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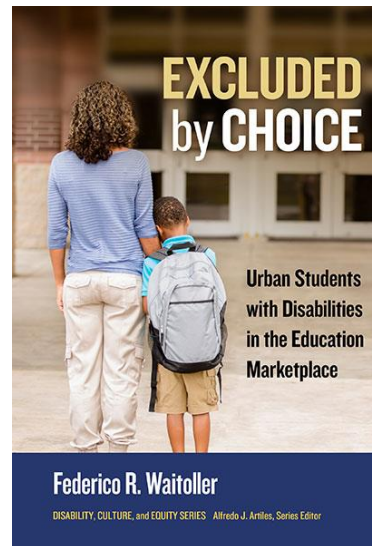
Waitoller, F. R. (2020). *Excluded by choice: Urban students with disabilities in the education marketplace*. Teachers College Press.

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Social justice has been a popular topic discussed by researchers in the education field, and although an emphasis on equity in education has been characteristic of research since the early 1990s (Skrtic, 1991), it wasn't until 21st century that academics began discussing the role of racism and ableism in creating exclusionary practices in schools (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007; Liasidou, 2012). Following the murder of George Floyd in the United States in May 2020, a reinvigorated focus on structural racism has brought conversations around the racism long held against marginalized communities to the attention of a wider American audience. In line with this trend, Federico Waitoller's *Excluded by Choice* offers well-researched insights on the need for inclusive education practices through its exploration of the intersection of racism and ableism in Chicago's charter schools. The book also provides a critical assessment on the role of market mechanisms on school policies.



Throughout the book, Waitoller discusses the nuances involved in school choice through the stories of families affected by discriminatory school policies and practices. He approaches these stories of parents and students of color with disabilities with curiosity and compassion. Self-identifying as a White, Latino, immigrant male, Waitoller provides a unique perspective on the complexities associated with identity in American society. Although his connection to the Latinx community in the United States and his personal experience with neoliberal education reforms in his home country of Argentina informed his

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interest and perspectives on the topics discussed in this book, Waitoller does an impressive job of decentering himself from his work. He writes with an air of openness and non-judgment, which centers the experiences of mothers of Black and Latinx students with disabilities within the historical context associated with market-driven school reforms and gentrification in Chicago.

Waitoller sheds light on the many challenges parents and their children face while dealing with the intersecting realities of racism and ableism in school choice. Ultimately, he draws the conclusion that, for many Black and Latinx parents and their children with disabilities, school choice is a fallacy. He persuasively argues that while approaches to school choice based on competition are intended to create higher quality education and are thought to ensure the ability of parents to pick those schools that are the best fit for their children, in reality these market-based reforms have only succeeded in upholding old—and in generating new—forms of exclusion.

Waitoller begins the book by describing the families of students with disabilities in Chicago's communities of color and by characterizing the desperation they feel to find appropriate schooling for their children after experiencing the failure of the Chicago Public School system to provide adequate special education services. The rise of charter schools in Chicago was a result of the school system's adoption of market-driven approaches, and for many of these families, the charter school represented optimism and the promise of an individualized, supportive, and safe education experience. However, as Waitoller explains, this optimism soon took on a "cruel" character as charter schools failed to uphold their promises. The author retells the heartbreak associated with the consequences of a school system based on neoliberal principles that support the normative student -- a concept in which those that are able to conform to rigid disciplinary and academic practices are rewarded (most often those who are white and without a disability) -- while excluding students who are unable to conform. Students of color with disabilities face unique acts of exclusion that often have a physical dimension (as in physical exclusion from the education space) while also having severe negative effects on students and their families in terms of deteriorating mental health and financial difficulties associated with time spent battling schools for proper support services.

More than a series of stories that recount the failure of the educational system and charter schools in Chicago to meet the needs of individuals, this volume also provides a theoretical framework for discussing the inability of market-driven education reforms to engender inclusive institutions. Titling his theory "*fantasies of inclusion in the education marketSpace*" (p. 129), Waitoller emphasizes the need to look beyond the perception of school choice as a rational and individual decision and instead to acknowledge that these decisions are shaped by the production of the *education marketSpace*, a space strongly influenced by structural racism and ableism. In his last chapter, Waitoller provides recommendations for practitioners, policy makers, and researchers to consider when supporting inclusive education in their own work.

Although Waitoller's argument is convincing, one must consider the limitations of his sample. Since the study that resulted in this book was undertaken in partnership with the civil rights nonprofit Disability Legal Advocates, the participants involved were linked to the work conducted by the agency. Therefore, as Waitoller acknowledges, this research only accounts for the experiences of parents that "have the knowledge, resources, and time to seek legal service" (p. 174). Based on the findings of this book, it seems highly likely that experiences of school choice are worse for Black and Latinx parents of students with disabilities who are unaware of these services or otherwise unable to engage in them.

The mixed-design study involved several means of gathering data, including interviews with Black and Latinx parents of students with disabilities who have experienced conflict with a charter school and the lawyers who provided legal representation to the parents; examination of various documents from the charter schools attended by the students including their Individualized Education Programs; review of the research and archival literature about the schools and areas of the city; and the researcher's attendance at school board meetings that discussed topics related to participate experience. Although this approach offers a thorough account of the experiences of a sample of parents and their students, it does not offer insights from parents who were unable to pursue legal support, nor parents and students who had a positive experience with the charter schools.

Moreover, the nature of Waitoller's study does not allow for an in-depth consideration of the school's perpetuation of racist and ableist practices from the role of individual actors within the school system, most importantly, the teachers. Several times Waitoller mentions the inadequate training and the high turnover rate of teachers in communities of color being served by the charter schools. However, as expressed by Wanda J. Blanchett (2006), the role of the teacher in perpetuating racism and ableism in the classroom may be driven by more than a lack of training for managing a diverse student population. Blanchett (2006) emphasizes the importance of understanding that inadequate teacher preparation results not only in missed opportunities for integrating students with disabilities or different cultural backgrounds but allows for teachers to bring their own racist and ableist worldviews into the classroom with little or no critical analysis of their own perspectives. She suggests that, coupled with the continued employment of "inappropriate and culturally unresponsive curriculum and pedagogy" (p. 26), teachers can be drivers of maintaining white supremacy within schools. Since Waitoller's book is primarily from the perspective of parents and their interaction with school administrators and policy, we are unable to gain a full picture of the role that teachers and the curriculum played in upholding racism and ableism in the schools or their contribution to the unproductive and unsafe conditions for students of color with disabilities.

Waitoller portrays the teachers and the time in the classroom as secondary to the immense challenges parents face in their student's access to special education services and individual education programs. This portrayal may be an

indicator of the lack of power and importance given to the role of the teacher in an education system based on market principles. The charter schools explored in this book allocate resources toward the promotion of the school and seem unwilling to invest in resources needed to serve the students, including training teachers. Provided as a critique of the market-driven approach to education, Waitoller's book discusses how austerity measures designed to create "efficiency and economic responsibility" often result in services not specifically designed to meet the narrowly defined mission of the school as "considered wasteful and, therefore, disposable" (p. 34). One would expect that any teacher enrichment activity that does not contribute to the charter school's mission of maintaining or improving their position as a high academic achieving institute, such as anti-racism or anti-ableism work, would be quickly written off as unimportant.

By the end of his book, Waitoller leaves the reader both introspective and infuriated, yet not without hope. His book is timely and represents an important perspective on the challenges of historical reckoning and inclusion that American institutions must address in becoming a more equitable and just society. Though focused on school choice for Black and Latinx parents and students with disabilities attending Chicago charter schools, Waitoller's book explores a framework for understanding the intersecting challenges faced by marginalized students across the United States and provides suggestions for promoting inclusive practices in any education setting.

As for the mothers and their stories, which comprise a majority of the book's content, Waitoller is careful not only to highlight their challenges but to celebrate their strengths. Through direct quotes from Black and Latinx mothers of children with disabilities, the reader is able to hear the voices of these women, who face seemingly insurmountable obstacles yet continue to fight for their children's right to an education. These women are more than simply victims of an unjust system, they are also important protagonists and leaders in the movement towards equity in education. As the community continues to explore inclusive education practices, and as researchers unpack the intersectionality associated with these challenges, it will serve us well to remember the stories of the individuals in Waitoller's book and to draw on them for inspiration and direction in our own work.

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