



Teachers' professional development: a solitary or collegial (ad)venture?

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Abstract

There exists nowadays consensus on the importance of teachers' professional development. Also, most authors agree that the school's workplace conditions can exert great influence on this development. In this paper the impact of two workplace conditions, autonomy and collegiality, on elementary school teachers' professional development is analysed. The qualitative research reported makes clear that this influence should be thought of in a balanced way. Certain forms of autonomy and collegiality — and more specifically certain combinations of both workplace conditions — have a far more positive influence on teachers' professional development than others. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Societal developments in several domains confront schools and teachers nowadays with ever more and various demands (Elchardus, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994b). In order to meet these challenges, teachers' professional development is considered vital (Hoyle, 1989; Vonk, 1989). More than that, current societal developments are so all-embracing and encroaching, one cannot expect

teachers to take care of their professional development individually. Each school is expected to create favourable conditions for teachers' professional development — especially in countries with a de-regulating, decentralizing and privatising educational policy (Berg, 1983).

Analysing the research literature, one is confronted with an overwhelming abundance of workplace conditions proven conducive to teachers' professional development and school improvement (Smylie, 1994). Yet one workplace condition seems to beat the lot: collegiality. Initially, collegiality got the status of a solution for all problems. It was considered a *conditio sine qua non* for teachers' professional development (Little, 1987, 1992). Lieberman (1986, p. 6) argued: "Contexts, needs, talents and commitments differ, but one thing

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appears to be constant: schools cannot improve without people working together.”

Later on, this (far too) enthusiast plea for collegiality was reconsidered. Not only did researchers point explicitly at the existence of the culture of individualism (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). Evidence has been given of the importance of teachers' autonomy — besides their collegiality — for their professional development (see among others Huberman, 1992, 1993a,b). Preferably teachers' workplace allows for their autonomy as well as their collegiality. McLaughlin's (1994, p. 48) description of healthy professional communities illustrates this point. “Healthy professional communities at all levels embrace diversity. They acknowledge and integrate the tension between individual and group, and they possess effective strategies of conflict resolution that enable individual preferences and needs to coexist within the context of shared beliefs, goals and values.”

Although recent views on teachers' collegiality leave room for their autonomy, the precise relation between the two workplace conditions remains unexplained. Moreover, the mechanisms through which this relation influences teachers' professional development remain a “black box” (Firestone & Pennell, 1993). Starting from these observations a qualitative study was established by which we answered the following research question: How do teachers' collegiality and autonomy relate to one another in (Flemish) primary education and how does this relation affect teachers' professional development?

After a brief general outline of the methodology used in this study, the “orienting theory” at the basis of it is discussed. Next the results are presented. In the final section the importance of the findings is examined.

2. Methodology

The purpose of the study was to develop a substantial theory (Glaser, 1982) accounting for the relation between primary school teachers' autonomy and collegiality and its impact on their professional development. Starting from the stand that reality can be considered socially constructed (Blumer, 1969), an interpretative study in three phases was set up (see Table 1).

Although each phase had particular aims, used specific methods and led to delineated results (as Table 1 shows), some general methodological characteristics of the study are worth mentioning.

The study clearly had the character of a “process composed of a set of double-back steps. As one moves forward, one constantly goes back to the previous steps.” (Glaser, 1978p. 16) Starting from an orienting theory (Whyte, 1984) — making explicit the researcher's assumptions combined with results of the analysis of relevant publications — the developing theory was refined in every phase of the study. Each time the researcher went back to the field to gather new data in order to answer increasingly more specified research questions. To give a concrete example: in the first phase of the research we discovered that learning experiences are crucial for teachers' professional development. Yet we needed more data – in context – to find out how these experiences originate. This was investigated in the second phase. Through this *cyclical strategy* more and more depth in the analysis was reached without losing contact with the perception of the research participants. The aim was indeed to reach understanding of what is important for the people involved according to their own mode (Smeyers, 1994).

Table 1
Methodology of the study: overview of the three stages

	Aim	Method	Result
Research phase 1	Exploration of the key concepts	Semi-structured interview of 39 teachers	Sensitizing concepts
Research phase 2	Insight in relations and patterns	2 case studies (including 25 interviews)	Substantial theory
Research phase 3	External validation	10 condensed case studies (including 30 interviews)	“Saturated” substantial theory

In order to gain this understanding the choice was made to collect mainly *qualitative data*. Throughout the study emphasis lay on interviews with the research participants (in total 94 teachers were interviewed). Yet in the second and third phase these were completed with document analyses and observations, and also a written questionnaire concerning the schools' professional culture (Staessens, 1990). For both these phases a multiple case design was set up in order to be able to generalize the findings on a legitimate basis (Firestone, 1993; Yin, 1989). In the second phase a case study was made of two schools, as the attention was focused on the relations between the concepts that were explored in the first phase and on the patterns that could be discerned in these relations. In the final phase a condensed case study of ten settings was made in order to check the external validity of the developed theory. The specific research questions of each phase grew out of the orienting theory and — for the second and third phase — of the results obtained so far. In the second research phase, for instance, we dealt with the question whether there would exist distinctive patterns of professionalism explaining the differences found in the first phase in teachers' perceptions of the results of their professional development.

Even though "technical" criteria (e.g., more or less representative for the Flemish situation with regard to the size of the schools and their location and to the sex and number of years of experience of the teachers) were taken into account to sample schools, interviewees and situations (in time and space), the *sampling strategy* was primarily a theoretical one. The choice was made on the basis of arguments of content. The selected cases differed from one another at the level of important variables (Schofield, 1990). The two case study schools of the second phase, for instance, were selected out of the sample that participated in the first phase because they differed from each other with regard to the purport of the micropolitical processes. This variable was chosen because the results of the first phase led to the hypothesis that these processes may have an impact on the incidence of the variants of autonomy and collegiality. Within the case studies of the second phase, we decided to interview

at least half of the team members, taking into account their sex, number of years of experience and the grade they taught. During the five weeks we spent in each of the schools, however, we handled these criteria in a flexible way. For example, "playing" with the data of one school revealed that good personal contacts might have an influence on teachers' professional relationships. In order to explore this hypothesis further, we decided to interview an interim teacher, although this was originally not the plan. We argued that the fact that he was more or less an "outsider" coming from a school where he had — as he called it himself — "lots of personal problems with colleagues", made him an excellent candidate to check our hypothesis of personal and professional relationships being closely intertwined.

Each phase of the study led to quite an amount of data. There were interview transcripts, descriptions of observations, documents, the researcher's diary containing reflections on the course of the research, memos about possible interesting hypotheses and first insights in the data, and the results of the written questionnaires. First of all these data were classified in "case records" (Burgess & Rudduck, 1993). Then the "vertical" *analysis* started by coding them. This coding showed an evolution from descriptive to more analytic (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). For example, going through the interview data of the first research phase made clear that, instead of simply indicating the variants of collegiality and autonomy, the codes should make it possible to differentiate between several relationships within the team. This would allow us to check whether differences in status have an impact on the way respondents design their collegial and autonomous behaviour.

After the data were coded, they were displayed in matrices. In a first version these matrices contained almost "raw" data, i.e. literal data fragments illustrating the key concepts of the developing theory, obtained from all data-sources. This offered a view of *what* exactly happened in the settings and *how* these events took place. The second version of the matrices was of a more "abstract" level. Attention was focused on *why* things happened. A more synthesizing comment on each of the key variables was formulated. In order to avoid the danger of the

“holistic fallacy”, “interpreting the events as more patterned and congruent than they really are” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 263), we evaluated each time the strength of the data. First-hand data (coming from our own interviews and/or observations and checked with the key informants) were considered more relevant. Besides that we constantly looked for negative evidence to check the robustness of our interpretations and we ran “if–then tests”. These matrices were used to make comparisons between settings (the “horizontal” analysis). For the cross-case analysis a case oriented approach was used (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The typical patterns found in each setting were compared with one another to “discover whether a pattern found in one site plays out in the others as well, suggesting a common scenario.” (Huberman & Miles, 1989, p. 64) This comparison consisted of a cyclical repeated pattern of careful reading of the material; developing interpretations and controlling these by confronting them again with the data. This was done to avoid having the analysis reach too high a level of abstraction so that we would end up with generalisations that are no longer applicable to the concrete settings.

Throughout the data collection and data analysis the *reliability* and *validity* were a major concern for the researchers. The most important strategies used in this regard were the following. Not only did we discuss the results of each phase of the study with our fellow researchers at the research centre, the findings were also validated in a communicative way (Kvale, 1994) by discussing them with the research participants. Teachers were invited to read and comment upon the vertical analysis of their interview. The “story” of each school was presented to the schoolleader and three “key informants” (and if they agreed, the whole team). Two main questions guided this validation process: (1) do you agree with the facts as they are reported? and (2) do you agree with the interpretation of these facts the researcher makes? Using this criterion we followed Yin, who states: “The informants and participants may still disagree with an investigator’s conclusions and interpretations, but these reviewers should not disagree over the actual facts of the case.” (1989, p. 144) In order to account for the study’s reliability, we worked with memberchecks throughout the

case studies, we ensured methodological triangulation, we made our own (pre)suppositions explicit in the researcher’s diary and we worked with an orienting theory.

3. The orienting theory¹

The analysis of the literature and the formulation of the researcher’s assumptions with regard to the key concepts of the research question (see introduction) led to the following orienting theory, on which more precise research questions and theoretical sampling were based (see methodology).

3.1. Collegiality and autonomy

3.1.1. Variants of collegiality

Collegiality is often considered a necessary condition for professional development. Moreover, the plea for collegiality (especially in the recent past) is very often of a prescriptive nature and not based on the description of what is actually going on in schools (Campbell & Southworth, 1990). In addition Little (1990, p. 509) draws attention to the fact that “the term collegiality has remained conceptually amorphous and ideologically sanguine.” Consequently, it is legitimate to ask whether the statement that teachers’ collegiality leads automatically to the disappearance of their isolation, and contributes always to their professional development, is too simplistic.

In order to conceptualize the concept of collegiality accurately and to gain insight into its significance for teachers’ professional development, Little (1990) makes out a case for a profound analysis of the content of collegial interactions (see also Clement & Staessens, 1993; Clement, Staessens & Vandenberghe, 1993). She discerns four variants of collegiality, that form a continuum from independence to interdependence. *Storytelling and scanning for ideas* refer to rather opportunistic contacts at a relatively great distance from the actual

¹ As we describe the orienting theory and the results of this study, we will not refer to the exact phase in the research each insight stems from. This would lead us too far. Since the third phase of the research validated the developed theory in globo, this confinement is acceptable.

classroom practice. The team members operate almost independently from one another. They “satisfy the demands of daily classroom life by occasional forays in search of specific ideas, solutions or reassurances.” (Little, 1990, p. 513) The variant *aid and assistance* bears reference to the asking and giving of help. *Sharing* relates to the interchange of materials, methods and new ideas. *Joint work*, finally, bears upon team members’ meetings that emphasize shared responsibility for teaching, shared ideas about autonomy and support for the professional initiatives of colleagues. In a context where joint work prevails, both the individual teacher and the school or the working conditions are important.²

3.1.2. Variants of autonomy

Little’s (1990) description of joint work clearly leaves room for teachers’ autonomy. Her conceptualization differs from the more common way teachers’ autonomy is approached in the literature. Very often, indeed, autonomy is labelled a deficit. Autonomy is related to uncertainty and fear (Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989). It is argued that autonomy results from a defensive attitude (Ashfort & Lee, 1990). It is not considered a good starting point for teachers’ professional development, because it is supposed to lead to confidence in outmoded educational views that are inspired by teachers’ own experiences as a pupil. Usually teachers’ autonomy is presented as a heresy (Hargreaves, 1993).

Hargreaves (1993) modified this negative picture of autonomy. He does not consider autonomy as a personal deficit of teachers. He discerns three forms of autonomy as a workplace condition. *Constrained individualism* can be described as a situation that forces teachers to work autonomously

because of administrative or organisational limitations. Teachers wanting to collaborate do not have time or a place to consult with one another. *Strategic individualism* occurs when teachers because of the high pressure on them — external pressure such as new expectations from parents, the growing number of pupils with educational needs and the like — choose consciously to withdraw in their own classroom. Hargreaves (1990, p. 16) speaks of a “calculated concentration of effort”. The third variant of autonomy is *elective individualism*. Not as much on the basis of pragmatic concerns, but on the basis of intrinsic reasons teachers choose actively to work alone. Usually a specific task for a limited period of time is involved. This variant of autonomy holds prospects for creativity, personal study, reflection, the elaboration of new orientations, and as a consequence for professional development.

3.1.3. The tension between autonomy and collegiality

The normative and polar view that collegiality and collaboration are always favourable for teachers’ professional development and autonomy obstructive, is refined. Autonomy and collegiality both can have a positive as well as a negative influence. Much depends on the way the two workplace conditions function in the school context. Moreover, it seems impossible to uncouple these workplace conditions from one another. Little’s (1990) description of joint work in particular makes this point clear. More generally one could say that autonomy and collegiality complement one another in a natural way (Wildman & Niles, 1987). This leads to a circular view on autonomy and collegiality. Both workplace conditions interact with each other continuously in different configurations. Simply put: in order to collaborate adequately, teachers need to work alone sometimes, and, vice versa, in order to work autonomously adequately, teachers need to collaborate sometimes (see also Clement, Staessens & Vandenberghe, 1994). Autonomy and collegiality relate to one another in a tension. This tension gets its shape at the level of the school organisation and is considered a workplace condition that influences teachers’ professional development. A “good” organisational design of the tension between autonomy and

² This elucidates that a good understanding of the impact of collegiality cannot be separated from a more general analysis of the functioning of the school as an organisation. Our study made unequivocally clear that a micropolitical reading of the team functioning, the school leadership and the mission of the school offers interesting leads to understand the way collegiality - and autonomy - are shaped within a school (Clement, 1995). These findings are not treated explicitly in this paper (see also Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe, 1996).

collegiality creates professional challenges. It functions as an organisational incentive for the professional development of individual teachers (Johnson, 1986; Mitchell, Ortiz & Mitchell, 1987). This “good” design can be described as an interdependence among teachers that doesn’t exclude independence (Campbell & Southworth, 1990; Lieberman & Miller, 1991). Collegiality can favour teachers’ professional development and it can contribute to emotional support. Also collegiality can challenge teachers intellectually and give them fresh ideas. But the freedom to keep this learning firmly in one’s own hands is a crucial part of a well designed collegiality. The teachers themselves should decide (or should have the chance to decide) when and what collaboration is relevant for. Their autonomy needs to be respected; it also holds prospects for professional development.

3.2. Learning opportunities and learning space leading to learning experiences

The tension between autonomy and collegiality creates different kinds of learning opportunities. These are essential for teachers’ professional development. As they stimulate teachers to put their professional functioning to discussion, they lead to learning experiences (see below). Learning opportunities can have a formal or informal character. They can originate during in-service activities, but also during a school day when for instance an experienced teacher counsels a novice or when a teacher tries to find a solution for a problem he or she is confronting. In other words, learning opportunities existing in a school can be labeled as the “level of opportunity” (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988): the incentives, challenges, support and feedback occurring in teachers’ work context, giving them the opportunity to gain new competences.

The presence of learning opportunities is a necessary, yet not sufficient condition for professional development. It is of crucial importance that teachers take advantage of these learning opportunities (see, e.g. Bullough, 1994; Collinson, Sherrill & Hohenbrink, 1994; Lange & Burroughs-Lange, 1994). Personal experiences and beliefs play an important role in the way teachers react to these learning opportunities (cf. *infra*). Yet, the learning

space created within the organization, making it possible for teachers to work constructively with the learning opportunities, is at least as important. McLaughlin and Yee (1988) refer to the “level of capacity”. They define this as the level of the power and control teachers have to access resources, to participate in the decision making with regard to issues important for them, and the availability of the instruments (teaching material, time, money) to work adequately. With this description they put themselves in line with the notion of teacher empowerment (Prawat, 1991). The teacher empowerment research becomes interesting — in the light of the connection made in this orienting theory between empowerment and the notion of learning space — when it examines the conditions deemed necessary for the improvement of teachers’ knowledge and organizational adroitness. One can differentiate between measures of a structural and cultural nature.

In the first category teachers’ participation in decision-making at the level of the classroom (content and methods of instruction) and the level of the school is unequivocally praised as a relevant strategy (Mertens & Yarger, 1988). Also, teachers should be freed of administrative, non-instructional tasks and they should have adequate time and teaching materials (Young, 1990). The school leader can support teachers’ empowerment by paying attention to in-service, by making relevant literature available, by giving information and supporting problem solving activities (Maeroff, 1988). With these last recommendations we reach the cultural measures favouring teacher empowerment. School leaders should create an atmosphere of trust fostering teachers’ commitment and they should take them seriously. Furthermore the taking of risks, the development of creativity and the engagement in innovations should be stimulated. Rewards for teachers’ efforts are deemed important (Kirby & Colbert, 1992). These structural and cultural interventions to empower teachers can be considered as measures to create a learning space. When teachers are recognized as professionals and can work in an atmosphere of trust where neither participative decision making nor autonomy are a taboo, they are supported at the same time to tackle learning opportunities in a constructive way.

Then professional development is possible. Put otherwise: an adequately supportive learning space allows learning opportunities to evolve into learning experiences.

3.3. *Professional development*

The succession of different kinds of learning experiences is an adequate description of professional development. Teachers' professional development is often conceptualized as a process (Elliot, 1992). Little (1986, p. 33) describes it as follows: "Learning to teach is (...) like learning to play a musical instrument. Beyond the wish to make music, it takes time, a grasp of essential patterns, much practice, tolerance for mistakes and a way of marking progress along the way." The image one gets of professional development is that of a longterm (Bernier & McClelland, 1989, Wildman & Niles, 1987) and non-linear process (Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1993; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994, McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978). The complexity of this process is sharply illustrated in a one-year case study of a teacher who was confronted with an innovation that had to lead to a stronger child-oriented approach (Walsh, Baturka, Smith & Colter, 1991). This teacher stated firmly she did not change that much. Yet, each outsider was impressed with the changes in her teaching practice. What they described as a radical change, was labeled by the teacher as a slow and continuous process. This made it possible for her to account for her changing in a way that she did not have to minimize her previous approach.

The course of this process is determined by the continuous interplay between the individual and the organization. It is obvious that individual teacher characteristics leave their mark on this interaction. In the literature the importance for professional development of for instance job satisfaction (Helderman & Spruit, 1993; Kottkamp, 1990; Tuetteman & Punch, 1992), teachers' commitment (Reyes, 1990; Rosenholtz & McAninch, 1987), their efficacy (Imants, 1988; Imants & De Brabander, 1992, Smylie, 1990) and involvement (Clement, Slegers & Vandenberghe, 1995) and their biography (Kelchtermans, 1993b) is stressed. However, notwithstanding the subjective and

idiosyncratic features of teachers' professional development, this process also is characterized by some remarkable constants beyond the individual. Indeed, each teacher is confronted with some specific tasks during his or her career (Vonk, 1989). They have to develop knowledge and expertise on the pedagogical, didactical and organizational level (Klaasen, 1994). Learning experiences in each of these domains are the driving force behind this development.

Professional development in each of these areas requires a lot of teachers' interpersonal and pedagogical capacities (Nias, 1989). Yet, the craftsmanship — the instrumental control — that results from this evolution is not sufficient on its own. Teaching demands that one is able to integrate these instrumental capacities (Pratte & Rury, 1991) in order to contribute to the development into adulthood of the youngsters (Vonk, 1989; Woods, 1987). Therefore teachers need to be aware of their own capacities and they have to show a genuine engagement to develop these within the context of their career (Cryns & Johnston, 1993; Kilbourn, 1991). In other words, it is not enough for teachers to fall back on their "tacit recognition, judgments and skillful performances" (Schön, 1983, p. 50). Their action needs to be sustained with reflection (Copeland, Birmingham, De La Cruz & Lewin, 1993; Schön, 1983) on the basis of which they can identify and solve problems in such a way that their knowledge is refined. Through the continuous reflection on their own practice, teachers develop mastery out of their craftsmanship.

3.4. *Summary*

The orienting theory at the basis of this research can be summarised as follows. Teachers' professional development is considered a continuous process determined by the interplay between the individual and the organization, leading to a combination of craftsmanship and mastery. More concretely, learning experiences at several domains lay at the basis of professional development. Learning experiences are the result of interactions between learning opportunities and the learning space. It is hypothesized that the tension between autonomy and collegiality is an important organizational

determinant of teachers' professional development, since the design of this tension leaves more or less room for learning opportunities and an adequate learning space to come about.

4. The results

The orienting theory described above laid the foundation for the consecutive research phases. Hereafter the results of the study are presented. We will focus on the relationship among teachers.³

4.1. Collegiality and autonomy

4.1.1. Variants of collegiality

The (observational) data confirmed the existence of the variants of collegiality described by Little (1990). During breaks and in the corridors stories are told about the weather, television programmes, politics and so on. Even though these stories often have the character of relaxing small talk, their symbolic value must not be underestimated. Storytelling functions as a meaningful way to communicate genuine care for one another. Team members show understanding for each other's health problems or experiences with their own children. The stories can also be significant at the professional level. Teachers can pour their heart out about certain pupils or the principal. They can give one another positive feedback on particular initiatives. A teacher comments: "*We have a very good team. At noon, we sit together and if one of us has a problem with one of the children, she tells what happened. Immediately we react: 'Oh, I had that child also and I reacted in that way'. That really supports you. You get some advice. You feel understood. That's really very positive.*"⁴

As such, storytelling can lead to the offering of help. A teacher tells: "*We arranged to have one hour*

class free together each week. During that hour we go through our programme for the week and we check for special things. During breaks we ask each other: 'I've treated that theme and I had that problem. Did you have it too? What did you do about it?' That's really reassuring!"

Offering help can lead to the exchange of ideas. *Sharing* takes place during (formal) meetings and informally in between classes. A teacher tells: "*If I find something new, I can tell about it. If the others think it's relevant, we add it to the programme. If it was a success, we keep it for next year, otherwise we throw it out again. We say then: 'We won't do that anymore, it was too difficult for the pupils' or something like that ... We always evaluate it together.*"

In some cases the sharing of ideas leads to *joint work*. Starting from a shared responsibility, teachers work together on projects like the school play, the year long planning of some subjects or the annual stay at the seaside. "*We have a programme for our stay at the seaside. That's for sure. We've done this for years now, going one week a year to the seaside with our sixth graders. Yet we try to do something new each year. Just to keep it exciting for ourselves too. It's very positive we can talk about it when we prepare it. Each of us puts in some fresh ideas. We discuss them all. It's also fun to live through it together once we're there. We're really one group over there.*"

4.1.2. Variants of autonomy

Our results support Hargreaves' (1993) analysis of autonomy. In some cases teachers are almost forced to work autonomously. *Constrained autonomy* can proceed from a lack of support from colleagues. The following statement illustrates this: "*When I started my career I really didn't know how to teach maths. I didn't have the training for it. So, in the beginning I had to find out how to teach it. I needed some help. If you're only a beginner, it's difficult to get some help. Also, my colleagues were very busy. They didn't have the time to help me. So I had to solve my problems on my own.*"

In other cases teachers consciously protect their professional practice from one another. *Strategic autonomy* is used very often to avoid the criticism of colleagues: "*You can consult. But you cannot discuss*

³Clement (1995) analyses besides this also the relationship between teachers and their principal and that between teachers and the remedial teacher.

⁴Quotations in italics are statements of the respondents. In the translation we tried to affect the original meaning as little as possible.

each and every problem with your colleagues. For some problems you have to find a solution yourself. Like for instance, if you have difficulties with one of the children, the real 'problem children', then it's delicate to discuss that with your colleague. You don't feel inclined to tell about it, because the other would doubt your competence. Especially if you're a novice teacher. Then they look at you with Argus' eyes, don't they."

The conscious choice to deal with one's own business autonomously is evident for the majority of the teachers. It is closely connected to the idea that they each have a specific individual professionalism that cannot be denied. The importance teachers attach to the maintenance of this individuality is legitimized from the need they feel to establish a very personal didactical and pedagogical relationship with the pupils. The need to do this, starting from their individuality and an explicit involvement towards the pupils, lays the basis for the *elective autonomy*. *"You're free. To a certain extent at least. There's always the curriculum of course. There is a fixed amount of time you have to spend on maths, language ... a certain programme or planning you have to follow. But within this curriculum you're really free, you know, to experiment, to try new things out. The day you don't experiment anymore, it's over. That would be a pity, that's the day you should leave, because teaching demands creativity."*

Sometimes teachers invite one of their colleagues explicitly to take responsibility for certain tasks. The characteristic for this variant of autonomy, we labelled *ascribed autonomy* (and which is a complement to those Hargreaves (1993) described), is that it is recognised explicitly by the whole team. On the basis of their specific knowledge or particular skills the team authorizes certain teachers to work out specific tasks autonomously, like for instance the organisation of extra-curricular activities or the collaboration with parents for reading exercises. Ascribed autonomy also appears with regard to tasks of a more explicit didactical character. Some teachers are asked to demonstrate a particular teaching technique they are good at, or they become the well-known specialist to address when one has difficulties with children showing behavioural problems. In other words, team members

accept and confirm the professionalism of one particular colleague. Typically this form of autonomy is explicitly integrated in the team's collegiality. The fact that teachers who enjoy ascribed autonomy are given the opportunity to report on their activities during team meetings illustrates this. As such, the ascribed autonomy not only influences positively the professional development of the executive teacher, it may also affect that of his or her colleagues. *"We prepare excursions in our own class with the pupils, but once we're gone it's me who's responsible for the explanations. I'm proud I can do that. I know a lot about the region we usually go to. It's my native region and it has always interested me. So on these excursions I can pass this through to the children and my colleagues. We had a new colleague this year coming along and she said afterwards she learned a lot. Such things make me proud. I feel a little bit responsible for the inservice of my colleagues on that topic, you could say."*

4.1.3. *The tension between autonomy and collegiality*

The ascribed autonomy makes clear how closely autonomy and collegiality are linked to one another. One can also state in more general terms that the way in which team members work alone in schools is strongly associated to the way they collaborate. In some schools the team members manage to collaborate without losing respect for each one's autonomy: *"All ideas lie on the table, we discuss them, but we can work them out in our own way for our own pupils. You can't of course enforce your colleague to do it your way: 'I want to do it like this with my children, I want you to do that too.' We're rather free. I believe that's crucial, because you have your own personality, your own way of teaching. We handle the children differently ..."* If the tension between autonomy and collegiality is defined like this, the elective and ascribed autonomy of teachers lead easily to collegial interactions. Personal initiatives of teachers give chances to ask for help and to share material and ideas and their collegial interactions are a source of inspiration to work autonomously.

In other schools both workplace conditions seem to be disconnected. Teachers' autonomous work doesn't incite collegiality and, vice versa, the collegial interactions do not hold impulses for

autonomy: “I have some ideas, but I never tell the others about it, because they would do it too. It doesn’t belong any longer to you, then. You invent it, you think it over, you work hard to make it work. If you tell the others about it, they pilfer it right under your nose. They take it over and it feels no longer yours.” In this configuration teachers’ autonomy quite often takes on a strategic character. It is not a basis to graft meaningful collegial interactions on. In fact, in these schools collegiality is so limited that it barely has any influence on teachers’ autonomous work.

4.1.4. Conclusions: the orienting theory refined

These observations led to the following conclusions. Different variants of autonomy and collegiality can be discerned. One variant of autonomy was added to the orienting theory. The description of both workplace conditions illustrates that the variants sometimes show close resemblance to one another. Sharing ideas among colleagues can easily lead to the offering of help or can function as a green light for joint work. Constrained autonomy can become strategic and elective autonomy can develop into ascribed autonomy. The only correct way to determine how a particular autonomous or collegial activity should be labelled, is to look for the meaning this activity has for the teacher(s) involved. As such it is possible that teachers experience the fact that they should work out their maths lessons autonomously as something they are forced to, given the lack of help by colleagues. However it is also possible they see it as an interesting professional challenge they consciously want to realise autonomously.

In other words, autonomy and collegiality can vary a lot. The qualitative differences between the variants can be described and analysed by using the notion of *profundity*. Autonomy and collegiality can be characterised by great openness. One is prepared to share his or her personal opinions and beliefs and experiences about the professional functioning with the others. The inherited traditions of independence and egalitarianism (Smylie, 1992) are left behind, in order to engage oneself with an interdependent attitude in autonomy and collegiality in a way that — on the basis of mutual trust — initiatives are appreciated and stimulated and that each other’s work and beliefs are looked at

with critical scrutiny. In this way it is possible for teachers’ subjective educational theory to come up for discussion. Kelchtermans (1993a) defines the subjective educational theory as the personal system of knowledge and beliefs that functions as the basis on which a teacher builds up and judges his or her own professional functioning. The variants of autonomy and collegiality can be shaped in such a way that they allow teachers to express their teaching principles and practices. Less profound variants of autonomy and collegiality do not permit this. They function in a way that offers teachers the opportunity to leave their subjective educational theory untouched.

The idea that stories allow for less profundity than joint work and that constrained autonomy gives fewer possibilities to reach the level of the subjective educational theory than ascribed autonomy, is very attractive. Little (1990) builds up the same line of reasoning when she states that there exists a linear continuum from stories to joint work, from autonomy to the collective, that can be described using the notion of profundity. However, this view does not seem to cover the complex reality completely. Our findings indeed demonstrate that the difference in profundity can also be observed within the variants of the workplace conditions. By way of illustration: in some cases teachers present their colleagues the initiatives they take on the basis of their elective autonomy; in other cases the elective autonomy rather leads to a defensive attitude inspired by the importance attached to the maintenance of one’s individuality. The first form of elective autonomy allows more opportunity to express one’s subjective educational theory than the second one. The same goes for the stories being told. They can be rather superficial, even banal or they can — “densely coded” (Nias, 1989) as they are — throw a light on one’s subjective educational theory through their professional import (as the example given on Section 4.1.1 clarifies).

To put it briefly, the results show that autonomy and collegiality can take different forms. It would be too simple, however, to state that some of these variants are always more profound than the others. The notion of profundity, defined as the openness to express one’s subjective educational theory, not only allows us to interpret the differences between

variants of autonomy and collegiality, it is also an interesting tool to analyse the differences within these variants. This is an important refinement of the orienting theory.

The tension between autonomy and collegiality, one of the major concepts of the orienting theory, can also be refined on the basis of the results. Two main variants of the tension can be discerned. On the one hand, there is the *polar* tension between autonomy and collegiality. Both workplace conditions are limited in shape (joint work, for example, is rare). Moreover, the variants are characterised by a lack of profundity. In the interactions among the teachers one does not find openness to discuss subjective educational theories. Basically the most common attitude is one of strategic autonomy. Autonomy and collegiality are not linked in a complementary way. On the other hand, the tension between autonomy and collegiality can get a *circular* character. Autonomy and collegiality show a rich diversity and profundity. Collegial interactions are a source for the autonomous work and autonomous initiatives often lead to meaningful collegial contacts.

Summarizing, one can state that autonomy and collegiality appear in different forms in the relationship among the teachers. These variants differ in profundity. Diverse and profound autonomy and collegiality are typical for the circular tension between both workplace conditions. In case of a polar tension the variants are less diverse and show less profundity. The consequences of all this for the professional development of teachers become clear when one analyses the tension using the concepts learning opportunities and learning space.

4.2. Learning opportunities and learning space

4.2.1. The impact of a circular tension on teachers' professional development

Working in a school where teachers succeed in defining the tension between autonomy and collegiality in a circular way clearly holds some prospects for their professional development. Not only do learning opportunities occur, there exists also a learning space necessary to handle these challenges constructively. This becomes evident when we analyse the circular tension characterising the

relationship among the teachers in one particular school. The majority of the interactions among the teachers allow for *learning opportunities* to come about. Teachers can learn a lot from the comments of colleagues. As they see and hear each other busy with their work, they get a lot of inspiration. What is more, the weekly scheduled consultation gives small groups of teachers peace and quiet to share professional matters with one another, to help one another and to set about joint work. Often this collaboration is inspired by the tasks the principal gives the teachers in order to prepare the monthly team meetings. It's evident that the evaluation of a didactical computer software, the discussion of particular learning problems of certain pupils, the consultation about good ways to differentiate among pupils, the collaborative preparation of exercises for certain subjects and so on, can imply learning opportunities that — if the teachers take advantage of them — can help them to get more grip on their professional functioning. This is also the case for the very concrete didactical tips teachers of this school give one another during consultation. Also, the feedback on autonomous work of colleagues for a joint project often leads to profound discussions about good teaching practice. In other words, learning opportunities arise in the relationship among teachers: "*We always put consultation time to good use. It happens often we keep talking about for instance a test. We ask one another how it worked out. We check the results and we analyze the failures of the pupils. Then we ask ourselves whether we didn't make any mistakes in teaching the subject.*"

The respect teachers so typically show for one another's autonomy in a circular tension, goes along with an adequate *learning space* sustaining these learning opportunities. The teachers can decide to a great extent for themselves where they want to get with their colleagues. They can give informal contacts and formal consultation a very personal cachet. In their relationship there's enough room to take autonomous initiatives. New ideas are treated in an open, though critical way: "*(...) I think everybody has the right to say: 'Look, this won't work.' Yes, then we'll try something else (...). We always try new things out first. Afterwards we decide together whether we'll work further with it or not.*" Colleagues

offer each other learning opportunities with no strings attached. They give each other the freedom to decide for themselves what to do with these opportunities: “*He will never, never say: ‘That’s the way you have to teach’, or ‘You have to do it like this’. Never. He won’t do that. What he says is: ‘Look, I do it like this. What do you think about it?’*”

The respect for each colleague’s autonomy makes teachers tolerant for the way each of them handles learning opportunities. The varied and profound collegiality makes it possible to support one another when working with learning opportunities. The circular tension between autonomy and collegiality implies that learning opportunities and learning space are usually well adjusted to one another. Consequently a lot of *learning experiences* come about. These are situated on several domains. In some cases teachers learn from their colleagues how to manage their pupils: “*When I began teaching I was really very strict. Now, I’m more relaxed. I have to pay attention I don’t become too loose. The children can tell things they wouldn’t be allowed to tell in other classes. I have to take care I don’t go too far. When we work together for both our groups, my colleague says sometimes: ‘I wouldn’t tolerate what you permit!’ We discuss the way we interact with the pupils. This really makes me think about the way I interact with the children.*” Other learning experiences refer to the teachers’ didactical tasks. Due to remarks of a colleague the teacher of the first grade revises the way he introduces addition and subtraction. Colleagues inspire each other with regard to the illustrative materials they use in their lessons. As such the relationship among colleagues usually has positive implications for their professional development.

4.2.2. *The impact of a polar tension on teachers’ professional development*

In another school — characterized by a polar tension — a different scenario emerges when one analyzes the tension between autonomy and collegiality using the notions of learning opportunities and learning space. In this school, *learning opportunities* are very scarce. The teachers hardly know what their colleagues actually do in their classes: “*They never come in to take a look in my classroom. They don’t know what I teach my pupils. They only*

know how I handle children from seeing me on the playground.” Consequently teachers receive very little or no feedback on their work from their colleagues. They do not feel close in terms of their teaching practices. Stories are superficial, help is almost never asked, sharing is rare (not to speak of joint work). Even stronger, a colleague’s interest for another’s classroom practice is often interpreted as medlesomeness: “*I always try to show some interest, but some of my colleagues don’t like that (...), they say then: ‘Here he goes interfering again!’*” The scarce feedback teachers do get on their work from their colleagues is so superficial and often so negative, one can easily understand it doesn’t really function as an opportunity to learn something: “*Well, well, what was all that messing around in your classroom!*” *I mean, those things can and should be said, but if that’s the only comment you get... That’s painful for somebody who tries, very painful ...*” The negative tension between autonomy and collegiality inhibits teachers from creating real learning opportunities. This becomes clear in the way they handle the implementation of new teaching methods. Such innovations are not taken advantage of to launch a critical and professional discussion about the options the team wants to take: “*Like with this new method for maths. That really hurts me. You cannot express your critical comments. They immediately label you as a non-cooperative one, the one who absolutely wants to pursue a different course. They make it look like I’m the troublemaker, despite all my efforts to make something out of that new method. Those who say all that stuff are the ones who have never seen my work in my classroom.*”

Even if there is a chance for a learning opportunity to come about, it is very difficult in this school for it to grow into a real learning experience, because there is no *learning space*. The learning space is not properly adjusted to the learning opportunity. When the ethics teacher has some difficulties with one particular pupil and wants to exchange some ideas about this issue with the classroom teacher, her attempt to share her experiences and to find out whether something is wrong with the little boy do not yield a lot. The learning opportunity she is eager to create for herself, is not sustained by an adequate learning space. Indeed, the classroom teacher restricts his comment to: “*He said then*

— and I thought that was a little bit strange — he said it was a ‘signal’ ... I didn’t think that was very supportive.” She is convinced a certain competition stands in the way of a constructive exchange of ideas and problem solving: “Why he said that ... I don’t know ... Maybe it was kind of a competition ... as if he wanted to say that it is more my problem than that of the child ... That little sentence, I don’t know, it felt like an accusation ...”

The lack of adjustment of the learning space to the learning opportunities — which are anyway scarce and often superficial — implies that concrete learning experiences are exceptional in the relationship among teachers in this school. The teachers often react in a discouraged way. They feel as if they have to look for appreciation outside the school: “ ... I really look forward to the holidays then and you have to look for esteem for who you are and what you do outside the school.” Some teachers try themselves to create opportunities for professional development. They refine their teaching practice by reflecting on the remarks they get from their pupils. They point for example to the fact they learned how to deal with conflicts among pupils, how to keep one’s lessons interesting enough and how to exercise one’s authority. “The children really put you on the way.”

4.2.3. Conclusions

These data warrant the following conclusions. With regard to the adjustment of the learning opportunities and the learning space three patterns can be discerned. In case of a circular tension between autonomy and collegiality, learning opportunities (stemming from teachers’ autonomy, collegiality and the interplay between both) and learning space are attuned to one another. Teachers are formally and informally challenged at the level of their pedagogical and didactical functioning as well as at the level of the way they behave within the team. They have enough learning space to handle these opportunities constructively. Consequently, learning experiences influencing teachers’ professional practice are evident.

In case of a polar tension between autonomy and collegiality both workplace conditions function independently. Teachers’ collegiality is scarce, superficial and often negatively coloured. That does not

stimulate the creation of learning opportunities. The predominance of the strategic autonomy impedes an open dialogue that could give rise to impulses for teachers’ professional development. The second pattern consists, in other words, in the fact that one lets pass by the chances to create learning opportunities. Inattention may cause this, but most certainly also the fact that each of the partners wants to protect his or her own territory plays an important role.

The third pattern is characterised by the fact that there are actually some learning opportunities, but these are not adequately supported by an adequate learning space. The challenges resulting from the independent autonomy and collegiality not only are scarce, the polar tension also makes it very difficult to manage them constructively. This set-up consequently does not lead to a lot of learning experiences.

The tension between autonomy and collegiality not only has an impact on the number of learning experiences that can be observed. Also, the quality of the learning experiences differs according to the adjustment of learning opportunities and the learning space. These qualitative differences refer to the impact of the learning experiences. Some of them are more fundamental than the others. They function as a critical incident. They force teachers to question their usual way of handling things and to put aside their usual approach to cope with new challenges (Kelchtermans, 1993a). They lead up to teachers making analyses of the pupils’ mistakes, changing their attitude towards the pupils and taking initiatives in the team. In the second school teachers almost never refer to the relationship with their colleagues as a source of learning experiences. If they do, one gets the impression that the impact of these experiences never reaches a very deep level. Teachers tell for instance one of their colleagues gave the suggestion to visit an exhibition with the pupils.

Fundamental learning experiences, on the contrary, have a critical character because they “touch” teachers’ professional self, bring it up for discussion and result in the refining of their subjective educational theory (Kelchtermans, 1993b), finally ending in concrete changes in teachers’ professional behaviour. The learning opportunities teachers are

confronted with lead them to question their usual approach. They feel the need to adjust their professional self and their subjective educational theory to cope with the challenges confronting them. Put more simply: the fundamental character of learning experiences not only can be deduced from the observed changes in their professional behaviour, but also from the fact that these changes are related to the refinement of their professional self and subjective educational theory.

Summarizing, one can state that there exists a greater chance that fundamental learning experiences arise if the tension between autonomy and collegiality is defined in a circular way, because the learning experiences and the learning space are attuned to one another. Moreover, this tension is characterized by more profound variants of autonomy and collegiality, which, as was demonstrated, reach the level of teachers' subjective educational theory. The inadequate support of learning opportunities or the lack of attention to create them — two patterns typical for the polar tension, that is characterized already by less profound forms of autonomy and collegiality — prevent fundamental learning experiences from arising.

In the orienting theory we defined professional development as the succession of different kinds of learning experiences on several domains, leading to a combination of craftsmanship and mastery. So far the results confirm the assertion that fundamental learning experiences on several domains are the concrete materials of teachers', far from easy, professional development. It remains an open question, however, how teachers perceive the length and aims of this process. This is discussed in the following section.

4.3. Professional development

4.3.1. How long it takes to learn to teach

Even though the research data seem to be in line with the orienting theory concerning professional development, it should be noted that there exists some divergence on one particular point — i.e. the length of professional development. The data do not reveal an image of professional development as an inevitably continuous process. Five of the 39 teachers who were interviewed in the first research

phase expressed a very limited view on professional development (in terms of the time it takes to learn to teach). In fact they argue that one cannot really learn to teach, since it's a gift: *"I think you have to have it in you. Some people have it from the very moment they start their career. They gain of course some experience throughout their career. Some are gifted and others probably will never get it."* This view is only slightly modified by some of the teachers holding it. The nuance they make refers to the idea that one needs a year or two to learn to teach on the condition one can keep the same grade during that period. Afterwards one can simply *"hold the class"* and one does not have to worry because *"the same things come back all the time"*. The majority of the teachers hold a more longitudinal point of view with regard to the time it takes to learn to teach. Yet almost all of them indicate there is a certain breaking point. After a first, very challenging period, a phase follows in which professional development is not so evident (see also McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978; Aitken & Mildon, 1992; Rosenholtz, 1989). The teachers point out that a lot depends on their personal engagement with regard to their professional development. Yet their comments also reveal that the organization plays an important role too. Professional development cannot simply be dismissed as an individual affair. The importance teachers attach to their interactions with colleagues, the challenges that result from the interaction with pupils or the changing of grades, all demonstrate that professional development has clearly an organizational side, however strongly teachers may argue that teaching is an innate gift: *"I think it was easier at the beginning. I try to read as much as possible at home and to talk it over with friends. Because, you know, if you restrict yourself to your own grade, it's kind of limited, isn't it. I believe I've lost already a lot of what I once learned. So if there is an opportunity I most certainly would change grades. Simply to be forced to do something else. I don't think I would be able to carry on for 20 years in the same grade."*

4.3.2. What teaching is all about

All the teachers we interviewed were unanimous though on one point in their perception of professional development. That is on the central place

the pupils occupy in this process. They formulate the aims of their professional development — what we described as craftsmanship and mastery in our orienting theory — very succinctly in terms of working for and with the pupils in a well-founded way. As such they confirm the well known research finding that teachers place the relationship with their pupils at the very core of their profession (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Lieberman & Miller, 1991; Louis & Smith, 1990; Vonk, 1989): *“I’m still very motivated. I hope this will last forever, because a teacher who’s not motivated is a bad teacher, don’t you think so. The children, they are the most important. The children still are my most important incentive.”* Teachers feel satisfied because of their relationship with the pupils. Kottkamp (1990) discerns two aspects in this satisfaction, that we found too. On the one hand teachers derive great pleasure from the good performances of the pupils. The scores of the pupils are in a way the proof of their efforts. *“I should tell you about the feeling you get when you really get across. It’s a real pleasure to see your pupils learn something they didn’t know yet, or master something they had difficulties with. That’s a real pleasure.”* The teachers want to treat their subjects in such a way that *“the pupils look happy and satisfied”* and say *“yes, we’ve learned something”*. Teachers quite often indicate that their job reaches further than just treating the subject content and themes prescribed by the curriculum. They want to contribute at a certain basis for later life. They want to arm their pupils with a sense of critical judgment. In other words, they want to contribute to the development into adulthood of their pupils.

In order to realize this aim teachers need a sound pedagogical relationship with their pupils. The quality of interactions with the pupils is indeed the second aspect of teachers’ professional satisfaction (Kottkamp, 1990). The teachers want to get to know and understand their pupils, so that they can build up a warm rapport in which each child feels at ease. Or as one teacher expressed it: *“Each child should be happy when it enters your classroom.”*

In other words, through their professional development teachers get their teaching well in hand. They feel good and at ease in their job. They gain a certain control that makes it possible to work

with their pupils in a way they can account for, i.e. didactically and pedagogically well-founded. This justified control makes it possible for them to enjoy the benefits of their efforts. Therefore teachers acknowledge that a certain flexibility is indispensable. Indeed, in order to keep working with the pupils in a responsible way, professional development is a stringent requirement. A lot of teachers are aware of the fact that they can and have to develop professionally. They do not want to rust in their old habits. A flexible attitude contributes to their control: *“I always try to realize the ideas I’ve got in my head. I sometimes lose my sleep over it, so that I just get up to write my ideas down in order not to forget them. The following day I try them out with my children and it makes me happy if it’s a success. I say then: ‘Well, this really worked. I can use this idea in the future again.’”* Control, accountability and flexibility are the core themes of teachers’ professional development. They make clear on a more concrete level how teachers give body to their craftsmanship and mastery (see also Provenzo, McCloskey, Kottkamp & Cohn, 1989).

4.3.3. Different types of professionalism

When an analysis is made of the way teachers at a certain point in their career give shape to these core themes of professional development, one gets an idea of their professionalism. Indeed, we made a “snapshot” of the way teachers involved in our study experience their own professional functioning in terms of *control*, *accountability* and *flexibility*. This revealed three distinct types of professionalism (see Table 2).

Teachers who can be characterized as *progressive professionals* have control over their work. One of these teachers (of the first grade) says for example: *“Each year, in September, I have this frightening*

Table 2
Types of professionalism

	Control	Accountability	Flexibility
Progressive	ok	Class + school	Necessary
Conservative	ok	Class	Not important
Reactionary	Not ok	Class	Absent

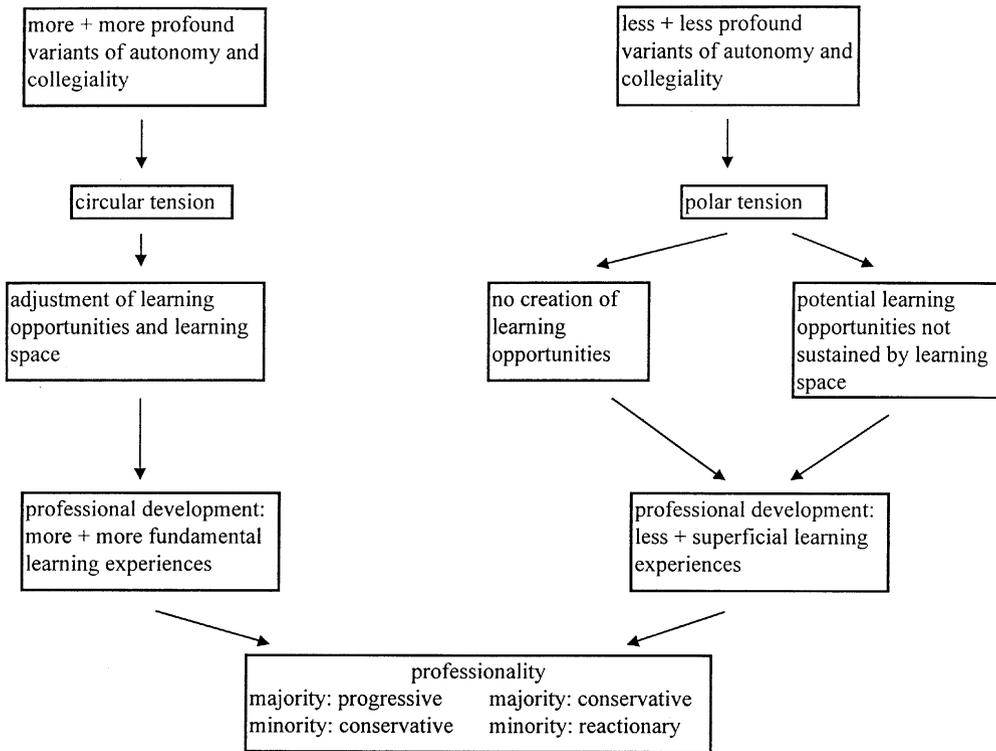
feeling: 'Oh, my god, they're so little!' I feel very determined then, I cannot make any mistake, or things will be messed up for the rest of the year. But once we've started this tension and insecurity disappear completely. I really love to work with these kids." Progressive professionals have no difficulty to account for their work. They do that spontaneously for their work in the classroom as well as for their functioning at the school level, within the team. For their work with the pupils, progressive professionals account for what they do referring to the well-being of the children, as well as to their achievements: "In the first place, I believe that the children as well as I have to feel good in the class. I think it's crucial to keep everyone involved. I insist on a quiet atmosphere in the class, though that doesn't inhibit us from having a good laugh once in a while. But when it's working time, we all take it seriously." The functioning in the team does not pose any problems. Progressive professionals invest a lot in the team. They do so on professional terms (and not primarily for sake of friendship, for instance): they want their functioning at the school level to contribute to their professional development: "All colleagues collaborate in our team. I feel really good in this school. I have a good relationship with the principal too. He realized a lot in this school. Sometimes I think: 'Gee, this is heavy', but in the end you always see the results of what he suggests you to do. And then I feel happy I did it. As long as it makes you work better with the children, it's all right, isn't it." Out of their justified control progressive professionals are indeed eager to refine their professional practices. They experience flexibility as a necessary tool to become a good professional. Progressive teachers are the ones who are always looking for learning experiences. And if they do not find them, they create them themselves. They try out innovative methods in their own classroom or they take advantage of challenges that make it possible to do something new at the school level (e.g. set up a project-week for all classes).

Contrary to these flexible progressive professionals who have their job under control in a justified way, some teachers can be characterized at a certain stage in their professional development as *reactionary professionals*. They have no real control over their work and they do not feel good at what

they do. They restrict themselves to their classroom practice and they show no flexibility. Reactionary teachers admit they do not feel good: "I don't feel at ease with these children ... You know, there are kids who really respond to your approach, who give you back when you give them. But there are others it doesn't work with." Although these teachers often claim very explicitly they love their work and account for what they do in terms of striving for a good relationship with the pupils, they are not successful. Often they are isolated team members. They work on their own and do not keep up with innovations. Even stronger, they feel no need for flexibility: "Well, to be honest ... With regard to that new method for maths ... It's not my cup of tea, you know ... I teach the basic notions and for the rest ... I glanced through my old method once again and I must admit, I prefer to hold on to that ... I do."

Somewhere in between these two types are the *conservative professionals*. These teachers feel good, they have control over their work: "Well, it's my 21st year in the first grade. Long before things actually happen you can predict them unerringly. You simply have to take that into account." This feeling is so strong they do not feel the need to change. Conservative professionals do not reject flexibility, but it does not take a very dominant place in the way they give shape to their professionalism: "The years count for something, you know. For example, it would be very difficult to make me do things in another way than I'm used to. Not that I would resist it... but it would be difficult to convince me (...). I do my job, you see. I want to tackle new things, but I won't really look out for them." This attitude explains why conservative professionals report little or no fundamental learning experiences. They keep on the same course once set during their training. The control they gain as such does not hold prospects for flexibility. In their account for their work these teachers spontaneously restrict themselves to their work in the classroom. They want to do a good job with the pupils, in the pedagogical as well as the didactical sense.

These results reveal that teachers experience their professionalism in different ways. A remarkable conclusion of our study is that certain types of professionalism occur more in some schools than in others. Indeed, the data of our third, validating



(Clement & Vandenberghe)

Fig. 1. Substantial theory explaining for the impact of the tension between autonomy and collegiality on teachers' professional development.

research phase, confirm that the majority of the teachers who are working in a school that is characterized by a circular tension between autonomy and collegiality and by an adjustment of learning opportunities and learning space, has reached the level of progressive professionalism. Schools where there exists a polar tension — with all the negative consequences for the adjustment of learning opportunities and learning space — have far more conservative and reactionary professionals in their team.

5. Discussion

Our study led to the following substantial theory with regard to the impact of the tension between autonomy and collegiality on the professional

development of primary school teachers (see Fig. 1).

The above-stated theory refines the common statement that the school organisation influences teachers' professional development. Indeed, the degree to which workplace conditions, such as autonomy and collegiality, give rise to an adjustment of learning opportunities and learning space is determining for the school's impact on professional development. As such insights in both workplace conditions were modified. Collegiality does not automatically lead to professional development, teachers' autonomy is also important. Teachers claim respect for their autonomy because their relationship with the pupils is central to them. Insofar as teachers' pursuit of autonomy and self-realisation does not harm the pupils' interests, it should be respected. As Buchman(1990, p. 504) puts it: "There

is no paradox in claiming that some forms of inwardness, of 'being situated within' are consistent with improving teaching and schools, although the idea of teachers pottering around in their classroom, putting things to working order, and making small-scale changes may be unpalatable to outsiders given no grander scheme and prior images of human agency. Yet it does not follow that what is grander in scope or style, and higher in status, is also more appropriate, good or right. Conversely, the potters may be looking at the stars." Our study shows, however, that even modest learning experiences originate more easily in a school characterised by a circular tension between autonomy and collegiality. Such circular tension cannot be created by enforcing collegiality through, for instance, the establishment of structural forms of collaboration. Teachers should be motivated to collaborate, if this collaboration gives rise to the creation of learning opportunities and an adequately adjusted learning space. But longing for a completely collegial school is as unrealistic as undesirable. Most teachers plan and teach certain things better on their own, and some may function better when working completely autonomously. As Hargreaves (1994b, p. 67) says: "The solitary mode has its place." How then, can we create schools where teachers' professional development is fostered through an inspiring interplay between profound variants of autonomy and collegiality? Hatton (1987) suggests following two tracks simultaneously. Firstly, one should create "cultural interruption", bringing teachers' opinions, beliefs and norms up for discussion. Besides that, "structural redefinition" is needed to support changes in teachers' consciousness - through the renewed design of workplace conditions. In other words, workplace conditions should be modified in a way that makes clear that collaboration implies challenges for professional development without teachers having to abandon their autonomy. To realise this, the teachers' voice should be heard, so as not to end up in a situation where consensus is forced without taking notice of the wisdom teachers possess. Yet, it is equally important to link a vision to this voice. Indeed, "a world of voice without a vision is a world reduced to chaotic blabla where there are no means for arbitrating

between voices, reconciling them, or drawing them together. Voices need to be not only heard, but also engaged, reconciled, and agreed with. It is important to attend not only to the aesthetics of articulating teacher voices, but also to the ethics of what these voices articulate." (Hargreaves, 1994b, p. 62)

The essence of this vision is that each school should become a place where not only the pupils, but also the teachers can grow into the maximum of their possibilities (see also Vandenberghe, 1990). Attention to the development of professional relationships among team members based on personal feelings is needed. The study indeed demonstrates the importance teachers attach to warmth and mutual trust in their relationships with other team members. Yet, this medal has two sides. As Hargreaves (1994b) pointed out, this trust, the fact that team members get along with one another on a personal basis, contributes to the development of loyalty, commitment and professionally challenging relationships, leaving scope for teachers' individuality. It can however also install (again) paternalism and dependence, and all the problems these imply. Fostering mutual trust thus is important, yet trust in people should be combined with trust in processes and expertise. We think a school should professionally try to become an organization characterized by collective expertise and striving to improve its problem solving capacities. This consists of: aiming at a good communication, collective decision making, the creation of learning opportunities and learning space, the development of "networks" (also outside the school), and commitment to reflect critically on the education offered. As Hargreaves (1994b) puts it: trust in people is important, but trust in processes and expertise goes beyond that. The latter is open ended and is not free of risks, but it is essential for schools to improve and for teachers to develop professionally.

Our theory suggests that only schools where learning opportunities and learning space are created in a professional way and without denying teachers' individuality through the reconciliation of autonomy and collegiality in a circular tension, can guarantee that teachers' much needed professional development will take place. Within such a context teachers can become professionals who not only are technically apt, but who are also conscious of

the moral and political implications of the work they are committed to (with all the positive and negative feelings this commitment evokes) (Hargreaves, 1994a).

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