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# "Weakness of the Soul:" The Special Education Tradition at the Intersection of Eugenic Discourses, Race Hygiene and Education Policies

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**Abstract**

*According to Vera Moser, the first professorship of healing pedagogy, Heilpädagogik at the University of Zürich in 1931, established pedagogy of the disabled as an academic discipline. Through the definition of the smallest common denominator for all disabilities, which Heinrich Hanselmann called "weakness of the soul," a connecting element of "imbecility, deaf-mutism, blindness, neglect and idiocy" was established. Under Nazi rule, school pedagogy advanced to völkisch, nationalist special pedagogy, shifting from the category of "innate imbecility" to a broader concept of disability. As an outcome of these programs and policies, 300,000 people with disabilities were killed as a part of the "T4 Aktion." Within just a few decades after World War II, special pedagogy expanded its sphere of influence through professionalization and institutionalization in West and East Germany and across Europe. This paper explores how special pedagogy aligned itself with the Nazi regime's discourse and policy on eugenics and race hygiene, leading to the murder and mass sterilization of "disabled" children and adults. It probes questions regarding the extent to which the professionalization of special pedagogy has drawn from the Nazi-era terminology of the deficient and foreign to legitimate the contemporary migrant bias in German and Austrian special pedagogical care.*

**Key-words**: *special pedagogy; special schools; eugenics; euthanasia; DisCrit in education; inclusion*

## I. Introduction

In 2006, the United Nations embarked on a policy shift that would recognize the social model of disability and turn toward ensuring the dignity of human beings with disabilities by addressing barriers to their participation and inclusion in all aspects of social, personal, and professional life. These policy shifts were embodied in a document known as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Article 24.2b of the

Convention mandates that signatory countries ensure inclusive education of all students close to the communities in which they are growing up. The thrust of this international agreement made segregation into special schools illegal and pushed toward closing all of them. More importantly, this piece of legislation, which is supported by EU policies on greater inclusivity for social coherence,[1] forced the issue of abolishing barriers that limited access to quality education not only for children with disabilities, but also for other children disadvantaged by poverty or migrant status. Although Germany and Austria have signed the UNCRPD, in these countries perceivable tensions exist in the way they implement these ideas in the context of highly fragmented school systems that place students with disabilities at the bottom of the performance hierarchy.

As a new phenomenon, inclusion does not have a chance in the face of special education, which educators perceive as having a long tradition without questioning its past. Dagmar Hänsel draws attention to blind spots in the historiography of the academic discipline of special education. She argues that it tells the tale of a discipline unencumbered by its National Socialist (NS) past, despite the role educational facilities played in the mass sterilization or even murders of people with disabilities during the Nazi era. Hänsel stresses: "[I]t was often overlooked that the law of enforced sterilization of hereditary defective offspring affected not only patients of mental hospitals, but most prominently students in special schools."[2] The absence of this examination of the past led to the undisrupted expansion of special education in postwar years. Within just a few decades after World War II, special education widened its sphere of influence through professionalization and institutionalization in West and East Germany and across Europe.[3] In this article, I investigate and illuminate the continuities of special education terminology, discourses, and practices that contribute to the construction of the deficient and foreign "other," creating barriers for students along the lines of physical and mental abilities, poverty, ethnicity, and migration.

I will start by analyzing the medicalization of education abilities that resulted in the profiling of healing pedagogy (*Heilpädagogik*) as a splinter branch of education studies, which took place gradually throughout the 19th century. To make my point more explicit, I will review notions that circulated around the connection of educability, soul and human being from the 17th century on

[1] See for example "European Union Council Recommendation of May 22, 2018, On Promoting Common Values, Inclusive Education, and the European Dimension of Teaching (2018/ C 194 /01)," *Official Journal of the European Union* (June, 2018).

[2] Dagmar Hänsel, "Special Pedagogy in National Socialism," *University of Innsbruck Lecture Series: Inclusive Pedagogy*, filmed 10 November 2016 at Universität Innsbruck, video, 14:22-14:41, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WCoWkNxh5U.

[3] Lisa Pfahl, *Techniken der Behinderung: Der deutsche Lernbehinderungsdiskurs, die Sonderschule und ihre Auswirkungen auf Bildungsbiographien* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011), 94ff.

to show that different approaches to disability existed before the natural sciences entered pedagogical discourses and foregrounded the trope of "deficient blood" as the common denominator for deviant behavior. Second, I want to shed light on the formative years of special education, which are strongly debated in academia. Some scholars contend that special education ceased to exist under Nazism, while others argue that the discipline flourished because of the ideology of race hygiene and eugenics. Finally, I will return to the present debate and the pushback that the implementation of inclusion receives in Germany and Austria. I will highlight the idea emphasized by the UNCRPD – that a social model of disability has not yet entered general education and that mainstream education continues to rely on the deficit view of students to channel the disabled, racial and poor Other into specialized tracks.

## II. The Common Denominator of 'Disability'

For centuries, scholars assumed that the soul was the distinctive characteristic that allowed humans to learn, to think, and to be. Beings who could not verbally perform these acts were in turn considered to be deprived of a soul, possessed by the devil, or simply less than human. In *Cretinism and Imbecility* (2015), Johannes Gstach focuses on the pedagogical treatment of people with cognitive disabilities and mental abnormalities from 1780 to 1900. Tracing different belief systems on educating people with disabilities through the centuries, Gstach highlights the work of Czech philosopher and pedagogue Jan Amos Comenius. As the author of the first comprehensive textbook, *Magna Didactica* (1657), his philosophy was "to teach everyone everything."[4] Despite this inclusive approach, Comenius also stated that those without reason did not need to attend school.[5] Moving into the 18th century, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi founded the Neuhof, a school for poor children to develop and cultivate their minds through farming.[6] Opening schools for the poor (*Armenschule*) represented a development in pedagogy: educators recognized that impoverished conditions had detrimental effects on a person's ability to learn, grow, and develop reason. Poorhouses and schools for the poor were signs of an increasing social responsibility, albeit one limited to religious or philanthropical initiatives. Drawing on Michel Foucault's broad ideas on the great confinement

[4] Johannes Gstach, *Kretinismus und Blödsinn. Zur fachlich-wissenschaftlichen Entdeckung und Konstruktion von Phänomenen der geistig-mentalen Auffälligkeit zwischen 1780 und 1900 und deren Bedeutung für Fragen der Erziehung und Behandlung* (Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 2015), 89.

[5] Gstach, *Kretinismus*, 89.

[6] Fredalene Bowers, and Thom Gehring, "Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi: 18th Century Swiss Educator and Correctional Reformer," *Journal of Correctional Education* 55, no. 4 ( 2004): 309.

helps to understand control, separation and differentiation when government policies started to manage social immiseration. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault uses the example of the leper and the plague to describe two closely related mechanisms that can characterize the governing of populations. The existence of the leper, he contends, led to the binary division between the sick and the healthy, while the plague enforced disciplinary projects through "differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is to be recognized; how a constant surveillance is to be exercised over him in an individual way, etc.)."[7] I share Foucault's interest in studying how governmental power manifests through policies that structure and affect the lives of individuals. Through this frame, one recognizes that it was a crucial moment when children with disorders and disabilities were considered educable and became subjected to government interventions. Foucault stresses the 19th century was peculiar in that "it applied to the space of exclusion [...] the technique of power proper to disciplinary partitioning."[8] Translating this peculiarity to the context of education, the 19th century not only discovered the educability of the "abnormal" child but also formulated different ways to partition and compartmentalize deviance. Furthermore, through the medicalization of social, health, and educational policies, children and adults with disabilities were gradually placed in the hands of state institutions that concentrated, counted, and tracked them.

With Foucault's perspective in mind, the 19th century brought differentiation among special educators into three groups, focusing on the deaf-mute, the blind, and the mentally and cognitively impaired. The first special schools were established for the sensory-impaired: for the deaf-mute in 1780 and the blind in 1804. Considering the triad of education, soul, and verbalization, schools for the deaf-mute and the blind presented a revolutionary breakthrough, as education and therapy enabled children to externalize thoughts and communicate. Sieglind Ellger-Rüttgardt points out how significant the founding of public schools for the deaf and the blind was, as these "schools guaranteed the right to education for disabled students permanently."[9] Whereas students of sensory schools could gradually claim full personhood, for children with cognitive disabilities the issue of expression nevertheless still remained. From the 1840s on, mentally disabled children were included in (pseudo-)educational facilities[10] such as "idiocy wards" ("*Id-*

[7] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books), 199.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Sieglind Ellger-Rüttgardt, "Sonderpädagogik – Ein blinder Fleck der Allgemeinen Pädagogik? Eine Replik auf den Aufsatz von Dagmar Hänsel," *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* 50, no. 3 (2004): 419.

[10] Johannes Gstach, "Heilpädagogik in der Zeit zwischen den Weltkriegen," in *Behinderung und*

*iotenanstalten*"), which focused on practical treatment and care; schools for the poor that tended to consist of children from impoverished homes; and help schools (*Hilfsschulen*) that concentrated on children with weak cognitive abilities (*schwachbefähigt*). Under the influence of healing pedagogy, help schools advanced to the strongest sub-group. Gstach notes the 1864 publication of the healing pedagogue Heinrich Stötzner *Schools for the Weakly Abled* as a milestone in the establishment of help schools.[11] Stötzner argued in favor of help schools that would take up the space between the Volksschule, i.e., general education, and idiocy wards. Whereas the idiotic student was a lost cause "since already dead," the "feeble-minded" ones would drown in general education and be returned to their communities as burdens without skills or knowledge. Hence, help schools for the feeble-minded were the ideal place to turn these students into productive members of society. In his text Stötzner characterized the typical help school student as follows:

> Experience has shown enough that also mentally weak children – not the idiotic ones because those must already be called dead – can be lifted to a higher level and be educated to sensible, useful humankind [...] however, this task cannot be taken over by the general school [...] The general school has different tasks to solve than to struggle with the mentally weak and feeble-minded. [...] Especially in the lower social classes where proper nourishment, a healthy home, careful education of children is lacking, the number of the feeble-minded turns out to be truly terrifying.[12]

This quotation situates the help school clientele in particular in the lower social classes of society, thereby adding an aspect of charity and welfare care to its pedagogical agenda. Ellger-Rüttgardt highlights the fact that the Volksschule in Germany profited immensely from help schools (later called special schools), which were relieved of educational responsibility for students who did not fit a fictitious norm.[13] Lisa Pfahl, on the other hand, argues that help schools were the driving force in creating demand for their own establishment. Stötzner's elaborations above support Pfahl's hypothesis. She summarizes, by segregating the "poor, sick, help school students" from the general student population, the Volkschule would be cleansed and the help school would safeguard the socially

*Gesellschaft*, ed. Gottfried Biewer, and Michelle Proyer, 22-44 (Wien: University of Vienna, 2019), 25.

[11] Gstach, "Heilpädagogik," 26.

[12] Heinrich Stötzner, *Schulen für schwachbefähigte Kinder: Ein Entwurf der Begründung derselben* (Leipzig: Winter'sche Verlagshandlung, 1864), 8-9.

[13] Ellger-Rüttgardt, "Sonderpädagogik," 420.

deprived student clientele. Pfahl points out that healing pedagogy increasingly sought cooperation with medical doctors and the police to suppot, but also to report and register, its own student population.[14] Hence, the criminalization of help school students perpetuated their Othering and contributed to the stigma of a potentially dangerous student population that had to be removed from the center of society. From 1893 to 1912, help schools and their student populations increased significantly in Germany. Over roughly 20 years, 37 help schools consisting of 2,300 students mushroomed into 305 schools consisting of 34,300 students.[15] In Austria, Gstach explains, the decline of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the subsequent reach of the nation-state through education policies allowed for the rapid expansion of help schools in "Red Vienna" and a few other regions of the country until the 1930s.[16] However, through these efforts, the invisible hand of governance, as Foucault described, received extensive access to parts of the population that were considered deviant and disabled. Coinciding with growing social care through government institutions, *Rassenhygiene* – race hygiene, a term coined by Alfred Plötz in 1895, based on Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest – gained wide recognition. The "'Sonderweg' of German Eugenics," as coined by Paul Weidling, encapsulates the fact that the pseudo-science of eugenics was not a German invention alone. Darwin's concept of "natural selection" that he laid out in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) turned into an experiential playground for followers, such as Francis Galton or Karl Pearson who claimed that as much as physical features were inherited from generation to generation so must be character traits and certain predispositions.[17] In his 1869 work *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences*, Galton expresses out:

> I wish again to emphasise the fact that the improvement of the natural gifts of future generations of the human race is largely, though indirectly, under our control... We must distinguish clearly between our power in this fundamental respect and that which we also possess of ameliorating education and hygiene. It is earnestly to be hoped that inquiries will be increasingly directed into historical facts, with the view of estimating the possible effects of reasonable political action in the future, in gradually raising the present miserably low standard

[14] Pfahl, *Techniken*, 87.

[15] Gstach, "Heilpädagogik," 27.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Daniel Okrent, *The Guarded Gate: Bigotry, Eugenics and the Law That Kept Two Generations of Jews, Italians, and Other European Immigrants Out of America: Bigotry, Eugenics and the Law That Kept Two Generations of Jews, Italians, and Other European Immigrants Out of America* (New York: Scribner, 2019), 15.

> of the human race to one in which the Utopias in the dreamland of philanthropists may become practical possibilities.[18]

At the late 19th century, Galton presented the scientific community with the concept of "positive eugenics," i.e. the manipulation of the gene pool through education, hygiene and deliberate breeding to produce, healthy, strong bodies; it is not yet the destruction of life considered unworthy of life in the National Socialist sense of eugenics. Nonetheless, Galton explicitly ranked African peoples inferior to what he described as the accomplishments of European civilization, thereby paving the way for extending individual features to an entire group of people, perpetuating a language of white superiority. Theorizing of this kind fell on fertile ground in the context of U.S. immigration policies as Daniel Okrent details in his book *The Guarded Gate* (2019). Incoming population demographics were controlled through prioritizing entrance for "White," Nordic ethnicities, shutting out Jews, Italians, Eastern European and Asian migrants, etc. from 1924 to 1965.[19] Also government-funded forced sterilization of mostly African American women and women of lower socio-economic status who were labelled "feebleminded" took place from 1900 to 1970s, resulting in an estimate of 60,000 victims of eugenics.[20] It is, thereby a very poignant question to ask as Henry Friedlander does in *The Origins of Nazi Genocide* (1995) "why American eugenics withered and died while German race hygiene succeeded in imposing on society its radical vision of a biological-social utopia."[21] Other than in England or the United States, the German *Sonderweg*, special path, describes the wedding of science with nationalistic fantasies of a superior race that presented the Nazis with a pseudo-scientific ideology upon which enslavement of "inferior races," such as Slavs, Jews, Roma, etc. was legitimated. In this spirit, Plötz and colleagues argued for breeding of desirable human characteristics through sterilization and marriage ban for "Asocial" people, meaning those who did not have a job, who were alcoholics, prostitutes, suffered from mental illness or were cognitively disabled.[22] Looking at larger institutions of social care, in

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[18] Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences* (London: Macmillan, 1869), xxvvii.

[19] Okrent, xv.

[20] Zanita E. Fenton, "Disability Does Not Discriminate: Toward a Theory of Multiple Identity through Coalition," in *DisCrit: Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory in Education*, eds. David J. Connor, Beth A. Ferri, and Subini A. Annamma, 203-212 (New York: Teachers College Press, 2016), 208.

[21] Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 16.

[22] Georg Lilienthal, "Rassenhygiene im Dritten Reich. Krise und Wende," *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 14, nos. 1-2 (1979): 114-115.

the 1920s, also hospitals and schools became complicit in eugenic research when they provided "records of many hundreds of twins needed for research in hereditary disease,"[23] as Paul Weidling points out.

While the sensory special schools were adamant about remaining distinct from help school teachers, student clientele, institutions, and funding, the discipline of healing pedagogy strived to combine all three branches into one special school complex outside mainstream primary education.[24] For this to happen, healing pedagogy needed to distinguish itself as an academic discipline that not only focused on the "feeble-minded" student body but on all types of disabilities. As the natural sciences advanced into the sphere of pedagogy, psychopathology and medicine turned out to be great assets in this endeavor. While putting an end to the demonization of the disabled as possessed by spirits, rational observations brought remarkable understanding of medical conditions.[25] However, the alliance of psychopathology and pedagogy turned out to be especially fruitful in the professionalization process of healing pedagogy. Pfahl explains that the medical and psychological perspective on the individual child was enforced through the IQ test brought forward by Alfred Binet and Theophile Simon in 1905.[26] Intelligence measurement as an objective tool to distinguish students' abilities joined the repertoire of healing pedagogy, through which it could claim scientific credibility as well as authority over diagnosis, classification, and treatment of the child who performed below average. Under the framework of DisCrit (disability studies and critical race theory in education), Subini Annamma, Beth Ferri and David Connor have continuously analyzed scientific racism. They show how racial segregation of African-American students has been justified through lower performance rates on apparently objective IQ testing scales.[27] Although the German government points out that intelligence tests alone are problematic in determining a child's special needs status, they are still a trusted tool in school practice. During my ethnographic field research at a German primary school in 2018, the special education specialist explained that the IQ test was "the tool of last resort" to determine a child's mental abilities if all other observations and assessments produced no distinct diagnosis. Return-

[23] Paul Weindling, "Weimar Eugenics: The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics in Social Context," *Annals of Science* 42, no. 3 (1985): 310.

[24] Moser, "Gründungsmythen," 265.

[25] For example, iodine deficiency was identified as a reason children were born with cretinism. With supplementary nutrition, the child's growth and development were stabilized. See Gstach, *Kretinismus*, 225.

[26] Pfahl, 101.

[27] Subini Annamma, Beth Ferri, and David Connor, "Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit): Theorizing at the Intersections of Race and Dis/ability," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 16, no. 1 (2013): 1-31.

ing to the foundational years of healing pedagogy, the IQ test was just one phenomenon that was distinctive at the beginning of the 20th century, when biological answers were being sought to social questions. Paul Weidling has presented remarkable scholarship that illuminates eugenic ambitions in the German-speaking territories from the Kaiserreich to the Nazi regime.[28] He points out: "Weimar administrators hoped that eugenics could solve intractable social problems with its promising combination of genetic, medical, and demographic expertise."[29]

When Heinrich Hanselmann finally closed the gaps among the three branches of special education, he also achieved full academization of the discipline as the first professor of healing pedagogy at Zurich University in 1931. Hanselmann, who was also honored by the medical society for his achievements, developed the term "weakness of the soul" (*Seelenschwäche*) as the smallest common denominator of conditions, such as "imbecility," "deaf-mutism," "blindness," etc. Vera Moser and Detlef Horster characterize "weakness of the soul" as a state consisting of "the inability to think sufficiently, the inability of sensory organs to perceive impression from the environment or insufficient will power due to social deprivation and neglect."[30] The construct of "weakness of the soul" built on the long tradition of associating disability with an inferior quality of the soul that educators had been discussing since the 17th century. At the same time, "weakness of the soul" rendered social aspects of disability and deviation invisible and attributed difference to some innate fault. Under the influence of the eugenics movement, everything that was presumably at fault with the human being was traced back to inferiority of blood, which then allowed for Nazi ideology as a "nation of pure blood" to deem any type of mental or physical a deviance from the norm. "Weakness of the soul" enforced the binary division between normal and deviant and at the same time differentiated deviance into individual "disciplinary projects," in Foucauldian terms, to which laboratories, wards, and special schools directed their attention. Furthermore, the construct not only pushed a deficient and humiliating view of the mentally and cognitively disabled student, but also imposed an inferior perspective on the sensory-impaired. Plurality of abilities was exchanged with inferiority to the standard norm, commencing an obsession with the perfect human body and mind.

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[28] Paul Weindling, "The 'Sonderweg' of German Eugenics: Nationalism and Scientific Internationalism. The British Journal for the History of Science," *Genetics, Eugenics and Evoultion: A Special Issue in Commemoration of Bernard Norton (1945-1984)* 22, no. 3 (1989): 321-333.

[29] Weindling, "Weimar," 304.

[30] Vera Moser, and Detlef Horster, "Einleitung: Ethische Argumentationen der Behindertenpädagogik – Eine Bestandsaufnahme," in *Ethik in der Behindertenpädagogik. Menschenrechte, Menschenwürde, Behinderung*, eds. Vera Moser, and Detlef Horster, 13-22 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011), 15.

## III. Special Schools: Accomplices of National Socialism

Whereas Sally Tomlinson points out that the eugenics movement affected education systems globally,[31] in the following, I will narrow the perspective on healing pedagogy/special education more strictly to the German and Austrian context. Aktion T4 and the "decentralized euthanasia killings" were carried out in both parts of German-speaking Nazi territory. With the annexation of Austria in March 1938, both countries officially fell into ideological and institutional lockstep. So did the two countries' social, educational, and health institutions. As Dagmar Hänsel explains: "In Vienna, the German Association for Children Psychiatry and Healing Pedagogy was founded. Its founding date was Sept. 5, 1940, at the University of Vienna in the Great Auditorium of the Neurological-Psychiatric University Clinic."[32] In a 1990 documentary by the Austrian Broadcasting Company (ORF), the historian Michael Hubensdorfer publicly detailed how Austrian psychiatrists and doctors took up leading positions in German medical facilities or killing sites established by the Nazis in occupied Poland, and Germans in Austrian facilities. He stated:

> The highest-ranking psychiatrist in Germany, the Berlin psychiatrist Maximilian Dekrenis, came from Graz in Austria and was crucially involved in medical science politics, as well as a doctor who was a concentration camp commander: Dr. Irmfried Eberl, who had previously studied in Innsbruck [Austria] before taking a position at a psychiatric clinic in Berlin [Germany] and then becoming the director of Treblinka [Poland].[33]

Herwig Czech's scholarship shows that from 1939 to 1941, Nazi officials operated six central killing institutions in which over 70,000 people were deemed unfit to live and were consequently murdered.[34] Hartheim was the first institution in history in which production-line, mass extermination took place, serving as a blueprint and harbinger for Aktion Reinhardt, the most atrocious period of the mass killing of Polish Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland. The laws for Prevention of Heredi-

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[31] Sally Tomlinson, *A Sociology of Special and Inclusive Education: Exploring the Manufacture of Inability* (London: Routledge, 2017), 65.

[32] Dagmar Hänsel, "Sonderschullehrkräfte im Nationalsozialismus," in *Behinderung und Gesellschaft*, eds. Gottfried Biewer, and Michelle Proyer, 120-135 (Wien: University of Vienna, 2019), 120.

[33] Johannes Neuhauser, "Hartheim: Behindert, ausgegrenzt, getötet," *Sendereihe Orientierungen, ORF 1990*, video, 18:37-19:42, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFUQZNi372I.

[34] Herwig Czech, "Von der 'Aktion T4' zur 'dezentralen Euthanasie:' Die niederösterreichischen Heil- und Pflegeanstalten Gugging, Mauer-Öhling und Ybbs," in *Fanatiker, Pflichterfüller, Widerständige: Reichsgaue Niederdonau, Groß-Wien*, ed. Christine Schindler, 219-266 (Wien: Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstands, 2016), 219.

tary Deficient Offspring (*Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*, GzVeN), issued on July 14, 1933, and the Law of Protection of German Blood and German Honor" (*Gesetz zum Schutz deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre*) from Sept. 5, 1935 created the legal reality that gave way to the frenzy of eugenics. In Foucauldian terms, "where judicial institutions and medical knowledge [...] intersect, statements are formulated having the status of true discourses with considerable judicial effects."[35] Discourses that were generated on the basis of these laws led to the disenfranchisement, dehumanization and mass extermination of European Jews, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals and the disabled. As Henry Friedlander writes, "Nazi genocide did not take place in a vacuum."[36] Considering that teachers in help schools were "over-proportionally represented among authors of the race-hygienic discussion of the NS regime,"[37] pedagogy's participation in the perpetuation and practice of isolation and extermination must be scrutinized.

When Hitler became Reich Chancellor in March 1933 and the NSDAP took power, the Weimar Republic ceased to exist, and the NS state was reorganized on the basis of complete lockstep of government institutions, unions and interest groups. At the end of this process, 97 percent of all educators were organized in the National Socialist Teachers Association (National Sozialistischer Lehrerbund, or NSLB).[38] The NSLB had already been founded in Bayreuth in 1926 and integrated into the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) in 1929.[39] After 1933, the NSLB organized all teachers in subgroups corresponding to their main areas of service, such as subchapter IV "Volksschule" (primary school) or subchapter V "Sonderschule" (special school).[40] Hänsel contends that the common task of working on the 1933 Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Deficient Offspring (*Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*, or GzVeN) contributed to uniting the different groups of special educators (deaf-mute, blind, help school and "idiocy wards"). Derived from this task was a new professional ethos that saw special education as essential in protecting the nation. The GzVeN law de-

[35] Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975* (London: Verso, 2003), 11.

[36] Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 1.

[37] Dagmar Hänsel, "Quellen zur NS-Zeit in der Geschichte der Sonderpädagogik," *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* 58, no. 2 (2012): 244.

[38] Astrid Ludwig, "Was geschah im Lehrerbund?" *Jüdische Allgemeine*, November 13, 2017, https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/was-geschah-im-lehrerbund.

[39] Uwe Schmidt, *Lehrer im Gleichschritt: Der Nationalsozialistische Lehrerbund Hamburg* (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2006), 11.

[40] Individual interest groups of special educators for the deaf-mute, the blind, the help school, and the care wards remained intact only as "sub-units" (Fachgruppe) within subgroup V "Sonderschule" (Special School) of the NSLB.

fined psychiatric diseases such as schizophrenia, epilepsy and bipolar disorders as hereditary, and it enumerated as "hereditary diseases" congenital feeble-mindedness, inherited blindness, inherited speech impediment and inherited deafness.[41] In April 1934 sub-division V of the NSLB published its first journal, "Die deutsche Sonderschule" ("The German Special School"). In the journal's first issue, the editor wrote:

> We have to make sure that the growing German power of the people [Volkskraft] is not diluted through nation-foreign, race-damaging humanity. For the care of the disabled, but still promising, student with regard to the life of the nation, we have to act in adequate form responsibly; to eradicate the completely invalid is the duty to sustain the nation. Herein lies the heavy responsibility of all special school teachers toward our father country.[42]

The author of these lines was Paul Ruckau, a teacher of deaf-mute students, who left no doubt about the newly acquired professional ethos of "sustaining the people's power of the nation" through appropriate education or "ausmerzen" – eradication. As Henry Friedlander remarks, "spreading the gospel of race hygiene, the scientists offered courses on race and eugenics to public health officers, SS physicians, teachers, nurses, and civil servants."[43] At this point, the 1942 handbook *Erbe und Schicksal* (*Heritage and Faith*) by Karl Tornow and Herbert Weinert must be taken into account to understand that eugenics was an essential part in the curriculum of special school teachers' education and sterilization of help schools students a declared goal. Tornow, a help school rector and a member of the Gau leadership of Magdeburg-Anhalt, and Weinert, a teacher of deaf-mute students and a Gau leadership member of Saxony and a Wehrmacht soldier, were both employed in the NSDAP's race politics bureau. This propaganda institution, as Werner Brill describes it, aimed for acceptance and understanding of NS racial and population politics among the general public.[44] Tornow and Weinert de-

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[41] Hänsel, "Sonderschullehrkräfte," 122-123.

[42] Original text: "Wir haben dafür zu sorgen, dass die aufwachsende deutsche Volkskraft nicht durch volksfeindliche, rasseschädigende Überhumanität gedrosselt wird. Für die Betreuung behinderter, aber für das Volksleben noch aussichtsvoller Schüler haben wir in angemessener Form verantwortungsbewusst zu wirken, das völlig Unwerte auszumerzen verlangt die Selbsterhaltungspflicht der Nation. Darin liegt die schwere Verantwortung aller Sonderschullehrer dem Vaterland gegenüber." See Marietheres Triebe, *NS-Ideologie in der NSLB-Zeitschrift "Die deutsche Sonderschule" 1934-1944: Eine dokumentarische Analyse* (Frankfurt am Main: Protagoras Academius, 2017), 53.

[43] Friedlander, *Origins*, 20.

[44] Werner Brill, "Die Verankerung der Eugenik durch die Sonerpädagogik während des Nationalsozialismus: Historische Fakten und sonderpädagogische Historiographie," in *Behinderung und Gesellschaft*, ed. Gottfried Biewer, and Michelle Proyer, 107-119 (Wien: University

clared that they had intended *Heritage and Faith* to be a book that would help its readers "find the necessary understanding for the existential race-hygienical questions of our nation and guide them toward the appropriate attitude."[45] The book would be especially welcome by "special schools and their teachers,"[46] they recommended. *Heritage and Faith* is divided into three parts: "Of heredity and genetics," "Of physically and mentally inherited diseases" and "Of the prevention of hereditary deficient offspring." In the first part, the basics of genetic laws are explained through genealogical family trees and the laws of Mendel to exemplify how human characteristics are inherited.[47] Part two deals with inherited physical disabilities, such as missing limbs or mild and severe malformations; inherited diseases of the eyes and ears; inherited speech impediments; nervous and cognitive diseases; and "family diseases" such as alcoholism, suicide or "undignified character" that showed itself in the "asocial" or the "antisocial." The final part then proposes answers to the question what the "hereditary deficient" should do if he/she wants to get married and have a family. It is followed by the subchapter on "Von der Unfruchtbarmachung" – "On creating infertility," i.e. sterilization. Each part is designed like a textbook that prepares its readers for passing a test. Questions at the end of each subchapter and solutions at the end of the book invite them to practice the "right" answer. For example, after muscular atrophy is discussed, question number 80 asks: "Why is it good that the person in picture 1 already died in his youth?"[48] The answer may be found in the back of the book: "Because he felt very unhappy and death relieved him of his heavy suffering."[49] In between chapters are calculations to exemplify the financial burden of different types of students. While the government spent on students in the help school and the Volksschule an annual amount of only 200 and 125 Reichsmark respectively, the uneducable mentally disabled cost 950 Reichsmark and the hereditary blind or deaf student 1,500.[50] The book repeatedly stresses that help school students who proved their usefulness to the nation were not a burden as long as they did not pass on their hereditary deficiencies.[51] Space here does not suffice to detail the extent to which the book negates the dignity of human beings. Pictures of abled-bodied, strong German girls or boys next to those of children with impairments evoke the patronizing, dehumanizing effect at which the book is aiming.

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of Vienna, 2019), 112.

[45] Karl Tornow, and Herbert Weinert, *Erbe und Schicksal* (Berlin: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1942), 5.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 19ff.

[48] Ibid., 69.

[49] Ibid., 219.

[50] Ibid., 187.

[51] Ibid., 167.

The book trains special school educators to convince their students that their own sterilization and reintegration into the German nation as "silent heroes" was the only honourable deed they could perform.[52] As Hänsel shows, Karl Tornow was a highly influential special educator. He advocated renaming healing pedagogy as special pedagogy/education (*Sonderpädagogik*) so that aspects of healing, rehabilitation and education would take a backseat in pedagogical efforts for children with disabilities and impairments. Under Tornow's influence, special education operated under the NS premise of protecting the nation from deficient and damaging elements of society. From Hanselmann to Tornow, the move to couple and combine genetic predispositions, social class and deviant behavior into one concept of "disability" (*Behinderung*) had been performed and made operational.

## IV. Special Education and Inclusion: The Paradox Continues

Through the decades, special education has continued to hold a tight grip over the education of children with disabilities. In both former East and West Germany, children with special needs and disabilities were educated primarily in special facilities, the largest subset being to this day the "learning-disabled" (38.8 percent), followed by those with cognitive development issues (16 percent).[53] In a report by Klaus Klemm on inclusive education in Germany, the author notes: "for the 1950s and 1960s, without a doubt, a strong expansion of the area of special schools can be spoken of: within 20 years, educational participation in special schools of 12-year-olds rose from two to five percent."[54] This expansion cannot be explained through a normal increase in children who needed special pedagogical care, the authors state, but through an increase in special educational facilities that recruited more and more students. This dynamic should seem familiar, as the former help schools established themselves in a very similar fashion through the "pull-in" function they held with regard to "cleansing" general education of slow and "feeble-minded" students (see Stötzner quote). Another peculiar development can be detected since the implementation of inclusive education in Austria in 2008 and in Germany in 2009. The Tyrol monitoring report for Austria and Klemm's study for the German context note that inclusive education did not lower the number of students under special educational care; on the contrary. Whereas more students have been included in mainstream education, the number of students in special schools has barely decreased.[55]

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[52] Dagmar Hänsel, *Karl Tornow als Wegbereiter der sonderpädagogischen Profession: Die Grundlegung des Bestehenden in der NS Zeit* (Stuttgart: Klinkhardt, 2008), 160.

[53] Klaus Klemm, *Inklusion in Deutschland: Daten und Fakten* (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2015), 32.

[54] Ibid., 14ff.

[55] See Tiroler Monitoringausschuss zur Umsetzung der UN-Konvention über die Rechte von

Hence, inclusion has *de facto* led to an expansion of special education in the whole education system.

Despite the horrendous experiences in care wards and residential institutions from which children and adults were deported, often directly to the killing premises, the practice of isolating people in centralized institutions away from home continued after the war. At the hands of religious orders (West Germany, Austria) or state educators (East Germany), cases of violence, violation of human dignity and the trope of "ineducability" surfaced over the decades.[56] Brigitte Wanker's autoethnographic accounts are just one example that depicts the failure of centralized institutions to protect the dignity of their residents. The UNCRPD responded to the detrimental legacy of collecting people with disabilities in mass institutions with its phrase "inclusive education close to home." Despite Austria's proximity to Italy, where students with disabilities have been fully included in the general education system since the 1970s, the special school system and care wards have prevailed even today. Norbert Myschker emphasizes: "After World War II, the German special school system continued its work where it had been interrupted in 1933. A closer analysis of the violations that were committed in the name of the discipline or the murder of children was not discussed."[57] Hänsel goes so far as to contend that the NS era was the most significant time of establishing special pedagogy as a professional discipline in Germany and Austria.[58] What can be said for certain is that only in 2009 did Benjamin Ortmeyer present one of the first substantial and critical re-evaluations of leading educational scholars in the time of National Socialism.[59] Whereas contemporary scholars of special education, such as Sieglind Ellger-Rüttgardt, Heinz-Elmar Tenorth and Andreas Möckel, argue that special educators have acknowledged the pain and crimes inflicted on people with disabilities under the veil of special pedagogy during the time of the NS, Brill, Ortmeyer and Hänsel contradict this notion. They demand an honest and comprehensive self-evaluation of the discipline and a way forward that takes the past into account. In 2009, when Ortmeyer presented his study, Germany ratified the UNCRPD. The international call for inclusive education increased pressure on special schools and special educators to justify the continuous segregation of their students from mainstream facilities. Strong ideological debates ensued.

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Menschen mit Behinderngen, *Inklusive Bildung in Tirol*, 2011, 7ff; Klemm, 6.

[56] Brigitte Wanker, "Mauern Überall," in *Behindertenalltag - Wie Man behindert wird*, eds. Rudolf Forster, and Volker Schönwiese, 21-34 (Wien: Jugend und Volk, Youth and Nation, 1982).

[57] Norbert Myschker, "Geistigbehindertenpädagogik," in *Geschichte der Sonderpädagogik*, ed. Svetluse Solarova, 84-120 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1983), 114.

[58] Hänsel, "Sonderschullehrer," 122ff.

[59] Benjamin Ortmeyer, *Mythos und Pathos statt Logos und Ethos: Zu den Publikationen führender Erziehungswissenschaftler in der NS-Zeit: Eduard Spranger, Hermann Nohl, Erich Weniger und Peter Petersen* (Weinheim: Beltz Verlag, 2009).

Instead of depicting the range of arguments, I would like to add to the debate with a few statistics on the student population of special schools.

In a 2009 report, the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), an international management firm, focused on the devastating consequences for the German economy if students with migrant backgrounds continued to be "the great losers in the German education system."[60] The report highlighted that 9.6 percent of students in Germany shared a migration background. In secondary education, these students made up only 4 out of 100 of those who enrolled in the Gymnasium – the academic secondary schools. Much larger proportions of migrant students attended the *Hauptschule* (20 percent), which qualified them for basic, vocational training, or special schools, where students with migrant backgrounds made up 16 percent.[61] In the Austrian context, the government report *Migration and Integration* presented the following statistics regarding the 2016-2017 school year.[62] Whereas 3.3 percent of students whose first language was Turkish attended special schools (*Sonderschule*), only 1.7 percent attended general education (*Volksschule*). This means twice as many children with a Turkish migrant background are educated in separated facilities for children with disabilities and special needs than in mainstream schools. In addition, more children whose first language was Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian attended special schools – 4.8 percent, compared to 2.9 percent in general education. The Tyrol monitoring report also points out a clear gender bias in special schools "male children and teenagers are strongly overrepresented in special schools."[63] Klemm's study shows that in the 2013-2014 school year, across Germany, 71.3 percent of special school students did not graduate, thereby losing the opportunity for further training education, and financial independence.[64] Considering the statistics, students in special schools belong primarily to an at-risk group of students, characterized by their migrant backgrounds and low socio-economic capacities. This phenomenon has also been noticed by DisCrit scholars in the United States, who constantly call out "the disproportionate placement of students of color in

[60] Christian Veith, Martin Koehler, and Monika Reiter, "Standortfaktor Bildungsintegration: Bildungschancen von Schülern mit Migrationshintergrund entscheidend für Standort Deutschland," *The Boston Consulting Group*, June 25, 2016, https://www.bcg.com/de-de/perspectives/141130.

[61] Veith, Koehler and Reiter, 10.

[62] Statistik Austria, *Migration und Integration: Zahlen. Daten. Indikatoren 2018* (Vienna, 2018), 47, https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Integration/Integrationsbericht_2018/Statistisches_Jahrbuch_migration__und_integration_2018.pdf.

[63] Tiroler Monitoringausschuss, 7.

[64] Klemm, 23.

special education."[65] A look back at Stötzner's description of the help school population rings familiar, to some extent. In light of the statistics above, special schools reproduce the stigma of a place for criminalized, dangerous and deficient Others. As students are referred to special schools at particular points of transition, i.e., from kindergarten to primary school or on entering secondary education, it is possible that some children in Austria and Germany will never spend a day of education at the centre of society but always in specialized institutions.

Only when the UNCRPD was ratified by Germany in 2009 and Austria in 2008 did individual states/regions in both countries move forward with the implementation of more inclusive concepts in education. Because of both countries' federal organization, some German states, such as Bremen, or Austrian regions, such as Reutte in Tyrol, have shown promising initiatives in inclusive education through learning centers that supplement mainstream schools to better cater to the needs of a diverse student population. In other states, such as North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany or parts of Tyrol in Austria, the segregation quota has not changed much, and new special schools have even opened. The argument that parents should be able to choose where to educate their children helps win election campaigns for candidates who defend the differentiated school system.[66] Even in areas where special schools have been eliminated, disability is managed through special pedagogical needs status, a label placed on students in inclusive settings based on performance in assessments. In other words, despite the major paradigm shift pushed by UNCRPD, pedagogical assumptions and toolboxes are still based on medicalized practices and terminologies, which serve the Othering of special-needs children through differentiation and segregation. Drawing on the analogy between governing a city and managing a school, the Foucauldian notion of a "pure community"[67] helps in understanding how special schools provide a place to keep the general school community "pure" – in other words, homogeneous. The German and Austrian differentiated school systems build on mainstream and special schools, thereby following the illusion of homogenized schools that can be upheld through the option of channeling unsuitable students out of the mainstream and into special facilities. Paradoxically, this logic does not

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[65] Claustina Mahon-Reynolds, and Laurence Parker, "The Overrepresentation of Students of Color with Learning Disabilities: How 'Working-Identity' Play a Role in the School-to-Prison Pipeline," in *DisCrit: Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory in Education*, eds. David J. Connor, Beth A. Ferri, and Subini A. Annamma, 145-156 (New York: Teachers College Press, 2016), 145.

[66] Ministry for School and Education of the State North Rhein-Westphalia, *Bildungsportal des Landes Nordrhein Westfalen*, https://www.schulministerium.nrw.de/docs/Schulsystem/Inklusion/index.html.

[67] Foucault, *Discipline*, 198.

change in inclusive settings, which build on nine different classifications of special pedagogical needs status. As a former teacher in a Berlin secondary school, I, together with the special educator, was confronted with the possibility of awarding my students up to nine different classifications of special education needs status (*sonderpädagogischer Förderbedarf*): learning (*Lernen*), emotional and social development (*emotionale und soziale Entwicklung*), language (Sprache), cognitive development (*kognitive Entwicklugn*), physical and motor development (*körperliche und motorische Entwicklung*), seeing (*Sehen*), hearing (*Hören*), autism (*Autismus*), and compensation of disadvantage due to: illness" (*Nachteilsausgleich bei "Krankheit"*).[68] These categories bear striking similarity to the "disability" construct that Tornow established. The fact that inclusion cannot be realized without the diagnostic tools (IQ testing) and the terminology of special pedagogy (*sonderpädagogischer Förderbedarf*) speaks to the prestige and the power of the discipline which I hope to have shown through a historical perspective regarding the origin of special pedagogy and the developments it underwent.

## V. Concluding remarks

Stacy Gallin and Ira Bedzow remark that "the Holocaust is a unique event, both in the history of genocide and in the history of professional ethics."[69] The Holocaust also marked a time in which educators turned in their students to be sterilized and/or murdered for the greater good of the "healthy and powerful nation." One goal of this paper was to illuminate the extent to which special education was infiltrated by racist and eugenic discourses that led to complicity in the murder of the disabled, Jews, Sinti, Roma and homosexuals. Another was to point out how special education continues to construct the racial and disabled Other, with detrimental effects on the educational chances of the students who fall under its influence.

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[68] Compare Berliner Senat, *Leitfaden zur Feststellung sonderpädagogischen Förderbedarfs an Berliner Schulen*, https://www.berlin.de/sen/bildung/schule/.../leitfaden_foerderbedarf-2017.pdf.

[69] Stacy Gallin, and Ira Bedzow, "Holocaust as an Inflection Point in the Development of Bioethics and Research Ethics," in *Handbook of Research Ethics and Scientific Integrity*, ed. Ron Iphofen, 1-20 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2019), 2.

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