



Public Schools and the Origins of Special Education: Educational Progress and the Otherizing of Disability in the United States

Dr. Osgood will examine the origins of special education in the United States through the lens of the intentional marginalization and disempowerment of persons with disabilities. He will trace events and perspectives dating to the first half of the nineteenth century up to the mid- 1900s.

The growth of public education in the United States closely paralleled evolving constructions of children who, in the words of a 1910 Boston school superintendent, “vary from the normal type.” The rise of special education was in many ways a response to the demonization of cognitive and/or behavioral disability during the Progressive Era, grounded in changes in educational and social policy, transitioning language and labels, emergent beliefs in the “science” of disability, and even the portrayal of these children as pitiable and helpless (“special”). The evidence demonstrates that public schooling and disability each have had a long and interconnected history of Otherizing certain groups of disadvantaged students.

March 3, 2021

1:25–2:25 pm (EST)

**Optional discussion to follow
Online through Zoom**



About the Speaker

Dr. Robert L. Osgood is a retired Professor of Education who has taught at Colgate University, IUPUI, Muskingum University, and St. Norbert College. He has also taught at universities in Japan and Malaysia. Dr. Osgood earned his bachelor’s degree in History from the University of Oregon, his M.Ed. in Foundations from the University of Vermont, and his Ph.D. in Education from Claremont Graduate University.

His research focuses on the history of special education in the United States, examining issues of student identification and selection; curriculum development; teacher education; professional status; inclusion; and the etiology of disability. He has published three books as well as numerous articles in *History of Education Quarterly*, *Teachers College Record*, and the *Indiana Magazine of History*, among others. His current book project explores how special education and general education became separate entities over time through changes in teacher education, research funding, school organization, and student stratification.

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