**Západočeská univerzita v Plzni**

**Fakulta pedagogická**

**Katedra anglického jazyka**

**Diplomová práce**

# VÝUKA A UČENÍ SE ANGLICKÉHO JAZYKA NA VYBRANÝCH DEMOKRATICKÝCH ŠKOLÁCH

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**Plzeň 2017**

**University of West Bohemia**

**Faculty of Education**

**Department of English**

**Thesis**

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING AT SELECTED DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLS

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**Plzeň 2017**

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*V Plzni dne 28. dubna 2017*                   …………………………….

Bc. Eliška Vaníčková

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

# ABSTRACT

Vaníčková Eliška. University of West Bohemia. April, 2017. English Language Teaching and Learning at Chosen Democratic Schools. Supervisor: Mgr. Gabriela Klečková, Ph.D.

The thesis deals with the topic of English language teaching and learning at democratic schools. The main purpose is to examine ways in which English is learnt and taught at democratic schools in their special learning environment different from traditional schooling. In the theoretical part terms are clarified and basic principles of democratic schooling are explained in theory as well as examples of two famous democratic schools. At the end of the theoretical part there is also information about English learning and acquisition theory to complete the theory base for the research. The research, realized by the means of observation and interviews, showed that although schools differed among each other in their ways of English language teaching, incidental learning played the most important role, though English lessons and intentional learning were present as well. Based on the results of the research, pedagogical implications are suggested.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

This graduate thesis deals with English language learning and teaching at a specific type of schools – democratic schools. Democratic schools are radical in several pedagogical features and differ hugely from traditional schooling. They differ from traditional schools mainly in these features:

- regardless of their age, students conduct all their activities themselves; they must decide what to do in their time at school, there is nobody to tell them;
- there are no compulsory lessons; students are allowed to do what they want; they can play the whole day outside, play computer games, play with their schoolmates or learn whatever they wish;
- playing is given at least the same importance as learning for the development of children;
- there is no compulsory division to classes; students of all ages mix together;
- teachers are called staff and are equal in their decision-making power to pupils;
- schools are led democratically; school meeting, consisting of all pupils and staff who wish to participate, decides about the school rules that must be obligatorily kept by all pupils and staff members; when they are not kept, there is a system of sanctions.

In the theoretical part of the thesis, after the important clarification of main terms, the principles of democratic schooling are explained in more detail since it is the school philosophy that influences English language learning and teaching at democratic schools to the greatest extent. In the second part of the theory, democratic principles are shown on two famous democratic schools of Summerhill in England and Sudbury Valley in America and the role of democratic schooling in the Czech Republic is discussed. At the end of the theoretical part, second language learning and acquisition principles are introduced for the later possibility to interconnect them with results of the research.

After the theoretical background, methods of the research are explained and the research part follows. The research has been carried out in five democratic schools, four in the Netherlands, one in Germany. The premise of the author for this research was that even though compulsory English lessons are not present at democratic schools, English language learning occurs. This premise was validated in the research, results of it being

explained and commented in the 'results and commentaries' part. These results are interconnected with pedagogical practice in the next chapter of implication where pedagogical implications of the research that can be used even in traditional schools are suggested. Limitations of the research and suggestions for further improvement are also stated there. The concluding chapter summarises the most important content of the thesis and findings of the research.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

To make the discussion about the topic of democratic schools clear, the definition of the key terms is provided at the beginning of the chapter. In the first part of the chapter, important features of democratic schooling are discussed, which include freedom, self-directed learning, belief in a child, democracy and age-mixing. Play and work are clarified from the point of view of democratic schooling. There is a section devoted to evaluation and teaching at democratic schools. In the second part of the chapter, principles of democratic schools are shown at examples of famous democratic schools Summerhill and Sudbury Valley and possibilities of democratic schooling in the Czech Republic are discussed. In the third part of the theoretical background second language acquisition and learning is discussed from the theoretical point of view of modern didactic principles.

**Definition of Terms**

**Democratic School, Sociocratic School, Free school**

There is a number of ways to refer to schools without a curriculum. All three terms 'democratic school', 'sociocratic school' and 'free school' indicate the type of school where students have freedom to choose what they want to do and there is equality among students and staff. These three types of schools differ in organisation:

Democratic schools decide on their school meetings democratically – the proposal with most votes is accepted. There is usually a committee called 'Juridical Committee' that consists of students and staff and solves violations of school laws.

Sociocratic schools are very similar to democratic schools in their daily life but on their school meetings they decide sociocratically – every individual can express their opinion to the point discussed and the point is not accepted until all the students agree with it (Villines, 2016). There is usually no juridical committee, school rules' violations are usually dealt with at school meetings.

The term 'free schools' was originally interchangeable with the term 'democratic school'. The 'free school movement' started in America in 1960s; in the present time, however, new schools appear that call themselves 'free schools' that differ from democratic schools – they are decentralised and work under principles of anarchy (Anarchistic free

school, 2016). These schools demand the smallest possible duties on their students, if any. For this reason of ambiguity, the term 'free school' will not be used in this work.

**Education**

Education is understood as institutionally controlled process of learning. Education is happening at traditional schools. Holt (2004, p. 3) described 'education' as "learning cut off from active life and done under pressure or bribe or threat, greed and fear... something that some people do to others for their own good, molding and shaping them, and trying to make them learn what they think they ought to know" (p. 3).

**English Language Learning**

The author of the thesis divided English language learning to two main categories that sometimes inevitably overlap:

1. **Incidental learning**
   A) acquisition of the language, alone or with others: students have no intention to learn English, they are not aware that learning is happening but it is still happening. For example, watching a film in English with intention to watch a film and not to learn English, being in environment where English is spoken and hearing it, playing a computer game in English
   B) using the current knowledge of English alone or with others – students' main intention is not to learn English, but to achieve some other goal, they are using their current level of English for fulfilling their goal. For example, reading a book in English with intention to read a book not to learn English, speaking with English language speakers or friends in English, playing a computer game in English, watching a film in English.
2. **Intentional learning** – practising and studying English in order to improve the knowledge of language and the language skills
   A) alone or in groups – students learn alone or in groups using available tools
   B) with a teacher – teacher is someone more knowledgeable who can help students with English language learning in some ways – either learning something new or practising and using their current knowledge. A teacher should be professionally qualified.

**English Language Lesson**

For English language lesson in the research part the author counted any incidental or intentional learning of English that happened with a teacher. The goal of the lesson might be set by the teacher, by students or in their cooperation. The main aim of the lesson does not need to be only learning English, it can include also other goals not connected with English language learning, for example to have fun while playing a game.

**Learning**

Learning is an inborn natural process that every person perform throughout his or her life; either intentionally or unintentionally.

**Traditional School**

Traditional education is understood as education in current state, private or church schools. In this education system, students must learn what the higher authority decided for them; sometimes they can choose from options, for example for optional courses.

**Unschooling**

Unschooling is learning at home. It is very similar to democratic schools in principles – both democratic schooling and unschooling value and create circumstances for self-directed education. There are two main differences. The first difference is that unschooling can be led democratically but it is not anywhere explicitly stated. The social structure of the school and the family is different (Lenz, 2010). The second difference is that in democratic schools children can pursue their own interests without being influenced by their parents, they are separated from them for a period of time when they are at school (Lenz, 2010). It is also probable that children unschooled wouldn't have as many opportunities to meet with other children and wouldn't have such possibilities concerning material (books, music and art facilities, playgrounds) and professional support (staff at school) as children in democratic schools.

# Pillars of Democratic Schools

Democratic schools are based on psychological principles; founders of democratic schools were influenced for example by a psychologist Sigmund Freud, a philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau or a writer and educator Lev Nikolajevič Tolstoj (Procházková, 2015, p. 14).

The first democratic school was founded in Britain by A. S. Neill and his wife in 1921. It is called Summerhill and it still exists and serves its purposes. The head of the school is currently Mr Neill's daughter Zoe Readhead. The school is located in Suffolk. More about Summerhill can be found in the section 'Democratic schools in the world'.

Schools based on free education emerged in 1960s in the USA as a criticism of public schooling system (Procházková, 2015, p. 14).The most well-known school in the USA is Sudbury Valley school, founded in 1968, located in Framingham, Massachusetts. The school was founded by Daniel Greenberg (Greenberg, 1995). More about Sudbury School can be found in the section 'Democratic schools in the world'.

There are more than seventy schools worldwide which state to be democratic schools. The schools help each other but there is no association with obligatory membership; everything is based on free will of the school. Though the basic pillars of democratic education are not legally defined, they can be easily derived from the principles of democracy and examples of founding democratic schools: freedom of children to do what they like, democracy in decision making about the school life and equality of staff and children.

In the Czech Republic it is difficult for democratic school to exist because of the law that determine obligatory knowledge for certain age periods. However, there are some very recent attempts to found a democratic school here. Meanwhile, some students are educated at home because more and more parents try to give their children more freedom, even though they still have to fulfil the law and teach their children specific areas at a certain age.

Democratic schools are based on the idea of freedom which means that each individual is allowed to do what he or she wishes unless he or she limits the freedom of another person or breaks a rule that was established at a school meeting (Neill, 1960, Greenberg, 1995). Self-learning is based on the belief that children know best what is best

for them at the current time of their development and it is not only unwanted but also destroying to force them to learn something that they do not want to learn themselves. Neill (1960), wrote, "If (a child is) left to himself without adult suggestion of any kind, he will develop as far as he is capable of developing" (p. 4). Therefore, there is no obligatory curriculum in democratic schools. Neill (1993), wrote, "Freedom is a relative term. The freedom we think about in Summerhill is individual freedom, inner freedom... we strive to see that children are free internally, free from fear, from hypocrisy, from hate, from intolerance" (p. 249). At democratic schools, children should be all the time free to do whatever they wish to do: play, talk with friends, learn, play sports, discuss with others, etc. anything that does not interfere with the freedom of anyone else in the school.

One of the most important elements for learning is a specific school community and learning environment. In democratic schools a school community consists of students – usually from the age of 5 or 6 to the age of 17 – and staff. Being in this community full of different people of different ages, knowledge and desires stirs itself the cognitive 'hunger' for learning. Students at democratic schools learn not only cognitive knowledge, but also, more importantly, learn to be full people – they acquire social skills, learn effective communication and cooperation, develop self-consciousness and independence. In democratic schools' philosophy, these "other" skills such as social skills and communication skills are given at least the same importance as cognitive knowledge.

There is a variety of support for children to learn – other children, staff facilitators (teachers educated in various subjects), school environment – different rooms for subjects (art room, music room, etc.), library, computers with the Internet and other resources, school grounds – a lawn to sit on or ran on, trees to climb, playground and sometimes a water area for swimming. In this environment children have time to play, to make friends and to do what amuses them the most. From this amusement gradually grows understanding what they want in life and desite to follow it (Greenberg, 1995; Neill, 1960).

Supported by theoretical works and opinions of some current educators and researchers, the main features of democratic schools can be named as: democratic school administration and decision-making mechanisms, self-education, equality between children and adults and confidence in children (Korkmaz & Erden, 2014, p. 336). According to Delphi study carried by Korkmaz and Erden, the most important category for a democratic school is its values and philosophy:

Those values are cooperation, justice, equity, empathy, sustainability, freedom, responsibility, openness, nondogmatism, self-criticism, and tolerance. In addition, findings indicate that democratic school embraces a clear philosophy based on equality, transparency, learner autonomy, and learner individuality. A democratic school is itself open to development and change as well as its members (p. 369).

**Self-Directed Learning**

Democratic schools are based on principles of learning that many leading psychologists and didactics found out. The main idea from Piaget to Gray nowadays is that learning is an active process, controlled by the learner and motivated by curiosity and interest (Gray, 2012). According to Procházková (2015):

Respectable psychological theories (Montessori, 1938, Piaget, 1951, Zimmermann, 1990) said that learning is active process and is effective only when it is driven by curiosity and controlled by the learner himself. These findings are supported by factual experiments... According to these theories, when our learning process is driven by someone else, our interest transforms to compulsion and limitation (p. 12).

There was an interesting learning experiment held by Sugata Mitra, the science director of an educational technology company, in India. Mitra installed computers in places where most of the children were unschooled and illiterate. He told the children who were around that they could play with it. Children immediately started to explore this new thing and soon learnt how to control it. They shared their exciting discoveries with other children and soon dozens of children around in the area were computer literate. If the internet connection was available, children also learnt how to use the internet, download music, games and texts and establish an email account. In all the places where the experiment was held, it had the same results (Gray, 2013, pp. 110-111). According to Gray (2013),

Mitra's experiments illustrate how three core aspects of our human nature – curiosity, playfulness, and sociability – can combine beautifully to serve the purpose of education. *Curiosity* draw the children to the computer and motivated them to explore it, *playfulness* motivated them to practice many computer skills; and *sociability* allowed each child's learning to spread like wildfire to dozens of other children (p. 112).

Gray (2015, pp. 21-24) explained self-centred learning from the historical point of view, "If we take, arbitrary, a million years ago as the beginning of human history, then 99 percent of that history we were all hunter-gatherers" (p. 24). Despite many differences in current hunter-gatherers societies they are very similar in these areas: social structures, values and ways of rising children (Gray, 2015, p. 24). What do have these societies all in common is that children have the whole day to play. They learn by play all what they need (Gray).

Holt (2004) wrote about how to make teaching learner-centred: it must be the learner's idea, the learner's interest. The teacher must be ready to stop all the times if the learner wanted to and must not put the student into the confusion, panic, and shame; he or she teacher must accept learner's anxiety and confusion. The teacher must be ready to let the learner ask all the questions and let the learner use the answers as he wishes. The teacher must not test understanding but rather let the learner decide whether he or she understood or not. The teacher must not use his student to prove to himself what a gifted teacher he is. It should be left fully up to learner if he/she is going to continue in the subject or not (p. 202).

The fact that students have good grades at school does not mean that they understand what they learn. Gardner (2013) wrote that students who exhibit good success at schools, have high grades, attendance and high test scores, often do not understand enough the materials and concepts they have been working with (p. 3).

In democratic schools staff sometimes do not know how a child learnt something. A child can all of a sudden perform a skill. Every child will find its own pace and methods how to acquire what it wants to learn most efficiently. The results of learning are so good because of motivation – inner motivation – the children really want to learn something themselves and not because they have to or because should do so. In democratic schools, there is no pressure to children to learn something, they are given time, sources and belief that they can choose themselves. These conditions fulfilled, the children have surprising results in both learning as well as other parts of their development such as social skills, communication, self-esteem, self-confidence and the general belief that it is them who decide about their life, not someone else (Neil, 1960; Gray, 2013).

Greenberg (1995) wrote that the most important condition for learning is the inner motivation of a child. "... the subject matter itself isn't that hard. What's hard, virtually

impossible, is beating it into the heads of youngsters who hate every step" (Greenberg, p. 18). When the child decides itself that it wants to learn something, the results are almost unbelievable compared with traditional schooling. Greenberg (1995), who taught mathematics at Sudbury Valley school, gave an example "Give me a kid who wants to learn the staff – well, twenty hours or so (for learning arithmetic that is taught for six years) makes sense" (p. 18). Other example can be with learning how to read. Children who are not "educated" by teachers how and when to read do it themselves voluntarily at their own pace and once they decide they are able to finish the whole process with less than 30 hours of individual help from an older person. Some children even do not want such help at all and manage to read only by themselves. The same was found when adults who could not read wanted to learn it, they could do it with minimal support and in a very short time that equalled 30 hours of support (Hold, 2004, pp. 4-6). Greenberg (1995) wrote about learning reading,

> At school, some kids read early, some read late. All of them read when they are ready, not a minute earlier. All of them eventually read, just fine. Some of the late readers become bookworms. Some of the early readers master the skill and then rarely crack a book. We don't have a single elementary reading textbook in the school... In fact, no one at school bothers much about reading. Only a few kids seek any help at all when they decide to learn. Each child seems to have their own method. Some learn from being read to, memorizing the stories and then ultimately reading them. Some learn from cereal boxes, others from game instructions, others from street signs. Some teach themselves letter sounds, others syllables, others whole words.... When kids are left to their own devices, they eventually see for
> themselves that in our world, the written word is a magic key to knowledge (p. 34).

What should be carefully taken care of is the difference between freedom and license.

Freedom at democratic schools ends where freedom of other people begins. It means that for example nobody is allowed to destroy other peoples' work or property or disturb them from their work. Neill (1960) wrote,

> There is a great difference between compelling a child to cease throwing stones and compelling him to learn Latin. Throwing stones involves others; but learning Latin involves only the boy. The community has the right to restrain the antisocial boy because he is interfering with the rights of others; but the community has no right to

compel a boy to a learn Latin – for learning Latin is a matter for the individual (p. 115).

The concept of freedom fits very well with the individual approach that is desired also by the Czech government but that is not much possible to fulfil in traditional schools. Robinson and Aronica (2015) wrote about the individuality of every person; people are different in their talents, interests and personality: "A narrow view of conformity inevitably creates enormous number of nonconformists who may be rejected by the system or be earmarked for remedial treatment. Those who meet the system specification are likely to do well; those who don't are not" (p. 36).

Robinson and Aronica (2015) wrote, what the set particular subjects can lead to, "it means that students' other talents and interests are almost systematically marginalized. Inevitably, many people don't discover what they're really capable of at schools, and their lives may be impoverished as a result" (p. 37).

The freedom has also its difficult side. One may think that democratic schools are very easy and enjoyable school to go to. Thought the process of learning it is sometimes definitely enjoyed by students, they are not "easy" schools to go to in any case. Students are faced with decisions about their own learning which is very demanding for their decision-making processes and self-concept. They are taking their life fully into their own hands and must decide what they want. That is one of the greatest benefits for their future life but also one of the most difficult things to learn – the burden of responsibility for their own life if fully on them. Nobody tells them what to do and how to do it unless they ask for help or advice. Children must learn to think, decide for themselves, express their needs and be inventive. That is why democratic schools are in a way harder a traditional school (Procházková, 2015, p. 16). Students are also often more self-demanding when they settle their own goals themselves than if the goals are settled by someone else which leads to several disappointments (Greenberg, 1995; Procházková, 2015). Neill (1960) wrote that "children need a lot of self-determination to study, because there are many enjoyable things going around them – their friends are playing games etc., therefore only those who really like studying will continue in it."

Greenberg (1995) wrote about the results of democratic schools,

What actually happens? Everyone learns the basics – but at their own pace, in their own time and their own way. Some children learn to read at age five, others at ten.

Some learn best from teachers or other students, others learn best by themselves. On any given day, students of all ages can be seen learning together, talking, playing – growing. As they grow older, they develop a strong sense of identity and set goals for the future. When they leave they go on to a huge variety of activities – professions, trades, businesses, colleges, all over the country (p. 2).

Neill (1960) wrote an interesting note about laziness. He claimed that laziness does not exist. When we see a 'lazy' child it is either physically ill or not interested in a subject matter. (p. 357).

There are limits of self-centred learning. It works best when children start their learning in democratic schools in a young age; the sooner a child is educated in the democratic way the better are the results. When the child is older than twelve years old, it is sometimes very difficult for him or her to adapt. Neill (1960) wrote about the limits of freedom, "Speaking generally, the method of freedom is almost sure with children under twelve, but children over twelve take a long time to recover from a spoon-fed education" (p. 34).

Students coming from other schools in older age cope with freedom in two ways according to their previous success at a traditional school. Those who were considered troublemakers adapt very well to free education. It is because they never surrender their fight for freedom and want to get their own way through. The second group are those who were successful students but not happy at their previous school. For these students it is much more difficult to cope with freedom. These "A" students are the real victims of the educational system. They focused all their life on filling the wishes of the outside authority that they lost touch with themselves. They are not able to say what they wish or want but they are perfect in filling orders and wishes of other people. (Greenberg, 1995). Greenberg (1995) added "The spark is gone from their eyes, the laughter from their souls... To them, freedom is terrifying. There is no one to tell them what to do. The "cure" is hard, and takes time." (pp. 157-158). Only after a long time of boredom these children are able to become interested in something again, out of their desperation. This is the only cure that works but even this does not always have to be successful in making them happy and in touch with themselves again (Greenberg, 1995).

Holt (2004) wrote about the importance to trust the child and allow him or her to have freedom,

Next to the right to life itself, the most fundamental of all human rights is the right to control our own minds and thoughts. That means, the right to decide for ourselves how we will explore the world around us, think about our own and other person's experiences, and find the meaning of our own lives. Whoever takes that right away from us, as the educators do, attacks the very centre of our being and does us a most profound and lasting injury. He tells us, in effect, that we cannot be trusted even to think, that for all our lives we must depend on others to tell us the meaning of our world and our lives, and that any meaning we may make for ourselves, out of our own experience, has no value... My concern is not to improve "education" but to do away with it, to end the ugly and antihuman business of people-shaping and let people shape themselves (p. 4).

**Belief In a Child**

Neill (1960) wrote that parents and teachers should always be on the child's side. He describes the process of behaviour of parents and staff towards students that differ individually for every student according to his or her actual psychological needs:

If I should be painting a door and Robert came along and threw mud on my fresh paint, I would swear at him heartily, because he has been one of us for a long time and what I say to him does not matter. But suppose Robert had just come from a hateful school and his mud slinging was an attempt to fight authority, I would join with him in his mud slinging because his salvation is more important that the door. I know that I must stay on his side while he lives out of his hate in order for him to become social again (Neill, 1960, p. 119).

Neill (1960) stressed in his works that fear is one of the worst things in child's life. Adult people should do all what is in their power to protect children from fear in any form: "fear of punishment, fear of disapproval, fear of God. Only hate can flourish in an atmosphere of fear" (p. 124).

**Democracy**

Another basic pillar of democratic schooling is democracy. Its basic idea is that every child is fully equal to adults in their rights and can govern the school and decide about community life in the same way as adults can. Adult people that are in democratic schools are therefore not named 'teachers' but usually simply 'staff'. Gray, (2015) wrote

about Sudbury Valley school, "The staff members are subject to the same school rules as are students, and when they are accused of violating a rule, they are tried in the same way" (p. 91).

Neill (1960) wrote about the role of the staff that can be different from the role of a student only in situations of emergency,

> If the house caught fire the children would run to me. They know that I am bigger and more knowledgeable, but in normal everyday situations no supreme authority of the director is applied... Staff and students have the same food and have to obey the same community laws. The children would resent any special privileges given to the staff (p. 9).

School community is self-governed and decides about school rules at school meetings. School meetings consist of every child and every staff person at school, create rules for the whole school and decide about all the important as well as less important matters. It is the core of the school. Staff and students have the same voice in deciding about everything concerning the school life. Case (1978, p. 81) wrote,

> I wonder if any society whose aim it is to produce a maturing membership can function without a meeting. The whole character of our community was noticeably different, I believe, because of it; there was the feeling as verbalised by one child to another in confidence, but overheard: 'We run this place.' In his remark, there was no feeling of: 'We run it against the adults or without adults.' 'We' meant 'all of us' (as cited in Fielding, 2010, p. 7).

According to Dundar (2013), the beginning of the democracy idea dates back to the ancient Rome. The world itself comes from Greece "demos" (people) and "kratos" (power, authority, government) (p. 1). Therefore, in democracy, the power of making decision in the community issues should be in the hand of every person that is part of the community. This is luckily possible to do at schools where number of students and staff are so low that they are all able to meet in one room and discuss together. In democratic schools, direct democracy is possible and it would break the main principles of the democratic schooling to apply representative democracy (e.g. in a form of school parliament) there. According to Dundar (2013), "democracy refers to the attitude of people with self-determination who are courageous enough to act against every problem they encounter with. This can be secured with education and education can be secured with democracy" (p. 1). According to Dundar

(2013), "Generally, in democratic schools, school staff and professors do not have arbitrary power to make a decision. Responsibilities are shared by the school community" (p. 2).

Fielding (2010) wrote about the importance of self governed schools for enabling students to have some experience with public life and responsibility. Only when they can try it at school they have a good chance to be actively interested in public live in a larger scale (e.g. in a city or state government) (p. 9).

Different democratic schools run their democratic processes in different ways. They all have school meetings but processes for claiming rules are different. Democratically established rules must always be claimable (Procházková, 2015, pp. 18-19). In some schools (Sudbury Valley), there is a full juridical system, at other schools these cases are dealt with at school meetings according to the rules (Summerhill) or informal interview is used.

When children are given power and possibility to decide about their own rules of life, it is surprising how wise these rules are. There are rules worked out and approved by children and staff in a general school meeting that takes care for the safety of the students, for example the School Meeting in Sudbury Valley passed a strict rule forbidding anyone even to enter the pond, when there is nobody from the staff present. The same went for going on it in the winter, when it is covered with ice (Greenberg, 1995, p. 111). In Summerhill, no child under eleven may cycle on the street alone.

> But there is no law about climbing trees. Climbing trees is a part of life's education; and to prohibit all dangerous undertakings would make child a coward. We prohibit climbing on roofs, and we prohibit air guns and other weapons that might wound... It is not easy to draw the line between realistic carefulness and anxiety (Neill, 1960, p. 21).

General school meeting allow students not only to actively participate in democracy, but also learn to promote their opinion and speak publicly, Neal (1960) wrote,

"In my opinion, one weekly General school meeting is of more value than a week curriculum to school subjects. It is an excellent theatre for practising public speaking, and most of the children speak well and without self-consciousness" (p. 55).

**Age Mixing**

There are many studies that prove that interaction of students of different ages has

large positive effects on their education. Children in mixed age groups are more interested, learn more and remember better. It is also in accordance with the zone of proximal development by Vygostky – older children help younger ones to understand (Procházková, pp. 19-20). According to Gray (2013),

> In the 1930s, Lev Vygotsky... coined the term *zone of proximal development* to refer to the set of activities a child cannot do alone or with others of the same ability but can do in collaboration with others who are more skilled. He suggested that children develop new skills and understanding largely by collaborating with others within their zones of proximal development. Extending Vygostky's idea, the Harward psychologist Jerome Bruner and his colleagues introduced the term *scaffolding* as a metaphor for the means by which skilled participants enable novices to engage in a shared activity. The scaffolding consists of the reminders, hints, encouragement, and other forms of help that lift the child up to a higher form of activity (p. 186).

In age-mixed learning environments, children learn from each other not only by direct learning but also by watching and listening to the others (Gray, 2013, p. 193). The sense of community is highly important for the social development of people. According to Vieno, A., Perkins D., Smith T. & Santinello M. (2005) "sense of community is negatively correlated with loneliness, worry, social isolation, antisocial behaviour, and positively related to happiness, coping efficacy, social skills, social support, conflict resolution skills, academic self-efficacy, academic achievement, and safety in the classroom" (p. 328).

Robinson and Aronica (2015), stressed that linear division of children according to age was typical for industrial era of manufacturing, but it is not in agreement with natural learning principles that different students learn at a different speed in different disciplines (p. 37). The real challenge begins where there are children with different level of knowledge about a subject. They help each other, show how to do it or scaffold a less knowledgeable friend. Children want to help each other because the system does not press them to competition with each other and it is very satisfying to help someone else and succeed at it. As side effect of mutual learning children learn the taught material more deeply because they have to clarify and organize it for themselves to be able to teach someone else.

Children love not only teaching but also learning from each other because they know that their friend who is closer to them in their age and interest can explain it in a way

that is understandable for them. Their friends also serve as models or counter-models for them (Neill, 1960, pp. 70-43). They think "when my friend managed to do this, I can do it as well" or "I want to be as good in Chemistry as Tom is". Gray (2013) introduced an example of one child teaching a younger one how to count by counting drops of medicine to a sick doll from one to seven (p. 189). In another case according to Gray (2013) "an older child explained to a younger one, in a game of store, how much it would cost to purchase two items when one cost $10 and the other $5, and how much change to give for a $20 bill" (p. 190).

**Play and Work**

In traditional schools and sometimes even families children are taught that life is not a game, but a sequence of duties. Game and work was divided and given the opposite polarity. Democratic school philosophy sais that it is not opposite. The importance of playing for logical thinking was underlined by Piaget who found out that children are extending their knowledge by experimenting and discovering which is best done in a form of a game. In accordance with this knowledge, free learning is based on connecting duties and games. Game is not considered as an opposite for learning but as a very effective tool, how to bring children to use their own inventiveness, which is an important factor for their learning competencies. (Greenberg as stated in Procházková 2015, p. 18). Neill (1960) wrote about the play being the greatest importance for the school. Children in Summerhill can live in their fantasy and play as much as they want. Children take their games seriously and while they are playing they do not take much care about their surrounding. It is a natural thing, if we wanted a child that is careful not to disturb adults by the noise or not to damage or break anything that would be a very unnatural child. Neill (1960) wrote,

> Children love noise and mud; they clatter on stairs; they shout like louts; they are
> unconscious of furniture. If they are playing a game of touch, they would walk over
> the Portland Vase if it happened to be in their way – walk over it without seeing it
> (p. 63).

A sane civilization would not ask children to work until they are themselves ready for it (Neill, 1960). Gray wrote about people who are still hunters and gatherers and live a natural way of life. Concerning education of their children, all the tribes had one thing in common – there was no 'education' in a sense how it is defined in this thesis. Their children

had the prevailing part of the day or the whole day fully to themselves to do anything they wish. These children spend this time by playing, mostly copying the adult members of the society. Boys, for example, constructed their own arrows and tried to catch small animals; girls played preparing meals, etc. The bigger the children were, the more they wanted to do the actual things themselves and so when the right time comes the children's game naturally switch to what we usually call "work" and it is then dome with the same enjoyment and concentration as was the play before. When children can have the luxury to spend their childhood in happy playing, they are prepared to face the reality as adults without longing to escape to their own fantasy and world. (Neill, 1960, p. 6, Gray, 2012, pp. 20-27).

## Evaluation and Teaching at Democratic Schools

Concerning evaluation, according to the philosophy of democratic schools, every child can assess his own work best. If he or she asks other students or staff for support or advice, it is always given, but nobody has the right to evaluate someone else's work without being asked to do so. At democratic schools, there are no grades or diplomas given out regularly. Students compare their work with works from the world outside they know, consequently, they size their work according to very high standards. Students are often frustrated by the high standards they seized for themselves, they sometimes even leave their work for a while but they usually come back to it. When they finally reach the goal they set for them it is a great satisfaction. Children then come to a staff or their friend and says that they like their work. It is he or she who decides that a piece of work is good enough (Greenberg, 1995, p. 96). Greenberg (1995) added, "At the heart of Sudbury Valley is the policy that we don't rate people. We don't compare them to each other, or to some standards we have set" (pp. 96-98).

In Summerhill, there are no class examinations. All the staff don't like them, but they cannot refuse to teach children the required subjects for the university exams. The Summerhill staff is qualified to teach for this preparation and is entirely up to children if they want to prepare for them or not. The experience is that when children decide for them, they do not find the exams especially difficult (Neill, 1960, p. 6). Neill (1960), wrote about how students prepare for university exams, "They generally begin to work for them seriously at the age of fourteen, and they do the work in about three years. Of course they

don't always pass at first try. The more important fact is that they try again" (p. 8).

One may ask how it works when a student from a democratic school wants to attend a university or a job where they need high school transcripts or recommendations from the school. At Sudbury School, they write a polite letter where they try to explain the policy of the school of giving no evaluation. Most of the time, this approach is understood by the receiver of the letter and students have a free way to their job of further studies. It is harder for the students than if they could use grades given to them but it is what the school is about: finding their own way through life and being able to face obstacles. (Greenberg, 1995, p. 98). There are two exceptions when children at Sudbury Valley can get some kind of certification. The first one is only for inter-school usage. For certain activities that are listed, only 'certificated' user can perform them. It covers for example kitchen appliances or wood-working tools. Whoever wishes to use these tools must be certified by a person appointed for it who would make sure that a student can use the facility in a good and safe way. The second exception is at the end of the school attendance – a student can prepare and defend a thesis explaining how he prepared himself for life and then can obtain a diploma from the school (Gray, 2015, p. 91).

Greenberg (1995) wrote about advantages of not rating people: "It is an atmosphere free of competition among students or battles for adult approval. At Sudbury Valley, people help each other all the time. They have no reason not to" (pp. 96-98).

At democratic schools, teacher is not the centre of the picture, his power element is eliminated. Teacher is no longer powerful just because he is a teacher, in lessons he or she is respected as a more knowledgeable person who can help children who wish to be helped. Outside lessons he or she is respected just as any other student that is part of the community (Neil, 1960, p. 328).

At Summerhill, there have to work qualified teachers, the same is for all the democratic schools that have some degree of recognition from the state. Neill (1993) wrote that having qualified and non-qualified teachers does not make much difference in actual teaching, "I have had trained and untrained teachers with good and bad in both categories. Teaching is an art, not a science" (p. 115).

Concerning the teaching methodology, there are no specific rules or methods. Neill (1993) wrote, "Never once have I told a teacher what to do, how to teach. One or two complained that I did not come to their classrooms often enough" (p. 115). Democratic

schools the author of the thesis read about take as the basic presumption that when children want to learn the method of teaching is not that much important. Neill (1960) wrote, "When the child wants to learn something it will learn it no matter how it is taught" (p. 5). Neill (1960) continued that teaching English by means of play was only a new way of supporting the theory that learning was the most important thing. He claimed that it is like a curse that blinds thousands of teachers and most school inspectors. "Fifty years ago the watchword was "Learn through doing". Today the watchword is "Learn through playing". (p. 27).

Lessons are and always will be voluntary at democratic schools. Children know that making lessons compulsory has no sense since every child is different and has different pace and needs. Lessons and learning are organised differently at every democratic school. In Summerhill, lessons are organised by the teachers and a timetable of the lessons that will be held is posted at the beginning of the school year. Teachers stick to their timetable but children can choose whatever they like from the offer. Lessons are organized usually according to the age of the children or sometimes according to their interests. There always are some lessons that not normally occur at other schools; they depend on abilities of the staff, it can be for example horse riding, dancing, Japanese. Artistic subjects such as music, art and theatre are always present (Neill, 1960).

What can be seen as a very surprising element in contrast with traditional schooling, children at democratic schools love their lessons. It is because they have chosen them voluntarily; sometimes they even designed what they exactly want to learn. Neill (1960), illustrated the relationship of children towards lessons at Summerhill,

> David, aged nine, had to be isolated for whooping cough. He cried bitterly "I'll miss Roger's lesson in geography", he protested.... At one of the School's General Meetings an idea was suggested that to be banished from the lessons for some time could be a punishment. It was not confirmed because other students saw it as too severe a punishment (p. 7).

## Democratic Schools in the World

When one looks outside the borders of the Czech Republic, one could see that it is not difficult to find a democratic school quite nearby. In Germany, for example, there are several democratic schools.

Although there is more than 70 democratic schools (usually Sudbury School' types of schools) in Europe that are associated in the European organisations called EUDEC (European Democratic Educational Community) (Procházková, 2015, p. 23), the exact number of democratic schools in the world is not known. It is also because of the fact that every year new schools are established. The estimation of the number of democratic schools worldwide was according to Korkmaz and Edren (2014, p. 1) 239 schools in 35 countries.

In the rest of this section Summerhill and Sudbury Valley schools, mentioned at the beginning of this work, will be looked at in more detail.

### Summerhill School

The school was founded in 1921 in Suffolk, England. It started as experimental school but it is no longer an experiment because of the long years for which the school work proves its success. (Neill, 1960) Mr. Neill and his wife started the school – according to Neill (1960) they had one main idea: "to make the school to fit the child – instead of making the child fit the school" (p. 4).

Summerhill is a boarding school which means that children also sleep in the school. They are housed by age groups with a house mother for every group (Neill, 1960, p. 3).

 At typical day in Summerhill, lessons begin at 9:30. At the beginning of every term there is a timetable posted and children can choose if they want to attend any lessons. If children don't attend their lessons regularly they can be told to stop going at all because they are decelerating the progress of other students. The young children usually spend their morning with their own room teacher. From one to five in the afternoon the time is completely free for everyone. At five o'clock, various activities begin. The smallest ones like to be read to, older children use several workshops – for example painting, leather work, basket making, pottery, wood and metal workshop. In the evenings, various events occur. Favourite activities at Summerhill are cooking and acting in the school theatre.

Children write and produce their own plays, produce their own costumes and scenery. Their acting talent is generally high because they are used to being sincere and not showing off (Neill, 1960, p. 15). In the evenings, older children go to the local movies, there are various reading groups, dance night is every Wednesday, on Saturday night there is a general school meeting (Neil, 1960).

**Sudbury Valley**

Sudbury Valley is a private day school established in Framingham, Massachusetts. It accepts students from the age of four to nineteen without any test or knowledge settled criteria of new students. The only criteria is an interview and a visiting week for a student and his parents to make sure that they know how democratic school work. It was founded in 1968 by Greenberg and pioneered a model of democratic school in America. It finally gained an official recognition and is the first school of democratic type to be fully accredited by the authorities. There are about one hundred and fifty students at the school and nine to eleven staff members (Greenberg, 1995, p. 1; Gray, 2015, p. 89). It is a not a boarding school – students have to commute to school every day and they sleep (as well as spend their weekends and holidays) in their own families.

In a typical day at Sudbury Valley, there are less scheduled activities than in Summerhill school. The school opens at 8:30 in the morning and closes at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. There is no lunchtime, when one wants to have lunch he or she takes it. It is possible for students to spend more time at school or come during the weekend; in this case they are given the keys to school. School meetings are scheduled at Thursday afternoon. Students favour cooking, working at different workshops and fishing (Greenberg, 1995, pp 87-90).

**Differences between Summerhill School and Sudbury Valley School**

As it was said in the introduction there are considerable differences among democratic schools in individual settings. I would like to illustrate this on differences among the most famous democratic schools, the founding ones. Although both schools strictly adhere to democratic principles, they differ fundamentally in some practical issues.

School meetings are the core of both schools. At Sudbury Valley, every important case must be discussed at least two times at two successive meetings to allow time for people to think matters over (Greenberg, 1995); at Summerhill, however, matters can be

decided in one meeting only. At Sudbury Valley, school meetings decide also about firing and hiring new staff (Greenberg, 1995), whereas at Summerhill it is the director who decides about staffing the school. Another difference with school meeting is that in Summerhill, a chairman is elected only for one meeting (Neill, 1960, p. 49), whereas in Sudbury Valley a chairman stays in his or her position for a longer time period (Greenberg, 1995).

Lessons are optional in both schools but there is a different system for the lessons to rise. In Summerhill, there is a timetable of lessons at the beginning of every term and children can sign in to lessons they wish to attend (Neill, 1960), whereas in Sudbury Valley there are no regular classes offered. At Sudbury Valley classes began only when a child or a group of children want to learn something specific, find a person (either other student or staff) who can teach it to them and they make a deal with this person specifying subject matter, time of the lesson and obligations for students and a teacher (Greenberg, 1995).

Role of parents at Summerhill and Sudbury Valley is different. Through Summerhill school welcome parents to visit the school sometimes, they are not a part of the school and they are sometimes considered as an element that puts obstacles to the right development of the child. The school is considered to be there also to compensate the bad behaviour of parents towards their children (Neill, 1960). At Sudbury Valley, parents are integral part of the community. They are members of an Assembly that meets once a year to set all major policies, they are always welcomed to visit the school and they take part in several social events organised by the school (Greenberg, 1995, p. 167).

The most important difference, however, lies in a boarding element. Summerhill is above all boarding school. The boarding element is important for all other differences that can be tracked among Summerhill and Sudbury Valley. Mr Neill (1960) wrote that the boarding element is crucial for free development of the children because it allows them to get freedom from their parents. School should be a new family for children so that they could 'recover' from their real family. Boarding also is historically underlaid in Summerhill – it had to be a boarding school then because there were not enough parents in one place who would like their children to attend Summerhill so children from the whole England and other countries as well attended the school; therefore the need for sleeping and living at school was inevitable (Neill, 1960). Sudbury Valley, on the contrary, is a day-school resembling a large group of friends rather than family (Greenberg, 1995).

## Democratic Schools in the Czech Republic

The current law does not allow fully democratic primary schools in the Czech Republic because in the Educational Framework Plan (Rámcový vzdělávací program pro základní vzdělávání) there is given amount of knowledge that a child has to know at the end of certain grades. There are also other restrictions, for example some school subjects has to be obligatory taught and attended by all students in a year. This goes directly against principles of self-directed education because when there are set rules of what the student needs to know in a specific time, there is no self-direction any more. Consequently, all the schools in the Czech Republic that would like to give more freedom to the students can do so to some extent but cannot fulfil the goal fully. Example of such school can be Scio schools (Scio) by Ondřej Šteffl, Donum Felix private primary school in Buštěhrad (ZŠ Donum Felix) or several 'alternative schools' such as Montessori schools, Waldorf schools, forest kindergartens and schools etc. Each of those 'alternative schools' offers different level of freedom and democracy to its students. There exist quite numerous group of people and parents who wish to have democratic schools (for example people gathered around a web pages svobodauceni.cz) and try to organize things that it will be possible – e.g. try to change the law, organize meetings and discussions, offer information and materials etc.

## Second Language Acquisition and Learning

### Principles of Instructed Language Learning

Ellis and Shintani (2014) explained eleven principles of instructed language learning that draw from second language acquisition research. They operated with the premise that "instruction that is not compatible with the way L2 acquisition takes place cannot be successful" (p. 27).

Both formulaic expressions and rule-based competence are important for the English learners to develop their language knowledge. Formulaic expressions consist of vocabulary and chunks of language learnt by heart to be used in certain situation whereas rule-based competence consists of grammatical rules for creating utterances. Instruction needs to ensure that learners focus on meaning while form should not be neglected. Meaning-focused instruction programmes are for example immersion programmes,

content-based language teaching and task-based language teaching. Teaching programmes should provide learners with the input and interactional opportunities. Focus on form can complement the focus on meaning in various ways, for example through the explicit clarification of a grammar point or consciousness raising tasks that enable learners to discover the grammatical rules themselves. Corrective feedback also raises rule-based competence of students (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, pp. 22-23).

Instruction needs to be directed at developing both implicit and explicit knowledge, their priority being implicit knowledge since it underlines the ability to communicate fluently and confidently (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 23).

One of the key findings of second language acquisition and research was according to Ellis and Shintani (2014) that learners acquire second language in a way that is to a large extend universal and reflects the gradual progress of the learner. According to some research, there are developmental constraints what learners can and cannot learn. This should be reflected in teaching in various ways, there is, however, one obstacle for teachers teaching more than one student: it is impractical for teachers to determine what point exactly individual students have reached in their learning, only highly individual approach allows to recognise differences in developmental levels among the students. One of the examples of implementation of sequence of acquisition is Krashen's zero grammar approach: task-based instruction that do not predetermine the linguistic content of the lesson (p. 24).

According to Ellis and Shintani (2014), much of the second language learning is incidental rather than intentional, thus, learning a second language requires a great amount of input. The more the learners come into contact with the target language (either passively, reading or listening, or actively, speaking or writing) the better. A teacher should therefore create opportunities for input. He or she should maximize the use of the target language in the classroom and support students in other activities outside the classroom that involve the target language, he or she can for example support extensive reading (pp. 24-25). A teacher should also take great care to include extensive practise in his or her lessons and not only controlled ones. It is advisable for the teacher to review the amount of students' participation and practice that the lesson provided (Bohlke & Richards, 2011, p. 7).

For mastering the language students must have opportunities for output. Controlled but mainly freer practise of writing and speaking skills is necessary in learning English.

Opportunities for interaction are connected with opportunities for output. Teacher should support interaction and communication among students, use small group work and pair work (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 25). Bohlke and Richards (2011) agree that variation of grouping arrangement is very useful. Other ways how to support interaction are to call on all the students in the class or change the class seating arrangement from time to time so that the students who sit at the back have the same opportunity to participate as those who sit at the front (pp. 6-7). A teacher can also develop interaction by creating meaningful language tasks based on real-life situations, providing opportunities for learners to use the language to express their own opinions and personal thoughts and helping students to master tasks that are beyond their level of proficiency (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 25).

Another important aspect of the second language instruction is that it needs to take into account individual differences in learners in many aspects, starting with their age and level of proficiency, their preferred way of learning, their purpose for learning English and ending with their personality, religion, opinions and values. Teaching should not aim only at learning the language but also at developing student's personality and general communicative abilities (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 26). According to Ellis and Shintani (2014), "learners have the opportunity to develop their subjective selves by taking on new identities and even new personality" (p. 26). English lessons should encourage learners to examine their world-view and critical thinking. Play with the language and emotional identification with it helps students to take a stand or form a relationship towards the language. It can be achieved for example through working with English literature or implementing creative writing into the curriculum (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 27).

**Effective Language Lesson**

In order for the English lesson to be effective, the teacher needs to have high professional standards. To have high professional standards means to have appropriate knowledge of the language itself as well as about its methodology, to possess teaching skills and behave in the classroom in a way that is expected from professional teachers. Professional standards are reflected in many ways in every-day teaching, for example in the degree of knowledge and skill that is demonstrated in teaching, in lesson-planning, in controlling teacher's own emotions in the classroom or in respectful and appropriate approach to individual students (Bohlke & Richards, 2011, pp. 1-2). In order to prove his

or her professionalism, a teacher needs to obtain a professional qualification. It is also essential that a teacher throughout his or her career stays in contact with current language and methodological developments and implements this knowledge into his or her teaching. Moreover, a teacher can be trained to teach following a particular approach, for example in Task Based Instruction or Communicative Language Teaching. Except professional training, the teacher should also understand the general nature of language, second language learning and his or her learners: all lessons must be adapted to and based on learners' needs (Bohlke & Richards, 2011, p. 3).

A professional teacher is able to address a meaningful learning outcome. Goals can be set by students, by a teacher or by their collaboration. Goals can be divided to short-term goals, they usually include goals for a lesson or a unit, and long-term goals that contain goals for a semester or for the whole study programme. Goals can also be formulated either generally or specifically; the specific formulation is preferred for short-term goals. It is very useful to state the aims of the course or lesson in the form of "can do" statements (Bohlke & Richards, 2011, p. 5).

To be able to address the outcome, the lesson must be effectively managed – the arrangement of both physical and the social dimensions of the class to provide a positive and supportive environment for learning (Bohlke & Richards, 2011, p. 8). Bohlke and Richards (2011) wrote, "Good classroom management is a prerequisite to an effective lesson... Achieving a positive atmosphere depends on how the teacher and the students build up a sense of rapport and mutual trust" (p. 8). According to Bohlke and Richards (2011), meaningful learning outcomes are achievable only when a lesson "is a coherent sequence of learning activities that link together to form a whole" (p. 9). A lesson is traditionally divided into three stages: opening, sequencing and closing. The opening stage serves for focusing students' attention on the goals of the lesson, trying to motivate students to fulfil them. It can also make links to previous learning or to preview language that will be used in the main part of the lesson. In the main part of the lesson, there is a sequence of activities aimed at achieving the goal of the lesson and at the end there is a closing part that summarises main points of the lesson or follow-up work is done in this part of the lesson (Bohlke & Richards, 2011, p. 9). As well as the principles just mentioned, the teacher should also have in mind general principles of language learning, Bohlke and Richards (2011) wrote some of the general didactic fundamentals, "'easier

before more difficult activities', 'receptive before productive skills', or 'accuracy activities before fluency activities'" (p. 10).

A lesson should also motivate students and provide them with opportunities for success (Bohlke and Richards, 2011, p. 11) According to Bohlke and Richards (2011), exceptional teachers have these qualities:

- enthusiasm for teaching: they maintain the motivational level of the class
- high expectations set for their learners: they praise their students' performance, give help to weaker students when needed and demonstrate by their behaviour that every student in their class can be successful, and
- a good relationship with their students: they have a warm caring attitude, treat students as people not as numbers, call students by their names and show interest in them as individuals (pp. 11-12).

**Learner-Centred Teaching**

Since in democratic schools learner-centred learning is utterly inherent, this section is devoted to its theoretical basics.

In order to be able to make a learner a centre of the lesson several conditions need to be fulfilled by the teacher. According to Bohlke and Richards (2011), it included "understanding learners' needs and goals, communicating trust and respect for them, acknowledging that your students have different needs and learning styles, giving feedback on their learning in encouraging ways... develop an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual support among learners" (p. 25).

Bohlke and Richards (2011) wrote that learner-centred teaching is more effective than other models of teaching for many reasons, for example:

It is sensitive to individual needs and preferences. It encourages construction of knowledge and meaning. It draws on and integrates language learning with students' life experiences. It generates more student participation and target language output. It encourages authentic communication. It breaks down barriers between in-class and out-of class learning. It opens up spaces for discussion of motivations, learning preferences, and styles. It encourages students to take more personal responsibility for their learning. It challenges the view that learning is equivalent to being taught (p. 26).

One of the first premises for learner-centred teaching is understanding learners' needs and goals. It includes the reasons why students want to learn English, their long-term and short-term goals, current proficiency level and language difficulties and other factors from students' personal life, such as age, occupation or usage of English outside the class, that may influence their language learning (Bohlke & Richards, 2011, pp. 26-27).

Second is the knowledge of every person's participation style in the lesson and their cognitive learning style. Cognitive learning styles can be divided to visual, auditory and kinaesthetic or other more subtle divisions are possible (Bohlke & Richards, 2011, pp. 28-29). When teacher helps his or her students to find their learning style and then supports learners to use it in their learning, it has a positive effect on learning. With more students in class, a teacher should vary the teaching method as much as possible, offering different possibilities of input for students so that students with different learning styles can find something that suits them.

The final point in creating learner-centred teaching rests in creating a community of learners. Only when learners support each other and there is atmosphere of mutual trust among students as well as among students and their teacher, the real learning that uses a full potential of students and their teacher can take place (Bohlke & Richards, 2011, p. 31). If students are afraid of their teacher or their classmates, if they do not feel safe, accepted and free to make mistakes, it puts a great obstacle on language learning. This statement was supported by the American psychologist Abraham Maslow who examined hierarchy of needs of people. He said that only when people have their physiological needs and the need of safety satisfied, they can freely learn new things and explore the world around them. The English classroom should be a friendly community. According to Bohlke and Richards (2011), the teacher can encourage a sense of community in his or her classroom in many ways, for example: learn and use students' names, encourage interaction within the class, treat students fairly, use cooperative and collaborative activities, encourage a sense of friendship among students and personalise learning so that students can share their experiences and stories. In personalizing his or her teaching, a teacher should try to involve students in generating lesson content, for example choose topics of lessons or bring books they would like to read. It is also important to try to make learning tasks as much as real-life tasks as possible because it increases students' motivation (pp. 31-32).

**Summary**

Democratic schools do not represent only a change in traditional schooling, they have changed completely the traditional way how education can be carried out (Procházková, 2015, p. 23). They offer their students freedom limited by democracy and a unique possibility to learn according to their own individuality and wishes. What is more, they offer the growth of personal qualities that can in real life sometimes be even more important that the factual knowledge, for example: social skills, democratic approach to the world, corresponding self-esteem and self-knowledge. The role of English teachers in democratic schools is to offer support to those who want to learn. Teachers should create friendly and inspiring environment that would support learning English. They can offer a range of possible activities in English for their students so that students can choose what (if something) suits them.

Second language acquisition theory supports the premise that second language should follow the principles how the first language is acquired. These principles say that both meaning and form are important, but more attentions should be focused on meaning. It is important that students have a lot of passive input and also opportunities for active output. A teacher should try to find out the developmental level of individual students and continue in teaching at this level or the teacher can use instruction that offer space for the development of several levels of knowledge of students. This is one of the conditions for learner-centred teaching; understanding of learner's individual needs, his or her goals, personality and cognitive style are other conditions for learner-centred teaching.

Effective language lessons need to be well managed and led by a professional teachers who teach according to didactic principles. It needs to have meaningful learning outcomes, suitable for particular student or students and therefore be motivating for them. Effective lesson should also provide opportunities for success. In the following chapter, methods of the research are explained.

III. METHODS

In this section, research questions are specified and methods of the research described. The used methods are structured interviews and observations; they were applied in democratic schools in the Netherlands and Germany.

The research question was "How is English language taught and learnt at democratic schools?" and can be specified in twelve sub-questions:

1. Do the students learn English either incidentally or intentionally outside the English lessons?
2. Is English taught in English lessons?
3. If yes, how are these lessons organized?
4. Who determines the content of the lesson?
5. Are there any difficulties in English language teaching at democratic schools?
6. Do students start learning English at any specific age?
7. What languages can students learn at democratic schools?
8. What languages are taught at democratic schools?
9. What is the level of English of students at democratic schools?
10. What is the motivation of students to learn English?
11. How much time do students devote to learning English intentionally?
12. What tools are available in schools for learning English and what tools students use?

To be able to respond to these questions the author decided to visit five democratic schools and spend a day in every school interviewing staff members and students and observing activities of students. The author created and used two observation tables, first one for activities outside lessons (see Appendix A) and the second one for activities in English language lessons (see Appendix B); she also created and used two questionnaires that were used as the base for interviews – one for staff members (see Appendix C) and one for students (see Appendix D).

The author has decided for the usage of aforementioned methods because she considered them the most suitable for researching in the specific conditions of democratic schools. Observations were the only possibility how to note incidental learning because students do not need to be aware of this learning consciously. Observations of lessons were

the easiest method to describe learning there – interviews or questionnaires about the lesson would be time-consuming and difficult to create and administer. Interviews with the staff and students were chosen as the most suitable method to obtain as much information as possible in short time. If these facts should be gathered through observations, it would take several days or weeks to get them if it were at all possible.

The first school the author visited was Libertad Democratische School in Breda, the Netherlands. The school was situated in the upper floor of the large building; students could use nearby sport facilities. The school was founded in 2014, had eleven students and accepted students from the age of twelve till the age of eighteen or nineteen (more information about the school in Appendix E). One staff member welcomed the author there on 20th February, 2017, in the morning. The author interviewed the staff member, who also showed her round the school. When the English teacher arrived, they had an interview. Then the author interviewed several students about their English language learning. After the interviews the author observed the students. She saw one English lesson which was noted down.

The second school the author visited was Sudburyschool Harderwijk in Harderwijk, the Netherlands (more information about the school in Appendix E). The school was situated in a detached ground-floor house with grass around it. The school was founded in 2014, had eighteen students and accepted students from the age of four till the age of nineteen. The author was there on 21st February, 2017, and was welcomed by a staff member in the morning: he showed her round the school and answered her questions. The author spend the day at school, observing students, asking them questions, and noting observations outside the lesson and in the lesson.

The third school the author visited was Democratisch Onderwijs Eindhoven in Eindhoven, the Netherlands (more information about the school in Appendix E). The school was situated in a detached ground-floor house with grass and play-ground in front of it. The school was founded in 2014, had fifty-six students and accepted students from the age of four till the age of twenty-one. The author was welcomed there in the morning on 23rd February, 2017. A staff member showed her round the school and answered her questions . During the day the author interviewed students and observed students. Unfortunately, the author could not see any English lesson because the English teacher was not at school that day.

The fourth school the author visited was Democratische School De Ruimte, located in Soest, the Netherlands (more information about the school in Appendix E). The school was situated in detached extensive ground-floor building with basement, lots of grass and play-ground around it. The school was founded in 2002, had one hundred and fifty pupils and accepted students from the age of two to the age of twenty-two. The author was welcomed there in the morning on 24th February by an English teacher staff member. The English teacher answered her questions and offered her the possibility to see the teacher's lesson as well as other English lessons. The author gladly accepted and saw three English lessons that the author recorded in the observation chart. The author also observed students outside formal lessons and asked them questions.

The fifth and last school the author visited was Demokratische Schule X, located in Berlin, Germany (more information about the school in Appendix E). The school was situated in a detached two-storey house and there was some space for playing around the building. There were about forty-five students. The author was welcomed there on 28th February, 2017, by a staff member who answered her questions. The author observed students and interviewed them. Unfortunately, she did not see any English lesson because the English teacher was not present at school that day.

The author have visited five democratic schools, interviewed teachers and students and observed students' learning both in English language lessons (where possible) and outside it. In the following chapter the results of the research are described.

IV. RESULTS AND COMMENTARIES

In this chapter the findings are presented and discussed. First data from observations of learning without a teacher are outlined. Then findings from observations in English lessons are given. After that results from the interviews with the staff/teachers are shared. And finally results from the interviews with students are presented. The information collected through the individual research tools (observations and interviews) is synthesized for all five visited schools so that the results are not allied with any specific school.

**Observations Outside Lessons**

The first observation chart (see Appendix A) was constructed to note incidental as well as intentional learning for individuals or groups without a teacher. There were twelve learning situations noted down during five days in five democratic schools. Eleven of them can be considered incidental learning – either acquiring English unconsciously or using the current knowledge of English. The twelfth situation can be considered on the edge of incidental and intentional learning. Seven students were playing computer games (one student on his mobile phone, the rest on computers and laptops) in English, five times alone and the sixth time in group of four (each of them has his or her own computer, but they cooperated in a game online) which enabled them chatting online in English. Seventh activity was a computer cooperation game played by two players in front of one computer – played by a staff person and a student – they had to cooperate to achieve the goal the game set. The game was completely in English. Other four examples included using the current knowledge of English. First, two students were reading an instruction book for a board game in advanced English. Second, two students were listening to YouTube songs in English and reading headlines in English; one of them was sometimes singing lines from the song to her friend. Third, a student played the guitar and sang an English song; sometimes a few people sang with her. Fourth, group of four students played a board game with cards; there was a lot of writing in English on the cards – students had to read them in order to play the game successfully. In the last situation, a student was watching YouTube fairy-tales in English – he needed to understand English in order to be able to watch the fairy-tales; he was learning by doing the action.

There were twelve situations of students or groups of students of learning English

outside the English lessons. For most of them the main goal was not to learn English but do some other activity while English was the means to achieve this goal. All the students learnt "by doing" which means doing what they desired to do and in the process of doing they acquired some English.

**Observation in Lessons**

The second observation chart (see Appendix B) was constructed to observe English lessons (as defined in theoretical part). There were five lessons described:

The first lesson consisted of a board cooperative game called Dungeons & Dragons. There were five students and one staff member. The teacher was the leader of the game; he set a fantasy world for the game and other players were playing together as a team, saying what they want to do and where they want to go. The teacher had a leading role not because of his superior role but because of his experience with the game; he had equal and friendly relationship to other players as well as they towards him. Students themselves decided that they wanted to play the game and organized it. They also decided that they would speak in English. The students practised reading in preparation for the game – each of them had to read long English rules and create their own character – write down his or her features in English (describing personality). While playing they spoke and listened to each other and also made notes in their worksheets about the process of the game. Students behaved among themselves in naturally friendly manner. There was no division among students according to their age, though the game would probably be too difficult to play for students younger than twelve years. They played in a room with a round table – sitting at the round table, using worksheets and the board. There was a lot of support and scaffolding from the side of the staff and more experienced English users to those who weren't speaking English comfortably yet. They sometimes offered right words, finished sentences, gave time to think, answered in English to sentences in mother tongue. The group met regularly twice a week.

The second lesson was a board game session where only English was spoken. The teacher and students had the same role. The atmosphere was friendly. The lesson happened in a classroom, students and a teacher were sitting around a table and on the table.

The third lesson was a literature lesson that served as preparation for exams. There were three students and a teacher. The teacher had a mentoring role: she explained,

clarified, gave advice, gave tasks to students but let them partly decide about the program of the lesson. The teacher offered a part of the program and the rest was led by one student who wanted to go through a poem she prepared for the exams. The observed behaviour among each other was supportive – they helped each other with answers. The lesson took place in one of classrooms (rooms intended for lessons and group work), they were sitting round the table.

The fourth lesson was an English conversation of a student and a teacher, it lasted for thirty minutes and the topic was the current life situation of the student. At the end of the lesson, the time and topic of the next conversation lesson was negotiated. The teacher had a leading role; she asked questions and the student talked for most of the time. The teacher also suggested a topic for the next lesson and the student accepted it. The author estimates the student's language level in speaking to C1 level.

The fifth lesson was a literature lesson open to everybody interested in literature and was beneficial as exam preparation as well. There were three students and a teacher. In the first part of the lesson students put together a summary of what they had already read from the specified book and for the rest of the lesson they were reading together with the teacher from the book, taking roles. The teacher explained unknown expressions and words. The teacher determined the content of the lesson, for example which books to read. Students were helpful to each other – for example they helped each other with correct pronunciation. The lesson took place in a classroom, the teacher and students were sitting around a table. The lesson also encouraged thinking in connections: students were thinking about the content of the story and expressed their opinions about it.

There were five English lessons the author of this thesis witnessed. The main purpose of three of them lied in improving English knowledge and the knowledge of English literature; the other two lessons had the main goal of playing games, English was the communication language.

**Interviews with Staff**

The third tool used for the research was an interview with staff based on prepared questions (see Appendix C). There were questions from six areas the staff answered.

The first question asked whether the school felt any difficulties in English language teaching and if so, which. Three schools mentioned that students are not motivated enough

for English language learning, students either did not want any lessons at all or they used the offer of the teacher irregularly. At the same time two of these schools mentioned that it was questionable to see it as a difficulty because students have freedom to choose whether they want lessons or not. One school mentioned that it was problematic that they are not able to pay teachers enough money (teachers are sometimes even volunteers), because they had no support from the state; another school mentioned that it was difficult for them to find qualified English teachers who understood the concept, were enthusiastic about it and did not need much money at the same time.

The second question asked whether students started learning English in any specific age. All the schools answered that there is no specific age, when students start learning English. Students were allowed to do whatever they want at a given time and moment, they could start learning English at four or at fourteen, if they wish, or they did not have to learn it intentionally at all. In practise, however, children start acquiring English passively from the moment they come to school because English was part of the world around them, part of the school community – visitors spoke only English, films on TV were mostly in English in the Netherlands, most computer games were in English. In one school all the students at the age of fourteen or fifteen wanted to prepare for exams that are at the end of the high school (similar to maturity exam in the Czech Republic), because according to a staff member, without these exams, it was almost impossible to find a good job in this country. Other schools mentioned that there are always some students who want to prepare for the exams.

The third question considered the range of possibilities for learning different languages at schools – languages that can be learnt and are taught at schools. All the schools answered that all the languages can be learnt. If a student wanted to learn a language, he or she could start on his or her computer and then can ask the school meeting (school meeting as a decision-making power explained in theoretical part) for financial and organisational support, for example to find him a teacher or to buy him a specialized computer programme for learning the language. Concerning current staff equipment with languages at four schools there was an English teacher regularly present; at one school the other staff members could speak English sufficiently. The schools also named what languages their students wanted to learn so far except English, it was: German, French, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, Russian, Latin, Arabic and Italian. In some schools there were

also other language teachers coming regularly, for example German and French teachers, according to the current needs of their students.

The fourth question went into depth for English language teaching – asked whether there are any regular English lessons offered. In four schools, there were regular English language lessons offered and in one school currently not. In three schools out of four the English teacher was in school twice a week to offer lessons and consultations. The work of the teacher was slightly different in every school. In the first school the teacher offered open lessons done in en enjoyable way – a sequence of attractive activities and tasks for people who wanted to do something in English and then offered preparation for exams. In the second school, similarly, the teacher offered general English lessons of two proficiency levels and an exam preparation lesson. In the third school, the English teacher was a staff member so she was present the whole school-week. There were games every week where conversation skills were practised; there were two lessons a week that followed a coursebook – they were open to all students who wanted to learn; there were three lessons a week aimed at exam preparation – literature and individual mentoring.  In the last school an English teacher worked with students mostly individually, offering individual lessons as preparation for exams, conversation lessons and mentoring; sometimes she organized an English game for a group of students.

The fifth question was about the availability of English materials and sources at school. All the schools answered that students mostly use their own electronic devices (mobile phones, laptops, touch-pads) and the Internet as a source of information. All the schools had a strong Wi-Fi connection accessible at the school-grounds, since the Internet was considered one of the most important sources of information and knowledge. All the schools had accessible books in English and coursebooks for students to use, but at the same time they said that these paper sources were not used much, students generally preferred the Internet. All the schools offered the possibility for students to use the school laptop or desktop computers. Most of the schools had some DVDs with films but they said that students preferred watching films and videos on the Internet.

The sixth question tackled knowledge of an English teacher or a staff person about the level of English of the students. All the schools answered that they did not measure the level of English of their students; it would be against democratic principles. English teachers usually had a general idea about the level of English of individual students from

several occasions when students could perform their English knowledge. These occasions were for example speaking with visitors, while travelling, speaking in English language lessons and on special occasions like the English month activity, where those who wish could speak only English for a month. Teachers generally estimated the level of passive knowledge of students as high (absorbed language unconsciously by doing things in it e.g. from watching films and playing games) and their active skills as improving according to their age and interest. Two teachers said that they were sometimes surprised how well a child is able to speak, even though it did not taken any lessons with them.

**Interviews with Students**

The fourth tool used for the research was an interview with students based on prepared questions (see Appendix D). Twenty-three students were interviewed. Students for the research were chosen randomly, most of them were older than fourteen years, because older students were more likely to able to able to answer in English. There were a few younger students who could not speak English but still willing to answer questions – on these occasions, staff were translating questions to the mother language of the students and students' answers back to English. Concerning gender, students were chosen for the research equally, there were approximately half of female and half of male respondents. There were questions from six areas.

The first area concerned incidental learning of English. All the students answered that they watched films, series or YouTube videos in English, even though sometimes these had subtitles in their first language. Some students added other situations when they use their English, namely playing computer games, reading news on the Internet, discovering the Internet, reading Wikipedia, communicating with friends who do not speak their first language, reading books, using English for learning another foreign language, talking to foreign people, watching TV and listening to songs.

The second part aimed at intentional usage of English alone or in group (but not in English lessons with a teacher). Eleven students answered they were not learning English intentionally. Seven students answered that they were learning English intentionally because they were preparing for their exams; five of them learnt alone, two of them learnt with a friend. Five students learnt English intentionally because they wanted to improve some aspect of their English or general comprehension skills.

The third part was aimed at English language lessons – intentional usage of English with a teacher. Thirteen students said they do not go to any language lessons with a teacher. One student had a conversation lesson; seven students attended English lessons because they wanted to pass their exams and two students attended general English lessons because they liked them.

The fourth part asked for motivation to learn English intentionally. Ten students had no motivation to learn English and they did not learn it intentionally. Four students said that they want to learn English because is a useful and international language; two students said they like English; two students mentioned that their motivation was to improve specific skills: writing, pronunciation, and knowledge of vocabulary. One student mentioned he wanted to learn English in order to understand YouTube videos and eight students said they wanted to improve English because they wanted to pass their exams.

The fifth question asked about the amount of time students devoted to intentional learning of English either in lessons or outside of them. Eleven students mentioned they devoted no time to intentional learning. Two students mentioned they spend one and a half hour a week learning English, one student two hours. Two students mentioned from two to three hours a week. Two students said they spend four hours a week learning English. One student mentioned seven hours a week and two students said they spend eight hours a week learning English. One student was learning language most of his time at school by improving his passive skills – mainly listening.

The sixth question was aimed at tools students used for learning English. Eleven students said they did not use any equipment since they were not learning English intentionally; they used mostly their laptops for learning English incidentally while playing computer games or watching films, series, videos or listening to music. Nine students said they used their laptop (or touchpad) and the Internet for learning English; five of them mentioned also other sources, namely: grammar books, the teacher, coursebooks, DVDs and readers. Three students mentioned they studied with coursebooks.

## Summary of Results

**Research Questions**

With regards to the results of the research, the research question and sub-questions can be answered. Research sub-questions will be stated and after every question there will follow an answer from the research.

1.  Do the students learn English either incidentally or intentionally outside the English lessons?

All questioned students learnt English incidentally because some of activities they liked doing contained English. They discovered the necessity of knowing the language for communication and for enjoying products of international society such as games and films. Only very rarely students learnt English intentionally without a teacher if they did not prepare for exams. Most of the situations of voluntary intentional learning was because of exam preparation.

2.  Is English taught in English lessons?

The fact that not all schools had regular English lessons is surprising from the traditional point of view of schooling, for the democratic schools; however, it only affirms the principle of freedom. Even though there were no compulsory lessons, and in case of one school there were not even voluntary lessons offered, the incidental as well as intentional (though intentional not for every student) learning took place (although it has to be said that there is no factual/measurable evidence to show that).

3.  How are these lessons organized?

Lessons are organised according to the needs of the students. At three schools out of four English lessons were offered, in some schools general English was taught in a sequence of enjoyable activities, in other literature courses or exam preparation were offered. In one school lessons were usually individual and in the other school there was no demand for English lessons at all.

4.  Who determines the content of the lesson?

The content of the lesson is either determined by the teacher who prepares a regular program and offers it to the students as a possibility or students together with the teacher make a deal of what they wish to learn and how. At traditional schools, goals are usually set by teachers while at democratic schools they are usually set by students or through the collaboration of students and teachers.

5.  Are there any difficulties in English language teaching at democratic schools?

Most of the schools saw it as a problem that their students do not attend English lessons enough, but at the same time they said that it is their choice. Two schools mentioned a problem having not enough finance to pay staff properly – the state refusing to give them any financial support.

6.  Do students start learning English at any specific age?

Students do not start learning English at any specific age because freedom of choice is one of the main democratic principles. It can be stated from the observations, however, that most of the students have good passive knowledge of English and a considerable part of older students is able to communicate in English without problems.

7.  What languages can students learn at democratic schools?

Any languages students wish can be learnt at democratic schools, because there is freedom in learning. If students need help in learning a language, schools try to find them needed support.

8.  What languages are taught at democratic schools?

Languages taught depend on the needs of individual schools. In one school, no language is taught by means of language lessons. In other schools, English is taught regularly, and in some of the schools other languages are taught as well.

9.  What is the level of English of students at democratic schools?

None of the schools measures the level of English of its students in any organised way; internal school exams are against the philosophy of democratic schooling. Staff can estimate the level of English of some students when they see them "doing things" in English, for example talking to foreigners or reading in English, but even staff members are sometimes surprised (usually positively) by the language level of their students.

10. What is the motivation of students to learn English?

The students who learnt English intentionally either in lessons or alone had different reasons for doing so. The prevailing motivation evolved around exam preparation. Quite a large number of students had their own inner motivation to pass the exams at the end of their secondary school studies and prepared for them conscientiously with the help of an English teacher as well as alone. Some students wanted to improve their English skills and some students learnt English because they liked the language or found it useful.

11. How much time do students devote to learning English intentionally?

The time devoted to intentional learning of English greatly varied according to individual students from no time to most of the school-time. The flexibility of the system – freedom for students – allowed them to accommodate their own learning exactly according to their current needs and wishes.

12. What tools are available in schools for learning English and what tools students use?

All the schools had Internet access which they saw as an important source of information for students. Except of this they offered more traditional tools for learning such as coursebooks, readers or DVDs. All the schools also had some desktop computers or laptops for students' use. Most of the students; however, preferred using their own devices. Only eight out of twenty-three questioned students responded that they use for intentional learning some other tools (for example coursebooks, grammar-books or readers) in addition to using their electronic devices. For incidental learning, readers were used by approximately a quarter of the questioned students.

**Language Learning Theory**

With regard to the language learning theory, democratic schools support individual approach – learner-centred teaching – and inner motivation. Developing inner motivation is a headstone of learning at democratic schools. Teachers try to avoid outer motivation such as rewards or grades to allow inner motivation to develop. An individual approach is always based on a specific student's needs, his or her goals and personality, but methods how to achieve the student's goal can be numerous. During the research the author saw individual lessons as well as group lessons.

Concerning the amount of input and output of English for students, all the schools named the large amount of input that students had. Students exposed themselves to a great amount of input of the English language (for example games and films) and they could use teachers for feedback or other guidance if they wish to focus on the language itself. The amount of output depended on individual student's wishes. Teachers offered students possibilities for controlled and freer output and students themselves could decide to use the language more actively, for example at one school two students decided that they would speak with each other only in English.

From the observed lessons, the author saw that the teachers tried to enhance a positive approach to language. For example in the literature lesson, students and a teacher were discussing what some interesting chunks of language mean and what it meant in the past. Reading English books also developed students' positive attitude towards English.

Professional standards of the encountered teachers was high, most of them were qualified teachers. Their level of knowledge was sufficient; what is more important, their relationship with students was friendly and they were able to create an inspiring and positive learning atmosphere. The observed lessons were effectively managed and provided opportunities for success and cooperation.

V. IMPLICATIONS

This chapter further discusses data collected in the practical part and describes their pedagogical implications as well as limitations of the research. At the end of the chapter, possible improvements of this research and suggestions for further research are offered.

**Pedagogical Implications**

The philosophy of democratic schools is based on the principle of self-directed learning which means freedom of choice what to do or not to do for individual students. This method supports inner motivation of students and brings long lasting fruits to English language learning, because those students, who decide to learn, learn from their own will. Teachers at traditional schools can hardly implement this philosophy into their daily teaching, but they can use at least some parts of it. They can for example offer choice to their students whenever possible and allow them more space for self-fulfilment. Teachers can discuss with their students goals and contents of lessons. Creative and friendly atmosphere can be supported by using continuous assessment, portfolios and projects in English language teaching.

At democratic schools, students had a large amount of input. At traditional school, teachers can encourage extensive reading, which also enhances positive relationship of students towards English. A useful way how to do it is to offer space for extensive reading in English language lessons. Literature lessons can also be offered; teachers can watch and discuss films with their students and evaluate positively any activity of students done in the English language, even though the activity would be a computer game. Teachers can for example try one "free" lesson a week where pupils could do anything as long as the activity was in the English language. Students could then share what they did with their friends and develop their conversation skills.

In the lessons observed the author saw a huge potential for learning English comprehension skills in gaming lessons. During these lessons a lot of spoken every-day English has to be used to maintain the game, what is more, students enjoyed the games and there is a chance that students in traditional schools, when given choice to choose the game, would enjoy the lessons as well. The author saw one lesson of a group partly-board game Dungeons & Dragons and considered it a perfect game for English conversation

because it consists mostly of talking and a lot of useful expressions must be used. The teacher and more experienced English users can offer scaffolding to not-so-much-experienced students as it happened in the lesson observed.

According to the research, most students used as their main tool for learning their electronic devices such as notebooks, tablets, touchpads or smart phones; therefore, students themselves consider these devices as most interesting and useful working tools for them. Teachers can take this into account when creating their English lessons and try to implement these technologies into learning. They can start by discussing this issue with the school headquarters whether to allow or not to allow students using their electronic devices at school in general (for example at some traditional schools there is a complete ban of using mobile phones) and then discussing with students the usefulness of their devices. It is probable that students would enjoy lessons more if allowed to use their electronic devices for learning purposes.

## Limitations of the Research

The collected data provide insights into language teaching practices in democratic schools yet they are very limited. First the chosen schools were located mostly in one country – the Netherlands. This fact is important when talking about incidental learning because in the Netherlands, all films on television are in their original language, only with Dutch subtitles. There is no dubbing for films in English. People in the Netherland have, therefore, more possibilities for incidental learning than in some other countries, for example in the Czech Republic, where films are dubbed. Second, responding schools as well as students and staff in them, were chosen randomly, but not randomly according to mathematical probability, therefore, there was a human factor that could have influenced the research slightly. Finally, the chosen sample of schools was not that big to allow generalisation for all democratic schools in Europe or in the world.

This research tried to examine teaching and learning practice of English at democratic schools, we must; however, consider two facts that influenced learning of students and teaching of staff in these schools. First it is important to note that most of the schools in this research were established a short time ago – three of the school have existed for less than three years – it is, therefore, clear that a huge percentage of students did not grow up in democratic schools from childhood but came from traditional schools in older

age. In the theoretical part it was already mentioned that the higher the age of the student is to come to democratic school, the more difficult it is for him or her to adjust to the democratic principles. Therefore it can be assumed that in these schools there was a large percentage of students who did not yet accommodated themselves fully to democratic principles and therefore cannot fully serve as a "model" school to show how democratic learning works. Second, it is also important to point out the small number of students at these schools. When the number of students is very low, there is not enough diversity of age and interests and it can be assumed that the general level of "inspiration" – the general atmosphere where one student inspires another for doing something – can suffer. To confirm it, however, more research would need to be carried out.

## Suggestions for Further Research

Because of the individual character and freedom of democratic schools, at the beginning of this research the author of the thesis presupposed great differences among individual schools. That is why she had chosen research tools that were open for modification. If she should carry this research again or continue with it, she would specify the research tools based on the knowledge she got from the current experience. She would inquire more deeply about the age of the schools themselves as well as how long individual students have been a part of the school. She would change mainly the set of questions based for interview with pupils to aim more at the differences between incidental and intentional learning; especially she would specify incidental and intentional learning in non-expert way for respondents, using examples from practise.

Another change the author would make if she had the chance to carry on this research would be to stay in one democratic school for longer time period, at least for a week. It would ensure that she sees some English lessons as well as she would have a chance to penetrate more deeply into the life of the democratic community of the school. Another idea to continue in the research is to visit democratic schools in different countries and compare results with this study.

In this chapter, suggestions how to use the data from the research part were offered, limitations of the research were discussed with regard to research tools as well as other factors and improvements for further research were suggested. In the next part, main ideas of the thesis are summarised.

VI. CONCLUSION

The thesis deals with the topic of English language teaching at democratic schools. These schools have their own unique philosophy of learning that is based on democratic principles, respect of other people and rules decided by the school community; self-directed learning which enables students to choose freely how they spend their time in school; age-mixing and belief in children that regardless of their age, they know best what is best for them and their development and learning at the given time and moment. The democratic schools' movement stresses the idea that children must have space and time to play and experience happy childhood to become mature adults. The school community is there to offer children suitable conditions to become competent, caring and responsible people. The specific democratic school philosophy is also reflected in English language learning and teaching.

The premise of the author of the thesis that even though compulsory English lessons are not present at democratic schools, some sort of English language learning occurs, had been confirmed. According to the results of the research the prevailing part of English language learning at democratic schools happens incidentally. Students do activities that are in English or that need English to be completed. While doing these activities, students learn English either consciously or unconsciously. Thanks to this passive influence of English on students, most of them have good passive knowledge of the English language which was noted in observations and interviews with staff/teachers. There was also intentional learning happening at democratic schools. Most of the students who learnt intentionally were preparing for their leaving examination which they decided to take. A few students wished to improve their English language skills and worked themselves or with a teacher on improving these skills. Some students learnt English because they liked the language or found it useful. English lessons happened according to the interest of students. At all the schools there were activities that were defined according to the author of this thesis as "English language lesson", even though some of them would probably not normally be considered English lessons in the traditional view, for example playing board games in English.

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**Observations Outside Lessons**

Did I see anyone learning English? What did it look like?

| | Student/group 1 | Student/group 2 | Student/group 3 | Student/group 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alone/in pairs/in small groups(3-5)/ in bigger groups (6 and more)– behaviour towards each other | | | | |
| Passive skills – listening, reading | | | | |
| Active skills – speaking, writing | | | | |
| Learning space – arrangement, tools used | | | | |
| Notes | | | | |

**Observations in Lessons**

Did I see any form of an organized English lesson? What did it look like?

|  | Lesson 1 | Lesson 2 | Lesson 3 | Lesson 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alone/in pairs/in small groups(3-5)/ in bigger groups (6 and more) |  |  |  |  |
| Role of the teacher – students' behaviour towards the teacher |  |  |  |  |
| Who decided the goals of the lesson? (Who decided the topic and skills taught?) |  |  |  |  |
| behaviour towards each other among students |  |  |  |  |
| Were students divided for the lesson? If so, according to age, abilities or interests? |  |  |  |  |
| Learning space – arrangement, tools used |  |  |  |  |
| Notes |  |  |  |  |

**Interviews with Staff**

- ***What difficulty** is your school facing in English language learning?*

- *Do the students start learning English in any **specific age**?*

- ***What languages** are taught/can be learnt at this school?*

- ***How** do students generally learn English in here?*
  - *Are regular lessons offered?*
    - *When and where they happen?*
    - *How are these lessons organized?*
    - *Who determine the content of the lesson?*
  - *What support from the side of the teacher can be offered? (consultation, lessons, ...)*
  - *Other:*

- ***What English sources** do you have here at school available for students?*
  - *English books and readers –*
  - *Course books –*
  - *Computers with Internet connection –*
  - *English audio and video material – films, music, audio books, etc. -*
  - *Other:*

- *Do you know what the approximate **level of English** of each student is? What can students do in English (skills vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, knowledge of English culture in different English speaking countries ...)?*

*Other information about the school:*
- *Do they have a school meeting?*
- *Do they decide democratically or use sociocracy?*

**Interviews with Students**

- ***Do you*** *currently learn English?* YES – NO

- ***Why*** *(do you have any specific motivation – what is your purpose)?*

- ***Where*** *do you usually study English?*

- ***When*** *and how long do you usually study English?*

- ***With whom****? Do you usually learn on your own, with a friend, with staff, or with more people around you?*

- ***What tools*** *do you use for learning English? (Computer programmes, internet, books, audio listening – e.g. audio books, radio, films; conversation with staff and other students, English lessons given by staff, tutoring from friends, etc.)*

- ***What area*** *of English do you study (What area of English – vocabulary, grammar, skills, linguistics, phonology – slang, jargon, realia and culture of English speaking countries)?*

**Democratisch Onderwijs Eindhoven (DOE)**

1. *Address:* Den Dolech 2 5612 AZ
   Eindhoven, the Netherlands
2. *Contact:* +31 40-2988838, info@doe040.nl
3. *Web pages: www.doe040.nl*
4. *Number of students when the research was held:* 56
5. *Allowed age of students:* 4-21
6. *School was founded in:* September 2014
7. *School building:* Detached ground-floor
   house with grass and play-ground in front
   of it



Figure 1. *Democratisch Onderwijs
Eindhowen (DOE, n.d.)*

**Democratische School De Ruimte**

1. *Address:* Insingerstraat 39, 3766 MA Soest, the Netherlands
2. *Contact:* +31 (035)-6015321, info@deruimtesoest.nl
3. *Web pages:* http://www.deruimtesoest.nl/
4. *Number of students when the research was held:* 150
5. *Allowed age of students:* 2-22
6. *School was founded in:* 2002
7. *School building:* Detached extensive ground-floor building with basement, lots of
   grass and play-ground around it



Figure 2. *Democratische School De Ruimte (Democratische School De Ruimte, n.d.)*

**Demokratische Schule X**

1. *Address:* Keilerstr. 17A, 13503 Berlin, Germany
2. *Contact:* +49 30 – 609 22 621, info@demokratische-schule-x.de
3. *Web pages:* http://www.demokratische-schule-x.de/
4. *Number of students when the research was held:* 35-60
5. *Allowed age of students:* data not available
6. *School was founded in:* data not available
7. *School building:* Detached two-storey house, space for playing around the building, playground


Figure 3. *Demokratische Schule X*

**Libertad Democratische School**

1. *Address:* Doelen 36, 4813 GR Breda, the Netherlands
2. *Contact: +31 6 28309035,* info@libertad-breda.nl
3. *Web pages:* http://www.libertad-breda.nl/
4. *Approximate number of students when the research was held:* 11
5. *Allowed age of students:*12-18
6. *School was founded in:* 2014
7. *School building:* Upper flood of the large building, possibility to use sport facilities nearby.


Figure 4. *Libertad Democratische School*

**Sudburyschool Harderwijk**

1. *Address:* Laan 1940 - 1945 1, 3841
   JA Harderwijk, the Netherlands
2. *Contact:* +31 341 269 027,
   contact@newschool.nu
3. *Web pages:*
   http://sudburyschoolharderwijk.nl/
4. *Number of students when the research
   was held:* 18
5. *Allowed age of students:* 4-19
6. *School was founded in:* September 2014
7. *School building:* Detached ground-floor house with grass around and its parting
   places



Figure 5. *Sudburyschool Harderwijk*

SHRNUTÍ

Diplomová práce se zabývá tématem výuky a učení se anglického jazyka na specifickém typu škol – demokratických školách. Tyto školy mají vlastní jedinečnou filosofii učení se, která je založena na demokratických principech, respektu k ostatním lidem a k pravidlům, která určí školní komunita; sebeřízení v učení, které umožňuje každému žákovi si svobodně vybrat, jak bude trávit svůj čas ve škole; různorodosti věku dětí a víře v dítě, že bez ohledu na svůj věk ví nejlépe, co je v daný moment pro jeho vývoj a učení nejlepší. Hnutí demokratických škol zdůrazňuje myšlenku, že děti musí mít prostor a čas k hraní a prožití šťastného dětství, aby se z nich mohli stát vyspělí dospělí lidé. Školní komunita je od toho, aby nabídla dětem vhodné podmínky pro jejich vývoj ke kompetentnímu, pečujícímu a zodpovědnému člověku. Specifická filosofie demokratických škol se také odráží ve výuce a učení se anglického jazyka, které se uskutečňuje mnoha způsoby.

Předpoklad, který autorka práce měla před vykonáním výzkumu, že i když se na demokratických školách nekonají povinné hodiny anglického jazyka, přesto se učení angličtiny děje, může být potvrzen jako správný. Dle výsledků z výzkumu, převažující část učení se anglickému jazyku se na demokratických školách děje nezáměrně. Žáci dělají činnosti, které jsou v anglickém jazyce nebo anglický jazyk vyžadují ke svému zvládnutí, například sledují filmy v angličtině, hrají počítačové hry v angličtině nebo čtou anglické články na internetu. Během těchto činností se žáci učí angličtinu ať již vědomě či nevědomě. Díky tomuto pasivnímu vlivu angličtiny na žáky má většina z nich dobrou pasivní znalost angličtiny, což bylo zaznamenáno při pozorování a v rozhovorech s personálem/učiteli. Na demokratických školách ale probíhalo také záměrné učení. Většina žáků, kteří se záměrně učili, se připravovala na maturitní zkoušku, kterou chtěli složit. Několik studentů chtělo zlepšit své dovednosti v určité oblasti anglického jazyka a pracovali buď sami, nebo s učitelem na zlepšení této dovednosti. Někteří studenti se učili anglicky, protože měli rádi angličtinu nebo jim připadala užitečná. Hodiny angličtiny se konaly dle zájmu studentů, na všech školách byly zaznamenány činnosti, které byly autorkou práce definovány jako „hodiny anglického jazyka" (v části práce „Definice termínů"), i když některé z nich by pravděpodobně z tradičního pohledu za hodiny anglického jazyka považovány nebyly, například hraní deskových her v anglickém jazyce.