DEMOCRACY AND THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GÄVLE

October 2017.

CONTENTS

1. AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The idea of the present study has come from the author's observation that, in spite of decades of educational policies and practices that assign an important role to democracy and democratic values, in developed countries that are usually referred to as "established" or "old democracies", the current level of democratic political culture still appears to be weak enough to allow for an alarming dissemination of anti-democratic attitudes and discourses in the polity. For all its venerable history, Democracy is actually very fragile. It has its structural or systemic flaws, and sometimes its fragility becomes painfully evident in the tyranny of the majority, in the rise of demagoguery (through its successful appeal to passion), or in privatism (misanthropy, voluntary isolation from society). To those who heed the "lessons of history" and are weary of these inherent flaws, the recent events and developments in two well-established democratic nations have rung the alarm. Enchanted by simplistic demagogical messages, British and U.S. voters have become "silent majorities" allowing extremists to crawl to the surface and infect the public discourse with suspicion, fear, and hatred of minorities, immigrants, and foreign nationals. (Lowles 2016, Elliott and Stewart 2017, Jones 2017, Wilson and King-Meadows 2017).

While it is still too early to draw any conclusions about the relationship between education and the unfolding political developments in Europe and the United States, it is not too late to scrutinize local and national educational policies and practices as well as the educators' notions of, approaches to, and attitudes toward democracy, democratic education, and democratic values in any democratic society. The aim of this study is to investigate these practices, notions, and attitudes as they inform (and are carried out in) the teaching of English as an academic subject at the University of Gävle. The research questions are: 1) What are the conceptions of democracy in education among the English faculty at the University of Gävle? 2) Which norms, structures and practices are considered to foster democracy in higher education and which norms, structures and practices are considered real or potential challenges to democracy in higher education? 3) How does democracy fare in the teaching practice, i.e. in objectives, content, assessment, as well as in the implementation and course/lesson design? 4) What specific advantages does the teaching of English have for democratic education? 5) How well are the teachers acquainted with official documents that outline the University of Gävle's

policy on promoting and maintaining democracy in this institution? To answer these questions, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with four of the six teachers who made up the English faculty at the University of Gävle in the spring semester of 2017. The respondents' answers and their subsequent analysis constitute the core of this qualitative research.

Since the concept of democracy is very broad and complex and the relationship between democracy and education is notoriously difficult to theorize let alone measure empirically, a review of democracy theories and previous research on democratic education is first in order. This presentation of theory and research will eventually hone in on the Swedish perspectives. To further narrow down the research, special attention will be paid to the legal framework for democratic higher education in Sweden and at the University of Gävle.

2. THEORY AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

2.1. Democracy Theories: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Democracy is a fundamental concept in history, political philosophy, politics, and the media. Although most people now share an ideal of democracy as a form of government based on unlimited popular sovereignty, and the only acceptable and legitimate form of government (Koselleck 2004), a diachronic and synchronic analysis of its meanings reveals a highly contested concept.

Tarcov (1996, pp. 1-34) provides a useful account of "democratic" theories and their views on education, from their beginnings in ancient Athens to the *Federalist Papers* at the end of the eighteenth century. For the ancient Greeks, democracy meant the power of the *demos*, often narrowly understood as the poor and common people rather than all the people, although the equality principle meant that it shared rule with the rich and the elites. Narrower still, the *demos* referred only to free-born men, and thus excluded slaves, women, and non-Greeks. The resulting constitution was what we would call today a direct, participatory democracy, predicated on equality and freedom, in which social tensions were frequently manifest and often hindered effective government. It is therefore no surprise that both Plato and Aristotle adopted a critical stance toward democracy as a form of government. In *The Republic*, Plato warns against conformism and the tyranny of the majority, and proposes an ideal form of government, the republic of philosophers, which is clearly undemocratic. In *Politics,* Aristotle lists democracy, by which he means rule of the many in their own private interests, among the bad forms of government, together with tyranny and oligarchy and opposes to it the polity (*politeia*), or rule of the many in the common interest. While this distinction may sound to us today simply as one between bad and good democracy, it must be emphasized that Aristotle actually warns us that "democracy as rule of the many can be either a good regime or a bad one" (Tarcov 1996, p. 10). As a bad regime, democracy collapses and becomes a tyranny when the poor oppress the rich, when the majority falls prey to demagogues, and when virtue is not the main criterion for leadership. As a good one, a polity, it is a mixed regime, featuring both democratic and oligarchic elements, where the rule of law prevails. Interestingly for the aim of this study, Aristotle does not exclude the possibility of a democracy becoming a polity, and the

solution he proposes is education for virtues as "the perfection of the soul" rather than education for liberty understood as freedom to do whatever one pleases (Tarcov, 1996, p. 13).

Two thousand years later, and echoing Aristotle's famous golden mean virtues from his works on ethics, John Locke names the virtues that, according to him, children should be educated in in civil society: "civility, liberality, humanity, self-denial, thrift, courage, truthfulness, and justice as respect for the rights of others" (Tarcov, 1996, pp. 20-21). This time, however, the virtues do not point to human perfection above and beyond the political regime of the society in question, but to the realization of the full potential of human beings as rational and free. It is to classical liberals like Locke and Rousseau that we owe the contractual approach to government and the belief that the people (or a constituted majority) are, in fact, superior to their government. Government by the people's consent is limited and serves to protect the fundamental rights of life, liberty, and property. Since every individual enjoys these rights by birth, the purport of classical liberalism is clearly democratic. But Locke himself is less concerned with establishing a democracy than with finding the criteria to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate governments, and in spite of his great contribution to such democratic principles as popular sovereignty and the separation of powers, he also supports less democratic practices and institutions, such as the monarch's executive prerogative and "federative" power to conduct foreign policy, wage wars etc. (Tarcov, 1996, p. 23).

Finally, a decisive contribution to the present-day notion of democracy comes from an offshoot of classical liberalism, the vivacious republicanism of the early decades of the United States. In addition to confirming the older liberal doctrines of equality by birth, popular consent and fundamental individual rights, the early American political thinkers (the so-called Founders) abolish hereditary privilege, strongly affirm popular sovereignty, consecrate the separation of powers and devise the checks-and-balances system to protect it, make representation a staple part of democratic thought and practice, and adopt the first modern constitution in the world, a document that still informs much of the present understanding and practice of democracy. As for the Founders' views of the role of education in a free society, it suffices to mention Thomas Jefferson's lifelong advocacy for a free school system to prepare youths "from every condition of life… for defeating the competition of wealth and birth for public trusts" (Jefferson,

1813/1988, p. 732) and John Adams's idea that "the republican government itself is a form of education that introduces knowledge among the people, inspires them with a conscious dignity befitting freemen, encourages a general emulation and elevation of sentiment that make the people brave and enterprising as well as sober, industrious, and frugal" (Tarcov, 1996, p. 25). It should be noted, however, that the Founders were not in the least inclined to use the word "democracy" for their project. They approached the concept through the lenses of classical sources, and, consequently, for them, democracy was a form of government based on direct citizen participation and only applicable to small societies. What would eventually come to be known as a "representative democracy" was, for the authors of *The Federalist* as well as for their opponents, simply a "republic". The Founders' distrust of the democratic order was primarily due to their fear of "factions", which they regarded as the most dangerous force in any form of human association. A special affinity for consensus (which may usher in conformity) is clear here, and, as it will be shown later in this section, it continues to influence liberal conceptualizations of democracy to this day. Another important early American contribution to democratic theory and politics, the concept of representation, is also problematic. As I observed elsewhere, the source of tension is "the gap between its democratic underlying principle and its elitist practice" (Cananau, 2015, p.139). While the idea of representation rests on the virtual identification of the representatives with the represented and in their embodiment of "the will of the people", the representatives are expected to be morally and intellectually superior to the voters en masse. But this contradiction may well illustrate a recurring issue in the implementation of democracy as a functioning mode of government and organization: the democratic ideals and values are not absolute and sometimes they have to be negotiated against objective conditions as well as against each other.

This brief review of the early meanings of democracy has revealed a few concerns about this idea and the practices it informed. Some of these problematic features are still plaguing our contemporary notion of democracy, if only as negative tendencies or potential dangers: conformism, privatism, tyranny of the majority (with its associate, intolerance of groups that, for some reason and in certain periods, are not perceived as part of "people"), the danger of demagoguery and indoctrination, indifference to excellence coupled with elitism . The risks that

the present-day idea of democracy still sustains are relevant for higher education and will be given due attention in this study.

The review has also revealed that in as much as democracy is self-contradictory, it is perfectible and probably not an absolute guarantee for human development; that the virtues to be cultivated by education for a democratic society overlap with the general virtues for the moral improvement of human beings, which means that education for democracy translates into education for self-improvement; that a free and rational society run by a government on democratic principles is itself a form of education, so from an educational standpoint democracy is not just some specialized knowledge and set of skills to be acquired, but also a way of living, something to be experienced (see my comments on Dewey below). These conclusions are important for a study of democratic attitudes and practices in higher education: the structure and content of the inquiry instruments and the response analysis must take them into account.

Much can be said about the history of the concept of democracy from late eighteenth century up to the present, but, for the purpose of this study, it suffices to emphasize that the liberal understanding of democracy in exclusively moral and rational terms, with a strong focus on consensus, has prevailed in mainstream politics and media (Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004; Mouffe, 2005) as well as in national curricula and educational policies (Biesta, 2011; Harber and Mncube, 2012). Moreover, a neo-liberal version of the concept, according to which "[d]emocracy flourishes… in an individualistic society with a competitive market economy and minimal state intervention" (Harber and Mncube, 2012, p. 11), has become widespread thanks to the swift advancement of globalization in the post-Cold War era. At the same time, alarmingly high levels of political apathy and the general failure of neo-liberal policies to reduce social inequity and to deal with the challenges of multiculturalism have brought forward such fundamental aspects of democracy as citizen participation in society (including decision-making), equal and fair treatment of groups and individuals, mutual respect among these, making decisions and expressing and/or accepting views based on evidence and reason (Harber and Mncube, 2002). There is, in other words, a generally acknowledged need for a democratic political culture characterized by "flexibility, trust, efficacy, a critical open-mindedness,

tolerance of other viewpoints and mutual respect for the persons holding them, a belief in the equality of human beings, and a respect for evidence in forming opinions" (Harber and Mncube, 2012, p. 22). As in the case of any type of political culture education plays the most important role in maintaining as well as transforming it.

It has become apparent that, for this investigation of democratic norms and practices in a higher education institution, a list of values or concepts associated with democracy and its political culture is in order, and the interview questions should account for it. Even Chantal Mouffe, one of the most articulate and influential critics of liberal democracy, believes that its fundamental values must be guarded and preserved at all costs. Her agonistic model of the political is meant to reform democracy through "'conflictual consensus': consensus on the ethico-political values of liberty and equality for all, dissent about their interpretation" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 121). In other words, far from being anarchistic, Mouffe's radical solution to the problems of contemporary democracy (including the rise of far-right extremists in developed democratic countries) is meant to more thoroughly realize the democratic values, not to replace or reject them.

2.2. Democracy and Education

The title of this section deliberately echoes John Dewey's classic work not because it is now customary to cite "the father of all things educational" no matter how narrow, diffuse or even misunderstood his contribution might be to the educationist study in question (Boostrom, 2016, p. 4); it borrows Dewey's title because the underlying conceptions of democracy and education in this study share the book's ideas on four counts: first, democracy "is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 87). Second, education is not conceived in instrumentalist terms, i.e. designed to provide students with tools for individual professional careers nicely fitting a classified list of jobs compiled by the state according to supply and demand estimates for the job market; the ultimate purpose of education, according to Dewey, should be "personal development" rather than disciplinary training (p. 94). Third, an education system ideally tailored for a democratic society requires not only equal access and equal facilities, but also a

"modification of traditional ideals of culture, traditional subjects of study and traditional methods of teaching and discipline" (p. 98). Finally, the individuals who are educated in this system are not merely passive recipients of knowledge and skills, but also "directive guardians" of the democratic order, that is, active participants in it (p. 322).

Unfortunately, a century after *Democracy and Education* was published, the core of Dewey's vision of education for democracy is still a distant ideal, particularly in the United States. As Robert Boostrom has observed, it is especially the moral dimension of Dewey's ideal of public education that is now lacking, so that nowadays American teachers "find… the whole of their moral mission in a single quality – in equity, or in the intellectual rigor of their curriculum, or in the 'effectiveness' of the classroom" (p. 15). As school and academic subjects, the humanities are uniquely positioned to contribute to the moral life in the classroom, but the neo-liberal ethos with its obsession with effectiveness, accountability, tests, and measurable outcomes has so thoroughly penetrated education in the U.S. and virtually everywhere in the world that the humanities' role and prestige among the disciplines has been drastically reduced (Nussbaum, 1997; Ekström and Sörlin, 2012). For this study, it is thus important to find out if the teachers themselves see their academic subject (English) as particularly advantageous to democratic education.

Against the current focus on individualism and consensus, which have informed the approach to citizenship in education, Gert Biesta argues for the importance of education for "a culture of participation", which would support the idea of citizenship as practice rather than an identity, "a practice of identification, more specifically a practice of identification with public issues, that is, with issues that are of common concern" (Biesta, 2011, p.13). Biesta enlists the help of Mouffes' political theory and proposes the concept of "knowledge democracy" as an alternative to the "knowledge economy" informed by the neo-liberal ethos (p. 46). This solution resonates with Anders Ekström and Sverker Sörlin's argument for a new paradigm of knowledge politics that would be more inclusive of the humanities and their contribution to education and research on social and political issues (pp. 28-32).

Biesta is certainly not the only critic of the way in which democracy and citizenship are now approached in education. Lest his and others' progressive ideas share the fate of their main

source of inspiration, Dewey's book on democratic education, by failing to produce a major impact on education, they need to be tested and validated. Biesta is primarily interested in adult or life-long learning education, so he cites research and case studies on the ways in which the goals of the learning democracy and the practice of citizenship have been pursued in this form of education in the UK. Even if these case studies provide both positive and negative examples of impact on further citizenship action, Biesta emphasizes that they ultimately demonstrate "the crucial role of learning – particularly collective, action-based learning – in actual practices and processes of democratisation. The case studies show how adult learning can make community action into a reflexive process, one which, amongst other things, helps participants to see beyond their immediate interests and to understand that their empowerment has to be connected with the empowerment of others" (p. 83).

Nicholas Michelli is also interested in cultivating a participative ideal of citizenship oriented toward democracy and social justice, but his focus is on teacher education in the U.S. His theoretical background is the philosophical perspective on critical thinking, as developed by John Dewey and Matthew Lipman. He cites a few national and local projects with a clear focus on democracy in education under the heading "Hopeful Signs", but some of these initiatives have already yielded positive results. For example, in the first three decades of its existence, the National Network for Educational Renewal had become the largest network linking teacher education programs from over 40 colleges and universities in 17 states, and it had "as its core theme the development of teachers who can prepare students for effective democratic participation in schools that share that mission" (Michelli, 2005, p.26). Michelli even mentions examples of research that investigates the effect of particular strategies for democratic education on student learning as measured by standardized tests; one such study, for example, demonstrates that "when teachers learn to teach in a multicultural environment and use critical thinking in their instruction, the mathematics scores of students in their classes increase" (p. 27).

Writing with a focus on developing countries, Herber and Mncube survey an impressive array of studies in an attempt to find evidence for the relationship between education and democracy (pp. 43-52). They conclude that there is evidence that this relationship is positive,

but also notice a scarcity of information on how exactly education might contribute to democracy and on the types of education that are the most suitable for developing a democratic political culture. Subsequently, they proceed to analyze an even greater number of statistical data, case studies, and reports on what education for democracy might mean for such aspects of formal education as educational policy, school organization and management, curriculum decision making, student voice and influence, methods of classroom teaching and learning, teacher education, and much more. Their investigation consistently finds that the Western- based authoritarian modes currently prevalent in many aspects of formal education leave little room for democratic ideals and practices (p. 101).

2.3. The Swedish Context

The relationship between democracy and education is well represented in the Swedish research landscape. A quick search of the subjects "democracy" and "education" among PhD dissertations on DiVA shows 103 hits, about 40 of them published between 2007 and 2017, and dealing specifically with issues of democratic education in Sweden and abroad[1]. Among the numerous individual and collective projects in this area, one especially broad and productive research group stands out: it is the national research network under the leadership of Tomas Englund of Örebro University, a group that also publishes the academic journal *Utbildining & Demokrati*. One of their most influential concepts with respect to theorizing and implementing democratic education is "deliberative communication". Englund, who is also the main proponent of this approach, envisages the classroom as a miniature public sphere in which a "discursive situation" – "en gemensam referensram där de grundläggande villkoren för förståelse och respekt föreligger eller åtminstone kan utvecklas på sikt" (Englund 2007, p. 156) - can be created, with the teacher as the real center of authority and legitimacy. This space is pluralistic, in the sense that it is a platform where different views on knowledge and different values can meet. However, Englund adds, "skolan inte kan vara en pendang till de värderingar som förekommer i hemmet. Skolan ska snarare vara en offentlig, pluralistik sfär som synliggör de skilda synsätt och värderingar som förekommer i olika frågor i samhället i stort där argument

[11] As of September 2017.

för det ena eller det andra synsättet ska komma i dagen" (158). But, we may ask, what happens when the gap between some students' private values and those generally accepted in the public sphere becomes one such problem that concerns society at large[2]? Englund does not address this issue directly, but emphasizes the centrality of the act or habit of calling into question (*ifrågasättande*) any established perspective, including private values from one's upbringing and domestic environment as well as the majority point of view and even the teacher's perspective (p. 160). Even as an ideal situation, the discursive situation in the classroom is clearly not devoid of contradictions. Basically, the only uncontested advantage of these deliberative conversations for the practice of democratic education remains the idea of tolerance and respect for the others and their opinions. Since Englund's model of deliberative communication is based on the Habermasian liberal theory of democracy with its exclusive focus on rationality, universality, and, especially, consensus, it cannot avoid becoming a victim of the disruptive tensions between pluralism and consensual will-formation, between a central source of authority and legitimacy (the teacher) and the other participants' (i.e. students') right to challenge, with arguments, even the views expressed by that authority. All these contradictions and more have been pointed out by Chantal Mouffe in her devastating critique of Habermas and other proponents of liberal consensus theories (Mouffe 2005, pp. 83-89). Yet it would be unfair to dismiss Englund's ideal because, ultimately, in the context of institutionalized education, one major prerequisite of democratic deliberation, namely the equal condition and value of all participants, is impossible to realize. But, as Englund pleads in the end of his essay, that should not prevent us from striving to achieve this ideal, as, in so doing, we may contribute to a more democratic education (166).

All the studies mentioned in the previous section take into account the evidence provided by qualitative and quantitative research on various aspects of democratic education. For the narrower purpose of this study it is important to consider the results of similar research

[2] An example of such a situation is provided by Eva Hultin, another researcher from Englund's circle, in a very informative essay in which she compares the deliberative conversation (DS) approach with another influential concept in Swedish curricular studies, the *dialogic classroom (DK)*, proposed by Olga Dysthe following Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of dialogical imagination and ideological becoming. Hultin's example concerns the wearing of burqas, and her conclusion is downright pessimistic: "skolan som demokratisk mötesplats aktualiserar frågor om gränsen mellan det privata och det offentliga och vem eller vilka som får sätta de gränserna i samtalet i klassrummet; och på de frågorna har varken DS eller DK några givna svar!" (Hultin 2007, p. 395).

carried out in Sweden, and Björn Åstrand's study on the conceptual understandings of democracy among teacher educators and institutional leaders is one such example (Åstrand, 2015). I will discuss it at some length because it presents my own research with both inspirational and cautionary material. After a valuable overview of the history of democratic education in Swedish education policies and national curricula from the aftermath of World War II to the present, the study hones in on teacher education and the government reports of 1999 and 2008, which would lead to profound transformations in teacher education programs. Åstand points out a significant difference between the two reports, namely that the 2008 one had a much greater emphasis on knowledge and disciplines (392). In this context, democracy and values education (Åstand's two key concepts that he often employs generically in the text) are mentioned as required areas of study in the 2008 proposal, which, according to the author, made use of "a rather technical notion of democracy" (394). Consequently, one might say that the Swedish context for democratic education currently has two dimensions: a consistent historical focus on democracy and values in teacher education and, more recently, a "disciplinary" approach to democracy and values, with measurable learning outcomes.

Based on the two dimensional context, Åstand lays out his working hypothesis that the "ability to articulate the key concepts and a clarity of conceptual awareness" are essential for the success of the democratic mission of teacher education (394). He then proceeds to describe his methodology: semi-structured, open-ended interviews with forty-five teacher educators and institutional leaders from twelve higher education institutions carried out in 2012, that is, one year after the teacher education reform came into force. The conclusions contradict the working hypothesis, which is cause for alarm: "democracy and values, despite being full-heartedly embraced by educators, seems (sic!) to exist in a kind of shadow within schools and teacher education programs. .. Democracy and values are indirectly addressed and discussed. This is worrying as it gives future students less guidance in their own understanding of democracy – and their role in a democratic society" (405).

How Åstrand came to these conclusions deserves special attention since it presents my own research with a few methodological considerations. Although I did not have access to the actual questions or the transcripts, based on the information provided by the author in the

"Findings" section, it appears that the open-ended questions dominated the interview. While this solution works well for revealing the respondents' attitudes toward the key concepts of democracy and values and their role in teacher education, it actually leads to very broad conceptualizations of these notions, thus leaving the researcher with the rather difficult task of trying to infer commonalities and variations in the informants' answers often from non-verbal communication and their use of figurative language. More specifically, while I agree with Åstrand's reading of his respondents' metaphors[3] about the importance of democracy and values in teacher education as the expression of their unanimous endorsement of and commitment to the idea, they do not necessarily demonstrate a diversity of understandings of the concepts in question, as the author claims (p. 398). As a matter of fact, if we are to believe Clifford Geertz's theory of ideological communication through figurative language (Geertz, 1973), we may even read Åstrand's informants' appetite for metaphors as a sign of ideological consensus. It is, however, less questionable that, as Åstrand observes, the interviewees show anxiety and hesitation at the prospect of being explicit on values, appear to prefer indirect ways of addressing values or assume a tacit agreement about them (401). As far as this study is concerned, it is important to retain that too much weight given to open-ended questions about the respondents' conceptualizations of democracy and its associate values might lead to indeterminate, formulaic, or conventional answers. If I want my respondents to reflect over the key concepts and share their deeper understanding of them, more guidance is needed in the form of multiple choice questions, for example.

Another interesting aspect of the Åstrand study is the investigation of the informants' epistemological understanding of democracy and values in order to infer their approaches to teaching them in teacher education programs. The researcher starts with a two-sided epistemological assumption that distinguishes between democracy and values as objects of knowledge and democracy and values as praxis, manifestation, or, as Åstrand prefers to call it, "holding *opinions* and *actions*" (402). Perhaps not surprisingly, he finds two epistemological positions around this binary, with many educators claiming to have an integrative approach (i.e.

[3] Expressions such as "the foundation of society", the "linchpin" of schools and teacher education, the "nucleus" or "blood" of teacher education, used to describe democracy and value are technically metonymic hyperboles, while other uses (e.g. democracy and values "permeating" teaching) are hardly figurative at all.

teaching democracy and values as *both* knowledge and praxis), while others approaching democracy and values as learning content which students can even be assessed on. The former also show a preference for the internalization of values, "downplaying other aspects", while the latter adopt the "duality oriented position [that] detaches or separates 'knowing' and 'opinioning' (sic!)" (403). One is left wondering about what exactly is revealed by this attempt to investigate the teacher educators' epistemological understanding of democracy and values. Clearly, a more detailed account of the respondents' teaching of democracy and values in terms of learning content, objectives, assessment, and course design would have been in order.

2.4. The Legal Framework of Democratic Higher Education in Sweden and at the University of Gävle

In the last section of this chapter, I will refer to those laws and regulations in force that are relevant for democracy in higher education nationwide as well as locally, at the University of Gävle. To begin with, it must be said that as a participant in international organizations and a signatory of treaties, Sweden must comply with international conventions that sometimes have the status of supranational laws, which means they have supremacy over the law of the land. One example is the European Union's Treaty of Lisbon, whose Title XII on education and youth provides that "Union action shall be aimed at… encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe" (The Lisbon Treaty 2008, Art. 165). The Swedish Constitution, which is the highest law of the land, asserts the democratic orientation of the state in unequivocal terms:

> The public institutions shall promote the ideals of democracy as guidelines in all sectors of society and protect the private and family lives of the individual. The public institutions shall promote the opportunity for all to attain participation and equality in society and for the rights of the child to be safeguarded. The public institutions shall combat discrimination of persons on grounds of gender, colour, national or ethnic origin, linguistic or religious affiliation, functional disability, sexual orientation, age or other circumstance affecting the individual. (The Instrument of Government, Chapter 1, Art 2)

As public institutions, schools and universities must comply with these constitutional provisions and thus have a fundamental obligation to actively promote democracy in society; as representatives of these institutions and participants in the exercise of public authority, teachers also have this duty. As administrative authorities (*förvaltningsmyndigheter*) public education institutions are also bound to observe The Administrative Procedure Act (*Förvaltningslagen*), but its provisions do not concern the so-called democratic mission of education institutions directly. By contrast, the Discrimination Act (2008:567) includes specific provisions for education and the schools' democratic mission as follows: in Chapter 2, sections 5-6 refer to the prohibition of discrimination on account of sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age, and disability, and section 7 stipulates the obligation to investigate and take measures against harassment; in Chapter 3, sections 14-16 assign obligations to education providers to actively promote equal rights and opportunities for children, pupils, and students, to prevent and hinder harassment, and to draw up equal treatment plans on a yearly basis; finally, in Chapter 4, under the heading "Board of Appeals for Higher Education" (*Överklagandenämnden för högskolan*) sections 18-19 statutes the appellate procedure in case of higher education institutions' decisions that student plaintiffs challenge on account of being contrary to the prohibition of discrimination (Discrimination Act).

The Higher Education Act (*Högskolelagen* 1992:1434) (hereinafter called HL) and The Higher Education Ordinance (*Högskoleförordningen* 1993:100) (hereinafter called HF) exert the broadest and deepest influence on democratic higher education. Chapter 1, section 4a of HL stipulates the students' right to exert influence over their education in higher education institutions and compels these institutions to endeavor to enable students to play an active role in their education. Furthermore, in section 5, the law also ordains that higher education institutions shall promote sustainable development and gender equality. Sections 4, 7 and 8 in Chapter 2 on the organization of higher education institutions also refer to student participation. Perhaps a little surprisingly, Chapter 3 on "professorer och andra lärare" includes no provisions of relevance for our topic, whereas Chapter 4, "Studenterna", includes a few provisions (11§ and 12§) on the democratic organization of student unions (HL, SFS 1992:1434).

We may conclude that, as far as the democratic life in higher education is concerned, HL's exclusive focus is on student participation.

By contrast, HF addresses issues of democratic higher education with respect to the students, the teaching staff, and the higher education institution. Section 13 in Chapter 1 stipulates the university's obligation to allow a democratically constituted student organization to use its premises but qualifies the provision by exempting the university from this obligation if there is reason to assume that the student organization's meeting may cause disturbance of the public order or that unlawful activity may be conducted there (HF, SFS 1993:100). Section 14 is more interesting for the purpose of this study because it refers to course evaluations as a real tool for students to exercise influence on courses and program studies: "Högskolan skall sammanställa kursvärderingar samt informera om resultaten och eventuella beslut om åtgärder som föranleds av kursvärderingarna. Resultaten skall hållas tillgängliga för studenterna" (SFS 1993:100). Chapter 2 includes several sections on the democratic election and office of teacher and student representatives to the university board of governors (§7, §7a, §7b); it also includes a mention of gender equity in the section 8 on proposing a candidate for the Vice-Chancellor (*Rektor*) position. The issue of gender equality also appears in Chapter 4, sections 5 and 6, on the employment of senior lecturers and the referees for the assessment of professorial candidates.

Annex 2 to HF, which includes the description of degrees and qualifications, contributes the most to the democratic ideal in higher education. I will only consider those qualifications that are currently relevant for the teaching of English at the University of Gävle (HIG-STYR 2015/63): The Bachelor of Arts (kandidatexamen), the Master of Arts in Primary Education (Grundlärarexamen), and the Master of Arts in Upper Secondary Education (Ämneslärarexamen – gymnasieskola). The learning objectives outlined for *Kandidatexamen* include references to critical thinking, a key value of democratic education, as we have seen in the previous sections: "studenten ska visa förmåga … att **kritiskt tolka** relevant information i en problemställning samt att **kritiskt diskutera** företeelser, frågeställningar och situationer" (my emphasis) (HF, SFS 1993:100). Another skill refers to the ability to present and discuss information, problems, and solutions, in dialog with different groups, while the last category of learning objectives,

Judgement and Approach, shows concern with social and ethical issues in the way in which the student shall make assessments (SFS 1993:100). The learning objectives for primary, secondary, and upper secondary teacher students also emphasize critical and independent thinking, but the democratic dimension of education is far more present in the law text. The idea that "democratic values" and "human rights" are part of the core educational values is expressed both as an objective/competence to communicate and instill them and as an obligation for the pedagogical core to account for it. Prevention and containment of discrimination against pupils and students and communication and inculcation of gender equality are also included among the skills and competences required for a Master's Degree in primary, secondary, or upper secondary education. Furthermore, the learning objectives have a clear focus on inclusiveness and equal rights: e.g. "att skapa förutsättningar för **alla elever** att lära och utvecklas", "at stimulera **varje elevs** lärande och utveckling" (my emphasis) (SFS 1993:100). But the egalitarian ethos is not extended to the teacher-student relation, and the teacher's role as a leader and conflict mediator is also asserted in the form of a learning objective. All of these provisions in Annex 2 to the Higher Education Ordinance are binding for universities and colleges accredited to offer such programs and degrees.

Finally, the legal framework for democratic education at the University of Gävle is completed by a few local norms and regulations that are currently in force. These regulations are: "Likabehandlingsplan vid Högskolan i Gävle" HIG-STYR 2014/108, "Trakasserier och kränkande särbehandling. Hanteringsanvisning för studenter och medarbetare vid Högskolan i Gävle" HIG 2012/1028, "Jämställdhetspolicy" 10-880/99 (the section called "Grundutbildning"), and, more narrowly, "Riktlinjer för hantering av klagomålärenden vid Högskolan i Gävle" HIG-STYR2016/82. For the purpose of this investigation it is important to find out if the respondents are aware of and familiar with these local regulations.

3. METHOD

3.1 Outline

In order to investigate the practices, norms and attitudes toward democracy, democratic education, and democratic values embraced and pursued in their teaching by the English faculty of the University of Gävle, I chose to conduct a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with four out of the seven members of the teaching staff to which I belong. The study can be most accurately described as qualitative research with features of practical action research. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), action research "not only seeks to understand how participants make meaning or interpret a particular phenomenon or problem in their workplace, community, or practice, but it also usually seeks to engage participants at some level in the process in order to solve a practical problem" (p.49). Furthermore, a variety of action research is **practical action research**, which, according to Kemmis, McTaggert, and Nixon (2014), is "guided by an interest in educating or enlightening practitioners so they can act more wisely and prudently" (quoted in Merriam and Tisdell 2016, p. 54). The reason why I have dubbed my study "qualitative with features of practical action research" is because the issues raised and the questions asked in the interview are also meant to make respondents reflect on problems they are not normally aware of and, hopefully, "spur them into action" so that they make changes in their professional practice. Given the socio-political import of the topic, democratic higher education, and the respondents' status as teachers and teacher educators, even a small improvement may yield significant results. It must be emphasized, however, that this practical action dimension only plays a secondary role in the study.

3.2 Data Collection

The four interviews were conducted over a period of two weeks in March 2017. Each interview was completed in one sitting, with a single respondent, and it took about 30 minutes. Three of them were conducted face to face in the respondents' office rooms at the University of Gävle. The fourth interview was conducted online using the web-conferencing tool Adobe Connect; both the interviewer and the interviewee had their webcams and microphones on throughout the exchange. All four interviews were recorded after the respondents verbally gave the interviewer permission to do so. Only the online interview was recorded as a video file. The

other three were recorded as audio files using a tool called Smart Recorder ©. Since I had no images to refer to later on, and because in qualitative research interviews even non-verbal communication may be a significant source of information, I tried to pay special attention to those three respondents' non-verbal reactions in my interview notes. These notes, together with the transcripts of all four recorded interviews, formed the basis of my discussion and analysis of the results in the next chapter.

As already mentioned, four of the seven members of the English faculty at the University of Gävle were interviewed for the purpose of this study. The interviewer himself has been working as a senior lecturer in English at the University of Gävle for six years and is thus a colleague of the respondents (more about researcher positionality and reflexivity in a separate section of this chapter). One colleague, who is a certified teacher of English in secondary education, had only been working in higher education for a few months at the time of the interview, which is why I decided not to interview him/her. Another colleague who was living abroad while also teaching English 75% at the University of Gävle was also approached, but he/she then declined the invitation invoking personal reasons (family problems and a high volume of student assignment grading work at that time).

A brief presentation of the informants is in order. Two of them are senior lecturers, while the other two are junior lectures (*adjunkter*). Both junior lecturers are certified upper secondary school teachers with almost ten years of teaching experience at that level. One of them (hereinafter called Respondent 4 or R4) has been teaching in higher education for four years, the other (R3) for three years. Their English courses at the University of Gävle cover areas such as grammar, proficiency, language didactics, school placement (VFU) coordination, and children's literature. The senior lecturers have done research in language acquisition, literary studies, and sociolinguistics; their courses generally reflect their research areas. One of the senior lecturers (identified as R1 in the analysis part) has over thirty years of teaching experience in higher education, most of which at the University of Gävle. The other senior lecturer (R2) is a certified upper secondary school teacher, who, after a long teaching career at that level, became a PhD student and subsequently a doctor, having worked as a researcher and

lecturer for two years up at the moment of the interview. This colleague worked full time one term at the University of Gävle before accepting a post-doctoral position at another university.

The interviews were structured on a predesigned set of ten questions based on the author's reading and review of the theory and previous research on the topic of democracy, democratic values, and democratic education. Since a variety of issues that have structured my interview and shaped the content of my questions have already been pointed out in the previous chapter, I will now present an overview of the preset questions, which are reproduced in full in Annex 1 hereto.

The first part of the interview is meant to probe the respondents' conceptions of democracy in the educational context. To do this, rather than ask an open question, I chose to provide my informants with the Oxford English Dictionary definition, which consists of four distinct meanings, and I invited them to indicate which of the four meanings is/are the most relevant for formal education. One meaning conceives of democracy strictly as a system of government; the second is broader, referring to democracy as a decision-making system in an institution or organization, in which "all members have the right to take part or vote"; the third describes it as a type of society based on equal rights, toleration and respect for the views of all citizens; finally, democracy is defined as "the principle of fair and equal treatment of everyone in a state, institution, organization, etc." ("democracy"). From an educationist perspective, acceptance of the first meaning might indicate an understanding of democracy as an object of knowledge, as Åstrand (2015) calls one side of his two-dimensional epistemological understanding of the concept. If the second meaning is indicated, an egalitarian and participative approach to education can be inferred. A preference for the fourth meaning might indicate a conception of democracy as praxis or internalized value system, while the third definition stands somewhere in between democracy as praxis and democracy as an object of knowledge. The first part of the interview includes an open-ended question on which values the respondents believe are most closely associated with the concept of democracy and an invitation to identify potential shortcomings of democracy in formal education. The former will be compared with the researcher's own list of such values later in the interview, while the latter

serves the purpose of giving the respondents an opportunity to use their critical thinking even when evaluating democracy and its relationship with education.

The second part of the interview focuses on the relationship between democracy and higher education. The first question in this group (the fourth in the interview) is a closed-ended question about the informants' knowledge of the University of Gävle's policy on promoting and maintaining democracy in this institution. An affirmative answer would trigger an invitation to illustrate with examples. The next two questions hone in on the teacher-student relation, and I ask the respondents to give examples of norms and practices that are beneficial/challenging for democracy and its associate values. The main reason for this focus on the teacher-student relation is that it represents one of the most problematic issues of democratic practice in higher education. As some of the sources (Harber & Mncube 2012; Englund 2007) indicate, the deeply hierarchical nature of this relationship cannot be overlooked when trying to find viable solutions to make education more democratic. The last question in this part (the seventh question in the interview) invites respondents to reflect over the potential of their academic subject (English) to contribute to democratic higher education.

The last part of the interview enquires about the role of democracy and democratic values in the respondents' own teaching practice. To give the respondents some guidance, I connect back to their answers to question 2 (on the democratic values) and supply them with a list of values that I identified upon reviewing the literature on theories of democracy and democratic education (see Annex 1). The eighth question of the interview subsequently invites the respondents to reflect over the representation of these values in the objectives, content, and assessment in their courses. The next question refers to the representation and the role of democratic values in the respondents' class layout or design. The final question is about the perceived differences (if any) between campus and online courses with respect to democratic education. While still relevant for the respondents' teaching practice and their class designs, this question is less focused on specific values; it may however, yield useful results for a future research project on the democratic potential of online teaching in higher education.

3.3. Ethical issues

The respondents are anonymous. Since the English teachers at the University of Gävle are a very small group, it might not be difficult for people in the organization to identify the respondents in spite of the researcher's efforts to maintain their anonymity. Some details about the respondents' professional background and their positions or form of employment are, however, relevant for the outcome of this study as well as for future research[4]. While the individual informants' gender identity might be relevant for the investigation of their attitudes to gender equality and other principles of democratic education, given the small size of the target group, I have decided not to disclose any individual respondent's gender. Consequently, all references to their persons are gender neutral.

As mentioned before, the respondents were asked for permission to record the interviews, which all of them granted verbally. The researcher was an insider, in the sense that he belonged to the interviewees' English faculty group, where he had no leadership position, and had a long experience with teaching English in higher education (in Sweden and abroad). A spirit of collegiality, mutual respect, and friendship characterized every exchange. The atmosphere was relaxed, and all the respondents showed a genuine commitment to answer the questions and have a dialog with the interviewer.

3.4. Method criticism and shortcomings

Investigating teachers' attitudes, conceptions and practices of democratic education runs the extreme risks of generating platitudes, on the one hand, and idiosyncrasies on the other. These risks are particularly high in the case of very limited numbers of respondents, because they may compromise the entire study. Nevertheless, my four respondents were representative for the small group which is the subject of this research. In an attempt to minimize the above-mentioned risks, I ruled out the idea of giving out questionnaires to be filled in by the respondents in writing, and opted for the more time-consuming solution of conducting

[4] My plan is to extend this research to a nationally representative group of academics while restricting its focus, from the teaching of English to the teaching of English-language literature as a subject.

face-to face interviews. In this way, I could modulate certain questions, bring the respondents back on track when needed, and ask them to elaborate on or explain certain answers.

Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of my approach was not having extended the research to students. Since the teacher-student hierarchical relation is one of the biggest challenges for democratic practice in higher education, I believe every study of teachers' conceptions and practices of democratic education should also account for the students' perspective. The idea is not to hold the teacher respondents accountable for what they claim, but simply to apply basic democratic principles to the research itself. In my case, I could have given a voice to the students in this investigation by doing one of the following: either searching for students' responses to the only question that is relevant for democratic education in the University of Gävle's course evaluation questionnaire, i.e. "I perceive that the teachers allowed me to continually express my views on the form and content during the course" (HiG-STYR 2015/109); or sending out a special survey with a more elaborate questionnaire on these issues to the students of our courses. I will take that into account in my future research on the topic.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Conceptions of Democracy in the Educational Context (Questions 1-3)

When asked to indicate the dictionary definitions of democracy that are the most relevant for education, all respondents choose the fourth one, that is, democracy as a principle of fair and equal treatment of all. This definition conceives of democracy as an internalized value system in quite neutral and passive terms, but it does not exclude a sense of hierarchy or unequal power relations: as a principle, democracy is to be maintained, safeguarded, and enforced by the government and the school management, or inculcated on students' minds by teachers and educators. Two respondents choose the third definition as well. It highlights the social import or the outcome of democratic education just as much as it emphasizes the praxis of democracy and democratic values. Significantly, no one chooses definition 2, which focuses on the participative and egalitarian dimension of democracy, as relevant for education. It is apparent that the respondents tend to regard democracy as a particular form of political culture that is manifest in practice and can also be taught. Another tentative conclusion is that they share a restricted view of the extent to which this democratic political culture is reflected in education.

In response to the second question, R1, R2 and R3 mention "equal rights" and "respect for diversity"; "transparency" or "openness" are mentioned by R1 and R2. To these values, R1 adds "a code of ethics" and "deliberation". R2 would like to mention "tolerance" but is uncomfortable with the word, because of its implications of elitism and inequality. R3 includes "freedom of speech" restrained by "respect for others". This respondent also mentions "participation in decision-making", but it quickly becomes clear that he/she refers only to the relationship between the teaching staff and the school management. R4 hones in on teaching: "critical thinking", "respect for diversity" in learning content and in teaching practice ("applying diverse perspectives when using grading criteria"). The respondent also points to "student involvement in decision-making" and clarifies the statement by saying that students "should be given alternatives about the schedule and reading pace". To sum up, the respondents unanimously believe that "respect for diversity" is one of the values most closely associated with the concept of democracy in the context of education. The value of "equal rights" is

mentioned by three respondents, while some version of “principled equality” and “transparency” are pointed out by half of the interviewees.

The last question in this part introduces a critically reflective perspective even on democracy, in the context of education. R1 points out two problems with an unqualified conception of democracy in education, namely that students and parents should not have as much as teachers and administrators to say in school education and that too much weight assigned to group decision can be “bad in the long run”. Asked to elaborate on the last part of the response, R1 explains that groups can be led by passion just as much as individuals and that groups often constitute sites of power in which the majority, and not necessarily the best solution, prevails (the latter echoes the notion of “tyranny of the majority, which is a classic criticism of democracy). By contrast, R2 criticizes democracy on the grounds of it being necessarily limited. R2 points out a paradox at the core of democratic education and explains that teaching with openness to diversity and equality implies “that I do not tolerate inequality, I do not tolerate hierarchy”. R3 also takes up the problem of approaching democracy in absolute terms and emphasizes that total democracy in education is very ineffective and time-consuming; as an example R3 points out that not everyone can or should be involved in decision making. Finally, R4 criticizes the frequent confusion of democracy with consensus, which ultimately reduces participation in decision making. Like R3, R4 believes that it is time-consuming to involve students in decision making on course structure and content, although he/she obviously does not exclude it, as we could see in the answer to the second question. To sum up, the dominant view among the respondents is that an absolute conception of democracy is counterproductive in formal education and an unqualified student participation in decision making is problematic.

4.2. Democracy and Higher Education (Questions 4-7)

The answers to the first question in this section reveal a rather alarming situation. R1 and R2 have no knowledge of official documents that outline the University of Gävle’s policy on promoting and maintaining democracy in the institution. It must be recalled here that R2 only worked for one term at the University of Gävle. R1, however, has worked for almost 25 years in

this institution. R3 vaguely remembers a document that has to do with student equality but concludes that he/she largely takes it for granted that the university does have such a policy. R4 correctly indicates Likabehandlingsplanen and Hanteringsanvisningen. He/she also mentions Högskolelagen och Högskoleförordningen with their provisions on students' participation and other rights. The fact that only one respondent was able to accurately identify the documents in question might indicate a lack of interest in these issues, contrary to what the respondents themselves may claim; but it might also indicate the failure on the part of the institution to update its staff on these and other policies in force. At this point, I must use my insider status and affirm that the latter explanation probably outweighs the former. In the six years of my employment at the University of Gävle, I have never had a single briefing on the institution's policy to promote and maintain democracy in its jurisdiction, except for one training session in gender equity and even then, the focus was not on the teacher-student relation, but on how the employees treat each other. It is true that all of the universities official documents pertaining to democratic education are accessible on the University's homepage, together with all the other norms, policies, and official guidelines, but had I not recently attended courses in higher education pedagogy and developed a research interest in democratic education, I myself would probably have had a difficult time identifying those documents.

In connection with the fifth question on norms and practices that can foster democracy in the teacher-student relation, R1 indicates the course evaluations and the class discussions. Class discussions are also singled out by R2, who sees them as fostering mutual respect and critical thinking, and R3, who considers them examples of democratic dialog and freedom of speech in the classroom. R4 believes that students' course evaluations are the best examples of practices that promote democracy in the teacher-student relation. R4 also mentions teachers' increased approachability and openness in the digital era, concluding that all of these practices serve to counterbalance the traditional teacher-student hierarchy. This conclusion can be extended to all responses.

Conversely, the responses to the sixth question on norms and practices that might hinder democracy in the teacher-student relation show less uniformity of opinions within the group. R2 pinpoints the "quite strict hierarchy" in the teacher-student relation, while R3 refers

to the same hierarchy albeit indirectly by mentioning the practice of not allowing students to express their opinions[5]. In addition, R3 indicates the subjective dimension of the assessment as a challenge to democratic principles. R4 mentions hierarchy, too, but identifies the lack of transparency and clarity about course objectives and grading criteria as other examples of hindrances to democratic education in the university. However, R1's answer is in sharp contrast with the opinions expressed by the rest of the group, as he/she identifies the main challenge to democratic principles in the teacher-student relation as "the aggressive positioning of the student union, which creates polarization." Paradoxically, according to R1, an otherwise democratic institution actually jeopardizes democracy because it creates "polarization". It is unclear what R1 means by this word: he/she might mean that the student representatives' attitude obstructs dialog, or the entire statement might signify a personal longing for consensus or even, as R1's answer to question 3 also suggests, a preference for an even stronger sense of hierarchy in the teacher-student relation. Or the answer might simply echo the respondent's frustration with some negative experiences in recent exchanges with student union representatives.

To the question whether the academic subject of English presents any advantages for democratic education, the respondents' answers are unanimously affirmative. R1 states that this is true due to the teaching of English-speaking literatures, where focus on inequalities and use of power is an important thematic structure and great material for class discussion. R2 highlights language as the carrier of values, including democratic ones, and maintains that the study of language offers a unique opportunity to learn critically and discuss (democratic) values. R3 points out that the study of both language and literature in English is valuable for democratic education, since it deals with communication and understanding people (as studied in linguistics, grammar, writing), it exposes power relations (linguistics and literature) and opens learners to "an appreciation of diversity and understanding of difference." According to R4, students are exposed to the diversity theme in most of our course contents, from literature to language studies and English teaching methodology. Based on these responses, it can be

[5] I was a little surprised to hear my (younger) colleague mention this practice in such close proximity to the word "norms", because I assumed this was virtually a dying practice and a more and more isolated phenomenon in Swedish higher education.

observed that senior lecturers (*lektorer*) are more concerned with their own specialty within the English studies, while junior lecturers (*adjunkter*) approach the question more holistically, from the broader scope of English as an academic subject, since they usually teach the whole spectrum of sub-disciplines: grammar, literature, methodology, and language proficiency.

4.3. Democracy in One's Own Teaching Practice (Questions 8-10)

The questions in the last part of the interview engaged the respondents to a higher degree than any of the previous questions. Their answers to question number eight will therefore be broken down into two parts: their responses on the course objectives and content will be discussed first; then their responses on assessment will be analyzed separately. Referring to the courses on literature and language acquisition, R1 indicates equal treatment, mutual respect, and integration as the democratic values most clearly represented in the objectives and content of these courses. R1 concludes that the democratic value of respect for diversity is the central thematic concern of his/her courses. Referring to courses on grammar, sociolinguistics, and language acquisition, R2 mentions solidarity, equality, mutual respect, critical thinking, equal access to language and knowledge. For R3, integration, critical thinking, mutual respect, and tolerance are all represented in course contents and objectives; he/she adds that a version of civic participation is also present in the activity of peer-reviewing and the learning objective to compare and evaluate one's own and other students' work[6]. R4 points to the English course syllabi as accounting for the presence of many of the democratic values in the course objectives and content.

With respect to the representation of democratic values in the assessment, the respondents are asked to reflect over both form and content. At first, R1 rejects any connection between assessment and democratic values; he/she states that he/she grades students on structure, performance and knowledge of the subject, not on the teacher's own or the student's expressed values, "except when the student's values are not in compliance with our role as a democratic institution" (e.g. fascist views). In other words, in R1's assessment practice,

[6] This objective appears under the section "Värderingsförmåga och förhållningssätt" in virtually all of the English syllabi at the University of Gävle.

antidemocratic values are explicitly rejected, even if no particular democratic values are upheld. According to R1, those democratic values are not relevant for assessment content or form, although he/she admits that equal treatment is a fundamental principle of assessment. In R2's case, the democratic values are not fully relevant, since much of the assessment is based on traditional written exams. However, the respondent expresses the belief that this could be improved, so that the content and form of his/her assessment could become more reflective of democratic values. For R3, the democratic values of "dialog" and "critical thinking" are especially highlighted in the practices of peer and self-assessment that he/she tries to implement as often as possible. R4 gives examples of assignments that deal specifically with the value of tolerance in issues such as gender equality, racial prejudice and homophobia. Other assignments are designed to make (teacher) students employ certain strategies such as scaffolding and formative assessment that are learner-centered and highlight equal treatment. The value of integration is also represented in the content of assignments that deal specifically with students' understanding of the school's integrative mission. As we can see, when asked to reflect over the presence of democratic values in both the content and the form of their assessment practices, the respondents whose subjects allow more room for the consideration of democratic values (R1 and R4, who primarily teach literature, children's literature, and language didactics) tend to focus exclusively on content, while the others (R2 and R3, who primarily teach grammar, proficiency, and linguistics) focus on the form of assessment. It is also significant that one of the respondents (R2) expressed a wish to change his/her form of assessment so that it becomes more responsive to the principles of democratic education.

The ninth question of the interview focuses on class design. According to R1, his/her class discussions include periodic consultations with students about their learning (as a sort of formative assessment), the teacher showing openness to students' suggestions, opinions and requests. R1 describes in detail his/her practice of allowing students to choose the exam structure (e.g. either an essay, or five paragraph answers or a combination thereof). Students then choose one form by vote. In this way, they have some share of participation in decision-making about the course and the assessment. This detailed description of what appears to be a classroom practice that R1 consistently employs also reveals the presence of the democratic

value of participation in the form, if not the content, of assessment, thus offering a qualification of R1's answer to the previous question. For R2, lesson design is crucial when we want to create lessons that promote democratic values and practices and critical thinking in spite of the asymmetry in knowledge between teacher and students. R2 is convinced that a truly dialogic learning situation, with a focus not only on content, but also on the acknowledgement of everybody's voice, is possible if we pay more attention to democratic values in our class designs. R3 also encourages dialog in her lessons and genuinely seeks to create an atmosphere of mutual trust in his/her class discussions to counterbalance the teacher-student hierarchy. Spontaneously, he/she thinks of a teaching strategy to resort to provocations to stimulate debate around democratic values such as tolerance and equal treatment as these values are all too often taken for granted, unquestioned, and unproblematized especially by teacher students. R2 and R3's answers are very encouraging signs for the action-oriented dimension of this study. R4 points out that class design is both a practice and an object of study in his/her courses on language didactics. He/she adds that his/her classes are structured around the principles of equality and participation.

Out of the list of democratic values indicated in the interview, the respondents mention equal treatment, mutual respect, critical thinking, integration, tolerance, and participation most frequently. Solidarity, equality, and dialog are also present in the respondents' reflections over their teaching practice, although less frequently. The two complementary liberal values of rule of law and freedom are absent from the respondents' reflections on their teaching practice, although freedom is mentioned by R3 in his/her understanding of democratic education. One reason why these more clearly political values of liberal democracy are not perceived by these educators as representative for their teaching practice might be that they are considered objects of knowledge for other disciplines, such as political science, economics, history, and philosophy and, as such, quite removed from the study of English as an academic subject. Citizenship, which is usually associated with democratic praxis, is also absent from the respondents' answers, thus reflecting the absence of that concept from the laws that govern higher education and from the English course syllabi at the University of Gävle. The two predominantly moral values of love of justice and empathy are missing from the respondents'

answers, which is a little surprising if we consider the widespread ethical argument in favor of the humanities' relevance in today's society (Nussbaum 1997). Transparency is mentioned by R1, R2, and R4 as a value associated with democracy in an educational context, but, since I did not include it in the list, it was not mentioned by the respondents as relevant for their teaching practices.

The question about the difference between campus and online teaching with respect to democratic education yields mixed responses. According to R3, there is no difference whatsoever. R1 says jokingly that there is no difference except that campus students get a better education, which means of course that the answer to the question is actually "yes". He/She explains that the teacher and the students can do more on campus than online in the same amount of time and concludes: "I'm teaching critical thinking within the context of human rights values. So that message… is better understood and it's more deeply received by the students in campus education and that's less successfully transferred in distance education". R2 answers "yes and no". He/She also feels that campus education is more effective in creating a more democratic conversation and adds that "you can feel the democratic values in the interaction that is going on (on campus)" and that by contrast, distance teaching emphasizes hierarchy, because the teacher brings on the knowledge. The word "feel" is interesting here: it betrays the same bias against online teaching as in R1's case, and probably for similar reasons: insecurity when it comes to the still novel e-learning and online teaching. It might also be that these two teachers share a Platonic ideal of education – the symposium – dialogic, but strongly hierarchical, based on synchronous communication, physical presence, body language, intuition, and maybe even a certain degree of mysticism about teaching and learning, usually expressed in such terms as the "magic" of teaching, the "illumination" of learning etc. However, R2 adds that online education has more democratic potential because it can reach everybody, and thus it really lives up to the democratic ideal of equal access to education. R4 starts by denying that there is any difference, but after giving examples from his/her own online teaching practice he/she concludes that it is actually easier to get students to actively participate in discussions or problem solving at the online seminars than on campus meetings. A reason why R4 seems to be more comfortable with online teaching could be his/her more effective use of available e-

learning tools and technology or a kind of subject matter that is actually easier to learn collaboratively and interactively.

5. CONCLUSIONS

With respect to the first research question, namely the conceptions of democracy among the English faculty at the University of Gävle, this study has found that the respondents approach democracy as a particular form of political culture that is manifest in practice and can also be taught, but they do not embrace the view that this democratic political culture can or should be reflected in education in its entirety. For example, the democratic principle of equal participation in decision-making is regarded as problematic in the context of formal education, because it threatens a type of teacher-student relation that is, like all power relations, unequal. Yet the respondents believe that "respect for diversity" and "equal rights" are the values most closely associated with the concept of democracy in the context of education. To put the findings in a theoretical or philosophical perspective, this paradox exemplifies one of the problems of the current (and dominant) liberal conception of democracy observed by Mouffe (2005): namely that it largely ignores the ubiquity of power and power relations in all forms of human society.

The tension caused by the paradox of embracing hierarchy and equality at the same time, is confirmed by the findings that pertain to the second research question: which norms, structures and practices are considered to foster democracy in higher education and which norms, structures and practices are considered real or potential challenges to democracy in higher education? All of the interviewed teachers mention course evaluations and class discussions, which are strategies of student empowerment, as examples of practices that foster democracy in higher education. With one exception, all of the respondents identify the "strict hierarchy" in the teacher-student relation as the main challenge to democracy in higher education. The exception is even more symptomatic of the above-mentioned paradox; that respondent identifies the main challenge to democratic principles in the teacher-student relation as "the aggressive positioning of the student union", because it "creates polarization". Subjective or emotional reasons notwithstanding, this statement may also indicate a preference for a much clearer sense of hierarchy in the teacher-student relation.

The third research question was: how does democracy fare in the teaching practice, i.e. in objectives, content, assessment, as well as in the implementation and course/lesson design?

The answers to these questions in the interviews show that the English teachers at the University of Gävle can identify a great number of democratic values as relevant for their teaching practice in all of the above-mentioned aspects. Out of a compiled list of thirteen democratic values based on my reading of the literature on democracy and democratic education, the respondents could identify nine of them as relevant for their course objectives, content, assessment, and/or class design. This demonstrates that the courses and the individual teaching practices of the English faculty at the University of Gävle have a great potential for a strong and genuine contribution to the promotion and implementation of democratic principles in higher education.

In a similar vein, the answers to the next, lesser research question show a unanimous support for the idea that the academic subject of English has significant advantages for democratic education. Perhaps predictably, when elaborating on their answers, the senior lecturers (*lektorer*) were more concerned with their own specialty in the English studies, while the junior lecturers (*adjunkter*) approached the question more holistically, from the broader scope of English as an academic subject, since they usually teach a greater variety of sub-disciplines: grammar, literature, methodology, and language proficiency.

The last (also smaller) research question on how well acquainted the teachers are with official documents that outline the University of Gävle's policy on promoting and maintaining democracy in the institution revealed a rather worrying alarming situation. Only one of the respondents could accurately identify those documents. Rather than indicating a lack of interest in these issues, this situation shows the failure on the part of the institution to update its staff on these and other policies in force.

As I wrote in the section on shortcomings, I have come to realize that this study of democratic higher education ought to have given a voice to the students, too. I could have accounted for the students' conceptions and opinions on the subject either by compiling their responses to the question that is relevant for democratic education in the University of Gävle's course evaluation questionnaire, or by setting up a special survey with a more elaborate questionnaire on these issues for current and former students of our English courses. I will take this aspect into account in my future research on the topic.

Last but not least, one of the many insights that my work on this study has presented me with is that this kind of research may inspire the respondents to reflect on concepts, values, and practices that they/we often take for granted or tend to overlook. And if there is a minute chance that this reflection leads to action in the direction of improving the quality of the education that we offer to other people so that it leaves an indelible mark on someone's character, intellect, or attitudes, this work and many others like it will be proven worthwhile.

REFERENCES

Biesta, Gert J.J. (2011) *Learning Democracy in School and Society. Education, Lifelong Learning, and the Politics of Citizenship* Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Boomstrom, Robert (2016) "The Peculiar Status of *Democracy and Education*" *Journal of Curriculum Studies* vol 48 no. 1, 4-22.

Cananau, Iulian (2015) *Constituting Americanness. A History of the Concept and Its Representations in Antebellum American Literature*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

"democracy, n." (2017) *OED Online*. Accessed 22 Sep. 2017. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.webproxy.student.hig.se:2048/view/Entry/49755?redirectedFrom=democracy .

Dewey, John (1916/1966) *Democracy and Education. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* New York: Free Press.

Discrimination Act (2008:567) Accessed: 28 Sep. 2016 from *government.se.* http://www.government.se/contentassets/6732121a2cb54ee3b21da9c628b6bdc7/oversattning-diskrimineringslagen_eng.pdf

Ekström, Anders and Sörlin, Sverker (2012) *Alltings mått. Humanistisk kunskap i framtidens samhälle*. Stockholm: Norstedts.

Elliott, Carole and Stewart, Jim, (2017) "What Are the (C)HRD Implications of Brexit? A Personal Reflection?" *Human Resource Development International* vol 20 no. 1, 1-8.

Englund, Tomas (2007) "Skola för deliberativ kommunikation". I T. Englund (Red.) *Utbildning som kommunikation. Deliberativa samtal som möjlighet* (s. 153-168). Göteborg: Daidalos.

Geertz, Clifford (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Harber, Clive and Mncube, Vusi (2012) *Education, Democracy and Development: Does Education Contribute to Democratisation in Developing Countries?* Oxford: Symposium Books.

HiG 10-880/99. *Jämställdhetspolicy*. https://www.hig.se/download/18.60008e35124724c056780005617/1353631213312/jamst_pol.pdf.

HIG 2012/1028. *Trakasserier och kränkande särbehandling. Hanteringsanvisning för studenter och medarbetare vid Högskolan i Gävle*. http://www.hig.se/download/18.2ab4fe5a1394206308480001379/1353631487114/Trakasserier+och+kr%C3%A4nkande+s%C3%A4rbehandling.pdf.

HIG-STYR 2014/108. *Likabehandlingsplan vid Högskolan i Gävle*. https://www.hig.se/download/18.5996d38a1557390e24726915/1467183843621/Likabehandlingsplan+L%C3%A4s%C3%A5ret+2014-2015%2C+f%C3%B6rl%C3%A4ngd+att+g%C3%A4lla+under+2016.pdf.

HIG-STYR 2015/63. *Lokala föreskrifter. Examensordning*. https://www.hig.se/download/18.1572950014e3c52133565e0/1435583049615/Examensording+vid+H%C3%B6gskolan+i+G%C3%A4vle.pdf.

HiG-STYR 2015/109. *Policy för kursvärdering vid Högskolan i Gävle*. https://www.hig.se/download/18.1bcbff9915adcc03c1d190ea/1490170775418/Kursv%C3%A4rderingspolicy2015.pdf .

HIG-STYR2016/82. *Riktlinjer för hantering av klagomålärenden vid Högskolan i Gävle*. https://www.hig.se/download/18.22c64944154dfe7d11b77de1/1466000162047/Riktlinjer+f%C3%B6r+hantering+av+klagom%C3%A5ls%C3%A4renden+vid+HiG.pdf.

Hultin, Eva (2007) "Dialogiska klassrum eller deliberative samtal – spelar det någon roll? En jämförelse mellan två normativa positioner I det samtida talet om skolans demokratiuppdrag". I *Utbildning som kommunikation* (s. 381-397).

Jefferson, Thomas (1813/1988) "The Natural Aristocracy. Letter to John Adams". In J.A. Leo Lemay (Ed.), *An Early American Reader* (pp. 730-734). Washington DC: USIA.

Jones, Van (2017) "Hate in the Age of Trump: All Across America Klan and Neo-Nazi Groups Are Not Only Flourishing – They're Joining Forces". *The New Republic* Vol. 248, issue 3, 38-45.

Koselleck, Reinhart (2004) *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time.* Translated by Keith Tribe. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lowles, Nick (2016) "Brexit: The Silent Majority Must Speak Up Against Racism and Hatred". *Newsweek* 6/29/16.

Merriam, Sharan B. and Tisdell, Elizabeth J. (2016) *Qualitative Research. A Guide to Design and Implementation.* Fourth Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Michelli, Nicholas M. (2005) "Education for Democracy: What Can It Be?" In N.M. Michelli & D.L. Keiser (Eds.), *Teacher Education for Democracy and Social Justice* (pp. 3-30). New York: Routledge.

Mouffe, Chantal (2005) *On the Political*. London: Routledge.

Nussbaum, Martha C. (1997). *Cultivating Humanity. A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

SFS 1992:1434. *Högskolelagen.* Retrieved September 25, 2017, from Riksdagen, http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/hogskolelag-19921434_sfs-1992-1434.

SFS 1993:100. *Högskoleförordningen*. Retrieved September 25, 2017, from Riksdagen, http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/hogskoleforordning-1993100_sfs-1993-100.

Tarcov, Nathan (1996) "The Meanings of Democracy". *Democracy, Education and the Schools*. Edited by Roger Soder. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Wilson, David C. and King-Meadows, Tyson (2016) "Perceived Electoral Malfeasance and Resentment over the Election of Barack Obama" *Electoral Studies* vol. 44, 35-45.

Åstrand, Björn (2015) "Conceptual Understandings of Democracy and Values as Aspects of Teacher Quality – The Case of Teacher Education in Sweden" *Promoting and Sustaining a Quality Teacher Workforce*. 385-412. Published online: 27 Oct 2015. Accessed: 16 Feb 2017. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/S1479-367920140000027009.

Annex 1.

INTERVIEW

Project title: Democracy and the Teaching of English at the University of Gävle.

Conceptions of democracy

Q1. Which of the following dictionary definitions are relevant for formal education?

1) "A system of government in which all the people of a state or polity … are involved in making decisions about its affairs, typically by voting to elect representatives to a parliament or similar assembly;"

2) "a system of decision-making within an institution, organization, etc., in which all members have the right to take part or vote;"

3) "a form of society in which all citizens have equal rights, ignoring hereditary distinctions of class or rank, and the views of all are tolerated and respected;"

4) "the principle of fair and equal treatment of everyone in a state, institution, organization, etc." ("democracy" 2017)

Q2. In the context of education, what values do you think are best associated with the concept of democracy?

Q3. Please give examples of the shortcomings of democracy in the context of formal education.

Democracy and higher education

Q4. Do you have knowledge of any official documents that outline HiG's policy on promoting and maintaining democracy in this institution?

Q5. Can you give examples of norms and practices that you identify as fostering democracy in the teacher-student relation in higher education?

Q6. Can you give examples of norms and practices that you see as real or potential challenges to democratic principles in the teacher-student relation in higher education?

Q7. Does the teaching of English offer any specific advantages for democratic education? If you think so, please give examples.

Democracy in one's own teaching practice

Consider the following democratic values: equality, equal treatment, freedom, rule of law, solidarity, tolerance, mutual respect, empathy/compassion, integration, critical thinking, participation in decision-making, (democratic) citizenship, dialog, (love of) justice.

Q8. Which of the values above are included or taken into account in the objectives, content and assessment of your courses?

Q9. Which of the values above are taken into account in the layout of your classes or in your class design?

Q10. Is there a difference between campus and online teaching with respect to democratic education?