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The Role of Collaborative Action Research in Teachers' Professional Development

El papel de la investigación acción colaborativa en el desarrollo profesional docente

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Teachers' professional development is a key factor to have more reflective educators capable of working on teams to find solutions to problems that arise in their classrooms. The objective of this study is to analyze the impact that the collaborative planning, implementation, and evaluation of classroom projects, developed through collaborative action research, have in the professional development of in-service and pre-service teachers in a BA in English program. This is a qualitative research study focused on collaborative action research. Data were collected through journals, surveys, and meeting proceedings of collaborative sessions. As a result, it was possible to describe the processes and dynamics generated, as well as the changes perceived, which contributed to the professional development of the participants.

Key words: Collaborative action research, professional development, reflection.

El desarrollo profesional docente es vital para formar educadores más reflexivos, capaces de trabajar en equipo para encontrar soluciones a los problemas que surgen en sus aulas. El objetivo de este estudio es analizar el impacto que la planeación en equipo, la ejecución y la evaluación de proyectos de aula, desarrollados a través de la investigación acción colaborativa, tienen en el desarrollo profesional de los docentes en servicio y en formación en un programa de licenciatura en inglés. Esta es una investigación cualitativa con un enfoque en investigación acción colaborativa. Los instrumentos de recolección de datos incluyen diarios, encuestas y actas de sesiones colaborativas. Como resultado, fue posible describir los procesos y dinámicas generadas, al igual que los cambios percibidos, lo cual contribuyó al desarrollo profesional de los participantes.

Palabras clave: desarrollo profesional, reflexión, trabajo colaborativo.

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Introduction

Ongoing teacher education is a need that many researchers have pointed out in the last few years. Richards and Farrell (2005) inquire how teachers can continue with their professional development (PD) and how supervisors and administrators can provide opportunities for such development to take place. They present a model that acknowledges the benefits of PD for the teacher, the students, and the institution. University professors in Colombia, who are the ones in charge of training teachers, have written proposals and reflections that contribute to the professional development of pre-service and in-service teachers (Aldana Prieto & Cárdenas, 2011; Cadavid Múnera, Quinchía Ortiz, & Díaz Mosquera, 2009; Cárdenas, González, & Álvarez, 2010; González, 2007, 2009; Sierra Piedrahita, 2007; among others). In this regard, the need for learning, sharing experiences, reflecting, and working together has also been contemplated at our university, so as to help our colleagues and ourselves to continue learning in order to be better prepared to face everyday challenges in the classroom. The experience from our context suggests that teacher training courses are usually regarded as the only solution for teachers' PD; however, working collaboratively with peers is a resource and an opportunity that teachers do not always see as important, and that is, in fact, a good way to keep up to date in educational issues because study groups and collaborative work get participants more committed and active in their own learning. In the same line of thought, Cárdenas et al. (2010) propose considering teachers' development, not training, which would imply an ongoing process. Through collaborative action research (CAR), pre-service and in-service teachers reflect critically, inquire into their own pedagogical practices and make changes that benefit themselves, their students, and their institutions.

This qualitative study analyzes the impact that the collaborative planning, implementation, and evaluation of classroom projects, developed through CAR, have in the professional development of in-service and pre-service teachers in the BA in English program at a Colombian public university. It relates to Burns' (2005) idea of exploring a common problem in a specific context in order to gain understanding, create meaning, and improve educational practices. This study reports the challenges found when trying to implement strategies to get teachers to reflect together and take advantage of their shared knowledge to improve their pedagogical practices. Sharing is necessary and rewarding. In fact, Burns (1999) considers that when teachers investigate in the solitude of their classrooms it is counter to the original goals of action research (AR), which are "to bring about change in social situations as the result of group problem-solving and collaboration" (p. 12). In this way, this study allowed us to describe the processes and dynamics generated from CAR and to understand how these processes added to the professional development of the participants.

Theoretical Framework

The two constructs that support the theoretical framework are: Teachers' Professional Development and Collaborative Action Research. Relevant literature about each one will be presented in order to depict its relation to this work.

Teacher's Professional Development

Teachers' professional development is an ongoing process in which teachers engage to transform some of their conceptions and practices around pedagogy, methodology, and didactics in order to find new roads that allow them to meet the needs and interests of their own contexts. A variety of authors support the idea that PD is an everlasting task that teachers undergo freely (Cárdenas et al., 2010; Diaz-Maggioli, 2003; Estrada, 2009; González, 2007, 2009; Montecinos, 2003).

Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1990) affirm that teachers' PD is closely related with the needs for gaining new knowledge, abilities, and attitudes of those who work in educational contexts. Montecinos (2003) also invites teachers to renew, change, or adapt their pedagogical practices to their specific contexts. This is, in fact, the intention we have when we propose teachers to work collaboratively—to change for the better, to evaluate one's own teaching practices, and to adapt them to the context. Diaz-Maggioli (2003) defines PD as

> an ongoing learning process in which teachers engage voluntarily to learn how best to adjust their teaching to the learning needs of their students . . . an evolving process of professional self-disclosure, reflection, and growth that yields the best results when sustained over time in communities of practice and when focused on job-embedded responsibilities. (p. 1)

Additionally, González (2007) mentions that teachers engage in PD programs after they have finished their undergraduate studies and are willing to enrich their pedagogical practices and propose changes that allow qualifying education. Therefore, PD is a challenge that teachers and teacher-researchers who are interested in improving their teaching practices face. Richards and Farrell (2005) make a strong distinction between teacher training and teacher development. They state that "training refers to activities directly focused on a teacher's present responsibilities and is typically aimed at short-term and immediate goals . . . understanding basic concepts and principles as a prerequisite for applying them to teaching" (p. 3). While "development refers to general growth not focused on a specific job. It serves a long-term goal and seeks to facilitate growth of teachers' understanding of teaching and of themselves as teachers" (p. 4). They propose a list of goals from a training and development perspective, in which the big difference relies on learning and using versus understanding. Mann (2005) also considers teachers' reflection as supportive in PD. He states that

> teachers develop by studying their own practice, collecting data and using reflective processes as the basis for evaluation and change. Such processes have a reflexive relationship with the construction of teacher knowledge and beliefs. Collaborative and co-operative processes can help sustain individual reflection and development. (p. 103)

The gain in teachers' professional development is that teachers give themselves the opportunity to go beyond a theory studied or a course taken, to analyze practices, reflect, and understand their own contexts.

Collaborative Action Research

One of the trends regarding reflection and research in contemporary contexts related to professional development programs is AR. Richards and Lockhart (1996) state that AR "typically involves small-scale investigative projects in the teacher's own classroom, and consists of a number of phases which often recur in cycles: planning, action, observation, and reflection" (p. 12).

Burns (2005) argues that the contemporary focus given to AR is rooted in John Dewey's work whose questioning on the separation between theory and practice gave birth to the search of strategies to improve the PD of educators. Researching one's own classrooms and teaching contexts is an issue that can, and should, be considered for language teachers as a realistic extension of professional practice. Kemmis and McTaggart (as cited in Burns, 1999) suggest that "the approach is only action research when it is collaborative, though it is important to realize that the action research of the group is achieved through the critically examined action of individual group members" (p. 5). In this way, we decided to work collaboratively because when AR is linked to collaborative work, the teachers involved have many more opportunities for PD. Burns (1999) also

asserts that "collaborative action research processes strengthen the opportunities for the results of research on practice to be fed back into educational systems in a more substantial and critical way" (p. 13).

López-Pastor, Monjas, and Manrique (2011) suggest that collaborative work is the fruit of a research study done in different stages and is very useful for PD. Thus, CAR is research that engages teachers in work teams and allows them to reflect upon their pedagogical practices. As an example, Cano Flores and García López (2010) affirm that CAR excels as framework, process, and form of knowledge construction. For these authors, such construction is conditioned by the necessary reflective exchange around theory and practice and by the continuous analysis of the educational reality. In fact, in the last decades, authors such as Cochran-Smith (1991), Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), Lieberman (1995), and Sparks and Hirsh (1997) have created a trend that makes it necessary to transcend AR in order to propose theoretical and practical developments that guarantee teachers' PD under the basis of ongoing questioning, reflection, and joint and participatory experience. This trend gives the teacher a more active role as a researcher and member of a collaborative team.

In regard to the relevance that CAR has on PD processes, some relevant research projects done in the area may be mentioned. Feldman (1999) examines the role of conversation on CAR to understand how teachers' conversations can serve as a research methodology to contribute to the process of meaning construction. González, Montoya, and Sierra (2002) study the needs reported by English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers regarding professional development. Sierra Piedrahita (2007) studies the professional development of a group of foreign language teacher educators and pre-service teachers through the participation in a study group. Cadavid Múnera et al. (2009) develop an AR project with professors and students from Universidad de Antioquia (Colombia) to determine the impact of a PD proposal for English teachers of primary school. González (2009) analyzes, in a critical way, two international models of PD that have the role of alternative and additional certifications for the English teaching professionals in Colombia. Arias and Restrepo (2009) carry out an AR study about the evaluation practices in foreign language acquisition as a way to propitiate knowledge, experience, social research, evaluative abilities, and attitudes toward evaluation and research. Cano Flores and García López (2010) present the results of a CAR project in the training of administration professionals and they evidence how teamwork, responsibility, and commitment help the team members' professional development. Cárdenas et al. (2010) reveal some key concepts in the analysis of in-service teachers' PD and propose a conceptual framework for Colombia. The present study gains relevance, as it gives account of how collaboration with peers, to pursue a common goal, may be a good model for PD. Additionally, it sets a starting point for teachers at our institution and others to value their partners and themselves as reflective practitioners who have the capacity to find solutions to problems that arise in their classrooms by means of a study group and with the support of colleagues.

Method

This is a qualitative study centered in AR to explore a common problem in a specific context in order to gain understanding, create meaning, and improve educational practices (Burns, 2005). Ethnographic tradition and qualitative methods constitute a decisive help for a better understanding of educational phenomena and, thus, for a more adequate and conscious intervention (Goetz & LeCompte, 1988). Such understanding is mediated by a reflective process in which the participants analyze their roles while

trying to discover and monitor potential changes in perceptions and educational practices.

Participants

This study was conducted at a state university in Colombia. There were four participants: two teacher trainers (and authors of this paper) who belong to the Research Group in Language Didactics, one homeroom teacher who teaches English 1 to freshmen, and one pre-service English teacher who is an eighth semester student for the BA in English. The four participants took different roles because of the different actions they had to take during the planning, implementation, and evaluation of classroom projects that were going to be developed by freshmen of the BA in English. We, as teacher trainers, participated in the planning and evaluation of classroom projects, were in charge of analyzing the interactions among the team members, and were non-participant observers during the implementation of the projects. The homeroom teacher, along with the pre-service teacher, participated in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the projects. It is relevant to mention that the pre-service teacher did more in-depth research as he analyzed the impact that project-based learning had on the development of autonomy in freshmen. He used those data to write a research project as a graduation requirement.

Data Collection Process

The data collection instruments included both an initial and a final survey, a journal with three entries, and the notes from three meetings. The research project was developed in three cycles. Each cycle had three stages: planning, implementation and reflection, and evaluation of the results of classroom projects. We based our work on the eleven phases proposed by Burns (1999): exploring, identifying, planning, collecting initial data, analyzing and reflecting, hypothesizing based on analysis and reflection, intervening, observing, reporting results, writing and presenting data. First, we administered the initial survey; second, we had three meetings—one for each cycle, which were audio-recorded and then narrowly transcribed in order to obtain the meeting proceedings—third, at the end of each meeting the four participants wrote one journal entry; fourth, we administered the final survey. The data obtained from these instruments were analyzed and triangulated to understand the dynamics of the four participants involved and to compare and contrast the information obtained.

Analysis and Discussion of Results

The first idea for developing a research project which explores CAR as a way to the professional development of in-service and pre-service teachers came from the meeting of two colleagues who were concerned about the needs that we, as teacher trainers, had of working on teams, reflecting together on everyday practices and finding strategies to continue our professional development. We also conceived the need to involve other colleagues in this research; then we extended an invitation to a homeroom teacher and to a pre-service teacher. Inviting both teachers to work together would give more sense to the planning because we could work with real students—those taking English 1 with the homeroom teacher. Also, the pre-service teacher could develop his potential as he actively participated in the research study. In the first meeting, we agreed on the potential topic of our study and assigned sections for each participant to work on. During the next meetings we put together the work everyone had done and negotiated the final version of the proposal. Working together was challenging and rewarding at the same time. We had to make decisions, study, carry out research, and collect data together—that is how our collaborative work started.

From the beginning of our work, we noticed that the benefits from working as a team were worth the time invested because of the learning that we derived from it. There were three meetings to plan the project in which the whole group met. During these meetings, we came to agree on how to collect the data, how to help the pre-service teacher collect his own data, and how to analyze the data collected. There were also three additional meetings; one during each cycle in order to plan the lessons and then analyze how the lessons had been implemented. During each meeting all the team members participated actively and collaboratively; in this way we had the opportunity to learn from each other.

Following is an analysis of the data collected from the meeting proceedings, the surveys, and the journals during each cycle.

Meeting Notes

First Cycle

During this meeting, the four participants met with the aim of analyzing a survey that freshmen had answered about autonomy which would help the team in the planning of the first lesson that the pre-service and in-service teachers would implement. The purpose was to help the pre-service teacher develop his project, then, the whole team helped him with ideas, allowing him to be the leader. In this way, the pre-service teacher presented the main objective of his research project, which was to identify the role that first semester students have when working with project-based learning regarding autonomy development, and to determine how project based learning promotes critical reflection and the development of communicative skills in English. The in-service teacher who was also the homeroom teacher described the group of freshmen in order to do a needs analysis of the group. He mentioned that his students were usually afraid of working in groups because they thought that not all of them were committed to their own duties and also because it was sometimes difficult to meet outside the classroom. After analyzing the first survey and helping in the planning of the lesson, the pre-service and in-service teachers gathered information to finish planning the lesson on their own and to implement it the week after.

Second Cycle

This meeting took place one week after the implementation of the first cycle and had the objective of analyzing the implementation of the first cycle and planning for the second cycle. One of the teacher trainers who observed the implementation of the first lesson mentioned that the in-service teacher's attitude during the implementation was so good that he influenced students in a positive way. Students did not have the chance to be reluctant to work on teams because the teacher had them see the great side of it through his enthusiasm and camaraderie. Moreover, the pre-service teacher had an active role as he explained what students were expected to do during the lesson and worked collaboratively with the in-service teacher to address students in a good way. He learned from the experience of the team members and also proposed great ideas to get freshmen involved in the project work that he was implementing.

During the planning of the second cycle the whole collaborative team gave ideas and came to agreements on what to suggest freshmen do next based on the analysis of the lesson that had been implemented. The more we met, the easier it was to reach agreements and negotiate among participants. As the research moved on, we continued to see benefits and to experience learning. We were little by little more open to suggestions and able to work collaboratively and to share ideas from our own lessons. We also analyzed that at the beginning of

our research project each person did a piece and then we put the pieces together, like making a quilt; however, later on we learned that we needed to work together and think together because, although challenging, that provided a better learning opportunity for all of us. As our perception on teamwork changed we were also able to analyze how to help freshmen work as teams. At the beginning, teamwork for them was having one person provide the ideas or write and the rest revise, but after the first lesson they started to gain awareness on the importance of doing real teamwork in order to share and learn from each other. Their collaborative work also helped them gain autonomy and avoid relying on their homeroom teacher all the time as they were encouraged to be creative and independent.

Third Cycle

The purpose of this meeting was to analyze the second cycle and to plan for the third cycle. One of the teacher trainers mentioned that during the implementation of the lesson she could notice the ability that the in-service and pre-service teachers had for addressing the students and for encouraging them to work as a team. Most freshmen were involved in the development of their projects and there was always one student who took the lead; however, a few students were seen a bit absent-minded and not focused on the project, which made the homeroom teacher call their attention and work with them more so that they could appropriate the work as their own. Since autonomy development was fostered in students, they were learning to take responsibility for their own work and this was a reflection on the teachers trying not to control every single thing students did. The ideas generated for the implementation of the third cycle reflected more maturity on the collaborative team as we had furthered our understanding of teamwork. Here we were able to help the pre-service and in-service teachers generate some general guidelines for their students while fostering the development of their autonomy. As a team we could grow professionally in terms of reading and reflecting together as well as sharing positive and negative issues lived in our own classes. While our meetings were productive and pleasurable, we were not as successful in the filling in of the surveys. It is common to talk about different ways to improve as professionals, but we do not always do as we say. It was rather easy to reach agreements during meetings and to work as a team, but rather difficult to do the "homework" for some us because not everyone was ready to lead their own professional development. As an example, there was a conference on foreign language research organized by the English Department of our university and one of the four team members did not participate because he did not see this one as an opportunity for professional development. It was also difficult to have everyone turn in the surveys in a timely manner.

Initial and Final Surveys

The initial survey was done with the aim of knowing what the main constructs that supported our research project meant to the participants involved (see Appendix A). We also included the concept autonomy in order to know the level of commitment each participant had to their own professional development. The four participants answered the questions based on our own ideas and on what we had been able to build throughout the research study. After finishing the data collection, the same survey was administered to understand how these main concepts were the same or how they had changed. In Tables 1, 2, and 3 we compare and contrast the answers provided by three of the four participants during the initial and final surveys. Only the main aspects mentioned by the participants are included.

Table 1. Perceptions of Participants on Professional Development

Teacher trainer 1	Teacher trainer 2	Pre-service teacher
Initial Survey		
• The opportunity that in-service teachers take to get involved in a process of ongoing learning. • Attending academic events such as lectures, seminars, conferences, etc. • Talking with colleagues and sharing the pedagogical practices. • Reading to get updated on research and pedagogy. • Action research. • Reflecting on one's own practice. • The continuous search for improvement.	• The opportunities I have to learn and reflect upon my pedagogical practices so I can be a better teacher for my students.	• The search for improving our teaching practice. • Improving our pedagogical knowledge.
Final Survey		
• The opportunity that teachers take to keep updated. • Using the resources available to search for knowledge (the internet, the library, colleagues, students). • Always finding opportunities to learn. • Being creative. • Seeing the library as a pedagogical laboratory.	• I now see it as a permanent task that allows the teacher to reflect and improve every day.	• Improving our teaching practices. • Developing new skills: ICTs and new educational trends. • Being competent. • Fostering meaningful learning.

Table 2. Perceptions of Participants on Collaborative Action Research

Teacher trainer 1	Teacher trainer 2	Pre-service teacher
Initial Survey		
• The opportunity of doing inquiry in the classroom. • Working with colleagues to reevaluate and gain feedback for our classes. • Enriching our professional development.	• Research in which all the participants work as a team and collaborate in the development of a project in order to reach the goals set.	• Is a tool that allows teachers to have a closer vision of the facts that surround students' lives and learning processes. • Is a tool that helps teachers work on teams to try to improve their practices.
Final Survey		
• Doing classroom research accompanied by peers. • Working as teams with the implications derived from it. • Participants collaborating, not everyone doing things on their own.	• Allows the participants to be at the same level and to share ideas that allow the development of a common project. • Taking responsibility in the task assigned and building strong interpersonal relationships. • Allows the sharing of experiences that enrich our work as teachers. • Reflection, participation, and cooperation.	• Allows teachers to access a great amount of information related to students. • Teachers can do research without affecting class performance. • It allows observing in an objective way any issue that might emerge in our classes and try to find solutions to it. • It helps teachers find better ways of offering meaningful learning to students.

Table 3. Perceptions of Participants on Autonomy

Teacher trainer 1	Teacher trainer 2	Pre-service teacher
Initial Survey		
• The capacity a person has to take responsibility for his or her own learning process. • An aspect that is not easy to gain autonomously where the teacher's mediation becomes necessary.	• The capacity a person has to make decisions about his or her own life. • The possibility to decide what are the best ways to have meaningful learning.	• The ability to make decisions in our learning process. • Gives students and teachers tools to face learning and teaching in a better way. • Has to do with the responsibility, self-knowledge, and good use of free time. • Not innate but developed.
Final Survey		
• Easy to be explained through theory as taking responsibility for one's own learning, for one's own personal and professional growth without having extrinsic motivation. • Difficult to measure and reach if there is no self-commitment.	• Capacity of knowing what is good and bad for our learning process to take place. • Capacity to make intelligent decisions without the teachers' help.	• The ability to make decisions in our learning process. • Such ability is to be developed, it is not natural. • The teacher is a guide ready to negotiate with her/his students and not a leader who imposes decisions on students.

The initial and final surveys complemented each other because teachers mentioned similar aspects in both. One of the gains obtained from this research was the refining of the constructs and the major commitment that teachers expressed having after being part of this project. Teachers did not have specific knowledge of the three concepts at the beginning of the research, but they gained a better understanding as we read and discussed research articles together, collected and analyzed data, and talked about our own teaching practices. The more we understood the concepts, the more we could appropriate them and put them into practice in our professional lives. Although the words used by the participants to define each term varied at times, there was a commonality in the definitions in general, which made us think that working together benefited all of us. The roles we had in the research study were different as well as the level of training; however, it was rewarding to notice that we could learn from each other no matter how much we thought we knew about a topic.

Journals

Writing a journal gave us the opportunity to reflect more deeply after the implementation of each cycle. All team members were asked to write some reflections taking into account the most relevant aspects of each cycle (see Appendix B). Here we present a summary of the journal entries.

First Cycle

During this cycle the participants were asked to write about the refinement of the research project, their academic peers' feedback, the advice given to the pre-service teacher for developing his micro project, and the collaborative planning of the team.

The participants stated that it was necessary to reflect upon the main constructs that guided our research and to continue documenting ourselves in order to have a better understanding of these constructs. Furthermore, the teacher trainers considered aspects such as the importance of teamwork and reflection to improve upon our teaching practices. Given the fact that our research proposal had been evaluated by academic peers, their feedback was seen as an opportunity to see our work through the eyes of others. The team took the comments in a positive way and improved what was suggested because it was part of our professional development based on what Richards and Farrell (2005) affirm: "Strategies for teacher development often involve documenting different kinds of teaching practices, reflective analysis of teaching practices, examining beliefs, values and principles; conversations with peers on core issues, and collaborating with peers in classroom projects" (p. 4).

Teacher trainers mentioned that advising the pre-service teacher was a valuable experience that allowed them to learn with him. It was also stated that it is not always easy to know how much to give to the advisee in order for him to increase his level of autonomy.

The collaborative planning of the team gave the participants the possibility to propose ideas regarding what would be done in the classroom, the opportunity to learn from each other, to appreciate others' thoughts and ideas, and the need to build communication strategies.

Second Cycle

During the second cycle, the participants were asked to express their feelings about the collaborative planning of the team, the communication among team members and the analysis of the implementation of the first cycle.

The participants mentioned the following:

> The planning has improved as there is better communication among team members, which was a concern at the beginning of the project. The team members make agreements more easily and can get the best out of meeting time. Everybody respects the ideas proposed and establishes a pleasant dialogue in case there is a disagreement. A good amount of learning has taken place as we learn from each other.

The first cycle was the result of the joint planning of the team. In this way, the participants could see the relation between what was said or planned outside the classroom and what was done in the classroom.

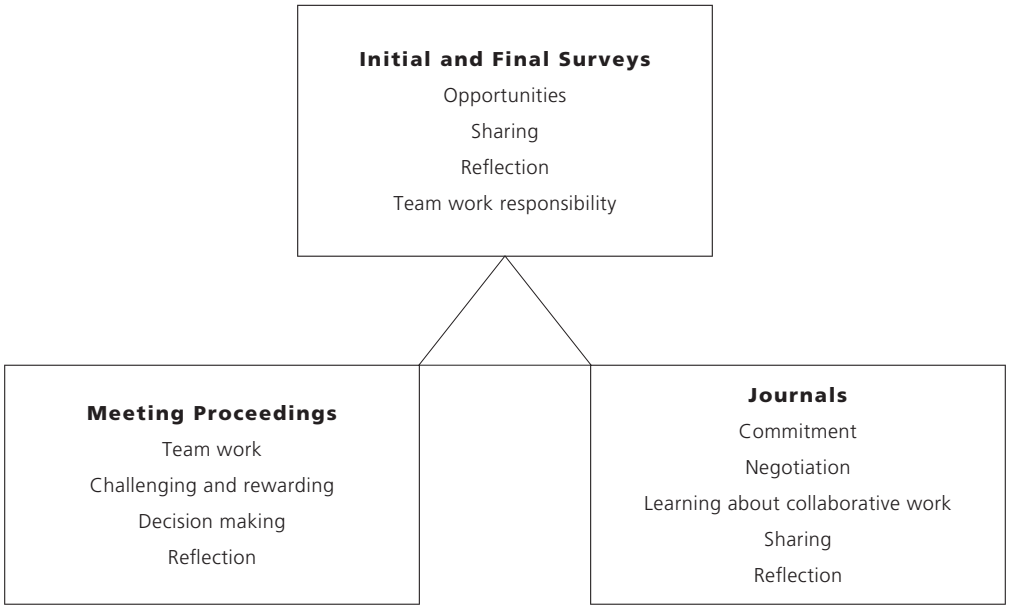
Third Cycle

The topics suggested for this cycle were the collaborative planning of the team and the analysis of the implementation of the third cycle. All team members were pleased with the planning because everyone's voice was heard during meetings. This project taught the participants that it is possible to work as a team and to be ready to start new projects together.

The pre-service teacher mentioned being in a reflective process and feeling more empowered thanks to the work done with the team. He said he is planning to present his findings at a conference. It was also stated that it is easy to communicate with team members.

It was rewarding to see students more focused on the activities assigned and to demonstrate a bigger sense of responsibility and commitment.

Figure 1. Most Common Terms Mentioned by Participants



The homeroom teacher's job was well done, which was a motivation for students to give the best of themselves.

Figure 1 presents the most common words mentioned by the participants. The word "reflection" was commonplace throughout the study as teachers became more aware of the need to analyze their own teaching practices. Responsibility, teamwork, opportunity, commitment, and negotiation are words that reflect the teachers' involvement in the projects and their desire to grow professionally. The words collaborative work and sharing can be paired up with the words challenging and rewarding because working with others will always have its ups and downs.

Conclusions

Collaborating with peers to reach a common goal is imperative in the teaching field—a field where students are supposed to grasp the importance of sharing and negotiating, something that teachers often do not put into practice. The goal we set at the beginning of our project was to analyze the impact that the collaborative planning, implementation, and evaluation of classroom projects, developed through CAR, have in the professional development of in-service and pre-service teachers working on a BA in English. Now we see that such impact was positive because of the following reasons:

1. We were able to study together in order to internalize and put into practice the main constructs that supported our research—professional development and CAR.
2. We gained a better understanding of basic concepts and theories related to the teaching of foreign languages as we read and discussed research articles together, met to plan lessons, collected and analyzed data, and talked about our own teaching practices.
3. Writing the journal entries was an opportunity to reflect upon the research process and our attitudes as team members.
4. We could grow professionally in terms of reading and reflecting together as well as sharing positive and negative issues lived in our classes.

5. We moved from having each participant do a piece of work in isolation to planning and working together.
6. The roles we had in the research study were different as well as the level of training; however, it was rewarding to notice that we could learn from each other no matter how much we thought we knew about a topic.

The literature we studied and our experience suggest that professional development needs to be considered as an everlasting task that cannot be limited to training courses or to occasional meetings with colleagues; it needs to be part of our teaching career. In this way, this study helped us uncover the benefits that working, studying, reflecting, and researching with colleagues have for our PD. Although challenging at times, this is a process that we plan to continue doing, as it allowed us to understand that sharing our own classroom experiences and knowledge with peers is a good way to keep growing personally and professionally.

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Appendix A: Initial and Final Survey

Please define the following constructs

1. Teachers' Professional Development

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2. Collaborative Action Research

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3. Autonomy

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Appendix B: Journals

First cycle

Please describe your reflection and learning about the following moments:

1. Writing and refinement of the project
2. Academic peers' feedback
3. Advice given to the pre-service teacher for developing his micro-project
4. Collaborative planning of the first cycle

Second cycle

Please describe your reflection and learning about the following moments:

1. Collaborative planning of the second cycle
2. Communication among team members
3. Analysis of the implementation of the first cycle

Third cycle

Please describe your reflection and learning about the following moments:

1. Analysis of the implementation of the second cycle
2. Collaborative planning of the third cycle