

## Article

# Teacher Professional Development: Experiences in an International Project on Intercultural Education

Michele Biasutti <sup>1,\*</sup>, Eleonora Concina <sup>1</sup>, Sara Frate <sup>1</sup> and Ibrahim Delen <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology, University of Padova, 35139 Padova, Italy; eleonora.ac84@gmail.com (E.C.); sara.frate@gmail.com (S.F.)

<sup>2</sup> Educational Sciences Department, University of Usak, 64200 Usak, Turkey; ibrahim.delen@usak.edu.tr

\* Correspondence: michele.biasutti@unipd.it

**Abstract:** The present study reports on the analysis of a professional development experience within an international Erasmus + project for primary and secondary teachers focused on intercultural education. The project consisted of intercultural education actions to promote the integration of migrant children in primary and secondary schools. A qualitative research method framed as a case study was chosen to assess the effects of the project activities. The perceived professional development was analyzed through the administration of semi-structured interviews with the teachers after the end of the project. The following six categories were identified in the qualitative analysis: attitudes, teaching approach, community of practice, communication with students, professional development, and implementation issues. The findings showed that participating in the project offered an occasion to discuss different pedagogical orientations, examine practices, and develop teaching strategies for intercultural education. Project activities provided teachers the opportunity to reflect on how their teaching approaches related to the integration of migrant students. Suggestions for professional development and the encouragement of a pedagogical change among primary and secondary teachers are proposed for further studies.

**Keywords:** professional development; teacher education; migrant integration; intercultural education



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## 1. Introduction

Recently, teachers have been driven to look for opportunities for professional development to face several critical events unfolding in today's world [1]. One such phenomenon is the migratory flows that have consequences in many institutional dimensions, including education [2]. Schools are becoming more multicultural by the day, and teachers are under pressure to find effective strategies to manage their changing classes [3]. There is a pressing need to find adequate pedagogical practices to successfully promote the inclusion of children from migrant families [4]. Teachers are constantly working to develop new attitudes, strategies, and approaches for creating an inclusive class, where children can find a welcoming environment in an intercultural perspective [5]. Teachers' competences may be enhanced by participating in professional development experiences, with particular reference to opportunities to attend international projects [6]. In an international context, educators may compare their practices with colleagues from other countries, sharing ideas, proposals, and problems while collaborating to find effective solutions. The international perspective could play a key role in developing the inclusion of migrant students, since it sustains an intercultural approach not only in the class but also within the educational community [7].

The present study reports on the analysis of a professional development experience for primary and secondary teachers focused on intercultural education and situated within an international Erasmus+ project. The project consisted of intercultural education actions to promote the integration of migrant children in primary and secondary schools. The background analysis covers aspects of teachers' needs in working with migrant students,

professional development for teachers, and international project participation and teachers' professional development.

## 2. Teachers' Needs in Working with Migrant Students

European countries such as Italy, Greece, and Turkey are under intense pressure because the number of migrants they receive is increasing. European schools are rapidly becoming multicultural, and teachers need to develop specific skills to manage their classrooms [2]. Developing intercultural education competencies is a complex job that must be based on specific abilities [3]. Some countries, including Italy, are treating school migrant problems as an emergency, so it is clearly relevant to define specific actions framed in a definite plan of activities [8]. The importance and challenges of encouraging the inclusion of migrant children in schools have been underestimated in Italy, and few opportunities are offered to teachers to update their teaching approaches and methods [9]. Conversely, studies in Turkey focus on the educational practices in temporary education centers [10], providing professional development opportunities for teachers [11].

Biasutti, Concina, and Frate [12] recently analyzed Italian primary and middle teachers' methodologies, practices, and needs to promote the integration of refugees and migrants in educational contexts. Several elements were highlighted, including the importance of taking care of students' emotional, cognitive, and linguistic needs, the role of teaching beliefs and values, and how to develop inclusive activities and resources for classroom activities. Social and relational aspects such as intercultural communication, social interactions with students, and networking with the local community were considered particularly important. Teaching approaches and strategies were based on inclusive approaches to promote the integration of migrant children. Teachers had to face different contexts, and creativity and flexibility emerged as core aspects of their work. Regarding teachers' needs, there was a call for training opportunities, didactic counselling, resources to support teaching, economic resources, and organizational changes in schools. Finally, the complexity of teaching in an intercultural context emerged as an overarching issue, and a multidimensional approach was identified as a strategy to adopt when examining educational issues.

In the wider perspective, teachers who work with migrant pupils face several challenges that are partly related to their educational competences [13]. Teachers need to become responsive to all students' needs, given that different cultural backgrounds must be taken into account when designing curricula for children. Teachers should link field contents with students' daily life experiences to sustain a meaningful learning process [14]. It may be particularly challenging to consider daily life experiences while working with a class from multiple cultural backgrounds because of the different contextual variables at work. Teachers should develop a specific sensitivity and attention to the cultural features that students express in their school activities in order to encourage the children's interest and sustain their motivation to learn. In addition, teachers need to be prepared to deal with the emotional dimensions of their pupils [13], including those arising from personal experiences such as migratory events and current living conditions, along with the effect of their feelings and attitudes toward linguistic and cultural differences on their learning processes.

Another educational task for teachers is to help all students—migrant or otherwise—to become citizens of a globalized world in which exchanges between cultures, transfers, and migrations can be accessible opportunities for all. Teachers must develop a set of complex skills for sustaining students' learning not only during the initial education of trainee teachers but also in professional development actions throughout the teaching career. In-service teachers would also benefit from professional development opportunities designed in several contexts.

## 3. Professional Development for Teachers

In a knowledge society that is constantly changing, professional development is a crucial issue in several fields, including primary and secondary education. In that arena, pro-

professional development consists of updating teachers on the latest pedagogical approaches and didactic methodologies and encouraging a reflective practice toward teaching.

Teachers' professional development is an important research topic that has three main themes. First, the key elements of effective training programs have been studied [15,16]. The second aspect refers to the definition of the change processes initiated by participation in professional development experiences [17,18]. The third topic relates to teachers' active role in shaping their professional development [19], with particular reference to the collective and relational dimensions [20].

As to the main aspects of training experiences, professional development systems are characterized by four features [15]: the training program, teachers in the role of learners, the trainer who leads and acts as a facilitator of participants' learning, and the context. Certain common features are typical of effective training programs [16], which focus not only on transmitting new content knowledge but also enhance participants' skills in defining their pedagogical approach. Effective programs encourage interpersonal exchanges among participants, contextualizing the training in the framework of a community of practice. In addition, effective programs are intensive and support constant critical reflection among learners.

To understand how the process of professional development works, several scholars have examined its phases and proposed different theoretical models [17,18]. Guskey [17] uses the model of teacher change to explain the effects that training experiences may have on teachers' activities. In the beginning, training experiences can influence teaching practices and modify teachers' classroom activities. These changes are usually reflected in improvements in the results of the students' learning process. Seeing these beneficial effects on their students' performance can inspire teachers to modify their professional attitudes and beliefs. This model could be useful in understanding why the impact of professional development experiences on teachers' values and attitudes is not always linear but is often affected by contextual and personal factors. With reference to the framework of teachers' professional development experiences, Koellner and Jacobs [18] argue that different models can be placed on a continuum, with one end representing highly adaptive professional development events and the other highly specific events. The former usually have a long duration, feature a flexible structure, and can involve not only teachers but also administrators and institutions, whereas highly specific models have a detailed, fixed structure and rely on materials such as handbooks, manuals, and workshops. Adaptive models are now becoming more and more popular, since their flexibility allows educational goals to be structured for the contexts in which they will be applied. Adaptive models are also focused on the long term, which is effective in promoting changes in teachers' professional competences.

The active role that teachers have as learners in training programs is a core element of professional development. Effective programs can impact both the individual and group dimensions [15]. At an individual level, effective programs can support teachers in changing their approaches and enhancing their practices, positively affecting their professional self-esteem [21]. Teachers have different attitudinal patterns regarding professional development on the individual side [3], which contribute to the construction of their professional identities as educators. These attitudinal patterns are defined by the relations between two factors: motivation for professional development (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) and career aspirations (lateral vs. vertical development). The attitude of an individual teacher can influence their experience in training programs. However, professional development is not only an individual experience but also a group phenomenon: professional communities are the most suitable contexts for enhancing experiences of professional development for teachers [20]. The group dimension refers to the creation of professional groups as communities of practice, in which sharing ideas, experiences, and best practices is encouraged and welcomed. Leadership, sharing experiences, common values, and group learning are the core features that characterize professional communities [20]. Communities that are effective in promoting professional development have the following common elements:

the presence of a learning facilitator who democratically manages the leadership of the group, group dynamics based on collaboration and mutual support, and confidence and respect among participants to ensure a meaningful involvement in the activities [22].

The professional growth actually promoted by a given training experience is affected by several elements; the program itself, teachers' attitudes, and the characteristics of each participant group are just some of the key elements that enable success or contribute to failure in the professional development process. In addition, several challenges could be considered while working in multicultural contexts, such as navigating tensions or challenges arising from resistance to discussions of diversity and equity, balancing specific knowledge about students' cultures, and guarding against promoting stereotypes or broad generalizations [5].

Organizing professional development activities for teachers is not an easy task and several issues were highlighted in previous experiences [1], such as conflicting agendas, scattered teacher collaboration and commitment, and little student and community involvement. Moreover, there seemed to be tensions between current professional development and teachers' needs and circumstances because teachers wished for more specific information and pedagogical solutions, more collaboration and more organizational support during the professional development activities. In addition, the format is important as one-time professional development workshops are ineffective because they do not offer teachers an opportunity to practice what they have learned and teachers need to practice new skills an average of 20 times to achieve mastery [23]. In addition, content-based professional development seems more effective than more general professional development because teachers are personally involved and can acquire skills through meaningfully contextualizing the proposed teaching techniques and methodologies [23].

One of the key skills for working in multicultural contexts is teacher self-efficacy, which could be developed by offering professional development in multicultural education [2]. In-service or trainee teachers would also benefit from opportunities to work with academic research groups involved in intercultural education research projects [6,11]. While acknowledging the role of researcher teacher collaboration, Delen et al. [11] underlined the need for thinking more than language education to support migrant students.

#### **4. International Project Participation and Teachers' Professional Development**

There are several ways to foster professional development, and participating in international projects offers a wide spectrum of experiences such as enabling participants to work in multinational groups and to see the value in learning conditions that are not always available in an individual institution. Participants can benefit from aspects such as exchanging views on different teaching approaches from an international context and gain new perspectives on the topic being studied [24].

The literature regarding the effects of attending international projects on intercultural education and education for sustainable development (ESD) has focused on improvements by students during intensive programs or summer schools [7,25], with less research considering the effects on teachers, which is the central emphasis of the present study [6]. Alfaro and Quezadab [6] examined 21 biliteracy teachers who studied and taught in schools through an eight-week in-service professional development program with indigenous Mexican children and underlined the need for providing support in ethnically diverse settings. Dooly and Villanueva [7] proposed an international training program for trainee teachers. The students were presented with a blended course focused on intercultural communication that aimed to develop awareness of intercultural issues and offer opportunities for critical reflection. The outcomes of the project highlighted the promotion of negotiating and reflection skills among participants, who recognized the importance of the intercultural dimension for their future educational activities.

With reference to professors of higher education institutions, Biasutti et al. [26] analyzed the effects of an international project on educating academic staff to reorient curricula in ESD. The project activities included revising university curricula to infuse sustainable

development principles. A qualitative approach based on focus groups was used to collect data about the perceived professional development of the university teaching staff. The findings showed that revising the curricula was an occasion to reflect on different pedagogical approaches, teaching methods, and educational practices. Participants developed a positive attitude toward metacognitive strategies and a goal-oriented approach to curriculum planning. In addition, the project inspired the participating university professors to reconsider their teaching methods, affecting their attitudes, pedagogical orientations, teaching methods, didactic planning skills, and assessment approaches [27]. Overall, the Biasutti et al. [26] study offered a variety of views on the effects of participating in an international project. However, few details were provided regarding the project's conditions and context, and it would be valuable to verify whether those kinds of variables could influence the quality of the professional development experience.

## 5. Summary of Literature Review

The background analysis above emphasized that acquiring strategies to promote the integration of refugees and migrant students is needed for primary and secondary teachers. Teachers' specific intercultural educational needs include training opportunities, didactic counselling, resources for supporting teaching, economic resources, and organizational changes in schools. For the professional development of teachers, the integration of migrant students is a core mission and demands new pedagogical orientations and didactic methodologies that will promote the reflective teacher model. Participating in international projects could be a way to encourage professional development and meaningful educational change.

The literature reviewed shows limitations such as the limited generalizability of the results due to the small number of participants. In addition, the creation of a permanent change in teaching staff must be verified using follow-up assessment techniques. It would be valuable to assess whether attending an international project could itself lead to a pedagogical change or whether there are specific conditions that are needed to facilitate such a change. Both the significant variables that might encourage pedagogical change and any specific conditions needed to enhance professional development during attendance at international projects need to be examined.

## 6. Method

### 6.1. Aim of the Study

The present study investigates the perceptions of teachers who participated in an international Erasmus+ project on intercultural education. A qualitative research method framed as a case study [28] was chosen to assess the effects of the project activities. The perceived professional development was considered through the administration of semi-structured interviews with the teachers after the end of the project. More specifically, participants' perceived improvements of their teaching competences were analyzed as indicators of their professional development.

The following research questions drove the investigation:

- (1) What are the main changes that participants reported in their professional activity as a consequence of their involvement in the project?
- (2) What are the main changes that participants reported in their ability to promote migrant students' inclusion in school?
- (3) What are the main changes that participants reported in their ability to collaborate with colleagues and professionals from other agencies to promote migrant students' inclusion in school?

### 6.2. The International Project

The EDUCAMIGRANT (Ensuring Equability in Education for Migrant and Refugee Pupils) project (2015-1-TR01-KA201-021464) was a KA2 Strategic partnership project approved by the Turkish National Agency that included partners from Italy and Spain. The

project started on 1 September 2015 and ended on 31 August 2017. In all three countries, the university faculty, teachers, and representatives of local branches of national education institutions worked together. During the project, the researchers and teachers from the different countries visited one another and focused on creating a learning environment for migrant students. The project focused on the development of three modules.

The first module was focused on (a) human rights as applied to migrants and refugees, (b) emotional education and educational support, (c) linguistic and communicative competences for migrant and refugee students, and (d) inclusive pedagogies and methodological proposals. This first training module also served as a key component for presenting the same language to all educators included in the project.

The second module addressed how teachers could implement these approaches by focusing on (a) orientation skills, (b) pedagogical-linguistic skills, and (c) intercultural skills. All three countries organized professional development sessions for local teachers to support dissemination.

The final step of the project was focused on developing the third module, which sought to support teachers in designing different learning outcomes regarding language and intercultural skills. To support these goals, the final module included five units: (1) teaching the alphabet and vocabulary, (2) my family and the world around me, (3) cultural life, (4) mathematics and science education, and (5) my food and my games. All five units supported students in creating design products as an outcome of their learning. The project team also developed an online game to assess students' language development.

The international project sought to ensure that all educators understood, above all, the importance of an inclusive approach. During the project, several activities that could be used by the teachers when educating their pupils were developed. Due to the limited nature of the project, these activities served as a baseline to help teachers support pupils in different topics.

A team of university professors, schoolteachers, and administrators from Italy, Spain, and Turkey conducted the project. There was continuous collaboration inside the team. The teachers attended the project meetings and supported the team in developing the materials and learning units for the modules; they also became the spokespeople for the different challenges that educators in European multicultural classes experience on a daily basis. The theoretical approaches proposed by academic researchers were merged with the teachers' perspectives to support a personal and professional process of empowerment among the teachers. Teachers from different countries shared their activity examples and brought their own activities, which were used in the modules.

### *6.3. Participants*

The interview was conducted with eight teachers who were actively engaged in the international project. Participants were five women and three men, with a mean age of 40.62 (range 35–49, SD = 4.75). Teachers worked in primary and secondary schools teaching different subjects: five taught English, two national languages, and one technology. Three Italian (two females and one male) and five Turkish (three females and two males) teachers participated in the study. All the teachers involved in the international project worked with university researchers on actions such as designing a teacher training program focused on intercultural education. It is also important to underline that four Turkish teachers attended several international project meetings with the project team and two of these teachers took an active role in creating the final project module after participating in the project's professional development sessions. They also collaborated in creating class activities to encourage the inclusion of newly arrived refugees and migrant children in primary and secondary schools.

#### 6.4. Ethical Statement

The study was designed and conducted in accordance with and respecting the standards of the Code of Ethics and Conduct of the British Psychological Society and the Declaration of Helsinki.

#### 6.5. Procedure and Interview

About 10 months after the end of the project, the teachers who participated were contacted about sitting for an interview. Eight teachers agreed to be interviewed; they were contacted individually by the researchers. In each case, informed consent was obtained, and all eight were informed that their answers would remain anonymous and be used only for research purposes.

The interviews aimed to elicit the changes and improvements that participants identified in their professional activities as a result of their involvement in the project. More specifically, teachers were encouraged to describe changes and enhancements in their attitudes, teaching methods and strategies, and communicative and interpersonal abilities related to their work in classes with migrant children. The interview questions are reported in the Appendix A; the interviews lasted approximately 30 min and were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

#### 6.6. Qualitative Analysis

The data collected from the eight teacher interviews were examined using an inductive qualitative method. A content analysis was performed to identify the main themes of the participants' experiences in the project, with a focus on their professional development. A grounded theory approach that has been used successfully in other studies on teachers' professional development was adopted [29]. The coding process was characterized by three main phases.

The first consisted of in-depth reading of the written material, followed by an identification of brief portions of the text to extract codes of content. The coding process started with an immersion phase, in which the answers of the interviews were read several times to acquire a high level of familiarity with the material. This task was carried out by each researcher individually.

The second phase involved deleting redundant or ambiguous codes and finding agreement among researchers on the codes identified. In the second phase, the discernibly different answers were determined, and distinct codes were assigned to the statements. While assigning the codes, a revision of the initial codes was undertaken by conscientiously rereading the interviews to avoid repetitions due to the nature of the coding process. In the second phase, the codes were checked many times, and before generating a new code, it was verified if it was possible to set the statement in an existing code; only in the case where the code did not fit the existing codes was a new code determined.

In the third phase, categories were defined with reference to the relations between codes and a coding scheme was developed. The coding scheme was used to analyze all the interviews and this process was carried out with the support of Atlas.ti software, which allowed the data to be systematically checked and verified. The Atlas.ti software was useful for proficiently managing the coding process and permitted the control of the quotations associated with the codes. The coding of the interviews was later endorsed by a researcher who independently proved the coding scheme and verified the coding of the interviews. Any contrasting findings were discussed until full agreement was obtained among the coders.

At the end of the coding process the following six categories and 28 codes ultimately emerged:

- (1) Attitudes (five codes)
- (2) Teaching approach (six codes)
- (3) Community of practice (three codes)
- (4) Communication with students (six codes)

- (5) Professional development (four codes)
- (6) Implementation issues (four codes).

The categories and their relations with codes are reported in Figure 1.

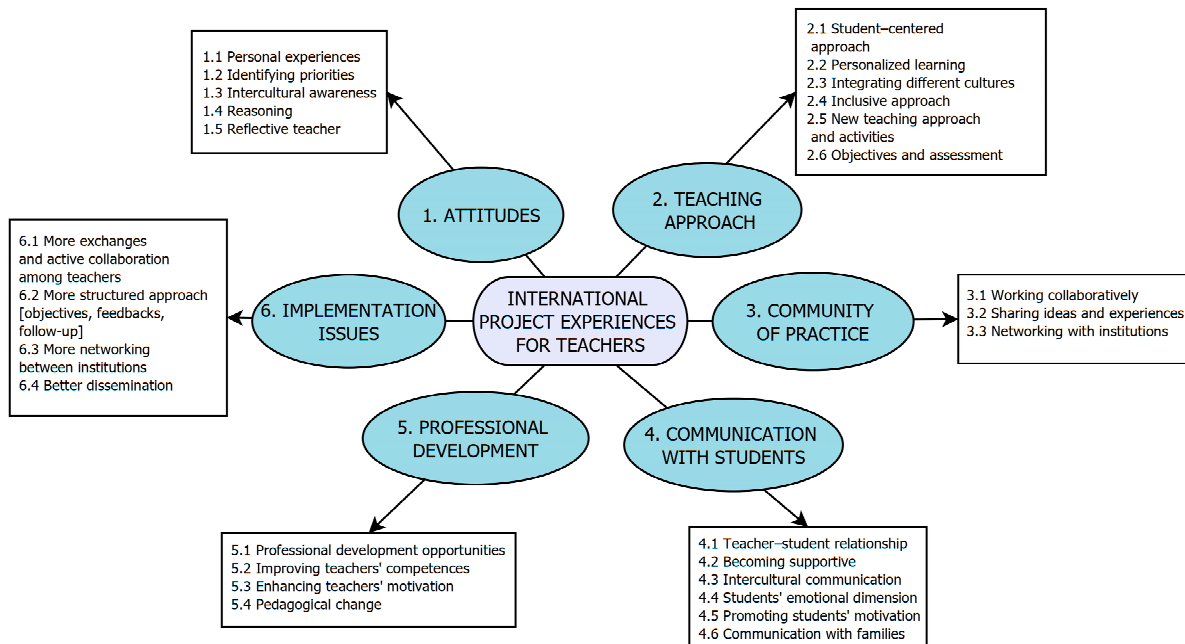


Figure 1. The categories and their relations with codes.

## 7. Results

The six categories consisted of several codes which are described in the following paragraphs. The quotations reported below are marked 'T1' to 'T8' (where 'T' indicates 'teacher'), to allow the reader to compare insights and comments belonging to the same or different individuals. Quotations for the Italian teachers are identified as T1 to T3, while the quotations for the Turkish teachers were identified as T4 to T8.

- (1) Attitudes. This category's five codes (1. Personal experiences, 2. Identifying priorities, 3. Intercultural awareness, 4. Reasoning, 5. Reflective teacher) relate to the main changes in teachers' professional mindset that occurred due to their involvement in the project. The quotations in the attitude category are focused on the thoughts, opinions, and experiences that teachers developed or revised as a result of their participation in the project. Participants reflected upon their personal experiences in relation to the perspective of intercultural education, as reported in the following statement of one teacher:

I asked students to make nativity scenes using recycled material from their daily life (e.g., the tea box with the tea bag) . . . for them, the option of the nativity scene, which is first of all strongly cultural, was to some extent transformed into another activity . . . of [simply] making an object with the recycled material (T1).

The activities proposed within the project helped participants to identify the first aspects that needed to be faced in working in multicultural classes and raised their awareness of intercultural issues:

I think it becomes an interesting starting point for a teacher to understand how cultural diversity is an added value (T3).

Another teacher stated awareness in multicultural classes as:

I noticed that each student was different. I learned how to involve all students into the education environment in multiple cultural classes. I understood the



importance of tolerance, patience and mutual understanding. When I put myself in the place of refugee students, I once again saw the importance of language learning (T6).

Other features focused on teachers' reflective activity, with participants prompted to reason about their experiences and beginning to adopt a reflective approach for monitoring and assessing their activities in school:

Professionally, I have been led to reflect more" (T1) and "The theme was stimulating . . . because it led me to make other reflections that will probably be the starting point of the educational theme of the future for us teachers (T3).

- (2) Teaching approach. This category captures all perceived improvements related to teaching practices (codes: 1. Student-centered approach, 2. Personalized learning, 3. Integrating different cultures, 4. Inclusive approach, 5. New teaching approach and activities, 6. Objectives and assessment). The quotations in the teaching approach category address the improvements related to objectives, strategies, methods, activities, and assessment that characterized participants' teaching methods as a result of their involvement in the project. Participating in the project encouraged teachers to adopt a student-centered approach and to invest their efforts in the personalization of learning to effectively meet their students' needs, as one participant summarized it:

I developed . . . [a teaching] approach that placed the students at the center of the teaching and learning processes. A student-centered perspective is very helpful when working with migrant students (T2).

Teachers learned the importance of working to integrate aspects from different cultures during class activities:

Cultural diversity is an added value . . . as the grafting of a new culture (T3).

The inclusive approach was recognized as a core dimension for promoting school inclusion, not only among migrant pupils but also of the whole class. The involvement in project tasks positively influenced the participants' teaching methods and offered them new ideas for activities in class. One of the teachers stated:

I started to use game-based activities in the classroom (T4).

In addition, designing activities, implementing educational objectives, and applying assessment practices were all affected, and the project modules were well-received by the teachers. Another teacher specifically addressed this point as follows:

The module booklet was a good advisor for me, I got effective clues on how to communicate with refugee students (T6).

- (3) Community of practice. The codes in this category (1. Working collaboratively, 2. Sharing ideas and experiences, 3. International networking) represent the interpersonal dimension of teachers' professional activities. The quotations in this category are focused on the importance of social interactions with students and their categories, including both migrants and native pupils. Being involved in collaborative tasks supported the development of a sense of community of practice in which teachers could meet colleagues from other schools and countries, sharing best practices and developing new ideas, approaches, and strategies. One teacher explained this aspect as follows:

I believe that international cooperation projects are the best tools for teachers to verify all their modalities of teaching and their professionalism, confronting themselves with other realities and within the limits of what can be our job as teachers (T3).

Another key aspect relates to the opportunity for participants to be included in a wider network that encompasses educational realities from different European countries. One of the teachers stated this international collaboration as follows:

In the EDUCAMIGRANT project, we have learned strategies and methodologies of other countries by working with the colleagues across Europe (T7).

- (4) Communication with students. This category includes all the features in the teacher-student interpersonal and communicative sphere, with reference to migrant pupils (codes: 1. Teacher-student relationship, 2. Becoming supportive, 3. Intercultural communication, 4. Students' emotional dimension, 5. Promoting students' motivation, 6. Communication with families). The quotations in this category are focused on the importance of social interactions with students and their categories, including both migrants and native pupils. One of the participants (T4) recognized the central role of a positive teacher-student relationship. It is also important to underline that T4 was also the vice-principal of the school and continued to support students inside and outside the classroom to promote school inclusion for migrant children and adolescents:

We hang a flag of their country in the class, we allowed them to explain themselves however they wanted. At the end, they had more confidence ... I visited their homes, saw their life conditions, had dinner together with them ... We went on a picnic and visited some places. While these were happening they tried more to talk and we tried more to understand them (T4).

Teachers acknowledged the value of becoming more attentive to students' needs, offering them support in facing their challenges. In this process, teachers underlined the need to improve themselves:

In the education of refugee and immigrant students I have been more understanding more supportive them. Through the EDUCAMIGRANT, they make themselves feel more valuable and vital. I have improved my communication, so immigrant students that have been integrated to school society understand different cultures and lifestyles (T7).

Another teacher also stated that the communication should be initiated by the teacher: Migrant students didn't know our language so that was the biggest problem that we faced ... I learned and understood how I touched the student and communicated with refugee students (T7).

Teachers learned how to communicate in an intercultural perspective and began taking greater care of the emotional dimension of their students, as reported by one participant:

Migrants face several problems; also, considering aspects such as emotional education is very important for the development of personality (T1).

The role of teachers in promoting students' motivation for learning and school emerged as a crucial element of the teacher-student relationship. Finally, communication with migrant families was recognized as fundamental to ensuring the positive inclusion of children and creating an educational network between the personal and institutional dimensions.

- (5) Professional development. In this category, participants identified the main elements that characterized their professional development experience and the growth of their teaching competences as a result of their participation in the project (codes: 1. Professional development opportunities, 2. Improving teachers' competences, 3. Enhancing teachers' motivation, 4. Pedagogical change). One of the most relevant features of the project was the professional development opportunity that teachers were afforded by being actively involved in designing educational programs. One of the teachers stated this collaboration as:

Academicians from educational science departments and experienced teaching staff of partner schools and administrators prepared a module for the pupils and guide book for teachers (T7).

As stated by T6, teachers were also part of a process of personal and professional growth that enhanced their teaching abilities:

Seeing good examples and experimenting in European countries were beneficial for me and my teaching skills (T7).

Teachers' psychological and emotional dimensions in terms of motivation were also reported as benefiting from project participation. Participants experienced a pedagogical change in their competences, which gave momentum to their work in multicultural classes. One teacher underlined how participating in the project helped with transferring abilities into different classes:

Observing and experiencing good examples in other European countries gave me several inputs, and now I could practice the system in any class (T5).

(6) Implementation issues. This category includes all of the project's critical issues and the aspects that should be improved (codes: 1. More exchange and active collaboration among teachers, 2. More structured approach (objectives, feedback, follow-up), 3. More networking between institutions, 4. Better dissemination). Participants suggested that more opportunities for exchange and support among teachers would be beneficial for both project implementation and professional development. As stated by one teacher, providing continuous support for the teachers is the key:

"These projects need to continue. Teachers working at schools that have a high number of immigrant students need PD. Immigrant students' language and adaptation problems can be solved when the teachers are supported (T8)."

In addition, teachers emphasized the importance of adopting a more structured approach, where objectives should be defined more specifically and made explicit to all project members before activities begin. One of the teachers underlined the importance of feedback and the need for a follow-up phase, features that are crucial for better understanding the impact of the project.

"The outputs of the project should be continuous . . . Similar practices should continue in the local area (T6)."

The summary of categories and their codes, along with other representative quotations, are reported in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Supporting quotations for the codes extracted from the interview responses.

Categories	Codes	Quotations	Explanations
1. Attitudes	1.1 Personal experiences	Considering the subject of recycled material, I leave the children's room to maneuver. In my experience, it has happened that, especially with those children who have aunts or mothers from Morocco, it helps to make small frames not from a shoebox but from branches taken from along the [river].	The quotations in the attitude category are focused on the thoughts, opinions, and experiences that teachers developed or revised as a result of their participation in the project.
	1.2 Identifying priorities	Migrant students didn't know our language, and that was the biggest problem that we faced. It is a way to manifest a cultural identity within a community but without giving it a particular social relevance. It is the egos of the students that manifest themselves, and it shows elements of continuity with different perspectives.	
	1.3 Intercultural awareness	Then, it pushed me to make some reflections that I use, for example, with pupils.	
	1.4 Reasoning	I learned to question myself and to confront myself; sometimes it was useful to review some of my positions to improve.	
	1.5 Reflective teacher		

Table 1. Cont.

Categories	Codes	Quotations	Explanations
2. Teaching approach	2.1 Student-centered approach	In addition, I understood that there are several ways of interacting with migrants and that a learner-centered perspective is more productive. You have to start considering the needs of the students and their requirements.	The quotations in the teaching approach category address the improvements related to objectives, strategies, methods, activities, and assessment that characterized participants' teaching methods as a result of their involvement in the project.
	2.2 Personalized learning	They [students] could potentially have several different issues, and you have to consider them carefully and in an individualized way. Students also showed different cultural perspectives; this means that I am not different from you, but that I act differently. For example, students proposed alternative solutions and integrated them into the schoolwork.	
	2.3 Integrating different cultures	It is not only how to include the students that have just arrived but how to facilitate migrants' inclusion in the community.	
	2.4 Inclusive approach	I developed a more systematic approach to curriculum planning with migrants.	
	2.5 New teaching approach and activities	Here, our goal remains the same, but the path can be varied. The objectives are to achieve a certain type of technological expertise.	
	2.6 Objectives and assessment		
3. Community of practice	3.1 Working collaboratively	We worked in a collaborative way during the project workshops, and that was very insightful. Working collaboratively helps you in sharing your ideas, verifying if the ideas are understood by the colleagues, and seeing if your proposals are effective.	The quotations in this category are focused on the interpersonal dimension of the project, which enabled the creation of a community of practice among participants.
	3.2 Sharing ideas and experiences		
	3.3 International networking	During this project, having an international context for reference was very intriguing.	
4. Communication with students	4.1 Teacher–student relationship	I understood that establishing a relationship is the first fundamental step for teaching with migrants. You cannot teach content if you have not developed a relationship. Perhaps I am more tolerant of and more attentive to the different modalities for supporting students.	The quotations in this category are focused on the importance of social interactions with students and their categories, including both migrants and native pupils.
	4.2 Becoming supportive		
	4.3 Intercultural communication	I consider the dialogue between migrants and natives, between guests and hosts. I had confirmation that taking care of the emotional aspect during teaching is important. And, of course, learning is more significant when it is linked to an engaging and fun activity. I visited their homes, I saw their life conditions, I had dinner together with them. We went on a picnic and visited some places. During these events, they tried to talk more, and we tried to understand them more.	
	4.4 Students' emotional dimension		
	4.5 Promoting students' motivation		
	4.6 Communication with families		
5. Professional Development	5.1 Professional development opportunities	It was also interesting to have activities that include the teacher training level and not just school class activities.	The quotations in this category are focused on the development of participants' professional competences as a result of their participation in the project.
	5.2 Improving teachers' competences	Just integrate it; that is, you go to add an attitude, a nuance, a greater sensitivity that you put inside the project, inside your way of teaching. Working in an international context is a difficult but very motivating challenge.	
	5.3 Enhancing teachers' motivation	This project was useful for improving learning methods and teaching techniques for refugee students. Observing and experiencing good examples in European contexts gave me insights into how to change my teaching in the system and in any school class.	
	5.4 Pedagogical change		

Table 1. Cont.

Categories	Codes	Quotations	Explanations
6. Implementation issues	6.1 More exchanges and active collaboration among teachers	As an example, if we had had two or three similar opportunities for meeting, the collaborative and participatory aspects would probably have come out much more.	The quotations in this category address the main issues related to the implementation of the project.
	6.2 More structured approach (objectives, feedbacks, follow-up)	I am not sure that all the interlocutors understood the aim of the result we actually obtained.	
	6.3 More networking between institutions	I would have linked the three design realities. So, it would have been appropriate for us [Italian schools] to function with the regional school office linked with the corresponding regional school office of the local branch of Education, as well as the Italian university world.	
	6.4 Better dissemination	The outputs of the project should be shared with all schools in our city.	

## 8. Discussion

Several important insights appear in the results. As to the first research question (What are the main changes that participants reported in their professional activity as a consequence of their involvement in the project?), participants reported categories such as attitudes, teaching approach, community of practice, communication with students, and professional development. These categories offer an overview of the richness of the experiences that teachers elaborated on during the project and reveal that teachers were fully involved in the activities since the teachers participated in international project meetings and some of these teachers took an active role in developing project modules. These findings contrasted with previous professional development activities addressed to teachers which were perceived challenging [1,5]. Aspects such as conflicting agendas, dispersed teacher collaboration and commitment, and little student and community involvement were avoided because teachers of the current study were supported constantly. In addition, teachers were offered several opportunities to practice new skills during the project that lasted more than two years and provided a continuous support to the teachers during a long period allowing teachers to obtain good results and to achieve mastery [23].

As to the second research question (What are the main changes that participants reported in their ability to promote migrant students' inclusion in school?), teachers recognized the value of the social dimension and the need to establish a positive relationship while working with migrants; these factors emerged in many categories, especially in communication with students and professional development categories. These findings are in agreement with Choi & Lee [2], who reported that professional development in multicultural education promoted a positive school climate. A teacher-centered approach was considered fundamental, and aspects such as the teacher–student relationship, becoming more supportive, and developing intercultural communication were identified as core elements. Teachers regarded it as important to take care of the students' emotional dimension, to promote student motivation, and to communicate with families [3]. The focus on social and emotional dimensions in these findings confirms the key aspects identified by Zhao [13] in working with migrant students, where the emotional sphere is of fundamental importance in assuring positive inclusion in the classroom. In addition, the results provide evidence that learning is closely linked with emotions and that the teacher should be aware of and attend to this complex relationship. Teachers also called for more training opportunities and felt the need to improve emotional aspects such as their empathy with students and motivation [6].

Regarding the third research question (What are the main changes that participants reported in their ability to collaborate with colleagues and professionals from other agencies to promote migrant students' inclusion in school?), participants identified several aspects of teamwork, which are highlighted in the community of practice category. These results are in agreement with Miled [4] who recognized the importance of learning community and

professional development. Working collaboratively, sharing ideas and experiences, and international networking were all cited as crucial elements developed during the project that fostered the teachers' attitudes toward collaborating. The collective dimension of the work helped the development of interpersonal skills that characterize teachers' professional activities. Sharing effective practices, proposing innovative ideas, and defining strategies and approaches were some of the key activities of the collaborative work. In addition, the international nature of the project facilitated this process, allowing participants to develop a sense of community of practice in which teachers could share a variety of best practices and approaches from different countries. Participants developed reasoning and a reflective practice in agreement with Dooly and Villanueva [7] who recognized the importance of developing an awareness of intercultural issues and providing opportunities for critical reflection.

It is important to identify the characteristics of the project that facilitated the professional development process and allowed participants to improve their competencies. First, the program promoted the achievement of professional competences among participants, as required for effective training programs or teachers [16]. Second, the interpersonal dimension was a core aspect, and participants were involved in collaborative tasks, with the possibility of meeting colleagues from other countries to develop new ideas and strategies. This is the educational power of professional communities, where the individual experience is shared and amplified by the collective dimension of the group [20]. Third, the setting in which the project's actions were developed was a friendly working environment with good group dynamics. Sharing the working methodology, discussing the pedagogical approach to be used during the project, and encouraging collaboration among participants were just some of the key aspects in this regard. The focus of the activities was on specific techniques and methodologies rather than on general aspects facilitating the personal involvement of the teachers and the acquisition of skills through meaningfully contextualizing activities [23]. Fourth, teachers had the opportunity to act as a team, receiving constructive feedback from other participants; in addition, they interacted with academic research experts, joining the theoretical and practical dimensions. All partners offered continuous feedback during the project. For instance, participants provided additional activities for modules developed by other colleagues, and all partners shared their working experiences with migrant students during school visits in each country. Moreover, teachers took an active role in realizing the modules. They not only implemented what was given to them; they also worked with the project team to design the final module. Fifth, the collaborative environment facilitated the sense of a community of practice, where participants developed their identities of working as teachers in multicultural contexts.

All these aspects reflect the core elements that Vangrieken et al. [22] recognized for effective professional communities of teachers, where collaboration and mutual respect are fundamental to assuring a positive training experience. It could be argued that the interaction of more factors contributed to the success of this project and that there was a fusion of competencies while working on the tasks. The organization of the project activities was also likely relevant; it was goal-oriented and developed through teamwork. Moreover, designing challenging activities and the nature of the task—the integration of migrants, which is an urgent social imperative—helped motivate the participants, who were keen to work on the tasks and achieve actionable results.

## 9. Limitations and Further Developments

The current study has several limitations, including ecological validity and assessment design. With regard to the former, the results from the participants were grouped even though they came from different countries and cultures. During the analysis, there was no reference to the impact that culture could have on the results or how it could shape different participants' perspectives. In addition, the teachers' disciplines were not distinguished in the analysis. However, the aim of the present study was not to compare participant

responses from different cultures while demonstrating the professional development effects that the participants experienced.

As to the assessment design, the methodology adopted was a post-evaluation design; it was not possible to apply a pre- and post-evaluation design, although that could be considered in future studies. Another issue regarding the evaluation methodology was that it involved only a limited number of participants located in specific areas of Italy and Turkey, which are only small parts of the two countries. In addition, the qualitative methods used in this research did not allow to generalize the findings. However, the results could be used for discussing and comparing methodologies and practices in other contexts and countries. A larger number of participants could be included in a future study to provide stronger validity of the results obtained here. In addition, future research studies should involve more participants from other countries to develop international comparisons.

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## Appendix A

- (1) What were the most stimulating aspects of the international project?
- (2) What were the main aspects of the international project that were useful for you professionally?
- (3) What have you modified in your professional line of work as a result of your participation in the international project?
- (4) How has the international project modified your relational ability to deal with and teach migrant students?
- (5) How has the international project modified your communication ability when teaching in intercultural classes?
- (6) How has the international project modified your professional abilities?
- (7) Do you have criticisms of or suggestions for improving the international project?
- (8) Any other suggestions?

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