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ORIGINAL

ACTION-RESEARCH, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN RURAL SCHOOLS

INVESTIGACIÓN-ACCIÓN, DESARROLLO PROFESIONAL DEL PROFESORADO DE EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA Y ESCUELA RURAL

Pedraza-González, M.A.¹ & López-Pastor, V.M.²

¹Doctor en Educación. Lugar de trabajo: CRA “Entre dos ríos” (Fuenterrabollo, Segovia – España). miguelpedrazagonzalez@yahoo.es

²Doctor en Educación. Lugar de trabajo: E.U. Magisterio de Segovia (Universidad de Valladolid – España). vlopez@mpc.uva.es

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the influence of a Action-Research group on professional development of physical education (PE) teachers in rural school. The research methodology used was case study. Data collection was conducted through interviews, life stories, document analysis and research notebook. Data analysis was performed through a categorization process.

The results show that: (a)-PEF teachers in rural school engaged in difficult situations at early years, and to be a membership of Action Research group helps them adapt to this context educational faster and easier, (b)-the Action Research methodology generates reflective processes that help improve their teaching, has a positive influence on their professional development and represent a support.

KEY WORDS: Physical Education, Action Research; Professional Development; Rural Schools.

RESUMEN

La finalidad de este estudio es analizar la influencia de un grupo de trabajo de Investigación-Acción en el desarrollo profesional de maestros de Educación Física (EF) que ejercen su labor docente en la Escuela Rural.

El diseño es un estudio multicaso. Para la recogida de datos se utilizaron: historias de vida, entrevistas en profundidad, análisis de documentos y diario de investigación. El análisis de datos se realizó a través de un proceso de categorización.

Los resultados muestran que: (a)-los maestros de EF que ejercen su labor docente en la escuela rural pasan por situaciones difíciles y complicadas los primeros años, y que la pertenencia a grupos de Investigación-Acción les ayuda a que la adaptación a este contexto educativo sea más rápida y fácil; (b)-la metodología de Investigación-Acción genera procesos de reflexión que ayudan a mejorar su práctica docente, influye positivamente en su desarrollo profesional y supone un apoyo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación Física, Investigación-Acción; Desarrollo Profesional Docente; Escuela Rural.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a large number of Physical Education (PE) Teachers teaching in rural schools in Spain. The professional advancement of many of them is focused on cooperation between colleagues by means of Action-Research (A-R) permanent groups. Some of the main purposes of such A-R groups are: (a)-improving educational quality of teaching practice; (b)-bringing theory and practice together both for transforming and improving practices and building knowledge useful for the professional and scientific community; (c)-solving educational issues teachers must face in their schools; (d)-preparing curricular material curricular adapted to context and to inherent pedagogical principles.

Rural school is one of the most complex and particular contexts within the Spanish educational system. For Primary Education those schools are characterised by including heterogeneous and diverse student groups, poor material resources and facilities and very few specific activities for the teaching training. Therefore, we decided to analyse the role played by belonging to an A-R group for professional advancement of a Primary Physical Education teacher group teaching in rural schools. The introduction has been organised around the three main fields of the study: (a)-A-R in Physical Education; (b)-Physical Education within rural school; (c)-teacher professional advancement.

1.1. Action-Research in Physical Education

When reviewing specialised literature, a great number of authors working on the subject of A-R can be found both from a generic view (Contreras, 1994; Elliott, 1993; Kemmis y McTaggart, 1988; Latorre, 2003), and from a specific one regarding Physical Education (Blández, 2000; Fernández-Rio et al. 2001; Fraile, 1992, 1995, 2002; García-Ruso, 1997; López-Pastor et al. 2005; López-Pastor, Manrique & Monjas, 2011; Lozano, 2007; Vaca, 1995; Viciano, 1993). One of the best definitions for A-R is that made by Rodríguez, Gil & García (1996), highlighting it is a type of research performed by teachers in order to improve their own practice, the curricular development or the educational programmes. According to Latorre (2003), such activities are sharing the identification of performed action strategies which are reflected upon and rethought at a later stage before implementing them again in their practice. That is, they create A-R cycles which can be on for a week, a month, a quarter or an academic year, simultaneously taking part in larger 'A-R spirals'.

A-R origins were introduced by de Kurt Lewin (Elliott, 1993; Kemmis y McTaggart, 1988), apart from the educational field. There were significant developments regarding A-R for the educational environment in the 70s and 80s (Stenhouse, 1991). A-R started to work in Spain at the beginning of the 90s. As explained by Pérez-Gómez (1990) these were ideas very welcomed by the teachers at that time, since they viewed a change of course and attitude in them. The key factor for this type of research it is undoubtedly its practical, participative and collaborative nature, creating planning, action, observation and reflection cycles (Elliott, 1993). The most important ideas provided by different authors might be summarised as follows: (a)-it is an active and participative research; (b)-it means a reflection upon the daily practice in class and focus on its improvement; (c)-it incorporates theory and practice; (d)-it transforms and enhance the social reality of teaching and learning processes; (e)-it is a continuing self-reflection process.

The first A-R projects for PE in Spain were carried out within contexts of Initial Teacher Training and Continuing Teacher Training (Blández, 2000; Fernández-Rio et al. 2001; Fraile, 1992, 1995, 2002; García-Ruso, 1997; López-Pastor et al. 2005; López-Pastor, Manrique & Monjas, 2011; Lozano-Pino, 2007; Vaca, 1995; Viciano, 1993), which were, in many cases, linked to the development of dissertations. The outcomes of these first researches proved to be similar in some aspects; for instance, the research model promotes and improves the collaborative work between teachers, creates PH teacher professional advancement, enhances the compliance with and commitment to professional tasks, as well as reflection, self-criticism, job satisfaction and flexibility levels. According to Blández (2000) it also increases professional self-esteem, it

breaks teacher's isolation, it reinforces motivation, it allows teachers to research and it means creating reflective teachers.

1.2. Physical Education in Rural School

Many authors from specific literature on rural school agree when pointing out some common features of this type of centres: heterogeneity of students, lack of resources, poor teacher training, lack of separate legislation, organisation of various schools in a region into one single centre (Barba, 2004, 2006; Boix, 2004; Cortés et al. 2002; Gracia, 2002; Gómez-Oviedo, 2002; López-Pastor, 2002, 2006; Ponce, Bravo y Torroba, 2000; Ruiz-Omeñaca, 2008). Many autonomous communities define them as Grouped Rural Centres (CRAs); for instance, in Aragón, Castilla la Mancha, Valencia, Castilla-León or Madrid; in Andalusia they define them as Rural Public Schools (CPRs) and in Catalunya Rural Schools Group (ZERs), etc.

The CRAs consist of a 'heading centre' and schools from adjacent different villages. In general, the heading centre is the biggest school in the CRA, but many other schools can be multi-grade schools (all children are together within the same classroom, aged from 3 to 12) or incomplete schools (two or three classrooms grouping children by age). This is why we can find two very different realities among CRAs (López-Pastor, 2006; Ruiz-Omeñaca, 2008): on the one hand, heading centres which usually have a complete line by level or cycle, with homogenous and numerous groups. They generally have appropriate materials and facilities for PE. On the other hand, there are multi-grade schools, with very few numbers of heterogeneous students sharing the same classroom, without specific infrastructures and materials for dealing with this subject. Specialist PE teachers must normally itinerate through these centres and, in many cases, they must group the PE schedule in one and a half or two hours sessions. Such deficiencies connected to the heterogeneity of students and the scarce number of students by group represent an organizational problem difficult to solve in our subject area, as explained by Contín (2003), since it is hard to programme contents for children so differently aged within the same PE session, as well as the impossibility to carry out activities requiring a great number of children.

López-Pastor (2006) and Ruiz-Omeñaca (2008) provide a detailed revision of the main characteristics of rural school. The most important ones are the following:

(1)-For facilities and resources, in general terms there are few and are located outdoors, so that it can diminish some valuable motor skills proposals. However, there are also some positive factors, such as the total availability of those facilities or an easy access to a natural environment full of possibilities for our subject area (Barba, 2004; Gómez-Oviedo, 2002; Gracia, 2002). Specific materials for the subject area and, particularly, the heaviest and most expensive ones, are usually insufficient and difficult to transport from one village to another

(Barba, 2004; Ruiz-Omeñaca, 2008), obviously limiting carrying out some PE curricular proposals.

(2)-For the teachers, some authors speak about the danger of professional isolation and lack of coordination with other specialists and tutors (Ruiz-Omeñaca, 2008). Others (Gracia, 2002; López-Pastor, 2006) explain that most of the teachers in rural schools have little experience and both their experiences and training are focused on an urban environment, with standardised classes, equipments and resources appropriate for dealing with PE. This usually creates some unstable staff, making the consolidation of a middle and long-term educational project hard to achieve.

(3)-For legislation, different authors agree to point out that for decades rural school has been shaded both at institutional and training levels. Teacher Training Schools or Education Colleges have not grant the required educational training and there is no obvious distinction regarding rural school PH regulations (Cortés et al. 2002; Gracia, 2002; López-Pastor, 2006; Uriel, 2002). As pointed out by Ponce, Bravo & Torroba (2000) educational legislation is the same for every centre, whether urban or rural ones, so there is some regulatory gap for the CRAs, even though it is known they are centres with special features with regard to ratio, material and human resources, organization, etc.

According to López-Pastor (2006) there are two ways to approach work as a PE specialist in rural schools: (a)-from a regretting view, focusing on difficulties and deficiencies; (b)-from a view with possibilities, focusing on advantages and the potential such context offers. Many communications, publications and discussions around PE in rural schools speak mainly from the regretting view, dealing with it as a problem and a limitation. That is why, Gracia (2002) emphasises the need to develop a positive approach, focused on advantages and potential of the PE in a rural environment in order to leverage them. Gracia (2002) shows some of these possibilities and López-Pastor (2006) shows a more systematic and structured development of advantages, potential solutions and possibilities these environments provide. Barba (2004) reviews different spaces which can be useful in these places in order to carry out different PE sessions. Both Cortés et al. (2002) and López-Pastor (2006) explain that this trend towards the regretting view in new teachers and the shock after arriving to a rural school, is very linked to their training, based on homogenous groups and facilities appropriate the physical-sporting practice. It is particularly important the distress specialist teachers often experience when working as a “teacher-tutor” of a multi-grade school, both because of the inherent context and because of the need to teach several subjects they do not feel enough capable of (López-Pastor, 2006; Barba, 2006).

1.3. Teaching professional development

According to Fraile (1995) first speeches about teacher training and professionalisation within Physical Education subject matter in Spain started by

means of an educational reform, by introducing this specialty in Primary and Secondary Education stages, as well as the emergence of the specialist teacher. Contreras (1992) performs a historical review of origins and evolution of Initial Teacher Training to the 90s educational reform. Bravo & Romero (1998) analyse the meaning of PE as a subject matter before the educational reform and the justification on the importance of granting some scientific nature to it and developing professionals properly trained and consistently updated. Romero (2009) analyses those specific competences most valued by PE teachers, both in office and in training, for the adjusting process to the new Bachelor's Degrees. Pascual (1992) examines how PE teachers training in their initial training should be. He states that planning action and reflecting upon afterwards it is an unquestionable need in training future teachers. Fraile (1995) provided the concept of PE teacher professionalism to previous studies and analysed this term from two perspectives: (a)-the traditional view, connecting the PE teacher to a simple applicator and technician, leading their professional activity towards instruments and problem solving; (b)-the role of the teacher as a reflective practical researcher guiding their practice towards the action analysis, making decisions, reflecting and making critical judgements. According to the author, the teachers' professional development must be linked to their capacity to research on the teaching activity; however, this task may be difficult when no specific training for it has been obtained.

Martínez-Álvarez (1994) identifies four stages in the teacher's socialisation process:: (1)-by means of their prior experiences to their initial training (2)-with their experiences from their "practicum"; (3)-their first years of their teaching performance; (4)-the point at which experience leads teachers to observe students as persons with individual needs. Contreras et al. (2002) analyse the influence of prior beliefs in the teacher initial training, considering them as important obstacles for developing the practice and possibly, impacting on the continuing training model. Delgado y Medina (1998) carried out a study on teaching styles and techniques for PE sessions, trying to find out their involvement in the teacher initial training and their ability to modify their previous beliefs. This same line is followed by López-Pastor et al. (2005) analysing that PE experienced by current PE teachers during their initial training, throughout their Primary and Secondary stages along the 80s and 90s, its characteristics and approaches, the reflection upon its influence in current practices and the possibility to transform it. Díaz del cueto (2009) shows the deficiencies in PE teacher initial training when dealing with daily work from students with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities and those difficulties experienced in order to start acquiring the required competencies along their professional development; in some cases they even need 11 years of experience in order to begin feeling competent enough with this type of students. This study can show that the simple accumulation of years in teaching experience it is not sufficient for having a proper and efficient professional development. In this sense, it is important to point out the work performed by Fraile (2002) on the influence of continuing training in collaborative workshops among teachers, where A-R methodology improves the teaching practices and, therefore, their professional development.

Continuing teacher training is regulated by the Spanish National Institute for Educational Technologies and Teacher Training (INTEF) and developed, in turn, by each autonomous community. This regulation specifies that the continuing teacher training must help to improve the educational service quality, must lead to the educational practice and activity and must provide sufficient updating and recycling to the teacher in order to deal with new needs and demands. There are several channels for the teachers and teachers groups to take part in continuing training: (a)-Continuing Training in Teaching Centres and Educational Support Services Plans; (b)-Teachers Groups Training Plans; (c)-Teachers Groups: Working Groups, Seminars, Training Project in Centres, Educational Innovation Project; (d)-Individual Participation in Courses, Congresses and Workshops.

Within the wide range of training offered to teachers, working groups are the most important for us. It is a training way in which a group of teachers take part with full autonomy in order to create their own training based on peer training; they dive into an educational topic following patterns from a very well defined project and they prepare conclusions and materials connected to the project development.

Our career path has been strongly connected to A-R groups for PE since we thought they played an important role within our professional development as teachers. They are groups consisting of Physical Education teachers from different educational stages. Likewise, we and many of our colleagues have been strongly linked to teaching in rural schools. That is why we were very concerned about researching the role played by an A-R group in the professional development of PE teachers teaching in rural schools.

1.4. Objectives

1-Analising the role played by Physical Education teachers belonging to an A-R group for their professional development rural teaching in rural schools.

2-Acknowledging difficulties experienced their first years teaching in rural schools and the influence of the A-R group in overcoming such difficulties.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research's design is known as "multicase study" (Stake, 1998). Six cases were selected. Each of them was considered to be part of a PE teacher meeting the following conditions: (a)-taking part of an A-R group for at least 4 years; (b)-developing or having developed their teaching in rural schools from Ávila, Madrid and Segovia provinces.

The techniques to obtain data were the following: Life stories, thorough interviews, research diary and working group documentation analysis (minutes, prepared curricular material, etc.)

The study was carried out in three stages:

(1)-Preparatory stage, defining the issue to be researched and the main research objectives; the cases to be studied and the working context were also selected.

(2)-Field work stage. Information collection was carried out by means of written life stories. Subsequently, open-ended interviews were carried out to every participant and the working group documentation was analysed. Interviews lasted around one to two hours, depending on the case, and they were audio recorded in order to be subsequently transcribed. There were many documents analysed (56 minutes, 12 curricular materials, 14 publications and 11 communications to congresses). Every step, piece of information and technique employed were recorded in the research diary. Once all the information was collected, a content analysis was performed by means of an originating categorisation process. This way the information was ordered and simplified and most relevant points analysed (see table 1).

(3)-Final stage. Case reports were prepared and reviewed by teachers involved in the study; outcomes and conclusions obtained were refined and established.

The categories found in the analysis are shown in table 1. These categories act as a guide to know the outcomes of the study.

Table 1. Categories and subcategories found after analysing the information compiled

CATEGORIES	SUBCATEGORIES
<i>1-Teaching Experience in Rural Schools</i>	1.1-First teaching experiences in the CRA. 1.2-Teaching progress. 1.3-PE continuing training.
<i>2-Influence of the Working Group in their professional development</i>	2.1-Working group role within the professional development (both in general terms and within the Rural Schools). 2.2-Input to the A-R methodology on the teaching practice development.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Teaching Experience in Rural Schools

After analysing the information obtained, all the participants agreed on pointing out that their first teaching experiences in rural schools were hard, particularly

when preparing and carrying out programmes for heterogeneous groups, as shown by these statements:

“Joining in Rural School is hard when this happens suddenly and without experience. You see yourself as a tutor in a town with four different levels within the same classroom” (HV-4/08).

“From my experience, I have had groups within the same classroom from 1st to 6th grade and it was crazy because there were moments when you don’t know how to approach contents” (E-1/2010).

“Rural school groupings are a problem, with a total of 20 students per centre (at college we were trained to design didactic units for an average of 25 students within the same classroom)” (E-3/2010).

Specialised literature shows references to difficulties when working with reduced and heterogeneous groups typical of multi-grade schools (Cortés et al. 2002; Gómez-Oviedo, 2002; Gracia, 2002; López-Pastor, 2002; Ruiz-Omeñaca, 2008) and, particularly, when developing teacher-tutor tasks (Barba, 2006, López-Pastor, 2006). Another important factor is the lack of material resources and PE specific facilities.

“In an urban school there are materials, resources, appropriate facilities and form the community, whereas in the Rural Schools there aren’t” (E-3/2010).

This led us to ask participants whether they thought there were differences between urban and rural schools. All answers were positive, agreeing with those found in specialised literature (Barba, 2004, 2006; Boix, 2004; Cortés et al. 2002; Gracia, 2002; Gómez-Oviedo, 2002; López-Pastor, 2002, 2006; Ponce, Bravo & Torroba, 2000; Ruiz-Omeñaca, 2008).

When analysing their teaching practice progress, participants tend to focus on compiling positive aspects of the range of issues and difficulties arising from the particularities of rural school. Some examples are the following: performing games according to an environment close to the town, promoting tutor sessions among peers, use of cooperative activities and games, establishing individual programmes, tasks with different solutions, etc.

“In Rural Schools you are more resourceful and you use the natural environment to your benefit, so that the students understand where they live, its importance and the resources they have” (E-4/2010).

“I find positive aspects in Rural Schools such as including levels within the classroom where younger students are mentored by older ones, improving interpersonal relationships; organisation is also easier, you make use of alternative methodologies, etc.” (E-1/2010).

Arguments compiled agree on the inputs from other studies proposing advantages and solutions aimed at minimising problems and difficulties typical of this schooling context (Barba, 2004; Cortés et al. 2002; Gracia, 2002; López-Pastor, 2006; Ruiz-Omeñaca, 2008).

They are also asked about continuing training as Physical Education specialists. All participants agree that they have been attending courses and congresses on PE at national level for years.

"I do attend congresses. Speeches are briefer and more concise and people are usually more qualified. They also allow you to present your work through communications and workshops. There are congresses where you get to know teachers working at classroom level so that a very important experience interchange takes place" (E-5/2010).

Besides, also cases search for their own interest in training in order to directly apply it to the classroom; that is, they search for practical aspects, individual needs and very specific solutions to be realised on their daily practice.

"When getting trained, I particularly search for practical, aspects; that is, I try to add contents to my daily practice, year over year" (E-1/2010).
"Now I look for what I demand and need when I get trained. There are individual interests within topics for seminars and they are not focused on general educational aspects" E-2/2010).

3.2 Influence of the Working Group in professional development

This category can be divided into two subcategories: the first one, is about the role played by the working group in their professional development; and the second one refers to the input made by the A-R methodology about the development of the teaching practice.

The outcomes show how teachers introduce solutions and possibilities against problems and difficulties found.

"Now I'm searching for solutions and I try to innovate my practice. The group's contributions, along with my years of experience, make me observe a kind of evolution" (E-6/2010).

A change in approaching context and an advancement in their teaching role can be observed both at general level and within the Rural School, moving from complaints to possibilities (Gracia, 2002; López-Pastor, 2006). The positive influence of the working group for teaching is another aspect to be taken into account. As it was previously confirmed, participants' working beginnings within rural schools were hard. Over the years, the contributions to their experience by the working group have been essential to overcome the obstacles of professional loneliness and isolation towards collaborative work, group decision taking processes and, above all, the preparation and dissemination of curricular material.

"I can see how my experience has evolved thanks to the working group. Preparing materials collectively, which are explained through practical sessions, makes you more competent in your actual educational practice" (HV-6/08).
"My practice has improved over the years. My biggest influence has been the working group" (E-1/2010).

“The influence of the working group in my career has been really important, not only regarding contents, but also by the experiences from other colleagues, practical workshops and discussions” (HV-2/08).

Viciano (1998) considers that preparing curricular materials is a training strategy typical of the teaching role during their continuing training stage. This forces teachers to get to know the content to be developed, to search for documentation, to reflect upon subjects related to such material or content and to dive into it.

The working group also facilitates teachers to innovate in their practice while looking for new challenges and motivations, improving their teaching updating.

“The Working Group has contributed a lot for me. We now think about innovation and we do not assume everything is already done” (E-2/2010).

“I had never come out with one of the didactic units I have prepared without the Working Group’s influence” (E-1/2010).

Furthermore, participants point out the importance of working as a team, highlighting contact among colleagues as an essential part for improving daily practice in the classroom, keeping contact with colleagues feeling they work the same or similar contents in their centres. López-Pastor et al. (2005) find collaborative dynamics are useful for creating communication channels between theory and practice, between initial and continuing training, which leads to a professional improvement and an obvious teacher’s evolution enhancement.

“I think working as a team and cooperating among teacher is essential. This is the meaning of a working group, with a support for your ideas, common goals and a common path” (E-6/2010).

“What I liked the most when working in the group was the possibility for a space to speak about everyone’s educational practices, fears and doubts, without vertical relationships ” (HV-6/08).

According to Blández (2000), using A-R methodology increases professional self-esteem, since that involves some active participation where all the professionals contribute with their experience. Besides, it reinforces professional motivation, since there is an interest in improving daily practice, keeping an open attitude towards change and improvement.

There are references on the influence of the WG as emotional and professional support:

“The Group provides you with guidelines, ideas and methodologies. For me, the Group has meant experiences, materials, and above all, a guide to be able to solve problems and conflicts. Being able to talk about this with the others is really important to me” (E-2/2010).

In this sense López-Pastor et al. (2005) think that collaborative work provides moral support to teachers, who can observe how their work is shared making sense.

On the contribution of the A-R methodology to the development of teaching practice, participants agree on the importance of the WG to their own practice and the influence this methodology has to the professional development obtained.

“The group’s methodology has influenced on me so strongly that I have adjusted all the contents of my programming” (E-1/2010).

This is a similar aspect to the outcomes from the A-R Seminal in Valladolid (Fraile et al. 2007) where one of the goals was to modify their practice from a reflection process in the classroom. This way, they intended to analyse some problems linked to the teaching action and also to the use of different strategies in the practice. For Fraile (2002), changes performed by the teachers throughout A-R dynamics are mainly the three following: (1)-they increase their professional autonomy by preparing curricular material; (2)-they look for alternatives to a PE more technical, with innovative proposals; y (3)-teachers facilitate a more democratising process among students.

Finally, it is important to highlight some aspect for the operation of the working group which have been pointed out by the dissertation’s participants: (a)-the importance of regular meetings for keeping the contact among colleagues and consensually taking decisions needed for the good operation of the group; (b)-the group acts as a stable and constant structure allowing us to continue working in a cooperative way towards the educational research and the improvement of our own practice; (c)-combining planning and teaching practice analysing sessions by means of theoretical-practical workshops in order to better get to know the potential implementation of the different didactic units:

“You can always take good things for practice from meetings and discussions, in order to carry them out and reflect on how to improve them ” (E-3/2010).

“The working group allows meetings with more experienced people and that improves your practice. It is important to meet and present all the works carried out. Changes can be suggested as well as how to improve our practice” (E-2/2010).

“The group’s methodology is based on a cooperative and participative approach. When we meet we talk about our problems and see the solutions we can contribute with” (HV-2/08).

“The working group has helped me with the mood for and interest to research and find out new ways to enrich the pedagogical action. My professional ethics have been enhanced” (HV-3/08).

“Workshops are important not only to see how to prepare a didactic unit, but to see how others do it and implement it, which can be useful for your own PE sessions (E-3/2010).

“Working group’s workshops are vital” (HV-2/08).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The A-R group has meant a very important support for developing and improving the teaching practice within rural schools. Developing a collaborative attitude among teachers promotes reflective processes helping to link theory and practice. In all the cases analysed, the beginning as a Physical Education

teacher in rural schools were hard, but they also consider that difficulties were reduced by means of experience and the group's contributions. It can be observed how complaints difficulties are replaced by a practice focused on possibilities, while learning to adjust their teaching to the context where they work. Teachers' professional development does not only prove a change in their daily practices, but also their concern for continuing training, trying it to be adjusted to their needs, interests and deficiencies.

The six cases studied considered that using A-R methodology has influenced their professional development as teachers, by advancing their daily teaching practice by the A-R cycles carried out within the group. Data collected show that this methodology promotes collaborative work among teachers, professional autonomy and teaching innovation, while improving emotional support, helping teachers to overcome their professional isolation in this educational context.

We hope outcomes from this study may be of interest to several groups in the educational community: PE teachers in rural schools, workshops and teacher working groups for various educational stages and levels, teachers in Initial and Continuing Teacher Training centres, and advisors for teachers and resources centres.

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