

# Why are the Scandinavian Schools Obsessed with Social Competence?



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## KEYWORDS

#Nordic Teaching Model  
#social competence  
#teacher-student relationship

## THE INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

The Scandinavian countries have an international reputation for the quality of their education systems; schools generally perform well in international educational studies. The countries of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark are also known for their happiness, quality of life, “hygge” (cosiness) and egalitarianism.

This article is focusing on explaining what social competence is in the Nordic schools and our aim is to share what we have experienced in the Scandinavian schools from a local (Casper) and a foreign (Jim) perspective.

We also want to show you how you can adapt the Scandinavian methods to professional learning programmes in your own school.

## NORDIC TEACHING IS BASED ON TRUST

If we only had one word to summarise the education system it would be ‘trust’.

Trust is seen at one scale from teacher to pupil and vice versa all the way through the system to local authorities and national policy. And while there will be multiple individual and cultural factors that contribute towards this, we believe the quality of the relationship between staff and teachers and students is central to the success. The fact that there is no public inspector system in any of the Scandinavian countries perhaps stresses the trustful relationship between government and schools in general.

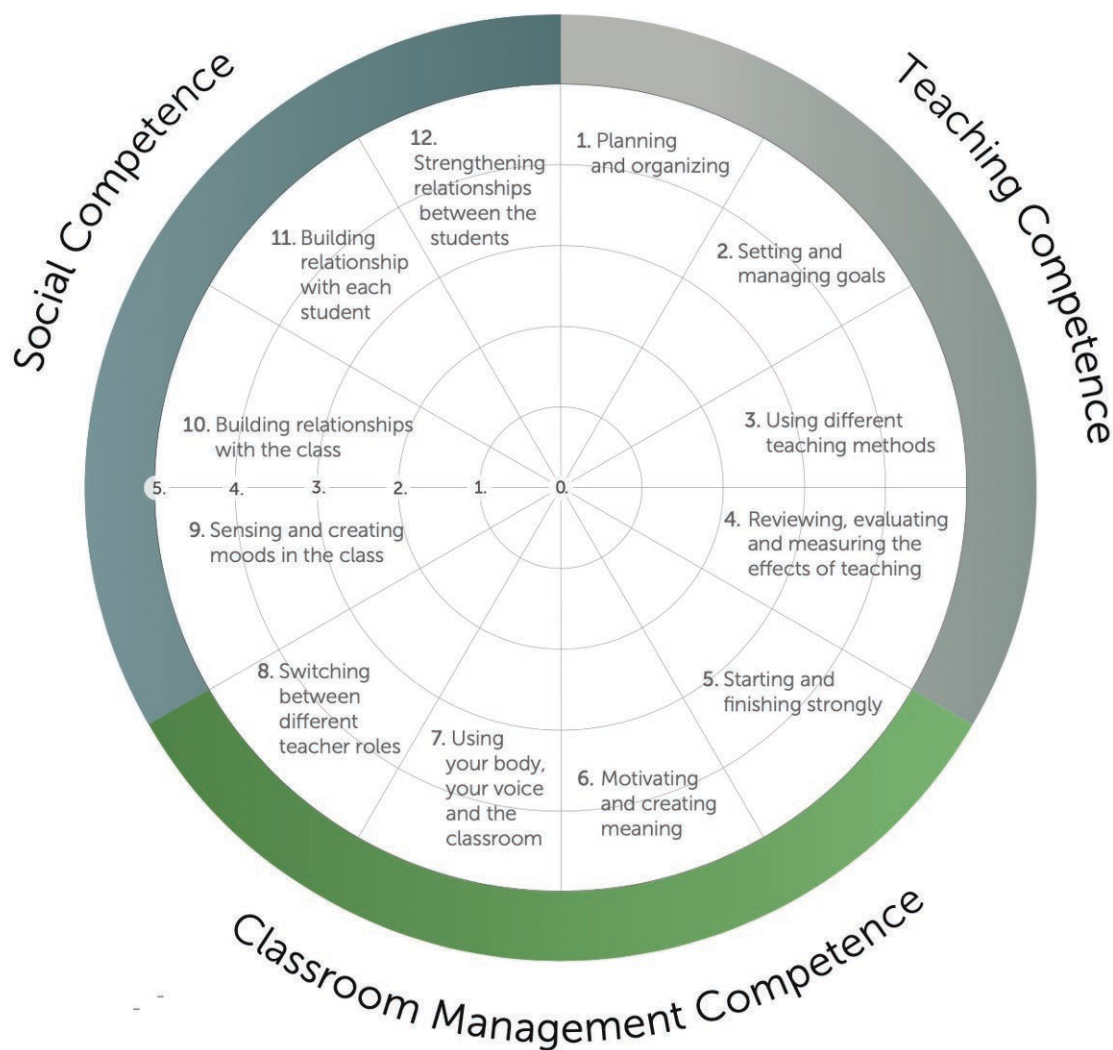
## WE ARE SOCIAL BEINGS

Trust is built up over time and we believe that it is the Nordic schools’ focus on working with the teachers’ Social Competence that is key to building this trust in all areas of school life.

We are social beings. Neurologically we develop through social interaction and we appear to socially construct knowledge and are far more effective and happier to work collectively than in isolation (Fullan and Edwards, 2022). Covid showed us that.

We are the only species of primate that can work with strangers at scale around fictitious constructs such as education for example (Harari, 2014). So, while schools are complex social environments, at their very heart is the relationships and rapport between professionals and between professionals

## The Nordic Teaching Model



and students (Rogers and Hill, 2022). Without quality relationships we are adopting a mechanistic, industrial model of education. And we do not want that!

The Scandinavian schools understand that any effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning needs to be delivered on a strong foundation of trust, effective relationships and rapport.

Why don't all school systems? Why are they relentless testing the focuspoint in so many countries? Coming from two different school backgrounds, we wonder if part of the problem is that some people think that trust, relationships and rapport are very personal, hard to define, and often perceived as entirely down to personality and intuition?

That is why we created The Nordic Teaching Model.

### THE NORDIC TEACHING MODEL

In this model you can see how we emphasise the importance of focusing on the 'softer skills' such as Social Competence alongside Teaching Competence and Classroom Management Competence. The Social Competence is divided into four categories:

- *Sensing and creating moods in the class*
- *Building relationships with the whole class*
- *Building relationship with each student*
- *Strengthening relationships between the students*

The model is used as an overview of teacher's competencies and as a reflective tool. Using the wheel, teachers reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, share knowledge and experiences about good teaching and then prioritise actions.



## CAN WE PROVE IT?

But what is the evidence behind this Scandinavian obsession with social competence? One of the largest studies ever done in Denmark and Norway is a meta-analysis of 71 international studies on the teachers' competencies led by professor Sven Nordenbo. The researchers found three fundamental teacher competencies: Didactical Competence, Classroom Management Competence and Social Competence. These can be found in The Nordic Teaching Model above.

The Danish writer and PhD Louise Klinge confirmed the importance of social competence in her research. She writes: 'Studies in all age groups show that we must build a relationship between the teacher and the student. The character of the relationship changes when the students get older, but its significance does not. All students' academic performance and wellbeing is highly affected by the quality of the relationship' (Klinge, 2016).

## LET'S START

We do hope that we have given you a window into a new way of doing things. To take the first steps we invite you to visit some of our free online resources. They can be used by every teacher and school leader to lead the teachers

to an enquiry into their own teaching practice, exploring research evidence and developing strategies to trial and test in the classroom.

We have a film about The Nordic Teaching Model here:

<https://youtu.be/N4tmKkZMGKY>

If you want more background, we did a TEDx Talk:

[https://youtu.be/EJ3a\\_qdnCCY&t=5s](https://youtu.be/EJ3a_qdnCCY&t=5s)

If you send us an email we will happily send you more free materials.

Write to [casper@nordicschools.com](mailto:casper@nordicschools.com)

Let's start building more trust, relationships and rapport in our schools.

## Sources

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