Teachers as Agents of Change for Inclusive Education
illustared by findings from post-Yugoslav countries

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Platform for Research on Inclusive Schooling (PRIS) Seminar
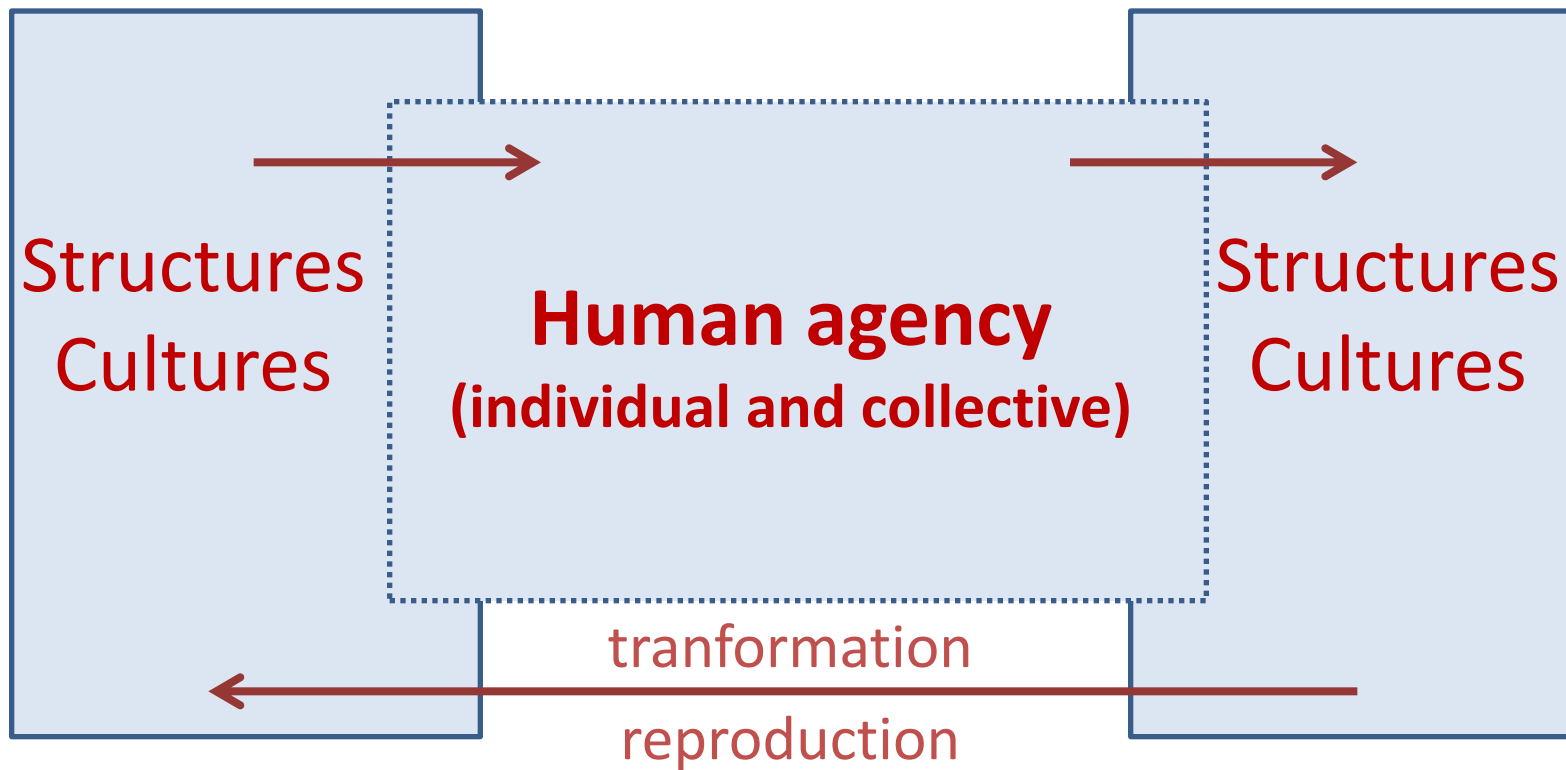University of Gothenburg, 17th October 2013

Background

International calls for teachers as 'agents of change' (Fullan, 1993)

Lack of empirical evidence:

- *What could count as evidence of teacher agency? Teacher agency for what?*

- *How could teachers be developed and supported as agents of change?*

Theoretical model of agency

Based on Giddens' (1984) structuration thoery

Archer (2000) relational theory of human agency

Biesta and Tedders (2007) ecological view of agency

Objectives

- Operationalise teacher agency (TA) for inclusive education

- Develop tools for empirical analysis of TA

- Study the conditions for transformative TA

- Inform teacher development and education

Teacher agency for what?

Teacher development for Inclusive Education (IE) - study for the European Training Foundation, mapping policy and practice 7 Western Balkan countries

Inclusive education – schools' attempt to respond to all learners by extending what is ordinarily available to improve the outcomes for all students (Ainscow, 2005; Florian, 2009).

Challenging systemic inequality, e.g. institutional features of schooling (Liston & Zeichner, 1990); exclusion and marginalisation of some learners, e.g. through ability 'streaming' and early 'tracking' (INCLUDE-ED project, 2009).

| Structures | **Teacher agency for** | Structures |
| Cultures | **inclusive education** | Cultures |
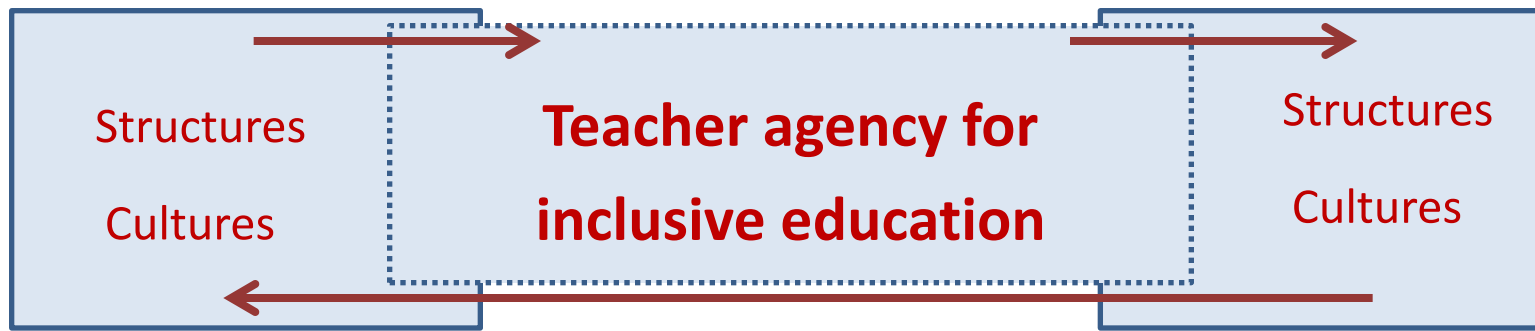
Analytical framework

Individual

• inclusive classroom practices, e.g. homogenous rather than 'ability' grouping (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; INCLUDE-ED Report, 2009)

• positive student-teacher relationships (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005)

• teachers' perceptions of their roles (Pantić & Wubbels, 2012)

School level

• engaging families and communities (INCLUDE-ED Report, 2009)

• initiating collaborations and conducting inquiry (Frost, 2006; 2012) e.g. to analyse and address dropout or underacheivment

Broader policy and social engagement

• engaging in professional and social networks with other agents, e.g. those seeking to contribute to social justice (Sachs, 2000).

post-Yugoslav context

- Shift from socialist 'homogeneity' to promotion and recognition of (group) rights
- Multifaceted diversity: ethnic, socioeconomic, social and family cultures, religious, gender….
- Post-conflict societies (Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo)
- Transition to market economy, democracy, European integration…

Teacher agency – human power to make a difference within given structures and cultures and to transform or reproduce them (Archer, 2000; Giddens, 1984):

• *a sense of purpose*

commitment to equality and inclusion, but

understanding inclusion as 'special needs' education

• *competence*

see inclusive education as requiring special skills, outside of their remit

limited experience of diversity (teaching the 'class')

• *scope of autonomy*

teaching seen as individualistic teacher-class activity rather than as a collaborative school-based activity

• *reflexivity*

teachers seen as 'implementers' of policies and curricula rather than critical system thinkers and co-developers of policies
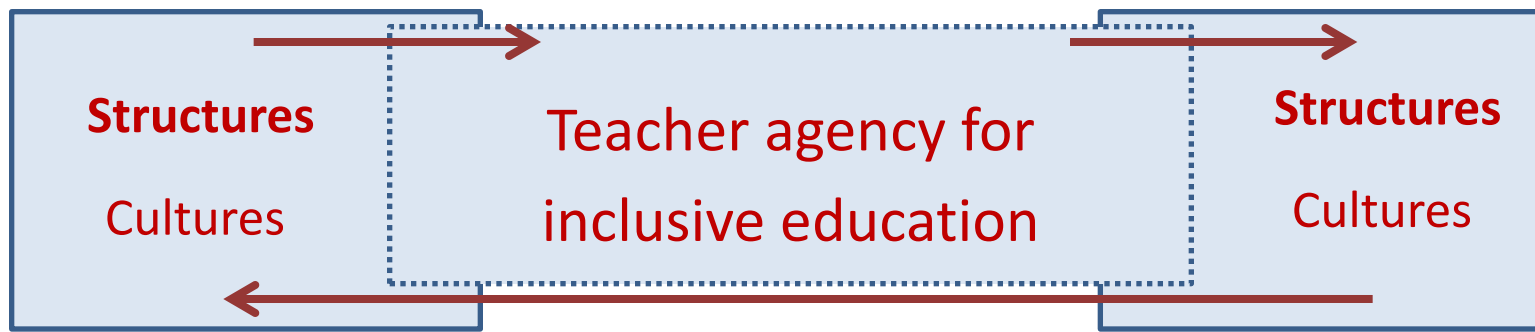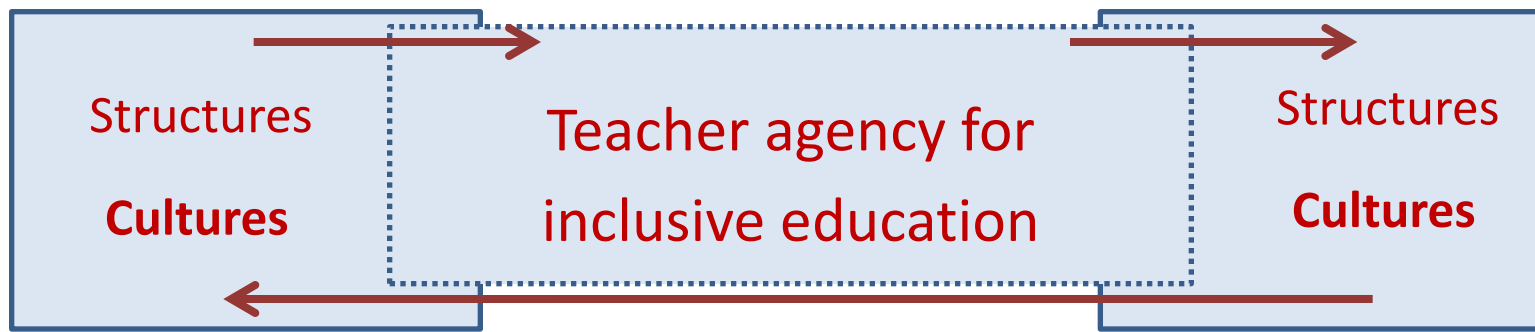
Structures - rules and resources implicated in the (re-)production of systems

Impeding inclusive practice
- segregation through special school systems and linguistic rights
- under-resourced, undervalued and outdated VET sector
- curricula laden with (pseudo-) facts taught by 'covering lessons', rigid assessment
- lack of time and opportunities for developing whole-school inclusion agendas
- unfavourable terms of employment and working conditions (low status, large classes, scarce resources)

Supporting inclusive practice
- national measures to reduce barriers to access for the disadvantaged
- opportunities for participation in decision-making: decentralised systems, but undeveloped capacities of local staff
- NGOs as partners, supportive local communities

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│   Structures │         │                   │              Structures  │
│                           Teacher agency for                         │
│   Cultures   │         │  inclusive education│              Cultures  │
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Cultures - ideational contexts, traditions, 'ways of being'

Impeding inclusive practice
• valuing academic excellence (or its appearance) and an 'average student'
• mutually unsupportive home-school relationships
• implementation lagging behind policies and legislation
• societal and institutional views of inclusion
• teacher education lagging behind the changes in schools

Supporting inclusive practice
• active leadership
• valuing equality
• staff working collaboratively
• inclusive education promoted in policies and development projects

Research avenues

- teachers' transformative practices at different levels (e.g. more individual than collective school-level teacher agency?)

- conditions supportive of teacher agency within the structures and cultures (e. g. explanatory power of personal vs. contextual variables?)

- teacher agency development over time (e.g. more reproduction than transformation? Experience of successful transformation nurturing further teacher agency?)

- implications for teacher education and development (e.g. helping teachers to think of themselves as agents of change might have an effect on their practices)

Implications for teacher education

Preparation of teachers to see themselves as active agents of change (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011) for inclusive education might involve:

•cultivation of *purpose* and commitment to the cause of fighting exclusion and educating all students

•expanding the scope of teachers' *competence* by bringing their practical, relational, tacit knowledge to the level of explicit professional capital

•helping teachers understand the full transformative potential of their collective and individual actions within the scope of their *autonomy* and considering the constraint of their structural and cultural environments

•promoting teachers' *critical reflection* – broader understanding and ability to analyse and change particular institutional arrangements and working conditions, especially those that might counteract their professional aims (Liston & Zeichner, 1990)

STRUCTURES (rules & resources) that impede teacher agency •lack of time for developing whole-school inclusion agendas •unfavourable terms of employment and working conditions	**TEACHER AGENCY** **Collective and Individual (Shared) sense of *purpose*** commitment to egalitarian practice **(Collective) *competence*** mitigating the external risks of exclusion/marginalisation **Scope of professional *autonomy*** working with colleagues and other agents, social services, policy makers **(Collective) *reflexivity*** what can be done given the constraints	**STRUCTURES** that support transformative teacher agency •opportunities for strategising whole school approaches •time for collaboration within working contracts
CULTURES that impede teacher agency for inclusive education •mutually unsupportive home-school relationships •well-behaving vs. 'problematic' students	**Transformative practices** Individual: relating to students and parents School level: whole school strategies for fighting exclusion/marginalisation Professional activism beyond school: advocating change in regulations and policies (e.g. through unions)	**CULTURES** that foster teacher agency for inclusive education •involving families in how to deal with students •shared responsibility for improving the outcomes of all students

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Thank you!

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Report ***Teachers for the Future: Teacher development for Inclusive Education in the Western Balkans*** avalilable at:

http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/%28RSS%29/A14937AC71D29F70C125788F0032EA08?OpenDocument&LAN=EN