



## TE\_REG Report WP2b2 / KUL & UCLL

# Competency-based Teacher Standards in Flanders: Integrative Perspective on the Teaching Profession and Teacher Education

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Research report with an integrative perspective on the teaching profession and Teacher Education in Flanders by the joined forces of KU Leuven and UCLL

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## Introduction : Context, purpose and method

This report was developed within the framework of the TE\_REG project, an Erasmus+ co-funded initiative that explores two major challenges facing contemporary teacher education. On the one hand, the rapid development of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) challenges established practices in teaching and learning. On the other hand, the emphasis on competency-based teacher standards — initially intended to enhance quality and clarity — has, in practice, led to analytical, fragmented, and procedural approaches to teacher education. These practices, now facing additional pressure from the demands of GenAI, call for a close (re-)examination of what it means to be a teacher and how teacher education can respond.

An exploratory literature review on the goals and organization of the Flemish teacher education system was conducted as a foundational step. This review included both analogue and online academic and popularized literature, policy documents, legislative texts, and program guides. The insights gained from this analysis informed the design of the focus group discussions.

In the context of WP2 of the TE\_REG project, two focus group sessions were organized. The second session (February 5th 2025), to which this report pertains, specifically examined competency-based teacher standards and their effects on teacher education. Different teacher education stakeholders – ranging from student teachers and teacher educators to policy makers and experts in education and GenAI – were brought together. This diverse composition was deliberately chosen as it enriches the discussions and allowed participants to broaden their professional networks and perspectives.

The report consists of two parts:

- Part 1 presents a reflection on the 'as is' situation, primarily based on insights from the focus group discussions.
- Part 2 articulates the authors' standpoints for future practice and policy.



## Reflections on regional practices and impact of competency-based teacher education in Flanders

Following the status overview in the explorative part in which the background and current status of teacher standards in Flanders are discussed, we now dive into the outcomes of the focus group discussions on the implications and experiences with these competency-based standards in practice, and the potential for rethinking or complementing them. One focus group discussion was specifically devoted to teacher standards. Given the large group of participants, the discussion was organized in four tables.

This first part synthesizes insights from focus group discussions and participant reflections, highlighting how theoretical concepts resonate with lived experiences in Flemish teacher education practice and how stakeholders view their effects on teacher education. It highlights recurring themes such as proceduralization, fragmentation, and the persistent tension between standardized frameworks and the inherently complex, relational, and moral nature of teaching.

In 2004, the Flemish Education Council, [in Dutch: de 'Vlaamse Onderwijsraad' (Vlor)], wrote (our translation): *"In connection with the principle of basic competences, the Vlor points out once again that teaching also has moral, political and emotional dimensions, in addition to the technical dimension of knowledge and (action) skills. A teacher acts according to his personality, moral views, commitment, vision of 'good education' and relational orientation towards the pupils. These aspects are difficult to capture in measurable and operational objectives. That is why teacher training should not only focus on the technical aspects of teaching."*

Participants in the focus groups express similar thoughts.

*"What I want to see is that a teacher has love for the school, that they say 'We, at our school' with pride. That's what creates a school culture, and this is not found in a competency profile."*

*"While actually teaching itself or 'being a teacher' in itself is almost 'a way of seeing' or 'a way of being'. But the moment you start naming elements that constitute the act of teaching – and that's just what you have to do – you start picking it apart and then you tend to read it as separate elements."*

*"Maybe that's also the big difficulty: that we tick off one by one, and we are not looking for the bigger picture. And then at the end we're like 'there's still something missing', while they do tick all the boxes."*

The analytical nature of competency frameworks for teachers typically breaks down teaching into discrete, measurable components. This brings along almost inevitable risks for the practice of education in terms of ‘fragmentation’ and ‘proceduralization’. By isolating competencies into separate, bite-sized elements, these frameworks are highly at risk to fail to account for the interconnectedness of skills, knowledge and attitudes in real-world teaching (e.g. in the Flemish framework ‘attitudes’ are isolated from ‘competences’, placing them in a separate section and giving them an overarching status, thus being inherently inconsistent with its own claim of an integrative approach). Teaching is intrinsically a complex and dynamic process. When competencies are treated as isolated standards, there is a risk that they will be practiced in a disjointed manner, rather than as part of a cohesive teaching approach. Moreover, the emphasis on breaking down competencies into specific, observable actions tends to proceduralize teaching. This means that education may become focused on following a prescribed set of procedures or checklists, rather than fostering deeper understanding and critical thinking. The proceduralization of teaching risks reducing the profession to a series of tasks that can be ‘performed’ rather than an evolving process of professional judgment, reflection, and adaptation. As a result, teachers might prioritize meeting predetermined competency standards over engaging in thoughtful, context-sensitive decision-making.

The following quotes from the focus groups underscore this line of thinking.

*"The problem is the detail of the descriptions, isn't it?  
That urge for details and exhaustiveness makes [the set of competencies]  
so infinite that it becomes a book, even an encyclopaedia."*

*"Again, it is about this tendency to tick the boxes while one actually feels that something is not right – something crucial is missing. And when I evaluate to what extent a student-teachers meets the competencies one by one, I often must honestly say: ‘Okay, enough things have been achieved’, and yet I feel that something is not right. It feels like it is not enough, like something is missing or slipping away. "*

*“Being a teacher has to do with ‘feeling’. I can’t name it,  
but it is not a simple calculation, you know.”*

*"Teaching competencies are often so vague that they end up being a checklist  
instead of an instrument that supports real growth. But the idea that you can ever  
‘achieve’ them all doesn’t make sense – teaching isn’t something you just  
complete. No teacher has all competencies fully mastered;  
it’s an ongoing process, not a box to tick."*

Ceulemans and Struyven (2013) warn against adopting a narrow, technical perspective on teaching. They call for continuous dialogue about what it means to be a teacher and urge all stakeholders – from (student) teachers and teacher educators to policy makers – to look beyond the prescribed 'answers' found in competency profiles or benchmarks. An idea supported by participants in our focus groups.

*"[Basic competencies] represent a technical, organizational, and administrative approach. But there must be room for the personal development of teachers, for the non-measurable aspects [...], for things that take time to emerge in teachers."*

*“Maybe we should have a philosophical conversation about the complex identity of a teacher, because that's just the way it is. That is also very complex.  
A good teacher. [...] That's kind of a super person, that is. That is not so obvious.  
And in that respect, I think it's a valuable, valuable attempt to capture the complexity of a good teacher somewhere. But not as a one-on-one evaluation tool because that's just not it.”*

Participants at all discussion tables report experiences with how the analytical nature of the basic competency framework – one way or another – inevitably leads to fragmentation, proceduralization, mechanization, 'tickboxization'. At all discussion tables, without exception, participants acknowledge that working with competences leads to the unravelling of teaching into a collection of sub-competencies that in turn consist of a number of clearly distinguishable knowledge elements, skills and attitudes. In thinking and talking about competences, this collection is presented as an integrated whole. In the various teacher education practices – in what is actually happening – (the constituent parts of) the sub-competencies are the unit that is given attention (from acquiring knowledge and practicing skills to reflecting on attitudes)

and to which the assessment instruments are tailored. This results in a lack of synthesis and integration.

*"If you do it the way you're supposed to, it becomes a checklist. You just do what's on the list instead of considering whether it actually benefits the student."*

*"We are once again falling into the trap of wanting to objectify everything and make it measurable. And – once again – it's not going to work."*

A clear example of this fragmentation is the use of rubrics for assessing (student) teachers. While rubrics aim to provide transparent criteria, they often reinforce a mechanistic approach to assessment. They break down complex teaching actions into measurable components that may not reflect the integrated nature of professional practice. Additionally, it was noted that rubric feedback often fails to clarify why a certain level was assigned or how it contributes to professional growth. Overly detailed rubrics can also lead to unnecessary complexity, shifting the focus – again – to 'ticking boxes' rather than fostering deeper reflection and learning.

## Heresy?

Ceulemans et al. (2012) argue that *"where the professional profile and the basic competencies of the teacher assert their authority, they make the question of what is 'good' irrelevant and therefore superfluous. What a good teacher is, what a good teacher education is or what a good educational practice is, can only be seen and discussed via the lists of the basic competencies and the professional profile."* The authors state – in other words – that these kinds of lists appear so self-evident and compelling that any reasonable person is expected to agree with them, making any critique seem irrational and unnecessary. However, this claim warrants some nuance. While these lists undeniably shape and steer the debate about what constitutes 'good' teaching, they do not completely preclude alternative views and discussions. For instance, in practice, educators and teacher educators continue to address qualities such as humor, passion, humility, and proximity – qualities that may not be captured in official competency frameworks, but nonetheless matter in the daily reality of teaching. It is not because something appears in a certain way that everybody necessarily sees it that way or acts accordingly; spaces for critical and alternative perspectives do persist, even within seemingly self-evident frameworks.

It is without a doubt noteworthy how firmly anchored the competency discourse is and how difficult it is for the participating teacher educators and educational experts to look at (the quality of) teaching from a different perspective; as if there were no alternatives imaginable. Questioning the conceptualization and operationalization of teacher standards in terms of 'competencies' (c.q. as basic competences) seems to participants like committing heresy. This resonates with participants of our focus groups.

*"Yes, but we have to work with competencies. We have to be able to work with them. Because that provides material for discussion among different groups of trainers, students, the field of work, etc. [...] Because without those competencies we'll have to rely on gut feeling in what it is to be a good teacher. Yes, we realize that talking about competencies excludes about 80% of that grey area, but still..."*

*"I do believe we need something measurable, a shared set of standards, so that across Flanders we can say: 'This is what we agree on; this is where we set the bar.' How one chooses to implement it, for me, is what defines autonomy."*

*"Working with competencies does provide a basis for conversation between many actors: trainers and educators, students and pupils, the professional field. But that never covers 100% of what we feel or see or think. [...] By working with competencies, we already eliminate many uncertainties, though they remain ever-present. They only make 'the gray zone' somewhat smaller. But suppose we don't have any competences at all... Yes, we would be working in a complete void."*

*"I do think that when you offer teacher education programs, you have to define the playing field somehow. And in Flanders, quality assurance is a must. So you do need criteria on which students are evaluated. Preferably, when you start working at a school, your colleagues and your principal should know at least what you are capable of, or not. And would we be able to define that if not through competencies?"*

*"Competencies are kind of like the 'best available technology'; this is a term used in engineering or urban planning, indicating that better options may be thinkable, but not (yet) implementable. These competences have been developed over decades, so they've just become the standard. You can question it, but there is nothing better. The problem is, if you try to come up with something that has the potential of becoming an alternative, it won't have that same long history behind it, so it's never going to feel like a full replacement right away."*



*"This framework has been chosen, so it is a good framework, I think. There is a reasoning behind it and you can make it concrete and then you can get to work with it. As far as I'm concerned, that is. I'm not inclined to say: "Let's invent something new again."*

*"Up till now, I've never questioned the basic competencies themselves, just our own practices as teacher educators."*

Participants clearly ask for reference points and they equate these points with 'competences', just as sailors need buoys and light towers. That, however, does not preclude a critical stance. The following quotes illustrate the ideas expressed in the focus groups.

*"For me, competences are not necessarily bad, but the sheer number of them can be overwhelming for beginning teachers. We need a competency-based baseline, but there should also be room to grow beyond the predefined criteria."*

*"Competency-based education, even in its simplified version, provides a framework that allows us to observe and discuss young teachers' performance. It offers a structured approach that makes it easier to support their professional growth."*

*"Competency profiles act as an objective framework. They help prevent situations where a mentor or lecturer might say, 'I just don't like this student,' and label them as a bad teacher. The profiles provide a reference point that makes evaluation more transparent."*

*"If I think back to my own teacher training, we had four main competencies with smaller subcategories underneath. And I thought that was a good system. It gave a structure to what we needed to develop each year. If you look at it, these competencies still reflect what we value: collaboration, subject knowledge, and creating a positive learning environment. So perhaps we need to keep working within this kind of framework."*

*"We observe that teacher education still focuses on measurable objectives. Maybe that's the only way we can make progress. We can't just say, 'let's trust the process'. We need to provide students with a clear framework, even if it's not perfect."*

## Alternative approaches to competence-based views on teacher standards and teacher education

The discussion among the participants in different groups revealed a complex and somewhat paradoxical stance towards competence-based teacher standards and teacher education. On the one hand, the participant remained anchored to the perceived completeness and objectivity of the existing competence frameworks, making it difficult to fully embrace alternative models. A key reason for this possibly lies in the security that competence frameworks seem to provide, as we mentioned before. Participants repeatedly emphasized that these frameworks offer a clear structure, ensuring that all teacher candidates meet a minimum standard. On the other hand, participants acknowledged the limitations of this approach and expressed a willingness to explore alternative ways of preparing future teachers. Several noted that an overemphasis on competence assessment can lead to bureaucratic formalization, reducing teacher education to a checklist rather than a transformative learning experience and resulting in unintended consequences, such as the loss of attention on intuition and professional judgment.

This tension between structure and flexibility also played out in discussions on how to move beyond competence-based models. While some participants advocated for a more holistic, ecosystem-based approach to teacher education, they struggled to articulate what such an alternative should look like without reverting to the language of competences. The following quote illustrates the point.

*"Do we then have to define the 'gray zones' - the added value beyond competences - as new competences? That's a trap we fell into before."*

Several alternative approaches emerged during the discussion, reflecting a clear and shared awareness that good teaching cannot be entirely captured within predefined standards. One potential alternative involved a dual-track approach, in which competence-based teacher education would be complemented by a more open-ended, reflective framework. Another approach involved broadening the perspective on what counts as essential in teacher education, moving beyond predefined competences to include non-measurable aspects such as professional identity, intrinsic motivation, and moral engagement. Participants support the idea of alternatives as illustrated by the following quotes.

*"Installing an alternative alongside competence-based education might be the way forward. I think it can work hand in hand, as long as we place the right emphasis."*

*"I think there could be a complementary addition. What that would entail depends on the professional judgment of the teacher educator, just as teachers have the autonomy to assess and respond to their own students."*

*"And I want to absolutely agree to work competency-based. If we add the grey elements. And if we do not be as pretentious as to think we can give a 'mathematical' score on these competencies."*

In sum, participants showed a willingness to think beyond competence-based education, even if they struggled to articulate a fully-fledged alternative. They acknowledged that certain aspects of good teaching are 'not measurable', critiqued the rigid implementation of competence frameworks, and called for a broader, more inclusive vision of teacher standards.

### Concluding observations

Competency frameworks are generally recognized as a useful tool for structuring and discussing the complexity of the teaching profession. They provide a shared language for educators, students, and professionals in the field, offering clarity and structure. The establishment of teaching standards is by and large seen as a logical and necessary step in ensuring quality. According to some participants, competencies can also serve as a protective framework for student teachers, making assessments more objective rather than purely subjective.

At the same time, there is significant doubt about whether the full scope of teaching can be captured within a set of predefined competencies. Teaching is seen as a fundamentally social undertaking, and the purposeful engagement in contextualized human interactions cannot be neatly measured or categorized. The fragmentation of competencies into sub-competencies risks reducing teaching to a checklist, neglecting the interconnected and adaptive nature of the profession. Competencies are meant to guide teacher development and serve as a framework for their education. However, their abstract nature often makes them impractical for assessment and mentoring. Teacher education programs need to translate competencies in concrete, observable behaviours, as to avoid ambiguity in the

evaluation process. There is a risk though that by doing so, a competency-based approach becomes a purely behavioral one.

This tension creates challenges for both student teachers and teacher educators. Student teachers may experience stress and uncertainty when confronted with a long list of competencies they must demonstrate, often in isolated instances. However, true professional development requires more than simply proving skills on demand - it demands time, experience, and a deeper sense of what 'being a teacher' means. Furthermore, competencies often struggle to account for the non-measurable aspects of teaching, such as intuition, relational skills, and the ability to respond to unique classroom dynamics.

These concerns highlight the need to rethink the role of competencies and explore alternative ways of ensuring quality in teacher education. Rather than relying solely on a rigid framework, a more holistic and flexible approach could acknowledge the evolving nature of teaching. This would leave room for professional growth that extends beyond what can be explicitly measured, allowing teacher education to embrace a broader and more integrated vision of what it means to become a teacher.

### Recommendations on teacher standards

As part of the focus group discussions, participants were asked to formulate five concrete recommendations or suggestions regarding the use of 'teacher standards' as a tool for quality assurance and as a basis for teacher education. The resulting recommendations can be broadly categorized into two groups: those directly addressing competency-based teacher standards and those focusing on broader aspects of teacher education and professional development.

Several recommendations did not directly relate to competency-based teacher standards but rather addressed broader systemic aspects of teacher education. These included:

- Strengthening collaboration between teacher education institutions and schools, ensuring a more integrated approach to learning and professional development.
- Establishing learning ecosystems that go beyond initial teacher education, supporting continuous professional growth within schools.

- Recognizing internships not only as learning opportunities for student teachers but also as moments of professional reflection and development for schools themselves.
- Allocating individual funding for teachers' professionalization to support continuous learning opportunities.
- Exploring extended teacher education pathways (e.g., a three-year program followed by an additional, structured transition year) to better prepare student teachers for professional practice.

In more direct relation to competency-based teacher standards, participants formulated the following recommendations:

- Ensure that teacher standards remain flexible and adaptable rather than rigid checklists. They should serve as reference points that allow for professional judgment and contextual adaptation.
- Broaden the scope of competency frameworks to better capture the complexity of teaching, including elements that are difficult to quantify, such as pedagogical intuition, ethical decision-making, and the ability to navigate diverse educational contexts.
- Provide space for 'grey areas' in teacher development—those aspects that do not fit neatly within predefined lists but are essential for becoming a skilled teacher. This could involve incorporating alternative assessment methods that allow for a more holistic evaluation of teacher preparedness.
- Define subject knowledge standards in a collaborative process with key stakeholders, rather than imposing them externally, to ensure they align with real-world teaching needs and expectations.
- If competency-based frameworks are maintained, complement them with structured opportunities for critical reflection on the frameworks. Teacher educators and student teachers should engage in discussions about how competencies function in practice rather than treating them as fixed outcomes.

### **Towards a broader perspective on teacher standards**

Throughout the discussions, a recurring theme was the question of whether competency-based standards alone can provide a sufficiently rich foundation for teacher education. While they offer a structured framework, there appears to be room for exploring more integrative alternatives that acknowledge the complexity of teaching and the evolving nature of educational practice.



## Really rethinking teacher standards

In the explorative report and in the first part of this integrative report, we described the current situation of competency-based teacher standards in Flanders and reflected on their effects through literature and focus group discussions. Both sources reveal fundamental limitations in the competency-based approach. While it offers structure and clarity, it risks reducing teaching to fragmented, procedural actions and overlooks essential, less measurable qualities of the profession.

Incremental adjustments will not suffice; there is a need for a strong, convincing, and workable alternative that responds to the shortcomings of the current model and meets the demands of an increasingly complex and dynamic educational landscape.

Therefore, we explore the possible consequences of our findings for the future of teacher standards in Flanders and for teacher education. Based on literature, international examples, and our focus group reflections, we outline a promising alternative conceptualisation grounded in teaching dispositions, offering a more integrated, relational, and future-proof framework for the profession.

## Teacher standards do matter

Teacher standards can play an important role in formalising professional expectations and responsibilities within education systems. They can offer a framework for structuring teacher education programmes; support the design and enactment of quality assurance measurements, strengthen professional development, and provide reference points for accountability. Since the 80's and 90's of the previous century these teacher standards have increasingly been conceptualised in terms of competencies. This trend is part of a broader international tendency to frame professionalism – not only in education, but also in domains as healthcare, ICT, technology, engineering, management, and for umbrella concepts as global citizenship, sustainable development, self-regulation... – as sets of measurable, demonstrable aggregates of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

As outlined earlier, the competency-based approach in teacher education has been widely adopted, including in Flanders, where it underpins the basic teacher standards since their introduction in 1998. While this approach has brought structure and clarity, its practical implementation has also revealed significant limitations and



unintended effects.

## Competency-Based Frameworks and shortcomings

Literature, as well as insights gained from the Flanders TE\_REG focus group discussions, indicate that the operationalisation of teaching into a collection of competencies has some rather problematic consequences. Although competencies may be theoretically meaningful, in practice their application almost inevitably leads to analytical fragmentation and proceduralisation of professional action, reducing teaching to a sequence of observable tasks or outcomes, neglecting the holistic dimensions of professional practice: the teacher is no longer an integral professional but a sum of seemingly separate competencies.

Focus group participants pointed to the tendency of competency-based frameworks to promote *'tickboxication'*, where the aim is to satisfy predetermined criteria rather than to cultivate thoughtful, context-sensitive, and ethically grounded judgement. Furthermore, certain essential qualities of good teaching – such as empathy, humor, professional courage, pedagogical tact, and the capacity to improvise – are difficult to translate into standardized, measurable competences and are consequently marginalized, if not neglected.

Despite these limitations, many actors in the field find it difficult to imagine alternative ways of conceptualizing teacher professionalism. As reported above, competency frameworks are so embedded in educational systems and institutional practices that alternatives often seem unthinkable or impractical. Nevertheless, our analysis suggests that the problems generated by competency-based models are not merely inconvenient side effects, but structural issues that call for a fundamental rethinking.

## Exploring alternative conceptualisations of professionalism

In light of these observations, we have explored possible alternative ways of framing teacher standards. These are not established paradigms or existing models, but rather conceptual directions worth considering.

Among the options we considered are:

- Conceptualising teaching in terms of ‘professional judgement-making’: prioritising the teacher's capacity to make context-sensitive decisions that are informed by professional knowledge, but not reduced to conformity with procedural rules. The quality of teaching would then be assessed by the capacity to reason, justify, and act responsibly in varied situations.
- Framing teacher professionalism as ‘virtue-based’, focusing on qualities such as empathy, integrity, courage, and care that shape how teachers relate to their students and their communities.
- Envisioning teacher expertise as ‘narratively constructed’, whereby professional identity and quality are articulated through cases, stories, and reflective accounts of situated practice.
- Defining professionalism through ‘ecological relationality’, understanding the teacher as operating within complex educational ecosystems of learners, colleagues, families, and societal structures.

Although each of these approaches has potential strengths, none can entirely replace the need for structured frameworks that are observable, assessable, learnable, and transferable across different teaching contexts. Each of these options offers valuable perspectives, but also faces challenges of operationalisation, assessability, and institutional integration. The need remains for a conceptualisation of teaching that is meaningful, learnable, observable, and transferable – one that avoids both reductionism and vagueness.

### **Towards a dispositional framework: the BTDD model**

Among the possible alternatives, we argue that a dispositional approach offers a promising and workable direction. In what follows, we take a clear stance – not because we presume this to be the only one possible, but because we consider it valuable and, by articulating it explicitly, we invite others to critically engage with it. The ideas presented in this section were previously outlined in a ‘position paper’ (Dhert & Elen, 2023).

Perkins et al. (2000) have conceptualized the idea of ‘disposition’ in their exploration of what they call ‘*intelligence in the wild*’. In the same way that they move away from an ‘abilities-centric’ view of intelligence, we move away from a ‘competences-

centric' approach to teaching. We propose that effective teaching practices in real-world settings rely on what we term 'broad triadic teaching dispositions'. This concept is both meaningful and practical, as it acknowledges the complexity of teaching while reducing the risks of fragmentation and proceduralization. Our proposed five broad triadic teaching dispositions encompass the current Flemish basic competencies framework, which includes 44 basic competencies and 8 attitudes.

Perkins et al. (1993) introduced the concept of 'triadic dispositions', which includes:

- (a) inclinations, reflecting motivation, habit, policy, or other factors, described as a 'tendency towards specific behavior';
- (b) sensitivities to occasions, or 'alertness to appropriate situations for exhibiting this behavior'; and
- (c) abilities, which are the actual capacities and skills to perform the behavior.

The authors highlight the integrated nature of these elements by explaining what is lacking if any one of them is absent. *"The trio of inclination, sensitivity, and ability constitute individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for behavior. Without inclination, a person will not feel drawn toward X behavior. Without sensitivity, a person will not detect an X occasion. And, of course, without the ability to follow through, sensitivity and inclination cannot generate the behavior."* (p. 4-5) In the words of Perkins and Tishman (2006): *"People commonly know better than they do. They either fail to notice opportunities to deploy what they know, or, recognizing the opportunities, don't care enough to bother."* (p. 3)

One could think of a disposition as a function constituted by its three vital components:  $D(isposition) = f(I(nclinations), S(ensitivities), A(bilities))$ . If any one of the three elements is absent or not 'activated' when the context calls for it, the person in question does not have the disposition and thus the appropriate behavior can and will not be performed. In order to make clear that these three components are vital, we use the term 'triadic dispositions'.

Perkins and Tishman (2006, p. 34) clarify why this dispositional approach is important when striving for 'learning that matters': *"Dispositions do not matter so much when the call for a particular already learned fact or understanding or practice is clear and strong, but out there in the larger world beyond formal learning the calls often come with a softer voice. The cues are much more subtle and the needs much less*

*immediately pressing than the performance-on-demand mode of the classic classroom.”*

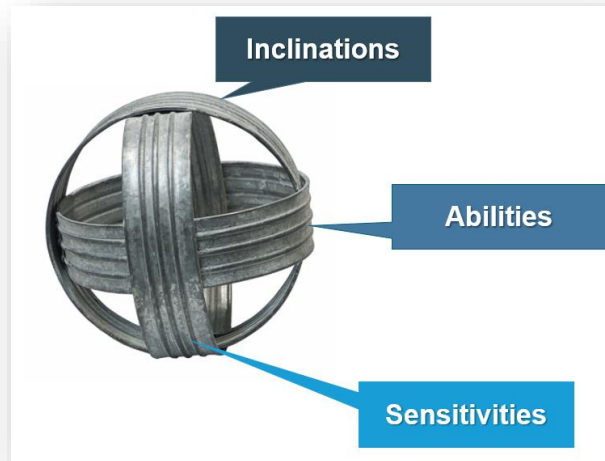


Figure 1: Visual representation of the intertwined nature of 'triadic dispositions' (taken from Dhert & Elen, 2023)

We introduce our concept of learning outcomes for student teachers as 'broad triadic teaching dispositions' (BTTDs). Our analysis indicates that effective teacher behavior can be encapsulated in five BTTDs, which we present alphabetically as they are all equally important. These dispositions form a multidimensional field rather than a sequential series. We choose to work with BTTDs because we view teachers as 'integral professionals' and teaching as an 'integral undertaking'. Thus, we avoid an overly analytical approach, preferring fewer dispositions that provide a practical framework for describing the comprehensive, complex, and multi-layered nature of teaching. These dispositions must also align with the Flemish 'basic competencies' framework.

We define the five BTTDs to characterize 'good teaching' similarly to how Perkins et al. (1993) define seven broad thinking dispositions for 'good thinking'. The five dispositions we believe constitute good teaching are:

1. **Collaborating:** The disposition to engage constructively with colleagues, learners, and other stakeholders in shaping educational processes.

2. **Contextualising:** The disposition to situate teaching practices within the specific cultural, social, institutional, and ethical contexts in which they occur.
3. **Designing:** The disposition to creatively shape meaningful, challenging, and inclusive learning environments tailored to learners' needs.
4. **Enacting:** The disposition to act responsibly and decisively in complex, dynamic, and sometimes ambiguous classroom and school situations.
5. **Inquiring:** The disposition to question, investigate, and critically reflect on one's own practices, assumptions, and the broader educational environment.

These five are neither definitive nor universally applicable; they represent a starting point for discussion and further elaboration. Other contexts might demand additional or differently phrased dispositions. Yet, they appear sufficiently comprehensive and operationalisable to form a workable alternative to competency lists.

The five dispositions can be easily remembered and help clarify the concept of 'teaching' and the type of teachers we aim to educate, unlike the extensive basic competencies framework. Good teaching can be seen as a function of these five BTDDs:  $G(ood)T(eaching) = f(Cl(collaborating), Cn(contextualizing), D(esigning), E(nactment), I(nquiry))$ . We assert that lacking any one disposition means one cannot be a sufficiently good teacher.

From the BTDD perspective, teacher education involves more than teaching skills; it requires student teachers to be inclined to perform the most suitable educational behavior in specific, complex, and dynamic contexts. **We focus on what students actually *do* rather than what they *can do*.**

The dispositions are not innate personality traits. As Tishman et al. (1993) show, teaching dispositions requires an expanded teaching approach, necessitating new programs that go beyond traditional models (such as the 'provision model', 'transmission model', 'imparting model', or Freire's 'banking model'). To meet the learning needs of student teachers from a dispositional and emancipatory perspective, a consistent and congruent curriculum is needed, characterized as a model of emancipation, beyond Tishman et al.'s model of enculturation.

The five dispositions are interconnected and overlap to such an extent that they can only be separated in a theoretical and conceptual sense. Additionally, these BTDDs

reinforce each other (e.g., an educator inclined towards critical thinking is likely to also be inclined towards contextualizing). Therefore, we place the dispositions within a multidimensional field, suggesting they interact like anchors and tendons in a structure: they cannot operate independently. Their relationships are neither hierarchical nor chronological.

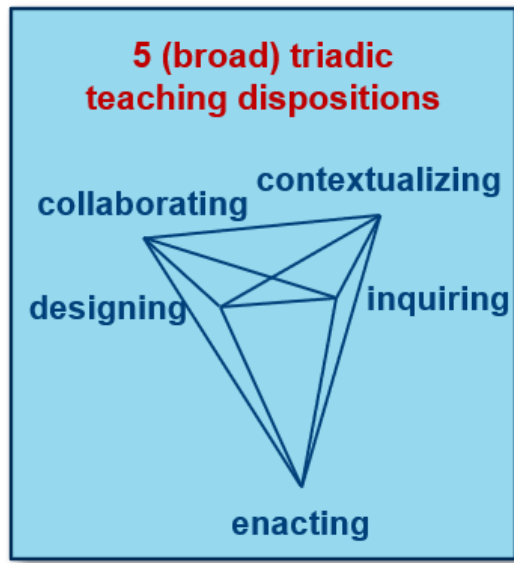


Figure 2: The 5 BTDD's form a multidimensional field  
(taken from Dhert & Elen, 2023)



## Conclusion

Teacher standards are interesting and important vehicles to bring about quality in teacher education and by doing so may contribute to the optimization of teaching and learning processes in primary as well as secondary education. Given their importance, serious discussion about the nature of these standards is essential.

In the past period, teacher education in Flanders has been operating in the context of a competency framework for teaching standards. Critical assessments of this framework both in the literature and in focus group discussions encourage to think deeper and consider alternatives. Especially fragmentation and a tendency to thicken the boxes threaten quality of teacher education.

The growing complexity of education – marked by increasing diversity, rising expectations, and the disruptive potential of Generative AI – demands a professional framework that is holistic, relational, and future-oriented. Competency lists, however detailed, struggle to capture the dynamic and value-laden nature of teaching in these conditions.

In this report it is proposed to replace the existing competency framework by a dispositional one, the BTDD model. Five broad triadic teaching dispositions are proposed: collaborating, contextualizing, designing, enacting, and inquiring.

Dispositional standards, and particularly the BTDD model, offer a promising route for articulating professional expectations in ways that are:

- **Holistic:** integrating ethical, relational, and cognitive dimensions
- **Learnable and observable:** through professional learning, practice, and reflection
- **Transferable:** across diverse situations and emerging challenges
- **Responsive:** to AI-mediated and unpredictably shifting educational contexts

It is argued that this dispositional framework may effectively replace existing competency-based standards or at least complement them to address their limitations. Our analysis and existing research suggest that dispositional standards offer several benefits:



- **Integration of essential aspects:** They encompass moral, cognitive, and relational dimensions of teaching that are resistant to proceduralization but crucial for quality education.
- **Support for transfer:** Dispositions, being tendencies to act, are inherently applicable across diverse and unforeseen situations, which is particularly advantageous in increasingly complex educational environments.
- **Learnability and development:** Dispositions are not innate traits but cultivated orientations that can be explicitly nurtured in teacher education through reflection, modeling, collaborative inquiry, and practice-based learning.
- **Facilitation of professional judgment:** They frame professional actions as context-sensitive and ethically reasoned, rather than mechanically procedural.

Adopting the BTDD model may have major implications for the teaching profession and for teacher education as it would several significant shifts:

- **Rethinking professional identity:** Teachers would be positioned not as implementers of predetermined competences, but as reflective, responsible, and relational agents.
- **Reframing teacher education curricula:** Emphasising critical inquiry, co-design, and immersion in complex practice situations rather than isolated skill mastery.
- **Revising assessment systems:** Moving away from tick-box rubrics toward portfolios, practice narratives, and (observable) evidence of professional judgement.
- **Integrating emerging challenges:** Preparing teachers to engage with GenAI and other technologies not only as tools, but as phenomena to be contextualised, questioned, and ethically navigated.

In the remainder of the TE\_REG project these shifts will be at the core of the activities.



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