

# Equitable Transitions to Adulthood: The Roles of Cultural and Social Capital



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# Problem & Significance

- Poor postschool outcomes for young adults with disabilities
- Outcomes vary across disability categories
- Young adults who are also from *historically marginalized* groups fair worse than their peers

# “Historically Marginalized”?

- Diverse
- Culturally diverse
- Linguistically diverse
- Impoverished
- Racial minorities
- Ethnic minorities
- Gender



Interactive

Situated



Privilege

Power



Agency



# Data Source: National

# Longitudinal Transition Study - 2

**When:** From 2000 to 2010

**Who:** Participants' ages ranged from 13-16 yrs. during Wave 1. Over 11,000 adolescents and young adults with disabilities from more than 500 LEAs

**What:** Data was collected in 5 waves: parent and youth interviews, school program and teacher surveys, direct assessments, and transcripts

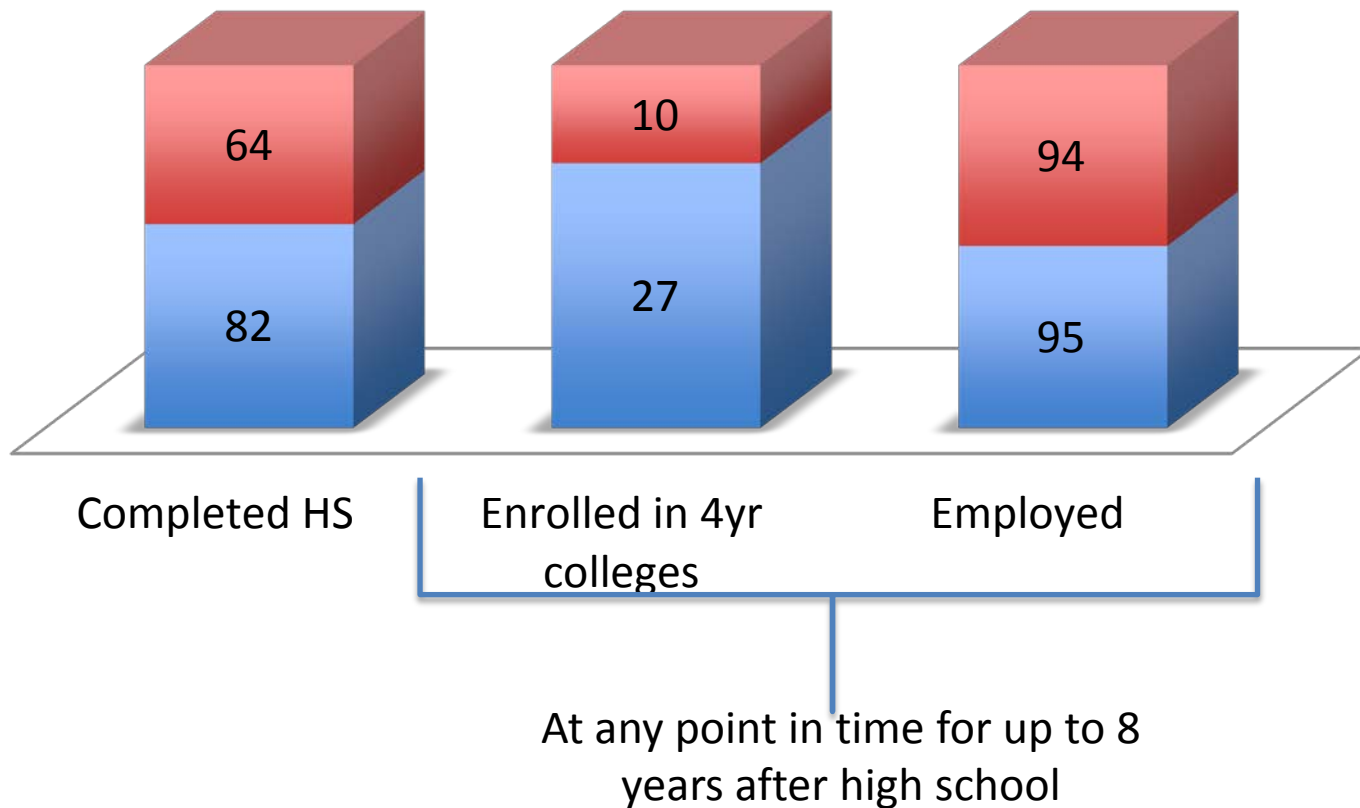
**Why:** To identify postschool outcomes *and* predictors of those outcomes for individuals with disabilities

**How:** A random sample, representative of the U.S. school population in: geographical region, size of school population, and socioeconomic level of community. The study population is weighted, reflecting representative distribution across disability category, race/ethnicity, urbanicity, and type of school

# Outcomes X Socioeconomic Background

## NLTS2 Reported Data

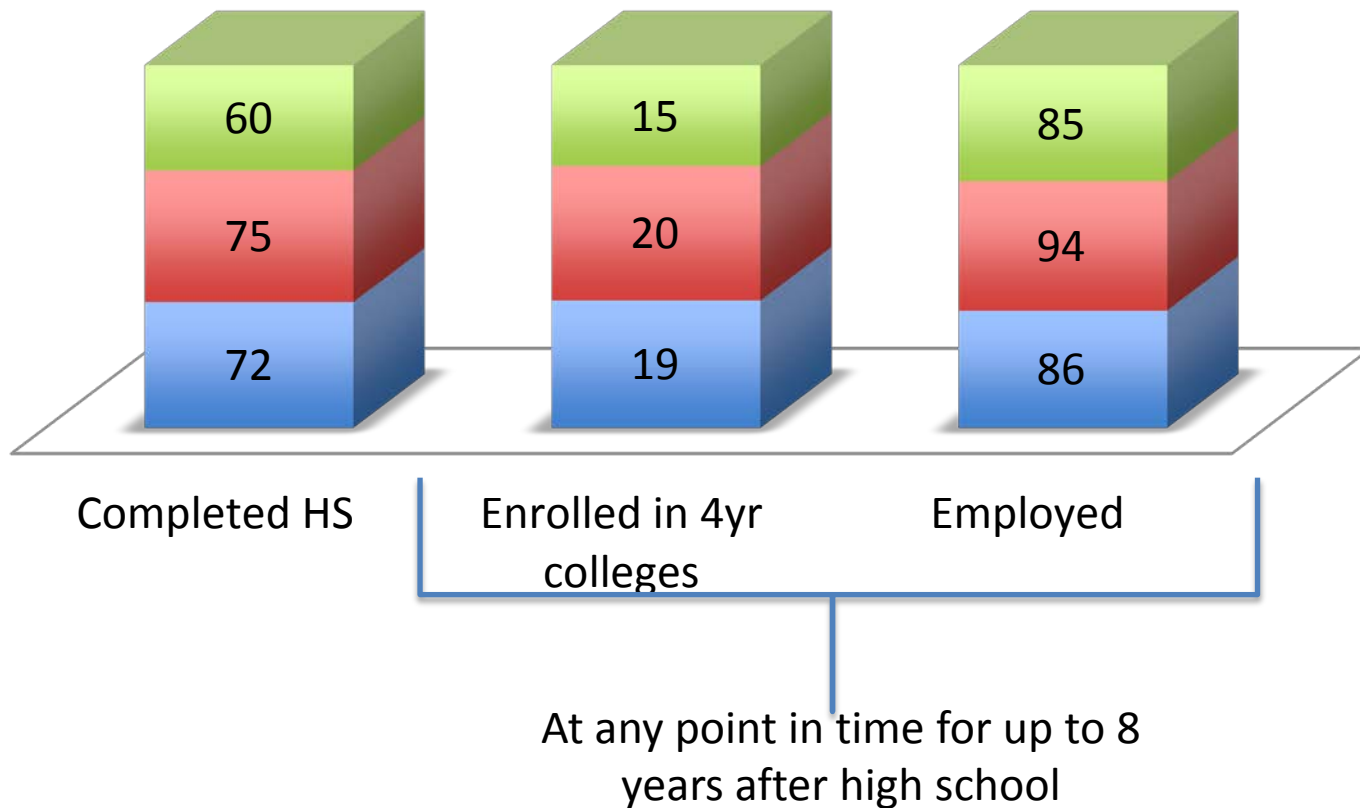
■ High SES ■ Low SES



# Outcomes X Race/Ethnicity

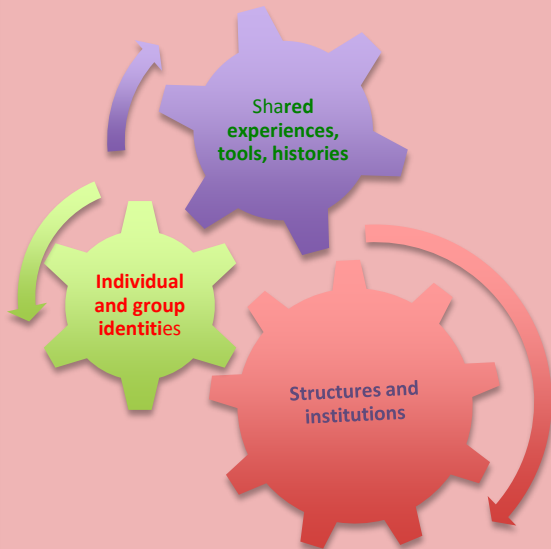
## NLTS2 Reported Data

■ African Am ■ Euro Am ■ Latino

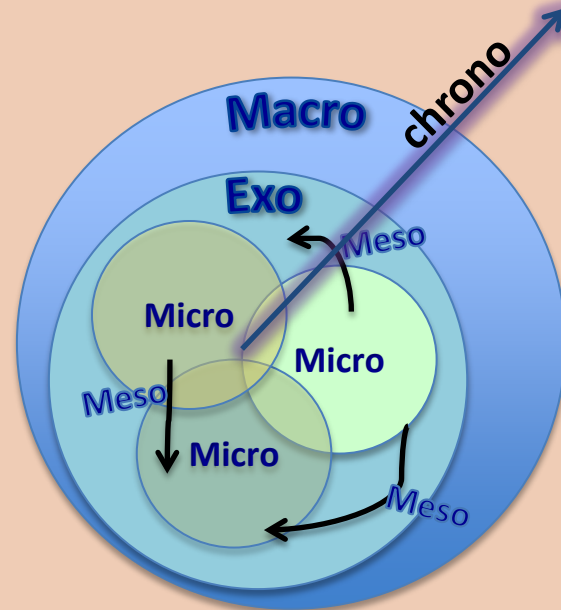


# Foundations and Theory

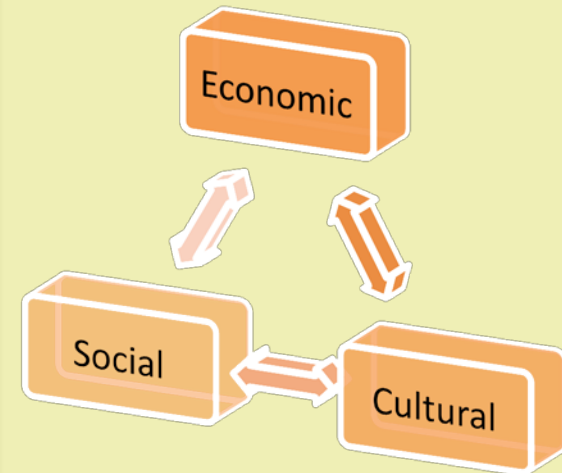
## *Sociocultural vantage point*



## *Bronfenbrenner's ecological development*

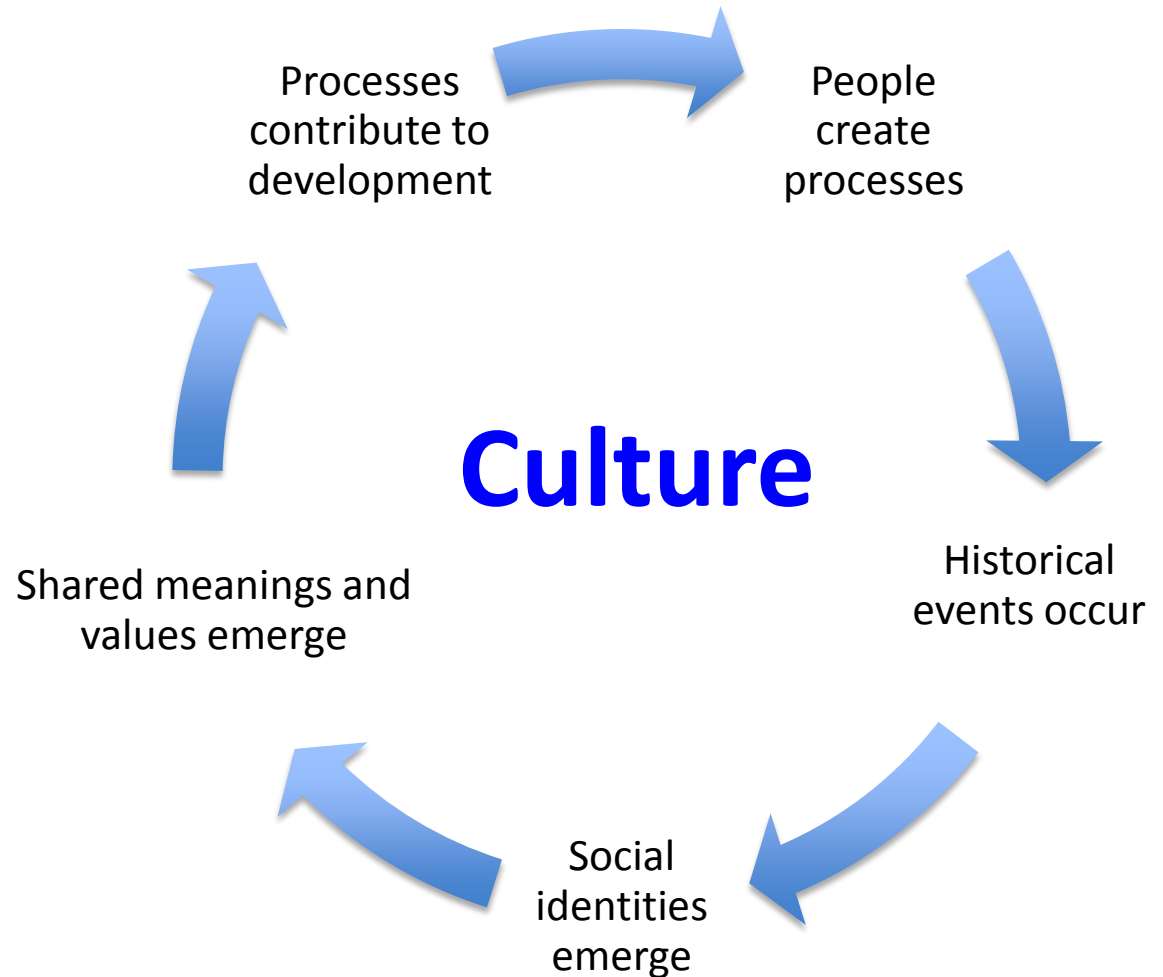


## *Bourdieu's capital theory*



## A Framework for Equity and Diversity

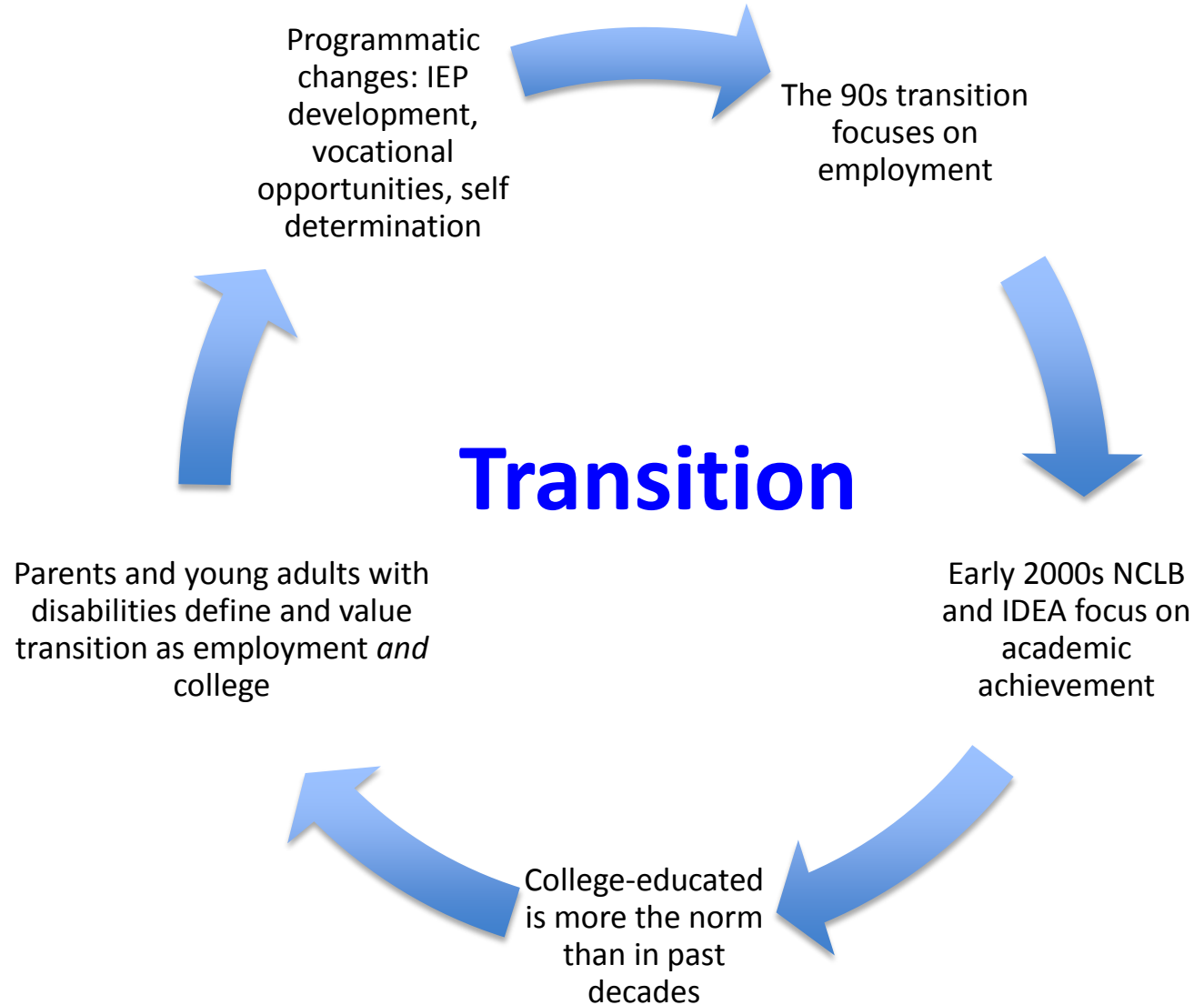
Balancing our understanding of students and their families' group membership and identity with individual differences and views of preferences, strengths, and needs in the context of our education system and society





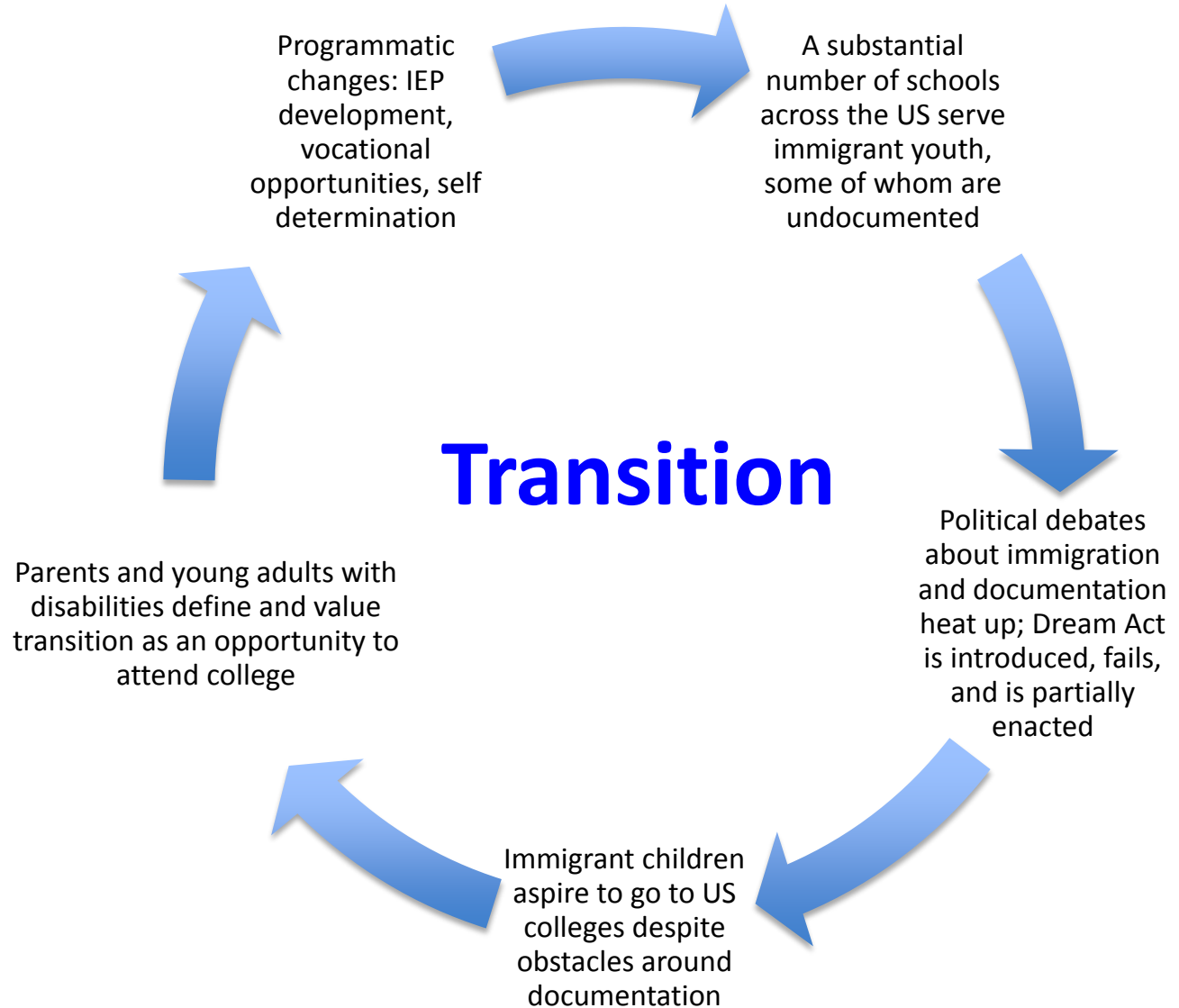
## An example

Wilson, a senior, is a young man with autism. He has been included in all academic courses and makes As and Bs, but he struggles with making friends and taking initiative to complete daily tasks such as self care, household chores, money management, etc. What does his transition plan look like?



## Another example

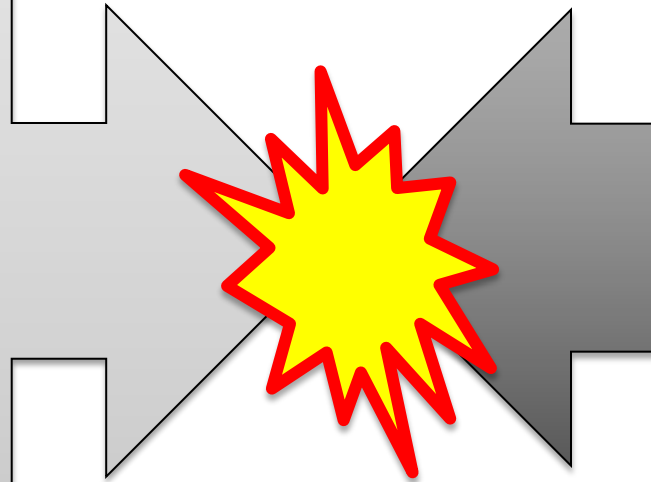
Nadia, a junior, first received services for speech and now a learning disability. She immigrated to Chicago with undocumented parents when she was 3 years old. She has been included in the general classroom and makes As and Bs. She has also been active in sports and extracurricular clubs such as the student newspaper. What does her transition plan look like?



# Question Formulation

## Capital Theory

- Cultural and social capital are levers for acquiring education and its benefits
- Capital is valued, intentionally and not, by people with power and lots of capital
- Capital has generative properties
- Habitus, or ways of thinking and doing, are acquired, but they seem natural



## Parent Participation

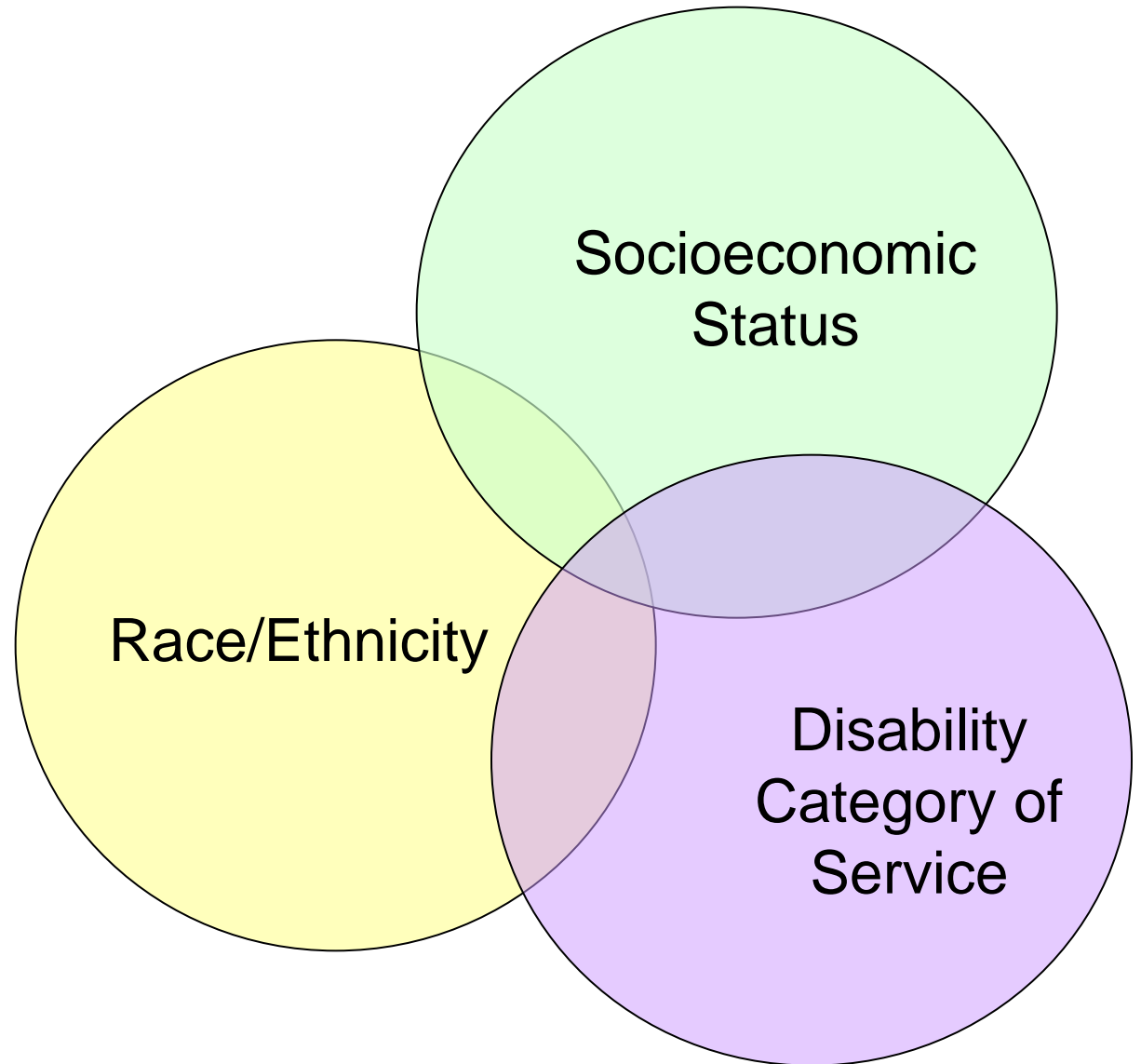
- Parents are seen as partners, equal to teachers
- Active participation includes decision-making
- Diversity is framed as preference or experience
- The processes and related assumptions are deeply embedded in laws such as IDEA '04

# Study 1: Select Research Questions

1. What types of cultural and social capital do parents acquire and use during special education home-school interactions?
2. How does this differ across parents from diverse backgrounds?

# Participants

**33** parents  
from **27**  
families,  
representing  
**36** children  
who received  
special  
education  
services



# Interview Guide

- Type of information used during home-school interactions....
- Most beneficial services for children....
- Locating disability-related information....
- Sources of emotional and informational support....

## A Common Thread: Special Ed 101

- Expertise about the individual child
- Understanding of the processes of special education; differing views on identification/diagnoses
- Recognition of the unspoken rules and hidden agendas of these processes
- Knowledge of disability, characteristics, causes, outcomes

## Eligible for FRCL

I *know* my child. I don't think medication is going to solve the problem. I would love for him to be in a small classroom. On top of that I love to see him get to attend half-day, just because I know he can't make it that long.

Diandra, African American mother of an elementary-aged son served as EBD

## Not Eligible for FRCL

I went to the NAMI [National Association for Mental Illness] library and checked out everything, and read everything. Yeah, I learned a lot.

Lori, Euro-American mother of an elementary-aged son served as EBD



## Eligible for FRCL

My mom said, 'You know, anybody that would meet Vincent, they'd say he's a great kid. Only in the setting of school, and in the eyes of a teacher, and in the eyes of the school district, there's something wrong with him.' But if you take him out of that setting and just put him, meet him as a person, you're like, he's a good kid, you know, smart, talks. He's very friendly. But just in the school district and in that mindset, there's something wrong.

Darcy, Native American mother of an elementary-aged son served as LD

## Not Eligible for FRCL

[Getting diagnosed] was a relief because, obviously, I don't want my kid to have a hearing loss, but we see her hearing loss as being not her major disability. It's an obvious disability that people can see. Finally, we were able to get people to say, 'Oh, yeah, we need to provide accommodations for her.'

Dani, Euro-American mother of an elementary-aged daughter served as LD and HH

## Eligible for FRCL

Too many teachers. I'm with this. I did this. It was very confusing keeping track of everything. The paperwork, the IEP report itself, it gives you all this wording, and then the final yes, he needs more reading, tutoring, whatever, that final thing. There's so much said on the way there that I have learned to skip it and just go to the bottom. Like I said, medical terminology, you don't know what it means. It's very complex. They must know what they're doing because we've got a winner here with my kid.

Melissa, Euro-American mother of an high school-aged son served as LD

## Not Eligible for FRCL

So we set up a really cool transition plan that [Principal] really came up with the ideas. We wanted was an itinerant teacher to help support the [preschool] staff maybe once a week. We still had our private PT. She was still getting speech, OT. We weren't asking that much. We wound up with this wonderful transition plan that had her taking a bus one day a week for like six weeks. A bus came over to [preschool]. The teacher got her on the bus. She went over to PSE9 in the kindergarten class for two hours. They got to know her. She got to know the school.

Morrie & Lydia, Euro-American father and mother of an elementary-aged daughter served as OHI

## Beyond Understanding: Advocacy

- Nuanced and embedded knowledge of special ed processes featured prominently for some parents
- Social networks with peers and teachers served distinct purposes; prioritizing networks varied
- Some see Special Ed 101 as foundational to advocacy on a larger scale

## Eligible for FRCL

The breakdown would be in the classroom because you don't have no special ed coordinator. He's just in a classroom with regular kids, a regular teacher, but I'm saying they've got one side where they've got handicapped kids. They spend quality time . . . and that's what I wanted with Montrez. I don't want Montrez in just a regular classroom because he's not at that level. They say 'It's a good idea. We'll work on it. We'll see what happens.' I'm not seeing nothing happen. Not one thing that I wrote out on his plan, and . . . so next year, he will probably have the same problems. That's only because y'all aren't responding back to my questions. Helping him is putting him into a class with 15 kids? He's not learning all his skills that he needs to learn.

Diandra, African American mother of an elementary-aged son served as EBD

## Not Eligible for FRCL

I walked in the school and grabbed his final, got a reader because they assigned no reader, and I knew he was going to fail the whole year. I walked right into the resource room, and I said, this is his final. I put my cell phone, and I said, anyone calls and questions why you're here and helping my son, call me. I got a call, of course, from the admin, saying, you know, that was probably not appropriate to do that. I said, 'I'm sick of talking and you guys letting him fail. I'll do it again. Don't make me come.' But I have that flexibility to walk into the school and, you know, know the power of it's in writing.

Jennifer, Native American mother of an high school-aged son served as EBD

## Eligible for FRCL

[Counselor] said for like behavior, he might need extra help in school. I called the school up, and I had said, hey, you know, I was told that there is a certain program or something you guys could do to help my son. And so I pushed for them to give him the testing or whatever to see if he needed help. They're like, 'Oh, just wait until next year' Because they wouldn't evaluate him anyways, or he would be due for a review by the time the next school years started, or something about the summertime, not do it until the following year. After I called, the second time, they were like, 'Well, you need to write a letter to start it.'

Marissa, Euro-American mother of an elementary-aged son served as EBD

## Not Eligible for FRCL

Comparing his IEP with the one the year before, and they still said he couldn't do it. And I started to talk to friends like [parent]. She said there's this book... if you want to borrow it or I can get you a copy where you can get some ideas. We can actually do this, we write it and we like some of those terms and we know there's some of the terms they have to use... put this 80% of the time, or 3/5 your know. Wow, we actually can come up with what we want. We know our child so we started just by sitting and having this big piece of paper in our basement and start writing what are his strengths and let's start on building what he can do, because it's another...

Fawn, African American mother of an elementary-aged son served as ASD

# Findings from Study 1

- Parents articulated an array cultural and social capital resources they acquired and used during home-school special education interactions.
- The dominant view of disability was a type of cultural capital that leveraged other capital; disability knowledge was necessary but not sufficient.
- Parents' acquisition and use of cultural and social capital resources generated additional capital resources.
  1. The material world The cultural goods of special education: books, websites on disability, special education handbooks, and school district documents
  2. The symbolic world Labels and identification, written communication, processes that identified deficits, blame, responsibility, and accountability
  3. The institutional world Medical diagnoses, research-based processes, methods and well-known branded approaches, conferences, and degrees

# Implications from Study 1

- Awareness of the differing types of capital; recognition that some capital leverage more power than others
- Diversity is complex; importance of considering race/ethnicity, SES, and disability labels
- Capital is not equally distributed; achieving equity requires sharing and recognition of diverse forms of capital

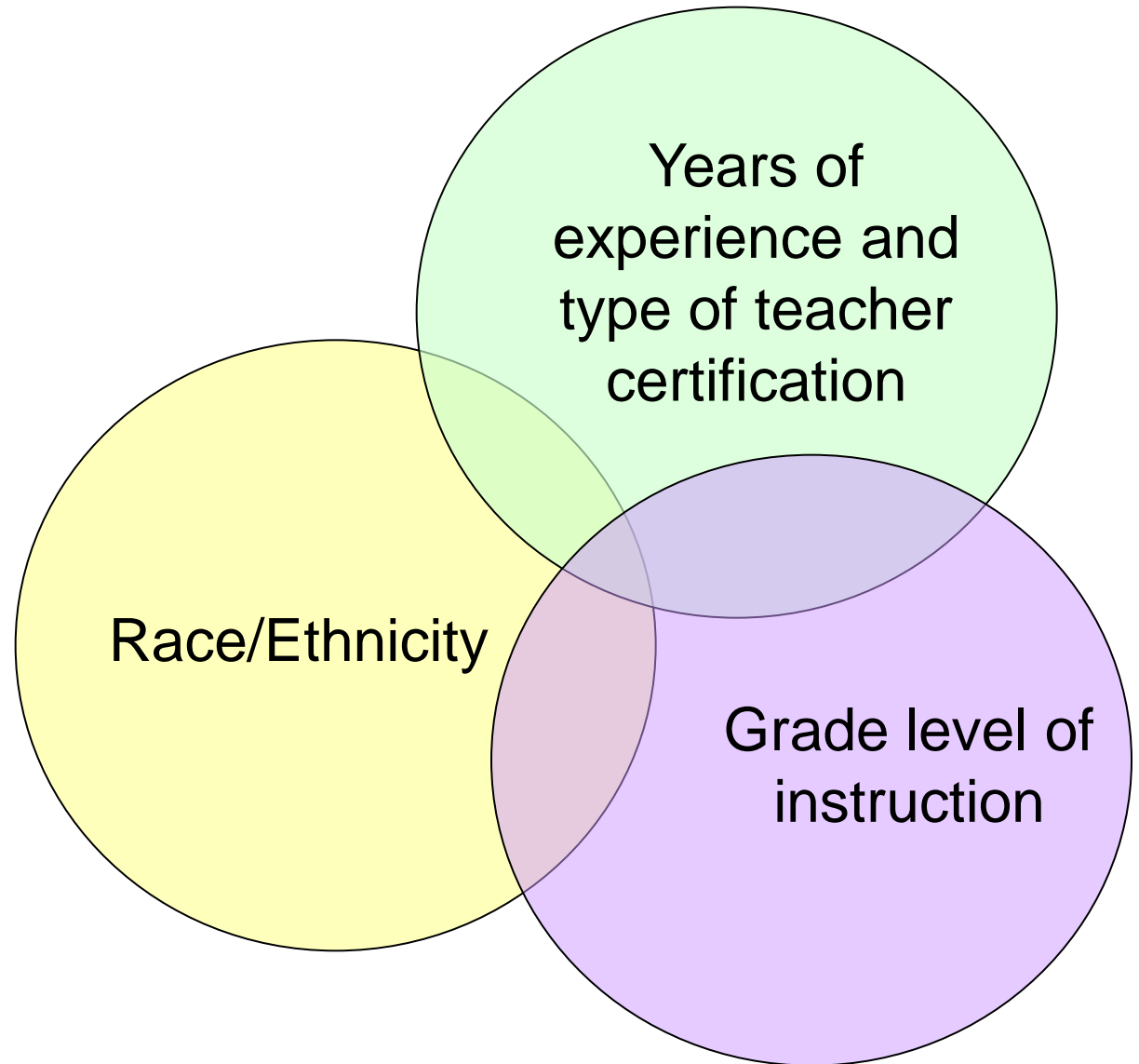
# Study 2: Select Research Questions

1. What types of cultural and social capital do teachers acquire and use during special education home-school interactions?
  2. How does this differ across diverse backgrounds?
- What do teachers expect parents to have/use during special education home-school interactions?



# Participants

**17 teachers**  
from 8  
elementary  
and high  
schools;



# Interview Guide

- Type of information used during home-school interactions....
- What types of information do you expect parents to bring to the table....
- Who are your go to people for special education-related information....

# Findings from Study 2

- Teachers stressed that they did not expect parents to come to school with any special education capital resources. Then, they enumerated many examples of material, symbolic, and institutional forms of capital they did, in fact, expect or want parents to have.
- Few teachers acknowledged that parents' knowledge of their children as individuals constituted viable or valuable capital for use in education settings.
- Teachers acquisition and use of cultural and social capital resources mirrored those of the dominant parent group.

## Teachers' expectations and capital resources

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I love it when parents bring me that kind of educational material, and I take it home and read it because then our playing field gets more level. If [I see] that's what they've purchased and that's what they're using, that helps me. And then I send home what I am using, and that can help them.

Miriam, elementary special education, 17 years

It's just as simple as a homework notebook ... we ask parents to do nothing more than initial each day that their child did their homework or that they knew of [the assignments]. And so that's just helpful, there's somebody out there responding to you.

Peggy, elementary special education, 33 years

I have a better relationship with parents who have e-mail. Not that I expect all my parents to have e-mail because, if you don't have a computer at home, you can't get to the library... I understand there's limitations to certain things people can have access to. But I know that I'm able to communicate in a more efficient manner and more often, because it's so much quicker... save one of those documents for Infinite Campus, attach it to an email with a short explanation. But I think that shows also, it's a characteristic of a parent who really wants to be involved weekly or daily and has the time to be able to do that or feels it's important to make the time in their child's education.

Glenna, high school special education, 5 years

## Teachers' expectations and capital resources

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I think just a willingness to communicate is more important. I think that through the process together, that the teachers and the students involved, or the teachers and the parents, can learn a lot about that child and about the disability. We're always here as a resource. It's nice when they can go outside and look for more resources. But like the number one thing they need to come with is the concern, the ability to listen, but the ability to also speak their minds. There's no fear keeping them from doing that.

Joan, elementary related service,  
28 years

The law dictates that, with the idea of parents being equal members at that IEP decision table. They are. My opinions, or certification, do not trump parents' anymore. I meet them within three days after you see their name. Don't see their kid, don't read the paper, don't do anything, so you can honestly look in their face and say, I don't know who you are. I need to have you help me do this. And I'm not going to be the professional that's going to run your life. I'm going to need to have you help me do this. And the parents are sitting there and the kid is sitting there, and I'm the one that is without information. They have all the information that I need to know about them, how to help them reach their goal.

Donald, high school special education,  
31 years

# Implications from Study 2

- Reflexive practice needs to include consideration of the roles of parents as partners
- Capital is not equally distributed; achieving equity requires sharing and recognition of diverse forms of capital
- Methods: Few general educators participated in the study; participants downplayed the importance or critical need for continued work involving parents

# What's Next?

- Consider capital as a lever for educational change. What would it take to expand our notions of cultural and social capital for the purpose of increasing equitable access to systems?
- Social capital has been identified as a network of resources. How can educators and school systems address the barriers to network development in ways that are meaningful across all segments of the population?
- SEd policy calls for partnership. Is partnership possible? In instances where parents neither desire nor participate as partners, what models are available to educators?
- *Diversity* as pertains to *equity* cannot be distilled down to a discussion of race/ethnicity.



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