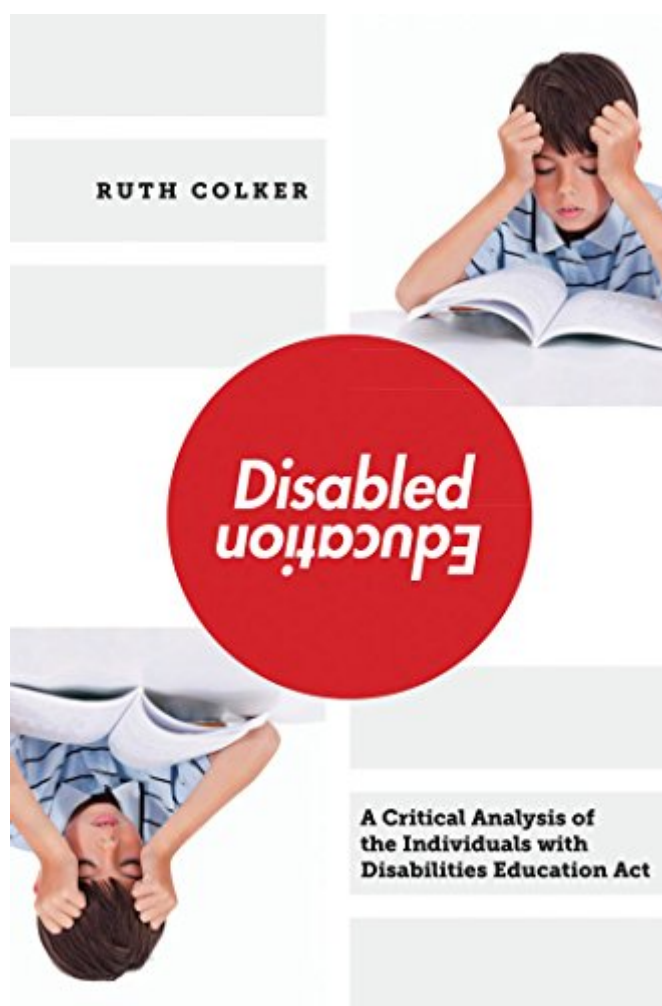


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Disabled Education: A Critical Analysis Of The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act



Synopsis

Enacted in 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act — now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides all children with the right to a free and appropriate public education. On the face of it, the IDEA is a shining example of law's democratizing impulse. But is that really the case? In *Disabled Education*, Ruth Colker digs deep beneath the IDEA's surface and reveals that the IDEA contains flaws that were evident at the time of its enactment that limit its effectiveness for poor and minority children. Both an expert in disability law and the mother of a child with a hearing impairment, Colker learned first-hand of the Act's limitations when she embarked on a legal battle to persuade her son's school to accommodate his impairment. Colker was able to devote the considerable resources of a middle-class lawyer to her struggle and ultimately won, but she knew that the IDEA would not have benefitted her son without her time-consuming and costly legal intervention. Her experience led her to investigate other cases, which confirmed her suspicions that the IDEA best serves those with the resources to advocate strongly for their children. The IDEA also works only as well as the rest of the system does: struggling schools that serve primarily poor students of color rarely have the funds to provide appropriate special education and related services to their students with disabilities. Through a close examination of the historical evolution of the IDEA, the actual experiences of children who fought for their education in court, and social science literature on the meaning of "learning disability," Colker reveals the IDEA's shortcomings, but also suggests ways in which resources might be allocated more evenly along class lines.

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