

EquiLearn Mini-Lecture Series

Dr. Robin Roscigno | Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center

TRANSCRIPTION

Dr. Roscigno: Hello. My name is Robin Roscigno, and I'm a Professional Learning Specialist at the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center. My research focuses on disability, specifically within special education contexts. My work departs from traditional models that often focus on medicalizing and pathologizing disabled students. Instead, I draw on disability studies in education, which encourages us to reimagine educational spaces so that disabled students are fully included, and their needs are met in more equitable ways. Rather than asking what is “wrong” with students, I examine how educational systems can be reshaped to better serve students with bodyminds that schools have historically marginalized or excluded.

Dr. Roscigno: I look at how educational spaces can be redesigned to integrate their voices, lived experiences, and the insights of disabled students into policies, into practices, and pedagogies. My research on special education connects with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, a key piece of legislation that guarantees students with disabilities the rights to a free and appropriate education. But beyond this legal framework, I explore how IDEA is interpreted and applied in schools, and the

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ways that disabled students' intersectional identities—like race, socioeconomic status, and language—shape their educational experiences. Although IDEA was revolutionary in advocating for access to education for disabled students, it does not always fully account for the complex, intersecting forms of discrimination these students may face.

Dr. Roscigno: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, also intersects with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. While IDEA specifically protects the rights of disabled students, it operates within the broader civil rights framework that prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, and national origin. In many ways, IDEA builds on the Civil Rights Act by ensuring that disabled students are not excluded from educational opportunities. Both laws seek to protect marginalized groups from discrimination and ensure access to public institutions, yet disabled students who belong to multiple marginalized groups often face compounded challenges. It's essential to understand how these pieces of legislation work together to address the layered forms of inequity that these students experience in schools.

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Dr. Roscigno: This year, the MAP Center has commemorated significant anniversaries; that of IDEA and other key legal cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education*. These were milestones in creating inclusive educational environments, but there's still so much work to be done. Schools are required to assess and accommodate students' disabilities, ensuring that they receive individualized supports. However, these legal frameworks often fail to consider the full picture of disabled students' lives, particularly when it comes to multiply-marginalized students.

Dr. Roscigno: In addition to my work on special education, I conduct historical research on the history of autism intervention. My research traces the evolution of approaches to autism, from early institutionalization and behaviorist interventions to more recent developments in neurodiversity advocacy. Historically, interventions for autistic individuals have often been shaped by deficit models with little regard for the perspectives and autonomy of autistic people themselves. I examine how these practices were influenced by broader social, medical, and educational trends, and how they have shifted over time as autistic individuals and their allies began to challenge dominant narratives.

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Dr. Roscigno: My work underscores the importance of centering autistic voices in developing more humane and inclusive approaches to intervention. As we continue to commemorate landmark decisions and legislation in education, we must remain committed to advancing the rights and educational outcomes of disabled students, particularly those who live at the intersections of multiple forms of marginalization. I am grateful to organizations like the MAP Center and the Great Lakes Equity Center for their dedication to supporting schools in becoming more equitable spaces for all students. And I'm so proud to work here. Thank you.

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