Andalusian teacher centres: in the political cross-fire

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This article analyses the background of teacher centres (CEPs) in Spain and presents the synthesis of conclusions drawn from the evaluation of such centres and continuous education in Andalusia (Spain), carried out according to the model of democratic evaluation defended by Barry McDonald. Three issues are dealt with: (a) the change of government policies concerning the running of teacher centres, from autonomy to control; (b) the changes in the way teachers’ continuous education and advice strategies are understood; and (c) how teacher commitment to innovation and education reform evolved with time. All this takes place within the framework of political confrontations between the two main parties in Spain: the Socialists (PSOE) – who institutionalized the CEPs and created education reform, and who continue to govern in Andalusia – and the Conservatives (PP) – who are currently in power in central government and who neither supported educational reform nor the teacher centres. In this context, the analysis of the use of the CEPs as a political weapon in their confrontation is one of the main objectives of the evaluation.

The model of teacher centres adopted in Spain was partly inspired by the experiences of the UK in the field of education during the 1960s and 1970s. During those years many new ideas emerged in the UK, most of them embodied in new curricular projects developed at a national scale. One of those was the creation of ‘teacher centres’. Their aim was to encourage contact and exchanges between in-service teachers, the development of projects, and to offer help and guidance to teachers. Within a few years, there were hundreds of them spread throughout the UK. In Spain, the first teacher centres (CEPs) were created in 1984 and each region slowly developed its own model. At that time, Spain was being politically organized into independent communities with local governments. Three of these regions – Andalusia, Catalonia and the Basque Country – enjoyed great independence from central government in educational policies.

However, from 1981 – the year in which the process of transferring educational responsibility to local governments was initiated in Catalonia and the Basque Country – until 2000 – when this process was finally completed in all the Spanish communities – most regions adopted the teacher centre model as outlined in the CIDE report (2000): ‘The functions of the centres [teachers centres] for continuous
Teacher education are multiple, varied, and coincident in the majority of the communities’ (2000: 300). Although the purpose of this article is not to generalize and draw conclusions for Spain (or any other country) as a whole, we believe that understanding what has taken place in Andalusia in this domain can shed light on the analysis of the policies carried out regarding continuous in-service teacher education in other places.

Teacher centres (CEPs) were created in Andalusia in 1986, during a period of socialist government. This was done in order to provide teachers with an organization, under their own management, which would help them to deal with the necessary educational changes required in Spain after the deterioration of the educational system brought about by the long period of Franco’s dictatorship. During the transition, there were notable quantitative changes in schooling: many centres were built and the number of teachers increased significantly. However, many teachers had poor initial teacher training and continuous education was officially non-existent. Despite this, one decade earlier, a teachers’ movement had arisen for the defence and development of state schools, organized and funded by teachers who – besides lobbying for worker’s rights, and political and social changes – encouraged and used teacher education as a means and a strategy to achieve educational improvement (Martínez Bonafé 1994). In general, many of these professionals organized themselves within the Movimientos de Renovación Pedagógica (the Movement for Educational Renovation (MRP)). When the socialists founded the CEPs, they sought to collect the knowledge and experience accumulated by these socio-professional bodies, and therefore they were designed to be organized and managed by the teachers. The aim of the CEPs was to assist with and meet teachers’ educational demands and needs, as well as enhance, encourage, co-ordinate and awaken professional responsibility and awareness. This was a genuinely progressive educational policy (Sanz Giménez 1998).

After three socialist governments, the conservatives – who had already been attacking the educational reforms – won the general election (1996). As in the UK (Kahn 1991), their initial plan was to eliminate the CEPs, as a further step towards ‘proving’ the failure of the educational reforms – designed by the previous government and voted for by all the Spanish political parties, except the conservatives. In this way, the eventual collapse of the reform could be presented as a socialist fiasco and, as such, it could become a politically useful weapon to be used against the opposition as soon as evaluations and comparisons between different schools were published at the national level. When the conservatives came into power the Education Minister promptly requested an evaluation of the new educational system, even before it was fully implemented in the whole country. In this sense, the editor of Cuadernos de Pedagogía, wrote:

the neoliberal inclinations of Esperanza Aguirre [the minister of education] and part of her team are well known, and so is her struggle to place social democrats and Opus Dei adepts in control of the Education Ministry. Such neoliberal discourse, inspired by Margaret Thatcher’s ideology, seeks free-market laws to rule and decide upon educational policies, in the same way that they are already ruling and deciding upon health care issues. This would involve the loss of the leading role of the State and thus of the state schools. (Carbonell, 1997)

However, Andalusia, which has its own autonomous government with high decision-making power in educational matters, was and still is under the administration of the socialist party, and so has become a symbol for the defence of the educational reforms (Junta de Andalucía 1992, 1995). We must place and analyse, within this con-
text, the Andalusian government’s policies, its stand on continuous teacher education and its attitude to the CEPs.

To evaluate the influence of the CEPs on teacher education we carried out an investigation which comprised three case studies of CEPs with different profiles, interviews with users and advisers, a questionnaire for teachers and another one for CEP advisers, and the creation of discussion groups with representatives from the educational administration, teachers, advisers, researchers, etc., in each of the eight counties of Andalusia. This article is based on the information collected during this evaluation (Fernández Sierra and Barquín Ruiz 1999).7

Socialist legislation: paving the way to conservative policies

The coming of the socialists to power in 1982 raised great hopes in large sectors of Spanish society – especially among intellectuals and teachers – that the changes in education were going to be significant and that their participation was going to be essential. In other words, teachers believed that professional autonomy and the involvement of education professionals in decision-making at all levels of the educational system would be indispensable for the desired changes to occur. Thus, teachers were fully prepared to assume the responsibilities demanded of them. The passing of progressive educational laws (such as LODE and LOGSE) meant that, for many, the process of ‘legalization’ and legitimization of the change was in place.

In Andalusia, we saw the incorporation into the administration of key representatives of the Movement for Educational Renovation (MRP). Similarly, there were original, diverse and rich experiments carried out to reform the upper levels of primary school education (Pérez Gómez and Gimeno Sacristán 1994).9 All this, taken together with the social awareness towards educational policies during the first years of the Junta (the Regional Government), led teachers to have even greater hopes in context-oriented, diverse and innovative (almost revolutionary) educational change. These were expected to help in dealing with the historical deficiencies in education in Spain, and especially in Andalusia, where the landowner-tenant system, the absence of a minimally innovative middle class, and the high rates of illiteracy and emigration clearly disadvantaged this region in comparison to other Spanish areas and even more in comparison to Europe.10

As an example of the interest and commitment of the first Regional Andalusian Government towards education, we can mention the most significant legislative document that gave expression to the underlying ideology guiding educational policies and teachers’ continuous education in Andalusia, i.e. the government act regarding the creation and organization of the teacher centres; the CEPs. The introduction reveals the kind of professional autonomy and teacher participation that was envisaged:

The model of a society based on principles of democracy and solidarity demanded by our times brings about the need to adopt an educational system open to the outside ... the educational system must be renewed and transformed ... based on reflection rather than dogmatism, encouraging participation and autonomy ... and therefore teachers will necessarily play an essential role. ... It is necessary to renew the concept of teacher improvement, and set this within a continuous and participatory process. ... In its widest sense, self-improvement must be one of the key guidelines on which to base the Educational Reform. (BOJA 21/02/1986)11
In case there is still any shade of doubt about the importance given to teachers and their expertise, especially to the most committed, innovative and enterprising, the same bulletin also stated:

For several years, the Teachers’ Associations and Movements for Educational Renovation in Andalusia have been working towards educational change through their daily experience in the classroom, and by meetings and exchanges organised by themselves. . . . The Regional Authority acknowledges and encourages these initiatives. (BOJA 21/02/1986)¹¹

This philosophy of empowering teachers by encouraging decision-making in education, respecting their autonomy and facilitating self-organization was the foundation of the CEPs in Andalusia. During this first period, the Annual Plan drawn up by the regional education authorities regarding continuous teacher education was restricted to some general guidelines characterized by their flexibility and easy adaptation to different contexts and situations. Nevertheless, as the years passed, these guidelines became rules and regulations (Barquín 1997). The Andalusian authorities seemed to be heading towards a ‘shift’ that became clearly apparent in the Act of 1995, a year before the conservatives attained power in Spain. There was a significant move away from the concept of teacher centres towards what could be better called teacher administration centres. In this new dispensation a radical shift in philosophy was evident: ‘One of the basic objectives of this Plan is to foster the training needs deriving from the implementation of the new system established in the LOGSE and in Acts 107, 105, and 106 of June 9th 1992’ (BOJA 22/08/1995).¹² As we can see, in this Act, everything is now exclusively linked to the development and implementation of LOGSE, and thus the teacher centres had to focus their attention on its successful implementation, as understood by the Regional Education Authorities.

The Socialist Party had won the previous elections (1993) by a simple majority and, in order to govern, it needed the support of the Catalan nationalists. The implementation of the Reform stopped being an educational policy and became a political weapon. Control over the CEPs – so the socialists believed – could be very useful with this end in mind. Andalusia, the major socialist ‘showroom’ for policy making, responded by tightening control. The Act of 1997 regulating the Sistema Andaluz de Formación del Profesorado (Andalusian System for Teacher Education), very clearly delimited in which fields teachers could be trained. In the same year, the almost moribund system of school inspection came out of the closet. An institution that not so long ago seemed to be on the verge of extinction, now emerged with renewed vigour to become a tool for control and the surveillance of curricular policy.¹³ To all this we have to note the increase in new responsibilities for teachers (Hargreaves 1994), mainly deriving from the duty of now having to write a series of documents (school projects, curricular projects, etc.), which became bureaucratic tasks that took up a great part of their time and energy.

Simultaneously – and this is another example of the political-educational contradictions of the socialist government of this period – in an attempt to avoid such bureaucratization and the estrangement of planning from the actual educational and organizational reality of compulsory education schools, an Act on School Evaluation, inspired by the principles of Democratic Evaluation (MacDonald 1974, 1983), was published in Andalusia (Plan Andaluz de Evaluación Educativa 1995). It included a theoretico-practical document that encouraged public debate regarding the Plan. However, the actual relationship between this Act and the improvement of education and quality of practice was not made clear.¹⁴
During this transition period, the most conservative teachers and institutions, which had held effective power, influence and weight during Franco’s regime, become visible and active once again at the regional and national governmental level. Simultaneously, some opportunistic teachers began physically and ideologically to occupy the places left in the CEPs by the most innovative people, who abandoned them due to conflicts or the impossibility to understand the shift that had taken place in educational policies. In those Spanish regions where the conservatives locally ruled, this turning point was taken advantage of in order to ‘realign’ and control the CEPs. In this regard, Carbonell wrote in 1997:

Although it is still too early to assess the educational policies of the Popular Party, as they are not yet half way through their term in office, we can highlight some of the features of the conservatives. Contrary to PSOE, this government shows little interest in compensatory policies to even out inequalities and have greatly reduced the budget for continuous education programs. The CEPs have seen their resources undermined, their future is increasingly uncertain, and there are no clear signs of alternatives. (Carbonell 1997)

In Andalusia, driven by the distrust generated by teachers’ attitudes towards the Reform and the political confrontations taking place at a national scale, the regional government opted for controlling the process as much as possible. On the one hand, the relationships and co-ordination between the different agencies had to be rearranged hierarchically. On the other, they had to make sure executive and managerial positions were taken by adherents of the official ideology. The democratization of CEP management very quickly began to erode.

So, it is within this political state of affairs that we have to place the largest and most radical reform in continuous teacher education policy and the restructuring of the teacher centres in Andalusia. By government act, they became Centros del Profesorado (Teaching Staff Centres) in 1997. The new philosophy and practice meant a 180-degree turn away from the precepts that regulated the legal framework of the first Andalusian CEP one decade earlier. This Act was completed with the appointment of trusted directors by the regional governmental agencies, and the closing of ranks of the middle management, who obeyed and applied the education policies emitted by the higher authorities to the letter. Whereas ‘co-ordination’ had been previously used, this was replaced by ‘direction’. Whereas the Andalusian government had previously recognized and encouraged the initiatives of the teachers, now it made it clear that the ‘new’ teacher centres were there to serve official educational policies.

In 1996, the Andalusian CEPs celebrated their first decade with conferences, seminars, and even parties – sponsored by the Regional Education Authorities – to celebrate the anniversary. A year later, the same government dismantled and restructured them, and for several months, they actually became the focus of severe criticism regarding their organization and results. In the discussion groups organized by our evaluation team after the ‘restructuring’, the new directors and regional government representatives made an effort to show that the new teaching centres had nothing to do with the previous teacher centres.

For a large number of teachers, the local authorities seemed to defend a model that cut teachers off from direct decision-making regarding their training. In their opinion, the discourse and practice of the new CEPs converged into a hierarchical and administration-dependent structure. This was repeatedly expressed during interviews and in discussion groups by the more socially and politically aware teachers, such as this secondary school teacher and MRP member:
The whole structure has changed; in other words, it is true that this CEP did not 100% match the model which it was supposed to follow; but now it is actually the opposite of that model. It is a hierarchical structure, the parties involved in training and education do not participate in it ... There is no Co-ordinator, but a Director ... the idea is that all the advisers are called to a meeting by the Authority representative ( ... This has happened once in eight years in power ...) and they are told something along the lines of: ‘You are just here to follow the orders of the Administration, so don’t complain and do what you are told. (GD4)

What had happened in such a short period of time? Among other things, the conservatives were by then in power as the national government, and the socialists feared for the educational reform they had designed. Their response was to exert even more control on in-service continuous teacher training and intervene strongly in the new teacher centres. So, for the Andalusian socialist government, the solution lay in ‘directing’ the process of defending the state school system/LOGSE by implementing legislative rules and, among other things, controlling the training process.

The concern, sometimes close to obsession, of the regional education authorities to control and direct teacher training in the ways they considered more appropriate for the implementation of the reform caused, and is still causing in our opinion, dangerous contradictions for the ends pursued: they seek innovative and creative actions, but these are fully directed; the curriculum should be flexible, but it is planned; the educational focus is on process, but the approach is technocratic; there is a wish to pay attention to cross-curricular issues, but from a hierarchical perspective, etc. Thus, we have a situation that is as contradictory as hot ice cream.

In the meantime, at the national level, the conservative government, which had often criticized the CEPs in the media and stated it would eliminate them from the regions in which it had power, changed its strategy and began their ‘realignment’ by exerting control over budgets, personnel, and the content and policies in teacher education.16 The result was that two ideologies with different educational models and presenting antagonistic positions regarding the state school system, were using the same strategy to defend their respective policies regarding continuous teacher education: controlling the new CEPs and their actions and, at the same time, fostering a technological model for teacher education.

The original teacher centres in Andalusia were distinctive in two ways: they tried to encourage teamwork among teachers, and they were run in a participative and democratic way. They were created out of the dialogue between teachers and run by a democratic Managing Committee; the role of co-ordinator was preferred to that of ‘director’; they emphasized their independence and so on.17

The first advisory teams were engaged in discussions and exchanges about the power of alternative educational models able to shift the thinking and actions of teachers. Their objective was to make the CEPs a place where teachers could feel at home.

During the school years of 1989/90 and 1990/91, there took place what is called among the older members of the CEPs ‘the landings’, i.e. the arrival of advisers appointed and sent by the regional education authorities, and who had received some training regarding how to go about teacher training. This action marked the most significant turning point in the rift between the regional educational authorities and the teacher centres’ Executive Committees: the latter saw their functions undermined and became aware that this action meant an important step towards control-
ling the CEPs and teachers’ continuous education. Thus, the new advisors from the administration felt rejected and the old ones appointed by the Executive Committees invaded. Although the situation later normalized, there was a residue of conflict over the best way to go about teacher education and the sharing of responsibilities.

The new advisers occupied and used the CEP space, but without clear knowledge of their functions or roles and felt out of place because the Executive Committee did not participate or accept the process of selection and appointment. This was a case of a group of professionals becoming part of an autonomous institution without its explicit consent. This double dependence of the advisers on the Committee and the administration coloured the social relationships within the CEPs from that moment on. Many advisers would have preferred to depend on the administration because they would have felt more legitimized and valued; but the very same people criticized the regional education authorities for setting up the subjects and content of the courses they had to run and how to go about them.

From this period onward, Andalusian teacher centres began to be run by two bodies, i.e. the Executive Committee, which had a representative character, and the Technical Team in charge of the professional aspects of education. The first one – although having gone through a series of restructuring processes enforced by governmental orders in its ten years of existence – carried on being a democratic body where the professional and social aspects converged as is shown by the fact that they were made up by representatives from unions, regional and educational administrations, groups from the educational innovation movements, and advisers. The second organ was formed from the advisers in each CEP.

This led to a shift in the model of continuous teacher education. It changed from the idea of improvement, based on support and resources, to a model of improvement based on advice and consultancy. The new model – founded on either the explicit or underlying premises that teachers have a precarious or outdated professional knowledge – gave rise to a teacher advisory system with predefined contents and theoretical and technical principles that had to be taught by educators clearly labelled as ‘experts’. On the other hand, another model views the process of continuous teacher education as a way to analyse, understand and solve specific teaching problems. This position granted the adviser a symmetrical/egalitarian role to that of the teachers and emphasized the adviser function as that of facilitator and inspirer of collaborative actions. This second option, with a great diversity of variations, seemed to be the one most teachers and advisers, as well as most representatives of the administration who participated in the discussion groups, considered to be more viable and useful. However, only the most innovative minority of secondary school teachers considered this to be so.

It is precisely at this latter educational level where we can locate the biggest problem the CEPs and advisers have to face: changing the educational culture of secondary school teachers. This situation has created a clear division between the teachers working in primary and secondary schools. We can observe a clear disparity of conceptions and practical approaches to the advisory system between primary and secondary school teachers. The latter have, in general, a more technological mentality, and are not willing to accept the arguments of many of their colleagues from primary schools who defend a more global and interdisciplinary teaching approach based on educating rather than on academic results. In general, co-ordinators and the Executive Committees were closer to this latter view, and this caused more or less
explicit feelings of rejection on the part of the secondary school teachers who felt their problems were not understood by either their own colleagues or the Executive Committee.

In fact, the difficulties encountered in working with secondary school teachers led many advisers to leave the CEPs and their posts were replaced by others appointed by the Executive Committee. Therefore, during the 1990s the adviser teams were made up of people appointed by the regional education authorities and others chosen by the Executive Committees – often due to their affinity with the Committee’s ideas rather than in the light of their professional qualifications. In this respect, we have been able to verify another hidden conflict between the professionals attaining their advisory role via one route or the other. The advisers from the administration considered themselves professionally better prepared, whereas the ones from the Executive Committees believed they were closer to the practice, innovation and original ideas of the CEPs.

Given this diversity regarding the origins and actions of the advisers and the different conceptions of what continuous teacher education means, theoretical discussions often take place in the Technical Teams mixed with technical interventions which are not always in line with the educational and political views globally defined by the Executive Committees. These committees, which are arguably dominated by people with a more open educational mentality – some of them with a long history of militancy in movements for educational innovation and unions, and who still support potential educational utopias – try to carry out complex educational processes in the CEPs, which are often antagonistic to the positions of the advisers. However, this innovative posture and interest often arises out of pseudo-progressive perspectives, as they focus on discourse and superficial details, without dealing with some of the key educational problems which confront teachers in the schools or the kinds of problems advisers have to face in a country with no tradition in this area.

Nevertheless, in spite of these limitations, our investigation has shown that the CEPs have a participatory and democratic approach. The existing structure and organization have generally contributed to making their running quick and efficient, mainly due to the great dedication of the working team. The meetings, in spite of being time-consuming, have facilitated collaboration, as well as the democratization of the information available and decision-making. This shared reflection has included issues about the professional dimension, and also about the Acts and attitudes of the education authorities. It has meant carrying out a critical analysis of situations based on the context around them and the teachers’ own experience. This approach, which is not always understood and accepted by certain sectors of the administration, has enriched the debates and contributed to finding contextualized solutions for teachers who in other circumstance otherwise would not have been involved with the CEPs or any official continuous education organization. Along general lines, we can state that the CEPs have promoted teamwork and provided people who are committed to a co-operative and democratic tradition with the opportunity to meet.

On the other hand, advisers and former advisors – in the face of the complexity of the roles they have to take on – tend to complain about the lack of specific training necessary to approach their work with some guarantee of success. They also complain about the lack of space, means and resources with which to carry out their work, and blame the administration for this situation which, according to them, is more concerned with bureaucratic aspects than with improving the quality of the advisers’ interventions.
However, without forgetting the responsibilities of the administration and the contradictions it has incurred regarding continuous teacher education and teacher centres, our data show that a small number of advisers have used the CEPs for their own self-interest. A larger number of them – in spite of talking about teamwork and collaboration – have practised a desk-oriented managerial style, becoming victims of their own ingrained technological approach to teaching or have been overwhelmed by the circumstances and work overload. However, to be true to the data, it must be acknowledged that a great part of the advisers of the Andalusian CEPs have shown exemplary dedication to their work. They have put into practice educational ideas in line with the principles of a universal, state and comprehensive educational system. They have striven successfully to bring teachers who were far from these ideas into continuous education. Equally, they have maintained professional relationships with the most innovative sectors, and have been able to create and collaborate with numerous self-teaching groups in their respective CEPs.

The regional education authorities have not valued this sufficiently, and instead of introducing measures to deal with the few people who misused their positions, it has viewed the most innovative and autonomy seeking sectors with suspicion, and opted for full control over the advisory system. The fear of a counter-reform organized by the conservatives, and the distrust shown by an important sector of the teaching staff have been two factors influencing this decision. The Regional Department of Education, instead of allying itself with the Executive Committee and advisers – most of them in favour of the reform – has eliminated them due to disagreements regarding some of the strategies used to carry it out. In this way, the authorities have not only lost an element of support, but to a certain extent have made unnecessary enemies.

Thus, although the socialist government initially looked to the teachers most committed to the educational innovation for support, during the decade of existence of the CEPs, it limited their autonomy and initiatives, and thereby provoked them into leaving their jobs. Later on, the socialist regional authorities confronted the CEPs openly and virtually eliminated them by restructuring them according to a model that suited their purposes. By 1997, they had become another administrative body dedicated to teachers’ continuous education with the clear purpose of implementing the reform. They were run by directors who the administration trusted politically, but who in most cases did not have any experience in the field of continuous education or any interest in this respect. Two years after this move, having realized the necessity of having well-respected people with more experience and innovative power, the regional government recruited people closer to or belonging to Innovative Education Movements (MRPs). These people have injected a certain dynamism into the CEPs once again. Nevertheless, there is something unrecoverable: the power of teachers to run their own body for continuous education which was one of the most progressive and useful decisions taken by the socialists in the revival of the state school (Morgenstern and Martín 1992, Barquín 1997, Fernández-Sierra and Barquín 1998, Sanz-Giménez 1998, etc.)

When the time comes for the political cycle to put the conservatives in power in the Andalusian government – which is very likely in the near future – they will find the ground sown by teachers resistant to implementing the counter-reform, which in Spain is beginning to mean the discrediting and elimination of the state school, supporting private schools in the hands of the Church, the resurgence of other power groups looking for ways to establish themselves and exert ideological influence in
education, elimination of the comprehensive system, and the establishment of a selective and classificatory school. It must not be forgotten that all this is taking place in a country that, in spite of the great advances of the last decades, cannot shake off the cultural backwardness it still carries due to 40 years of dictatorship and a history of ideological pressure from the most conservative sectors of Catholic thought.

Teachers: from commitment to apathy

The reform started by developing a discourse that tried to reject the view of the teacher as a technician whose only role was to transmit the knowledge taught by those external to the classroom experience. In fact, it attempted to present the idea of teachers as researchers, deliberators, critical strategists and artists engaged in a practical-theoretical approach. In this manner, the leading role of the teacher regarding the formulation of the means and objectives of his/her work was acknowledged.

For this reason, during our interviews and in the discussion groups, the more committed and innovative teachers expressed their surprise regarding the importance given to the form rather than the content of the reform as a whole and, consequently, to the proposals for teacher’s continuous education. They could not understand the emphasis the regional education authorities placed on teaching them how to write curricular documents without worrying about the processes that these would give rise to. They thought that this was due to the rationale of the administration, which was more concerned with control than with offering useful strategies in respect of their educational tasks. From this analysis, teachers demanded educational approaches that contemplated and supported the deeper meaning of the development of the teaching and learning processes in the classroom.

On the other hand, the main strategy the administration uses to involve teachers with the CEPs is the ‘sexenios’, a type of financial bonus. Some of the people interviewed saw two main advantages to this administrative measure: financial benefits, and putting the most reticent teachers into contact with the culture of teacher education. The negative aspects perceived made reference, fundamentally, to the distortion of the actual concept of education, the deterioration of the quality of training activities, and the bureaucratization of institutions such as the old CEPs that has prevented the fulfilment of their original role of being the motivating force in this field. Nevertheless, it seems that for a number of teachers the main motivation is their own conscience and professional commitment, and some claim that incentives are not necessary for improvement.

In this context of contradictory discourses and attitudes, the current new teacher centres are valued in very different ways by teachers (Fernandez Sierra and Barquín Ruiz 1998). In principle, they are considered to be the organizations that can better serve the interests of continuous education, although this opinion and the willingness to participate in them are conditioned by three factors: whether they are already users or not; their workplace; and whether they are secondary or primary teachers. Teachers in rural schools visited the CEPs much more than their city-based colleagues. In addition, the people who visited them more often appraised their role more positively than those who hardly ever used the services offered.
Similarly, secondary school teachers had less information on and appreciation of the CEPs. In this sense, it is necessary to highlight three main ideas around which teachers’ attitudes towards these Centres and continuous education revolved. The first idea, which is voiced quite frequently, is that the CEPs are an institution almost exclusively dedicated to the education of primary school teachers and have been unable to fulfil the educational needs of secondary school teachers. The second idea holds that secondary school teachers cannot properly deal with diversity in the classroom. Secondary school teachers are repeatedly identified as the group with more difficulties in understanding the meaning of the comprehensive model now applied to compulsory secondary school. It is argued that secondary school teachers have not had the training primary teachers have had for dealing with students whose capacity and knowledge are very low.

The third idea suggests that the implementation of the new secondary school system gave rise to unresolved social and labour problems. Many teachers from the old non-compulsory secondary school system asserted that their colleagues complained about their loss of ‘status’, and some teachers from the old primary school (EGB) voiced the general uneasiness caused by the discriminatory treatment primary teachers receive in the current system compared to the secondary school teachers.

It is necessary to stress that teachers – in spite of certain negative attitudes regarding the CEPs – do not request restaffing, for example, but more staff and funding. At the same time, although they acknowledge that the CEPs have served to accumulate the training hours required to obtain a pay rise, if nothing else, they believe that such an organization should be maintained and improved. However, the policies of the Andalusian authorities regarding this issue are moving in the opposite direction.

In this sense, we have observed a critical attitude of teachers towards the administration, who point out that the Regional Education Authority is one of the negative elements impeding teachers’ continuous education. Nevertheless, we cannot separate the opinions and contradictions regarding the CEPs from the general pessimism felt by teachers, whose low spirits are very obvious. There is a widespread dissatisfaction with the situation, which has been analysed from the point of view of four sets of arguments that the participating teachers have identified.

The first revolves around the feeling teachers have of facing demands that continually overwhelm them. They feel that they are continuously presented with new ways to organize their work and new strategies to put into operation. In fact, they feel a new role is demanded from them without being given the necessary help to confront these challenges with some guarantee of success. On the other hand, the demands are not only excessive because of their difficulty and complexity, but because of the sheer amount. Some teachers claim that the bureaucratic tasks – which are the most meaningless for them – have considerably increased.

The second set of arguments revolves around the feeling of abandonment and contempt they perceive from both society as a whole and the regional authorities. Some people mention the storm of criticism they receive from all areas, groups and ideologies, while only on very few occasions is their work praised.

The third set makes reference to a group of administrative measures (cutbacks in the number of jobs, compulsory moves from one school location to another, etc.), which some participants interpret as a true attack on the profession. Teachers consider that these measures have strongly damaged their spirits and hopes, and this has had negative repercussions on their work. The final complaint revolves around the fact
that teaching is a profession without promotion prospects, and reduced and inadequate incentives.

The teachers’ psychological state – provoked by objective facts as much as by individual and collective feelings and beliefs – has given birth to a dominant pessimistic attitude regarding the possibilities of the reform to improve education. Nevertheless, a significant sector is still convinced of the necessity to: (a) be up to date and in contact with the new educational currents and research; (b) gather information about the regulations of the education authorities; and (c) know about their colleagues’ experiences and work. They also believe the CEPs are still a body with possibilities for making a bridge between the aspirations of teachers and the proposals of the administration.

**Synthesis of conclusions**

Teacher centres (CEPs) took care of teachers’ continuous education in Andalusia, Spain, from 1986 to 1997. From 1997 onwards, the new teacher centres, a result of the restructuring or dismantling of the former – depending on how this is viewed – took on this role. The data available regarding this process of organizational-political change indicates that the decade of experience with the former teacher centres has not been properly taken into account, mistakes have not been learned from, and so the new teacher centres are likely to aggravate the situation. 27

Later conflicts with the regional education authorities – at some stages very serious – which have led to important professional, political and sometimes personal confrontations, have impinged on continuity even more and on the possibility of learning from previous experience. The situation became so radical that in all our local discussion groups, the evaluation recorded an explicit rejection on the part of the administrative middle management of anything related to the old teacher centres. They seem to have forgotten that the old CEPs are an experience from which teachers and advisors have a lot to learn. No one in the area of continuous education can monopolize or ignore the old CEPs.

It might be a mistake to relinquish the basic principles that brought about the creation of the CEPs – i.e. democratic management and the participation of teachers in their own improvement. Efforts should be made to return these institutions to being the ‘teachers’ homes’ that they used to be. It is not a question of going back to organize continuous education in the way it was done by the teachers movements during the ‘transition’ period, when teachers voluntarily used their vacation time and self-funded the projects. The socio-political and professional situation that gave rise to this no longer exists. However, it is possible to recover its philosophy regarding self-organization, social commitment and the chance to innovate within education by inspiring self-organized teachers to creative action. Indeed, the structure has to be adapted, but this does not mean that the principles that should govern continuous teacher education and research – decentralization, democratic participation, autonomy and contextualization (Lledó 1998) – have to be abandoned.

As long as the administration insists on directing and controlling their continuous education, teachers will carry on perceiving any advisory system stemming from it in a negative light. The reasons the political authorities bring forward for directing the change are based on a managerial approach. This might be valid for economic or
production-based activities, but its application to education, and specifically to in-service teachers’ education, will only encourage an increasing de-professionalization. Certain socio-political sectors seem to be delighted with these results and others, from the opposite political colour but blinded by their managerial and technocratic beliefs, are helping them to achieve it.28

Educational policies based on orientation and facilitation rather than on paternalism or intervention are needed to build up educational growth in a democratic society. Such a society needs to trust in the capacity for improvement of its available teachers rather than, more or less explicitly, permanently questioning their professional suitability and their potential for improvement: this is applicable to teachers, advisors and any other specialists. We suggest taking up, once again, the educational reform that Zeichner denominated ‘social reconstructionism’ (1993: 51 ff.), according to which teachers will work for a more just society, where the focus of teacher education leads towards reflection about the social order and raising awareness. As Gimeno argues (1998), the abilities of teachers for self-reflection, raising awareness and practising common sense should be viewed as their ‘techno-cultural’ knowledge. At the same time, he suggests educating the current culture that is demanding a rigid stance from the school and the teacher.

Teacher centres and the regional education authorities have made a great effort in transmitting to teachers the epistemological principles underlying the reform of the educational system, and in teaching them how to apply the techniques or methods derived from constructivist psychological theories in the classrooms (Tadeus Da Silva 2000). However, they have neglected to deepen the social, political and ethical dimensions of the change; they have forgotten to emphasize and work towards the aim of teachers understanding, sharing and applying the philosophy of the proposed educational reform. A reorientation of educational action towards a flexible and process-based curriculum has been sought by applying technological educational actions during its management and development. The result of this is that teachers have possibly only partly understood that they are required to adopt a new psychological and methodological framework, but they have not reached the point of understanding why this shift is required and where to place it within the socio-political context.

As in the rest of Europe, social inequalities are becoming worryingly common in Spain, and in Andalusia. Racist and antidemocratic attitudes are sprouting up again, suggesting that certain antisocial currents which were thought to be dead are not so. Therefore, there is a need to educate citizens regarding democracy, coexistence and tolerance. This implies the need to encourage ways to run and manage institutions in a way that promotes participation, integration and commitment.

It is neither easy to transfer administrative regulations (of any kind) to schools and their daily practice, nor for innovative and committed educational discourse to penetrate into the professional thought of teachers. Time is needed for any possible positive effects of a given continuous education policy to become manifest. In order to succeed it is indispensable to have resources properly co-ordinated, complementary strategies, diversity of options and investment in human and material resources. It will not be possible to achieve full success without obtaining the commitment and involvement of teachers, and this will not be achieved by taking away their decision power and the management of their programmes for professional improvement.

The Andalusian government fostered teacher centres having great autonomy and participation levels. It drew up its own Evaluation Plan for the Andalusian
Educational System, etc., but this path has been truncated. Although many teachers have taken on the comprehensive principle, they find it difficult to justify some of the regional administration’s decisions regarding the reform, despite sharing the same ideas. The regional education authorities’ swings regarding policy on teachers’ continuous education means that coherent discourse is seriously compromised.

The new CEPs carry the burden of the political pressure the Andalusian Government endures stemming from the central government’s interest in the failure of LOGSE. In addition, they are under strong social pressure to prove their ‘effectiveness’, which has nothing to do with quality comprehensive and universal teaching. On the other hand, some sectors of the administration show very little vision. All these factors are suffocating the already weakened professional autonomy and commitment of teachers even more. This is causing the deterioration of the state school system, a system that the current Andalusian government is undoubtedly trying hard to defend and promote.

In this article, we have tried to clarify how it is that administrations from opposite ideological standpoints are promoting identical educational policies or and how a left-wing administration has let itself be captured by conservative ideas, policies and norms in the field of education. To succeed, the battle for state schools, quality teaching and comprehensive education must take place at the level of ideological debate as well as in practice. For this to occur, it is both indispensable and healthy to seek the support and involvement of the most innovative teachers, while also trying to engage the maximum number of professionals and institutions involved in education who can directly or indirectly participate in the process. This will not be achieved by excluding them from decision making, as demonstrated by the negative situation resulting from the educational and continuous teacher education policies dictated by the regional government of Andalusia.

Notes

1. See Stenhouse (1975) for a review of the significance of some of these experiences for curricular change.
2. Pereyra (1984) states that in 1969 there were 270 teacher centres in the UK; a year later the figure had almost doubled (466), and in 1979 there were 529. Pereyra also describes how the UK teacher centres were organized in the 1980s as well as their areas of responsibility.
3. In all regions (communities), CEPs or similar bodies were created to develop in-service teacher education functions: the exception was Catalonia, where the ICEs (Institutes of Education) played, and still play, this role.
4. This term is used in Spain to describe the period of the dismantling of Franco’s political system and the re-building of the basis of democracy.
5. The reform – LOGSE – which stands for Ley General de Ordenación del Sistema Educativo, is a new law which raised the age of compulsory schooling to 16 and introduced the concept of comprehensive education.
6. The attempt to use the data gathered as a way to discredit the new educational system is acknowledged by the actual professionals who carried out the evaluation (in private conversation with some of the people involved). The results, which did not turn out to be as negative as the minister expected, leaked out to the press and were finally published by the ministry (INCE 1997). An outcome of the discomfort generated by this incident was the resignation of García Garrido, a well-known Director of the INCE, (The Spanish Institute for Evaluation and Quality Assurance, a body under the wing of the MEC which is an institution in charge of carrying out official evaluations of the Spanish educational system).
7. The authors invite researchers interested in the full report of the evaluation (about 800 pages including three case studies) or in the conclusions and reviews (about 120 pages which will be published by the Andalusian Government), to contact them by e-mail.
8. LODE acknowledges and regulates the participation of all parties (i.e., teachers, parents, students and regional authorities) in the educational decisions of the schools.
9. Originally, the educational system was made up of a 'primary' compulsory school (EGB), up to 14 years, split into two blocks from 5 to 12 and from 12 to 14 years old. These were taught by people with a degree in teaching ('ordinary teachers'). Later, those pupils who wanted to further their academic education carried on to BUP (from 14 to 18), which was taught by people with post-graduate degrees in the different subjects, but with little teacher training ('specialist' teachers). These teachers, in the new comprehensive system, became the secondary school teachers, teaching children from 12 to 16 (compulsory school) and also from 16 to 18 (non-compulsory).

10. We must bear in mind that historically, and during Franco’s years, Andalusia is a region that has been highly discriminated against, with little economic or social development, and in the hands of a few landowners.


12. It is worth noting that all the restrictive laws were published and passed in the months of July or August, a time when all schools and teaching centres were closed for the summer holidays.

13. The school inspectorate has traditionally played a role in bureaucratic control and enforcing disciplinary measures. With the arrival of democracy, several professional and political bodies believed that the inspecting system was a hindrance to the change sought in education. In 1984, the first socialist government eliminated the traditional inspecting bodies (Legislation 30/84). According to this new legislation, the inspection was to be carried out by working teachers who took up the inspection function for a minimum of three years and a maximum of six. In 1995, the last socialist government revived the inspecting body (Ley Orgánica 9/9, BOE 274). For more information, see Mayorga Manrique (2000).

14. This document, which was widely distributed among teachers, included a questionnaire that aimed at gathering opinions and suggestions regarding the plan. In addition, the local educational authorities organized discussion groups where parent association representatives, teachers, inspectors, advisers, MR P members and researchers were invited to participate.

15. The slight change in the name (although still abbreviated to CEP in Spanish) was made under the excuse of adopting non-sexist language. In fact, it carried the symbolic meaning of the shift to a new educational policy and was simply a power play.

16. Opportunistic teachers played a key role in this situation, because they took on these technological jobs in the new teacher centres, comfortably far from the classroom with no direct responsibilities and interesting career prospects.

17. The creation of CEPs gave rise to a wide range of situations regarding their management and emergence in Andalucia. For further information see Yus (1991), Barquín Ruiz and Fernández Sierra (1998) and Barquín (1998).

18. This statement should not be taken as absolute because we found some secondary school advisers who supported a more global and interdisciplinary model, whereas some primary school teachers held the opposite view.

19. Generally speaking the advisers who left had a more interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach. The involvement of the old secondary teachers in the comprehensive model has always been very low in Spain and, in recent years, they have shown marked rejection and resistance to it. According to the data published in one of the major Spanish newspapers, El País (15/06/01) – based on a report made by IDEA 2001 – secondary teachers agree with the proposal of the conservative government to split 14-year-old children into three categories that will lead them into either high school, vocational training or insertion into the labour market.

20. This does not mean that most people in the committee share these views. Rather, those who do share them present their arguments and views with such strong foundations that their proposals tend to be accepted. We have witnessed this occurring in the many committees we have attended as observers.

21. In this sense, the questionnaires revealed that teachers considered their training needs to be related to learning difficulties (two out of three people) and the design and development of the teaching learning process (one out of two). On the other hand, they considered creating the centre projects or getting to know the law to be bureaucratic tasks. Only 10% of respondents considered the latter part of their training needs.

22. Traditionally, teachers get an increase in their wages after accumulating 100 hours of in-service training within six years. In 1997, the number of hours was reduced to 60 and there was great flexibility as to how accumulate them.

23. A total of 67% of teachers considered the CEPs to be the best organization to provide continuous education, while 20% preferred this to be done by universities, and about 8% preferred other agencies.

24. The complaints are mainly related to the lack of infrastructure (47.8% of replies) and the need for an increased budget (41%). Similarly, more qualified staff is demanded (53.5%), which does not mean teachers are unhappy with current advisors, since only 12.8% of teachers think these should be replaced.

25. In August 1997, the editorial of Cuadernos de Pedagogía (260: 3) criticized the dismantling of the CEPs network in the Community of Valencia (governed by the PP) and in Andalusia (governed by PSOE) – carried out by reducing the number of advisers by 40% – stressing that the debate should be focused on the in-service education model and not on survival or the institutions.

26. When teachers were asked about who had helped solve difficult situations or problems, 77% mentioned their colleagues, 77% tutors and advisor, and 57% the executive committee. Only 18% mentioned the regional education authorities.

27. The regional authorities spoke of restructuring, but co-ordinators and the majority of teachers thought that the original CEPs had been dismantled and replaced by a body subordinate to the administration.
28. The CEPs of other Spanish regions in which conservative governments are in power – The Comunidad Valenciana, Asturias and MEC – went through a strong process of restructuring during the ministry of Esperanza Aguirre (the most neoliberal and conservative minister of the first Spanish conservative government). Interestingly, many changes were similar to those implemented by the Socialist government of Andalusia in spite of their apparent opposite ideologies.

References


