

ON THE EMERGENCE OF THE L1 RESEARCH FIELD

A comparative study of PhD abstracts in the Nordic countries 2000–2017

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Abstract

Research of L1 education is recently established in the Nordic countries. Since the turn of the century we have seen the emergence of national and Nordic research networks, conference and publication series, research programs, and the designation of positions as professors and associate professors. Studies of Nordic L1 research have taken stock of the disciplinary sub fields, but empirical studies of the L1 school subject as a unitary field are still in demand. The aim of this study is to investigate the emergence of Nordic L1 research and its present profile(s) through PhD research. The present study examines the abstracts of Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish L1 PhD dissertations defended between 2000 and 2017. The results point to a growing field. A general observation is that the research focuses on reading and writing, whereas oral and aesthetical expressions are minor topics. Another result is a set of national differences which are related to governmental policy documents and school curricula. Further, the research has become more internationally oriented during recent years. The L1 research is characterized as a professionalized region (Bernstein, 2003) with strong didactization (Ongstad, 2004), and a potential for powerful disciplinary knowledge (Lambert, 2017).

Keywords: L1 research, PhD dissertations, trends of development, the Nordic countries

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INTRODUCTION

Although L1 education is probably one of the largest school subjects across the globe, research on L1 as a school subject does not have a very strong global presence, and our knowledge of what currently constitutes the field is limited. L1 research is highly sensitive to local languages and local subject cultures, and communication of empirical studies across local contexts is challenging (Herrlitz & Ven, 2007). Thus, L1 researchers may to a high degree publish locally or within regions that share languages and cultures, as well as in different specialized sub disciplines.

The purpose of the present study is to contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of the L1 research field by mapping and analyzing patterns in Nordic PhD dissertations since the turn of the century.¹ Our focus on the PhD dissertation is motivated by its prominent position in the constitution of a research field. By studying Nordic PhD research into L1 as a school subject, we will answer the following two research questions: How have the Nordic L1 school subjects been researched in PhD dissertations? How could trends and changes within the research field be analytically related to academic knowledge building, conceptualizations of the research object, the L1 school subject, and future challenges of L1 education?

L1 research in the global context

Within the research network IMEN (The International Mother Tongue Education Network), we find previous contributions to the study of the L1 field and its constitutive features. IMEN organized European L1 researchers from nine countries during the 80s and the 90s, taking its point of departure in the observation of cultural differences of “mother tongue education” in different countries (Herrlitz & Ven, 2007). The research question “What is mother tongue education?” led to comparative studies of curricular documents, teacher portraits, and classroom practices. While summing up results of the program, Herrlitz and Ven (2007) conclude that the IMEN research program clarified mother tongue education as a social construction along the lines of national educational cultures and developed a methodology for comparative research. The IMEN research program inspired later studies such as “Nordfag” in which Scandinavian researchers conducted interview studies of teachers to explore the professional identities of Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish teachers (Elf & Kasperen, 2012, Krogh, 2012). IMEN provides an important background for the present project. It offers a clarification of the *object* of L1 research through insisting on the school subject as the core object, and thus contributes to a delimitation of the research field. Further, the development of methodologies for qualitative, explorative

¹ In this article “the Nordic countries” refers to Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. We are well aware that a complete study of L1 PhD research in the Nordic countries should have included Iceland as well.

studies within IMEN constitutes an interesting background for our studies of historical trends in the Nordic PhD research.

At present, L1 researchers are organized internationally in ARLE—*International Association for Research in L1 Education. Languages, Literatures, and Literacies* which since 1997 organizes biannual conferences and houses the journal *L1, Educational Studies in Language and Literature*. Previously, the organization was a more informal network, tied to participation in the conferences, but in 2015 the organization was formalized and there was a shift of name that indicated changes of identity. Whereas the former name associated to a developmental approach to the school subject (The International Association for the Improvement of Mother Tongue Education, IAIMTE), in “ARLE” there is a stronger focus on research. Further, the name of the object field is changed. Today, “mother tongue education” no longer refers to German in Germany and French in France, but to the education of minority language speakers in their first language. Hence, as discussed by Ongstad (2003) as well as by Herrlitz and Ven (2007), for decades there has been uncertainty as to the naming of the L1 research field. By instituting L1 in the organization title, ARLE thus proposes a globally standardized name of the field that may capture the teaching of (one of) the official language(s) in spite of great national differences. By adding “Languages, Literatures, and Literacies”, ARLE further indicates an expansion of the classical dual content field (language and literature) and with the plural forms also a context sensitive approach to the complex L1 field.

The global L1 research field is still young. On the other hand, a new step has been taken towards self-awareness and professionalization of the field through a stronger and formalized organization based on a research agenda. Concerning the object of the research field, two trends are remarkable, namely the inclusion of literacy as a co-defining category of the field, and the context sensitive approach to the L1 school subject and its sub disciplines. ARLE represents an important reference for this article’s project since the historical period covered by IAIMTE/ARLE is parallel to the period that we have studied. Hence, it is relevant to discuss the degree of overlap in trends and patterns, both as to the conceptualization of the research object and as to the professionalization of the organization.

L1 research in the Nordic context

The Nordic countries constitute an interesting case for comparison between the countries as well as for possible comparison with other global regions. The Nordic welfare states share features of educational and research cultures such as free access to education, policies of equality through education, and a dominance of public higher education institutions. The knowledge domain of Nordic L1 can be described as three interlinked, but partly independent fields (Ongstad, 2012b: 30). The first field is the state governed L1 school subject. The second field is the state governed teacher education, supporting the L1 school subject. The third field is the L1

research, characterized by relatively free research related to the L1 school subject. This third field is the focus of the present study.

The Nordic research field of L1 education reaches back to the 1970s. Since the turn of the millennium, we have however, seen the emergence of national and Nordic networks, conference and publication series, and more formalized PhD research programs within the field.

In Ongstad (2012a, 2012b and 2012c) we find discussions of the L1 field that are relevant for the present study. Thus, Ongstad claims that from a didactic perspective, the L1 knowledge domain is not primarily defined by language or nationality, but by the substantial content of the L1 subject. The definition of this content is, however, a complex and contested matter. In his discussion of this issue, Ongstad quotes the definition given by the international L1 special interest group in AILA² in 2001, stating that the L1 subject is “concerned with learners’ curricular enculturation to language, literature and culture, and focuses on the disciplinary teaching and/or learning of signs, texts, utterances and their contexts, in particular reading, speaking, writing and listening” (Ongstad, 2012c: 320). From the point of view of the historical interest of our study, this definition is interesting. Comparing with ARLE’s subtitle, “Languages, literatures, and literacies”, we find that “culture” has been substituted with “literacy”, and that the generalizing singular nouns have been substituted with plural forms that stress complexity and contextual difference.

Naturally, the general significance of these observations is difficult to tell. From the Nordic viewpoint, however, we find empirical evidence of similar trends in Elf and Kaspersen (2012) that reports collaborative studies in Scandinavian teacher interviews. Hence, in the concluding chapter, it is argued that the strong tradition of a homogeneous, democratic Nordic school is documented in the shared frames of teaching and the shared language for planning and reflecting on teaching that support the professional identities of the participating teachers. On the other hand, this tradition is challenged by the growing ethnic, sociocultural, and linguistic heterogeneity in the classrooms, by new competitive goals and values following the international comparisons of student achievement, and by the development of digital media and technology (Krogh, Penne, & Ulfgard 2012: 245f.). These results are further developed and elaborated in Krogh and Penne’s (2015) critical discussion of the present situation in Nordic L1 education. Taking their point of departure in Sawyer and Ven’s (2006) claim that a utilitarian paradigm currently dominates European L1 subjects, Krogh and Penne find an according pragmatic turn towards skills and literacy in the Nordic L1 subjects. Thus, they argue that the traditional L1 dyad of language and literature presently appears more convincingly represented in the plural forms of languages, literatures, and literacies.

While the above studies explore trends in Nordic L1 education and add to the understanding and delimitation of the school subject, comparative empirical studies

² Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée *or* International Association of Applied Linguistics (AILA).

of Nordic *research* into L1 education are in demand. The Swedish L1 research has been studied by Holmberg and Nordenstam (2016). They analyze abstracts of Swedish PhD research during the period of 2000–2014 and find that the Swedish field of L1 research is indeed expanding, especially in recent years, and that it is well established as an independent research field, but is also well represented within linguistics, literature, and education science. The present study aims at carrying on and widening Holmberg and Nordenstam's work by exploring the emergence of Nordic L1 research and its present profile(s) through PhD research within the field.

Theoretical and analytical frame

As theoretical and analytical frame for this study, we have combined perspectives on education elaborated by the British sociologist Basil Bernstein, the British researcher of education David Lambert and the Norwegian L1 researcher Sigmund Ongstad. Thus, the development of L1 research can be understood on three different levels of abstraction.

Bernstein's theory in the sociology of education is well known for its critical understanding of the organization of school education. The concept of weak and strong classification has, for example, been useful for analyzing how the ideals of the new middle class about individual freedom and flexibility are reflected in a teaching that makes the boundaries between the school subjects weaker. Later Bernstein also, on the same high level of abstraction, developed models to describe and understand knowledge building in the universities. Here he makes a distinction between *singularities* with strong classification and *regions* with a much weaker classification, as two ways of building new knowledge. He argues that regions have been favored in the era of late capitalism, as it seems to promise national success in the global arena of knowledge competition (Bernstein, 2003; 1998: 156).

Singularities typically correspond to the classical university subjects for research and postgraduate education, e.g. Philosophy, Mathematics, Literature and Linguistics. They are characterized by strong classification, and their research is ideally based on distinctive theories and methods. This makes it crucial to maintain the boundaries towards other disciplines, and these boundaries are often more important than the potential applicability of research outside the academy. Regions are related to the knowledge requirements of different professions, in our case teachers. Even if regions typically occur as new university subjects (e.g. criminology, conservation, social work) some regions are found among the classical university subjects. The vital condition for medicine and law, is the contribution to a knowledge base for physicians and lawyers respectively, which guarantees the professional activities of those groups. Regions may incorporate major fields of knowledge from singularities, as is the case with human anatomy that medicine has incorporated from the discipline of biology. Although such overlaps in the long run may be conceived as natural, since they are necessary for the professional knowledge base, they usually lead to

initial conflicts. The logic of professional applicability bumps against the logic of disciplinary boundaries.

Thus, when taking Bernstein's perspective, we investigate the general tension between on the one hand cross-disciplinary, practice-driven "regionalized" research about what is going on in L1 classrooms, and on the other, disciplinary, theory driven research on language, text and literature produced or consumed in such contexts.

The main concern in Lambert, Solem and Tani (2015) and Lambert (2017) is the recontextualization of knowledge in the school curriculum. The starting point has been a discussion of the aims, purposes and consequences of geographical knowledge to school students. One important outcome of this discussion is the concept of powerful disciplinary knowledge, which refers to young people's rights in school to access knowledge that is powerful for them in their everyday lives in the rapidly changing world (cf. Young, 2008; see also Stoltman, Lidstone & Kidman, 2015). This is an important aspect also on L1 subject that aims to give student tools to understand the textually mediated world.

Sharing Bernstein's critical perspective, Lambert (2017) elaborates three hypothetical futures for the school curriculum (cf. Young, Lambert, Roberts, & Roberts, 2014). The first is the "curriculum of the transmission of given and inert facts" (Lambert, 2017: 14). Even if Lambert does not map the connections between school curriculum and academic research, it is evident that this first scenario is related to an academic priority of knowledge with strong borders between disciplines (cf. Bernstein's 'singularities'). The second future is the "curriculum of skills or competences", which has already made clear impressions in contemporary curricula. This ideal of general competencies is related to a cross disciplinary way of building knowledge also in academic research (cf. Bernstein's 'regions'). Lambert himself argues for a third alternative, namely the "curriculum of powerful disciplinary knowledge" with the aim that students should gain understanding of the logic, reasons and consequences grounded on disciplinary facts and that teachers should communicate the disciplinary knowledge powerfully in pedagogical settings (Lambert, 2017: 23-27). This program for subject didactics (in opposition to general didactics) demands academic research that supports not only the professional practices of teachers in general, but very specifically the professional practices of the teachers as experts of different content subjects, e.g. geography, mathematics or L1.

Based on the findings of our study it will be possible to discuss to what extent the Nordic L1 PhD research enables or supports different school curricula for the future.

Ongstad (2002, 2006) concurs with Lambert in the strive for establishing a research based subject didactics, for which not only methods are important, but more crucially the relations between the methods (the how) and the content of the subject (the what), as well as the reasons for choosing content and approaches (the why) (cf. Gudem 1998; compare Lambert 2017: 27-28). These basic, interrelated didactic aspects provide a point of departure for subject didactic practice and research. There is, however, also a need for meta-didactic reflection and communication which, according to Ongstad's analysis, constitutes the primary task for contemporary subject

didactics and which is also the background for the increased and increasing attention to subject didactics within academic disciplines and professions (Ongstad, 2002; 2006). Specialized knowledge is under pressure in knowledge economies that demand global competitiveness and adaptability, and there is a need for subjects and disciplines to discuss and justify their special contribution to education. They need to “didactize” specialized knowledge in answer to fast changing conditions and contexts. Hence, subject didactics takes on a strategic responsibility to preserve, continue and develop specialized knowledge under pressure by change. Within this theoretical approach, subject didactics is conceived as a processual and contextualized scientific approach, captured by the concept of didactization.

While Lambert’s principles for “powerful disciplinary knowledge” remain on a rather abstract level (although made concrete in the school subject of geography), Ongstad (2004) reflects especially on the evident processes of didactization within the Norwegian L1 school subject, as well as the tendencies of strong didactization within teacher education in Norwegian universities (2004, cf. especially 20-21, 138, 274-275). It should be noted that didactization is a neutral concept for Ongstad, who sees potential traps for the L1 school subject with both weak and strong didactization. With weak didactization follows the danger of losing sight of both the complexity of learning and the diversity of learners (cf. Lambert’s “curriculum of the transmission of given and inert facts”). With strong didactization follows the challenge of conceiving a subject didactically relevant and legitimized school subject. How are educational policies and aims balanced with subject didactic reflection and analysis? There is a danger that subject specific content is downplayed (cf. Lambert’s “curriculum of skills or competencies”). But there is also the option that new subject didactic constructions of the school subject secure a stronger, didactically reflected coherence of content (cf. Lambert’s powerful knowledge) and a new level of professionalized practice in teaching and research.

From this perspective, we will discuss whether findings in the present study confirm that didactization is growing within the general field of Nordic L1 PhD research, and whether there are systematically different patterns among the four national contexts.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The empirical material of this study is abstracts of PhD dissertations in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden from 2000 until 2017. The argument for investigating abstracts of PhD dissertations is that they have a special position in the constitution of a research field and that they are assessed by an external committee. Hence, PhD dissertations provide a fruitful object of study for research into the emergence of changes of the research field of L1 education. Using the abstracts was also a way to handle a large set of material. The abstracts were mostly available in the internet at the university websites, but there were also, particularly older, cases where the abstracts were placed only in the printed book. A general observation is that abstracts

of PhD dissertations as a genre seem to vary a lot both among and within the Nordic countries, but we do not consider this genre variation as a major problem for the analysis of our data.

A great challenge for the data collection, was that the relevant PhD research is conducted in a wide variety of research environments and disciplines, and that this distribution is related to national differences in the organization of both universities and teacher education. In other words, it was not possible to determine in advance where the relevant PhD research is carried out. Instead it was necessary to establish criteria for which PhD dissertations that should be regarded as belonging to the L1 research field and included in the study. The overarching principle was that the topics should be closely related to L1 education, and that the doctoral theses should concentrate on primary (pupils aged from 6-12 years), lower secondary (pupils aged about 12-15 years), or upper secondary school (students aged about 15-18 years) and thus have a clear school relevance for L1 education. These topics are, for example, writing processes in different school levels, reading development in primary school, or L1 textbooks. In most of the abstracts, the subject mother tongue and literature was mentioned. We decided, however, that the data set should include dissertations on learning to read and write in primary school even if the L1 subject was not explicitly mentioned in the abstract.

We did not include studies of literacy as a general skill, and we also excluded reading and writing in other school subjects. The background for the latter decision is that literacy and communication has become an obligation of all school subjects in the Nordic countries, and in the research into different school subjects the trend is increasingly to include the specific disciplinary communication and literacy. These dissertations would thus be viewed as part of the subject didactic research of the specific subject. We further decided to exclude research on L2 that was not explicitly related to the L1 school subject since the Nordic L2 research field has been established as an independent field.

In practice, the selection of the data has been done as follows. The national authors reviewed lists of possible dissertations on the websites of the relevant universities in their countries and made a relatively generous selection of possible candidates based on the titles and abstracts of the theses. After several discussions in the Nordic author group, we excluded the dissertations whose abstracts were considered not to meet the set of criteria above. The findings were summarized into four national tables which were subjected to two rounds of further critical discussion in the author group before they were finalized.

In order to coordinate the drawing up of comparable national descriptions of the PhD research, it was decided to extract the following information from the abstracts: (1) the university and the year of the dissertation; (2) the discipline (affiliation) in which the doctoral theses was defended (e.g. educational sciences, linguistics, literature studies, (educational) psychology); (3) the language in which the doctoral thesis is written (in practice that meant in the national language or in English); (4) the format of the thesis (monography or anthology e.g. a thesis that consists of at least

three articles and a summary); (5) school level (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary school); (6) the topic of research (e.g. reading, writing, orality, literature education, multimodality, media and technology, curriculum studies, and L1-teacher profession); (7) the methodological choices (e.g. qualitative or quantitative approach); (8) the data (e.g. student texts, interviews, observations on classroom interaction etc.).

Discussions concerning which categories to compare in the study resulted in the decision to focus on the above-mentioned didactic questions of *what* research was conducted (topics and levels in the school system), *how* it was conducted (kind of empirical material and methodological framework), and *why* the state of affairs is the current one (institutional, societal or political background with explanatory value). When the numbers or share of different types of studies are given below, transition studies (for example studying the transition from primary to secondary school) have been counted for both relevant categories (for example both as a study of primary and secondary school).

OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

Altogether 216 L1 PhD dissertations were identified for the period 2000–2017. Tables 1 and 2 give an overview of some of the findings that will be presented and discussed in separate sections for each country below.

Table 1 shows how the dissertations are distributed between main content fields in each country. The category *reading* includes investigation of reading as a basic skill, but does not include investigations of reading literature. The latter are included within *literature* together with research on reading and teaching literature or textbooks in literature. The category *writing* comprises different kinds of writing research, but not dissertations focusing the production of multimodal text, which are included in *multimodality, media and technology*. Dissertations within the category of *orality* investigate the teaching or development of oral interaction, and also two (Finnish) studies on drama performance as a part of the L1 school subject. The category *L1 curriculum and profession* finally, is used for dissertations with a main focus on the character of the L1 subject, not only on one of its aspects.

Table 1. Distribution between main content fields.

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	Total
Reading (skills)	2	30	4	17	53
Writing	7	9	12	20	48
Literature (reading and teaching)	8	6	7	23	44
Multimodality, media & technology	8	7	5	4	25
L1 curriculum & profession	6	6	2	10	22
Orality	1	2	2	4	9
Other	-	3	5	6	15
Number	32	63	37	84	216

Table 2 shows the choice of language and format for the dissertations, as well as the gender distribution for the authors.

Table 2. Distribution of language and format of the dissertations and gender of the authors.

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	Total
Language	Danish 28 English 3 Mixed 1	Finnish 36 Swedish 9 English 18	Norwegian 33 English 3 Mixed 1	Swedish 78 English 6	National languages 184 English 30 Mixed 2
Format					
Monograph/ anthology	29/3	47/16	24/13	77/7	177/39
Gender					
Male/female	11/21	7/54	10/27	15/69	43/171

National section: Denmark

What?

We have identified 32 Danish dissertations addressing L1-education, submitted and defended during the period 2000–2017. The dissertations come from the five Danish universities that provide possible institutional affiliation for L1 research,³ such as

³ The remaining three Danish universities specialize in respectively engineering, business, and IT studies.

institutional units for educational sciences, literature and language disciplines, or media and technology studies.

The majority of dissertations have been hosted by respectively Aarhus University (14) and The University of Southern Denmark (12). Four dissertations have been hosted by The University of Copenhagen; and each of the Universities of Aalborg and Roskilde have hosted one dissertation.

In Denmark, no formal institutional units are specialized in L1 research. But 75% ($n = 24$) of the Danish L1 research is located within institutional units for *educational sciences*. Six dissertations have been hosted by departments for *literature and language disciplines* that provide education of upper secondary L1 teachers. Two recent dissertations have been hosted by research units for *media and technology studies*.

Concerning age groups, 53 % ($n = 17$) of the dissertations address the upper secondary level, 47 % ($n = 15$) the lower secondary level. A lower percentage (16 %, $n = 5$) focuses L1 education at the primary level. For historical and institutional reasons⁴, the educational science department at Aarhus University mainly specializes in primary and lower secondary school, with only a few dissertations on upper secondary school. The educational science unit at The University of Southern Denmark, on the other hand, mainly specializes in upper secondary school, although with a growing number of studies in primary and lower secondary school since 2015. The Departments for Nordic Studies at Copenhagen and Aarhus University specialize in upper secondary school.

As to content, in the Danish context we find a mixed picture where more than one content aspect is often at play in the dissertations as for example students' oral practices in the teaching of literature. We do, however, find patterns. One such pattern is that students' productive practices have a strong presence. Thus, 11 dissertations focus students' writing, oral performance, or technology-based media practices. Within this field, research in student writing dominates with seven dissertations, mainly focusing upper secondary school. One dissertation addresses students' oral practices in upper secondary school, three address student's productive practices mediated by technology and media in lower secondary (2) and upper secondary education (1).

Literature pedagogy is thematised by eight dissertations, addressing upper (4) and lower (4) secondary school. Some of these combine literature studies with productive practices (oral, writing, technology), and two focus children's literature. Reading is addressed by two dissertations, both focusing technology supported reading in primary school. Media and technology are thematised in eight dissertations

⁴ In Denmark, the four-year education of primary and lower secondary teachers takes place at University colleges. The Department for Educational Sciences at Aarhus University offers further and higher education of teacher educators at university colleges. To teach at the upper secondary level, a five-year university education is needed, supplemented by a pedagogic/didactic in-service course which for many years has been managed by The University of Southern Denmark.

and is as such a fairly strong theme in the Danish L1 field. Two studies investigate gender and ethnic norms in curricula for the subject Danish. Other studies thematise how to meet secondary students' need to know the textual practices that they will meet in vocational education, educational aids, and students' transition between lower and upper secondary school.

Four studies address the subject didactic construction and aims of the L1 subject. Two dissertations study the changes of didactics and identity that follow from integrating technology and media in the subject. These six dissertations are conducted during the first half of the period. Since 2010 we don't find this kind of generalizing studies of L1 subject didactics and identity. We do, however, find intervention studies of teacher practices (2), aiming at changing practices towards so-called scenario-based and progressive teaching.

How?

The dominant format is the monograph. As in the other Nordic countries, this might be changing, since two dissertations from 2016 and one dissertation from 2017 are published as anthologies. The dominant language is Danish. Research policies in Denmark support publication in English, but only three of the explored dissertations are written in English and one (anthology) is partly in English. About one third of the dissertations are written by men (11) and two thirds are written by women (21). This reflects the gender balance among teachers and students in the related fields (humanistic research in general).

Qualitative methods are dominating. Only four dissertations include quantitative aspects as part of their research designs, typically in the shape of questionnaires; only one study applies an experimental design (on primary school reading). Different kinds of data form the empirical bases of the studies: curricular documents, textbooks, children's literature, questionnaires, student texts, interviews with teachers and students, and classroom observations. The analytical methods are also very different and influenced by varied scientific and theoretical paradigms.

Still, it is possible to recognize some tendencies. Ethnography (classroom observations, interviews) is conducted in one third of the studies, often supplemented with student texts. This pattern is stable through the period. But we find a growing number of intervention studies. Eleven studies are based on intervention or design-based research, and six of these are from 2015–2017. Studies of literary texts are found in some of the literature didactic studies, most often combined with e.g. interviews, collected student texts, or curriculum data. There are no systematic differences of methodological approaches among the universities.

Why?

We recognize two patterns that call for an explanation: the relatively low number of Danish dissertations, and the growing impact on research by educational policies at the national level.

In relation to the comparable population figures in Denmark, Norway, and Finland, we find relatively few Danish dissertations into L1 education. A plausible explanation is that in Denmark teacher education is separated institutionally from master and PhD education. Teacher education for primary and lower secondary education is provided by university colleges, while coming upper secondary teachers receive their disciplinary education at university departments that have no systematic cooperation with research units for educational sciences. Thus, Danish PhD research into L1 education—mostly hosted by university research units for educational sciences—has no institutional affiliation with teacher education.

Until 2010, there were no national funding agencies for educational research. In 2011, however, this situation was systematically remediated since a new national program for practice-oriented school research into primary and secondary education was launched, offering 10-12 PhD stipends each year. The purpose of the program is to create new pedagogical and didactical knowledge and to raise the educational level at the university colleges. Hence, the program has mainly funded PhD projects conducted by teacher educators and through this policy, has also established mandatory cooperation between university PhD providers and university colleges.

This program has changed the Danish research into L1 education in various ways. An obvious change is that since 2014 we have witnessed a steep growth in research towards lower secondary and primary school as compared to the numbers for upper secondary school (10 lower secondary/primary, 2 upper secondary). But changes as to content (*what* and *how*) have also emerged although they must be conceived as tentative since numbers are still small. These changes may be connected to the tighter connection of L1 research to teacher education. They may also reflect a stronger direct impact of national policies and curricular reforms on issues and approaches in the research.

One such trend is the growth in more specialized issues of teaching and learning where specific didactic practices or concepts are investigated, often through interventions. Examples are multimodal productive practices, technology supported reading practices, or scenario-based teaching. This trend could be conceived as the other side of the coin which has already been hinted at above, namely the shifting picture concerning studies that thematise the school subject as a subject didactic construction.

One interpretation of these trends could be that the L1 research field has now been established so that there is no need for more elaborated general “didactizations” of the field while there is a need for research into more specialized didactic issues. Although there is certainly a need for research into specialized issues, our interpretation of the trends is less positive. They indicate, as we see it, that utilitarian

policies have impacted the field so that the didactic disciplinarity and identity of the school subject has lost interest (and possibility of funding) to the advantage of issues of improvement of teaching and learning in the subject.

National section: Finland

What?

In Finland, there are eight universities that offer teacher education program or programs. All of them arrange primary teacher education, seven of them subject teacher education programs, and six of them special education teacher programs. Courses in the different teacher education programs at the universities are partly integrated, so that the students have common courses, which has consequences also for the research into L1 education. We have teacher education programs both in Finnish and Swedish since Finland has two national languages.

We identified together 63 dissertations on L1 education during the period 2000–2017. These come from all universities. However, in the University of Jyväskylä, which has the oldest traditions in teacher education in Finland (starting from 1863), the number of dissertations was very high (23). In other universities, we identified eight to nine L1 dissertations (Åbo Akademi University, University of Helsinki, University of Eastern Finland) while others had been less productive of L1 dissertations.⁵

More than half of the dissertations (37) have been written in the different areas of educational sciences, including special education. However, there are eleven L1 dissertations written also in the disciplines of Finnish or Swedish linguistics and in the discipline of psychology. In Jyväskylä the department of psychology produces dissertations that could also be identified as educational research on reading or writing L1. In the discipline of literature studies, the number of L1 related dissertations is surprisingly modest (3). One dissertation was written in the discipline of journalism.

In the Finnish context, reading seems to be the most popular research topic. Almost half of the dissertations (30) explore reading, most of them the stages of learning to read or reading in the primary school context (25). The dissertations produced in the departments of special education and psychology are included in this group. We did not find any L1 education research on reading at the upper secondary level (students aged 16-18). Writing and writing skills were the second most popular of the topics (9). In contrast to reading research, the research on writing was concentrated on older students (for example, upper secondary school, six dissertations). Also, the research on literature education (6) was concentrated on older students' literature learning and the teaching methods. In all the other topics, the production of dissertations was modest (2-3), although topics were various, including such areas as media education, curriculum studies, L1-teacher professional development, and

⁵ We thank Kaisu Rättyä for helping us in the collection of the Finnish data.

orality, which in the Finnish context means basically studies on drama education and classroom interaction. In Finland drama studies and media studies are integrated in L1 education (see NC, 2014).

How?

Most of the Finnish L1 dissertations were monographs (47). Monographs are written especially within the fields of L1 linguistics and literature studies, and to a great extent also in educational sciences. However, recently dissertations that include three to five articles and a summary have been more popular also within these fields. Anthology has been the dominant format, for example, in psychology and in special education even for a longer time. Most dissertations are written in Finnish (36). However, dissertations in English have become more popular; together there are 18 English-mediated dissertations, and the topics gather around reading skills and learning to read in the fields of special education or psychology. There are nine dissertations that are written in Swedish. The gender division in L1 education research in Finland is, in the light of the data, extremely biased: only seven of the 63 PhD dissertations in our data are written by men.

Both the qualitative and quantitative methods are used in Finnish L1 education research. Almost all of the dissertations were based on empirical data from student texts or educational documents to surveys, interviews, and observations on pedagogical interventions. Qualitative methods were more commonly used (35); and in the Finnish data base, it was typical to use several kinds of data sources, and thus the mixed methods strategy was often used. Even if it was possible to find several methods that are used in qualitative analyses, the use of interaction or conversation analysis was extremely rare; we found only one dissertation that focused on orality in L1 classrooms in order to understand the quality of teaching and learning better. Quantitative methods (27) were used particularly in the reading research, using, for example, different kinds of reading tests as their data. Only one of the theses in our collection was considered as theoretical.

Why?

We want to comment on three tendencies that we noticed while doing the mapping of dissertations. First, the number of dissertations written in the discipline of psychology, and also in special education within the educational sciences, is a noteworthy phenomenon that we want to comment on. Second, the increasing number of anthologies in L1 educational studies needs additional comments. Third, we would like to comment on the gender bias among the writers.

The high number of dissertations within the field of psychology reflects well the situation in educational practice in Finland. In Finnish schools, special education is tightly connected particularly to L1 (and mathematics) education. Especially in the context of Finnish primary and secondary education, identification of the possible

problems on learning L1 reading and writing are considered very important, and even 17.5 % of students in basic education gets additional support from special education teaching (in 2017, see SVT 2017). In Finland, if pupils have problems in reading or writing, they are entitled to get special help from their own or special education teachers. This has also been seen as one reason for Finland's success in reading performance in international assessments such as PIRLS and PISA (see e.g. PISA, 2016).

The increasing number of dissertations in the format of anthology reflects the overall tendency in the Finnish educational research (Karvonen, Tainio & Routarinne, 2017). The current research politics in Finland favors rapid publication, and thus journal articles over monographs. This can have consequences also on the research into L1 education. Writing articles into journals directs young researchers to choose well-known and tested methodologies as well as clear and restricted data sets that can easily be analyzed (Karvonen, Tainio & Routarinne, 2017). The consequences are that research projects that require deep understanding, time-taking data collection, and ability to use various research methods, might not be selected by PhD students. This means that young L1 researchers might not any be interested in acting as pioneers in new and probably risky studies that could shed new and innovative light on the fields and topics of L1 education.

There is a large gender gap among young L1 researchers in Finland. Because of the Finnish students' success in reading performance in PISA evaluations since 2000, Finnish L1 education has got a positive international reputation that still has its weak points: the gender gap among Finnish students is largest in all OECD countries, and much larger than in any other Nordic country (PISA 2016: 168-172). In the latest PISA evaluation, Finnish 15-year-old female students, in average, are 47 points ahead of boys which means more than one year's studies (Vettenranta et al, 2016: 49.) Finnish researchers, as well as researchers in other countries, have not reached any tenable explanation for the prevailing gender gap in reading literacy skills in young people, but the feminine image of the school subjects seems to be one of the explanations (see e.g. PISA 2016: 168-170). This feminine image appears to reflect also into the academic level of Finnish L1 research.

Compared to the population in Finland (5.5 million), it might be justified to suggest that the number of dissertations in L1 education is relatively high. This might be a consequence of the position teacher education has reached in the Finnish society. Teacher education has during the 1970s moved to the university level, and the first thesis in L1 education was defended over 40 years ago (Heilä-Ylikallio & Østern, 2012). During the period in question (2000–2017), Finland has had two remarkable reforms in the national curricula for primary and secondary schools. In addition to that, the Finnish population is much more multicultural and multilingual than before 2000. The fact that pupils and students in Finnish schools have increasingly different kinds of accesses to Finnish and Swedish languages has not yet been manifested in the Finnish L1 research. Also, the digitalization has changed communication (literacy

habits in daily life) in Finnish society. These changes in the educational culture and population will greatly affect L1 educational research.

National section: Norway

What?

The Norwegian data consists of 37 dissertations defended in the period 2000–2017. As in Denmark, we see that the number of dissertations after 2009 are much higher than the first half of the period. From 2000 to 2009 the number is nine (24 %). The remaining 28 dissertations (76 %) are defended after 2009.

The dissertations are hosted at five different universities in Norway. Twenty, or more than 50%, at The University of Oslo, seven at The University of Stavanger, five at The Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim (NTNU), four at The University of Bergen, and one at The University of Agder. Only recently, the university colleges, that provide teacher education for primary and lower secondary education, have had the opportunity to host PhD projects, and by the end of 2017 no candidates had defended their theses at these institutions.

The disciplinary research environment of L1 research was until 2017 located at the universities. The universities have different affiliations to L1 research. While the University of Oslo has a faculty of education and research, the University of Agder has an own teacher education unit. NTNU hosts The Norwegian Centre for Writing Education and Research, and the University of Stavanger hosts the Norwegian Reading Centre. L1 dissertations can also be hosted by Scandinavian language and literature departments at the universities.

Twelve of the dissertations address writing, and one of them is an intervention study focusing on nynorsk.⁶ Seven dissertations focus on students' reading of literature or the teaching of literature, four address reading as a basic skill. Two of them are intervention studies testing training in different reading strategies, one addresses teachers' assessment of reading, and one addresses reading of multiple texts. Five address multimodality and digital aspects of reading, writing and learning, and two have orality as the main topic. The rest of the dissertations (5) focus on different topics such as text structure in schoolbooks, the role of language in the learning process, and teacher support during L1-lessons, learning through dialogue. We see that student performance in different aspects of the L1 subject has a strong presence in the Norwegian data. Nineteen of the thirty-seven dissertations address student performance. There is a strong tendency to concentrate on only one aspect of the L1 subject, and a focus on the L1 subject as a didactic field is rare (2).

Traditionally, the universities have educated teachers for upper secondary school while university colleges educate teachers for primary and lower secondary. Concerning L1 research and age group, sixteen dissertations focus on lower secondary

⁶ *Nynorsk is one of the two written standards of the Norwegian language.*

school (43 %), seven dissertations contain data from primary school (19 %), twelve (32 %) from upper secondary school, one from teacher education, and one addresses all school levels. The high number of dissertations within the lower secondary level indicates that even though L1 research at the PhD-level is hosted by the universities, a relatively high number of the candidates were engaged or employed by the university colleges.

Multimodality, media and technology are topics of six dissertations. This represents a newer trend, since, even though the first is from 2006, the rest is from 2010 and later.

There are three official written languages in Norwegian, *bokmål*, *nynorsk* and sami. *Bokmål* and *nynorsk* are two standard written variants of spoken Norwegian, while the Sami languages belong to another language family. Students of Norwegian must sit for separate exams in the two variants of standard written Norwegian after lower and upper secondary. In our data sample, only one thesis addresses this special L1-situation. There are no L1 dissertations investigating the Sami context of L1-training.

There are few dissertations addressing the increasing inequality between students with different sociocultural backgrounds or between boys and girls, inequalities that are reported to increase according to quantitative studies of school results (Bakken & Elstad, 2012).

How?

The overall dominant format is the monograph, i.e. 24 dissertations. The rest, thirteen, are anthologies. The anthologies represent a new trend, the first defended in 2011. Thirty-three dissertations are written in Norwegian, three in English, the first is defended in 2011, and one anthology is written in both languages. Twenty-seven dissertations (73 %) are written by women, and 10 by men.

Among the 37 dissertations, only four are quantitative studies. The first one dates back to 2006, the rest are from 2011 or later. Four use mixed methods, defended in 2014 and later, and the rest are qualitative studies. Seven dissertations make use of videotaping; the first one is from 2011. The dominant theoretical perspective is social constructivist, while the cognitive perspective is found, but to a much lesser extent.

The prominent approach is ethnographic. Eighteen of the dissertations use this approach. Three dissertations are instances of intervention studies where methods are implemented in the classroom, and the learning outcome is measured. The first of these three dissertations, defended in 2008, is a field experiment study where four different teaching methods for the development of reading and writing strategies are tested. In 2010, we find the second intervention study, where the overt teaching of inference reading is tested. The third, from 2016, addresses *nynorsk* training in a class where *bokmål* is the dominant written language.

Why?

There are three patterns that call for explanations: the relatively high number of dissertations addressing lower secondary, the increase of numbers of dissertation after 2009, and the dominant role of some universities. We will also address other aspects of the L1 research field that might be connected to these patterns.

Firstly, as in Denmark, Norwegian primary and lower secondary teacher education has been separated from master education. However, differently from Denmark, the highest number of dissertations concerning age group is addressing lower secondary. A possible explanation is the strategic plan many university colleges have had in order to become universities. To gain the status as a university, the university colleges need a certain amount of staff with a PhD education. This explanation of the number of L1 dissertations addressing lower secondary, may relate less to the L1 subject as such, but rather to a change in national institutional structures.

Secondly, our data indicate that there is a change in the L1 research field around 2009–2010. From 2000 to 2009 the number of L1 dissertations was nine. The 28 others (76 %) are defended after 2009. This increase may be seen in relation to the institutional reform explained in the previous paragraph, but also in relation to the school reform, The Knowledge Promotion Reform, that was implemented in 2006. This reform is considered to have implicated a stronger need to professionalize teacher education, a need that might explain the increase in numbers of dissertations after 2009.

Thirdly, more than 50 % of the dissertations are hosted by the University of Oslo where an independent faculty for teacher education and research was established in 1996. The second and third highest numbers of dissertation are to be found at the University of Stavanger and NTNU in Trondheim where the national centers for reading and writing are located.

The increase in number of dissertations after 2009 is followed by other trends that might be a sign of a more internationally oriented research field—an increasing number of anthologies, increasing use of English as a research language, and a growth of intervention studies. These trends can be interpreted as results of international trends rather than driven by the L1 subject's need for knowledge development. A tendency that might support this explanation is that the interest in disciplinary content such as hermeneutic understanding and interpretation is decreasing as a study object. Seven dissertations investigate literature as part of the L1 subject, a strong decrease of interest as four of these studies are from the period before 2009. A trend that derives from within the L1 subject, is that multimodality and digital learning cultures gain prominence as research objects. Not unexpectedly, the majority of these theses are defended after 2009.

Yet another pattern seems to follow the historical lines displayed in the previous sections. There seem to be two main rationales for the importance and relevance of the research, a pattern connected to the social constructivist approach. The first and the most prominent rationale is to investigate the L1 subject as it is, i.e. the research

questions address the current features of the subject and how students learn and how teachers reason and teach in this given context. The second trend is to investigate how knowledge is constructed or negotiated in the interaction between the teacher and the students. These two differ in the sense that the first trend sees the L1 subject as more or less given, while the second trend sees the L1 subject as something that is constructed and negotiated in classroom interaction. The first rationale is present in the dissertations throughout the period, while the second rationale is found in dissertations from 2013 and forth and are all cross curricula studies.

National section: Sweden

What?

The Swedish dissertations within L1 education research, 84 in our data, are written in every main Swedish university. Four of the universities stand out as most productive: University of Gothenburg, Malmö university, Uppsala university and Örebro university. The main part has been produced in Educational sciences (28). But it is significant for the Swedish context that also the discipline of Swedish has contributed (17), as well as the disciplines of comparative literature (6) and linguistics (3). Another important feature is that many dissertations have been written in a new cross disciplinary field, Swedish and education that relates specifically to the school subject Swedish, and includes both language and literature (23).

Three content fields appear as essential for the Swedish L1 research: writing research (20), research on teaching and reading literature (24), and other reading research such as the development of basic reading skills (17). In the majority of the latter dissertations the investigation of basic reading skills also includes writing skills. A fourth research interest, only developed within the new cross disciplinary field of Swedish and education, is the conditions of the L1 school subject, in terms of curriculum and/or teacher education (10). Other content fields are represented by just a few dissertations: orality (4) and multimodality in the context of digital technology (3).

The dissertations cover all levels of education: primary school (29), lower secondary (8), upper secondary (34). (The others cover two or more levels.) Primary school is typically investigated within educational sciences, while secondary school is the focus of the research conducted in the disciplines of Swedish and contemporary literature. The dominant content fields in upper secondary school research are writing and literature didactics. Primary school research tends to focus basic literacy skills, most typically the learning and development of reading competence.

How?

The overall dominant format is the monograph. This might however be changing, since three of the seven anthologies were published during the last year of the study

(2017). The dominant language is, not surprisingly, Swedish. Only six dissertations are written in English. About four fifths of the dissertations are written by women (69) and one fifth by men (15), which seems to reflect the Swedish gender distribution within the teacher profession.

Qualitative methods are totally dominating. The only exceptions are a few dissertations which apply either quantitative linguistic analysis of student texts or reading tests. The methodological choices are strongly affected by the disciplinary environments. The dissertations in Swedish linguistics have typically their empirical basis in student texts and written assignments. Commonly, however, these dissertations use a mixed method perspective combining text analysis with observation data of teaching processes, classroom conversations or text production processes. For the dissertations in the comparative literature discipline the dominant method is text analysis of literature. In educational sciences the trend is either application of ethnographical methods, or mixed methods. The new cross disciplinary field of Swedish and education typically shares methodology with educational sciences, although also text analysis is used to a greater extent.

Why?

We recognize four patterns that require some explanation. Firstly, the rapid growth of L1 research within a broad range of Swedish universities. Secondly, the tendency of a division of labour in regard of school levels. And thirdly, the methodological tensions within the field. Finally, we want to comment on the emergence of L1 conditions as a new research interest.

A central condition for the development of L1 research is the new Swedish Educational act (2010) which states that teaching should be based on research. Another important factor is that teacher education for all levels in Sweden is a task for the university (not for university colleges), which demands staff with PhD also within L1. Together these two features form the background for governmental and university internal investments in L1 research schools. Such research schools explain the high number of dissertations from Malmö University, the University of Gothenburg and Örebro University.

The tendency that dissertations in educational sciences investigate primary school, while dissertations written within linguistic or literature departments focus secondary school, is most easily explained by the traditional division between these environments in regard of their engagement in teacher education. As a consequence, there are admission requirements that makes it much easier for teachers in secondary school to enter PhD education at linguistic or literature departments, than for teachers in primary school.

The methodological tension between on the one hand educational sciences and on the other literature and Swedish language is concerned with the application of ethnographical methods. Methods for classroom observations and interviews with teachers and students, are the main priority in research conducted within edu-

cational sciences. The same methods have also been borrowed by the old linguistic and literature disciplines for L1 research. Although this implies a methodological renewal of the old disciplines, it is clear that ethnographically inspired methods in these contexts are used to complement well-established methods of text analysis. The resistance against a more pervasive change of methodology suggests that this concerns essential traits of the disciplinarity for comparative literature and Swedish linguistics respectively. It should be noted that the methodological tension between these two old disciplines seems to be a border that is even harder to transgress. The only dissertations that are inspired by both literary and linguistic traditions of text analysis are dissertations that investigate multimodal texts. Maybe there is a chance of a new methodological cross over when the object of research is in itself a new phenomenon.

Finally, it should be noted that several Swedish L1 PhD projects elaborate a discourse on the character of the L1 school subject, its curriculum conditions and its teacher education. This has been a central concern for the new cross disciplinary field of Swedish and education. While the old disciplines of Swedish Linguistics and Literature, as well as Educational studies, have made it possible to investigate certain aspects of what is going on in the Swedish L1 school subject, the L1 subject itself has become an important research object within the new field of Swedish and education.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The L1 PhD research analyzed in this article is rich and vital, and the presentation of the growing and diverse body of research has necessarily been characterized by a complexity of details. Thus, we want to conclude by stating firstly the main patterns we find across all Nordic countries, the most important national differences and as well as the lacunas where new research seems to be wanting. This summarizes how we have answered our first research question about the character of Nordic L1 PhD research. Finally, we use the three theoretical perspectives presented in the introduction in order to discuss the second research question, how to understand trends and changes within the research field.

Concerning our first research question, about how the Nordic L1 school subjects have been researched, a general observation is that the PhD research of this study mainly presents the Nordic L1 school subjects as a matter of handling writing and written texts. The teaching and learning of reading and writing different kinds of texts, are focused in more than two-thirds of the dissertations. The three major main content fields viewed across the four countries are research on reading as a basic skill; research on writing; and research on the teaching and reading of literature. This is not surprising, since there is both a stronger tradition of researching written text, and a new international focus on literary skills related to OECD's PISA ranking, which has already made imprints in the Nordic L1 curricula.

Throughout the period we also find a rather consistent priority of the kinds of writing and reading that are construed as research objects. Reading research is

mainly focusing on primary school and conducted within educational studies, while the linguistic disciplines as well as the disciplines of literary studies tend to support research on secondary and upper secondary school. This distribution seems to mirror a traditional division of labor for the academic engagement in the L1 school subject, also notable in the responsibility for L1 teacher education. One consequence is that the reading of non-literary texts in secondary and upper secondary school is a very rare object of research, although the reading of such texts is included in the Nordic L1 school subjects. The same is true for the writing of literary texts in upper secondary school.

Another obvious pattern across the Nordic countries is that the research field has become more internationally oriented. At least this is clear as to the internationalization of the dissertation format, visible in the increased use of English and anthologies, which challenges the strong tradition of writing monographs in national languages. The change can be interpreted as part of a global trend, partly connected to the implementation of new university evaluation systems. When the trend now has reached also the Nordic L1 PhD research, it may open for new ways of researching L1, but it may also strengthen traditional divisions between distinct research fields that already have well-established international channels for publishing.

At a societal level the growing volume of the L1 PhD research can be explained by growing governmental funding of PhD education. Even though educational policies differ in the four countries, we find two main arguments for supporting L1 PhD research. One is the stronger emphasis on research-based education. The other is the academization of teacher education, which increases the demand for relevant PhD-educated university or university college staff. A mapping of this kind of governmental investments in L1 research is a research project in itself, but we may note the following educational investments: the Swedish funding of L1 PhD-research schools (starting with Swedish and Education, Malmö, 1995–), the establishment of the Norwegian national centers for reading (in Stavanger, 2004–) and writing (in Trondheim, 2009–), the Danish program for practice-oriented research into school research (2010–).

This said about common traits, we now turn to specific characteristics of each country. It is clear from our study, that the *Nordic* L1 school subject is a rather abstract construct, and that several systematic patterns of differences between countries in our data can best be explained by the observation that each country has its own L1 subject(s).

Starting with Denmark, we want to draw attention to the high proportion of dissertations that investigate media and technology. As much as a quarter of all Danish L1 dissertations (8/32) belongs to this content field, which in fact makes it the most popular (together with writing and literature). The background is that both Danish L1 school curricula and L1 teacher education place more emphasis on media and technology than the other Nordic countries.

In the Finnish data there is a remarkable overweight of research on reading as a basic skill in primary school. Almost half of the Finnish dissertations are written

within this field (30/63). These dissertations were typically carried out with quantitative methods and defended within the disciplines of psychology and educational psychology, disciplines that do not contribute to the L1 research in the other three Nordic countries. This priority may have some resonance with the Finnish L1 curriculum which emphasizes also decoding competence. It should also be noted that the connection between the discipline of psychology and teacher education has been strong since the Finnish teacher education was academized, as early as in the 1970s, and that a large proportion of these dissertations were produced in one successful research environment.

What stands out in the Norwegian data is the high proportion of dissertations within writing research, especially in comparison to the rather small number with a focus on teaching or reading literature. The Norwegian dissertations within writing research account for almost a third of the total number (12/37), almost twice as many as the literary dissertations. Moreover, the gap between writing and literature widens during the second half of the period. There seems to be an obvious relation between this distribution and the Norwegian curriculum 2006/2007 which made writing, but not literature, a key competence. In the long run, such uneven distribution of PhD research may contribute to the change of the Norwegian L1 school subject, which has traditionally been regarded as a hermeneutic subject.

In the Swedish and Danish data, we find a counterweight against the strong tendency to divide the L1 school subject into separate aspects. Ten Swedish dissertations makes the L1 subject itself their object of research during the period and six Danish dissertations from the first half of the period, otherwise we see very few other attempts to investigate the character and condition of the L1 subject. As discussed in the Swedish national section, this has been made possible in the Swedish national context through the emergence of the cross disciplinary field of Swedish and Education. Although it has succeeded in highlighting the L1 subject as an interesting case for subject didactic analysis, it has however not succeeded in bridging the gap between linguistic and literary research interests.

If this is what has been researched, what has not? Firstly, we note that although we find, in the second half of the period, an increase of dissertations within the field of multimodality, we see minor research about aesthetic expressions such as playing drama and producing films in the L1 subject. The ten latest years' curriculum reforms with stronger focus on multimodality, digital media and technologies have not yet made as clear impressions as one could expect. Secondly, there are very few dissertations about orality in the Nordic countries. This is surprisingly, since orality and rhetoric are part of the curriculum in all countries and a skill which is paid more and more attention to in the overall society. Thirdly, there seems to be a lack of critical research based on an intersectional perspective. Although there are some dissertations that address growing socioeconomic and gender differences, the small amount of critical research is remarkable, as an open, inclusive, democratic school aimed at reducing social differences, has been a defining characteristic and a source of pride for the Nordic countries.

Our second research question (concerning how trends and changes within the research field may be related to academic knowledge building, conceptualizations of the research object, the L1 school subject, and future challenges of L1 education) is best discussed from the theoretical perspectives of Bernstein, Ongstad and Lambert.

From the perspective of Bernstein, we find a strong trend towards a professionalized cross-disciplinary focus on regions. This trend is supported by both governmental and scholarly initiatives (cf. ARLE). Whereas the singularities are able to connect to the cross disciplinary educational sciences, they do not enter into cross disciplinary ventures with other singularities. Their productivity as singularities within the L1 field appears to be weakening. Another possible future trajectory is that old disciplines will incorporate some regionalized parts of the L1 research field and so lose a bit of their character as singularities. One example may be the connection between linguistic disciplines and writing research in school contexts.

From the perspective of Ongstad, the growth of the L1 research is a sign of a growing didactization of L1 education. The L1 research clearly meets the stronger educational demand for reflection and communication. As to the threats and opportunities that Ongstad points out, the focus on general skills suggests that the content of the L1 school subject is threatened, whereas the dissertations focusing the identity of the L1 school subject and wider curricular issues suggest that the didactization also offers an opportunity to legitimize and develop the L1 research field.

From the perspective of Lambert, the fairly strong focus on productive literacy and skills practices would suggest that the second hypothetical future, the curriculum of skills or competences, has a strong position in L1 PhD research. The dissertations lifting subject didactic curricular and identity discussions point towards the future of powerful disciplinary knowledge. However, how L1 research really affects the L1 education in the Nordic countries is still an unanswered question.

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