

Faculty Development and complexity of knowledge: Reflectivity as a “systemic bridge” between and within the competence frameworks of university teaching

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Submitted: April 26, 2026 – Accepted: July 3, 2026 – Published: September 15, 2026

Faculty Development e complessità della conoscenza: la riflessività come ponte sistemico tra e all'interno dei framework di competenze dell'insegnamento universitario

This theoretical contribution examines reflectivity as a core element to overcome the epistemic fragmentation of knowledge in Higher Education, proposing it as a meta-competence capable of connecting various university teaching competence frameworks. Through Faculty Development, university teachers are encouraged to evolve from mere disciplinary experts into conscious educators, integrating research, teaching, and methodological innovation. This perspective promotes a systemic vision that facilitates dialogue between the role of the university teacher and those of instructional designers, faculty developers, and students, ensuring that classroom practices are coherent with contemporary educational needs. Operational tools such as the Teaching Portfolio are presented as essential devices for documenting this professional growth and making underlying teaching philosophies explicit. Ultimately, this approach aims to transform university into an ecosystem of knowledge where critical reflection acts as a bridge between institutional policies and daily teaching practices.

Il presente contributo teorico esamina la riflessività come elemento centrale per superare la frammentazione del sapere nell'istruzione superiore, proponendola come una meta-competenza capace di connettere i diversi quadri di riferimento dell'insegnamento universitario. Attraverso il Faculty Development, i docenti sono incoraggiati a evolvere da meri esperti disciplinari a educatori consapevoli, integrando ricerca, didattica e innovazione metodologica. Questa prospettiva promuove una visione sistemica che mette in dialogo il ruolo del docente universitario con quelli degli *instructional designers* e degli studenti, garantendo che le pratiche d'aula siano coerenti con i bisogni formativi contemporanei. Strumenti operativi come il Teaching Portfolio vengono presentati come dispositivi essenziali per documentare questo percorso di crescita e per rendere esplicite le filosofie d'insegnamento sottostanti. In definitiva, l'approccio mira a trasformare l'università in un ecosistema del sapere dove la riflessione critica funge da ponte tra politiche istituzionali e agire didattico quotidiano.

Keywords: Faculty Development; Reflectivity; Competence frameworks; Higher Education; Complexity.

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1. Introduction

The progressive specialization of knowledge, if on the one hand it has allowed a significant advancement of disciplinary knowledge, on the other it has produced an epistemic fragmentation that makes it increasingly difficult to address complex problems, characterized by interdependencies and by a nature intrinsically transdisciplinary (Marci, 2025b; Sola, 2024). In this sense, the current context of Higher Education (HE) does not represent an exception: the complexity of knowledge it is not a contingent phenomenon, but a structural characteristic of reality and of the processes of production of knowledge. The growing intertwining among scientific, technological, social, cultural and ethical dimensions progressively puts into crisis models of teaching founded on a linear, cumulative and sectoral transmission of knowledge (Marci, 2025c). The university is thus called to confront itself with a fundamental tension: the necessity of preserving the epistemological rigor and the depth of disciplinary knowledge, and the urgency of making them comprehensible, integrable and educationally meaningful for students who will have to become capable of orienting themselves and acting in complex, uncertain and continuously transforming contexts (Felisatti & Perla, 2023; Marci, 2025a).

This tension, didactic and epistemological, directly affects the role and the identity of the university teachers, which calls the university to provide them the conditions of rethinking themselves: not only as a disciplinary expert, but also as a conscious educator, capable of facing this complexity (Lotti & Serbati, 2025; Silva, 2022). One may think of a university course in a certain disciplinary field, in which the faculty introduces highly specialized contents through rigorous frontal lectures, but receives from the students feedback of disorientation: not so much with respect to the single contents, as with respect to the overall meaning of the pathway. The students struggle to understand how the concepts connect among themselves, how they dialogue with other courses or how they can be used to interpret real problems (Marci, 2025c). This is not an issue about the “quality of contents”, but a lack of systemicity in the didactic mediation. Such tension, therefore, cannot be solved through the addition of new competences in a cumulative way, but requires an organizing principle capable of giving coherence to the system.

The present contribution places itself in this scenario by maintaining that such principle can be identified in the transversal nature of reflectivity, understood as a systemic competence that operates within the single competence frameworks and between different frameworks, allowing the dialogue among roles, knowledges and levels of the university system (Marci, 2026; Milani & Moscardo, 2026; Nuzzaci, 2011; Silva, 2022). In this perspective, Faculty Development (FD) assumes a strategic role as institutional space in which such reflectivity can be cultivated, shared and made operative (Marci et al., 2026; Silva, 2022).

2. Beyond the fragmentation of knowledge

The complexity of contemporary knowledge has been widely thematized in the humanistic, pedagogical, and social fields of knowledge and contemporary epistemological ones (Morin, 2000, 2020): it does not coincide with the simple multiplication of information or disciplines, but concerns the way in which knowledges articulate themselves, intersect and transform each other reciprocally. Therefore, as highlighted by the “Theory of complexity” (Morin, 2016), knowledge is a system of relations, and, as such, its understanding requires the capacity to grasp connections, interdependencies and feedback and the capacity to hold together unity and multiplicity, avoiding both a simplifying reduction and the disordered accumulation of information.

Despite this, the organization of the university remains largely founded on a disciplinary logic which, although being epistemologically legitimate, risks producing effects of fragmentation. In many interdisciplinary study paths, students face teachings of different areas (e. g. juridical, economic, medical, technological, etc.) without there being an explicit space of connection among the different epistemological approaches: each university teacher maybe acts in a coherent way within his own discipline, but the overall result is a sum of perspectives that do not dialogue and this—considering the problems that characterize the contemporary world (from sustainability to health, from inclusion to AI to social justice)—, cannot be an effective approach to their resolution (Marci, 2025a; 2025c). This approach, in fact, risks generating a growing distance between the production of academic knowledge and the edu-

cational needs of students, called every day to confront themselves with real problems that require integration of perspectives, critical thinking and capacity of orientation in and for life (Marci & Modugno, 2025). Therefore, such fragmentation does not concern only the contents, but also didactic practices, assessment processes and representations themselves of teaching role.

In many academic contexts, teaching is still conceived as an “ancillary function” with respect to research, while pedagogical competences are considered accessory or merely instrumental, thus translating into little coordinated and conscious teaching practices, in which disciplinary knowledge is proposed as self-sufficient and scarcely connected to other areas of knowledge (Felisatti & Perla, 2023; Silva, 2022). From this derives a certain difficulty in promoting meaningful and transformative learnings, capable of valuing epistemic diversity and at the same time supporting the development of complex competences—because connected to the future profession, but even to life—of students (Marci & Modugno, 2025).

It is, therefore, in this critical space of “emergency-urgency” that the necessity of a systemic approach emerges, where speaking of “systemicity of knowledge” means going beyond the recognition of complexity and questioning oneself on how it can be inhabited and transformed into a formative resource, learning to recognize the relations among the parts in order to orient the educational action.

Specifically, in HE, we could say that systemicity concerns at least four fundamental dimensions:

1. the relationship between disciplinary knowledges and pedagogical-didactic knowledges;
2. the coherence between formative objectives, didactic practices and assessment;
3. the dialogue among the different actors involved in the formative and educational processes;
4. the alignment between the competence frameworks of university teachers, of faculty developers/instructional designers and those of students.

At this point, one of the questions to ask is: how can we deal with these levels of complexity, in which the latter is a constant of HE?

3. Faculty Development as a systemic space of reflective and synergic integration of competences

In order to contribute to addressing the complexity articulated in these four levels or “axes”, FD can be conceived as a privileged space to support and rethink, in a systemic key, the transformation of university teaching (Lotti & Serbati, 2025) and, therefore, for the construction of systematicity.

By FD is meant the set of

all actions—formal and informal, individual and collective—designed and implemented to have a positive impact on every university, promoting the development and the acquisition of didactic and transversal competences of university teachers, first of all, but also relevant for every aspect of their personal and professional empowerment for all faculty members and for those who also benefit from it indirectly—the students—with the objective of offering them increasingly meaningful learning experiences (Marci, 2025c, p. 76).

In this regard, the framework formulated by Steinert (2010), as highlighted by Lampugnani (2020), returns the approaches to FD outlined by the international literature, subdivided with respect to the context (formal or informal) and to the typology of action and of learning (individual or group-based), such as: online learning, Peer Coaching, workshops, longitudinal programmes, reflective and learning by doing activities, Community of Practice, Mentorship, etc. Far from a reductionistic conception, it does not coincide exclusively with occasional or merely technical interventions of methodological updating, but represents a continuous process of professional development that involves cognitive, epistemological, identity and relational dimensions, in order to promote conscious teaching practices and to positively affect the quality of university teaching in the broadest sense (Steinert, 2010).

Within FD, reflectivity and reflective competences assume a central function (Marci et al., 2026; van Dijk, van Tartwijk, van Der Schaaf, & Kluijtmans, 2020). It is appropriate to clarify that, while often

used as synonyms, a distinction should be made: *reflectivity* refers to the epistemic disposition and the recursive process of analyzing action, while *reflective competence* represents the situated ability of the university teacher to integrate this process into teaching frameworks to address complex problems (Nuzzaci, 2011; Striano, Melacarne, & Oliverio, 2018). Specifically, Silva (2022), when discussing reflective competences, maintains that developing them represents giving meaning to one's own acting (research and teaching) and assuming one's own role (researcher and university teacher) in a conscious way, rendering clear, evident, the logical processes that have led to certain results and/or decisions. As researchers, in fact, for them, the development of reflective competences improve the research skills, understanding the areas of improvement of their own professional profile and in relation to the study of their own discipline; as university teachers, they allow one to place oneself in a non-habitual, pre-packaged, uncritical perspective and not to adhere to models imposed by others (Silva, 2022) without analyzing them in a critical and decontextualized way: they therefore also allow to strengthen the often controversial and dichotomic relationship between research and teaching (Felisatti & Perla, 2023).

Drawing on D. L. Schön's (1993) perspective, the university teacher can also be understood as a "reflective practitioner". From this perspective, reflective competence entails the capacity to critically analyse one's own teaching practices by reflecting in, on, and for action. It enables university teachers to interpret complex situations in ways that are grounded in reality, contextually situated, and coherent with their teaching objectives and students' educational needs. Specifically, being a reflective teacher entails (Nuzzaci, 2011): a careful examination of the lived personal experience, of one's own personal convictions, of the decisions taken and of their consequences on practice, all in a recursive and circular process; an orientation to the increase of one's own knowledge and to the improvement of one's own professionalism; and a consideration of the needs of students and of changing contextual factors, developing awareness of the role of experiences, values and beliefs in making decisions (Conway, 2001).

Rather than posing the issue in purely interrogative terms, it is pertinent to examine the rationale for reflective competences and the benefits they may generate. First of all, they entail an increase of critical awareness on one's own teaching and on one's own professional profile, supporting to ask "*How do I teach? What kind of teacher am I and do I want to be?*". At the same time, they are essential for designing, implementing and assessing a teaching that promotes the same kind of skills (reflective) for students (Marci, 2025a; Nuzzaci, 2011; Striano et al., 2018). Moreover, as highlighted by Xia, Sun, & Galo (2025) and Marci & Scellato (2025), reflective competences foster an increase of the teacher efficacy in terms of a more effective teaching perception—related to self-efficacy, self-monitoring, and self-assessment—, while also enhancing the capacity to design a teaching adaptable to different needs. In addition, reflectivity supports the balance of competences already mobilized and acquired, leading Professional Development (PD) (Guskey, 2002). In this sense, the university teachers should carve out spaces of reflection, stop and dedicate time to themselves and to their students, questioning on the meanings of what has happened in the classroom: this is essential to delineate possibilities of continuous improvement, renewal and learning.

Therefore, within FD, university teachers are accompanied to (Hubball, Collins, & Pratt, 2005; Lotti & Serbati, 2025; Steinert, 2010): critically reflect on their own teaching practices; interrogate the epistemological assumptions of their own disciplinary knowledges; recognize the impact of didactic choices on students' learning processes. Examples of FD tools that can support university teachers to achieve these objectives are classifiable into individual and pair or collaborative ones (Silva, 2022; Steinert, 2010; Stes, Min-Leliveld, Gijbels, & Van Petegem, 2010; Striano et al., 2018; Tucker, Stronge, Gareis, & Beers, 2003; Wenger, 1998): e.g. reflective prompts, reflective journals, Teaching Portfolio, peer or teaching observation, and Communities of Practice. In this perspective, reflectivity is not an accessory activity, but the condition of possibility to render professional development systemic. More specifically, reflectivity performs both a vertical and horizontal function: vertically, it connects macro-level policies and competence frameworks with meso-level FD initiatives and micro-level classroom practices; horizontally, it enables dialogue among disciplinary, pedagogical, evaluative, and technological dimensions, transforming competence frameworks from "descriptive inventories" into interpretative tools for educational decision-making (Milani & Moscardo, 2026; van Dijk et al., 2020). Therefore, it allows to avoid an additive conception of the required competences, favoring instead processes of integration and of internal reorganization of the reference frameworks (Felisatti & Perla, 2023). FD thus be-

comes a space of institutional reflectivity, in which practices are not simply transmitted or standardized, but analyzed, discussed and re-elaborated also collectively (Marci, 2025c). In this perspective, reflectivity is not only individual, but also social and organizational. Therefore, university teachers, following an FD pathway, re-read their own teaching no longer as a sequence of contents, but as a pathway of meaning. They decide, for example, to make explicit to students the connections among the treated themes, to clarify which fundamental questions orient the course and to connect each module to broader competences. This does not necessarily require changing the contents, but redesigning their meaning. For example, in an FD pathway, university teachers are asked to bring a problematic teaching situation, like an assessment that does not produce learning: through guided discussion, teachers have the possibility to reflect on the implicit assumptions that have oriented their choices, asking themselves: “*what idea of learning underlies that assessment? What type of knowledge is valued?*” This kind of activity does not provide standard solutions, but activates “reflectivity on action” (Schön, 1993), rendering visible the complexity of didactic decisions. All this necessity of reflection through effective and structured FD activities also embodies one of the basic assumptions on which it increasingly rests over the last years, namely the attempt to sustain that disciplinary competence is not in itself a guarantee of good teaching.

4. Competence frameworks of university teaching and reflective competences

Let us now enter more deeply into the role of reflectivity as intended, placing it in relation to the competence frameworks of university teaching—promoted by national and international bodies and documents (ESG, 2015; EUA, 2015; EHEA, 2018; Felisatti & Perla, 2023)—which aim to delineate the profile of the university teacher as an articulated set of dimensions that FD aims to contribute to develop. There are very many of them in the international panorama, as illustrated by Milani & Moscardo (2026), such as the Australian University Teaching Criteria and Standards, the UK Professional Standard Framework, the University Copenhagen Pedagogical Competence Profile, but also obviously DigComp and the evolution of DigCompEdu (2017) and DigCompEdu 2.2 (2022), more properly centered on digital competences and connected to a formative use of AI.

Of recent development is the international framework elaborated by the research of van Dijk et al. (2020), who elaborates the “University Teacher Expertise” model (UNITE) across this main question: “*what makes a teacher expert?*”. Starting from this, they identified six main tasks or areas of competence of the university teacher, which then coincide—although perhaps with different denominations—with those identified by the other above-mentioned frameworks:

1. *Teaching and supporting learning*, that concern guiding learning processes through teacher-student interactions in order to reach the learning objectives;
2. *Assessment and feedback*, that includes planning, designing and implementing formative and summative assessments of learning and performance;
3. *Educational leadership and management*, that means exercising an intentional influence on training and/or instruction and on the educational organization, collaborating with subjects, groups or entire organizations;
4. *Educational leadership*, that involves acquiring and applying knowledge on teaching and learning, contributing to its dissemination;
5. At the center, there is *Professional/Faculty Development*, that includes reflecting and promoting one’s own and others’ professional empowerment-development. Such task is always carried out in order to improve in one or more of the other tasks.

Another relevant framework for the university teaching competences can be found within the national Italian document promoted by the “National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and Research System” (ANVUR), namely the *Guidelines for the recognition and valorization of university*

teaching. Within the document itself, is clearly declared that “the proposed framework has an exemplary value and embraces a holistic vision of the teaching professionalism. Having a framework allows to reconfigure the professional vision of the teacher and to valorize competences in academia” (Felisatti & Perla, 2023, p. 15).

Therefore, the main competences of the university teacher are identified in (Felisatti & Perla, 2023):

1. design;
2. didactic mediation with methodologies and technologies;
3. assessment and self-assessment;
4. scholarship;
5. continuous learning and development;
6. partnership and communication;
7. leadership and entrepreneurship.

Each area is articulated through a sort of evaluative and self-evaluative “rubric” with respect to such competences, subdivided into basic, intermediate and advanced level according to the level of university teachers career phase or expertise grade (Felisatti & Perla, 2023). This “rubric” highlights how important it is to make them reflect on their own areas of competence, at which level they are/feel themselves, to understand what to do in order to improve/acquire them; whether and in which moments of the teaching experience they feel they have acquired/developed them and in which way they can develop others. The focus is also placed on the area “*Continuous reflection and professional development*” (Felisatti & Perla, p. 18), strictly related to the development of reflective competences, insofar as it supports the importance of “developing personal and professional identity in a perspective of continuous and holistic formation” (Felisatti & Perla, 2023, p. 24).

These frameworks, however, often risk being interpreted in a summative key, as lists of competences to be acquired or certified and as if they could always be acquired in a linear and independent way. Such “reading” is incompatible with the logic of systemicity, since it does not consider the relations among the different dimensions of competence. Placing the emphasis on reflectivity, instead—as however transpires more or less explicitly in some of such frameworks (Milani & Moscardo, 2026)—allows instead to interpret the frameworks as complex, open systems, in which the different dimensions are intrinsically interconnected. In this perspective, reflective competence is not an additional competence, but a meta-competence that allows to integrate the others. For example, from an operational perspective, reflectivity enables university teachers to critically examine the coherence between learning outcomes, teaching methods, assessment strategies and the use of educational technologies. In this sense, professional expertise does not emerge from the “accumulation” of isolated competences, but from their dynamic integration within specific educational contexts (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

In many of the cited frameworks, in fact, the very idea of reflective practice permeates several areas of teacher competence as a practice enabling the general improvement of teaching, intersecting with (Milani & Moscardo, 2026): a) self-reflection and self-assessment, for the development of a mindset in which teaching is translated into an iterative process of questioning and improvement; b) continuous professional development with participation in formal and informal moments of professional development; c) innovation, connecting this dimension to the idea of continuous improvement, with open and collaborative processes.

FD, according to this perspective, can carry out a systemic function in putting in relation different levels of competence, favoring processes of awareness and critical re-elaboration of teaching practices. In this perspective, it becomes a space of mediation between disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and institutional context. Indeed, according to this, reflectivity—as mentioned—is not an isolated task, but the central function that allows for the integration of all other dimensions. A concrete example to understand such question concerns the level of the teaching practices of the university teacher: in absence of reflectivity, a teacher can limit themselves to adopting active methodologies or educational

technologies as isolated tools, applying them in a standardized and decontextualized way. Reflectivity allows, instead, to critically integrate the meaning of such choices: *“why use a certain methodology in a specific course? Which conception of knowledge and of learning does it underlie? Which effects does it produce on students in terms of understanding, participation and construction of meaning?”*.

Through this reflective process, the teacher does not limit themselves to “doing didactic innovation”, but integrates in a systemic way disciplinary knowledge, formative objectives and pedagogical strategies. Reflectivity thus allows to connect dimensions that, if considered in themselves, would risk remaining fragmented. Reflectivity allows to read the frameworks as complex systems, in which the single components acquire meaning only in their interaction (Silva, 2022). In this perspective, reflectivity operates within frameworks, allowing teachers to integrate the different dimensions of their own professionalism and to adapt them to specific teaching contexts.

5. Plurality of formative roles and reflectivity as a bridge between frameworks

In what way, however, and thanks to which figures can FD truly be understood as just described? A further element of complexity related to the HE context, concerns the plurality of roles involved in university formative processes. Alongside the university teacher, the faculty developer and the instructional designer assume an increasingly relevant role (Marci, 2025a), working within the Teaching and Learning Centres (TLCs), each of whom is in turn defined according to competence frameworks. Such frameworks (Fettes, Hazen, Reznik, Wingard, & Trejo, 2025; Masini, Piccinno, Picasso, Botto, Garbarino, & Lampugnani, 2023; Stanley, 2001) emphasize competences linked to e.g. the design of formative pathways, pedagogical consultancy, facilitation of communities of practice, evaluation of the impact of didactic innovations and of the formative pathways themselves, highlighting also technological and methodological competences.

However, the coexistence of these frameworks does not in itself guarantee a real integration of roles. The risk is that of a fragmentation of educational responsibilities, in which didactic design is delegated only to specialist figures, while university teachers remain anchored to a transmissive conception of their own role, first when there are no listening, confrontation and dialogue among them. Therefore, although collaboration between instructional designers, faculty developers, and university teachers is not yet a systematic reality in all universities, it represents a crucial model for innovation within TLCs. For this reason and this scenario, it becomes crucial to identify transversal elements capable of connecting the different frameworks and of sustaining a shared vision of university education. Reflectivity, therefore, also here performs a function of epistemic and operative bridge among different frameworks: in fact, analogously to those of university teachers, the frameworks that orient the action of the faculty developer and the instructional designer respond to specific professional logics, but share with those of teaching the objective of improving the quality of educational processes (Masini et al., 2023). Respecting complexity and transforming it into systemicity means recognizing the specificities and the value of the roles—the teacher is bearer of disciplinary knowledge and the principal responsible of the educational relationship with students; the faculty developer operates as facilitator of professional development processes, promoting reflective practices and learning communities; the instructional designer contributes to the design of learning environments and experiences, with particular attention to methodological and technological aspects—but at the same time it means going beyond, that is, understanding the indispensability of real dialogue, according to an approach of concrete and situated dialogical circularity.

A useful theoretical reference model in support of such position is the “Dynamic System Model of Role Identity” (DSMRI) (Kaplan, Garner, & Semo, 2015), analyzed by Silva (2022). It affirms that FD actions oriented to didactic innovation cannot be based on a transmissive approach referable to the deficit model, according to which the teacher is seen as bearer of gaps to be filled, insofar as it does not allow the trainee to recognize the usefulness of the formation. It is therefore necessary to adopt the dialogue model, founded on a situated, dialogical formation centered on the concrete usability of knowledge (Silva, 2022).

The model interprets didactic action as the result of the dynamic integration of four interrelated components: 1) the ontological and epistemological vision of the teacher (idea of knowledge, teaching and learning); 2) the perception of possible actions in a given situation; 3) personal objectives; 4) and the representation of self. According to the model, the ontological and epistemological vision is strictly connected to personal objectives and both are influenced by the social and cultural context. Personal goals are interconnected with self-representation, disciplinary mastery, and perceived possibilities for action, which are shaped by cultural background and influence ontological and epistemological beliefs (Kaplan et al., 2015; Silva, 2022). These elements form a dynamic system in which didactic action is central and cannot be changed in isolation. According to the DSMRI, effective instructional change requires coherent, coordinated intervention across multiple dimensions, so focusing on a single aspect leads to generate resistance to change and transformation (Kunnari, 2018; Silva, 2022). Therefore, teacher development must go beyond transmitting strategies and instead engage teachers as active agents in a transformative process that involves both professional identity and personal beliefs.

Concrete examples can be:

- *the relationship between the university teacher and the instructional designer.* The instructional designer operates according to frameworks oriented to the design of effective learning environments and pathways, often with a strong emphasis on technological and methodological aspects. Without reflectivity, the risk is a clear separation between design and teaching, in which the teachers limit themselves to implementing solutions designed elsewhere. Reflectivity instead allows to render this relationship systemic: the teacher, through a reflective practice, actively participates in the design, interrogating design choices in light of the epistemological specificities of their own discipline and of the characteristics of the students. In this way, didactic design becomes a dialogical process, in which the different frameworks meet without overlapping;
- *the dialogue between university teachers and faculty developers within FD pathways.* In a non-reflective approach, the faculty developer can be conceived as an external expert who provides pre-packaged models or solutions. Reflectivity, instead, transforms this relationship into a space of co-construction, in which teaching practices are analyzed, discussed and reinterpreted in light of specific disciplinary contexts. In this sense, reflectivity functions as common language among different frameworks: it allows the teacher to make explicit their own disciplinary assumptions and the faculty developer to connect them to broader pedagogical frames. The result is not the imposition of a didactic model, but the construction of a shared vision, coherent with the systematicity of knowledge.
- *the collaboration between university teachers, instructional designers and faculty developers.* During the participatory design of a blended course, the teacher works with an instructional designer. The teacher brings disciplinary and formative needs; the instructional designer proposes technological solutions; the faculty developer facilitates the confrontation, helping to clarify objectives and assumptions. Shared reflectivity allows to avoid that technology dominates design or that the discipline remains impermeable to change, so the frameworks remain distinct, but in dialogue.

Furthermore, operationally, this dialogue can be supported through structured co-design activities, peer review of teaching, interdisciplinary Communities of Practices, longitudinal FD programmes, and—as it will be explained—, periodic discussion of Teaching Portfolio (TPf). Such settings create opportunities for shared reflection and facilitate the development of a common “language” around teaching quality and student learning (Hubball et al., 2005; Steinert, 2010).

In addition, as mentioned before, in absence of reflectivity such relationship risks reducing itself to an instrumental subordination of teaching with respect to the discipline. Reflectivity instead allows to open a space of reciprocal interrogation in which: disciplinary knowledge reflects on its own epistemological statutes and on its own modes of construction; pedagogical knowledge confronts itself with the specificity of disciplinary languages and methods. This reflective dialogue aims at the construction of meaningful connections, capable of sustaining learning experiences that valorize epistemic diversity and the complexity of students’ cognitive processes.

6. Teaching Portfolio as systemic-reflective device

Operationally and concretely, therefore, how can all this be “collected”? How are reflective competences developed, how is their development and their systematicity seen in connection with everything else? How and where can it be declared? To contribute to answer these questions, a central device is the TPf (Guskey, 2002; Stes et al., 2010; Tucker et al., 2003), namely a structured “dossier” that gathers evidence, experiences, materials and reflections related to a teacher’s teaching activity. It has a triple value (Marci, 2026; Marci & Scellato, 2025): a) formative, because it fosters awareness in relation to professional and teaching identity, and it favors continuous professional development; b) reflective, because it makes more explicit all the pedagogical-didactic choices, supporting critical reflection on what works and what does not and why; so it connects “*what I do*”, “*why I do it*” and “*what impact it has on students*”; c) evaluative, because it makes possible to collect a more transparent documentation of the quality and effectiveness of one’s own teaching (Marci, 2025a). About the structure, the elements that are possible to find in usually are (Tucker et al., 2003):

1. Teaching philosophy statement (vision, values, ideas related to teaching and learning, etc.);
2. teaching objectives (as a teacher and of the course);
3. teaching experiences;
4. teaching and assessment methodologies, tools;
5. teaching materials and innovation (syllabus, slide, exercises; projects of teaching innovation, laboratories, etc.);
6. evaluation of teaching (student feedback, colleagues’ observations, critical reflection);
7. training and professional development (FD and PD, CoP, etc.);
8. tutoring and mentoring (thesis/project supervision, support activities of colleagues and students);
9. future perspectives (plan of teaching development and improvement).

It can be conceived as a narrative and reflective space, in which one’s teaching choices are made explicit and visible and the university teacher can critically analyze their outcomes. Specifically, the Teaching philosophy statement (Chism, 1998; Kenny, Mann, & McLeod, 2003; Marci, 2026; Stes et al., 2010) represents a fundamental epistemological junction: it makes explicit the conceptions of knowledge, learning and teaching that orient one’s practice (they must be coherent with it), thus drawing one’s own teaching vision. It is properly a (written) declaration that describes values, objectives and beliefs that reflect one’s identity as a teacher and orient one’s teaching. Through the TPf, such conceptions can be questioned, put in relation with competence frameworks and reworked in light of experience.

In this sense, the TPf operates as a “within-framework connector”, integrating the different dimensions of teaching competence, and as a “between framework connector”, facilitating dialogue with faculty developers and instructional designers in professional development paths. Therefore, it as an “operational bridge” between different frameworks as it translates reflectivity into documented practice, allowing university teachers to visibly negotiate their identity with institutional demands. Operationally, it should be proposed at key stages of the academic career: e.g. during structured FD paths to support initial or continuous professional growth, as a dossier for recruitment or career progression to document teaching excellence, or as a tool for self-assessment (Tucker et al., 2003).

Let’s make an example. We could imagine a TPf where a teacher makes explicit his/her own teaching philosophy, declaring to conceive knowledge as dialogical construction. Analyzing his practices, he realizes that most lessons are frontal and that students have few spaces of re-elaboration. This gap between declared teaching philosophy and real practices becomes object of reflection and co-re-design. It is therefore not only a collection of evidence, but a device that fosters systemic coherence, which makes visible the relationship between conceptions, practices and results. In this process, reflectivity operates as a mechanism of internal integration: disciplinary competence is not separated from pedagogical one, assessment is not disconnected from design, the use of technologies is not reduced to instrumental choice. The teaching competence framework is thus lived as a dynamic system, and not as a list of requirements.

7. Systemic coherence with frameworks of students' competences

A further level of analysis that concerns the necessity of the systematicity of knowledge also extends to the relationship that should subsist between the teaching competence frameworks and those that define the competences expected in students. They are specifically linked to learning but also transversal, orientative (Marci & Modugno, 2025) and for life, appropriately described by the European Recommendation of 2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union which specifies and officializes the competences considered key for lifelong learning, then redefined through the Recommendation of the European Council of 2018 (Marci, 2025a, 2025c). Later, they have been highlighted and brought to convergence in the LifeComp Framework (2020) in particular relation to personal, social competences and the capacity to learn to learn as fundamental for the previous ones. They underline the importance of competences such as reflectivity, critical thinking, self-regulation and orientative competences, as well as the capacity to give meaning to one's own experiences. They cannot be effectively promoted if they are not embodied in teaching practices (Marci & Modugno, 2025; Marci & Scellato, 2025). Therefore, the value of the teacher as reflective professional (Schön, 1993) identifies itself in his capacity to critically accompanying the required development of such competences by students: for example, by making explicit his own decision-making processes, valuing error as a resource, promoting moments of meta-reflection. Concretely, it is a teacher who makes explicit the criteria of his teaching and assessment choices and methodologies, making evident their coherence with the objectives (Biggs & Tang, 2007); who invites students to reflect on their own learning processes, but also on the value that specific disciplinary contents have for their future profession (Marci, 2025c), for their life, making them 'experience' it actively, thus making them protagonists and at the center of their own formative path: as university teachers it is not possible to expect his students to be reflective learner if he, first, as a teacher, is not a reflective one (Hattie, 2016). Only in this way, competences truly develop as a set of "knowing", "knowing how to do" and "knowing how to be" (Maccario, 2012).

In any case, through a reflection that aims to make coherent—as inter-connected—the frameworks for the competences of teachers and students, the point is that teachers should think own teaching in a way that knows how to "go beyond" (Marci, 2025c) the competences required of students, in the sense of placing students—each grasped in his/her specificity and diversity with respect to all the others—in the condition of critically crossing them, analyzing and experiencing them in practice (Marci, 2025c).

Putting in relation the teaching frameworks with those of students allows to strengthen the systemic coherence of HE, avoiding a disconnection between what is required of students and the teaching practices that should support their development, like a real big "Constructive alignment" (Biggs & Tang, 2007). In this perspective, university teaching assumes a formative value that goes beyond the acquisition of contents, configuring itself as a space of construction of personal and professional identity, also for students.

8. Conclusion

In light of what has been discussed, reflectivity can be interpreted not simply as a competence among others, but it acts on multiple levels of the university system, producing concrete effects both within individual competence frameworks and in the relationships between different frameworks. Reflectivity can be fully understood as a generative principle of the systematicity of knowledge only if it is analyzed in its dual function as connector within frameworks and as bridge between frameworks.

It is precisely this double function that makes it possible to overcome a fragmented vision of HE, FD or PD, and to restore coherence to the university system as a whole:

- *reflectivity as a connector within frameworks* of university teaching, the different dimensions of teaching professionalism (disciplinary, pedagogical, evaluative, digital, relational, etc.). Reflectivity operates as a mechanism of internal integration. Through structured reflective practices, the teacher is called to question how the different dimensions of own competences influence each other reciprocally. In this sense, reflectivity makes it possible to transform the framework from a list of competences into a dynamic system, in which each dimension acquires meaning only in

relation to the others. The systematicity of knowledge manifests itself here as internal coherence between practices, epistemological presuppositions and formative objectives;

- *reflectivity as a connector between frameworks*. The systemic function of reflectivity becomes even more evident when one considers the relationship between frameworks referring to distinct professional roles (university teachers, faculty developers and instructional designers), but also in relation to those of the competences expected from students. Without a principle of connection, such frameworks risk remaining self-referential, generating a fragmentation of formative-educational responsibility.

Furthermore, it is possible to say that reflectivity also performs a function of translation between different levels of the university system: between institutional policies, normative frameworks and daily teaching practices. For example, the European frameworks on digital or transversal competences may remain abstract documents if they are not interpreted and contextualized through reflective practices. In this sense, a reflective university teacher should be able to translate such indications into concrete teaching choices, maintaining a systemic alignment between macro levels (policy), meso (institution and FD) and micro (classroom) (Felisatti & Perla, 2023; Silva, 2022).

To conclude, reflectivity does not eliminate nor even hide complexity nor plurality, but makes their habitability possible. This implies transforming fragmentation into correlation and allowing the university to function as a true 'ecosystem of knowledge' (Marci, 2025c; Marci & Scellato, 2025), maintaining a dynamic balance between differentiation and integration, which represents the very heart of the systematicity of knowledge.

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