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Introduction

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Published in:
Developing a Didactic Framework Across and Beyond School Subjects

DOI:
[10.4324/9781003367260-1](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003367260-1)
[10.4324/9781003367260](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003367260)

Published: 22/12/2023

Document Version
Final published version

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[Link to publication](#)

Please cite the original version:
Mård, N., & Harnow Klausen, S. (2023). Introduction. In S. Harnow Klausen, & N. Mård (Eds.), *Developing a Didactic Framework Across and Beyond School Subjects : Cross- and Transcurricular Teaching* Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003367260-1>, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003367260>

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1 Introduction

Nina Mård and Søren Harnow Klausen

Teaching and learning across and beyond individual school subjects continues to be in high demand. Large societal challenges, such as information overload, problems of orientation and motivation, mental health challenges, democracy and climate crises, and the rise of transhumanism, call for teaching approaches that support and promote students' overall development. To meet the challenges and prepare students for future work and life in increasingly diverse societies, they must acquire competences and skills that are not adequately supported by the standard curriculum. Instead, this requires collaboration between different school subjects or the creation of new contexts of teaching and learning.

There is, however, a profound lack of theoretical foundation and didactic guidelines for cross- and transcurricular teaching. Research on interdisciplinary teaching (a different but widely used concept that indicates the need for conceptual clarification) has been to a large part focused on higher education. Studies on crosscurricular teaching in primary or secondary school are predominantly descriptive, mostly confined to reporting the outcome of individual teaching projects. Hence paradoxically, research on crosscurricular teaching and learning, which aims at achieving unity and coherence, is itself highly fragmented. This means that even when crosscurricular teaching is officially encouraged or required by educational policy, as it is in many countries, it is left to teachers to make difficult decisions about the choice of topics and methods with little systematic guidance.

This book presents not only a theoretically grounded and unified, but also a flexible and inclusive framework for cross- and transcurricular teaching and learning. It lays down the theoretical foundation by offering a systematic account of the rationale and aims of different kinds of cross- and transcurricular teaching, and shows how more specific didactic guidelines can be developed on this basis. It connects theory and educational practice by offering accounts of some of the most promising teaching methods, like dialogic teaching or movement integration, transversal competences like digital or entrepreneurial thinking, and topics that currently call for crosscurricular approaches, like sustainability or citizenship. It further addresses important challenges that

have been widely ignored, like how to evaluate crosscurricular work. The book breaks with the tendency to focus on narrowly cognitive aspects of crosscurricular teaching. It explores how movement and emotions can become integral parts of learning across school subjects, and recognizes a diversity of goals and outcomes, including a concern for wellbeing both as an educational goal and as a means for fostering motivation and collaboration. The book also addresses typical worries and criticism of crosscurricular teaching, such as the widespread fear that it will be less sophisticated than subject-specific teaching, that such teaching is likely to benefit certain kinds of students more than others, or that the time and resources spent on it will make it difficult to ensure that students also acquire the necessary subject-specific content and skills.

A welter of different, seemingly incommensurable, theoretical approaches characterizes educational research. Crosscurricular teaching is also understood and valued differently by various pedagogical traditions and from various normative stances. The very idea of fostering general competences or teaching to meet future challenges remains controversial. Despite a partial rapprochement in recent times, the Anglo-Saxon tradition of curriculum studies and emphasis on problem-solving is still contrasted with the Continental European tradition of *Bildung* and *Didaktik*. Without downplaying the importance of such differences, the book presents a comprehensive approach that makes it possible to accommodate insights and practices that have been associated with different traditions and theories. By offering a framework for clarifying the aims and goals of crosscurricular teaching, it will enable teachers and educational planners to make qualified decisions. It is centered on a comprehensive notion of cultivation or *Bildung*, which provides the basis for balancing and merging concerns for not only the background, needs, and interests of the individual student, but also the social context, the internal features of subjects and disciplines, and the larger societal goals and challenges to which contemporary education must be sensitive.

This approach helps to ensure that the framework, which allows and calls for ongoing modification and development, is adaptable to different national or sector-specific traditions, curricula, and other framework conditions. Although many of the cases and examples are taken from a Scandinavian context, mostly Finnish and Danish, the reflections and guidelines are formulated to be widely applicable. Also, while the *Bildung*-based approach is self-consciously normative, its emphasis on contextualization and adaptation makes it not only possible, but necessary to take into account and negotiate between different, more or less established “subject didactics.”

Positioning itself in the genre of a research-based monograph, the book is to be consulted for inspiration, justification, and guidance. It addresses school teaching, with a special focus on secondary education, and is thus relevant for not only teachers and teacher students but also researchers and everyone with an interest in education. The different chapters make a framework that probes the ideas and openly discusses potentials, challenges, and possible shortcomings of crosscurricular teaching and learning. As indicated by the title, the

focus is on the ongoing development of a suitable framework. This means, first, that the chapters describe ongoing attempts to practice and improve crosscurricular teaching, and that they critically discuss and sometimes complement or correct assumptions made in other chapters. Second, it means that the framework that emerges still needs to be further developed when applied to specific school contexts. Serving as a tool for reflection, it both provides specific ideas and recommendations that are realistic and applicable in classrooms across educational settings and raises imaginative issues that can foster new and creative ways of thinking.

The book is a result of fruitful research collaboration between Åbo Akademi University (ÅAU) and University of Southern Denmark (USD). In 2021, Prof. Søren Harnow Klausen from USD was invited guest professor in crosscurricular education to support the development of crosscurricular didactics together with ÅAU's teacher education (2022–2025). Besides editing this book, the collaboration involves empirical research in schools and input to courses in teacher education programs in both countries. Special thanks go to Högskolestiftelsen of Ostrobothnia and Swedish Cultural Foundation, both located in Finland, for financially supporting the collaboration and enabling the development work, to Prof. Michaela Pörn from ÅAU, who has provided much help and support along the way, and to Furkan Mustafa Tuncer, who helped bringing the manuscript into shape. Very special thanks go to senior lecturer Mårten Björkgren from ÅAU, who has not contributed directly to the book, but initiated the research collaboration on crosscurricular education and has been a constant source of advice, support, and inspiration.