Teachers as Mighty Stakeholders? (Dis)empowering Moments during Advancement of 'Inclusion' Policies in Education [1]

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to describe factors which empower or disempower teachers to take an active role in shaping and implementing educational policies on the example of policy guidelines on inclusion in education. The paper is based on qualitative research conducted through in-depth interviews with different stakeholders in education. In the first part of the article, I will elaborate on theoretical discussions concerning the concept of empowerment and the role of teachers in educational politics (including their role in drafting and implementation of policies). It will be argued that the most suitable definition of empowerment stems from Freire's *conscientização*. Moreover, the text will also argue that the main factors which empower or disempower teachers to take an active role in shaping and implementing policy guidelines on inclusion in education are the following: team leadership, team cohesion, common values, school reputation, trust (internal and external) among different stakeholders, the role of parents, fear of *white flight* (segregation) and clarity (or lack thereof) regarding the role of teachers. Teachers and schools very often perceive each other as competitors, and their unclear duties and responsibilities lead to limited transparency in educational policy and therefore limited access of teachers to decision-making. All those factors undermine teachers' empowerment and limit their ability to take an active part in the decision-making process.

Keywords: agenda, stakeholders, empowerment, educational (inclusion) policies

"We, teachers, have never been asked or consulted about anything." Two similar comments from highly qualified educators in the Czech Republic (one of them a principal, both with over 20 years of experience) captured

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my interest during my research on stakeholders' empowerment in education in the context of developing policy guidelines on inclusive education in the Czech Republic with a special focus on the anti-discrimination policy concerning Romany pupils.

When I set out to study educational agenda-setting in the Czech Republic after 2013, my original aim was to search for strategies for teachers and other stakeholders in education that would support inclusion and prevent discrimination, especially of Romany students (D. H. and Others v. Czech Republic; European Court of Human Rights, 2007; Varvařovský, 2012; MŠMT, 2014). I was searching for a link between inclusion and empowerment, which I perceived from the point of view of critical and anti-bias education[2]. But with the emerging legal change in inclusive education policy, I wanted to know what is actually happening and if the process is leading to the declared goals. Increasingly, I focused on the process of (inclusion) policy implementation with the following questions: What is the role of teachers and directors in drafting and implementation of educational policies? How inclusive is the process of inclusion policy in the Czech Republic? To what extent do the actors feel in charge of influencing this process and policy?

Thus, I became interested in the actual agenda of teachers and other stakeholders and their position towards possible changes coming with the *School Law Amendment* (*Sněmovní tisk č. 288*, 2013). The trigger for this research focus shift was a key interview with a director of an elementary school in a medium-sized Czech town:

> Director: And I am irritated, you know why? Always when something happens in society, somebody is thinking it over for two days and the third day they declare: "You know who's going to fix it? They're gonna teach them about it at school!" [...] and we teachers are so[...]; all other professions stay together and oppose, but we bow. We would never have the idea that, you know – we are not going to do this anymore. It is not a part of that what we teach the children in history, geography, and maths; these results are expected and measured [...] so what should the

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[2]   Anti-bias education is an approach founded by Louise Derman-Sparks, which started as a reaction on shortcomings of multicultural education in preschools. "Anti-bias is an active/ activist approach to challenging prejudice, stereotyping, bias and the 'isms'. In a society where institutional structures create and maintain sexism, racism and handicappism (able-ism), it is not enough to be non-biased (and it is also highly unlikely), nor is it sufficient to be an observer. It is necessary for each individual to actively intervene, to challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviour that perpetuate oppression." (Derman-Sparks, 1989, p. 7)

teachers do first? This is what irritates me.

Researcher: […] So if you could influence the policy, to tell what you (teachers) won't do anymore, what would it be?

D: We are not going to make up for the problems of society. If I should sum it up in one sentence, they should not demand more from us, these teachers do as much as they can […]

R: And who is going to tell them?

D: Not us, because we are never asked about anything. (Director of the 2nd elementary school)

As this dialogue suggests, the key question to be tackled here is to define the primary goals of educational policies and the role of teachers and directors in their design and implementation. On the one hand, the director and her colleagues have done a lot of work in integrating pupils with different needs and in preventing student failure thanks to a program developed by the school, which is exactly the goal of inclusive education. On the other hand, she hesitates to define the boundaries of the school's role and is worried by the pressure that is put on outcomes.

I was intrigued by the difference between stakeholders who do and do not feel entitled to decide about educational policies. Is it personal or structural influence that leads the director to wait to be asked and only after that to speak about her own position or are there any hidden factors? If teachers and directors are role-models for pupils, what supports them in becoming empowered and developing their "critical awareness of their role as subject of transformation?" (Freire, 1970, p. 108)

In order to describe, how do teachers and directors[3] perceive their own role, capacity and entitlement to change the conditions of their work in order to fulfill their agenda, I will analytically study the goals they themselves set and their interpretation of inclusive education. Most importantly, I will assess how they define the boundaries of their own roles, actions and influence on educational policies. In order to do this, I will relate to the concept of empowerment.

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[3]   Directors in the Czech Republic often teach pupils as well, that's why I choose the category "teacher" as an umbrella term for teachers and directors. I distinguish between teachers and directors, when it is important to stress the role and power of the specific position in decision-making process.

1 Role of teachers, educational (inclusion) policy and empowerment

A growing number of authors have addressed missing concepts and missing leadership in educational policy and the problem of constant change of Ministry of Education representatives (17 in 24 years) in the Czech Republic, but the role and the interests of particular stakeholders are not often investigated (Straková, Veselý, & Matějů, 2010; Veselý, 2013). Veselý reminds us that influence and power of different actors is crucial for politics. If we change the legislation or ministry documents it does not necessarily bring any significant change in practice, because different actors choose different interpretations and strategies in policy implementation to follow their own goals. Policy implementation by specific stakeholders is therefore just as important as the political concepts and legal form of documents. Veselý also shares an interesting comment on political disputes which are presented as expert disputes, but in reality, they "mirror deep conflicts between actors, who have different interests and perspectives" (Veselý, 2013, p. 282). For that, he provides an example of repealing special schools and inclusive education, which is also the example I focus on in the article.

1.1 Goals of inclusive education

The legal basis for the latest development of inclusion policy advancement is the *School Law Amendment*, which took effect in September 2016, but was discussed no later than 2013.[4] Inclusive education, as the Czech Ministry of Education defines it, is "equal access to education for all pupils in the Czech Republic" and "needs to be seen as a developing concept, where the topics of diversity and democracy gain even greater importance." (MŠMT, 2016). Unfortunately, this is not a very helpful definition. The term "inclusion policy" stands for many often contradictory conceptions and definitions, which are implemented without a detailed analysis of needs and conditions in practice (Lechta, 2010, p. 27–28).

The most cited definition comes from the *Salamanca Statement* and UNESCO, which highlights the need for quality education for all and "being proactive

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[4]   The *School Law Amendment* was presented in the Parliament on 2nd September 2014 and after several rounds of comments and changes, the amendment was passed in January 2015 and was signed by the President in April 2015. I have been working on my research since the spring of 2013 and my interviews with teachers took place before and after the authorization. The whole process of the Amendment's adoption is documented on https://www.psp.cz/sqw/historie.sqw?o=7&t=288.

in identifying the barriers and obstacles learners encounter in attempting to access opportunities for quality education, as well as in removing those barriers and obstacles that lead to exclusion" (UNESCO, 2016). These documents are formed around the principle of inclusion and the need to work towards "schools for all", i.e. institutions which include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning, and respond to individual needs (*Salamanca Statement*, 1994, p. 3). But even in the *Salamanca Statement*, there are several contradictions. There is a tension between the terms "special" and "inclusive" education and between responding to individual needs and educating in a more effective way.

> Confusion surrounding the nature and aspiration of inclusive education is ubiquitous. For many, inclusive education is a kind of default vocabulary for special education or, more specifically, for the education of that part of the school population that has come to be known as students with Special Education Needs (SEN). (Slee, 2011, p. 177)

Slee describes that many different approaches are hidden behind this term all over the world.

> Inclusive education, as some researchers and activists claim, should concentrate on issues pursuant to disability and education. Others disagree, suggesting that inclusive education provides a necessary platform for collaboration across a range of constituencies that are marginalized by, or excluded from education. In this configuration, we invite discussion of the diverse and potentially harming impacts of schooling on a range of identity groups […]. (Slee, 2011, p. 178)

There is a specifically Czech issue tied to Slee's last point and that is the role played by Roma discrimination and the diagnosis of "lightly mentally disabled person" in the policy development and implementation. The main change in the *School Law Amendment* is the introduction of supportive measures in education, which should allow and support inclusive education. In addition to that, a part of the *Framework Educational Programme for Pupils with Mild Mental Disabilities* is hereby cancelled.

This brings up a question relevant not only in the Czech context: who is inclusion policy for? Who shall profit from it? Pupils with special needs or everybody? This particular question is very divisive because of the fear that inclusion diminishes the focus on "normal" pupils, who don't have "any problem". The most widespread fear is that the "normal" pupils will be

slowed down in their development. Similar questions and doubts occurred during the process of negotiation and adoption of the *School Law Amendment* and several positions and discussion points of actors evolved (ASPCR, 2010, 2015; EduIn, 2014; Fremlová, 2014; Jiřička, 2014; Mrštík, 2014; Oláh, 2014; Štech, 2015; UPS, 2015). In addition to that, there was also the question of competence – who is the true expert entitled to take part in the discussion about educational policy development and the Amendment? This debate is led by actors who are involved with inclusion policy, such as practical school teachers and NGO workers.

My interpretation is that issues of recognition of one's merits and the boundaries of the role of professionals are often presented as a question of money and expertise. Instead of clearly formulating the actual needs and expectations of stakeholders, the debates on educational policies remain vague. In fact, "educational politics is rather a 'battle' over influence, power and opinion enforcement, all of which is concerned by what needs to be done" (Veselý, 2013, p. 281). In the analysis of stakeholders, I therefore try to recognize the goals and agendas of different stakeholders and their own view on what influence they have on policy change and implementation. In order to achieve this, I use the concept of empowerment.

1.2   Roles of teachers and directors

Roles of teachers and directors are defined by the *School law* (*Školský zákon*, 2017). Teachers and directors are pedagogical workers, realizing (special) pedagogical work and upbringing, which follows the goals of national educational program, framework educational program and school educational program. The goals of education are still very general, that means, there is a large space for interpretation within the law. These interpretations are realized by the director (§ 164; named by the school founder), who is responsible for ensuring the conditions for quality education, pedagogical workers and educational inspection. Most of the interpretations deal with the qualification needed for teachers and directors, but there is still a considerable space for individual interpretation of educational goals. These then need to respect the newest knowledge in each subject as well as in psychology and pedagogy (§ 4), all of which is very difficult. Therefore, one can get the impression that school has to "deal with all problems of the society". However, there is still the possibility to choose the most important of the goals.

The need to find space and time to define the goals and the boundaries of this profession is even more important in times of *exhausted society* (Keupp, 2010). The main obstacle here is the neoliberal demand of flexibility, which blurs the role of boundaries, and so stakeholders do not stop to maintain the boundaries of their role and race into exhaustion and professional burn-out.

In education, the situation is similar and many changes come quickly. "A lot of attention is given to creation of documents, but as soon as a document is created, no one is concerned with its implementation" (Veselý, 2013, p. 293).

Annette Mulkau describes a situation of transformation within education and social work in former East Germany, in which changes follow one another very quickly and over time, society, which stood on firm hierarchy, starts to dissolve. In the earlier days, there was authority defining values on the top of the hierarchy, but in a democratic society, there are competing authorities, who often act in contradictory ways. This creates uncertainty, confusion and increases complexity (Mulkau, 2014, p. 36–42). In this case, stakeholders need a *collective buffer* as an ability to define one's own position in relation to various requirements coming quickly from the outside. This would mean empowerment as a counter force to postmodern pressure on flexibility, as an "attitude, as standing still, finding peace and position, from where another movement can start" (Mulkau, 2014, p. 34).

These findings are consistent with that of Moree, who describes a shift of the role of school in society in the last 30 years. Teachers she studied reported that nowadays parents expect education and upbringing from school, which was not the case before 1989. Before 1989, parents had more time to spend with children. Today, parents pay much more attention to results and marks because they want the children to be competitive in the society, and moral and social skills are not perceived that important (Moree, 2013, p. 141–142).

If the stakeholders, in our case the teachers, do not succeed in defining their own goals

> [...] stakeholders start to be irritated with each other and start to question the competences of one another in a state of quick political changes. Often, different groups are formed. One of them usually wants to change something, the other wants to rather preserve something and instead of creating a common discourse, a small conflict in relationships and mutual degradation appears. (Mulkau, 2014, p. 39)

This corresponds exactly with the situation I was able to observe, and what I will analyze. Instead of creating a common discourse, where the different stakeholders can clarify the boundaries of the roles and articulate common needs as policy proposals, the various actors often degrade each other and lack respect and acknowledgment.

1.3   Empowerment and critical education

In my research, I work with the definition of empowerment which is very close to Freire's *conscientização*, i.e. gaining and realizing the capacity to fulfil one's own needs. *Conscientização* refers to "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 17). It is an inner process which might be supported from the outside – through reflection, redefining one's role or through discovering sources of power, or gaining access to those resources.

Empowerment may be individual or group emancipation. "Empowerment is thus more than simply opening up access to decision-making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as capable of and entitled to occupy that decision-making space" (Rowlands, 1996, p. 87). Therefore, "empowerment must involve undoing negative social constructs, so that the people affected by it come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and have an influence" (Rowlands, 1996, p. 88). It is thus a process of building this capacity connected to critical reflection on the political situation and structural circumstances. The term empowerment is commonly used to indicate both a process (of empowering groups or individuals) and an outcome (a person or group is empowered) (Alsop & Heinson, 2005, p. 5).

In education *conscientização* supports overcoming the *banking concept* of education. Freire describes the *banking concept* of education as depositing information without creativity, transformation or any re-invention. He therefore promotes problem-posing education, critical and liberating dialogue and reflexive participation (of the oppressed) (Freire, 1970, p. 53). Illich describes the hidden plan of education as summoning children for 40 hours a week in groups of 30 in institutions under authority of licensed teachers so that they consume knowledge that "learning about the world is more valuable than learning through the world" (Illich, 2001, p. 95). In

overcoming the *banking concept*, educators should play a role of partners rather than teachers in order to enable students to become active subjects.

Archibald and Wilson warn that even though Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was a big inspiration for "investigating the manifold intersections of power and education" they find that "the concept's ubiquity is troubling, largely because power has often ironically been omitted from discussions about empowerment" (Archibald & Wilson, 2011, p. 22). That is why it is important to consider the roles of stakeholders and to indicate the power they could have and the power they use.

Yet, in educational policy, the participation of teachers and their ability to address problems in educational structures and transform them seems to be limited, as in the case described by the director cited above. This could either mean that the teachers are content with the school structure and their needs are satisfied, or that there is some other kind of dynamic in the institution (which might be somehow connected to the trap of the *banking concept* or the hidden plan of education) which prevents teachers from trying to change the structures. My intention is therefore to find some connection between the concept of empowerment and teachers' engagement in educational policy.

I will focus on empowerment factors of teachers and directors with regards to their role in shaping and implementing educational policies through the example of policy guidelines on inclusion in education. To identify empowerment moments in the text, I worked with indicators described by Rubin and Rubin (2012, p. 216–217) – beside the explicit description of success stories connected to the declared goals, it is also the way in which interviewees describe their action and use verbs indicating (in)activity, success or fail, situation where they can(not)/ shall (not) achieve something.

2   Methodology

In the qualitative research based on in-depth interviews and a narrative approach to interviewing (Kohler Riessman, 1993; Hermanowicz, 2002; Gee, 2014), I try to indicate how the interviewees describe their own role – if they describe their role as active, or if they see themselves rather as somebody who passively takes part in a process set by others.

As for the choice of methodology, I relate to the problem structuring[5] or delimitation (in public policy) (Veselý, 2007). As the "case" is not clear – the agenda of "inclusion policy" for each stakeholder differs – I decided to focus on the problem of delimitation in educational policy (Veselý, 2009). As for investigating the problem, I chose the Stakeholder Analysis (Schmeer, 2000; Varvarsovszky & Brugha, 2000; Reed et al., 2009), which offers deep insight into different interpretations of the problem, as Straková and Veselý (2010, p. 406) propose: "We need to try to get beyond general statements and reveal the true interests and values of key stakeholders". In our case, this means teachers' role in shaping educational policy. Schmeer suggests that Stakeholder Analysis as a tool might help to consider different interests in implementing policies and furthermore, it might be a participative process which supports the creation of consensus (Schmeer, 2000, p. 4).

I have interviewed 27 different actors for my stakeholder analysis, so far. The actors represent a variety of stakeholders from two towns with socially excluded areas (teachers from primary and practical primary schools, directors, parents, social and NGO workers tutoring children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds). I choose two cities with comparable development, industrial history, similar rates of unemployment and where there are socially excluded localities, segregated schools and special schools. In addition to that, I also made an interview in one school in Prague and with randomly chosen parents as a control sample. I spoke to 5 teachers, 5 directors or vice directors from elementary and practical schools, 1 school psychologist, 1 employee of a pedagogical–psychological consultancy, 6 NGO workers who work with children in socially excluded areas and provide them educational support, 4 parents (2 from minority, 2 from majority), and 5 others experts.

The core topics of the interviews were the goals of the interviewee's work and how are these fulfilled, how the interviewees define inclusion, what their opinion on ongoing political change is and how the interviewees see their role and the role of other stakeholders with regard to fulfilling their professional goals.

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[5]   Through problem structuring as "an analytical process respecting subjectivity, multi-dimensionality and vagueness of policy issues [...], one analyzes competing definitions by different actors, different aspects and dimensions of the issue and tries to impose order on ill-derived unstructured mess and to elicit its boundaries. The outcome of the problem structuring can be the classification of different dimensions of the problem or interrelations between different clusters of the problem." (Veselý, 2007, p. 12)

3   Factors influencing (dis)empowerment of teachers

In this analysis, I will elaborate on factors which might indicate a different path in teachers' behaviour and whether they are influenced rather by empowering or disempowering factors and attitudes in shaping educational policies.

The first factors are the goals that teachers and directors set for their work with pupils and how do they succeed in fulfilling them. This includes the way they relate to the goals of inclusion policies; i.e. what inclusion means in the classroom, and what skills, supportive measures and finances are needed. It also includes the skills the teachers need, not only when interacting with children, but also in communication with parents of children with no special needs.

This is followed by role limits in interaction of teachers and parents and the phenomenon of *white flight*, which has a significant influence on school reputation and teachers' behaviour. This is linked to perceived respect and professional self-confidence. However, different stakeholders have different strategies for how to react upon tensions from the outside world and unclear demands on school outcomes.

The third factor is the sphere of political influence. Here, I refer to teachers' own perception of their influence on educational policy. I will attempt to show how the actual needs of schools were assessed during the process of implementation of inclusion policy and to what extent do the teachers and directors feel invited to participate and influence the political will.

Finally, in the fourth unit, I will describe the empowering factors, conditions and proposals, such as team cohesion and collective action that the stakeholders emphasized.

3.1   Goals in education and inclusion

Teachers cannot solve all society's problems, as we learned in the introductory citation, but it is interesting to see what their opinion on what they can solve is. Let us have a closer look at the question of where school employees view the boundaries of their role. The borderline is derived from the goals set by each stakeholder.

The goals of the teachers and directors, which they declare to fulfil, could be divided into two parts: First, learning goals and goals connected to qualification and second, soft skills and social competences goals. The goals presented differ based on the type of school – the practical school I visited wants the pupils to finish elementary education, gain elementary school skills and life skills and, if possible, to continue to apprenticeship and start working. The skills named by the interviewees, were primarily – reading, writing and arithmetic. As for life skills, they mentioned being self-sufficient, creating a safe and supportive environment and providing the type of upbringing children lack at home.

In the elementary schools I visited, the goals mentioned are more specific and more connected to soft skills and school atmosphere. Beside basic skills – to read and write – the teachers and the director mentioned learning skills and motivation, (offline or face-to-face) communication and social skills. These soft and learning skills were not mentioned at the practical school at all. While defining "soft" goals connected to attitudes and values, only a few interviewees were specific:

> We agreed on interpersonal communication, and that we want to promote traditional values, so that the pupils become decent persons, that they know that failure is also healthy, and that success comes after hard work and effort. That you must respect others and deal with them in a polite way, even if they don't agree with your opinions. We also focus a bit on ecology and healthy lifestyle. But the most important is being a "decent person" with heart. (Director of the 4th elementary school)

In this example, the connection between effort, success and failure indicates a clearer picture of what is important in this school and that not only the outcomes, but also the processes are important to the teachers.

In some of those defined goals, I identified some unclear boundaries between teachers and family. When it comes to creating safe and supportive environment, when the families do not support children in education, in some schools they see their role as a substitute for the family, i.e. teaching children hygiene etc. What is needed in this case is a very fine cooperation between school, the department of child welfare and even the police.

Some teachers perceive that the parents have a veto right concerning their children's education. One director of a practical school describes a situation

in which parents prevented their children from continuing education to apprenticeship, in order to collect money for social benefits. Another case at an elementary school mentions a refusal of special education support for children with special education needs, in order to not deviate from the standard.

The next big topic in my interview was how do teachers define inclusion policy and how do they perceive the approaching change connected to the *School Law Amendment*. Czech educational policy is not very stable and lacks continuity. Changes often come quickly and without an intensive discussion with teachers. Inclusion might seem as a prescribed concept and not as a concept which would reflect the needs of society.

If we have a look at the definition of inclusion, we can follow similar contradiction, which is described by Slee and his question on who is inclusion for.

> […] I have been working in education for a long time and I remember the first time they started to talk about it. It wasn't about Roma children, that wasn't an issue, because there weren't so many of them, there were no problems and no particular schools for them. But then it started with pupils with specific learning disorders, and it boomed 25 years ago, so we started to create programs and so on. But then we realized – oh, there are also very gifted pupils. Another boom, even quicker than the one with integration, and we came back to socially weak and disadvantaged pupils. An I'm curious– where is the rest?
> R: What do you mean by the rest?
> D: I mean the usual education mainstream. All politicians, all parties, ministry, all articles are concerned only about those children, but who is concerned with the rest, with the usual ones? Sometimes I feel that they stay on the side-lines. And I read articles from parents who say that they understand that the teachers need to give special attention to those children, but what about their children, when they are just given work and the teacher focuses on the other ones? Are the politicians and the ministry concerned with that? So this is my final question to the ministry, what shall happen with these children? (Director of the 2nd elementary school)

This quotation shows several important issues. Inclusion is not presented as an approach which will increase the quality of education for everybody. (Roma discrimination in education before 1989 is not acknowledged as a problem.) Moreover, the benefits of inclusive education are not even clear to experts and teachers. It is similar doubt which Slee defines in his critical analysis and which is linked to "inclusive" education in general.

In contradiction to this statement, this director works in quite an empowering and inclusive way. She stated that in their school, they don't wait for any instructions from the ministry to come, they act as soon as they see any need for action. And they can recognize those needs thanks to thirty three years of work experience in education. They view their influence in working with pupils and supporting colleagues. They see it as their goal to prevent academic failure so that all students can continue with their own class.

> Actually, we could help our colleagues, because we created our own inner procedure on how to work. And I must say, we've been working in this way since September and we haven't had any student graded with insufficient. It is true that the teachers put their maximum effort in this, so we created supportive measures for students at the risk of failing. (Director of the 2nd elementary school)

There are considerable differences concerning what should an inclusive policy support. On one hand, it should be individual development of students, safety and friendly atmosphere. On the other hand, there is the pressure on results, testing and school ranking according to their results and rates of students admitted to high school. The question of perceived pressure on results (knowledge of children) is very interesting. On one hand, the second director primarily talks about good atmosphere and responding to the needs of pupils and staff in order to ensure individualization, but when it comes to policy, the discussion switches to this perceived pressure on results, which is somehow present.

The vice director of the 2nd practical school describes the paradox of inclusion policy in a similar way. According to her, the teachers at elementary schools are limited by what needs to be accomplished (but she did not specify what that is). Therefore, greater demands are put on weaker pupils in elementary school, which is contradictory to individualization. According to her, individualization is not a true priority in Czech mainstream education and it is the same in special and practical education as well. For her, inclusion would mean fusion, but supportive measures introduced by the Law Amendment do not bring about fusion, they mean integration again. In her eyes, the term inclusion is chosen incorrectly. For her, inclusion means that everybody is content, with no regards to the actual needs.

Stakeholders use different strategies to cope with this contradiction. Some decide to follow the individualization and creating safe and supportive

environment, and some try to keep up with the pressure on results, which happens through the school's ranking and is connected to the reputation shared by parents etc. Both ways also require different demands from stakeholders, but there is the question of how clearly are these articulated and promoted. This ability of needs articulation and the strategy of goal setting and sticking with them then influences their role in educational policy.

3.2 Limits of the role – teachers, parents and the white flight

Talking about a policy change towards inclusive education while not assessing the needs of specific teachers and schools is one of the biggest problems mentioned, because the situation in every school is different. "I think my personal influence (on inclusion policy) is none. Only that I can work inclusively, I have no problem with teaching in groups." (special pedagogue, 1st practical and elementary school). Here, teachers see their role in achieving the goals of working with the pupils, but when it comes to influencing policy, conditions, or to being active in shaping the policies, their self-confidence decreases.

But as the director of the 2nd school declared, the teachers are not being consulted and they will not formulate their position and needs actively. Similarly, the director of the 3rd school states that in order to prepare and promote the *School Law Amendment*, experts were invited, but in the end, they consulted teachers rarely and only upset and frightened everyone. She then states that she is unsure about the base of the politicians' conviction that the ones "down there" are going to master inclusion.

The feeling of disempowerment in questions of policy development appeared four times. Four pedagogues had the impression that they must cope with the policies imposed on them, without being asked if it is acceptable for them. How can the educational system fulfill its goals to support learners in developing their potential, when the structure perpetuates this kind of thinking? Observing educational politics, can we talk about Freire's *banking concept* which "leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power?" (Freire, 1970, p. 58) Is that an indication that the structure is too hierarchical and non-participative? Or are the teachers content with the status quo, and complaints without actions indicate rather their passive resistance to change?

> I think we cannot influence it (educational policy), I think we have a rather tiny possibility to influence it. In fact, we serve – and I will speak openly – to the school inspection and Ministry of Education, they have us to make a kind of sample of students' knowledge. Some kind of testing, and I feel sorry about it. Because I think it is not ideal. You cannot compare the knowledge of students and their results to the teachers' efforts and to the level of the school. (Director of the 2nd elementary school)

For example, Veselý says that the framework conditions of educational policy development are not prepared for a true dialogue. As an example, he refers to conferences concerning education in the Czech Republic where "meetings of different stakeholder (politicians, clerks, teachers, director and inspectors…) in one event happen only rarely. Often, it is only about 'persuading the persuaded', i.e. sharing similar ideas and experiences materializing through permanent parallel discussions at separate events" (Veselý, 2013, p. 294). Veselý suggests that people from practice need to come up with concrete, well-argued proposals on how exactly methodical support should look (Veselý, 2013, p. 294).

Nevertheless, it seems that besides this kind of structural gap in communication, there might also be a problem with teachers' inability to formulate their own needs. As the vice director of the 2nd practical school mentioned, the big problem of education is that teachers tend to obey blindly (for instance the European Union legislation), and never say that they are going to do things their way, because that is the way the system functions the best. Furthermore, she highlights that it is more important to act according to the needs of children, not according to the law or Strasbourg.[6] Finally, she states that teachers need to know how to stand up for their own decisions and to defend them against the system, not to change everything because of someone from the outside. This seem as a truly empowering statement, but the goals it wishes to promote are hard to identify.

School reputation and white flight

Beside the goal fragmentation of inclusive education, some teachers and directors also expressed worries tied to the behavior of parents whose children are "the usual ones". One director also talks about the fear of the so called *white flight*.

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[6] The Vice Director from the special and practical school refers to the Appeal of ECHR D.H. and others v. Czech Republic, which is used as one of the core arguments to promote inclusive education and putting political pressure on that.

White flight is a phenomenon which is described as a "threat to school integration – the fleeing of white children from public schools into private schools. In particular, to the extent that this white flight is a response to the presence of minority school children, it may pose an especially important and vexing problem for the nation's public schools" (Fairlie & Resch, 2000, p. 4). This phenomenon has been described since school desegregation in the United States after Brown v. Board of education, a verdict which declared a racially separated school in the U.S. unconstitutional, which has served as a precedent for D.H. and others v. Czech Republic. D.H. and others was the

> […] centerpiece of the Roma right movement's litigation strategy. […] The complaint argued that the Czech practices produced de facto segregation on the basis of race, with Roma students largely assigned to special schools for students with disabilities while the regular primary schools were used by the majority of the population. (Minow, 2010, p. 178)

The court supported the argument of indirect discrimination and since then, this verdict is one of the main legal reasoning for Roma desegregation policies, and of course for the *School Law Amendment*. In other words, white flight is a reaction of the majority on desegregation legislation, which, in our case, is also partly relevant for inclusive education.

The dynamics of white flight was mentioned also by the director of the 2nd elementary school while talking about the unspoken school and class limits on the number of Roma children. There are cases of "white" parents coming and asking the director openly about how many Roma children there would be in the class. As a consequence of the fear of losing the well-off families in exchange for the pupils from socially disadvantaged areas, the director has set some unspoken limits. This is a perfect example of a paradoxical situation in which the director acts in a discriminatory way in order to ensure at least partly inclusive education, because of the fear of becoming a segregated school.

As we can see, this fear is not only an obstacle in the minds of teachers. On the top of that, white flight is also not only an issue of racial bias, but also of able-ism. A teacher from the same school described her experience with a class that included up to 20 children, eight of them with an individual study plan. In the middle of the school year, only 13 of the 20 pupils stayed, because the parents of "normal" pupils changed schools, providing the explanation

that their children were not given enough attention from the teacher who was preoccupied with the pupils with special needs. Both the teachers and the director addressed this fear and this bad experience independently. "In the end, there were more pupils with special needs than the 'normal' ones and so the pupils from rather 'decent' families became a minority and were taken away immediately." This was then even followed up by a rumor that the school is meant for socially weaker groups. The school experienced the consequences of this incident immediately during the enrollment phase, when parents were asking about the class composition and especially about the number of Roma pupils in the classroom (Teachers, 2nd elementary school). Even the interviewed parents mention some limits in number of pupils with special needs, which sometimes mean Roma pupils from socially disadvantaged areas. One mother mentions the limit of 30 % pupils with special need in one class, even one Romany mother expresses her worries about segregated classes. Experience of this kind also has an influence on school reputation.

In addition to the white flight experience and reputation of social schools (or maybe because of that) two directors also described that in their towns, school reputation and some kind of traditional school rating exists, regardless of the actual development in recent years.

> Parents rate the elementary schools and they would number them from the best to the worst. It is unchangeable […] You got the label and you stick with that, even if you try hard, you stick with that for 80 years here. The only hope for change is through hard every day work. (Director of the 2nd elementary school)

The 4th elementary school, which is situated in another city, has a similar reputation. "We are seen as a school which works with children from socially weak families and where we work intensively with children with special needs […] and I must say it is this way." (Director, 4th school). In this city, the schools compete in the unofficial ranking and the schools were also numbered from 1 to 10. So, this school is seen as a school with very mixed pupils and for socially disadvantaged students.

However, there are different ways the directors deal with this given reputation. The director from the 4th school says her solution is not to be ashamed of it, but to say that the strong point of the school is exactly being able to work with children with different needs. "And I fight for it as a lion," she says. The school has created an advantage by not allowing social differences to dominate the

atmosphere of the school. In the second school, where the director strives for advancing in the ranking, the situation is different. In order to improve the school's image, the director mentions many events the school needs to organize and participate in (for example with the topic of healthcare or food). The school also takes part in many knowledge contests. This is very interesting because the pressure on outcomes and some improvements seem to be supported by the director, even though she was the one who was upset with "the school inspection and Ministry of Education for making a kind of sample of students' knowledge." The difference the way both directors cope with their equal reputation is obvious. In both schools, I saw that they really try to implement inclusive education, but one has made an advantage of it and the other one has not.

Fear and disrespect

The burden of long lasting reputation might also be linked to the professional confidence of teachers and directors. During the interviews, the respondents sometimes talked about their fear of doing something wrong. Mostly it was not keeping up with the administrative demands, fear for children's health, but also fear of what NGOs could cause by reporting the school to the inspection for not being inclusive enough. This fear includes the perceived obligation to act inclusively at any cost, even if they think this policy is not the best for the child (according to their experience).

There is also a kind of fear of losing teachers' professionalism, which is in contradiction to the fear of interpreting the law using their best knowledge and experience. This is something that the vice director of the 2nd practical school talked about when she mentioned the need to know how to stand behind her own decisions and defend them against the system.

The feeling of not being respected as a professional is widespread among teachers. However, disrespect towards other professionals by the teachers is also present in the interviews. Often, the ones who lack respect of others do not respect others either.

Freire highlights trust as a crucial component of humanization and liberation. "They talk about the people, but they don't trust them; and trusting people is the indispensable precondition for a revolutionary change. A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in people, which engages him in the struggle, than by thousand actions in their favor without that

trust." (Freire, 1970, p. 42). In this case, trust might be absent from political level, because teachers are not asked to negotiate about the condition for their work. However, I also detected missing trust from teachers towards other stakeholders, especially NGO workers and other experts, but also among themselves.

The situation of mistrusting one's capacity can be linked to the situation of the practical schools with long-term underestimation of students and teachers and overall depreciation of this type of school in the society. In this situation, respect is missing even within the same profession, which makes it even harder for everyone to build a good reputation of the profession.

> Terrible. I took part in supervision, because I have participated in a project for protecting vulnerable children in the 1st grade. I took part in the supervision with 4 other teachers; I introduced myself, where I come from. One teacher said: "From that school?" with disrespect, even towards us, teachers. They have their elementary schools. They think we don't do anything and hang around, that we are something less. They think we, the teachers, are there because we don't know much. And Mr. psychologist there was like, he was only starring at the other teacher and then he told me: "You must be a strong person". And I said: "Maybe, after all this." Well, they despise us too. In the end, we are in the same boat as our children. (Teacher of the 1st practical school)

The feeling of disrespect is widespread and teachers often highlight it in various other research: "According to the interviewees, the role of teachers is weakened (some of them even stated that when they started to teach, they experienced it as decline of social position). Despite this, they see themselves as guardians of values." (Moree, 2013, p. 143). In her research, other stakeholders from the municipality see it as the role of teachers to reclaim the prestige of the profession, so that they act pro-actively and present themselves (Moree, 2013, p. 144).

Researching empowerment and the potential to fulfill one's agenda is also linked to self-respect. According to Rowlands, self-respect is also a part of empowerment (1996, p. 87). This indeed happens as well.

Fear could be used as an indicator of areas where needs are not met, or rather where they are put in danger. Recognizing needs is at the core of empowerment. Thus, the question is: How can we help to overcome fear? Fear is often linked to disrespect and missing trust among different stakeholders. During the interviews, I noticed that many teachers perceive themselves

as isolated actors without the respect and trust of others. However, I could observe that the teachers degrade other stakeholders and also each other. Instead, it would be more helpful to create a common discourse, where they can clear their role boundaries and articulate common needs as policy proposals.

3.3   Empowering articulation of needs and limits

Although the teachers and directors complained about not being heard, they succeeded in formulating their needs in a detailed way. Here are some requirements defined by teachers and directors during the research, and some challenges which need to be taken into account:

- In "normal" elementary school, teachers with special education training are needed.

- Teachers' education and training needs to reflect inclusion and individualization.

- Extra work related to preparation for individual programs and supportive measures should be extra paid.

- There should be a change in financing through school subvention per pupil numbers (normative) in favor of financing per class. In this way, smaller classes and a more individual approach can be ensured. Classes should have max. 24 students.

- Administration connected to teaching and individualization should be limited and the school inspection (ČŠI) should not consider proper administration as the main criterion for inspection controls and school assessment.

- Limits of children with special needs or individual study plans in one class should be considered. The question of how many SEN pupils can be managed in the classroom is often discussed by experts and teachers. (In the research, the number of 7 children with SEN was far too much), but with no outcomes.

- Supporting individual assessment of what specific schools and teachers need to do to work inclusively needs to be present.

- Individualization should be declared as a true priority of education policy. So far, the knowledge comparison is still more important.

- Marking hinders inclusions, therefore, there should be an option not to mark.

- Motivation in the work as burnout prevention should be enforced.

As we can see, teachers and directors from the research very clearly formulate what needs to be done. Straková, Veselý and Matějů describe that there is a high level of hypocrisy and buck passing when talking about decreasing inequality in education, formulated as "it is not possible", "it is politically impossible", "we agree with that in general, but…" There is a big discrepancy between "the 'ideal culture' where stakeholders declare what should happen and between the 'real culture' of what stakeholders really think and how they act" (Matějů et al., 2010, p. 422). So let's have a look at what obstacles the teachers describe in our case.

It is a known psychological trap that people usually remember failure rather than success. Empowerment is about trying to remember situations which worked out. In my research, several success stories of the schools were described, which are very much linked to inclusive education policies. One of the teachers described:

> If one has it as a goal, that education at some point switches to self-education and life-long learning of the children or pupils, then I think the teachers can do anything. You are the screenwriter and the director, you don't have to call it inclusion. So I think that teachers are absolutely free there.

I already mentioned that teachers and directors often succeed in fulfilling their goals in interaction in the classroom and often thank for the support from colleagues. The interviewees mentioned some other points which usually help to fulfill their agenda:

- managerial support (from director or school founder);

- more money for more work – reward for extra effort;

- team cohesion – openness, same or similar professional goal of the team and mutual support; this is also linked to the factor of trust;

- transparent information;

- space for participation and initiative (bottom-up measures).

Teachers and directors who highlighted communication and soft skills often described their participative (directors and teachers) goal setting at school and stated that good conditions and unity of team, attitudes and common goals are necessary to achieve the prior goals, otherwise pupils will recognize this discrepancy.

A situation in which teachers stated that they can make a change were the examples of presenting the quality of school with a high number of Roma pupils to majority mothers, so that they decide to inscribe their children at the school. This was the example of the 1st practical and elementary school. It was a case of standing up for good and inclusive work that they can do just as well, for openness of the teacher and preparation to let the mother visit the classroom and to see how they work with children. It is also a sign that "white flight" must not be irreversible. What helped in this situation was dialogue, openness and self-confidence. Even in a school which is labeled as a "Roma-school", this teacher did not catch herself up in the mind trap that it is too hard to cope with school reputation, and so she tried.

Another successful situation was already mentioned by staff of the 2nd elementary school describing their program for preventing school failure, which led to immediate problem solving. For this, the director emphasized that the crucial thing was team cooperation. The idea behind this special program came from the team and many colleagues collaborated on it. A teacher from the same school supports the argument that team unity can make a difference, because it is not enough when 4 teachers from one school try alone. Another important aspect is also to have an impact across school levels so that the approach of the teachers does not change dramatically after 5th grade. Through these examples, it seems that change is definitely possible.

One important aspect of empowerment is that empowerment has more dimensions than the personal one, and that is the dimension of close relationships and team, which is particularly important in education. Collective empowerment occurs when "individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact than each could have had alone. This includes involvement in political structures, but might also cover collective action based on cooperation rather than competition." (Rowlands, 1996, p. 87). At the end of our meeting, one of the interviewees told me that she would recommend her younger colleagues to unite, to create some kind of union in order to assert better conditions for themselves. Maybe this is the way, which

seems to be obvious, but it has not been implemented so far. It represents exactly the need of creating a collective buffer, space and time to define goals and limits in an exhausted society as described by Keupp and Mulkau. There have already been several actions towards a pay rise in the Czech Republic, but there is no union which would try to define the other goals of the profession.

4   Conclusion

I argued that the important factors for (dis)empowerment are the (lack of) clarity of goals and roles of stakeholders. All other factors – fears, school reputation, lack of trust and respect – are only derived from this unclear vision of the actors' objectives and the scope of their allowed freehand in implementation.

These factors outline stakeholders' practical and political attitudes. One dimension is the practical one – goal setting and implementation in educational work. Here, stakeholders' interpretations of inclusion policy, implementation and conditions required were presented.

The second dimension is the political one. It shows how the actual needs of schools were assessed during the process of implementation of inclusion policy and to what extent do the teachers and directors feel invited to participate and influence the political will. Finally, I have described the empowering moments, conditions and proposals, such as team cohesion and collective action.

By comparing the goals of different schools, I established that the border between state and family education is not clearly set. This concerns upbringing and educational goals and also the question of class composition. Building on that, there seem to be several unclear borderlines between the focus on results and focus on relationships and social skills and between education and upbringing, which makes the mission of educational institutions unclear. Moreover, this makes it even harder for stakeholder to find their position in the structure and to articulate their needs clearly. These findings are consistent with that of Moree (2013) and Mulkau (2014). It might also be the pressure of the *banking concept* of education, which prefers knowledge transfer over liberation and humanization.

Two different approaches of two of the interviewed directors show different strategies of how to cope with school reputation and demonstrate the difference between the pressure on outcomes and the pressure on inclusion and individualization of schools. One director (2nd school) has not decided on her goal priorities and seemed more frustrated with the possibility to influence politics. The other director (4th school) recognizes her power to influence the school's policies such as calm and healthy atmosphere, assuring conditions for inclusion and cooperation with the school's founder, but she has decided not to spare energy by engaging in educational politics.

> To participate in political debates, or represent some teachers' association, no. Personally […] it is not because I'm lazy, or I don't want to. But in my age, I know that there is a limited amount of time I have, and I am already working overtime and I also want to live like a human. I'm saying it selfishly, I want to be a mother and a partner. I want to have time for my hobbies, because without that, one is tired and overwhelmed. And having time for oneself, one can create positive values, and if I am content in my life that means not only to fulfill myself at work. It might be selfish but it is this way. (Director of the 4th elementary school)

This decision concerning priorities might be the key to the attitude of empowerment. Teachers and directors who clearly know where their role in the system is, what their goals and limits are, feel and act more empowered. I have found that knowing this, it is easier to deal with fear, disrespect and others issues I described. Standing still but not aside, teachers can be role models for pupils in order to step out of the *banking concept* of education and to live in the exhausted society quietly and contentedly.

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Učitelé jako (bez)mocní aktéři? Momenty, které (ne)posilují v během zavádění „inkluzivní" politiky ve vzdělávání

Abstrakt: Cílem článku je popsat faktory, které (ne)posilují učitele, aby zaujali aktivní roli ve vytváření a implementaci vzdělávacích politik na příkladu novely školského zákona a zaváděním tzv. inkluzivního vzdělávání. Článek vychází z kvalitativní analýzy hloubkových rozhovorů s různými aktéry ve vzdělávání. První část článku se věnuje teoretické diskuzi o vymezení pojmu empowerment a roli učitelů ve vzdělávací politice (včetně jejich role při navrhování a implementaci politik). Pojetí empowermentu, se kterým budu pracovat, chci navázat na Freireho *conscientização*. V článku chci ukázat, že hlavní faktory, které (ne)posilují učitele v jejich vlivu na realizaci inkluzivní vzdělávací politiky, jsou: vedení, jednotnost týmu, společné hodnoty, pověst školy, důvěra (vůči sobě a vůči druhým aktérům), role rodičů, obava z fenoménu *white flight* a segregace školy, ale také definice role učitele. Učitelé a školy sebe navzájem často považují za konkurenty a jejich nejasné povinnosti a zodpovědnosti vedou k omezené transparentnosti vzdělávací politiky a přístupu učitelů k rozhodovacím procesům. Všechny tyto faktory oslabují empowerment učitelů a jejich schopnost aktivně se podílet na rozhodovacích procesech.

Klíčová slova: agenda, aktéři, empowerment, vzdělávací (inkluzivní) politika