

# Alone in a Crowded Room?

First-Year Students' Views on the Inclusion  
of Students with Special Needs  
in High School Classrooms

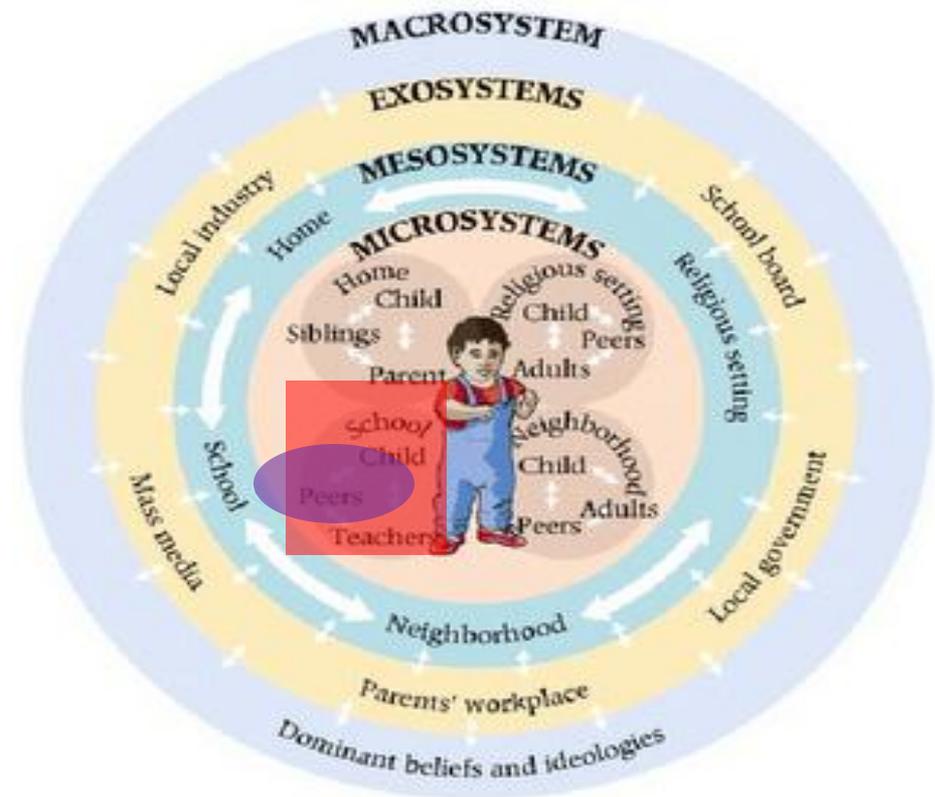
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Fall 2010

# Background

- Danish Institute for Study Abroad
  - Psychology and Child Development Course
    - Children with Special Needs Track
- Schools with inclusive education (Giangreco, 1997)
  - Some common features:
    - Collaborative teamwork
    - Family involvement
    - Clear role relationships among professionals
    - Effective use of support staff
    - Meaningful Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)
    - Procedures for evaluating effectiveness

# Significance

- Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory
  - Microsystems
    - Child and immediate environment (Berk, 2009)
- Trinity College Student
  - Senior Project, Fall 2006
    - Teachers' perceptions
- My Study
  - Peers' views
    - Long-term effects



# Background

- High school-aged youths' attitudes toward their peers with disabilities: The role of school and student interpersonal factors. (McDougall, DeWit, King, Miller, and Killip, 2004)
  - Two questionnaires – fall and spring
    - “Slightly above neutral to very positive” attitudes – 61%
    - “Slightly below neutral to very negative” attitudes – Significant 21%
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) (Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, 2009)
  - A Free, Appropriate, Public Education (FAPE)
  - Appropriate Evaluation
  - Individualized Education Program (IEP)
  - Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
  - Parent and Student Participation in Decision Making
  - Procedural Safeguards

# Research Questions

- How do college students view the inclusion of students with special needs in classrooms?
    - Why do they support or oppose it?
    - Did their high school experience affect their views?
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# Methods

- Qualitative Study
  - Stacy\* (CT Boarding School)
  - Tom\* (CT Boarding School)
  - Mandy\* (CT Boarding School, last 2 years)
  - Carmen\* (CT Boarding School)
  - Brandon\* (CT District High School)
- Random sample
  - Trinity College first-year students
    - Not labeled “special needs”
    - Attended CT High Schools

\*pseudonyms

# Theses

- Ignorance regarding inclusion has led to division between students, strengthened by confusion, frustration, and bullying.
  - Students view inclusion positively but support it under certain circumstances.
  - Earlier exposure during elementary or middle school provides students with more evidence to make strong claims.
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# Findings: Division due to Ignorance

- “...I think it can be challenging because you have the students who don't have special needs getting frustrated with those other students. And the students with special needs don't really know what else to do...”  
-Carmen
- “...I remember one of them specifically, he had something wrong with him so he would walk slower. And they wouldn't say anything to the person but if the person was behind them or next to them then they would say, why can't this kid walk or walk faster...”  
- Brandon

# Findings: Division due to Ignorance

- “I know that when she was in the first grade, she didn’t get why no one else had a special buddy...When she was little, she wondered why but it wasn’t like the other kids would say anything. I don’t think they understood...She thought she was cooler than everyone else...” -Mandy

# Findings: Conditional Support

- “I’m absolutely fine with it. I have no problem with it. It’s never really bothered or affected me. If they are capable of being in the class then that’s it, I’m fine with that.” -Brandon
- “It would be the best case scenario if we could include everyone together because I think when you start separating groups of people, things get messy...I just think it depends on the degree of the disability.”  
-Carmen

# Findings: Conditional Support

- “Honestly, it depends on the severity of each person’s case. Because if you have someone that really really has ADD or ADHD, they might be a disruption to the class just by the nature of that disorder and what it makes them do...But if it’s mild and it’s just a matter of, ‘Just repeat it one more time for me. I didn’t quite catch it the first time,’ that’s fine.” -Stacy

# Findings: Earlier Exposure

- Less confident claim
  - “I think that...I think that just because, just excluding a few students and putting them in a separate classroom isn't, wouldn't be helpful. I guess it's sort of like segregation.” -Tom

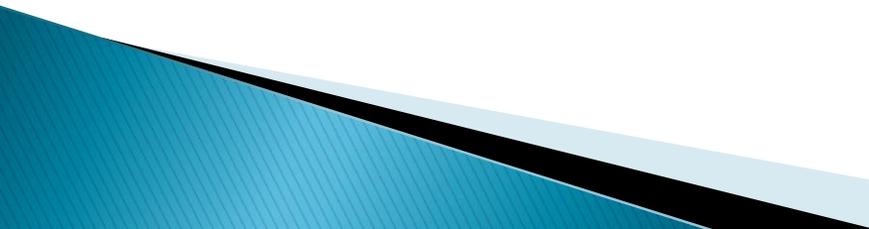
# Findings: Earlier Exposure

- More confident claim
  - “...when there are so many students without disabilities and then there is one who has a very visible disability, everyone just sort of talks about that. But as you get older, as you meet more older people, I think you sort of balance this out. No, I definitely think it was an age thing. Because even I used to think some stuff like that when I was younger. But you get older, you see things, you learn things, so I think it’s an age thing.” -Carmen

# Findings: Earlier Exposure

- More confident claim
  - “...even throughout middle school and elementary school, I remember there was people who, not the same ones, but I know this one girl who I had been going to school with since the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and she always had a helper come around to go to every class. So it wasn't something that we hadn't seen before, it was just more people once you're in high school.” -Brandon

# Conclusion

- How do students view the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream classrooms?
    - Ignorance regarding inclusion has led to division between students, strengthened by confusion, frustration, and bullying.
    - Why do they support or oppose it?
      - Students view inclusion positively but support it under certain circumstances.
    - Did their high school experience affect their views?
      - Earlier exposure during elementary or middle school provides students with more evidence to make stronger claims.
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# Conclusion

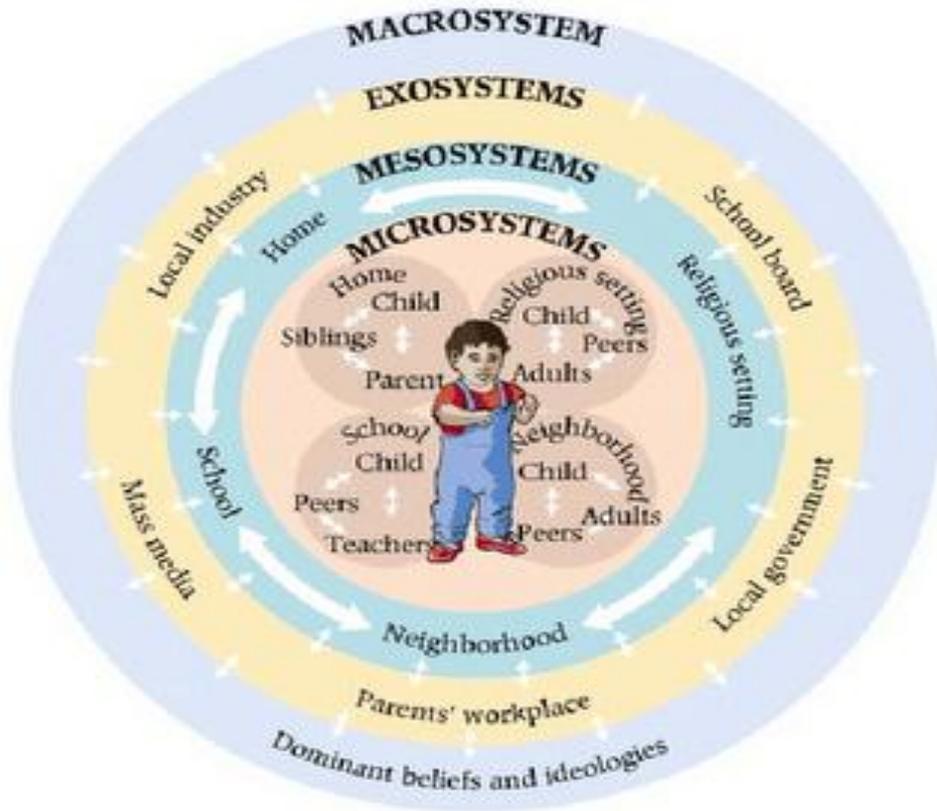


Image source: Southern Methodist University, Center for Child and Community Development, 2010.



Image source: Creating Accessible Teaching & Support, Social and Political Context, 2010.



Image source: The University of Winnipeg, Academic Departments and Programs, Disability Studies, 2010.

# Conclusion and Future Research

## MEDICAL / SOCIAL MODELS

Medical And Social Model Thinking In Schools

MEDICAL MODEL THINKING	SOCIAL MODEL THINKING
Child is faulty	Child is Valued
Diagnosis	Strengths and Needs defined by self and others
Labeling	Identify Barriers and develop solutions
Impairment becomes Focus of attention	Outcome based programme designed
Assessment, monitoring, programmes of therapy imposed	Resources are made available to Ordinary services
Segregation and alternative services	Training for Parents and Professionals
Ordinary needs put on hold	Relationships nurtured
Reentry if normal enough OR Permanent Exclusion	Diversity Welcomed, Child is Included
Society remains unchanged	Society Evolves

Disability Equality (2010)

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