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

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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, schoolmates) 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,

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

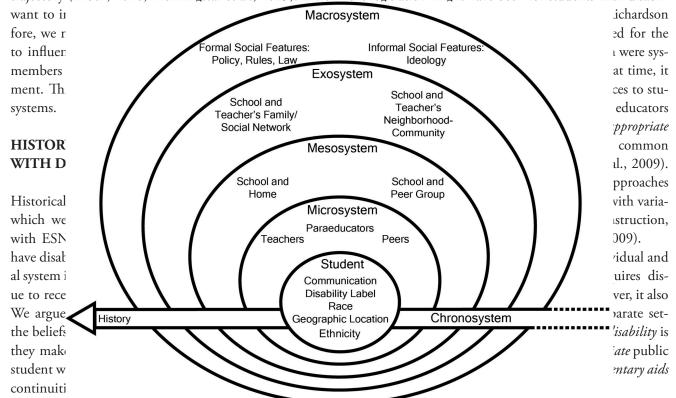
Chronosystem

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

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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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).

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the befoine foinneact a bream and enable promper the priloans go feeffect. Five stry the standuptable reconcidents in the forts across multiple levels to ensure evidence-based practices are being im-Olhmomosylsteith fidelity. Fifth, programs must seek the Theuchoforous receive in the fibre is a second structure of the contract of th become feeled bear wanthe services be pragging ovided no ni Brock fonthrendesized 90/4) iceBrSixten brannerus(1 00/4) olldesed bas vaeiables nuosyastass paratyresshaonyas dan be edestine ditipesa athiae amension i expection fest and princetion cumi estible en vivocomerst Davahiddivelned dissiphorhusu tingatabin difectimic and she iros historistaldtinus. serhineges in schools or levels (e.g., elementary to middle school), for example, impact the ed-**COMMENUTATION** ent of a student with ESN and provides opportunities for education teams to assess the student's Threistring general confication tion rivulor Unioph Stateslis 2021 Red We has bern all segregations be sent lone still eare ithen sing-Socialnife anistrosical the amges consiste continue i piespetuation paics educational procegation decision destrative in the Estate of the educational process of the education inaulgulchiioedoStaten dadayy special education services. We mai Waien thate durge tion leed is don't matake a h chaogen is no decisions ahlaesingning teemedy den advintes Fisher froed generatied watieddeolnwixhinthby are reaking ideciision sylvang really lighti fhhrestuckionisaoppioreuntionealtecticanna (Tameboledat, f20dra), Immundistrict, coarsiderably indupaction herandenels lifellodig vialing to ave (Brootler 2011 the Mocialing stremes, allhe 2011, 70 at 16 mat system o aimodpuloe seg istigation of congetence with of the 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 REFERENCES

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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 tematically 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