

LANGUAGES, LITERATURES, AND LITERACIES.  
RESEARCHING PARADOXES AND NEGOTIATIONS IN  
SCANDINAVIAN L1 SUBJECTS

Introduction

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

For many decades, "The Nordic Model of Education" (Telhaug, Mediaas, & Aasen, 2006) has been a recognized metaphor for the open and democratic educational system in Scandinavian countries. Education has been a primary political objective for the Social Democratic governments that have held majority seats in Scandinavian parliaments for substantial periods in the post-war period. According to Telhaug, Mediaas, and Aasen (2006), schooling should be involved in the realization of "social goals such as equal opportunities and community fellowship" (p. 245). Several studies also show that the post-war commitment to public schools and opportunities for education had a democratic effect (Aamodt & Stølen, 2003).

The Scandinavian countries generally followed the same course but at different tempos. A main source of inspiration for the post-war educational reforms were progressive ideas about the active and "doing" student, which drew largely on Dewey's philosophy of learning by doing. As Johnson and Lakoff (1999) have described, this became a liberating metaphor constructed in pre-modern times (Bruner, 1996; Dewey, 1897, 1996; cp. Petersson & Olsson, 2005; Popkewitz, 2005). In the Scandinavian context, however, it became an established part of the educational discourse during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, gradually absorbing new meanings although sustaining the progressivist and liberating associations. Thus, the notion of the free and active student—with a mentoring and facilitating teacher—still remains a powerful metaphor in Scandinavian educational discourse (Dale, 2010; Foros & Vetlesen, 2012; Penne, 2012; Krogh, Penne, & Ulfgard, 2012).

The Nordic model of education entered a new phase in the 1960s and 70s as it was revived from new sources. The new international radicalism was followed by an increasing cultural focus on what Telhaug et al. (2006) describe as the "pupil's individual emancipation" so that the local impact on educational development was strengthened (p. 256).

The overarching goal of the Scandinavian school has been inclusion. Therefore, there has been little foregrounding of student performance and grading levels in public debate and in policy plans. This changed, however, in the 2000s with the OECD PISA studies. The fact that Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish students repeatedly achieved mediocre results in the PISA studies has had severe effects on the democratic self-image and outward reputation of the Scandinavian educational systems. Foros and Vetlesen (2012) have explained that former educational ideals and conceptual metaphors like *the learner at the center* and *equality through education* suddenly lost political relevance and were replaced by more meritocratic and utilitarian programs. According to Telhaug et al. (2006) the Nordic school in the 1980s entered its third and final phase:

In the third and final phase, the Nordic school model was of less importance in comparison with other countries. Partly as a result of new globalisation and free markets, economic competition between nations gained greater influence over school philosophy and development. (p. 245)

Paradoxically, the transition from phase 2 to phase 3 has not been too dramatic. The traditional Scandinavian educational ideology of "the learner at the center" was gradually taken over by more global standards that cultivated a focus on learning, competence, and outcome orientation. There is a continually strong focus on the individual, but the meaning-making metaphor has successively changed (Johnson & Lakoff, 1999). Foros and Vetlesen (2012) remind us that while young people in the 1960s and 1970s fought for democratic *rights* so everyone could "realize themselves," today's young people face relentless *demands* to realize themselves: "The cult of personal responsibility" tightens its grip at a time of major systemic changes and reforms (p. 53). To a high degree, traditional educational *Bildung* aims have been dissolved by neoliberal notions of the school as a manufacturer of human resources for national competitiveness. Foros and Vetlesen (2012) have stated it as follows:

The shift of control and assessment from the external to the internal is accompanied by a certain rhetoric, recognisable from thousands of leadership and management courses and just as many restructuring processes initiated by New Public Management. To use a programmatic expression: One goes from programmatic management to individual autonomy. The individual pupil, student, client or colleague is the focus of attention. (p. 58)

Responsibility is accordingly placed on the individual while control over attainment of that objective is external. Consequently, the teacher's role has become more complicated than in previous phases. Instructors are still guiding resources for their individual students, but at the same time they are accountable for institutional reputation when it comes to test results—local, national, and international. As a successful teacher, the educator needs to guide active students in their learning while also maintaining progress in the PISA competition.

## 2. L1: AN EXPOSED SUBJECT IN A TIME OF CHANGE

L1 is a humanistic and hermeneutic subject. By virtue of its closeness to everyday language and different dominant cultural distinctions of our day, it is particularly vulnerable. This is especially true when the focus on individuality is increasing in the learning context (Gee, 2012; Wertsch, 1995; Bruner 1986, 1990; Ziehe, 2007). Language and discourses mediate meaning. Along these lines, Penne (2006) and Bakken and Elstad (2012) note that a strong focus on the achievements of the individual learner, and a society increasingly focused on the individual, may create a less democratic school. In such cases, students' pre-understandings and home cultures will deeply affect their school results. L1 researchers and professionals have a special responsibility to develop didactic knowledge in this area—a major theme of this special issue.

Times are rapidly changing for the three Scandinavian L1 subjects: Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish. During the last 10-15 years, we have seen dramatic shifts in goals and general tasks as well as in the conceptualization of subject contents. As

Elf and Kaspersen (2012) reveal, paradoxes and paradigm negotiations now characterize each subject. Denmark, Norway, and Sweden have traditionally been somewhat homogeneous societies. In this milieu, the L1 subjects have served—more or less—as nationally regulated, stable constructions in which the language and literature dyad was untouchable and well defined as the cornerstones of nation-building aims (Nordstoga, 2003; Aase, 2007; Krogh, 2003; Henningsen & Sørensen, 1995; Thavenius, 1991, 2005). Currently, though, issues of cultural heterogeneity have entered the Scandinavian L1 subjects. Due to a growing trend of immigration during the last 30-40 years, a previously unknown ethnical and linguistic diversity is now the rule in most classrooms. This development has raised issues regarding both literature and language instruction.

As a reaction against this new situation, from the 1990s, and in accordance with late-modern tendencies of cultural deconstruction, debates have arisen about the literary canon—the national literature in schools (Thavenius, 1991; Andreassen & Berge 2001). As a result, literature has lost its former status in the said Scandinavian classrooms (Kaspersen, 2012; Sjöstedt, 2013; Persson, 2012). Steinfeld (2009) and Penne (2010) both confirm that the historical perspective of the L1 subject, as cultivated mainly in literature studies, has also been reduced. This circumstance is particularly true in Sweden and Norway but is also clearly present in Denmark even though Denmark's change has perhaps been somewhat delayed in comparison to its Scandinavian neighbors (Sjöstedt, 2013).

Digital media represent another aspect of heterogeneity. "Language" as a field of study no longer entails verbal discourse alone but also covers visual and other semiotic resources for expression and communication. "Literature" is being transformed as well as it extends into digital, interactive literary practices along with patterns of L1 literary studies. Performance and written interaction with literary texts have been a part of literature didactics for decades. As documented by Penne (2012), current textbooks tend to give priority to students' own reflective and experimental writing practices at the cost of more comprehensive reading exercises. This tendency can be viewed in light of research from Brandt (2015), who has studied the current status of reading and writing in American workplaces. Brandt finds that for the first time in the history of mass literacy, writing seems to be eclipsing reading as the literate experience of consequence in common people's work life (p. 3). In addition, Christensen, Elf, & Krogh (2014) have found that young people now write more outside of school than in school.

A third issue of heterogeneity is related to the aforementioned cultural features of globalization and individualization. Sawyer and Van de Ven (2006) substantiate that a utilitarian paradigm currently dominates European L1 subjects. This situation reflects the global educational values of competition and innovation and will lead to the standardization of goals and outcome-based governance. Accordingly, in Scandinavian countries, an adaptation to the OECD educational policies—including the testing system—has led to a pragmatic turn towards skills and literacy in the L1 subjects of Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish (Ongstad, 2015; Krogh, 2012; Sjöstedt,

2013). As an example, the present Norwegian curriculum (2006) can be read as an adaptation to the testing system to the detriment of the *Bildung* values and subject content (Ongstad, 2015). Reading and writing is less focused on cultural forms such as aesthetic or investigative actions or on the distinctions between the literary and the fictional (Krogh, 2012a; Penne, 2010; Årheim, 2007). The traditional L1 dyad of "language and literature" now calls for quotation marks and appears more convincingly represented in the plural forms of languages, literatures, and literacies.

As already indicated in various references, the historical tendencies we are discussing are by no means peculiar to the Scandinavian countries but are also very well known in our globalized world (Kamens, 2013; Ravitch, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Nonetheless, in Scandinavia these changes are actualized in a specific cultural setting as the introduction above has shown. The current patterns of change and reactions in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden may provide a deeper insight into what is generally at stake. The Scandinavian school systems and Scandinavian L1 subjects have been protected discourses with proud educational traditions, justified by democratic values. But they are now faced with challenging paradoxes and contradictions as the traditional *Bildung* goals of schooling—and of the L1 subjects in particular—are being contested and are in flux.

Indeed, the present situation for Scandinavian education, and specifically L1 education, appears insecure, and the losses seem to be more obvious than the gains. Nevertheless, Scandinavian L1 research offers analyses and reflections on possible directions for transforming the strong didactic tradition of Scandinavian L1 education in order to address current cultural and educational challenges. One such case is Krogh's (2012b) study of Scandinavian L1 teachers' reflections on writing as part of their teaching practice. Krogh has found that a group of teachers, viewing and practicing writing as an integral part of L1, accentuated both competence and *Bildung* aims such as supporting student language, literary competence, and personal and social development. These teachers were obviously able to draw on disciplinary didactic knowledge and experiences that provided them with both a sense of direction and tools for action when faced with challenges.

The present special issue takes these questions further, investigating contemporary challenges and conflicts in Scandinavian L1 education and asking how these issues can be elucidated and discussed in a wider spectrum of current L1 research. What rationalities and justifications are found when previous justifications appear to have lost their meaning and relevance? Where will we find new directions for general didactic perspectives and for action in the classroom? Accordingly, the first four articles primarily investigate critical problems and dilemmas in Scandinavian L1 education while the following three explore new frontiers in L1 research and didactics.

### 3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The contribution by Sylvi Penne and Dag Skarstein, "The L1 Subject in a World of Increasing Individualism. Democratic Paradoxes in Norwegian L1 Classrooms," (2015) takes its point of departure in Norwegian quantitative research. As such, it substantiates that social inequalities are increasing in the Norwegian educational system — as in so many other countries — although the public school system has been maintained and further developed. The article explores this issue, with emphasis on the L1-subject and two recent qualitative studies from lower and upper secondary school. The goal of both studies was to investigate background factors for learning difficulties as well as successes in the hermeneutic and humanistic L1 subject.

A consistent pattern in both studies is that becoming a clever student is both a matter of identity—of accepting the identity of a student in a learning context—and a matter of being open for new and different discourses. Making this switch necessitates the ability to integrate reflections and interpretations and implement the abstract thinking expressed through meta-language. Students who operate in this manner benefit from the freedom offered in a student-oriented school. This freedom may, however, pose problems for weaker students. According to Penne's and Skarstein's (2015) analysis, one backdrop for this is L1's close relationship to our interpretation of everyday discourses and understandings. The closeness to everyday language and culture creates a learning environment that is particularly vulnerable to the identity constructions of less motivated contemporary students (i.e., their previously acquired experiences, affinities, likes, and dislikes).

Two tendencies appear concerning weaker students: firstly, students who predominantly mediate affinity have a weak student identity or institutional identity. They rarely reflect strategically when confronted with a school's institutional demands. In these students' accounts, school is not perceived to be an arena for learning but, instead, as a social arena. Secondly, for a large group of the informants, their language is not a tool for further learning. Interpretation and hermeneutical understanding arise only when they include meta-thinking.

Penne and Skarstein (2015) claim that these two characteristics are closely linked since one naturally leads to the other. Thus, drawing on Wertsch, Del Rio, and Alvarez (1995), they find that instead of assuming the individual alone is the agent of action, student identity should more accurately be understood as an "individual operating with mediational means." As it concludes, the article proposes that the importance of language as a mediating tool in the learning context should be more of a focus in the classroom. Apart from being substantiated in the present studies, these findings and analyses are supported by a larger, joint Scandinavian study based on L1-teacher interviews.

While Penne and Skarstein (2015) discuss current L1 classroom practices and the weakening learning opportunities of less privileged students, Sigmund

Ongstad's (2015) study provides a historical analysis of changes within Norwegian L1 curricula. "Competing Disciplinarity in Curricular L1. A Norwegian Case" takes its point of departure in the observation that the notions of discipline and disciplinarity appear to be at stake under contemporary curricular and political conditions. The article applies the idea of three developmental stages that a school subject might run through over time: a *first stage* is the transformation of specific knowledges into an educationally defined syllabus; a *second stage* is related to didactization, a process where knowledge and content elements are deliberately mixed with pedagogical concerns, forming new kinds of disciplinarity; and a possible *third stage* is associated with politically initiated curricular reforms where a certain kind of disciplinarity is made explicit.

It took 150 years (1739-1889) for 'Norwegian' to materialize from "aspects" such as reading, Christianity, and writing, to an independent school subject. The processes of didactization (the second stage) were connected to democratic nation building and later to a psychology-oriented pedagogy aimed at developing the individual pupil's identity and creativity. A third stage was reached in the 1997 curriculum in which Norwegian was realized as a classical, *Bildung* subject that integrated the pupils' interests (identity and experience), the school subject's domain (education and culture), and society's interest in able communicators (skills and communication). This disciplinary profile was, on the other hand, changed with the 2006 curriculum in which Norwegian is seen not as much as a defined content (nouns) but rather as an action (verbs). Furthermore, a chapter on basic aptitudes such as reading, writing, and oral skills is integrated in the description of all subjects. In a recent revision, particular responsibility for basic skills across the curriculum is ascribed to L1.

Recently, curricula have been backed up with an extensive use of international, national, and local tests. All of the assessments described knowledge, skills, and general competences—specified in bullet points—as disciplines that are expected to be testable. Thus, focus has been moved from signaling expected goals to formulating a precise and measurable outcome.

Ongstad discusses two impact factors contributing to the curricular developments of the L1 subject of Norwegian. An external and top-down impact is the politically motivated worldwide trend called "focused curricula," holding increased emphasis on staging, learners and outcome, products, so-called precise concepts, and the simplification of goals. These ideas are invading all kinds of school subjects and are reducing these subjects to mere skills, hence obstructing a broader, more integrated disciplinarity.

Another impact is the internal and bottom-up movement of process-oriented writing pedagogy, which according to Ongstad, may have had a significant impact on the shift from seeing L1 as a subject to seeing parts of it as a means. This shift is reflected in the changes of overarching ideological concepts in L1 from language to text and communication. A symptom of this understanding of L1 and disciplinarity

as communicational is that literature has lost its earlier significant place in L1 curricula.

The Norwegian general curriculum contains *Bildung* aims that have been in force through several reforms. Recently, however, a National Qualifications Framework was established as an informal, overall curriculum, and this change has made knowledge, skills, and general competence the key concepts. Such emphasis tends to give priority to competence as such (i.e., as an end, not a means). According to Ongstad, the split between the *Bildung* aims of the general curriculum and the competence aims of the National Qualifications Framework will affect all school subjects, and L1 in particular, since L1 has been and probably will be the main school subject in striving for general *Bildung*. The National Qualifications Framework contributes to disconnections between school subjects and the general curriculum as well as between their joint role as means for intended *Bildung*. Thus, paradoxically, the Framework's calls for increased essential L1 disciplinarity—believed to promote both competencies and *Bildung*—might be counterproductive. As such, it may cause a resistance to competences across subjects as well as to *Bildung* ambitions in a general curriculum.

As discussed in Ongstad's article, writing is a prominent field within Scandinavian L1 research. This fact is reflected in the special issue since three articles deal with writing, although from different perspectives. "Voice and Narrative in L1 Writing," authored by Ellen Krogh and Anke Piekut (2015), aims at raising the issue of *Bildung* in L1 writing by exploring the value of voice and narrative as resources in students' writing. Krogh and Piekut claim that a prerequisite of *Bildung* processes in writing is that the student writer be afforded the opportunity to bridge individual experience and societal reality.

The backdrop for the Krogh and Piekut study is the curricular and cultural gap between L1 writing in the Danish lower and upper secondary school. While narratives, fiction, and personal experiences are invited as resources for L1 writing in lower secondary school, this is not the case in upper secondary school where a more academic writing culture is prevalent. Drawing on a Bakhtinian perspective, the article opens by discussing research on narratives, writer identity, and L1 writing to explore the notion of *Bildung* in L1 writing. Subsequently, two empirical cases of L1 writing in the Danish upper secondary school are presented. The findings substantiate that issues of writer identity and voice are always at play in students' L1 writing even though assessment and exams will foster strategic interests in earning good marks. While struggling to appropriate an academic voice, students also experiment with their own voices in order to develop textual repertoires and add agency to their writing. In this endeavour, they draw upon narrative resources in ways that are not acknowledged in the upper secondary writing culture.

Krogh's & Piekut's study raises issues of transition between different writing cultures in the Danish educational system. It documents that narrative and personal voice provide resources for identity work and *Bildung* processes. The research then goes on to argue that they should be part of any writing instruction, and par-

ticularly so in L1 subjects. Krogh and Piekut do not suggest that the importance of argumentative writing and analytical work in the L1 subject should be reduced. They do, however, recommend an equal balancing of paradigmatic and narrative modes of thought in L1 instruction. The authors also argue for the inclusion and honing of narratives and personal experience as resources for L1 writing at all levels. Accordingly, if narrative competence is treasured as an academic resource, students may develop the meta-knowledge and competence that will provide them with a strong tool for integrating personal experience in reasoning and composition.

Writing is also the topic for Maj Asplund Carlsen's and Pernilla Andersson Varga's study (2015), "Writing for life? A Case Study of Affordances of Writing in Four L1 Upper Secondary Classrooms." Carlsson and Varga exercise their approach in sociology of education by drawing on Bernstein as their main theoretical reference. Their interest is in the processes of social reproduction with writing instruction in the Swedish upper secondary school. Thus, the purpose of the study is to explore how the teaching of writing in two academic and two vocational programs differs, which writing repertoires are developed, and how writing is assessed. Although the syllabi are identical, issues of inequity, disparities in curricula, and different expectations on students—depending on the program—are revealed.

The two academic curricula are characterized by academic ambitions and a vertical structure of knowledge and skills whereas one of the vocational curricula is leaning on a horizontal discourse and structure based on everyday knowledge and personal experience. According to Carlsson & Varga, this pattern can be expected since teachers tend to have clear opinions of different student trajectories and the role of writing in these trajectories. As a result, the study substantiates how expectations of trajectories both in the form of further education and further working life in three of the writing classrooms comply with the reproduction of gender and class dispositions. Working class boys become working class men with little or no need to play an active part as writing citizens in a democratic society. Students on the academic programs are either taught to write or simply expected to do well when preparing for academic careers. The fourth classroom curriculum, conversely, differs from this pattern since the teacher's ambivalent but effective instruction and practice serves as an interruption of the social order's preservation. Working class girls, training for work in business and administration, are given an opportunity to learn to write in ways that prepare them both for school and for taking part as writers in civic society.

At the end of their work, Carlsson and Varga add a disturbing perspective to their ethnography. In 2011, the 1994 reform was still in effect during the study but was superseded by a new Swedish upper-secondary school reform. While the 1994 reform was more egalitarian, offering identical L1 syllabi in all programs, the 2011 reform accentuated the differences between vocational and academic programs. Today, students in the academic programs study three times as much as students in the vocational programs. In the 2011 syllabus, there are also no signs of the im-

portance of students' ability to use language as a prerequisite for further education nor for active and responsible participation in society. As underscored by Carlsson and Varga, writing in this case is reduced to a skill only for education and not for life. Moreover, teachers whose curricula are aimed at interrupting the preservation of the social order for their working class female students will have to reconsider that curricula. This will reduce the chances for working class girls to become writing citizens.

While these four studies focus on contemporary challenges for Scandinavian L1 subjects and didactics, viewed in a longer or shorter historical perspective, the following three studies—while also diagnosing challenges—discuss them in a future perspective. Addressing the fields of *technology*, *assessment*, and *literature education*, the three studies present issues at stake within these fields, discuss them from the wider perspective of the L1 subject, and point to possible future directions for L1 teaching and research.

"Language" as a field of study is no longer just verbal expression but also visual language and other semiotic resources for expression and communication. These technological, communicative, and cultural changes have had—and still have—a deep impact on the L1 subject. In the article, "Technology in L1. A Review of Empirical Research Projects in Scandinavia 1992-2014," the four Scandinavian researchers Nikolaj Elf, Thorkild Hanghøj, Håvard Skaar and Per-Olof Erixon (2015) present an overview of Scandinavian research in this field. Their purpose is to gather, systematize, and review research on technology within L1.

The following three interrelated research questions are focused: 1) What do we mean when we talk about "technology" in L1? 2) Based on a systematic review of empirical studies, what characterizes the research field? 3) For discussion, which broader implications does the review suggest for a rethinking of L1 in terms of practice and research? In order to systematize a complex field of knowledge, the authors present a theoretical framework that revolves around the four metaphors of tool, media, socialization, and literacy practices, arguing that this terminology could be used to understand existing research better. A *key finding* is that the conceptualization of technology as *media* is a dominating approach that downplays aesthetic, critical, and tool-oriented perspectives. This media perspective—especially in relation to theories on multimodality and social semiotics—has become an integrated part of the vocabulary within L1 when it comes to understanding the analysis, design, and interpretation of technologically mediated texts.

A *second key finding* relates to the number and characteristics of studies that focus on student practices within L1 and their relationship to out-of-school literacy practices. The studies show that it is probably misleading to impose narrow dichotomies on digital and non-digital learning materials within L1. Students develop a broad range of competencies, or "multiple literacies," out of school that are difficult to integrate into contemporary L1 practice. They also present some interesting research examples where the Scandinavian L1 practice manages to create a space

for such competencies to be used in meaningful and even creative ways. The researchers then conclude that this point may have implications for policy thinking.

A *third key finding* is the emphasis on teachers' uncertainty regarding how and why to integrate technology within the subject. L1 teachers in general seem to consider the emergence of new technologies on the school level and within the subject as a significant challenge interpreted in both analytical and emotional ways.

These findings suggest that a reconfiguration of the L1 subject is indeed taking place in terms of alterations in communicative forms and utterances. At the same time, the four authors find a general lack of critical reflection on the relation between technological developments, political rhetoric, and the development of L1 teaching and learning.

International and national tests have strengthened the focus on assessment in the Scandinavian educational context. Simultaneously, research substantiates the close relationship between constructive assessment and development of students' writing competency. On the other hand, providing constructive and formative feedback is no simple endeavour since it requires linguistic and textual resources as well as knowledge regarding what to expect of students' writing proficiency at different levels.

The need for augmenting Norwegian teachers' assessment competencies was the point of departure of the Norwegian NORM project, *Developing National Standards for the Assessment of Writing*. Analyses and findings from the NORM project are presented in Synnøve Matre and Randi Solheim's (2015) study, "Writing Education and Assessment in Norway: Towards Shared Understanding, Shared Language and Shared Responsibility." A basic hypothesis of this research is that assessment should be anchored in a functional understanding of writing. In addition, specific norms for expected writing proficiency may be an important impetus for developing students' writing competency across subjects as well as teachers' assessment competence. To succeed in this manner, teachers need to acquire a well-founded and shared understanding of writing, text, and assessment.

Matre and Solheim report an intervention study that provides insight into teachers' practices and knowledge development. This is done while discussing and assessing students' texts from different subjects—supported by assessment resources—including explicit norms of expectation. Since the norms are not very detailed and prescriptive, they invite teachers to call on additional and more specified criteria when needed, lending authority to the teachers and their acquired competence in writing and assessing texts.

The study identifies two ideal typical points when it comes to the teachers' use of the assessment resources: A rather *instrumental* and ritualized use of the norms for expected writing proficiency on the one hand, where the norms function more or less as "check lists," against a more *flexible* and functional understanding on the other hand, where the teachers assess different features in texts related to contexts, acts of writing, and the project of the individual writer. Between the two extremes, the authors see clear signs of a third category labeled *learning in progress*.

Findings indicate that the teachers in the project on the whole are analyzing and assessing texts in a more competent way, having acquired a more extensive meta-language. Data also substantiate that teachers find it difficult to transform the diagnoses of students' texts into appropriate and helpful formative feedback. Analyses, however, point to the value of *text conversations* as key elements in writing education—both conversations between the teachers and between teachers and students.

According to Matre and Solheim, in this kind of meta-conversation on writing and literacy, L1 teachers should have a key role. Contemporary L1 teachers have a double responsibility since the L1 subject is responsible both for providing the students with general literacy skills and for developing specific disciplinary literacy and *Bildung*. Through the L1 text culture, introducing a broad variety of texts and genres, and focusing on aesthetic dimensions and cultural values, students are invited to ways of thinking that may be of importance for their personal development.

If L1 is primarily reduced to dealing with formal and textual features in texts or assisting with writing in other subjects, it will represent a threat to the subject's distinctive character and to the *Bildung* components connected to L1's text culture. Matre and Solheim, nonetheless, argue that the stronger focus on literacy in L1 invites integration with the *Bildung* perspectives. Thus, the NORM project is anchored in a belief that writing contributes to *Bildung* by empowering the thinking process of writers and their ability to make meaning. Writing may therefore support students' in becoming independent and reflective and give them access to participation and contribution in a democratic society.

Unfortunately, recent signs in Norwegian educational policy appear to indicate a tendency to strengthen the aspect of skills at the expense of broader cultural and literate experiences. Matre and Solheim, thus, express a strong concern that utilitarian conceptions of literacy and education will prevail in the Norwegian context. The authors consequently call for persistent discussion in the L1 community on aims and values in the subject.

The final contribution to this special issue on Scandinavian L1 research is Magnus Persson's (2015) "Reading around the Text: On the Diversity of Reading Practices in the New Popular Literary Culture." Traditionally, literature has been an important part of the Scandinavian L1-subject. As Persson's presentation show, this former trend is no longer a matter of course. So what exactly is relevant literature in contemporary school, and how should it be read in our digitalized media world that constantly challenges previous distinctions between high and low culture? Such cultural transformations provide the theoretical background for the author's research within the framework of an ongoing Swedish project: *The Dialectics of Immersion. On Professional and Everyday Reading Practices in the New Media Landscape*.

Persson and his project colleagues represent a new generation of researchers, holding a more postmodern view of reading literature in the L1-discipline. In his article, Persson challenges the conventional distinctions between high and low cul-

ture and advances a critical attitude towards many traditional reasons for reading literature in school. Accordingly, he criticizes literary theory and didactics in presenting the reader as a "discorporate, purely theoretical entity" and making the reader a construction "without history, biography, gender or psychology" (p. 6).

In this Swedish context, the notion that reading is in crisis has long been a subject of debate. Although it is a common concern that many young people do not read, Persson wants to focus on the many existing passionate and committed readers. For instance, he alludes to the numerous young readers who create more or less formalized reading communities in book circles or on the Internet. He argues for an increased focus, within literature didactics, on the wide range of reading practices available both within and without the educational system. He further promotes a more phenomenological understanding of impassioned reading, including bodily experiences and socially shared experiences: "The collective, the conversations, meetings, (other) actors, concrete locations, movements in the room, bodies, other art forms—all of these seem to play vital roles when reading is no longer a purely individual, mental activity" (p. 12).

At the same time, Persson focuses on "critical reading" as an important but rather overlooked aspect in literature didactics. Critical reading is often presented as an antithesis to impassioned reading. Referring to Latour, Persson argues for moving towards "critical proximity," a reading that can be simultaneously impassioned and critical. Thus, students should learn and be afforded experience that impassioned reading also may lead to a critical view.

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As these studies demonstrate, L1 is an exposed subject in a time of change with shifts in goals and general tasks as well as in the conceptualization of the subject contents. "The Nordic model" is no longer an inclusive and democratic metaphor but increasingly reflects global values of competition. The OECD educational policies and testing system has led to a pragmatic turn towards skills and literacy in the Scandinavian L1 subjects. In the present special issue, we ask how these changes are elucidated in current L1 research: What rationalities and justifications are found when previous justifications appear to have lost their meaning and relevance? Where will we find new directions for general didactic perspectives and action in the classroom?

The contributions to this special issue could be said to provide more insight into the conditions of possibilities of contemporary Scandinavian L1 education rather than providing clear answers to these questions. They do, however, identify both professional challenges and possible research-based directions for future L1 teaching and learning. As a result, an important conclusion to be drawn from this special issue on Scandinavian L1 education is the need to meet today's strong policy guidelines with research-based, didactic knowledge.

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