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TEACHERS' DISEMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

A critical realist view

Areti Stylianou and Michalinos Zembylas

Introduction

Although there is widespread support in education for inclusion at a philosophical level, there are concerns that the policy of inclusion is difficult to implement (Rouse, 2009). Some of these concerns have to do with teachers not being sufficiently well prepared and supported to work in inclusive ways (e.g. European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010); other concerns blame teachers for their negative attitudes, beliefs, and values in relation to inclusive education (e.g. Corbett, 2002; Forlin, 2012; UNESCO, 2009b). Changing teachers' attitudes and their teaching practices have been prioritized by worldwide organizations (UNESCO, 2009b) by offering professional development and training (UNESCO, 2009a), new certifications and regulations (Connell, 2009), and the diffusion of 'best practices' (Klerides, 2014) about inclusive education.

In this chapter, we put forward a different explanation about teachers' negative attitudes, beliefs, and values towards inclusive education and teachers' 'failure' to teach inclusively. We argue that the futility teachers feel about inclusive classrooms comes because they are *disempowered* by the impossible task claimed by inclusivity itself. This chapter suggests that a *critical realist* framework (Bhaskar, 1998, 2008, 2016) – in contrast to empiricist or constructivist perspectives underpinning mainstream explanations – can help explain the futility that teachers feel about inclusive classroom as *reality*. Furthermore, we suggest that using a critical realist framework to explore inclusive education highlights important aspects of teachers' disempowerment that may not be always visible. Simply put, critical realism (Archer, Collier, & Porpora, 2004) argues for the necessity of ontology in our attempt to understand and say something about 'the things themselves' in the world rather than about our beliefs and experiences of those things. Thus, drawing on critical realism, we approach the phenomenon of teachers' disempowerment

as real, which suggests that teachers' barriers are real, complex, and most importantly out of the sphere of their control, and therefore, teachers cannot make justice for all injustices found in society (Stylianou, 2016).

The main premise of this chapter is that not all challenges of inclusive classrooms can be resolved (Evans & Lunt, 2002) by teachers themselves. Teachers cannot close the gaps or address the particular tensions which pre-exist students' coming to school (Stylianou, 2016), which as Allan (2008) points out are 'likely to entrench the sense of failure' (p. 10) among teachers. By placing emphasis on reasons and possibilities rooted in reality (Brown, 2009) rather than mainly on teachers (OECD, 2009) and their attitudes or competences, critical realism 'ameliorates the tendency towards "blame" because there are so many factors to be considered' (Price, 2014, p. 73). In addition, approaching the ontology of teachers' disempowerment from a critical realist viewpoint offers two important insights in contrast to research that blames teachers for their lack of knowledge and skills or negative attitudes, beliefs, and values: first, this approach allows for a new 'inclusive thinking' (Thomas, 2013) for explaining the phenomenon of teachers' disempowerment, casting doubt on ideas and actions deriving from dominant philosophical ideas; and, second, this approach affects educational decisions, gearing them towards being more productive, consistent, and holistic (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006).

The chapter is divided into four parts. The first part briefly reviews work showing that teachers are often blamed for having negative attitudes towards inclusive education and for not knowing how to teach inclusively; we also revisit work that demonstrates teachers' disempowerment in inclusive education to show that 'the problem' at hand is much more complex than the 'solution' offered (i.e. fixing teachers' knowledge, competences, or attitudes). The second part delves into the dominant epistemological assumptions regarding teachers' disempowerment and inclusive education, addressing in particular the empiricist or constructivist perspectives underpinning explanations of blaming teachers for not knowing how to teach inclusively or for not having the 'right' attitudes, beliefs, and values. The next part introduces the critical realist framework and how it provides a different way of conceptualizing the futility that teachers feel about inclusive classrooms, because it allows us to pay attention to teacher disempowerment as a real phenomenon. The last part discusses some conceptual implications, if we choose to use a critical realist framework to explore teachers' disempowerment in inclusive education.

The futility that teachers feel about inclusive education: the reality of teachers' disempowerment

We begin by providing a brief review of work showing that teachers are often blamed for having negative attitudes towards inclusive education and for not knowing how to teach inclusively. In light of the absence of a

substantial body of research showing teachers' disempowerment in inclusive education, we introduce this notion by drawing on research showing factors that contribute to teachers being disempowered.

Even though inclusive education is set as a priority by many organizations (e.g. United Nations, 2015) and educational systems worldwide (Rouse, 2009), it is a slippery and confusing concept (Boyle & Topping, 2012) 'that means different things to different people' (Dyson & Millward, 1999, p. 153). There is an obscurity as to who is to be included and where, since a number of differences and stakeholders are embraced under the inclusive umbrella. Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006) developed a typology of six categories for approaching inclusion: as a concern with students with disabilities and others categorized as 'having special educational needs'; as a response to disciplinary exclusion; in relation to all groups being vulnerable to exclusion; as developing the school for all; as 'education for all'; and as a principled approach to education and society. In this chapter, we focus on the idea of inclusive education as a continuing process of reforming the mainstream school against discrimination produced by any form of diversity to offer quality education to all, taking into account the abilities and needs of all students and communities (UNESCO, 2008). Diversity is defined in its broad sense (Norwich, 2012), including issues of gender, language, ability or disability, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, race, pregnancy, culture, health, socioeconomic background, and geographic location (UNESCO, 2009b). In the process of achieving inclusion and quality education for all in the mainstream school, the teacher's role is considered crucial (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Teachers and their initial or continuing education are identified by UNESCO (2009b) as one of the four major areas of action for policymaking directed towards building inclusive educational systems (the other three being attitudinal change, inclusive curricula, and resources), while the Incheon Declaration puts to the front the need for educators to be empowered, well trained, motivated, and qualified in order to achieve inclusion and quality for all (World Education Forum, 2015).

Furthermore, the emphasis on the role of teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and values towards inclusive education (Slee, 2011) is not surprising given that attitudes have been assumed to influence behaviours (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005; Olson & Stone, 2005), and from this perspective, negative attitudes are considered barriers to inclusion (e.g. Forlin, 2012; UNESCO, 2009b). Research refers to teachers' 'low understandings' (Forlin, Kawai, & Higuchi, 2015), 'negative attitudes' (Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2009), 'lack of understanding' (Bailey, Nomanbhoy, & Tubpun, 2015), 'problematic conceptualizations' (Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2009), and 'unfavourable attitudes' (Malinen, Savolainen, & Xu, 2012). These attitudes and conceptualizations result inter alia in favouring segregated settings for educating some groups of children (e.g. children with special needs [Symeonidou, 2009] or children with challenging behaviour [Roffey, 2010]), transmitting oppressive values and beliefs in teaching (e.g. segregation

[Symeonidou, 2009] and assimilation [Zembylas, 2010]), or holding practical considerations in applying inclusive education (e.g. differentiated teaching [Symeonidou, 2009]). Researchers reach a consensus regarding the necessity of teachers' attitudinal change through initial or further professional development and training (e.g. UNESCO, 2009a; European Agency, 2015) so as to transcend the particular barrier and achieve the full inclusion potential (Forlin, 2010). As UNESCO maintains, 'empowering all of these individuals, equipping them with new confidence and skills in the process of introducing inclusion as a guiding principle, will have implications for teachers' attitudes and performance' (2009b, p. 20). Through education, trainers are expected, among other tasks, to sensitize teachers in democratic values and equal participation of all children (Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2009), nurture teachers to understand various forms of exclusions (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013), and help teachers challenge their deeply rooted oppressive and dominant beliefs towards inclusive education – for example, towards disability (Symeonidou, 2009) or towards children who engage in challenging behaviour (Greenstein, 2013).

Another main line of research focuses on teachers' incapacity to teach in the inclusive classroom which is related to lack of knowledge, skills, and experience (e.g. Forlin et al., 2015; Symeonidou, 2009). The assumption is that fostering teachers with self-capacities, competences, and autonomy (Prawat, 1991) will enable them 'to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems' (Short, Greer, & Melvin, 1994, p. 38), making 'diversity work in the classroom and in line with reformed curricula' (UNESCO, 2009b, p. 17). Among others, suggestions on teacher education include the need for promoting 'reflexive learning' for teachers (Kaikkonen, 2010), fostering self-efficacy in collaborative skills of teachers with other teachers and professionals regarding the planning of teaching (Malinen et al., 2012), and strengthening collaboration with families to uncover students' learning barriers (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013) so that teachers can help students be included and better educated (Greenstein, 2013). The recent European Agency (2015) document 'Empowering teachers to promote inclusive education: A literature review' reinforces the foregoing points, namely:

1 The education of teachers is the most important factor in building inclusive communities (see also European Agency, 2011).
2 Teachers' values, attitudes, and beliefs are crucial in creating initial teacher education and continuing professional development programmes (see also European Agency, 2012).
3 Teachers' educators' skills and knowledge need to be enhanced.
4 Their skills need to be enhanced to support teachers' knowledge, experience, and development for teaching in inclusive settings.

Even though the empowerment of teachers is a common recommendation for inclusive education, the notion of teachers' disempowerment is

rarely mentioned or seriously theorized in this context (see for instance European Agency, 2015). Generally speaking, there are different understandings concerning the notion of teachers' disempowerment. For example, a widespread view of disempowerment is that teachers' 'classroom decision-making power' (Giroux, 2010) 'is removed away to specialists such as curriculum experts, making teachers educational technicians' (ibid.: 39) who follow instructions from above. Disempowerment, in this instance, concerns centralized control actions, too much accountability, and top-down decisions (Ingersoll, 2003). In this chapter, we define 'disempowerment' as the erosion of teachers' power, through certain events, actions, and behaviours (Overton, 2009), particularly in relation to addressing the diversities of all students in the classroom and offering quality education. Teachers' power is perceived as their potential or capacity to do something which in the case of disempowerment cannot be realized (Bhaskar, 2008). We argue, then, that revisiting the challenges, tensions, and contradictions that teachers face in their everyday lives for putting inclusive education in practice suggests that the futility that they feel about inclusive education not only is due to negative attitudes and their incapacity to teach but may also be an expression of a real phenomenon. We come to discuss these tensions as forms of disempowerment, because they create dead ends in teachers' professional lives, what Allan (2008) calls – drawing on Derrida – aporias, a Greek word meaning 'no way'. These aporias or dead ends concern not only the sphere of everyday teaching practice but also the realm of teacher education (Allan, 2008) and are expressed through the language of 'not only . . . but also' (Fairclough, 2000).

For example, a tension in teaching might concern the teacher's attempts to address not only the needs of disadvantaged students in the classroom (e.g. economic, linguistic, and cultural) but also the calls to raise standards and achieve outstanding performance for all (Meshulam & Apple, 2014; Blackmore, 2006). Another contradiction might refer to the call for teachers to not only include students with behavioural problems in the mainstream classroom but also provide safety for other students (Allan, 2008). With regard to teacher education, examples of contradictions include the task of trainers to not only enhance teachers' abilities to act autonomously but also collaborate with other professionals or comply not only with policy requirements regarding high standards of excellence but also with the legal requirements of avoiding discrimination. These 'double duties' create confusion, frustration, uncertainty, unpredictability, guilt, and exhaustion in teachers (Allan, 2008). In the following section, we attempt to revisit and deconstruct the epistemological assumptions that underpin and sustain research findings pertaining to teachers' feelings of disempowerment in inclusive education, to illustrate the reductionist understanding that they secrete.

Epistemological assumptions regarding teachers' disempowerment in inclusive education: between empiricism and constructivism

Generally speaking, the epistemological approaches of research – including research on teacher (dis)empowerment in inclusive education – fall into one of two camps (see Brown, 2009). According to Brown, the first camp includes approaches embodying principles of constructivism – e.g. post-structuralism, postmodernism, and interpretivism – and advocates that reality is the construction of human minds, and the second camp embodies the central principles of empiricism – e.g. objectivism and behaviourism – and emphasizes the role of experience and evidence. What does this mean regarding teachers' disempowerment? At the root of the distinction between the two camps is the fact that teachers' disempowerment from a constructivist view resides in different, albeit multiple (correct), agents' constructions of reality, whereas from an empiricist view, there is an objective reality which exists outside the agents' body. Adhering to one or the other perspective or even combining the two entails reductionist understandings of teachers' disempowerment, especially as those are 'translated' to policies aiming at empowering teachers.

Adhering to the constructivist approach, where teachers are perceived to have different understandings of the same phenomenon, there is research concerned with exploring teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education (Slee, 2011). The main problem with this approach is that it eschews the ontological dimension of teachers' disempowerment, by arguing that it does not exist before the investigation by the researcher. In particular, teachers' challenges are not considered 'real'; rather, they are collapsed to a matter of perceptions by different agents, such as the teachers or the researchers themselves (Corbett, 2002; Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006; Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007). From this perspective, there is what might be called the *deontologization* of teachers' disempowerment, namely the lack of recognizing and investigating disaffection as something real (see Despain, 2012). Yet as McDonald (2008) aptly points out, 'the attempts to change things would be doomed to failure given the uncertainty regarding the very existence of the things that need to be changed' (p. 31).

Abiding to the empiricist view, on the other hand, researchers tend to investigate the production of universal laws from constant conjunctions of atomistic events (Popper, 1959). From this perspective, teachers' understandings (cause A) have an impact on their behaviour (cause B), affecting inclusive education practice (cause C). For example, the OECD's (2005) report on teachers points out that teacher quality is the only determinant for students' outcomes; teacher training and especially the diffusion of 'best practices' are, therefore, suggested as the primary 'solution' to unsatisfactory students' outcomes – over other factors such as the socioeconomic

background of students, because these factors are claimed to be out of the sphere of policy control. Revolving around the belief in universal values and that the future can be predicted, the search for and diffusion of 'best practice' has become one of the main goals of organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, OECD, the Council of Europe, and others (Klerides, 2014).

Research outcomes and policy reports often seem to combine the reductionisms secreted by constructivist (perceptions) and empiricist (universal laws) approaches. For example, teachers' perceptions, particularly teachers' negative attitudes (constructivism), are considered to be a barrier to inclusive education and therefore they need to be changed (UNESCO, 2009b) through a particular process (empiricism). This takes place mainly through trainings focusing on changing teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education (UNESCO, 2009b) or through new certifications and regulations for producing effective teachers (Connell, 2009). However, by combining empiricist and constructivist ideas without clarifying their ontological and epistemological groundings can readily result in blaming and scapegoating teachers for any presumed failures of inclusive education. This takes place for the following reasons:

1 Teachers' agency is considered to be the most important, if not the only, determinant (OECD, 2005) in the process of inclusive change.
2 Teachers' challenges are not taken to be real, because there is a lack of vocabulary to describe them (Dall' Alba & Barnacle, 2007).
3 Other factors are left out of understanding the phenomenon, leading to decontextualized and mono-dimensional policy actions (Ball, 2010) that target teachers.

What is implicitly suggested is that should teachers fail, it is their fault, and they have no alibi, since they all had the same opportunities to start with (Koutselini, 2012): they received the support they needed (e.g. training).

In the following section, we draw on the 'holy trinity' of critical realism, in order to begin sketching an alternative, ontological conceptualization of teachers' disempowerment.

The 'holy trinity' of critical realism: a revindication of ontology

Critical realism is a philosophy which articulates a third position or a 'third way', both in relation to the philosophy of science generally or natural sciences in particular (Bhaskar, 2008). Against the empiricist/objectivist and constructivist/interpretivist positions can be placed Roy Bhaskar's framing of critical realism: the possibilities of knowledge are given in the ontology (Brown, 2009). The core ideas of critical realism are described in the 'holy trinity': *ontological realism*, *epistemological relativism*, and *judgemental*

rationality (Bhaskar, 2008; Hartwig, 2007). *Ontological realism* suggests that there is a natural/social reality (in ancient Greek, the word 'ov' means 'being'), which is real and intransitive. 'Intransitivity' means that the objects of knowledge exist independently of people's knowledge or conceptualizations of them. For example, teachers in inclusive education may be disempowered whether we know it or not. Critical realists retain ontological realism (i.e. a real word exists independently of our beliefs and understandings), a standpoint that may wrongly be perceived as a positivistic stance; however, they also accept *epistemological relativism*.

Epistemological relativism suggests that our understanding of the world pertains to our constructions of it. In other words, the beliefs, perceptions, and knowledge that we have of the world are undeniably socially constructed and geo-historically situated (Hartwig, 2007). What is accentuated from a critical realist perspective is that there are no 'multiple realities', but there are multiple true perspectives on reality. By drawing on the differentiation between the intransitive or ontological from the transitive or epistemological dimensions (and objects) of knowledge, critical realism foregrounds the idea that any beliefs or knowledge about the independently existing, intransitive objects of the world are built on existing knowledge. Thus, this being ≠ knowing suggests that natural-social reality cannot be reduced only to our constructions and discourses about it. Critical realism also argues that illusory or reductionist beliefs are part of reality in that they have causal effects (Maxwell, 2012). For instance, the belief that the solution to teachers' empowerment in inclusive education is teacher education has a causal effect in that it shifts the emphasis from examining other factors that contribute to exclusion (Ecclestone & Brunila, 2015).

The third element of the 'holy trinity' is *judgemental rationality*. What this element encapsulates, as its name suggests, is that one needs to decide (or make a judgement) about the validity and accuracy of an account over another grounded in a set of rational criteria. An example concerns the theory that teachers' disempowerment is rooted in reality (ontological realism) instead of only in teachers' minds (epistemological relativism). This argument first suggests that theoretical (and empirical) knowledge can be developed at any given time for kinds of events that have never been imagined; second, entities such as teachers' real challenges or constraints may exist without being known (i.e. ontological realism) and with the possibility of remaining unknown; and third, the two accounts of reality just mentioned can be judged against the ontology of the world that is based on a set of rational criteria (Bhaskar, 1998). Of course, even though some theorists put forward some of these criteria (Scott, 2010), making judgements in social sciences is not a straightforward process and it is yet to be resolved. All in all, as the name 'critical realism' suggests, there is a reality, which is socially and conceptually constructed, even though we can be critical about it (Zembylas, 2006).

Even though other theories, besides critical realism, attempted to resolve dualisms – e.g. critical theory and poststructuralism – critical realism's subtle but telling difference is the revindication of a new ontology (Bhaskar, 1998) – an idea which is crucial to offering an alternative to the understanding of teachers' disempowerment in inclusive education. Ontology is a necessity from a critical realist framework (as the word 'realist' suggests), such that one cannot do without it. This is advocated through a critique of the mistake which reduces the world to our knowledge of it, what is coined as the epistemic fallacy (Bhaskar, 2008). This takes place basically because of people's 'natural attitude' which sees reality in terms of a *known* reality. This suggests that we fail to disambiguate or differentiate the ontological (reality) from the epistemological (known). To put it in Archer's words, 'The epistemic fallacy involves the fallacious inference that because there is no epistemologically objective view of the world, there is no objective world ontologically' (Archer et al., 2004, p. 2).

There is, of course, a healthy dose of scepticism raised by researchers and theorists concerning critical realism and particularly the idea of the holy trinity. In particular, even though critical realism argues in favour of the fallibility of any theory (or research) and it moves beyond relative epistemology, avoiding the constraints of relativist epistemology (Maxwell, 2012), the way of deciding on the best possible theory or research between contrasting and competing theories, according to its advantages and distortions, is an issue yet to be resolved (Scott, 2010). Hammersley (2009) argues that even though critical realism goes beyond constructivist accounts that accept everything as true under the rubric of relativism, it fails to justify critical social research and critical sociology, because it does not provide a teleological justification of negative evaluations or judgements and the alternative actions taken for change. Some critical realists attempted to bring justice to these critiques by offering criteria (Scott, 2010) for deciding on the best possible theory or research (i.e. judgemental rationality), but social scientists did not put theory into practice concerning this issue.

In the next section, we will attempt to answer whether by foregrounding the ontological realism of the phenomenon of teachers' disempowerment as part of the 'holy trinity' may shed light on some reductionisms perpetuated in inclusive education thinking and bring some justice to the phenomenon of teachers' disempowerment.

Conceptual implications of a critical realist framework used to explore teachers' disempowerment in inclusive education

As already stated, each element of the holy trinity (i.e. ontological realism, epistemological relativism, and judgemental rationality) has a life of its own, but it is also part of each other, and all three elements constitute a compound

body (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006). Taking this into account, we can make the following claims in relation to teachers' disempowerment:

1 It is a real feature (ontological realism), so either we have knowledge about it or not.
2 It is the product of the minds of people (epistemological relativism), so each stakeholder constructs their reality about disempowerment.
3 Different realities can be judged against a set of rational criteria in order to decide which is the most appropriate one at a certain time.

Even though the three elements of the 'holy trinity' should be approached as inexorable, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality are not explicitly discussed in this chapter, because epistemological relativism has been the dominant way for conceptualizing the teacher's role in inclusive education (Slee, 2011), and judgemental rationality's complexity (Scott, 2010) would require a separate chapter to theorize about its implications. Furthermore, it should be clarified that even though we take the reasons for teachers' disempowerment to be real, it is not the focus of this chapter to present or analyse them as such (Stylianou & Scott, in press). Our focus here is on the element of ontological realism and its implications for exploring teachers' disempowerment in inclusive education.

First of all, the element of ontological realism enables us to foreground the ontological status of the notion of teachers' disempowerment. We remind the reader that the explicit exploration of teachers' disempowerment as such – particularly underpinned by critical realism – is absent from the literature in inclusive education. However, as shown earlier, there is research showing how teachers are generally disempowered by the impossible tasks claimed by demands such as inclusivity (Allan, 2008; Overton, 2009; Giroux, 2010). The idea of ontological realism or the foregrounding of ontology for the phenomenon of teachers' disempowerment is related to the recent ontological turn in social sciences in general (Vigh & Sausdal, 2014) and in education more specifically (Brown, 2009). The ontological turn is grounded in the assumption that 'people, perspectives, ideas and entities are not to be understood as merely culturally or socially differentiated from one another but also different-in-being' (Vigh & Sausdal, 2014, p. 50).

By approaching teachers' disempowerment as real, it is suggested that teachers' barriers are real, complex, and most importantly out of the sphere of teachers' control and that teachers cannot make justice for all injustices that are found in society (Stylianou, 2016). In other words, it is accepted that not all challenges of the inclusive school can be resolved by teachers themselves (Evans & Lunt, 2002). This perspective challenges reductionist understandings of the inclusive school as a closed system (see Brown, 2009) in which the teacher can resolve inequalities, bridge gaps, and offer a fair and just world to all through the ideal of the inclusive school. Furthermore,

by revisiting and deconstructing the notion of the disempowerment of teachers and by accepting that the challenges teachers face are real, dominant ways of thinking about inclusive education are expected to be questioned, because normalized perspectives about inclusive education are weighted against teachers' disempowerment as a real phenomenon. From this perspective, teachers as individuals are also expected to be re-empowered in a way that could respond differently to the political and ethical challenges and tensions that they are called to address, especially in the neoliberal era (Connell, 2013).

In addition, although teachers' attitudes are accepted as influential of their behaviours (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005; Olson &Stone, 2005) and hence their negative attitudes are viewed as barriers to inclusion (e.g. Corbett, 2002; Forlin, 2012; UNESCO, 2009b), the focus on ontology helps challenge the implicit idea that teachers' negative attitudes are merely a sign of unwillingness to change. According to Corbett (2002), 'For those who espouse a purist stance, resistance on practical grounds is a sign of unwillingness to change. This typical deadlock is hampering the process of inclusive education, which is considered valid, appropriate and nothing out of the ordinary' (p. 29). The focus on ontology emphasizes instead that teachers' negative attitudes might also be a sign of teachers' real difficulties.

These ideas help reconsider the implicit victimization or scapegoating of teachers derived by thinking that their role is the only or most important in inclusive education, as part of a closed rather than an open system that includes any presumed failures deriving from it as their blame. By placing emphasis on reasons and possibilities rooted in reality (Brown, 2009) rather than only on teachers (OECD, 2005, 2009, 2012) and their attitudes, critical realism 'ameliorates the tendency towards "blame" because there are so many factors to be considered' (Price, 2014, p. 73).

Furthermore, employing a critical realist framework and rethinking of teachers' disempowerment as real allow the creation of a new theoretical language for inclusion, which has a twofold effect, both for the inclusive field in general and for teachers in particular. As Allan (2008) claims,

> A key role for philosophy, if it is to be put to work on inclusion, is in relation to language and the challenge here is complex. It requires overcoming the complacency and lack of reflexivity through which inclusion has come to be understood as a catch all for everything and everyone.
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> (p. 57)

In particular, Allan (2008) argues that this task 'involves taking language out of its natural equilibrium where there is security with definitions and meanings' (p. 57). What we argue here is that by deconstructing the notion of disempowerment and by introducing a new theoretical vocabulary

(i.e. critical realism), we challenge the normalized conceptual roots of inclusive education – for example, the notion that inclusive education is an ideal that has only positive effects (Edmunds & Macmillan, 2010; Norwich, 2013; Ryan, 2006). This disruption takes place because it is accepted that not everything in relation to the inclusive school is positive. This paves the way to change the vicious circle of 'truth normalization' (Graham & Slee, 2007) which directs policies and practices towards an accepted and proper way of acting, especially as far as teachers are concerned, as the only accepted reality (Allan, 1996). Foregrounding ontology, however, helps to shift the emphasis from a particular account of reality as being the ultimate truth (positivism) and provides tools to reontologize the social and political factors contributing to teachers' disempowerment in inclusive education (see Norwich, 2013).

The new theoretical vocabulary introduced by critical realism is also expected to help teachers discuss their disempowerment at a personal level (Ainscow, 2005). This idea is relevant to Prawat's (1991) political empowerment agenda. Prawat (1991) draws particular attention to oppressed groups (e.g. women or ethnic minority) being 'silenced' such that they 'have trouble giving voice to their experience' (p. 743) because the existing 'rational' forms of speech (Bourdieu, 1991) devalue their experiences of disempowerment. It is expected, then, that approaching teachers' disempowerment from an ontological frame can help teachers as well as decision makers and teachers' trainers to uncover aporias (i.e. contradictory pleas) and confront the dilemmas that teachers face in inclusive education as real. To put it in Allan's (2008) own words, 'If these aporias were accepted as an inevitable element of teacher education for inclusion and if the pressure to choose between the double contradictory imperatives was resisted, there would be less confusion, frustration, guilt and exhaustion' (p. 118). Furthermore, Allan speaks about aporias in teacher education, suggesting that

> Exposing these aporias within teacher education, rather than being disruptive and negative, could prove to be an effective form of deterritorialization, by smoothing out some of the spaces where adjudication between imperatives has previously created chasms and impasses. The revelation of these aporias forces us to invent new ways of pursuing inclusion within teacher education which always involve at least two ways.
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> (Allan, 2008, p. 118)

This is very important, if one takes into consideration Apple's (2013) comment that the pleas of the neoliberal age, such as 'commodification, marketization, competition and cost-benefit analysis' (p. 6) and the tensions that they create to teachers' professional role and social identity (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Ball, 2003; Norwich, 2014; Norwich, 2013; Slee & Allan, 2001),

become more and more hidden. What is necessary for teachers is to be able to uncover these tensions and talk about them in critical ways. To put it in Connell's words (2013), 'educators need to understand neo-liberalism in terms of its effects on their work and on children's learning' (p. 99). From this perspective, teacher training should aim at learning to 'read the world' (Freire, 1970) rather than only 'what works' in inclusive education.

To conclude, in addressing the question of ontology in the phenomenon of teachers' disempowerment in the context of inclusive education, the critical realist framework allows us to do two important things: to foreground that the disempowerment of teachers and challenges that they face are rooted in reality and to disrupt dominant yet reductionist ways of thinking for teachers' roles in the context of inclusive education which may scapegoat and victimize teachers for any kind of challenges that are not possible to be addressed. Revisiting and foregrounding the ontology of teachers' disempowerment challenges the 'solution' offered: if teachers are called to 'fight', then things will necessarily be improved (Allan, 2014; Thomas, 2013). In addition, it paves the way for the creation of a new language (Allan, 2008) to discuss the challenges and the disempowerment of teachers from a different, realist angle. From this perspective, policymakers are challenged to offer more-holistic and less-reductionist ways of empowering teachers. Policy actions are expected not to be *a-theorized* (empiricist approach) or mono-dimensional, such as addressing only teachers' agency (constructivist approach).

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was twofold: first, to problematize and revisit the understanding of teachers' disempowerment in inclusive education, by drawing on 'the holy trinity' of critical realism; and, second, to discuss some conceptual implications for exploring teachers' disempowerment in inclusive education, by reiterating the ontology teachers' disempowerment. An analysis of the three elements of the holy trinity of critical realism provides an alternative to the empiricist and constructivist accounts in inclusive education, especially as those are manifested in claims made about 'good practices' in various reports of international organizations. The problem with these accounts is that neither of them theorizes and takes into consideration the possibilities that are rooted in reality (ontological realism), which may include real disempowering elements for teachers. However, by drawing on the revindication of ontology, one may argue that a critical realist framework can provide for a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon of teachers' disempowerment in the context of inclusive education, thus avoiding reductionist thinking and actions.

Researchers, policymakers, teachers' trainers, and teachers can use the idea of the holy trinity as a springboard to reconceptualize the teacher's role in the context of inclusive education. Teachers' agency from this perspective

does not constitute the only reason to be blamed for or acted on. Rather, the possibilities rooted in various life systems (e.g. family situation) which may hinder or limit teachers need also to be taken into consideration. Most importantly, this new way of thinking will allow for shifting the emphasis from the hidden or overt victimization of teachers for any presumed failures of inclusive education (Thomas, 2013), emphasizing the multitiered reality and the possibilities that this has on hindering or facilitating teachers to act. By providing a new language for the phenomenon as being real, teachers will be given 'voice' to critically analyse their problems and challenges as part of reality.

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