Chapter 3
Aims of Citizenship Education Across Nordic Countries: Comparing School Principals' Priorities in Citizenship Education 2009–2016

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Abstract The Nordic welfare state has been associated with certain ideas of citizenship, the highlights of which are equal rights, social mobility, democracy, and participation. To better understand how these ideas are interpreted in the educational system, this chapter compares school principals' prioritization of the aims of civic and citizenship education in four Nordic countries as they are expressed in IEA's International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). We discuss our findings in relation to the Nordic model of education, meaning the governance of education epitomizing the Nordic welfare state. When comparing data from the survey of school principals in ICCS 2009 with ICCS 2016, we find a consistent prioritization of promoting students' critical thinking, while items concerning democratic participation are the lowest priority. While these results are similar to the international sample, the Nordic principals' support for promoting critical thinking is consistently stronger. In the Nordic welfare state, a shift toward neoliberal policies is seen as an adaption to economic challenges with an emphasis on development of human capital through knowledge, skills, and abilities. However, as critical thinking represents such abilities, this may also be seen as a prerequisite for social critique and political mobilization. We review these possibilities as representations of a break in or a

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continuation of the traditional ideas of citizenship associated with the Nordic welfare state. We conclude that, for Nordic principals, critical thinking may align with the recent international emphasis on competence while also relating to the concept of *Bildung*, an 18th-century emancipation ideal with deep roots in the Nordic model of education.

Keywords Civic and citizenship education · International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) · Nordic model · Welfare state · Critical thinking · Democratic participation

3.1 Introduction

A common point of reference for the Nordic countries after World War II has been the Nordic welfare state, also termed the social democratic welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 1990). Embedded in the social democratic welfare regime is the Nordic model of education, which aims for increased social mobility strengthened by democratic participation and sense of citizenship (Imsen et al. 2017; Buchardt et al. 2013). Antikainen (2006, p. 230) views the Nordic model of education as a national system founded on specific local values, which are concretized in equity, participation, and the welfare state. In practice, the Nordic education model represents a comprehensive and unified school that brings together pupils from different social and cultural backgrounds (Imsen et al. 2017; Buchardt et al. 2013).

As one of the central means of maintaining societal cohesion in the Nordic welfare state, the Nordic education model both reflects certain ideas of citizenship and reinforces citizenship through educational institutions. How can these ideas of citizenship be identified and conceptualized? A starting point would be to look at the aims of civic and citizenship education (CCE) across the Nordic countries.

This chapter compares the aims of CCE in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden at two different levels: the national political level, represented by national school curricula, and the intersection between policy and pedagogy at the institutional level, represented by school principals' prioritization of CCE aims. IEA's International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), in which these four countries participated in both 2009 and 2016, provides the data for analytical comparison. Our objective is to study how similar or how diverse the aims for CCE may be among these countries and to discuss our main findings in relation to recent shifts in policy which concerns the Nordic model of education. The aim of this chapter is to discuss whether there has been a continuation or a break in the model's citizenship ideals.

3.2 The Nordic Model of Education and the Nordic Welfare State

As a political project, the Nordic education model became an integrated element of social democratic policy for societal modernization after 1945 (Wiborg 2013; Telhaug and Mediaas 2006). For the welfare states forming in the four Nordic countries between 1950 and 1970, the overall goals were citizens' equal rights and the state's responsibility for full employment of the national labour force and the narrowing of social differences; these goals rested on democracy, a sense of equality, and mutual trust (Brochmann and Hagelund 2010).

The concept of *Bildung* is embedded in the historical coordination of education in the Nordic countries, at both the institutional and political levels. Originating from Germany and bearing 18th-century cultural and philosophical connotations, *Bildung* is a democratizing, equalizing force enabling people to fulfil their aspirations in a free society and in pursuit of moral and intellectual growth (Ahonen and Rantala 2001). In its classic form, *Bildung* emphasized the individual's capacity for free and reasoned self-government, entailing a critique of the non-rational and pre-modern arguments legitimizing institutions like the church and the nobility (Ryen 2020). The concept's Nordic variations, spanning from *bildning* (Swedish) to *dannelse* (Danish and Norwegian) to *sivistys* (Finnish), combine the Enlightenment ideal of liberation with a romantic striving for personal refinement through the humanities (Högnäs 2001). *Bildung* is still relevant today as the overarching aim of schooling and of spiritual formation of the individual (Ryen 2020).

However, the last 30 years have brought changes to the Nordic welfare state and the Nordic education model. Efforts to increase welfare efficiency and quality through marketization, referred to as neoliberal strategies, are usually ascribed to shifts in government between parties from the political left to the right. Wiborg (2013), on the other hand, directs attention to the neoliberal shift that took place mainly within the Scandinavian social democratic parties, adapting to new economic realities and societal challenges following recessions and increasing globalization after 1980. She demonstrates how this shift may apply to all the Scandinavian countries with Sweden being the primary example.

The changing realities of the Nordic welfare states, and especially of their national education policies, were also influenced by international agencies, such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), gradually shifting from formerly prioritized national–cultural perspectives to global and human capital issues. These international changes have been described as resulting from increased attention to technical–economic or cognitive–instrumental rationality (Telhaug and Mediaas 2006; Imsen et al. 2017). In response, the Scandinavian states have developed their primary and secondary education sectors partly through decentralization as quasi-market systems, using voucher schemes, school choice, increased standardization, and testing (Wiborg 2013). The result is a universal education system with more or less distinct national variations created and strengthened by market-based initiatives and adaptions.

3.3 Citizenship and CCE

While "citizenship" denotes the relationship between the individual and the state and a sense of belonging to the state (Kivisto and Faist 2007), CCE is devoted to cultivating and maintaining the knowledge, attitude, and disposition associated with good citizenship (Isin and Turner 2007). As a theoretical concept, citizenship is a formal, objective dimension of law and justice expressed in the individual's rights and duties, which are upheld by state institutions. A second, more subjective and informal dimension of citizenship emerges through a shared identity and loyalty to a collective entity, the state. The social and psychological aspects of citizenship are meant to strengthen cohesion among individuals in a political community, ideally forming trust and willingness to participate in political processes (Fleury 2006).

Arthur et al. (2008) suggest that CCE may be a means of stabilizing states based on perceptions of challenges facing the community. Academically, CCE hails from research on political socialization in the 1950s and 1960s, which identified mechanisms to integrate individuals into a political community by helping them to develop political identities (Solhaug 2013). CCE reinforces national ideologies and values through institutions of mass education, being a product of the historical establishment of nation states (Fraser 2008; Osler 2012). This is not a straightforward task, as Audigier (2000, p. 18) illustrates:

> [CCE] concerns the individual and his relations with others, the construction of personal and collective identities, the conditions of living together. It thus has to deal with the individual and the social, the particular and the universal, the already there, insertion in a historical and cultural continuity, and the invention of the future … the acceptance of a pre-existing reality and the development of a critical approach.

As stable democratic states require citizens who are both critical and loyal (Almond and Verba 1963), CCE faces the challenge of socializing citizens to a democratic regime while also promoting critical thinking to uphold democratic principles and values. This apparent dilemma touches upon major ideological debates on democracy and democratic values. Weinberg and Flinders (2018) describe how, at a macro political level in England, the left has advocated for CCE to promote interest for broader structural arguments and social critique, while the right emphasizes CCE to promote good character and personal responsibility. At the political centre, visions of strong democracy have emerged, trying to unite the two pillars of individual responsibility and collective participation.

According to Weinberg and Flinders (2018), it is against this backdrop that Westheimer (2015) (see also Westheimer and Kahne 2004) "three kinds of citizens" should be understood. This frequently referred to typology describes the intent of CCE programmes to support the development of either (1) the personally responsible citizen, (2) the participatory citizen, or (3) the social justice-oriented citizen.

By the personally responsible citizen Westheimer (2015) means character, or individual conduct guided by virtues, such as honesty, integrity, self-discipline, and hard work. CCE programs that aim to form personally responsible citizens tend to emphasize kindness, volunteerism, and the act of helping others. The participatory

citizen takes an active part in civic life and affairs. CCE programmes intended to promote participatory citizenship provide students with technical knowledge of how government and legislature function. However, technical knowledge about institutions and democratic procedures does not necessarily deepen the insight into societal problems, Westheimer argues. In his opinion, only CCE programs aimed at a critical assessment of the causes of such problems, involving considerations of fairness and equality of opportunity, can form social justice-oriented citizens truly engaged in democracy.

Another perspective is presented by Biesta (2009). Biesta engages in a macro-level discussion about the purpose of schooling, which criticises the emphasis on competition, testing and accountability found in neoliberal educational policy. According to Biesta, the first of education's three main functions is to qualify students, meaning to provide them with knowledge and skills so they can participate in work and social and civic life. The second function, socialization through education, is to help people become members of the social, cultural, and political order. Education's third function, subjectification, is described by Biesta as the opposite of socialization, as it is about creating independent individuals with their own opinions and agency in life and society.

Biesta (2009) regularly uses the three functions of education to discuss aspects of CCE and argues that a strong focus on qualification can be understood as a way to avoid discussions about explicit political socialization. On the other hand, Biesta observes, like Westheimer and Kahne (2004), that programs for CCE are often intended to socialize citizens to be obedient and well-behaved. Additionally, knowledge or qualification can, in Biesta's understanding, have the potential both to disrupt (subjectify) and to stabilize (socialize). This may depend both on how knowledge is taught and, especially, for what purpose, in a nation's educational system.

To add to other researchers' discussions, the objectives of citizens' engagement and participation can be framed by various intersections of the political and pedagogical aspects of CCE. For example, in some calls for school to engage young people in politics, especially voting, civic knowledge becomes nothing more than a means to achieve participation (e.g., Galson 2004). A somewhat different argument emphasizes that preparedness and ability are more important than participation and that a major role of the school is to enable "standby" citizenship by instilling political interest, knowledge, and skills (Ekman and Amnå 2012). Others are more sceptical of the celebration of political participation per se and advocate epistocracy, where only the competent, knowledgeable, and prudent citizens are trusted with full political rights and responsibilites (e.g., Brennan 2016). This position emphasizes education, though not in the form of universal participation.

Moreover, enabling student influence and participation within schools is vital to pragmatic and progressive educational ideals, both to improve learning and to democratize schools (e.g., Dewey 2007 [1916]). However, pleads for student participation in school can also be problematized for its strong focus on the present at the expense of the past and the future (Wedin 2018) and for its limited attention to inequality and power relations between students (Taylor and Robinson 2009). Education policies in

Nordic countries include all of these lines of argument, and it is therefore possible to find support for both extensive and more limited student influence and participation in school and society.

3.4 National Aims for CCE in Four Nordic Countries

We now turn to educational curricula to see how aims for CCE are formulated at the national political level in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The following are descriptions of the curricula that were in use when school principals in these countries answered the ICCS 2016 survey.

3.4.1 CCE in Denmark

The preamble of the Danish Education Act states that the school "must prepare the pupils for participation, co-responsibility, rights, and duties in a society with freedom and rule by the people" (Undervisningsministeriet 2017). This kind of general democratic scope (i.e., a whole-school approach to CCE which is considered part of the school experience as a whole, as well as being more or less integrated into different subjects) has been central for primary and lower secondary education in the Danish Education Act since 1975, with some changes to the wording in 1993 and 2006. The Act does not detail how to implement this preparation for living in a democracy. For most subjects, the dimension of democracy and civic education are implicitly addressed in the ministerial guidelines.

In grades 8 and 9, the main subject for teaching CCE is social studies. The purpose of this subject is to provide students with knowledge and skills that enable them to take a considered approach to society and its development. Social studies consist of four competence areas: politics, economy, social and cultural issues, and methods (Børne- og undervisningsministeriet 2019). Within each competence area, students should develop the skills needed to take a reasoned position, take part in discussions, and decide how to act.

The official objectives and guidelines for social studies concern managing, searching for, and assessing information; project-oriented and problem-oriented teaching and learning; forming and expressing value-based standpoints; and criticizing sources and thinking critically, such as the ability to weigh arguments and understand a case from different positions. The main intention is to enhance students' understanding of themselves as independent individuals and as members of the wider society and, at the same time, to help them view their future opportunities and choices in the society.

3.4.2 CCE in Finland

In Finland, the document that most directly guides basic education is the core curriculum for basic education, *Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet* (POPS). The core curriculum relevant to the analysis of the results of ICCS 2009 and ICCS 2016 is that of 2004 (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2004).

POPS 2004 has several educational aims related to CCE. Some of them are implied in the section of Underlying Values of Basic Education, where "human rights, equality, democracy, natural diversity, preservation of environmental viability and the endorsement of multiculturalism" are given as "underlying values of basic education." Moreover, "responsibility, a sense of community and respect for the rights and freedoms of individuals" are mentioned as values that basic education should promote among pupils. The section Mission of Basic Education contains items related to pupils' individual self-development but also to their ability to "develop a democratic society" as "involved citizens."

The social studies section of POPS 2004 contains more focused goals related to civic competences. They include promoting knowledge related to societal topics and promoting the ability to acquire and use critical information related to society and to understand societal processes. Also among the learning objectives is promoting pupils' disposition to be active agents in a democratic society and "take an interest in social participation and exerting an influence." However, there are few explicit references to values.

POPS 2004 also contains seven cross-curricular themes that must be addressed in all subjects and school activities. Most of them relate to civic education, such as "participatory citizenship and entrepreneurship" or "responsibility for the environment and a sustainable future." However, the themes were often not implemented because no teaching resources were allocated specifically to that purpose (Löfström et al. 2017, p. 78).

The Operational Culture section of POPS 2004 also states that pupils must have "opportunity to participate in the creation and development of the school's operational culture." The section does not make explicit reference to CCE, whereas the most recent Core Curriculum for Basic Education, POPS 2014, states clearly that schools' operational culture must be democratic and support pupils' growth into active citizens (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2014). This change may reflect the discussion of the Finnish results of ICCS 2009, of which it was noted that significant CCE takes place in everyday forms of school participation, where pupils can make their voice heard in decision-making processes (Löfström et al. 2017, pp. 77–81).

3.4.3 CCE in Norway

The Norwegian principals who answered the ICCS 2016 survey were subject to the Education Act, with its revised 2009 preamble and the 2006 national curriculum

entitled "Knowledge Promotion," which contains the core curriculum instituted by a 1993 parliament resolution.

The preamble of the Norwegian Education Act (Kunnskapsdepartementet 1998) states that democracy and equality are among the aims of education, along with pupils' right to codetermination and respect for the fellowship of humans, for cultural diversity, and for nature. Furthermore, pupils should learn to think critically and to act ethically and in accordance with environmental concerns.

The core curriculum (Kirke-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet 1997) in effect when the ICCS 2016 data were collected describes human beings through six so-called dimensions, examples being "moral outlook," "cooperation," and "ecological understanding." The components of moral outlook are equality and tolerance of diversity and of diverging opinions within the framework of liberal democracy and the rule of law. Cooperation encompasses decision-making, organizing for the common good, and peaceful conflict resolution. Ecological understanding refers to sustainable global development and underlines the necessity of international effort. These dimensions of human activity and character are followed by 11 principles for education, bridging the preamble and the subjects of the national curriculum. Among these principles are pupils' right to codetermination, their development of critical thinking, and a call to include the local community in schools' activities.

The national syllabus for social studies (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2013) addresses most CCE issues in Norwegian primary and secondary education, although all subjects are intended to promote democracy and citizenship in accordance with the preamble of the Education Act (Biseth et al. 2021; Seland and Huang 2018). The national syllabus for social studies states that knowledge related to politics and society is necessary for active citizenship and democratic participation to take place. The competence aims for lower-secondary pupils thus include knowledge related to national and international political parties and institutions, principles and procedures of the legal system, and knowledge related to national and global economies.

3.4.4 CCE in Sweden

Sweden has an all-school approach to CCE, which means that all curricula from preschool to upper secondary school include an overall "democratic mission." The curriculum for the 10 years[1] of compulsory school contains three types of civic tasks: the school must ensure that students leave school with certain value orientations, knowledge, and abilities (Arensmeier 2015).

Values, in particular, are mentioned in the introductory section of the curriculum, and the first sentence states that "the school system is based on democratic foundations." A set of core values are then presented, a respect for human rights, fundamental democratic values, the intrinsic value of each person, and the environment. Further, a quite long list of different desirable values and attitudes come together in

[1]The "preschool class," preceding grade 1, is mandatory from autumn 2018.

the first chapter of the curriculum including a sense of justice, empathy, generosity, tolerance, and responsibility, the inviolability of human life, individual freedom, and integrity, the equal value of all people and equality between women and men, solidarity between people, understanding of other people, and an appreciation of values inherent in cultural diversity (Skolverket 2018).

Both the general curriculum and the syllabi for different subjects, particularly for social studies, contain knowledge and abilities relevant to civic education. Civics includes five content areas: individuals and communities, information and communication, rights and the judicial system, society's resources and their distribution, and decision-making and political ideas (Skolverket 2018). Abilities underlined throughout the curricula and syllabi concern critical thinking; forming, expressing, and assessing standpoints; managing, searching for, and assessing information; examining and analyzing social structures; capacity to use democratic methods, gradually exercise influence in school, and become involved and participate as active, responsible citizens (Skolverket 2018).

3.4.5 Summary: National Curricula for CCE in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden

This short review of the national curricula of four Nordic countries illustrates the complexity of the CCE ideals described by Audigier (2000), especially in the multitude of values that are to be conveyed through education. The values included in the curricula may be viewed as templates for socialization through education (Biesta 2009). As for traces of macro-political debates on CCE (Weinberg and Flinders 2018; Westheimer 2015), we find a strong and consistent emphasis on knowledge and related abilities in all four states, spanning from traditional civics to how to use information from different sources. Knowledge and abilities are then coupled with democratic participation, but with no description of how this transformation from knowing to mobilization may take place. The curricula thus fulfil Biesta's (2009) assertion of qualification as one of the main functions of education and seems further directed at producing citizens that fall into Westheimer's (2015) participatory category.

3.5 Institutional Aims for CCE in Four Nordic Countries

As head of pedagogical activities and of implementing national policies at their schools, principals' prioritization of CCE's aims links the national and the institutional level of this domain in the Nordic countries. The following analysis is based on Nordic school principals' responses to the ICCS 2009 and ICCS 2016 survey

question "What are the three most important aims for citizenship education at your school?" We conduct the analysis along the following comparative questions:

1. What are the aims of CCE across the Nordic countries, according to the understanding of lower secondary school principals?
2. How similar or different are the Nordic countries in this respect, and could the Nordic countries be described as a distinct group from a global perspective?
3. Have there been changes in school principals' prioritization of CCE aims between 2009 and 2016?

3.5.1 Data and Methods

A two-step analysis was used to compare results from the principals' ICCS surveys from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden ($n = 618$ in ICCS 2009; $n = 638$ in ICCS 2016). The focus was one question included in both study cycles, which asked the school principals to indicate the three most important aims for CCE at their schools from a list of 10 possibilities. To answer the first and second research questions, a descriptive analysis of the principals' responses in 2009 and in 2016 was first conducted and compared with international averages, as presented in Table 3.1. In the second step of the analysis, changes in the response percentages of principals in 2016 compared to those in 2009 were examined, as presented in Table 3.2, to answer the third research question.

The ICCS study uses two-stage cluster samples of student surveys and teacher surveys, and schools were selected at the first stage using probability proportional to size, as measured by the number of students at a school. The data from questionnaires completed by the school principals carry the base weight, which is defined as the inverse of the school's selection probability (i.e., school size) and an adjustment weight for non-responses, which together make up the final school weight (TOTWGTC) (Köhler et al. 2018). As the participation rates of school principals in all Nordic countries fulfilled the ICCS study standard in both cycles, national representativeness of the data can be assumed. A simple descriptive analysis was performed with percentages, and a chi-squared test was performed on the significance of the difference between 2009 and 2016 using school weight TOTWGTC.

3.5.2 Analysis Results

Table 3.1 presents the percentages of school principals' responses to the question of the most important aims of civic and citizenship education in 2009 and those in 2016.

As shown in Table 3.1, on average, the three most chosen CCE aims of the principals of four Nordic countries differ; only one of the three most chosen aims is the same among the Nordic school principals and in comparison with the aims chosen

Table 3.1 The three most important CCE aims chosen by principals in ICCS 2009 and 2016, percent (standard error)

	2009					2016				
	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	International	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	International
Promoting students' critical and independent thinking	**81 (3.6)**	**84 (2.8)**	**64 (6.7)**	**89 (3.6)**	**55**	**85 (3.2)**	**80 (3.4)**	**75 (5.2)**	**81 (8.6)**	**64**
Promoting the capacity to defend one's own point of view	7 (2.3)	9 (3.8)	8 (2.8)	16 (3.6)	15	16 (3.8)	18 (6.8)	16 (5.1)	16 (3.9)	21
Promoting knowledge of social, political and civic institutions	**54 (5.0)**	**47 (4.5)**	**54 (7.8)**	21 (3.7)	**42**	**55 (3.7)**	30 (4.9)	**51 (8.1)**	18 (3.5)	37
Promoting knowledge of citizens' rights and responsibilities	43 (4.6)	44 (4.0)	**35 (6.4)**	**79 (5.0)**	**66**	**55 (4.2)**	44 (6.0)	25 (3.7)	**78 (4.3)**	**61**
Promoting students' participation in the local community	13 (2.5)	10 (2.4)	22 (3.8)	1 (0.7)	18	13 (3.1)	10 (2.7)	35 (5.5)	3 (1.6)	24
Promoting students' participation in school life	4 (1.4)	10 (2.7)	22 (4.1)	13 (4.3)	18	9 (3.0)	21 (4.1)	27 (5.5)	10 (2.7)	25
Preparing students for future political engagement	23 (3.4)	4 (1.7)	9 (3.9)	3 (2.4)	12	18 (3.3)	2 (0.9)	2 (0.7)	4 (1.8)	10
Promoting respect for and safeguard of the environment	15 (3.7)	**49 (4.7)**	21 (5.9)	24 (4.7)	31	9 (2.4)	**47 (6.1)**	30 (5.8)	**41 (4.7)**	38

(continued)

Table 3.1 (continued)

	2009					2016				
	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	International	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	International
Supporting the development of effective strategies to reduce racism	15 (4.0)	6 (2.6)	31 (8.5)	**31 (6.0)**	8	2(0.7)	8 (2.1)	21 (6.6)	32 (5.4)	8
Developing students' skills and competencies in conflict resolution	**46 (4.5)**	36 (3.8)	34 (7.7)	23 (4.5)	33	41 (4.8)	**47 (6.0)**	**43 (5.7)**	25 (4.6)	**44**

Notes Numbers in bold indicate the three most chosen CCE aims. All results are calculated using IDB Analyzer and applying the total school weight. International averages are retrieved from international reports of ICCS 2009 [Schulz et al. 2010] and ICCS 2016 [Schulz et al. 2018]

Table 3.2 Changes of percentage points of principals' responses about the most important CCE aims from 2009 to 2016

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
Promoting students' critical and independent thinking	+4	−4	+11[a]	−8
Promoting the capacity to defend one's own point of view	+9[a]	+9[a]	+8[a]	0
Promoting knowledge of social, political, and civic institutions	+1	−17[a]	−3	−3
Promoting knowledge of citizens' rights and responsibilities	+12[a]	0	−10[a]	−1
Promoting students' participation in the local community	0	0	+13[a]	+2[a]
Promoting students' participation in school life	+5[a]	+11[a]	+5[a]	−3[a]
Preparing students for future political engagement	−5[a]	−2	−7[a]	+1
Promoting respect for and safeguard of the environment	−6[a]	−2	+9[a]	+17[a]
Supporting the development of effective strategies to reduce racism	−13[a]	+2	−10[a]	+1
Developing students' skills and competencies in conflict resolution	−5[a]	11[a]	+9[a]	+2

Notes + indicates an increase in percentage, and — indicates a decrease in percentage from 2009 to 2016; [a]indicates a significant change of percentage at a 0.05 level

by international principals in both 2009 and 2016. However, if we compare the five most chosen aims, the Nordic school principals have more in common. In 2009, three of the five most important CCE aims were similar among the Nordic school principals. These three aims are "promoting students' critical and independent thinking," "developing students' skills and competencies in conflict resolution," and "promoting knowledge of citizens' rights and responsibilities." In 2016, only two of the five most important CCE aims were similar across the four countries: "promoting students' critical and independent thinking" and "developing students' skills and competencies in conflict resolution." Although rather different in percentages, Nordic school principals shared two least chosen CCE aims: "promoting the capacity to defend one's own point of view" and "promoting students' participation in school life."

There are some significant differences among Nordic school principals. In both 2009 and 2016, "promoting knowledge of social, political and civic institutions" was one of the five important CCE aims in Denmark, Finland, and Norway but not in Sweden. While "promoting respect for and safeguard of the environment" was one of the five important CCE aims only in Finland and Sweden in 2009, it became one of five in Norway in 2016 but never in Denmark. "Supporting the development of effective strategies to reduce racism" was one of the five important CCE aims in Norway and Sweden in 2009 and only in Sweden in 2016. "Preparing students for future political engagement" was the fifth most important CCE aim only among Danish principals in both 2009 and 2016, while "promoting students' participation

in the local community" became one of the five important CCE aims in 2016 only in Norway.

Nevertheless, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden's five most important aims remained more or less the same between 2009 and 2016. In Norway, only four of the five important CCE aims remained the same from 2009 to 2016: in 2016, the participation-related aim of "promoting students' participation in the local community" became one of the five most important aims, replacing "promoting knowledge of citizens' rights and responsibilities," which was one of the five most important aims in 2009.

Figure 3.1 is a visual presentation of the results shown in Table 3.1, from which we can see a pattern in Nordic school principals' responses about the most important aims of CCE, showing only small changes between 2009 and 2016. Except for some significant differences between the countries, the Nordic principals chose similar aims as the most and least important.

Table 3.2 presents the percentage changes between 2009 and 2016 of the CCE aims chosen by school principals.

In general, although there were some significant changes between 2009 and 2016, as shown in Table 3.2, there was not a common direction of change among the Nordic school principals. For instance, the largest changes for Danish principals include a

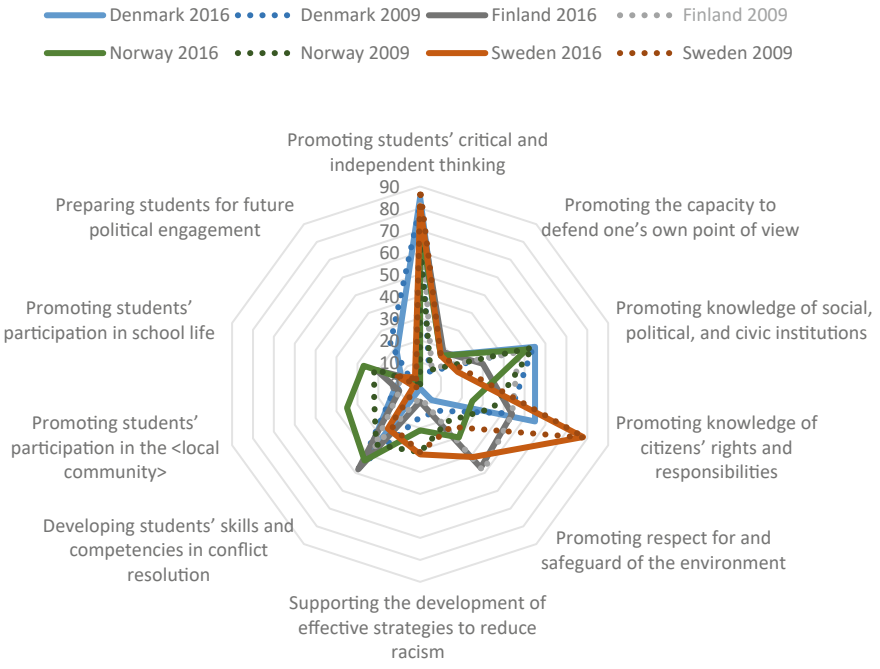

Fig. 3.1 Visual presentation of the most important CCE aims chosen by Nordic principals from ICCS 2009 and 2016 (*Notes* Chart created by Excel 2016 software function. Diagrams using percentages presented in Table 3.1)

12 percentage point increase in the aim of "promoting knowledge of citizens' rights and responsibilities" and a 13 percentage point decrease in the value-related aim of "supporting the development of effective strategies to reduce racism." The largest changes for Finnish school principals include a 17 percentage point decrease in the aim of "promoting knowledge of social, political and civic institutions" and a 12 percentage point increase in the skill-related aim of "developing students' skills and competencies in conflict resolution." In Norway, changes are significant for all CCE aims except that of "promoting knowledge of social, political and civic institutions" while the biggest change is a 13 percentage point increase in the participation related aim of "promoting students' participation in the local community." School principals in Sweden had the fewest significant changes with only three, including a 17 percentage point increase in the aim of "promoting respect for and safeguard of the environment."

3.6 Discussion

The analysis shows that, at the institutional level, only two of the Nordic principals' most-prioritized CCE aims were consistent between 2009 and 2016, namely "promoting students' critical and independent thinking" and "developing students' skills and competencies in conflict resolution." In 2009, the Nordic principals ranked "promoting knowledge of citizens' rights and responsibilities" as CCE aim number three, but in 2016 they diverge on this aim. For all the other ICCS survey items, there is less consistency among Nordic principals regarding the most important CCE aims.

The international sample of principals from outside the Nordic countries also values students' critical and independent thinking and promoting students' rights and responsibilities. In this way, the Nordic and the international samples of principals are fully aligned in their first priority for CCE aims. However, if the results are examined more closely, it becomes clear that the support for promoting students' critical and independent thinking is stronger in the Nordic sample than in the international sample of principals. Still, the principals' relative support for critical thinking fluctuated between 2009 and 2016 within the Nordic sample. While this aim was given increased importance in Norway and Denmark, relative interest decreased among principals in Sweden and Finland.

In our previous analysis of CCE aims at the national level in four Nordic countries, we found a consistent emphasis on knowledge/qualification. In the curricula, knowledge, skills, and abilities are meant to enable students to participate in society at large, including in democratic processes. This connection between knowledge and participation resembles Westheimer's (2015) participatory citizen ideal. However, the Nordic principals ranked all three survey items concerning democratic or political participation last. The analysis thus reveals a discrepancy between how aims concerning knowledge or qualification are linked to participation at the national curricula level and how these aims are assessed at the institutional–pedagogical level.

Viewed against the backdrop of the national aims of CCE in the curricula, Nordic principals' diminished interest in democratic participation is puzzling, but this finding is also consistent with the priorities of principals in the international sample, both in 2009 and 2016. This trend is thought-provoking, as there has been a general down-turn in democratic participation in countries with long-standing democratic traditions, especially among younger people (Schulz et al. 2016). It is possible, in line with Ekman and Amnå (2012), to suggest that principals believe education is a tool for stand-by citizenship, meaning that schools should prepare students for future political agency. The relatively strong support for different CCE aims highlighting knowledge and abilities in the ICCS survey could also indicate what Galston (2004) has described as the belief that participation is promoted by knowledge. This relationship between cognitive skills and active citizenship is also an underlying principle of the framework for ICCS (Schulz et al. 2016).

Then how should we understand Nordic principals' support for critical thinking and, especially, their stronger support for this item than in the international sample? Here, we may once more turn to macro-political debates on CCE (Weinberg and Flinders 2018). According to Ryen (2020), the concept of critical thinking as a skill or competence is currently the object of major interest in education worldwide, with the support of OECD, which refers to this as a "21st century skill." Technical–economic rationality and measurement introduced by international educational agencies have influenced education in the Nordic countries since the 1990s (Telhaug Mediaas 2006; Imsen et al. 2017). Nordic principals' preference for promoting students' critical thinking abilities may therefore be interpreted as a result of international agencies' influence, one of several aspects of the neoliberal turn in education worldwide.

Critical thinking may, on the other hand, be viewed as a prerequisite for action (Ryen 2020). We recognize this especially in Westheimer's (2015) ideal of the social justice-oriented citizen, in which critical assessment of the causes of societal problems and arguments about fairness should guide democratic participation. It is possible to relate the Nordic principals' support for critical thinking to this citizenship ideal, but we do not actually know *why* principals ranked this survey item number one. One interpretation may be that their support for critical thinking align with the political left's traditional interest in broader structural arguments and social critiques (Weinberg and Flinders 2018).

This possibility brings us back to the social democratic welfare state regime as the framework for the Nordic education model. Wiborg's (2013) main argument about this neoliberal turn is that it was not due to the factual shift to right-wing or conservative government that took place in these countries during the 1980s and 1990s, but to significant shifts within the social democratic parties' political response to economic challenges. The Nordic principals' strong support for critical thinking may then be interpreted not as traditional social democratic ideology but as a consequence of ideological shifts within the social democratic regime itself. As a result, at the institutional level, civic and cognitive skills such as critical thinking seem to have surpassed political participation in the notion of what good citizenship means. This is a break from the ideas of citizenship underpinning the traditional Nordic model

of education, as well as a divergence from the national CCE aims in the Nordic countries.

Notably, the literature presents a third option for the meaning of critical thinking in the context of the Nordic education model. This option follows from the *Bildung* ideal, described at the beginning of this chapter. *Bildung* is frequently contrasted with neoliberal shifts in education policies, but there have also been attempts to align the two positions through the latter's emphasis on skills and competencies. Ryen (2020) goes further in this direction, trying to unite recent theory on critical thinking and the German/Scandinavian *Bildung*-centred Didaktik, which uses processes of lesson planning to facilitate students' meaningful encounters with pedagogical content. Ryen highlights the "classroom as a community of enquiry," which was a major educational ideal of the original critical thinking movement in the second half of the 20th century. For the critical-constructive Didaktik movement, the crucial point is the teacher's ability to lead students toward *Bildung,* meaning self-determination, co-determination, and solidarity through the experience of meaning. If students are given examples they can connect to, new insight might help create personal and political agency.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined ideas of citizenship in the Nordic education model through the aims of CCE across four Nordic countries at the national political level and the institutional level. We find that, as curricula at the national level combine knowledge and ability with an ideal of participation, principals at the institutional level prioritize "critical thinking" above political and democratic participation, as an aim for CCE.

While prioritizations of CCE aims at the national level are aligned with values traditionally associated with the social democratic welfare state, the principals' low ranking of democratic participation indicates a break from this regime at the institutional level. However, shifts toward neoliberal educational policies have to a certain extent also been embraced, in some respects even lead, by the social democratic parties. The Nordic principals' strong support for knowledge and competencies may in that respect be on par with recent developments within the social democratic welfare state.

Within this web of potential continuations or breaks in the notion of citizenship that are embedded in the Nordic model of education, we also present the possibility that Nordic principals see a connection between critical thinking and *Bildung,* as this concept has had a strong influence on the educational ideals of Nordic countries for generations. Interpreted as *Bildung*, critical thinking may represent both a reminiscence and a continuation of the original citizenship ideals of the Nordic education model, uniting individualization and participation in a society where education is considered the main social equalizer and the mind is considered to be free.

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