Abstract

Forms of ‘empowerment’ in the frame of the anti-discrimination agenda in Education

‘Empowerment’ – or a state of emancipation, in which an individual is able to achieve their goals, fulfill their needs, and reach their potential despite the structural limitations – should be the result of education. Forms of empowerment include: the capacity of involved actors to make changes, and their ability to influence conditions and structures, in which they move. In my dissertation, I inspect the empowerment found in actors in Education, families, the public sector, schools and other governmental organizations.

I conducted my research in the context of the integration of the so-called ‘inclusive education’ and the associated changes in the system of the Czech elementary education, in the period of spring 2013 until the end of 2017. The method of qualitative research I chose was the stakeholder analysis and in-depth interviews.

I analyzed the gathered data from the point of view of the actors’ goals and agendas, their experience with discrimination, their involvement in the inclusive education, their cooperation with each other, and last but not least, from the point of view of the power(lessness) and empowerment of the actors themselves describe it.

I then link the concept of empowerment with the concept of discrimination prevention in education, as I’ve observed a clear parallel between empowerment and anti-discrimination practices. Reflecting upon discrimination itself and a given actor’s own power is crucial here. In this regard, the expectations from families that are not reflected upon play a role, too, which in part sustain social inequality.

From the analysis comes to light not only recommendations for a better, more effective inclusive education, but more importantly, the factors, which influence the possibilities of empowerment among (groups of) actors. The most pivotal of which are shown to be the ability to clearly define goals and the correlating ability to realize one’s own value(s). What’s more, empowerment aids in the realization of one’s own role, influence and limits, and (helps) with their upkeep. The ability to reflect upon and relate one’s goals and values, and to become personally involved are often critical in a successful collaboration. They are also factors, which strengthen trust and deepen bonds.

The research has shown that the main obstacle in creating and maintaining a first-class inclusive education is mostly the lack of exploration and acknowledgement of discrimination, which is present not only among families and government officials, but among some non-governmental, non-profit organizations, as well. Other significant obstacles are also uncertain goals and priorities found not only in individual actors, but also in Education, and the inefficiency of involved actors in communicating their goals and priorities with each other.