methods? To this end, qualitative research methods seem to be most suitable. Moreover, my research takes the form of a case study.
2. Methodology

In this chapter I will justify my choice of research approach. By using qualitative research, I am going to have a chance to interpret concrete human phenomena (Lichtman, 2013) through conducting open interviews on my topic of interest. Qualitative research approach is well suited for investigating the use of democratic methods, implemented by primary school teachers in their classrooms in Norway. Collecting data through semi-structured interviews allows me and the interviewees to construct the reality of shared knowledge and, thereby, move towards more just and democratic society (Oral, 2018). This qualitative research will, further, take the form of a case study, focusing on an in-depth examination of a particular case which is the implementation of democratic teaching methods at the Nyskolen in Oslo. I as an interviewer, will have the role of an initiator and a guide that helps my interviewees, using a prepared interview framework, to stay close to the subject matter I am interested in. The interview framework does not consist in questions listed in advance but a collection of topics and considerations that relate both to the academic literature I use and the pedagogic practice of Nyskolen.

2.1Democratic teaching at Nyskolen as a case

My research focuses on democratic practices at a single elementary school in Oslo, Nyskolen. My research question is: How are democratic methods implemented in the primary school classroom in Nyskolen?

What characterizes this type of detailed approach to the collection of qualitative research best is the specificity and detailed selection of data, referring to a single case or cases of study (Lichtman, 2013). Furthermore, what Lichtman (2013) identifies as an important quality of the case is that it can be limited to a trait, characteristic, or behavior which can be identified in advance. This will help the researcher identify and depict the individuals that are in possession of these characteristics. Another characteristic of the case study that makes it attractive to some researchers is that case that might be selected is one that is referred to as unique, or special (Lichtman, 2013). The theme I have selected for my case study is unique: democracy education at Nyskolen. My research question casts light on the professional behavior of a group of individuals. In my case, these are the primary school
teachers at Nyskolen that are implementing democracy teaching methods in their teaching and the headmistress of the school.

2.2 In-depth interview – specifics

The principal data for this case study will be collected via semi-structured interviews (Lichtman, 2013). This kind of approach leaves space for personal ponderings and brainstorming on the connection between education, democracy, and pedagogical capacity. Through the in-depth interviews I can get information from my interviewees that is not slanted toward what they think I want to hear. They can relate their stories in an honest conversation, using their own words and language, which, on the other hand, also gives their narratives a certain uniqueness intertwined with their own sense of reality (Lichtman, 2013). A specific characteristic for the in-depth interview is that there is no standard set of questions. The researcher has to identify five to ten topic areas that need to be covered during the process of the interview. For my interviews, I have identified individual topics contained in the academic literature that I will use as a basis for my research. My plan is to pre-group the questions I want to ask my interviewees in five to ten separate thematic parts which will structure well and facilitate the interviews. Whenever these are conducted a signed permission given by the interviewees is a matter of necessity. The type of questions that fits best in in-depth interviews are as follows: grand tour, concrete example, comparison or contrast, new elements, and closing questions (Lichtman, 2013). One quality of the in-depth interviews is that the pedagogic personnel that are interviewed are going to leave the impression that they have taken you, my readers, on a great adventure (as cited in Lichtman, 2013, p. 192), through unleashing their professional stories in the form of multiple realities, which are then discussed.

2.3 In-depth interviews and my interviewees

These multiple realities are a direct consequence of the fact that I am planning on interviewing, first of all, the headmistress of the Norwegian school. Then, in a separate chapter I will present the interviews with three representatives of the pedagogical personnel from the school: one teacher of the youngest grades, one tutor from the middle grades, and one teacher responsible for the pedagogical work with the oldest students. The
in-depth interviews I find to be an adequate tool for collecting data, especially when I must be prepared to face ignorance on the part of teaching methods used today by Norwegian educators. The teachers I have chosen in advance should shed light on issues related to the effectiveness of the democratic teaching methods they use on a daily basis, while teaching students from the first to the tenth grade. There are many subjective factors that can lead the discussants to forget to talk about teaching methods. Therefore, I have to prepare appropriate questions that show respect but at the same time gather the needed information. The latter will be collected with the help of two electronic devices – Dictaphone and a mobile phone – while at the same time interesting moments from the conversations will be recorded on paper. Immediately after collecting the raw data in the form of interview transcripts, the final two chapters of my case study are going to be the focal point of my work where my aim is to manage the balance from initial coding to categorizing and further to delineate the concepts (Lichtman, 2013) of my case study. This makes it necessary to clarify the positive and negative aspects of applying case study as an approach to qualitative research.

2.4 Benefits and disadvantages of case studies

One of the benefits of using a case study as a method of research is that the researcher can choose a case that could be described as unique. This is a mental process followed by an in-depth examination of this particular case which does not lead to any general characterization, which can become a challenge for new researchers (Lichtman, 2013).

Along with the benefits of using a case study as a research method there are certain disadvantages that should be mentioned. These disadvantages are listed by Lichtman (2013) and are as follows: the results of this study cannot be generalized; the absence of detailed characteristics that can summarize how to conduct a case study and consequently what makes a piece of research a case study; and finally there is a variety of applicable ways to analyze and write-up the data. However, I am willing to give it a chance, focusing on the uniqueness of my case and the social significance of the topic I have chosen.
2.5 Ethics

When the social significance of a topic is investigated the ethical issues must be outlined. This is a direct consequence of the fact that the “qualitative researchers involve themselves in every aspect of their own work” (Lichtman, 2013) that can lead to deliberate delusion to protect a personal cause. The role of the researcher concerns only the one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is the people being interviewed who share not only facts with the researcher but reveal their emotions. This the researcher must treat with care and respect, because good interviewing demands reflexive awareness and engagement with the emotional part of the interviewing (Ezzy, 2010).

2.6 Techniques of gathering the results

In the present research, three different techniques will be used to code, systematize and analyze the qualitative data gathered from all four interviews. The most important method is the constant-comparative method, because of how it guides the researcher through different phases of processing the actual data, referred to as coding, taking the researcher further to choose between the most important codes which then will be categorized and theorized as results (Lichtman, 2013). The second analytical technique is content (textual) analysis, according to which the coding categories are derived directly from the text (Lichtman, 2013). Similar to this is the third one, conversation analysis (Lichtman, 2013) which allows “the assembled collection of single instances to be tested for robustness of particular description of an action and to refine this analysis through repeated instances of an action in different examples of interaction” (Liddicoat, 2007). From what has been said so far, it follows that the information collected will be divided and graded in terms of frequency of applicability, therefore efficiency of the democratic teaching methods. All three techniques together with other procedures of qualitative analysis, are used as complementary procedures of extrapolating results from the materials, bestowed on the same topic: “Implementation of democratic methods in the primary school classroom in Norway.”
3. Theoretical framework

Here I will focus on the theoretical framework underpinning my research. My purpose is to find several distinct focal points that will make it easier for you, my reader, to become well-informed about the actual theoretical parameters or characteristics of democracy as they are in the contemporary schools, which I use as a base for my interviews. Thus, I group the academic literature on the topic of democracy in schools, into four different areas, one at school level and three at classroom level:

- Democracy education and a sustainable developing society;
- Democracy teaching methods and students’ cooperation;
- Democracy teaching methods and their formative role in the process of young individuals clarifying their political positions;
- Some negative outcomes of implementing democracy teaching methods.

3.1 Democratic education and sustainable developing society

During the last few years, global discussion has focused on how important it is for the human population of planet Earth to change the way it lives and become a more sustainable developed global community. In order for people and society to change, we need to change the compulsory education, especially when it comes to the methods of teaching. The study content should also be changed, synchronizing itself with the needs of a sustainably developing society. Some Nordic initiatives exist, such as the NOS-HS-funded workshop titled “A Sense of Sustainability: Democracy, Sustainability and Education” (Jónsson et al., 2018). In a set of three workshops academics and other professionals from several Nordic countries agreed that education has to be changed. This change means less competition between students and more collaboration between schools and society’s public and private institutions. The spirit of the Nordic discussion is that students need more chances for cooperation, as well as more opportunities to get to know how the society works and how they can become active participants in it. Student participation influences the important processes in the democratic approach, while allowing them to express freely their beliefs and activities they are good at (Jónsson et al., 2018). The innovative character of this Nordic attempt to revise the education has also been explored by other academics such as Knowles and Clark (2018).
A more democratic and sustainably developing education can be achieved once the function and meaning of all three – school, society, and classroom have been changed (Knowles & Clark, 2018) in a way that political communities of our society provide models of action for students. Knowles and Clark (2018) argue that if teachers in schools become acquainted with and use in practice deliberative democracy this could be accomplished. The partners in the Nordic workshop concluded that teachers have to be trained in creating learning environments, where the free flow of ideas and perspectives are necessary for deliberative democracy in the classroom. The combination of students’ political experiences and the characteristics of the communities the belong to should be used as a foundation for democratic education. Political communities could be created as an answer to local societies’ problems, which, when incorporated in education, can supply students with certain models of action in lasting networks, providing an empowering democratic experience (Knowles & Clark, 2018). This democratic experience is achievable only if the democratic education enables students “to support and advocate for themselves based on their identities” (Chalmers, 2015).

Another important democratic competence is the ability to influence the behavior of other individuals after getting a chance of being self-civilized through civic education (Yoldas, 2014). Civilization here is seen through the prism of social education which, according to Yoldas, will teach the young people social virtues such as empathy, cooperativeness, loyalty, solidarity and tolerance. Supporting young students in developing an adequate social competence, civic education has “to equip students with political know-how” (Yoldas, 2014) that can lead to living in sustainably developing communities. This inference minimizes the intellectual meaning of generalization such as that referring to democracy in many academic works is no more than economic growth, generated by human capital (Dahlum & Knutsen, 2017).

In contrast to the capitalist vision for contemporary education is the Nordic idea that leads to a sustainably developing society, i.e. the notion that contemporary pedagogues have to prioritize learning needs more than learning schemes, as well as pedagogy that motivates, inspires, and prepares students for lifelong learning (Bjerkaker, 2014). Bjerkaker’s statement resonates further with Payne (2017) who concludes that contemporary schools must not hesitate to adopt teaching/learning methods such as discussion, deliberation and social action to collect more knowledge about democracy, and
democratic values and dispositions. These are the democracy teaching methods that the young teachers should be capable of using, together with problem-solving, which are the foundation for giving students the necessary participatory skills that makes it easier for young individuals to do things – both for others and themselves (Payne, 2017) in a society where developing in a more sustainable manner is the ultimate goal. The achievability of this goal is influenced by another important aspect of the democratic classroom, teaching pupils how to become more comfortable working in a more cooperative manner.

The findings of Bjerkaker (2014) and Payne (2017) are closely related to the concept of sustainability and democracy in teaching. However, the topic of what and how the primary school teachers should teach (about) democracy in terms of students acquiring competence that can lead to more social cooperation and to synchronized co-existence between humans at a global level has been systemized by Jónsson and Rodriguez (2019). In their research they focus on competence for democracy through the Deweyan conception of democracy. What is specific about this concept of democracy is the idea that at the core of democratic living is a competence for amicable cooperation (Jónsson & Rodriguez, 2019, p.9). This unique interpretation of Dewey combining competence for democracy together with competences stresses the need for more critical evaluation, communal living, resilience, and forming the conception of a good life as an ethical parameter are the corner stones for democratic teaching. Moreover, the competence that I find is the essence of the democratic existence and education is the one respecting the natural boundaries of human living as the essential prerequisite for further social cooperation between humans themselves, and humans and other species (Jónsson & Rodriguez, 2019). It is obvious that in their work Jónsson and Rodriguez (2019) further infer that the schools have to teach the students these competences for establishing a common democratic culture, nourishing cooperation between not only fellow human beings across the globe, but also with other creatures of the Earth (Jónsson & Rodriguez, 2019).

3.2 Democratic teaching methods and students’ cooperation

In order for primary school teachers to adopt more democracy teaching methods that will teach students the important skill of cooperating with others, dialogical teaching methods
must be explored (Calcagni & Lago, 2018). The practice of dialogue, as a collective and collaborative intellectual activity initiated in a concrete group, such as the class, consists in an ongoing process of connecting with each other through meaningful and constructive exchange of reason (Calcagni & Lago, 2018). Such dialogues will not surface in the classrooms, unless cooperative learning practices – such as positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face supportive interaction, appropriate use of social skills, and group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 2016) – are firmly entered into the class curricula. This will also in the long term increase cultural tolerance at the group level, through the individuals’ internalization of a wide range of moral and political norms. Such formation may even be more likely in groups with a diverse cultural background (Johnson & Johnson, 2016). Without doubt, increasing students’ proficiency in dialogue and both individual and group recognition of the prerequisites of cooperative learning are important elements for the development democratic teaching methods. The attitudes of the pre-service and young teachers are also important for cooperativeness to flourish in the classroom.

A hundred teachers at the Turkish University of Cukurova understood democracy as a human right to freely exercise all the palette of rights, without violating the rights of others (Yolcu, 2015). This understanding of democracy has an indirect connection to the idea of enhancing the cooperativeness in the classroom. According to these novices in the field of pedagogy, the freedom in all of its forms, like the freedom of expression, the ability to freely set the group rules, as well as the freedom of cooperation in class, are all important features of democratic education. It is democratic education that points to the idea that human rights are learnable through experience, which the Turkish pre-service teachers further support with the inference that the process of taking decisions has to be achieved in a cooperative manner, involving staff members and students alike (Yolcu, 2015).

Another example of learning democracy through practicing it is the work of a young teacher named Zoey. She was observed by two American scholars who focused on the practical aspects of her pedagogic agenda, such as the fact that she incorporates in her teaching Reggio Emilia’s approach, as well as inquiry-based learning, and peer collaboration (Heafner & Norwood, 2018). The necessity of teaching cooperativeness through practicing it in an active way and on a daily basis through group work and in pair assignments, is
described as a crucial component for implementing democratic teaching methods according to pre-service (Yolcu, 2015) and young teachers (Heafner & Norwood, 2018).

There are commonalities between cooperativeness and the philosophical ideas of Confucius (Yung, 2010). According to the Confucian philosophy, the well-being of family and the immediate community is of greater importance than the individuals’ well-being. Yung (2010) says that Confucian philosophy may not be able to add any value to democracy education (2010). I disagree, because I believe that when educating students in a systematic way (Auster & Wylie, 2006) about the content and importance of this stream in philosophy for our society, primary school teachers will actually teach their pupils to make democratic choices, based on real knowledge. While exercising learning through action, the students can take an informed decision about the importance of this Asian philosophy for the democratic society. The philosophical ideas behind cooperativeness is part of the necessary knowledge that the primary students ought to be in a possession of as good citizens.

Another, more contemporary interpretation of the democratic term of good citizens exemplifies the Internet as a form of fast-developing communication venue that will assist communities in creating a culture not only of communication and education, but also of tolerance, consensus, and finally, but not least, cooperation (Oral, 2008).

This inference leads logically to the final point, that following the exposition of the philosophical foundation and contemporary dimension for cooperativeness in the form of Confucianism and Internet communication, that “schools ought to attend more consciously to their physical place on earth” and that “we need to foster a sense of community” (Theobald, 1997).

3.3 Democratic teaching methods and formation of political position

One of the most important skills that the primary school teachers have to nourish in their pupils, is the ability to find a balance between individuals’ demands and the societies’ attempts to prioritize the common good as a superior value for community development as a unified and democratically governed political element. Therefore, the ideals that democratic societies rest on have to be transferred through education to reach the young people. In that way they will be educated to become well-acquainted with the virtues of democracy and the balance between individual and common good and wellbeing (Johnson
This can be achieved if students have an opportunity to work on different democratic projects (Payne, 2017), developing students’ participation skills, which are the crucial element for nurturing the individuals’ readiness to participate in socially, politically, and economically significant activities for the society. Different models of democratic education aim at challenging the defects of deliberative democracy, focusing on critical citizenship and critical multiculturalism (Knowles & Clark, 2018). The element “critical” is an essential part of both definitions – critical citizenship and critical multiculturalism – needs to be integrated into teaching methods, supplying pupils with one of the most important skills conveying democracy. That can be achieved while giving students agency to influence their own work, which increases considerably their creativity (Jonsdottir, 2017). Although creativity is an intricate and personalized ability for expressing ones’ ideas, it does not mean that it could not be successfully incorporated into typical democratic teaching methods, such as problem-solving and discussion (Payne, 2017). To understand better how the methods used by primary school teachers may help to develop both the individual strengths of the good citizen and his community commitment, we need to look at some practical parameters that characterize successful forms of participation in society’s democracy.

For example, the Scandinavian Study Circle is a democratic and emancipatory method which teaches all its members/students equally how to share the responsibility for the progress of the common group (Bjerkaker, 2014). Similar conclusion is found in Herbert Marcuse’s statement that education is to know and understand the factors that have established the facts inasmuch as to change their inhuman reality (Giroux, 1980). This is achievable through incorporating teaching methods that focus on student empowerment, decision-making, participation, and contribution to the common learning initiatives (Brough, 2012). Some practical games can be played in class, such as: all different, all equal, difference, and the human rights tree (Gollob & Krapf, 2008), which will stimulate students’ understanding of others, as well as increase their knowledge and perception of others, giving them the critical tools to deal in practice with such problems. Ahead of such practical games, the primary school teachers have to seek student contributions to the classroom curricula (Brough, 2012) in the form of agenda-free questions.

Teaching students about the importance of their individual and group commitment to the democracy-initiated practices in our society, happens through their participation in the different phrases of the teaching process – from planning and considering the teaching itself
to calculating their own participation and learning outcomes (NOU, 2015). However, this process of implementing democratic teaching methods in the contemporary classrooms has not only its advocates in society but also academic opponents.

3.4 The negative outcomes of implementing democratic teaching methods

Together with the positive meaning of the term ‘democracy’ that has been investigated by many scholars, it may also have some negative aspects as a political tool to promote economic growth (Dahlum & Knutsen, 2017). This is an important aspect of the concept of democracy that needs to be exposed in order to affect the application of democratic teaching methods in school. The meaning of democracy as a cooperative living and working together suggests that its practical application is central for the education system. However, the principle is vague, and it may be difficult to explain how it can be interpreted as a teaching method. That is why, Dahlum and Knutsen (2017) infer that there is no clear evidence of any relationship between democracy and quality of education. Democratically elected governments are failing their voters providing poor teaching, poor facilities and not well-functioning school authorities. These are the consequences of central government’s inability of creating a legal framework and implementation (Dahlum & Knutsen, 2017). These theoretical considerations, refined by Dahlum and Knutsen, are the foundation for further exploration of the eventual more negative consequences, after implementing democratic teaching methods in primary schools. That is why, pre-service teachers do not believe that democracy can be included in education for real which is a statement that relates to the idea that students learn about democracy through practicing it, which is a time-consuming task (Yolcu, 2015).

Furthermore, what the pre-service teachers experience as time-consuming task, i.e. when it comes to implementing democratic teaching methods – the young teachers refer to as time-pressure and being administratively restricted by various requirements about the school day that leads to lack of motivation and ability to be fully effective in class (Heafner & Norwood, 2018). When new school curricula are created, teacher’s autonomy has to be administratively regulated. This means that “policy makers need to realize the complexity of implementing new kinds of curricular thinking into practice, such as building aims of education on fundamental ideals rather than around subjects” (Jonsdottir, 2017).
In conclusion, one of the major tasks of educators is to shed the image of students and teachers as “social puppets” (Giroux, 1980). Citizenship education has to prioritize teaching methods that stimulate pupils’ motivation, interests, passions, and imagination which are the intellectual initiators for all the significant changes in the society (Giroux, 1980). That is why, in the next chapter I am going to look at the practical side of democracy doctrine in one school in Oslo that is established as a democratic school. I will also report on an interview with the headmistress of the school. This interview will be decoded in order to gain a real image of what democratic teaching methods look like in practice, especially when the whole existence of this school is predominantly governed by democratic principles and methods.
4. Democracy in practice – The ideology of Nyskolen

Establishing a primary school focusing on democracy is not a simple task. My desire to get a better understanding of the school’s democratic platform and daily methods of teaching led me on the path to collect information from both published materials and through interviews with teachers that have decided to work in a way that is different from the traditional pedagogy. There was no better way to collect information about the school’s platform and practices than to interview the headmistress of Nyskolen, Sunniva Sandanger, who is one of the two major figures that has been engaged in the project since its inception.

4.1 The idea behind the first interview

The idea of education that can fit to everyone’s needs has never been more vital to me, though it is probably a naïve idea. I had already deemed the project as feasible when I started my education in The Subject Teaching Department at The University of Iceland in 2014. Then I became acquainted with sustainable development and I got the impression that contemporary education had to change, and the importance of democratic teaching methods reconsidered. One of Sugata Mitra’s speeches (TED, 2010) showed how students can benefit from learning in a group. This made me realize that the class teacher has to become a significant stimulus and a part of this group dynamics, not to be left out as if the teacher is a hindrance. Therefore, I decided that my research was going to focus on democracy and teaching methods as those components of teaching can make a difference in students’ lives. Furthermore, I regard my interviewees as co-researchers (Lichtman, 2013) by the form of interviews and the type of questions I am asking. The interviews are planned as a model of dialogue that aims at clarifying the integrity and professional virtues of the interviewees which are necessary for establishing a good relationship between a student and its tutor. In my research, I would like for you, my reader, to experience what it is to indirectly witness the Nyskolen’s pedagogues’ inferences and personal experiences of teaching in a classroom, where the students are the active co-designers of their own learning (Vander Els & Benson, 2015). The importance of this statement for Nyskolen and its pedagogical staff can be detected in the ideological platform of the Norwegian school.
4.2 The ideological platform of Nyskolen

The school’s digital platform is supported by the Forum Nyskolen which is the ideological bank, representing the school. What is unique about this school, as Hansen (2013) explains, is its social concept that originates from the idea about close and informal relationships between adults and children, who accept each other as friends and colleagues, not bosses and subordinates. This is one of the pillars of the democratic concept of Nyskolen. Nyskolen was created as an alternative to the current public-school system, which can be envisaged as an ineffective authoritarian organization. Nyskolen’s founders decided to teach students that they cannot do what they want, without affecting the others in the group. On the digital platform of Forum Nyskolen is the statement that schooling does not necessary mean that students are going to learn something, as Hansen (2013) explains. The Norwegian school of democracy ignores the old authoritarian structure of schooling, which means that the innovative school has to come up with its own structure and function. Representing the most important brick in this structure and in the foundation of Nyskolen are the common school meetings that are a specific form of training in democracy. These meetings help to develop in children knowledge and practical skills about the difficulty of running a society, a society that needs active democracy-makers that have been taught how to make informed choices.

It is inevitable and necessary for children from Nyskolen to enact democratic practice. Ways of implementing it are to run the common school meetings so that they function, while achieving their ultimate goal which is to train children in practicing democracy on a daily basis. That is why the size of the school community is adjusted to the democratic idea; around one hundred children from the first up to the tenth grade are enrolled with some twenty adults’ staff. This is a deliberate decision taken by the founders of the school, based on the idea of well-functioning public meetings, in which the real participation and equality are the keys towards creating a good social environment, operating democratically without any central veto-imposing authority. Another characteristic of the Nyskolen are the small age-mixed groups of around ten to fifteen students, high adult density, period teaching, and most importantly student-initiated learning. The innovative Norwegian school is mainly interested in teaching students how to become functioning humans, concludes Hansen (2013).
What could be said about Nyskolen in a few words, before moving on to Sunniva Sandanger’s interview, based on the information on Forum Nyskolen’s website is that this Norwegian school focuses on developing artistic and aesthetic qualities in their students as much as their intellectual qualities, supported by the idea that when imagination is present then the theoretical subjects are easily acquired. In this atmosphere, pupils and teachers are equals and the respect is that of the human relationships that has to be earned, not demanded. Most of all, the ultimate goal for Forum Nyskolen would be to give more Norwegian kids a chance to experience days at school where they are included and respected, as well as prepare them for lives where they can use their skills and enthusiasm in a constructive way, says Hansen (2013).

This ideological platform of Nyskolen has its fervent advocate – the headmistress of the school Sunniva Sandanger.

4.3 An interview with the headmistress of Nyskolen – Sunniva Sandanger: Theory in practice

Many of the principles that have already been described as the pillars for Nyskolen’s ideological platform and form of existence can be detected in the following interview. In this in-depth interview (Lichtman, 2013) the headmistress of Nyskolen answers a range of questions that are initiated by my curiosity and fondness for the topic of how well democracy and teaching methods can co-exist in the contemporary classrooms, especially in the ones of Nyskolen.

I decided to take the interview on Wednesday, the twenty-sixth of June 2019. After I made a phone call to Sunniva, she explained that she was in her office, working on the plans for the next school year. This she did not see as a reason for postponing the interview. When I came to her office, which is on the top, third floor, of the school building, Sunniva smiled and welcomed me into her office which was more like an arty workspace. We decided to proceed to the interview almost immediately, because of our mutual eagerness to get to the important topic of the day. In the interview, I refer to myself as the interviewer and to address Sunniva I use the term the interviewee. Envisaging myself and Sunniva as the two protagonists in this chapter I find it appropriate to use capital letters whenever the written forms of the Interviewer and the Interviewee appear in the text. Furthermore, I would like to introduce Sunniva to you as not only the mentor behind the project Nyskolen.
She is the person implementing in practice this form of education in Norway, as well as the educator supporting and developing the school’s image, becoming Nyskolen’s most ardent and benevolent advocate to the public authorities. Sunniva is a charismatic person, possessing this natural talent to make others feel comfortable, safe and respected. During the whole interview I had a feeling that she lives and breathes for the project Nyskolen. Her body language and gesticulations appeared to me as ones in total synchronous with her devoted utterances. This you can witness by yourselves in the interview to follow. I now begin the transcript.

4.3.1 Sunniva’s background and pedagogic interests that brought her closer to Nyskolen’s ideology

–The Interviewer: Hi, Sunniva! I know you very well, but can you present yourself briefly?
–The Interviewee: Yes! My name is Sunniva Sandanger and I am working as the leader of this school, Nyskolen in Oslo. I have been working as the leader since 2013 and before that I was working as a teacher and I was part of the group that founded this school. So, I have been working with this way of teaching since 2002. Actually, two years before we started the school. I studied Literature, Language and Social Sciences at Oslo University, before I decided that to become a teacher (she is laughing a bit here).
–The Interviewer: What was the reason that made you choose Nyskolen as a working place?
   It is a revolutionary type of school not only for Oslo, but also Norway’s type of educational system, isn’t it?
–The Interviewee: The thing is that I got in for personal reasons, because I have two children, and I was very interested in how they could get a good life, and also how to make them and other children too, grow into a society they could also change, because I thought it was needed. And at the local school, they were only discussing painting and toilets, and which color to put on the buildings. And they were never discussing something important. That kind of frustrated me, so, and then someone told me about Moose Jorgensen and that she was still going strong. She was 80 years old at that time, this was in 2002. So, I joined the group, attended a weekend course, and very quickly I found out that this was the kind of view of education that I was looking for, something that is looking at the whole child, both physically and mentally, and in all kind of ways, thinking about education as something to make children
become able to participate in the world in a good way, and also change it. So, then I joined the group and we started to work together, and the more I read, the more convinced I became. I read about other schools in other countries, also the Danish schools, and how they have been working with democracy, and then I realized why I wanted to have one of those in Norway. Then I joined the group, and became very active, and became the person who was pushing the authorities to get permission to start the school. So, I was working with Moose in that process, yeah (she looked very eager to give me all the needed information around the founding of that school Nyskolen – which is the first school of its kind in Oslo and Norway).

–The Interviewer: You have said earlier, in our conversation, that you had to push the Norwegian authorities a bit to get permission for establishing the school in Oslo, right? Then, the logical question here is – was it very difficult for you to succeed in that attempt? Since we both know that the Norwegian educational authorities and the whole educational system are quite conservative.

–The interviewee: Well, actually, when I joined this group, they had all, they had just written the educational application to start a private school, which was turned down. Then there was a change, politically, so then came a new law, “Friskole lovet”, that was in 2003, so then I took the law and there was no kind of application form, because it was too early. So, I just took the law and called Moose, I guess twenty-five times, and I read every paragraph in that law, and then I wrote how we wanted to do this. How we were going to teach the children, how we were going to fulfill all of these different paragraphs. And then, I went on, the 1st of October 2003, when the law took effect, down to the County Governor and then I wanted a receipt: “Please, write down that I have applied for the foundation of a private school!” And then we had to totally follow the law. The authorities didn’t know anything about this, so they had to choose between accepting what we were telling them, or to read something that was quite new to them – about dialogue, about democratic education, mixed aged groups, all these kind of things that we had been working with for a long time. But, after eight months, no – seven months – with many phone calls (Sunniva is laughing), and e-mails, and letters, we got permission to start the school. That was, I think, the 28th of May of 2004, and I really, really, wanted that school, so I took that chance. I was preparing a building with the contractors, hiring teachers (she was laughing again, very
ardently and spontaneously). So, we got it! (Sunniva looked so happy, when she said that).

—The Interviewer: So, starting this school project, you were using a very democratic way to reach to the Norwegian authorities. Finally, you received the desired support from the authorities, or the government of Norway, if I may summarize?

—The Interviewee: Yes! We had a lot of meetings with people – discussing and making the headlines about this kind of education – how do we do this? We had these people’s meetings at Sagenes society’s house, and we got some help from the Danish free schools. They held courses for us, talked to us, and showed us their schools in Denmark. So, we went abroad to get an impression of what this is, because it hadn’t been done in Norway before.

After the inevitable questions, concerning Sunniva’s background and political struggle to establish this type of school on the educational scene in Norway, some more questions referring to the political support for the school followed:

4.3.2 Nyskolen and how political reality has influenced the school’s everyday life

—The Interviewer: But, do you think that the authorities here in Norway are a bit more positive today towards that concept of education you have been standing for the whole time? Do you think that the government authorities are more open today than fifteen years ago towards changes, willing to make drastic changes in the educational system?

—The Interviewee: Yes, I think so! I think a lot of the things that we were standing for, were a kind of radical, but it was not something that we just made up. Moose Jorgensen used to say that this is not fashion, this is not teaching fashion. This is research-based! And a lot of other things that we did, that the authorities were skeptical about, they have later taken into the plans for the Norwegian schools. Like, the first thing we did was we asked if we could teach Religion and Ethics, instead of Christianity, only. And they said: “No! You have to – Christian Religion and Ethics!” But, just one year later, they took away ‘Christianity’ and kept the ‘Religion’. They have now put it back again, it is political (Sunniva hesitates a bit here)! But the year after we got this “No!” they took it
away, and also about having different organizational possibilities for the classes – they (the authorities) are more positive about it now. In the beginning, they told us what we had to do, asking how we could do this and that. Then, they took away some of the strict boundaries between the different age groups, and now they are much more positive towards it, and they have been making reports about it. The thing about how to teach responsibilities, that has been one of the main subjects we have become better at and the authorities have agreed more with the way we do things now. Responsibilities has become a major subject in Norwegian schools, and it has been like that for a long time now. For a long time, we thought that responsibilities come the same way as learning to walk, but it doesn’t. It has to be built into the educational system. And I think that not only teachers, but also researchers saw that that there is something lacking here. We are talking about that pupils have to feel responsible for themselves and for the community, but we don’t teach them how, we don’t show them what it means. Democracy is something that has to be taught and practiced at school and from the 1st of August this year that is the law for every Norwegian school. Like I have said, you cannot expect people to become good citizens and active practicing democracy citizens, if they don’t know what it is, if they feel that there is someone else making the decisions. You can’t just ask them once a year: What do you want? They have to practice all the time, and you have to learn during all the years in school, and that is what we have been building on the whole time. I believe that from the 1st of August that is going to be the law for all Norwegian schools, not only to teach the students about democracy, but also to practice it.

–The Interviewer: It means, then, that you have revolutionized the education system?

–The Interviewee: Yes, actually! We are not that radical anymore. We have become mainstream (Sunniva is laughing again with some kind of unadulterated laugh). But that feels good. And I also feel that the first few years there was a lot of skepticism from authorities and also in the papers, but we have earned a lot more respect! I know that some of the people with authority gave us just two years of existence. That was said back in 2004, but we didn’t close the school. So, I think that they didn’t believe in us, but we have proven to them that we are more serious. The international education system has become more visible to the Norwegian researchers and politicians. Maybe, thanks to PISA, and these things that I don’t like too much, but it
has changed the focus of the Norwegian researchers and politicians and they have become more interested in international education. For example, OECD – they have written a large report about the whole school plan – using the same methods as us, which has also helped us to gain popularity in Norway.

Without doubt, the central political support for Nyskolen was crucial for its foundation which makes it interesting to look further at how Sunniva finds the support from the local authorities in Oslo:

4.3.3 The importance of the local authorities for Nyskolen’s existence

– The Interviewer: In the form Nyskolen exists today, how important is the support you are getting from the local authorities?

– The Interviewee: Actually, we need to fulfill the curriculum, for the pupils. We have twelve certain rules to follow, and as long as we do that, we don’t need good will anymore. There are a lot of different things that we have to keep track of. All kinds of different laws, not only the school laws, but the economics. If we don’t have the political support from the system, they will check up on us a lot more, and of course we are going to make some mistakes. There are going to be mistakes, even though that I am trying not to. And if we don’t have support from the government and the local authorities, or any other kind of authorities, they will check on more things and there it will be a greater risk for us. One of the negatives is that we have to use a lot of time on paperwork, which means less time for our pupils. However, in that way we have learnt how to build up an organization in a solid way. But I think that if the politicians don’t like you, or the way you think, you are still vulnerable. You know Steinerskolen and Montessori, right?

- The Interviewer: Yes, of course!

- The Interviewee: They all have large organizations, a kind of international network. Nyskolen is on its own, no network (Sunniva is laughing again, spontaneously). This means that if something happens, if the country becomes less democratic in the future, then, we will be vulnerable!
Moving on from the topic about the local support for Nyskolen, the next topic to be considered is the robustness of the Nyskolen’s school curriculum in comparison to the national curriculum:

4.3.4 Nyskolen’s school curriculum versus the national curriculum for primary education in Norway – Teaching methods and practice

–The Interviewer: Yes, I get it, unfortunately! Earlier in our conversation Sunniva, you mentioned something about the school’s own curriculum and the one made by the central authorities, but since you are a school following a different educational platform, then you are implementing teaching methods, which differ from the mainstream. Which of these teaching methods are you using the most in your teaching?

–The Interviewee: Something is a teaching method, and something is more about how it is in practice, between methods and educational philosophy. Dialogue is a central teaching method. We believe, supported by different thinkers, that dialogue is one of the most important ways in which you can teach and learn. Learning is nothing happening only from inside and in the person but is something happening between the persons. For example, when you and I are talking, we are learning. It is not just you and me, it is us that are learning something. We need each other to be in a dialogue, but dialogue is a way for the teacher to show respect for the pupil, and to show that you expect something from that pupil, but also be aware that you as a teacher are in a position of more power and knowledge. Use that in a wise way! It is a very fine balance between respecting and accepting the pupil’s point of view, while showing your point of view and finally to try to make a synthesis. That doesn’t mean that the pupil is not responsible for having knowledge, but you are as a grown-up, and as a teacher. You have to understand what it fully means. You have to experience how taking into account what the pupil says, whatever it is, and build that into the dialogue about what you are teaching. It is about respect and dialogue, it’s about putting the educational level where the pupil is, but it’s also about acknowledging that it is all about language. Language is what we use to think with. That is the tool! Being in a dialogue develops the pupils’ tool that they use to open-up, to discover the world, to think with, to reflect upon. That is how, when we develop the language of the pupils,
they will have a better understanding, a better way to learn. It will enhance their possibilities to learn. We use the term language in a broad way. Language is about how you speak, how you talk to each other, how you read and write, and, also, about things like using a special-subject word like in a natural science and mathematics. Mathematics is also a kind of a language. Looking like this, using language and developing language is a central skill in a dialogue. Having that perspective, it is not a method in itself, but it is a foundation for all the methods we use. When we have this as a foundation, we try to look at knowledge as a whole. Of course, there is something called social science, something called natural science, and mathematics, English, but it all comes up to the knowledge about the society, and about humans, and nature. It is like a whole. I really don’t know how to say that in English “tverrfaglig” – it probably means the interrelation between the different subjects, yes, that’s it. So, when you put these two things together, the dialogue and language.

After initiating the discussion about the implementation of democratic methods in Nyskolen’s classrooms, Sunniva and I start discussing dialogical teaching which takes us to the next aspect of Nyskolen’s democratic platform: deep learning:

4.3.5 What is the foundation for deep learning according to Sunniva?

–The Interviewer: You are talking about deep learning, aren’t you?
–The Interviewee: Yes! I am talking about deep learning, actually! And that’s the foundation for all the other methods. I have to have this as a foundation and then I can apply all the other, more practical, methods on the top. It is important to use a lot of different methods, because I have to teach pupils that possess different ways of learning. If I don’t use a lot of methods, how would they know? We won’t say that one, two, or three methods are the only ones. Of course, we implement this kind of project method, called “Eureka.” It is a research project for children. And that’s the main method we do twice a year for all pupils. But we have to do a lot more, because we are supposed to meet all the different needs the pupils have. Not only using the concretes, even if I do a lot. And we use the role play a lot, all these kinds of things.
But that is on top, the foundation is the dialogue and the language, and the deep learning, and also the mixed-age groups.

From the class structure and size the interview goes further to another democratic teaching method – cooperation:

4.3.6 How important is the teaching method of cooperation for Nyskolen?

–The Interviewer: Actually, democracy is also about cooperation and teaching students how to cooperate with each other in different ways. If I know something about your “Eureka” project, then it will be the fact that you give all students a chance, representing different age groups, to build the project together, learning from each other. Then, my next question is going to bring up the attention paid to one teaching method that I know many teachers have their doubts about and that is the discussion method. The discussion method, if successfully and skillfully implemented in teaching is develops not only students’ skills to become good listeners, but it also teaches them to maintain a good dialogue in a respectful manner, leading to changing at some point of the discussion to the opponents’ points of view. How successfully you and your teachers are dealing with discussion in class?

–The Interviewee: We, actually, have to do this from the very beginning. When the students are six years old and they come here to us. We have to teach them how to separate subjects, therefore we use simplification with the youngest one. Then, you can challenge them with the winter: “Those who think that the snow is the main reason for good winter – one step left, those who think staying inside with a hot cup of chocolate in their hands – one step right.” And if you see the difference, first they are making choice about something which everyone can do, and then they have to make a choice between things- “Is it because I like skiing or sledding, or is it because I like to stay inside and I don’t want to go skiing. And what is more important for me?” That is how you teach small children to reflect. You don’t call it a task, or a homework, or anything like that, it is just a kind of a game, a play. And you teach them to do this in many different ways. When we have these “Eureka” projects with the small children we use a lot of mind-mapping and they come-up with all kinds of things. Is there a link
between what Camilla and Peter said: maybe – yes, or maybe – not? But why is that, could you put these two together? Can you find the good things about winter? Then, you can put these on papers and then physically move them into different categories. This is about weather, this is about why we like winter, this about why the winter belongs to bad categories. You, actually, teach the pupils, in very simple ways, to categorize, to say “yes” or “no” to things, and to sort things into different categories. After that, you will have to gradually evolve the complexity of this. One of the things they do is that they start to listen to the other pupils, but, of course, they have been trained more to do this. And then you have another one, building- up a frame box on the paper. Next, you can write: “The feeling I have when this happens is…” You are the one that has the ways to help pupils to find the argument for things, and you can start with personal things. We have different ways of training them to do this. They are also working in groups and in pairs, also the older ones. The students are working together in small groups, talking together so they don’t feel too vulnerable. Therefore, we try to pair them up with someone you know is not going to laugh at them. This is something we do the whole year around, not only for the big projects. That is why when the pupils come to work on the big projects, they are very well trained. We do this every year, so after ten years that is when you should be able to write a kind of an academic report with a good discussion and a conclusion. We have also these school meetings every week, where we discuss things that mean something to the pupils. They report different cases, and the way we do things in these meetings benefits the whole school, and also learning. Point number one- the meeting-leader reads-up the case, for example: “I would like it to be allowed to use mobile phones during lessons, as long as it doesn’t disturb anyone!” Then, people can ask questions to clear-out what we are really discussing, clarifying what the target of the suggestion is. What we do then is that the pupils say OK we have the first vote, that is not a binding vote, it is just a testing vote. After we clarify who supports the suggestion made, we count every vote, every pupil has one vote, every grown-up has just one vote also. There are a hundred children and twenty grown-ups, so you can see that if there were a conflict the pupils are going to win (Sunniva is laughing spontaneously). After this vote, then those who represent the minority will be able to speak for themselves first. The majority has to be silent and wait. All the arguments from the minority will come first. After the
minority is done arguing, the majority can speak, which is followed by another
discussion and a second vote. We do this once a week. Having these meetings is not
only about democracy, or it is about democracy, because the education is about
democracy, but it also benefits education. It’s both ways, actually.

After clarifying the necessity of cooperativeness for the small democratic school, I find it
appropriate to ask some questions that relate to the topic of students’ own contribution to
their learning as not only a principle of democracy, but as a democratic method of teaching
and for managing the classroom:

4.3.7 Students’ contribution to their own learning as a part of the democracy
concept of Nyskolen

–The Interviewer: I absolutely support that. When it comes to school’s everyday – to what
degree do you include students when deciding on the learning content and the
teaching methods used? Does it matter to you what they can come up with, so they
can own and influence their everyday?

–The Interviewee: Of course, they can. During the last year I have been teaching
mathematics. But the things I do with my class is that I show them the different
methods. We are working in books or having a kind of relay. We have different kinds
of ways of teaching each other – putting things on the blackboard, all kind of different
methods. And at the beginning of the teaching year we try different methods and I put
names on them. This is group teaching, this is backwards teaching, when they read
something first and then we discuss it in class. Afterwards, this is problem-solving, and
then we repeat, and then they get to rank the methods. We have different ways of
ranking this: it is- this is what I like, OK? On a scale from one to ten, how much do I like
this? Ten is “perfect, it is so fun”, and zero is “I hate it,” OK? So, they get to rank the
different methods, and then we turn the page, and they make a new table, where in
the columns they are writing down methods that have helped them learn something.
Because, even if they really have fun, they might feel that they do not learnt
something, or the other way around. I really get a grip on this division thing, you see?!
Then, I take the books, and I see if there is something that they all agree upon, and I
conclude that we can use that sometimes, not all the time, of course. They will differ!
But I also do know that some pupils have written that they learn when they have the chance to write a comment on something. And I can see that for other students exists the reality of the following phenomenon: that when you talk in front of the blackboard, I can’t listen, but when you come to my desk and explain the material to me, then I understand. So, then I can make a kind of – OK, I put the table here, in front of the blackboard, and we divide ourselves into groups, and then these groups will have assignments to deal with. But I also do make workbooks for them, collect different kind of subjects and methods, written methods to different tasks, which means that I make the workbooks all by myself, gathering the information for it from all kinds of other books all by myself. It is for me to decide on what I should put into these workbooks, and it is based on my dialogue with the children. But, I can’t expect from them to know how to teach mathematics, so I have to show them, and I have to put a name on it, and I have to make sure that they learn these names, and I have to make sure that they learn what the method is all about, and then they can reflect on what is good for them.

Like Sunniva explains herself now, the ideology of Nyskolen is becoming mainstream and more Norwegian schools apply to their teaching students’ voice and opinion just like Nyskolen does. However, there are some critics who strongly object to that form of teaching:

4.3.8 How does Sunniva answer those criticizing democratic teaching methods?

–The Interviewer: Yes, you put it in a very good way! However, how are you going to answer your critics? Because, the way your teaching day looks like could have been presented by others, referred to as critics of democracy in schools, as too much work for the wages you get. There are, unfortunately, teachers that would like to be done with their teaching for the day and go home, without bothering at all to give a room for students’ voice to be heard in the classroom. What is your answer for those representatives of the teaching profession?

–The Interviewee: Well, I have a very important answer to that! My job is not just to teach. My job is to make sure that children learn. You can’t say I have taught therefore; they
have learned! My work is to make sure that they learn, and if I have my focus only on going into the classroom and doing something then it doesn’t mean that what I have said or explained is something that my students can learn from. My job is to make sure that they learn something.

The last answer of Sunniva’s makes me curious about what she thinks the role of a good teacher is for managing democratic teaching methods in the classroom:

4.3.9 What is the role of a good teacher in a classroom governed by democratic methods?

–The Interviewer: But the way you are talking about teaching brings up another topic, the good teacher. Do you mean that a good teacher is the one focusing on children and having a good relationship with them? How important is a good teacher for implementing the concept of democracy in the classroom?

–The Interviewee: For human beings in general the relations are a kind of everything. And without a good relation, without working on good relations, you won’t be able to do anything! When it comes to democracy and the Norwegian society, then what is the good thing about the Norwegian society? Actually, it is trust! And how do you get trust? When treating each other well! However, one of the things that makes it easier to live here is that we have trust in each other. It is the same way in school. We need to trust each other, and we have to build that trust, and we have to maintain the trust. Maintenance is very important. The trust is not something that you can get and then keep. Maintenance must be done, every day, every lesson!

From the topic of the good teacher Sunniva and I proceed to the next one, focusing on the importance of teaching virtues as a part of managing democracy in the classroom:

4.3.10 The democratic teaching methods and teaching virtues

–The Interviewer: What you have just said leads me to my next question about the importance to teach virtues at school on a daily basis in relation to democracy? Is it that through teaching virtues, you are actually teaching students more about democracy?
–The Interviewee: Yes! (Sunniva looks a bit puzzled, but she is processing my question).
–The Interviewer: But again: virtues – democracy, how do you think these values are going to influence our society in the future in order to become more sustainable? In order for that to happen then how important for you is teaching students democracy?
–The Interviewee: I think that teaching democracy is very important as long as it contains knowledge. Because, democracy without knowledge is dangerous for the planet. Democracy without knowledge is not really democracy! Democratic education is very closely related to that statement. On the other hand, we cannot possess all the information and know everything, but we have to know how we can be quite sure about things. Democracy has to be based on knowledge, because if it isn’t, if we look at democracy only as at voting on things, then that doesn’t mean anything! It doesn’t save the world! If I just, as long as I am thinking about myself only – that is not democracy! That’s egoism! (Sunniva laughs at what she has just said!) I think democracy is really important for the future, to get a good society. However, to make these children able to change the world, we have to define democracy and put it into education.

My fascination with the democratic teaching methods managed by Nyskolen’s staff, makes it natural to ask the next set of questions, concerning the developmental work in the Norwegian school:

4.3.11 Nyskolen and its developmental work in the sphere of the democratic methods

–The Interviewer: What you mean here is that we have to have a doctrine, or a platform to teach democracy in school, so everything can be connected. This automatically means, that Nyskolen has to focus on developmental work, after the students go home, in order for this democratically oriented school to further develop its democratic platform based on various teaching methods that could be easily included in other school curricula. Do you agree?
–The Interviewee: Of course, we would love that! I would really love to be a part of an organization that is bigger. The thing is that starting up a school and building up an organization like we have is both hard work and time consuming. The problem is that
we couldn’t cope with it! We have regular problems with the housing for school, and we also have a lot of children with problematic backgrounds. Many times, Martin, the social teacher, and other of us have been invited to different meetings and courses, and seminars. We have been participating in such gatherings a little bit, but not as much as we wanted. Actually, we haven’t been able to start other schools, there is no network, only us! We are living, as a school, in a closed world and I find that a bit sad, because I would love to work with representatives from the teaching education in the university, for example.

–The interviewer: Do you need a support from them?
–The Interviewee: Yes! I have talked to some people, but I think that I have to do it in a more formal way, because maybe now we have the chance! Now, democracy is gaining popularity and a bigger place (democracy and citizenship) in the educational curriculum. Maybe this is the chance that we have to expand the thoughts that we have and to be able to tell others how and what are we doing. The reward you get, working with these children on this way, having this close relationship with them, and all the extremely important things happening all the time, means that the energy you get back from this work is really extraordinary! That is what is keeping me, because even though that this is hard work, being this passionate about your work is necessary. If you are just longing to be on your own, then change jobs, find something else to do! But if you open up and take on the responsibility, and all the things that come with that responsibility. If you really give it a try to go all in, I guess most teachers that have freely decided to become ones, are going to get a large reward in the form of that they are going to become very happy for their pupils’ sake. Then, being a teacher would be more fun for more teachers, especially if they have the chance to work as we do- in smaller groups with fewer children so you can really get to know them!

Even though Nyskolen does not have the opportunity to invest time in developmental work, my last question to Sunniva is about her own opinion on the topic of changing the pedagogy education in favor of teaching the young teachers more about dialogue teaching and how to become good class leaders?
4.3.12 Sunniva’s reflections on how the pedagogic education should be changed

–The interviewer: Before I thank you for the enormous amount of information you just gave me, I would really like to ask you to think about something else you might want to add about dialogue teaching?

–The interviewee: Hmmm!? (Sunniva needs a little time to think about a concrete theme that she hasn’t discussed yet!) I would like for some changes to occur in teacher education. In a more general way, I would say that teacher education is one of the keys to make schools places of democracy and human growth, actually! The teachers are taught a lot about what to do, but they are left on their own when it comes to how to do it. And that is one of the things we work a lot on here. We cannot just tell teachers what to do, we have to teach the teachers how to do it. Therefore, I think that teachers should know more about democracy, and more about dialogue, and more about how to really do all of these things. I think that not so many people support what we are doing here, because they don’t have a clue where to start. It is important to understand that taking care of each and every single individual, with a focus on individual and society are just two sides of the same coin. Many people think that these are two opposite things, but they are not! You are unique, and at the same time you are not, because you have a unique value, but you are nothing on your own. None of us are! We need other people to survive, and we are valuable, all of us! We have to take care for each and every individual, this cannot be taken from you, and we have to help everyone to become a part of the group, at same time. That is really important for the democracy to work in the classroom and in the society.

–The interviewer: What you have just said sounds like a pedagogic virtue. I can even go further referring to it as the absolute, supreme pedagogic virtue, that you have summarized very well! Here, in the end I would like to thank you a lot Sunniva for your willingness to share with us your school concept and democracy platform for teaching students how to be strong individuals, but also how to become stronger as a group!
4.4 Critical reflections on Sunniva’s interview

At the end of this chapter I have to say that I was totally mesmerized by Sunniva. During the interview I had the feeling that Sunniva is not just a regular school administrator, she is a passionate motivator and an ardent advocate of the idea for establishing more schools that apply democratic teaching methods. She was talking about and explaining with so much passion the concept of Nyskolen and why it is a matter of necessity for the Norwegian educational system to be changed thoroughly in favor of student-governed school days, supported by democratic teaching methods as the moral form of teaching and taking care of students. Utopian would some of you say, but I think that in the intriguing days we live in, the days of multiculturalism, sustainable development and apparent need for more innovations and new ways of thinking, we have no other choice but to find resources and reach an agreement with the institutions governing our society to change the educational system first where we live and then worldwide. However, before embarking on a quest to change something, especially when we talk about something so important as the educational system of a particular country, then we need more evidence on how successfully the democracy teaching methods could be implemented day by day from the teaching staff of Nyskolen. That is why the next chapter of this research considers three pedagogues from the Nyskolen’s staff who describe their experiences and concerns about the vitality and effectivity of democracy intertwined in the teaching methods.
5. Practicing democracy on a daily basis

One of the most important conclusions to be drawn from the previous chapter is that Nyskolen is not only an ideological project, invented by a group of enthusiasts, including the daily manager of the Norwegian school Sunniva Sandanger, it is much more than that. This is a well conceptualized educational platform that has been totally adjusted to the reality of the Norwegian educational system, and inasmuch as the Norwegian society strives towards democracy this proves to be the type of democratic school that is totally compatible and perfectly attuned to the needs of the cosmopolitan, multicultural, sustainably-developing and just society. That is why, as Sunniva Sandanger explains that the well-considered and complete daily teaching plan of democracy in practice, combining numerous teaching methods, represents teachers’ own beliefs where everybody finds a piece of satisfaction. The present chapter aims at presenting information about Nyskolen’s every day, especially when it comes to teachers’ perspective and opinion on the significance and necessity of using democratic teaching methods. As we are going to witness, it is not only Sunniva that is a passionate and ardent adherent to the idea of using more democratic teaching methods in Norwegian schools. Her co-workers are equally dedicated to this modern idea, insisting that this is the moral way to bring up the pupils closer to the concept of living in a future where everybody matters contributing to build a more just, tolerant, and respectful society.

5.1 The idea behind the teacher interviews

The three teachers whose interviews are presented in this chapter are not only good professionals, they are professional teachers who create an atmosphere that nourishes relationships of mutual understanding and respect among classmates and between pupils and their teacher. All the three teachers are different, possessing a kind of uniqueness that helps them implement in their own way those of the democratic methods of teaching that are most compatible with their own and students’ personalities.

5.2 Interview with Jonina Margret Arnarsdottir: Teaching democracy through practice

In discussing the idea of a more just and tolerant society, and the role of the school in the process of giving students skills to become good citizens in a democratic society, my first
interviewee is Jonina from Iceland. I took the interview during one of the warm days in the early autumn in Oslo. Jonina decided to take me into her small classroom, where she works daily with her mixed-aged class of twelve students. Behind the Icelandic teacher on the wide whiteboard was a drawing of a huge ice-cream. During the thirty-five-minute interview, Jonina explained to me that this was a part of an art project that she had been working on earlier that day with her class. She explained to me that she didn’t feel comfortable talking in English and I had a few minutes to prepare myself mentally to convert all the questions I had in my head in Icelandic. After a few informal remarks, about Iceland, and how much we both were missing this amazing country, we began the interview. The Icelandic teacher made an impression to be a devoted, good-hearted, tolerant and just person. I knew that the set of questions I had prepared in my head were the same as those of Sunniva’s interview. Jonina’s facial expression and body language corresponded well with the whole atmosphere in her classroom, which could be described with just one word: peace. The interview to follow confirms this inference of mine:

5.2.1 Jonina’s personal presentation

-The Interviewer: Hi, Jonina! I know you personally from before, but can you introduce yourself for the purposes of this research?

-The Interviewee: My name is Jonina Margret Arnarsdottir and I became a teacher in Iceland. I graduated from the Teaching Department of The University of Iceland in 1999. I tried to teach a little bit before that, so it means that I have been teaching now for almost twenty years with short breaks in between. I moved to Norway seven years ago and have been teaching here, in Nyskolen, for five and a half years, almost six, if I remember correctly. I was a teacher in Iceland too. There I taught in small schools, mostly in the countryside, where I was first introduced to the concept of mixed-aged groups/classes. I worked for a long period of time as a department leader in a junior high, probably seven or eight years. Here in Norway, at Nyskolen, I have been working as a class teacher for five years, but this school year I have decided to make some changes. I am going to teach only subjects, such as art, to students from the fourth and up to the seventh grade – which is a combination of crafts, construction, and visual art, religious knowledge in the first and up to the third grade. Moreover, I am
also going to teach special pedagogy in mathematics to students in the fourth to the seventh grade. During these years here in Nyskolen, I have taught many different subjects, mainly in the first, second and third grade.

It is obvious that for Jonina small classes and the mixed-age groups are the norm that should be applied to all schools, which makes it necessary for me to ask her more about that.

5.2.2 Smaller classes and mixed-age groups as a necessary prerequisite for managing democratic methods in class

–The Interviewer: As you have mentioned, Nyskolen is a very special school, governed by a highly democratic platform. This means, in terms of teaching, that not only do you have smaller classes that are of mixed ages, but the students are also in charge of their own learning. If you can compare your experience here with your previous teaching experience in Iceland, then which form of teaching do you find to be the most demanding one?

–The Interviewee: How I teach here in Nyskolen matches my personal vision about how teaching should happen in general. I have been introduced to various teaching methods and that is why I consider methods allowing the students to decide and make plans with us, teachers, about their own learning as the most important ones. This gives us an opportunity as pedagogues to achieve much more in class and involve each and every pupil in the learning process, which allows me to teach in a more engaging, lively, and interesting way. Each and every year the students at Nyskolen wish to work on different projects which gives us an opportunity to summarize our job as topic orientated. By including the pupils in the process of deciding on what we should work with during the next few months, they get a chance to be the ones to decide what and how they should learn, which strengthens their inner motivation and ability to become good learners. Nyskolen as a part of the Norwegian educational system has to follow the National Curriculum for primary education, which is revised every three years, but as a school with mixed-age groups and a democratic platform of existence, we can manage our own school curriculum in a different way. We can act as a more flexible school, because we have longer school days than the rest of the schools in Norway, which leaves us with more chances to work with a little bit of extra subject
matter that can reach our students directly. For example, one theme/topic teaching that we have been working with is dedicated to Roald Dahl. Then students had been informed beforehand about that day, but no one had any clue about what that meant in practice. They came to school that day, we divided them into groups, where the students were mixed from first to seven graders, and then they were told to meet up in the big hall to get some information before following the different teachers into the classrooms. My classroom was transformed into a candy shop, the students had a chance to smell, touch and taste sweets. I was dressed up as an actual person from Roald Dahl’s story and my pupils did not recognize me at all. They were totally in the story itself, especially because my make-up, clothes, and diverse accessories were helping them to forget about the reality. There are still children wondering if that was me or not, almost three years later. Another topic project that we have been working on is about women’s stories here in Norway. This is how we pedagogues work here in Nyskolen. We ask our students to help us decide what we should work on during certain periods of time. Sometimes the projects are for all classes from first and up to the seventh grades. However, it can happen that only the pupils from a certain age group are working on something that the others have no clue about. After we are done working on the theme project, the students get a chance to hand in either written assignments, or to make an art installation/artwork, including writing music. Now, we are staring to work on a three-year teaching program for the years to come. That is why, we are in constant search of students’ ideas and visions on what and how they want to work. Their opinion matters a lot to us.

After clarifying how these mixed-age groups of students work, asking Jonina more questions about students’ contribution to their own learning is a logical step:

5.2.3 Including students in deciding on the teaching materials and methods

—The Interviewer: It means, then, that you as a school are implementing the National Curriculum in Norway, fulfilling the requirements, listed in the educational law. But when you are about to work on a school’s curriculum you find it crucial to include students’ voice in it too, right?
–The Interviewee: Yes, our students have a big influence on the school’s curriculum, their voice is very important to us. Our students learn a lot about democracy, because our school’s ideology builds on the concept of democracy. For example, every autumn the pupils are the ones who decide what the name of the class should be. The group of the youngest, from the first and up to the third grades, have chosen to be referred to as the Yellow color, the group of the older ones, from the fourth and up to the sixth grades, have chosen the Red color, and the seventh grade adopted the name Blue, which they further combine with a noun, just to give one unique touch to the class name. After many discussions, involving all the students, they agree on class names such as the Yellow Emoji, the Yellow Chameleon, and many others funny names that the students choose after careful and long discussion, followed by voting.

For the children from first and up to seventh grades there is a meeting once a week, where they can come up with different cases, that are important to them. For example, I remember that last year one pupil from the first grade came up with a suggestion to celebrate Santa Lucia for one day. Events, like this one, are thoroughly discussed in our case meetings, referred to as mini parliament, where all the students take part, including the personnel of the Nyskolen. In these meetings we discuss problems that are important for the whole school. There are two examples that I find quite remarkable: the first one is about the homework. After extensive discussions and double voting, as the protocol requires, it was decided that the students from the junior high were not going to submit homework, just like the younger pupils of the school who also do not have any homework. The other example that I would like to mention was recently on the agenda for the mini parliament of Nyskolen. The problem concerns the democratic society and the concept that everyone has to work for that society in order for it to flourish. We were proud to see that our students can see for themselves what democracy stands for. I was satisfied by this result!

For Jonina, including students in planning their own teaching/learning is a matter of necessity and since she has already mentioned working on projects as a teaching method, I ask her more about democratic teaching methods:
5.2.4 Democratic methods in practice

– The Interviewer: That was definitively an interesting discussion. Which of the teaching methods are most compatible with the principle of democracy in the classroom? Can you describe some methods that you find to be more effective than others?
– The Interviewee: I think, it is quite difficult to pick just a few. I mix all the teaching methods I am using daily, but I am going to try to describe some.
– The Interviewer: Do not worry! I can help you defining them with the names they are known by in the contemporary literature. You can focus on the teaching approach that you find as most successful, while working with students from Nyskolen.
– The Interviewee: Certainly, cooperative learning is one of the teaching methods. I use cooperative learning a lot, leaving my students to work together in groups, helping each other. Often, I start my teaching with a short introduction of the teaching material, asking my pupils to use mind-mapping, either in their workbooks, or on the blackboard. I think that the best thing is to activate the most of my students, which varies from subject to subject. Pupils learn the most from each other, that is why I leave them to work together, like the cooperative learning requires.

Using a palette of teaching methods, identified as necessary for managing the democracy in the classroom, is a matter of priority according to Jonina. Therefore, the question about the connection between discipline and democratic teaching methods follows naturally:

5.2.5 Is there any connection between discipline and democratic methods?

– The Interviewer: Do you think that there is less need for discipline in class, when using the democracy teaching methods? How important is discipline for democratic teaching methods, if it is important at all?
– The Interviewee: Good discipline in class is very important! If there is no discipline, or rules of proper behavior in class, then productive teaching and learning are impossible. No results are reachable, without good discipline in class. I, for example, have very clear rules about what is allowed in my classroom, so the students know beforehand what my expectations towards them are. Having clear rules about the required behavior in class are equally important, rules that the pupils know are needed for our small school
society to function in a democratic way. Students know that democracy doesn’t mean that everybody can do whatever they want to! Democracy does not function like that! My students know that despite all of the rights they have, they are expected to fulfill their obligations too. When they are in my class, then I am the one responsible for them, as much as they are responsible for their participation in class. They are trained (during the whole schooling in Nyskolen) to follow that what they have chosen to work with! If this is the topic that the majority of the students have decided to work on, then the minority has to do the same. It is how it is in a democratically functioning society. We teach our pupils that they have to stay true to what they have chosen to work with.

The importance of discipline in the form of well-defined rules for all the students to follow is an absolute prerequisite for managing democracy teaching methods in the classroom, according to Jonina. However, there are some teaching approaches that she sees as being not applicable in democracy teaching environment:

5.2.6 The teaching methods that are not allowed in democratic classrooms

– The Interviewer: Can you mention some teaching methods that are not compatible at all with the concept of democracy in the classroom?

– The Interviewee: I can start with teaching in front of the blackboard, with pupils expected to sit still during the whole lesson, writing and doing assignments. However, there are always teachers that consider these old school ways of teaching as the best way to teach. If the students are deprived of opportunity to participate in the teaching, then no, or very little learning will take place. It means that we, as teachers, have no idea about what the kids are learning, especially if they are deprived of the opportunity to participate. Other teaching method I find applicable to the democratic classroom are problem-solving and interdisciplinary teaching methods. They give the students opportunity to express something on the subject that he/she is less proficient in, with the means of a subject that he or she masters and feel confident in. For example, a few days ago I had a student in one of my art classes that totally refused to draw a picture, like the other kids were supposed to do, following the art topic they had
chosen to work with. Then, what I did was to ask directly in person my student how did she want to work? The answer I got was that the pupil wanted to work with clay. This is an example of how teachers should not ignore in their teaching the multiple intelligence the class has.

Identifying teaching methods that are not applicable to managing democracy in the classroom brings us to the last question, concerning Jonina’s motivation to choose to work with democratic teaching methods:

5.2.7 Democratic teaching methods versus non-democratic teaching methods

–The Interviewer: What you have just said sounds so beautiful and quite reasonable! But, you, as a teacher, teaching in a school with a democratic profile, what could you advise teachers that have little, or no experience in using democratic teaching methods? Why should teachers choose democratic teaching methods instead of the ones well-known and commonly used for many decades?

–The Interviewee: I, honestly, do not know what kind of advice I should give them! I can just speak from my own experience for almost six years now, here in Nyskolen. When the teacher is using democratic teaching methods lively, then the students become much more responsible towards their learning and their interest for the subjects to be taught increases formidably. On the other hand, this helps teachers to continue to find new and more materials on the subject to be taught, which means that the pedagogy personnel are in a process of constant intellectual and professional development! You, as a teacher, would like to surprise your pupils with more facts about this or that topic. Both sides benefit that way. Here, in Nyskolen, we teach the students that whenever they vote, or choose something, then what they have chosen means something. We teach them that they can change the system that way, which is something that helps them later in their lives. We have students from our school that are successful politicians now in Norway. One of them was on TV two weeks ago. I think that our students understand much better than other students do, how the society works. We had a discussion with the youngest about how the people should use electricity and they decided that they should create a party that should fight for
what is good and fair for most of the people and the climate too. Our students know that there is a connection between paying taxes, building roads, hospitals and so on. Finally, what I want to conclude is that I think that in our school we are helping to create good citizens that are necessary for democracy to be successful!

–The Interviewer: I can just conclude here Jonina, that the world would have been a much better place to live in, if more children had that chance to be a part of schools like yours! Thank you very much for that interview!

This interview, with Jonina from Iceland, who has been working as a teacher at Nyskolen since 2013 was touching and once again confirmed my initial thoughts that using teaching methods that allow students to contribute substantially to their own learning, that are able to learn more about democracy are the ones that are the future of teaching and the educational system. Jonina was so calm and descriptive during the whole interview that I almost instantly felt a part of her classroom. I am encouraged by the thought that more teachers as Jonina are to be found in Nyskolen. This became evident in my next interview with a teacher from the Norwegian school that teaches mainly students in the middle age-group, but also, she is a pedagogue for the students in the junior high.

5.3 Interview with Marit Lokke: Teaching democracy through dialogue

It is important for me and my thesis to show how democratic teaching methods are implemented by different pedagogues in Nyskolen, covering the whole spectrum of classes from the first and up to the tenth grades. That is why, on September the 24th I was lucky to sit together with one of the most experienced teachers in Nyskolen, Marit, who mainly teaches Norwegian at the school. It was late in the afternoon of Tuesday the 24th of September when I and Marit sat in the teachers’ office on the third floor. We talked about school politics and how important it is for contemporary schools to have democratic teaching in focus. Marit strikes me as an enthusiastic, flexible, companionable, energetic and reflective person and a professional. Seldom have I become so motivated and inspired by a single person. Marit is one of the few people that I have ever met that have made me think more and, more importantly, made me remember what we discussed. She belongs to that group of teachers that never get tired of their students. Marit is always ready to learn
something new, it looks like she is as much curious as her pupils are. Here comes the interview:

5.3.1 Marit’s personal presentation

—The Interviewer: Hi, Marit! We know each other from previous contacts, but can you say something about yourself for the purpose of this interview?

—The Interviewee: I am Marit Lokke and I am a teacher in Norwegian at Nyskolen. I have been working here for eight years, and before that I had worked fifteen years in another school in Baerum. I wanted to come here, because I had read about the school, I had read about the case-meetings, and what you call it- the mixed aged groups (The smile didn’t leave Marit’s face during the whole interview). I liked the notion that you are more than your age. That was very important for me, because I have seen it in ordinary classes, that there is a big difference between the youngest and the oldest in maturity. And, also, the case-meetings, where the pupils take part in to deciding what to do, decide on different things, and practicing democracy from the very small things to the more important things. But you have to practice, and I am still fascinated (When Marit shared this with me, her eyes were shining like the ones of a child that is curious and anxious to get to know more things about the world)!

—The Interviewer: You are still fascinated?

—The Interviewee: Yes! Because what you see is often with the case-meetings, with the whole school-from the very young ones to the oldest pupils, to the teachers, to Sunniva the rector; we all have one voice each, one vote, and that is unusual! Sometimes you think that the case is banal, very small, very tiny, like “can we have sugar,” “can we have desserts,” but in that way they practice. And I also see that if the majority of children vote for some case, there are still a lot of kids that are against. But they have to agree, and that is hard, and difficult, and very-very important practice. We witness that every week!

After summarizing why, she has chosen to work in Nyskolen, Marit answers a few more questions about democratic teaching methods:
5.3.2 What democratic teaching methods does Marit find most applicable to her classroom

– The Interviewer: Like you have mentioned before, you are working with kids in the middle grades, as well as those in junior high. That is why I would like to ask you if you could see some change in the children that has been influenced by your approach and the democratic teaching methods you are implementing every day in your teaching?

– The Interviewee: Yes, there are changes! Because, we have pupils at junior high that have been at Nyskolen during their whole schooling, and they have a more mature attitude. They understand more of how democracy works, that is what I see with our pupils now that they accept that if you are in the minority, then you have to accept what the majority decides.

– The Interviewer: When it comes to your own teaching do you think that there are teaching methods that you use that are especially applicable to democracy and the type of teaching Nyskolen stands for? If there are such methods, then can you name them?

– The Interviewee: First of all, invite pupils to plan what they want to learn, and how they want to learn it, within the framework that the curriculum gives you. You have to be honest with the pupils and tell them: you can co-decide on this, but this you cannot decide on, neither can I! With the curriculum I cannot say we are going to do this, or that, I have no power to decide, even if there is something in the curriculum, I find stupid. This I explain to the pupils! We do not pretend that when you are a grown-up you can decide on everything, because you can’t. We have a lot of things to do as a parent, as an employee, as a teacher, and I think that this is a very important lesson to teach the young ones. Often pupils think that the grown-ups can decide on everything, but I think that children can decide more, and you have to stay cool! You have to let them make mistakes- that is a very important lesson to teach them too (Marit says that feeling uncomfortable wondering if I will really understand her point correctly, that is why she continues her explanation). The teachers I work with, my co-workers, we talk a lot about that it is not dangerous to make mistakes. That is how we learn. This the pupils have to experience. That is why, when I give them tasks, then I always give them some choices. Sometimes I see that they decide to work on a text that is more difficult, or to easy, but they have to experience by themselves. According to the
three years timespan, we have to cover everything in the curriculum. For example, I explain to my students that if we have covered Islam last year, then we won’t work on that topic this year. What do you want to learn? The students like having discussions, this makes them more aware. I let them decide, whether this or that is going to be our topic of work. You have to leave a room for discussions, and this has to be an inseparable part of the whole process of teaching. For instance, my students discuss how they want to be assessed at the end of the project. This is up to my pupils to decide, I need to assess them at the end and give them a grade (Marit starts to make face expressions and her gesticulation changes to a more nervous one. It is obvious that she doesn’t like to assess students). Earlier, I used to write a whole page with what was good and on what the student had to work more on, but now I ask my students if they prefer to have a verbal evaluation. This year I am going to individualize it even more. I will have both – verbal and written assessments for my pupils to choose between. I always try to be more flexible with that and I want to be more flexible, because what is important in the end is what is best for my pupils (When Marit shares this with me she looks very honest.). Some of them enjoy the conversation we have. I also prefer the verbal, because we sit, like the same way we two are sitting now, they bring their text and then we assess it together.

All of this information means that according to Marit the democratic teaching methods necessary for managing the classroom are various – from dialogue teaching to including students in planning their own learning and form of assessment. This triggers my curiosity when it comes to the size of the class:

5.3.3 How important is the size of the class for managing democracy in the classroom?

– The Interviewer: You talked a lot about flexibility, but do you think that your flexibility as a teacher is because of the size of the classes at Nyskolen? Because your classes are much smaller than those in the public schools in Norway. Do you think it is easier to implement democratic teaching methods in the middle grades?

– The Interviewee: Yes and no! Because I have forty pupils at the junior high and I always have forty assessments to make and in Norwegian you have the marks from one to six
to give. In my other school I had seventy-five assessments to prepare in total. Seventy-five times five texts to assess and it took time. Then I used to write a whole page, now it is easier with forty than seventy-five, of course. It takes time to write. I prefer to give them a verbal assessment.

–The Interviewer: Yes! But in a way when you work with ten to twelve students in a class, then do you find it easier to reach to these students, while using democracy teaching methods, in comparison to twenty-five or thirty students in a normal sized Norwegian class?

–The Interviewee: It is easier. Yes! When we work in class, I have time to attend to everyone. That is a big difference.

–The Interviewer: Then they can feel that you take notice of them, right?

–The Interviewee: Yes, every day! It is easier to have a close relationship!

–The Interviewer: Do you think that this is important for the process of learning and teaching?

–The Interviewee: It is very important! Yes! Because if you want to practice democracy, then they have to have confidence. To have a confidence you have to know someone and that is easier with fewer pupils. I think it is very important. You could do that also in other schools, but it takes more time. You could have many pupils, but you could not have many subjects. We, at Nyskolen, have close relationships with our pupils.

Like Marit explains, small classes improve relationships between teachers and their students which means that democratic teaching methods work well:

5.3.4 Democratic teaching methods preferred by Marit

–The Interviewer: But again, when it comes to your everyday life here at the school, how important is it for you to use teaching methods such as discussion or dialogue, or problem-solving?

–The Interviewee: It is very important! And it is important to have a lot of dialogue, a lot of discussion. Students have to practice – dialogue and discussion, because many of them are not used to it. I also always tell parents when we have meetings about the academic progress of their children that they have to discuss when they are eating
dinner, because at home it is safe to have stupid arguments. Because if you never have stupid arguments then you never learn anything. It is very important that every pupil feels safe enough to say what they think in class and with thirty-six pupils in class it is not safe, but with twenty it is safer! Often, in our school, we let the students discuss in groups. Often pupils have a lot of ideas, which has made me write another question on the whiteboard, like is it fair to have the same exam for every person in Norway? After that, the pupils are supposed to think alone, in their heads, until next week, and then we will have a discussion. The students need time to think what they feel and then we will practice that they could have opinions that differ. But at the same time all of these opinions can be right. This is something they have to practice. I can conclude that for me it is very important to practice discussion, especially because in the subjects I teach there is seldom just one right answer (Marit looks satisfied with what she has just shared with me).

–The Interviewer: This means that the students are allowed to think and come up with their own ideas, right?

–The Interviewee: Yes! They are very-very welcome.

–The Interviewer: When it comes to working in class then which of the following teaching methods do you think is most compatible with democracy: is it working alone the best one, or working in pairs, or working in small groups?

–The Interviewee: I think that it is very important to vary! It is good to have individual work, working in pairs, groups, the whole class, so variation is very important! There are some pupils that prefer to work alone, but only in very few places can you work alone. Therefore, you have to learn to cooperate and communicate. This is also an important part of the curriculum for primary school education. That is why, we have to teach the students so they can learn that they have to listen to others, without making faces, and we work a lot on that in our school. We explain to our pupils that we all have the right to feel safe in the class, nobody is allowed to laugh! For me it is enough to see some form of gesture, I do not need a verbal expression. This is not appropriate! Teachers have to be very aware what is going on around them in the classroom. I explain to my students that it is very undemocratic to make gestures. This is something important in junior high, as well as for the whole school.
After identifying the democratic teaching methods which Marit sees as essential, I bring up the question why project teaching remains so central for her and Nyskolen:

5.3.5 Project teaching as one of the central democratic methods for managing the classroom

–The Interviewer: I am well acquainted with the school’s teaching platform, that is why I know that you are working on different projects. My next question is about the relationship between different school subjects. How important it is for democratic teaching to give the students the tools to see these connections between the different subjects at school?

–The Interviewee: It as very important! I have always been teaching that way, also when I taught at another school, before I started to work here. Actually, my previous school was the pioneer here in Norway, when it comes to implementing such projects in teaching. Projects when we want to teach students about the interrelationships between the different subjects.

–The Interviewer: How important is this method of teaching, the one allowing students to work longer on one topic, going deeper into that particular topic? How important is this form of teaching for democracy in class?

–The Interviewee: This is something crucial, I think! Because the students have to understand that Norwegian, religion, and the other subjects do not stand alone, they coexist and are interrelated. These subjects cannot exist separately. Students have to practice this. Sometimes they see these links, sometimes they don’t, because they don’t have the same references and experiences as the grown-ups. Often, I have to guide my students, but that I find interesting! Now, we are working on a project that is about the emigration from Norway to USA in the 1880s. I supply my pupils with photos of these emigrants from which they have to choose a photo and write either an interview for a newspaper, or a letter home. They have to pretend that they are some of the people in the photo. Before they did that, I read a literary book about emigration, and they also have to read a history book, recommended on this topic, with many facts in it. This helps students see the links and that is very nice, and that is how I like to work (Marit’s whole face was smiling when she was sharing this with me).
Marit’s opinion on the importance of democratic teaching methods for managing the classroom makes me curious about it: dialogical teaching is the absolute foundation for the rest of the democratic teaching methods to thrive in the classroom:

5.3.6 The dialogical teaching is necessary for managing democracy in the classroom

–The Interviewer: But you know Marit that our society today is all about competition. People are eager to defend their point of view. They forget that the point with dialogue is to learn from each other, not to compete for who is going to say more and in a more reasonable way. That is why, it is very good that Nyskolen teaches kids the merits of good dialogue, right?
–The Interviewee: Yes, it is! Absolutely! That is what I like about the teaching here (This is a statement that very spontaneously sprang from Marit’s mouth. She really means it)!
–The Interviewer: Finally, Marit, do you have some last advice to the rest of the teaching society? Some teaching method that is good for teaching, but has been neglected?
–The Interviewee: I would say dialogue! In all subjects, among pupils, between pupil and teacher, between teachers, on all levels! Dialogue, dialogue, dialogue! For instance, today a pupil brought up the idea of using VR-glasses in our daily case-meeting. At first, I was against that suggestion, but after I have listened to the discussion, I changed my mind. Sometimes, my pupils see me changing my opinion, which I explain to them is a consequence of the way they have presented their arguments. That is very important for my students to see and experience. I am a grown-up for them, a teacher with a long teaching experience and I am changing my mind. That makes my pupils very proud. Then, I explain to them that I did that, because of the good arguments they had! That is democracy in practice! Finally, it is most important to listen and have a dialogue, and don’t be scared to change your mind, you don’t lose a thing! Some teachers think that if they change their mind, they will lose their authority, students won’t respect them anymore. I think that it is the other way around. Students will respect me more, if they see that I can change my mind. But I think that if you want to be a teacher, then you have to be curious, I like the young ones, I like being with them! And you have to, if you don’t like your pupils, find
something else to do (And this Marit meant- her face expression and body language confirmed that)!

5.3.7 Critical reflections on the interview with Marit

This interview was very emotional for both Marit and myself! We found a lot of topics that we agreed on, especially when it comes to the passion of being a teacher. Further, what impressed me during this interview was how the democracy teaching platform of the Nyskolen motivated Marit and gave her inner strength. In that way she accomplishes more of the planned teaching topics and gets professional satisfaction from encountering students’ interests, desire to work, and signs of academic progress. While working at Nyskolen, Marit sees the development of the social skills of the pupils, as well as their personal growth as individuals, ready to participate in discussions as members of a democratic society. The Norwegian teacher answered all my questions with such passion and alacrity. I was further impressed by Marit’s reflectiveness on the importance of implementing democratic teaching methods. This means that she did not automatically adopt the school concept but rather sought this type of teaching as the right one for her. During the interview with Marit I felt that the leading motif was about the effectiveness of discussion and dialogue as democratic teaching methods. But are we going to witness the same for another member of the pedagogy staff of Nyskolen, the middle-classes and junior high teacher Audun?

5.4 Interview with Audun Wurgler: Democracy teaching and interdisciplinarity

The interview with Audun was recorded at Nyskolen, a few weeks after the one with Marit. We were sitting in the office of junior high teachers. It was in the late afternoon of the fourteenth of October 2019. After a friendly shaking of hands, Audun asked me if I wanted something to drink, a suggestion that I decided to accept. The next step was for me to check my equipment, which was enabled for using. I caught a glimpse of Audun’s face, which looked relaxed and calm, however underneath this well-covered calmness the traces of commotion could have been spotted in the form of perplexed eye-contact. After I detected these signs of unease and discomfort of Audun’s, I became extra alert, adjusting my questions to the situation. Here comes the interview:
5.4.1 The personal presentation of Audun, my last interviewee

—The Interviewer: Hello, Audun! Would you like to tell us something about you and your professional experience as a teacher?

—The Interviewee: Yes! I am a teacher at Nyskolen in Oslo. I have been here for nine years now. My academical background is in physical health education. I have a bachelor’s degree in physical health, and I have English as another academic subject, and also science. I teach mainly the seventh grade, but I also teach science at junior high, and I also have some classes with the younger children at Nyskolen. These are the groups we call “sibling’s groups.”

—The Interviewer: You have mentioned that you have been working here for almost nine years now, right? Can I ask you then, why did you choose Nyskolen as a working place? Was it because of the school’s special teaching platform, or was it something else that motivated you to apply for a job here- probably your previous teaching job was the reason?

—The Interviewee: No! I haven’t worked in another school. Before I started to work here, I worked in a daycare with three to six years old kids. A friend of mine, who was working here asked me if I wanted to come and work here. My time was up as a temporary leader at the daycare (Audun smiles softly), so I started here. My friend recruited me here, at Nyskolen.

Audun’s personal presentation is followed by question targeting teaching methods promoting democracy:

5.4.2 The democratic methods used by Audun in his classroom

—The Interviewer: Hopefully, it was for a good reason! Nine years as a teacher here, then one could say that you have a good experience of practicing democracy and appropriate teaching methods. Which teaching methods do you prefer the most in your classroom? Which methods are most compatible with democracy?

—The Interviewee: What I like to do the most when I start teaching the kids in the different subjects is to find out where the students are, how much do they know. We start by discussing the topic, like we have been working on religion these past weeks and we
have been discussing why do we need religion, and what is religion? I ask the students the big questions and I then I listen to what they have to say. Then, I take notes and pursue what they have come up with. That is my favorite way of entering into a new topic!

—The Interviewer: Discussing and brainstorming?
—The Interviewee: Yes! And just following what students already know from before. And just a kind of building on the top of that. That is what I prefer the most!

Audun’s opinion on democratic teaching methods and class management makes me ask my next set of questions, focusing on students’ contribution to their own learning:

5.4.3 Students’ contribution to their own learning as the cornerstone to managing democracy in the classroom

—The Interviewer: Like you have mentioned before when taking in consideration what students like and think about the topic, then do you find that to be the cornerstone of not only having a good discussion, but also of involving students more actively in building-up your teaching plan with them?
—The Interviewee: For sure! I try to do that now and I have been trying to do that during all my years of teaching here: with some classes you could do it earlier than others, it depends on where they are at, and how many students you have in class with special needs or learning difficulties. But that is my preferred way of starting a new subject, finding out what do the kids know from before and just start there. Then, they can do a wallpaper, or a presentation, or something else, connected to the topic.

—The Interviewer: Is it that you leave your students to come up with their own interpretations on the subject in the form of discussion, or other alternative forms of communicating what they find as interesting and fit their personalities? For example, when it comes to assessments or assignments, do you find yourself more flexible?
—The Interviewee: Yes! I think my job is to present new topics rather than to ask them to open this or that book, on this or that page, and then to ask them to work through it. It doesn’t matter if you know it, or not from before, this is what we are going to do! For me, this does not sound right to do, because if the students know the topic from before, then we don’t need to spend time on it, we can do something else. I think that
you get more dynamic situations in the classroom and you also motivate the students more.

Audun considers students’ opinion as essential for managing democratic teaching methods in the classroom. For him problem-solving tasks are equally important:

5.4.4 Problem-solving is a central democratic method according to Audun

–The Interviewer: You have mentioned earlier during the interview that you are also teaching science, what about the problem-solving then as a teaching method? Do you find that this is a teaching method that is compatible with democracy in the classroom and the democratic teaching platform of Nyskolen?

–The Interviewee: I think so! When you present students with a problem, then they can understand the reason why they need to find out this or that and they will, in their own way. We don’t need to show them exactly how to fly the paper, we just need to tell them “to fly!” Figure out the solution. Then you can have thirty different types of flying paper, and then they can see which one did the best. I haven’t taught in regular schools at all, so (Audun is laughing quietly), but I know that it is a lot different from the time when I went to school, like twenty years ago. Today, I have got children of my own, starting school, they are still more bound to the textbook.

If problem-solving is a teaching method compatible with democracy, then why is teaching with textbooks not?

5.4.5 How important are the textbooks for democratic teaching?

-The Interviewer: You mean that you, here at Nyskolen, you don’t use textbooks at all?

-The Interviewee: No! We have some books, but we have not one book per student. In some subjects we have a book just to see what is recommended to get through, or this is the one way to get through it, and then we use it to get more ideas, and what to do, and to follow. Many of the textbooks are ten years old, fifteen years old, right? Of course, some subjects are the same, but other subjects have changed. There are different
ways of learning now, than ten years ago. So, I don’t think that I have ever had class textbooks for any of the nine years I have been here!

After clarifying the negative outcomes for democracy in the classroom from using textbooks, I ask a set of questions, focusing on why the project teaching approach is preferred by Audun for managing democratic methods of teaching in his classroom:

5.4.6 Project work as a democratic method

–The Interviewer: I have been reading that here at Nyskolen you are working a lot on projects, like for example Eureka. These projects practice deep learning, and I guess it is quite demanding to write a textbook that focuses on that type of teaching/learning, right?
–The Interviewee: For sure! Yeah! During the Eureka project we really go into the depth of the subject.
–The Interviewer: Only one, or more? Can you give me an example?
–The Interviewee: Like for example, we had a Viking Eureka, and then we had all the subjects like math, Norwegian, English, social science, and science, as well as arts and craftsmanship, represented. Because all of these spheres of knowledge contribute to the subject of the Vikings, of course in their own way. What I mean the theme is the same, not the subject. So, all the subjects will work on the same theme.
–The Interviewer: Why do you think it is good for the students to learn that way? Through projects like Eureka, not the old-fashioned way – one subject, covering only one topic? Why should others follow your way of teaching?
–The Interviewee: Because this is the best way (Audun is smiling again)! No, I think that when the best projects are being worked on, like the Viking Eureka as a theme, combining different subjects, then you could say that all of these subjects have something to do with that theme and then the students get a broader picture of what this theme means in the real world. I think that is the advantage with working on a project-based teaching/learning that the pupils get a bigger picture of the same theme than if they were working just on the Viking Eureka in the sphere of social science and something completely different in maths. It is better with one theme in all the
subjects, than with different themes in the different subjects! Because, when we work on grammar, then you can work on text, based on the Vikings in English, or when analyzing poems, you could use those that are related to the Vikings or the theme that is being covered at the moment. The students will get a broader sense of what the theme is all about.

–The Interviewer: What you mean then is that through the project-based teaching/learning the pupils will be able to see better the links between the different disciplines, right?
–The Interviewee: Yes! I do think so!

From project teaching we move towards interdisciplinarity:

5.4.7 Interdisciplinarity and democratic teaching

–The Interviewer: There is something in pedagogy that is referred to as interdisciplinarity. This is a new way of teaching, different from the traditional subject-teaching, insisting on that the knowledge exist out there in forms that are difficult to fit in to one subject, because everything is connected. Your Eureka projects resemble that approach, right?
–The Interviewee: That is what we try to show to our students during most of the time they spend here at school that everything is connected.
–The Interviewer: It means that you, the teachers, are spending a good amount of your time on preparations, planning your own teaching for the week, or the month?
–The Interviewee: In junior high the team works closely together. We plan not only big projects, like Eureka, which is a six-week project, but we also do shorter planning. But we plan together what we are going to work in Norwegian, or English, or how can we relate physical education to what has already been planned in English and Norwegian. In other words, we search for connections between the different disciplines we are teaching as teachers, building on each other’s strengths. That is what gives the students more in-depth understanding.

Interdisciplinarity as a democratic teaching method gives students the opportunity to participate in their own learning in a more active way, including the process of planning their school day.
5.4.8 Involving students in the process of planning their everyday

–The Interviewer: How do you include your students in planning your teaching? Do you discuss with them, or do you know them so well, because of the smaller size of your classes here at Nyskolen in comparison to the other schools, that you can plan alone, but taking into consideration their voice?

–The Interviewee: In the seventh grade, which I am the class teacher for, we have only nine students. Then, I sit and talk more with the students. I choose the topics and then we talk about the different topics. In junior high we do not discuss so much what we are going to learn, more on how we are going to learn it. Since the students there are graded, then we need to talk about what they are going to be graded on, how they are going to be graded. So, we can have different ways to be graded during the semester, because there is a set of criteria we are having to go through in science. It is a bit more serious, when we get to junior high than it is with seventh grade. In seventh grade we are more at liberty what to do, a kind of, what we like, and we are more flexible, as long as we stick to the same frame as the curriculum sets upon the whole education system in Norway.

–The Interviewer: You have mentioned before that in junior high you are following the democratic principle of including your pupils in the process of deciding not only how they are going to be taught, but, also, they decide how they are going to be assessed. Do you think that this makes them more responsible towards their own learning?

–The Interviewee: Sometimes (Audun is laughing at what he has just said)! We still encounter challenges with that, for sure. It depends on the topic: do the students like the topic or is it something from the curriculum that they have to cover. I do not think that we can get away from that, because we have different interests and not everything is fun, not everything has to be fun, but we can find ways to work around it! The best way to do that is to engage the students, do different things, not only the standard- to stand in front of them and talk. Have discussions, have quizzes, dialogues in search of finding out why is it boring. What can we do then? Let’s find the ways around it, avoiding what hinders students from learning.
Audun is explicitly concluding that the group of students is a group of individuals that needs different democratic teaching methods for me successful management of the classroom:

5.4.9 Using different democratic methods is the key towards successfully managing Audun’s classroom

–The Interviewer: Earlier in our conversation, you mentioned that you work in a way and with teaching methods that help the students that are weaker in some areas to learn, while using what they are good at. Some teaching methods stimulate individual learning, while others stress the need for more working in-pairs or in groups. Which of these methods do you find are more compatible with the democracy in the classroom?

–The Interviewee: I think that having a variation is the key there! Also, we have, even in junior high, eighteen students at the time, so the class size for the students that struggle, that’s the key! Having a limited number of students, just for example eighteen, is, I think, of great benefit and allows me as a teacher to work with the class in different ways. The students have more freedom, I can give them freedom, while I sit almost one-to-one with a pupil during the same lesson. I think that class size, this is one of the main reasons for me to stay here, at Nyskolen. Of course, you can move far away from the cities, to small places, where you have smaller classes and everything, but here in Oslo there are up to thirty students per class and it is just too many. How is it possible to teach a class of that size? I don’t want to do that!

Like the Norwegian teacher Audun explains that having fewer students in the class means more chances for the different individuals to get what they deserve out of the day at school:

5.4.10 The importance of the class size for managing a classroom, governed by democracy

–The Interviewer: I think that the headmistress of Nyskolen, Sunniva, mentioned once that the class size is crucial for implementing democracy in the classroom, because it has been shown that younger students do not have the ability to establish good relationships that they can benefit from socially with many students at the same time. You are familiar with that, aren’t you? Having good relationships between students is something crucial for their learning, right?
Smaller classes and different democratic teaching methods is, according to Audun, the formula for good education and training:

5.4.11 How well are the students from Nyskolen trained in democracy?

–The Interviewer: Because you have been working here at Nyskolen for a long time now, then it is quite logical for me to ask you if you see any difference between the students that have been studying here during the whole period of ten years and those that enter Nyskolen later? Do you think that the students you educate here are better at discussing on various topics and explaining, as well as accepting others’ opinion than students that haven’t been exposed to democratic methods, or even those of them that enter the school later?

–The Interviewee: I think so! Yeah! I think so! We train our students very much to discuss and express themselves in order to give them self-confidence to be able to talk and tell all the others what they mean. That is an important part of the school week here. We have meetings once a week, it is for the whole school, from the first to tenth grader, we call these meetings case meetings. In these meetings everyone has just one vote – one vote for each student and teacher. Then, the student council, they present the different cases and they also decide if we should vote on it, or if the case has to go to the teaching meetings first, or the junior high, or primary school meetings eventually. After that, we can vote. Sometimes they have great discussions on the importance of contributing to the community, the school community, and they find out by themselves. So, the democracy system we have here, it works (Audun is
remarking that with astonishment and proudness that he is actually a part of it)! Our pupils do not just decide on things, because they can. We, as teachers, are outnumbered in these case meetings of ours, so the students get a really good practice at arguing. All the students participate. Even though the youngest students don’t talk that much, they can listen, they can listen to the tenth graders arguing and presenting a case, how they express their different opinions, and they learn from that! That is a very good thing, it is!

After clarifying the social significance of schools like Nyskolen that educate members of society to make them ready to participate in the democratic processes in the wider society, I ask Audun about his final thoughts on the subject:

5.4.12 The final thoughts of Audun on the topic of democratic methods

—The Interviewer: What you’ve told me so far is something amazing and it sounds so interesting! Is there something more that you would like to add to the topic we’ve been talking about for more than thirty minutes? It could be something about the vitality and effectivity of the democratic teaching methods that you are using here, in Nyskolen, in comparison to the rest of the schools in Norway?

—The Interviewee: Great things are done in ordinary schools as well, but I think that they are, just, limited by textbooks and too many students at a time. But I think that the answer to your question is theme-based learning. For example, the seventh graders in Nyskolen, I am their teacher in social science, science, religion, in English, and physical education, sometimes in Norwegian as well. We are working closely with the Norwegian teacher and just doing themes- now we are going to focus on the Renaissance and all the subjects are about the Renaissance.

—The Interviewer: You are synchronizing the subjects, aren’t you?

—The Interviewer: Yes, we do! We are synchronizing the subjects. Some subjects will be more controlled by me, while in others I can leave more control to the students. I haven’t got the impression that this is something happening in ordinary schools. It is more every subject for itself.
The Interviewer: Thank you very much for spending your time discussing with me and giving me examples of what it is that makes your teaching platform here so unique!

5.5 Some reflections over the interviews

This was my last interview at Nyskolen, and I have to admit that it gave me lots of food for thoughts for a few weeks afterwards. This last conversation was saturated with realism, while at the same time, it unveiled Audun’s well thought-out persuasion about the merits of democratic teaching methods. Audun answered my questions briefly and concisely without unnecessary emotionality. During the time I spent with these dedicated teachers, especially when it comes to how consciously they are implementing democratic teaching methods on a daily basis, I have become more and more convinced about how important it is to have more schools work in the same way as Nyskolen does. This appears to be more than an educational platform and theoretical concept of existing. This is a pedagogical journey carefully created and adapted to the individuals’ inner need to learn. At the same time, it meets the need to be challenged out of one’s comfort zone and into the sphere of individual’s growth, achieved through the norms of the democracy-controlled school society. These three interviews gave me the feeling that I was dealing with a puzzle and made me curious to proceed from interview to interview, because each interview introduced me to different facets of the same concept of implementing democracy on a class level through teaching methods. For example, Jonina’s interview was all about project work (Sigurgeirsson, 2013), whereas Marit’s major focus was on the importance of classroom leadership and, therefore, the implemented democratic teaching methods to include students in all the parts from the process of teaching and learning through discussions (Sigurgeirsson, 2016). That brings me to Audun’s interview, who emphasized interdisciplinarity and theme-based teaching and learning (Sigurgeirsson, 2013).

As a matter of fact, the findings of this chapter, on implementation of democratic methods in primary school classrooms, as well as Sunniva’s interview from the fourth chapter, are going to be coded, categorized, and conceptualized (Lichtman, 2013) in the next, the sixth chapter, that is going to focus on the results from my school research.
6. Results

In the previous two chapters the actual interviews have been presented and explained in order to capture and introduce the essence of the topic “implementation of democratic methods in the primary school classroom in Norway.” It has been an intriguing journey to me to listen and capture not only what my interviewees said, but also the different emotions my questions generated. This is an emotional topic not only for me, but for my interviewees as well. Therefore, choosing the right approach for decoding the information, collected through the four interviews, is a matter of priority in this stage of my research. Lichtman (2013) represents and characterized the actual qualitative analysis techniques and procedures that can be applied to a range of qualitative research, including mine. However, I am going to depict only these of the qualitative analysis techniques from the lavish palette of Lichtman (2013). Those are referred to as: a constant-comparative method, a content (textual) analysis, and a conversation analysis – all three are defined and described in the methodology chapter of my research.

6.1 Dialogical teaching and democracy

What the results of my study are making explicit is the fact that all the four teachers interviewed by me agree that the dialogue between the teacher and the students is the most important of all the teaching methods that convey democracy. Dialogue, as well as flexibility in teaching, allowing students to choose between different teaching methods, were among the democratic qualities of teaching at Nyskolen. The teachers I interviewed all agreed that variation in the teaching methods used, has an impact on both students and teachers. This variation in teaching can be achieved if, like Sunniva and Marit said, the dialogue is applied not only as a form of teaching, or teaching method, but as a prerequisite for establishing a solid relationship between a teacher and a student, which is the absolute precondition for further teaching/learning to be successful. According to Jonina and Audun the dialogue is important too, but more in the form of discussion that is going to give a direction for further planning and deciding on teaching materials and learning outcomes. Sunniva refers to dialogical teaching as a form of a teaching method that is closely related to developing a good language which is a central skill for engaging in not only a good dialogue,
but also for enabling a democratic community in the classroom and further across the whole school. This refers especially to the case-meetings.

6.2 Case meetings as a teaching method towards democracy

The idea of emphasizing good forms of dialogue and democratic spirit of teaching is achieved at Nyskolen through weekly case meetings, where all the students and teachers take part. This introduces the primary school children to democracy in what can be referred as discussion teaching method, combined with the surveys and seminar method (Sigurgeirsson, 2013). The headmistress of Nyskolen Sunniva makes it explicit that while sitting in these case meetings the students are actually taught how to become responsible not only for their own learning, and therefore well-being, but also for the society, which is a matter of priority for democracy. These forms of teaching provide younger and older students from the Norwegian school with an adequate idea of how to practice democracy as an idea, or as a teaching method that all the four teachers agreed as being an inseparable part of the whole democracy concept in Nyskolen. The significance of the case meetings as a form of practicing democracy is that it teaches students about the importance of participation on a crucial part of democracy, just like working on projects, where the responsibility for the project is shared by all participants.

6.3 Project teaching and democracy

Another form of practicing democracy and democratic teaching that all the interviewed teachers and the headmistress of the school find to be necessary for their existence is project teaching/learning (Sigurgeirsson, 2013). However, what was interesting here, while decoding the results from all the four interviews, is the way the teachers referred to the project teaching, which at Nyskolen is called “Eureka.” I had the impression that for all four teachers the “Eureka” projects were the best way to combine teaching methods that are not only resonate with the democracy platform of the school but also capture pupils’ vision and beliefs for the type of learning they can benefit most from. For Sunniva the “Eureka” project teaching combined other teaching methods such as the role-play method together with democratic teaching methods training the students in deep learning. The students also acquired practical skills through participating in democratic processes. Jonina, on the other
hand argues that the story-line teaching method (Sigurgeirsson, 2013) can be used as an opening for introducing project teaching. Marit explained that the project teaching is a well systemized democracy concept that involves the students from all the classes of Nyskolen in the whole process of deciding on the topic they are going to work on as the preferable form of education. Finally, what Audun sees as the main outcome of implementing project teaching as democratic teaching method is that the students are exposed to a form of learning where interdisciplinarity is central.

6.4 Interdisciplinarity approach as a democratic method of teaching

Sunniva and Audun mentioned interdisciplinarity approach as a democratic method of teaching. If Sunniva depicts interdisciplinarity as a form of consolidating the knowledge about society, humans and nature, then Audun sees this form as a pragmatic way of teaching students how to detect the links between subjects. When instructing primary school students about the significance of democracy as a form of deep learning, Audun stressed the importance of theme-based teaching (Sigurgeirsson, 2013) for the students which is synthesized through the prism of the different subjects. Audun’s own reflections are supported by the academic literature, especially in Repko’s (2009) work where the thesis of how interdisciplinarity fosters advances in cognitive abilities is exposed. Marit and Jonina emphasized the problem-solving teaching method (Sigurgeirsson, 2013). Although Marit also highlighted the importance of critical thinking for the students to help them to see the links between subjects. Without doubt, both problem solving and critical thinking are required for interdisciplinarity to become transparent- problem-solving when it comes to the point that declarative and procedural knowledge help students to solve complex problems, whereas critical thinking enhances pupils’ ability to integrate conflicting insights from disciplines (“Why Teach,” n.d.). Students can accomplish this while working individually, in pairs, or through group projects.

6.5 Textbook and mixed-age group teaching. Which one belongs to the group of democratic teaching methods?

The traditional textbook teaching (Sigurgeirsson, 2013) was identified by all the teachers as incompatible with democracy. This form of teaching has been totally abolished at Nyskolen. Audun stated that it is a waste of time to deliver the same information to all the students.
The textbook teaching has been replaced by dialogical teaching. Through dialogical teaching the teachers from Nyskolen scrutinize how well their pupils master different topics, which is a necessary practice in order to decide on the level of complexity of the teaching materials.

Finally, the teaching method that all the four teachers refer to as a foundation not only for their school, but for the contemporary society too, are the mixed-aged classrooms. As Sunniva makes it clear in her interview, their school is a projection of the society we live in and as much as members of different aged groups work often together in society this happens at school as well, where each age group benefits somehow from being with the others. Mixed-aged grouping is an important part of the whole concept of Nyskolen for democracy teaching, based on smaller and mixed aged classes, which stimulates children’s social and emotional growth, as they learn to compromise and collaborate as well as to be both – leaders and followers (“Mixed-Age Classrooms,” n.d.). The only thing that matters is knowledge, because like Sunniva herself concludes “democracy without knowledge is not really a democracy.”

If the primary school teachers in Norway want to implement democratic teaching methods, then they have to adjust them to the classroom, starting with building solid relationships with their pupils.
7. Discussion

Themes identified as important by participants in a three-part workshop, funded by NOS-HS in 2018 were sustainable development, democracy and education. The results in the previous chapter corroborate what has been established as a leading goal for the Nordic countries – “…the factum that the contemporary education has to become less compatible, but more connected to society’s private and public institutions” (Jónsson et al., 2018). The same concern was expressed by Sunniva, especially when she talked about how the progress of our society is intertwined with the cooperative work among people. That is why, as a basic democratic teaching method, implemented by all the primary teachers at Nyskolen, Sunniva chooses to refer to dialogue and dialogical teaching as fundamental for the academic life at Nyskolen. This is the preferred form for establishing pupils’ attitude towards various forms of evaluation that they can discuss and agree upon with their tutors, as was also supported by Marit. It is not wrong to conclude that dialogical teaching combines in itself those features of democratic pedagogy that are necessary and irrevocably intertwined with students’ well-being in the classroom in the form of satisfaction with ones’ own contribution to the teaching materials and methodology.

The implementation of democratic teaching methods by the primary school teachers at Nyskolen are an important part of well-considered and systemized concept towards democracy in education, where the interests of the students come first. That is why, cooperation and dialogical teaching (Calcagni & Lago, 2018) can be seen as major teaching method that both Marit and Sunniva refer to as the total prerequisite for good relationships between classmates, and between teacher and students. Towards these relationships these two wonderful tutors from Nyskolen are referring on the same way as Johnson and Johnson (2016) allude to as those ones nourishing positive interdependence, individual accountability and the appropriate use of social skills. It is important for the primary school teachers to implement more teaching methods that train students in acquiring good dialogue skills. All four interviewed teachers from Nyskolen agreed on the importance of dialogical teaching for democracy in the school. However, Sunniva said something about the methods of democracy teaching that I find fundamental to the whole concept of Nyskolen, and about the choices that their students have to make daily, the choices that have to be based on knowledge to be legitimate for democracy. What she says coincides with Auster
and Wylie’s (2006) statement that primary school teachers have to guide their pupils to make democratic choices, based on real knowledge. The knowledge the scholars are referring to, the pupils from Nyskolen are using as an essential part of their speeches, while arguing their standpoints on different matters during the daily case meetings where all the students and pedagogy personnel gather. During these daily meetings the students get a unique opportunity to practice direct democracy.

Nyskolen incorporates into the school curriculum the project teaching/learning in the form of “Eureka”. Through these regularly implemented and democracy orientated projects the pupils from Nyskolen are trained in important democratic skills. These include, cooperation and working in groups and independent work. Participating in project work is crucial part of training students to take responsibility not only for their own learning, but for that of the whole group/class, because without their participation the whole project is doomed to fail. The project work is a critical element in nurturing the individuals’ readiness to participate in socially, politically, and economically significant activities for the society causes (Payne, 2017). Consequently, the project teaching/learning as a democratic teaching method conveys to pupils the merits of real democracy. Like all the four tutors from Nyskolen explained the discussion in class with and between students in order to measure their acquaintance with various academic facts is skillfully implemented by Nyskolen’s pedagogy personnel who seek students’ opinion (Brough, 2012), as the same time they are ably managing the whole discussion. However, this implication of Brough’s, even though important for class management, it was not apparent component from the interviews. I got the impression that the tutors at Nyskolen are practicing some form of co-management in their classrooms, leaving an equally important part of that responsibility to their pupils.

These democratic teaching methods of managing the classroom prepare the young individuals to become more politically active in the future, possessing a clear political position.

Through such teaching methods, together with the discussion that can be identified as another major feature of the democratic teaching all the interviewed teachers from Sunniva to Audun allude to, the tutors at Nyskolen validate Knowles and Clark’s (2018) statement that contemporary students have to be trained to advocate for themselves. Sunniva, Marit, and Jonina explained, that students are systematically taught and trained during their entire primary school career to master the art of discussion and supporting their viewpoints. This
makes them become good dialogue partners. The idea about sustainability and its place in contemporary education, especially when this notion is presented through the prism of the democratic teaching methods, is an inseparable part of the whole concept of Nyskolen. The school manages an educational project for primary school education in Norway, which not only educates pupils, but it also raises them to become mature enough and responsible to be members of society. This ideal from Nyskolen’s ideological platform for democracy education is in total unison with one of the conclusions from the Scandinavian workshop focusing on sustainability and education (Jónsson et al., 2018). At Nyskolen the pupils measure up the success of the interdisciplinary projects they are working on, called “Eureka,” according the outcomes different individuals and the entire school community are seeking for.

Focus on sustainability in education at Nyskolen is supported of those democratic teaching methods that stimulate students towards cooperative working on different projects, including mixed-age groups, which like Yoldas (2014) explains is like the milestone for conducting social education and leading to virtues like empathy and tolerance. Even more, at Nyskolen the primary school teachers are implementing democratic teaching methods such as discussion, deliberation, and also supply their pupils with adequate skills for social action (Payne, 2017) that motivates and inspires students to continue to study in that way as an important and quality life-long characteristic (Bjerkaker, 2014). All four interviewed teachers were in favor of working in class through vast collaboration projects like Eureka. These are the projects that not only stimulate children’s imagination and creativity, which further enhances deep-learning and teaching, but it helps pupils to understand naturally, like Audun repeatedly referred to in his interview, the links between different types of knowledge. Through these types of projects, the kids learn indirectly about sustainability too, and how through knowledge and action following this knowledge we all can influence the world around us. The teachers and the headmistress of Nyskolen Sunniva agreed that while implementing Eureka as a teaching method, which is a project combining in itself various teaching methods, their students learn in more entertaining and attuned way to their own individual abilities about the world around them. Through students’ engagement and dedication to these “Eureka” projects, the teachers from Nyskolen stress the need for more diversity, while implementing teaching methods. That in itself is practicing democracy, while teaching.
In spite of the effectiveness of the democratic teaching methods, implemented in the Nyskolen’s classroom, there are also those who criticize these methods, like Dahlum and Knutsen (2017) who did not see a relationship between democracy and educational quality. Nyskolen is attempting to implement its democratic form of education in a practical way that enables students to learn about democracy while practicing it. This is achieved through different teaching methods that enable students to develop as unique individuals at their own pace. Therefore, the four Norwegian teachers were unanimous that the democratic teaching methods are the tool that secures the quality of good teaching in their classrooms.

What is explicit from Nyskolen’s democracy concept of teaching is that all the teaching methods that the primary school teachers are implementing on a daily basis are a part of not only well-considered teaching platform that is going to educate younger students. This is a philosophic platform that is vital for the teaching methods that form individuals and real citizens. However, the need for academic work targeting the parents and their contribution to the democratization of the contemporary education is evident.
8. Conclusion

Implementation of democratic teaching methods in the primary school classroom in Norway is a matter of major interest to me. I have always been convinced that the way of teaching and the way we, as teachers, collaborate with children has to be changed. It is not enough to change the National Curriculum for primary school education, the change has to be more substantial and has to occur soon. This is important in times of the rapid changes we observe in society due to globalization, multiculturalism and digitalization, which have not led to the establishment of a critical standard when it comes to the global exchange of information. All of these factors combined with a concrete and specific situation, characterizing different individuals, societies, and whole countries, makes the need for changing and adapting the education to the needs of the world today quite obvious. I have often reflected on this, especially after I started my education at The University of Iceland, the Teaching Department. Last year, when I took the practice course of pedagogy in Iceland, I participated in a lecture, dedicated to democracy. I was amazed to learn that the students in Iceland and those worldwide are still experiencing that their voice does not matter, they are not contributing to their own learning in terms of deciding on the teaching material and the forms of teaching and evaluation. That was a stunning fact to me. That is why, I decided to explore on my own the implementation of democratic teaching methods in primary school classrooms in Norway by teachers from the only Norwegian school, referred to as democracy governed.

What I have found through interviewing the headmistress of Nyskolen and the other three teachers, is both encouraging and inspiring. The most important of all is the dialogical teaching and the teaching methods such as discussion, which are those that contribute the most for the young students to become proficient and skillful in managing a dialogue.

The form of democratic teaching that Nyskolen is practicing symbolizes innovation in education. However, an attractive form of education, democracy, implemented in teaching by the primary school teachers has to be further tested against the robust educational system that has been gradually amended in favor of human rights and democracy. Therefore, research focusing on democracy issues in education, including the effect those issues exert on the cooperation between families and primary schools, have to be initiated.
References


Appendix

In this special appendix the reader will find a more detailed version of the interviews with staff which in turn show the commitment and enthusiasm with which Nyskolen staff approach their work. On that way in a short story form the reader is going to have an opportunity to take a peek at the concise but descriptive version of these parts of my work containing the interviews. This is also an adequate way of summarizing those parts of the interviews in my work that are central. The story begins with Sunniva the school principal talking about her ideology.

- **Sunniva’s background and pedagogic interests that brought her closer to Nyskolen’s Ideology:**
  Nyskolen and how political reality has influenced the school’s everyday life.
  The importance of the local authorities for Nyskolen’s existence.
  Nyskolen’s school curriculum versus the national curriculum for primary education in Norway – Teaching methods and practice.
- **Teaching methods and practice:**
  What is the foundation for deep learning according to Sunniva?
  How important is teaching method of cooperation for Nyskolen?
  Students’ contribution to their own learning as a part of the democracy concept of Nyskolen.
  How does Sunniva answer those criticizing democratic teaching methods?
  What is the role of a good teacher in a classroom governed by democratic methods?
  The democratic teaching methods and teaching virtues.
  Nyskolen and its developmental work in the sphere of the democratic methods.
  Sunniva’s reflections on how the pedagogic education should be changed.
- **Working with the students:**
  Jonina’s personal presentation.
  Smaller classes and mixed-age groups as a necessary prerequisite for managing democratic methods in class.
  Including students in deciding on the teaching materials and methods.
Democratic methods in practice:
Is there any connection between discipline and democratic methods?
The teaching methods that are not allowed in democratic classrooms.
Democratic teaching methods versus non-democratic teaching methods.

Marit a teacher:
Marit’s personal presentation.
What democratic teaching methods does Marit find most applicable to her classroom?
How important is the size of the class for managing democracy in the classroom?
Democratic teaching methods preferred by Marit.
The dialogical teaching is necessary for managing democracy in the classroom.

Project work as a democratic method:
Audun’s personal presentation.
The democratic methods used by Audun in his classroom.
Students’ contribution to their own learning as the cornerstone to managing democracy in the classroom.
Problem-solving is a central democratic method according to Audun.
How important are the textbooks for democratic teaching?
Project work as a democratic method.
Interdisciplinarity and democratic teaching.
Involving students in the process of planning their everyday.
Using different democratic methods is the key towards successfully managing Audun’s classroom.
The importance of the class size for managing a classroom, governed by democracy.

Using democratic methods:
How well are the students from Nyskolen trained in democracy?
The final thoughts of Audun on the topic of democratic methods.