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Review of doctoral dissertation

***Struggling for Educational Justice in Disabling Societies: A Multi-sited School-based  
Ethnography of Inclusive Policies and Practices in Poland, Austria, and Germany***

Written by Josefine Wagner

Under the guidance of Prof. DSW dr hab. Hana Cervinkova

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Overview

Wagner's dissertation consists of seven chapters divided into subsections, in addition to a table of contents, an acknowledgements section, a bibliography, and a summary in Polish, English, and German. The dissertation is 279 pages long; the bibliography consists nearly of 256 references including books, monographs, journal articles, and pieces of legislation.

Chapter 1 establishes the scholarly problem and scope of the research project as it pertains to how school cultures in Poland, Austria, and Germany grapple with the implementation of inclusive policies and practices. In particular, Wagner is interested in exploring how teachers and pedagogues try to find ways of bridging the gap between the disabled and abled, foreign and familiar, protected and vulnerable students of their schools. Throughout her doctoral dissertation study, Wagner draws on inclusive education as a “deeply ethical concept that promotes schools as strongholds against discrimination by granting access to all students” (Booth, 2005). In addition, Wagner explores how the commitment to recognizing and valuing diversity in schools takes shape in these three countries given their historical, political, social, and cultural past marked by the Holocaust, and the recent guidelines by the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD) to the right to free, quality primary and secondary education for all students (Art. 24.2b).

Chapter 2 presents a very strong, robust, integrated, systematic, and comprehensive theoretical underpinning for the study, situating inclusive education as a paradigm for social justice and schools as sites of justice and injustice. Theories of disability models, understanding disability from the social to the cultural to the intersectional, expanding on the theory and practice of inclusive education are also included.

Chapter 3 establishes the study methodology, educational ethnography of empirical research and its representation. Wagner school-based ethnographic study consisted of examining how the “initial baseline conceptual identity” of inclusive education presented in the literature review, was actualized in each of three primary school sites in Poland, Austria, and Germany, she studied for approximate four to five months each. Chapter 3 also

includes information on the research design, methods of data collection, data analysis, and writing. In addition, there is a section on negotiating access for the research sites.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are each dedicated to describe the conditions and discuss the findings of each of the three school-based sites, Poland, Austria, and Germany, respectively. They present the case studies, drawing on individual countries socio-political and cultural aspects which influence the education of students of diverse identities, as well on some common themes present in the three schools. It is in these three chapters that Wagner helps the reader make meaning and identify themes and threads through the voices of the study participants and as well as her own observations and analysis as the researcher, offering a conclusion relevant to each site at the end of each chapter.

Chapter 7, Discussion, includes the conclusion of the dissertation presented in the role of the ethnographer under the question: “What does it mean?” (Schultz). In addition, Wagner, offers connections to the EdiTE Framework, presents her study limitations, and offers concluding remarks.

### Originality

Wagner’s dissertation offers a very distinctive way of exploring the question of teachers and pedagogues’ attitudes towards inclusive education, and the challenges and opportunities that those who are considered “others” experience the right to free, quality primary and secondary education for all students, as stated in Art. 24.2b of United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD). Further, Wagner’s comparative methodology studying three separate countries, Poland, Austria, and Germany, yet linked together by their histories marked by the Holocaust, makes this study

original. The focus on how the past ideologies have influenced the present landscape of inclusive education offers a fresh new look at issues of equality in education. And finally, Wagner's careful, thorough, well-rounded, respectful, interdisciplinary, international, and comprehensive literature review, data analysis and reporting, drawn from many different academic disciplines, such as critical disability studies, critical race theory, critical pedagogy, offers a much needed and nuanced approach to the inclusion of those deemed "less than" in our schools.

### Theoretical Foundation and Methodology

In order to answer the research questions of "how schooling cultures are affected by the implementation of inclusive education, and how schools grapple and respond to the call for acknowledging human diversity and creating inclusive settings for learning and teaching" Wagner starts by providing a thorough and critical review of extensive and varied scholarly literature that is multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural, multi-lingual. She is able to exquisitely thread and link the existing literature with her research findings, in ways that enable us to understand the realities of her study participants and the theoretical underpinnings of their experiences. Wagner frames her study by "situating the paradigm of inclusive education within the theoretical perspective of critical pedagogy in opposition to the epistemological foundations of special pedagogy." In doing so, she maps out the debate on the nature of disability, and the corresponding notion of inclusion. Considerations of inclusive practices are not limited to students with disabilities, but also include differences such as migrant status, language, culture, social class, religion, among other. In addition, Wagner embraces an intersectional approach recognizing the systemic socio-cultural and

structural factors of oppression and discrimination rather than in the “individual students’ shortcomings.”

Wagner study’s methodology employed educational ethnography utilizing a cross-cultural, multi-sited ethnographic research design study. Data collection included participant observations and extensive interviews to explore how inclusive education is enacted in each of the school sites, where she spent at least 100 hours in each of them. Data was analyzed separately for each site, and conclusions and emerging themes identified and discussed relative to each one.

### Structure and Writing Mechanics

The organization of the dissertation follows a logical structure: the introduction provides a coherent plan for the reader and each chapter contains a well-developed introduction and clear summaries and conclusions. The three data chapters are organized around a salient quote, which anchors the discussion around well thought out, relevant and appropriate organized emerging themes.

The writing of this study is impeccable. It is very well organized, it seamlessly combines scholarly literature, participants’ voices, observations, and conclusions in ways that are both informational and even poetic at times. Wagner’s ability to bring together disparate scholarly theories, countries, voices, and personal reflections of such complex, multilayered, and nuanced content, speaks of her exceptional writing and critical thinking skills, and in a language, that is not her mother tongue.

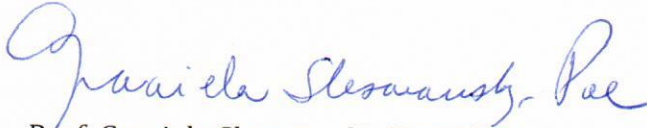
## Concluding Remarks

As a Teacher Educator and Inclusive Education scholar and advocate, I have found reviewing Josefine's doctoral dissertation study a delightful and enriching experience. Wagner offers a remarkable and much needed integrated approach to the emerging field of critical inclusive education. In addition to the value and contributions of her research study, I personally appreciated the way in which Josefine shared the origins of this study as she raised some of the research study questions many years ago as an in-service teacher education at a mass public secondary school in Germany, her country of origin. She was able to see then, that the multi-tiered tracking system perpetuating inequities and injustices and wanted to do something about it. Josefine concludes her dissertation stating: "For the sake of continuing the conversation and action on creating more inclusive and equitable ways to educate children, I hope I have illuminated daily life in European schools and the structural, historical, and local conditions in which they are embedded." Josefine, your dissertation has exceeded your hope. My hope is that Josefine finds ways to publish her study so that teacher educators, as well as the educators and pedagogues can attend to the barriers that Josefine has so brilliantly identified to build on the promise of schools for all, that is schools that are inclusive, just, and equitable for all?

To conclude y review of the doctoral dissertation by Josefine Wagner entitled *Struggling for Educational Justice in Disabling Societies: A Multi-sited School-based Ethnography of Inclusive Policies and Practices in Poland, Austria, and Germany*, I submit that it meets and exceeds the legal requirements for a doctoral dissertation in substance and form. Therefore, I recommend that Josefine Wagner be allowed to proceed to the next stages of doctoral procedures and public defense. Moreover, I strongly recommend that

Josefine Wagner's dissertation be recognized for distinction on the basis that it constitutes a significant contribution to the fields of education and special pedagogy.

Respectfully submitted,



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