Preface

The Principal as Leader of the Equitable School is designed to assist principals and all school leaders in expanding awareness of equity issues, nurturing a spirit of activism in addressing these issues, and developing ideas and strategies for working with others toward those ends. It is based on the premise that awareness and celebration of diversity, although important, are not sufficient to ensure that all students are well served and have equitable chances to learn and achieve. Acknowledging the complexity associated with this topic, this book presents a blend of theory and practice and provides concrete strategies for continuing the journey toward more equitable schools.

Much of the book's content stems from the work of the OPC Equity and Inclusive Education Team. For several years, this team has been designing and implementing workshops, web modules, and conferences to assist principals in addressing issues of equity and inclusive education in their schools and school communities. It is the authors' position that this book will provide an overarching framework for considering the approaches to leading student achievement presented in the other books within the series.

Rationale: Schools in the 21st century are complex sites. On one hand, growing diversity provides exciting opportunities for everyone to be enriched by the experiences, customs, skills, and worldviews of diverse student and community populations. On the other hand, the challenges of ensuring that everyone in this evolving context has the respect, voice, power, and support necessary for a rich and relevant education are real and pressing. Because schools reflect the society around them, students and families who are not a part of the dominant culture still face substantial barriers in meeting with success.

The Principal as Leader of the Equitable School acknowledges the centrality of the principal's role as a catalyst and a perpetuator of change toward more inclusive and equitable school environments. It is designed to provide school leaders with the tools requisite to engage meaningfully and strategically in this process.

The book is grounded in a number of underlying assumptions that include the following:

- Racism, religious intolerance, homophobia, and gender-based violence are still evident in our communities and—unfortunately—in our schools. "These and other discriminatory beliefs and actions should not be seen as forces to which schools must adjust or for which schools must compensate; rather schools should be leading the way and allowing society to respond to innovations in schooling and education" (Delhi, 1995, p. 21).
- "The significant new investments in education are not reaching many of the children who need the most help because long-identified barriers to learning are not being addressed." (McMurtry & Curling, 2008, p. 3).
- "Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone" (Dei, 2006).
- Students who feel welcomed and respected, accepted, and celebrated in their schools are more likely to meet with academic success, to reach their highest potential, to improve their life chances, and to contribute to a more inclusive and democratic society. There is an increasing body of research showing that students who feel connected to school—to teachers, to other students, and to the school itself—do better academically (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002; Schargel, Thacker, & Bell, 2007).
- In a truly equitable system, factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status do not prevent students from achieving ambitious outcomes. Our experience shows that barriers can be removed when all education partners create the conditions needed for success (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008).

This book is designed to meet the challenges of this sociocultural context and to contribute to its improvement.

Audience: No matter where principals are on the continuum of understanding and actively engaging in creating more equitable schools, this book should be of use. Foundational information and activities for heightening personal awareness of equity issues will assist those who are in the early stages of considering how our schools would better serve the students and families who have been traditionally marginalized. For those well on the way in strategically addressing these needs, the reflections, case studies, and activities will provide ideas for working with staff, students, and community to further the work of actively confronting inequitable practices and removing barriers for students who have been underserved. This book would also be a valuable handbook for school equity committees, principal preparation courses, and professional development sessions on improving equity and inclusive education.

APPROACH AND ORGANIZATION

Although the book grounds its practical suggestions clearly in relevant theory, its main thrust is to provide concrete strategies and applications. For this purpose, it is presented as a handbook, divided into eight chapters.

Chapter 1 addresses the essential question*: Why is leading for equity and diversity important?* Drawing upon current demographic and contextual (local, national, and global) information as well as a brief selection of relevant research, this chapter takes a look at the current education environment and the challenges that we as school leaders face in ensuring that equity is at the forefront of what we do to ensure optimal learning for all of our students.

Chapter 2 looks at some of the understandings that are foundational for leading equitable schools. Definitions are provided. A brief overview is provided of the purposes of education; accountability issues and the concepts of power and privilege and their centrality to removing barriers are addressed. Characteristics of leadership that promote inclusive education and serve traditionally marginalized students are outlined.

Chapter 3 focuses on the self and the inner work necessary to move forward on the personal journey to being more equitable and inclusive in our work. This chapter extends an invitation to

- *unearth,*
- *unravel,* and
- *understand* personal stories of individual/group and systemic oppression and, as a result of this process, to
- *unfold* reconsidered attitudes and responses.

Chapter 4 turns to strategies for collaboratively creating a school climate that promotes equity. Central to this chapter is the onus on school leaders to develop an equitable environment and strategies for working with others to ensure that this is a priority. Community partnerships and student outcomes are presented as pivotal issues.

Chapter 5 explores approaches to working specifically with school staff, including teachers, caretakers, secretaries, educational assistants, and all others who work as part of the school team. It addresses the difficult but necessary work of engaging staff in conversations that have traditionally been avoided in school meetings. It also suggests strategies for addressing oppressive acts and embracing a culturally relevant pedagogy.

Chapter 6 focuses on working with students to foster greater equity and inclusive education. Central to this chapter are the questions: "How do school leaders provide space for all students to flourish in equitable ways?" and "How do we elicit students' voices and involve them in working toward socially just ends?" Inclusive curricula using the James Banks (Toronto District School Board, n.d.) and "windows and mirrors" (Style, 1996) models are discussed. In addition, this chapter looks at fostering student leadership and voice, including suggestions for student action research. It considers the importance of formally honoring the diverse student skills and contributions that are not considered to be part of the formal curriculum and assessment processes.

Chapter 7 addresses strategies for building partnerships with school communities to enhance inclusion and to engage families in creating a vision for an equitable school. Approaches are suggested for getting to know your community, enhancing capacity for working toward inclusive education, and building communication bridges.

Finally, *Chapter 8* presents a detailed and specific tool, the *Equity Walk*, that may be used to assess progress within your school. This tool will be useful for establishing a "current state of affairs," identifying gaps and setting specific goals for moving your school along on the journey toward recognizing oppressive practices and

working toward a more equitable and antioppressive school environ-ment. As such, it can become an integral part of both formal and informal school improvement planning.

SPECIAL FEATURES

This book provides a variety of practical special features to assist school leaders in their quest to create more equitable schools.

Reflection Activity: In order to consolidate and expand the con-tent of each chapter, a reflection activity is provided for personal and/or collaborative work.

Case Studies: Following each chapter, a case study is provided for personal reflection and/or for use as a professional development tool in working with staff. Each case study is followed by suggested questions for probing the issues raised.

Principals' Action Steps: Each chapter culminates with three short, specific action steps, described as ***Self, Others,*** and ***Try Tomorrow***.

- In the ***Self*** section, leaders are asked to reflect upon a specific aspect of the chapter contents.
- In the ***Others*** section, links are provided to short web mod-ules that will be useful in extending discussion and providing ideas associated with the contents of each chapter. These modules are rich sources of insight by recognized leaders in the field of equity. They also provide opportunities to see what equity work looks like in the context of real schools. Reflective questions accompany each of these modules.
- ***Try Tomorrow*** suggests a specific "to do" item for imple-menting a concrete, specific strategy.

Tools and Resources: A separate section at the back of the book provides easy access to tools, templates, and activities that have been referred to throughout the chapters. The comprehensive *Equity Walk Template* is also included in this section.

The Three Main Reasons to Purchase This Book

Grounded in relevant theory, this book is a *highly accessible, user friendly,* and *practical* source for developing and extending initiatives in the vitally important process of making our schools more welcoming, inclusive, and equitable places.