



Standards and teacher education: A case for non-competency-based views

TE_REG Report 4 (WP2b2) Integrative Report on Teacher Education and Teacher Standards

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Overview

This integrative report ‘Standards and teacher education: A case for non-competency-based views’ (TE_REG Report 4) builds on the exploratory report ‘Teacher standards and professionalism: International visions and regional realities’ (TE_REG Report 3), which examined how teacher standards are formulated and debated in five European regions: Finland, Flanders (Belgium), Hessen (Germany), Montenegro, and Portugal. While Report 3 focused on mapping and comparison, this fourth report shifts toward critical reflection and conceptual positioning.

This report synthesizes insights from regional focus groups on teacher standards, identifies common concerns (such as fragmentation), and puts forward a clear position regarding the future of teacher standards in light of a ‘dispositional turn’.

4.1 Regional focus group insights on teacher standards

The five regional reports on teacher standards form an integral part of this overarching TE_REG Report 4. Each regional reflection is grounded in document analysis and structured focus group discussions held the first half of 2025. The focus groups brought together teacher educators, policy actors, in-service and pre-service (student) teachers, and educational researchers to reflect on how teacher standards function in their respective contexts – not just as policy instruments, but as lived realities that shape (and are shaped by) practice.

What follows are five concise abstracts that highlight the main insights from each region. These contributions reveal both shared concerns and region-specific nuances in how teacher standards are experienced, critiqued, and reimaged.

Finland

In Finland, there are no binding teacher standards. Instead, teacher education follows broad curricular aims in which wider competences, situational skills and professional practices are approached as interconnected dimensions of teacher development. The focus is on pedagogical judgment, ethical responsibility and research-informed practice.

Focus group participants express strong appreciation for this autonomy and trust-based model. While the notion of ‘standards’ is often seen as too rigid or external, participants recognise a need for clearer reference points, especially during practicum. They point to a growing need for tools that support dialogue, self-evaluation and transparency in increasingly diverse and digitally influenced learning environments, and emphasise the importance of reflection, pedagogical adaptability and ethical responsibility – qualities understood to develop through practice rather than being imposed externally. At the same time, some note a tension between holistic ideals and the need for greater clarity or shared criteria. Overall, the Finnish deliberations reflect both resistance to rigid standardisation and openness to frameworks that support professional growth without undermining autonomy or complexity.

Flanders (Belgium)

The Flemish focus groups reveal deep tensions surrounding the current competency-based teacher standards. While participants acknowledge the value of having a shared reference framework - particularly for quality assurance and communication – they express widespread frustration with the framework’s fragmented and procedural nature. Many point out that it

reduces teaching to a list of discrete behaviours, undermining the relational, ethical and holistic dimensions of the profession. Yet despite this critique, participants find it difficult to imagine alternatives. Competencies are perceived as so self-evident and deeply woven into policy and practice that letting go of them feels not only unthinkable, but even professionally irresponsible. Participants stress the need for a baseline, a framework, a structure, a common language, looking for ways to adjust, reformulate or complement existing competence-based teacher standards.

In the second part of the Flemish report, the research team takes a step beyond the focus group itself: it introduces the model of broad triadic teaching dispositions (BTTDs), inspired by the work of Perkins et al. (Perkins et al., 2000; see also Perkins et al., 1993; Perkins & Grotzer, 1997; Perkins & Tishman, 2006; Tishman et al., 1993; Perkins & Salomon, 2012), as a conceptually grounded and practically workable alternative. This proposal aims to restore the integrative, ethical and contextual nature of teaching and offers a direction for moving beyond the limits of fragmented competence lists.

Hessen (Germany)

The focus group discussions centre on the dual-phase structure of teacher education and the role of the federal 'KMK framework' in defining professional expectations. While the standards serve as helpful reference points, participants express a widespread sense of overload and disconnection. Student teachers often feel overwhelmed by the number and abstraction of standards, which can obscure rather than support their growth. Teacher educators, meanwhile, increasingly rely on local, self-designed tools to translate general standards into meaningful, dialogic and context-sensitive guidance. Across the group, there is strong support for reflection, cooperation and continuous feedback as key pillars of professionalisation. Several participants point out that the system's strength lies not in its formal standards, but in the quality of mentoring and the integration of ethical, biographical and pedagogical reflection throughout the training process.

Montenegro

The Montenegrin focus groups express a sharp critique of current teacher standards as overly technical and disconnected from the lived realities of teaching. Participants voice concern that education is increasingly governed by bureaucratic logics that prioritise efficiency over ethics, and procedures over presence. In this context, standards are often perceived as external impositions rather than meaningful professional tools. Much of the discussion focuses on the need to revitalise teacher education by reintroducing time, dialogue and human connection as central values. Participants respond positively to the alternative of the so-called BTTD (Broad Triadic Teaching Dispositions) model, seeing it as a more holistic and flexible framework that helps re-integrate the moral, relational and contextual dimensions of teaching. There is broad agreement that teacher education needs to shift from 'pedagogical engineering' (understood as a system that produces teachers according to technical blueprints) towards a deeper, more reflective and ethically grounded formation of future teachers.

Portugal

Focus group participants recognise the value of tightly defined legal performance profiles in providing clarity and legitimacy to the teaching profession – particularly in the context of national accreditation – and note that in Portugal, these profiles function as the formal articulation of

teacher standards, covering ethical, pedagogical and professional dimensions. However, they also point out significant limitations. The standards are often perceived as too static, not well aligned with contemporary challenges such as multiculturalism, digitalisation and the emergence of GenAI. Participants describe a gap between the holistic ambitions of the profiles and the realities of initial teacher education, where time constraints, resource limitations and curriculum fragmentation hinder effective implementation. There is strong support for rethinking the frameworks to allow for greater flexibility, critical reflection and professional agency, particularly in relation to intercultural sensitivity, ethical awareness and continuous professional growth.

4.1.1 Finland

[Insert the report here.]

https://te-reg.eu/wp-content/uploads/go-x/u/26b06995-6e4a-40ed-bba6-3122a58516f7/University-of-Helsinki-Finland-Teacher-Standards-Reflections_WP2b2.pdf

4.1.2 Flanders (Belgium)

[Insert the report here.]

https://te-reg.eu/wp-content/uploads/go-x/u/67649ff8-ac22-4069-bdbb-784fccf8fbf3/WP2b2-Flanders-Teacher-Standards-Report-20250504_1.pdf

4.1.3 Hessen (Germany)

[Insert the report here.]

https://te-reg.eu/wp-content/uploads/go-x/u/db0ac418-5158-4fb8-9206-a1f3c1ea27e5/WP2b2-Germany-Hesse-Teacher-Standards-Report-20250528_1.pdf

4.1.4 Montenegro

[Insert the report here.]

https://te-reg.eu/wp-content/uploads/go-x/u/5eb52214-ef5a-4d7a-a372-990275309d2a/TE_REG-Report-WP2b2-Montenegro.pdf

4.1.5 Portugal

[Insert the report here.]

https://te-reg.eu/wp-content/uploads/go-x/u/0699612c-960a-46a7-89c6-d2cdbac1796c/WP2b2_Portugal_Teachers_Standards_EN_1.pdf

4.2. Towards a dispositional alternative

4.2.1 Teacher standards between coherence and constraint

In the different regional focus groups conducted as part of this phase of the TE_REG project, participants shared how teacher standards are designed, implemented and experienced in their respective contexts. The conversations show that standards can serve multiple purposes –

offering orientation, supporting quality assurance, enabling shared language, etc. – while also giving rise to concerns. In some settings, participants speak of a lack of shared reference points or common frameworks. In others, they describe an excess of procedural detail that narrows professional space. Elsewhere, tensions emerge between the formal articulation of standards and the lived realities of teacher education. These are not contradictory perspectives, but situated expressions of how standards are shaped, applied and felt in different educational environments. Together, they bring into view a diverse set of experiences and interpretations, informed by local structures, traditions and expectations.

At the heart of many of these experiences, there seems to lie a shared concern with balance. Standards are expected to provide structure, but not at the expense of autonomy. They are meant to clarify expectations, but without closing down space for interpretation and growth. They are supposed to guide collaboration, but without erasing the diversity of professional voices. Across settings, people seem to be looking for forms of guidance that are strong enough to support coherence, yet open enough to sustain plurality, responsiveness and trust.

Taken together, these reported concerns point to a recurring tension: while standards are valued for the structure they promise, they are also experienced as constraining the complexity they aim to support. When being too open, they may leave teacher educators and student teachers searching for direction. When too prescriptive, they may reduce teaching to predefined behaviors or narrow interpretations of professionalism. This tension is not new, nor necessarily problematic either. But when made visible, it invites further reflection on how standards function as meaningful tools for professional learning.

4.2.2 The Whole-To-Parts Professional Pendulum

The teaching profession carries a public significance that extends beyond the domain of education providers and teacher educators. Across systems, there is a widely shared understanding that the formation of teachers is too important to be left to local judgment or implicit tradition. This often leads to an effort – sometimes explicit, sometimes tacit – to define common ground: a negotiated understanding of what teachers should know, be able to do, and embody. These efforts typically begin with the ambition to do justice to the complexity of the profession. They seek to formulate integrated descriptions of teaching that recognise its pedagogical, ethical, and relational dimensions.

(Over time) these descriptions may take the form of structured frameworks, often organised around competences or domains of practice. Initially intended to support coherence and professional dialogue, they gradually become aligned with assessment procedures, policy regulations and public accountability mechanisms. What starts as a holistic orientation can, under these pressures, become increasingly operationalised – and ultimately fragmented.

This movement is not incidental. It recurs across contexts. Descriptions that were meant to be integrated often shift toward implementation tools: competences become indicators, behaviors, checklists. In response, countermeasures emerge – portfolios, reflective instruments, mentoring frameworks – aiming to reassemble what has come apart. Yet these too may become proceduralised, drawn into the same logics of validation and control. In this cycle, the intention to support professional judgment risks being overtaken by the need to monitor and measure it.

The ‘Whole-to-Parts Professional Pendulum’ – from holistic vision to fragmented implementation and back again – reflects a deeper tension in how education systems seek to balance conceptual clarity with lived complexity.

4.2.3 A triadic proposal: broad teaching dispositions

Despite pendular pitfalls, the search for a more meaningful alternative remains essential. In this report, we propose an approach that seeks to retain the holistic ambition of earlier frameworks without succumbing to procedural reduction: the model of Broad Triadic Teaching Dispositions (BTTDs), as developed in the Flemish contribution to TE_REG and grounded in the work of Perkins et al. (2000).

BTTDs are based on the understanding that professional behaviour is not just a matter of knowledge or skill, but of situated, value-informed tendencies to act. These dispositions are structured along three interdependent dimensions:

- **Inclinations.**
The motivational dimension: what teachers tend to prioritise or care about.
- **Sensitivities.**
The perceptual-ethical dimension: what teachers tend to notice or attend to in complex, real-life contexts.
- **Abilities.**
The performative dimension: what teachers tend to be able to do in practice.

What makes this model distinctive is not the categorisation itself, but the triadic level of processing: professional action is shaped not by isolated attributes, but by the dynamic interplay of intention, perception and capacity. Descriptions at the level of individual abilities, sensitivities or inclinations can be illustrative but must remain secondary to the integrated triad as the basic unit of analysis and reflection.

This emphasis on the triadic level is essential. The Flemish position paper (Dhert & Elen, 2023) stresses vigilance against reducing the model to a new checklist or re-fragmenting it into separate categories. The strength of the approach lies in its insistence on integration – not just conceptually, but in how it supports teacher formation, dialogue, and judgment in situated practice.

For more information about this dispositional view of teaching, we refer to the Flemish report, which has been included earlier in this overarching integrative report.

4.3 Concluding Reflections

Building on the insights of regional focus groups and the critical mapping of TE_REG Report 3 ‘Teacher Standards and Professionalism: International Visions and Regional Realities’, the TE_REG Report 4 ‘Standards and teacher education: A case for non-competency-based views’ takes a step beyond descriptive comparison and toward conceptual positioning. The report has explored the current state, tensions and possibilities surrounding teacher standards and their impact on teacher education in five European contexts. While the specific conditions vary, a shared thread runs through all contributions: the recognition that teacher standards, when narrowly formulated or overly proceduralised, can fall short of capturing the professional,

relational and ethical richness of teaching. At the same time, it was shown that the absence of shared reference points can also pose challenges – particularly for teacher education contexts seeking clarity, orientation or common ground. Moreover, efforts to support holistic teacher development through reflection-based instruments or mentoring practices may themselves become proceduralised, revealing how even well-intentioned alternatives risk being drawn into standardising logics.

This underscores the need for a careful rethinking of how standards are designed, interpreted and enacted. This report calls for a reimagining. It argues for a shift in perspective – from fragmented competencies to integrated dispositions, from predefined behaviours to situated professional judgment, from external validation to formative dialogue. The Broad Triadic Teaching Dispositions (BTTDs) model, introduced in the Flemish contribution and elaborated here as a conceptual proposal, exemplifies such a dispositional turn. By centering professional inclinations, sensitivities and abilities in a mutually constitutive triad, the BTTDs model opens space for more holistic, ethically grounded and context-sensitive understandings of teaching and teacher growth.

Across regions, participants emphasized the importance of trust, coherence, reflection and autonomy. They voiced concerns about overly technical frameworks but also acknowledged the need for shared orientation and professional language. The challenge seems thus the development of teacher standards that support complexity.

The BTTDs model offer a possible way to approach teaching as an integrated practice shaped by what matters to teachers, what they attend to in complex situations, and what they are able to do. It supports professional language that remains close to ethical awareness and pedagogical judgment. As a conceptually grounded and practically usable proposal, it opens space for ongoing reflection and development within the broader TE_REG project.

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