

# EDUCATIONAL MODELS COMPARED: ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULA IN ITALY AND MALTA FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL CONTEXTS

## MODELLI EDUCATIVI A CONFRONTO: ANALISI DEI CURRICULA DI FORMAZIONE DEGLI INSEGNANTI DI SCUOLA PRIMARIA IN ITALIA E MALTA PER LO SVILUPPO DELL'IDENTITÀ PROFESSIONALE NEI CONTESTI SCOLASTICI INCLUSIVI



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### ABSTRACT

This study compares the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs for future primary school teachers in Italy and Malta, analyzing similarities and differences in curricula, course content, and teaching methodologies (MIUR; MIM). The data collected outlines how in both countries the courses combine a theoretical and practical approach, with an interdisciplinary perspective and a focus on inclusion (Pace & Aiello, 2018). Programs are focused on responding to the social and cultural changes, considering education as an essential public service for holistic well-being (Faculty of Education, UOM). Additionally, internships play a central role in developing practical skills for entering the job market, albeit differences in the implementation of teaching practices (Calleja et al., 2017). The presentation will provide insights into how professional identity is strengthened in the two ITE systems with the aim of improving teacher preparation to teach in inclusive classrooms.

Questo studio confronta i programmi di formazione iniziale degli insegnanti (Initial Teacher Education - ITE) per futuri docenti della scuola primaria in Italia e a Malta, analizzando somiglianze e differenze nei curricula, nei contenuti dei corsi e nelle metodologie didattiche (MIUR; MIM). I dati raccolti evidenziano come, in entrambi i Paesi, i corsi combinino un approccio teorico e pratico, con una prospettiva interdisciplinare e un'attenzione particolare all'inclusione (Pace & Aiello, 2018). I programmi sono orientati a rispondere ai cambiamenti sociali e culturali, considerando l'educazione come un servizio pubblico essenziale per il benessere olistico (Faculty of Education, UOM). Inoltre, i tirocini svolgono un ruolo centrale nello sviluppo delle competenze pratiche necessarie per l'ingresso nel mondo del lavoro, sebbene vi siano differenze nell'attuazione delle pratiche didattiche (Calleja et al., 2017). La presentazione offrirà spunti su come l'identità professionale venga rafforzata nei due sistemi di ITE, con l'obiettivo di migliorare la preparazione degli insegnanti a operare in classi inclusive.

### KEYWORDS

Initial teacher education (ITE), cross-country comparisons, inclusive education, professional identity  
Formazione iniziale degli insegnanti (ITE), confronti tra paesi, istruzione inclusiva, identità professionale

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## Introduction

Interaction with the education system and its broader context plays a fundamental role in the development of teachers' professional identity (Suarez & McGrath, 2022), especially in inclusive settings, where the identity of future teachers is crucial in determining the quality of teaching. Notably, this development is not limited to acquiring theoretical knowledge and operational skills but is the result of personal interpretations of one's role, the meanings attributed to this function, and the choices—whether conscious or conditioned—through which individuals position themselves within the organizational contexts where they work (Bracci & Romano, 2020). For this reason, paying attention to the initial phase of teacher education represents a key step in fostering full awareness of their professional role. Moreover, the socio-cultural context of the education system and its structure can influence teachers' own perceptions (Sachs, 2005; Mockler, 2020; Suarez & McGrath, 2022). Likewise, teachers' professional and personal experiences, shaped by context of reference, form beliefs about the teacher's role (Nias, 1998; Bailey, 2006; Suarez & McGrath, 2022). In light of these reflections, curricula need to be designed "to respond in a coherent, organized, and systematic way to the theoretical and practical competencies required by the profession" (Gattullo, 1986, p.130).

In the context of a growing emphasis on teacher education (OECD, 2019), comparing teacher education programmes offered by different countries is becoming increasingly important. Most research within this field focuses on student teachers and early-career educators (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Izadinia, 2013). Comparing countries such as Italy and Malta involves analysing and contrasting significant aspects of each national system to identify similarities, differences, and possible mutual influences. This approach provides a broader and more in-depth view of academic programmes to analyse how these programmes can contribute to building a solid teacher identity. Therefore, in this study, comparing different training paths and experiences plays a fundamental role, as it enables a deeper understanding of the level of awareness reached by future teachers and the dynamics influencing their identity formation. The Primary Teacher Education programme, in particular, is central in preparing professionals capable of working in public and private educational contexts. The choice of Malta is motivated by its unique geopolitical position: Malta is a member of the Commonwealth and still bears a strong British influence due to its colonial past. Nonetheless, its history, geographical proximity to Italy, and the EU membership in 2008 have led to an alignment with European legislation and

systems in an array of fields, including education. Furthermore, in line with the Italian school system, the Maltese education system purports to promote inclusion in mainstream schools across all levels. Therefore, this comparison offers the opportunity to gain a broader perspective, allowing for identifying strengths and weaknesses in both education systems in supporting the development of teachers' professional identity. The ultimate goal is to effectively meet the needs of diverse classrooms and ensure inclusive education for all students (Goal 4, Agenda 2030, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>).

This contribution compares the two systems by analysing the primary teacher education degree programmes in Italy and Malta. Through a qualitative analysis of the respective training curricula, the article aims to highlight how these programmes support professional identity development by promoting conscious, reflective, and responsive teaching professionalism suited to the needs of increasingly diverse schools. The goal is to provide insights for improving initial teacher training pathways, enhancing best practices from both countries, and identifying potential areas for development.

## **2. Teacher Education Programs for Primary school teachers in Italy and Malta**

Both countries' primary school teaching profession is formalised through specific higher education programmes. In Italy, the single-cycle master's degree in Primary Teacher Education (Scienze della Formazione Primaria, LM-85 bis) constitutes the main training pathway. This five-year programme, in line with ministerial directives (Gazzetta Ufficiale, Ministerial Decree 249/2010), is designed to provide a comprehensive, in-depth preparation. Until 2016 in Malta, access to the teaching profession at the primary level was exclusively through a four-year Bachelor of Education (Honours) in Primary Education. Subsequently, A new two-year Master's in Teaching and Learning (MTL), classified at MQF Level 7, was introduced to replace the former four-year bachelor's degree. The transition from the four-year Bachelor of Education (Honours) in Primary Education to the new two-year program was formalised through Legal Notice 206 of 2016<sup>1</sup>. In 2019, the Faculty of

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<sup>1</sup> Recruitment, Initial Training and Continuous Professional Development of Personnel and Protection of Minors in Compulsory Education Regulations, 2016. This regulation, published in the *Malta Government Gazette* on 31 May 2016, introduced significant changes to initial

Education started offering the BA (Honours) in Primary Education. This degree also leads to a teacher's warrant in line with Bye-Laws of 2023 in terms of the General Regulations for University Undergraduate Awards, 2019, for the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Primary Education - B.A. (Hons) - under the auspices of the Faculty of Education.

Upon completing either one of the programmes and obtaining the Teacher's Warrant<sup>2</sup>, graduates are authorised to teach in primary schools in Malta. In this way, degree programmes have been aligned with the Bologna Process (1999)<sup>3</sup>, facilitating mutual recognition of academic qualifications among participating countries, including Malta and other EU member states. In Italy, since 2001, primary school teachers have graduated in Primary Teacher Education, according to Ministerial Decree No. 509 of 1999, which officially came into effect in the 2000/2001 academic year. This course was initially a 4-year degree course, but was changed to a five-year single-cycle one in 2018.

## **2.1 The Primary Education Sciences course in Italy**

Specifically, in Italy, the *Primary Teacher Education* degree programme is offered by faculties of education and other faculties authorised by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (Gazzetta Ufficiale, Ministerial Decree 249/2010). The curriculum integrates subjects from pedagogy, psychology, didactics, and methodological-laboratory practice. Its epistemological foundation aims to develop advanced professional skills essential for effectively managing

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teacher training, aligning it with European standards and national educational needs (<https://legislation.mt/>).

<sup>2</sup> This professional title is issued by the *Council for the Teaching Profession* (CTP) of Malta and represents the official qualification required to practice as a teacher within the national education system

([https://recruitmentadmin.gov.mt/attachments/circulars/d17a18ed-957b-4b73-89b2-83be11c2319c\\_p.pdf](https://recruitmentadmin.gov.mt/attachments/circulars/d17a18ed-957b-4b73-89b2-83be11c2319c_p.pdf)).

<sup>3</sup> "The Bologna Process has had a significant impact on higher education in Europe. [...] In addition to harmonizing degree standards and quality assurance, the Bologna Process has also encouraged innovation and the modernization of education. It has prompted universities to adopt new teaching methods and to focus on the development of practical skills, making graduates more attractive to the job market. [...] Overall, the Bologna Process has been successful in achieving its goals of creating a more inclusive, accessible, and competitive higher education system in Europe. It continues to evolve and adapt to meet the changing needs of students, universities, and employers" (<https://campusmalta.ieu.edu.ua/it/bologna-process/>).

teaching and learning processes within the diverse context of primary education, emphasising inclusion and innovative teaching practices.

The Master's degree programme (LM-85bis) prepares students in the various subjects they will teach, ensuring they can adapt instruction to their students' school level, age, and cultural background. For this reason, the knowledge acquired by future teachers must be directly linked to classroom management and the planning of educational and didactic activities (Gazzetta Ufficiale, DM 249/2010). Ministerial Decree 249/2010 established that the training pathway is divided into theoretical and practical components. Alongside theoretical instruction, pedagogical-didactic workshops are included to allow students to directly experience the practical application of what they have learned in class. A total of 300 ECTS credits are required, divided into several areas: 135 ECTS are dedicated to subject-specific teaching content, 78 ECTS cover pedagogy, didactics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology, 31 ECTS are assigned to training activities for the inclusion of students with disabilities, 32 ECTS include workshops, English language, educational technologies, and the final exam, and finally, 24 ECTS are reserved for the internship (Eurydice, 2024).

From the second year, compulsory indirect internship activities are introduced, including preparation, reflection, discussion of the activities carried out, and documentation for the final internship report. In addition, students must complete 600 hours, equivalent to 24 university credits of in-school training. According to Ministerial Decree 249/2010, "upon completion of the programme, graduates obtain the teaching qualification for primary school. The awarding of the degree is based on a comprehensive assessment of the academic curriculum, the thesis, and the internship report, evaluated by a committee composed of university professors, two tutors, and a ministerial representative appointed by the Regional School Offices" (Gazzetta Ufficiale, Ministerial Decree 249/2010).

## **2.2 University Level Teacher Training Courses for Primary School in Malta**

A key guiding document for Education in Malta is the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), which emerged from an extensive national consultation process involving teachers, students, families, and professionals from the education sector (<https://curriculum.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/NCF.pdf>). Specifically, the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta, the only university offering such programmes, has dedicated resources to reforming its teacher education programme, to contribute to the national effort to reform the education system

and ensure that all citizens acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to meet the challenges of the 21st century (Sultana et al., 2020). In addition to the University of Malta, the Institute for Education (IfE) also plays a central role in teachers' initial training and professional development. The IfE was established as an institute in April 2015 under Legal Notice 140 of 2015, later amended by Legal Notice 240 of the same year, and restructured as an agency through Legal Notice 243 of 2017. The Institute is accredited by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA)<sup>4</sup> as a Higher Education Institution, by the Second Schedule of Subsidiary Legislation 327.433.

The University of Malta offers two distinct academic pathways for those seeking to qualify as primary school teachers. The first is an undergraduate programme: the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Primary Education, a three-year course designed to equip future educators with the foundational knowledge, pedagogical skills, and practical classroom experience needed to become effective and engaging primary school teachers. This programme, governed by *Legal Notice 137 of 2024* (Malta Government Gazette No. 21,273 – 21 June 2024), also opens doors to alternative career opportunities such as curriculum development, educational consultancy, instructional coordination, or educational research (Faculty of Education, University of Malta, [course overview](#)). Students are required to complete 180 ECTS credits. Upon graduation, they will have developed a comprehensive understanding of the core areas of learning in primary education, the ability to apply relevant research methodologies, and the competence to create and manage learning environments that support student development. The curriculum is divided into 120 ECTS credits related to the scientific-disciplinary fields of Early Childhood and Primary Education, 20 ECTS for Education Studies, 8 ECTS for Inclusion and Access to Learning, and 12 ECTS for Leadership for Learning and Innovation. The programme, as outlined in the reference document, places particular emphasis on key competencies, which include the ability to encourage students to reflect on themselves, use and integrate meaningful educational research findings, and demonstrate a strong commitment to equity and justice by

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<sup>4</sup> The *Malta Further and Higher Education Authority* (MFHEA) is the governmental body in Malta responsible for monitoring, regulating, and accrediting educational institutions in the field of higher education and lifelong learning. Its mission is to ensure the quality and reliability of educational programs offered by universities, colleges, and other institutions operating in the higher education and vocational training sectors in Malta (<https://mfhea.mt/>).

adopting inclusive practices that are free from discrimination regarding gender, sexual orientation, race, disability, age, religion, and culture. Additionally, most of the subjects are specific to primary education.

The second pathway is a postgraduate route: the Master's in Teaching and Learning (MTL) in Early Childhood and Primary Education. This two-year programme is intended for graduates with a first degree in another discipline who wish to pursue a professional qualification to teach at the primary level. The MTL focuses on advanced pedagogical theory, reflective practice, and classroom-based research, preparing students to meet the complex needs of diverse learners and become transformative educators. The course focuses on understanding the educational context and research and analysis methodologies in education. These areas are connected to the direct experience of the *Internship* (20 ECTS). Additionally, there are 50 ECTS in *Education Studies*, 5 ECTS in *Early Childhood and Primary Education*, and 5 ECTS in *Inclusion and Access to Learning*. The MTL combines theory and practice, shaping a reflective, curious, collaborative professional educator. It promotes teaching and learning for democracy and social justice (Faculty of Education, University of Malta,

Both programmes align with the overarching goals of Malta's education system, which strives to provide every young person with the skills, values, and independence necessary for lifelong learning; expand opportunities for higher education and professional growth; and implement effective educational and employment policies in close collaboration with sector stakeholders (Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation, [source](#)).

The Maltese curriculum framework places significant importance on developing specific teaching competencies for the 5-11 age range, focusing on bilingualism (Maltese and English), principles of inclusive education, and the adoption of innovative, evidence-based teaching methodologies. While both training models differ in the specificities of the national education systems, they converge in the goal of shaping reflective, competent professionals with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary to effectively carry out the role of educator in primary schools (Calleja, 2005).

The study programme promoted by the Institute for Education (IfE) focuses on the initial training and continuous professional development of teaching staff, to integrate 21st-century skills and abilities into educational processes and leadership

practices at all levels (IfE, <https://ife.edu.mt/>). A particular focus is placed on including equity and social justice principles throughout the training. The Institute is committed to designing and offering accredited programs with high flexibility and accessibility, delivered through various methods such as in-person teaching, online learning, and blended learning. Specifically, the Bachelor of Education (Honours) in Primary Education course offered by the Institute for Education (IfE) in Malta is a four-year undergraduate degree, recognized as level 6 according to the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF). The programme aims to prepare qualified primary school teachers and is intended for those who wish to work with children in the early years of schooling.

One of the distinctive features of the course is the adoption of a blended learning approach, combining in-person and distance learning activities, thus offering greater flexibility for students with work or family commitments. The four-year training programme balances theoretical foundations with practical field experience. Each year includes a practical internship period directly in schools, providing a concrete and progressively evolving educational experience. The theoretical content covers areas ranging from pedagogy to learning psychology, including classroom management, school inclusion, the use of technology in teaching, and a critical reflection on the teacher's role and responsibilities. Future teachers are also trained in all the core subjects, including Maltese, English, mathematics, science, social studies, religious education, physical education, art, and music. Innovative elements include outdoor learning, interdisciplinary projects, an investigative approach, and solid preparation for educational research, culminating in a thesis in the fourth year (<https://ife.edu.mt/bachelor-of-education-hons/>).

### **3. Discussion**

Despite structural and socio-cultural differences, the described degree programmes significantly and multidimensionally contribute to developing teachers' professional identity, operating on various interconnected levels. A solid theoretical foundation enables future teachers to understand learning processes, the most effective teaching methodologies, strategies for classroom management, and the inclusion of students with special educational needs. Understanding these theoretical foundations is crucial for developing a conscious and reasoned view of one's professional role. In both countries, the course does not neglect the in-depth study of the subjects that future teachers will be called upon to teach. Acquiring a

solid mastery of disciplinary content is essential for conveying concepts accurately and engagingly, adapting the complexity of topics to the age of the students. This competency helps build a professional identity based on global skills, also developing a greater awareness of one's cultural identity (Van Werven et al., 2021).

Additionally, the numerous practical workshops integrated into the course allow students to actively experiment with innovative teaching methodologies, design learning activities, use tools and technologies for teaching, and develop skills in classroom management and student assessment. This practical dimension is essential for translating theoretical knowledge into operational skills, a central element of the teacher's professional identity. As Zecca reports, "the workshops were conceived as a hinge capable of connecting the times of 'formal' preparation and 'practical' preparation through analysis, design, and meta-reflection (Damiano, 1998, p. 173), or as a 'place/structure for operationalising the theory-practice-theory link' (Perrucca, 2005, p. 89)" (Zecca, 2014). Alongside the workshops, both direct and indirect internships represent a crucial stage in the transition into the profession. With the support of experienced teachers (school mentors) and guidance from university tutors, students can directly engage with effective teaching practices, experience the complexity of the school context, reflect on their work, and gradually develop their professional identity through direct experience. The role of the tutor includes "valuing students' implicit knowledge, connecting it to disciplinary content, providing educational support, integrating students into the school reality, observing both the immediate and broader context, as well as narrating and reinterpreting the internship experience individually and collectively" (Buccolo in Manfreda, 2023, p. 47). In Italy and Malta, internships are necessary for training future teachers. The field internship is a fundamental element of teacher training, as it allows the acquisition and practical application of professional skills in a real context. In addition to promoting learning, it represents an opportunity to reflect on one's role and develop professional identity through interaction with teachers, colleagues, and tutors (Chetcuti & Buhagiar, 2019). A distinctive feature of the Italian programme is the emphasis on both direct and indirect internships as an opportunity "to give and listen to the voice of students who are in a transitional phase from being students to becoming professional figures, thus acting as a bridge between the two realities that illuminate each other for a more conscious and self-determined decision-making process and a better deciphering of complexity" (Sibilio, 2020; Pace et al., 2021).

According to Wenger (1998), the internship should not be understood solely as an opportunity to acquire individual skills but as an experience within a community of

practice. The collaboration between the various actors in the educational community creates adequate support to help interns develop their professional identity (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). While both countries place increasing emphasis on inclusion and intercultural education, the specifics of each country's educational and social contexts are reflected, suggesting that, despite different approaches, both models aim to prepare highly qualified teachers capable of responding to the needs of an increasingly diverse school environment.

On the other hand, the degree programme in Primary Education Science constantly encourages students to reflect on their experiences, beliefs, and teaching approaches. Through self-assessment activities, group discussions, and the development of portfolios, future teachers are prompted to develop greater awareness of their teaching style, strengths, and areas for improvement. This reflective capacity is a distinctive feature of a professional aware of their identity. Visceglia (2023) described that "reflectivity represents a particularly intricate and profound form of thought. Cultivating allows teachers to examine, discuss, evaluate, and review their way of organising, educating, and teaching. It also fosters a conscious connection with the social and political context in which one operates, stimulates a critical view of one's beliefs, promotes awareness of one's educational path and personal growth, and allows for the development of an autonomous and conscious vision of teaching, integrating theoretical and cultural reflections into daily practice" (p. 187).

### **3.1 Focus on inclusion and development of professional identity**

Malta is strongly inspired by European guidelines and primary international documents concerning rights and inclusion, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), promoting a vision of inclusive education as a fundamental right and a founding principle of the school system. Inclusion is recognized as a key element in educational contexts to ensure equal learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their characteristics or needs. However, within the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Primary Education course, specific teachings dedicated to inclusion remain few. They are sometimes addressed cross-sectionally, without a systematic, in-depth approach comparable to other European educational contexts. In contrast, in Italy, attention to inclusion is particularly marked. It is reflected in a well-defined university education, which includes specific teachings related to special pedagogy, inclusive didactics, and regulations on special educational needs and disability. In the Primary Education degree courses, these contents are obligatorily and systematically included in the

academic path, and students also have the opportunity to pursue a post-graduate specialization to become support teachers. This educational model is supported by a robust regulatory framework, starting from Law 104 of 1992 to Legislative Decree 66 of 2017, which places inclusion at the center of the educational mission of the Italian school system. However, the concept of inclusion is often addressed in terms of disability and special educational needs, neglecting other aspects such as interculturalism, the inclusion of migrant students or those with different linguistic backgrounds, and gender identity. This aspect has significant implications for constructing the teacher's professional identity. It is seen as a dynamic process through which the future teacher develops an integrated set of competencies, values, attitudes, and pedagogical awareness that guide their educational practice. In the Maltese context, the limited presence of teachings specifically dedicated to inclusion within the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Primary Education may not provide a complete picture of an inclusive teaching professionalism.

In Italy, on the other hand, the more structured organisation of educational pathways and the presence of mandatory contents related to special pedagogy, inclusive didactics, and regulations on BES and disability contribute more significantly to the formation of a professional identity centered on the shared responsibility for the educational success of all students. However, the tendency to focus mainly on disability and educational needs may result in a reductive view of inclusion, neglecting equally essential dimensions such as linguistic-cultural diversity, gender identity, and socio-economic conditions.

Another critical point is the lack of specific teachings for developing the teacher's professional identity and reflectivity. In Malta, topics related to the teaching profession and its evolution are addressed through teachings that allow students in training “to reflect on what it means to become professional teachers, on the relationship between this role and research in the educational field, on ethics and research methodologies” (<https://www.um.edu.mt/courses/studyunit/EDS5023>). Although there is significant attention to fundamental theoretical disciplines for teacher training in Italy, the teacher's professional identity is not treated autonomously and systematically within the study programmes. While disciplinary areas offer valuable tools for understanding educational contexts, relational dynamics, and the cognitive and social processes influencing teaching, there is a lack of a specific and in-depth analysis of the evolution of the teacher's professional identity as an object of independent reflection.

#### 4. Conclusion

The curriculum integrates theoretical and practical aspects in both contexts, promoting a deep understanding of the educational role and the necessary pedagogical competencies. The Primary Education course in Italy and Malta represents a fundamental path for constructing a solid professional identity for future teachers. This is especially true because "the concept of personal development is closely related to that of professional identity and presupposes a series of elements [...] such as the ability to ask questions, as personal development is a state of mind (Baldassarre, 2019) and not the sum of merely instrumental knowledge" (Visceglia, 2023, p. 188). However, various elements that influence the decision to pursue and continue a career in teaching include psychological factors and a range of social factors related to personality, gender, socio-cultural context, age, and other demographic aspects (Attard et al., 2023). How specific societies conceive of teachers' identity is also essential for developing that identity.

It would be vital for Italy and Malta to pay more attention to the development of teachers' professional identity, so that they can acquire solid teaching competencies and a deeper awareness of their educational and social role. Malta represents an example from which Italy could draw inspiration, introducing a more targeted path that promotes reflection on teachers' professional identity, integrating reflections on ethics, research, and the profession's evolution into its training programmes (Faculty of Education, University of Malta). The Maltese model demonstrates how the inclusion of specific subjects for primary school in the curriculum and the conscious integration of ethics and research-related themes can strengthen the identity-building of teachers. In this perspective, Italy could also undertake a process of educational renewal that, in addition to technical skills, promotes critical and personal reflection on teachers' academic, social, and cultural roles. On the other hand, Malta could benefit from the approach of Italian programmes, which emphasise inclusion, further integrating this aspect into their educational pathways.

Considering what has emerged, it is clear that developing teachers' professional identity is a central element in initial training, but it is still somewhat neglected. While sharing a curricular structure that integrates theory and practice, Italy and Malta present different approaches in valuing the reflective and ethical dimension of the teaching profession. Both countries show areas for growth and opportunities for mutual learning, especially regarding the construction of professional identity in the initial training of teachers. Promoting this development means training more

aware teachers, capable of critically reflecting on their role and addressing its complexity with responsibility and competence (Aiello & Sibilio, 2018). As Bezzina and Camilleri (2001) remind us, "each teacher is unique, with their circumstances and experiences, and is a creator and interpreter of meaning, thus with a personal educational philosophy" (p. 163): recognizing and nurturing this uniqueness represents both a challenge and a fundamental resource for a high-quality inclusive education.

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