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Betreff: Habilitation Thesis Reviewer's Report, Mgr. Jana Obrovská, Ph.D.

Masaryk University

Applicant	Mgr. Jana Obrovská, Ph.D.
Habilitation thesis	Addressing Student Diversity in Education
Reviewer	Prof. Dr. Susanne Schwab
Reviewer's home unit, institution	University of Vienna

Mgr. Jana Obrovská, Ph.D., has submitted a cumulative habilitation thesis comprising an introduction and six peer-reviewed journal articles. Five of the articles were published in English-language Q1 or Q2 journals, and one appeared in a Czech-language Q4 journal. The candidate is first author on five publications (including one sole-authored article) and third author on one publication.

The introduction situates the habilitation within the overarching theme “Addressing Student Diversity in Education,” emphasizing that diversity characterizes schooling globally and underscoring the imperative to prepare teachers to effectively meet heterogeneous educational needs. The candidate then outlines the thesis structure, noting that the first three publications engage with student diversity from a broad perspective, whereas studies four through six adopt a more focused lens on the education of Roma students. Mgr. Jana Obrovská, Ph.D. proceeds to contextualize the publications within their project settings, specifying that all studies draw on data from third-party funded national and international projects conducted between 2016 and 2025, in which she served

as principal investigator and national coordinator. The candidate convincingly documents substantial contributions to all included studies and provides a detailed CRediT-style authorship and contribution statement in Appendix A.

In the second chapter of the habilitation framework, Mgr. Jana Obrovská, Ph.D., surveys conceptualizations of student diversity along a continuum from broad to narrow and reflects on the respective risks and benefits of privileging one approach over the other. She argues for treating these perspectives as complementary and intersecting rather than mutually exclusive. While the chapter offers a clear exposition of key concepts, the discussion moves rather quickly from the premise (definitions and scope of diversity) to the policy and pedagogical response (e.g., inclusive education), which are closely related but constitute distinct analytical foci. As a result, the conceptual groundwork would benefit from a more sustained treatment before pivoting to implications.

The chapter largely synthesizes established positions in the literature on broad versus narrow understandings of diversity, and it does not substantially advance new conceptual perspectives. Although the author's call to consider broad and narrow conceptualizations as complementary is valuable, the argument would be strengthened by specifying the added value of such an integrative stance, for example, how it enhances analytical precision, improves the targeting of interventions, or reduces the risk of either overgeneralization or stigmatization. In addition, when enumerating theories that address structural inequalities and individual positionalities (e.g., critical race theory; p. 46), the chapter lists key approaches but does not explicate their core assumptions, mechanisms, or relevance to the subsequent empirical work. Briefly situating each framework and clarifying its operational implications would improve coherence and better justify the chosen conceptual lens for the studies that follow.

In Chapter 2.1, the candidate details the broader conceptualizations of student diversity that inform the habilitation, indicating reliance on differentiated instruction (Study 2), inclusive education for all learners (Study 3), and inclusive practices (Study 1). The discussion of differentiated instruction is generally clear and accurately outlines its core principles. However, the text invokes individualization (p. 48) without distinguishing it from differentiated instruction, which risks conceptual ambiguity. A brief clarification of the relationship between these constructs, e.g., whether individualization is treated as a subset, a distinct approach, or a historical antecedent—would improve conceptual precision.

Further, while the selection of differentiated instruction is defensible, the rationale for privileging this framework over other widely used approaches, such as Universal Design for Learning, is not sufficiently articulated. A short justification, addressing theoretical fit, empirical support, or alignment with the study's methodological constraints, would strengthen the argument.

With respect to Study 3, the candidate cites Göransson and Nilholm (2014) to frame inclusive education but does not explicate the framework's dimensions in adequate depth. Given that some readers may be unfamiliar with this source, a concise summary of the dimensions and their operational implications would enhance accessibility and analytic coherence. Similarly, the description of "inclusive practices" in Study 1 remains at a general level. A more detailed account of the specific practices under consideration, including their definitional boundaries and how they are measured or observed in the empirical work, would facilitate a clearer understanding of the study's conceptual underpinnings.

In Chapter 2.2, Mgr. Jana Obrovská, Ph.D., outlines the theoretical lenses underpinning Studies 4–6, specifically social reproduction theories, critical race theory in Study 5, and conceptualizations of everyday ethnicity in Study 6. The subchapter is conceptually promising and engages with pertinent frameworks. However, it lacks a sustained critical analysis of the structural mechanisms through which inequality is reproduced in educational settings. A deeper treatment of institutional arrangements, policy regimes, tracking practices, and intersectional dynamics would strengthen the argument and clarify how these theories illuminate the empirical findings. In addition, the transition on p. 50 to a descriptive account of the situation of Roma students in the Czech context appears abrupt. A brief orienting paragraph that explains the rationale for this shift and its linkage to the preceding theoretical discussion would improve coherence and reader guidance.

In sum, the introductory chapters on conceptualizing student diversity provide timely and relevant explications of the approaches and theories employed in the cumulative habilitation. The candidate clearly articulates the claim that broad and narrow conceptualizations should be treated as complementary. Nonetheless, the framing would benefit from a more robust critique of each approach, including explicit discussion of their limitations, boundary conditions, and potential unintended consequences. Specifying the mechanisms through which the proposed frameworks operate, and demonstrating how these mechanisms are evidenced in the subsequent studies, would enhance argumentative rigor and better justify the chosen conceptual architecture.

Moreover, this introductory chapter conflates conceptualizations of student diversity with pedagogical approaches to addressing diversity. For example, differentiated instruction is presented as enabling a broad understanding of diversity. In fact, differentiated instruction is a response framework that can be operationalized in either a broad or a narrow manner. It can function as a universal design strategy that anticipates heterogeneity across the whole student body, or it can be targeted to specific groups, such as learners with migration biographies. Consequently, I concur only in part with the candidate's treatment of conceptualizations of diversity. I do not agree with framing approaches like differentiated instruction as conceptualizations in their own right. I recommend reserving "conceptualization" for definitional lenses that delineate the scope and dimensions of diversity, and using "approach" or "framework" for pedagogical or organizational responses. Clarifying this distinction would improve conceptual precision and avoid category errors that blur definitions with interventions.

The methodology section is clearly articulated, offering a coherent overview of the designs and samples across Studies 1 to 6, including ethnographic, biographical, and case study approaches, alongside detailed descriptions of field notes, video recordings, semi-structured and focus group interviews, and questionnaires. Table 2 provides a helpful synoptic view of methodological choices, although a formatting issue appears to misalign the columns and should be corrected for readability. The candidate convincingly justifies the central role of ethnography, showing how sustained classroom observation enabled an analysis of inclusive teaching practices and students' responses in everyday instruction, and the substantial effort required for such resource-intensive data collection is evident and commendable. At the same time, the section would benefit from a more explicit critical engagement with the intellectual and ethical roots of ethnography, including its historical entanglements with colonial knowledge production, and from a reflexive account of positionality, representation, consent, reciprocity, and data stewardship, including concrete strategies used to mitigate power asymmetries and avoid extractive practices. The sustained focus on students'

perspectives stands out as a significant strength that aligns the methodological choices with the normative and analytical aims of the thesis and reflects a commitment that is evident at both the research and personal levels.

The findings section is presented in a non-chronological sequence that opens with Study 2, an in-depth analysis of pre-service teachers' reflections on and responses to student diversity during practicum. The results are largely anticipated, foregrounding enduring challenges in both pre-service and in-service contexts to attend systematically to students perceived as needing additional support, and highlighting persistent theory–practice gaps in inclusive pedagogy that have been documented extensively in prior research. Study 1, discussed next, synthesizes inclusive strategies used by experienced teachers and offers a useful systematization, yet several practices overlap with existing taxonomies of differentiated instruction, for instance Pozas and Schneider (2019), and some categories appear overly broad, such as “creating a safe classroom environment,” which risks subsuming multiple distinct dimensions under a single label. The extent to which the study advances genuinely new insights beyond, for example, Finkelstein et al. (2019), is not fully established, though the incorporation of students' perspectives is a notable and underrepresented contribution. Study 3, a scoping review, reiterates familiar conclusions, including difficulties in capturing diverse needs at a broad level, misalignment between teacher beliefs and classroom practices, the variety of inclusive practices and associated implementation challenges, and the imperative to involve students in participatory research. Its most distinctive contribution lies in documenting sampling tendencies in inclusive education studies that continue to focus disproportionately on specific student groups, often those with disabilities.

Studies 4–6 are presented separately because they focus on a specific group of disadvantaged students, socially disadvantaged students and Roma students in the Czech Republic.

Study 4 examines post-COVID support programs intended to improve outcomes in schools with higher proportions of socially disadvantaged students. However, its alignment with a “narrow” conceptualization of diversity is not fully convincing, as the participating schools likely exhibit multidimensional diversity beyond socioeconomic status. Greater attention to intersecting dimensions (e.g., ethnicity, language, disability) and their compounding effects would strengthen the rationale and analytic precision.

Study 5 concentrates on Roma mothers' perspectives, identifying barriers and resilience factors in primary education. While the focus on Roma communities is timely and important, the habilitation would benefit from a clearer justification for prioritizing this group across Studies 4–6, whether due to their specific historical marginalization, policy salience, data access, or theoretical considerations, explicitly linked to the broader aims of conceptualizing diversity. Additionally, the introduction of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework in this chapter, without prior foreshadowing in the conceptual section, creates a disjuncture. Integrating this framework earlier and clarifying how it complements the other lenses would improve coherence. Notwithstanding these issues, the findings make a substantial contribution by documenting deficit-based perceptions faced by Roma students and families in everyday school life and by delineating the wider structural constraints shaping their educational experiences. The decision to foreground Roma voices and to situate individual experiences within structural contexts is a notable strength of the habilitation, although the argument would be further enhanced by a more explicit intersectional analysis and a clearer articulation of how the group-specific insights feed back into the thesis's overarching framework on student diversity.

Finally, Study 6 foregrounds Roma students' and their peers' perspectives on classroom dynamics, yielding novel and compelling insights, particularly into how ethnicity intersects with other social identities (e.g., gender) to shape participation, peer relations, and teacher–student interactions.

I appreciate that the candidate structured the implications by separating theoretical, methodological, and practical dimensions into distinct sections, which enhances clarity and facilitates uptake by different audiences.

The implications are then organized by individual studies, again in a non-chronological order. For Study 1, it remains unclear how the findings extend prior reviews by Finkelstein et al. (2019) and Lindner and Schwab (2020). In discussing implications from Studies 3–6, the text simultaneously advocates a narrow categorical lens while urging fluid, contextually constructed understandings, without clarifying how categories can be analytically useful yet ontologically unstable in practice. Methodologically, the attention to sample construction and the risk that labelling may inadvertently reproduce exclusion is important. Notably, the strongest contribution of the habilitation is the insistence that students' perspectives be captured more frequently in inclusive education research, with a persuasive case for biographical approaches to elicit children's experiential knowledge. The practical implications are partially convincing: Study 1 offers core inclusive practices that align with existing models and are readily applicable. Study 2 yields valuable recommendations for teacher education but is geographically bounded, limiting generalizability. In the discussion of Study 4, the emphasis on parent engagement as a key school focus is contrasted with Study 5's reports of negative experiences among Roma women and children. Given that the datasets are not directly linked, these should not be presented as contradictory findings. Moreover, the recommendation that schools serving disadvantaged students foster open, supportive, partnership-oriented engagement is well established in the home–school collaboration literature and does not constitute a novel implication. The practical implications of Study 6 are among the most compelling, revealing complex dynamics experienced by Roma students. However, the decision to focus on a specific group carries risks of essentialization and stigmatization, potentially portraying a heterogeneous population as a homogeneous “problem group” and normalizing racialized distinctions without careful reflexivity.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)

You argue that narrow and broad conceptualizations of student diversity should be treated as complementary. Could you explicate the rationale for this position, indicate the conditions under which each lens is most useful, and address critiques that single-dimension foci risk essentialization or analytic myopia? Please illustrate with examples from your studies where each lens added value and how their integration informed interpretation and intervention.

In the introduction you frame differentiated instruction as enabling a broad understanding of diversity. Given that differentiated instruction (DI) can operate as a universal design strategy for heterogeneous classrooms or as a targeted approach for specific groups (e.g., learners with migration biographies), how do you position it within your narrow/broad framework? What criteria determine when DI functions as a broad versus a narrow response, and what safeguards do you propose to prevent tracking or deficit framing?

What role does intersectionality play in your conceptualization of student diversity, and how was it operationalized across study design, sampling, coding, and analysis? Please indicate how intersectional insights shaped your findings and practical implications, including any trade-offs in handling categories for analytic and policy purposes.

Your habilitation devotes substantial attention to Roma students. Could you elaborate on the rationale for this focus and how you mitigated risks of essentialization and stigmatization? How do you ensure that group-specific insights inform broader inclusive education without reinforcing racialized boundaries, and what are the implications for transferability beyond the Roma context?

Conclusion

Mgr. Jana Obrovská, Ph.D., makes a substantial contribution to inclusive education research through her focus on ethnographic inquiry, bridging theory and practice, and research with children. The habilitation meets formal standards and is linguistically polished, comprising several publications in international journals. These studies demonstrate rigorous engagement with the research questions and proficient handling of ethnographic data, and their findings advance the field's knowledge base.

At the same time, the theoretical framework and introduction are less compelling: the link between conceptualizations of student diversity and approaches to linguistic diversity is insufficiently clarified. The framing of differentiated instruction risks conflating a pedagogical approach with a conceptual lens and does not address its potential use within narrow conceptualizations, and the rationale for treating narrow and broad conceptualizations as complementary is underdeveloped. Practical implications are strongest in Study 1, which offers a robust, actionable framework for inclusive strategies relevant to both pre- and in-service teachers. Given the breadth of topics, a more extensive integrative text would be valuable, as the current version largely centers on conceptualizations of diversity without fully synthesizing the six contributions. Finally, the subchapter on the situation of Roma students is not adequately embedded within the overall argument, and the sustained focus on this group is insufficiently problematized with respect to potential risks of essentialization and stigmatization.

The habilitation thesis entitled *Addressing Student Diversity in Education* by Mgr. Jana Obrovská, Ph.D., does not fulfil requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Pedagogy.

Vienna,

March 16th, 2026



Prof. Dr. Susanne Schwab