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Inclusive Education and the Interlocking of Ability and Race in the United States

Notes for an Educational Equity Research Program

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Inclusive education attained the status of a global movement a number of years ago, and many nations have been engaged in powerful transformations of their educational systems following inclusive agendas.¹ In the United States, for example, more than 60 percent of all students with disabilities are educated in general education classrooms more than 80 percent of their school day.² This number has gradually increased in the last six years, from 52 percent.³ However, the true meanings and implications of inclusive education are located in the interstices between its universal principles and the flavors of local inclusive initiatives.⁴ To complicate matters, reviews of the knowledge base on inclusive education suggest two troubling trends.⁵ First, the bulk of this research narrows the comprehensive focus of inclusive education to analyses about the opportunities, experiences, and outcomes of students with disabilities. Second,

systematic attention to equity issues in the implementation of inclusive education is the exception because of unexamined historical legacies both within and outside of education. For instance, in the United States, the research on inclusive education and the research on racial disparities in special education have been on parallel tracks, often published in different journals with very little attention to their potential intersections.⁶ This bifurcation suggests that the time is ripe to explore how historical legacies for groups that inhabit intersecting forms of difference have informed and influenced inclusive program implementation. A concern with addressing this substantial gap in the literature guides the work reported in this chapter.

We focus on the disproportionate identification of low-income racial minority students in high-incidence disability categories—learning disabilities (LD), emotional/behavioral disorders (E/BD), and mild intellectual disabilities (MID)—as a window into long-standing educational inequities that contribute to the stratification of US society while schools grapple with inclusive education agendas that encompass a broader range of disability labels and needs. It is here, in the socially constructed disability categories that the intersections of the racialized histories of the United States and the ways that disability has been appropriated to draw distinctions between and among students that the intersections can be explored. We reframe the research conducted to date and reflect on how this perspective can strengthen future policy and research efforts. Specifically, we avoid the reliance on simplistic binary framings of the problem (e.g., is the problem due to community or within-child traits?), the privileging of individual child or teacher variables, and the primary focus on deficits of children, families, teachers, schools, and communities traditionally used in this research. Instead, we frame the analysis of racial inequities in disability categories from a cultural historical perspective.⁷

A key assumption of the proposed model is that educational inequities for racial minority children are shaped and emerge at the intersection of multiple sectors beyond education.⁸ For this reason, we examine the role of school factors in the context of community forces as a means to obtain a broader, more situated understanding of educational inequities for this population. In addition, by identifying the intersections between community and school constraints and strengths, we will pinpoint factors and processes that can be used to frame community and school partnerships on behalf of these children.

We aim to provide evidence to researchers and educational leaders that defy simplistic theories of action in the design of interventions. That is, modeling a more complex view of how institutional, social, and educational factors intersect to produce inequity will compel policy makers to attend to the critical and, as of yet, seemingly invisible roles of space and time, schooling structures, everyday cultural practices in schools and communities, and regularities and contradictions in the analysis of educational inequities. In other words, this perspective calls attention to the production of educational (in)equity as mediated by sociocultural ecologies of constraints and resources in schools and neighborhoods.

BACKGROUND: THE RESEARCH AND THE CONTEXT

Before we present the assumptions of our proposed model, we outline background information on the research conducted to date and its limits.

Research on Racial Inequities in Special Education: Background and Needs

Since 1968, debates about minority students' disproportionate representation in special education remain unabated despite two reports funded by the National Academy of Sciences.⁹ The more recent of these concluded that schooling independently contributes to the incidence of special needs among racial minority students "through the opportunities that it provides."¹⁰ Research on this problem has focused largely on elementary school students and has included almost exclusively racial minority samples.¹¹ African American and Native American students are overrepresented in these programs at the national level. There is some evidence that Latino students and English language learners (ELLs) are disproportionately identified in certain regions and states (e.g., the Southwest) under certain conditions (e.g., the size of the group's school enrollment, presence of language support programs, and poverty level of the school).¹² NCCRESt (National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems) tracked state-level data from 1998–2010 on the risk for students from six ethnic groups to be identified for special education and also tracked student risk in eight large urban school systems throughout the United States.¹³ These data show that while states changed their thresholds for identifying districts with disproportionality, in a number of districts the overall risk for special education identification for African American, Native American, and Latino students increased.

It should be noted that the bulk of this research has been conducted in the last ten years despite the problem's long-standing presence, and most of it is concerned with the examination of school professionals' practices (e.g., referrals, assessment, or diagnostic decisions).¹⁴ Many of these studies examine individuals' biases theorized largely through a cognitive lens. Attention to school contexts, (group or institutional) cultural influences, or the roles of historical legacies of oppression are noticeably neglected and theoretically narrow.¹⁵ Another favored approach for studying this problem looks at school and community sociodemographic factors (e.g., income level, student enrollment by race and social class) and often aims to predict disability identification.¹⁶ Conceptually, these studies tend to be framed from a "risk" perspective—that is, the search for individually rooted causes of student learning difficulties; attention to assets, cultural resources, and protective processes is virtually nonexistent.

One important consequence of using these research approaches is that school-based responses to this problem have focused on psychological (e.g., cultural competence, individual bias elimination) rather than systemic solutions that offer the possibility of understanding the sociological, political, and cultural contexts that undergird disproportionality. For instance, if neighborhoods are organized along boundaries that define immigrant nationalities, how do these monocultural enclaves impact the ways that teachers and students alike identify intellectual and cultural capital in the classroom? What group or groups are considered atypical or different, and how do these differences get interpreted in student classroom performance? If some parts of local neighborhoods are considered "unsafe," how do these perceptions affect how students from those neighborhoods are perceived, and how do students who live in those sections of town perceive themselves? Answering such questions requires attention to community and other nonschool factors so that an explicit, theoretically sound view of culture and its mediating power in human affairs (particularly in schools) can be developed.

Another consequence of traditional research approaches is that school districts and schools end up mathematizing the problem; that is, they frame and tackle it from a purely technical perspective in which constructs are quantified under abstract categories and processes are erased.¹⁷ Thus, educators often focus solely on reducing the disproportionality indices or changing the placement thresholds that trigger state or federal audits.¹⁸ This way, remedies become a numbers game in which placement risks can be reduced for racial minority students without nec-

essarily improving the quality of education offered to these students or the transformation of the structures and practices that created the inequities in the first place. Another recent trend is observed in districts' efforts to change what counts as disproportionality, so that even substantially high placement probabilities (in the neighborhood of four to five times more likely) would not constitute disproportionate representation.¹⁹ These are indeed consequential decisions with potentially grave implications.

An interdisciplinary framework to track equity in inclusive education, therefore, is urgently needed to rely on a broader unit of analysis that considers the multiple layers of this problem. More importantly, a cultural historical model will enable the research community to foreground equity analyses during program implementation and transcend the historical limits of this literature.

Assumptions of a Cultural Historical Model

We conceptualize neighborhoods, communities, and schools as interdependent spheres of influence that have the potential to advance or constrain the opportunities of the next generation of US citizens. Although the majority of racial minority children live under adverse circumstances, we broaden traditional analytical lenses so that a strengths-based, culturally responsive perspective is systematically used. In turn, we expect the knowledge gathered from this standpoint will inform the design and reform of educational programs that enhance learning opportunities and strengthen preparation for participation in a democratic society.

We use an interdisciplinary model that accounts for people's everyday practices as embedded in cultural milieus and connect local actions to larger historical/structural processes, such as race relations in racially stratified societies, and the structural distribution of opportunities along racial and other forms of difference. Moreover, a historically dynamic and instrumental view of culture informs our framework, so that culture's simultaneous pressures to renew and reproduce practices are accounted for.²⁰ The attention to the complexities of educational equity as embedded in larger sociohistorical processes will enable us to paint a more nuanced portrait of the educational experiences of marginalized learners.

Scholarship from urban sociology, critical policy studies, and critical geography offers important insights about the intersection of space and time in sociocultural practices.²¹ Thus, a focus on the spatial distribution of opportunities at a point in time (or across time) enables us to study

how educational equity is constituted by opportunities and constraints in the wider educational system and beyond. For instance, there is substantial evidence about the structuring nature of race in American society and how opportunities to valuable experiences and resources (e.g., quality teachers and schools, access to college, higher-paid employment, housing) are racially and spatially distributed.²² And there is a plethora of evidence on the intersections of race, ethnicity, language, gender, and national status and how they mediate intergroup relations in everyday ecologies of communities and neighborhoods where schools are located that ultimately shape sociocultural processes, attitudes, and behaviors.²³ We use such analytic lens to contextualize the examination of inequities in education.²⁴

Assumptions of an Inclusive Education Stance

Education for All (EFA) has influenced significant reforms in educational systems around the globe, at least at the policy level.²⁵ EFA has targeted inclusive education through international declarations and projects sponsored by international agencies such as UNESCO. Defined broadly, inclusive education focuses on ensuring that a variety of groups that have been traditionally excluded from formal schooling are able to access a variety of opportunities to learn in schools.²⁶ In spite of the press for inclusive education internationally, its agenda has some skeptics questioning who benefits from advancing a universal and standardized effort that has the potential to erase local, indigenous ways of responding to and accommodating difference.²⁷ How such an agenda might be accomplished and the degree to which a deep and sustained commitment to inclusiveness exists in policy and practice remains only partially examined. As the push for formal education disrupts the social fabric of communities of nomadic, immigrant, and agrarian communities, inclusive education must be examined from multiple perspectives that take into account tensions between local, national, and global scales.

Inclusive education comprises a set of ambitious reform agendas that emerged primarily from equity critiques focusing on the diluted curriculum of classrooms segregated by ability differences, the content knowledge of special educators, and the lack of opportunities to learn from and alongside peers with a range of abilities and talents.²⁸ Despite growing consensus around definitions of inclusive education, there are few similarities from context to context.²⁹ For instance, beginning in 1968, special education critics in the United States pointed to the flaws in an educational process that seemed to promise specialized treatments and

interventions linked to specific needs for students who were identified in specific disability categories.³⁰ Beginning in 1995, a call for inclusive education in the United States found voice in the research literature.³¹ Where inclusive education took hold in the United States, it benefited White children—who were more likely to be included in general education—more than their African American and Latino counterparts.³² Although inclusive education was defined as a project for advancing a transformative agenda that focused on examining the processes and legacies that marginalized students because of race, class, gender, religion, language, and ability, inclusive education primarily focused on the construction of difference, particularly as it related to within-child deficits.³³ Oppression and exclusion because of race, language, class, gender, and complex cultural practices provided a fuzzy backdrop for the ability discourse. Yet the endemic and sustaining structure within the US education system is predicated on selection criteria that have their roots in enduring legacies of racial oppression and stratification in US society.³⁴ Without attention to the intersections of race and ability, inclusive education will always fail to earn legitimacy and authenticity in the eyes of minority students and their families.

Who is included, for what purpose, and in what context varies dramatically.³⁵ The heterogeneity of national and local sociocultural contexts dictates variances that are often unclear for researchers and practitioners working across national contexts. For the most part, inclusive education projects have failed to address deeply embedded assumptions that guard how schooling is constructed: (1) the complex process of identity formation and development, (2) the dynamic and cultural nature of practice within local schools, and (3) the institutional pressure to conform, sort, and organize along bureaucratic lines. In this chapter, we conceptualize inclusive education as a project that involves examining the nature of local and indigenous ways of interacting with what counts as “different” within a given community. How difference has been constructed and for what purposes intersects with how individual, familial, and institutional identities are constructed and sustained over time. The work of Soja and others helps to understand how spatial relationships such as proximity to physical, intellectual, and social resources; other people; and multiple languages inform, influence, and complete individual and collective narratives about what is valued, useful, and desirable.³⁶ Woven into these spatial narratives are historical, contemporary, and future-oriented notions of time and people’s agency. These concepts function to construct and afford the degree to which difference becomes

visible and subject to reinterpretation.³⁷ To engage inclusive education as a project of becoming, rather than a state of being, requires understanding the historical legacies that produce cultural patterns within schools and opening the possibility of reconsideration of those practices. A sociocultural framework creates the possibility of examining the affordances and constraints of inclusive education in terms of the tools, structures, and activity patterns embedded within school as well as understanding how local community culture informs and influences the ways in which difference is defined and addressed. Communities themselves play critical roles in assigning purpose and outcomes to the function of schooling. These values undergird how school is organized and for whom. In this way, a more complete understanding of who is being included, in what ways, and for what outcomes can be accomplished.

UNDERSTANDING THE RACIALIZATION OF DISABILITY THROUGH AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PRISM

In this section, we highlight some key ideas from our standpoint to examine the racialization of disability. We present descriptive evidence about the city of Chicago and one of its neighborhoods as a means to illustrate the potential value of the proposed perspective. For this purpose, we summarize broad descriptors of the state of Illinois and Chicago public schools to contextualize our analysis. Second, we describe disability as a fluid notion that is distributed across city spaces in particular ways. Third, we summarize descriptive data on a Chicago neighborhood and contextualize the racialization of disability data with evidence on socio-cultural indicators of school and neighborhood life. We expect this multilevel sketch will broaden the study of the racialization of disability and compel researchers to examine this longstanding problem in its broader sociohistorical contexts.

Chicago Public Schools: An Overview

The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) district is located in the third-largest city and is the fourth-largest school district in the United States. In 2010, CPS educated 409,279 students in its 482 elementary schools, 122 high schools, and 71 charter schools. Latino and African American students constituted the largest proportion of students in CPS (41 percent and 45 percent, respectively), while White students accounted for 9 percent, Asian/Pacific Islander (A/PI) account for 3.6 percent, and Native Americans accounted for 0.2 percent of the total school enrollment.

Students from a low-income background accounted for 86 percent, and students identified as limited English proficient (LEP) accounted for 12.2 percent of the school enrollment.³⁸ Almost 50 percent of the teachers are White, about 30 percent are African American, and 16 percent are of Latino background.³⁹

Overall, students' academic outcomes as measured by the Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT) have increased over the last decade. The percentage of students in grades 3-8 meeting or exceeding standards grew from 39 percent in 2001 to over 65 percent in 2010 in reading and from 35 percent to 75 percent in the mathematics portion of the ISAT. Yet racial differences in these indicators remained throughout the decade with African American, Latino, and Native American students being outperformed by White and Asian/Pacific Islander students. The percentage of students with disabilities and LEP students meeting or exceeding reading and mathematics standards also increased over the last decade but continued to be significantly lower compared with the percentage of students without disabilities and English proficient students respectively.⁴⁰

Similar trends are observed in the dropout and graduation rates. Overall graduation rates increased from 47.2 in 2001 to 55.8, and dropout rates decreased from 50 percent in 2001 to 41 percent in 2010. African American, Latino, and Native American students and students with either an IEP or a 504 plan had the highest dropout rates and lowest graduation rates. LEP students' dropout rates are lower and graduation rates are higher than the rates for all students.⁴¹

As of 2010, students with an individualized educational plan (IEP) composed a little over 12 percent of the total school enrollment, which is about the same proportion reported in 2006 (11.7 percent). If one looks at special education placement across grade levels, it is noticeable that greater percentages of students with IEP are found in the higher grades. In 2006, for instance, students with an IEP constituted 6 percent of the total first-grade enrollment, while they accounted for almost 17 percent of the total enrollment in tenth grade.⁴²

Fluid Geographies of Disability: Tracing and Understanding Boundary Objects

The racialization of disability is traditionally calculated in the United States with relative risk ratios.⁴³ This index "provides a group's relative likelihood of identification or placement in comparison to some other group. It is represented by a ratio of the risk indices for two groups [in which a risk index is] calculated by dividing the number of group members in the

disability category by the total number of those individuals in the population."⁴⁴ Thus, the relative risks for identification in the high-incidence disabilities for various racial groups in Illinois in 2005–06 are reported in table 2.1. These data suggest African Americans are the only students overrepresented in MID and E/BD in Illinois. Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander students, on the other hand, are underrepresented in several disability categories at the state level, the former in the E/BD category and the latter in LD and E/BD.

As we move this analysis from the state to the city level (i.e., Chicago), the aggregated data on special education placements do not show overrepresentation patterns for any racial category. However, the placement evidence by disability category shows that Latino and African American students were overrepresented in the high-incidence categories. African American students were almost six times as likely (5.87) and Latino students were over three times (2.41) more likely to be placed in the high-incidence disability categories than their peers (see table 2.2).

Note, however, that these placement indices by themselves do not provide information about potential contributing or contextual factors. The challenge for researchers, therefore, is to use analytical tools that enable them to contextualize the identification patterns reflected in the relative risk ratios. For this purpose, we reframe some of the basic tenets typically used in the analysis of this problem. Specifically, we assume educational systems are engaged in intensive cultural work that both: (1) encultur-

TABLE 2.1 Relative risk ratio for students in high incidence disabilities (compared with all other groups) in Illinois, 2005–06*

	<i>Intellectual disabilities</i>	<i>Learning disabilities</i>	<i>Emotional/behavioral disorders</i>	<i>Speech/language impairments</i>
African American	3.20	1.37	2.43	0.79
Latino/a	0.78	1.04	0.46	0.74
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.52	0.29	0.20	0.67
Native American	0.76	0.89	0.92	0.98
White	0.47	0.87	0.80	1.45

Source: www.nccrest.org (based on Census count)

* A relative risk ratio of 2 or above is generally considered an overrepresentation pattern and 0.5 reflects underrepresentation.

TABLE 2.2 Disability relative risk ratio by student race in CPS and selected neighborhood school, 2005–06

Student race	K–8 SCHOOLS			HIGH SCHOOL
	District (n = 401,699)	Madrigal (n = 776)	Mendoza (n = 572)	Herrera (n = 1690)
African American	5.87	3.05	1.73	1.14
Latino/a	3.41	0.33	1.00	0.74
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.12	n/a	3.87	0.6
Native American	0.02	n/a	n/a	n/a
White	1.0	1.0	1.95	2.19

Source: www.nccrest.org.

ates future adult citizens to the dominant cultural codes of communities and (2) sets conditions and deploys technologies and practices that ultimately stratify those communities.⁴⁵ We further assume educational systems use notions such as giftedness, risk status, and disabilities in subtly disparate ways across social worlds to *manage diversity and cooperation* among school professionals, leading ultimately to important equity consequences.⁴⁶ For the purpose of this analysis, we conceptualize disabilities as *boundary objects*; these are defined as objects that “inhabit several intersecting worlds . . . and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them . . . [These objects] are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites.”⁴⁷

We consider disability an *ideal type* of boundary object. An ideal type “does not accurately describe the details of any locality or thing. It is abstracted for all domains, and may be fairly vague” (e.g., species).⁴⁸ Thus, an ideal type of boundary object is adaptable to specific sites because of its vagueness, and these objects delete local contingencies. This notion allows us to examine the potentially changing meanings and purposes of a construct such as LD as professionals, students, parents, and administrators move through the institutional practices that lead to disability identification—from student participation and learning opportunities in the general education classroom to referrals, assessments, and eligibility meetings.⁴⁹ We are also interested in *standardized* boundary objects that are used as “methods of common communication across dispersed work

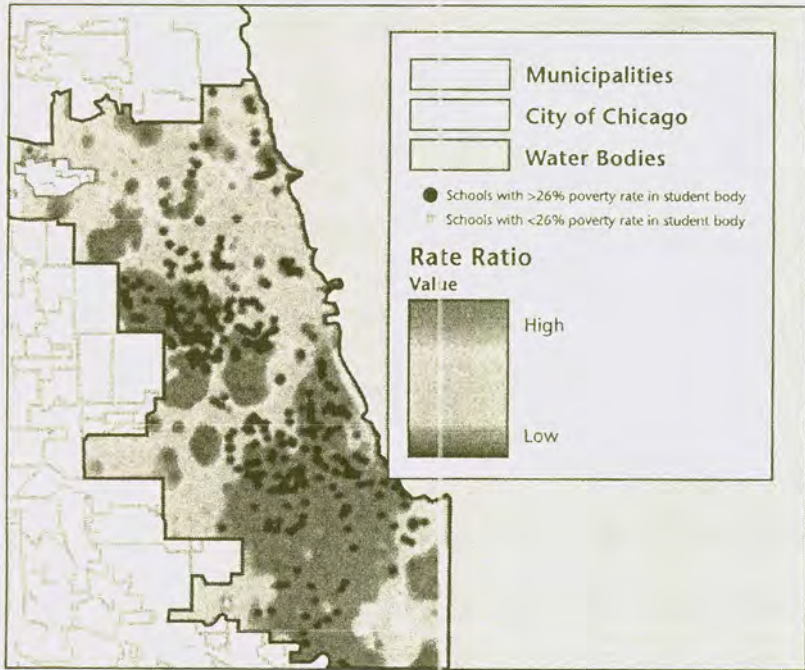
groups.”⁵⁰ These objects delete local uncertainties. We consider relative risk ratios a *standardized* boundary object.

Our theoretical assumptions, therefore, enable us to examine how a technical index that standardizes information (e.g., relative risk ratio) allows individuals from disparate constituencies situated in different locations to communicate about a notion that might embody rather diverse meanings and purposes (e.g., disability). From this vantage point, we broaden analytical possibilities for understanding the cultural work of disabilities.⁵¹

Let us take, for example, longstanding assumptions and arguments about the consequences of poverty for disability identification risk. A favored explanation in this literature is that the high poverty rate among minority families explains the disproportionate prevalence of disability in these groups.⁵² This traditional explanation constitutes a major barrier in efforts to address this problem, since it could lead to the conclusion that interventions should target only families and children (given that the transformation of structural factors requires more expensive efforts over longer periods of time). In contrast, we can contextualize the association of poverty with disability identification patterns through the examination of the spatial distribution of disabilities for a particular racial group across localities with distinct socioeconomic levels. This analytical strategy can assist us to raise questions regarding the role of disability as an ideal boundary object across geographical areas.

Figure 2.1 represents the areas of Chicago where disproportionate representation was observed (red areas) for African American students in low- and high-poverty schools. Visual examination of this map suggests that African American disproportionality rates are found in areas where high-poverty schools are located, though there are also disproportionality patterns in low-poverty schools. To complicate matters, disproportionate representation levels are identified in areas of the city where *both* high- and low-poverty schools sit in close proximity. How do factors like teacher salary and attrition across districts, history of desegregation court orders, teacher perceptions of student ability, and teacher and parent perceptions of neighborhood violence and trust that can mediate parent-teacher and teacher-student interactions shape disability identification decisions? Interestingly, research suggests all of these factors are linked to equity concerns in education, some of which also bear on the disproportionate representation problem.⁵³ Reframing this problem from the standpoint of disability as boundary object opens opportunities to examine aspects and issues that otherwise would be ignored in the traditional research para-

FIGURE 2.1 African American student disproportionate representation in CPS's high- and low-poverty schools



Source: E. B. Kozleski, A. Artiles, J. Klingner, and C. Utley, National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems, Office of Special Education Programs, U. S. Department of Education, Contract # H326E060001, 2004–2010.

digm used in this literature. For instance, questions that arise from the proposed perspective include the following: (1) What meanings and purposes do the notion of disability have in these schools? and (2) How do differences in the meanings and purposes of disability across social contexts shape identification rates for racial minority groups? We turn next to a closer examination of some of these issues at the neighborhood and school levels.

The Racialization of Disability in Its School and Neighborhood Contexts

We bring the analysis of the racialization of disability to the level of a neighborhood in Chicago. (We define neighborhoods as “ecological units nested within successively larger communities.”⁵⁴) This neighborhood is

predominately populated by Latino residents (over 90 percent; majority Mexican), and about one-fifth of households are headed by women. The neighborhood's socioeconomic statistics portray a typical urban community in a major US city.⁵⁵ About one-third of household incomes are below \$15,000 per year and over one-third of children in the neighborhood live under the federal poverty level. The median household incomes are 20 percent below the citywide level. The unemployment rate was 13 percent, compared with 7 percent for the rest of the city. Gang violence is widely considered to be second only to East Los Angeles.⁵⁶ Two-thirds of children drop out of school and almost three-quarters of adults never completed a ninth-grade education.

We reviewed patterns of disability identification for subgroups of students in the neighborhood schools and learned that Latino students were not disproportionately represented in the neighborhood schools. This is interesting, considering that Latinos were over three times as likely to be placed in special education in CPS (see table 2.2). Moreover, we found that African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and White students were overrepresented in three neighborhood schools, two K-8 schools and one high school (see table 2.2).⁵⁷ Specifically, African Americans were over three times as likely to be placed in special education at Madrigal K-8 school. (*Note:* All school names are pseudonyms.) This risk is lower than the districtwide ratio of 5.87. In turn, Mendoza school (K-8), showed substantial overrepresentation of Asian/Pacific Islander students (almost four times as likely) and borderline levels of representation for African American and White learners (see table 2.2). Neither Asian American nor White students were overrepresented in CPS. Lastly, White learners were twice as likely to be placed in special education at Herrera High School. Note that these schools had a higher proportion of students living in poverty compared with the CPS rate (see table 2.3). In addition, compared with the district, the two K-8 schools had a higher proportion of students classified as LEP, while the high school had a comparable rate of LEP learners. Student mobility rate was lower in the two K-8 schools and higher in the high school than the CPS level. In contrast to the CPS rate, student attendance was lower in the high school and higher in the K-8 schools (see table 2.3).

Our analytic approach takes into account socioeconomic indicators in the examination of racial identification patterns in the neighborhood schools. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are patterns of racial overrepresentation in light of the poverty level and low educational attainment of most residents in this geographical area.⁵⁸ The link between disproportionality rates and these factors has been documented in previ-

TABLE 2.3 Percentage of school population in CPS and selected schools across various sociodemographic and educational indicators, 2005

<i>Sociodemographic and educational indicators</i>	<i>District (n = 401,699)</i>	K-8 SCHOOLS		HIGH SCHOOL
		<i>Madrigal (n = 776)</i>	<i>Mendoza (n = 572)</i>	<i>Herrera (n = 1690)</i>
Race:				
African American	48	2	4	4
Latino/a	38	96	88	93
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	0	0.7	1
Native American	0.1	0	0	0
White	8	0.3	2	2
Multiracial/ethnic	2	1	5	0.8
Limited English proficient	14	23	23	15
Eligible for free/reduced lunch	86	97	94	97
Mobility rate	24	14	10	28
Attendance rate	92	97	96	84

Source: <https://research.cps.k12.il.us/resweb/PageServlet?page=schoolprofile&class=profile.SchoolProfile>.

ous research.⁵⁹ However, the evidence described above also suggests the target K-8 schools had a greater demand for second-language accommodations, but also had a more stable student population and greater student attendance than the high school. What practices, policies, beliefs, and ideologies account for the differential patterns of disproportionality observed across these three schools that affected distinct racial groups? What mediated student attendance and mobility rates, and how did these factors shape special education placement patterns?

In addition, it is important that we document neighborhood and family processes and resources as a deliberate theoretical move to challenge the image of poor communities as places in which there are only despair, deprivation, apathy, and negative conditions. We aim to enrich these sources with school related data. Our goal is to examine educational equity concerns in the contexts of structures of opportunity and uses of interorganizational ties.⁶⁰ For this purpose, we rely on evidence from the Consortium on Chicago School Research about teacher and student perceptions of various aspects of school life that include professional capacity, quality of instruction, school leadership, parent and community relationship, and learning climate.⁶¹ When relevant, we juxtapose data

from a project led by urban geographers in the same neighborhood that focused on civic engagement and other indicators of community life.⁶²

We use these data sets in a descriptive fashion to raise key questions regarding a broader and cultural-historical understanding of disproportionality. This analytic process helps us illustrate the potential of the model proposed in this chapter to examine equity questions germane to the racialization of disabilities.

Table 2.4 reports the Consortium student perception data for the three selected schools. The evidence on student sense of support (under the parent and community relationship dimension) suggests that the three schools fell below the school district average, with Madrigal at the bottom and Mendoza at the highest level; Herrera high school fell between these two schools. This aspect of the survey instrument measured student perception of parent support for student learning and social resources in the community. We link student perceptions of social resources in the community with the notion of collective efficacy beliefs. Note that collective efficacy in the neighborhood was somewhat absent in the geographical areas where these three schools are located (see figure 2.2). Mendoza school, which had the highest level of student sense of support, was the closest to areas of the neighborhood where collective efficacy was high (see figure 2.2). Although Asian American students at Mendoza K-8 school were overrepresented, and African American and White students approached disproportionality levels, student sense of support as measured by this survey was high.

These trends are counterintuitive and raise questions about the social climate at this school and the potential influence of community efficacy perceptions. It is possible that the scores of the Latino majority in the school population are driving the average rates of these measures, thus skewing data that might be construed as contradictory with the disproportionality data. But it is also important to raise questions about what happens to students who constitute a small portion of the student population in schools where there is a strong social cohesion among the majority population. How does this situation shape their chance to be placed in special education? What would be the impact of strengthening collective self-efficacy in the community for school practices? In contrast, African American learners at Madrigal school were three times as likely to be identified with disabilities. Given that this school's students reported the lowest sense of support rates, it is relevant to question how a rather negative mood among students is associated with a heightened level of disproportionality for African Americans.

TABLE 2.4 Selected neighborhood schools' scores in the 2005 Consortium on Chicago School Research biannual survey

<i>Dimensions</i>	K-8 SCHOOLS		HIGH SCHOOL
	<i>Madrigal</i>	<i>Mendoza</i>	<i>Herrera</i>
1.1. Professional community			
a) Reflective dialogue	2 ^a	4	4
b) Collective responsibility	3	3	3
c) Socialization of new teachers	3	4	5
1.2. Professional work place			
a) School commitment	5	4	5
b) Innovation	3	3	3
c) Teacher-teacher trust	3	3	4
1.3. Professional development			
a) Access to new ideas	3	3	3
b) Quality of professional development	1	3	3
2. Quality of instruction			
2.1. Engaging pedagogy and academic demand			
a) Quality of student discussion	4	3	4
b) Use of classroom libraries	3	3	n/a
c) Interactive math instruction	4	3	3
d) Student center literacy instruction	1	3	n/a
3. School leadership			
a) Teacher-principal trust	2	2	3
b) Teacher influence	3	3	3
c) Instructional debate	3	2	3
d) Program coherence	2	3	4
4. Parent and community relationships			
4.1. Participants relations			
a) Parent involvement	3	4	n/a
b) Teacher-parent trust	3	4	3
c) Teacher-parent interaction	2	1	1
4.2. Student sense of support			
a) Parent support for student learning	1	2	1
b) Human social resources in the community	2	3	3
5. Learning climate			
5.1. Safety norms and behavior			
a) Safety	3	3	2
b) Student classroom behavior	3	4	3
c) Incident of disciplinary action ^b	5	5	3
5.2. Involvement and support			
a) Student-teacher trust	3	4	3
b) Academic engagement	3	4	4
c) Academic press	2	2	2
d) Peer support academic work	2	2	n/a

Source: Consortium on Chicago School Research (2005). *Improving Chicago's Schools: A report specially prepared to assist in self-assessment and long term planning.* Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research.

a. One standard deviation below the average of CPS; 2 = One half to one standard deviation below average of CPS; 3 = One half standard deviation below to one half standard deviation above the average of CPS; 4 = One half to one standard deviation above average of CPS; 5 = One standard deviation above average.

b. This item was coded on a negative scale; thus, lower scores reflect more desirable patterns with regard to discipline.

FIGURE 2.2 Distribution of neighborhood residents' collective efficacy perceptions



Source: D. Fernández, P. L. Price, D. D. Arreola, C. Lukinbeal, M. Torres, and T. Ready, *Comparative Civic and Place Engagement in Three Latino Enclave Neighborhoods in Transition*, National Science Foundation Human and Social Dynamics program award number 433947, 2007.

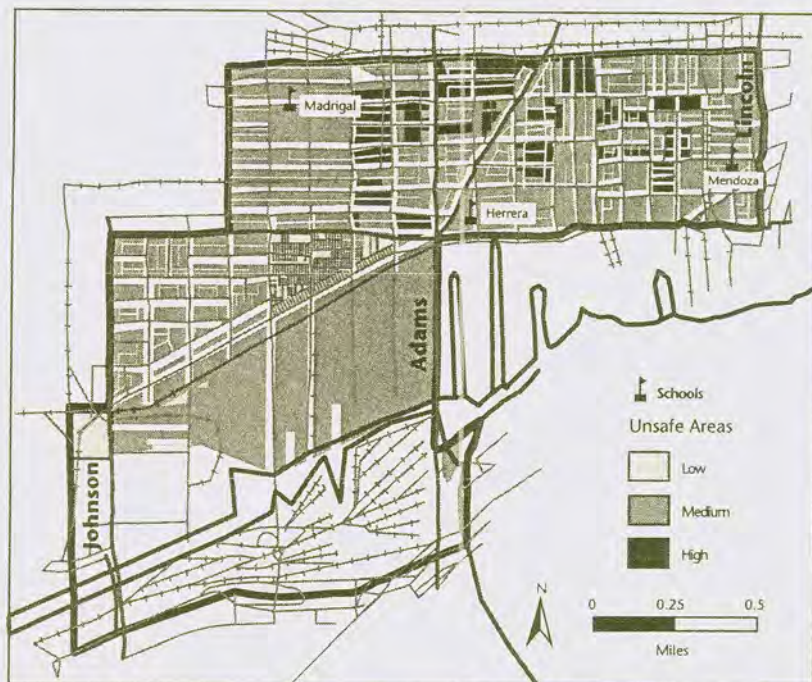
The ratings in the safety norms and behavior aspect (under the “learning climate” dimension) show that the two K–8 schools had a higher frequency of disciplinary problems (see scores for item 5.1.c. “incident of disciplinary action”) than the high school (see table 2.4). While a report from the National Center on Educational Statistics (NCES) states that there are no differences reported in incidents of violence, middle schoolers do experience more school harassment and bullying than high schoolers.⁶³ In fact, these schools were one standard deviation above CPS average. The high school disciplinary action score was at the district average level. Sociological research suggests neighborhood collective efficacy and neighborhood civic engagement are associated with levels of violence and sense of well-being.⁶⁴ We already noted that collective efficacy seemed to be low in the surrounding sites where the schools were located (see figure 2.2). Thus, it is possible that the disciplinary action data from the two K–8 schools reflect disorderly organizational cultures that resort to heavy use

of disciplinary referrals and actions. This would not be surprising, since urban schools that serve predominately low-income racial minority students tend to adopt harsher disciplinary measures and rules.⁶⁵ It would be useful to examine teacher quality data (e.g., level of education/certification) in these schools, since urban schools serving low-income students tend to have a disproportionate number of low-quality teachers, which in turn is associated with a proclivity to refer students to special education when presented with negative behaviors.⁶⁶ Recent research also shows that teachers working in low socioeconomic and low-achieving contexts tend to underestimate their students' abilities, which increases the risk for special education referral.⁶⁷ This finding holds after data are statistically controlled for students' social and academic backgrounds.

A related aspect of the learning climate is students' perceptions of safety (see item 5.1.a. in table 2.4). The two K–8 schools reflect safety perceptions at the same level of CPS, suggesting that students feel safe inside and outside of school and traveling to and from the school. The evidence on perceptions of unsafe neighborhood spaces from local residents supports student perceptions, since these schools were not located in “unsafe” areas (see figure 2.3). Although there were neighborhood spots close to these schools that were considered unsafe, the available data on perceptions of safety do not reflect the typical image of urban neighborhoods. Although greater detail is needed about the level of neighborhood violence and safety, it is noticeable that local residents do not perceive safety problems in the immediate surroundings of the target schools. Hence, a closer examination of the organizational culture of these schools is warranted to help us understand how school contexts in which students have high disciplinary referral rates also feel safe. More importantly, this analysis should shed light on how the social spaces of these schools shape the patterns of disproportionate placement in special education for some racial groups.

Quality of instruction is a key consideration in understanding inappropriate referrals and placement in special education. As table 2.4 shows, Herrera high school was rated higher the CPS average when compared with the other two K–8 schools, though the latter were rated at the same level as CPS schools. The data on involvement and support (section 5.2 under “Learning climate”) reflect a somewhat consistent pattern; Herrera high school was rated at the same level as CPS schools, like Mendoza school; Madrigal school came below the CPS average. All in all, these indicators did not show problematic trends, and it will be useful to compare them with teacher perception data. Specifically, we observe

FIGURE 2.3 Distribution of neighborhood residents' perceptions of unsafe areas



Source: D. Fernández, P. L. Price, D. D. Arreola, C. Lukinbeal, M. Torres, and T. Ready, *Comparative Civic and Place Engagement in Three Latino Enclave Neighborhoods in Transition*, National Science Foundation Human and Social Dynamics program award number 433947, 2007.

Herrera high school had a professional workplace score above the CPS average, though the two K–8 schools were at the level of the school district. Herrera was consistently at or above CPS schools on the other measures of professional culture, such as professional community, professional development, and school leadership (see table 2.4). Madrigal school, where African Americans were three times as likely to be placed in special education, was below CPS schools in all of these areas. Although Mendoza school was at the level of CPS schools in two of these areas, it was also below the district average in the school leadership measure (see table 2.4). These data do not raise red flags for the most part, with the exception of school leadership, where both K–8 schools were rated below the district level. Hence, greater scrutiny in this domain is warranted to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the racialization of disability.

The last area we discuss is participants' relationships (under parent and community relationships). The Consortium evidence shows

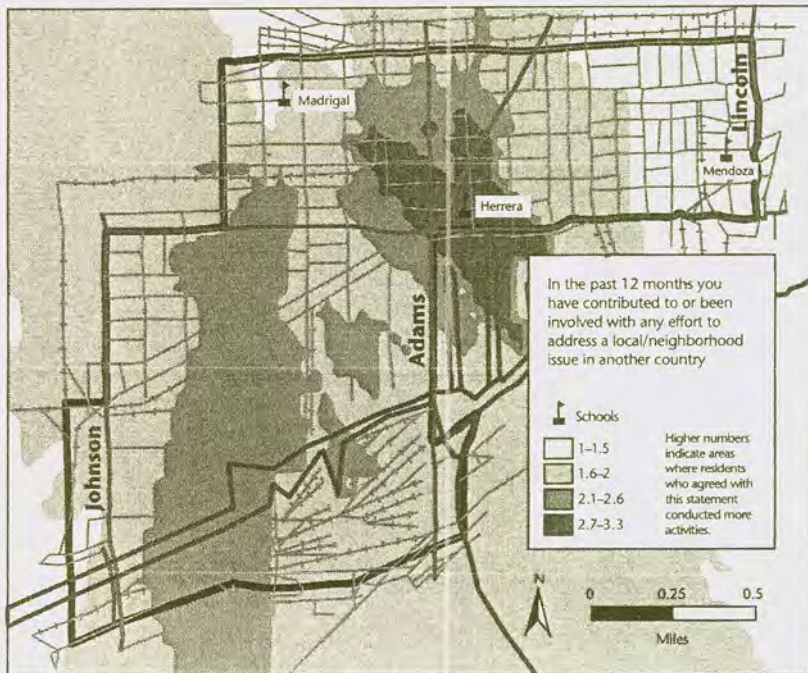
Mendoza, the school with the most trouble around disproportionality, with a level comparable to CPS schools. Both Madrigal and Herrera high school were below the district average score. What seems to be affecting these scores is the rating on teacher-parent interactions (see item 4.1.c. in table 2.4). Unfortunately, racial minority families, including immigrant families from developing countries, tend to be regarded as disengaged in their children's education, particularly in urban schools—the student perception data cited above suggest the children and youth in these schools seem to share such perspective.⁶⁸ Professionals' negative perceptions can be associated with racial disproportionality in special education.⁶⁹ Although the socioeconomic and labor realities of many low-income families might get in the way of their participation in their children's education as traditionally defined (e.g., homework supervision, school volunteer work, school meeting attendance), parent-community relationships with schools can benefit from a broader analytical lens.

Therefore, a major challenge for future research on disproportionality is to examine parent and community relationships from an alternative perspective; specifically, a standpoint that taps into family and neighborhood assets. Many neighborhood effect studies have relied on national samples that aggregate a single neighborhood effect size without attention to region of the country or the presence of immigrants.⁷⁰ These are important considerations, since the concentration of immigrants in neighborhoods is associated with the presence of community resources such as small businesses, *irrespective of the level of community poverty*.⁷¹ Similarly, the probability of having other key neighborhood resources such as public childcare centers *does not diminish with poverty level*.⁷² This is a key fact, considering that "childcare centers provide important resource-access through their ties and that neighborhood poverty does not undermine this capacity."⁷³ The neighborhood in which we have focused in this chapter is populated by a sizable number of immigrant families. A cultural historical examination of parent-school relationships will benefit from an analysis of families' interorganizational ties at the neighborhood level in places like churches and child-care centers. These organizations serve as resource brokers to desirable social capital through their ties with state agencies, businesses, and other organizations.⁷⁴

What resources are available in these ties that might otherwise be ignored by or invisible to school professionals? Are there aspects of civic engagement that could be capitalized on in school-family relationships? Although we do not have evidence on local civic engagement, we present a GIS image of *transnational* civic engagement that is distinctive of

neighborhoods where first-generation immigrants live (see figure 2.4). The map represents residents' efforts in the last year to address neighborhood issues *in another country*. These data reflect considerable transnational engagement in the southwestern portion of the neighborhood where neither one of the target schools is located. But the most intense level of this kind of civic engagement activity is observed in the center of the neighborhood where Herrera high school is located. Questions that could guide future work in this area include: What kinds of civic engagement activities are common in this region of the neighborhood and how do they relate to intergroup relations, since White students were over-represented at this high school? How can some of the civic engagement activities be redirected or translated into local efforts that support these children's education? Are there interorganizational ties in this geographical area that could be used to spread to other regions of the neighborhood the type of civic engagement observed?

FIGURE 2.4 Distribution of neighborhood residents' transnational civic engagement



Source: D. Fernández, P. L. Price, D. D. Arreola, C. Lukinbeal, M. Torres, and T. Ready, *Comparative Civic and Place Engagement in Three Latino Enclave Neighborhoods in Transition*, National Science Foundation Human and Social Dynamics program award number 433947, 2007.

Consider also evidence on immigrants indicating a negative association between length of residence in the United States and health status; moreover, immigrants “do better on a wide range of social indicators—including propensity to violence—than one would expect given their socioeconomic disadvantages.”⁷⁵ What practices and factors explain these patterns? What cultural resources do recent immigrants bring that afford them a better health status and lower propensity to violence despite their low education level, high poverty level, and underuse of health-care resources? The analysis of inequities in other sectors, along with evidence on families’ understanding and practices in these sectors, will contextualize how educational equity (e.g., disability identification practices) is explained and shaped in schools for this population.

CONCLUSION

By braiding multiple perspectives in our analysis, attention to contexts, cultural forces (e.g., perceptions), and multiple system levels (from state to city to neighborhood), we offer an approach to examining how neighborhood sociocultural ecologies and cultural assets mediate school equity processes and outcomes.⁷⁶ Because our data drew from multiple studies, we offer them not as conclusive evidence but rather as illustrative of the ways in which data can help to inform and extend understanding of complex social interactions beyond the typical institutional boundaries between school and community. The proposed framework affords the examination of evidence that is not typically used in equity research on the racialization of disability and hence the project of inclusive education. By superimposing a variety of data sets that canvas the same geographic area but address different aspects of the cultural, economic, political, and linguistic environmental contexts, researchers can inform a more complex understanding of how educational inequities (e.g., disproportionate representation of racial minority learners in disability categories) are, or are not, mediated by community contexts that have had been theorized but not substantiated as playing a role in influencing inequity. In some instances, these analyses can offer counter narratives to long-standing assumptions that endorse deficit views of these communities and hence, of their educational “worthiness.” Moreover, this analysis can offer insights to guide future action to address educational inequalities.

Importantly, layering data punctuates the importance of understanding the ways in which seemingly bounded agendas, like inclusive education,

are inextricably linked to multiple social phenomena not only in their genesis (e.g., “Let’s fix deficit thinking”), but also in their historical links to other forms of segregation that are not typically associated. Further, by examining *patterns* within inequities, intersections are uncovered and made transparent to scholars, practitioners, community members, families, and students. Powerful convergence among these perspectives has the potential to allow change to seed and grow in ways that unitary explanations and bounded analyses are unable to capture. Through this kind of complex analysis, we hope to sustain systematic attention to the equity issues that are often unattended within the inclusive education project.