

The Flemish knowledge-turn and powerful knowledge A practice-oriented literature and document study

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Starting September 2025, in a Flemish practice-oriented project we will conduct a literature review on powerful knowledge coupled to a study of Flemish policy and practice documents, with the goal of providing an inspirational resource on powerful knowledge for Flemish educational practice.

In December 2024, the results of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2023 publicly displayed the further plummeting of the performance of 4th grade Flemish pupils. In a press release, the Flemish minister of education announced a shift to a knowledge-rich curriculum for early childhood and primary education, inspired by England and Ireland. Proficiency in the native language will be emphasized, including measures such as pull-out classes. New minimum targets for pre-school and primary education, prioritizing mathematics, Dutch and science & technology, will apply from September 2025, starting with a transition year. Teacher education will be reformed accordingly, with focus on subject content, class management and ‘teaching in the right way’ (FME, 2024-25).

In the current Flemish discourse around knowledge-rich curriculum, the concept of powerful knowledge is conspicuous by its absence. The need for a knowledge-rich curriculum is associated with its expected capacity to support student achievement and academic excellence. There is no reference to the ‘student’s entitlement to knowledge’ or to specific features of knowledge one wishes to introduce (Young, 2013). Relying on a discourse of urgency, in which Flemish education is said to be in freefall according to international measurements, the minister is acting quickly, stating that a ‘curriculum based on knowledge’ has already turned the tide in other countries, and is expected to do the same in Flanders.

Our research questions aim at defining and describing ‘powerful knowledge’ for Flemish educational practice, based on international literature. We will apply a systematic review approach with international databases. Our analysis will consider the Flemish policy and practice perspectives, in order to develop a resource suitable for Flemish practitioners.

References

FME - Flemish Ministry of Education (2024-25).

Press release 4/12/2024;

New minimum targets in early education and primary school from 2025. Q&A;

Concept note ‘Every child language hero’.

Young, M. (2013). *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 45, 2, 101-118.