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## Editorial Context-based vocational didactics: Perspectives and practices

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## Introduction

Vocational didactics has existed as long as humans have. As early as the Stone Age, masters taught children to sharpen spears and hunt, which was crucial for survival. The concept of vocational didactics did not exist then, but the practice did (Asghari, 2024a). Despite its long history, research in vocational didactics has only begun in the last few decades. Based on research, the concept vocational didactics can be defined as a process that occurs in the interaction between practical teaching work, reflection, and theory development within the profession (Henning Loeb et al., 2019; Kontio & Lundmark, 2021; Paul, 2017; Tyson, 2023). This process includes the profession's knowledge content, students' conditions, framework factors, and the evaluation of teaching and learning (Andersson & Köpsén, 2014; Henning Loeb et al., 2019; Hiim, 2015). The goal is to create conditions for students to acquire sufficient knowledge for professional work and to utilise resources in both school and working life (Hiim, 2015; Lindberg, 2003).

Regarding the acquisition of knowledge in schools, a special issue was recently published in a Nordic vocational education context (Asplund et al., 2024) that explores different aspects of teaching and learning in vocational classrooms. The articles in these special issues highlight how interactions between teachers and students, the use of specific tools such as mirrors, digital simulations, and the implementation of digital technology can create productive learning environments. The special issues also emphasise the importance of understanding and improving the dynamic and complex processes in vocational education to support students' vocational learning and development.

Vocational didactics is a multifaceted approach to vocational teaching and learning, encompassing the development of vocational skills and methods for nurturing students into professionals for a labour market that is context-bound and continuously evolves with technological advancements and social change (Asghari, 2024b). In context-bound vocational



didactics, the student cohort includes vocational students with immigrant backgrounds. In recent years, several studies have been conducted on vocational education for students with immigrant backgrounds, including newly arrived students (Asghari, 2022, 2023, 2025; Asghari & Abraham, 2022; Eliasson et al., 2024; Eliasson et al., 2022; Paul, 2023).

Didactics also serves as a framework that helps vocational teachers reflect on their teaching (Fejes et al., 2017; Hiim, 2015) and carefully plan tasks that assist students in their knowledge development (Hiim & Hippe, 2001; Klope & Gåfvels, 2022). Vocational didactics focuses on the teaching and learning of a profession, including the profession's knowledge content, students' conditions, framework factors, and evaluation (Hiim, 2013, 2015). It is described as the practical-theoretical planning, implementation, and evaluation of vocational-specific education (Hiim, 2013, 2015; Hiim & Hippe, 2001).

Research in vocational didactics is broad, encompassing everything from policy decisions to classroom teaching, including upper secondary vocational education and adult education (Muhrman, 2020). It concerns how VET teacher students understand success and failure in the work of VET teachers (Salo et al., 2024), how a vocational teacher profession can be perceived as meaningful (Antera, 2023; Antera et al., 2022; Asghari et al., 2024), how vocational students can improve their vocational knowledge and competence, and how vocational knowledge can be further developed through systematic educational and research processes (Hiim, 2013; Lindberg & Wärvik, 2017). Additionally, vocational didactics shows that vocational teachers adapt their teaching to a changing labour market and education system, where teaching also involves preparing students for life as citizens (Asghari, 2014). It has also addressed professional ethics as a means to create conditions for students to receive support in school and complete their studies, regardless of family background, gender, or class (Öhman, 2022). Furthermore, vocational didactics has been discussed in relation to respect for the value of all individuals, gender equality in Swedish society, and the ability to collaborate with everyone in the workplace team (Asghari, 2024a, 2024b).

Vocational didactics also aims to create a useful framework for vocational teaching and to explain vocational teachers' actions in relation to the curriculum (Gessler & Herrera, 2015). It has been studied in relation to digital learning resources and pedagogical tools (Haaland & Nilsen, 2023) as well as the development of vocational skills in vocational education (Hansen, 2017). Research with a didactical content can also be found in studies of teaching through assessment documents (Asghari & Kilbrink, 2018; Lindberg, 2005; Lindberg, 2011; Nore & Lindberg, 2020; Tsagalidis, 2012, 2019), feedback practices (Öhman, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Öhman & Tanner, 2017), and teaching perceptive sensoriality (Öhman & Klope, 2024).

It is also important to highlight that research in vocational subject didactics has been conducted in recent years. Vocational subject didactics involves transforming vocational knowledge into teaching content (Axelsson et al., 2023). It includes general methods for teaching in vocational education (Pahl, 2014), and focuses on specific vocational subjects (Gougoulakis & Moreno Herrera, 2018; Kimmelmann & Peitz, 2018). In other words, vocational didactics is broader and more general, while vocational subject didactics is more specialised and subjectspecific.

## Articles included in the special issue

The aim of this special issue, which includes 16 articles featuring research from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland, is to deepen and clarify the understanding of context-based vocational didactics, which continuously evolves with changes in society and technological advancements.

In context-based vocational didactics, vocational students with special educational needs are also included. Öhman (2025) addresses this by focusing on special educational support from the perspective of vocational upper secondary school students, examining the need for adaptations and support, particularly in academic subjects. Similarly, Björk-Åman and Ström (2025) highlight the didactic aspects of teaching in vocational education, especially how vocational teachers manage heterogeneous groups of students with varying learning abilities and support needs. Carlsson (2025) explores how vocational teachers manage and reflect on their socio-material teaching practices to enhance students' sense of coherence, emphasising the importance of various teaching materials and human interactions in creating a meaningful, manageable, and comprehensible learning environment.

The evolving educational landscape necessitates continued research on vocational didactics and an update of the existing research field, particularly concerning vocational students with immigrant backgrounds. Stiklestad and Bergskaug (2025)5 have contributed with an article focusing on students with minority backgrounds in adult education within the healthcare sector. Their article examines vocational teachers' didactical methods and how these are adapted to the specific conditions and needs of the students.

The contextual changes and technological advancements in vocational didactics are apparent in this text. With the help of digital technology and AI, we have used Copilot, an AI assistant utilised by Karlstad University, to proofread this introduction. Two articles in this special issue address vocational didactics from a digitalisation perspective: Stenholm (2025) and Nore et al. (2025). Stenholm's article discusses the development and implementation of ePortfolio didactics within the child and youth care worker profession in Norway, describing how digital learning portfolios can enhance vocational identity and pride among students and apprentices, making education more meaningful. Nore et al. investigate how digital documentation systems can be integrated and used effectively to support coherent vocational education, focusing on the impact of digital tools on both theory and practice in vocational didactics.

Like Nore et al. highlight the importance of vocational didactic theory and practice, Leonardsen and Normann (2025) highlight the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills in vocational education. The study examines how training in different environments can develop vocational didactic competence. The authors emphasise the need for practically oriented campus teaching, the application of campus learning in practice, and a cohesive link between theory and practice. Similarly, Endresen and Ringereide (2025) focus on how practical experiences and vocational didactic methods can be integrated into teacher education to better prepare students for their future professional roles. In line with Endresen and Ringereide, who focus on the integration of practical experiences and vocational didactics in teacher education, Wyszynska Johansson and Påsses (2025) highlight vocational didactic knowledge development through work-integrated learning. Their article also discusses how vocational teacher educators develop practical didactic theory and strengthen the scientific foundation of vocational teacher education through reflection and collaboration. Collaboration is a recurring concept in several articles. The collaboration between school and working life can be found, for example, in Karstensen and Aakernes (2025) and Paul et al. (2025). Karstensen and Aakernes focus on how vocational teachers can improve teaching by integrating work experience into the school environment. The study also highlights the need for close cooperation between school and working life. By using the concept of boundary crossing, the study also analyses how vocational teachers can use the differences between learning environments as a resource in their vocational didactic work. An article that examines vocational didactics within Swedish upper secondary vocational education, with a focus on workplacebased learning (WBL) for floristry students, is written by Paul et al. (2025). The article, based on interviews with students and supervisors, shows that economic aspects of vocational knowledge often remain hidden from students and that economic considerations influence supervisors' decisions regarding which tasks students are assigned during WBL. It is highlighted that the order form is an important tool in workplaces, with various functions that students have not yet grasped. The article emphasises the need for better integration between school and workplace to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the vocation.

The collaboration between different subject teachers can be found in Frejd and Muhrman (2025). Their article discusses the use of paired teaching as a method for subject integration in upper secondary vocational education. The study analyses how this teaching method affects students' motivation and relevance to working life, as well as how it promotes collaboration between mathematics teachers and vocational teachers. The article also focuses on how collaboration between different subject teachers can improve students' learning and prepare them for working life. Regarding vocational students' motivation for their learning, Lind Benthien and Hersom (2025) write that STEM teaching which integrates vocational practice can motivate and include more student groups, including those with negative experiences from previous schooling. The authors argue that practice-based and holistic teaching makes abstract concepts more concrete and easier for students to relate to their future vocational roles. This contributes to more inclusive and meaningful teaching that can engage a broader range of students. Practice-based holistic teaching requires interdisciplinary collaboration between STEM teachers and vocational structures that facilitate this.

As part of preparing students for working life, also includes preparing them to become democratic citizens. Duch's (2025) article focuses on democracy in vocational education. The article examines how democracy is integrated into Danish vocational education, particularly within social and healthcare education, and how teachers implement democratic principles in teaching. The article also addresses how democratic values and methods can be taught and practised within the framework of vocational education, and how this is balanced with both general and vocational educational goals.

In context-bound vocational didactics, with all that it entails in terms of vocational skills and approaches to nurturing a student into a professional (Asghari, 2024b), tools and artefacts, as well as the realisation of tasks, are also included. In this context, the article written by Asghari et al. (2025) focuses on the use of tools in vocational teaching and learning. It examines how tools can be used as learning objects in the interaction between teachers and students during workshop lessons in technical vocational programs. The article also discusses how tools can be understood in different teaching situations in relation to students' learning and

ability to solve tasks in here-and-now situations. Regarding the realisation of tasks, the article written by Granborg and Stubstad Henriksen (2025) focuses on simulation and supervision in vocational education. It investigates how simulations of tasks and supervision can be used to build vocational competence in media production, and also how they can improve students' understanding and ability to perform vocation-related tasks in a realistic context.

Overall, we are very satisfied to see the great and diverse contributions to the field of vocational didactics in this special issue. This special issue brings together a collection of articles that contribute to reflective discussions and practices in vocational education and training (VET). Each article offers unique insights and findings that enhance our understanding of vocational didactics. The collaborative effort in compiling this special issue highlights the importance of interdisciplinary research and the dedication of all contributors. We are proud of the important work that has been done to make this special issue a reality, and we believe it will serve as a valuable resource for researchers, educators, and practitioners in the field.

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