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# Distilling the comparative essence of teachers' centres in England and Spain 1960-1990: past perspectives and current potential for teacher professional development?

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## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to examine a specific development in the history of teacher education to explore whether it might illuminate and inform contemporary debate. It offers a historical/comparative analysis of the contribution of teachers' centres to the professional development of teachers in England and Spain during the late 1960s to the early 1990s. In looking back to the impact that teachers' centres had on teachers in these very different social and political contexts, the paper examines whether, in spite of being adopted and adapted differently in the English and Spanish contexts, there was a fundamental essence of the teachers' centre model that could transcend both time and space. Thus, although essentially historical in method and focus, the paper will problematise just how far new forms of teacher professional development have lessons to learn from older, now largely overlooked forms, as found in the practice of the teachers' centres, with their focus on grassroots teacher autonomy and collaboration. The paper is in four parts: setting the scene and methodology; outlining the rise and fall of teachers' centres in England and Spain; identifying the core essence of the teachers' centre model; and finally exploring potential implications for current policy and practice.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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Teacher professional development; teachers centres; teacher education; history of education - Spain and England; teacher professionalism; educational transfer

## 1. Introduction and context

A highly trained, professional, skilled and responsible teaching force, able to make a real difference to the quality of young people's learning, is regarded as essential to educational reform and economic sustainability across the world. (OECD 1998, 2011; Musset 2010) However, there is also widespread international concern that teaching is in a state of real crisis, reflected in sustained problems with attracting and retaining the very best possible recruits into the profession. (Lynch et al. 2016; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas 2016; England House of Commons Education Committee 2017; Podolsky et al. 2019) At a time when it is argued that neo-liberal political imperatives have served to de-professionalise teachers and to centralise educational reform, there is also a powerful imperative for a major redefining of the field.

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(Leiton-Gray 2006; Beck 2008; Neufeld 2009; Beauchamp et al. 2013; Ball 2017) This paper seeks to examine a specific development in the history of teacher education to explore whether it might illuminate and inform contemporary debate. It offers a historical/comparative analysis of the contribution of teachers' centres to the professional development of teachers in England and Spain during the late 1960s to the early 1990s. In looking back to the impact that teachers' centres had on teachers in these very different social and political contexts, the paper examines whether, in spite of being adopted and adapted differently in the English and Spanish contexts, there was a fundamental essence of the teachers' centre model that could transcend both time and space. Thus, although essentially historical in method and focus, the paper will problematise just how far new forms of teacher professional development, found, for example in the idea of collaborative professional learning communities or networks, have lessons to learn from older, now largely overlooked forms, as found in the practice of the teachers' centres, with their focus on grassroots teacher autonomy and collaboration. (Stoll et al. 2006; Stoll and Seashore Louis ; Vescio, Ross, and Adams 2008)

Initially developed in England and Wales during the 1960s, throughout a period of educational reform and curriculum innovation, the concept of the teachers' centre as a stimulus for teacher professional development was embraced internationally and went on to become an inspirational model for other countries, including Spain in the early 1980s. Teachers' centres brought together teachers from a local area and offered a forum in which they could access resources, engage in professional courses and form communities of practice. Though differently adapted to each country's particular social, political and economic context, the teachers' centre model promoted a distinctive philosophy of democratised teacher professional learning which valued organic, teacher-led transformation, was responsive to local demand, and was committed to teacher autonomy. Teachers' centres evolved just before neo-liberal discourses of public accountability, performance management, regulation and control began to reshape much of the European educational landscape. Their demise or reformation into quite different institutions by the mid-1990s, corresponded with significant reforms and structural changes to professional practice. In their brief historical moment, however, teachers' centres held out a promise to radically shape the teaching profession and educational reform. This exploratory paper considers whether there might be scope for reinventing a refined model of teachers' centres as part of the twenty-first century teacher re-professionalisation agenda.

The paper is in four main parts. First, the introduction sets the scene and scope of the paper and describes the historical/comparative methodology used. Secondly, there is a detailed discussion of the historical development and demise of teachers' centres in England and Spain and the dynamics of educational exchange which underpinned this history. Thirdly, those fundamental elements that constituted the core essence of the teachers' centre model of teacher professional development are identified. Finally, potential implications for current policy and practice are explored.

The paper draws upon a range of traditional historical and documentary sources and analysis, with a particular focus on oral history methods. Central to both country studies was a commitment to finding ways to scrutinise the history of the teachers' centres from both an official 'top-down' perspective as well as seeking insights into the personal lived experience of those teachers and educationists who experienced the centres. In addition,

individual country studies uncovered previously unexamined sources. For Robinson's research on England and Wales, sources included published and unpublished secondary books, articles and studies, archive material from a number of national and local archive collections, and oral history interviews with 31 retired teachers, educators and teacher trainers. (Robinson 2014) A small group of retired former teacher centre leaders or wardens who continue to meet to discuss the work they did in the Centres in the South West of England, known as the 'Wayforwarders' provided particular insights in the teachers' centre phenomenon and were interviewed separately and as part of a focus group. For Groves' research on the Spanish context, sources included: archive material from the Ministry of Education as well as from a number of local archives; reports by the Ministry of Education, local authorities and the Division for Teacher Professional Development; national teachers' professional journals and local teachers' associations grassroots publications; published and unpublished secondary books, articles and studies; and oral history interviews with high ranking officials in the Ministry of Education at the time as well as directors and teachers working in the teachers' centres in the 1980s and 1990s. (Groves 2015)

There are well-documented methodological challenges associated with this kind of historical research, which focus on the nature of historical interpretation and reconstruction as well as issues of reliability and representativeness. Both authors, as experienced educational historians have endeavoured to be prudent in the historical analysis of the centres in their respective countries and to be mindful of the special problems associated with oral history methods. Both studies were conducted independently and set out to do so from different starting points. In bringing together these independent research findings from England and Spain, a different set of overarching research questions about the teachers' centre phenomenon on an international stage which combine comparative as well as historical approaches have been raised. In this exploratory paper we hope to begin to offer something distinctive to a field where there is a dearth of any systematic transnational historical analysis of the role and impact of teachers centres and to look beyond national boundaries to the potential examination of supra-national analyses.

## **2. The development of teachers centres in England and Spain 1960-1990**

In exploring the emergence of teachers centres in England and Wales in the early 1960s, it is important to consider their development in the wider context of the history of the English education system since the end of the Second World War, where a free system of differentiated secondary education for all children was introduced, requiring a significant expansion of qualified trained teachers. During the 1960s, a time of economic growth, there was significant change and expansion in education generally which demanded improved provision of both initial training and continuous professional development for teachers. New developments in Science teaching, as well as an overhaul of other curriculum areas, the development of the Nuffield Science project, the establishment of the Schools Council for Curriculum and Examinations in 1964 as the body which co-ordinated secondary school examinations and advised government on curriculum, revised school leaving examinations, planning for the raising of the school leaving age to sixteen years, as well as comprehensive school reorganisation combined to create a real need for the modernisation of teacher professional development, which Robinson has detailed in her

2014 book. (Robinson 2014) This was also a time of innovation with curriculum, methods and pedagogy – particularly in the new comprehensive schools. Changing youth culture and more permissive social attitudes and values also began to challenge some of the traditional hierarchies and processes in the school context.

Teachers' centres emerged in England and Wales during the 1960s and early 1970s during a period of relatively expansive liberal and progressive thinking in the field of education, initially as a means to disseminate to teachers the materials generated through curriculum development projects such as the Schools Council and the Nuffield Foundation. At this time the British economy was thriving and there was high public expenditure on education generally, when government spending on education more than tripled and was twice the amount spent on defence. (Simon 1991, 261) The first centres were mathematics subject centres, such as the specialist Wythenshawe mathematics centre in Manchester. These were soon followed by centres on a variety of other models. There were subject specific centres, phase-specific centres, catering either for primary or secondary teachers, resource-only centres and general centres. The majority of centres were general centres funded by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) with one established per town, city or LEA district. Teachers' centres were run by individuals known as wardens or leaders, who, although employed by LEAs often enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in their work. Teachers' centre leaders in England and Wales formed their own association in 1973, which was first known as the 'National Conference of Teachers' Centre Leaders' (NCTSL). The NCTCL changed its name several times, becoming the 'National Council of Teachers in Professional Development', then the 'National Association of Professional Development', and then the 'Association of Professional Development in Education'. There was also a journal of the NCTCL, *Insight*, which was first published in April 1977 and which went on to actively promote networking between teachers' centres nationally. By the late 1970s it was estimated that there were over 700 teachers' centres across England and Wales. (Thornbury 1974, 61)

There was a great variety of teachers' centres across the country, with differences in the physical space, size and location of the centres, and clear rural/urban disparities. Initially, many were housed in former school buildings though some were also in Nissan huts, disused fire stations and ambulance stations, or shared buildings with other local authority services. Rarely were purpose-built centres established. The physical location of a centre and its easy accessibility for teachers at the end of the school day, either by private or public transport, was crucial to its use and popularity – and this was a particular problem for dispersed rural areas. A number of oral history participants who had worked in rural areas recalled that without cars it was difficult for them to get to the centre so they only went if there was a special in-service course. Some centres were well equipped with a number of rooms for seminars, meetings or workshops, a library and resources facility and social space, including bars, refreshment areas and snooker tables. City based centres, such as in London or Coventry appeared to be better equipped and very popular as a social base for younger teachers. One oral history participant, Diana Lucas working in Hackney, London in the early 1970s, recalled the popularity of the Hackney centre with teachers who would routinely go after school three or four evenings a week. She was a member of the social committee and used the centre for recreational as well as professional activity. One oral history participant, Bill Parkinson, recalled having used the Coventry teachers' centre as

a second home in his early days of teaching in the late 1960s. Living in fairly primitive bedsit accommodation he would even go to the centre for a bath. Some centres specialised in providing teaching materials and resources for teachers, as well as reprographic and photocopying equipment so that teachers could make their own resources and share them with others.

In a paper presented at the annual DES/NATHFE Conference at Bristol Polytechnic in September 1978, Vin Davis, warden of the Kendal Teachers' Centre, described what he regarded as the holistic function that teachers' centres could provide for local teachers, with in-service education being one part of a much bigger service. He wrote.

It is the success of the whole Teachers' Centre which nourishes the contributory parts, especially INSET provision. A successful combination of uncomplicated and useful services is seen as an essential base from which to build and support Teachers' Centre-based INSET activities. Workshop facilities, a library of teaching aids and resources, audio-visual equipment, reprographic facilities and mobile support for sparsely populated areas, are the wherewithal which allows a Teachers' Centre to readily respond to the immediate and varied needs of teachers. The creditability of the Teachers Centre depends on the availability of human and material resources, the knowledge and experience to utilise these resources, the accurate identification of teachers' needs and wants, and above all – good will. (University of London, Institute of Education Archive SCC/175/385/01)

The funding, management, staffing and governance of the centres varied. A National Union of Teachers (NUT) survey of teachers' centres in 1972 found that, though LEAs were totally responsible for allocating grants to the centres, resourcing varied between authorities. 'By means of weighted average, to the nearest ten units, urban centres receive the most generous allowances: urban £3,660 per annum, rural £630 per annum; specialist £930 per annum.' (University of London, Institute of Education Archive, SCC/385/416/01) Data from the Schools Council Survey highlighted a specific tension inherent in the teachers' centre model – the nature of the relationship between the centre staff and the LEA, with considerable confusion over who had the ultimate power and authority. One warden wrote,

It has never been made absolutely clear whether a centre and its staff are operating (a) on behalf of the LEA – as an instrument of dissemination on communication of the policies and views which are formulated by senior colleagues in the administrative hierarchy or (b) on behalf of the teachers – gauging their wishes and needs, identifying their problems, supporting them in the classroom, and defending their interests. (University of London, Institute of Education Archive, SCC /17175/385/01)

Robinson has written elsewhere about the distinctive leadership of the teachers centre, occupying as they did a middle ground between schools and local authorities. Clearly, centre leaders networking with each other was important. It is interesting that in London, where there were large networks of centres under the Inner London Education Authority, there were separate groups for men and women wardens. There is clearly scope for further work to be undertaken on the gendered nature of leadership in the centres and whether different forms of leadership generated different levels of participation and engagement from the local teachers. (Robinson 2014, 94–100)

There was a sense that teachers' centres were very much subject to the whims of local authorities – with some regarding centres as useful institutions worth investing in, whilst others treating them grudgingly in terms of resource allocation. Whilst enthusiasts for the teachers' centres were keen to point out their teacher-centred, democratic and organic management and organisation – with centres being run for the teachers and by the teachers, management structures and responsibilities also varied. Keith Martin suggested that in his time as warden of the Purbeck Teachers' Centre there was a strong commitment to teacher-led centre activity. He said,

At the centre, they had a representative from all schools. They didn't all go but there was the chance for every school to have a representative and yes, and that, that more or less ran the place. They were supposed to just run the Teachers Centre so it was teacher led. (Martin 2011)

Similarly, Alec Fellows in discussing the management of his centre in Nuneaton remembered that the management committee was heavily represented by teacher union officials and he emphasised that teachers' centres were quite literally *teachers' centres*.

There was a managing body and quite hefty union representation on that managing body although it was funded by the local authority it was, it was largely governed by the teachers themselves. (Fellows 2011)

Many centres had a teachers' management committee comprising elected teacher representatives from local schools who would work with designated centre leaders/wardens to design programmes of activity, make decisions about resources and funding and take responsibility for the centre building and social programme. These management committees would also have co-opted LEA representatives and sometimes representation from teachers' professional organisations or unions. The role of the teacher unions in setting the agenda of the local centres was not insignificant, and warrants some further detailed research as does the role of smaller teacher networks or professional associations. Sub-committees focussing on specific aspects of the centre, such as library facilities, resources, specific curriculum areas, catering and social programmes were often established. (England, *The National Archives*, ED 272/33) Joslyn Owen, Deputy Chief Education Officer for Devon, wrote a paper in 1968 which probed the extent to which teachers really engaged in the organisation and management of the teachers' centres. His experience was that teachers' centres appeared to thrive on a fine balance between teacher and local authority control. He argued that,

The management of centres has some effects on teacher participation: much again, seems to depend on how far the local education authority is involved and on how far the teacher members of the management committees are chosen on the basis of their proportionally representing teacher associations. Teachers are said to participate less suspiciously in centres where the management committee is one in which the local education authority voice is not dominant and where the representation of teachers is based not simply on association membership but also on the individual's contribution to the curriculum. (Owen 1968)

Whilst acknowledging the ambition for teachers' centres to respond to local need, he queried the extent to which local teachers were either able or willing to take ownership of their professional development through the work of the centres and suggested that,

Apart from areas which are taking part in the trial stages of national projects, there is as yet comparatively little planned local experiment: the emphasis seems almost entirely to be on open discussion and exchange of views rather than on the devising of specific contributions to teaching within particular subject areas. The dangers are obvious: as long as the lecture/seminar/discussion group method of traditional in-service training are regarded as the principal methods appropriate to curriculum development, teachers seem unlikely to provide, and to work within, their own framework of activity. (Owen 1968)

With such a variety in practice between centres, for geographical, professional, administrative and financial reasons, understanding what they actually did in terms of in-service provision, providing support for teachers, creating opportunities for teacher discussion and sharing of resources is also difficult to define, as there were numerous permutations of activity. Keith Williams' 2014 paper on the Liverpool Teachers Centre, being led by a particular visionary principal, Dr Eric Midwinter, with a commitment to transforming teacher professional development through a focus on the benefits of community education to address social disadvantage provides a detailed insight into the complex, variable and political nature of local teachers' centres. (Williams 2014).

Contemporary critics of the centres, including Dick Weindling, who was commissioned by the Schools Council to review their effectiveness in the late 1970s, identified key strengths as well as weaknesses. (Weindling, Reid, and Davis 1983) Teachers appeared to like the centres – though the material benefits of the centres were less tangible. Bob Gough emphasised that the contribution teachers' centres made to in-service education was only part of their story. He particularly valued their local nature and identity and the way in which teachers themselves were closely involved in their governance and running. (Gough 1975, 12) Keith Williams similarly suggests that, 'Although the teachers' centre was presented as a collaborative democratic institution by those who championed it, it is questionable whether it was a realistic strategy for changing professional identity.' (Williams 2014, 833).

Robinson's research on the English teachers' centres uncovered evidence that the English model influenced and was 'adopted' and 'adapted' in a number of other countries, including the Netherlands, Spain, Japan, South Africa, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Teachers' centres leaders from English centres engaged in a series of study visits and exchanges with sister institutions in the US, South Africa and Europe, supported by a 'National Conference of Teachers' Centre Leaders'. The British Council was also influential in funding networking conferences which brought together teacher educators committed to the particular teacher-centred model of professional development that was embodied in the UK teachers' centre model. This phenomenon was evocatively described in the opening to Robert Thornbury's 1973 book on *Teachers' Centres*.

'A New Zealand Teachers' Union Official, a New York elementary school principal, a sari'd administrator from Delhi, 20 Brazilian class teachers, a West German director of education, a lecturer planning the raising of the Hong Kong school-leaving age, a teaching sister from Connemara, and the education minister for a Middle East oil sheikdom – this mixed group of educationalists – visiting London in summer 1972 all made the same request. They all asked to see a teachers' centre. In fact, they all visited Sherbrooke Teachers' Centre, three converted classrooms in a Hammersmith primary school. Other teachers' centres all over the country were at the same time welcoming a similar flow of visitors.' (Thornbury 1973, 1)



He went on to describe a proliferation of international interest in teachers' centres – because for him they were a true 'British First' – so fundamental to educational reform in the late 1960s and early 1970s that they represented a 'silent educational revolution'. So successful were the early teachers' centres in Britain, numbering over 700 by the late 1970s, that Thornbury argued that they had become one of Britain's major invisible exports both to the developed and developing world. (Thornbury 1974, 76) Spain was one such European country that looked to the English teachers' centre as a potential model for educational reform in the post-Franco period of the 1980s.

Unlike the English centres that sprang up gradually and in different shapes and forms, in the Spanish case it was a national decision enacted by an official decree published on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November, 1984 that initiated their introduction (BOE of the 24 – XI – 1984). The decree specified the reason for the establishment of the centres, their functions, their administrative composition and the form of election and responsibilities of their governance and management and role of centre directors. The import of the idea of the English teachers' centres into Spain in the early 1980s is an interesting example of an explicit educational policy transfer as found in the theoretical ideas about educational policy borrowing and comparative education developed by Phillips and Ochs (2004) The Spanish educational authorities, after debating and considering different options, decided that the foreign model of the English teachers' centres best suited their needs for transforming teacher professional development in Spain in the dawn of the post-Franco political era. (Pereyra 1984)

The creation of teachers' centres was also part of a much wider plan for educational reform initiated by the socialist government, after coming into power in 1982. The once illegal opposition to the Franco dictatorship became the leading power in Spanish politics and was determined to transform Spain into a modern welfare democracy. Education occupied a central place in this political and social project and there was perceived to be an urgent need for a new in-service training for teachers that would secure their collaboration with the process of reform. The English teachers' centre model was recognised by the new Spanish government as a successful mechanism for the reconstruction of the English education system, led by a Labour government – and seen as highly attractive to the first socialist democratic government in Spain. Ironically, at a time when the teachers centres were being set up Spain – they were being phased out in England – reflecting the significant political shifts with a conservative government and the development of neo-liberal educational policy and reform that has gone on to dominate and shape the landscape of English education ever since, with a focus on economic efficiency, market-led supply of education and strengthened teacher accountability and control. Their demise in the late 1980s and early 1990s corresponded with the 1988 Education Reform Act, the education reform movement which mandated radical structural changes to teachers' professional engagement and practice where the teacher-led, bottom up model espoused by the centres was no longer deemed appropriate. (Whitty 2016) In England, from the 1980s there was an increasingly centralised approach to teacher professional development, just as there was to initial teacher training, the school curriculum and all other aspects of the education service. Direct dedicated funding from government to LEAs for in service education and training was subjected to steady attrition throughout the 1980s and 1990s until eventually it was devolved entirely to schools to do with as they so wished. Radical changes to teachers' conditions

of service saw the introduction of a new working contract in the mid-1980s which mandated that five of the of the 196 designated working days per year should be formally spent on professional training – days which were commonly known as ‘Baker Days’ after Kenneth Baker, the Secretary of State for Education responsible for their introduction, and which were not always welcomed by teachers who resented being forced into this activity. The introduction of the National Curriculum as part of the 1988 Education Reform Act, as well as the identification of national school priorities shaped the content and focus of funded training for teachers.

In Spain, the newly created teachers’ centres assumed the in-service training responsibilities previously held by the *Institutos de Ciencias de la Educación* (Institutes for Education Sciences – ICEs). ICEs were very much part of the old framework of educational reform developed under the Franco dictatorship during the 1970s and early 1980s and were deemed inadequate and outdated by the new socialist educational administration. First, they were associated with the dictatorship and its specific educational discourse which was mainly focused on expanding the education system, without connecting it to the wider democratisation of state and society. Secondly, the ICEs were criticised because although they enjoyed generous funding, teachers attended their training mainly to obtain certificates and not out of genuine interest or desire to change their practice. Thirdly, the ICEs were associated with the discourse of ‘technological functionalism’ that had long pervaded Spanish politics.

In those days it was a common belief that introducing innovation into education was merely a technological process; that is, that education is a kind of technology that has a specific content and techniques that can be improved by experimentation and technological innovation. (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia 1986, 9)

The new socialist educational administration had a different understanding and expectation of education as well as of teacher training. It argued that the economic crisis of the 1970s had proved that it was impossible to predict or shape the future based on technical formulas and that the confidence of the potential of what education should and could be had been lost.

It must be emphasized that the main lesson learnt from the crisis is that recipes are not useful: the technocratic models – homogenizing teaching – are efficient for resisting the lack of a critical consensus, but do not serve in order to handle new situations. (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia 1986, 3)

The new administration thus looked for a different kind of educational dynamics and training in which the teacher would play an active and autonomous role, overcoming the position of mediator and contributing to curriculum development and reform. The legal decree which established the centres clearly reflected this sentiment.

Modes which are coherent with the conception of the teacher as a professional, endowed with a high level of autonomy and who can adapt the teaching to the conditions of the social context and is not limited to implementing programs. (BOE of the 24 - XI –1984)

It was argued that teachers needed a solid, professional, training which would allow them to evaluate their own work and a flexible curriculum frame which would permit their participation in reforming it. These two factors would then shape both professional development and then follow through into teachers’ work in their classrooms.

The necessity to leave behind the old technocratic model and introduce one based on teacher autonomy and collaborative work was also supported by a large survey conducted with teachers that showed that, overall teachers gave better evaluation to training offered by grassroots autonomous groups of teachers who designed their own training, than to the training offered by the ICEs. (CIDE 1985) These self-regulated training courses for teachers expanded from a tiny minority at the end of the 1960s to a large variety of training schemes at the beginning of the 1980s, particularly attracting primary school teachers. The new model of teacher training was thus designed to collaborate with these movements in the framework of the imported English model of teacher professional development. (Groves 2012)

The specified functions of the teachers' centres, according to the government decree were: delivering approved professional development programmes, organising activities for teachers, discussion and diffusion of the educational reforms advanced by the administration, promoting the balanced adaptation of the contents of the curriculum to the social context of the school and fomenting research of the educational reality and available pedagogical and didactic resources.

The decree also declared it was the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to promote, create and coordinate the new teachers' centres. However, it transpired that there was little need to actively encourage and promote their establishment. The educational officials were, in fact, overwhelmed by the rhythm and quantity of requests which arrived from all over the country to open new teachers' centres. (Romero Morante and Luís Gómez 2006) Many local grassroots teachers' movements saw in the centres an opportunity to enhance their influence and impact. Although concerns were raised about the possibility that the centres might be used to control the local movements and limit their freedom, the relative autonomy of the centres and their democratic running convinced most of the local movements that indeed it was an opportunity to consolidate their pedagogical training schemes. Another factor that contributed to local enthusiasm in opening teachers' centres was that at that time Spain was living through a process of political decentralisation. The responsibilities of the education system were being transferred to regional governments and the recent democratisation of municipal government stimulated the mushrooming of highly localised institutions. As a result, provincial entities, municipalities and regional authorities embraced the centres as part of their social and educational reform. In the first phase of development, between January and April 1985, 57 centres were opened all over Spain. By 1986 there were more than 1000 working centres dealing with issues such as social science, IT, language, adult education or language education. (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia 1986, 328)

An interesting question regarding the translation of the English teachers' centre model into the Spanish context, concerns the unresolved debate about the true autonomy of the centres. Were they authentically teacher-led and teacher-run or were they really organised by local authorities on behalf of teachers – or possibly a combination of the two? In Spain the model seemed to seek a compromise position with the idea that the centres created a useful meeting point between central and local administration and the teachers.

... Sincere collaboration from which mutual criticism should not be absent, is one of the most valuable opportunities offered by the teachers' centres. (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia 1986, 54)

In a report drafted during the expansion of the centres in Spain a number of characteristics of this particular model of teacher professional development were highlighted: its closeness to the schools, its contribution to diffusing accumulated experience from work in the classrooms, its ability to foment participation, not only among teachers but also with other institutions such as municipalities so they could collaborate on different projects, its democratic nature as teachers occupied leadership and management positions in the governance of the centres; and its bringing together teachers from across the primary and secondary phases. (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia 1986, 49–51) While the English centres sprang up ad hoc and were varied with regard to structure and focus, in Spain there were clear guidelines regarding the functions, types of activities and aspired collaborations of the centres. That is, from the start, the Spanish teachers' centres were accompanied by clear ideas about the philosophy that sustained them and how it should be translated into their organisation and actions – they were intended to be much more cohesive than their English counterparts.

However, though there was a common plan for the centres, there were also many local differences that are inherent in such decentralised structures. Some regions which had a strong tradition of pedagogical innovation, such as Valencia, were actively involved in the process of creating the new centres in places where there already existed well-established local institutions and movements. In others, such as Galicia, for example, there was disconnection between the conservative-run regional government and the movements, which resulted in a lower level of collaboration with the pedagogical movements. In some places the teachers' centres were not perceived as places for innovative work but as mechanisms for the diffusion of the central government's plans, leaving aside the idea that the teachers had to play an important role in their own on-the-job training. (Costa 2011) In other places, the regional government guaranteed the democratic functioning of the centres, sometimes enhancing an even more horizontal model such as in the case of Andalucía. (Yus Ramos 1991)

By the second half of the 1980s, there was a wide variety of teachers' centres across Spain. Their different characters were shaped by the strength and attitude of the local pedagogical movements, and occasionally the local teachers' unions, by the attitude of the local authority and its capacity to support the centre, and by the initiatives of the regional government that could enhance or reduce their liberty. In some cases, the centres adopted a very critical view of the administration and great tensions were aroused. (Groves 2015) The original ideal of the centres serving as a middle ground between teachers and the administration lost ground very quickly. Gradually the centres lost part of their autonomy and the social movements retreated from their involvement. More importantly, the central administration backtracked on its original intentions for the centres and began to introduce more top-down ideas related to experimental pedagogy and the measurement of education through various statistical approaches, evaluation techniques and observations. At the beginning, these were gradual steps, which did not pass unnoticed by the teachers involved in the work of the centres, even in areas where there was regional support of the autonomy of the teacher centres. 'In relation to all this, the new orientation of the institution of the Teacher Centre has to be highlighted. Those of us who have been involved year after year in its implementation and evolution, can warn against the degree in which the institution is being oriented towards directions which are much closer to the programs emanating from the central administration' (Yus

Ramos 1991) These represented more of an exercise of central control of teacher professional development and learning. In 1989, on the eve of an ambitious new educational reform, a dual programme of activity, including education research and teacher education were positioned as complementary dimensions. This represented a change from the previous discourse regarding the teachers centres. If in the earlier report of the ministry from 1986, the teachers centres were presented as an innovative alternative to teachers training which was based on teachers' autonomy, in this new report from 1989, teachers training was fused with educational research which, although counted on the contribution of teachers, was mainly carried out in a Research Centre run by the Ministry (Centro de Investigación y Documentación Educativa), in the old ICEs, and in the Universities. It was mentioned that the teachers centres were invited to collaborate, but of course they were far from being pivotal for the new plan. (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia 1989) The importance given to educational research regarding educational policy in general and teacher training in particular, reduced and limited the role of the teachers centres in the implementation of the new reform.

Education research does not pretend to become the sole principle of education and education policy. Nevertheless, its role is immensely important, as it fulfills a set of functions that induce change and quest for more quality and efficiency in the educational structures and activities. (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia 1989, 12)

As can be seen in the above quotation the discourse of efficiency entered Spanish educational policy in general and teacher education in particular. In practical terms, teacher education was divided into three levels. The first focused on the schools and their ability to offer individual educational projects. The second involved the teachers' centres and the third was the introduction of new provincial programmes for professional development based on a national programme. This meant that the teachers' centres lost their protagonist role and autonomy and became another piece in an elaborated programme of centralised and regionalised teacher training and educational research. Arguably, the promise of the teachers' centres to radically reform Spanish education in the post-Franco period was never fully realised, in spite of some early success during the 1980s. In their change of focus and ultimate demise, there are clear parallels between the histories of the English and Spanish teachers' centres – a sense that their promise and potential was never fully realised or embedded, as political imperatives around educational reform created a very different environment.

### 3. Distilling the essence of the teachers' centre model

Having suggested that there was no such thing as a homogenous English teachers' centre model and having also suggested that this model was adopted and adapted with enthusiasm across the world, including in post-Franco Spain, it is important to consider what characteristics of the supposed ideal model were so prized that they warranted translation into different international contexts and communities. The early English pioneers, such as Robert Thornbury, Harry Kahn, Bob Gough and other founding members of the NCTSL, were almost polemical in their advocacy of the centres to potentially revolutionise teacher professionalism. However difficult to define, given their ad-hoc development, it is worth considering whether there was something intrinsic to the ideological

vision for the English teachers' centre which piqued the interest of international observers. Even Kahn, however, with his unswerving optimism for the centres, advised that his published handbook on the centres should be read as a guide and not as a 'description of Utopia' – '... and that some adjustments would have to be made to local systems, resources and contexts'. (Khan 1982, 1) Gough attempted to crystallise his conceptualisation of the core philosophy of the centres as one in which, '... teachers' centres are teacher-centred and should be quickly responsive to teachers' needs and wants', (Gough 1989, 59), whilst Kahn felt that the 'main plank' in the philosophy of teachers' centres was that they should offer support to '... the teacher as a professional'. (Khan 1982, 8)

Various typologies of the ideal centre emerged with practical suggestions for their successful operation. Kahn in particular used a very teacher-centred democratic language to describe centres as neutral, relevant, flexible, led by teachers, concerned with education, as opposed to mechanistic training, professional, realistic and above all focussed on immediate local need. He argued that governance should be non-hierarchical and respectful of relationships between teachers, staff and visitors. (Khan 1982, 10) He concluded that,

The Teachers' Resource Centre will weave the various educational agencies and the almost untapped expertise of the teaching force into its own democratic patterns through its committees, its co-operative style of work, and its empathy with its clients so that its work will win the confidence of the administration and the trust of the teachers and community. In this way the Centre will establish for itself an influential place in the evolution of educational advance.' (Khan 1982, 113)

If the ideal essence of the teachers' centre was deemed to be its belief in organic, teacher-led professional development, Robinson's research on the English model suggests a more ambiguous picture of reality – particularly reflected in the new oral history testimony. Teachers' centres emerged and flourished in the 1960s and 1970s – a period in time described by many of the oral history participants as an almost halcyonic golden-age in teaching, before the 1988 Education Reform Act heralded a different culture of accountability, performance management, regulation and central control. Further work is needed to unpick and interpret this notion of a professional golden age – which in reality might have been as elusive as the very unitary and ideological model of the teachers' centre itself. However, the demise of teachers' centres in the late 1990s and early 1990s did correspond with significant education reforms and structural changes to professional engagement and practice. This was related to top-down, centralised direction – the very antithesis of Khan's utopian teachers' centre philosophy. It is also interesting to note that centres flourished in England and Wales during a time of relative economic prosperity, when education was better resourced than it ever had been and that they began to decline in a period of economic decline, following the oil crisis of the mid-1970s.

It is interesting to note that when Spanish officials debated on importing the English model into Spain at the beginning of the 1980s they were fully aware of the growing threats to the institution in its country of origin. The person most identified with their implementation in Spain was Miguel Pereyra, the head of the Educational Innovation Programme in the Ministry of Education and Science. When explaining their philosophy he observed that their days of glory had passed in England due to the adoption of a unified curriculum and a generalised obsession for measuring efficiency in business-

like terms, which were not a favourable context to the teachers' centres and their qualitative capacity to contribute to teachers' professional development. However, in spite of these difficulties in the English context, Pereyra still defended their potential in general and their relevance to the Spanish context in particular. He saw real potential in the ideal of the centres – if not the lived reality.

According to Pereyra, the true essence of teacher professional development, as conceived in the activities of the Spanish teachers' centres, lay in the fact that through the centres the teachers were enabled to become active agents of their own learning. This was fundamental to the whole point of the centres. It was teachers who were intended to manage the centres, to interact with their fellow teachers and other relevant professionals and were also able to take part in deciding what was taught in the schools and how it should best be taught. In this sense the Spanish perspective replicated up to a certain degree the essence of the teachers centres as exported by the English experts. In addition, it also reflected the ideals and experiences of the teachers' pedagogical movements which organised autonomous, collaborative teacher education opportunities.

Arguably, in the Spanish case, perhaps less like the English case, the centres were designed to revitalise the work in the schools as well as amongst all other professional groups involved with education, including parents, students and educational departments. The core idea was certainly based on responding to the teachers' professional needs, as in the English case, but at the same time they were assigned with wider educational objectives. So, if in the English case the teachers' centres were mainly about the teachers, in Spain they were about education in its broadest sense as a mechanism for social and political reform, with the teachers playing a pivotal part and the centres being viewed as a vehicle for change.

They should be centres that foment participation, not only among the teachers, but also with other educational institutions and local organizations which have extended responsibilities in the organization of social and cultural life of municipalities . . . (the centres) becoming sources of counsel and collaboration in for looking for solutions to educational and cultural problems which these entities confront. (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia 1986, 50)

The essential ideas of the teachers' centre model, initially exported from England certainly caught the imagination of both the officials who launched them and of the teachers' movements that embraced them. They were perceived as places that allowed and promoted the central role of teachers in the process of their own learning and were based on democratic and collaborative work. In addition, similar to the all-embracing character of the English centres, in Spain they were also perceived as places designed to cover as many professional needs of teachers as possible. They were designed for professional development, for curriculum development and class-based investigation and action research, for providing information, for providing materials and resources, for coordination and orientation among schools and professionals of the area, for displaying contemporary or historical teaching materials and for covering social needs. Meeting the multiple and complex needs of teachers was at the heart of the centres. However, it was the same administration that introduced teachers' centres into Spain because of their grass-roots and democratic potential, which went on to desert the fundamental essence of the model in favour of a more controlled and centralised

professional development scheme, thus bringing an end to the short lived experience of the teachers centres in Spain – a pattern not dissimilar to what happened with the English centres.

#### 4. Future directions?

Having turned to the past to consider a radical model of teacher professional development that actively sought to put teachers firmly at the heart of educational reform, we would now like to consider whether such a model might have any resonance in the current contested context of teacher education. As Robinson has previously argued, much of the current discourse on teacher professionalism suggests that the top-down, politically driven education reform agendas of the last three decades have reduced teaching to a technicist function, far removed from traditional notions of a profession and more akin to new forms of managed or managerial professionalism. (Robinson 2014, 3, 2016) It is suggested that teaching, on the one hand, has been subject to a deliberate de-professionalisation and, on the other, to a different kind of re-professionalisation agenda. This has raised important questions about what kind of professionalism for teachers is fit for purpose in the twenty-first century. Researchers such as Sachs, Mockler and Whitty have argued for new forms of democratic or collaborative professionalism to counter what they see as the unhelpful binary notion of traditional occupation professionalism versus managerial professionalism. (Sachs 2001, 2003; Whitty 2002, 2008; Mockler 2005) There is also further thinking about the idea of ‘blended professionalism’, ‘inter-professional working; or “third-space professionalism”’. (Whitchurch 2008). Furthermore there is comparison between national models of professionalism being increasingly replaced by highly localised or even “branded” notions of teacher professionalism, fuelled in England by a significant shift towards autonomous schools through the flourishing of consortia of deregulated school academies, with local authorities ceding any power or control over schools. (Whitty 2016) Arguably, this is a contested and highly complex field. However, at the heart of these new models of professionalism is the idea that teachers should become active, not passive, negotiators of their own identity and that this is contingent on them collectively developing strong professional networks based on informed educational enquiry. Significantly, these current discourses about new models of teacher professionalism have at their very heart the idea that teacher professional learning is critical for any professional transformation and that teachers themselves need to be active not passive agents in this process – ideas and principles that had resonance with the historical model of the teachers’ centres discussed in this paper.

It is interesting that much current research on teacher professional development has identified that the ‘personal’ and possibly the ‘professional’ dimensions of teacher professional development has been overshadowed with national initiatives, school and pupil-level improvement priorities dominating the agenda. This critique of a ‘centre-periphery’ or ‘top-down’ perspective on teacher professional development views teachers as having no real personal or professional ownership of their own learning – something very undermining and damaging for the profession. (Hopkins 1986) At the same time, there is a strong sense that well-resourced and well-integrated continuing professional development opportunities for teachers remains problematic. The wide-scale international TALIS study of 2009 reported an unfulfilled demand for professional development



opportunities for teachers, with a significant proportion of teachers reporting that their professional development experiences had failed to meet their needs and over half wanting more. TALIS painted a picture of a sporadic and unsystematic approach to teacher professional development with over 40% of teachers working in isolation in the absence of more collaborative learning opportunities, in spite of a strong will for teachers to be enabled to share their expertise and experience more systematically and in collaborative fora (TALIS 2009). The situation in the England and Wales fares poorly by comparison. A recent report published by the English House of Commons argued that, ‘... until now, England has had a weaker commitment to CPD for teachers than many high performing countries (House of Commons 2017, 26). Similarly, an influential report by the Sutton Trust on teacher development in the UK, published in 2015 criticised current arrangements for teacher professional development as ‘... haphazard and not inclusive’ (Sutton Trust 2015, 11). In Spain there is relatively little research concerning teacher professional development in the last decade and those few published works on the issue offer a rather gloomy picture. Firstly, researchers previously involved in a project regarding the high level of school failure in secondary education in Spain, were struck by the fact that teachers assigned very little importance to professional development in their struggle to handle this challenge in their schools. In a follow up research they found out that, similar to the results of TALIS, 80% of teachers participated in continuous training. Nevertheless, they make the following observations regarding the training: The contents correspond more to European guidelines or to regional political interests than to concrete problems and tends to be technical and individual (Escudero 2017). In the Spanish case there is an additional complexity in understanding teacher training dynamics, as every region (in total there are 17 Autonomous Communities) has its own teacher training policy, programmes and evaluation tools. As a result, there are differences among regions and it is not easy to gather consistent data about all of them. Another research study which looked at how teachers evaluate continuous teacher training in Spain, found that most teachers talk about a slight impact on their classroom activities. (González González and Cutanda López 2017)

In spite of such deep-seated problems with resourcing and political challenges, there remains a strong underlining belief in the field which suggests that effective teacher collaboration and teacher-led professional development offers a possible way forward. For example, Philippa Cordingly in her extensive work on teacher professional development in the UK has been arguing for this since the early 2000s (Cordingly et al. 2003). In 2007, *Teachers Matter: Connecting Lives, Work and Effectiveness*, was published to present findings from a large research project initiated by the then UK Department for Education and Science. The VITAE project, ‘Variations in Teachers’ Work, Lives and their Effects on Pupils’, amongst many other things, sought to fundamentally relocate teachers, ‘... right back into the centre of the equation and in this act of moral re-centring hopes to reinvigorate an educational enterprise which at the moment seems to be too often unfocused and unfulfilling for the teaching force ...’ (Day et al. 2007, xiii)

In the midst of this contested and challenging context for teacher professional development, the idea of ‘Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) or networked PLCs, as advocated by such researchers as Stoll, Vescio, Jackson and Temperley have been heralded as a potential new model. Not dissimilar to the ideas that lay at the ideological core of the old teachers’ centre model, PLCs seek to locate teachers at the heart of their

own collaborative professional learning and development. The model advocates that groups of teachers should be enabled to come together to share their practice and experience. Vescio et al's 2008 study suggested that these PLCs need to be underpinned by four core qualities: successful collaboration; a focus on student learning; continuous teacher learning; and a commitment to valuing teacher authority. (Vescio, Ross, and Adams 2008). Stoll's 2006 study also suggested that PLCs show great promise for 'capacity building and for sustainable improvement'. (Stoll et al. 2006) In comparison with the old teachers' centre model which sought to bring together teachers across a local community and not just from within one school – the PLCs described in these recent studies do not appear to be community based, just focussed on one school context. The Sutton Trust's 2015 report, makes a case for more community-based approaches to professional learning communities – with boundaries being broken down between and across schools and phases – though it concluded that without a change in political will and a commitment to appropriate and sustained funding the fractured picture of teacher professional development would persist. (Sutton Trust 2015)

We have illustrated in this paper that the full promise and potential of teachers' centres as a model of teacher-led, community based organic autonomous teacher professional development was never fully realised – either in England and Wales where they were first introduced or in other international contexts such as Spain. Indeed, the full expression of their ideal might have been very far removed from reality in many cases – though not entirely, particularly in their early days. The teachers' centre model had strengths and weaknesses that would need to be considered in any possible future reimagining of their role in current teacher professional development. Arguably, the teachers' centres were highly responsive to local initiatives but were not set up as vehicles for large-scale national educational reform. The model as it emerged could only ever produce piecemeal reform and this was one of its weaknesses as well as its strengths. Moreover, though the values that were built into and represented in teachers' centres were clear and very much advocated the importance of teacher-led professional development, any empirical measure of their effectiveness is much harder to determine, as suggested by their contemporary critics. In seeking to distil the essence of the teachers' centre model, we suggest that there is scope for considering which aspects of teacher-led and community-based professional development that they embodied, might speak to the current moment – particularly when ideas of teacher-led professional development are gaining greater prominence against what is widely perceived as a flawed system.

More historical/comparative research on the impact and reach of the teachers' centre model – its rise and fall in changing educational climates, is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the past, present and future potential of some of its core principles and contribution. We have begun this work in this exploratory paper but finish by posing two very important questions which we consider are critical to understanding the historical legacy of teacher professional development and the 'failure' of the teachers' centre model – and to future possible developments which seek to put the teacher firmly at the heart of professional learning. We suggest that these questions are as relevant now in the context of unresolved debates about the locus of control for teacher professional development and possible solutions in alternative models such as PLCs as when the centres were initially conceived in the 1960s. The first is whether there a genuine political will or desire on the part of governments to vest responsibility and ownership for

continuing professional learning to the teaching profession itself? We know that the global history of teacher education has been riven with unresolved questions about the control of the profession and the key role of nation states in shaping the development of teacher education. (Robinson 2017). The rhetoric of teacher autonomy and teacher-regulated professional learning is attractive, particularly when it is set against a centralised ‘top down’ reality – but will it ever be able to be fully realised? Secondly, and possibly even more controversial, concerns the willingness, desire and ability of the teaching profession to take on this mantle of autonomy for itself. This question challenges fundamental notions of teacher professionalism and identity beyond the scope of this paper, but nevertheless important to consider in this broader context of the past, present and future legacy of continued teacher professional learning.

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