

## Teachers' Work Groups as professional development : What do the teachers learn?

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### 1. Professional Development in Spain

In the past 20 years, teacher professional development in Spain has undergone profound changes: from an on-going training centred on the university, using centralized, content-based training models, to more-decentralized, more-independent models managed by the teachers themselves. From their birth, Permanent Seminars have helped to develop a more democratic and more grass-roots professional development of teachers. The concern of successive socialist governments of Andalusia in on-going teacher training has been to offer teachers a variety of training modalities. The result is short courses (workshops) together with Innovation Projects and school-based training. Why have such modalities appeared in Andalusia? The answer lies in the setting in motion of a left-wing policy aimed at enabling teachers to manage their whole training independently: a policy to give innovating teachers their head in setting up teams for renovation in teaching. This policy has been well received by the teaching staff, especially the more innovative.

In Andalusia, the term Self-training Programme is applied to the various training modalities that are aimed at the development of teachers under their own initiative and responsibility. It is intended to create work groups of teachers (who might belong to the same school or not), able to diagnose a teaching problem, whether curricular or administrative, and develop a project to solve it. This project is assumed to give cohesion to the group of teachers, giving them room to learn about what they want and are motivated by.

The Permanent Seminars are a prime self-training modality financed by the Board of Education and Science of the Junta de Andalucía. Permanent Seminars have a long tradition in Andalusia. They were one of the main measures adopted in 1983 by the Junta de Andalucía

(the Regional Government) when it became responsible for educational policy. A policy to give support to teachers, who want to change their practice, by setting up teams for innovation and teaching. What are they, and how are they organized? Their members are teachers - a minimum of four, and a maximum of 10. These teachers may belong to the same school or not; they may belong to the same educational level or not - it depends completely on them. They decide who will form part of the Seminar.

A feature of the Permanent Seminars is that to be recognized and to receive public funds, they must present a work project. This project has to consider specific problems and situations of everyday practice of the teachers taking part in the Seminar. In this article, we analyze some topics identified during our research.

The Permanent Seminars should incorporate training activities, such as work in groups or individually. There are no strict rules as to when the members should meet, nor how often, except for an established minimum of 20 hours a year for the study and development of the chosen topic. Through this meeting and study, the teachers direct their own training. The co-ordination and working of the Permanent Seminars is completely the responsibility of the teaching staff, and so is broadly democratic. The Permanent Seminars may receive outside advice when the teachers think it necessary. Such advice is generally given by advisors belonging to Andalusian Teacher Centres. However, a common complaint of teachers is that the level of advice is low due to the small number of advisors available.

What is the role of the university in the working of the Permanent Seminars? In principle, none. The on-going training of the teaching staff in Andalusia is organized by the Teacher Centres. These are run by teachers of Infants, Primary, or Secondary Education, and include, as mentioned before, a number of Training Advisors, who are also teachers. University teachers can also act as advisors on any appropriate topic, at the request of a Permanent Seminar.

In 1992, the **Andalusian Plan of Permanent Training for Teachers** was set up. This was an attempt to establish a general framework of action and co-ordination in the training of

teaching staff. The Permanent Seminar is meant to be a self-development activity: "a continuing system of group self-education and reflection in teams of teachers". It must have the following characteristics:

- Team work for communication and the sharing of experiences in educational tasks.
- The activity carried out in the Seminar emerges from the group as a whole. The functioning of the Seminar comes from particular situations linked to the reality of the classroom.

Permanent Seminars are a mode of work in group/team as a continuing system of self-development and reflection in the practice of teaching. They are a form of study, analysis, and reflection on a topic chosen by the teachers themselves to acquire a deeper knowledge of that topic. They are a necessary connection between the acquiring of new knowledge and the analysis and interchange of experiences. They are a meeting point between teachers with different training backgrounds, in which the reflection and the interchange of experiences takes precedence over practice.

## **2. Research**

**This article** presents a study on the Permanent Seminars in Andalusia, from the point of view of their internal conditions of learning and development. It is a **descriptive** work on the internal characteristics indicated by the teachers themselves, their intended goals, their topics of common interest, and the individual and collaborative learning strategies they use. Our fundamental questions are: What learning can we expect of teachers working in Permanent Seminars? What achievements can be considered relevant? What are the implications for the programs of professional development of teachers?

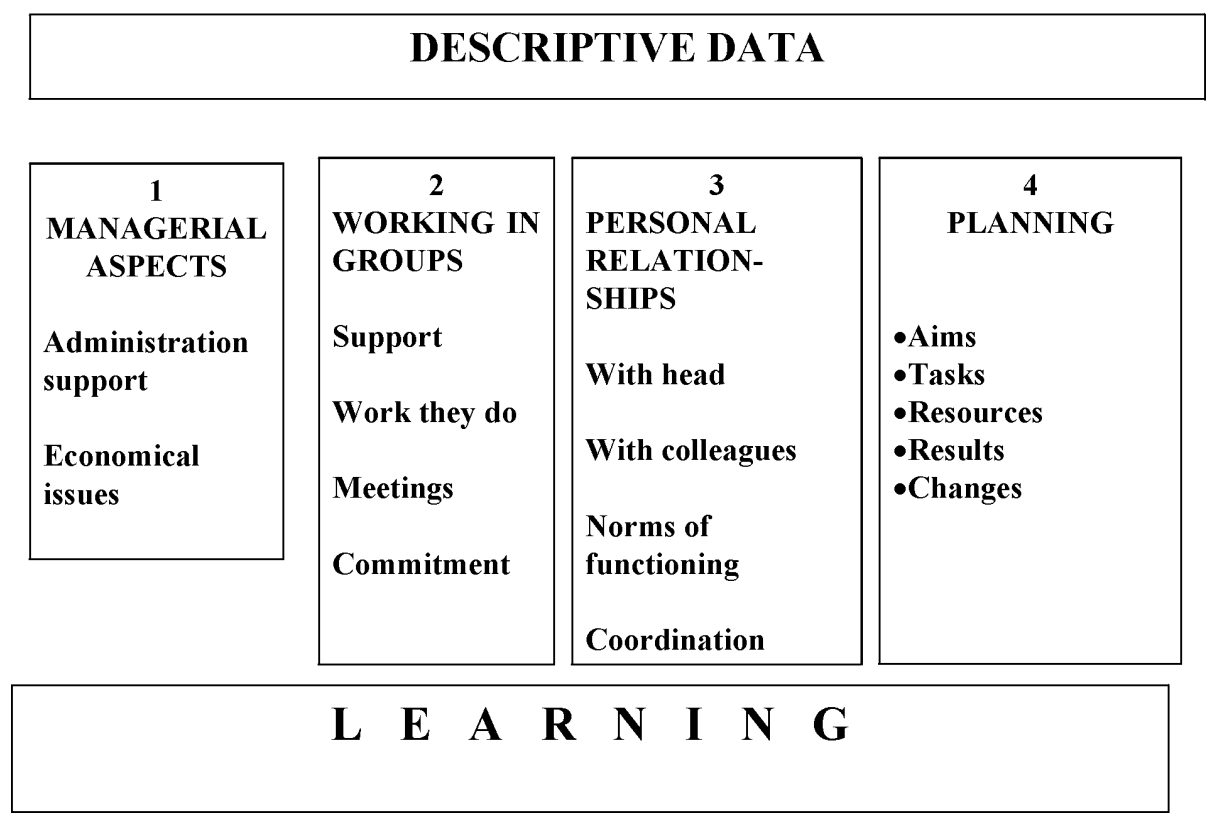
We consider Permanent Seminars an essential instrument for the professional development of teachers, for innovation, and for the improvement of the school; and we attempt to identify the characteristics and the work system of the teachers necessary for

success in training activities. In a previous study on the Projects of Innovation, carried out in the academic year 94-95, we showed that the first step in carrying out projects of innovation is determined by the Permanent Seminars (Marcelo et al, 1996).

**Techniques of data collection: the questionnaire.**

The data for the study were obtained using a group questionnaire, intended to be answered by all or a large majority of the teachers taking part in each Seminar. It consisted of 34 items, including both multiple-choice and open responses, based on the **six dimensions** shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1



First, there are **descriptive** data: the Title of the Seminar, variables describing the members (number, level, curricular areas), and the meeting place, etc. Secondly, the **administrative** characteristics defining it and control by the Authority, including contributions of economic or other type of support. Thirdly, the different aspects of **group work**:

**experience, topic chosen**, how the idea arose, how the members work (description of a normal session), and tasks carried out. Fourthly, the **interpersonal relationships** established or maintained between group members, between the group and the management team of the school, and with other colleagues; at the same time, how co-ordination was achieved, and what problems were encountered. Fifthly, information on the **planning of the Seminar**, including the aims, the most-frequent activities, the resources, and the internal evaluation of the group. The sixth and last dimension refers to the **learning of the teachers**, explored as three aspects: teaching, organization, and the group work itself.

### **Techniques of data analysis.**

Analysis of the questionnaires had a quantitative component and another qualitative, depending on the type of response. For the **quantitative** analysis, we used descriptive statistical tests of the package SPSS. For the **qualitative** analysis, we used the analytical techniques of qualitative content, identifying units of significance, and inferring inductively the classes that emerged from the data. The *systems of classes* were represented on *semantic maps* to help in the interpretation, description and explanation of the data obtained.

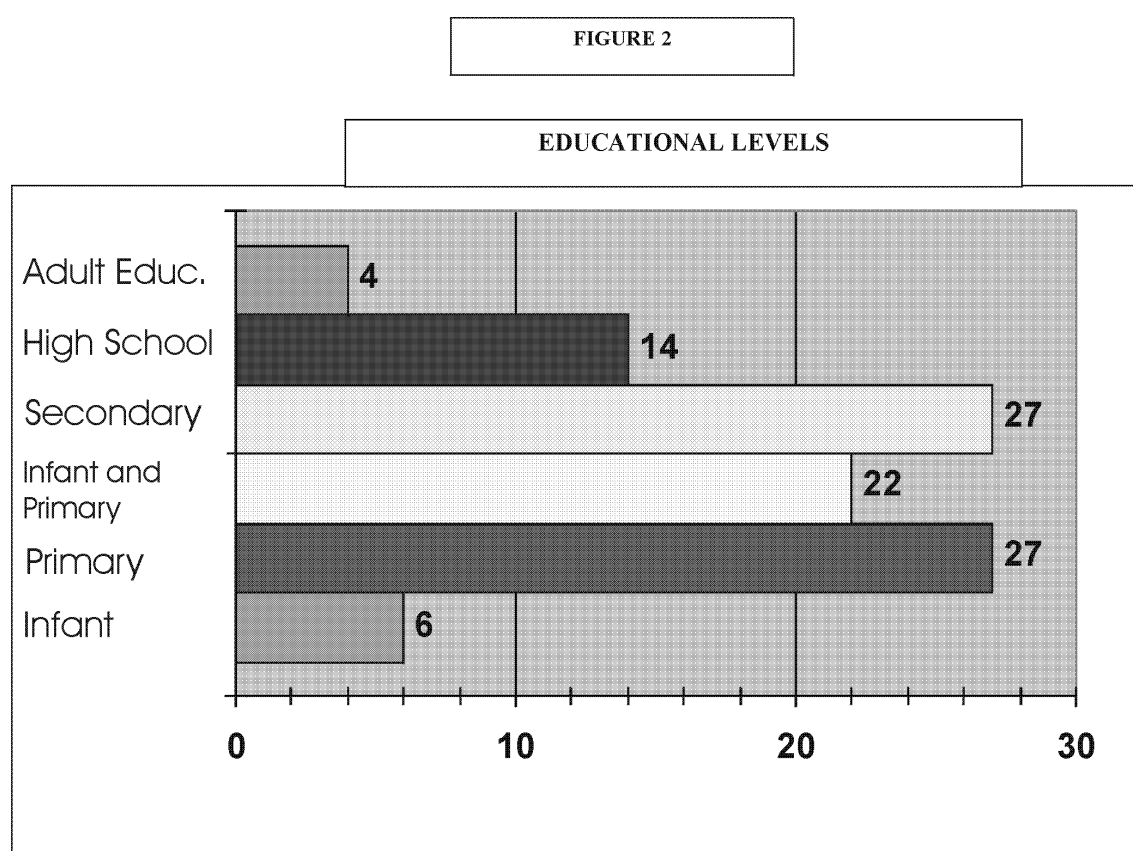
As the goals of each Permanent Seminars are idiosyncratic, the question referring to them was open. We obtained a great amount and variety of information on this topic. It is an important one because it makes the Permanent Seminars unite in agreeing on the intentions, focus, and direction of their effort. We used the program AQUAD 5.1 to analyze the weighting of certain classes of goal, and the frequency with which certain proposals were repeated (Huber and Marcelo, 1993).

### **The sample.**

The Consejería de Educación of the Junta de Andalucía supplied us with a list of all the Seminars approved for the year 1995-96: there were 2,000. We did not make a selection from the sample, but approached the Co-ordinators of all the Permanent Seminars, inviting them to take part in the study, and sent them the group questionnaire. We studied the work of

all the Permanent Seminars that returned a response: **616** Permanent Seminars (30.8% of the population), which included 4,840 teachers. In Andalusia at that time there was about 80.000 teachers (pre-school, primary and secondary), so more or less the 6% participate in a Permanent Seminar.

In these Permanent Seminars, the **number of members** ranged between 4 and 10 (the minimum and maximum respectively established by the Education Authority, except in exceptional cases, when a Seminar of up to 14 teachers can be approved). Most of the Seminars had 6, 7 or 8 members.



The teachers of a Permanent Seminar might belong to **the same school or to various**. It is interesting that the total number of schools included in the sample of teachers was 1,658. Most were from public schools (87.3%), with the rest from private schools.

Continuing with the descriptive data of the sample, we think it is important to indicate that with regard to **educational level**, the highest percentage was for those Seminars carried

out at Primary level, followed by Infants and Primary simultaneously. The number of Seminars including teachers at Secondary level was also high.

The questionnaire was sent to the co-ordinator of the Permanent Seminar, with the request that the response was made at a meeting. This was done in 59% of cases. In 30.7%, the response was made by the co-ordinator.

### **The results.**

We present the results of our work as the following topics: **aims**: What are the intentions of the teachers making up a Permanent Seminar?; the **group**: What are the Seminars, and how do they work?; and **learning**: What do the participating teachers learn?

### **Who takes part, and why?**

Of the teachers taking part in a Permanent Seminar, 42.4% belong to the same school, 12% to two schools, 9% to three, 10% to four, and 5.5% to five. Moreover, when the teachers belong to different schools, 52% of these schools are in the same town or city. Meetings are generally held in one of the schools to which the teachers belong, although it is not uncommon that they are in other places, such as a teacher's house. The meetings last between 1 and 3 hours, and their frequency varies: 53% of the Seminars meet each fortnight, while 23% meet weekly.

When we asked the teachers "How did the idea of creating a Permanent Seminar come up?", most (52%) replied "*from shared needs of the group*", or because of an "*attempt to solve a problem*" (40%).

The Permanent Seminars operate in an open-ended way, and their composition varies throughout the training process. Of those that replied to the questionnaire, 62% had been in operation more than one year, while 35% were newly set up. Some 18% had been working two years, 12% three years, 8% four years, another 8% five years, and 4% six years. At the

same time, 57% of the Seminars said the number of their members had changed. The main cause of leaving the Seminar was a change of school (35.9%). The percentage for personal conflicts was very low (4.2%).

### **Aims.**

What are the intentions of the teachers who make up a Permanent Seminar? Table I shows the results of the analysis of qualitative content, established in classes, subclasses, and specific codes referring to the aims included in each, as generated by the data. It also shows the frequency with which these aims appear when applying the technique of AQUAD.3; the aims are listed within each subclass in descending order of frequency.

As can be seen, the aims are grouped around the three basic components of education: the pupils, the teachers, and the curriculum.

***Aims regarding the pupils.*** Pupils are considered by teachers as subjects who learn and who could learn more and better. The first subclass emerging from the data is ***learning***. What is the learning that concerns or interests teachers? First, there is *culture*, to help the pupils discover the Andalusian culture, and to become cultured citizens, who know, value and “renew” the real form and expression of their historical, artistic, linguistic, and literary heritage. Another important learning technique, although at a considerably lower level, is *thought*: “*learning to think*”, or to develop cognitive and metacognitive skills, as a medium inducing pupils to become more active and self-dependant in their learning; to *learn to be* (personal learning), and to integrate other areas of learning, such as habits of health, clarification of values, the acquisition of sexual identity, and the development of self-concept and self-esteem; to *learn to live together and to co-operate*, respecting plurality (social learning); and, finally, to *learn to do* (technological learning), above all to use the new technologies. At a third level of importance is *ecological learning* — interest in the respect for and care of the environment.



All these aims are included in the Educational Reform, so that Permanent Seminars contribute to its implementation. At the same time, we think it significant that three of the seven topics proposed by the Authority for study in the self-training projects are precisely “Andalusian culture”, “Transverse cores of the curriculum” and “New technologies of Information and Communication”. In only a few cases do teachers propose to reduce educational failure by improving the educational quality.

***Aims regarding teachers.*** Permanent Seminars are a means of learning for teachers, promoting their professional development, and are so considered by them. The first subclass that emerges is what we have called ***research/training***, from the teachers’ own terminology: “ ... *to convert the Seminar into a research community where we can share our classroom experiences, and, through them, dialogue*” (S.P.003, 2749-2751). The most precise aims refer to professional growth: the *interchange of experiences*, the *updating of scientific knowledge*, and *discussion and critical reflection*. In second place are those learning techniques that have an impact on teaching, such as *changes in methods*, the *review of teaching-learning processes*, and the *improvement of teaching practice*. Lastly, there is the desire to *improve relationships between all the sectors of the community*, by learning to collaborate in groups.

Other aims proposed by the teachers regarding their professional development are *to know* and to assimilate the educational vision in the *LOGSE* (Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo; or Statute for the General Organization of the Education System), which was passed in 1990, but is still in the implementation phase; to *co-ordinate with other educational agencies and with parents*; and to *promote the interest of other teachers and stimulate both staff and pupils* of the school.

### Aims regarding pupils

Class	Code and meaning	Frequency
<i>Learning</i>	ACU – Cultural learning	103
	AIN – Intellectual learning	60
	APE – Personal learning	59
	ASO – Social learning	57
	ATE – Technological learning	55
	AEC – Ecological learning	26
<i>Reduction of educational failure</i>	MCE – Improvement of educational quality	16

### Aims regarding teachers

Class	Code and meaning	Frequency
<i>Research and training</i>	IEX – Interchange of experiences	86
	ACO – Updating of knowledge	81
	DRC – Discussion and critical reflection	77
	RMT – A methodological revolution	54
	RPE – Constant review of teaching-learning processes.	32
	MPD – Improvement in teaching practice.	27
	MRS – Improvement in social relationships between sectors of the community.	14
<i>Adaptation to the Reform</i>	ALA- Adoption and application of the LOGSE	59
<i>Co-ordination</i>	CAE – Co-ordination between the various educational agencies	28
	FPP – Facilitation of parent participation	19
<i>Motivation</i>	IPP – Interest the rest of the teaching staff in the Project.	21
	MCA – Stimulate the staff and motivate the pupils.	18

### Aims regarding the curriculum

Class	Code and meaning	Frequency
<i>Planning</i>	SOC – Team work to sequence aims and content.	77
	PLA – Draw up and review plans and programmes.	42
	DMI – Develop an interdisciplinary methodology.	42
<i>Experimentation</i>	REM – Establish and experiment with curricular materials.	179
	NTA– Bring new technologies into service of the curricular areas.	56
	EAP– Experimentation in the classroom and evaluation of the Project.	53
	ICM– Curricular integration and motivation.	31

Table I. Classes of aims and their frequency in the Permanent Seminars.

***Aims regarding the curriculum.*** Curricular innovation is a fundamental pillar of Educational Reform in Spain, and teachers are also interested in promoting and contributing to changes in the curriculum. Two subclasses of aims emerge: *Planning* and *experimentation*. With regard to ***planning***, it must be said that to understand the curriculum as a responsibility of teachers and school is in itself an important change; above all, the teachers consider that the curriculum is a joint responsibility requiring collaboration, co-ordination, and constant reviewing to make it coherent and continuous. Three fundamental aims are proposed: team work to *sequence aims and content*, to *prepare and review plans and programmes*, and to *develop an interdisciplinary methodology*. The implementation of a new curriculum means ***experimentation***, which in the case of the Permanent Seminars refers to *new curricular materials*, prepared or not by the teachers, to *new technologies*, and to testing the ideas learned in the group. Teachers also begin to experiment with an *overall, integral curriculum*, to help *motivate* the pupils.

## **Description of the Permanent Seminars.**

### ***What are they, and how do they work?***

The Permanent Seminars that we have studied are a meeting point between teachers with different training backgrounds. Their prime aspect is the interchange of experiences and reflection on practice. Their nature coincides with what Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) consider as elemental in the collaborative attitude and work of teachers:

- They **arise** spontaneously, emerging from the teachers as a social group.
- The individuals taking part are **volunteers** in collaborative work, which they see as an asset deriving from their experience, inclination, or non-coercive persuasion; they work together with enthusiasm and with results.
- **Oriented towards development.** Teachers work together primarily to carry out their own ideas, or those in which they have a commitment although supported from outside, within a single space and time. Permanent Seminars are

unpredictable in that the collaborative attitude is incompatible with the scholastic system in which curriculum and evaluation are centralized.

It is important that the idea of forming a work group among teachers arises from **shared needs** of the participants. These needs are, in most cases, very similar, although it is not easy to distinguish which is the foremost; the teachers' responses indicate that the needs can be satisfied by the interchange of experiences, the establishment of links between the various curricular areas and ability to prepare curricular materials, or by the solving of the problems that crop up, such as motivation and improvement in school practices, the improvement of coexistence, and unification of criteria of action, such as evaluation. One element uniting teachers is the topic of study and reflection chosen, which is selected by the group depending on a common interest. Some 27% of the Permanent Seminars refer to curricular planning in general, and the other 73% have selected one area of the curriculum, or particular aspects of certain areas.

The activity to which most time is devoted is, by a long chalk, the preparation of materials for classroom use with the pupils. This takes up some 65% of Seminar time, followed by analysis of the practical problems found, and the discussion and analysis of lectures and documents by the members of the Seminar.

The Permanent Seminars devote their meetings mainly to preparing curricular materials for classroom use, and to analyzing, discussing, and reflecting on the problems found in practice. Other options such as *dissertations or demonstrations by experts*, *classroom observations*, or *meetings with other teachers not belonging to the Seminar* are of low priority.

In the questionnaire completed by the teachers, we asked about the working of the group: participation, task assignment, degree of completing tasks, etc. We found that the Seminars usually have a permanent co-ordinator (74%), and in only 12% was co-ordination rotated. The tasks to be carried out by Seminar members were assigned voluntarily and depending on the level of knowledge and specialization of each one, although in 23.5% of the

Seminars, all the teachers carried out the same tasks. In 74% of cases, the teachers claimed that the degree to which the commitments are carried out is high, while for 23.4, it is average. The Permanent Seminars operate as work groups, but ones in which personal relationships count.

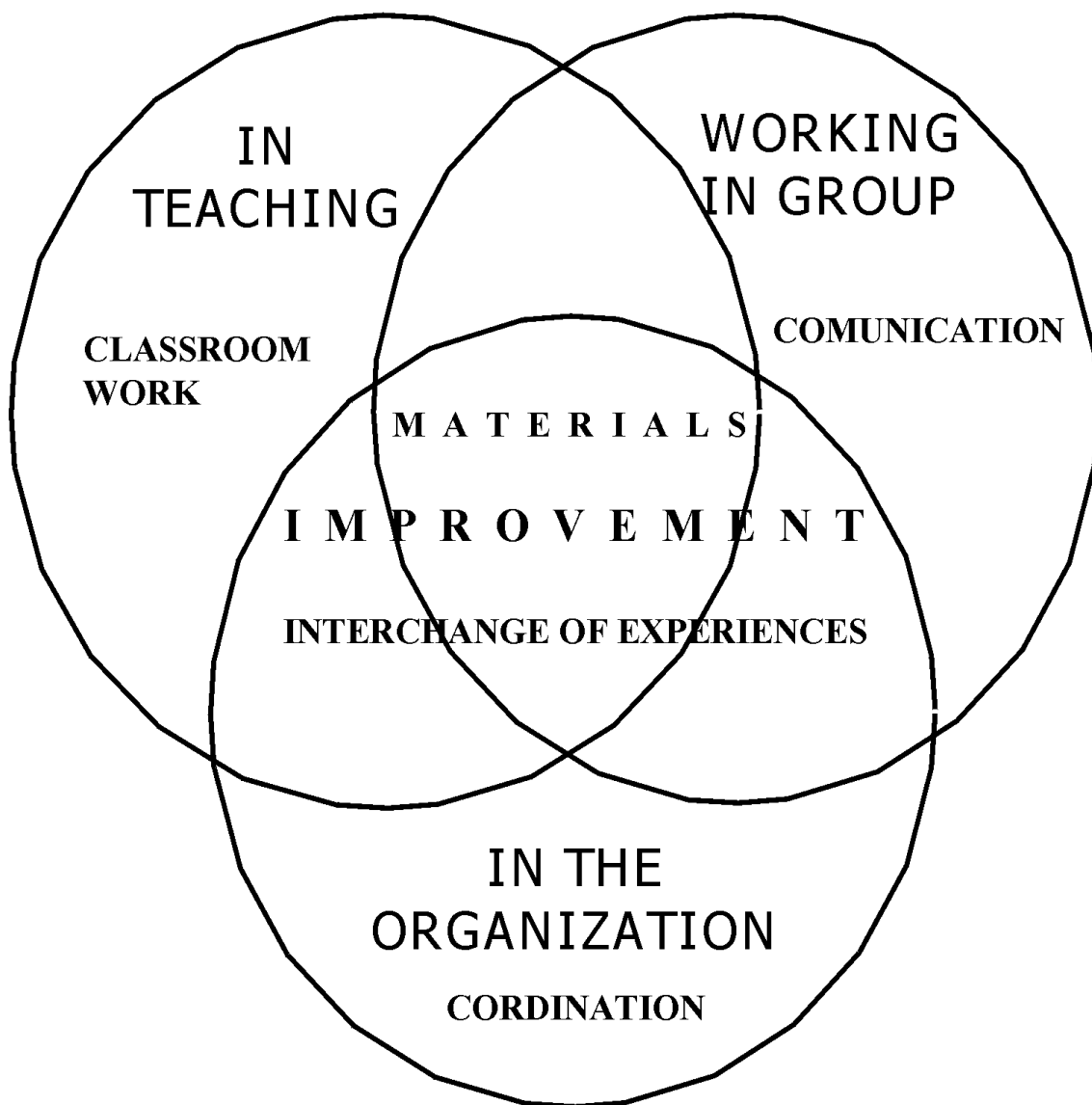
### *Learning of the teachers*

Hopkins and others (1994) indicate that teaching and learning are the prime focus of effort for school improvement. The key element in professional development is that of the work group, because that is where teachers get understanding of new practices, see demonstrations of teaching strategies that they can acquire, and have the opportunity to practice. In addition, they can themselves transfer these skills to the school and to the classroom. One item of the questionnaire asked the teachers to say, in their own words, what they had learned and how they had improved as a result of taking part in the Permanent Seminar. We made a qualitative analysis of their responses, grouping the open replies into categories.

The field where the learning of the teachers is most felt is in the **classroom and in the concrete day-to-day work** of the school. This means it is important that the learning is significant; for adults this means connection and recognition of ideas. Significant learning is essentially creative.

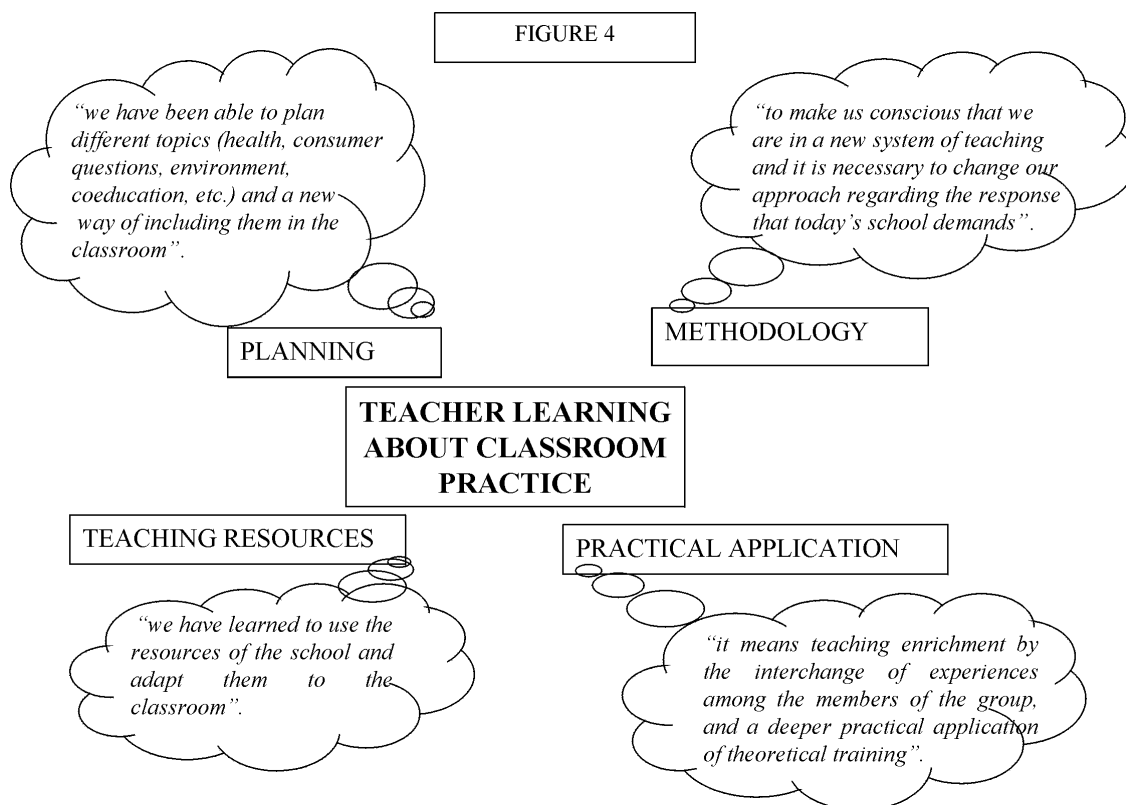
Figure 3 shows the three great fields of learning of teachers: learning about questions of classroom teaching, about working in group as professional requirement, and about organizational learning.

**FIGURE 3**



**Figure 3. DIMENSIONS OF TEACHERS' LEARNING**

To illustrate these results we have selected the most representative sentences written by the teachers in the open-ended questions of the questionnaire. One of the most important



parts of the teachers’ learning is classroom work and all that is related with it -- basically, changes in the way of giving classes: “we have been able to improve or change in some cases the way of giving our class”, “more-detailed methods”, “organizing our class and tasks”, “a more encouraging method, which has helped for all the rest” ....

What has changed in the way of giving classes? The explanations given are varied -- we will use the teachers’ own words to describe the changes, and attempt to show what they mean. This is a **method based on play**, that is, the use of play as a teaching resource; it is *dynamic, active, participative, creative, attractive* and *novel* for the pupil. All the members of the group reflect on and interchange their experiences of working in the classroom, trying to find new resources among themselves, to resolve the problems cropping up, and to learn from them. New methods enable an approach to new contents, or at least allow them to be dealt with in a different way; their intention is “to make us conscious that we are in a new system of teaching and it is necessary to change our approach regarding the response that today’s school demands”. The teachers are concerned about topics such as the environment, drug prevention, music, ceramics (a typical Andalusian art form), reading...; in summary: they

have adopted “*an open attitude towards innovation*”, which is an important aspect of learning for classroom work.

What most interests teachers is, obviously, the daily teaching-learning process, but there is also some interest in getting new knowledge and concepts, providing an innovative understanding of *the philosophy in the Reform: work on curricular projects both at school level* and within a particular curricular area. In addition, there is a need to learn how to make the recommended curricular adaptations possible, by both *better planning of the teaching units and greater adaptation to the needs of the pupil*.

This need extends to other aspects, such as the preparation of materials, the capacity to lead a class to different levels, and adaptation of the curriculum in the different schools to which the teachers of the Seminar belong; in summary, **teaching and curricular planning** for adaptation to the needs of pupils -- a new field for innovation, with a wider view on special educational needs, implying greater thrust from teachers in their classroom delivery; and giving teachers the chance to gain confidence regarding innovations, which they understand “*as a new attitude in front of a new class, like a challenge*”. They also gain information about specific topics, and about the culture of the pupils. Planning is a professional situation in which the teachers indicate what they have learned by working together. This means the preparation and programming of new, all-encompassing subjects, the preparation of work guides for use in the classroom, and an open attitude towards innovation: “*we have been able to plan different topics (health, consumer questions, environment, coeducation, etc.) and a new way of including them in the classroom, together – the educational community*”. This situation has given the teachers an opportunity to share teaching experiences, and to become better informed about what is happening in the schools. At the same time, it has provided a practical opportunity for improved analysis in the classroom, based on observation and experimentation: “*we have learned to define and identify the behaviour of our pupils clearly, to act consistently and automatically in difficult situations, and to break up classroom isolation*”.



With regard to **teaching resources**, the Seminar has a double function: it promotes the preparation of new materials, *“to have more materials for studying the environment and to count on the support of experience”*, and, at the same time, it is an occasion for getting to know and attempting to use new materials, above all those connected with the **New Technologies** *“improvement in mastering the computer, in particular word processors and databases for educational aims”*. Teachers also recognize that via the Seminar they have a greater stimulus to use more resources in general: *“we have learned to use the resources of the school and adapt them to the classroom”*. **Evaluation** is a source of learning for teachers, but to a lesser degree; few groups referred to the topic; the greatest interest was the search for unified criteria in formative evaluation, which could, in turn, help in the evaluation of learning processes.

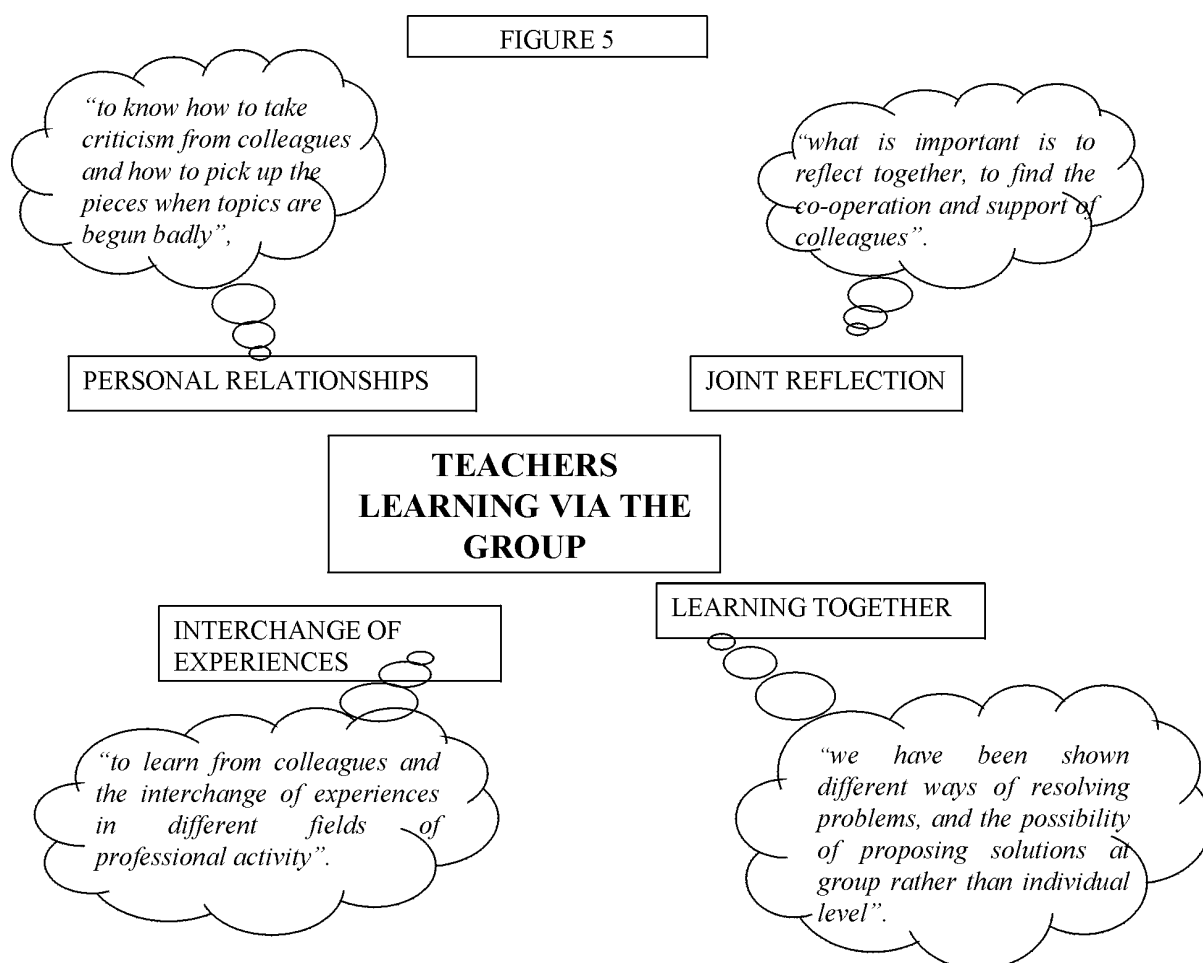
**Practical application** of what they learn is another concern of teachers in their training. They need to have a clear idea of the effectiveness of their learning; in this sense, they feel motivated for group work because *“it means teaching enrichment by the interchange of experiences among the members of the group, and a deeper practical application of theoretical training”*.

#### ***b) The learning of teachers via the group.***

Practically all learning phenomena are the result of direct experience, though they may derive vicariously from observing the behaviour of others and the consequences of such behaviour. *Learning by observation* enables the individual to generate and regulate patterns of behaviour, and thus has a great effect in the practice of teaching. Teachers, during group work, are immersed in networks of professional relationships. The opinions and behaviour of those enjoying the same professional status have a great effect in the dissemination of the practices adopted by certain members of the group.

*What have the teachers taking part in the Permanent Seminars achieved?*

Almost all learning is the result of direct experience, although it may be vicarious, by observation of the behaviour of others and of the consequences that such behaviour produces. The ability to learn from observation allows the individual to generate and regulate patterns of behaviour, and thus has a great impact on the practice of teaching. In this regard, the teachers are quite clear about the learning acquired. Above all, they emphasize **positive personal relationships** which, however, have to be worked at: *“our relationships inside the group are very good; at first, there were quite a lot of problems which we overcame with time; there is friction from time to time, disagreements and differences, but we get over it”*; in addition,



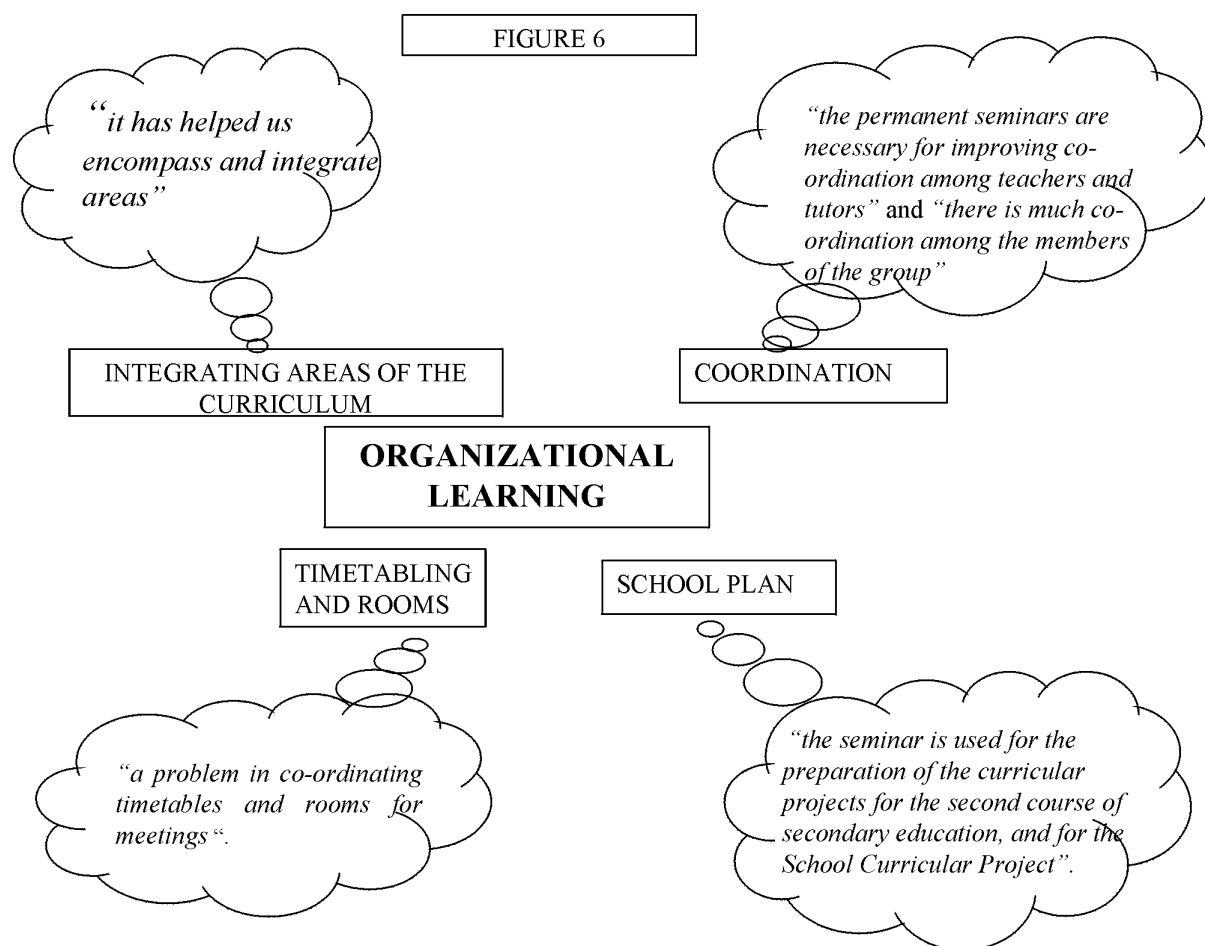
they think it important *“to know how to take criticism from colleagues and how to pick up the pieces when topics are begun badly”*, because it is a great opportunity to increase knowledge and improve practice. All the groups mentioned the need *“to be tolerant and respect the ideas of others, even when the members of the group have very different inclinations”*. In most cases, the results are favourable: *“we have enjoyed a great friendliness and have learned*

*from each other”. “Interpersonal relationships have been cemented, ideas have been proposed and worked on in common”.*

Learning requires **processes of deliberation** as an essential part of the projects carried out in common, in which, according to the teachers, *“we have learned to consent on certain topics”*. The teachers also feel the need of **joint reflection**; group work provides, above all, *“many occasions for reflection”*, because *“what is important is to reflect together, to find the co-operation and support of colleagues”*. By communication, deliberation, and reflection they are able to **learn together** what is done by others: *“we have been able to go inside each classroom and see how each teacher deals with conflicts, and what solutions are proposed”*, *“we have been shown different ways of resolving problems, and the possibility of proposing solutions at group rather than individual level”*. Nevertheless, there are difficulties arising from the diversity of the members of the group: *“the more-hardworking and intelligent, whatever their age, should not be held back by the rest of the group”*. However, they recognize that professional improvement requires this interchange and joint reflection: *“the group is also supportive; we have to solve the problems ourselves, with everybody contributing”*. The evaluation of the group, as a learning situation, is very positive: *“group work really is possible”*, and develops *“the capacity to learn, above all, from the experience of other teachers”*. The result is the **interchange of experiences** with the *“improvement in attitude towards teamwork and the interchange of experiences”*, *“the best thing has been the experience of working with teachers of other areas with the same aims”*.

In summary, we transcribe what one group of teachers said: *“we have achieved good interpersonal relationships, and at the same time the creation of the seminar has allowed us to reflect on topics that concern us all, to analyze them, and to look for solutions. We think it is very important to know the opinions and experiences of each and every one of the colleagues making up the group, to be able, if necessary, to change or improve our educational practice, and to intervene actively in the playground to improve it and transform it, with the aim that should always be uppermost in our mind: to put the children into contact with the open spaces and different materials that form the building of knowledge, starting from their own activity in continuous interchange and interaction with the environment. We have learned together by reflection, interchanging ideas and experiences”*.

*c) The learning of teachers: the organizational aspect.*



Item 32 of the questionnaire asked about the impact the development of the Permanent Seminars had on educational centres. One specific aspect was that of organization: What did innovation mean for the organization of the school? The frequency of response indicates that this is not a topic greatly concerning the groups; moreover, they consider that a change affecting the school as a whole causes problems -- because of a difference of interests, or from involvement in common tasks, or from leadership and advisors: *"from the organizational point of view, it is difficult to learn when the interests of each one are so different: salary weightings and similar distractions..."*; *"from the organizational point of view, if outside help is not available, it's always the same ones who take the brunt"*; *"the organizational aspect is perhaps where we have advanced least due to the lack of training*

*and advice that we needed but lacked*". However, the replies do indicate which topics were of most concern. One is **co-ordination** among colleagues: *"a good opportunity to co-ordinate work rationally, to have it ready at the correct moment"; "the permanent seminars are necessary for improving co-ordination among teachers and tutors" and "there is much co-ordination among the members of the group" by "the sharing out of tasks, and through their co-ordination, we communicate and prepare work strategies"*.

Another aspect is the preparation of the **School Plan**, an educational project in common that is the main work of some groups: *"we are preparing the S.P."; "the seminar is used for the preparation of the curricular projects for the second course of secondary education, and for the School Curricular Project"*. In such cases, co-ordination is seen to be necessary between the different courses, among the teachers, and between the department of orientation and the tutors. An oft-repeated reference is that of **integrating the different areas of the curriculum**. This means *co-ordination of the different areas* regarding curricular content and the search for interdisciplinary features, and in the use of resources: *"it has helped us encompass and integrate areas"; "we have gone deeper into co-ordination and integration of the different subject areas"; "our intention was always that this activity was interdisciplinary, although we did find certain problems"; "it has helped us encompass and integrate areas"*. An organizational topic that cannot be left out is that of **timetabling and rooms**, although it appears very rarely, and is always related with some problem concerning the group: *"a problem in co-ordinating timetables and rooms for meetings"*.

## **Conclusions.**

Comparison of the goals of self-development proposed by the Permanent Seminars with the learning acquired by the teachers reveals a great coherence and coincidence. If the present study has shown anything, it is that the **work group** is an ideal situation for professional development. Teachers find in it a way to improve their ideas and practices, and to achieve a greater sense and satisfaction in their professional life. But they also find the curriculum as a source for organizing a coherent and valuable whole, being founded on an

**attitude of collaboration** that orients the school in carrying out a **Common Educational Project**.

What does this experience show us that could be useful in programmes of professional development? We believe that the study demonstrates certain conditions that the programmes should include:

**School based learning group.** Learning in the workplace is being considered a new approach to teacher development. This means that individuals or groups acquire, interpret, reorganize, assimilate, or change information, skills, and feelings jointly. In this new paradigm, the learning design emphasizes critical reflection. But learning within the workplace involves reflection, because reflection, or evaluation of what has been done, becomes part of the way in which individuals do something in a particular place.

Teachers' learning should be from their own experience, and from direct contact with the problems. Gil Rodríguez and García Saiz (1993) note that in informal groups, the factors necessary for agreement among members are (apart from physical closeness) common personal needs, interests, and experience in work, and established relationships, as we have found in this study.

**Constructing from experience and developing group skills.** Since professional knowledge is based on practice and observing the experiences of others, there have to be opportunities not only for mutual observation, but also for creating situations in which individuals and groups can think about the processes and content of their learning. At the same time, group learning should be the object of reflection, focusing discussion on how the experiences of the members can have an impact on their work through increased participation and collaboration in classroom activity.

**Creating a climate of support** that gives sense to the professional community of the members, their collaboration, and their professional dialogue. And not only when dealing with groups formally constituted to participate in training projects of the Education Authority,

as in this case, but also with more informal groups seeking school improvement. Groups cannot be “grafted onto” existing structures, but must be real cells of a new kind of organization.

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