

The Centre for Social Science Didactics

Research program 2025–2027



**The Centre for
Social Science Didactics, CSD**
Karlstad University

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Background

This is the “Centre for social science didactics” (CSD) sixth research program since its inception in 2005. The first two programs focused on subject didactics teacher research and conceptual development within the social science subjects. An important development phase for CSD during this period was two research schools for teachers funded by the Swedish Research Council: the Research School for Teachers in History and Social Studies (FLHS), which ran from 2008–2011, and CSD's Research School for Teachers in all Social Science subjects (CSD-FL), which ran from 2012–2014. In FLHS, there were three sub-themes: Teachers' narratives about subject teaching, teachers' work in the classroom, and teachers' work with grading and assessment. In CSD-FL, there were two overlapping sub-themes: language and conceptual development, and grading and assessment. During this time, a special project conducted research on social science subjects in grades 4–6 (SAMSTUD1 and 2). The 2013–2015 program also included a theme on teachers' work in higher education with a special focus on teacher education.

The focus of the third research program (2016–2018) expanded to subject didactics research on teaching and learning. The practice-oriented perspective and the societal relevance of research were emphasized. There was also a keen interest in developing theoretically grounded research. The research program highlighted three development lines: first, theory development for practice-oriented subject didactics in teacher education and school activities; second, testing models and theories and design-oriented approaches in collaboration with teachers; third, interdisciplinary approaches. Overall, it can be said that particularly the first two development lines have developed successfully, with several projects receiving external funding, and a significant increase in publications in international journals. Since the research milieu “Research on subject-specific education” (ROSE) was established in 2017, comparative subject didactics studies have become an important theme for this environment and have been less in focus within CSD.

The fourth research program (2019–2021) addressed not only research but also CSD's operational idea and strategies for organizational development. Therefore, this program was called the research and operational program. During the period, the investments in theory development and practice-oriented research yielded clear results. The VR-funded research school KÄKK (Knowledge, Subjects, and Quality in Teacher Education and Classroom) started in 2020 in collaboration with ROSE. The research school, which also includes Halmstad University and University West, is aimed at teacher educators, centered around "powerful

knowledge" and transformation, and has a practice-oriented focus. The publication rate has continued to grow and has also included educational material. Within the framework of developing higher education didactics and teacher education, CSD has been instrumental in developing a master's program with a focus on subject didactics and practice-oriented research. The program is primarily aimed at practicing teachers. In the autumn of 2021, the faculty board decided to support the main areas in subject didactics, which made the program possible. CSD has been instrumental in both financing and supervising the increase of research-trained teachers in teacher education, including supporting a research school for adjuncts.

The fifth research program (2022–2024) was largely a continuation of the established path but also included new elements. The program defined four main lines: 1) Subject didactics theory and conceptual development; 2) Socially oriented key themes; 3) Practice-oriented perspectives on research and subject didactics school development; 4) Teacher education and subject didactics in higher education. The combination of theory, practice-oriented research, and societal relevance remained the guiding principle. Additionally, teacher education and higher education were particularly highlighted as a separate area, primarily due to the need to further develop engagement in teacher education, but also to give greater attention to the ongoing work. This is a task that remains important for CSD to develop. The investment in supporting subject didactics for higher education is an important area, but also an area where CSD has had difficulty finding working methods.

In the work with CSD's Research Program 2025–2027, it has been clear that CSD is in a new development phase. The number of researchers in our various subjects has grown through doctoral students, postdoctoral researchers, and PhD graduates. This has meant that the variation in research interests has grown. It is therefore no longer adequate to designate specific key themes for the program period. However, it remains CSD's goal to conduct socially relevant research that responds to current key themes. The research program has a strong focus on research collaboration. As a research environment, CSD itself is a platform for collaboration both locally and nationally, but also internationally. It is also clear that our research is largely conducted together with schools and active teachers. We see that this collaboration plays a strategic role in developing and improving schools and teaching. It has also clearly impacted our activities in the theoretical and methodological development of subject didactics.

Research Focus

CSD's research can be said to stand on three pillars today: a practice-oriented approach with ambitions to understand and influence the conditions, forms, and content of teaching; a theory- and method-developing approach; and an interest in how societal changes affect the conditions for teaching and learning in the social science subjects. These approaches are developed here under four themes: 1) Subject didactics theory and conceptual development; 2) Socially-oriented key themes; 3) Practice-oriented perspectives on research and subject didactics school development; 4) Collaborative research. Based on the research themes, goals for the period's activities are formulated. Since individual goals can address multiple themes, the goals are presented in context.

1) Subject Didactics Theory and Conceptual Development

CSD works to develop the field of subject didactics research, which includes strengthening and developing the theoretical foundation at various levels. Within each subject didactics area—geography, history, religious studies, and social studies—it is CSD's ambition to contribute to strengthening the scientific field. CSD also sees the need to develop both curriculum-related subject didactics and subject didactics focused on teachers' transformation and students' learning. We draw central insights from international research, which underscores the importance of actively participating in international contexts such as conferences, journals, research collaborations, and similar activities.

A strength for CSD is that in our thematic seminars, we have a form for working together with conceptual and theoretical starting points without striving for conformity and uniformity. We have developed knowledge about the sociology of knowledge and "powerful knowledge," the Anthropocene, design research, and didactic models. These seminars have influenced the activities through theoretical articles, research projects, and collaboration with ROSE.

In the interplay between didactic practice and curriculum theory, a model perspective can be related to various levels in the education system, from disciplines, politics, and policy levels, to planning and implementation in the classroom. By working with models, complex relationships between transformation and learning can be described, analyzed, and developed. Didactic models relate theories to teaching practice and can, depending on the application, function both as research-based reflection tools and as support for developing the planning and implementation of teaching. During the upcoming period, the work that has begun around subject didactics models within and between our subjects will continue.

2) Socially-Oriented Key Themes

Socially-oriented key themes refer to themes that can be considered an entry or "key" to complex societal issues with high relevance to CSD's research areas. Theoretically, the concept is linked to German didactician Wolfgang Klafki's reasoning about "epoch-typical key problems." The contemporary world is highly complex, which places great demands on teachers within CSD's subject areas. Teachers must handle increasing political polarization, foster understanding and acceptance of societal diversity, as well as take a clear position against climate denial, conspiracy theories, and various forms of intolerance. This makes questions about how students acquire knowledge to understand and interact in this world central to CSD. An overarching key theme concerns the school's role in this complex situation. Having a critical view of societal changes and their consequences is therefore an important task for the research we conduct, and this should also influence our work with didactic models. Examples of work with key themes include research on learning, education in the Anthropocene, questions about how wars and conflicts affect the school's relationship to preparedness and crisis management; controversial societal issues; questions about how students learn about society and democracy in a complex news and media landscape, etc. To emphasize the importance of connecting subject didactics questions to societal relevance, CSD expects research conducted with CSD support to relate to a key theme.

3) Practice-Oriented Perspectives on Research and Subject Didactics School Development

The practice-oriented perspective is central to CSD. It includes both an interest in mapping and identifying patterns and problems in school practice, and developing, testing, and applying methods and models in practice. Research that aims to contribute to the development of teaching and learning needs to be conducted in collaboration with practitioners in schools and higher education. CSD sees a need for subject didactics development where schools and academia collaborate to promote infrastructures that support education on a scientific basis. Subject didactics research needs to work on exploring conditions, generating new knowledge, and testing applications and implementations. This can be expressed in research and teaching at the school level and at the teacher education and other higher education levels. During the upcoming period, CSD will deepen the work of establishing both research on and structures for practice-oriented subject didactics. This means a continued development towards involving practicing teachers in the activities. This work needs to be driven at several levels: researching teachers are a natural part of the research environment, driving and/or participating in research

projects. Researching teachers can have all or part of their employment in schools. An important part of developing infrastructures is creating opportunities for adjunct positions, affiliations, and supporting networks for researching teachers in various ways. Teachers are also an important target group for practice-oriented research. To support a school on a scientific basis, it is also required that teachers can access the research conducted. CSD will support infrastructures for disseminating research through several channels, such as seminar activities aimed at teachers, continuing education activities, advanced education, Nordidactica, and through collaboration with SO-didaktik i Centrum.

4) Collaborative Research

Karlstad University conducts one of Sweden's largest teacher education programs, which is also the university's largest program. The Teacher Education Board's (LUN) research program emphasizes that teacher education rests on strong educational science/subject didactics research centers. The strong development of subject didactics research at Karlstad University has been made possible by LUN creating conditions for the long-term development of research environments. The “strong research” profiling of subject didactics is a resource that also gives teacher education this profile and contributes to the education being research-based and resting on close interaction between theory and practice.

CSD has extensive engagement in networks and collaboration both nationally and internationally. Within the subject didactics environment at Karlstad University, a large part of the collaboration takes place within ROSE. CSD also participates in collaboration with RUC and strives to further develop collaboration with principal research. At the national level, collaboration takes place with several higher education institutions, both through doctoral education and research collaboration. Extensive collaboration, both nationally and internationally, occurs within each subject field, but also linked to specific research fields. Today, there is no complete overview of the extent of this activity. Part of the international collaboration takes place through ROSE, of which the KOSS network(a subject didactics collaboration between University College London and the University of Helsinki) has played an important role and is considered to have further potential. Another part of the international collaboration is to invite guest professors/guest researchers with high competence in strategic areas. In the selection process, gender aspects should be particularly considered in relation to the imbalance that exists within the group of senior researchers.

A goal for CSD is to develop forms to enhance and deepen the subject didactics competence within teacher education. The work to strengthen the proportion of research-trained teachers through doctoral education will continue. CSD also supports the development of teacher education through active participation in boards, committees, and through participation and support for course development and other development work.

Research Focus: Goals for the Period

- To develop the theoretical and conceptual foundations for subject didactics models,
- To ensure that the work with subject didactics models generates research applications and publications,
- To conduct scholarly seminars as a continued important element in the work with theory and conceptual development, as well as in exploring and connecting to current key themes,
- To actively participate in the educational policy conversation,
- To support researchers and teachers in developing connections between subject didactics and complex societal issues,
- To have ongoing and close collaboration with practicing teachers and principals, as well as to develop contacts with the regional ULF node and RUC,
- To develop a seminar activity that is open to practicing teachers and other interested parties and to involve teachers active in research projects in seminar activities,
- To run and develop the master's program in subject didactics,
- To develop collaboration with research-trained teachers by supporting and developing forms for partnerships and hybrid positions,
- To expand and deepen collaboration with international and national partners, including schools,
- To work toward scientifically anchoring teacher education,
- To work toward increasing the proportion of research-trained teachers, both through new recruitment and adjunct support. CSD will continue to collaborate with ROSE and other higher education institutions to develop research schools for practicing teachers and teacher educators,
- To invite guest professors/guest researchers with high competence in strategic areas.

CSD's Organization

The success of CSD's activities relies on active and engaged staff members. Our goal is to offer an inclusive environment that contributes to high-quality research and development. The environment is multidisciplinary, bringing together researchers and teachers from various disciplines. The common denominator is the focus on subject didactics. Therefore, the discussion about the didactic foundation needs to be continuously maintained, along with activities such as seminars, writing retreats, doctoral activities, and reading circles. Goals for the operational period are set after discussions about CSD's organization. They are presented in context as individual goals may address multiple areas.

Seminar Activities: CSD shall run an advanced seminar characterized by a high scientific level and an open and constructive approach. The seminar is a central part of the activities and serves several functions: It is a platform for researchers and doctoral students interested in CSD's field to present and develop their research. It is open to interested parties nationally and internationally. The seminars shall regularly offer scholarly and in-depth themes within research methodology and theory. They are also a platform for critically reviewing and developing CSD's activities.

Doctoral Environment: CSD collaborates with several doctoral education subjects, and many doctoral students are closely linked to CSD's research environment. CSD finances several doctoral projects both directly through budget allocations and indirectly through co-financing or research projects. Therefore, CSD has a responsibility to function as a supportive and developmental doctoral environment and considers it essential that doctoral students are represented in decision-making and advisory bodies. During the period, we will explore ways to support doctoral students at different stages of their education, including supporting international collaboration and exchange.

Nordidactica: Our subject didactics journal is a successful initiative to disseminate subject didactics research within the social science subjects at a Nordic level. Through an updated website and OJS portal, as well as continued work with governance, statutes, and dissemination, the activities and visibility are further developed.

CSD's Organization: The operational period begins with a new management organization in place. The ambition is that this will provide additional space to develop CSD's position as a scientific environment. CSD has shown good development in terms of external research funding approvals, recruitment of doctoral students, and scientific publications. At the same

time, there has been a noted ongoing gender imbalance at the management level. There are also few lecturers in CSD's environment with docent competence, creating a recruitment gap between lecturers and professors. Due to age structures, this may have consequences for scientific leadership in a few years. Another challenge is the imbalance in both senior competence and doctoral students. The subjects are of different sizes and go through different development phases, which means that the distribution between subjects needs to be considered strategically. During the upcoming period, CSD needs to work on recruitment issues and balance between age, gender, and subject.

CSD's Organization: Goals for the Period

- To map CSD's national and international contacts during the period,
- To provide opportunities for researchers to workshop research applications and publication drafts, both independently and in collaboration with ROSE,
- To work to disseminate research results to the academic world and to schools. This is done, for example, through Nordidactica and by developing CSD's website to include research-based teaching materials. Collaboration with the journal SO-didaktik shall be developed during the period,
- To support newly graduated researchers within CSD's environment to continue developing their research,
- To review structures to support doctoral students at different stages of their education, including supervisor collegiums and international exchange. During the period, the need for doctoral education courses will be examined.