

Coimbra & Alves, 2017

Volume 1 Issue 2, pp. 75-92

Date of Publication: 28<sup>th</sup> December 2017

DOI-<https://dx.doi.org/10.20319/pijtel.2017.12.7592>

This paper can be cited: Coimbra, M.D.N.C.T & Alves, C.D.D. (2017). *First Language Teachers' Development: Learning From Small-Scale Classroom Research*. PUPIL: International Journal of Teaching, Education and Learning , 1(2), 75-92.

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## **FIRST LANGUAGE TEACHERS' DEVELOPMENT: LEARNING FROM SMALL-SCALE CLASSROOM RESEARCH**

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### **Abstract**

*This study aims at analysing how small-scale classroom research can improve professional development of first language teachers, as well as promotes students' reading and writing skills. The research took place in four elementary and secondary schools of northern of Portugal, in the academic year 2015/16, during two continuous training courses for first language teachers. The qualitative approach focused on the analysis of fifty teachers' reports of their classroom research project, including the pedagogical intervention process, the results achieved and exemplification of students' work and written comments. The results show teachers' awareness of small-scale classroom research, viewed as essential to deepen the understanding of specific educational realities and contexts and to uphold the quality of teaching. For these reasons, classroom research is considered a strategic tool for the improvement of training and teaching, the stimulation of meaningful learning and academic achievement, and the development of the students' reading and writing skills. All teachers*

*have confirmed classroom research as a foundation for practical reflectivity, in order to achieve good-quality first language teaching and learning and help students overcome their language difficulties. However, teachers also recognize that classroom research is not yet common practice, since it demands investigation skills and a theoretical and practical framework which many teachers do not, in fact, possess. Therefore, more small-scale research in the classroom is needed, along with collaborative work between peers and pedagogical-didactic updates. Such improvements would promote teachers' professional development as well as students' reading and writing skills, within the dynamics of each school as a learning community.*

### **Keywords**

Teachers' Professional Development, First Language Teaching, Small-Scale Classroom Research, Practical Reflectivity

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## **1. Introduction**

Language learning is an imperative and a challenge these days. The development of communicative skills is essential for the integration of children in a sociolinguistic community, as well as for their training as people and citizens. In a global society, supported by communication networks, it is necessary that, from an inclusive perspective, everyone have access to knowledge, which is not always the case, because of lack of communication or technological skills. It is a major challenge that school faces nowadays, concerning reading and writing competences. This is all the more pertinent in terms of first language teachers, since linguistic cross-cutting shows the influence of Language on school success. However, good practices are not employed by many teachers, due to the overload of everyday work. Therefore, given the tutoring role of language teachers across the curriculum, it is important to rethink their ongoing training.

For a long time, there was not a recognition of teachers' ability to produce their own classroom research and to promote self-learning and professional improvement. Teachers' training centers offered continuing education courses which were compulsory for teachers' progression in their educational careers, with contents that often did not meet real training needs. As a consequence, prescriptive and applicationist perspectives of teacher training still prevail over critical and reflective ones (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Coe, Aloisi, Higgins, & Major, 2014). Nowadays, the work developed in the classroom begins to be valued as a source of research and educational quality. In the context of each school, it is possible to test the effectiveness of the implemented strategies in collaborative work among

peers. Education planning process and pedagogical regulation imply more classroom research. In this sense, the role of the teacher as a researcher of his own practice is essential (Fareh & Saeed, 2011; Mussabekova, 2017).

Thus, this study arises from the understanding that teachers' training, and particularly of first language teachers, requires a new logic of action, in order to renew teachers' knowledge and skills. In this way, we intend to analyse how small-scale classroom research can improve professional development of first language teachers, and to promote students' reading and writing skills. The research was carried out in the context of two continuous training courses, encouraging Portuguese teachers to become lifelong learners in a research-based profession.

## **2. First language teachers' development and small-scale classroom research**

Mastery of the language of schooling is a condition of academic and professional success, since the improvement of transversal reading and writing skills, comprehending linguistic variants and textual typologies, is central to access knowledge in all curricular disciplines.

In the Portuguese educational system, learning of reading and writing skills emerge as a central issue in elementary and secondary education programs, reinforcing Language as the basis of literacy and a powerful teaching and learning tool in all academic subjects. Language improvement is a challenge that requires teachers' commitment to the development of students' achievement, by creating effective learning environments. Thus, it is necessary to rethink teaching and learning, connecting the professional development of first language teachers with the improvement of students' reading and writing skills (Calsamiglia & Tusón, 2014; OECD, 2014; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Sá, 2012; Tusón, 2015).

In order to cope with everyday challenges, teachers must acquire a reflexive action, which is based on his practice. Therefore, they need to improve their scientific and pedagogical knowledge. Being the main protagonist of his profession, the teacher (re)builds knowledge for his own use, so his experiences must be integrated into the formative pathways. There is an intrinsic relationship between teacher training and the quality of practice (Conway, Murphy, Rath, & Hall, 2009; Luján, Gaviria, & Ramos, 2009; Peel, 2005; Tusón & Lomas, 2011). As a consequence, teacher's continuous learning became a priority for educational policies, which led to an increase in the supply of continuous training courses. Professional development is now understood as a lifelong process, comprising job embedded learning, through peer supervision and action research, as well as conferences and school and

university partnerships, or workshops and courses provided by teachers' certified training centers (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2017).

Nowadays, teacher's professional development, with regard to continuous training, is based on a model of practical rationality or reflection on action, which takes into account the characteristics of practical phenomena, such as complexity, uncertainty, singularity and conflict of values. This model arose in opposition to a technical rationality model, according to an epistemological conception of practice that lasted during the twentieth century (Diniz-Pereira, 2014; Hopkins, 2008; Martins, Coimbra, Pinto, & Serradas, 2015).

Among the characteristics that can improve teacher's continuous learning and development, we can mention professional updating, practical reflexivity, small-scale classroom research, collaborative work and the involvement of school as an educational community.

*Professional update* is a fundamental characteristic to renew practices, by acquiring more knowledge about teaching. The teacher should keep up with scientific theories of his curricular area. However, this knowledge is not sufficient, given the complexity of the teaching and learning process. For effective professional development, it is imperative that any teacher extends his scientific and pedagogical knowledge, incorporating other skills, related to attitudes and interpersonal relations, essential in a pedagogical intervention (Caena, 2011; Pawlas & Oliva, 2007). Besides, there is also the gap between many teachers as "Digital Immigrant educators" and their "Digital Native students" (Prensky, 2001, pp. 3-6).

Another characteristic is *practical reflection*. According to Dewey (1938; 1933; 1910) there is a relation between "reflective thinking" and the educative process, while for Schön (1991; 1987; 1983) "reflection-in-action" forms the basis of professional development of the "reflective practitioners", due to the interactions between teachers and their experiences. Extending Dewey's and Schön's concepts, Stenhouse (1988; 1981; 1975) practical reflectivity encourages "teachers as researches" to study their own work in class and to allow other teachers to observe it. Lewin (1946), Corey (1953) and Zeichner (2008; 1993; 1981) reinforce field-based experience and "action research" and the need for teacher training and social reconstruction. Dewey (1938) and Shulman (1987) also stand up for reflective schools viewed as democratic "learning communities".

This type of knowledge is made up of reflection on the practice, including reflection before, during and after the action. The reflective teacher is the one who problematizes his / her pedagogical performance, inferring the advantages and disadvantages of decision making, in relation to the quality and effectiveness of teaching models and strategies. This way, the

teacher becomes a researcher in his context of action, learning and generating new knowledge in the very act of teaching (Bartlett & Leask, 2016; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; McLaughlin, 2004; Rodgers, 2002).

Contradicting the idea that educational research can only be undertaken by specialists, small-scale classroom research arose from teachers' need to investigate their practices, looking for teaching strategies to enhance students' skills and performance. The first time teachers' research at the local level has been included as a method, in a *Research Handbook*, was with Zeichner and Noffke (2001). Large-scale research projects are not necessarily better than small-scale ones. The real value of classroom-based research is in the process of building teachers' capacity to reflect critically on their own practice, creating practical knowledge and professional expertise through the testing of ideas about teaching and learning (Caena, 2011; Coe et al., 2014).

With regard to language teaching, it is important to mention the transversal nature of some cross-disciplinary research, on the assumption that student's failure in Mathematics or Science often results from the lack of proficiency in scientific language, compromising the resolution of both simple tasks and problem situations (OECD, 2016; Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Although classroom research does not always meet all the requirements of an action research, the advantages of its use by teachers are undeniable, in order to develop strategies applicable to their own classroom situations. In educational situations, action research aims to develop strategies applicable to teachers' own practical actions, in a process of improvement and reform on a concrete situation. As systematic inquiry it should be undertaken by groups of participants, although it can also be designed and conducted by individuals (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kalmbach-Phillips & Carr, 2006; Zeichner, 1993).

Due to the constraints of the research undertaken by the teachers, there are those who prefer to call it "classroom research by teachers" or "small-scale classroom research" rather than "action-research", which is a too prescriptive framework for action, implying the acquisition of skills and techniques many teachers don't have. So, the research task, undertaken for professional purposes within a community context, becomes an extension of teaching work, and not an imitation of academic research. Usually, it is not for wider public knowledge but intended to be divulged to a few colleagues inside a school community (McIntyre, 2004).

In general, these are case studies, carried out according to the teacher's available time and focused on a specific problem, such as the effectiveness of a teaching strategy, the

evaluation of a classroom project, or the analysis of students' writing. This way, the case-study approach is ideally suited to the needs and resources of a small-scale researcher, providing in-depth analysis and understanding about educational practices. Data collected will depend upon the nature of the particular case to be investigated (Yin, 2011; 2003). Increasingly, teachers are seeing reflection about practice and classroom research as part of their professional responsibilities.

Another characteristic lies in *collaborative work*, since it promotes the ability to develop interdependent relationships with others to succeed in achieving goals and to build group cohesion, providing environments for learning. Quality of formal and informal partnerships between teachers at the school level have a significant positive impact on students' and teachers' performance (Dewey, 1938; Rubinstein, 2014). Collaborative learning from small-scale classroom studies is essential to build teachers' continuous learning. Sharing tasks and responsibilities among peers should focus on planning, implementation, evaluation and reformulation of the action. For example, work teams of each school year are fundamental to stimulate collaborative reflection and exchange of good practices among teachers. Collaborative work is central in teacher's training and peer supervision, with or without classroom observation (Alarcão, 2009; Coimbra, 2013; Pawlas & Oliva, 2007; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015).

Finally, in a broader perspective, it is necessary to rethink the school as an *educational community* capable of creating work teams that break the isolated work of many teachers. The development of the teacher is linked to the construction of collective knowledge of a school that learns and empowers interactions among educational actors. In this sense, school is an organization where people can expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire and where people are continually learning to see the whole together, engaging in practitioner inquiry and constructing local knowledge within inquiry communities (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; McIntyre, 2004; Senge et al., 2000).

Therefore, teachers should make connections between their own classroom research and the school's development priorities, relating their work to school initiatives and aims (Conway et al., 2009; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). School, with its educational project, rooted in a specific historical, geographic and sociocultural environment, can motivate teachers to a quality collaborative work, based on dialogue and innovation, connecting school and family for the same purpose of improvement of the student's communication skills. In this perspective, teachers face specific and complex contexts of action, sharing a collective knowledge in community (Glickman et al., 2017).

### **3. Methodology**

At present, being a teacher requires in-depth knowledge about pedagogy and didactics in different curricular areas, including the teaching of the mother tongue. Traditionally, this knowledge was made available during initial formation and later reinforced within teaching practice. Nowadays, teachers have to deal with a globalized and technological world, with social and cultural diversity. Therefore, professional updating based on research and reflection carried out by teachers is essential, in order to create innovative teaching strategies and motivate students to work together in projects. However, the dissemination and recognition of the research carried out by teachers is not very common, nor is it used to improve students' and teachers' development; many teachers do not use the research skills required, except for those who are conducting studies for their master's or doctorate degrees. Besides, there are few studies on the advantages of research conducted by teachers in their classes.

This study aims at contributing to fill this information gap. Therefore, the main objective of the study is to analyse how small-scale classroom research can improve professional development of first language teachers, as well as students' reading and writing skills. The specific aims of the study are: (i) to identify how first language teachers view ongoing training; (ii) to analyse teachers' perceptions about how small-scale classroom research and practical reflectivity can improve professional development of first language teachers; (iii) to analyse teachers' perceptions about how small-scale classroom research can increase a stronger participation in class projects and improve students' reading and writing skills.

The participants included fifty teachers from four elementary and secondary schools of northern Portugal, who attended two continuous training courses for first language teachers, during the academic year 2015/16.

Taking into account the nature of educational research, a qualitative approach was selected, considering that social phenomena are unique and complex, and therefore perceived in a particular way (Lichtman, 2013). So, qualitative research focus on how participants interact and develop their professional knowledge and skills, by bringing their own meanings and beliefs about educational research and effective teaching, linking theory and practice.

In our study, the data were collected in 2016, from fifty teachers' reports of elementary and secondary school classroom research projects, including description of the pedagogical intervention in classroom and students' work and written comments. In order to provide an in-depth analysis of teachers' reports, a content analysis, supported by numerical data, was applied to the *corpus* (Yin, 2011). Predefined categories were based in the

characteristics concerning teachers' continuous learning and development, as mentioned in literature review, although emergent subcategories were also considered.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

In a global analysis, and starting with the structure of the teachers' reports, the majority of the teachers present a reflective account of the planning, implementation and evaluation of a reading or writing project, developed in classroom, with a diagnostic, objectives, data collection, monitoring, presentation and reflection on results. At the end, conclusions and future developments were included, as well as examples of students' work and comments, collected during the process and when evaluating the project.

As mentioned in methodology, fifty teachers' reports were analysed, applying categories and sub-categories. The results for the first category, professional update, are presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Professional update**

Category	Subcategories	Oc
<b>1. Professional update</b>	Self-training	19
	Peer-to-peer training	24
	Ongoing training	40
	Training courses	35

Subtitle – Oc: Occurrences. Source: Teachers' reports, 2016, Portugal.

Analysing the data in table 1, it is verified that most Portuguese teachers consider that professional update takes place in a process of continuous training (40), in relation to the frequency of training courses (35). Invariably, at the end of their report, teachers list what they have learned in the training course, associating their professional development with the knowledge gained during the course sessions and peer-sharing practices. Thus, teachers valued less self-training (19) and more training between peers (24). This sharing of good practice took place among the teachers from 4 schools, of elementary and secondary education, which are part of the same training center.

The importance of professional update is outlined by teachers in the following way:

**Teacher 9:** *"Ongoing training is essential to our professional development. Training courses can motivate us to rethink and innovate practices. (...) In a daily life burdened with tasks, we only think about arriving at the end of the day with all the classes and meetings fulfilled and we forget the most important, to start thinking about what could be altered and improved. Therefore, I enrolled in this training course, which is always at the end of the work day, sacrificing time with the family."*

**Teacher 13:** *"Professional updating is imperative. The knowledge of the teacher must include scientific and pedagogical knowledge, interconnecting the knowledge of the Portuguese subject with pedagogical-didactic knowledge, taking into account the transversality of the Language, which is an increased responsibility of the Portuguese teacher (...) You must know and apply new strategies and technologies and know how to prepare teaching materials."*

In these comments, from which we selected some significant examples, teachers



highlight the influence of professional update on the renewal of practices, connecting scientific and pedagogical knowledge. Therefore, these teachers show their commitment to attend a course that allows them to rethink their practices, "about what could be altered and improved", as T9 writes. In addition, they recall the increased responsibility of Portuguese language transversality throughout the curriculum (T13).

As for the second category, results concerning practical reflectivity are shown in table 2.

**Table 2: Practical reflectivity**

Category	Subcategories	Oc.
<b>2. Practical reflectivity</b>	Questioning of teachers' practice	58
	Reflection before, during and after action	46
	Reflective teacher	18
	Practical reflectivity as the basis for pedagogical update	17

Subtitle – Oc: Occurrences. Source: Teachers' reports, 2016, Portugal.

All teachers recognise the potential of practical reflectivity, enhancing the possibility of questioning their practice (58), essential to the reflection before, during and after action (46). However, few teachers identify practical reflectivity as the basis for pedagogical update (17). The occurrences for the reflective teacher (18) show that many do not yet have the ability to perform critical reflection. In general, teachers' written records confirm the awareness of the advantages of practical reflectivity (Stenhouse, 1988; 1981; 1975; Bartlett & Leask, 2016), in contrast to teacher's difficulties in questioning the practices, in order to improve the quality of the teaching process.

Some teachers provided their perspectives about practical reflectivity:

**Teacher 44:** *"I teach Portuguese in a secondary school (...) Teachers need to learn from action, connecting practice with theoretical knowledge (...) so as to renew strategies and improve their competences. Practical reflectivity should always be shared among teachers who are responsible for the same subject and the same year."*

**Teacher 19:** *"I do not consider myself a teacher researcher, but an apprentice. Programs are extensive and it is not possible to always do extra work that takes a lot of time. (...) I did a research in the class, but it cannot be considered action-research, because I don't apply specific techniques. (...) Usually, instead of following models, I do research on my own, according to the time available."*

Analysing the texts selected from two reports, the teachers' concern about learning from practice is visible, linking reflection on practice with theoretical knowledge (T44) and valuing collaborative work among peers. Despite the teachers' awareness of the advantages of practical reflectivity, there is still a gap to be overcome between knowledge and know-how, especially in relation to action research (T19), as already mentioned in the theoretical review. Therefore, among many comments on the profile of teacher researcher, the most representative is the one of the teacher who, in addition to the constraints of programs and workload, continues to insist in classroom research (T19), even if sometimes it only occurs

due to the compulsory work of a training course. The same teacher admits that he does not perform his research according to scientific norms, but he recognises the importance of classroom research for a reasoned practical reflectivity (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001; Coe et al., 2014), as we will analyse in the third category.

Considering the third category, small-scale classroom research, the results are shown below, in table 3.

**Table 3:** *Small-scale classroom research*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Subcategories</b>	<b>Oc.</b>
<b>3. Small-scale classroom research</b>	Teacher as researcher	42
	More practical reflectivity	24
	More collaborative work	30
	Improvement of teaching skills	62
	Improvement of students' reading and writing skills	53
	Improvement of students' Portuguese Language competences across the curriculum	45
	Improvement of students' use of technology as a learning tool	14
	Commitment to continuous professional learning and development	37

Subtitle – Oc: Occurrences. Source: Teachers' reports, 2016, Portugal.

As for the small-scale classroom research category, emerging subcategories were considered from the content analysis of teacher's reports. Most teachers refer to the "improvement of teaching skills" (62), and the improvement of students' reading and writing skills (53), linking the development of the teacher with that of the student, not only in the Portuguese Language, but also in the other disciplines of the curriculum, due to linguistic transversality. Thus, the improvement of students' language skills across the curriculum is highlighted (45). In contrast to this subcategory, the enlargement in the use of technology, as a learning tool for students, registers lower values (14), highlighting the resistance of some first language teachers to the use of new technologies in the classroom, as mentioned by Prensky (2001). In general, teachers emphasize the importance of the teacher as a researcher (42), in connection with more collaborative work (30) and more practical reflectivity (24), as already analysed in category 2. Concerning the involvement of teachers in their learning, it is meaningful the commitment to continuous professional learning and development (37), as an appropriate training (Mangaleswarasharma, 2017).

Overall, teachers confirm that the small-scale classroom research, undertaken by the teacher as researcher, is the basis for more quality in teaching and learning, improving the professional development of first language teachers, as well as student's reading and writing skills. In order to visualise the pedagogical intervention as a whole, we include two reports of teachers explaining a project work that motivated all the participants, students and teachers, and constituted the focus of the research carried out by the teachers.

**Teacher 32:** *"It was very gratifying to have developed a collaborative work with another teacher, sharing the classroom, presenting various work tools and different approaches to content. (...) It was rewarding to see the elementary students interested every time the collaborating teacher came to the classroom, because they already knew that there would be a more innovative and dynamic class. The students responded very well to all the requests made and worked in a committed and organized way. The positive reaction of the parents, when they visualised the presentation of a Photo Story made by the students (...) was also very important.*

**Teacher 40:** *"Among the works are the diagnosis of difficulties and strategies of overcoming indicated by the students, the accomplishment of reading activities and the possibility of working curricular and non-curricular areas, reinforcing Language transversality in Portuguese, Mathematics, Study of the Environment, ICT, Artistic Expressions and Civic Formation. (...) My 3rd year students were happy with the project and showed interest in developing similar projects because, according to them, working like this is "much cooler and funnier than just reading the story." (...) This project gave me more motivation to teach Portuguese language."*

**Teacher 49:** *"My research project focuses on the reading of Os Maias by Eça de Queirós in a class of the eleventh grade, interconnecting reading and writing. The choice is due to the fact that it is very difficult to motivate students to read literature (...). So as to make a critical reading of this nineteenth-century novel, the Reading Project was successfully implemented, (...) with group work, oral presentations and writing of an expository text about the critical intent of the novel. (...) Although not all the students have finished reading the book, they organised a global reading in group work (...) and 10 students (in 24) concluded their reading, which was very good indeed. In the end, the students evaluated the project with very good and good."*

The three selected reports show students' strong participation in class projects, with a high level of energy and enthusiasm in the classroom learning environment. As the teachers describe, the students "worked in a committed and organized way" (T32), for students it was "much cooler and funnier than just reading the story" (T40), "made a global reading in group work" and evaluated the project with "good" and "very good" (T49). As researchers, teachers also express their enthusiasm, when referring to the classroom positive results due to the pedagogical intervention process, mentioning "very gratifying", "positive reaction" (T32), "more motivation to teach" (T40) and "was very good indeed" (T49). In this way, teacher motivation can be linked with job satisfaction (Mangaleswarasharma, 2017).

In a comparative analysis between different levels some differences arose, due to the students' age, level and year of schooling. On the one hand, in *elementary education*, projects and activities focus on learning to read and write, in a more playful and transversal perspective, adding curricular and non-curricular areas (T32, T40). At this level of education, information and communication technologies are more used in the classroom, for pedagogical-didactic purposes. On the other hand, in *secondary education* there are more projects of literature reading (T49). Furthermore, a significant number of elementary school teachers mention, in their reports, the advantages of collaborative peer-to-peer work in the classroom (T32), which was not mentioned by any secondary school teacher, which means that the collaborative work was done exclusively outside the classroom. Collaboration

between peers is considered essential for students' achievement (OECD, 2014; Ronfeldt et al., 2015).

In classroom research, all teachers used reflection to improve their practice. Although the teachers themselves recognise some weaknesses in their role as researchers, they all considered the implementation of small-scale classroom research very positively in the context of school as an educational community. According to the teachers' records, students also perceived positive changes in a more motivating, collaborative and active teaching and learning, that took into account their interests and tastes. As for the last category, the results, related to professional development in school context, are shown in table 4.

**Table 4:** *Professional development in school context*

Category	Subcategories	Oc
<b>4. Professional development in school context</b>	Schools as learning communities	29
	Professional development within a community of practice	27

Subtitle – Oc: Occurrences. Source: Teachers' reports, 2016, Portugal.

The occurrences of the last category and subcategories, "schools as learning communities" (29) and "professional development within a community of practice" (27) show that most teachers recognize their professional development within a democratic, reflective and learning school.

**Teacher 47:** *"Ongoing training is a priority. However, it is no good to attend training courses if we do not learn from our practice and from other teachers. (...) It is best to have an internal training that starts with the teacher's practice at a specific school community, and goes on externally, at an accredited teacher training center, but always corresponding to the training needs of teachers."*

This comment proves the importance of a school community that motivates teachers for more scientific and pedagogical updating, along with more research, reflection and collaborative work. For most teachers, professional development results both from continuing education, provided by schools as learning communities, and from attending workshops and courses at certified training centers, combining "internal (...) and external training" (T47), to improve teachers' practices and students' educational success.

## 5. Conclusions

The study confirms the change from an individualistic approach to teacher-centered training towards a collaborative, peer-to-peer continuous professional development process, in view of the specificities of each school community.

The results allow us to conclude that teachers are aware that everyday school life and praxis are at the heart of an educational research that aims to describe, interpret and analyse

the reality in the classroom, in order to transform and optimize teaching and learning strategies. This is a framework for the improvement of instructional practices, based on professional update, small-scale classroom research, practical reflectivity and collaborative work.

Thus, teachers' professional development occurs through their reflection about educational intervention in the classroom. This involvement of teachers in formative strategies, based on small-scale classroom research, requires basic conditions such as more time and resources, so as to support research and peer groups. Moreover, as it is recognized by teachers, it is important to combine internal and external training, provided by ongoing training courses, since, for example, many teachers still lack the knowledge to implement action research.

Despite time constraints, due do the overload of daily work, teachers are willing to attend training courses about pedagogical intervention projects and classroom research, which they believe can improve both teachers' and students' performance. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of first language teaching from a cross-linguistic perspective, highlighting students' reading and writing skills across the curriculum. Accordingly, being a teacher researcher is required for the monitoring and improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. This will only be possible through a professional development based on a research-training-action, in the context of schools as learning communities, complemented with continuous training courses that respond to teachers' training needs.

In addition, society and parents are increasingly looking for a path to success in school, one which ideally would solve problems experienced by students and open up opportunities for personal and professional fulfilment. It is a responsibility and a challenge that can only be met through the understanding that being a teacher means investigating his own practices in the context of each class and of the educational community. Only through more in-depth knowledge about students, their abilities and difficulties will it be possible for teachers to adjust and reshape their daily actions. This can be achieved through small scale-classroom research, as observed in our work, a conclusion which is in line with other studies (Alves & Coimbra, 2014; Fareh & Saeed, 2011; Martins et al., 2015), carried out at different levels of education, involving language and the application of focused strategies in the classroom.

Being a qualitative research, a generalisation of results is unadvised. However, there is the possibility of using them to temper approaches in similar contexts (Yin, 2003).

In the future, more research will be needed, concerning small-scale research,

conducted by teachers in their classrooms, language projects guided by school pedagogical coordinators and teacher training courses held at certified training centres.

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