



Internationalisation in Educator Training: Insights from an International Research Cooperation

L'internazionalizzazione nella formazione degli educatori: prospettive da una cooperazione di ricerca internazionale

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DOUBLE BLIND PEER REVIEW

ABSTRACT

This paper examines, using the Erasmus+ project *ProLernen* as an example, how internationalisation in educational science can be understood and how it contributes to the professional development of prospective educators. The project aimed to develop the phenomenological vignette used in qualitative research, into a fruitful tool for professionalisation in diverse educational contexts. Its implementation at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano is presented and evaluated through the analysis of student portfolios, revealing how the vignette fosters professional growth by sensitising students' perceptions. The paper concludes by discussing limitations of the project – such as the predominantly one-sided reception of German theoretical traditions – and by highlighting its potential, including the establishment of a new understanding of professionalisation within the context examined.

Questo articolo analizza, attraverso l'esempio del progetto Erasmus+ *ProLernen*, in che modo l'internazionalizzazione nelle scienze della formazione possa essere interpretata e contribuire allo sviluppo professionale dei futuri educatori. Il progetto mirava a sviluppare la vignetta fenomenologica, già impiegata nella ricerca qualitativa, in uno strumento efficace di professionalizzazione in diversi contesti educativi. La sua implementazione presso la Libera Università di Bolzano viene presentata e valutata attraverso l'analisi dei portfolio degli studenti e delle studentesse, da cui emerge come la vignetta promuova la crescita professionale sensibilizzando la percezione degli studenti e delle studentesse. L'articolo si conclude discutendo i limiti del progetto, tra cui la prevalente ricezione unilaterale delle tradizioni teoriche tedesche, e ne mette in luce le potenzialità, in particolare l'avvio di una nuova concezione della professionalizzazione nel contesto analizzato.

KEYWORDS

Internationalisation, Research cooperation, Phenomenological vignette research, Professionalisation
Internazionalizzazione, Cooperazione scientifica, Ricerca con vignette fenomenologiche, Professionalizzazione

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a significant surge in academic and practice-oriented publications addressing pedagogical actions and teacher professionalisation (Cramer et al., 2020; European Commission, 2023; Helsper, 2021). As internationalisation is considered a key prerequisite for the successful development of research and teaching at universities (DAAD & DZHW, 2020), the Erasmus+ project *ProLernen* sought to contribute to the professionalisation of prospective educators and educational leaders by establishing an international network of researchers. Various institutions – including universities, universities of education, and a school authority – participated across seven locations in five European countries, namely Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Liechtenstein. These institutions represented a broad spectrum of educational fields, ranging from primary and secondary education to vocational training and pedagogical leadership, depending on the national context. What united the researchers was a shared theoretical orientation toward the understanding of professionalisation within the project. Unlike approaches that primarily focus on action-norming recommendations (European Union, 2018), organisation-related transformation goals (Kaser & Halbert, 2009), structural critiques of the education system (Baldacci, 2022; Neuman, 2019), or innovative guidelines for designing didactic models to improve pedagogical practice (Damiano, 2013; Smith, 2012), this project adopted a phenomenological approach. This perspective provides experience-based, attitude- and action-sensitising proposals for an alternative standpoint on pedagogical practice, emphasising its potential to cultivate perception (Agostini, 2020a; Agostini et al., 2023).

Over the 25 months of the project, a comprehensive manual – *The Vignette as an Exercise in Perception* – was developed in four languages (German, English, Italian, and Greek) and organised around the topics of *Perception*, *Body*, *Vignette*, and *Learning* (Agostini et al., 2023). Training modules for multipliers were developed on the basis of this manual, enabling educators to disseminate the methodology among other interested teachers, educators, and pedagogical leaders – both transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary. A continuous exchange across national borders facilitated the integration of international experiences and forms of knowledge that had not previously established at the respective sites. This achievement was made possible through a combination of six transnational partner meetings, held both online and in person (in Thessaloniki, Bozen-Bolzano, and Vienna) – in the spirit of *Virtual Exchange* (VE) as a partly online community of practice and in connection with the process of the internationalisation of higher education (Finardi & Aik, 2024). Furthermore, a series of internal training courses took place in which knowledge and experience were shared, and differing understandings were discussed among the partners. While the manual chapters were created by cross-location research groups, the training modules were adapted – based on the manual and a common set of slides – to suit the specific contexts, subject areas, pedagogical fields, and target groups of the individual locations.

2. Theoretical framework of the project

Phenomenological educational science is a pedagogical movement that developed from phenomenology – a branch of philosophy – at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The German philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) is regarded as its founder. Husserl analysed the genesis of experience and explored the constitutive achievements of consciousness that make experience possible. Many of his successors, including the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, criticised the early Husserl for his strong orientation towards a philosophy of consciousness. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty developed a philosophy of experience grounded in the incarnation of the subject. According to more recent German representatives of phenomenology, such as Bernhard Waldenfels, intentionality is unable to provide sufficient space for the alien, the extra-ordinary, and the intersubjective dimensions of experience, due to its orientation towards purpose and rules. In his investigations of the alien, Waldenfels (2000) argues that experiential processes are elicited by foreign claims, which he analyses from the perspective of corporeality, following Merleau-Ponty. Phenomenology is often described by its proponents as a particular attitude of opening oneself to the world and others in a committed manner – and of reorienting one's own gaze. In this way, the gaze can be redirected and the manifold possibilities inherent in perception can be traced to the act of perceiving something as something else (Agostini, in press). The suspension of (immediate) judgement that arises from the phenomenological attitude of *epoché* and the explicit inclusion – in the sense of phenomenological reduction – of the distinction between a thing and its meaning, can offer an approach to engage with diverse perspectives. A phenomenological educational approach is based on an understanding of learning that does not begin with a clear result, but rather conceives learning as a transition from the irritating and resistant “no longer” to the fragile and difficult “not yet” of knowing and being able (Meyer-Drawe, 2012). In this phenomenological understanding of learning, established habits, familiar routines, and acquired knowledge are negated and challenged by the intrusion of the unfamiliar. To recognise such fragile moments of learning – both in the others and within one's own pedagogical practice – it is essential to cultivate an open attitude of perception. The exercise of attention and perception is therefore the first step towards professionalisation in a phenomenological sense – a way of opening possible perspectives that are already inherent in the perception of the situation itself (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005). It is precisely the awareness of alternative ways of seeing that opens the door to a new perception of the situation and to the pedagogical possibilities for action inherent within it. For educators, this attitude entails a constant engagement with the unfamiliar and challenging. For students in educational sciences, this phenomenological perspective is particularly relevant, as it fosters the development of sensitivity to difference, alterity, and diversity. In this way, prospective educators can learn to question their own patterns of perception and interpretation, to integrate alternative viewpoints, and to cultivate a professional stance that

is shaped less by rapid judgement and more by attentiveness, openness, and reflexivity in relation to complex pedagogical situations marked by a multiplicity of meaning. It thereby not only broadens students' perspective on learning theories, but also opens up alternative ways of seeing, thinking, and ultimately acting differently within their educational practice.

This descriptive and bodily-phenomenological understanding within the German and French traditions is also continued in phenomenological vignette research (Schratz et al., 2012; Zadra & Agostini, 2024), which has already proven fruitful for teacher education and professional development (Agostini et al., 2023). Originally developed at the University of Innsbruck for researching learning in heterogeneous school groups, this approach aims to explore lived experiences within pedagogical situations. To this end, vignette researchers record what they co-experience in the field and subsequently condense their notes into a concise narrative text that captures the shared experience. This text undergoes intersubjective validation within a (research) group. Vignette writers do not seek to reconstruct situations or provide full contextualisation; rather, they translate actions, bodily expressions, atmospheres, and moods – the pathic dimension of the experience – into language in an aesthetic and resonant way. Therein lies the strength of the vignette: they are written in an evocative, meaningful manner, enabling what is perceived to unfold in multiple ways regarding its meaning. This evocative quality makes it possible to reveal different perspectives on the same experiential situation – perspective shaped by individual experiences and influenced by specific theoretical references or (professional) knowledge at the respective locations and institutions. This allows the actors at different institutions retain sovereignty over the interpretation of the data (Agostini & Mian, 2019).

The analysis of vignettes, referred to as vignette-reading (*Lektüre*), enables this reflection on what has been perceived. Through the comparison between perception and reflection – in the transition from the pre-reflective to the reflective, and in the forward and backward movement – knowledge (contextual, national, and previous) is set in motion, allowing both the practice and theory of pedagogical work to be examined for their potentials and limitations. Vignette readings raise questions that cannot be answered conclusively, yet they foster an awareness of diverse perspectives. In turn, this awareness can cultivate a professional pedagogical ethos (Agostini, 2020a) one that entails being consistently aware of a variety of perspectives and leading to deeper reflection and an expanded repertoire of actions.

Within the project, and through collaboration with partner institutions across Europe, the phenomenological vignette was systematically developed from a well-established research instrument in school pedagogy in the German-speaking world into a valuable tool for professionalisation in diverse pedagogical, national, and linguistic contexts. This process fostered an international theoretical discourse on professionalisation involving the exchange and transfer of a knowledge from different traditions of phenomenology and varied understandings of phenomenological vi-

gnette research, as well as its translation into multiple fields of pedagogical practice.

3. The implementation of the Erasmus+ Project *ProLernen* at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano

3.1 The Bozen-Bolzano location

Given the multilingual context in South Tyrol, where German, Italian, and Ladin are officially recognised languages, internationalisation in higher education within the field of educational sciences is essential to address the co-evolution between the world of work and the training of future educators. Due to its strategic location on the border with Austria and Switzerland, the conditions for the internationalisation in the higher education sector are already favourable: the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (FUB) is not only a university characterised by trilingualism (English, German, and Italian), but the entire province can be viewed as a space shaped by multiple cultures and languages – one that embraces diversity and recognises the added value it brings, thus enabling productive exchange. Accordingly, the Faculty of Education at FUB, which trains kindergarten and primary school teachers, could serve as a site where educators are prepared for their future professional environment – one characterised not only by the region's linguistic particularities but also by an increasingly international society.

These evolving demands are also being addressed at the political level, as exemplified by the introduction of the professional profile of the school social educator in 2017, which focuses on roles related to prevention and integration in schools (Autonomous Province of Bolzano, 2015). The responsibilities of the school social educator include coordinating socio-pedagogical activities, providing counselling and support in relation to various social issues, and promoting the creation of sustainable social networks. This role requires educators to develop and implement projects that foster students' social and self-competence in collaboration with teachers (Autonomous Province of Bolzano-Bozen, 2017). A prerequisite for entering the profession is the completion of at least a three-year university degree in the field of social education – a qualification that can also be obtained at the Faculty of Education.

These political efforts are in line with international trends that seek to assign new responsibilities to educators and promote the establishment of multi-professional teams in schools (Böhm-Kasper et al., 2016). While the role of the school social educator responds to local needs, internationalisation initiatives at institutions as FUB aim to equip educators with the necessary skills and perspectives to navigate an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. Despite FUB's strong commitment to internationalisation and its continuous efforts to create a shared academic space, linguistic and cultural boundaries continue to persist. Although the Faculty of Education includes researchers and professors of diverse nationalities, the Educational Sciences for Primary Education programme remains divided along linguistic lines. Accordingly,

three departments have been established – one for German, one for Italian, and one for Ladin – reflecting the three school systems in South Tyrol: German and Italian schools, as well as those in Ladin-speaking valleys. In contrast to the Master's in Educational Science, courses in the Bachelor's degree programme in Social Education are taught in Italian, German, and English. This situation reveals that linguistic and cultural boundaries – which could potentially be crossed – are not only maintained but also reproduced and stabilised. There is, however, an attempt to overcome language barriers and to create the conditions for adopting an international perspective at a linguistic level: students are required to demonstrate proficiency in two local languages at the C1 level and in a third language at the B2 level in order to complete the course.

This multilingual approach attracts students and academic staff from other countries, thus fostering internationalisation and exchange. Through numerous Erasmus+ and bilateral partnerships worldwide, FUB promotes personal growth, social engagement, career development, and intercultural openness (European Union, 2018). This endeavour to shift linguistic and cultural boundaries – and to encourage people to cross them – aligns with the broader goal of setting knowledge in motion. Through international research collaborations and networks involving scholars from different linguistic and pedagogical traditions, efforts are made to exchange, develop, and disseminate knowledge across contexts, thereby rendering it productive in a variety of settings. Such collaborations and networks are crucial for advancing research and promoting global understanding.

In the context of educational science, international learning experiences are pivotal because they prepare future educators “as human, social, and economic beings” (Leask, 2020, p. 1942) to navigate diversity, global knowledge flows, and unequal power relations. Such experiences foster *cosmopolitan teachers* (Luke, 2004) who are open, reflexive, and able to connect local and global contexts in inclusive and socially just ways (Koh et al., 2025). Moreover, international perspectives on issues in educational science open new avenues of thought that enable prospective teachers to critically examine and question national structures as well as historically and nationally embedded traditions of thought (Vogt et al., 2024). According to Koh et al. (2025) the internationalization of higher education should not be understood solely as “institutional internationalization” (p. 21), but rather as an ongoing practice of dialogue between pedagogical values and practical realities. From this perspective, vignettes can be regarded as a globally transformative experience designed to cultivate reflexivity and a critical stance toward one's own assumptions about alterity.

One initiative that further advanced the university's internationalisation efforts was the participation of FUB in the Erasmus+ project *ProLernen*, led by the University of Vienna from 2020 to 2022. This collaboration enabled the integration of an international and intercultural dimension into the university's teaching, research, and service aligning with the principles of Internationalization at Home (IaH) (Finardi & Aik, 2024).

3.2 The training modules at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano

The training modules at the Faculty of Education at FUB, which emerged from the international theoretical discourse and the exchange of knowledge and experiences, were implemented during the 2021–22 academic year as part of two courses in social pedagogy: *Introduction to General Pedagogy and Social Pedagogy* and *Qualitative Methods in Educational and Social Research*. A total of 22 first and second semester students took part in the courses, which comprised a total of 20 hours across the winter and summer semesters. During the winter term, a six-hour introduction to the theoretical foundations of vignette research was provided. The course began with an interactive discussion on the concept of professionalisation and the relationship between theory and practice. This was followed by a brief overview of phenomenology as a philosophical movement and its significance within educational sciences. Finally, two topics addressed in the manual, *Perception* and *Learning* (Agostini et al., 2023), were examined in greater detail. The students' various modes of perception were collected and explored in depth with the aim of fostering greater sensitivity to different ways of perceiving. This exercise was designed to highlight that perception always occurs as something specific – that is, in significant difference (Waldenfels, 2000). In the productive gap that thereby emerges, a new meaning is awakened – one that is already inherent in a constellation of circumstances (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005). In this sense, special attention was given to the potential experiences condensed within the vignettes. These captured co-experienced moments were then theorised as learning moments, drawing on the phenomenological understanding of learning as experience (Meyer-Drawe, 2012), in which expectations are thwarted and new meanings about the self, the other, and the subject matter emerge.

In the summer term, 14 lessons focused on the topics *Vignettes*, *Perception*, and *Body* to illustrate the distinction between lived body and objective body from a phenomenological perspective and to clarify the importance of perceiving bodily expressions within vignettes. In this context, the ambivalent relationship between language and experience was also addressed. Following a theoretical introduction to the vignette and subsequent discursive readings, students were introduced to the practice of vignette writing and the challenges it entails. What follows is a student's first attempt at writing vignettes. Although it is still a provisional vignette lacking full writing maturity, it already displays many features of a final vignette, such as the attention to bodily expression and the distinctive sensitivity to atmosphere, which together create a surplus of meaning for the reader.

3.2.1. The boy with the crumpled flag¹

Three boys of primary school age are standing together in a small semi-circle on an open-air commu-

¹ All German quotations and the vignette have been translated into English by the authors of this article.

nity square, where a Peace Run event is taking place. Around them, other people – young and old – are present. Each of them holds a painted square sheet of paper (approx. 15 cm x 15 cm). The flags that have already been hung up display various peace-related themed designs – for example, one flag shows two doves, while others depict rainbows, hearts, smiling suns, the international peace symbol, crossed-out weapons, and words such as peace and war. Some flags are also bear the first names of their creators. One boy has crumpled the self-drawn sheet into his hands, as if he were shaping a dumpling. The other two boys are holding their flags lightly between their fingers so that they hang loosely at their sides visible to passers-by. The boy with the crumpled flag keeps looking down at his folded hands and then back up at the line where the other flags hang. He only moves his head, otherwise he keeps his gaze lowered and he says nothing. His body remains motionless, except for his hands; his fingers open and close rhythmically, and in the hollow of his palms – shaped like a small bowl – rests his crumpled flag. His friends have turned their bodies towards him and only the two of them are talking. They seem to be trying to engage their friend in a conversation. Their eyes seek his, but he barely responds. Every now and then they glance sideways toward the line where a lady is hanging a flag. When the lady climbs down from the ladder and turns to the three boys, she says: “Come on, let’s go and cut it down! The others will have to wait a moment!” She speaks fast, lifts her gaze, and moves briskly forward. The lady and the boy run to a doorway and disappear into the house. The boy with the crumpled flag is now bursting with energy and running into the house as if for his life. Another woman’s voice can be heard telling her child: “The boy has misspelled something.” (anonymised student; unpublished)

3.3 Evaluation through students’ reflective portfolios

During and at the end of the ‘vignette journey’, the students engaged in a reflective writing process, which alongside the writing and analysis of the vignettes, involved compiling a portfolio containing their reflections, guided by questions about what the course had meant to them. Students were asked whether their vignettes could serve various purposes, to reflect on their significance, and to consider how they might be applied in different pedagogical contexts. Another question focused on their engagement with the vignette research, exploring the insights they had gained for their personal development and future professional endeavours, as well as how these insights could influence their future practice as educators in school or in school-related contexts. Students were also asked to identify the kind of knowledge they believe vignettes generate and how such knowledge might contribute to a broader understanding of human behaviour, decision-making processes, and social dynamics. Additionally, they were asked to envision potential applications of this kind of knowledge across different professional domains. Finally, the students were invited to consider how vignettes could be used to address research questions or practical challenges within academia, policymaking, and other

professional domains. Based on their experiences with vignettes compared to other qualitative methods, students were asked whether they had identified any distinctive features or advantages that might enhance the effectiveness or depth of pedagogical research and analysis. The guiding questions encouraged them to engage in reflective practice – rethinking their experiences, recognising and acknowledging associated emotions, and thereby becoming aware of alternative possibilities of meaning.

Twenty-eight portfolios containing students’ reflections on the guiding questions were collected. All reflections were anonymised and subjected to an iterative reading process, with particular attention to critical observations, aimed at identifying every possible unit of meaning while preserving the uniqueness and original voice of each reflection. The material underwent a qualitative analysis drawing on Moustakas’ phenomenological approach (1994). The objective was to comprehend and describe the meanings inherent in the experiences. This analytical process entailed navigating between close examination of the data and reflective distancing from it. Initially, the researchers should become familiar with the data through open reading. This process involves exploring the experiences represented contained in the data with the aim of uncovering new insights rather than confirming existing assumptions. Subsequently, the text is reread multiple times, accompanied by notes and brief descriptive terms used to identify meanings for the first time. The process is conducted gradually through an ongoing dialogue with the text, to allow the data to ‘speak’ and to preserve the multiplicity of voices and meanings. This iterative engagement fosters a deeper understanding of the data, which are then organised into themes to create a coherent and meaningful whole. The outlining these themes serves to reveal the underlying meanings embedded in the participants’ experiences. Only once this process is complete are the results articulated and refined.

The following section primarily highlights the themes identified in relation to the subjects of movement and multiplicity. The analysis revealed particularly interesting reflections on how the vignettes open new possibilities for perception and offer alternative ways of understanding experience. A multiplication of possibilities is unveiled – both in the multi-step process of writing the vignette and in its reading, which generally takes the form of a discursive reading moving progressively away from a single perspective, from the ‘unicum’ of its own truth to become an inventory of possibilities, “a combinatoria of experiences, of information, of readings” (Calvino, 1993, p. 123). Recognising the multiplicity of viewpoints and of perceptions entails acknowledging the perspectives of others and reorienting one’s own. These perspectives may be influenced by different theoretical frameworks, prior knowledge, lived experiences, and relationships with the world, calling for alternative ways of interweaving knowledge. According to the students, the recognition of multiplicity allows for a broadening of one’s own point of view to encompass the multifaceted experiences described in the vignettes.

This recognition simultaneously requires that students reorganise their ways of seeing, perceiving and listening – a modification on the self that encompasses

ses both the personal dimension and the (future) professional perspective. Indeed, the students emphasised that this new perception of plurality involves not only generating knowledge but also the capacity to perceive differently. Multiplicity thus pertains to the perceptible and sensorial experiences and to their continuous evolution, in connection with the multiple movement of experience within and in relation to the physical and social world.

The perceived multiplicity is closely linked to the specific type of experience evoked by the vignettes: a tangible and immersive encounter that enables one to sense the atmosphere, perceive body movements, and discern gestures, glances, and postures. The atmospheres described in the vignettes resonate with readers on a personal level, as if each had directly lived the experience. The students expressed a sense of shared participation in their peers' experiences, highlighting the vividness, intensity, and scenic dimension of the situations depicted, as if one "could enter the vignette itself" (Sara, student).

Both the language used in the vignettes and the scenic representation of gestures, postures, and movements seem to have a significant impact on the students. This innovative way of looking at and seeing educational phenomena 'anew' underscores the importance of attentive sensory perception and bodily involvement. A student, Marion, emphasises that she was able to recognise "this added value: the diversity, the complexity of the most varied situations, which can be perceived quite differently". The almost imperceptible movements of a hand, subtle facial expressions, or minute mimicry – such as a barely suggested smile or a furrowed brow – are elements that sustain attention to detail, and thus expand the experience. They enable its meaning to be understood and illuminated, or as Waldenfels (2006) states, allow an attention that "does not decide on whether something is, nor does it have to do with the who and what of the experience, rather it invests the how" (p. 118).

The vignette is therefore a tool that guides students along a path of awareness and attentiveness to perception, inviting them to renounce the obviousness of things and meanings. The gaze induced by the vignette allows them to perceive light and shadow – to engage in a mode of enquiry that extends beyond direct and conscious perception, encompassing affectivity and a pre-reflexive access to the world and others. This new orientation of the gaze seeks not so much explanation, but meaning; it does not operate in a causal manner but remains open to the multiplicity of understanding that comes from intuition, wonder, and emotion. As Patrick notes in his reflective portfolio: "For the first time, I do not interpret immediately, I do not try to explain, but I focus on understanding, on being intuitive". As the participating students emphasise, the process of writing vignettes is, in itself, an exercise in perception, as it requires one to patiently revisit one's own experiences, to constantly redefine one's gaze, to continually problematise one's choices, to allow oneself to be continually displaced, and to dwell in the unpredictable.

The theme that emerged from the data analysis – the multiplicity of experiences – is closely connected to another form of multiplicity: that of understanding. The wide range of possible meanings arising from the

vignettes represents a crucial aspect of the method. Participants found it both stimulating and challenging to question their beliefs, established perspectives, and predefined structures, as well as their preconceptions and implicit assumptions. Nevertheless, they considered the multiplicity of meanings that emerge through writing and reading as a key element of the vignette approach. In this regard, the students emphasise that reading the vignettes is not so much about "reading between the lines" (Linda), or uncovering hidden meanings, but about recognising that there are multiple ways of making sense of reality simultaneously – without reducing understanding to a single meaning or imposing a hierarchy among different possible understandings.

In fact, students point out that they are not dealing with 'given' and final readings, but with an openness towards experiences – to what arises in the always original, unpredictable and unrepeatable encounter with the world and with others. Writing and reading the vignettes thus protects from fixed formulas and predetermined answers, guiding instead toward an exploration of experience that remains always open. The students stated that the vignettes enabled them to grasp the complexity of educational phenomena and developmental processes. Simultaneously, they reported gaining insights into the implications of multiple, evolving selves, various self-perceptions, and shifting connections and roles within a diverse professional environment – allowing them, as one student (Silvia) noted, to "appreciate the changes in our world and life views". Here, we recognise the importance of valuing a wide range of perspectives, perceptions, and practical approaches, trying to "activate a sense of possibility whereby we do not simply lock ourselves into reality, but take into account that reality could also be different" (Waldenfels, 2011, p. 41). Engaging in the practice of writing vignettes and reading those produced by others led students to reconsider their own approach to scientific knowledge – to question what kind of knowledge this tool generates and what forms of professional practice such knowledge makes possible. The reflections highlight the fluid nature of knowledge – its dynamic, constantly evolving dimension, constantly situated within the fabric of everyday life, in our lived world, the 'Lebenswelt'. The self-reported information in the portfolios is also reflected in the results of a questionnaire conducted across all six locations in the summer semester of 2022, with a total of 83 respondents. The results were evaluated using descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis. The vignette thus emerges as an instrument that opens up possibilities for multiple forms of knowledge – one that, by embracing the validity of diverse interpretations, fosters interdisciplinary connections and networks within the humanities and encourages the dismantling of boundaries, and ignites a movement of knowledge, perceptions, and exchange.

4. Conclusions: Potentials and limitations of the international research cooperation

Through the *ProLernen* project, internationalisation was promoted by integrating new knowledge – pre-

viously not established at the Bolzano site – into courses for future social workers. The project demonstrates how a research tool originally developed in the German-speaking context was adapted and transformed into a valuable instrument for professional development across diverse pedagogical, national, and linguistic settings. The vignettes themselves proved to be powerful instruments for transcending professional boundaries and fostering a deeper understanding of the pedagogical profession, offering the potential to move beyond established borders of knowledge and experience. Viewed through a phenomenological lens, the process enabled students to confront and question their pre-existing perceptions of their professional roles, thus engaging in a reflective process often absent from more traditional approaches to professionalisation, which tend to prioritise competence and certainty.

In contrast, the vignette method encouraged students to slow down, reconsider entrenched patterns of thought, and to pay attention to perception as an active and dynamic process. This shift led students to critically examine their personal professional identities, opening new pathways for ongoing professionalisation. The international exchange within *ProLernen* further reinforced these insights, as the participating locations shared and integrated diverse perceptions of the teaching profession and its professional norms. Importantly, the project also demonstrated how implicit assumptions about professional identity can be challenged and reshaped through collaborative dialogue, both among educators and across national borders.

An essential outcome of the project has been the blurring of boundaries between the professional roles of teachers and social educators. While these roles are traditionally seen as distinct – teachers as responsible for academic knowledge and social educators focusing on life-world knowledge (Agostini, 2020b) – *ProLernen* demonstrated that close cooperation between them is not only possible but necessary. The project opened up new possibilities for collaboration in schools by fostering a transdisciplinary approach. Transdisciplinarity is defined here as the practice of transcending disciplinary and interdisciplinary hierarchies, connecting diverse bodies of knowledge, and framing educational issues within broader, open relationships. This approach requires collaboration among all education actors, each contributing their unique responsibilities and expertise without rigid separation. Thus, while different professional roles remain essential, they should be regarded as equal contributors to the shared educational mission, rather than as isolated domains.

However, it is equally important to acknowledge the limitations and challenges encountered in the project's internationalisation efforts. The outcomes of the vignette exercises were predominantly documented through self-reflections, such as student portfolios and surveys, and therefore cannot offer definitive conclusions about whether these exercises translated into actual behavioural changes or shifts in pedagogical practice. Furthermore, the theoretical and practical exchange primarily flowed in one direction, from German-speaking countries to the other partners involved, which resulted in the limited integration of Italian

and Greek perspectives within the broader framework. While these regional traditions and discourses were incorporated at specific sites, such as in multiplier training sessions, they did not permeate back to the other locations.

Despite these challenges, the project facilitated valuable and active exchanges of experience and knowledge among the partner institutions, with those joining at a later stage benefiting from the insights gained by earlier participants. Some partners even took the initiative to attend courses offered by other institutions, thereby fostering a more collaborative learning environment. This collaborative spirit also extended to joint events organised by Austrian partners, which further enhanced dialogue and learning. In this sense, it can be argued that the project not only enables reflection but also provides valuable insights into how international cooperation can operate at different levels, and generate transformative processes among diverse educational actors.

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