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In this study, I explored the perception of school leaders and teachers in a rural middle school in Southern Italy. For my conceptual framework, I pulled on three bodies of scholarship: intercultural education, the overall importance of school leaders, and teachers' attitudes towards immigrant students. I conducted a basic qualitative study using interviews, documents, and field notes as part of my data collection. I was interested in how school leaders and teachers attended to the increase of immigrant students in Italy. This study aimed at answering two significant questions. First, how did school leaders attend to the increase in immigrant students in a rural middle school in Southern Italy? The second question focused on the perceptions of Italian teachers in a rural middle school in Southern Italy on how they supported immigrant students. My findings highlighted how school leaders and teachers attempted to bring an inclusive approach within their middle school. They created an inclusion project as part of the schools' vision, which reflected intercultural education practices. In my findings, I displayed several components that positively contributed to immigrant students' overall experience. I also highlighted factors that hindered the school leaders' and teachers' vision for inclusion. This work contributes to the limited research on immigrant students in Southern Italy.

CON AMORE: EXPLORING HOW ITALIAN SCHOOL LEADERS AND TEACHERS

ACCOMMODATE IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

by

Arianna Di Puorto

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Approved by

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Dr. Silvia Bettez
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DEDICATION

To my brother, Luigi, who showed me how to laugh even in the hardest of times. To my brother Aldo, who showed me how powerful I can be. To my immigrant parents, who followed the American dream to give my brothers and me a better life. To my partner, Danilo, who has supported me and loved me throughout this whole journey.

To my mentor and friend, Tiffanie, who has guided me throughout this program. To the amazing people, I get to call friends who hyped me up and believed in me. To my students, who have taught me that in the face of diversity-hate is easy, but love takes courage. Lastly, to the younger version of myself who didn't give up hope.

APPROVAL PAGE

This Dissertation written by Arianna Di Puorto has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I: "FALLO CON AMORE"

"Fallo con Amore," [Do it with love]; my sixth-grade language teacher in Italy told us students to apply this principle to everything we did in life. My teacher believed that love should be our drive to do anything, or it should not be done at all. I have lived my life trying to reflect love in everything I do. Love is a topic that reappeared many years later in the Cultural Foundations program. In my first year as a cultural foundations scholar, I was introduced to Paulo Freire (1970): his theory promoted love as the essential key to humanization and liberation. The purpose of this study is love — love for others. As an immigrant from Italy in the United States, I felt that I did not belong and suffered from the lack of resources throughout my educational experience. I acknowledged the tremendous research within the United States and the efforts for improvement. I also became aware of the flow of immigrants within Italy and became interested in this phenomenon. I found little research on immigrant students within Southern Italy- this led me to pursue this study. I returned to my hometown to explore the perspectives of school leaders and teachers regarding their how they are attending to immigrant students.

The Italian government mandated different policies throughout the Italian state to better the experiences of immigrant students in Italian schools. I situated my study with a desire to understand "what is" and go beyond "what could be" (Glesne, 2016, p. 10). This framework initiated from my experience as a cultural foundations' scholar. For my framework, I found intercultural education which replicated many ideologies found within critical theory. Essentially, I drew from three different scholarships for my conceptualized framework: intercultural education, the overall importance of school leaders and teachers' attitudes towards immigrant students of which I explained further in my Methodology chapter.

Intercultural education theory results from the growing complex cultural diversity within European society. The Italian government has addressed immigrant educational policies in the past twenty years, a step towards progress. Some educational approaches sound good in theory, such as intercultural education, but teachers often lack the proper resources for them to be successfully implemented (Pasquale, 2015). With an immigrant surge, Italy needs better educational reforms. Nevertheless, the Italian educational literature for immigrant students remains underdeveloped (Azzolini et al., 2019). There continues to be little national concern for the experiences of immigrant students and immigrant families in Italy.

Some scholars fear that with Meloni's recent election, immigrant students have never been more threatened (Sondel-Cedarmas, 2022). Giorgia Meloni is from the far right, Fratelli D'Italia political party. Meloni is the first female elected prime minister in Italy; she intends to restrict the flow of immigration in Italy. Meloni's political agenda promotes a ruthless policy against the immigration of undocumented people; it proposes to block "illegal" immigrants coming by sea by banning the Italian Navy's rescue boats. Meloni and Fratelli D'Italia oppose immigrant citizenship birthright based on "ius soli"- [right of the soil or "birthright citizenship"], emphasizing that "the acquisition of Italian citizenship is not a right but a privilege" (Sondel-Cedarmas,2022, p. 63). They believe citizenship should be granted only to those who know the Italian language and respect the country's laws, culture, and historical and religious traditions (Sondel-Cedarmas, 2022). The results of this election may undo some of the progress made in Italian immigrant education. In recent work, Malusà (2020) offered harsh critiques of Meloni's socio-political climate that is infused with fear of difference, exploited by the new right, which turns Italian natives and immigrants on each other (p.92). The tension stirred by Meloni's political agenda may promote additional problems for immigrant students experience.

Thankfully, at the moment, there seems to be no specific attack on the educational policies or methods accommodating immigrant students.

Over the last two decades, while there has been limited research, some scholars have contributed to research by highlighting the educational inequalities of immigrant students (Battistini & Meroni, 2016; Salza, 2022; Santagati, 2018). Additionally, some authors have found a significant achievement gap between immigrant and native students in Italian Schools (Barban & White, 2011, p.74; MIUR, 2017; Özdemir & Özdemir, 2020; Vlach, 2019). This resulted in the over-representation of immigrants in the vocational school tracks which is explained later in this chapter (Azzolini, 2011; Azzolini et al., 2019; Ballatore et al., 2018; Bonizzoni et al., 2016). Researchers have examined immigrant students' parents' involvement and concluded that income and the country of origin contributed to the students' academic success or failure (Minello & Dalla Zuanna, 2014; Minello & Barban, 2012). There is also existing literature on teachers' and school leaders' roles in immigrant students' academic success and social experience (Agasisti et al., 2020; Biasutti & Concina, 2021). Further research has been conducted on the intercultural approach; some scholars have critiqued it, and others studied its successful implementation (Biasutti et al., 2019; Caponio & Donatiello, 2017; Liddicoat & Díaz, 2008; Pasquale, 2015; Santagati, 2015). However, a gap comes in the research regarding southern Italian schools and the perspectives of teachers and principals in rural areas.

Southern Italian rural areas are often disregarded by the Ministry when it comes to planning and providing resources, yet they also host many immigrant students. Northern city schools have few resources for immigrant students. Smaller urban areas in southern Italy, where there is little to no additional resources, might be detrimental to immigrant students' overall success. My interest in immigrant education policies comes from my experiences as an

immigrant in the United States. However, my circumstances differ from the students I intend to approach. I am interested in learning if and how educators' perceptions of immigrant students in a rural school in southern Italy impacts the overall experience of immigrant students.

Purpose of the Study

I am interested in observing how, if at all, educators in a middle school in Italy attend to the increased number of immigrant students in their school. My study aims to learn the methods of approach for immigrant students and conduct interviews with school leaders and teachers in a middle school serving immigrant students. Liddicoat and Díaz (2008) explain that intercultural education promotes "a constructive cohabitation in a multiform social and cultural fabric... with a target of mutual enrichment" (p. 142). Although this decree (European Economic Community's (EEC), Council Directive 486/1977, [which] was ratified by presidential decree PDR 722/1982, in Article 2) sounds like an invitation to diversity, the existing literature shows that the approach is not being implemented with fidelity in schools (Liddicoat & Díaz, 2008, p. 139). Pasquale (2015) finds that schools are often left to improvise without accurate planning of educational and didactic strategies to support immigrant students (p. 2675). The consequences of this negligence are that immigrant students experience a poor education and face social rejection.

Essentially, the analysis will illuminate the themes that answer Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do school leaders attend to the increase in immigrant students in a rural middle school in Southern Italy? Research Question 2 (RQ2): What are the perceptions of Italian teachers in a rural middle school in Southern Italy on how they are supporting immigrant students? The following sections will provide an overview of the immigrant population in Italy with a brief background of the Italian educational system. Next, a section will be dedicated to the intercultural educational approach and existing literature on immigrant students' experiences in

Italian schools. Lastly, a section will share known literature on the overall experience of immigrant students including the role of teachers and administrators in immigrant students' experiences.

Context

Immigration has increased tremendously throughout Europe; despite the economic crisis, Italy remains one of the primary host countries for immigrants. The latest statistics by Euromed Rights (2022) found that of the 6,263 migrants who disembarked in Italy in just the first three months of 2022, 737 were unaccompanied minors. This influx of immigrants increased the number of children needing educational accommodations. In addition, Italy faces an ever-growing surge of immigrant children, bringing new challenges to the Italian school system.

The Italian School System

Italy is divided into 20 regions which are made up of multiple provinces. Cruz Martins (2019) explains, "The [Italian] state has exclusive competence [or responsibility] for general education matters (e.g., minimum standards, school staff, and recruitment, quality assessment, financial resources)." The state and regions (districts) co-govern most educational decisions. The local authorities such as municipalities (cities) organize education from pre-primary to upper secondary at the local level (e.g., school buildings and their maintenance, student transport, school meals, and other forms of assistance, including childcare services in larger cities) (p. 140). The divided regions of Italy work closely with the Italian state legislation over some sectors of the education system, such as establishing the school year according to location and climate and the distribution of schools within their territory. Through a political reform, the "Bassanini Law 1" in 2000 "allowed all schools to achieve a certain degree of autonomy over the delivery of learning goals and methods, time organization, internal education research, and

development/innovation activities" (Colombo & Desideri, 2019, p. 103-104). Because of European autonomy and governance, the Italian government is one of three European countries where "schools and the central state have the same power to intervene in educational governance" (Cruz Martins, 2019, p. 11).

While Italian schools have some autonomy, "norme generali sull'istruzione" (general instruction) is exclusively reserved for the state of Italy, which guarantees basic levels of expectations nationwide (MIUR, 2018). The Italian educational system begins at three years of age, which is not mandatory. Italian compulsory education starts at 6 with Scuola Primaria or primary school, which funnels into Scuola Secondaria or middle school. At 14, students are placed on different tracks, take written and oral exams in every subject, and all their teachers collectively decide their overall grades. Their determination leads to a five-year general education called Licei or high school, or a five-year technical-oriented education, called Istituti Tecnici, with an additional three-year vocational school, called Istituti di Formazione Professionale. Education post-middle school is encouraged but not mandatory after the age of 16.

In Italy, primary and secondary teachers must obtain a degree which takes five years and includes 600 hours of internship. They will write a thesis and a report on their internship to complete their degree. Additional requirements are needed for secondary-level teaching; middle or high school teachers must obtain a university degree and a period of specialization and training. Like the United States lateral entry program for teachers, Italy has the Tirocinio Formativo Attivo (TFA), an active training internship first implemented in 2010. Universities manage TFA programs and are very competitive — applicants must pass an entrance examination and places are limited (Isac et al., 2019). Teachers in secondary school teach one subject to different class levels (e.g., the same teacher would teach to her students of the first

year, second year and third year of middle school), students are assigned a class, and teachers navigate to classrooms to instruct. School hours may vary from school to school but must fulfill 5 hours of instruction daily. There is a new specialization in the teacher education program which would prepare teachers to teach Italian as a second language (L2), which may be a huge advantage for immigrant educational policies (Chiofalo et al., 2019a). Teacher education in Italian schools has been reformed to be more inclusive; however, existing literature shares that most teachers do not feel prepared for diversity (Santerini, 2010, p. 185). Regardless of how prepared or not Italian teachers are, immigrant students take seats in Italian classrooms across the country.

Immigrant Students in School

In 2011, D'Errico et al. (2011) asserted that 6.4% of all students in Italian schools are immigrant students (p.129). Recent literature has shared that 10% of the overall student population in Italy are immigrant students (Meschi & Pavese, 2023, p.11). The increase of immigrant students prompts Italian schools to reexamine how to welcome immigrant students. Most of the immigrant population, including children born in Italy to immigrant parents, concentrates in north-central Italy, in more competitive economic areas (D'Errico et al., 2011, p.129). More than 11,000 unaccompanied minors live in Italy, of which 92.2% are males aged between 15 and 17. They have experienced dramatic events in their countries of origin, and the school may play an essential role in promoting their social integration (Azzolini et al., 2019, p.702). Unattended minors that have arrived by sea and remained close to their landing [country of origin], as a result, attend schools in southern regions of Italy: Sicilia (5.9%), Molise (5.7%), Sardegna e Basilicata (5.3%) e Campania (4.3%) (Genzone, 2018).

Santagati (2021) explains that Italy's first effort at developing social policies toward immigrants was the Turco-Napolitano Law of 1998, which aimed to ensure certain fundamental rights are granted to all residents (with or without a residency permit), including free education to all minors. Simultaneously, since the 1990s, Italy has adopted an intercultural school integration model for non-Italian students (p.7). Educational inclusion has been incorporated in the legislation, but it has never been implemented in practice leaving universal access to education to be merely an idea (Azzolini et al., 2019).

Challenges Facing Immigrant Students

In Italy, the acquisition of citizenship is a topic that is constantly debated. Distinct from U.S citizenship laws, "Italy's citizenship is still achieved under the old principle of "ius sanguinis" — or the right of citizenship based on being the child of an Italian citizen — instead of "jus soli" in which nationality is conferred to those born in a territory of Italy" (Catarci, 2018. p. 53). A foreigner born in Italy must have legal residency and live uninterrupted in Italy up to the legal adult age of 18 to request citizenship. In contrast, foreigners born abroad must legally reside in Italy for ten years to request citizenship (Azzolini et al., 2019, p. 701). The process for citizenship is a very complex and tedious task for immigrants to face (Mariani et al., 2023). The immigration law is still in need of reformation where citizenship is more accessible to immigrant families residing in Italy.

The schooling of immigrant children has become a national debate along with the overall reception of immigrants in Italy, who tend to concentrate in North-Central Italy where more job opportunities are available (D'Errico et al., 2011, p.129). Different factors come into play with Italy's alarming academic performance gap between immigrant and native-born students (Barban & White, 201, p.74; MIUR, 2017; Triventi et al., 2021; Vlach, 2019). Özdemir and Özdemir

(2020) share that immigrant students in European countries consistently display poor educational outcomes (p. 1). Some scholars have questioned the factors contributing to poor outcomes. For instance, the Italian government and schools are not attentive, leaving immigrant families to face "socioeconomic ... [and] ... other factors such as poor knowledge of the education system, language skills, upward social mobility aspirations, and ethnic segregation and stereotypes" of their own which contribute to the academic performance gap (Bertozzi, 2018, p. 27). Bertozzi brings attention to the many challenges immigrant families endure upon arrival from the beginning. As such, Minello & Dalla Zuanna (2014) support the claim that immigrant parents face language disadvantages and having a lack of knowledge on how to navigate the educational system to better support their children. Other factors influence immigrant students' experiences, such as cultural differences, linguistic barriers, and peer effects. However, scholars Özdemir and Özdemir (2020) emphasize that "Promoting immigrant youths' education may be the most effective policy measure to promote their well-being and successful adaptation into the host society" (p.1). Educators recognize the importance of education for the process of social integration for immigrants.

The Intercultural Approach

Over 5 million immigrants are residing in Italy (Mariani et al., 2023). At least 800,000 are students attending mandatory school (MIUR, 2017, Triventi et al., 2021; Vlach, 2019, p.74). Some scholars have argued when accommodating immigrant students with a variety of languages throughout Europe, assimilation is an easier choice than a bilingual education because "it is almost impossible to paint a uniform portrait of the European approach, given the huge differences between 27 European countries" (Tarozzi, 2012, p. 395). However, the surge of immigrant students throughout Europe has brought an attention for a better educational

approach. The obstacles faced by immigrant children from outside of Europe began to be considered at the policy level in 1989 (CM 301/1989), concerned with their integration into the Italian schooling system (Liddicoat & Diaz, 2008, p. 5). With the immigrant surge throughout Europe, the intercultural education approach emerged from the European Union Council as a response to accommodating immigrant students in schools. The intercultural education shifted from integration from an assimilation ideology towards an acculturation which promoted a respect for the diversity of cultures.

From the language in education policies, the intercultural education approach emerged in the 1990s. The Ministerial circular CM 205/1990 expanded the provisions of Law 39/1990 regarding the education of immigrant children in three themes: administrative, language and culture integration, and intercultural education. There are three key themes of the provisions of Law 39/1990:

- The first theme emphasizes how school leaders and teachers must recognize the student's prior knowledge of any school subject and form a temporary personalized [didactic] program.
- The second theme relates to students' linguistic and cultural "integration" into the Italian classrooms and the teaching of the immigrant students' original language and culture.
- Lastly, the third theme involves introducing "intercultural education" as the pedagogical response to linguistic and cultural diversity within Italy (Liddicoat and Diaz, 2008, p. 6-7).

The Law 39/1990 was crafted to serve the needs of immigrant students and was reformed over the years. Over time, the intercultural education progressed to be an "innovative pedagogical approach reforming the school in general curriculum" (Fiorucci, 2015, p.111). Worldwide,

intercultural education has been defined differently by different authors (see Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006; Biasutti et al., 2019; Contini & Pica-Smith, 2017; Gundara & Portera, 2008; Fiorucci, 2015; Pasquale, 2015; Santagati, 2016); however, interculturalism foundations are centered in every interpretation (Contini & Pica-Smith, 2017). Tarozzi (2012) describes interculturalism "as an approach aimed at improving and facilitating cultural relationships, starting by recognizing diversity, and then promoting dialogue and exchange" (p. 395). Catarci (2018) quotes the Ministry of Education, stating in 2007 that the intercultural approach in the educational context is a "deliberate project to promote dialogue and cultural exchange for all — natives and foreigners alike" (p. 59). Italian educational policymakers and educational authorities believe that interculturalism will bridge the educational needs of immigrants and the internationalization agenda of the EU regarding cooperation on education (Santagati, 2021). Intercultural education is explained further in the Literature Review chapter. In addition, I use intercultural education to inform my conceptual framework which I discuss in my Methodology chapter.

The Influences of Immigrant Students' Experiences

While the number of pupils seems high, "universal access to education does not always translate into equal opportunities, especially in those schools with a high percentage of immigrant students, with insufficient economic resources and a lack of specific training among teachers" (Santagati, 2021, p.13). One of the issues is that the government allocates very few resources to assist teachers and school leaders with meeting the needs of immigrant students. Barberis and Violante (2017) explain that "Local resources and policy networks are unevenly endowed and may lack tools for an effective coping of emerging problems – including segregation" (p.65). The intercultural approach requires a capacity for action by the government

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to prepare the schools to have a plan for immigrant students, the training necessary for teachers, and funding across the whole Italian state.

Education plays a vital role in shaping society and the experiences of individuals who live within it. As such, intercultural education should be anchored to a vision of an intercultural society in which relationships between its members are inspired by the principles of democracy, cultural openness, and social justice (Catarci, 2018). Many obstacles lie within the social context that influences the educational experiences of immigrant students; the work to be done is tremendous. This study is warranted because as Italy is on the cusp of a new, remarkably conservative political regime, educators and policymakers must be ready for changes that may further suppress students. The far-right political views on immigration may threaten Italy's work towards an intercultural education. The Meloni administration believes in preserving Italian culture, language, and traditions. Meloni believes immigrants should learn Italian if they choose to live in Italy. While this does not pose a limitation or obstacle in my study, my concern is for the future of immigrant students' experience in Italian schools.

Methods

As a social justice advocate and a cultural foundations student, my belief is that reality can be changed through research by "unmasking beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice, and democracy" (Glesne, 2016, p. 10). I sought to understand human interaction and addressed the issues of marginalized individuals in my analysis as a call for action and change. For my conceptual framework, I borrowed from three different scholarships: intercultural education, the overall importance of school leaders and teachers' attitudes towards immigrant student. I conducted a basic qualitative research study is on a specific area in Southern Italy. I took a closer look at the experiences of immigrant students, teachers, and leaders in an Italian

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school through relevant documents and interviews. As part of my data collection, I collected 17 interviews with the school leaders and teachers, field notes from the site, and relevant documents for this basic qualitative research study.

Initially, I intended to collect interviews, review documents, and observe teachers and students in the classroom. However, due to some challenges within my university with increasingly long wait periods with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and my time frame for international travel, I moved forward without my initial plans to do classroom observations, which would have been a longer IRB process. Upon IRB approval, I invited the administrator and teachers at a middle school within the province of Caserta, located in Campania in southern Italy, which hosts a small population of immigrant students, to share their experiences on how they are accommodating immigrant students. The middle school is one of two middle schools within the small rural town. With roughly 12,000 residences in this small town, 10% are immigrants (Tuttitalia, 2021). The school is just beginning to see a rise in immigrant students within their schools. The middle school had a well-established connection within the community. Parents were engaged in their children's lives, which promoted a mutual respect among the teachers, school leaders, parents, and students. Immigrant families that lived in Italy for a longer period of time that were familiar with the school system were often involved in the integration of immigrant newcomers. The small town had limited resources; this brought the community to come together often to support each other.

Researcher's Positionality

My positionality mattered significantly here as this was an additional lens through which I framed and analyzed my study. My journey through this program morphed me from a simple educator into an advocate for social justice educator. When I first began teaching as a lateral

entry teacher, I naively trusted the education system as being a way to contribute generously to this world. However, I quickly realized the injustices within the system. I refused to be neutral about the oppression I witnessed against my students. In the classroom, the eyes of immigrant students mirrored the scared little girl I was when I moved to this country. I saw myself in my students as I pushed to find their representation in my lesson plans because I knew what it meant to feel unseen. My teaching experience was full of mistakes, especially with the missing pedagogy part in my education, but no book could have taught how it feels not to belong. I became friends with the scared child I had pushed to the back of my mind to help me better serve my students. While I learned from my experience, I wanted to do more, leading me to the Cultural Foundations program.

The field of cultural foundations challenged me as a human being to truly understand the importance of education and my position as an educator. I became a radical individual dissecting the historical and sociopolitical events that have contributed to institutional oppression in education. Additionally, I was immersed in research through participation, witnessing the suggested work of previous scholars toward a more equitable system. "Our job, then, is to work with and for the oppressed, join social movements as well as help bring them to the fore, and help craft 'radical theory' and return knowledge to assist the social movements that are trying to change the world" (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 252). I have the tools I lacked when I first walked into the education field. I have gained perspectives of reaching beyond what is presented. I have found the connection between myself and the rest of the world, embracing each other with our diversity and unique contributions.

My experience in the United States has shifted my attention toward Italy and its approach to immigrant students. When I think of positionality, I think of who I am and how I am seen. As Bettez (2015) defines positionality:

> Our positionalities–how we see ourselves, how we are perceived by others, and our experiences – influence how we approach knowledge, what we know, and what we believe we know. Thus, positionality is paramount to the production and understanding of knowledge. (p. 935)

What meets the eye can be very deceiving. The color of my skin and how I carry myself do not capture how I see myself. As a white woman, I have had the privilege of navigating through white spaces, yet my label as an immigrant has hindered me in the United States. As an immigrant from Italy, I have faced the challenges of an educational system that does not welcome foreign-born students. As an immigrant child in the United States, I was left without resources and expected to keep pace with my peers.

I sought to understand the Italian educational system and how educators attended to immigrant students. For my study, I decided to return home to Caserta, where I was born, and to the school I attended as a child. I returned to a middle school within the province of Caserta, located in the Campania region, which is among the regions that host the most newcomer immigrant students (Genzone, 2018). I attended one year at the middle school I chose for this study in 2002 when I lived in Italy with my family. It's important that I address the complexity of my positionality as an Italian who once attended the school where I conducted my research.

Moreover, my knowledge of the cultural context of being Italian and living in the United States has felt like a push-pull situation when analyzing the data. I attempted to suspend my biases and listened to the participants of this study to the best of my ability. Being Italian and

speaking Italian contributed to the relationship between my participants. I could relate to my interview participants by sharing parts of my personal story both as a student at the school and as an educator. My personal experience helped me build rapport with my participants as they entrusted me with their experiences, helping me craft this dissertation project.

Significance of the Study

Dotts (2015) cited Harold Rosenberg, "the intellectual is one who turns answers into questions, often shifting the steady ground that we stand upon" (p. 52). As a scholar of social foundations of education, I must ask deeper questions about the social injustices I have witnessed. When I recognize inequity issues, I cannot ignore them. Italy's attempt at more equitable education for immigrant students, which would help them transition into their new country, caught my attention. Tarozzi (2012) asserted:

> School and public education is one of the public spheres where a fundamental challenge
> to immigrant integration arises. Everywhere across Europe, governments assign schools
> the work to accomplish that social goal, which other parts of the society ignore.
> Moreover, schools are required to rethink their organizational structures and their
> curriculum to face an increasing number of immigrant students. (p. 394)

In other words, the school becomes a vital aspect for the integration of immigrant children in their new society. The importance of this study is to take a deeper look at the factors in place that neglect the genuine potential of immigrant students. I will examine one school's approach to immigrant students' academic and social experiences. Nationally, the topic of readdressing the educational support for immigrant students has not been addressed. However, existing literature within Italian schools can be a model of emerging and evolving intercultural practices.

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This study is critical to contribute to the literature on immigrant students in Italian schools. Specifically, this study adds to the literature on Italian educators' perceptions of immigrant students. Furthermore, the significance of this study will be in showing whether Italian educators in southern Italian schools contribute to the practice of progression or digression of an inclusive educational approach. Finally, in the conclusion of this study, this specific middle school poses as a model for other Italian schools in approaching the rise of immigrant students in Italy.

Conclusion

Despite the political tension within Europe at this time, my ideal timeline was not impacted. Without complications from the current war tension between Russia and other European countries, I connected with the school leader at the beginning of the fall semester of 2022. Using the connections of family and friends in southern Italy, I requested to use the middle school as my study site. After IRB approval, I traveled to Italy, where I collected data at the middle school in the fall of 2022 (October-November). I spent seven days at the middle school. I spent four hours every day for seven days. In addition, I spent time exploring the school, interviewing participants, collecting relevant documents, and writing field notes of my time there. After my time at the school, I began getting familiar with the data. Upon returning to the United States, I began my coding process and data analysis. Then began my interpretation; I eventually concluded my study in the Summer of 2023.

This dissertation is organized into five chapters: Chapter I: Introduction; Chapter II: Literature Review; Chapter III: Methodology; Chapter IV: Findings; and Chapter V: Discussion and Implications for further study. In this introductory chapter, I have explained the purpose of the study and the research questions and design. I also included the timeline of my research plan.

In Chapter II: Literature Review, I introduced the existing literature on the Italian educational system and the practices in place for immigrant students. Additionally, I included information about the influences teachers and administrators have on immigrant students' academic and social experiences. Finally, summarized the existing research that shares perspectives on the intercultural model. Following the literature review, Chapter III discussed the methodology used for this research. I included my framework and explained how I found the answers to my research questions. Next, I briefly explained how I analyzed my data. In the final chapters, I critically analyzed the data collected and then brought the key themes that emerged from coding my data into the Findings, a reflection on my Findings, and a Conclusion of this study and its Limitations.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the introduction chapter, I provided context about the politics in Italy that influenced this study. I provided some information about the current Italian political agenda, the citizenship status of immigrant students, and an overview of the educational system and the educational policies meant for immigrant students. The context is vital for this study; in this chapter I reviewed the literature covering the history, statistics, policies, principals' and teachers' perceptions, and the overall experience of immigrant students. I identified the gaps that inform this study. This chapter reviewed the literature on the factors influencing immigrant students' experiences in Italian schools. The factors included language education policies, the role of teachers and principals, the importance of peer relationships, and persistent challenges; I also looked at methods for improvement. From the language in education policies, a section focused on the intercultural education approach and the factors critical for successful implementation.

I intentionally drew exclusively on the existing literature in Italy and Europe to avoid misinterpreting the cultural context with the exception of some international literature. By drawing only on Italian literature, there were many gaps and limited research regarding immigrant students' experiences in southern Italy. Different factors influenced the experiences of immigrant students, their arrival into their host country, their country of origin, their parental involvement in their academics, teachers' and peers' perceptions of them, and educational attainment. Azzolini & Barone (2013) found education vital as a means of human capital, resulting in job opportunities and social integration. The attendance of immigrant children in Italian schools brought different challenges to school leaders, and teachers as to how to accommodate the incoming immigrant children without the resources.

Immigrant Students in Italian Schools

As stated in the previous chapter, Italy is divided into 20 regions which are made up of multiple provinces. Each sector, including the state, the region, and the local, is given exclusive matters overseeing the educational system. The Italian state coordinates the overall standards, assessments, and finances, and regional authorities work with the Italian state for most educational decisions. Building maintenance, student transport, school meals, and other forms of assistance are left up to local authorities (Cruz Martins, 2019, p. 140). Schools gained some autonomy through the "Bassanini Law" in 2000, which allowed flexibility over "academic approach, research, and initiatives" (Colombo & Desideri, 2019, p. 103-104). Italian compulsory education starts at age six with Scuola Primaria or primary school, which funnels into Scuola Secondaria or middle school where students are placed on different tracks which leads to Licei [high school] that typically leads to a university or Istituti Tecnici [technical-oriented education] with an additional vocational school, called Istituti di Formazione Professionale [professional institute]. However, education post-middle school is encouraged but not mandatory after the age of 16, which leaves students and parents to make responsible decisions. As the number of immigrant students increases in Italian classrooms, Italian educators attempt to find ways to accommodate them.

Immigrant students are dispersed throughout Italy, including in small rural schools. Immigrant students are 9.4% of the overall student population in Italian schools; per jus sanguinis law, this includes children born in Italy from immigrant parents. Campania is among the top three most populated regions in southern Italy, with 232.214 immigrants out of the 924.414 inhabitants (Comuni e Cittá, 2020). Caserta has 689 early childhood education schools (scuole dell'infanzia) 405 primary (scuole elementari) and 139 middle (scuole medie) and 136

high school (scuole superiori). Caserta is a large province; for this study, I researched one middle school in Caserta.

Over the past three decades, Italy has become the new home to many immigrants from neighboring countries. Ceccoli (2022) shares that "there are 5,013,215 foreign nationals legally residing in Italy, which is equivalent to about 8% of the entire population"; large groups come from "Romania (22.9%), Albania (8.5%), Morocco (8.1%), China 5.7%, and Ukraine 4.6%" out of the total number of foreign residents (p. 2). The number of Ukrainian immigrants has increased from the recent conflict with Russia, which means that "53,600 Ukrainians, including 27,000 women and 21,600 children, have come to Italy so far following Russia's invasion of their country on Feb. 24" (Amante, 2022, para. 1). One key element of this influx of immigrants from Ukraine is that the European Union has mapped out relief plans for Ukrainian refugees, which Italy follows. Specifically, the Italian government has laid out the following plan for Ukrainian refugees:

> The government encourages peer education and peer-to-peer sharing of best practices among teachers and schools, as well as using bilingual or mother-tongue learning material. The MOE (Ministry of Education (Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione-MPI) is allocating a €1 million financial package to affected schools providing bilingual learning materials, linguistic and cultural mediation and psychological support. (UNESCO, 2022, para. 46)

The above statement indicates that Italy, as part of the European Union, has the desire to support students through the infusion of funds and their emphasis that instruction for Ukrainian refugees be culturally appropriate and accommodating, as well as emotionally supportive. The European Union has executed a mandated plan for the arrival of Ukrainian refugees, as they did

for Syrian refugees back in 2014, with the five-year integration plan (Vander Boon, 2016, p. 10). The issue with the plans issued by the Ministry of Education is the absence of accountability.

The Italian government is in need for more immigrant law reforms which is a topic of debate in public opinion. In March 2022, the immigrant citizenship law was reformed, allowing children born in Italy from immigrant parents can now claim citizenship at the age of eighteen. The new law is very complex making citizenship hard to acquire (Testore, 2022). Prior to the latest reform, children born in Italy to immigrant parents are labeled as immigrant. As previously explained in the context, the old "ius sanguinis" [right of blood] principle is among the challenges immigrant students face (Catarci, 2018. p. 53). Although immigrant students are granted access to education, they face obstacles that limit the level of education they pursue. Regardless of the recent reform, Italian citizenship awaits national political reforms which give better access to immigrant families to claim their birthright citizenship and better educational accommodations. For context, it is essential to understand that immigrants include both first-generation individuals born outside of Italy, and the second generation which are the children of immigrant parents born in Italy. Therefore, the literature refers to any student labeled immigrant. Whether newly arriving in Italy or growing up in Italy, enrollment of immigrant students in Italian schools continues to rise. However, the educational methods have remained the same, showing how Italian schools fail to face the different cultures and languages at their door though they claim they have.

Immigrant Educational Policies

With a tremendous increase of immigrants throughout Europe, Italy is one of the primary host countries for immigrants despite the economic crisis. The first approach to immigrant children's education was Directive 486/1977, to provide education for the children of immigrant

workers from European states; in 1986, Law 934/1986 extended to immigrant children from outside of Europe (Liddicoat & Diaz, 2008, p. 3). However, pedagogical guidance was not provided for teachers of immigrant students. Researchers have examined Italian immigrant educational policies and critiqued the methods of approach (Barberis & Violante, 2017; Barberis & White, 2011; Bonizzoni et al., 2016; Catarci, 2018; Fiorucci, 2015; Liddicoat & Diaz, 2008; Richter, 2022). The attempt for school integration may have sounded like an inclusion effort; however, the academic performance gap and the overall experience of immigrant students raised national concerns.

The Intercultural Approach

In the previous chapter, intercultural education is explained on how it entered the sphere of educational support for immigrant students which would encourage diversity and inclusion. In the section, the existing literature on intercultural education's progress and concerns will be shared. Researchers share factors that contribute to the failures of the approach, which indicates the need for effective ways to create educational opportunities and outcomes for immigrant students (Barberis & Violante, 2017; Bonizzoni et al., 2016; Santagati, 2021). There is yet much confusion among educators on defining intercultural education (Pasquale, 2015, p. 2675). Intercultural education is spread throughout European countries, yet the process becomes more of a suggestion than an applied method. In Italy, intercultural education was intended to be used by all schools, whether immigrant children attended them or not. Liddicoat and Díaz (2008) explain:

> Intercultural education confirms that the meaning of democracy considered as 'diversità culturale' is to be thought of as a positive resource for the complex processes of social and personal growth... It involves not only respect for diversity, but also the recognition

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of one's cultural identity in the daily pursuit of dialogue, understanding and collaboration

with a target of mutual enrichment. (Liddicoat & Díaz, 2008, p. 142)

This educational approach uses the language of inclusivity and a method of embracing cultural

diversity as a positive resource for all students. Scholars traced the first references to

interculturalism from the Council of Europe and a Belgian origin in 1981. Outside of the

European context, interculturalism surfaced in 1985 in Québec and in the 1980s in Latin

America, born from an Indigenous People's Rights Movement (Pica-Smith et al., 2019). The

idea of interculturalism was a political initiative to accommodate the rising population of diverse

cultures. The interculturalism made it's way into an education approach in Europe as the

immigration population skyrocketed.

Intercultural education differs from multicultural education. Multicultural education

promotes passive acceptance while intercultural education seeks to achieve a mutual respect and

dialogue among all cultural groups (Holm & Zilliacus, 2009). Interculturalism differs from

multiculturalism viewpoints: in multicultural education- "cultures [are] understood...like the

atmosphere that surrounds living beings and allows them to breathe," while in intercultural

education- "cultures do not have to be understood like armor that prevents growth."

Interculturalism is a "dynamic investigation of cultures" where the learner suspends their cultural

starting point and engages creatively with culture (Liddicoat & Díaz, 2008, p.10). Therefore,

intercultural education is a task that requires all participants involved to commit to.

The Italian government has attempted to address the issues immigrant students face

academically and socially using educational policies within the European government through an

"intercultural education" approach, which has evolved into its latest form (Love & Varghese,

2012, p. 10). In 2006 the Ministry of Education stated: "Intercultural education rejects the logic

of assimilation and the construction and reinforcement of closed ethnic communities and is oriented to favour [*sic*] comparison, dialogue, reciprocal enrichment within the coexistence of differences" (Liddicoat & Diaz, 2008, p.14). An interesting factor about the intercultural education approach is that it develops a perspective of looking at immigrant students as resources rather than a problem. Students are reciprocating and exchanging cultural diversity rather than being passively tolerated.

In Italy, intercultural education was intended to be used by all schools to prepare school leaders and teachers to accommodate their growing society; this included a language of inclusivity and a method of embracing cultural diversity as a positive resource for all students. Ventura (2012) describes the intercultural approach, as a "promotion of dialogue between cultures for all students and on all levels" (p. 554). Interculturalism stresses the dynamic nature of cultures to develop a new shared culture through dialogue and mutual respect (Liddicoat & Díaz, 2008; Santagati, 2021). The intercultural education approach was crafted to promote better education for immigrant students and to provide native students with fluency in other cultures and languages.

The Overall Experiences of Immigrant Students

The variety of languages from the diverse immigrant surge has become problematic for educators to accommodate. The language in education policies for immigrant students has reformed the intercultural approach over the years, but Italian schools fail to provide equitable outcomes without the necessary resources. Some scholars have proposed different ways to approach immigrant students' integration and inclusion in schools. The existing literature on the educational failures in Italian schools indicates the need for effective ways to create immigrant students' educational opportunities. The language in education policy (Law 39/1990) provides a

personalized didactic plan for all immigrant students upon arrival (Liddicoat & Diaz, 2008). Immigrant students are expected to achieve the same level of competence as their Italian peers to meet the Italian state's standards (Minello & Barban, 2012). However, without language support in the classroom, immigrant students face vast disadvantages compared to their peers.

    Italy is among the countries in Europe with the most alarming academic performance gap between immigrant and native-born students (Barban & White, 201, p.74; MIUR, 2017; Vlach, 2019). Different factors can influence the performance gap, such as socioeconomic status, poor knowledge of the education system, limited language skills, aspirations, and ethnic segregation (Bertozzi, 2018, p. 27). Additionally, researchers found that low school attendance of immigrant students is among the negative factors contributing to immigrant students' poor educational outcomes (Strozza, 2008), leading to high dropout rates (Bianchi et al., 2021a) and significant performance gaps. The reformation process must be continuous as Italy continues to be among the top countries in Europe hosting new immigrants (Zincone, 2000). Italian educators genuinely invest in interculturalism as a bridge of mutual enrichment among immigrant and native students (Santagati, 2021, p. 7). However, without the proper tools to promote the approach, it "has turned out to be ambiguous when translated into practice" (Azzolini et al., 2019, p. 705). Love and Varghese (2012) share:

        The Italian official migrant language education policy does not require that schools teach such languages of immigrant origin but instead allows them to implement such a policy if the individual school takes the initiative. Therefore, there is unlikely to be a nation-wide, coordinated campaign for bilingual and biliteracy education for children from [an] immigrant origin in languages that reflect their own heritage and community. (p. 11)

With the school autonomy, school leaders are left to interpret the intercultural education leaving the mutually enriching dialogue simply words on paper. Moreover, schools cannot take the blame for the lack of resources from the government.

The Factors Needed for Improvement

Different factors come into play with Italy's alarming educational disparities between immigrant and native-born students (Barban & White, 201, p.74; MIUR, 2017; Vlach, 2019). Scholars have found that immigrant students in European countries consistently display poor educational outcomes (Özdemir & Özdemir, 2020, p. 1). Other scholars have examined the factors influencing adverse academic and social outcomes (Azzolini et al., 2019; Bertozzi, 2018, p. 27; Minello & Dalla Zuanna, 2014;). One contributing factor is that the government has little accountability in providing schools to serve immigrant students better. Tarozzi (2012) states that the intercultural model lacks credibility as a practical approach; some scholars have found that with resilience, the intercultural approach can be a successful practice (Biasutti et al., 2019; Pasquale, 2015;). By recognizing the obstacles, scholars can suggest solutions. Azzolini et al., (2019) address the problems that impede educational inclusion, such as an ineffective implementation framework. There was also a lack of systematic monitoring, a lack of coordination at the national level, and the dismissal of human needs. Although, due to the lack of resources, the Italian government has left schools to interpret the intercultural approach at their own discretion. The "Bassanini" Law (Presidential Decree 275/1999) declared school establishments have autonomy, leaving school leaders to find innovative ways to provide the necessary means for students' success (Colombo & Desideri, 2019, p. 4, Pirola 2015, p. 90). The government's lack of support in providing resources leaves schools to push for an integration that resembles more assimilation or a forced acculturation instead of an integration that reflects

inclusion. As diverse immigrant children enter classrooms, native-born students still dominate culturally, leaving little room for incorporating diversity. Santagati (2021) asserts that, without the resources, the intercultural model has represented more of an aspiration than a fact.

Methods to ensure accountability from the government seems to be a missing piece in Italian research. The Ministry for Education, Research, and Universities (MIUR) formed a group known as the "National Observatory for the Integration of foreign students and Interculturalism"(Caneva, 2014). The group created a plan that required immigrants to learn the Italian language, familiarize themselves with the Italian constitution, navigate civic culture (the health system, educational system, and taxes), and engage in mandatory education for children up to 16 years old (Caneva, 2014, p. 12). However, the accountability seemed to be shifted to immigrant individuals, but the educational policymakers and leaders cannot ignore the necessary actions needed to be taken on their part. With Meloni's recent election and conservative political views, the responsibility might be placed more on immigrant students and families to assimilate into the Italian community (Sondel-Cedarmas, 2022). In order to provide the necessary means for immigrants to be successful in schools, the government must invest in teaching training, intercultural mediators, linguistic facilitators, and additional funding to support literacy programs to help immigrant students. If the government does not make the necessary changes to support immigrant students, schools will be limited in providing them with the tools needed to succeed in Italian society.

Linguistic Support. Among the necessary tools to support immigrant students, European countries have brought the figure of the intercultural mediator into schools to help (Catarci, 2016). Intercultural mediators and better teacher preparation may be the answer to the failure of language education policies, but the existing literature shows insufficient efforts in execution.

Although the Italian government has written procedures for integration, the lack of resources has caused many administrators to dismiss the suggested approach for immigrant children. The hiring process for teachers comes from the State, which gives the Italian State the power to decide whether they believe a school needs additional personnel. The demand for intercultural mediators in Italian schools arises. Chifalo et al., (2019) explain the role of an intercultural mediator as "an interpreter that facilitates relations between the different segments of the educational community and promotes reciprocal understanding" (p.4). The intercultural mediator plays a vital role in immigrant students' experience in language support and in promoting a cultural diversity understanding. Chifalo et al., (2019) emphasizes that the intercultural mediator becomes "part of the microsystem of schools" (p. 4). Although there is limited literature on the effectiveness of intercultural mediators, their assistance may be the solution educators need to provide an inclusive education (Catarci, 2016; Chifalo et al., 2019; Baraldi & Rossi, 2011; Sani, 2015). In guiding an effective intercultural education, the role of the mediator appears to be more of a requirement rather than just a suggestion.

Catarci (2016) referenced Margalit Cohen-Emerique (1994), intercultural mediators must provide intervention in three different ways. The mediator must act as an "intermediary" to facilitate communication among people of different cultures. Secondly, they must find a "conflict resolution" for values to help immigrant families navigate their new society. Moreover, lastly, the mediator must participate in the "creation " process for social transformation (Catarci, 2016, p. 129). Rather than simply providing language support, an intercultural mediator may provide the guidance immigrant students and families need. Scholars have argued that with the intercultural mediator, the intercultural education approach can be successfully enacted (Catarci,

2016; Chifalo et al., 2019; Sani, 2015). To implement intercultural education there is a task that is more complicated than defined. Tarozzi (2012) critiques this approach:

> Intercultural education fulfills its scope when the equal value and equal dignity of every culture is recognised [*sic]* at least theoretically, when teachers teach that no culture is superior to another. But there is another equality to be accomplished within a democratic society: the one that guarantees to all the cultures the same rights. In other words, a concept of justice as equity. For these reasons some scholars have come to the conclusion that the intercultural model is, by its own nature, inapplicable to reality; ideally it tends to cultural harmony, but abstractly and is not convertible into real (political) practices or social action. (p. 400)

The argument Tarozzi makes on the intercultural education approach has proven to be true in practice. The desire for equality is present, but the obstacles seem to prevent it in reality. The help of an intercultural mediator has shown to be a significant help not only for teachers but for students and families. Sani (2015) states that the intercultural mediator can "promote intercultural dialogue in schools and be the basis for a positive relationship with teachers and natives classmates" (p. 2583). Existing literature shows the benefits of intercultural mediators, but their presence in Italian schools is still lacking (Catarci, 2016; Carrión-Martínez et al., 2021; Richter, 2022; Rus, 2006; Vezzali et al., 2019). Another suggested attempt to enrich the immigrant students' experience is creating programs incorporating a sense of community.

Another figure that has been discussed as an important figure for immigrant students is the linguistic facilitator which differs from the intercultural mediators. The intercultural mediators help the students with the social integration and bridges the dialogue for immigrant students and their families in their new home. Intercultural mediators speak the language of

origin of the students they are serving. On the contrary, the linguistic facilitator is a special

education teacher which is trained in L2-teaching the Italian language as a second language to

newly arrived immigrant students. However, the two figures are not seen as different nationally

which is why often they are interchangeable (Favaro, 2002). To clarify the difference,

> Il mediatore linguistico e culturale è quindi spesso un madrelingua straniero già inserito
>
> in Italia (o un italiano con una adeguata conoscenza di una delle lingue e culture di
>
> "migrazione") e che, a differenza del facilitatore linguistico, non necessariamente dispone
>
> di una formazione glottodidattica e pedagogica.
>
> [The linguistic and intercultural mediator is more often a foreign mother-tongue who is
>
> already integrated in Italy, which differs from the linguistic facilitator because the
>
> mediator does not have foreign language pedagogical preparation.] (Caon, 2008)

Both the linguistic facilitator and the intercultural mediator can better support immigrant

students. However, studies show there needs to be a clearer separation between the two figures.

The linguistic facilitator is a specialized educator who obtains a pedagogical preparation to work

with immigrants and teach Italian as a second language, while the linguistic/intercultural

mediator serves as an interpreter and translator and can help immigrant students and their

families understand cultural differences. In Italy, there is more use of intercultural mediators due

to the scarce number of professional linguistic facilitators. Linguistic facilitators must obtain

additional training and courses. Linguistic facilitators can be compared to English Language

Learners teachers in the United States who have teacher education in the field to properly work

with teaching the country's native language to immigrant children.

Social Programs. School-directed programs may ease the process for immigrant children

and their families. Implementing inclusive programs implies social inclusion while establishing

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peer relationships, academic achievement, and a sense of community. Some communities assist newcomers, but little help is available to immigrants in schools. Establishing programs that work directly with the children at their school creates connections between teachers, administrators, and students, positively affecting the immigrant child. An example of such a program is the Italian Ministry of Education's 'Equality of Opportunity for Immigrant Students' (EOP) program, aimed at aligning the goals and aspirations of high-achieving immigrant students with their ability to make congruous educational choices at the end of middle school" (Carlana et al., 2022, p.8). Similar programs that support immigrant children's integration can lead to equitable future opportunities in their new homes.

The intercultural model in schools is limited when the cooperation ends at the school. Gabrielli & Impicciatore (2021) state that "mentoring programs that provide positive role models and cooperative learning" can improve equality of educational opportunity for immigrant students, "as well as extra-scholastic activities that support social interactions between students and parents with different ethnic backgrounds" (p. 12). With limited examples within Italy, schools can utilize existing school integration programs and approaches suggested by educators outside of Italy, which can help provide the proper resources for the integration process of immigrant students. As Grilli & Terrusi (2014) point out, "Many interventions meant to promote integration and intercultural exchanges have been developed over the last decades, but their complexity arises because they must accommodate pupils from over 200 countries, which is no easy task" (p. 219). The linguistic challenges cannot be solemnly left up to teachers and school leaders to face. The teachers and administrators need additional support in creating a school as a bridge for their integration into their new world. As explained in this section, language support

and social programs are factors needed for improvement; in the next section, scholars explore the key for improvement.

A Collaborative Effort

Interculturalism involves participation from all: native and immigrant students, families, educators, and policymakers, requiring a critical self-reflection to break down the barriers that encourage inequalities. Collaboration is needed to increase the possibilities of intervention together to integrate and value the presence of immigrants as an opportunity to improve the school and think in innovative ways (Grilli & Terrusi, 2014, p. 220). Barberis and Violante (2017) explains:

> With a weak national attention to immigrant policy, problems are mostly dumped on single schools, making national goals hard to achieve without adequate support and shared practices. An ideal-type comprehensive educational system is on the ropes in a retrenchment era that jeopardizes the agency of school institutions, which are given responsibilities but limited resources, skills, and governance networks to deal with them. (p. 62)

With the national level leaving the responsibility to the local schools, immigrant students suffer the consequences of linguistic and cultural disadvantages. The responsibility becomes a collective matter to address as teachers, principals, parents, and peers contribute to the overall success of immigrant students.

Principals. Over twenty years ago, principals in Italy became accountable for the success of their students. The Education Act of 2013 introduced a system to be hold schools accountable for developing "the learning outcomes that students need to achieve"; "the principal being held responsible for what students achieve"; and the "establishment of a transparent reporting system"

(Paletta & Bezzina, 2016, p. 525). Therefore, when it comes to promoting an inclusive school environment the principal is vital. The role of principals in promoting an inclusive practice for the integration of immigrant students, a few studies suggest the importance of their role (see Agasisti et al., 2020; Barnett & McCormick, 2002; Barker, 2001; Devos & Bouckenooghe, 2009; Fernandez, 2000; Halawah, 2005). Strong principals may influence school climates which is a key factor to an effective school.

Scholars find that principals can influence institutional decisions that support and sustain inclusive perspectives in teaching (Biassutti & Concina, 2021, p. 989). One of the issues is that the government allocates very few resources to assist teachers and school leaders with meeting the needs of teaching immigrant. Barberis and Violante (2017) explain that "local resources and policy networks are unevenly endowed and may lack tools for an effective coping with emerging problems" (p.65). "Given this lack of personnel and financial autonomy, it is inferred that the effective school is one where the principal assumes the role of guiding the school improvement process, retaining high expectations for student learning" (Paletta & Bezzina, 2016, p. 526). The Ministry of Education needs a more organized plan of action to prepare the schools to accommodate immigrant students. Further, Bianchi et al, (2021a) find that immigrant students' school attendance reduces with their age: "School dropout rates increase with age, with a higher prevalence in late adolescence, it can be considered the outcome of a long process that starts during the earliest years of school" (p. 2). Immigrant students need to feel included in their new home country, especially at school, surrounded by peers.

While school leaders are held accountable they don't have much autonomy when it comes to shaping their school. Paletta & Bezzina (2016) explain:

Italian schools do not have any control over the employment of staff, have no control

over funding arrangements and budgeting, and have limited discretion on school

organization and curriculum development. In particular, the school principals do not have

any control on the recruitment and selection of teachers, their professional development,

career progression, evaluation, and salary incentives. (Paletta & Bezzina, 2016, p. 525)

This is a challenging task for leaders, which is why the strong leadership skills are so important.

The school leader matters when it comes to promoting an effective inclusive environment for

immigrant students. "In order to be a successful leader in an intercultural environment one needs

to have a certain level of meta-cognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral intercultural

competence" (Seiler, 2007, p. 5). A principal cannot be neutral person nor a manager. Ramsey

(2005) argues the difference between principals being managers or leaders. They state:

Leaders, on the other hand, energize and excite the organization and the people in it by

showing what it can become. Leaders deal with visions, dreams, and possibilities. They

shape the organization, involve others in creating its future, and model ways to make it

happen. (p. 20)

In order to promote an inclusive environment, the school leader must believe in the vision and

obtain the skills to promote one. If capable, a school leader can influence the school climate to

welcome immigrant students.

Peers. Building relationships within the classroom can open immigrant children to

different opportunities while giving native students and teachers intercultural awareness.

Relationships must be holistically built rather than an obligated integration. Immigrant children

find a sense of belonging in creating relationships, influencing their identity, self-esteem, and

overall academic experience. Contini (2013) explains:

School achievement is likely to be influenced not only by individuals' characteristics but, as individuals interact, also by the achievement and behavioral patterns of peers: within-children and children-teacher interactions may affect attitudes toward learning, class climate, teachers' pedagogical style, and effort and learning targets. Understanding how peer effects function is crucial to analyzing various educational policies. (p. 1123)

Studies suggest peer effects can positively impact immigrant students' academic and social success, while negative interactions can be detrimental. In 2010, MIUR issued a new regulation setting a cap of a maximum of 30% of foreign students in each class. This decision was justified as "preventing implicit intra-school segregation policies and promoting a good level of integration and intercultural dialogue" (Azzolini et al., 2019, p. 705). Previous authors have agreed that relationships between immigrant students and their peers are the foundation for integrating immigrant children (Bianchi et al., 2021b; Dusi et al., 2014; Hjerm, 2001). Further, Meschi and Pavese (2023) found "that peer effects are stronger within groups: natives exert a greater influence on native students and immigrant students on other immigrants" (p.4).

Scholars have also brought caution to the prejudices and bullying immigrant students have faced from their native peers (Bianchi et al., 2021b; Caravita et al., 2020; Malúsa, 2020). Many factors influence and differ among immigrant students being bullied in the absence of adequate social support (Bianchi et al., 2021b, p. 1015). According to Alivernini et al., (2019), for "immigrant students in particular, it is crucial to establish positive relationships at school, in order for them to be well integrated into a new society" (p. 226). Among the factors contributing to the tension between peers is how schools accommodate the needs of immigrant students. Although, the government's protocol for the accommodation and inclusion of immigrant students implies that school leaders must take into consideration the immigrant students' grade level.

There is a common tendency for school leaders across the state to demote immigrant newcomer students to a grade lower than their age group as a means to "help" them linguistically. While not a mandated practice, many schools choose this deficit practice due to the lack of resources and proper preparation to work with immigrant students.

Nonetheless, the practice of integration without inclusion is spread throughout Italian schools due to the lack of financial and human resources sufficient to address language proficiency and the proper method for the inclusion of immigrant students (Azzolini et al., 2019, p. 703). Immigrant children are more likely to achieve social integration, language acquisition, and academic success through creating relationships among their peers. By being socially accepted, immigrant students may change their attitudes toward learning. The key factor for peer relationships is the role of the teacher. Therefore, the teachers' attitudes and perceptions are important to immigrant students' experiences within the classroom.

Teachers. Research (Biasutti et al., 2019; D'Errico et al., 2011; Santerini, 2010) shows that to build relationships between immigrant students and native peers, the teacher is important in promoting interaction and encouraging communication. Teachers must be adequately trained to work with immigrant students pedagogically and culturally. When a teacher accepts the student and includes the immigrant student, the whole class acknowledges their presence. The teacher, as well, plays a vital role in social inclusion. The classroom becomes an opportunity for all students; immigrant students are integrated with their native peers with the teacher's guidance. Dusi et al., (2014) states "Communication in the peer group is also one of the most effective mediators to learning a new language" (p. 1397). Therefore, there is a need for integration and inclusion, which requires communication, but the linguistic barrier impedes communication. Regarding integration, native and immigrant students must create a connection within the

classroom (Minello & Barban, 2012, p. 100). Intercultural education promotes social inclusion and can help students to create strong relationships with their peers, creating future opportunities.

Teachers in the classroom must promote social inclusion within the school by creating an inclusive pedagogy. "Within the context of Italian schools, fostering a sense of belonging remains an important challenge for teachers" (Dusi et al., 2014, p.1400). Additionally, teachers may influence peers to interact with immigrant students, opening a culturally diverse experience which is why their perspectives are vital to their experience (Chiofalo et al., 2019b). Pourdavood & Yan (2020) find that "teachers' perceptions and attitudes influence their expectations and treatment of the learners, which may directly impact students and cause them to exhibit either positive or negative attitudes or behaviors" (p.116). Scholars have looked into Italian teachers' attitudes toward immigrant students and found that school leaders encourage teachers to use the presence of newcomers to encourage the rest of the class to "reflect on the themes of diversity" (Chiofalo et al., 2019b, p. 10). However, literature also has critiqued the Italian teacher preparation is in need of revision (Mincu, 2018). Some effective in-service teacher trainings have proven the possibilities of improvement (Profanter, 2017, Santerini, 2010). The learning environment created is essential to immigrant students' experiences because, based on their experience, their development outcomes may vary.

Scholars have found that teachers' perspectives have influenced the academic outcomes of immigrants, which steered them toward specific academic tracks (Alesina et al., 2018; Mona et al., 2021; Pace et al., 2022). Since the 1960s, teachers collectively have provided non-binding recommendations to students regarding school choices after middle school (Bonizzoni et al., 2016, p. 5). Ventura (2012) shares, "Immigrant students are more often directed toward vocational schools by middle school teachers than Italian students due to difficulties in speaking,

reading, and writing Italian" (p. 555). As a result, immigrant students have a low college attendance rate since college admission requirements are five years of secondary school education, requiring vocational students to obtain an additional two years to be eligible. As a result, immigrant children are more at risk of dropping out of school and settling for lower-paying jobs. Scholars have found that teachers tend to guide students toward vocational school tracks based on their biases (Bonizzoni et al., 2016). Teachers' prejudiced perceptions of immigrant students are detrimental to the students' success.

Teacher education training experiences must be supported with the proper tools and guidelines to encourage multi-ethnic classrooms (Biassuti et al., 2020, p. 117). The need for inclusion is too complex for schools to face independently, and teachers have expressed that they do not feel prepared to face diversity (Santerini, 2010). Teachers must examine their "self" and culture and biases to invite an intercultural approach in the classroom (Biasutti et al., 2019). Santerini (2010) shared a study where teachers' intercultural competence was identified via survey and suggested further training and research are needed to better prepare teachers.

Teachers may not have the means to work with immigrant students, which makes the push for inclusion a burden for the teacher. The teacher may not be able to linguistically support the student, which will lead to the exclusion of the student within the classroom. Finding effective ways of teaching all students sounds simple on paper but requires much more assistance that is out of reach for classroom teachers. Tarozzi (2012) asserts that teachers do not seem to have a clear, shared frame of reference for promoting integration and fostering intercultural activities (p. 398). As a result, the policy is unclear for teachers to follow. Therefore, teachers are left without the proper teacher education training to work with immigrant students and without

the guidelines for pedagogical practice, making this vision for inclusion unattainable. Teachers in distress turn to school leaders for help navigating these new waters.

Scholars have found issues within the policy that require revision and additional support for educators. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to reverse the problems present to better immigrant students' experiences, of which school leaders, policymakers, and teachers hold the key to change. In the context of globalization, effective teaching goes beyond the present student in the classroom; to create culturally relevant practices a teacher must learn of their experiences before arriving in their host country (Pourdavood & Yan, 2020). It is essential for immigrant students' experiences that the teacher be culturally aware of the students within their classroom. Being culturally aware can help teachers create a welcoming environment within the classroom that can promote relationships among peers and the overall academic success of immigrant students.

Biasutti et al., (2021) found positive outcomes from professional development training focused on the intercultural approach. The training increased the importance of "seeing" the students, fostering a community of practice, a need for engagement with other teachers, and a structured approach (p. 11). Teachers and Administrators can benefit from professional development focused on intercultural teaching practices. Holm & Zilliacus (2009) state, "Intercultural education is described as crossing borders by aiming at creating something new that corrects old or existing injustices" (p. 14). Teachers and administrators must use a critical lens to analyze the social context that reproduces inequalities.

Families and Country of Origin. The unattended minors attending southern Italian schools that have arrived by sea (Genzone, 2018) face more challenges than other immigrant students that live with their families. Some studies have shown that immigrant students' country

of origin may influence their academic and social experience (Contini, 2013). Coming from a wealthier country rather than a less affluent one may enhance their skills in navigating their new host country (Azzolini et al., 2012). Additionally, the immigrant students' generational status contributes to their experience. First-generation immigrant children might face more challenges than second-generation immigrant children. Scholars have found that stable families with strong relationships are thought to increase their children's likelihood of upward assimilation by decreasing the risk of deviation and increasing the motivation to study (Azzolini et al., 2017). Immigrant families are often disadvantaged when unfamiliar with the school system or not proficient in Italian, which may detract from their child's academic and social experience. The educational activity is carried out during the morning, and the rest of the day is the family's responsibility (Barban & White, 2011). Scholars state that it is unlikely for immigrant students to attend higher education "considering the economic, social and cultural capital of many families" (Bertozzi, 2018, p. 27). Further, scholars have found that parents play a vital role in their children's academic success, yet without the proper accommodations, families are struggling to navigate the Italian school system (Barban & White, 2011; Bonizzoni et al., 2016). Immigrant parents unfamiliar with the educational system entrust school leaders and teachers with their child's academic and social success. Giovannini and Vezzali (2011) found that strong relationships between parents and teachers gave teachers a more positive attitude toward immigrant children. "In particular, contact with immigrant parents was associated with increased perceived heterogeneity and enhanced support for policies favoring immigrant pupils" (Giovannini & Vezzali, 2011, p. 71). The relationship among teachers and parents gave teachers a better understanding and cultural awareness of the families they were working with. Passiatore

et al., (2017) conducted a case study on the involvement of parents with teachers for the experience of both native and immigrant students. Their study concluded:

> School and family reciprocally influence each other: children's development is not only a product of their individual characteristics but primarily of the action of people in the life contexts where the child learns social behaviours and develops cognitive and linguistic abilities, and secondly of the context created by the interactions among the child's life contexts. Thus we can talk of a paradigm of interdependence. (Passiatore et al., 2017, p. 78)

Students are influenced by their surroundings, so educators and families must have a mutual understanding of the student's best interests. Although scholars have recognized that the teacher can either boost or hinder a student's success, proper resources, and education must prepare teachers to work with immigrant students and their families.

This section notes the conclusion of scholars that the process for an inclusive practice for immigrant students requires a collective effort; the responsibility cannot simply be placed on immigrant students and their families. There must be a collaboration from all members that influence immigrant students' experience. School leaders and teachers must work together in accommodating immigrant student and their families to best support their integration within the Italian educational system. School leaders must encourage teachers to create welcoming spaces for immigrant students to academically and socially succeed. Furthermore, school leaders and teachers must provide the necessary resources to create relationships with families to support their children better.

<center>**Conclusion**</center>

Due to the recent political shift in Italy, there are many uncertainties regarding the future of immigrant educational policies. However, education plays a vital role in shaping society and the experiences of individuals who live within it. First, however, it is crucial to understand an important concept; Macias (1996) shares that "neither anthropologists, nor families, nor schoolteachers, nor politicians, acting alone, can turn an entire nation's history around. All must contribute to such transformation based on education" (p. 250). For a positive academic and social experience for immigrant students, there must be collaboration from all members of society. Pagani et al. (2011) discusses the competitive lifestyle in a society that leads individuals to typically consider 'the other' as a rival and not an individual we might be interested in getting to know; however, cooperative cross-cultural relations at school can effectively contribute to countervailing this lifestyle perspective (p. 347). Many obstacles lie within the social context that influences the educational experiences of immigrant students, and the work to be done is tremendous. Catarci (2018) asserts:

> The intercultural approach should be political; intercultural education cannot be translated into a neutral practice, but instead requires a precise choice of field. In this context, an approach to intercultural education also requires the awareness of the underlying ideological dimensions to any educational practice, as well as the role of education in relation to the dynamics of reproduction of the status quo and forms of social injustice. (p.65)

There is a need to analyze methods of teaching that can bring forward an intercultural education that reflects equal opportunities for immigrant students. In addition, there must be a commitment to social change by providing immigrant students with the tools necessary to access equal

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opportunities. Therefore, school leaders and teachers accommodating immigrant students should commit to providing the necessary resources to promote intercultural education, such as an inclusive climate, proper teacher training, and intercultural mediators. The bodies of literature within this chapter are important to addressing immigrant students experiences. Scholars have shared the experiences of immigrant students within Italian schools, but there are other factors to consider on what influences their overall experience. For this study, immigrant educational policies and factors that promote or hinder immigrant students' experience are a key piece to understanding this phenomena.

The gaps within the literature can be found between the suggested policies and approaches for immigrant students and the actual implementation and practices within the schools. The most significant gap in the literature is the minimal research on rural southern Italian schools where this study occurs. Therefore, this chapter included an overview of the literature regarding the Italian Educational system, immigrant students in Italian schools, and the intercultural approach and factors needed for implementation. Additionally, I incorporated critiques of intercultural policies and practices and existing literature on the experiences of immigrant students in Italian schools. Finally, this study explored the perspectives of southern Italian teachers and school leaders on immigrant students in a rural area in the Campania region. In the next chapter, I discussed my methodology, including a description of my data collection methods, my coding process, and an explanation of my data analysis.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology and research design used in this study. The purpose of my study was to take a closer look at the perspectives of principals and teachers on immigrant students and how they handled to the rising number of immigrant students in their school. I specifically researched a small middle school in a rural part of Southern Italy. I explored the perspectives of school leaders and teachers on how they attend to the immigrant students within their school. My study was intended to answer these two research questions: RQ1: How do school leaders attend to the increase in immigrant students in a rural middle school in Southern Italy? RQ2: What are the perceptions of Italian teachers in a rural middle school in Southern Italy on how they are supporting immigrant students?

I conducted interviews to explore the educational support for immigrant students in Italian schools. As an immigrant and a student, I developed a keen interest in the experiences of immigrant students. Therefore, my study focused on teachers' and school leaders' perceptions of how Italian schools support immigrant students' academic and social experiences.

For this study, I used a basic qualitative research method. As Merriam (2002) explains, in a qualitative study "the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon; this meaning is mediated through the researcher as an instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive" (p.6). I appreciate that as a researcher of qualitative research I explore the phenomenon personally as I interact with my participants. As Neuman (2014) describes, in qualitative work:

''I is the instrument'' because of the insightfulness, flexibility, responsiveness, and

judgment a human being can bring to the research setting, I is the ideal data-gathering

device who can pursue emerging dimensions of a study that are beyond the scope of

instruments designed in advance. (p. 74)

Therefore, qualitative research requires me to be the critical component of this study. As a

researcher, I am interested in the interpretations my participants have on the phenomenon of the

experiences of immigrant students. In summary, "The overall purpose is to understand how

people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 24). After

receiving approval from the IRB and my dissertation committee, I contacted the principal and

scheduled my time to collect data.

Conceptual Framework

"For what good is knowing unless it is coupled with caring?" (Wall, 2013, p. 345). I

reference Wall (2013) because while I seek to understand, I also care to work toward change.

There are numerous factors that influence the overall experience of immigrant students. For my

conceptual framework I draw on three bodies of scholarship: intercultural education, the overall

importance of school leaders, and teachers' attitudes towards immigrant students. These three

bodies of scholarship inform my analysis.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Map
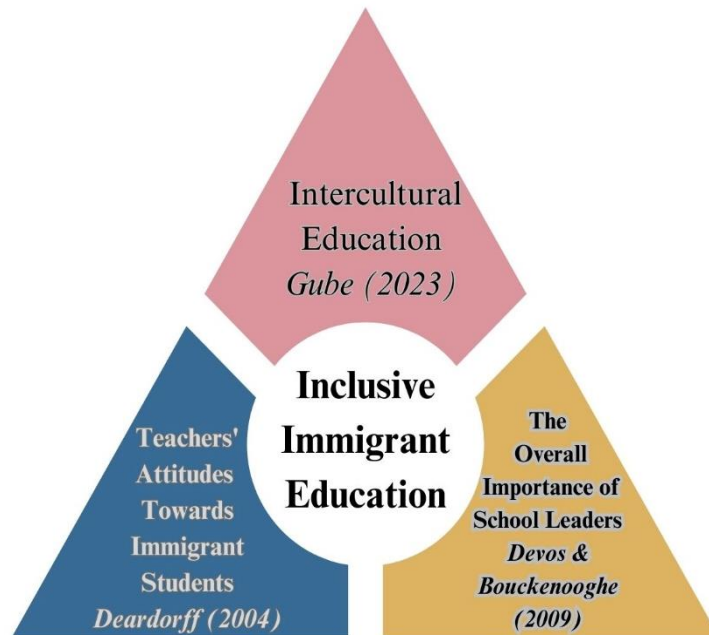
The image above (Figure 1.) depicts the components of the conceptual framework. I specifically map my conceptual framework as a triangle that comes together at center. Rather than placing one concept as more important than another, I argue that each component is equally important to my phenomena. Moreover, I argue that these key concepts consistently matter to create inclusive immigration education. In the next section I extend on the literature on intercultural education, the overall importance of school leaders, and teachers' attitudes towards immigrant students.

Intercultural Education

In Chapter II, I cited existing literature on intercultural education (see Biasutti et al., 2019; Contini & Pica-Smith, 2017; Fiorucci, 2015; Santagati, 2016). In reference to intercultural education as a theory, I call on several scholars (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006; Gube, 2023; Pasquale, 2015; Portera, 2008; Tarozzi, 2012). Intercultural education finds itself epistemologically, per Portera (2008), "between universalism and relativism" (p.485). Gube (2023) simplified this as:

The resulting position is one that neither relies excessively on individualistic

(characteristics that cannot be typified) nor essentialist identities (boxing people into

categories). These core principles have been instrumental to the development of

intercultural pedagogies in two ways: first, to counteract the harmful effects of

integration and, second, to recognize the parallel existence and contact of cultures in a

society. (p.5)

Gube clarifies the purpose; therefore, "interculturalism is part understanding and part action"

(Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006, p. 480). Rather than seeing cultural differences as a challenge within

society, scholars of intercultural education believe in cultural enrichment for social growth. Pica-

Smith et .al (2019) clarifies, "In other words, interculturalism builds itself as the policy of

dialogue, creating the space and opportunity for groups to come together harmoniously" (p.17).

Interculturalism centers intercultural education as a place to rediscover the meaning of being

human. In several ways, intercultural education instills critical pedagogy ideologies, which

sparked my interest as a foundations scholar.

There is a fine line between multicultural education and intercultural education. Unlike

multicultural education theory, intercultural education theory is seen as a more social justice-

oriented approach. UNESCO (2006) explained:

Multicultural education uses learning about other cultures in order to produce acceptance,

or at least tolerance, of these cultures. Intercultural education aims to go beyond passive

coexistence, to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in

multicultural societies through the creation of understanding of, respect for and dialogue

between the different cultural groups. (p.18)

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Intercultural education aims to build "a shared common public culture in which all forms of diversity are recognized, respected, and have equal opportunities to develop" (Zapata-Barrero, 2011, p.7). The idea of intercultural education has been pushed throughout Europe to respond to the growing population of immigrants, as explained in Chapter II. Contini & Pica-Smith (2017) asserted:

> Intercultural education, then, is meant be understood as a new educational philosophy and pedagogy towards a new citizenship education, a citizenship framework that is adapted towards pluralism and that includes an intercultural dimension whose goals are openness towards diversity, equality amongst students, and social cohesion. Intercultural education is more than an educational practice, it is commitment towards a more just education for all. (p. 247)

In theory, intercultural education requires effort. As suggested guidelines of the Intercultural education approach, Gube (2023) shared the three guiding principles to guide curricula, learning, and teaching by:

1. Respecting the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all;

2. Providing every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve the active and full participation in society; and

3. Providing all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural, and religious groups and nations (p. 3).

I highlighted these principles as part of my framework to guide my analysis of the school leaders' and teachers' efforts to accommodate immigrant students. Scholars argued for the

importance of critical reflection when using intercultural education theory. As a foundations scholar, I am intrigued by the critical theory that arises in intercultural education. Scholars Dewey, Freire, and Illich challenged the oppressive educational structures; this stand for change is also reflected in intercultural education theory. The critical theory and intercultural education framework intersect in ideologies and practices through a commitment to change, which aims to change how individuals are being integrated, shifting from accepting others to embracing openness to diversity. Scholar Maniatis (2012) writes that both theories are dedicated to promoting equal opportunity for students and having an "emancipatory and transforming character" (p.160). Regardless of the intersections between the two theories, I must clarify, I specifically frame intercultural education and not critical theory in my analysis.

The Overall importance of School Leaders

Next, I employed research on the role of school leaders and the influences they have on the school climate (see Agasisti et al., 2020; Barker, 2001; Devos & Bouckenooghe, 2009; Halawah, 2005). Scholars have pointed out that school leaders are vital to developing the school climate. In fact, effective leaders are committed to establishing a secure and nurturing school climate (Halawah, 2005). Specifically, I engaged on Devos and Bouckenooghe (2009)'s Effective Leaders characteristics for strong school climates:

- The first dimension, goal orientedness, reflects the extent to which the school vision is clearly formulated and shared by the school members.
- The second dimension, participative decision making, reflects the extent to which teachers participate in school decision-making processes, and are responsible for their actions.

- The third dimension, innovativeness, reflects the extent to which school members adapt to change, and have an open attitude toward educational innovations.

- Finally, cooperation between teachers reflects the formal and informal relationships between teachers (p. 177).

Devos and Bouckenooghe highlighted the key factors that make effective school climates. In relationship to the intercultural education, effective leadership is vital to its survival which is why I bring this scholarship into my framework. Moreover, I believe a school leader's role contributes to the experience of immigrant students which can be either beneficial or detrimental.

Teachers' Attitudes towards Immigrant Students

Lastly, I employed the notion of teachers' attitudes towards immigrant students. Scholars have engaged in the study of teachers' attitudes towards immigrant students as a vital piece to integration (Biasutti et al., 2019; D'Errico et al., 2011; Giovannini & Vezzali, 2011; Santerini, 2010). In particular, Pourdavood & Yan (2020) highlighted the ways in which the perceptions and attitudes of teachers can directly harm or benefit immigrant students. The literature implied the importance of the teacher's role within the classroom in facilitating interaction among native and immigrant peers. Minello & Barban (2012) and Dusi et al. (2014) emphasized the teacher's role in fostering self-belonging for immigrant students to succeed in their new environment. In promoting an intercultural education teachers can be the necessary key to guide all students to engage on the diversity of cultures (Chiofalo et al., 2019b). Recent studies on the attitudes of Italian teachers towards immigrant students have been more positive (Aiello et al., 2019; Salovitta & Consegnati, 2019). As Italy's immigration flux continues, I am interested in the attitudes of teachers towards immigrant students. The attitudes of teachers can truly shape the overall experience of immigrant students within their classroom.

In relation to intercultural education, teachers facilitate the classroom which is vital to the success of its implementation (see Ambrosini, 2013; Biasutti et al., 2019; Profanter, 2017; Santerini, 2010). Teachers' beliefs and attitudes must align with interculturalism in order to promote an intercultural dialogue of mutual engagement for all students. To clarify, scholars have addressed that integration and intercultural education cannot be simply based on the matter of goodwill but on specific skills and competences (Biasutti et al., 2019). In fact, teachers must have an intercultural competence, which is described by Barrett (2013) as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" (p.3). For my analysis, I turned to Santerini's (2010) scholarship on teacher training models who highlighted "Deardorff's multidimensional model (2004)" for intercultural competence:

1. attitude (openness, respect, curiosity, tolerance of ambiguity)

2. knowledge and skills (cultural awareness, knowledge of one's own and other cultures, observation, ability to evaluate)

3. internal outcomes (adaptability, flexibility, empathy, the ability to see things from another's point of view)

4. external outcomes (situation-appropriate behaviours and communication) (p. 191).

Santerini surveyed several models of intercultural trainings, however I chose to borrow from Deardorff's model because of how it not only defines intercultural competence, it shows how to improve it. Although, my study does not focus on teachers training but teachers' attitudes toward immigrant students, I believe this model provides a frame on how to interpret the teachers' perspectives.

Data collection

Setting

The middle school is in a small town in the province of Caserta, in a residential area closed in by a fence that wraps around the school and the outside gym. The school has not made any renovations since I attended the school in 2001. The school is outdated and plain; the walls are washed-out and puke green. The hallways feature different paintings done by students throughout the years. Each classroom has plain white walls with a clock and a cross at the front of the room by their black chalkboard. Some rooms have technologically advanced "smart" boards that European grants have funded. A few laboratories throughout the school include some musical instruments and a technology room with computers. The school serves 374 students, with only a small percentage of immigrant students. There were a total of 36 immigrant students of which 23 were born outside of Italy. Immigrant students were from different countries neighboring the peninsula and beyond such as: Romania, Albania, Ukraine, Syria, China, Poland, Ghana, Brazil and Morocco. Although the school only serves a small percentage of immigrant students, the school leaders and teachers wanted to create a welcoming space and understood that the numbers of immigrants would likely increase.

Recruitment

My original intention for recruitment was to select teacher participants with any current or prior experience with immigrant students within the school. I created a Questionnaire for interested participants, which was sent to all teachers via an email from the assistant principal. However, the questionnaire was not returned, and participants volunteered based on personal invitations in person and if they had spare time for an interview. The principal and vice principal helped me connect with the teachers.

Participants

The table below shows the profiles of the participants of this study. I was interested in the participants' time at this specific school and if they lived in the community they served. Most of the teachers were females. I have learned from the interviews that many participants were mothers or fathers. I assumed that the participants' age varied from mid-twenties to late fifties, although this was not asked directly in the interviews. The younger participants appeared to have a greater cultural awareness than the veteran teachers. The teacher education program in Italy has been updated, which may be the reason for this difference between teachers. Some participants spent more time in the interviews than I requested, so they were quoted more than others throughout this study. In the following chart, I categorized the teachers' information obtained from interviews. The pseudonyms were picked by what appeared suitable. I felt the years the participants were at the school were important because my study was specifically on this middle school. I also believed the years of experience teaching, which came up in every interview, was important when looking into changes in the Italian teacher education program. Also, I thought it would enrich my data if the participants lived within the community or area of the school because it would make them more aware of additional resources for immigrant students.

Table 1. Participants Profile

Title	Sex	Years at the School	Lives in the Community
Principal Miriam	Female	6 years	Yes
Assistant Principal Anna	Female	30 years	Yes
Special Education Head Teacher - Nunzia	Female	8 years	Yes

Inclusion Project Coordinator/Teacher Fabiana	Female	5 years	Yes
Teacher Carmela	Female	2 years	No
Teacher Roberta		2 years	No
Teacher Annarita	Female	2 years	No
Teacher Noami	Female	17 years	Yes
Teacher Maria	Female	7 years	Yes
Teacher Marianna	Female	7 years	Yes
Teacher Sonia	Female	3 years	No
Teacher Laura	Female	5 years	Yes
Teacher Maura	Female	6 years	Yes
Teacher Cristofaro	Male	15 years	Yes
Teacher Luigi	Male	20 Years	Yes
Special Education Teacher Giovanni	Male	10 years	No

The years the participants who worked at the school were varied from being fairly new to others who were there long before the current principal. Some participants were part of the local community, while others stayed in neighboring towns. Teachers were first selected for the interviews based on their interaction with the school's inclusion project. Liaisons of the inclusion project were first recommended, and then, eventually, teachers in different subject areas and experiences volunteered. An important note to point out is that middle school teachers in Italy are expected to teach different grade levels. For example, one math teacher will teach middle students in all three middle school years; this benefited my recruitment because all teachers had experience with students of different grade levels.

Interviews

I turned to interviews as a potent form of data; as Denzin and Lincoln (2018) mention, "By using interviews, the researcher can reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes" (p.1163). Specifically, I used a semi-structured interview protocol, which allowed much more leeway in the conversation where I, as the interviewer, had flexibility in asking follow-up questions. I used two protocols: one for teachers and one for school leaders. All participants were invited for a one-on-one interview, but some people ended up being interviewed in pairs. There was a total of 16 participants- 2 were school leaders and 14 were teachers. Two teachers were interviewed together over their break time. In another instance, one teacher joined in on the initial interview with the assistant principal. The special education coordinator was interviewed twice. The school leaders-the principal, and the assistant principal were each interviewed three times, once before teacher interviews and twice as a follow-up. The assistant principal was initially interviewed alone until the teacher joined the conversation. The principal was interviewed alone once before the teacher interviews, and the follow-up interviews were conducted with the assistant principal. Ultimately, I conducted a total of 17 interviews with the 16 total participants. The assistant principal was responsible for office management administrative work, and as a teacher if called on to substitute. For her initial interview, I used both the leader and teacher interview protocols.

After my initial 90 minutes interview with the principal in her office, I was invited to the teacher's lounge area to conduct the first teacher interviews. The room had windows on one side of the wall that brought light into the room. There were aluminum cabinets and a long desk of multiple small tables that held a printer and a laptop. The walls were primarily bare, besides a calendar and a clock. With the help of the assistant principal, I was scheduled to meet teachers

during their break time. The teachers and school leaders were set up as individual interviews. However, one of the interviews had two teachers interviewing in the same session. These teachers asked to be interviewed together. In one of the interviews with the assistant principal, a teacher joined in on the interview when the assistant principal invited them to collaborate on one of the interview questions. The setting for the first couple of interviews was disruptive and loud. The teacher's lounge was constantly filled with other teachers, making the interviewing process difficult.

To my surprise, the assistant principal set up a private room for me to conduct my other interviews. The room had a window and a private bathroom. It was bare due to freshly painted walls, completed a few days before I visited the school. The room was a storage place, but the office staff set up a desk and chairs to accommodate my needs. The room temperature was freezing compared to the rest of the school, but I appreciated the quiet space to conduct the interviews. The following interview conversations flowed well, and almost all the participants were helpful individuals open to sharing in a more private setting. The individual interviews took 30-55 minutes; some teachers only had 30 minutes to spare due to using their break time to be interviewed.

After several one on one interviews, I had another group interview. I was scheduled to meet two teachers at different times, but the two teachers showed up together and asked to be interviewed. For my follow-up interview with the principal, we were joined by the assistant principal. The teacher group interviews were 35 - 40 minutes, and the school leaders group interview was 70 minutes for a total of roughly 11 hours. Interviews were conducted in the language of their preference; each chose to be interviewed in Italian, even English-language teachers. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in Italian, and the sections included in

the dissertation were translated into English. Also, during the interview, I attempted to take notes but tried to be attentive and fully engaged with the participants. I took notes after the interview to preserve any additional information. Each individual was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity, written in my dissertation notebook and safely stored in a locked cabinet. Each participant was provided with a consent form in English and Italian and told that they might withdraw from the study at any point.

Questions were based on their own experiences with their school and students. Two interview protocols were developed for this study. The first was for the school leaders, and the second was for teachers. The interviews were open-ended and semi-structured, allowing flexibility to ask follow-up questions. Questions were focused on the immigrant student, teaching inclusive strategies, and methods put in place. I also asked about their relationship with other teachers and how they felt regarding the principal. Initial questions asked about personal information to familiarize myself with the participants. I also asked about their current position and primary responsibilities. I tried to understand, from their point of view, the intercultural policy about immigrant student integration, but they redirected me to the school's inclusive project. In the interview, participants shared their insights into immigrant students' experiences within a classroom and whether they felt they had the necessary resources to help them succeed academically.

Additionally, I was interested to know if there was something they might suggest that would improve their current interactions with immigrant students. Interviewing provides rich data; however, the data may be limited without the proper rapport. It was easy to create a rapport built on being judgment-free and having genuine curiosity before the interview, leading to a rich participant interview. Additionally, I requested a follow-up interview, if needed, during my data

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analysis with each participant in the recruitment process, which I ended up not needing.

Questions were based on their own experiences with knowledge of their school and students, and two interview protocols were developed for this study.

Documents

Any policies addressing immigrant students or curricula that illustrated best practices for immigrant populations were gathered for analysis. When I first met with the principal and teacher coordinator, I requested an example of personalized plans they applied in classrooms. The principal shared the school's inclusive project mission and the current Ukraine immigrant war refugees' protocol (which is not applicable at this school right now). In addition, she shared the general immigrant student protocol, the examination process for all students, and a brief overview of the educational expectations of the Italian state. Further, the principal shared the step-by-step application of the process to receive funds from the European Union to support any school's initiative. Although I requested documents from teachers, they did not share their lesson plans or student examples. I was able to get an example of the personalized didactic plans that was often brought up in the interviews. These documents were added to the interview data collection and served as additional support and evidence for the research.

Field Notes

In addition to my interviews and document collection, I kept field notes from my time at the school. I spent 4 hours daily at the school for seven days, which included my time interviewing. Out of the 24 total hours at the school, approximately 11 hours were spent doing interviews and the remaining 13 hours I spent with the school leaders and teachers. In this time, I took fieldnotes prior, after and in between interviews. I was invited to walk throughout the school on different occasions. I kept notes of my encounters with the structure of the building,

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the teachers, the office staff, and the students. While I did not officially observe classrooms, I met students and teachers throughout my tour. What I witnessed throughout the time spent beyond the interviews is key to my findings, adding to my understanding gathered through interviews and document review.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using the different components that informed my conceptual framework: intercultural education, the overall importance of school leaders, and teachers' attitudes towards immigrant students. Together, I was able to interpret the data through a compassionate lens that was aware of the cultural context of the participants. In addition, I was able to analyze the data with a critical perspective that challenged the participants' reality to become more culturally aware of the immigrant students they served. I must note that in the data, immigrant students were referred to as "foreign students", however I chose to use the term immigrant students in this study. Outside of Italy, the term "foreign" is critiqued by scholars as problematic. For cultural context, I recognized the term was not intentionally harmful which is why I avoided the term "foreign" throughout my study. I began my analysis with the interviews and then moved to the documents. I also turned to my field notes to support my thematic analysis. Upon data collection, the data were thematically analyzed. Creswell et al., (2016) explain how:

> Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion. (p. 180)

In this section, I provide a detailed description of my interview and document analysis process. I also share the ethical considerations and provide a summary in my conclusion.

Interview Analysis

Interviews were transcribed before analysis and stored in a secured database. Then, I began coding the data to make meaning of it using manual coding methods and used a thematic-inductive analysis where themes emerged from coded data analysis. I used the in-vivo coding method suggested by Saldaña (2021), "In vivo's root meaning is 'in that which is alive,' and as a code refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record, 'the terms used by [participants] themselves'" (p. 91). I listened to the interviews in Italian and wrote down key words that appeared as a pattern in the data. For example, the participants mentioned welcoming and inclusion often which became codes in my analysis. In the first cycle of coding, I physically wrote the codes then eventually created a spreadsheet to organize them. In my second cycle of coding, I highlighted the codes in the transcriptions online and copied the quotes into the spreadsheet to have to use in my analysis. I noticed the codes were familiar from my conceptual framework; this connection helped as I developed my analysis.

Coding was tedious and took longer than expected due to the data being in Italian and needing to transcribe the interviews in Italian first and then code in English. As a new researcher, I coded data sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph and coded for meaning. I also listened to the recordings repeatedly while reading the coding process and took notes in my dissertation notebook to better organize my thoughts. I was observant of any pattern or language that emerged throughout the coding process, during and after collection, as part of my analytic strategy. Initially, I coded words such as inclusion and challenges, but my list expanded as I

reread transcripts and relistened to the recorded audio of the interviews. After several revisions, I

highlighted some initial themes and elaborated on key themes in my findings chapter.

Basit (2003) states, "Coding and analysis are not synonymous, though coding is a crucial

aspect of analysis" (p. 145). After coding the data using inductive codes, I created an Excel sheet

listing the codes and then grouped codes into categories, and my themes emerged. As an

interpretive researcher, I research to understand and interpret "meanings [that] are constructed by

human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). An

essential fact to note by Creswell et al., (2016) is that "data analysis is not off-the-shelf; rather, it

is custom-built, revised, and 'choreographed'"(p. 182). Data analysis was constantly revised and

reduced to codes, then to categories, and eventually to themes. Upon data analysis, I realized that

some of the interviews were more robust than others which enriched my study. Some of the

participants are quoted more than others due to their rich contribution to the data.

Document Analysis

Several documents were collected for this study to better understand how the teachers

and school leaders accommodated immigrant students. I was given the school's protocols

mandated by the Italian state and the school's personal inclusion project they created, which was

influenced by other educational policies. I was handed printed versions of all the documents,

making coding more accessible. I read line by line and highlighted any keywords or codes I had

developed for my interview analysis. I then added the name of the document and page and

paragraph numbers to a page in the Excel coding document I had started for interviews. I only

used some of the documents I was given in my analysis because many documents were irrelevant

to my study. Although I requested examples of immigrant students' work, I was not given any.

Initially, I believed I was given many documents to review, but after coding, I realized that this

form of data was not as robust as I had predicted. However, some of the documents came to good use. I used the inclusion project created by the school, which I intersected with the government protocol for accommodating and including immigrant students. I also analyzed the personalized didactic plans the school leaders and special education coordinator shared with me to get a better sense of how teachers were supporting immigrant students.

Field Notes Analysis

Phillippi & Lauderdale (2018) state field notes are a contribution to "constructing thick, rich descriptions of the study context, encounter, interview, focus group, and document's valuable contextual data" (p. 381). During my time spent at the school I took descriptive field notes to reflect my whole experience and interactions. In my analysis, I reference my fieldnotes to support my interpretation of the data. I referred to my field notes for essential takeaways from my time at the school. After coding all of the data, I made a tangible board with sticky notes which highlighted critical takeaways and possible themes in different colors. I interconnected my field notes with the codes from the interviews and documents, which helped select the important themes I encountered across all data.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1986) proposed credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to construct a study's trustworthiness. My study found credibility through the pattern across the data. My use of triangulation highlighted the credibility of the data. I was able to verify the data evidence from my interviews to my documents and my fieldnotes. Although, I did not collect observations within the classroom I spent a good amount of time at the school. I took notes from every meeting I was invited to, every encounter I observed throughout the school. The participants spoke of inclusion and welcoming spaces, which interconnected with the

inclusion project objectives. Moreover, what I heard in the interviews I saw reflected in the interaction between teachers and school leaders and students within the school when reviewing my fieldnotes . I observed the students, teachers and school leaders within the school as they exchanged friendly dialogues. I witnessed how the school addressed any bullying incident when I was sitting in the front office interviewing a teacher. The participants' positive perspectives towards immigrant students was supported by the thick description of my fieldnotes and the documents. In addition, I reflected upon my own interpretation and the participants' reactions towards me. I attempted to be open, because I was genuinely curious. However, I maintained my critical scholar lens as I journaled my thoughts and feelings at the end of the day after collecting data.

Ethical Considerations

Following the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro protocol, participation in this study posed minimal risk to participants. Participants were provided with the IRB guidelines that protected their identity and confidentiality. Teachers and leaders shared their own experiences and interpretations of immigrant students. There was the possibility that teachers and leaders felt uncomfortable discussing their experiences with immigrant students and might feel pressured to answer in favor of the educational policies in place. All considerations were included in the research design stage, and measures were taken to ensure participants were comfortable. Participants were free to withdraw from the study if they felt the need to at any moment.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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Throughout this chapter, I have discussed the methodology of my research design to answer the following questions: RQ1: How do school leaders attend to the increase in immigrant

students in a rural middle school in Southern Italy? RQ2: What are the perceptions of Italian teachers in a rural middle school in Southern Italy on how they are supporting immigrant students? My ideal timeline was not impacted by the recent conflict in Europe. I connected with teachers and leaders in the late Fall of 2022 and was able to collect data within the Fall semester of 2022 (from October to early November). I spent seven days at the site of the study and collected field notes and documents, and conducted a total of 17 interviews with 16 participants. Some interviews were group interviews. My additional time in Italy was spent familiarizing myself with the data and initiating the coding process. Upon returning to the United States, I continued data analysis and interpretation and concluded my study. The concern for immigrant students' experiences in Italian schools is not recognized at the international level yet; with the rapid increase of immigrant students and emerging educational models, I believe this study will contribute to better immigrant educational opportunities.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

For this study, I took a closer look at the perspective of school leaders and teachers concerning immigrant students in a small rural middle school in Southern Italy. School leaders, in this case, refer specifically to principals and assistant principals. I set out to understand how school leaders prepare for immigrant students. I also examined teachers' perspectives on supporting immigrant students' academic and social experiences. The findings are about all students considered immigrant students; I do not distinguish between first-generation and second-generation. Although my interview questions were regarding all immigrant students, teachers, and leaders, most of the time, they spoke about the immigrant newcomers, which implied that these students had linguistic disadvantages requiring additional attention. The teachers and school leaders did not seem concerned for the first or second-generation immigrants residing in Italy who spoke Italian. Teachers and school leaders believed the immigrant students who spoke Italian were well integrated into their community and among their peers. Instead, their concern was for the newcomers with linguistic disadvantages hindering their academic and social experience. Overall, the existing research is minimal on immigrant students in Southern Italy, and most studies focus on larger metropolitan areas rather than the smaller rural areas of Italy. In this chapter, I presented the findings relating to my research questions. I used thematic analysis to share the themes in response to my research questions. These findings stemmed from coding interview transcripts, field notes, and document analysis that answered the following research questions: (RQ1): How do school leaders attend to the increase in immigrant students in a rural middle school in Southern Italy? (RQ2): What are the perceptions of Italian teachers in a rural middle school in Southern Italy on how they are supporting immigrant students?

The methodology chapter provides examples of how I developed codes and categories. This chapter explains the themes that came from the coding process. Before going into the themes, I would like to highlight a few characteristics of the Italian school system. Teaching is a respected career in Italy, specifically in the Southern regions. There is a high unemployment rate, and teaching gives people a sense of stability and security. Students are at the school for six hours, randomly placed into different letter groups, and stay with the same students and fellow teachers for three consecutive years of middle school. Also, teachers navigate from class to class as students remain in one class during their time at school, excluding classes in laboratories or gym classes.

Furthermore, middle school students have a break in their classroom where they enjoy their snacks among their classmates. Snacks are brought from home because the school does not provide meals, with a few exceptions for children in need. For the next three years, the time spent at the school is within one classroom besides elective courses; this gives students and teachers time to familiarize themselves with each other. This cultural context is important to keep in mind when reading the findings in this chapter.

Each central theme includes subthemes that are related to that specific theme. The three major themes I have identified through the analysis are: a) Collaborative Effort for Inclusion; b) "Doing the Best with What We Got!"; and c) The Abandoned South. The first theme addresses the school's efforts for inclusion. It has two subthemes that elaborate on the importance of inclusive leadership and the protocols for accommodating immigrant students. The second theme is about the teachers' and principals' perspectives on how they were supporting immigrant students. This theme has two subthemes that explain the different measures teachers and school leaders took to promote inclusion. The last theme concerns the teachers' and leaders' challenges

and requests to assist immigrant students better. This theme has two subthemes that explain the

methods of improving how school leaders and teachers serve immigrant students.

A Collaborative Effort for Inclusion

The middle school is in a southern rural area of Campania in Southern Italy. The town has

a population of 12.331, of which 1.428 are immigrants (Tuttitalia, 2023). In Chapter III, I

provide deeper context about the school and the participants. The immigration percentage has

grown over time, demanding the school system to prepare for the complexity of accommodating

immigrant students from thirty-nine countries (Tuttitalia, 2023). When interviewing Principal

Miriam, she shared the different protocols mandated by the state to accommodate immigrant

students and special needs.

Among the protocols discussed, Miriam described the recent protocol for war refugees due

to the current European tension between Russia and Ukraine. While the school did not have war

refugees, the principal shared her anticipation and preparation for them. Although the protocols

were provided, the principal felt the resources needed to be improved, leaving the school leaders

and teachers to take the initiative. The principal worked with the school staff to be inclusive of

all students. She summoned an inclusion project committee that crafted the school's mission and

vision. The inclusion project borrowed from the Italian Ministry inclusion law passed over 40

years ago, which was created for students with special educational needs (Legge 104 del 1992).

The inclusion project was viewed as a crucial component of making an inclusive school because

it allowed school members to work together to evaluate, analyze and plan their methods of

inclusion. The inclusion project created objectives for school leaders and teachers to work

towards. For example:

- Prevent uncomfortable situations;

- Create an accommodating and inclusive climate for students and families;

- Promote collaboration with community in the intercultural scope;

- Create a class contest to favor other cultures;

- Project intercultural didactic courses towards awareness and appreciation of other cultures;

- Plan interventions for the comprehension of Italian as a second language;

- Plan formal classroom integration.

These objectives the school leaders and teachers created reflected ideas of intercultural education and inclusion policies (Legge 140). The principal shared her inclusion project policy with pride and reminded me multiple times that the teachers and school leaders put it together. She shared her passion for including everyone. She repeatedly would say, "Tutti inclusi tutti!" [All includes all!]. Their progetto dell'inclusione [inclusion project] highlights the importance of serving immigrant students. The project reflects similar ideologies in the intercultural education approach explained in chapter one. The document stated:

L'intenzione è fornire punti di riferimento collaudati ai docenti e, insieme, alle famiglie e a tutti gli operatori sociali ed educativi con cui interagisce la scuola. E' nostra convinzione, infatti, che solo una reale sinergia tra le varie figure professionali ed educative possa garantire il fondamentale diritto di ogni bambino e ragazzo all'istruzione e alla formazione, in un ambiente in grado di valorizzare le potenzialità e di rispondere ai bisogni di tutti e di ciascuno.

[The intention is to create reference points for teachers to work with families and all social and educational services with which the school interacts. We believe that only a natural synergy between all figures of educational professionals guarantees the

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fundamental right of every student to instruction and education in a climate that can

valorize the potential and response to the educational needs of everyone and each

other.]

In other words, this statement holds the intention of the school's inclusion initiative to be a

collaborative effort to provide every student with equal rights to education. In addition, the

project must value everyone's potential and provide the necessary support to succeed. The

principal shared how vital each student was to her and how she spent much of her time on

this project and finding activities to support all students. The principal and teachers within

the school created the inclusion project. The mission was to support students and teachers so

they may better serve the students. The inclusion project reflected two different educational

policies: the immigrant education policy and the special needs inclusion policy. The

inclusion project policy was not directly aimed at immigrant students but included them

among students with special needs and those needing temporary support. The ideologies for

the inclusion project came from the inclusion policy (Legge 104), which discontinued the

separation of students with disabilities from the classroom. This intercultural approach was

rooted in the European immigrant education policies for linguistic support, which is

discussed later in this chapter (M.I.U.R., 2012). The principal attempted to center the

inclusion project in every aspect of the school; she constantly supported new ways to

support teachers and students. One of the initial findings showed an investment from school

leaders and teachers in wanting a more inclusive school. This dedication brought a

supportive environment for all members of the school. In the subthemes of this section, I

explore a) the vital role of the principal in the subtheme: *An Inclusive Leader brings*

Everyone Together, and b) how the school implemented an immigrant students' protocol in the subtheme: *Following Immigrant Students Protocol*.

An Inclusive Leader Brings Everyone Together

The principal showed excellent leadership skills and a passion for inclusion. She spoke of integration and inclusion along the same lines. Integration is when the students are placed among their peers, and inclusion is when they are valued among their peers. She explained her desire for an intercultural school as a beneficial reciprocating exchange between Italian and immigrant students. Principal Miriam spoke about her previous experience in the metropolitan areas where she witnessed the chaos of the overwhelming population of immigrant students and little resources. Due to her previous experiences, she was thoughtful about planning ahead to attend to the rise of immigrant children within this small town. Her enthusiasm and inspiration to do better influenced others. Teachers and students expressed admiration for the principal. The principal appeared to influence the school members strongly. When I asked Miriam how she defined integration, she said:

> L'inserimento attivo all'interno della società fa parte di una società diventare membri di quella società e questo processo di inclusione parte già dalla scuola quindi dobbiamo fare in modo che queste due culture si devono incontrare. In un certo punto della vita e dello studente si devono aprire è come un fiore che si apre si specchia dentro l'altra parte cioè proprio cosi vedi dove le due culture devono scambiarsi per interagire e per convivere insieme dove ognuno si arricchisce della particolarità e della diversità dell'altra cultura e fare in modo che anche l'altro lo straniero diciamo non si senta più straniera ma si senta partecipe all'interno della società in cui vive.

[Active integration into society is where one becomes a member of that society. This part

begins in school, so we must have the two cultures to meet. Then, the student must open

up at a certain point in their life. It is like a flower that flourishes; it mirrors itself, just

like the two cultures must exchange to interact and cohabit where the particularity and the

diversity of the other culture enriches everyone. In order that the other, the "foreign,"

let's say, no longer feels a foreigner but instead feels a participant in the society they live

in.]

Like the intercultural education mission, the principal explained the need for integration in a

mutual openness. The principal's philosophy was a philosophy of care; she genuinely showed

knowledge of what intercultural education should look like. Nonetheless, her philosophy

required significant work to present her envisioned full picture.

Throughout the interviews, the school members turned to the inclusion project as their

foundation and spoke confidently about their dedication to inclusion. When asked about their

experience with immigrant students, school leaders and teachers brought up their inclusion

project policy, which they created in 2020. Teacher Carmela said:

Qui c'è proprio un clima di accoglienza e di famiglia da parte di tutti, dalla preside, I

colleghi, collaboratori, anche da parte dei ragazzi...c'e' collaborazione anche con i

genitori. Per fortuna, quella insomma é la cosa fondamentale.

[Here, there is a welcoming and family-like climate from everyone, from the

principal, the colleagues, collaborators, even from the students...there is a

collaboration from parents as well. Luckily, that [collaboration] is the fundamental

thing.]

Carmela illustrated the school climate as being family-oriented from all school community members. She refers to this collaboration as the most fundamental in supporting students. As stated in the inclusion project document, this approach requires a collaborative effort, a synergy. The school's climate was crucial for maintaining this synergy among all school members. Throughout the interviews and interactions with the school, everyone felt welcoming to anyone. I felt this too. As the researcher, I was an outsider, yet I was always greeted in the office with "Buon Giorno, Dottoressa!"[Good Morning, Doctor!]; I was offered way too much espresso coffee and brioche filled with Nutella chocolate. Within the school, I saw the interactions between school staff and parents. There was a friendly conversation with every parent that walked in.

The interaction towards immigrant parents was equally kind, despite the language obstacles within their dialogue. The staff appeared patient and did their best to interact with immigrant parents, although their struggle to converse was evident. One of my interviews with the assistant principal, Anna, was interrupted by a student who seemed frantic about the school fees payment. The assistant principal reassured him that his parent took care of it. She later explained that many students at their school qualified as low-income. These families would receive fee waivers, and the school staff did their best to keep their status anonymous among classroom peers. I also noted how the principal, in the hallways, interacted with students and addressed them by their first name and how all students greeted the school janitors. This welcoming climate encouraged an inclusive approach that rippled throughout the school.

Research reveals that one of the most critical influences on the experiences of immigrant students is the role of an inclusive leader (see Barnett & McCormick, 2002; Devos &

Bouckenooghe, 2009; Halawah, 2005). Biasutti and Concina (2021) explain, "School principals have major responsibilities in promoting the integration of migrant students" (p. 986). Teachers shared how they felt supported by the principal and her vision of being an inclusive school. The admiration for the principal was consistent throughout the interviews with teachers. The assistant principal, Anna, also admired and respected Miriam. She shared:

Per quanto riguarda il dirigente scolastico nostro, è di una disponibilità unica soprattutto nei confronti di "questi" ragazzini, veramente da tutto se stessa. Cioè quando si parla di inclusione la preside sta sempre lì a vedere cercare di di di di fare quando più attività è possibile a favore di questi ragazzi.

[When it comes to our principal, she gives a unique availability, especially for "those" students; she truly gives her whole self. So, whenever there is a talk about inclusion, the principal is always there trying to do more activities in favor of these students.]

Anna described how the principal had constant availability for immigrant students as unique in how she truly goes beyond and puts all her efforts toward inclusion. In addition, Anna shared that the principal was always searching for new activities that may contribute to the students in her school. Teachers felt included and supported in their efforts to work with immigrant students by an inclusive leader, which is vital to creating an environment where everyone buys into the inclusion policies and practices.

The principal made herself available for office staff, teachers, and parents. Teacher Marianna worked closely with the principal as she was in charge of keeping attendance records. She articulated:

Per lei i studenti sono tutti uguali quindi noi qualsiasi problema poniamo lei lo risolve all'alunno della scuola non guarda che tipo che nazionalità. Lei risolve il problema

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dell'alunno della nostra scuola ,del nostro istituto, qualsiasi esso sia. Ma poi pure il

rapporto con i genitori molte volte quando li convochiamo vuole esserci anche lei

partecipa a tutti i consigli di classe e si interessa dei casi particolari che vuole vedere

dove vuole avere anche lei un colloquio con i genitori è sempre molto interna molto

onorevole nei confronti dei genitori nei confronti dei ragazzini.

[For her, all students are the same, so any time we have an issue, she resolves it as a

school student, not looking at their nationality. So, she resolves the problem of the

student of our school, of our institute, whomever they may be. Not only also her

relationship with parents, many times when we summon them, she also wants to be

present in our teacher committee meetings and wants to meet with parents; she is always

very present and honorable towards parents and students.]

The principal viewed all of her students as equally valuable to her school. She did not

discriminate or cater to any specific group of students. Marianna wanted to clarify that everyone

was treated the same because they were seen as school members. The way Marianna talked about

the principal showed admiration, a sentiment shared throughout the interviews. She also noted

the principal's efforts in securing a relationship with the parents. This admiration for the

principal's intentional efforts to support staff was vital because it fueled teachers' work

performance.

The reciprocal respect and support the principal, assistant principals, and teachers gave

each other made the school environment powerful. The teachers and staff were guided by the

principal's beliefs in inclusion and supported by her trust in each of them. For example, from my

conversation with Fabiana, an Italian, history, and geography teacher, I learned:

Quello che mi piace della nostra dirigente innanzitutto è che crede moltissimo nei docenti io penso che questo sia sia la strategia giusta cioè quando i docenti si sentono apprezzati e si sentono incoraggiati lavorano meglio. Lei, secondo me valorizza il corpo docente proprio perché crede in loro questo fa la differenza. Anzi la dirigente è aperta a lavorare e poi soprattutto è una è una professionista che non chiude le porte nel senso offre la possibilità a tutti di lavorare.

[What I like about our principal, first of all, is that she truly believes in the teachers. This is the right strategy because when teachers feel appreciated and encouraged, they work better. In my opinion, she values the teacher body because she believes in them, which makes a difference. In fact, our leader is open to everything, she is especially a professional first, that never closes the doors in the sense that she offers everyone the possibility to share.]

Francesca explains that the principal trusted the teachers to perform what they crafted in the inclusion project. The principal was open to the teachers' ideas and events that promoted inclusion. Principal Miriam also stated in one of the interviews that she believed in the capability of her staff to perform well. The principal attended the teacher committee meetings to provide any support the teachers may need to serve the school's students better. Francesa saw the principal's respectful and trusting approach to working with teachers as a strategy. She described the strategy as effective because teachers felt valued, influencing their work climate. In fact, teacher Sonia illustrated, "Il clima di della dirigente poi anche del corpo docenti è molto collaborativo per gli studenti stranieri." [The climate of the principal and even the teacher body is very collaborative for the immigrant students.] The teachers were all part of the teacher's

committee, which met biweekly to discuss students' plans and progress. The principal's leadership skills brought the school members to work together.

Assistant principal Anna on the school's protocol for bullying said: "Noi subito siamo intervenuti e la situazione è finita. Appena nasce qualcosa si spegne" [We immediately intervene and the situation ends there. As soon as something arises, we extinguish it.] I was curious about what this meant, so I pressed Anna to discuss this further. She explained that when there is an issue between students, they actively call parents to come in to discuss the matter altogether. Anna and other teachers shared that, luckily, parents were very attentive about these matters and collaborated well with the school. Assistant principal Anna recognized that the urgency to respond swiftly was necessary to maintain the climate they had worked so hard to create. In the teacher interviews, bullying did not seem to be an issue because of their immediate reaction to addressing it rather than ignoring it. For example, teacher Annarita shared an incident of students teasing each other in class; she immediately stopped the lesson to address the matter. She explained how ignoring it would cause more harm. The urgency and consistency of addressing issues was a common standard across the board.

In a follow-up interview, principal Miriam pointed out that she had a great team. The principal did not suppress her staff; instead, she trusted them with leadership tasks. Teacher Laura said:

> Devo dire di stare molto bene in questa scuola perché, a parte la detergente, è anche uno staff dirigenziale che è molto presente insomma quindi se hai un problema comunque una qualunque questione qualcosa che ti preoccupa all'interno di una classe anche se non c'è la dirigente c'è comunque un suo referente a cui ti puoi refirrire appunto per per chiedere un parere per un supporto.

[I must say I am doing very well at this school; besides the school leader, the office staff

is very present; in other words, if you have an issue, whatever it may be in regards to

your classroom, even if the principal is not present one of her supporting staff will be

there to answer questions, an opinion or support.]

As Laura articulated, the school members worked together, which derived from the principal

herself. Laura referred to the assistant principal, the teacher coordinator, the special education

coordinator, or the office staff as supporting staff. In the absence of the principal, the school was

well prepared to take executive action because the principal gave them the authority. As explored

in this subtheme, the principal's inclusive leadership was vital for an environment where school

staff believed in the inclusion project. The principal did not simply state her passion for

promoting inclusion; she acted upon it by believing in all the school members and students.

Miriam supported and promoted the programs and activities the teachers requested to serve the

students better. She was not seen as a hierarchal figure but as a good leader who invited every

school member to make school improvements. The principal's role encouraged inclusion

throughout the school; she defined inclusion as a mutual openness to one another. Principal

Miriam showed intercultural education guiding principles in the way she spoke about inclusion

and how she treated other. In my fieldnotes, I noted that one of the interactions I witnessed

within the school was how the principal stood in the hall when students were headed to the

elective classes, she greeted each one of them by their name. There was a presence of friendly

encounters among all students and staff. This strong school climate was the principal's doing

(Devos & Bouckenooghe, 2009). Although the principal could not prevent prejudiced biases of

all school members, she pushed for inclusive practices and followed a specific agenda for

immigrant students.

Resources for Identifying and Supporting Immigrant Students

The school used the inclusion project as a guide to meet the necessary requirements to support immigrant students. The school's inclusion project borrowed from the Italian Ministry of Education inclusion policy mandated by the state to include all students, and the project mirrored the policy's intentions. The mandate also required students with disabilities to be placed within the mainstream classroom to avoid any form of segregation. Teacher Fabiana explained more in-depth who is included in the inclusion mandate. She shared:

> Includere per loro non solo significa includere i disabili. La disabilita è un poco un concetto diciamo così che abbraccia diverse categorie. Voglio dire disabile non è soltanto l'alunno che ha delle difficoltà cognitive e psicomotorie per noi insomma includere significa anche includere il profugo di guerra oppure un semplice ragazzino con B.E.S. con bisogni educativi speciali magari la difficoltà familiare temporanea. [We try to include everyone, and that is not just the disabled. Disabled is a concept that, let's say, includes different categories. I am trying to say that the disabled are not just students with cognitive or physical difficulties; for us, inclusion also means war refugees or simply a student with temporary special educational needs, perhaps because of family issues.]

Fabiana distinguished the different accommodations between the students included in the inclusion project, which follows the national Italian protocol of inclusion of all students. Immigrant students were included among students with special needs and those needing temporary support in the inclusion policy. The educational inclusion project policy states, "Special educational needs is a broad category that comprises the culturally and socially disadvantaged, those with specific learning disabilities and specific developmental disorders, and

those with difficulties derived from a lack of knowledge of the Italian language and culture due to diverse cultural backgrounds" (M.I.U.R., 2012, p. 2). The coordinator of special education, Naomi, explained the process for filtering students' needs:

> I studenti BES dicevo sono bisogni educativi speciali e sono i ragazzi che si fa un PDP che però venne qui stilato ogni anno perché decade. Cioè praticamente viene rinnovato l'anno successivo a differenza invece del DSA invece no viene fatto un PDP perché loro hanno una certificazione medica.
>
> [The B.E.S. [Bisogni Educativi Speciali] students are special educational needs and are students that have a PDP [personalized didactic plan] that is styled every year because it dissipates. That is, practically, it is revised the following year, which differs from the students with disturbed cognitive learning (DSA); instead, there is no temporary personalized didactic plan (PDP) made because they have a medical certificate.]

In other words, students with dyslexia, dysorthography, and dyscalculia were considered students with disturbed cognitive abilities, which required a medical diagnosis. This diagnosis granted students a permanent modified plan and a supporting special education teacher throughout their school years. The difference between the two types of students (D.S.A. and B.E.S.) was that clinically diagnosed students (D.S.A.) received the additional support of a special education teacher and a permanent modified plan. In contrast, students with special educational needs (B.E.S.) were temporarily given a personalized plan. The Ministry of Education mandated no additional help to help students with linguistic disadvantages, so the school attempted to accommodate them the best way it could. A more precise understanding of the difference is explained by Italian scholar Sandri (2014):

Public health certification is required for those who display disabilities (whether

intellectual, motor, sensory, autism, etc.) and specific learning disabilities (dyslexia,

dysorthography, dyscalculia, etc.). For those who present learning difficulties of a

temporary nature (i.e., sociocultural and linguistic disadvantages, etc.), a pedagogical

and educational document elaborated by the teachers of the class council and signed

by the school and by the family is sufficient to allow the creation of an individualized

and personalized learning pathway. (p.94)

Students with disabilities were accompanied by a special education teacher who supported

the student within the classroom along with a personalized didactic plan. The additional

special education teacher support was an educational plan mandated by the State to

accommodate only clinically diagnosed students, not students with pedagogical diagnosed

disadvantages. Their protocol for newcomers was slightly different from the clinically

diagnosed students. Upon arrival, newcomers are under observation, where teachers observe

and evaluate their competence across all subjects. Core teachers at the school were expected

to create an Individualized Personalized Didactic Plan. The principal and teachers saw the

linguistic challenge the newcomer immigrant students faced and requested additional help

from the State. The lack of additional help brought their desperation to add more

responsibility to the special education teachers they had on site.

Classrooms were filled with all students; however, teachers explained that only

immigrant students who grew up in Italy and spoke Italian seemed entirely immersed with

the rest of the native students. Newcomer immigrant students had more difficulty integrating

with their peers because of the language barrier, but teachers constantly arranged for their

interaction. To teachers, the biggest obstacle was the language disadvantages for immigrant

newcomers because it hindered peer relationships and their content comprehension.

Nonetheless, teachers used different strategies to best communicate with the students to

confront the language obstacle. Moreover, teachers shared in their interviews that they

worked additional time outside the classroom on personalized didactic plans and modified or

translated content material.

When new students, including immigrant students, arrived at the school, the first step the

school took was a placement test. When students first come to the school, they are asked to take

a placement test to show their knowledge across all subjects. Roberta explained:

> Per tutti gli alunni che arrivano si fa un test d'ingresso per valutare i prerequisiti che lui
>
> che conoscenze al di là della conoscenza della lingua italiana perché se non conosce
>
> proprio l'italiano e tu gli poni un test d'ingresso e lui non sa leggere allora è insufficiente.
>
> La prova magari il ragazzo la sa pure fare la prova ma non ha compreso la consegna
>
> quindi non sa l'esercizio come si svolge.
>
> [For all students that arrive, there is a placement test to evaluate their knowledge beyond
>
> the Italian language, but if they do not know any Italian and you give them a placement
>
> test, and they cannot read, then the test is unsatisfactory. Maybe the student knows how
>
> to do the test but needs help understanding the instructions, so they do not know how to
>
> complete the exercise.]

Once the student is placed based on their test, if language disadvantages occur, students are

enrolled as B.E.S. students [students with special educational needs] for a brief period. These

students receive a personalized plan across all subjects to help their transition into the Italian

language. All teachers collaborated on personalized didactic plans for immigrant newcomers,

simplifying and modifying the work to suit the students. Roberta continued to explain:

Ai consigli di classe vengono prese in considerazione dei punti all'ordine del giorno tra

cui anche l'andamento didattico disciplinare della classe nella classe ci sono anche gli

alunni stranieri che vengono valutati ci confrontiamo e in seguito al confronto si tirano le

somme di dei dei traguardi che loro hanno ruggito. Al termine del consiglio di classe e

c'è necessità di rapportarci con la famiglia nei conviviamo per confrontarci su questo.

[Our teacher committee takes into consideration the didactic discipline in class.

Immigrant students are evaluated, and we [teachers] bring out the goals that they have

accomplished. At the end of the meeting, if there is any necessity to report to parents, we

collaborate to confront this.]

All teachers were part of the teachers' committee, which played an essential role in the student's

success. The bi-weekly meetings gave teachers a chance to share with the administration their

concerns for students and what they needed to support them best. In addition, the teacher

committee played an essential role in supporting the inclusion project; teachers and

administrators met monthly to push the inclusion project agenda, address any concerns, and

prepare additional support for students in need. This work demanded collaboration from all

teachers to provide a suitable plan. As the principal beautifully described, "La scuola è come un

sarto in realtà cuce addosso ad ogni alunno l'abito che li servisse. [The school is like a tailor in

reality, it alters each student's outfit based on what would serve them.] This statement is

reflected in the principal's inclusion project and her leadership.

Throughout the interviews, teachers shared that they acknowledged the uniqueness of

each student. The teachers showed compassion and empathy towards all of their students.

Teachers were aware of the different learners they were teaching. Carmela, a young teacher,

shared,

Io cerco sempre di fare un lavoro di semplificazione per tutti e poi nel dettaglio insomma

cerco di adeguare la lezione a quelli che sono di capacita simili. Chiaramente, il livello si

accoglie ognuno diverso quindi c'e' bisogno di fare un lavoro a parte.

[I always try to craft the lessons to each learner and pair up students based on their

similar comprehension. Clearly, learning is different for everyone, requiring additional

work.]

Carmela explained that the extra work was required to support her students better. The teachers

and school leaders were on the same frequency when serving the students. Like the teachers, the

school leaders found ways to find additional resources; the most important one was the search

for financial support. The assistant principal and principal shared the process of applying for

funds to better the school. The principal and assistant principal explained that the Ministry of

Education of the Italian government needs to fund the school more. The principal became aware

of the economic resources given by the European Union and put herself to work.

The principal and her team searched for grants the European Union (E.U.) provided. Via

its website, the E.U. shared the call for projects with all public schools across Europe; the

projects are shared periodically throughout the year. The process is a complex task, and it is very

competitive as well. The principal explained that depending on the grant, it takes them a year to

apply, if not longer. Teacher Marianna shared how great the E.U. grant funding had been for the

school "da quando partecipiamo ai P.O.N. stanno arrivando diciamo diversi tipi di materiale

soprattutto attraverso il computer, attraverso i digitali riusciamo ad aituare." [Since we

participate in the P.O.N. (a type of grant for supplies), we are receiving different types of

materials, primarily through the computer; through digital supports, we manage to help

[students]. Grants are for resources within the school, such as computers, desks, musical

instruments, or sports equipment. Alternatively, grants can be monetary to pay people to provide academic support such as tutoring. The principal explained that many principals across the state do not want to apply for grants because of the tedious and lengthy process. "Impiega molto tempo." [It takes a lot of time.] Because it takes time, many have asked her why she bothers to do it, but she said, "è per la mia scuola, per I, miei student" [it is for my school, for my students.] The principal's dedication was rewarding, but it also came with challenges.

In a follow-up interview, the principal appeared restless and overwhelmed; she confessed that she did not sleep because she was constantly worrying about her job all night. She talked about the different demands the school had, but she was desperate for more help. She requested more funds from the state and asked for more programs from the city, but her shouts for help were never heard. Miriam shared her love for her job, but her burnout was apparent. The teachers and the school leaders expressed gratitude for each other's collaboration in holding the school together, but they also shared their frustration and exhaustion.

This section highlighted the school's collaborative effort for inclusion. The critical factor for inclusion was the principal's influence over the school members to craft specific plans for immigrant students. The teachers praised the principal's leadership and felt valued for bringing the school to work collaboratively towards the vision for inclusion. The school adopted protocols to accommodate immigrant students with the resources they had. However, the teachers struggled to achieve the school's vision for inclusion without the proper personnel and resources. The school seemed to have a plan and resources for identifying and supporting immigrant students. The principal spoke of constantly searching for more resources and better ways to serve her students. The teachers also showed their dedication to teaching and supporting students with the means at hand. Both teachers and school leaders wanted more from the Ministry of Education

regarding resources. However, they were aware that their efforts were minimal to the work that needed to be done. In the next theme section, I explore the strategies the school teachers and leaders used to support the overall experience of immigrant students.

"Doing the Best with What We Got!"

In this theme, the participants described their efforts to promote inclusion and support immigrant students' academic and social experiences. Without the proper resources, teachers and school leaders used what they had available to serve immigrant students. First, the school leaders and teachers used special education teachers as a means to support linguistic needs. Secondly, the school staff used the available resources they had at hand for linguistic support. Lastly, the teachers and school leaders pushed for peer relationships for social inclusion. Although language is vital for dialogue, the linguistic barrier seemed to be the biggest problem for immigrant newcomer students because it gave them a learning disadvantage and delayed their social integration. Teacher Nunzia asserted:

> Ci sono parecchi ragazzi stranieri che comunque ogni anno arrivano nelle nostre classi e ti dirò che la situazione è un pó delicata. Nel senso che la scuola con quello che può offrire, fa tanto. Nel senso, i ragazzi hanno la difficoltá di parlare la nostra lingua e quindi ovviamente per loro c'é una pausa a livello didattico. Nel momento in cui nel loro paese lasciano il programma che stanno seguendo e poi si rialaccia a un programma italiano che non posso seguire per la stessa classe ne tanto meno per altre classi perché il vehicolo proprio fondamentale é la lingua.
>
> [Many immigrant students arrive yearly in our classrooms, and I will tell you the situation is delicate. In the sense that the school, with what it can offer, does a lot, in the sense that the students have difficulty speaking our language, and so obviously, for them,

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it is a pause at an educational level. When they leave their country and the program, they

follow and latch on to an Italian program; they cannot follow it or other classes because

the fundamental navigation is the language.]

Like Nunzia, other teachers and the principal believed language disadvantage hindered their

educational experience. However, language difficulty seemed to be the only concern and

noticeable difference for immigrant students across the interviews with school leaders and

teachers. Beyond the language disadvantages, the teachers explained that immigrant students

who spoke Italian were easily socially integrated among their native Italian peers. Teachers

explained how within their classrooms, they saw the interaction and relationships between native

Italian peers and immigrant children who spoke Italian. I explained later in this chapter how

teachers encouraged peer relationships. With the lack of resources, the school members got

creative in accommodating their newcomer students. For the immigrant students with language

disadvantages, the school attempted to be resourceful in a few ways: with the special education

teacher's help and by using different dialogue strategies.

In this theme, two subthemes emerged: a) Making the Impossible Possible; and b)

Fostering Relationships and Culture. The first subtheme, Making the Impossible Possible,

reveals the school's strategies to support immigrant students. The second subtheme,

Fostering Relationships and Culture, explored the relationship among immigrant students,

their families, and their native peers and how the school embraced the contributing cultures.

The subthemes relate to the theme "Doing the Best with What We Got!" which was a

reoccurring statement that surfaced in the interviews. The teachers, the assistant principal,

and the principal confessed that from their desperation of missing necessary resources, they

used what they could to help immigrant students.

Making the Impossible Possible

One of the most critical aspects of the experiences of immigrant students occurs within the classroom. Several strategies were brought up when teachers were interviewed about academically and socially accommodating immigrant students. For example, some teachers attempted to incorporate technology such as online translators. Others requested bilingual textbooks and assigned Italian peers to support their immigrant student classmates to assist in accommodating immigrant students with language barriers. This section provides the findings of how teachers cultivated the experiences of immigrant students within their classrooms. Rather than focusing on what the school needed, the school leaders and faculty strategized ways to use what they had to accommodate their students best. With limited funds, the school worked with additional personnel to assist with supporting immigrant students and the use of technology. One of the main strategies to support immigrant students' language comprehension that the school leaders pressed was the assistance of the special education teacher in the classroom.

Almost all classrooms had special needs students because of the Italy 92 law, also referenced as Legge 140, which required that special needs students would no longer be taught separately but in the classroom with the support of a special education teacher. Several teachers emphasized the importance of the special education teacher's presence for immigrant students in the classroom. Teacher Sonia shared:

La figura dell'insegnante di sostegno é importante perché ci aiuta, ci supporta in tutto. Nei riguardi del processo di inclusione sono un aiuto sia per i ragazzini seguiti da loro ma ci aiutano comunque anche con i ragazzini stranieri.

[The role of special education teachers is vital because they help and support us in everything. For example, for the inclusion process, they help the students they are assigned to and help us with immigrant students.]

Classroom teachers recognized that special needs teachers went above and beyond to assist their assigned students with a clinical diagnosis and tried to support immigrant students with linguistic support. Many teachers shared their appreciation for the special education teachers. Nunzia also shared "Portare avanti 20 ragazzini non è semplice c'è bisogno comunque dell'aiuto anche dei docenti di sostegno." [To carry forward 20 students is not easy, there has to be help from the special education teacher.] Teachers seemed to appreciate the special education teacher and felt they depended on their presence in the classroom.

While teachers and school leaders praised the additional help, special education Teacher Giovanni shared how this has become problematic with recent changes. He said,

Quest'anno mi hanno associato anche un altro ragazzo di una terza quindi faccio 9 ore e 9 questo sicuramente ha portato molti problemi perché mentre prima una continuità con l'alunno e li vedevi molto vicino a fare i compiti adesso viene messo più a lato.

[This year, they assigned me a new student in the third level, so I spent 9 hours [in one classroom] and 9 hours [in another classroom]; this has definitely brought many problems because initially, the students were used to working with me the whole time, but now they [the D.A.S. students] are set aside.]

Giovanni elaborated on the consequences of spreading himself thin; he explained how he had noticed that his assigned special needs students were falling behind. He expressed frustration and concern but understood that the teachers and students needed his support.

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Giovanni was the only special education teacher I had an opportunity to interview due to the importance of their presence within the classroom. Giovanni claimed his expertise was in working with students with disabilities and not with immigrant students. He showed me a workbook he used to book with immigrant students who spoke no Italian; it was beginner-level work. There was clear evidence from Giovanni's approach to immigrant students that he needed extra help and training.

The school leaders and classroom teachers expressed their gratitude for special education teachers in their classrooms, but they appeared oblivious to the detrimental consequences the immigrant students were facing. The teachers' demand for special education teachers was taking a toll on the special education teachers themselves and the students they were meant to assist. The Italian law of 1992 mandated that all students, regardless of their educational accommodations, were placed randomly in mainstream classrooms. I asked how the school leaders decided on the placement of the students; I was informed by the Assistant principal, Anna, that the classroom selection was not random. She said:

> Noi andiamo a vedere oltre alle classi che hanno minor numero di iscritti già all'interno anche là dove c'è un docente di sostegno perché in questo modo il docente di sostegno diciamo che di sostegno poi alla classe oltre che all'alunno può dare una mano pure insomma a questi ragazzini con un programma differenziato attento appunto dalla dell'alfabetizzazione.
>
> [We go and see not only which of the classes has fewer students registered but also where there is a special education teacher because, in this way, the special education

teacher can give support to the class not only to their assigned student but also to

these students with different plans explicitly paying attention to literacy.]

The school leaders believed that the immigrant students would benefit from being placed in

classrooms that provide special education need services already. Unfortunately, this weighed

down more responsibilities on the special education teachers who were not adequately

trained to work with immigrant students. Although Giovanni was the only special education

teacher I could interview, I found other ways to learn more about the special education

teachers' preparation. I was informed of their training from the interviews with the school

leaders, the special education teacher, Giovanni, and the special education coordinator,

Naomi. The special education teachers' training was intensive for disabled students, but they

received no preparation to work with Italian as second language learners.

Aside from special education teachers, the school occasionally had teachers working

internships, which they also attempted to use to their advantage to support immigrant

students. For example, assuming that most countries teach English as a second language, the

teachers tried to use English interns to help with linguistics. Teacher, Fabiana as the

inclusion coordinator, said:

Abbiamo degli insegnanti di potenziamento della lingua inglese quando non sono

occupati in classe prendono questi ragazzi che non parlano italiano. Si deve cominciare

daccapo ...cerchiamo di includere in questo modo facendo dei piccoli gruppi di lavoro e

quindi si parte da l'ABC.

[We have internship English teachers who, when they are not busy in class, take these

students that do not speak Italian; they must start from the beginning. We try to include

them in this way of making small groups work with and starting with the A.B.C.s]

Fabiana further explained how using the immigrant students' knowledge of English to build on the Italian basics was another strategy they attempted to use. While some European countries followed similar curricula and standards, not all immigrants were fluent in English. Therefore, the teachers' assumption that English would be used to communicate content that would eventually lead to learning the Italian language was problematic. While Fabiana used this method, Italian, history, and geography teacher Cristofaro, who once was a special education teacher, shared his experience of using the students, but English fluency was not successful. He spoke of a few students he works with who speak no Italian or English, so he said he used images or gestures to communicate the basics of the Italian language.

Although classroom teachers benefitted from creatively using the presence of additional help in the classroom, both English interns and special education teachers, their support was limited. Maura, for example, said:

Li aiutiamo noi con quello che riusciamo a fare sulle nostre forze. Perché poi colleghi di sostegno sono impegnati con gli alunni di sostegno. Noi qualcosa dobbiamo dare.

[We try to help them [immigrant newcomers] ourselves with what we can manage to do with our strength. Because our special education colleagues are busy with their assigned disabled students. We have to give them [newcomers] something.]

Cristofaro and Maura were interviewed together and expressed their concern about not having the proper resources or training to work with immigrant newcomers. Maura shared that she was the previous inclusion project coordinator, "Uno poi scive tante belle cose, ma poi rimane la, perche i fondi non ci sono." [One writes so many nice things, but then it is left there [on paper] because there are no funds.] Cristofaro and Maura exposed the hard truth that the interns and special education teachers spent limited time in the classroom, and their presence was

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inconsistent enough to make a difference. Therefore, teachers used their time outside of school to accommodate immigrant students' academic needs and display intercultural practices within their classrooms.

When strategizing for linguistic support, teachers attempted to get creative to get students to participate in class. For example, teacher Laura, who teaches English and French, described how she incorporates technology to get immigrant students intrigued to participate in class. She said:

> Molte volte riescono a coinvolgerli soprattutto con i giochi o gli esercizi finché sono di grammatica ma non sembrano di grammatica perché magari sono giochi online. Io li utilizzo spesso e purtroppo non sempre si può fare questo perché altrimenti non si riesce a portare avanti una programmazione però quando lo faccio noto che anche questi ragazzi partecipano di più.
>
> [Frequently, I manage to get them involved, especially with games or exercises that are grammar, but they do not seem to like grammar [exercises] because perhaps they are games online. I often use them and unfortunately cannot always do this because you cannot move forward with a lesson, but when I do, I notice that even these [immigrant] students participate more.]

Using the universal language of games, Laura could teach grammar and invoke a desire for students to learn. Teacher Laura focused on using strategies to teach her content, but when I asked how she welcomed culture into her classroom, she told me she did not. The interesting thing about Laura was that as a language teacher, she did not open opportunities within her classroom for immigrant students to share their culture. Instead, Laura seemed more focused on

getting her classroom content across rather than inviting opportunities for students to bring in their culture.

On the contrary, teacher Marianna, a physical education teacher, let go of the teacher-led pedagogy and used more creativity in the classroom as an invitation to inclusion. She shared her experience:

> Siccome teniamo la palestra fuori, noi dobbiamo uscire passare allo scoperto per andare in palestra a volte quando piove, io approfitto per fare la lezione teorica. Come devono fare ma a volte faccio fare dei giochi di società o dei giochi delle nostre tradizioni o delle loro tradizioni e quindi favorisco lo scambio li faccio lavorare in gruppi e loro si spiegano si divertono di loro allora la mia disciplina consente molte cose mi permette tanto e quindi lo sfrutto tutto quello che posso fare.
>
> [Since our gym is separate, we sometimes have to walk out in the open to go to the gym when it rains. So, I take advantage of having a theoretical lesson of social games or our traditional games and their traditions, and so I favor the exchange, and I make them work in groups, and they explain, and they have fun.]

Marianna stated in her interview that her physical education class was more accessible than other classes regarding the social inclusion of immigrant students. Marianna used this example of how inclusion looked like in her classroom. Her idea of cultural awareness and inclusion did not sound intentionally pre-planned but improvised when her intended lesson plan did not go accordingly.

The classroom instruction in the school context followed traditional methods of teacher-focused instruction. Although my questions did not focus on the teaching philosophy or their form of instruction, I noticed a difference in instructions within the interviews. There seemed to

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be a different teaching approach between the veteran and beginning-year teachers. Some teachers called on students to participate. For example, when I asked music teacher, Marila, how she handled situations with language issues, she did not seem concerned. She replied, "Ci dico adesso spiego poi vi chiamo e funziona alla meglio" [I tell them I would explain, and then I would call on them afterward, and it works somewhat.] Marila was not the only teacher that used a more direct method to involve students; teacher Fabiana confessed she often called on her students, including the newcomers. Both Marila and Fabiana were veteran teachers.

On the contrary, beginning teacher Carmela shared that when she also used a direct method of approach but tried something different than directly calling on students. She encouraged native classmates to help immigrant students to participate in the classroom. The teachers used what they assumed would work best to support the immigrant students. However, their efforts showed they lacked proper preparation to work with immigrant students. Research shows that while there has been some improvement in preservice teacher education, there is a need for better teacher education to include diverse students, including immigrant students (Tarozzi, 2014). Nevertheless, the teachers continued to do their best with what they had to accommodate the immigrant students in their classrooms.

Another attempt to help students with language disadvantages was using translated textbooks. The translated textbooks were provided in the language of the students in need. A few core subject teachers shared how they requested books in their students' language to serve them better. Italian, history, and geography teacher Nunzia shared, "Abbiamo chiesto anche ai rappresentanti dei libri qualche libro in lingua albanese che magari potesse avere anche la lingua italiana in modo da creare un gancio linguistico. [We even requested books from the book representatives in both the Albanian language and the Italian language to use as a reference.] The

core teachers were granted some funds to request textbooks, and teachers like Nunzia used it to their advantage. The bilingual or translated textbooks requested were an advancement for teaching classroom content. Like Nunzia, math and science teacher Roberta used the translated textbook to prepare some lessons ahead of time for the students. Again, Roberta shared how helpful the books were in her experience:

> L'anno scorso per aiutare questi alunni ho contattato un rappresentante dei libri perché esistono dei sussidi per gli alunni stranieri. Ne ho ricevuto uno come coordinatrice di classe o poi cercato gli argomenti che potevano interessarmi come materia legata a matematica oppure a scienza in modo che venendo già preparata quando io arrivo in classe i ragazzi sanno che devono lavorare sul materiale.

> [Last year, to help these students, I contacted a book representative because there are subsidies for immigrant students. I received one and looked for lessons that might interest me tied to mathematics or science. In that way, I came prepared when I arrived in class; the students knew that they needed to work on the material.]

Her concern for the student's attention and engagement in the class drove her to prepare in advance, requiring additional time outside the classroom to serve them best. The translated textbooks contributed to the academic success of newcomers, but the funds for books across all subjects were scarce. Roberta and Nunzia shared in their interviews that there was only a small budget for new textbooks, and the core subject teachers had priority over elective subject teachers. In fact, some teachers did not even mention textbooks as a strategy. Nevertheless, this attempted solution to accommodate immigrant students sounded better than in its practice because books were not available across all subjects and left students to self-teach themselves.

In every interview, online translators were mentioned as helpful in navigating dialogue. Using the translator was common for situations where there was no mutual understanding. Nunzia said:

Utilizziamo il computer per tradurre però ripeto è molto limitato perché poi non è che l'insegnante può stare lì a scrivere pagine intere di storie pagine, intere di geografia e quindi insomma facciamo quello che possiamo non è tanto però.

[We use the computer to translate, but I repeat, it is limited because it is not like the teacher can stay there writing whole pages of history pages, entire geography, and so in summary, we do what we can, it is not much, but this is it.]

In particular, Nunzia showed frustration with translating page after page. The pressure of managing a classroom and teaching a lesson for everyone to follow was overwhelming. There were several instances where Nunzia appeared burned out in our interview. Like other veteran teachers I spoke with, she seemed less concerned about fostering a bond with the students and more focused on the instruction of her classroom content.

In the interviews with teachers, they shared the different methods they attempted to support the overall experience of immigrant students in their classrooms. They used different strategies, such as using elective courses, and bilingual textbooks, calling on students, and using an online translator. These strategies were well-intended ways the teachers believed they supported the immigrant students' experiences.

Fostering Relationships and Culture

For context, students spent most of their day at school with one group of students, which allowed them to create relationships organically, and in other circumstances, teachers pressed for this interaction. Additionally, the school attempted to cultivate relationships with families by

hosting cultural events to give them a sense of belonging. Teachers believed peer relationships within the classroom were vital to fostering a connection between immigrant students and natives. The principal also spoke about how she encouraged native students to invite their immigrant peers for their birthday or a movie. She stated, "L'integrazione sociale avviene più in ritardo perché l'alunno di 13 -14 anni e' già formato e meno propenso ad aprirsi all'altro e la società stessa e meno propensa ad accogliere lo straniero. Quando sono più piccoli l'alunno piccolo della scuola primaria non la vede questa differenza." [Social integration takes longer for students of 13 or 14 years of age because they are older and less inclined to open up, and society is less inclined to accept them. When they are young, the child in primary school does not see a difference.] The principal acknowledged the audience she was working with and encouraged native students to help with this social integration. Teachers also shared how they used methods of reciprocal learning in the class and pushed students to spend time together outside of school. There were several occasions where the classroom peers' bonding happened organically. Fabiana shared the importance of peer relationships between the students:

> Devo dire c'è anche molta responsabilità dai parte da gli alunni proprio perché noi cerchiamo di sensibilizzarli al fatto di includerli. L'anno scorso io avevo una terza in cui arrivo un ragazzino io dissi guardate se per la fine dell'anno lui non avrà imparato bene la lingua avrete un voto in meno tutti. Vi minaccio anche in questo modo voglio che voi impariate qualcosa della sua lingua erano ucraino e voglio che lui impari bene l'italiano quindi ogni volta che c'è la ricreazione per cortesia fate sì che lui impari come si dice il bagno voglio mangiare il panino questo è un panino col salame questo e quel prosciutto quello è un supermercato quello e la cartolibreria questo ce lo dovete insegnarvelo voi

perché comunque lui trascorre sei ore a scuola con voi e noi dobbiamo dare qualcosa a questi ragazzi.

[I believe that a lot of the responsibility comes from the students, mainly because we have to raise awareness for inclusion. For example, last year, I had a third year I had an immigrant student; I told the class that if he did not learn the language well by the end of the year, you would all have a lower grade. So I am warning you all because I want you to learn something from his language, he is from Ukraine, and I want him to learn Italian well. So when there is recess, please make sure that he learns to say "the bathroom; I want to eat the sandwich; this sandwich has salami; this one has ham; that is the supermarket, that is a bookstore." You must teach these things because he spends six hours at school with you, and we have to give these kids something.]

We can see here how Fabiana is promoting interaction and not only emphasizing that the native students have something to teach, but they also have something to learn. Reciprocity is emphasized. The teacher here emphasizes that this is a task the students take up as a form of learning from each other and with one another. This ideology of learning with and from comes from intercultural education, highlighting the importance of dialogue among students (Liddicoat & Díaz, 2008). Teacher Fabiana understood that it was crucial for the student's integration into their community. It shows how the teacher here played a significant role in promoting this dialogue.

Teachers found strategies to enhance both immigrant and Italian students' academic and social performance by placing students in spaces in ways to promote interactions. Roberta, for example, shared:

Ho già distribuito i ragazzi nell'aula in modo diverso loro inizialmente i due erano gli stranieri si erano messi vicino li ho fatti stare per un po' e poi ho giustificato i posti assegnati ai ragazzi li ho separati sono sempre al primo banco perché in questo modo possono ascoltarci pure attenzione in modo più diretto rispetto agli ultimi banchi ma nel corso dell'anno. Ho ipotizzato anche l'idea di spostarli perché devono tutti cambiare posto sia per cambiare sia logisticamente parlando e anche alle donne che italiane che sono vicino a loro gli ho spiegato che hanno un ruolo di responsabilità nei confronti degli alunni perché devono essere e loro angeli custodi ma nel senso che quando nota no che magari la il compagno si è fermato o che non ha iniziato devono chiedere perché così il confronto avviene con un alunno italiano e l'alunno deve sforzarsi di trovare le parole giuste per comunicare all'altro ma anche durante la la ricreazione.

[I have already distributed the students in class differently. Initially, the two immigrant students sat together; I let them stay for a while then justified their assigned seats; I separated them while still keeping them at the first desk because they could listen well and pay attention more directly than sitting at the last desk. I also speculated on the idea of rotating them because everyone should change seats for relationships [with peers], and, logistically speaking. The Italian students that sat with them, I explained their role as guardian angels in the sense that if they notice their classmate has stopped or has not started, they must ask [the immigrant students]. Because this way, interaction occurs, Italian and newcomer students need to push themselves to find the right words to communicate to the other even during recreation time.]

We see here how the teacher intentionally arranged the classroom to encourage peer interaction. The students were encouraged to collaborate with their peers to complete assignments. The

assigned responsibility of the native students is to push their immigrant peers into the conversation. Further Roberta said, "Per me vale più questa loro relazione è stata importantissima più questo confronto, questa relazione che l'argomento di matematica". [For me, this relationship has more value; it was more imperative, this interaction, this relationship, than the math problem.] The teacher felt the importance of this exchange was more profound than the classroom subject. Teachers shared stories of observing their students and seeing them create bonds as the interaction between immigrant students and native peers occurred. Carmela affirmed:

> Nel inserirsi, se c'é un studento in difficolta, grazie ai ragazzi entrambi sia gli stranieri che si lasciano coinvolgere nelle attività, che gli altri che li accolgono e non li fanno sentire in difficolta.
>
> [If there is a student that has difficulties integrating, thanks to the students, both the immigrant students that have been here longer and the others [natives]; they welcome them and don't let them feel out of place.]

Carmela observed the natural occurrence of peer acceptance in her classroom. Teacher Maura spoke about how the native students acted towards the immigrant peers: "I ragazzi li amano, li accolgono. Anche se non parlano italiano, riescono a farsi capire." [The (native) kids love them (immigrant students); they accept them. Even if they do not speak Italian, they manage to understand.] In the interviews, the teachers explained that immigrant students were more conversational with their peers than their teachers, especially newcomers with language disadvantages. Teachers like Carmela and Maura acknowledged that the classroom was crucial for integrating immigrant children, which supports existing literature (Giusti, 2014; Minello & Barban, 2012; Pourdavood & Yan, 2020).

An interesting approach a few teachers took for native students to be more culturally accepting was using self-reflection. The idea of self-reflection is rooted in interculturalism, which requires a recognition of one's own cultural identity in order to create a dialogue of mutual enrichment (Liddicoat and Díaz, 2008). Roberta expressed:

> Delle volte ho chiesto agli alunni stranieri giusto per far capire la difficoltà agli alunni italiani e quindi essere inclusivi per dire vi rendete conto quando noi diamo per scontato che loro ci capiscono ma sei ore in classe ad ascoltare qualcosa di cui non si capisce niente quanto può essere difficile. Che sentimenti provereste ? Vi annoiereste? Giusto per far capire pure la posizione dell'uno straniero quando e nel banco e magari si sente disorientato aspetta una consegna perché non la inizia se non la se non l'ha capita perché se non gli viene semplificata o anche tradotta.
>
> [Sometimes, I have asked immigrant students just to show the difficulty to Italian students. And so, in order to be more inclusive, I question them (native students), do you realize how much we take for granted that they (immigrant students) understand us, but six hours in a class listening to something you do not understand can be challenging. What emotions would you feel? Would you be annoyed? Simply to help them understand the position of the immigrant students who are at their desks and may feel disorienting, waiting to be approached because they would only initiate it [dialogue] if it has been simplified or translated.]

Using an empathetic approach seemed important to Teacher Roberta; she shared her experiences working with immigrant students from her previous teaching jobs in the metropolitan area of Southern Italy. In those schools, she learned about the importance of immigrant students being seen. Roberta explained the constant modification she puts in to assist immigrant students better.

She is a math teacher who stresses the importance of the Italian language for immigrant students, not only to deliver the classroom content but also to create relationships with their peers. She facilitates group work to further use the Italian language and social integration of immigrant students. Although teachers like Roberta and Carmela wanted to drive students to create relationships with their peers, their help was not needed in some circumstances where peers naturally bonded.

While at the school, as students and teachers walked to their elective classes, such as physical education, the music lab, or the creative writing room, I noticed an authentic exchange between the students and could not identify the immigrant students among them. It was only when the special education coordinator pointed them out that I could identify who were the immigrant students. There were a handful of immigrant students of color within the predominately white school. As mentioned earlier, children born in Italy to immigrant parents were still considered an immigrant (see jus solis and jus sanguis reference). Yet, they were treated no differently than their peers because their integration within the community began at birth. The principal stated this, and she also laughed about how well they knew the town's dialect and spoke better Italian than some of the town's natives.

Peer relationships among native Italian and immigrant students served to enhance immigrant students' social and academic success. Another form of peer relationship helpful in dialogue was between immigrant students who had lived in Italy for a while and immigrant newcomers. Immigrant students living in Italy for a more extended period often played the role of an interlocutor between the teachers and newcomers. When the language was an obstacle for dialogue, teachers often used immigrant classmates who spoke Italian and the newcomers'

language to help with dialogue. Roberta collaborated on attempting to reach a newcomer student in the class.

> In altri momenti invece è stato importante anche l'aiuto da parte di un compagno straniero magari di uguale lingua che magari conoscesse di più già l'italiano perché sta in Italia da più tempo che traducesse la parte al compagno di classe.
>
> [Sometimes, it has been necessary to get help another immigrant student, perhaps that speaks the same language that knows more Italian from being in Italy longer, who would translate that part to their newcomer peer.]

The help of immigrant peers who spoke Italian and other languages was valuable and provided an easy way to communicate. Although, however, Roberta recognized the downfall of this approach, she shared her concern about using it because she worried the newcomer student would not push themselves to learn, so she tried to use it as little as possible. Nevertheless, in several interviews, assistant principal Anna and teachers Marianna, Laura, and Nunzia confessed that immigrant students who spoke Italian helped classmates and their parents deliver conversation.

Parents' involvement was brought up throughout the interviews. Teachers implied that it was important for the students to have a strong family presence. Teachers and school leaders said that most immigrant parents were in attendance at the events and parent-teacher conferences, but not everyone. However, when I asked how they invite parents to participate in school events, they did not have a separate way to reach out to them. Instead, they simply expected parents to just show up based on the little information they received from their own children. For example, Marianna explained how immigrant students acted as translators for their parents:

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Alcuni genitori invece vengono loro qui a chiedere informazioni e ed è sempre il figlio che fa da tramite perché poi ragazzino quando ha cominciato a conoscere un poco la lingua riesci a trasmettere al genitore diciamo la notizia o la comunicazione che noi vogliamo fare.

[Some parents instead come here to ask for information, and it is always their kid that acts as a translator because the student starts to recognize a little of the language so they can transmit the news or communication we are trying to do to the parents.]

Students were left to communicate to their best knowledge between parents and the school team. This method of dialogue becomes problematic when delicate matters are to be discussed, such as the student's educational attainment or social performance. Using students to interpret hinders the relationship between the school and families. Moreover, for newcomer families where the student knew no Italian, parents were left without any additional help. A few teachers stated that they did send flyers home, but they were not intentionally translated for immigrant parents to understand.

The school could not provide immigrant families with interpreters, so they connected the immigrant families to include them within the school community. Immigrant parents living in Italy longer than newcomer immigrants were often available to help with the language barrier. For example, some immigrant parents were often accompanied by someone they brought themselves to help translate at parent-teacher conferences. Teacher Laura shared,

Ci sono alcuni genitori che per fortuna magari riescono a comunicarci prima che magari conoscono di più la lingua italiana dagli altri in cui con cui invece è comunque difficile però ecco si fanno sempre aiutare magari da qualcuno del lungo che magari fa da intermediario.

[There are some parents that luckily can communicate with us that perhaps they know the Italian language more than others that do not, and it is hard, but they get help perhaps from someone who has been here longer to be a mediator.]

Immigrant parents in the community collaborated with newcomer immigrant parents to assist them. The school often set up for immigrant parents to meet to help with language and familiarize the new families with the school's logistics. The school members seemed confident in their helpful community. This method helped immigrant families connect throughout the community, which could also promote social integration. Another example, teacher Nunzia said:

C'è la mamma dello studente che è in seconda e non parla bene in italiano ma ha un compagno italiano e quindi viene sempre accompagnato infatti anche quando chiamo io al telefono risponde sempre lui di modo che poi passa la parola al alla mamma invece. [A student's mom in my second period does not speak good Italian, but her partner is Italian, so she always comes accompanied. In fact, when I call, he is the one to answer and then passes my message to the mom.]

Parents from the community came together to communicate, and the families felt welcomed from the teachers' perspectives. The school leaders and teachers claimed they were lucky to have this help from other immigrant parents. However, there were a few concerns that sprouted, one being that not all immigrant parents came from the same countries nor spoke the same language. In addition, using community members as a resource was inconsistent due to their own matters and schedule conflicts, leaving the newcomer parents disconnected.

The school leaders and teachers explained that when language barriers rose, the use of online translators came into play. The first attempt to include parents was connecting them with

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other immigrant parents, but in their absence, they relied on the use of technology. Moreover, in Roberta's case:

> Quindi il primo colloquio l'ho avuto c'era il papà che parlava l'italiano probabilmente perché è venuto prima in Italia che traduceva poi alla mamma. Le altre volte ho scritto la comunicazione al ragazzo tramite Google traduttore in modo che lui la riportasse a casa la mamma. Quando ho provato a contattarla telefonicamente lei ha capito, io le ho detto sono la professoressa di matematica lei mi ha chiesto mi puoi scrivere whatsapp?Cosi lei faceva la traduzione del messaggio.

> [The first conference I had, there was the dad that spoke Italian, probably because he came earlier in Italy and translated for the mom. Other times I wrote the student the communication via Google translator so he could deliver it at home to the mom. Then, when I tried to contact her by phone, she understood; I told her I was the math teacher, and she asked me if I could text her on *WhatsApp.* So she would then translate the message.]

The father's presence was not a constant convenience leaving Roberta to find other ways to communicate with them. In this instance, technology was a convenient resort. One of the easiest methods for dialogue between school members and newcomers and their families was online translators.

The school hosted cultural events as a way to mirror their inclusion vision, where they would celebrate all cultures within their school. Cultural events were often led by music and art teachers. The school members displayed cultural diversity as inclusive practices by organizing cultural events. Teacher Fabiana was the representative of the inclusion project; she explained that her duty as an inclusion representative was to coordinate and promote events for all students

to participate. Nunzia spoke of past events the school organized for inclusion: "Un anno che i genitori prepararono i dolci tipici del loro paese e fu un bel momento per tutti noi sopratutto per i ragazzi che si sentivano accolti e partecipi della comunità." [One year, parents prepared typical desserts from their country of origin, and it was a beautiful moment for us, especially for the students who felt welcomed and participated in their community.] Nunzia implied the importance of belonging for immigrant students and their families. The school claimed they provided welcoming spaces, but a few situations pointed out that their equity lens needed some readjusting. The school leaders and teachers spoke of cultural events to include immigrant parents but took no initiative in sending translated flyers home. Nor did they ask immigrant families and students what they wanted to display about their culture.

In one of the circumstances, the school spoke of Christmas events as inclusive practices. Some of the events included music concerts facilitated by Teacher Luigi and Teacher Marila. Like many Italian schools, the school is Catholic and has a Christmas concert yearly. Teachers Luigi and Marila shared how they invited immigrant students to sing Christmas songs in their native language. While some immigrant students from neighboring European countries may participate, the music teachers did not share how they included students from different beliefs to participate in the yearly concert. In another interview, I specifically asked how non-Catholic students were included. Teacher Marianna recalled:

Una volta mi ricordo una ragazza di colore che ballo' un ballo tradizionale del suo paese straniero ma molto bello. E poi anche i ragazzi di colore che hanno delle disabilità o delle problematicità partecipano con gli strumenti, quello che riescono a fare, quel poco che riescono a fare ma sempre integrati nel gruppo mai messi da soli.

[Once, I remember a girl of color that danced in a different language, a traditional dance of her national origin. It was nice. Moreover, also students of color with disabilities participated with instruments, whatever they could do, the little they are capable of doing but integrated into the group and never set aside.]

Teacher Marianna confidently commented on how involved immigrant students are in extracurricular activities. When I asked about parents' attendance at school events, Marianna said most parents tried to attend. In situations where parents could not attend, she replied, "ci siamo noi" [we are here]. Marianna explained when parents had other obligations; the school staff tried to be present to support the students. Parents were openly invited to these events through flyers and emails, but most commonly through their children, which is problematic when there is a language barrier. The school did not provide translated event flyers but simply expected their presence. In fact, in the interviews, the teachers implied that strong families were the foundation for the student's success. Although most immigrant parents tried to be present in their child's school performance, some parents could not attend due to their work schedule, as Marianna stated. The school events, therefore, seemed exclusive for parents who unfortunately could not attend due to work schedule conflicts. Overall, the school believed the cultural events promoted exposure to the community and a form of inclusive practice for immigrant students and their families.

The teachers acknowledged issues in their preparation to work with immigrant students, but they truly believed they were doing their best with what they had. When I asked the teachers how they promoted cultural diversity, surprisingly they all responded with examples of how they did this through extracurricular activities and events, but it was not integrated into their lesson plan. Not even the English and French teacher, Laura, planned specific cultural projects in her

class. The teachers did not seem aware of the problematic assumptions and detrimental efforts they conceived for immigrant students. In the next section, I discussed the challenges school leaders and teachers felt when cultivating immigrant students' academic and social experiences.

"The Abandoned South"

Throughout this study, the school members showed their vision, strategies, and challenges. This last theme addresses the challenges affecting how school leaders and teachers attended to and supported immigrant students. The themes discussed support for all immigrant students, specifically newcomers needing linguistic support. The challenges encountered in the findings were: a) teacher preparation training: b) the urgency for intercultural mediators: and c) the exigency for afterschool programs. Unfortunately, these challenges resulted from the Ministry's lack of funds rather than from the school. The school has submitted multiple requests for additional support and funds but has yet to be considered by the Ministry, leaving the school to do what it can.

For context, the school is located in a rural city in Southern Italy, where there has been a low supply of educational resources for schools. Teacher Marianna articulated how she felt regarding the school funds:

È sempre poco quello che si ha ed è sempre poco anche quello che danno perché la scuola più strumenti ha a disposizione più riesce a favorire l'integrazione di questi ragazzi. Noi qui a sud diciamo che siamo un po' abbandonati.

[It is always little what one has, and it is always little what they give us because the more the school has available, the better it can favor the integration of these students. Us, here in the South we are a little abandoned.]

The lack of funds was the prominent reason school members expressed they could not better serve immigrant students. Marianna's comment about the South being abandoned became the title for this theme as it articulated the feelings of the school members and their desperation for resources.

From my time at the school, it was evident that it needed to be more economically sponsored. In addition, there was the stringent odor of all-purpose cleaner and a collection of dust. The paint on the walls was washed out, the desks were beaten down, and the volleyball court in the middle of the courtyard needed severe renovation. Some classrooms still had chalkboards and windows stained, so you could not look through them. Regardless of the school's appearance, its members welcomed all students. Unfortunately, the school efforts for inclusion required more work, leaving teachers frustrated, overwhelmed, and unprepared to work with immigrant students.

More Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation is not needed only for newcomers' linguistics support but to produce more culturally competent teachers. The need for intercultural exchange was also a missing factor the teachers needed. In the interviews, the teachers and school leaders emphasized that they did their best with what they had. However, they also were aware that this process was not easy. Teacher Cristofaro reflected on his many years of experience and how he still struggled to teach Italian to newly arrived-immigrant students. Cristofaro explained that he offers additional help during his break period. When asked why he said:

> Poi quando studi una cosa poi entri una classe dove trovi un bambino che ha delle
>
> difficoltà allora devi essere tu cioè tu sei il laboratorio tu devi cercare di trovare dei
>
> sistemi per farlo integrare. Si prova delle strategie, o un metodo cooperativo di strategie

cercando anche di di trovare delle soluzioni per i ragazzi che stanno interni della classe. É il mio lavoro e anche perché li voglio bene.

[When you study something, and then you enter a classroom where you find a student that has difficulties, then you must be the researcher; you must experiment to find ways for them to integrate. So we attempt different or school-wide strategies to find a solution for the students within the classrooms. It is my job and because I care about them.]

His experience within the classroom showed him that there is always something to learn as a teacher to serve the students better. Cristofaro depicted the reality he and other teachers face when having a student in difficulty and being unable to help them. Although he saw the struggles, Cristofaro focused on finding solutions with his fellow teachers to support immigrant students in their classrooms best. Teacher Sonia also described her love for her job as the reason why she did not mind the extra work. She said, "Sicuramente la l'amore per il mio lavoro." [It is definitely for the love I have for my job.] The teachers justified their additional stress with their love for teaching. Teachers and school leaders recognized there was a need for improvement to overall support the immigrant students. As stated in the school's inclusion project, the process towards inclusion is never-ending:

E' per questo che il presente progetto non può definirsi mai concluso, di anno in anno sarà nostra cura intervenire per migliorarlo e adeguarlo alle situazioni e alle nuove consapevolezze che via via emergeranno. Come ogni strumento di lavoro dovrà permeare le relazioni tra scuola, studente, familia e servizi sociali e, pertanto, verrà arricchito nel tempo da nuove sensibilità ed esperienze.

[This is a never-ending process and can never be considered concluded because every year, the school must intervene to improve inclusion and adjust to new

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situations that may emerge. Like any work tool, it will have to permeate the

relationships between school, student, family, and social services and, therefore, will

be enriched over time by new sensitivities and experiences.

This inclusion projects a never-ending process molded year after year to serve the students best.

Teachers are pressed to take action to accommodate students without consistent assistance in

class. The school leaders and teachers understood that there was work to do and room for

improvement. The school members seemed well aware of the missing support they needed to

help immigrant students and the need to reassess their strategies. However, they continued using

their methods of approach which continued to hinder the overall experience of the immigrant

students.

When teachers were asked how they felt working with immigrant students, they all felt

the need for more preparation, regardless of the courses they took in their teacher education

preparation. Teacher Cristofaro said:

Abbiamo fatto dei corsi sull'inclusione però voglio dire che comunque è tutto

diciamo ancora da scoprire perché l'inclusione è quello che tu fai in classe realmente,

non è quello che studi.

[We have taken some classes on inclusion, but I want to say that everything is still

yet to uncover because inclusion is what you actually do in class, not something you

study.]

Although inclusion is written as their policy, teachers like Cristofaro recognized that words

in a text must translate into action when you are in class. The classroom turned out to be

different than what was on paper. Another example is how teacher Sonia felt:

Mi sentivo che non avevo gli strumenti o comunque non sapevo come fronteggiare

credo che comunque un po di formazione vada fatta ah ho seguito qualche corso però

non di tante ore erano semplicemente dei webinar però secondo me ci vorrebbe una

formazione perché vedo che è una cosa che giustamente la nostra società si trasforma

sempre di più ed è un'esigenza a cui andiamo incontro.

[I felt like I did not have the necessary tools, nor did I know how to confront the

issue; I believe some training or preparation should be done. I have followed some

courses but not many hours. It was simply a webinar, but I think we need specific

training because I see that our society is increasingly transforming, and we must

prepare for what we are going up against.]

Sonia pointed out the incoming issues the school will face if teachers are not fully prepared

to accommodate the continuous flow of immigrant students. Sonia was the only teacher who

mentioned the L2 program offered now in the teacher preparation courses in Italian

universities (Chiofalo et al., 2019b). The purpose of this program was to help teachers teach

students whose first language is not Italian. This program is a new approach to

accommodating immigrant students, and many current veteran and in-service teachers do not

have these credentials. Unfortunately, the participants of this study felt unprepared to work

with immigrant students. In fact, most teachers stated they did not feel prepared to work with

immigrant students, including language teacher Annarita:

Secondo me la presenza di di una/un docente un po' comunque un educatore qualcuno

che affianchi il docente di classe. in classe. man mano che andiamo avanti con gli anni

questi ragazzi stranieri aumentano, quindi effettivamente è una figura che dare una mano

ai docenti.

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[I think the presence of someone who works with the classroom teacher [is needed]. The more we go forward in the years, the number of immigrant students is increasing, which effectively requires a figure to give a hand to the teachers.]

Teachers acknowledge where they faltered in providing to immigrant students, which is why they had a strong desire for additional help in the classroom. Specifically, there was a desire for someone to help in the classroom with immigrant newcomers. Special education teachers were responsible for working with immigrant students while working with their assigned special educational needs students, leaving them overwhelmed. The teachers recognized they needed a specific figure to support immigrant students. The school leaders and teachers craved the support of someone that would bridge both linguistic and cultural connections for students to navigate.

The Need for Intercultural Mediators

Scholars have shared that intercultural mediators (also referenced in this study as cultural mediators) are crucial for transitioning newcomers into their new homes (Amato & Garwood, 2011; Catarci, 2015). As multiple teachers were interviewed, the language barrier was their biggest concern for students' academic and social success. As most teachers showed to be resourceful in helping immigrant students with language disadvantages, they expressed frustration when they did not have the support. Nunzia explained, "I cannot spend the whole time working with them; I need to continue the lessons." Nunzia appeared worried about her students. She recognized the language barrier issue and tried to resolve it the only way she knew how, but she also realized it was not enough. Teacher Maura expressed:

Uno scrive tante cose belle che però poi resta la perché i fondi non ce ne sono,

perché per noi che stanno alle scuole medie dovremmo fare dei corsi pomeridiani

però comunque dicono non ci sono i fondi e quindi abbiamo un pochino noi

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insegnanti ma come ha detto il professore su quello che riusciamo a fare sulle nostre

forze non non di più.

[One writes many pretty things, but it remains there because there are no funds;

because our students are in middle school, we should be doing afternoon classes but

they say we don't have the funds, and so we help a little us teachers, but what we can

do with our strength and nothing more.]

The previous year, Maura shared that she was the coordinator of the inclusion project. She

showed frustration towards the Ministry because she felt limited in her plans for the

inclusion project. The school leaders' and teachers' vision for inclusion was hindered by

forces outside of their control. Naomi, the special education coordinator, vented how it was

already November, and back in August, the school was approved to hire an additional

special education teacher for the school year, but the state showed no urgency in the hiring

process. Naomi said she sometimes felt helpless because she could not provide extra help for

everyone. However, this dilemma was not under the school's control.

Assistant Principal Anna explained further that the school could only hire a few

special education teachers due to the lack of additional funds. While these teachers were also

being used to support language disadvantages, the government did not recognize this

necessity, leaving the school to manage with what they had. Although special education

teachers like Giovanni were facing burnout, he recognized the importance of his help. He

shared:

I docenti di classe devono gestire già la classe per spiegare...ti puoi dedicare magari 5

minuti alla fine della lezione ma non puoi. Tu ti devi dedicare esclusivamente a loro

dopo e quello che non lo puoi fare quindi almeno il docente di sostegno si rende

conto che di questo problema e cerca di di dare un modo di aiutare.

[The teachers have to manage the class already to lecture, you can dedicate 5 minutes

at the end of class, but you cannot. You must exclusively dedicate yourself to them,

and you cannot do that, but at least the special education teacher sees that this is a

problem, and they try to give a hand to help.]

The time was limited for the help the special educators could give the students with linguistical

disadvantages. Moreover, in a conversation with Teacher Maura and Cristofaro, they explained

how grateful they were for the additional support when it was present because sometimes the

additional help would have to cover as a substitute teacher. However, unfortunately, the time

spent in the classroom was limited for teacher Giovanni because he had to juggle being between

different classes.

The assistant principal elaborated that when communicating with parents, parents bring

their friends that may have been living longer in Italy to help translate. She said:

Purtroppo non abbiamo i mediatori culturali perché [sono] questi che mancano nelle

scuole...non non abbiamo proprio queste figure. Fortunatamente non è che sono

tantissimi diciamo che siano tantissimi questi studenti stranieri e quindi riusciamo a

cavarcela anche ecco anche noi stessi vediamo come fare ad aiutarli peró queste figure

mancano...mancano veramente.

[Unfortunately, we do not have cultural mediators because [they] are whom the school is

missing...we do not have these figures. Fortunately, there aren't many of these immigrant

students, so we tend to manage even ourselves try to figure out how to help them but

these figures are truly missing.]

Assistant principal Anna responded in regards to accommodating both immigrant students and parents. Many teachers expressed a concern for the language barrier including former inclusion coordinator Maura, "Ci vorrebbe un affiancamento, un'altra persona nel loro caso un mediatore culturale." [There should be a support, another person, in their case, a cultural mediator.] Cultural mediators are important figures that teachers and school leaders requested but were ignored by the Ministry. Teachers tried to advocate for the benefits of their presence, Roberta said, "Per le prime fasi piuttosto che utilizzare strumenti tecnologici avere un mediatore anche per la famiglia per avere una persona di riferimento." [In the initial phase, instead of using technological instruments, it would be helpful to have a mediator even for the family to have a person they can refer to.] This is not needed for all immigrant students but for the newcomers that need time to adjust to the Italian language. The request to the ministry was denied because the percentage of immigrant students was not alarming like that of more metropolitan areas.

In response to finding solutions without the cultural mediators, many teachers suggested afterschool programs to support students with literacy, beginning with the alphabet. However, teacher Maura says "La voglia ci sta, le idee ci sono però poi non essendoci i fondi la preside non puó pagare i docenti, allora dipende dallo stato." [There is a will, there are ideas; however, without the funds, the principal cannot pay the teachers, so it is up to the state]. She pointed out that the school leaders' and teachers' intentions are good, but they are impeded from moving forward because of the financial needs the state is not procuring. In response to the need for intercultural mediators or afterschool programs, principal Miriam shared that the City has initiated an afterschool program in 2022 that is free and open to all students; the school specifically pushes for immigrant newcomers to attend. However, the flyers showed that the program had limited seats, and how it was communicated with the parents with linguistic barriers

was unclear. Furthermore, Principal Miriam discussed the afterschool linguistic support program she coordinated through the European grant for the inclusion project. This process was tedious because the grant required an out-of-school hire which meant more paperwork and more wait time for the disadvantaged students. This plan would teach the fundamentals of the language from English to Italian. She hopes the new grant will be linguistically helpful for immigrant students. There were several instances were principal Miriam showed she was an effective leader which created a strong environment. Devos and Bouckenooghe (2009) stated effective leaders were goal oriented, inclusive in decision making and innovative. Principal Miriam was goal oriented with her vision for inclusion, she showed participative decision-making skills as she crafted the inclusion project with teachers and the assistant principal. Further, Miriam was an innovator as she attempted to find creative ways to better serve her students. Lastly, Miriam cooperated with teachers and the assistant principal which was important for the successful implementation of an immigrant inclusive education. The school leaders and teachers attempted to find ways to attend to the rise of immigrant students in their school, but with financial limitations, their initiatives fell short in their vision for the inclusion of immigrant students. Moreover, within the interviews, the teachers and the school leaders showed a need for better teacher preparation when working directly with immigrant students. While their intentions were good, they fell short of grasping the cultural awareness and training of intercultural education.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided the key findings that emerged from the data analysis. This chapter was divided into three themes: A Collaborative Effort for Inclusion; "Doing the Best with What We Got!" and; The Abandoned South, with subthemes that followed in each theme. The initial theme revealed how school leaders and teachers attempted to be a more inclusive

school. Specifically, in this first theme section, we see the influence the principal's vision for inclusion had on the rest of the school. Additionally, it showed the protocol the school took specifically for immigrant students. The second theme answered how the school members accommodated immigrant students into their school using what they had readily available. Also, the responsibilities and strategies teachers and principals took were explored. Finally, the last theme addressed the challenges the teachers and school leaders encountered due to the Italian government's lack of assistance. The findings answered the two research questions, contributing to the literature on immigrant students in Italian schools.

This research explored how principals and teachers in a southern Italian rural middle school attended to immigrant students. The themes discussed in this chapter answered RQ1: How do school leaders attend to the increase in immigrant students in a rural middle school in Southern Italy? RQ2: What are the perceptions of Italian teachers in a rural middle school in Southern Italy on how they are supporting immigrant students? This study contributes to the experience of immigrant students in foreign schools; specifically, this contributes to the under-researched areas of Southern Italy, where immigrant students' attendance is on the rise. The study shows that the efforts of a small school community to accommodate immigrant students, while well-intended, still need improvement to support their overall academic and social experience.

In the next chapter, I will restate the problem and purpose of this research. I will then discuss my interpretation of the findings and how they answered my research questions. Using an interpretive paradigm, I explore the meaning of the key findings. I also use my conceptual framework in my discussion. The next chapter will be organized by themes and subthemes found in this chapter. I will also reference existing literature from Chapter II and

highlight any missing gaps in this research. The chapter will expose the limitations of this

research and include implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to explore the perspectives and attitudes of principals and teachers in Southern rural Italy. Several studies in Italy attach negative connotations to the experience of immigrant students in Italian schools, critiquing any educational efforts (see Barberis & Violante, 2017; Bonizzoni et al., 2016; Catarci, 2018; Fiorucci, 2015; Liddicoat & Diaz, 2008; Richter, 2022). There is evidence from existing literature that immigrant students are in need of additional resources to succeed academically and socially in their new environment. Most of the literature on immigrant students in Italian schools references the experiences of students in the Northern regions of the peninsula, where there are more economic opportunities (Caponio & Donatiello, 2017; Cardiello, 2019; Genzone, 2018). My interest in this study was to explore a rural southern region of Italy where poverty rates are higher and the schools are less connected to the help of the Italian government.

For this basic qualitative study, I used a critical lens. My framework joined intercultural education, the overall importance of school leaders, and teachers' attitudes towards immigrant students, which I believe are key influencing factors in immigrant students' experience. In my methodology chapter, I provided an overview of the different components which informed my framework. My methods included interviews, field notes, and document analysis. The study took place in a small middle school in a rural town of Campania, in Southern Italy. There was a total of sixteen participants, fourteen teachers, and two school leaders. I interviewed each participant once and conducted follow-up interviews with the special education coordinator and the principal, where the assistant joined in. I spent four hours daily for seven days at the school to conduct my research at the beginning of November 2022. I collected interview data, relevant

documents, and fieldnotes from my encounters in the school. I transcribed and translated the documents and interviews from Italian to English.

In the previous chapter, I identified three different themes as I analyzed the data. Theme one, *A Collaborative Effort for Inclusion,* showed how the school leaders and teachers worked together towards their vision of inclusion. This theme was divided into two subthemes. The first subtheme of this section, *An Inclusive Leader Brings Everyone Together,* captured the importance of the role of an inclusive principal. The second subtheme, *Resources for Identifying and Supporting Immigrant Students,* shared the school's procedures for immigrant students. The second theme: "*Doing the Best with What We Got!"* was named after the reoccurring statement that emerged from the interviews with teachers and principals. Regardless of the missing components to apply an inclusive environment, the school leaders and teachers believed they did their best. This theme was divided into two subthemes. The first, *Asking the Impossible to be Possible,* discussed the teachers' and school leaders' struggles for linguistic support within the classroom. The second subtheme, *Fostering Relationships, and Culture,* displayed how the school staff attempted to cultivate relationships with immigrant students, their families and their culture. The title of the final theme, *The Abandoned South,* comes from an interview with a teacher who explains the government's lack of help in Southern Italy; this section explored the feelings of teachers and principals about their lack of resources. In the subthemes, *More Teacher Preparation* and *The Need for Intercultural Mediators,* teachers and principals confessed how they felt unprepared and desperate for additional help and resources beyond the school leaders' control.

The findings answered the following research questions: (RQ1) How do school leaders attend to the increase in immigrant students in a rural middle school in Southern Italy? And

(RQ2) What are the perceptions of Italian teachers in a rural middle school in Southern Italy on how they are supporting immigrant students? In this chapter, I combine my interpretation of the data with my conceptual framework informed by existing literature to answer the research questions. Lastly, I elaborate on the limitations, recommendations for practice, and future research and conclude with my final thoughts as a scholar.

Discussion

Within the existing literature on immigrant students in Italian schools, scholars have shown a need for improvement (see Bianchi et al., 2021; Biasutti and Concina, 2021; Caravita et al., 2020; Malúsa, 2020). Scholars like Biasutti and Concina (2021) analyzed Italian school teachers' teaching methods and practices and highlighted the need to promote better integration for immigrant children. Similarly, my study emphasized the need for improvement to better serve immigrant students. Within my study, there was a strong positive outcome from the principal's attitudes and beliefs toward immigrant students, which created an inclusive environment. The school leader influenced teachers, staff, and students to push for the inclusion of immigrant students. The school leaders projected a vision for inclusion; teachers bore the responsibility of converting words into actions in their classrooms. With language barriers and little additional support, teachers spent overtime hours crafting strategies for dialogue with immigrant students. Unlike existing literature that showed how native peers bully immigrant students (Caravita et al.) and found teachers' and principals' perceptions to be harmful towards immigrant students (Malúsa, 2020), my study differed because teachers and principals wanted to be inclusive, and they prevented bullying. However, there were different factors that hindered the school leaders and teachers and how they fostered their relationships with immigrant students, their families, and their culture.

In the next section, I provide my interpretation of my findings which is divided into two sections: School leaders Attending to the Rise of Immigrant Students and Teachers Perceptions on Supporting Immigrant Students. In the first section, I discuss the school leaders' efforts for an inclusive protocol and the factors that hindered their vision. In the second section, I interpret the perceptions of teachers on their linguistic and social support. Within this section, I explained how each section answers my research questions and how they further challenge the topic of my study. Finally, I center the different scholarships that informed immigrant students' experience to understand how school leaders and teachers responded to supporting immigrant students.

School Leaders Attending to the Rise of Immigrant Students

In much of the existing literature, researchers emphasized the importance of the role of the principal in relation to the overall experience of immigrant students (Biassutti & Concina, 2021; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020). I place the notion of the overall importance of school leaders within my framework because, in regard to implementing inclusive immigrant education, the school leader is essential. In addition, I believe the role of the school leader is important because intercultural education theory cannot survive in an environment that rejects the idea of embracing other cultures. Therefore, I borrowed from Devos and Bouckenooghe (2009) three characteristics of strong school climates. I find the school leaders fit into three dimensions: goal "orientedness," participative decision-making, and innovativeness (p. 177). I explain how the school leaders contributed to the school climate in this section. My research revealed that the principal and assistant principal had a significant role in the teachers' perceptions of the overall experience of immigrant students. The school leaders promoted an inclusion project that was intended to accommodate all students, including immigrant students, with the necessary needs to succeed. The principal's quick response to address any matter showed a preparation to embrace

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students as they arrived at their school. The interviews also revealed that the principal and assistant principal worked together to find additional resources to help students with language disadvantages. The school leaders attended to the immigrant students by pressuring the government for help; they also sought help elsewhere. Regardless of the attempts, the school leaders were aware that the school still needed help, such as additional resources, personnel, teacher training, and more programs to enhance the overall experience of students, not only academically but socially as well. The findings also revealed the school's need for more growth when it comes to equitable practices for immigrant students and families. Overall, however, the teachers and school leaders believed students felt welcomed and part of the school, especially once they obtained Italian fluency. The next section is divided into two topics: An Inclusive Protocol, and, Factors Hindering the Vision, where I offer insight into Research Question One on how school leaders attended to the rise of immigrant students.

An Inclusive Protocol

The school leaders and teachers had embraced an inclusion project which was influenced by the Italian government's law92 (Legge 140 del 1992) inclusion policy (see Liddicoat and Diaz, 2008, p. 6-7). The project the school leaders and teachers created followed guidelines from the inclusion policy, which was created to promote the inclusion of students with special educational needs. Moreover, the school leaders and teachers added objectives to their inclusion project to better assist their students. Some of the inclusion project objectives, for example: creating an accommodating and inclusive climate for students and families; and planning formal classroom integration, were being approached. The school leaders and teachers collaborated on these objectives for their inclusion project. The aims of the project the school leaders and teachers created to reflect the inclusion project and intercultural education practices. The

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objectives that the school leaders and teachers created shared values of Gube's (2023) guiding principles of teaching intercultural education that revolve around respect, guidance, and facilitating dialogue among all peers. In different ways, the objectives of the inclusion project were a way that the school leaders and teachers held themselves accountable. In fact, the principal points out a statement within the inclusion project, which speaks of how the inclusion project is a never-ending process that requires revision every year for the betterment of the experience of the students.

Without good leadership, there is chaos. Agasisti et al. (2020) highlighted "if the principal has good collaborators at disposal, implementing more effective managerial practices can actually be easier" (p. 948). In other words, the principal needed a strong team to bring her vision forward. The principal is at the center of how the school embraced the idea of an inclusive environment. The principal, Miriam, philosophized about mutual openness:

> In un certo punto della vita e dello studente si devono aprire è come un fiore che si apre si specchia dentro l'altra parte. dove le due culture devono scambiarsi per interagire e per convivere insieme dove ognuno si arricchisce della particolarità e della diversità dell'altra cultura.
>
> [At a certain point in their life, the student must open, it is like a flower that flourishes, it mirrors itself, just like that, the two cultures must exchange to interact and cohabit where everyone is enriched by the particularity and by the diversity of the other culture.]

Principal Miriam saw the beauty in the exchange of diversity and believed this process was crucial for immigrant students to feel a sense of belonging. As Pasquale (2015) stated, "Intercultural education intends to guide students to the awareness of the variety of identities and cultures, in order to put into effect consciousness and respect behaviors and dialogic openness to

otherness" (p. 2676). Principal Miriam also defined inclusion as an openness to each other, as she articulated in the follow-up interview. Principal Miriam showed her belief in intercultural and inclusive education in how she contributed to the factors that influence immigrant students.

The school leader understood the importance of her role, which rippled into the school climate. The resilience of the school leaders and teachers in my study supported the intercultural notion of mutual openness; they believed in the possibility of an inclusive environment. In this study, the principal's attitude was reflected in the teachers' classroom performance and the overall climate of the school. The teachers appreciated their workspace. For example, Carmela described the school as "a welcoming, family-like climate from everyone." This collaborative effort from everyone was important for all students, particularly for the immigrant students to integrate. As Alivernini et al. (2019) asserted, "For immigrant students in particular, it is crucial to establish positive relationships at school in order for them to be well integrated into a new society" (p. 226). The principal's own perception of seeing how people could come together to enrich each other was the foundation of the school's welcoming environment. Teacher Marianna stated that the principal saw all students as being part of the same school, and she addressed any situation as any member of the school. Teacher Marianna explained that the principal resolved situations equally without preferences or biases, regardless of the situation or the student. Parents did not sway the principal to overlook any situation; she gave every student the same opportunity.

The school leaders and teachers promoted a welcoming space and had zero tolerance for any kind of bullying. This finding is unlike the findings of other studies throughout Italy, which found evidence of immigrant children being bullied by their native peers (Bianchi et al., 2021; Caravita et al., 2020; Malúsa, 2020). Assistant principal Anna on the school's protocol for

bullying said: "Noi subito siamo intervenuti e la situazione è finita. Appena nasce qualcosa si spegne" [We immediately intervene, and the situation ends there. As soon as something arises, we extinguish it.] This urgency to stop bullying was implemented throughout the school; this helped to prevent problems from occurring. In fact, in the interviews with teachers, bullying was not a concern; teachers believed the matter needed to be addressed in the moment rather than ignored. Teacher Annarita's response to a bullying incident, in which she immediately stopped the lesson to address the matter, was a common approach. The immediate response was necessary to keep a consistent environment where inclusion could be possible.

Regardless of the obstacles, the principal's leadership skills influenced all school members to work together toward the vision of inclusion. All participants in this study felt the principal had a vital role in creating an inclusive school climate. The principal's attitudes and beliefs set the foundation for the whole school's environment. This inclusion project she promoted was made to accommodate all students, including students with learning disabilities or disadvantages. The teachers and school leaders pushed for the project to become a reality, which was uncovered in my conversations with the principal. Her trust in the staff was important because it boosted the confidence of the school staff to face the persistent challenges that surfaced. This finding supported previous scholars' implications that if school principals believed in an intercultural context, they were more than likely to transmit this pedagogical perspective to the school's members (Biasutti et al., 2019). Teacher Fabiana described the principal's leadership as a strategy. She said, "Io penso che questo sia la strategia giusta, quando i docenti si sentono apprezzati e si sentono incoraggiati lavorano meglio." [I believe this is the right strategy when teachers feel appreciated and they feel encouraged they work better.] Fabiana saw the principal's interaction with the staff as a strategy that proposed a healthier working

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environment. This inclusive leadership went hand in hand with the protocol set in place to help integrate immigrant students.

The first day I was at the school, the principal had an office staff member print off the school's inclusion project, which stated a belief in a synergy that would guarantee the educational needs of every student. Principal Miriam read the first couple of pages of the inclusion project out loud to me in our first meeting; she explained that the project was meant to be a reference for teachers to use in promoting an inclusive environment. Principal Miriam also read the Inclusive Project mission statement of the inclusion project and emphasized: "the value of diversity," "self-belonging," "member of the community," and "respect of individuality." While reading, Miriam repeated these words again. After our meeting, I highlighted these words in my document analysis and reflected on Miriam as a principal, and found different ways in which she reflected the words. Principal Miriam was valued as a school leader by her teachers; she preached her inclusive beliefs to her teachers and community. In a follow up meeting, principal Miriam describes integration as "è come un fiore che si apre si specchia dentro l'altra parte cioè proprio cosi vedi dove le due culture devono scambiarsi per interagire e per convivere insieme dove ognuno si arricchisce della particolarità e della diversità dell'altra cultura. [It is like a flower that flourishes; it mirrors itself, just like the two cultures must exchange to interact and cohabit where the particularity and the diversity of the other culture enrich everyone]". Principal Miriam believed in the value of diversity, self-belonging, and respect for individuality, as she made sure to push for inclusive practices. In addition, Miriam aimed to welcome immigrant students as members of the community as she pushed for additional resources.

The principal explained how the teachers, the assistant principal, and herself worked together in creating the inclusion project, which was adopted from the inclusion law that stated

all students were given access to education in the mainstream classroom (Sandri, 2014). The principal's statement, "Tutti inclusi, tutti!" [All included, all!] was reflected in her actions. She confidently spoke about her staff and students and showed a sense of pride in her school. Among her teachers, she was admired and respected. The principal and teachers shared their feelings on this mutual respect and trust towards each other. This leadership had a ripple effect on the whole school; in other words, the principal's desire for inclusion was practiced in her relationships with office staff and her teachers.

When immigrant students arrived at the middle school as newcomers or immigrants, they were automatically enrolled as special educational needs students, which gave students personalized didactic plans for an equitable academic opportunity. These plans were temporary and as needed. After a thorough observation and examination by the teachers, students either continued with the plan or integrated among their native peers. This was the school's generalized approach to supporting immigrant students' academic performance. The teachers worked together on this plan, and they followed students and strategized in meetings on their next steps. The teacher committee was part of the responsibilities the teachers carried. As the principal illustrated, "La scuola è come un sarto in realtà cuce addosso ad ogni alunno l'abito che li servisse". [The school is like a tailor in reality; it alters each student's outfit based on what would serve them.]. The school leaders and teachers worked together to create uniquely crafted plans for each student. As stated in Chapter IV, to be clear, although in the U.S., immigrant students are not identified as special needs students, nor should they be, in Italy, although they were named "special needs" they were distinguished from students with physical or other learning disabilities.

The principal had a vision for inclusion, which meant that the school leaders would work together with teachers to provide all students with the necessary accommodations. The inclusion project, which was influenced by the inclusion policy of law92, was crafted by the teachers and principals, which added particular goals to better serve students. The inclusion project was a living document to use as a reference. However, there were some matters that were not left up to the school leaders, which hindered the project's mission. The inclusion project crafted by the school leaders and teachers also reflected intercultural education practices. The inclusion project emphasized protocols to accommodate and improve the overall experience for all students. Principal Miriam and Assistant Principal Anna shared documents of different European Union grant applications. The school leaders used their inclusion project to apply for additional funds that would provide more resources for immigrant students. Without the proper resources, the inclusion project the school leaders and teachers crafted could not be fully implemented. As Azzolini et al. (2019) found that many Italian schools' efforts for inclusion were "ambiguous when translated into practice" (p. 705). The lack of government intervention did not stop the principal and the staff from trying to accommodate their students. The principal shared their future plans to continue working to include immigrant students as best as possible because she is aware Italy will become an increasingly diverse society. The teachers also stated they had to do better to be prepared because of the increase of immigrant children in schools.

The school leaders and teachers created an inclusion project and truly put an effort into bringing their vision to life. The key part of their vision was their collaboration to set an inclusive environment. The school leaders and teachers recognized the challenges that would disrupt their vision of inclusivity and worked together to address them. They were innovative in their practices for inclusion, and they were alert to the threats that would impede their progress,

such as bullying. Regardless of the hard work the school leaders and teachers put into their

vision for inclusion, they faced obstacles that were out of their reach to solve, leaving them

feeling helpless at times.

Factors Hindering the Vision

The school leaders and the teachers created an inclusion project to reflect inclusive

policies and intercultural practices. The inclusion project, unlike most protocols given by the

government, had objectives on how to execute the plan for improvements. However, there were

several factors hindering their vision for an inclusive school environment. Throughout the

interviews, there was evidence of burnout among the participants and a sense of helplessness.

The teachers confessed their desire for better preparation to work with immigrant students. In

addition, the teachers recognized the importance of an intercultural mediator within the

classroom. Although teachers showed appreciation for the special education teacher, who did his

best to support Italian-language learners, there was an understanding that the immigrant students

needed intercultural mediators who would be properly trained to work with them. Overall, the

factors hindering the vision for inclusion came down to the lack of funds from the government.

From my interview with the principal and reviewing the mandated Italian state immigrant policy,

I uncovered more problematic factors.

During a morning encounter with the principal, she expressed how she didn't get any

sleep the night before because she was up thinking about her school. Principal Miriam shared

how much she loved her job, but she exposed the truth of her hardships as a school leader in

Southern Italy. The principal and teachers pointed out that there has always been tension

between Northern Italy and Southern Italy. Northern Italy is known to be economically fruitful,

while Southern Italy remains in poverty. Teacher Marianna explained how abandoned the South

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was when it came to resources. Although the school leaders' and teachers' vision for inclusion is present and the efforts are there, they clearly need more help. The collaboration of the school leaders and teachers showed their will to put in the work. The issues that prevented the further improvement of the way the school leaders supported immigrant students' academic and social experience were due to the lack of resources from the government. With the proper funds, the school leaders would be able to provide teacher training on how to serve immigrant students and hire additional help to support the linguistic needs of immigrant students.

Santagati (2016) analyzed how schools struggled to apply interculturalism in Italy because of the disorganized execution between "legislation, official documents, school choices, and the opinions of teaching staff" (p.13). In this study, the biggest fault was the government's lack of accountability. Although my study did not focus on policies, the principal provided policy documents, which I analyzed to correlate the government guidelines and what was being implemented. In the *Guidelines to Accommodate and Integrate Immigrant Students*, I found it troubling that the Italian government "se ne lavato le mani" [washed its hands], which is an Italian reference to say someone has passed [or washed off] on the problem to not take accountability for it. The document states that the school leader must provide accommodations for immigrant students to promote their academic and social success, which gives schools, especially in poor rural areas, an impossible task.

Scholars have found the effectiveness of intercultural mediators in implementing an intercultural approach (Baraldi & Rossi, 2011; Carrión-Martínez et al., 2021; Catarci, 2016; Chifalo et al., 2019; Richter, 2022; Rus, 2006; Sani, 2015; Vezzali et al., 2017). Although the European states have brought in the intercultural mediator to help with immigrant educational policies, not all Italian schools have them. Scholars have found their contribution to intercultural

education is vital, and yet there was no action taken by the government to increase the availability of this desired and useful resource. The school leaders shared that upon their request for intercultural mediators, they were told that the state did not recognize the necessity for intercultural mediators because of the low number of immigrant students within their rural schools compared to metropolitan areas. Also, research confirms the highest population of immigrant students is in Northern Italy, where there are more economic opportunities (Ambrosini, 2013).

The principal tried to find solutions for the linguistic support by applying for European Union grants, which was additional time and work for her. In one of the follow-up interviews, the principal described the step-by-step process of applying for additional funds to support the student's needs. The school leaders pulled out a thick binder of part of the inclusion project grant proposal they submitted to the European Union funds. My eyes widened at the size of the application, and they specified that this was only one part of the application. Each page required extensive work on the proposed project. There was no additional compensation for the school leaders for making the application, which the principal explained was why so many principals in the region don't apply for it. She told me she has been asked time and time again why she put herself through such a tedious process, and she replied, "I have to; this is for my school." The funds from the Ministry of Education of the Italian public school system were so scarce the grant appeared to be the only option for any improvement. The school did not display any monetary wealth; there was no luxurious gymnasium or theatre. The school is only funded by the state. The school leader used her means in the best way possible. This study supported Italian scholars' literature on the problematic issues of educational inequalities due to the lack of funding from the government (Azzolini et al., 2019; Barberis & Violante, 2017). The existing literature

showed that there was a connection between low funding in Italian schools and immigrant students' poor academic performance.

The school's principal was given the challenging task of accommodating immigrant students into their school without additional resources from the Italian government. The school leader offered limited resources due to the means of their budget. Computers and after-school programs contribute to helping teachers accommodate immigrant students. The trust in the teachers was in itself a resource; the teachers felt encouraged to take their own initiatives within the classroom. Throughout the interviews, the team members justified their methods of support for immigrant students with "We are doing the best with what we got." The school leaders and teachers believed their initiatives without the government's support were satisfactory. There seemed to be a misinterpretation of the biggest concerns for immigrant students among the participants. Besides the lack of funding, the principal recognized the issue at the broader view; teachers, on the contrary, believed their biggest challenge was the day-to-day language disadvantage. The principal believed the biggest challenge for immigrant students was social integration, especially at the age level of middle schoolers. She acknowledged the delicacy of the intercultural process; she did not see the language barrier as a threat to mutual enrichment. Instead, she believed in the process where students reflected on their own identity and respect for others. The participants acknowledged the lack of funding was impeding their overall vision for inclusion but felt their efforts were well-intended.

Another important conversation I had with the school leader was about the absence of support for immigrant students for the final state examination at the end of the year. Among the documents the principal shared with me, Miriam explained the process of final examinations at the end of the year, which is a requirement for all students to take regardless of their educational

disabilities. Miriam explained how students with medical diagnoses were given modified plans to take exams. However, all immigrant students were expected to compete at the same level as their native peers. Within my document analysis, I found that in case of a situation where the student does not speak the Italian language, the school may allow the students to conduct their examination in their language of origin (p.14). However, the school leader did not have the tools or human resources to support the language of origin. Further, the document states that in the case of immigrant newcomers, the responsibility lies on the school leaders to provide the necessary linguistic support to advance the student (p.13). Along with the lack of funds from the government, the government lacked accountability for supporting Italian school leaders in assisting immigrant students.

The overall intentions of the school leaders and teachers seemed well-intended; however, as explained in this section, there were several factors that hindered their vision. The biggest factor that challenged the mission for inclusion was the lack of funds. The school leaders and teachers understood that there was more work to do. They acknowledge their faults and want to do better to support their students. The school leaders scoured for additional grants to fulfill their vision regardless of the extensive work it required. The teachers truly did the best with what they had and with what they knew. I found their intercultural competence to be present but in need of work that they were willing to do. However, without the recognition of the government, there was only so much the school leaders and teachers could do.

Teachers' Perceptions on Supporting Immigrant Students

Within my conceptual framework, I draw on teachers' attitudes toward immigrant students. I find the scholarship on teachers to be important as the teacher plays a vital role in the overall experience of immigrant students. Specifically, I use Deardorff's (2004) model for

intercultural competence, which centered on attitude, knowledge and skills, internal outcomes, and external outcomes. In certain ways, intercultural competence was present among teachers: there was evidence of respect, curiosity and empathy toward immigrant students. However, there was clear evidence the teachers lacked some of the knowledge and skills needed for an inclusive immigrant education.

As previous scholars have stated, the teachers' perceptions and attitudes have a big influence on peer acceptance among students (Chiofalo et al., 2019b; Giusti, 2014; Pourdavood & Yan, 2020). The teachers' perspectives of how they supported immigrant students were that they believed they were doing the best they could with what they had. Teachers believed their collaboration with other teachers and the personalized didactic plans were a contribution to serving immigrant students better. Many teachers perceived dialogue between immigrant students and native students as vital not only for the comprehension of the classroom lessons but also for building relationships to integrate immigrant students among their native classmates. Teachers clarified that not all immigrant students needed linguistic support. Linguistic support was only for immigrant newcomers who were not fluent in the Italian language. However, teachers did not seem to acknowledge how problematic their focus on the language disadvantage was to the overall experience of immigrant students. In this section, there are two topics: Linguistic Support and Welcoming Spaces, in which I analyzed the findings from a critical perspective on what the teachers did and what seemed to be missing.

Linguistic Support

The biggest concern teachers expressed when it came to supporting immigrant students was the lack of linguistic support. Teachers claimed they wanted additional help in the classroom. At this school, when it came to language support, the heaviest responsibilities fell

onto special education teachers. Additionally, teachers were given scarce resources to support immigrant students. Another attempt to support the linguistic disadvantages of immigrant students was the collaboration of the teachers at teacher committee meetings where they designed personalized plans. The teachers concern for what they were missing seemed to overshadow the additional opportunities at hand to assist immigrant students in their academic experiences. They showed intercultural competence in their attitude and outcomes, but they still lacked the knowledge and skills to better accommodate the immigrant students.

Special education teachers were required to support their assigned student(s) with disabilities, and then they had the added duty of assisting immigrant students with any linguistic or educational needs. The assistant principal explained how they strategically placed immigrant newcomers in classrooms with smaller headcounts for them to benefit from the support of the special education teacher. This was their improvised approach due to the lack of additional personnel. The placement of additional responsibilities on the special education teacher seemed to be appreciated by teachers. There was evidence that teachers recognized and showed gratitude for the additional presence. However, this approach, as explained by the special education teacher Giovanni, was detrimental to the students it meant to serve and a burden for the special education teachers. As Naomi explained, the immigrant students' special educational needs differed from the students with learning disabilities. The students with learning disabilities required medical accommodations, which the state provided for them specifically, such as a special education teacher. In addition, special education teacher Giovanni expressed his feeling of being overwhelmed by juggling his time in classes and the difficulty of having to witness his assigned students falling behind. Although the school leaders were aware of the need for

intercultural mediators, while they waited on the government's assistance, they improvised with the additional help of the special education teacher.

The strategies for linguistic support were limited, and the tools used to produce dialogue were not always effective. The teachers were not able to give the immigrant students the linguistic support they needed. Instead, they attempted to push for dialogue through games, online translators, and direct methods. There were many problems with these methods because they were only momentarily useful. Throughout the interviews, teachers elaborated on their efforts for immigrant students' inclusion inside and outside of the classroom. The easiest method that was commonly used throughout the school was the use of online translators. A few teachers requested textbooks specifically in the students' language of origin. Others, although teachers showed signs of burnout, tried to do more to provide the students with the necessary support. Some teachers described how they would spend their lunch break working one-on-one with immigrant students needing linguistic support. The principal's trust in teachers gave them the opportunity to craft their own strategies. In the teacher committee meetings, teachers discussed and examined the objectives set in place for each student. The collaboration of all teachers in accommodating each individual student's educational needs was not an easy task, as explained by teachers Fabiana and Carmela. Regardless of the excessive work, the teachers delivered their support to the immigrant students. Assistant Principal Anna shared how some teachers took on additional responsibilities without more pay, especially since the inclusion project was launched. The salary remained the same, but their workload got heavier. When I asked a few teachers how they felt about putting in the extra time for free, teacher Cristofaro said, "É il mio lavoro e anche perché li voglio bene." [It is my job and because I care about them.] Another teacher, Sonia, replied, "Sicuramente la l'amore per il mio lavoro." [It is definitely for the love I have for my

job.] Love was their motivator. Love for one another is vital to the call for interculturalism. Teachers passionately did their job and the additional work because they believed it was needed for their students. The passion that fueled the teachers within this study was undeniable, but their burnout was hard to ignore.

The teachers and school leaders pushed for inclusion, but there was not a clear idea of what inclusion looked like to them. Some teachers expressed the need for social relationships or learning basic Italian, but there was no measure of successful implementation of inclusion. Furthermore, I do not believe school leaders nor teachers are accountable for the Italian government's lack of guidance on how to assist immigrant students. The teachers explained that they were driven to help students because they cared, and they recognized the school did not have additional funds to hire more people for extra support. Their hard work showed the chase for an inclusive school, but the challenges that persisted showed that their efforts needed more support and preparation to help immigrant students' academic and social experiences.

Welcoming Spaces

The teachers believed in the importance of dialogue among native and immigrant students, and with limited instructional resources, they pushed for relationships among the students. As Contini (2013) emphasized, "School achievement is likely to be influenced not only by individuals' characteristics but as individuals interact" (p. 1123). It is not new information that peer relationships are vital for the social experience of immigrant students. It is also important to note that scholars have found the importance of teachers' influence when it comes to peer relationships (Biasutti et al., 2021; Rakhawy et al., 2021). Within this section, I highlighted how the school leaders and teachers attempted to create welcoming spaces for immigrant students and their families. School leaders reached out to the community for assistance with welcoming

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families. Teachers and school leaders promoted peer relationships in and outside of the classroom. However, teachers shared how they attempted to embrace immigrant students by pushing for social integration and integrating intercultural practices within their classrooms. Teachers persevered in finding strategies to advance students in language, but in other ways, they were missing out on the bigger picture of the vision for inclusion. In this section, I called on the teachers' attitudes toward immigrant students' literature and intercultural education to critically interpret what these welcoming spaces looked like and what they could be.

When it came to the school leaders' and teachers' engagement with immigrant families, I was intrigued by how the school leaders and teachers extended their trust to the community. Immigrant parents or immigrant students who fluently spoke Italian helped newcomers who did not speak Italian with school matters, assisting with integrating them into the school. Teachers affirmed most immigrant parents made an effort to be present in their child's academics and events. The school leaders and teachers did not share any issues they had with parents besides the language barrier, which parents were left to manage with their own children through the support of other immigrant students or parents acting as mediators. Teacher Laura elaborated on how parents figured it out on their own, "There are some parents that luckily can communicate with us that perhaps they know the Italian language more than others that don't, and it is hard, but they get help perhaps from someone who has been here longer to be a mediator." The teachers and school leaders admitted that they did not have interpreters to accommodate parents, but they always figured it out within the community. The principal pleaded to the city hall for interpreters and mediators but once again was not given the requested support. Regardless of the lack of additional assistance, the school leaders and teachers attempted to make families feel welcome.

In my interviews with teachers, I pushed to learn more about how teachers saw the integration happening; they elaborated that they saw students within the school during recess or events spending time together. The teachers spoke about the interaction among peers during snack time or extracurricular activities. Some teachers believed that having fluency in the Italian vocabulary was vital to the success of immigrant students. The issue with this belief is that some teachers focused on what the students were lacking rather than focusing on their strengths (Bonizzoni et al., 2016). The majority of the teachers focused on the language barrier, but three teachers emphasized immigrant students' strengths in forming bonds despite language differences with native students. Teachers Marianna, Roberta, and Carmela spoke about what skills the immigrant students had and their ability to connect to others, even with language differences. Moreover, these three teachers tried to use different methods to promote native and immigrant peer relationships inside the classroom. Teacher Marianna for instance, tried to explain how she valued teaching gym class because she felt immigrant students were able to exhibit their skills. She found that students had relationships with each other regardless of the language barrier. Carmela affirmed that native students themselves did a great job in welcoming students that felt out of place. When I asked how she welcomed immigrant students, she informed me that the biggest help was the native students' welcoming attitude towards them. She praised her native students as being accepting, which made the integration process easier. In another situation, teacher Roberta spoke about how she often rearranged her seating chart to place native peers and immigrant peers together. Roberta explained how this relationship was more important to her than her classroom subject; she believed that peer interaction was imperative for the students. Neither Marianna, Carmela, nor Roberta specifically addressed the implementation of intercultural education theory within their classroom. However, these actions

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taking place were reflecting the key practices of intercultural education, such as "respect," "empathy," and "communication" (Santerini, 2010, p. 191). Intercultural education requires a mutual exchange among peers and respect for one another. Teachers pressed for practices that promoted the overall experience of immigrant students.

The classroom climate set by the teacher was crucial to the overall experience of immigrant students. From my fieldnotes, I often couldn't tell which students were immigrants and which weren't unless there was a clear physical marker that would lead me to wonder. My observations from my time at the school was evidence of how the immigrant students were fitting in. Teachers and school leaders were vital in the success of an inclusive environment. A strong school leader influences teachers, and within the classroom, it is the role of the teachers to influence native peers, which can either be a positive or negative experience for immigrant students. "Students' perception of an environment that does not encourage reciprocal respect and acceptance of others might lead them to perpetrate and likely justify bullying" (Caravita et al., 2020, p. 21). In other words, when students are not encouraged to accept others, it allows opportunities for students to tease and bully their classmates. In this study, school leaders and teachers encouraged reciprocal respect among all students. In addition, there was zero tolerance for bullying, which facilitated a welcoming space for immigrant students.

As scholars have shown, the classroom is the place where the integration of immigrant children occurs (Giusti, 2014; Minello & Barban, 2012; Pourdavood & Yan, 2020). Many teachers in this study recognized the importance of the classroom. However, they did not implement specific intercultural education practices to enrich the experience of immigrant students. In fact, while the teachers said they pushed for peer relationships, they did not put any effort into guiding the students. There was no dialogue of mutual enrichment or reflection on the

themes of diversity (Chiofalo et al., 2019a). In fact, when asked how they promoted the different cultures within the classroom, the teachers talked about the cultural events outside of the classroom. To my surprise, even the world language teacher explained that there was not enough time for cultural practices within instruction. Rather than implement intercultural practices within lesson plans, the teachers pointed to musical concerts, dance, and sports events as their understanding of being culturally welcoming. The teachers spoke of the importance of social interactions, but they were not willing to disrupt or think creatively about their instruction time to allow this exchange. Teachers Sonia and Fabiana spoke about how, occasionally, during class, they would ask immigrant students about their country of origin, their language, and their culture to encourage their participation. While teachers Sonia and Fabiana were well-intended, they did not recognize the problematic issue of excluding intercultural practices in everyday lesson plans. From my understanding of how the teachers spoke about their classroom lectures, the teaching methods were still teacher-centered, which impeded the open conversation for mutual intercultural enrichment. The lack of intercultural competence was not in the attitudes of the teachers but in the lack of knowledge and skills in reference to Deardorff's (2004) model. I believe teachers were not at fault because they simply didn't know better.

Within the interviews and from the confessions from teachers, there was a clear recognition of better teacher preparation needed. This study supports the existing literature that Italian teachers need better teacher preparation to work with immigrant students (Santerini, 2010; Tarozzi, 2012), specifically in-service teacher training supporting intercultural education and inclusion as the core pedagogical construct (Biasutti & 2019). Tarozzi (2014) brings attention to the teacher programs that use models of intercultural competencies, which refer to the skills "to communicate, to understand (themselves, situations and others), to cooperate and to act" (p.

129). Several studies on Italian teachers have suggested the need for intercultural training to better prepare teachers when serving immigrant students (Pace et al., 2022; Pasquale, 2015). Further, Tarozzi (2012) stated that teachers do not seem to have a clear, shared frame of reference for promoting integration and fostering intercultural activities. My study also found that teachers were not clear on how to accommodate immigrant students' overall experience. However, in their opinion, the teachers and school leaders attempted to support the immigrant students as best as they could.

Summary

It was evident that the school leaders and teachers had a desire for an inclusive environment for immigrant students. However, there were complex factors that caused a shift in the experience of immigrant students. Teachers and school leaders exceeded their desire for an inclusive environment; they would push intercultural practices and the betterment of immigrant students' experiences. The teachers and school leaders recognized the issues that held back their work to accommodate immigrant students and achieve their overall inclusive mission. The school leader was very capable based on her previous experience with immigrant students. She was strategic in planning ahead for preparing for the rise of immigrant students that are coming. The inclusion project borrowed from educational protocols but incorporated intercultural education, which laid a foundation for the growing number of immigrant students. The school leader excelled in her leadership and in her influence for inclusion with her teachers, even though the school leaders and teachers lacked funds to successfully implement inclusive and intercultural practices. The teachers and school leaders believed they needed better training and preparation to better serve immigrant students and their families. I believe the teachers' and school leaders' awareness of needing extra preparation and training is important because it

invokes critical self-reflection. Although there were multiple ways the teachers and school leaders managed to accommodate the immigrant students and their families, they recognized there was room for growth, which is vital for the future immigrant students' experience. Their attitudes towards immigrant students embraced the models of intercultural competence and characteristics for a strong climate.

Referencing back to Principal Miriam's explanation of inclusion, she said, "...the two cultures must exchange to interact and cohabit where everyone is enriched by the particularity and by the diversity of the other culture." Miriam's vision for inclusion is possible because, among the school leaders and teachers, there is a desire to improve; the teachers and school leaders were open to ideas and suggestions. In several conversations with the participants, I pointed out solutions to some of their concerns. For example, the teachers and school leaders did not see any harm in hosting their yearly Christmas concerts. In fact, some teachers referenced the Christmas concert as a culturally diverse display regardless of having non-Christian students. When I spoke with the school leader and a few teachers, I asked if they had considered how they could promote the diverse cultures of their students. The school leaders and teachers were open to exploring different events to celebrate the diversity within their school and within their classroom daily. The school leaders and teachers were very open to the ideas I presented, demonstrating that they could benefit greatly from professional development geared towards increasing their skills in inclusive immigrant education. There was a genuine interest in improving their work with immigrant students within their school.

From the document analysis of the immigrant integration protocol and the inclusion project, I recognized the government's absence was detrimental to the vision of the school leaders and teachers. Multiple scholars have suggested that in order to move forward in

successfully integrating immigrant students' educational policies, there must be a collaboration from all members of the school (Biasutti et al., 2021; Catarci, 2018; Macias, 1996). The school leaders and teachers showed a true desire to collaborate toward inclusive educational practices for immigrant students. Additionally, the school leaders and teachers acknowledged in their inclusion project that the process was never-ending because the school leaders and teachers collectively must continuously work towards doing better. Although the school leaders and teachers seemed determined to fulfill an inclusive vision, they could not act alone; they were crying for help from the Italian government for the necessary resources to better support immigrant students' academic and social experiences.

With the assistance of the government, school leaders and teachers could have intercultural mediators to enhance the relationships between immigrant and their families with the teachers and school leaders. If school leaders received the additional funds, the teachers could benefit from in-service teacher training programs that center on intercultural education practices. Therefore, school leaders and teachers can create a space for intercultural education to thrive where students are guided to think critically, understand histories and cultures, and make connections through dialogue with one another (Pasquale, 2015, p. 2677). In other words, teachers must be prepared with an intercultural understanding to guide students towards a reflection of the self to promote mutual openness among one another. It was evident that the teachers displayed intercultural competence, which contributes to the growth of inclusive immigrant education. The extended hours the teachers spent on personalized didactic plans and their openness to acknowledge their faults were tangible examples of how they were supporting immigrant students. Further, the teachers showed empathy for their helplessness; they showed adaptability to the ever-changing circumstances of newcomers, and they put an effort towards

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communication in whatever way they found possible. The teachers displayed characteristics that

reflect Deardorff's (2004) model for intercultural competence ("openness," "respect,"

"curiosity," "cultural awareness," "empathy," and "communication" (Santerini, 2010, p. 191).

The only area needing improvement was some of the knowledge and skills the teachers lacked,

such as intercultural competence "knowledge and skills," which would promote more "cultural

awareness" and better "knowledge of one's own and other cultures" (Santerini, 2010, p. 191).

Teachers were receptive to learning more to better themselves in working with immigrant

students; thus, with money for professional development training, they could learn the missing

knowledge and skills. The teachers acquired these intercultural competence characteristics

without the proper training, which shows the power of the influences of the school leaders.

Furthermore, the school leaders persevered in creating a strong school climate (Devos &

Bouckenooghe, 2009). The school leaders included the teachers in creating the inclusion project

and vision. In addition, the school leaders trusted the teachers, which created spaces for

participative decision-making. Multiple teachers referenced how they felt valued and appreciated

by the school leader, which was also reflected in the overall school climate. Lastly, in reference

to the last dimension of Devos and Bouckenooghe's characteristics of effective school leaders

and strong school climates, the school leaders became innovators as they adapted to the changing

population of their school. The school leaders successfully created a strong school climate,

which was vital for the survival of their inclusion project.

In summary, to answer research question one (How do school leaders attend to the

increase in immigrant students in a rural middle school in Southern Italy?), I conclude that the

school leaders showed powerful leadership, which created a strong school climate. In addition,

the school leaders reflected interculturalism within their practices. The school leaders are an

essential piece to the overall vision for inclusive immigrant education. In regard to research question two (What are the perceptions of Italian teachers in a rural middle school in Southern Italy on how they are supporting immigrant students?), I believe the teachers felt encouraged by their school leaders, which positively influenced their attitudes toward immigrant students. They unknowingly displayed intercultural competencies. The teachers felt supported by the school leaders, and together they became innovators to support the overall experience of immigrant students.

Limitations

This study has a few limitations that must be considered. One of the biggest limitations was the absence of the students' perspectives and students' academic performance. Another limitation was that the number of participants was limited, and they were all from one small, rural part of this region of Southern Italy. The middle school did not host a large number of immigrant students in comparison to the Metropolitan area. Also, the interview questions could have been expanded to uncover more about immigrant students' experiences, such as asking about absentees and dropouts. Reflecting on my document collection, I believe the evidence of students' academic performance could have enriched my study of how the students were being supported academically. Additional data could have been collected to reinforce the participants' descriptions of the experiences of immigrant students, such as classroom observations and student and parent surveys. In reviewing the literature, I mostly looked at Italian studies, which limited the supporting literature on how other countries are attending to immigrant students.

Recommendations for Future Practice

This research revealed how the school leaders' and teachers' efforts for inclusion were missing crucial elements to better serve immigrant students. School leaders should continue to

find better strategies and plans to support immigrant students, which must be consistently analyzed and supported by school leaders. There were circumstances in this study that showed a need for in-service teaching training. Additional areas to be explored could include teacher education and teacher training on intercultural education. Teachers could explore more ways to promote community, connection, and dialogue despite the language barriers. Teachers may find ways to incorporate culture within the classroom weekly rather than hosting yearly school events. This research could be useful for policymakers to better support school leaders and teachers to improve the overall experience of immigrant students. Besides recommendations in practice, there are many opportunities for further research exploration.

Recommendations for Future Research

Some areas for future research could include a deeper exploration of immigrant students' experiences and intercultural education training. I would encourage researchers to understand the perspective of immigrant students from immigrant students, their native peers, and both of their families. There would be a benefit to researching the correlation between the attendance and academic performance of immigrant students and the practices towards inclusion. In addition, this study raises the question of how school leaders and teachers could further engage with immigrant parents. Also, by taking a deeper look at teacher education, researchers can push for educational reforms. From the literature, there is a clear need for more research on immigrant students in Italy, specifically in Southern Italy. Further, this study calls for a comparison study between the existing research in the Northern and Southern schools of Italy. A case study could be a contribution by extending a more expansive study. Follow-up interviews and a larger participant pool would help inform this topic. Future researchers could benefit from exploring the overall dynamics of immigrant students throughout schools in Italy, which is still

underexamined. This study added to the current literature on immigrant students' experiences in Italian schools. Additionally, researchers could conduct policy analysis on the current immigrant educational policies. There is more work to do to bring attention to the inequalities immigrant students face due to the negligence of the Italian educational system and government.

Final Thoughts

This research project had many learning curves, which I consider all valuable to my learning process. I have not only become a better researcher and writer. I have gained more as a cultural foundations' scholar. I had the opportunity to travel to Italy to conduct research; I was able to bring forward a topic that is not discussed enough in Italian schools. I had the opportunity to be a researcher and a traveler. I was able to revisit my homeland of Italy and the middle school that I once attended as a young girl. This middle school still gave me the same welcoming feeling I felt as a young child. Although I did not find any of my former teachers or school leaders, the building was the same, and the teachers, school leaders, and students welcomed me with the same genuine curiosity I experienced as a kid. I was very nervous during my first few interviews, but eventually, I warmed up. The interviews started to feel like conversations among educator friends. I spoke fluent Italian, with the exception of code-switching to English from time to time for academic terminology. I walked into the empty room that once used to be my sixth-grade classroom and felt flushed with childhood memories. The school leaders and teachers did a great job of welcoming me and making me feel like I had returned back to the school I knew. Besides the new staff members, what was different from twenty years ago was the number of immigrant students attending the school.

As an Italian immigrant student who lived in the United States, this project was very meaningful. When I moved to the United States, I was bullied by my classroom peers and

academically suppressed by some of my teachers and mentors. My dreams of being an honors student were crushed when my high school counselor told me he didn't think I could handle an English honors course. I lived most of my life in the United States, but I never truly felt like I was welcomed in the schools I attended. This project was important to me because I recall the painful memories of being a child and not being accepted. My family and I moved to the United States with high hopes, our culture and our language. We relocated among strangers, in a different place without the knowledge of the English language. I related to the immigrant students in this study because I experienced the hardships of being an outsider. It makes me especially grateful for all the work the school leaders and teachers did to create a welcoming climate for immigrant students in this school. As a researcher, I was asked to listen and observe. I faced my demons of imposter syndrome and learned that I am too still learning. "Fallo con amore" [Do it with love] comes to mind as I conclude this project. The notion of love resurfaces in my reflection on this journey as a researcher and cultural foundations' scholar. I will continue to do everything "con amore" [with love], for there is a need for more love for others in this world. This project has revealed there is still so much to do to better support immigrant students in Italian schools, and I intend to continue this work with my scholarly peers.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR SCHOOL LEADER

My name is Arianna Di Puorto. I am a student in the Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations Ph.D. program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am conducting a study on the school leaders' and teachers' perceptions of immigrant students' experiences in Italian schools, including closely examining how students are being supported.

This study will help educators and policymakers understand how schools are implementing policies in schools. I would conduct two sixty-minute interviews upon consent. I would interview your teachers; therefore, I would like to interview you before and post their interviews. I would take notes on our meeting and ask permission to record our session. I am flexible when scheduling the interview.

Participation in this study is optional, but the benefits of speaking with you could bring awareness to policies and how they are being implemented. Overall, your participation is greatly appreciated and will help educators like myself understand how policymakers, school leaders, and teachers influence immigrant students' experiences. If you have any additional questions, please contact me at a_dipuor@uncg.edu .

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Arianna Di Puorto Graduate Student,

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

TRANSLATED RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Per Dirigente Scolastico

Mi chiamo Arianna Di Puorto. Sono una studentessa nel programma del dottorato di ricerche in *Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations* all'universitá della Carolina del Nord in Greensboro. L'obiettivo del mio studio è di esplorare in che modo le scuole secondarie in Italia accolgono i studenti immigranti. Questo studio contribuisce alle ricerche in educazione specificamente per i studenti immigranti.

Vorrei condurre due interviste di 60 minuti con il vostro permesso, una prima e una dopo l'intervista con i docenti. Vorrei scrivere appunti nei nostri incontri e con il vostro permesso vorrei registrare l'audio della nostra sessione. Sono disponibile al vostro orario per condurre una intervita. La partecipazione è volontaria peró i benefici sono la vostra contribuzione allo studio della esperienza dei studenti immigranti. L'obiettivo del mio studio è di esplorare la perspettiva del dirigente scholastico e docenti sui studenti immigranti nelle scuole secondarie in Italia.

In tutto, la vostra partecipazione sará molto apprezzata e aiuterà ricercatori come me capire come i politici, i dirigenti scolastici y i docenti influiscono l'esperienza scholare dei studenti immigranti. Se avresti altre domande sullo studio, potete contattarmi al indirizzo email a_dipuor@uncg.edu . Grazie per il vostro tempo e spero di sentirvi presto.

Cordiali Saluti,

Arianna Di Puorto

Studentessa di Ricerche dell' Universitá della Carolina del Nord in Greensboro

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR TEACHERS

My name is Arianna Di Puorto. I am a student in the Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations Ph.D. program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am conducting a study on the school leaders' and teachers' perceptions of the experiences of immigrant students in Italian schools, including taking a close look at the intercultural education. This study will help educators and policymakers understand if and how schools are implementing procedures in schools. I would like to conduct a sixty-minute interview upon your consent. I would like to take notes on our meeting and ask your permission to record our session. I am flexible with you when scheduling a time and date for the interview.

Participation in this study is optional, but the benefits of speaking with you could bring awareness to policies and how they are being implemented. Overall, your participation is greatly appreciated and will help educators like myself understand how policymakers, school leaders, and teachers influence immigrant students' experiences.

If you have any additional questions, please contact me at a_dipuor@uncg.edu . Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Arianna Di Puorto Graduate Student,

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

TRANSLATED RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR TEACHERS

Per Docenti

Mi chiamo Arianna Di Puorto. Sono una studentessa nel programma del dottorato di ricerche in *Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations* all'universitá della Carolina del Nord in Greensboro. L'obiettivo del mio studio è di esplorare in che modo le scuole secondarie in Italia accolgono i studenti immigranti. Questo studio contribuisce alle ricerche in educazione specificamente per i studenti immigranti.

Vorrei condurre una intervista di 60 minuti con il vostro permesso. Vorrei scrivere appunti nei nostri incontri e con il vostro permesso vorrei registrare l'audio della nostra sessione. Sono disponibile al vostro orario per condurre una intervita. La partecipazione è volontaria peró i benefici sono la vostra contribuzione allo studio della esperienza dei studenti immigranti. L'obiettivo del mio studio è di esplorare la perspettiva del dirigente scholastico e docenti sui studenti immigranti nelle scuole secondarie in Italia.

In tutto, la vostra partecipazione sará molto apprezzata e aiuterà ricercatori come me capire come i politici, i dirigenti scolastici y i docenti influiscono l'esperienza scholare dei studenti immigranti. Se avresti altre domande sullo studio, potete contattarmi al indirizzo email a_dipuor@uncg.edu . Grazie per il vostro tempo e spero di sentirvi presto.

Cordiali Saluti,

Arianna Di Puorto

Studentessa di Ricerche dell' Universitá della Carolina del Nord in Greensboro

APPENDIX C: ADULT CONSENT FORM

Name of student researcher: Arianna Di Puorto

Address: UNCG, Greensboro NC

Telephone number: +01- 336 6886470

E-mail address: a_dipuor@uncg.edu

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this class activity with the student researcher, a graduate student at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. This form outlines the purposes of this class research activity and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant. You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty. Research studies are designed to obtain new information. This new information may help other researchers. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with I or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

More information about this study is discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, please contact this study's PI Arianna Di Puorto a_dipuor@uncg.edu or faculty advisor Dr. Silvia C. Bettez, at scbettez@uncg.edu ...

The purposes of this class research activity are the following:

The purpose of my research is to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of teachers and school leaders on immigrant students' experiences. You are invited to participate in a study to understand more about how teachers and school leaders are working with immigrant students and how that relates to intercultural education policies. Teacher participants: You are being asked to participate in a 60-minute interview.

If you are a school leader, I would like to have two 60 minute interviews with you.

As a participant in this research, you are entitled to know the nature of my research. You are free to decline to participate, and you are free to stop the interview or withdraw from the study at any time. There is no penalty for withdrawing your participation. Feel free to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the class research activity and the methods I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me. Please contact me at a_dipuor@uncg.edu or my dissertation advisor Dr. Bettez scbettez@uncg.edu with any questions. You will be asked to participate in an interview. The interview will concern only professional activities and will not include any personal questions. The interview will be digitally recorded. A follow-up interview may be requested.

Audio/video recording?

As I, I will audio record our interview and transcribe the recording for accuracy. At the end of the study, the audio files will be erased or destroyed. I will assign you a pseudonym on the transcript. Your real name will not be used at any point of information collection. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed, although I will try to limit access to the recording as described below.

Risk/Benefits/Cost

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses a minimal-no risk to participants. There will be no monetary incentive for participating in this study. Additionally, participants will benefit from this study by allowing for an opportunity to reflect on their contribution to knowledge on this topic. There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

Confidentiality

Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured via Box, a cloud content management and file-sharing service. The box is the University of North Carolina Greensboro's recommended procedure for electronic data storage. The recording of digital recording will not be shared with anyone except for the principal investigators and transcriber. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. All digital recordings will be kept on file for five years after this study's closure. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped. If new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.
Please indicate your willingness to participate in this research process by checking one of the following statements and providing your signature below. The signatures below indicate an acknowledgment of the terms described above.

I wish to participate in the research described above, have read this consent form, and agree to be audio recorded.

(SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT)   (DATE)

(SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER)   (DATE)

The participant signs two copies. The participant receives a copy, and the student researcher retains a copy.

Modulo di Consenso per Adulti

Nome: Arianna Di Puorto

Indirizzo: UNCG, Greensboro NC

Number: +01- 336 6886470

E-mail:a_dipuor@uncg.edu

Ti è stato richiesto di prendere parte a uno studio di ricerca. Grazie per aver accettato di partecipare a questo studio con una studentessa ricercatrice, studentessa di The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. In questa forma ti verrà spiegato il proposito di questo studio e include una descrizione della tua partecipazione e i vostri diritti come partecipante. La tua partecipazione è volontaria. Potete rinunciare alla partecipazione, oppure ritirarsi in qualunque momento, per qualunque motivo, senza penalitá. Lo studio di ricerche sono progettati per ottenere nuova informazione. Questa nuova informazione potrebbe aiutare altri ricercatori. Non ci sono benefici diretti per voi. Ci potrebbero essere dei minimi rischi nella tua partecipazione. Se decidete di non partecipare allo studio oppure abbandonarlo prima di completarlo, non cambierà la relazione con me né con la universitá.

Più informazione di questo studio è spiegata in questa forma di consenso. É di grande importanza che comprendete l'informazione così che potete fare una decisione informata nella vostra partecipazione. Sarete date una copia di questa forma di consenso. Se avete domande di questo studio in qualsiasi momento, potete contattare l'investigatrice primaria Arianna Di Puorto a_dipuor@uncg.edu oppure la sua consigliere di facoltà Dr. Silvia C. Bettez, at scbettez@uncg.edu .

Il proposito di questo studio

L'obiettivo del mio studio è di esplorare in che modo le scuole secondarie in Italia affrontano la questione connessa alla valutazione della competenza interculturale. Questo studio contribuisce alle ricerche in educazione specificamente per gli studenti immigrati. Vorrei condurre una intervista di 60 minuti con docenti e due interviste di 60 minuti con il dirigente scolastico. Vorrei scrivere appunti nei nostri incontri e con il vostro permesso vorrei registrare l'audio della nostra sessione.

Come Partecipante in questo studio, avete accesso alla natura delle mie ricerche. Potete rinunciare alla partecipazione, oppure ritirarsi in qualunque momento, per qualunque motivo. Non c'e' nessuna penalitá se rinunciate. Siete liberi di chiedere dello studio oppure dei metodi che uso. I vostri suggerimenti e riguardi sono importanti per me. Per favore contattatemi oppure la mia consigliere di facoltà Dr. Silvia C. Bettez, at scbettez@uncg.edu. Sarete chiesti di partecipare in una intervista. L'intervista è esclusivamente professionale e non riguarda domande personali. L'intervista sarà registrata digitale. Sará probabile che una seconda intervista vi sará richiesta.

Audio/ Video Registrazione

L'intervista sará registrata e trascritta. Alla fine dello studio, l'audio sarà cancellato e distrutto. Vi sarà assegnato un pseudonimo nella trascrizione. Il vostro nome non sarà usato in nessun momento nella raccolta di informazione. Poiché la vostra voce può essere identificata da chiunque lo ascolta, la vostra confidenziale per le cose che saranno registrate non è garantita però l'investigatrice proverá a limitare l'accesso alla registrazione come segue in questa forma.

Rischi/Benefici/ Costi

Institutional Review Board (IRB) di the University of North Carolina at Greensboro ha esaminato ed approvato che la partecipazione in questo studio propone minima-a niente rischio ai partecipanti. Non ci sarà nessuna ricompensa per la partecipazione, tranne che i partecipanti ricevono il beneficio di avere contribuito a questo studio. Non c'è nessun costo per partecipare in questo studio.

Confidenziale

La vostra partecipazione in questo studio è confidenziale. L'informazione sarà salvata in un software sicuro Box, contiene informazioni in una cloud. Box è raccomandata dall'università come procedura per salvare informazioni. La registrazione digitale non sarà condivisa con nessuno tranne l'investigatrice e il trascrittore. In evento che una pubblicazione o presentazione di questo studio, nessuna informazione identificabile personale sarà condivisa. Tutte le registrazioni digitali saranno conservate per cinque anni dopo la chiusura di questo studio. Tutta l'informazione ottenuta in questo studio sarà severamente confidenziale se non è mandatoria dalla legge. Avete il diritto di rifiutare di partecipare oppure ritirare in qualunque momento, senza penalità. Se decidete di ritirarvi, non vi riguarda in nessun modo. Se decidete di ritirarvi, potete richiedere che le vostre informazioni condivise siano distrutte se non sono anonimi. L'investigatore ha il diritto di fermare la vostra partecipazione in qualsiasi momenti. Questo può essere che avete avuto una reazione inaspettata, oppure fallito di seguire direzioni, oppure perché lo studio è stato sospeso. Se nuova informazione in relazione allo studio sarà disponibile, che potrebbe riguardare la vostra partecipazione, questa informazione vi sarà condivisa.

Per favore indica la vostra partecipazione in questo studio mettendo una croce al testamento con la vostra firma. La firma indica che sei consapevole dei termini spiegati in questo modulo.

Io concedo a partecipare a questa ricerca descritta, letto la forma di consenso, e accetto di essere registrata digitale.

(FIRMA DEL SOGGETTO INTERESSATO)   (DATA)

(NOME IN STAMPATELLO DEL SOGGETTO)   (DATA)

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR SCHOOL LEADER

1. Please tell me a little about yourself, how long have you been a school leader? What is your educational experience? How long have you been working in the education field? What kind of responsibilities comes with your title position as a school administrator?

2. Could you tell me how Italian schools operate? How have you structured your teaching process in the school?

3. What methods and resources do you offer teachers (lesson plans/training) to ensure the homogenous quality of teaching across all classes?

4. The school concerns itself with identifying educational needs specific to each student, in what ways does the school answer these needs within the classroom?

5. In your role as a school leader, what methods do you use to ensure that teachers effectively teach personalized lessons to each class?

6. In which ways do parents become involved in students' academic success?

7. Describe for me how are students' academic performances assessed. Is the process different for immigrant students? If so, how do you assess the basic skills of immigrant students?

8. I noticed on the school's website a page dedicated to "special need" education, will you share who is considered a "special need" student?

9. How many immigrant/non-Italian students do you have in your school? What are their countries of origin?

10. What are the policies the school has adopted to serve immigrant students?

11. In your experience, how have the methods of academic inclusion changed for immigrant students in your time as an educator?

12. What methods do you use now?

13. How do you feel these methods allow students to feel that their language is valued?

14. How would you describe the performance of immigrant students compared to their native peers at your school?

Follow Up Interview with School Leaders

15. What actions do you propose to meet the educational needs of immigrant children?

16. What are the tasks that a school principal carries out regarding immigrant students?

17. Are there any training activities focused on intercultural education for in-service teachers?

18. Are there any activities in collaboration with external agencies to support immigrant students?

19. As a school leader, do you feel supported by the Italian government in providing the resources necessary for the success of immigrant students? How well do you feel like the immigrant students in your school are supported when considering all their needs? What suggestions for improving schools' actions for immigrant students do you have?

20. For the purpose of my study, I am interested in your perceptions on how you attend to immigrant students within your school, is there anything you would like to add that you might not have said already?

TRANSLATED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Per Dirigente Scolastico

1. Per favore raccontami di te: Raccontami della tua esperienza scolastica? Da quanto tempo lavori per le scuole? Qual e' il tuo titolo di lavoro? Quale responsabilità hai con questo titolo?

2. Puoi dirmi come operano le scuole italiane? Come avete strutturato i processi d'insegnamento nella scuola?Come avete strutturato i processi d'insegnamento nella scuola? How have you structured your teaching process in the school?

3. Quali strumenti e risorse offrite agli insegnanti (i.e. lucidi/schemi/strutture di lezione redatti secondo standard precisi) per assicurare un livello di qualità dell'insegnamento omogeneo(simile) tra le diverse classi? What methods and resources do you offer teachers (lesson plans) to ensure the homogeonous quality of teaching across all classes?

4. La scuola si preoccupa di identificare eventuali bisogni educativi specifici dei singoli studenti? In che modo si prova a dare risposta a queste necessità all'interno delle classi?

5. Nel suo ruolo di DS, in che modo si adopera per assicurare che gli insegnanti effettuino modalità di insegnamento personalizzate in ciascuna classe della scuola? As your role as a school leader, what methods do you use to ensure that teachers effectively teach personalized lessons to each class?

6. In che modo vengono coinvolti i genitori nel successo academico dei studenti? In which ways do parents become involved in students' academic success?

7. Come valorizzi il successo scolastico dei studenti immigranti? Come distingui il successo scolastico dei studenti immgranti in paragone ai studenti italiani?

8. Ho notato sulla vostra pagina del web, avete dedicato una parte ai studenti con disabilita, chi viene incluso come disabile?

9. Nella sua scuola qual'è la quota di ragazzi stranieri? Quali sono i paesi d'origine di questi studenti?

10. Nella sua esperienza come sono cambiate nel tempo le modalità di inserimento scolastico dei ragazzi stranieri? Che metodi usate? Per la valorizzazione delle diversità linguistiche che metodi utilizza la sua scuola ?

11. Come descriveresti il processo politico relativo agli studenti immigrati?

12. Che tipo di obiettivi fissa la scuola per migliorare gli apprendimenti dei studenti immigranti?

13. Potresti spiegarmi "Approccio Interculturale" suggerito dallo stato italiano?

14. Quali sono le sfide più grandi per gli studenti immigrati in Italia?

Seconda Intervista

15. Como descrivesti l'esperienza degli studenti immigranti nella classe presso il tuo Istituto?

16. Ci sono le risorse necessarie per garantire il successo accademico degli studenti immigranti?

17. In quali modi gli studenti immigranti hanno condiviso la loro cultura all'interno della scuola?

18. Ci sono delle attività focalizzate sull'educazione interculturale per gli insegnati? ci sono delle attività di collaborazione con agenzie esterne a supporto degli studenti immigranti? Quali azioni e progetti il sistema nazionale dell'educazione promuove a favore degli studenti immigranti?

19. A livello ministeriale, quali attività e risorse potrebbero essere attivate e migliorate per gli studenti immigranti?

20. Per il proposito del mio studio, mi interessa sapere come assistete i studenti immigranti nelle scuole italiane, avresti altri suggerimenti che vorresti condividere?

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS

1) Please tell me about yourself. What is your experience and studies within education?   What is your current position and main responsibilities of current position?

2) As you began your experience teaching, what were your thoughts about working with immigrant students?

3) Describe how you have been trained or prepared to work with immigrant students.

4) Within your classroom, which strategies or practices have seemed most effective with immigrant students?

5) What effect does having immigrant students have on classroom climate and other students in a regular classroom?

6) Describe a challenging experience you've had with an immigrant student? How did you confront the situation?

8) What are the main challenges that you believe immigrant students face in the educational context? How well equipped do you feel to address those?

9) What are some of the main strengths that you believe immigrant students bring to the school?

10) Do immigrant students have the necessary resources to succeed academically? What could help better their situation?

11) In what ways have immigrant students being able to express their own culture within the school?

12) What teaching strategies or methods do you use that support immigrant students within your classroom?

14) How do you support the inclusion and adaptation of immigrant students to the new school context?

15) What kind of activities could be proposed to support immigrant students while learning Italian?

16) Do you feel supported by the school to work with immigrant students? What kind of support would you like to receive while working with immigrant students?

17) For the purpose of my study, I am interested in your perceptions on how you support immigrant students, is there anything you would like to add that you might not have said already?

TRANSLATED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS

Per Docenti

1. Per favore raccontami di te: •Raccontami della tua esperienza scolastica? Da quanto tempo lavori per le scuole? Quale e' il tuo titolo di lavoro? Quale responsabilità hai con questo titolo?

2. I fattori dell'immigrazione • Puoi raccontarmi della tua esperienza con i studenti immigranti? Cosa pensavate di lavorare con studenti immigranti? Avete preparazione scolastica per lavorare con studenti immigranti?

3) Quali metodi ha suggeritola scuola italiano per assistere agli studenti immigranti?

Cosa usate nella vostra classe per supporto dell'inclusività dei studenti immigranti?

6) Raccontami come insegni ai studenti immigranti? Che tipo di sfide gestisci lavorando con gli studenti immigranti? Descivetemi una situazione difficile che avete avuto con un studente immigrante? Come confronti la situazione? Come procedete con studenti che non capiscono bene la lingua italiana? Potete raccontarmi di come la presenza dei studenti immigranti influenza i metodi usati in classe e gli altri studenti nella classe?

7) Secondo voi, quali sono le sfide più grandi per gli studenti immigrati nell'ambiente scolastico? Come vi sentite preparti per confrontare questi ostacoli?

8) Ci sono le risorse necessarie per garantire il successo accademico per gli studenti immigranti?

9) Che tipo di attività di classe potresti proporre per l'integrazione culturale degli studenti?

10) In quali modi gli studenti immigranti hanno condiviso la loro cultura all'interno della scuola?

11) Secondo voi, come sono sopportati i studenti immigranti con il curriculum scolastico?

12) Che metodo d'insegnamento usate che sopportano i studenti immgiranti nella vostra classe?

13) Che tipo di supporto vorresti ricevere nel mentre lavori con gli studenti immigranti per sentirsi inclusi nel contesto della scuola?

14) Che tipo di attività potresti proporre agli studenti nel mentre studieranno l'italiano?

15) Nella osservazione ho notato...potresti collaborare su questo...

16) Vi sentite preparati per lavorare con studenti immigranti? Che suggerimenti avresti per lavorare in maniera performante con gli studenti immigranti?

17) Per il proposito del mio studio, mi interessa sapere come assistete i studenti immigranti nelle scuole italiane, avresti altri suggerimenti che vorresti condividere?