

## Fragments of *danning*: A critical analysis of a key concept in Norwegian core curricula between 1997 and 2020

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### Abstract

In 2017, a new core curriculum was implemented in Norwegian primary and secondary education, replacing the core curriculum from 1997. While the concept of *danning* is present in both curricula, its meaning and use seem to change.

The concept of *danning* has played a significant role in Norwegian society and educational history. *Danning* has been linked to the establishment of Norwegian democracy, in which education plays an important role. Since the 19th century, the meaning of the concept has been subject to change, corresponding to historical changes, yet the word itself continues to be part of the Norwegian educational rhetoric and national curriculum. This means that conversations about *danning* may not be fruitful because the participants attach different meanings to the same concept. Thus, a study of how *danning* has been used and how it is used today is warranted.

Through an analysis of two Norwegian curricula, from 1997 and 2017, we find changes in the perception of *danning* and in its role as an educational concept in Norwegian education. We argue that *danning* goes from being understood as a result-oriented, social and democratic concept in 1997 to being seen as an individualistic process in pursuit of certain personal characteristics, without its former social component, in 2017. This indicates a fragmentation of *danning*.

### Keywords

Norway, *Bildung*, *danning*, formation, education, conceptual analysis, hermeneutics, curriculum, translation, Nordic education

### Introduction

Today, the concept of *Bildung* has become increasingly relevant as a critical counterweight to a neoliberal trend in education (Horlacher, 2015; d'Agnese, 2020; Willbergh, 2015; Biesta, 2006), or to the so-called Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) characterized by competition, standardization, an emphasis on core subjects, and test-based accountability policies (Sahlberg, 2016). Although descriptions of GERM show similar tendencies across national borders, an important objection is that with such generalization, one risks losing sight of the nuances and complexity at the local level, not

only regarding educational policy (Fuller & Stevenson, 2019; Wiborg, 2013; Lundahl, 2016) but also when it comes to the terms that are used. The use of the term *Bildung* in such contexts demonstrates this latter point.

The German *Bildung* is a term that appears in international debates on education with clear reference to the German (historical) context (see e.g. Horlacher, 2015), but also as a translation of corresponding terms in other languages, such as Norwegian. As Norwegian education policy has adopted elements from GERM in the last two curriculum reforms (Sjøberg, 2014), critical researchers have

pointed to *Bildung* as a theoretical counterbalance (Willbergh, 2015, 2016; Hilt, Riese & Søreide, 2019; Ulvik, Kvam & Eide, 2021). This exemplifies how *Bildung* figures both as a culture-specific term related to a given context and an educational philosophical idea with validity beyond that context. Which of these meanings of the concept is referred to is rarely given further attention, even if such an unreflexive translation practice risks contributing to an oversimplified representation of the issue in question. In this article, we want to demonstrate this by using the corresponding Norwegian concept *danning* as a reference point for our analysis, a concept that shares significant features with *Bildung* but also differs from it. We argue that this enables a more nuanced analysis on a conceptual level, which in turn will generate new insight into the impact of the neoliberal education trend more generally. As our analysis of *danning* demonstrates, traces of this trend can be seen in interpretations of the concept itself.

The Norwegian concept of *danning* has traditionally been a key term in Norwegian education (Hilt et al., 2019; Straume, 2013). It is related to the German concept of *Bildung*, but is not identical, as the Norwegian word *danning* has come to hold a specific meaning linked to the establishment of Norwegian democracy in the 19th century. While the meaning of the concept has varied over time, corresponding to historical changes, the word itself continues to be part of the Norwegian educational rhetoric, including the national curriculum.

Since 1939, Norway has had a tradition of national curricula that function as primary and secondary education guidelines. In addition

to subject curricula, there is a core curriculum, which, according to the Norwegian Education Act, outlines the fundamental values of Norwegian education and its most important aims. In the autumn of 2017, a new core curriculum (LK20) was introduced in Norwegian schools as part of the latest curriculum reform, the Subject Renewal. This latest core curriculum includes the concept of *danning*, which also played a prominent role in the previous curriculum's framing of the values and aims of education, but it testifies to a new, more fragmented perception of the concept. This article investigates and compares how *danning* is understood and defined in the two core curricula and discusses how the concept may have become fragmented from 1997 to 2017.

“[T]he meaning of words can be defined exactly, but concepts can only be interpreted,” writes Reinhart Koselleck (2011, 20). In line with Koselleck's view, we assume an analytical distinction between words and concepts. We consider *danning* a concept in Koselleck's sense, namely as something clear but ambiguous: “it bundles together the richness of historical experience and the sum of theoretical and practical lessons drawn from it in such a way that their relationship can be established and properly understood only through a concept” (Koselleck, 2011, 20).<sup>1</sup> The continuous historical reshaping of *danning* results in a situation where the same word is used in both the curricula from 1997 and 2017, but has different meanings in the two documents. This implies the necessity of a hermeneutic, interpretive exploration of the concept.

The analytical focus of the article is on changes in the perception of the concept and in

<sup>1</sup> A key difference from Koselleck and his colleagues' project is that while they studied changes in the use and understanding of certain key concepts

in the German language between 1750 and 1850 (Koselleck, 2011), we looked at a concept in educational documents from 1997 and 2017.

its role as an educational concept in Norwegian education. To explain the identified changes, we look to historical developments that take place before, at the time of, and between the implementations of the curricula. The comparative analysis of two core curricula from two different points in time makes this a diachronic study, in which we focus on fundamental dimensions of historical research: change and continuity, in this case in the understanding and definition of the concept of *danning*.

We start by outlining the historical definitions of *danning* in Norway. This leads us into analyses of *danning* in the two core curricula before embarking on a comparison of the 1997 understanding of the concept with the one from 2017. Our analysis focuses on three conceptual pairs in relation to which the concept of *danning* will be examined: (a) process–result, (b) individual–community, and (c) national–global.

As the concept of *danning* encompasses all the layers of meaning that it has acquired through its conceptual history, a precise translation is difficult. It is common to translate it as *Bildung*, formation, liberal education or simply education, but none of these cover all of the nuances of meaning and history incorporated in the term. Consequently, as already mentioned, we use the Norwegian word. For this same reason, our interpretation of the curricula is based on the original Norwegian versions, but for the sake of accessibility, we quote the official English translations. There are, however, some significant differences between the Norwegian original and the English translations, which affect the meaning of the texts. Major differences are noted and discussed in endnotes.

## What is *danning*?

When analyzing a concept, dictionary definitions serve as an interesting starting point. The Norwegian standard dictionary, *Bokmålsordboka*, gives four definitions of *danning*: (a) becoming, the act of constituting or creating something; (b) the result of this act of constitution or creation; (c) the acquisition of knowledge and experience through upbringing, education, and socialization; and (d) the result of the process in definition n. 3, which is characterized as insight into essential subjects and worldly or sophisticated conduct (*Bokmålsordboka*, 2022). *Danning* is a verbal noun; it denotes a process and an end. *Danning* is simultaneously something a subject acquires through the process of an interaction or interplay (similar to what Humboldt called *Wechselwirkung* in his concept of *Bildung*) with the surrounding culture and society, and this process itself. *Danning* has also been understood as an ideal and has thus absorbed the cultural ideals of the time and place in which it has been used. This is reflected in the fourth definition from the dictionary: insight into essential subjects. What has been deemed essential is historically and culturally contingent. Still, the modern concept of *danning* also has a critical aspect, as a normative yardstick by which to measure the quality of a society or its education (Straume, 2013).

*Danning* is historically linked to the establishment of Norwegian democracy because it was judged that all citizens needed a fundamental education to be able to participate in democracy. The concept is thus significant in the history of Norwegian society and education.

The concept of *danning* is specifically Norwegian, but it is also part of a European history of ideas dating back to antiquity. We can

trace its roots to the Greek *paideia*.<sup>2</sup> The strongest influence arguably came from the German concept of *Bildung*, the content of meaning of which was formed during the 18th and 19th centuries.<sup>3</sup> In Germany, the concept was central to educational thinking and to Humboldt's university. According to Masschelein and Ricken, *Bildung* in Humboldt's terms implied "a process of self-production through self-activated dealing with the world, [...] a *work of myself*" (Masschelein & Ricken, 2010, 127, our emphasis). The *Bildung* of the self is thus a conscious endeavor carried out by the individual with the goal of increased independence. However, in Humboldt's view, this always happens in interaction (*Wechselwirkung*) and engagement with the outer world (Humboldt, 2016).

When *Bildung* was appropriated in the Norwegian context, it became the word "*dannelse*."<sup>4</sup> In the Norwegian discourse of the 19th century, the content of the concept's meaning was the subject of debate: on one side stood the defenders of a classical *danning*, namely knowledge of the classical languages and canon, while those on the other, more popular side of the "*danning* debate" promoted what may be called a more democratic interpretation, where *danning* was understood as common, useful knowledge needed in the building of the nation. This understanding of *danning* had parallels in Sweden and Denmark with the concepts of *folkbildning* and *folkedannelse*, respectively (Sjöström et al., 2017). The prefixes "*allmenn-*" (common) or "*folke-*" (people's) were

added to "*dannelse*" to mark the concept's democratic potential. This first version of the concept – *allmenndannelse* – appears in the objectives clauses for public education in 1860 and 1889.

*Allmenndannelse* came to denote the knowledge and skills all members of society should possess. This occurred at a time when Norway was establishing itself as an independent, democratic nation state. The *allmenndannelse* of the people was considered instrumental to the national project (Slagstad, 2015).<sup>5</sup>

The prefixes shaped and changed the meaning of *danning* and perceptions about who had access to it and what its purpose was: it went from being a qualification for bourgeois society to a democratic formation for the sake of national democracy. The meaning of *danning* further developed during the 20th century in response to changes in society, both globally and in Norway. This is evident in the core curriculum that was implemented in Norwegian education at the end of the 20th century. The core curriculum from 1997 can be said to mirror a transitional phase in Norwegian educational thought and policy (Volckmar, 2016). It carried on ideas about *allmenndannelse* and a unitary school system, while simultaneously heralding the globalization and market logic that would influence the Norwegian education system in the 2000s.

<sup>2</sup> The self-development of the citizen toward the highest ethical ideal.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/civic-education/>

<sup>3</sup> And continues to be formed to this day.

<sup>4</sup> This Danish version of the word was the standard in 19th-century Norway. With later language reforms, the form *danning* became more common.

<sup>5</sup> In Germany, too, *Bildung* was perceived as "the royal road to the construction and reconstruction of the nation and of national culture" (Masschelein & Ricken, 2010, 128).

### Danning in the core curriculum from 1997

With the transition from an industrial to a knowledge economy that gradually began to show in Norway from the 1980s, there came new educational requirements. In a knowledge society, the education system plays a crucial role in ensuring a country's competitiveness in a globalized economy. The 1997 curriculum shows an increased emphasis on knowledge and learning outcomes (Volckmar, 2017; Thuen 2017). The intention behind the education reforms in the 1990s was to develop the Norwegian unitary school into a standardized, knowledge-intensive school for all. This would meet the knowledge society's requirement to raise student performance, while simultaneously taking into account the Norwegian school's two main motives: social integration and utility-oriented knowledge (Thuen, 2017). By emphasizing a common national knowledge base, the curriculum reflected on the one hand, the belief that school should contribute to social integration within the country's borders by being a counterweight to the fragmented society of the global age, and on the other hand the belief that school should prepare students for a future in a competitive globalized knowledge society (Volckmar, 2016).

In the 50-page core curriculum from 1997 (L97), there is a chapter titled "The liberally-educated human being" dedicated to describing what *danning* consists of. The original Norwegian title is "*Det allmenndannede menneske*." Accordingly, *danning* will hereafter be referred to as *allmenndannelse* when discussing L97.

The 1997 curriculum was content-oriented, focusing on what students should learn. It perpetuated the idea that all Norwegian citizens needed and should be given access to certain knowledge that was deemed necessary for participation in society. In relation to the conceptual pair process-result, the emphasis here is on the result or the content of *allmenndannelse*, which is understood as threefold: (a) knowledge about the human being, society and nature; (b) skills to face life's practical, social and personal challenges; and (c) personal "qualities and values that facilitate cooperation between people and make it enriching and exciting for them to live together" (L97, 25). *Allmenndannelse* is defined as something the student or individual receives from education,<sup>6</sup> through the acquisition of "integrated understanding" (L97, 26), shared frames of reference, "concern for others," and "national identity and solidarity" (L97, 29), to name a few. How the *process* happens on an individual level is not elaborated in the L97, which reveals that little significance is attached to the processual aspect of *danning*.

The L97 presents *allmenndannelse* as a means – as opposed to an end in itself, or as having inherent value – playing a central part in the furthering the Norwegian nation state as a multicultural society in a globalized world. It was thought that common frames of reference and shared knowledge would keep society together by counteracting social inequality and providing equal opportunities for all to participate in society and democracy:

It is a central tenet of popular enlightenment that such [shared] frames of reference must be the common property of all the people –

<sup>6</sup> Thus, the idea of *Bildung* as a process of work on oneself seems absent in this understanding of

*danning*, indicating a deviation of the Norwegian concept from its German precursor.

indeed must be an integral part of the general education – to escape differences in competence which otherwise can surface in social inequality and be abused by undemocratic forces. [...] Common background knowledge is thus at the core of a national network of communication between members of a democratic community. [...] Education plays a leading role in passing on this common background information – the culture everybody must be familiar with if society is to remain democratic and its citizens sovereign (L97, 26-28).

*Allmenndannelse* is understood as exactly that, an “*allmenn*” (common) *danning* that should be accessible to and shared by all members of a society because it is perceived as essential to establishing and preserving the nation as a community. In relation to the conceptual pair individual-community, we see that the L97 emphasizes community.

Moreover, L97 specifies that *allmenndannelse* should also be guaranteed to newcomers: “Newcomers to a country who are not immersed in its frames of reference often remain outsiders because others cannot take for granted what they know and can do – they are in constant need of extra explanations” (L97, 26). *Allmenndannelse* is thus understood as a path to integration.

*Allmenndannelse* is understood as fundamental to securing and furthering Norwegian democracy, as a protection against “undemocratic forces.” This gives *allmenndannelse* a twofold purpose: uniting the nation and protecting democracy. This reflects the two motives of the unitary school, namely promoting unity within the nation and advancing the state’s competitiveness globally

(Thuen, 2017). This relates to another of our conceptual pairs, local-global.

The L97 paints Norway as a specialized, globalized society needing a highly skilled workforce:

The flows between nations – of capital and commodities, of materials and machines – have become more extensive, formidable and inexorable. [...] All this poses many challenges to the task of education: to combine [...] a work force that is highly qualified and versatile, and to combine an international outlook with national distinction (L97, 29).

*Allmenndannelse* is understood as a means of providing the work force that Norway and the global society need in the future (L97, 28) as it “strengthens qualities and values that provide society with richer opportunities for growth in the future” (L97, 29). Consequently, *allmenndannelse* is perceived as something that will benefit the community first and the individual second.

However, the specialized society to which the individual and their *allmenndannelse* are meant to contribute is, according to the L97, a global one. In the L97, Norway is understood as embedded in an international network in which people, goods, and ideas move across national borders. Thus, *allmenndannelse*’s role in maintaining widespread knowledge of Norwegian cultural heritage among the Norwegian population is executed on a global stage. The L97 stresses the importance of maintaining a national identity in, and because of, the global society into which the curriculum defines Norway as integrated: “the increasing specialization and complexity of the global community requires a deepened familiarity with

the main currents and traditional tones of our Norwegian culture” (L97, 29).<sup>7</sup> Again, the knowledge aspect of *allmenndannelse* is emphasized, here denoting knowledge about Norwegian culture and history. This upholding of Norwegian identity is justified in light of what can be interpreted as a “threat” from a modern, rapidly changing society. *Allmenndannelse* is seen as an anchor or mast, a counterweight to the seemingly fluctuating modern society: “When transitions are massive and changes rapid, it becomes even more pressing to emphasize historical orientation, national distinctiveness and local variation to safeguard our identity – and to sustain a global environment with breadth and vigor” (L97, 29). Again, national distinctiveness is emphasized within a global context.

The society in which the students will grow up is further defined as specialized, globalized, and based on technology, science, and knowledge. Not only should *allmenndannelse* serve as a counterweight to the global flux, it should also function as a tool to help the nation be successful in a competitive global environment (L97, 28). *Allmenndannelse* is presented as a means to improve Norway’s standing in a globally competitive environment and to promote growth within the Norwegian

state itself. The chapter on *allmenndannelse* concludes by stating that “[*allmenndannelse*] strengthens qualities and values that provide society with richer opportunities for growth in the future” (L97, 29).

The liberally educated human being seems to become a pawn in the Norwegian state’s quest for global success in the markets of economy, international rankings, and political impact. Danning is turned into a commodity which the individual sells or uses to further his/her own position in a competition, as a small part of a global system. This instrumentalization of *danning* could be said to mark a change in how the concept is viewed: from being seen as a process of perfectibility integrated in the individual to being seen as something attached to, or rather detached from, the individual, ready to be marketed.

At the conclusion of the 20th century and on the cusp of a new millennium, the concept of *danning* presented in 1997 seems to point in two directions: it simultaneously looks back at the understanding of *danning* as encyclopedic knowledge and an inherently valuable process of self-formation and heralds the globalized, fragmented concept that will come to dominate in the 2000s.

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<sup>7</sup> The above quote does not just tell us something about the L97’s understanding of *allmenndannelse*. When comparing the original Norwegian and the English translation of the quote, interesting findings appear. Most of the English translation of the quote directly reflects the Norwegian original. In the last sentence, however, there is a major difference. Whereas the English translation reads “sustain a *global* environment with breadth and vigor” (author’s emphasis) (which is to be understood as the environment having breadth and vigor), the word “global” does not appear in the Norwegian original. The Norwegian sentence thus suggests that *national* environments should be sustained. Note also that the English translation says environment (singular),

whereas the original Norwegian uses the plural [*miljøer*]. The two texts can thus be understood quite differently. This poses serious issues for researchers: A non-Norwegian speaking researcher analyzing the English translation would be reading a different text from a Norwegian-speaking researcher analyzing the original. Not only the language, but the content differs. This poses problems for academic transparency in an international academic context where English is the lingua franca and would possibly pose problems for research on documents in other languages than Norwegian as well. This should be of concern to any researcher working on national documents originally written in the national language.



### The concept of *danning* in the new millennium

In the year 2000, Norway participated in the international PISA test for the first time and Norwegian students scored lower than expected. This led to a vigorous debate over Norwegian education system, and a *system change* (Volckmar, 2016), which, in reality, already was on the way due to a change of government, and received solid public support. With the Knowledge Promotion reform, launched in 2006, the traditionally content-related Norwegian curricula were replaced by a competence-based assessment system emphasizing what students should *master* rather than work with (Sivesind, 2013). This was further consolidated when the latest core curriculum, launched in 2017,<sup>8</sup> clearly anchored the concept “competence” in cognitive learning theory with the introduction of terms such as “deep learning,” “self-regulation” and “metacognition.”

The core curriculum from 2017 was implemented in 2020 for Norwegian primary, secondary and upper secondary education. Instead of *allmenndannelse*, LK20 uses the term “*danning*.” *Danning* is defined under the subheading “Principles for education and all-round development,”<sup>9</sup> which comprises 262 words in the original Norwegian. Thus, compared to L97, considerably less space is given to the concept of *danning*. The first

sentence states: “The school’s mission is the education and all-round development (*Bildung*)<sup>10</sup> [sic] of all pupils. Education and all-round development are interlinked and mutually dependent” (LK20,<sup>11</sup> 9). The mission is derived from the objectives clause in the Norwegian Education Act, which states that education should provide students and apprentices with challenges that “promote formation<sup>12</sup> and [a] desire to learn” (LK20, 3). Consequently, one might ask whether the occurrence of the word “*danning*” in the objectives clause can be interpreted as a reason why *danning* appears in the core curriculum.

The *danning* mission of education is further elaborated as follows: “Primary and secondary education and training is an important part of a lifelong process which has the individual’s all-round development, intellectual freedom, independence, responsibility and compassion for others as its goal” (LK20, 10). Here, the Norwegian and English versions differ: whereas the English version states that *danning* (translated as all-round development) is one of the goals of a lifelong process, the Norwegian version states that primary education is part of a lifelong *danningsprosess* which has the individual’s freedom,<sup>13</sup> independence, responsibility, and compassion/humanity<sup>14</sup> as its goal (LK20, 9).<sup>15</sup> Thus, in the original Norwegian, *danning* is understood as a process, not a goal, as it is in the

<sup>8</sup> In the curriculum issued in 2006 (LK06), the core curriculum had been continued from L97.

<sup>9</sup> “*Prinsipper for læring, utvikling og danning*” in the original Norwegian.

<sup>10</sup> Here, the concept becomes explicitly linked to the German *Bildung*, which is not the case in the Norwegian original.

<sup>11</sup> LK20 is a widely used abbreviation for the core curriculum that was implemented for upper secondary education in 2017 and for primary and secondary education in 2020.

<sup>12</sup> “*Danning*” in the original Norwegian text.

<sup>13</sup> “Intellectual” does not appear in the Norwegian text.

<sup>14</sup> “*Medmenneskelighet*” in the original Norwegian.

<sup>15</sup> The original text reads: “*Grunnopløringen er en viktig del av en livslang danningsprosess som har enkeltmenneskets frihet, selvstendighet, ansvarlighet og medmenneskelighet som mål.*”



English translation. With reference to the conceptual pair process-result, the quote shows that the processual aspect of *danning* is significant in the 2017 understanding of the concept. This is further confirmed by the following quote:

This process [of *danning*] occurs when the pupils acquire knowledge about and insight into nature and the environment, language and history, society and working life, art and culture, and religion and worldviews. This all-round education is also achieved through the experiences and practical challenges found in the teaching and everyday school affairs (LK20, 10).

LK20 defines *when* the process of *danning* occurs, and which subjects the student must become acquainted with to enter the process of *danning*. What *danning* is, or what a person with *danning* looks like, is not elaborated on, save for the characteristics that were defined as *danning's* goals: intellectual freedom, independence, responsibility and compassion.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the result of the process is more opaque in LK20 than in L97. As we see it, a key difference between the two curricula is that the former emphasizes process, whereas the latter focuses on the result of the process. The conceptual pair individual-community elaborates this key difference: the results or content of *allmenndannelse* in L97 are rooted in communal values, whereas the processual aspect of *danning* in LK20 concerns the individual.

L97, as shown, was focused on *allmenndannelse's* role in Norwegian society, both as a tool of integration and coexistence and as an advantage in a competitive global environment. This social framing is almost completely replaced by an individual focus in LK20. Although LK20 refers to “the students” plural, it is evident that *danning* is something that happens to and within the individual, and it also seems to be exclusively *for* the individual. The shift of focus from community to individual can be related to the use of different terms in the two core curricula. The concept of *danning* in LK20 appears without the “*allmenn-*” (common) prefix that it had in L97, and which can be traced back to the objectives clauses of the 19th century curricula. This individualistic-processual focus can be seen in the following quote:

This all-round education is also achieved through the experiences and practical challenges found in the teaching and everyday school affairs. [...] This [*danning*] occurs when they are working on their own and when they cooperate with others. They develop [*dannes* in the original Norwegian] when they struggle with theoretical challenges using formulas and academic material in the subjects, and when using tools to master a practical task. Pupils develop [*dannes* in the original Norwegian] when they learn how to find correct answers, but also when they understand that simple and set answers are not always easy to find (LK20, 10).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The process of *danning*, however, is lifelong, thus the goal of *danning* can never be reached.

<sup>17</sup> The quote must be scrutinized in terms of translation, as we again encounter significant differences between the Norwegian original and the English translation. The Norwegian paragraph contains many phrases with the term “*danning*” in

them: “*danning* happens” [*danning skjer*], “the student *dannes* [becomes someone with *danning*].” As *danning* is a specifically Norwegian term, it is difficult to directly translate these phrases, leading to translations with a different content of meaning: in the English translation, “*danning skjer*” is translated as “this process occurs” and “this all-round education

When it comes to where the concept of *danning* in LK20 stands in relation to our conceptual pair national-global, this is not as clear from the core curriculum's description of *danning* as in L97. As noted, the concept of *danning* has historically played a central role in the furthering of democracy in Norway.

Consequently, the concept took on a social and political dimension, as reflected in L97, where *allmenndannelse* was seen as a means to unite the Norwegian people through shared knowledge and frames of reference. At the same time, with L97, *allmenndannelse* also became an instrument to help Norway to the forefront of global competition. In LK20, the latter ambition remains, although it appears more indirectly: under the subheading where *danning* is described, it is never linked to global competition or Norway's role in a globalized society. The global context must therefore be found in other parts of the curriculum, and in surrounding official documents (Meld. St. 28 (2015–2016)) and reports (NOU 2015:8) as well as in interpretations of these texts as responding to neoliberal international trends in education (Willbergh, 2015, 2016; Hilt, Riese & Søreide, 2019).

The individualistic-processual orientation also testifies to a quite different understanding of what this ambition, namely allowing Norway to get ahead in the global competition, entails. It is striking how the description of *danning* in the core curriculum of 2020 fits together with the curriculum's overall focus on "learning" and "competence," curricular

foci reflecting global education reform trends. The social and political dimension of the concept of *danning*, however, is absent. Consequently, the 2020 core curriculum represents a break with the tradition that sees *danning* as having a role in the furthering of democracy in Norway. It is important to note, however, that the core curriculum from 2017 does indeed mention democracy and shared frames of reference, but it does this in another chapter, namely chapter 1, "Core values of education and training."<sup>18</sup> Thus, the political and social dimensions that were integrated in the 1997 understanding of the concept of *danning*, become detached in LK20, leaving the concept of *danning* fragmented.

### Conclusion

Our comparison of the two Norwegian core curricula has shown a significant change in the perception of the concept of *danning* in the last 20 years. The concept in the core curriculum from 1997 bore witness to a time of change, as it encompassed the democratic potential that was so vital to the understanding of *danning* in Norwegian educational thought in the 19th and 20th centuries. Simultaneously, the 1997 concept reflected the globalization taking place at the time. Twenty years later, the concept of *danning* seems to have been reduced to an individual process without a formal content or a description of its overall aims. Thus, it is deprived of the social and political dimensions characteristic of previous understandings. We find that there is a shift in how *danning* is conceived in Norwegian national curricula from

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is achieved." "*Elevene* [the students] *dannes*" is translated as "pupils develop." In an educational context, the term "develop"/"development" connotes a psychological/mental development of the individual's cognitive abilities, but this form of development cannot be said to be part of *danning*. Does this translation not leave an alarming amount of room for misinterpretation?

<sup>18</sup> Shared frames of reference are discussed under the heading "1.2 Identity and cultural diversity": "Common reference frameworks are important for each person's sense of belonging in society. This creates solidarity and connects each individual's identity to the greater community and to a historical context." Democracy is discussed under the heading "1.6 Democracy and participation."

a result-oriented, social and democratic concept in 1997 to an individualistic process in pursuit of certain personal characteristics, without a defined content, and without its former social component. This indicates a fragmentation of the concept and calls for a revisiting of the normative discussion of what *danning* should be. In 2003, Masschelein and Ricken argued that the concept of *Bildung* had lost its relevance as a critical concept and asked whether we should abandon the concept altogether (Masschelein & Ricken, 2003). We believe, however, that the concepts of *danning* and *Bildung* have the potential to not only reflect, but serve as the basis for a critique of, ideals and practices, and thereby function as critical counterweights to the neoliberal agenda. However, as our analysis of *danning* in the Norwegian curricula shows, they can also absorb traces of neoliberal trends and practices, thereby losing their relevance as critical yardsticks.

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