

# The History of Special Education

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## THE HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

*A Struggle for Equality in American Public Schools*

Robert L. Osgood

Growing Up: History of Children and Youth  
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Osgood examines the history of the school lives of children placed in formal or informal special education settings in American public schools during the last 120 years. As the public school system in the United States grew throughout the 20th century, special education became a recognized and dependable, but marginalized, arm of public schooling. Throughout the 1900s, special education emerged as its own world in many ways, developing policies, practices, structures, and an identity that became increasingly important as the public school bureaucracy grew and the school population became more diverse and inclusive. This work describes and interprets the nature and characteristics of special education. It examines carefully the human aspects of identification and placement; the nature of work and play in the classroom; the relationship among students, teachers, administrators, and parents involved in the process; the status and relation of children with disabilities to their non-disabled peers in various school settings; and the impact of school experiences on the lives of these children beyond school.

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