

# Disrupting the System: How Social Systems Perpetuate Educational Segregation of Students with Extensive Support Needs

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## ABSTRACT:

Education teams continue to place students with extensive support needs (ESN) in segregated settings despite nearly 50 years of research culminating in the conclusion that students with ESN have better outcomes when educated in general education contexts. This article uses Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to explain how social systems influence the beliefs, attitudes, and decisions made by education team members about the educational placement of students with ESN. This article describes: (a) Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to explain how each social system influences decisions made about the educational placement of students with ESN; (b) the history of educational segregation of students with disabilities; (c) macrosystems of education team members and how they perpetuate segregated placement decisions of students with ESN; and (d) actions to disrupt the education system and segregated placement decisions.

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**Keywords:** Ecological systems theory, placement decisions,  
inclusive education, systems change, extensive support needs

with many individuals within their school environment, including peers with and without disabilities, special and general educators, related service providers, and paraeducators (Ruppar et al., 2017).

The second nested social system is the mesosystem, which includes the processes and relations occurring between two or more microsystems in which a person is involved. It consists of relations among multiple interacting microsystems, such as the relations between school and home, or home and work (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The mesosystem for each student with ESN primarily includes the relations among the school, home, and peer microsystems. For example, each student's mesosystem consists of many microsystems from school (e.g., teachers, related service providers), home (e.g., parents, siblings), and peer groups (e.g., neighbors, cousins, school-mates) in which the student is directly involved.

The third nested social system is the exosystem which also consists of the processes and relations between two or more microsystems, however at least one of those microsystems does not involve the individual. The processes of these microsystems indirectly impact the individual and the microsystems in which they are involved (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). For example, each education team member's education, workplaces, family social networks, and neighborhood-community contexts are microsystems that impact their perceptions, opinions, and ideals about disability, but these microsystems do not directly involve the student with ESN (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Each team member cannot be separated from the influence of their own microsystems which influences their perceptions, opinions, and ideals when discussing and making decisions about the educational placement, curriculum content, and educational supports provided for a student with ESN (Ruppar et al., 2017). We contend that these decisions impact a student's development as they dictate the degree to which the student has opportunities to learn academic content and embedded essential skills.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) describes the fourth nested social system, a macrosystem, as the overarching institutional patterns of a culture or subculture. As such, the macrosystem provides the "blueprint" for both cultures and subcultures (Bronfenbrenner 1994, 1977). He describes culture as a group of people with common belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, lifestyles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options (Bronfenbrenner 1993, 1994). Likewise, he describes subculture as a group of people within a culture who share a common broader social structure, such

as social class, race, ethnicity, disability, religion, or geographic location (e.g., the same neighborhood, community, or region; Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The overarching institutional patterns of a culture or subculture would include the economic, social, educational, and political systems that influence each person's micro-, meso-, and exosystems nested within the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). What a student with ESN experiences within the disability subculture, therefore, is influenced by every aspect of their own macrosystem, including the perceptions of each education team member derived from their own macrosystems.

Each macrosystem exists in both explicit forms (e.g., formal social features such as rules and law) and implicit forms (e.g., informal social features such as ideologies) that are exposed through everyday decisions and actions (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These social features bear information and ideology that give meaning and direction to agencies (e.g., government), social networks (e.g., families), roles (e.g., teacher, parent), and activities, and the relationship among them (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). We maintain that these social features blend together and impact the decisions made by education team members, which expose their personal ideology about ESN (e.g., student expectations), the role of education for students with ESN, and appropriate services for students with ESN. It is critical, therefore, to identify the social features of each macrosystem that affect conditions, processes, and interactions experienced by education team members within their own microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) that influence their ideology and beliefs about students with ESN and their educational services.

In 1993 Bronfenbrenner discussed how human development differs significantly between each person's macrosystems (p. 317), which clarifies his earlier work (1977) when he stated:

"What place or priority children and those responsible for their care have in such macrosystems is of special importance in determining how a child and his or her caretakers are treated and interact with each other in different types of settings" (p. 515).

While this is relevant for all students with disabilities, we believe it is particularly important to each student with ESN because decisions about their educational placement and services are made by their education team members, and these decisions have led to a high probability of a student with ESN being segregated from general education contexts, peers, content, and experiences (Brock 2018; Morningstar et al., 2017). The macrosystem of each member of a student's education team,

United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries. First, “common schools” were *intended* to serve *all* children in a geographic area. Second, “delinquent schools” were developed for students who were expelled or excluded from the common schools and operated as a means to segregate students of color. Third, “special schools” were intended for students with mental and physical disabilities because they were considered to be uneducable, but were required to attend a special school in a state asylum or institution for care, protection, and instruction. The government imposed compulsory education and educational standards to only the common schools. Professionals who worked in either the delinquent or special schools were not required to implement the government policies or curriculum from the common schools; rather, they operated with no mandated curriculum or legal consequences for their services. Richardson argued that the decisions to apply compulsory education and educational standards to only the common schools cultivated the controversy about educational policy and practice that remains today.

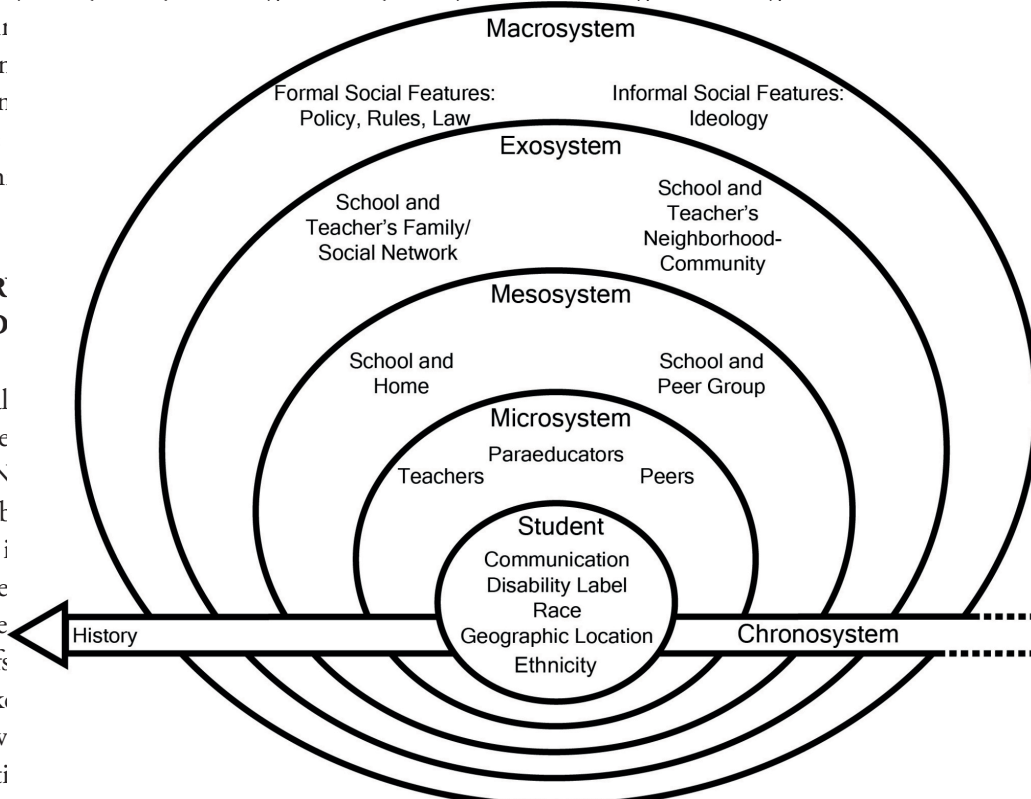
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The diagram illustrates Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. It consists of four concentric circles representing nested systems, with a horizontal bar intersecting them. From the innermost circle to the outermost, the systems are:

- Individual (Student):** The innermost circle, containing the text: "Student", "Communication", "Identity Label", "Access", "Social Location", and "Specificity".
- School and Teacher's Neighborhood-Community:** The second circle from the center, containing the text: "School and Teacher's Neighborhood-Community".
- School and Peer Group:** The third circle from the center, containing the text: "School and Peer Group".
- Informal Social Features: Ideology:** The outermost circle, containing the text: "Informal Social Features: Ideology".

A horizontal bar labeled **Chronosystem** intersects all four circles. The bar is solid in the middle and has dotted lines extending from its ends.

Despite numerous approaches used and policies enacted, there has been virtually no change in educational placements for students with ESN. Brock (2018) analyzed federal educational placement data for students



Historical systems which we have with ESN have disaffected the educational system in the United States. We argue that the belief that they make student work more difficult perpetuates the systems that perpetuate the educational segregation of students with ESN today.

Richardson (1994) described three separate types of schools in the public education system that existed in the

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therefore, impacts team members' perceptions of effective services and placement decisions.

### Chronosystem

The chronosystem is the final social system that extends beyond the environment to the passage of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Bronfenbrenner (1994) describes the chronosystem as the changes and continuities that a person experiences and that occur in the environment in which they live, both during their lifetime and across historical time. Changes in schools or levels (e.g., elementary to middle school), for example, impact the educational placement of a student with ESN and provides opportunities for education teams to assess the student's access to the general education curriculum (Ruppar et al., 2017). We assert that even more influential are the significant historical changes and continuities that impact educational placement decisions of all students with ESN in the United States today.

When an education team makes a placement decision that segregates a student with ESN from general education contexts, they are making decisions that greatly limit that student's opportunities to learn (Taub et al., 2017). In turn, this considerably impacts the student's lifelong trajectory (Brock, 2018; Morningstar et al., 2017). If we want to improve a student's long-term outcomes, therefore, we must consider the chronosystem as we attempt to influence the macrosystems of their education team members and the decisions made about education placement. This would require disrupting the existing social systems.

### HISTORY OF SEGREGATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Historical events have shaped the education system in which we currently function, which includes students with ESN being segregated from students who do not have disabilities. They also have resulted in an educational system ideology that students with ESN should continue to receive services in segregated educational contexts. We argue that this ableist systemic ideology influences the beliefs of education team members and the decisions they make related to the educational placement of each student with ESN. Understanding historical changes and continuities in the chronosystem is critical to disrupting the systems that perpetuate the educational segregation of students with ESN today.

Richardson (1994) described three separate types of schools in the public education system that existed in the

United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries. First, "common schools" were *intended* to serve *all* children in a geographic area. Second, "delinquent schools" were developed for students who were expelled or excluded from the common schools and operated as a means to segregate students of color. Third, "special schools" were intended for students with mental and physical disabilities because they were considered to be uneducable, but were required to attend a special school in a state asylum or institution for care, protection, and instruction. The government imposed compulsory education and educational standards to only the common schools. Professionals who worked in either the delinquent or special schools were not required to implement the government policies or curriculum from the common schools; rather, they operated with no mandated curriculum or legal consequences for their services. Richardson argued that the decisions to apply compulsory education and educational standards to only the common schools cultivated the controversy about educational policy and practice that remains today.

In 1975 federal policy changed and began to include students with ESN in compulsory education and, when *appropriate*, in common schools. Although the intent of the legislation might have been for students with disabilities to be integrated into common schools, Richardson (1994) argues that the policy's language allowed for the continuation of the three types of schools which were systematically designed to separate students. At that time, it was unknown how to provide educational services to students with ESN (Jackson et al., 2009). Special educators and families had to decide what comprised an *appropriate* education, without being required to use the common school's curriculum or instruction (Jackson et al., 2009). In the past 45 years, there have been numerous approaches used to provide services to students with ESN with variations in the curriculum content, the place of instruction, and the instructional practices (Jackson et al., 2009).

Today, federal policy remains open for individual and collective interpretation. Policy language requires districts to have a continuum of placements; however, it also states that students should be removed to separate settings only "when the *nature or severity of their disability* is such that they *cannot* receive a free and *appropriate* public education in the *regular classroom* with *supplementary aids and services*" (IDEA, 2004).

Despite numerous approaches used and policies enacted, there has been virtually no change in educational placements for students with ESN. Brock (2018) analyzed federal educational placement data for students

with intellectual disability from the 1976 to 2014, it is found that individual progress toward educational goals is slow and uneven across classrooms, related needs provide its 99th percentile, and the (Rally) direct follow-up in 2017 that progress declined between 2014 and 2016 and 2016 and 2017. These findings suggest that the current system, which tends to view the process as a whole and analyze educational goals, places more focus on the process than on the results. Williams (2020) found that the system of 1990 and 2000 generally had more progress in the system, such as the intellectual disability school and the only 34% nationally, (Barnard et al., 1994). The 71% of system for each is declining in the ISN. In addition, it includes a list of 10 factors and one which school, on the other hand, peer microsystem analysis for example, each is between 2000 and 2014. It is of importance to note (2017) that from school to the students with related disability, the system is less homogeneous, toward the students and general population (e.g., neighboring, consider school with related disability) is not directly involved.

Federal policy suggests a system of education system which blurs consists of the process and the relation between receive on inappropriate system, homogeneous education of those sent, base systems, their individualized teaching. The PIDEA, (2006) has a main suggestion on direct, the individual and the decision systems and which the ESN are involved. (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In fact, each education have from the social, family, social, of parks, and in the school, students with disabilities, including those that in the past. (Ruppert, 2007) in a case and that each about disability, but these process system being a disability involved the student with the ESN. (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Each mean in the competence, a separate of the geographic location, the individual system, which influence of the perception is, is provided by an individual. We discussing that taking a decision in the education, the teachers' perceptions of the student and the classroom as a part of the individual as a student with ESN. (Ruppert, 2007) We consider that these decisions with a student's level of education, systemic and the degree, and which the student has a positive suggested placement. When considering the student and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory that has each Bronfenbrenner (1977) describes the social and the social system, at the social system, the overall by the majority, which ultimately the culture, the school, of the student's placement, the "blueprint" for both cultures and subcultures (Bronfenbrenner 1994, 1977). He de-

**MACROSYSTEMS OF EDUCATION** common belief

**TEAM MEMBERS** knowledge, material resources, customs, lifestyles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life

For the system (Assumptions in 1993 and 1994) in the world, the student's subculture, a group of people with their own macro system, which connects the individual's culture, (such

personnel, teachers, and families) and the influence of factors such as the child's social and cultural background, the child's individual characteristics, and the child's learning environment. The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that influence the learning outcomes of students with disabilities in the classroom and to identify the factors that can be used to improve the learning outcomes of these students. The study is based on a review of the literature and a survey of teachers and students. The results of the study are discussed in terms of the implications for practice and policy.



[illegible]

[illegible][illegible]

In 1993 Brown et al. reviewed a series of data on Sherman (2014) found six different significantly have been effective for persons with disabilities (p. 617) which took into consideration the work of the students with ESN, and embedded the use of evidence-based practices for children and the use of responsible stakeholders for their care. In particular, such measures, strategies, and special interventions are provided to the students and school-wide historical factors are considered and in a way with school policies in different types of services” (p. 155). In addition, professional development for all and technical assistance is available with in particular wide provision to encourage school-wide ESN and decisions also in practice. Second, all professionals and services developed by the understanding of the members of the school decision required the change probability will be associated with ESN to bring a targeted person to the education to establish positive contrast to each experience (Brooks 2018; Murnighan et al., 2017) school, and education of each level, both of a student’s educational level



**CONCLUSION** The placement of a student with ESN and provides opportunities for education teams to assess the student's achievement narrative of education in the United States is at risk. We have a dual segregation based historical and emerging significant historical changes and work in a pipeline that this educational segregation decisions of all with ESN with ESN in the United States today special education services. We maintain that the education team makes a change needed as the sign of the system to address ESN and inequalities located within, they are making decisions to change. The light of the student's opportunities to learn (Taubman, 2007), that is, this is a school that impacts the students' life and vitality are (Booth, 2001). The National Center, the 2011 Cat 16 and system to improve segregation of students with ESN, therefore, we must consider the chronosystem as we attempt to influence the macrosystems of their education placement. This would require disrupting the existing social

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Richardson (1994) described how we can test types of school view <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131801.2023.2020116> in the

**Data Source:** Data were obtained from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (AddHealth), a nationally representative sample of adolescents aged 12–18 years who participated in a longitudinal survey of health and well-being. The study was conducted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Institute of Medicine, Diabetes, and Endocrinology Research Center. AddHealth includes data from multiple sources, including self-reports, school records, and medical records. The current analysis focused on the 2004 wave of data collection.

[illegible]



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