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Bildung and critical thinking in the LK20 and educational policy  
documents by OECD

Danning og kritisk tenkning i LK20 og utdanningspolitiske  
dokumenter fra OECD

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by

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## Preface

Thank you to:

Hilde, for listening to my endless rants, believing in me when I longer did, and for who's guidance kept me from writing into the abyss of irrelevance.

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And lastly, my fiancé Ida, who's light continues to shine even in the darkest of places. Who comforts me like no other, while still filling me with courage and joyous energy.

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the concepts *Bildung* and critical thinking through a document analysis of educational policy documents. The foundation for the analysis consists of a brief historical background of *Bildung*, its use since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and foremost Klafki's theory of categorical *Bildung*. Additionally, a description of critical thinking, its proposed purposes and aspects, and its connections to *Bildung*. The analysis uncovers purposes and aspects of *Bildung* and critical thinking from how they are described in the policy documents. Furthermore, discussing them in the light of the literature presented, towards the goal of unravelling the stipulations this poses on English language teaching in Norway and more generally. This study finds that *Bildung* still has a prevalent presence in the Norwegian policy documents, however, by conflating it with other ideas and not clarifying an orientation, its potential, and probably its implementation, are reduced. Similarly, critical thinking is largely reduced to source assessment and rationality in the LK20, omitting aspects of decision-making, developing attitudes and argumentative abilities. The results substantiates Willbergh's (2016) research, demonstrating that the LK20 is predominantly *formal* (in *Bildung* terms), which neglects the role of content and conceals it from public debate. Moreover, the thesis calls attention to the influence OECD has on Norwegian education policymaking. This influence is discussed in the latter part of the thesis, raising concerns as to whether it contributes to individualisation and exclusion of civic influence, and whether the increased pragmatism of competences and evaluation are coming at the cost of the more general humane aspects of education.

## Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven utforsker begrepene danning og kritisk tenkning gjennom en dokumentanalyse av utdanningspolitiske dokumenter. Grunnlaget i analysen består av en kort historisk bakgrunn av danning, dets bruk siden 1800-tallet, og først og fremst Klafkis kategoriske dannelsesteori. Deretter beskrives kritisk tenkning med søkelys på dets foreslåtte formål og aspekter, og dets forbindelser til danning. Analysen avdekker formål og aspekter ved danning og kritisk tenkning ut ifra hvordan de er beskrevet i de utdanningspolitiske dokumentene. Videre diskuteres de i lys av litteraturen presentert med mål om å nøste opp de krav dette stiller til engelskundervisning i Norge og mer generelt. Denne studien finner at danning fortsatt har en utbredt tilstedeværelse i de norske styringsdokumentene, men ved å blande det med andre ideer og ikke klargjøre en orientering, reduseres potensialet og sannsynligvis implementeringen. Tilsvarende er kritisk tenkning i stor grad redusert til kildevurdering og rasjonalitet i LK20, det utelater aspekter ved beslutningstaking, utvikling av holdninger og argumentasjonsevner. Videre underbygger resultatene Willbergh (2016) sin forskning, de viser at LK20 er overveiende *formativ* (i danningsterminologi), noe som neglisjerer innholdets rolle i undervisning og skjuler det fra offentlig debatt. Fokuset på *formale* aspekter ved utdanning kommer i stor grad av innflytelsen OECD har på norsk utdanningspolitikk. Denne påvirkningen diskuteres i siste del av oppgaven, der det vekkes bekymringer for om påvirkningen bidrar til økt individualisering og ekskludering av samfunnspåvirkning, og hvorvidt den økte pragmatismen i form av kompetanser og evaluering går på bekostning av de mer generelle humane aspektene ved utdanning.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Since the 1990s competence- and skills-oriented schools have been on the rise in Europe. The introduction of international testing such as TIMSS and PISA has revolutionised the goals of public education, several researchers point out the new pragmatic turn towards testable abilities, and specifically those tested for in these international tests (Biesta, 2002; Mausestagen, 2013a; Willbergh, 2015). A central concern is that general educational purposes which are not evaluated and graded stand at risk of being neglected. There is a tension between functional utilitarian purposes and formative educational purposes (Byram, 2010; Imerslund, 2000). This thesis aims to shed some light on this tension by analysing education policy documents in the context of Norway. In this analysis *Bildung* and critical thinking are focal points representing the formative educational purposes. Whilst evaluation, testing and competences are key concepts representing the more functional utilitarian purposes. At a grander scale my work is also an attempt at reviving the more intangible aspects of education.

With the introduction of the recent curricular reform LK20, critical thinking has become a new core competency in Norwegian schools (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020). The trait is being referred to as the thinking skill we arm the youth with, in order to improve their argumentative skills and source evaluation; to be a compass when orienting information, epistemological and moral issues (Børresen, 2020; Ferrer et al., 2019; Ingeborg & Leila, 2020). Critical thinking is undoubtedly a much-needed skill in the information age, as people are being bombarded with evermore (not evergreen) information from an increased number of sources. It used to be the case the information was more of a scarcity and something that had to be sought out, now one stands the risk of being blinded by misinformation and, to a varying degree, redundant information (Ferrer et al., 2019; Foros & Vetlesen, 2015).

Furthermore, the information age is characterised by rapid development of new technology which is altering society at a higher pace than before. This in turn changes what jobs are in

demand more quickly, and indeed, there has been an increase in job uncertainty, short-time jobs and unemployment rates (OECD, 2019b). A popular remedy is to advocate for schools to foster more adaptive workers able to re-educate themselves and meet the new demands (Gerver, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2016). This decreases the importance of highly specific skills as the broader skills will be more applicable when facing several work fields, and more developed resilient individuals may better face the oncoming challenges.

In the situation painted above, The Organisation for Cooperation and Development (henceforth abbreviated as OECD), who conducts PISA testing, offer their solution. Mainly directed at policymakers, OECD offer council based on vast amounts of statistical data on economy and education. Their solution revolves around their comprehensive conception of competences and the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner, and their implementation strategies catered to governments. This solution is contested by several critics claiming that OECD fuel this recent pragmatic turn in education and advocate for *Bildung* as a counterbalance or alternative (Byram, 2010; Mausethagen, 2013a; Willbergh, 2015).

My personal interest in topic this begun a couple of years prior to writing this thesis. I remember attending an online lecture on the topic of evaluation and it arose a reflection in me that made me ask “In an educational system becoming increasingly outcome-oriented, how is *Bildung* supposed to gain traction when it is not, and possibly, cannot be tested for? Are there incentives for teachers to teach for a *Bildung* purpose?”

## 1.2 Research questions

This brings us to the research questions, as the information age presents a novel environment in which schools are trying to fulfil the demands for competencies and teaching becoming increasingly method- and skill-based, I pose three sub-questions: How are goals of *Bildung* supposed to gain traction? They are pinned down in the curriculum and law of education, however, what are their impediments in those same documents? CT is a central skill in our new era how does it relate to *Bildung* and does it face similar impediments? Finally, and mainly:

*How are the ideas of critical thinking and Bildung embedded in the educational policy documents, and what stipulations do they impose on ELT in Norway?*



## 1.3 Clarification of concepts

### 1.3.1 *Bildung*

*Bildung* is a German word describing the tradition of formational education. Wherein an individual's development is viewed as a lifelong self-realising process occurring with the surrounding culture. It carries connotations of emancipation and maturation, I will use it to represent the Norwegian word *Danning*, which is practically identical apart from its connotation to politeness and ableness in terms of cultural knowledge and work – alas no translation is perfect.

Although similar, the word education refers to the action of teaching. One can f.eks say an educator, but not a *Bildunger*, that is non-sensical because *Bildung* is an internal process rather than something which is done. Education also refers to the broad sense of the word, as in the system of education, schools, kindergarten (to a degree), universities etc. Put generically education is administered whilst *Bildung* is something to be brought about and facilitated for.

### 1.3.2 Critical thinking

The definition used in throughout this thesis is one provided by Robert H. Ennis: “reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do” (2016a, p. 166). Critical, in this sense, is easily confused with scepticism, critique or with the usage in the movement called critical pedagogy, while drawing inspiration from all is unique. It involves understanding and evaluating standpoints in a position-taking process. Understanding the embedded reasoning and motives; evaluating them normatively and/or rationality. Needless to say, critical thinkin is difficult, and its purpose is multifold as shall be expanded upon in the literature section 3.3. From here on out, critical thinking will be abbreviated to CT.

### 1.3.3 Educational policy documents

‘Educational policy documents’ is an umbrella term used in this thesis mostly referring to the official government documents Educational Act and the current curriculum LK20, but also including OECD's documents offering political advice on education.

## 2. Research Methodology

The following chapter outlines the method used in this thesis, including some justifications for the methodological choices made. A preliminary situational factor discouraging a practical approach is the overload of research requests it would put on schools, making it more difficult to attain enough data. However, the primary justification is tied to the research question, which is repeated for convenience here:

*How are the ideas of Bildung and critical thinking embedded in the educational policy documents, and what stipulations do they impose on ELT in Norway?*

There are multiple pathways to researching the question: One would be to survey teachers, looking at whether they report focusing on formative aspects; another could be to observe English classes, paying attention to certain predetermined metrics of good practice; and surely, several other in-the-field approaches could also be viable and prove very insightful. Some research on critical thinking is being conducted by the KRIT team on OsloMet, however, their work and accompanying data is mainly concerned with the respective subjects: science and Norwegian. Additionally, one particular paper (Andersson-Bakken et al., forthcoming), dealing with a similar question to mine in the field of English, is currently underway and therefore not yet available. As described, very little existing research deals with this specific question, and it therefore seems reasonable to start at the top of the school hierarchy, with the overarching education policy documents.

Analysing education policy documents entails a qualitative method as it deals with texts and their embedded sentiments. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have their respective advantages and disadvantages. Regarding my topic, even if one could measure and quantify *Bildung* and CT, the metrics used would have to be somewhat arbitrary, and still, the question of whether one should, remains. As the quote often attributed to Albert Einstein goes “Not everything that counts can be counted; not everything that can be counted counts”. In this sense a qualitative approach is more forgiving, allowing for more elaborative descriptions and in-depth analysis which need not be quantifiable (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2012). Although this study is primarily qualitative, it also entails a quantitative element, such as counting the number

of occurrences phrases and concepts have, and this will be described both numerically and verbally (Kuckartz, 2014). Having decided upon analysing educational policy documents some choices remain: what documents to analyse and how to conduct the analysis?

As conveyed earlier I find it logical to start at the top working downwards through the hierarchy of educational policy documents. Firstly, presented is a short segment called the objectives clause (*skolens formålsparagraf*) in the Education Act (the Norwegian law of education, *opplæringslova*) about the purpose of our primary and secondary educational. Secondly, there is the newly reformed curriculum LK20 consisting of two segments, the core curriculum and the English subject syllabus, both of which will be analysed. Norway is a part of OECD and our school policies are (heavily) influenced by their policy recommendations (Mausethagen, 2013a), OECD has published several papers and rapports, a selection of which will be examined. This selection is done according to relevance to *Bildung*, CT, Norway and the general purpose of education.

## 2.1 Document Analysis

The objects of analysis are governmental and institutional documents which necessitates a different analytical approach than if working with literature. As a theoretical framework for the analysis, Klafki's theory of *Bildung* and the selected literature on critical thinking, will be used as perspectives for discussion and insight. Document analysis deals with secondary data that is not produced by the researcher, instead the material is comprised of records which may tell us something about the authors, their philosophy, opinions, facts and matters that they chose to emphasise (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2012). Explained in short this shall be done in three steps. First, a general description of the material, most importantly its purpose and context. Second, an interpretation of the relevant content and discussing it with the chosen theory. Last, answering the research question and discussing the findings and trends across the documents.

## 2.2 Quality and limitations of the study

The following subchapter deals with the quality of the study. It describes what actions have been undergone to improve the quality in terms of its reliability and validity. Firstly, the internal

quality of the study is discussed; secondly, the external quality; and lastly my biases are disclosed.

### 2.2.1 Internal quality and reliability

A fundamental question to ask in any study which aims to be scientific is, how reliable is the data? The data used needs to be reliable, otherwise the discussion and following conclusion will be drawn from corrupt information and in turn be arbitrary (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2012). The objects of analysis, the education policy documents, make up the data of this study. Unlike answers in a questionnaire, where reliability relates to whether the answers are an accurate representation of reality, the policy documents are objects. As Kuckartz writes in reference to text analysis “phenomena exist independent of our assumptions about them, although our assumptions can be more or less fitting (...) [and] reality is accessible from several perspectives we have on the phenomena” (2014, p. 152). In other words, the reliability of text analysis depends on the assumptions and perspectives by the researcher. This is why a well-established theory is used as a framework for reference in the analysis (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2011), this way some of my biases are mitigated and it is easier to replicate the findings. Lastly, openness into the methodology is paramount, to proof the integrity of my assumptions and perspectives, and to increase the verifiability.

### 2.2.2 External quality and validity

The external quality of a study is whether the results can be transferred to other situations and if the results may be generalised. It deals with “how transferrable your research is to the external context of the specific research question at hand” (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 154). Since my analysis is of the curriculum and other overarching documents, it could be claimed that the results should be relevant for all Norwegian schooling. However, even though these documents give directions for educations practices, they do not represent the actual practices. That is a crucial difference, my analysis is therefore never of actual teaching practices, just the documents and polices that guide them. Teachers and principals interpret the curriculum and objectives clause themselves and educate towards the appointed goals in their own way.

Validity refers to the degree a method of inquiry measures what it intends to measure. This study aims to ‘measure’ in what ways *Bildung* and critical thinking are communicated. How something is communicated is largely contingent on the context, who are the readers and the authors? Why are the documents written, what are their purposes? Etc. Increasing the contextual information makes for more precise interpretations and higher validity of said interpretations. Furthermore, to improve validity, there needs to be a consistency in the use of terminology or at least an explanation of how the use of terms might differ.

### 2.2.3 Limitations and my biases

The following two paragraphs outline potential limitations of the study, as well as potential biases. As mentioned earlier the education policy documents do not represent precisely what is enacted in schools, that is highly dependent on the individual teacher and professional environment at the school, as they themselves interpret those documents both individually and collectively. When studying the documents, being aware of selective plausibility, that is, using original quotations to justify each analytical finding is crucial. Thus, contradictory statements in the research report and a wider field of interpretation are also presented.

One relevant bias to this project, is my humanist philosophy of education. I believe that in the right circumstances, with its needs met, any individual will grow in the direction of the good, realised person. Furthermore, I am quite naturalistic. I think humans, like all mammals are born to learn and develop mental models of their surroundings, mainly through their innate drive to play and explore. This outlook on education opposes a testing environment as it leaves more trust with the pupils to develop themselves. Indeed, abilities which are close to our evolutionary nature – have been typical human behaviour for more than 100 000 years, are best left to natural means of development, namely free play and exploration. These biases might influence what literature is represented and in turn the discussion of the educational documents, nevertheless objectivity is strived for throughout.

## 3. Literature

The theoretical foundation of this study consists of a brief historical background of *Bildung* before leading into the term's relevance today in school policies and didactics, primarily drawing on insight and the perspective of Klafki. From there an account is given for some ways in which *Bildung* and CT are interconnected, while diving into varying perspectives on what CT should be in education. Lastly, intercultural (communicative) competence (ICC) is briefly mentioned as an example of 'new age' *Bildung* term and how the broader concept is being altered.

### 3.1 Bildung

The concept of *Bildung* has changed over time and been moulded by society's needs and forces. To understand this complex concept and regard its position in today's education, it is worthwhile to give a brief description of its history and evolution, as its past influences how it is used today. In short, the concept and notions of it has existed for a long time, and since its neo-humanistic conception roughly three hundred years ago, its meaning and connotations has changed and become vastly more complex. This chapter will be describing this evolution, focusing mainly on the rationale and characterisations the concept had during its conception in Germany three hundred years ago. Secondly, in what ways the concept changed from said conception the next two and a half centuries. And tertiary, in what ways the concept is used and understood today.

*Bildung* is, at least in hindsight, a timeless concept. In ancient Greece, it existed under the name of its predecessor "pandia" (Larsen, 2004) which meant methodically developing skills and abilities. The Roman Cicero further entangled the concepts of culture and humanism making "pandia" mean the inauguration into a cultural context and development of one's humanness (Briseid, 2008). Onwards into the Middle Ages, religion had monopoly on knowledge and normative issues. In this era, *Bildung* in the ideal of the church, the human soul had to transcend its bodily needs and desires, to rise above its sinful animalistic urges and seek to become an image of God (Hansen, 2008a; Larsen, 2004).

The Enlightenment brought the change of tide to the concept of *Bildung*, and Klafki highlights three influential movements in the period 1770-1830 which led to its humanistic conception in

Germany. First, the movement away from feudalism and authoritarian regimes, into more civic, democratic societies. Second, the novel effects of the early industrialisation. And lastly, people were becoming more secular, less religiously deterministic and started to believe in human ability to reason and to self-cultivate (Klafki, 2011, p. 31) The concept of *Bildung* was at the time discussed by several influential figures, Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Kant, Pestalozzi, Hegel etc., not as one cohesive theory of *Bildung*, but as epistemological, psychological, societal and pedagogical reflections (Klafki, 2001a). This constituted a movement which regarded *Bildung* as a societal mission of realising human potential, as reflected by Kant at the time:

One principle of education which those men especially who form educational schemes should keep before their eyes is this – children ought to be educated, not for the present, but for a possibly improved condition of man in the future; that is, in a manner which is adapted to the idea of humanity and the whole destiny of man. (...) Parents usually educate their children merely in such a manner that, however bad the world may be, they may adapt themselves to its present conditions. But they ought to give them an education so much better than this, that a better condition of things may thereby be brought about in the future (Kant, 1900).

In this era *Bildung* can be characterised by phrases such as rational self-determination, self-realisation, maturation, emancipation, development of innate abilities, and individual development with the purpose of improving humanity's condition (Briseid, 2008; Hansen, 2008a; Klafki, 2001a). Byrne (2020) eloquently formulates *Bildung* as “educative self-formation that involves self-cultivation, and the development of a person's humanity within their historical, social and cultural milieu”. This ambitious educational task may only be accomplished if the individual is connected to the world and the cultural objects of society in a most general, lively and free interplay (Briseid, 2008; Hansen, 2008b). According to Miyamoto's (2022) analysis, in Humboldt's *Bildungsreform* written for the German school in 1809-1810 (but not enacted), Humboldt writes that the *Bildung* process occurs in the interface between the self and world with *Wissenschaft* (science) as the medium. Miyamoto further interprets “In the sense of Humboldt, the didactic process concerns the (re)construction of the student's I–World relationships through the approach to stimulating, waking up, and training methodical faculties that are innate in

human nature” (Miyamoto, 2022, pp. 10-11). In this view the teacher’s role is to facilitate this interaction between the material and the students.

Furthermore, *Bildung* was meant to be for everyone, regardless of social class or heritage, according to Klafki’s analysis, Schleiermacher, Pestalozzi and Humboldt all viewed *Bildung* as an antidote to inherited inequality with the means of improving social mobility (2001b). For example, Humboldt argued that “everyone, including the poorest [should receive] complete *Bildung* as human beings” (1956, p. 29 as cited in Klafki, 2001b). Klafki also highlights Schleiermacher’s distinction between inherited inequality, that is inequality contingent on history and/or society, and innate, natural inequality. And he further states that education must avoid amplifying or preserving the inherited inequality, even though it is not education’s role to directly alter the societal circumstances from where it originates. It can only do so indirectly by providing each individual equal opportunities and optimally facilitating the unfolding of their natural abilities (Klafki, 2001b, p. 54).

From this outset Jesper Eckhard Larsen (2004) categorises *Bildung*’s development into three phases leading into today. In the first phase, *Bildung* was perversely used and served the middle class to distinguish themselves from the uneducated masses below and the hereditary nobility above; to define them as the core of the nation. In this sense the term came to mean self-cultivation through attainment of cultural and academic knowledge, and cultivation of the human as a piece of art. Emphasis was put on proper manners, knowledge of music, art and academic achievements (Larsen, 2004).

The second phase, sprouted especially in Scandinavia during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Norwegian public school was in its initial phase (as was Norway as a nation). Contrary to the first phase, *Bildung* went from being reserved to the privileged to concern every citizen, *Allmenndannelse*. Its aim was to grant people general knowledge and moral courage to participate in democracy, to fulfil their public duties (Briseid, 2008). Furthermore, it contained a nationalistic mission about consolidating a national identity through schoolwork with cultural heritage as content (Kvam, 2016). Larsen (2004) points out how this in practice worked to exclude those not authentically belonging to the culture or state religion in question, in this case Nordic and Protestantism. He postulates that *Bildung* was replaced by the similar although



crucially different concept of *Folkeopplysning* (enlightenment of the masses), which as the wording implicates has more to do with indoctrination into a culture both religious and otherwise (Larsen, 2004).

The third phase emerged gradually over the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continues today. Hansen (2008a) describes it as a period in which the *Bildung* term is fighting for its survival in post-modernity. Examining *Bildung* in modern times, Larsen (2004) diagnoses the concept as often used as an instrument in the process of selecting a literary or academical canon. Moreover, conserving a cultural heritage through generations, in this sense he writes the concept is used as a mark of quality. Parallely, *Bildung* is used as a kind of *Borger* (bourgeoise) ideology, a praised idea of an individual how has become self-realised through discipline and civic participation optimising his efforts in terms of time and money (Larsen, 2004) – a perfect capitalist citizen.

Whereas in academia, researchers are split on whether the term (still) should be used in an educational context. Masschelein and Ricken (2003) argue against the continued use of *Bildung* describing it as a power-apparatus that contributes to an increased individualisation in society (more on this in the discussion section). On the contrary Taylor (2017) argues that “*Bildung* may offer conceptual sustenance to those who wish to develop educative practices to supplement or contest the privileging of market and economic imperatives in higher education which configure teaching and learning as an object available to measurement via performance indicators” (p. 3). Due to its long history and convoluted meanings several researchers have tried to revise and recontextualise *Bildung* (Biesta, 2002; Hansen, 2008a; Klafki, 2001a; Kvamme, 2021; Miyamoto, 2022).

### 3.2 Klafki’s theory of *Bildung* and didactics

As mentioned, many researchers have tried to re-coin *Bildung* to better suit today’s needs. Perhaps most prominent, at least in northern Europe, is Wolfgang Klafki. In his book *Neue Studien zur Bildungstheorie und Didaktik* (Theory of Bildung and Didactics: New Studies) Klafki outlines a new theory of *Bildung* and drafts its implications on educational content, goals, classroom methodology and didactics. This section aims to present the essence of his work with

the further means of using his theory as a lens through which an analysis of contemporary educational documents may be conducted. Preliminarily presented are his reasons for why *Bildung* (still/again) is a desirable and why a central theory of education like *Bildung* is unavoidable. Thereafter and constituting the main part, will be the core aspects of his theory of *Bildung*. Lastly both concluding and giving way to operationalisation are his didactic framework which facilitate the implementation of his theory.

Klafki argues that a central theory of education is mandatory if one is to reason for the didactic and pedagogical choices made. If such a theory is vacant education and upbringing is more or less left to random processes of socialisation and under the control of external interest groups as other researchers argue is the case with the increased focus on competence (Hyland, 1991; Willbergh, 2015). Klafki continues, stating that several more contemporary concepts such as, emancipation and self- and co-determination often tread into *Bildung's* stead in overarching goals for education, and serve the exact same function, thus demonstrating the need for a comprehensive central theory of education (Klafki, 2001a, pp. 60-61).

Initially Klafki (2001b) details how the concept of *Bildung* was constructed and conceived in Germany during the period 1780-1830, some of which is referred to previously. Klafki upholds this period's classical notion of *Bildung* separate from its latter historical uses which he categorises into two directions namely *formative Bildung* and *material Bildung*. *Formative Bildung* predominantly focuses on personal abilities and subjective experience, accomplished through teaching pupils' methods, ways of thinking, using tools and strategies to master life. Pedagogical ideas which belong in this category are highly subjective-oriented such as learning to learn, learning strategies and different kinds of literacies (Willbergh, 2016).

By contrast, *material Bildung* predominantly focuses on the educational content claiming it alone has a formative effect in a normative direction and provide knowledge. Prioritising traditions, cultural works, and knowledge which are viewed as particularly important, instead of the learning subject. Whilst not discounting either direction, Klafki critiques these directions for their one-sidedness and claims that *Bildung* is best accomplished if the content of cultural importance is experienced as meaningful and relatable. Klafki therefore suggests a middle-way which he terms categorical *Bildung* (Klafki, 2001a; Ryen, 2020).

In categorical *Bildung* theory, Klafki (2001a) epistemologically defines the *Bildung* process as occurring in the interface between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ (e.g. child and the world) as a mutual and active integration process: the ‘object’ becomes available, understandable, possible to criticise and changeable; the ‘subject’ develops its possibilities for understanding, action and responsibilities. The internal subjective process is thereby described as: the subject deciphers its experience into *categories* which guide its actions. Alternatively, as Erik Ryen neatly describes it “the process of *Bildung* is, therefore, one that occurs in a dialectic relationship between the external world and the individual, where the former is at the same time constraining and being constructed as meaningful by the latter” (2020, p. 226).

In order to bring this epistemology of categorical *Bildung* into the classroom, Klafki introduces exemplary teaching also known as the exemplary principle. A teaching model by which the teacher introduces something specific that can stand to represent something more general (Klafki, 2001a). This could be an aesthetic object, an issue, a verbal expression or common to the English subject a piece of literature which illuminates a bigger picture and leads to general knowledge (Klafki, 2001a; Willbergh, 2016). The exemplary principle is an idea going back as far as ancient Greece. Importantly, Klafki adds that the content has to be relevant to the pupils’ themselves for them to turn the *matter* into *meaning* and thus be formed by it:

The child’s need for guidance has its counterpart in its need for independent will. Also this need has to be taken into consideration because it is foundational for and a prerequisite for cultural renewal, for fundamental understanding, and for establishment of new categories (Klafki, 2001a, pp. 18,19, translation by author)

### 3.2.1 Core aspects of Klafki’s theory of *Bildung*

As a preface, Klafki (2001a, pp. 66-68) points out the entangled nature of *Bildung* and society; questions of education and *Bildung* are also questions of society. This unavoidable connection can be ordered in two ways, either pedagogical theories and practice are subordinate to society’s needs or conversely, they are regarded as not entirely depended on society. Klafki argues for the latter organisation, reasoning that society is made up of people or groups of people, who if their will and majority demand it could alter society through a political process. This connection logically suggests that the pedagogy based on *Bildung* has as a mission, not just to react to

conditions and developments in society, instead its pedagogy should facilitate people's evaluation of society and their vigour in making societal alterations.

The goals for Klafki's *Bildung* exists on two different levels, first comes the three foundational human qualities which must be interconnected:

- Self-determination: ability to decide for oneself one's life situation and opinions regarding profession, ethics and religion.
- Co-determination: everyone has the right, possibility and responsibility for conditions regarding culture, society and politics.
- Solidarity: the aforementioned qualities may only exist in harmony if in combination with an effort for and together with the people who are separate from an individual's co- and self-determination (Klafki, 2001a, p. 69).

The subordinate level deals with the ambiguous term *allmenndannelse*, a term which (poorly) translates into English as general *Bildung*. Klafki (2001a, pp. 69-71) specifies the goals for its "generalness" integral and implied by the qualities mentioned above. First, he argues that if *Bildung* is regarded as a democratic right and a prerequisite for self-determination, then *Bildung* must be *for everyone*. Second, he argues that if co-determination and solidarity are to be fulfilled then *Bildung* must be regarded as the acquisition of common human issues of contemporary and future importance, and furthermore discussing ways of dealing with these issues. Last, he argues that if the fundamental right of free expression of one's personality is to be fulfilled, then *Bildung* must embrace all aspects of human interest and potential – it must be a general education in the sense that it includes cognitive possibilities, bodily pleasure and responsibility, production in practical crafts, aesthetics capabilities and judgement, socialisation, ethical and political decision making together with a call to action.

From these goals Klafki draws several important inferences. For instance, a common issue in curriculum making and in discussions of *Bildung*, is the issue of canon (Klafki, 2001a, pp. 74-89; Larsen, 2004), in other words, what content of cultural salience should be at the core of education. Klafki infers from the previous goals that the answer to this question is to induce a consciousness of central contemporary issues so that people with time feel responsible and a readiness towards said issues. Supplementarily, he lists five central issues in accordance with his

understanding of ‘our time’ (in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition written in 1995), namely issues of *war, climate change, inequality, digitalisation* and lastly *social relations*. Through these topics teachers may foster a multidimensional conversation in the classroom where the pupils may become opinionated and form their values, which Klafki argues is a prerequisite for self-determination. Furthermore, teaching through key issues may promote ability to critically evaluate one’s own and other’s reasoning and arguments; think empathically; and to view the bigger picture and understand how the context matters. Which, as we get into critical thinking, it can be by extension argued that

Klafki’s critical-constructive Didaktik (...) offers an epistemology that can ground CT in a comprehensive theory of education built on commitment to autonomy, democracy, justice and solidarity. (...) an epistemology of CT that goes beyond the rather narrow and decontextualised offerings of the CT movement. (Ryen, 2020, pp. 226, 227)

Klafki’s educational purpose of nourishing the development of self-determination, co-determination, and solidarity in pupils, enables them to understand the society around them, participate in democratic processes therein and make their own informed decisions. “The *critical* aspect of Klafki’s didactics is concerned with how this *Bildung* ideal is not always reflected in reality” (Ferrer et al., 2019, pp. 17-18, translated by author). For the ideal of self-determination to be realised fairly, it is vital to uncover the power relations in society.

### 3.3 Critical thinking

Not only does *Bildung*-centered didactics provide a valuable framework for working with CT, indeed there is also a considerable overlap in their purposes, as will become clear in this chapter projecting varying intended purposes of CT. In the research literature on critical thinking the term critical thinking is defined in a multitude of ways, Robert H. Ennis (2016b) lists 17 different definitions of mainstream CT he has come across during his many years of research in the field. He argues they are all different descriptions of the same concept and promotes an inclusive definition of CT as “reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do” (Ennis, 2016a, p. 166). In conjunction with the often-broad definition, there are inconsistencies

in the understanding and teachings of the skill. Questions are raised as to whether teachers themselves are able to think critically and to how this goal should be operationalised (Kränge & Ferguson, 2020; Lim, 2015). Furthermore, the complex nature of CT leads to a variation in what components the researchers choose to highlight, in addition to a variation in what is proclaimed as the purpose and benefits of teaching CT, some examples are explicated below.

First and most commonly, Lai (2011) concludes in her literature review, that components skills of critical thinking are skills of analysing arguments, making inferences using methods of logic, decision making and problem solving based on careful evaluation, often of conflicting considerations. This viewpoint is influenced by John Dewey, although he termed it reflective thinking, he was one of the most prominent early advocates for this scientific attitude of mind (2011; Ennis, 2016a) and provided a definition for reflective thinking as early as 1909 in *How We Think* “Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusion to which it tends”. Interestingly, in his analysis Miyamoto (2022) finds that Humboldt regarded *Wissenschaft* (scientific, systematised knowledge of the disciplines) frame of mind as a fundamental goal in his *Bildung*-centred didactics and curriculum and Miyamoto writes

[Humboldt] suggests that science can serve as a background view to one's actions in the world. In this sense, science was conceived as the core of forming one's thoughts and actions with functioning behind them and providing important resources to make judgments in each thought and action. (Miyamoto, 2022, p. 9)

This conception of CT falls in line with the definition provided by Ennis and is often included when researchers highlight other components and ascertain a broader purpose (Ferrer et al., 2019; Kränge & Ferguson, 2020; Lim, 2015; Lorentzen & Røthing, 2017).

The more specific skill of source assessment is emphasised by some researchers (Brante & Strømsø, 2018; Kränge & Ferguson, 2020), a trait which seems to be especially common in Norway. Kränge & Ferguson forward two components when teaching this. First, strategic source assessment is for them to extract information about the source and use this to evaluate the source's legitimacy and applicability. Second, it is inducing an epistemology which holds knowledge as more tentative, seeking to scrutinise it and judge its validity (2020). Dewey

suggests something similar, more specifically, that reflective thinking (CT) happens in this moment of uncertainty, where the individual is weighing the different empirical impressions for a logically sound causal connection. Dewey further states that this state of uncertainty always entails some degree of discomfort and unease, which is part of what makes CT so difficult (2011). This perspective on CT argues that source assessment is vital in a digital age when pupils are navigating the internet for information instead of school books, and that it influences the pupils to have their ground covered when making an argument (Brante & Strømsø, 2018; Krangle & Ferguson, 2020).

A further purpose of CT particularly in line with Klafki's theory of *Bildung* is to enhance democratic and societal participation, CT may act as an important aspect of school's democratic education as it teaches for and through democracy instead of about it. The advocated educational method here is issues discussion, fostering reflections on topics of societal norms, power-relations, climate, and other central moral and practical issues of our time (Ferrer et al., 2019; Foros & Vetlesen, 2015; Lorentzen & Røthing, 2017). Ferrer et al. (2019) point out that this normative foundation of CT ties into *Bildung* since it partakes in forming the pupils' values and opinions, and thereby character. Krangle and Ferguson (2020) in their attempt at operationalising CT highlight a dialogic teaching process where the teacher facilitates a healthy discussion instead of dominating one or simply transferring information. This purpose for CT also overlaps with Klafki's dialectic epistemology and his didactics focused on key issues (Klafki, 2001b; Ryen, 2020).

In his discussion of the CT movement Leonel Lim (2015) criticises issues discussion for not representing minority perspectives as the children in any given class are not heterogeneous enough in terms of social class and cultural background. Further stating that an "ideological diversity is (...) a prerequisite for any kind of deliberation that aspires towards a meaningful consideration of alternative, even competing perspectives" (ibid., p. 12). To resolve this inherent issue Lim calls for the development of a social and relational epistemology. He further argues the importance of teaching an awareness of society's interconnectivity and complexity; furthermore the influence this situation has on persons values, ideas and actions (2015). Everything an individual does, from tapping the light switch to deciding what to eat for dinner, is affected by what other people do. An individual's actions are incredibly interconnected; personal, "unique"

ideas are really caught up within webs of related ideas and are shaped by the social atmosphere surrounding the individual (Lim, 2015). Due to this Lim argues for increasing awareness around the fundamental relationality, prompting that such an awareness will be able to dispel the haze of the ‘anonymous other’, clarifying social and societal complexity, enabling an understanding of one’s place in society and the lives of the people that surround one’s own (2015). This progressive purpose for CT stemming from the critical pedagogy tradition, may be aided by the German *Bildung*-centred didactics as it provides an existing “epistemology [that] is social and relational, incorporates issues of differential power in society and meets the need of students ‘to be able to relate themselves and their actions to other supposedly distant members of society—and even the world’ (Lim, 2015, p. 15)” (Ryen, 2020, p. 226).

### 3.3.1 Critical thinking assessment

Having described some of what CT in education entails, an often-neglected aspect of CT needs to be discussed, namely assessment. This is a complicated aspect of teaching CT as assessment may inhibit critical thinking processes in more ways than one, while still being useful for leaning and evaluating the effectiveness of the education according to specific metrics (Ennis, 1993; Gray, 2013b). On the one hand regarding the usefulness of assessment, Ennis (1993) lists seven purposes for assessing CT, here paraphrased as: diagnosing student level of CT; giving formative feedback; external motivation and avoiding the fact that non-test goals are often neglected by students and educators; informing teachers about their teachings effect on CT progress; providing data for CT research; a selection tool for admissions into higher education programs; holding schools accountable to the goal of improving CT skills in students.

On the other hand assessment may also inhibit CT, Peter Gray (2013a) who reasons from an evolutionary psychology perspective, argues that “the grading system, which is the chief motivator throughout our system of education, is a powerful force against honest debate and critical thought in the classroom” (Gray, 2013b, p. 79). This is because students perceive their main goal as attaining good grades and to accomplish that the students primarily need to figure out what the teacher or test maker wants them to answer. Furthermore, since teachers do the grading, students are used to teachers holding the solution, thus they are incentivised away from criticising and questioning this “correct” solution (Gray, 2013b). In a similar though more



technical vein, Ennis states several traps when assessing CT, one of which is that high-stakes testing interferes with CT by incentives teaching to the test and cram-schools, thereby weakening test validity. Additionally, “the high-stakes situation pressures the test makers to avoid taking risks, (...) limit[-ing] their testing to multiple-choice deductive-logic items” (1993, p. 181) thus reducing the comprehensiveness of CT measured by the test (1993).

From a psychological perspective testing in general and high-stakes testing especially induce varying degrees of anxiety in students. CT requires an openness to new ideas and the ability to evaluate differing viewpoints and their consequences reflectively and even playfully. Anxiety prevents this playful openness and “forces thought along well-worn channels. Anxiety facilitates the ability to feed back what one knows by rote, but it inhibits the generation of new ideas or insights” (Gray, 2013b, pp. 80-81). Doing assessment of CT is analogous to navigating a quagmire – an endeavour you would not choose if you knew how murky it was.

### 3.4 Intercultural competence

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is an expansion of the concept of communicative competence developed by Michael Byram in his book *Teaching and assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence* (Byram, 1997). It is a competence which is mainly addressed in foreign language teaching, and it is meant to introduce the valuable experience of otherness to learners. Aiming to improve the efficacy of communication by finding common ground, respecting differences in beliefs and behaviours (Byram, 2010, p. 3). Hoff argues in her article that ICC is “an inseparable aspect of *Bildung*” as they are both “inherently concerned with the personal and cultural development of individuals” (Hoff, 2014, p. 2). In an analysis of ICC in light of *Bildung* theories, Hoff finds that Byram’s model of ICC is reconcilable with Gadamer’s notion of the ‘fusion of horizons’. Which is to say, meeting the Other with curiosity and openness, putting oneself in the Other’s position and ultimately reaching a shared new understanding.

This is a point of contention, as not everybody agrees with Gadamer’s notion, especially not if one is blindly accepting a new world view. Such a thought process neglects the role of disagreement and disharmony as a viable fuel for a fruitful discussion. Hoff highlights Ricoeur’s

and Bakhtin's view that intercultural relationships can contain elements of contention and disagreement, while still maintaining equality and mutual respect. If the intercultural encounter is to stimulate *Bildung*, then it needs to have an impact on the learner's way of thinking and have a formative effect on the learner as a person, which is perhaps more likely the more profound the dialogue is (Hoff, 2014). A similar line of reasoning is made by Dewey regarding reflective thinking, he highlights the role of uncertainty as a catalyst for inquiry (2011), furthermore, describing reflective thinking as a process that "involves a willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance. Reflective thinking, in short, means judgment suspended during further inquiry; and suspense is likely to be somewhat painful" (2011, pp. 12-13)

## 4. Analysis and discussion

This chapter combines the analysis and discussion for a more seamless transition between the two dealing with each of the educational policy documents in turn. More specifically, the structure of this chapter follows each document in order, starting with the objectives clause of the Educational Act, followed by the core curriculum, and then the English subject curriculum, and lastly OECD reports and articles. In each part the document(s) is described, analysed, and discussed separately before a concluding more general discussion of *Bildung*, CT and OECD's influence. The documents are described in the introduction to their respective segments to supply necessary contextual information, and they are discussed in light of the theory presented in section 2. Literature.

The analysis of these documents intends to reveal how the ideas of *Bildung* and CT are represented: what concepts they connote or oppose, how prevalent are the ideas, and what seems to be their purpose? Since these ideas are broadly defined, encapsulate and/or overlap with other concepts, these ideas will also be under scrutiny; included in the 'code' if you will. Included in the *Bildung* code are elements of personal formation, self-determination, co-determination, solidarity, democratic values and also elements of Klafki's didactics.

### 4.1 Objectives Clause for Norwegian Education

The Education Act, the law of Norwegian education, contains an objectives clause which establishes the purposes of the educational system in Norway, and it applies to both primary and secondary education. This has remained unchanged since 2008 and the curriculum builds upon it, elaborating on the values stated and providing more detailed descriptions. The paragraph is no more than half a page, yet everything in the curriculum has to be viewed in the light of it, this protects the integrity of the education, it binds everything together for a common purpose. Furthermore, there is plenty to unpack when analysing how the idea of *Bildung* and CT are embedded in it.

The objectives stated in the clause are what values the education builds on; why school develops skills, knowledge, and attitudes; what mindset and qualities it should foster; and lastly in what

ways the pupils should be met with in order to promote *Bildung* and desire to learn (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020a). To give a brief summary, the education in cooperation with households shall, first and foremost, prepare children for the world and the future, and provide them with a historical and cultural insight as anchorage. It builds on values found in human rights and in Norwegian religious and cultural heritage, more specifically, respect for human dignity and for nature, intellectual freedom, compassion, forgiveness, equality, and solidarity. Furthermore, the education shall: promote democracy, equality, and scientific thinking; build on and expand knowledge of our national cultural heritage and our common international cultural tradition; develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes so that when the pupils grow up, they master their lives and partake in working life and society. The pupils shall experience that they are co-responsible and have the right to participate, moreover learn to think critically and act ethically and with environmental awareness. At school they shall be met with respect, trust, demands and challenges that promote *Bildung* and a desire to learn (Opplæringslova, 2008).

#### 4.1.1 Bildung

Viewing the objectives clause in light of Klafki and *Bildung* theory, illustrates how impactful the idea of *Bildung* has been in shaping Norwegian education and how prevalent of a tradition it is. The task at hand now is to distill this paragraph and examine how the remains compares to historical ideas of *Bildung*. In comparison to the classical notion of *Bildung*, there are many commonalities, for instance, like Kant expressed the education should first and foremost prepare children for the world and the future (1900). By the same token as Humboldt, the clause also repeatedly states that education and the *Bildung* process occurs when the pupils meet the surrounding culture (Miyamoto, 2022), a difference here however, is the classical's emphasis on free interplay between the individual and society (Briseid, 2008; Hansen, 2008a), whilst in the clause, integration and participation are emphasised (Opplæringslova, 2008). Similar to the classical notion of *Bildung* the objectives clause also aims at 'leveling the playing field', striving equality of opportunity (Klafki, 2001b), which is arguably the greatest gift of this age old idea.

Upon further comparison, a few differences are also prevalent between the clause and classical notions of *Bildung*. Chiefly among them is the indispensable humanistic part of classical *Bildung*, namely self-realisation. A common feature of humanistic traditions which stems from a

trust in the individual human to acquire knowledge and attributes by itself, if placed in the right circumstances and/or facilitated correctly. To stray away from this concept is something which Klafki also does to a degree, inspired by Habermas, he molds self-realisation into self-determination and combines it with the society enhancing qualities of co-determination and solidarity (Klafki, 2001a; Ryen, 2020).

This move away from self-realisation is interesting in more ways than one, as it arguably was the attribute which moved *Bildung* into the first phase following the classical where the middle class took ownership of it and utilised it for social status signaling, cultivating themselves. A pervasive shift in the eyes of the neo-humanist who formed classical *Bildung*, it does however suggest the self-centric downside of focusing on self-realisation, especially if left without communal goals. The clause's concept of *Bildung* clearly does not fall under that category.

What about the opposite end of the spectrum, where the primary focus is to build the individuals to suit the needs of society? This is what Larsen (2004) calls the second phase in the history of *Bildung*, characterised by a nationalistic mission of creating a national identity, enlightenment of the masses and focusing on cultural heritage as educational content (Kvam, 2016). Similar to this notion of *Bildung*, the Education Act conveys an emphasis on “cultural heritage” and its value package, and that the pupils grow up to “partake in working life and society” (Opplæringslova, 2008, translated by author). Complementing the increased globalisation since that phase, the clause also incorporates international cultural traditions and highlight values rooted in human rights. Thus crucially making the education more culturally including, combating the moral defect this notion of *Bildung* had during its prime as Larsen (2004) points out in his historical review of *Bildung*. Moreover, it hints at the exemplary principle, still regarding some forms of content as contributing to *Bildung*.

In short summary, the objectives clause of the Education Act carries with it much of the content seen in *Bildung* through history. Elements of the classical notion, the first and second phase are all apparent. Furthermore, and as one would hope for, the defects experienced through the historical usage of *Bildung* has been corrected for. As Klafki foregrounded, in line with the classical notion, solidarity and other societally important aspects have been incorporated into the

*Bildung* vision for education at large. What remains to be seen now is how this is transitioned into the core curriculum and the English subject curriculum.

#### 4.1.2 Critical thinking

The idea of CT is explicitly mentioned in the objectives clause as something the pupils shall learn, “the pupils and apprentices shall learn to think critically and act ethically and with environmental awareness. They shall have joint responsibility and the right to participate” in tandem the educators shall “show respect for the individual’s convictions. They are to promote democracy, equality and scientific thinking” (Opplæringslova, 2008, pp. § 1-1, translation provided by udir.no). By placing CT alongside phrases such as, act ethically, environmental awareness, equality, democracy, and individual convictions, the clause signals the importance of teaching for CT alongside these topics. A connection which is reflected in the literature, and plenary and group discussions are suggested as a valuable arenas for CT with an interests in contemporary issues (Ferrer et al., 2019; Krangle & Ferguson, 2020).

In addition to suggesting how CT ought to be worked with in school, the clause further implies that thinking critically involves normativity. This aspect is something which Beate Børresen criticises the LK20 for not carrying out, she claims CT is instead being operationalised mainly as source evaluation with some argumentative abilities and logical deduction sprinkled in with it (2020). Børresen argues that not only should CT involve distinguishing and evaluation, it should also involve doing so according to normative standards, questioning whether something is good or bad, true or false (2020).

## 4.2 LK20 Core Curriculum

The core curriculum is the overarching part of LK20, its function is to forward the objectives in the Education Act. The values and principles the education shall be based on are concretised, and further descriptions of how to operationalise them are given. In the same manner as the objectives clause the core curriculum applies to both primary and secondary education. It is

comprised of an introduction and a purpose section which is the same as the objectives clause. In addition, there are three further sections, one elaborating on the core values, a second detailing the principles for education and *Bildung*, and last, there is a chapter on principles for the school's practice. This 19-page regulatory document presents general goals for education, and it therefore naturally contains a lot of material which reveals how the idea of *Bildung* is represented. The concept of CT is also present and will be analysed second.

#### 4.2.1 Bildung

Since the core curriculum is an expansion of the objectives clause, it is redundant to write another summary – that would be very repetitive. Instead, it is worthwhile to investigate some of the ways in which the core curriculum elaborates on what the purpose of *Bildung* is and how it is achieved, much of this is described in detail in chapter 2. Principles for learning, development and *Bildung*. Afterwards, an analysis will be conducted of the values stated in the objectives clause that are expanded upon, values which are supposed to radiate through the school's practice, especially in its development of attitudes and competence (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020c).

*Bildung* is deeply rooted in the core curriculum. In it, *Bildung* is written alongside education, and the two are explicitly stated as comprising a dual mission for schools. This point is further illustrated in the excerpts “the core curriculum clarifies the responsibility schools and training establishments have when it comes to education, *Bildung* and development of competences”, “schools shall meet pupils with trust, respect and demands, and they shall be met with challenges that promote *Bildung* and desire to learn”, “academic leaning is a central part of achieving both the *Bildung* and educational mission.” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020c, pp. 1, 5, 10).

Correspondingly, *danning* and other inflections of the word is mentioned 21 instances across 19 pages and in comparison, *kompetanse* (competence, including variations such as competence goals), is coincidentally also mentioned 21 times, while *utdanning* (education) is mentioned 8 times (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020c). A further analysis could be made, but it is hard to avoid without comprising the data by choosing words which translate poorly or are used too often thus requiring too much time and space to represent properly. The selected examples are representative of the amount the concepts are represented in the document.

Conversely, the ways in which they are described is different. Competence receives its own definition and its own subchapter called 2.2 competence in the subjects, rendering it more visible and accessible to work towards (one would think). Regardless, the definition they provide is “competence is the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and abilities, to master challenges and solve tasks in known and unknown contexts and situations. Competence involves understanding and the capabilities of reflection and critical thinking” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020c, p. 10). Compared with the Cambridge Dictionary definition, “the ability to do something well” (Cambridge-Dictionary, n.d.), it appears borderline ridiculous how much the policymakers want to encompass. *Bildung* is not defined, but it is explained in what scenarios the process of *Bildung* occurs. However, the explanation provided is vague and similar to competence leaves the impression that *Bildung* occurs in virtually any educational situation. This close connection between *Bildung* and education is seen throughout the core curriculum, and so is blurring of the lines between them and between concepts in general.

In general the curriculum avoids concretising ways in which knowledge is attained, it describes what knowledge is and what methods the pupils are to use, but crucially it lacks an epistemology for how knowledge is attained and what teaching practices to use - precisely what Klafki’s didactic provides and why researchers call for it (Ryen, 2020; Willbergh, 2016; Young & Muller, 2010).

The purposes for *Bildung* held in the curriculum are interconnected and interdependent with education, they constitute a dual mission. “Primary and secondary education is a vital part of a life-long *Bildung* process which has the individual’s freedom, independence, responsibility, and human compassion as its goals”, through education the person as a whole shall be *Gebildet* (read ‘formed’) and “each and every one shall have the opportunity to develop their abilities” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020c, p. 9, translation by author). By extension the directorate of education states that the education shall grant a foundation which helps the pupils understand themselves and the Other. This shall help them make better decisions in life and better enable their participation in society. Integrating it to the idea of *Bildung*, the curriculum upholds that the intrinsic value of childhood and adolescence has to be respected – school is not just for the sake of education, or future work and civil life (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020c).



In reviewing these purposes proposed in the core curriculum with the literature, much is the same when compared with the objectives clause, although there are a few alterations. First and foremost, Klafki central goals of *Bildung*-centered didactics, self-determination, co-determination and solidarity appear to a degree: individual freedom combined with independence is reminiscent of self-determination; responsibility together with human compassion is reminiscent of solidarity; understanding oneself and the Other is a prerequisite to co-determination. Yet it is different, in ideological terms, individual freedom and independence is in line with individualism, and refraining from usage of the word solidarity, is a move away from socialism and the social democratic tradition in Norway. Altering these core aspirations of the educational system will have ramification on the societal level in the long run, every child goes through school and every teacher is supposed to read and follow the curriculum. These are not the only differences in those words, this change should be studied further by someone with more competence in sociology and philosophy. It bears mention that solidarity is stated as a principle for the growth and development of human beings in the core curriculum, under values and human dignity. However, its role is diminished from in the clause and in light of Klafki's theory of *Bildung*, it is crucially underrepresented.

Klafki's maintains the importance of solidarity based on the fact that society in its entirety is made up of people and groups of people who if their will and majority demand it could alter society through a political process. Because of this *Bildung* and society have an unavoidable connection, and in Klafki's opinion, questions of *Bildung* should not be solely dependent on society, as a variable to freely alter according to its needs and condition. Instead, pedagogical theory, such as *Bildung*, and practice should partake in the evaluation and formation of itself and furthermore facilitate people's evaluation of society and their vigor in making societal alterations (Klafki, 2001a).

Relatedly, educational practitioners were actually involved, to a degree, in the development of the core elements of each subject in the LK20 and of the subject curriculums. Selected teachers, school owners and people with experience and competence in curriculum making were involved in the process. However, in shaping the core curriculum, which describes the most of the *Bildung* aspects of the education, the involvement was limited to groups within the Department of Knowledge and the Directorate of Education (Karseth et al., 2020).

Regarding the second excerpt from principles for learning, development and *Bildung*, ending with “opportunities to develop their abilities”, contains something similar to self-realisation, as it seeks to compel the pupils to develop their innate abilities. Upon further reading of how the curriculum relays that development functions, whether it is transferred from teacher to pupil, or whether pupil realises and develops itself, it is clear that both are represented. An example which stands in contrast to the first, “*Bildung* happens when the pupils receive knowledge about and insight into [basically anything]”, keeping in mind that language follows patterns and that there is a culture to how words are used in phrases – it is unorthodox to say that one receives abilities or that pupils should discover all their knowledge and insights. This further strays away from the exemplary principle leaving teachers less critical of what subject content to include.

The attribution of a plethora of processes, methods and abilities into *Bildung* and into other concepts such as competences, contributes to a blurring of concepts and makes the overall purpose and its function confusing. This analysis substantiates the concern that “without an orientation for *Bildung*, every pedagogical action will be like fumbling around in the dark” (Gaare, 2018, translation by author, italics added) echoed by Willbergh (2016).

#### 4.2.2 Critical thinking

Compared with the objectives clause, CT is considerably more prominent in the core curriculum. In particular by the inclusion of CT into the LK20 definition of competences cited above, in segment 3.2.1 *Bildung*. In accordance with the curriculum this means that if the pupils are to prove their competence, they not only have to be able to do something well, they must also demonstrate critical thinking in that process for it to be good enough. This makes the task of educating competences burdensome for teachers, as CT is regarded by many as not only difficult to do (Dewey, 2011), but also difficult to teach (Lai, 2011) and evaluate (Ennis, 1993; Lai, 2011). That is unless the curriculum holds a much simpler view of CT, than what the research suggest.

Much the same as *Bildung* and competence, CT is described in its own chapter named 1.3 critical thinking and ethical consciousness. In it, CT is tied mostly to the terms scientific thinking and

ethical consciousness. The curriculum provides something close to a definition where it states that “critical and scientific thinking involves using reason in an exploratory and systematic way when faces with concrete practical challenges, phenomena, statements and forms of knowledge” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020c, p. 6). Connectedly, the curriculum asserts that the “pupils shall be able to evaluate different sources of knowledge and think critically about how knowledge is developed”. This is familiar territory as far as what has been covered in this thesis’ literature, found under 3.3 Critical thinking. Yet nothing has been written about CT leading to action, to what to believe or what to do.

In the descriptions of what ethical consciousness entails, the curriculum contends that it is “to weigh different considerations against each other”, and that a further purpose is to “develop the pupils’ ability to make ethical evaluations” and together with CT it will develop the pupils’ good judgement (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020c, p. 6). The curriculum thereby does include judgement, moving its concept of CT closer to the widely accepted definition by Ennis, yet it is not as prevalent.

In relation to the other perspectives outlined in the literature section 3.3 Critical thinking, next to nothing is mentioned about teaching for societal participation nor for the fundamental relationality which Lim (2015) calls for. Under democracy and citizenship CT is mentioned as a part of learning how to deal with conflicting opinions and respecting differing perspectives. Other than that there is nothing to tie those aspects to CT in the curriculum (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020c).

Concept conflation.

## 4.3 English subject curriculum

The Norwegian curriculum is composed of all the subject curricula and an encompassing core curriculum imbuing the former. This core curriculum states three interdisciplinary topics, health and life skills, democracy and citizenship, and sustainable development, in the English subject the latter is omitted, and the two others are specified for the subject. This subchapter analyses and discusses how the ideas of *Bildung* and CT are used in the English subject curriculum, and what purpose they are made to fulfill in the curriculum, starting with *Bildung*.

### 4.3.1 *Bildung*

The Directorate of Education who institute the curriculum has translated it to English. In which their introductory sentence in the relevance and central values section, “English is an important subject when it comes to cultural understanding, communication, all-round education and identity development” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020b), reveal that they choose to translate the word ‘danning’ to ‘all-round education’ instead of the research terms ‘*Bildung*’, ‘(general) education’ commonly used in the UK, or ‘liberal arts’ the North American version. All of which deal with a kind of all-round education although carrying their unique connotations. It is important to mention that teachers do their individual interpretations of the curriculum when planning the syllabus and lessons, moreover, this freedom of interpretation also applies for individual schools and entire municipalities, most of which read the Norwegian version thus reading ‘danning’, the closest relative to *Bildung*.

In the description of how the English subject should incorporate the interdisciplinary topic of health and life skills, a heavy emphasis is put on enabling the pupils’ expression, as well as understanding the expressions of Others. An example of this is, developing the pupils’ literacy “forms the basis for being able to express their feelings, thoughts, experiences and opinions and can provide new perspectives on different ways of thinking and communication patterns, as well as on the pupils’ own way of life and that of others” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020b). The ability to express and be cognisant of Others’ expressions, together with freedom of speech are crucial parts of Klafki’s *Bildung* core qualities self-determination, co-determination and solidarity

(2001a). Finally, the curriculum emphasises the important role expression plays in the pupils' development of "a positive self-image and a secure identity" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020b).

Mentioned alongside the first *Bildung* code found under the subject's relevance and values, are the competencies cultural understanding and communication, both of which are embedded in Klafki's notion of *Bildung*. Supplementarily, Klafki provides a didactical framework which aims to educate both of these, namely by educating through contemporary key issues of cultural significance (2001a). According to his work this has the added purpose of also educating for democratic participation, since it both revolves around issues of political importance, and it teaches argumentative skills and facilitates for students in forming their own values through discussions and work with the key issues (Klafki, 2001a). A sentiment which is partly echoed by the curriculum under how the interdisciplinary topic of democracy and citizenship is to be implemented: "by learning English, the pupils can experience different societies and cultures by communicating with others around the world" and subsequently "develop their understanding of the fact that the way they view the world is culture dependent" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020b). While the excerpts are situated under democracy and citizenship, it does not mention democratic participation or developing the pupil's values or opinions in meeting with cultural differences.

ICC is an idea throughout the English part of LK20, demonstrated in the following examples located in the subject's relevance and central values: "develop the pupils' understanding that their views of the world are culture-dependent"<sup>1</sup>. This can open new ways to interpret the world, promote curiosity and engagement and help to prevent prejudice", moreover, through working with text critically, thus gaining knowledge of the Other, "pupils will develop intercultural competence enabling them to deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020b). The prevalence of ICC illustrates the importance of overarching goals of education, indeed, Klafki would argue that ICC is an example of how more contemporary concepts step into *Bildung's* shoes trying to serve the same function, however failing at cojoining all the subjects for a common purpose, thus implicitly demonstrating the need for a more comprehensive central theory of education (2001a). The obvious counterargument here is that the interdisciplinary topics and central values of the

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<sup>1</sup> Small remark: they write the same thing twice only hyphenating culture and dependent in one of the instances

overarching part serve that function, and that was discussed in segment 3.2 LK20 Core Curriculum.

When examining how ICC is portrayed in the curriculum, it appears more closely related to Byram's model than what Hoff is advocating for (Byram, 1997; Hoff, 2014). The pupils are supposed to "deal with" other ways of living, communicating, and thinking, signaling that the change is supposed to happen within instead of forming opinions, taking a stance, or changing external factors. Illustratively, the repeated goal of understanding that "their views of the world are culture (-) dependent", bears no mention of critical reflection or forming opinions based on that insight. The potentially formative *Bildung* aspects of ICC are therefore missed out on according to Hoff, who advocates the value of disagreement. To encourage more *Bildung*, Klafki theorises that a multilateral discussion, representing diverse opinions and interest around key issues facilitates the pupils' formation of values and opinions, a necessity for realising self-determination, co-determination, and solidarity. Contrary to the curriculum Klafki emphasises that "*Bildung* has nothing to do with arbitrariness or unprincipled pluralism" (2001a, p. 81). In more concise terms, the curriculum lacks moral aspirations, it does not encourage the pupils to form an opinion, a standpoint, a mental position from which things are judged. The lack of what in Norwegian is called 'meningsdannelse' (which directly translates to opinion *Bildung*), is a deficiency in (post-)modern upbringing and education according to Foros and Vetlesen's diagnose (2015).

Thus far only the more general and overarching components of the English curriculum have been analysed, what remains to be put under scrutiny are the competence aims. For this analysis, only the competence aims for 10<sup>th</sup> grade will be regarded. These aims are predominantly concerned with learning processes, methods and strategies such as: be able to "use a variety of strategies", "use different digital resources and other aids", "express oneself with fluency and coherence with a varied vocabulary and idiomatic expressions adapted to the purpose, recipient and situation", "read factual text and assess the reliability of the sources" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020b). The curriculum furthermore demands a large variety of such processes to be undertaken, which is apparent by reading the verbs used to describe the schoolwork: explore, reflect, present, revise, write, use, read, follow, express, listen, understand and assess (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020b). These excerpts showcase what Klafki would categorise as the *formative* side of the curriculum.

Conversely it also contains some more *material* competence aims such as “describe and reflect on the role played by the English language in Norway and the rest of the world”, explore and describe ways of living, ways of thinking, communication patterns and diversity in the English-speaking world”. Both of these aims encourage a more ‘specific’ (although not particularly specific) insight than the formative aims, and simultaneously it promotes a predetermined cultural understanding which is meant to be educative (read *Bildung*). However, contrary to previous curricula, LK20 does not state specific subject knowledge explicitly, when stated it is foremost implicit in an aim which is primarily aimed at achieving a process. This is mirrored by Willbergh’s findings in an analysis of the NOU, the report leading into the curriculum reform LK20 (2016). Willbergh further argues that subordinating knowledge to competences, devalues knowledge and makes the curriculum predominantly *formative* (Willbergh, 2016). Continuing along these lines there are no aims that seek convey a nationalistic message or a cultural heritage specific to Norway. To state the obvious, the curriculum’s notion of *Bildung* is therefore far from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century idea of *Bildung* as enlightenment and nation building – an extreme version of *material Bildung*.

According to *Bildung* centered didactics, in order to successfully bring about *Bildung*, the *formative* and *material* are insufficient in isolation. This insufficiency stems from the fact that not only didactics, but societal powers define, decide and control learning processes (Klafki, 2001a). Gundem explains it thusly: through education the individual exists in area of tension between demands from the outside world and the need for self-realisation, in clarity, the *material* represents the demands from society while the *formative* supposedly facilitates self-realisation. Ideally, these factions exist in equilibrium so that the individual can learn to balance its inner motives with external demands (Gundem, 2011, pp. 34-35). Furthermore, Klafki (2001a) aspires the pupils to reflect on this power relation to increase their sense identity in the context of society. In working with this, one such critical reflection arose in myself: the *formative* processes which supposedly facilitates self-realisation stands at the risk of coming off as another external demand, a demanded self-realisation sounds rather paradoxical.

Willbergh on the other hand explains the solitary weaknesses of *formative* and *material* differently. In her interpretation of Klafki, the insufficiency of the *formative* in isolation stems partly from its reliance on method based *Bildung* “there are no universal methods through which the subject can grasp and process all kinds of knowledge”, and ultimately, when methods are moulded to be applied universally, they become too abstract to be applied in working with specific content. Which is precisely the case with the key competences for each subject, according to Willbergh (2016). Additionally, as a final remark, the English curriculum suggest no particular texts, aesthetic objects or stories to be used as examples exemplary teaching, as mentioned, only the method aspect of working with something is specified.

To summarise, the English curriculum certainly contains an idea of *Bildung* and holds it as an overarching goal, particularly by its stress on the importance of cultural understanding and communication for the development of the individual. Although the concept is quite apparent, the development itself does not carry the same flavour as Klafki’s notion or the classical notion of *Bildung*. It lacks the progressive, critical, and moral aspects of these theoretical standpoints. Moreover, the curriculum refrains from asserting or recommending particular content. This would by my understanding, in Klafki’s terms, place the curriculum on the *formative* end of the spectrum as the predominant focus is on teaching through methods and strategies. Pushing it further into the *formative* side is how knowledge is subordinate to competences and activities (Willbergh, 2016).

#### 4.3.2 Critical Thinking

Having examined the idea of *Bildung* in the English curriculum, CT is next on the list. In the section about the subject, relevance and central values, there is no mention of CT directly. However, the related skill of “ways of thinking” and the characteristic “open for new ways to interpret the world” are forwarded as part of the purpose of teaching English. In the core elements section, CT is highlighted as a part of working with texts in English: “by reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing different types of texts in English, the pupils shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society”, this is then said to promote ICC and further enabling the pupils to view their identity in a multicultural context (Utdanningsdirektoratet,



2020b). While working with texts in this manner does enable the teacher to incorporate the more relational perspective which Lim (2015) calls for, the LK20 does not itself call for it, and regardless, most teachers are presumably unaware of Lim's work.

Under basic skills CT is mentioned both under writing and reading skills. In their writing the pupils should be able to create “different types of coherent texts that present viewpoints and knowledge. It also entails using different types of sources in a critical and verifiable manner”. The reading skill requires that the pupils are “increasingly able to critically reflect on and assess different types of texts”, the competence aims chime in a similar tone the pupil is expected to be able to “read factual texts and assess the reliability of the sources” and “use sources in a critical and accountable manner”(Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020b). This thoroughgoing connection made between source evaluation and critical thinking is something which is also seen in the research literature (Brante & Strømsø, 2018; Krangle & Ferguson, 2020), although it is definitely overshadowed by the more common ascription of reasonable decision-making and argumentative skills (Lai, 2011).

This is not the case in the English subject part of LK20, as the critical use of sources is almost the only way in which the word critical is used, but for one exception located at the bottom, below the competence aims. As part of the assessment, teachers are to evaluate according to whether the competence the pupils demonstrate, shows “understanding, reflection and critical thought” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020b). This description does not exactly enrich CT, and a teacher reading only the English subject part of the curriculum is likely to be left with an impression that CT is merely source evaluation, and has little to do with argumentation, deciding on what to believe or do, reasoning, power relations, societal participation or *Bildung*.

#### 4.4 OECD

Much has been said about OECD, and their influence is a controversial topic in the educational debate. This study aims at uncovering the intended purpose of OECD's influence in the educational context with regards to *Bildung* and CT, but also at a grander scale. Does for example OECD only focus on testable aspects of education i.e. competences and skills, as it enables them to conduct better surveys, or are more general aspects of education also included, if

so in what ways? If *Bildung* is included, what is their conceptualisation? Furthermore, what purpose do they hold for CT, do they present a definition? These sub-questions will be attempted answered in this segment, preceding that, some background information on OECD is provided and a brief discussion of their influence.

OECD, as their name clearly states, is an international organisation which has as its main purpose to stimulate economic development, mainly for its 38 members who are mostly western developed countries, but also more expansively. It was formerly under the name The Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) who administered the Marshall Plan in Europe after World War II until 1961 when it adopted a broader purpose and expanded out from Europe, including countries such as Canada, Japan, and the US. According to their website “OECD countries and Key Partners [which includes Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, and South Africa] represent about 80% of world trade and investment” (OECD, 2022a), moreover they state their ambitions as “to build better policies for **better lives**. Our goal is to shape policies that foster prosperity, equality, opportunity and well-being for all (...) [and] to better prepare the world of tomorrow” (OECD, 2022b, emboldened text is unedited)

Wanting good things is hardly controversial, the how is as per usual the crux of the matter. OECD’s website states that they try to achieve their ambitious goals by providing “evidence-based international standards” and “fostering strong education” (OECD, 2022b). OECD is the administrator of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a test which enables policymakers to compare national test scores with other countries and learn from each other. In short, their educational vision revolves around development of skills, and they are widely known for composing their set of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, a set of skills which is needed in the information age and will stay relevant in the future, preparing the young.

While OECD does not have any legal, regulatory, or financial means of influencing countries, they apply a ‘moral’ and competitive pressure which is often described as *soft governance*. This has certainly influenced policymakers in Norway, demonstrated by an recent increase in “emphasis on student outcomes, new assessment and testing practices, and teacher accountability” (Mausethagen, 2013a, p. 3). The PISA tests has proved especially powerful in applying pressure to change as it provides very concrete test scores for comparisons across

borders, and crucially for OECD, it is a means for them to disseminate ideas such as the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and the competences framework (Mausethagen, 2013a).

An example of how the OECD extrudes their influence is this: “The importance of knowledge, skills, and competencies to individuals and society is widely accepted among policymakers in OECD countries” (OECD, n.d.). This sentence formula is very typical OECD argumentation. *The importance of*, insert a concept which is indisputably important, *to basically everyone, is accepted or proven or show in this data*. Followingly, they present PISA results which shows how some countries are better than others at these indisputably important concepts. Another example is how Andreas Schleicher introduces his article “anyone wondering why knowledge and skills are important to the future of our economies should consider two facts”, the reader walks into the article already agreeing because no one wonders why knowledge and skills are important in virtually any context.

By repeating such phrases innumerable times OECD broadcast their ideas of competence and skills, and then accentuating the message by adding competitive pressure with international test results. It is quite comparable to advertisement ‘buy the OECD fitness program to help your country get in shape, just like Finland!’. Except its aimed at policymakers and it comes with enormous implications if one accepts the deal. Critically, this implicates that the influence occurs one step away from the democratic process. Because OECD directs their messaging towards policymakers it obscures their influence on education from the ordinary citizens of respective nations.

The interests of OECD are largely economic, even though they speak of other matters, their actions and policy recommendations are mostly focused on economics. Reading through OECD’s website leaves the impression that they nuance their position. In their reports however, they are by and large positive to new technologies, digitalisation and globalisation; all of which contribute to economic growth of free market enterprises (OECD, 2021, 2022a, 2022b). Their skills system arguably reinforces this dynamic, making workers more capable at completing tasks inherent to the information age. It should be contested how heavily OECD values these economically prudent dynamics, it lies as a premise for all their work, seemingly unquestioned. Which is problematic as all of these dynamics have their shortcomings and are not particularly

concerned with power relations, social relations or what it means to be human (Mausestagen, 2013a).

OECD highlights global value chains (GVC) and whilst increasing efficiency and adding value they have their weaknesses in their reliance on consistent transportation – as the covid-19 pandemic clarified with transportation line disruptions, causing year-long delays. The Russian war on Ukraine demonstrates the same weakness: relying on others for essential goods such as energy might be detrimental, Germany is certainly regretting the transition from nuclear energy to Russian gas as they are tight pressed to continue the embargo (Askew, 2022). One could also question the ethical dynamics in GVCs, in some cases it is merely corporate jargon for exploiting cheap labour abroad to fuel materialism in the west. GVC is moreover a part of a broader issue with globalisation, namely, the more interconnected the world becomes, the more vulnerable it becomes too, as more people both reap the rewards and face the challenges caused elsewhere. At the time of writing, a quick look into the news media, it is apparent that the world is living through two such events with global ramifications: a disease outbreak in China leads to a global pandemic and War between Russia and Ukraine threatens wheat shortages in the Arab world (Bourne Jr., 2022) and parts of Africa, not to mention a possible global economic recession (Josephs, 2022).

Interconnectivity is especially apparent in today's use of ICT, and it is an area as complicated as it gets, not economically, but psychologically. As consequences of one's utterances are stripped away by anonymity and lack of physical contact, the radical and extreme human behavior is not only capacitated, but furthermore promoted by attention driven algorithms. Conversely, Lars Løvlie (2003) argues that the internet and its novel social functions provides the young with a new socialisation arena in which they may form themselves more freely. He maintains that ICT acts as an interface for *Bildung* in meeting with the Other online. In Løvlie's view the human becomes a kind of cyborg and he terms this new form of *Bildung*, 'teknokulturell danning' (techno-cultural *Bildung*) (2003). Larsen (2004) on the other hand contests this view and criticises it for being overly self-cultivating irrespective of the Other, and that "techno-cultural *Bildung* loses itself in the indifference of internet interaction" (2004, p. 6).

When boiled down, stimulating economic growth is the underlying purpose of OECD, demonstrated by how highly they price innovation, adaptability of workers, raising competence levels and creating a more competitive environment. While many have economic growth as a premise for a well-functioning society, it is not some absolute truth. Plenty economists argue that a slower economic growth while focusing on improving the distribution of wealth and well-being might be a healthier approach than maximising growth. Another important factor is how the growth over the last decades have been spent. Has the general public become better off? Or is it just the top 10% who have reaped the benefits? Anyways, the point is premises are important, especially when they have such massive repercussions as when they come from an umbrella organisation such as OECD. What they prioritise is not the same as the parents who put their children in school.

#### 4.4.1 Bildung

It proved more difficult than expected to search for traces of *Bildung* in OECD's reports, perhaps because my expectation is coloured by how common it is to tie education and *Bildung* together in Norway. In the analysis undertaken, the three main documents that were looked at were parts of OECD Skills Strategy 2019: Skills to Shape a Better Future, OECD's policy outlook for Norway, and lastly an article written by Andreas Schleicher, the director for education and skills at OECD, titled The Case for 21st-century Learning. These documents were deemed relevant to answer the research question of how the idea of *Bildung* is embedded in their publications and what stipulations this imposes on ELT in Norway.

To summarise the outlook report for Norway, the salient idea throughout is the development of skills and its policy implementation. It delves into how Norway compares internationally with regards to attainment of skills, how the government can invigorate skills acquisition in schools, vocational training and in adult training, and furthermore assess it. What parameters should be altered, where to increase funding<sup>2</sup>, how to centralise the educational system and streamline the policy implementations (OECD, 2020). In other words, it is a highly pragmatic document, where the OECD presents results from PISA and a policy analysis, and offers advice aimed at

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<sup>2</sup> I find it interesting that decreased funding is never discussed. Less education never seems to be an option for anyone, it is a taboo topic in the educational debate.

influencing Norwegian policymakers. There is very little to say about *Bildung* in this one, there is some relevant data and recommendations on social mobility, but regardless. Through the pragmatic lens of this document, education is reduced to a machine with the purpose of getting people into work, and through that same lens OECD provides excellent diagnostics.

Looking through OECD reports database regarding education in Norway, little to no data or policy recommendations concerning the idea of *Bildung*. Their focus is primarily on how the governance of the school system is, how assessment is carried through at every level, how children are prepared for participating in work life and society, through competences and skills. Having said that, OECD does provide data for equity and social mobility, and they have some interesting descriptions about those data. For example they write that “According to OECD evidence, some system-level policies can favour equity, such as a longer period of compulsory education, delayed tracking, and limited ability grouping and school choice” (OECD, 2020, p. 9). This is echoed in another book by OECD regarding social mobility (2010). However, even though equity, social mobility, diversity and inclusion are voiced as important issues it is unclear whether OECD’s influence improve education in those aspects. Especially since they are not included as indicators of performance and quality (Mausethagen, 2013a).

In comparison, classical *Bildung* was part of the first movement towards equalising opportunities for people in Europe. According to Klafki, Schleiermacher and Humboldt believed that it is not education’s role to directly alter the societal classes and where they originate. It can only do so indirectly by providing each individual equal opportunities and optimally facilitating the unfolding of their natural abilities (2001b, p. 54). Klafki further emphasises the central cohesive qualities of self-determination, co-determination and solidarity, and their importance for a fair democracy where opportunity for power and wealth exists for everyone (Klafki, 2001a). Another key difference lies in the distribution of power, OECD does not hold this critical purpose for education.

Continuing the topic of social mobility, the leading 11 out of 82 countries indexed worldwide in order are: Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, Austria, Luxembourg and Germany according to World Economic Forum (WEF, 2020). Correspondingly, all of them are North European or Scandinavian and constitute the region in

which *Bildung* exists most prominently. Evidently, this alone cannot constitute a causal relation, yet it is a noteworthy correlation between the *Bildung* didactic tradition and social mobility, something which OECD has not mentioned. On the other hand, the other western countries Great Britain and United States has neither inherited nor adopted this largely German tradition and are ranked 21<sup>st</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> respectively.

To cover an example of common ground, a couple of similarities exist between the concept of *Bildung* and OECD's concept of life-long learning. Both concepts are concerned with the development of people not just through education, but also in everyday life, at the workplace and at home. They are both, to a degree, a continual development of the individual in meeting with society. However, leaving commonalities aside, the two ideas diverge in terms of means and purpose of development. On the one hand, lifelong learning is concerned with equipping individuals with skills adapting them to the changing job market. On the other, *Bildung* is more concerned with a more holistic formation of individuals and fostering self-determination, co-determination and solidarity.

Now more than ever, supporting people in learning throughout their lives, and equipping them with solid skills that they can use fully and effectively at work and in society, is key to ensuring that both individuals and society thrive in this increasingly complex, interconnected and changing world. Lifelong learning is key for individuals to adapt and succeed in labour markets and societies. (OECD, 2021, p. 1)

OECD disseminates the idea that individuals in a society should be adaptable and possess, or if without, learn the skills necessary to meet the demands of labour. In this view, education is the means through which society develops these adaptable workers, and lifelong learning is corporate jargon for 'peoples' willingness to adapt' and commit to further education. This illustrates a point made earlier, that OECD are encouraging of globalisation, new technologies and increased interconnectivity, and furthermore wants to facilitate for said changes through education. On the contrary, Klafki maintains that pedagogical theory and practice should not solely be variables to alter according to society's needs (2001a). Integral to a well-functioning democracy is the empowerment of individuals and groupings of people to alter society instead of

having to roll with the tide (Foros & Vetlesen, 2015). A sentiment which is echoed by Gert Biesta in her paper on *Bildung* and modernity:

We should not think of *Bildung* – let alone a future *Bildung*, a *Bildung* of (and for?) the future – as a process in which we create a democratic character or democratic dispositions early in life and then leave it all to the individual. Such an individualistic (and in a sense psychological) approach to the question of *Bildung* forgets that we should not only focus on the acquisition of the right “habits” (including reflective habits and habits of reflection), but should be aware that these “habits” also need an appropriate “habitat” in order to endure (Biesta, 2002)

Two final criticisms of OECD’s approach to education through the lens of *Bildung*. First, several researchers argue that a central theory of education, an epistemology for learning, is mandatory if one is to reason for the didactic and pedagogical choices made (Klafki, 2001a; Willbergh, 2015, 2016). If such a theory is vacant education and upbringing is more or less left to random processes of socialisation and under the control of external interest groups as other researchers argue is the case with the increased focus on competence (Hyland, 1991; Willbergh, 2015). Lastly, Klafki argues that if self-determination is to be fulfilled, then education has to be general in the sense that it embraces all aspects of human interest and potential (2001a) – not that they all have to be taught, but the engagement in them has to be facilitated for. This purpose is neglected in OECD’s view, for one, they only test a handful of subjects, and second, the skills put forth are in the best interests of the job market and the economy, other human interests are omitted.

#### 4.4.2 Critical thinking

In probing OECD documents for their usage of CT some findings were descriptive of their conception of CT and what purpose they hold for it. Dealing with the former first OECD frames CT in two main ways, both as an innovative skill often in tandem with creativity and problem solving, and as a cognitive skill together with meta-cognition and reflection (2019b). It is also a part of their 21<sup>st</sup> century skills framework under the category learning and innovation skills (OECD, 2008; OECD/CERI, 2008).



OECD has published an entire book titled *Fostering Student's Creativity and Critical Thinking*, where CT and creativity are discussed and defined, they establish that both require a degree of openness, curiosity, and prior knowledge. Insofar as sub-skills they both involve imagining, inquiring, doing, and reflecting. Creativity demands more imagination whilst CT is mainly inquisitive (OECD, 2019a). Much like this thesis, the OECD leans on Ennis' definition "reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do" (Ennis, 2016a) and further ascribing "logical or rational thinking; that is, the ability to reason, assess arguments and evidence, and argue in a sound way to reach a relevant and appropriate solution to a problem" (ibid. , p. 24). Additionally, they include the dimensions of recognising multiple perspectives and seeing their inherent presumptions.

A reoccurring description of CT is that it is a skill for the future; the implications of the megatrends digitalisation, automation and artificial intelligence reduce the demand for manual labour and routine cognitive skills (OECD, 2019a, 2019b; Schleicher, 2018; Schleicher, n.d.). In the words of Andreas Schleicher,

Education today is much more about ways of thinking which involve creative and critical approaches to problem-solving and decision-making. It is also about ways of working, including communication and collaboration, as well as the tools they require, such as the capacity to recognise and exploit the potential of new technologies, or indeed, to avert their risks (Schleicher, n.d.)

Another prominent purpose for CT found in OECD's documents is source evaluation and critical awareness online. "As a result, it is becoming critical that individuals develop adequate skills to access, filter and process information, to perform the tasks that can be done via the Internet and to benefit from the new opportunities offered by the digital era" (OECD, 2019b, ch.3). Schools are expected to "educate children to become critical consumers of internet services and electronic media, helping them to make informed choices and avoid harmful behaviours" (OECD, 2015, p. 3).

In OECD's Future of Education and Skills 2030 project their existing *Key Competences* have been accompanied by three further categories of what they call transformative competence – answering those who wondered if the term could become even more all-encompassing. These are

*Creating New Value*, described as innovation, adaptability, creativity etc. *Reconciling tensions and dilemmas*, which is in essence advanced problem solving with negotiation and compromises, furthermore they write that “individuals have to learn to think and act in a more integrated way, taking into account the interconnections and inter-relations between contradictory or incompatible ideas, logics and positions (...). In other words, they have to learn to be systems thinkers” (OECD, 2018, p. 5). This description bears some resemblance to Lim’s idea of CT (2015), except it does not contain the aspects of social relations and power relations. Besides that, most of what has been covered as purposes for CT in this thesis is also included in OECD’s idea of the term. The third transformative competence is *taking responsibility*, although it is not particularly relevant to CT it exemplifies the individualism permeating through OECD’s documents.

Central to this competency is the concept of self-regulation, which involves self-control, self-efficacy, responsibility, problem solving and adaptability. Advances in developmental neuroscience show that a second burst of brain plasticity takes place during adolescence, and that the brain regions and systems that are especially plastic are those implicated in the development of selfregulation. Adolescence can now be seen as a time not just of vulnerability but of opportunity for developing a sense of responsibility. (OECD, 2018, p. 6)

## 5 Answering the research question

Having conducted the analysis and discussed some of the findings it is time to revisit the research question, repeated here for convenience:

*How are the ideas of Bildung and critical thinking embedded in the educational policy documents, and what stipulations do they impose on ELT in Norway?*

*Bildung* is embedded in a way that reflects the German-didactic tradition and its roots from classical *Bildung*. However, it also reflects how this tradition is being altered to better suit society's perceived needs, a perception influenced by OECD's diagnoses. This is represented in the documents by: the movement away from solidarity towards individualism from the older objectives clause to the newer LK20; establishing a largely formative curriculum centred around competences and methods conforming to OECD's framework. Moreover, the *Bildung* concept seen throughout the documents lacks the progressive and critical aspiration of Klakfi's and the classical theory of *Bildung*, and crucially lacks a central educational theory such as Klakfi's categorical *Bildung* paired with critical-constructive didactic.

For teaching, the documents stipulate a method-based approach, where the pupils are meant to develop competences through participation and action in learning activities. Furthermore, the curriculum conflates concepts that were previously separated thus blurring the lines and making didactic decisions more ambiguous for teachers. Content is subordinate to methods and competences are subordinating knowledge complicating the matter further. For ELT this means that content such as literary pieces are devaluated compared to the process of working with said pieces. Less than before, content itself is viewed as containing a formative potential. There is a movement from selecting content based on its formative purpose to instead prioritising invoking a formative process by utilising learning strategies and methods. Instead of choosing content based on the exemplary principle, the selection process is increasingly characterised by 'anything goes'.

CT is less controversial and widely accepted across all the educational documents analysed. However, how it is conceptualised in the documents differs from how it is defined in the CT literature, especially in the LK20. Whilst CT has a pronounced presence in the LK20, it is mainly

conceptualised as revolving around source evaluation, particularly in the English subject curriculum where this is the only component ascribed to CT. In the core curriculum additional emphasis is placed on evaluating, exploring, and using reason systematically. The omission of CT as a part of decision making is a striking difference from the literature and the OECD. And while, all the educational policy documents lack aspects of critical pedagogy (social and power relational dimensions) this comes as no surprise as it is not widely held in the CT literature either (Ennis, 2016a; Lai, 2011). The conspicuous purpose for teaching CT according to OECD, is to adapt people to the information age; CT usefulness primarily comes from labour market demands and helping the individual filter information.

As a consequence, CT stands at the risk of being reduced to source evaluation in Norwegian classrooms. This should be researched further, surveying teachers for their practise. One preliminary paper indicates the same as this finding, and in said a case study measures were taken to further educate and inspire English teachers to expand their teaching of CT by using picture books (Andersson-Bakken et al., forthcoming). Another entrance to teaching for CT as more than source evaluation is through issues discussion, arguably the objectives clause suggests this, but the curriculum does not further highlight it. As hinted at earlier, Klafki's *Bildung* approach compliments this methodology, by providing an epistemology and a grander purpose committed to autonomy, democracy, justice and solidarity (Klafki, 2001a; Ryen, 2020).

## 5.1 Broader implications

The following chapter details reflections on the broader implications and trends implied by the results of this study. The reflections are informed by theoretical perspectives and the findings. It therefore should be read as such, and as topics for further investigation and discussion.

### 5.1.1 Testing and competences

The introduction of national and international testing, together with a competence orientation the last couple of decades constitute a pragmatic educational reform. The findings of this thesis indicate that this movement comes at the expense of the *Bildung* tradition in Norway, and

perhaps of broader social and humanistic aims. This is, however, an empirical question to be investigated further.

To better facilitate for *Bildung*, Klafki calls for a revision of the performance concept (prestasjonsbegrepet). Arguing for it to be less outcome oriented and more dynamic, respecting and accounting for the intangible processes involved in developmental progress. Furthermore, he criticises contemporary testing for being too individualistic and competitive, favouring those already gifted with a good socio-economic background for learning, and degrading those without. While, acknowledging the use of grades for admissions, Klafki questions whether grading opposes education's salient task of facilitating for and developing each child's ability to learn (2001a). In addition, evidence from a review study found that teachers' social, caring relations to students are weakened under increased testing and accountability (Mausethagen, 2013b), moreover, CT too is if not prohibited, then at least complicated by a testing environment (Ennis, 1993; Gray, 2013b) as described in chapter 3.3.1.

This pragmatic side of education therefore has to be balanced out with the more humane side, especially when considering the purpose of education. Like Knut Imerslund puts it: Whilst it is important to hold the educational institutions responsible for "laying a good general foundation for the individual's career in professional life, it must not become the educational institutions' sole purpose" (Imerslund, 2000, p. 109). Fortunately, the core curriculum highlights something similar which Imerslund emphasises later in his article. "At the same time, children and young people are living in the here and now, and school must recognise the intrinsic value of childhood and the adolescent years" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020c, p. 12). Through an existential lens, childhood and adolescence must not become merely a preparatory phase for adulthood and work life. That would implicate that one should always live for the future, which is completely negates much of the potential meaning in life. The contents of consciousness are one's existence, and the present moment constitutes much of that content and therefore in extension, the content and meaning in a person's life. This is one of the potential dangers lurking in the pragmatic side, and why the more humane aspects such as friendship, play and solidarity must be guarded.

If testing is one side, then the other side of the pragmatic coin is competences. A useful concept when describing instrumental tenable knowledge and skills, to be precise – reading, writing,

basic communication and maths, etc. All of which should be a part of any general education. However, as demonstrated in the analysis of educational policy documents and as pointed out by Mausethagen (2013a), the concept is augmenting and becoming too all-encompassing.

Klafki for one, states that competences, in the aforementioned instrumental meaning, is part of a *Bildung* approach when “the pupils may realise that they constitute an instrumental necessity, they are not separate from humane and democratic principles, and they can be reasoned for” (Klafki, 2001a, pp. 96,97, translated by author). Building on Klafki’s theory, Willbergh (2015) argues that since the future is unforeseeable education should not guess at what skills or competencies should be useful. Instead, education should aim at developing humans such that they themselves will be able to evaluate what is important and normatively salient.

Another issue with OECD’s competence and method-based framework is how *formative* it is, which has the downsides of obscuring the content and blurring the lines between concepts. Not only does this complicate didactical decision, it also hides the content from public debate (Willbergh, 2015, 2016). Categorical *Bildung* on the other hand strikes the balance between the *formative* and *material*, which reveals the content to the public and makes it debatable. In turn allowing for a normative discussion of values presented in schools, a prerequisite to a well-functioning democracy.

### 5.1.2 Individualisation

Foros and Vetlesen (2015) argue that freedom has shifted from freedom as a possibility, to freedom as mandatory for the individual. In other words, it shifted from being the individual’s demand from its surroundings to it being the surrounding’s demand from the individual. This right to freedom has resulted in more responsibility pressuring the individual to realise oneself, increase one’s competence level, and manage one’s privileges thereafter, leading to a constant self-evaluation of one’s worth and attainment. “Hell is other people; their judgments of me” has now become “Hell is my self-evaluation; it never rests”. This responsibility might have been better if not for the fact that the goal is decided externally, and its attainment is also controlled

externally. This is, according to Foros and Vetlesen, contributing to the increased individualisation in western societies(2015).

Individualisation implies a situation where authorities have handed their responsibility down the food chain. Any success or failure is self-inflicted, not the result of a poorly formed or near impossible task, or a properly addressed task befitted the subject. The information age is doubtlessly harder to navigate than previous eras and individualisation puts this navigation problem onto the individual, embodied by the OECD: “the heart of future education is to help students develop a reliable compass and tools, transformative competency, and to navigate through and increasingly complex volatile, and uncertain world” (Schleicher, 2018, p. 2). In a different paper the OECD writes: “heightened awareness is needed to protect individuals’ privacy by securing their data. If people have the necessary skills, digitalisation offers large potential” (OECD, 2019b, ch. 3). In other words, the individual needs to adapt and attain the right attitudes and skills. “Success will go to those individuals and countries that are swift to adapt, slow to resist and open to change” (Schleicher, n.d.).

In this picture, CT can be seen as adding to this environmental pressure on the individual since it is demanded to be more reflected and wiser. Now the individual alone must find the needle in the ever-growing haystack. Thus, an even greater demand is placed on the individual’s competence, while those responsible for the large body of information are not held accountable. The media, influencers, advertisement and government bodies continue to have free rein in the information space. A *Bildung* approach in education could counteract this individualisation trend by facilitating for the development of self-determination, co-determination and solidary, and thus invigorating the public culture and civic action instead of disintegrating it. Distributing power instead of centralising it.

### 5.1.3 OECD’s influence

If OECD continues their influence, it could mean the further dissolution of *Bildung* as an educational idea, in favour of a more pragmatic approach revolving around testable competences. Consequently, since OECD sits on the big data, they can further legitimise their influence and

power on education, fuelling a 'positive' feedback loop, resulting in power being transferred from people to the hands of big co-operations and government. Because the amount of power is finite, if that balance is moved from one end, then the other end is left with less. Even though government officials are elected by the citizens, more isolated power for the government is still centralising power, and the more centralised the power balance gets, the less influence people and groups of people have. This is counteracting a central part of *Bildung's* purpose of nurturing active democratic citizens through fostering self-determination, co-determination and solidarity. This can all be tied back to OECD's primary purpose of sustaining global economic development, and the relevant issue at heart is not that goal itself but effectuating it as the main purpose of education.

The main power of economics lies in its ability to fill our pockets, not to fill our lives with meaning. The free-market capitalism which OECD fosters, is a force creating wealth in the world, and the benefits it provides should not go unappreciated. The question this paper asks and helps reveal, is whether school should be an arena through which we boost the economy? To answer that question a larger public debate has to take place, one which includes a broader participation and influence, other than just the government and interest groups such as OECD, whom is in turn powered by governments. OECD's influence is hidden behind the curtain of government and competence, one layer away from the democratic process, excluding the public.



## 6 Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that *Bildung* is still established in the Norwegian policy documents. However, its usage lacks depth, is undefined and too conflated with other ideas, thus reducing its potential and likely weakening its implementation. The prevailing idea replacing *Bildung* is competence and its accompanying assessment regime. In light of *Bildung* literature and the results of this thesis, it seems unlikely that this successor will be a successful one, considering that it conflates concepts and lacks an epistemological grounding. Indeed, it seems an undesirable option democratically as it obscures the educational content behind a spotlight on strategies and methods, removing it from public debate. A public debate that is further threatened by individualisation and the centralisation of power over education, at the hands of OECD and other larger societal trends.

CT and adaptability are advocated as remedies for issues of our century, yet they are forwarded without aspirations of fostering political agency. The implicit message is: “You have to change - to a world whose demands you must know you cannot change” (Foros & Vetlesen, 2015, p. 73). A more inspiring message would be that which Klafki contends: through education people shall learn about and assume the common human issues “though not to keep those humans, who educates or *Bilden* themselves, on the historical development thus far, but on the contrary to liberate them, so that they can understand and shape their present and future in self-determination, co-determination and solidarity” (Klafki, 2001a, pp. 70, 71). *Bildung* is at the cusp of retirement, like an elderly woman whom adults respectfully nod to, yet they are too busy to listen to her ancient wisdom. Time is due to take a breath and listen.

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