

# ETHICS, EQUITY, AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

# INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE  
EDUCATION VOLUME 9

# ETHICS, EQUITY, AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to Julia and Marcus, my greatest gifts.

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# FOREWORD

We have a natural tendency to categorize, divide, and subdivide our world. Not the least among the categories are ways to differentiate our fellow human beings from ourselves, locating ourselves in systems of descriptors that discriminate each of us from the other. This in itself is critical for our social communication. It becomes problematic however, when we attach values to the descriptors, ranking each attribute as having greater or lesser value for membership in, or ability to contribute to, society as a whole. It is the relative valuing of attributes that leads society to discriminate against those who are defined as being different. And society frequently sanctions the process of assigning relative values to such characteristics as age, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, and sexual preference.

In many ways, this second decade of the 21st century is marked by awareness of human difference. There are challenges to centuries old distinctions that are inevitably values-based and that lead us to discriminate and to exclude some from the higher status accorded to others. We are now asked to be aware of how our language lacks “political correctness,” not without considerable discussion about whether being correct implies how we use language that disrespects others, or whether something greater is at work.

Is this relative valuing a basic trait of human nature? Are we inherently discriminatory bound by our language and our tribal affiliations to impose relative worth on others?

If we check back into early societies, there seems to be evidence that the way we look at human difference is not a universal characteristic. Some of the ancient tribes in South and Central America may have existed by not defining differences that could have led them to engage in tribal warfare. Rather, they may have recognized each others’ unique attributes as strengths to be drawn upon through barter and trade. About 3000 years BC, the Norte Chico cotton growers on the otherwise inhospitable dry plains in the north west of Peru may have exchanged cotton clothing and fishing nets for fish and vegetables from their coastal neighbors. The early Inka people inhabited widely varied ecologies in the Andes, creating communi-



ties that stretched from the river valleys and plains to the snow-capped peaks. They created roadways that ran vertically, accessible only by llama, to trade llama meat from the high slopes for fruit, beans, and maize from the farmers in the foothills, and fish from the river valleys.<sup>1</sup> While trade has always been a characteristic of humankind, what is surprising is that these early cultures lack evidence of any form of warfare — no skeletal remains with spearhead lodged in them, nor charred remain. These people seem to have established a society that flourished by valuing each others' differing strengths and contributions.

Closer to the present, following its autonomy as a territory of Canada in 1999, the government of Nunavut addressed some of the problems inherent in Aboriginal communities by designing an education system that emphasized inclusion. Philpot, Nesbit, Cahill, and Jeffrey (2004) note that

Inclusive education has as one of its core philosophical underpinnings a sense of community belonging and celebration of individual differences. While such is defended and proclaimed globally within a recognitive interpretation of social justice, aboriginal people see it as inherent to their existence ... Instead of viewing difference as something to be tolerated and accepted, differences are seen as essential to the group's survival and as such are to be celebrated. (p. 63)

Philpott (2007) notes that the result is the emergence of a remarkable education model that focuses on empowering the classroom teacher with the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of all children.

Ethics, the study of standards of conduct and moral judgment, has a historically long and deep past, although it could not have been more important to society than it is today. An ethical challenge or dilemma results not only from opposing views about what defines us, but more importantly from differences in the values we attribute to our defining characteristics. So we may have every intention of accommodating the differently abled person, but our sympathy emerges as a condescending attitude of "poor person" with an accompanying label for the disability. Giving special accommodations so that the other may rise to our level of access smacks of our view of him or her as inferior, and of our inability to find out what he or she brings to us. I recently experienced this with J, a person with mobility challenges that require additional assistance when J is on foot. In the context in which we worked, I initially failed to discover that J was a Para-Olympian when on horseback. I had failed to take the time to find out what she had accomplished.

Our schools are laced with such distinctions; assessment can be norm-based, summative, and meritorious, or it can be curriculum-based,

formative, and focused on achieving gains. Who is more deserving of a teacher's time — the needs of the individual or the needs of the class? Is our colleague's behavior more important than the effect it is having on our student? These dilemmas frequently appear in tandem. The educator may be forced to make decisions on who has priority or who is more deserving. Sometimes the decisions cannot be made because there are no guidelines or areas of consensus about who should predominate, or because the cost of making a decision is personal and damaging. All of them are wrenching only because they require us to apply values that we know do not apply.

Equal opportunity may be a human right, but we are still in the early stages of learning to recognize difference as an asset, as a contribution to our classroom. Ethical compromises and dilemmas take place on behalf of differences in values accorded to our human traits. By definition, ethical dilemmas are generally unsolvable and therefore among the hardest challenges that educators face. As we learn from this volume, nothing less than a shift in human values will be required; a societal shift that will allow us to dig deeply into the strengths and knowledge that each person brings in order to refocus on what we could learn from each other.

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## NOTE

1. Mann (2005).

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## SERIES INTRODUCTION

The adoption internationally of inclusive practice as the most equitable and all-encompassing approach to education and its relation to compliance with various international Declarations and Conventions underpins the importance of this series for people working at all levels of education and schooling in both the developed and developing worlds. There is little doubt that inclusive education is complex and diverse and that there are enormous disparities in understanding and application at both inter- and intra-country levels. A broad perspective on inclusive education throughout this series is taken, encompassing a wide range of contemporary viewpoints, ideas, and research for enabling the development of more inclusive schools, education systems, and communities.

Volumes in this series on *International Perspectives on Inclusive Education* contribute to the academic and professional discourse by providing a collection of philosophies and practices that can be reviewed in light of local contextual and cultural situations in order to assist educators, peripatetic staffs, and other professionals to provide the best education for all children. Each volume in the series focuses on a key aspect of inclusive education and provides critical chapters by contributing leaders in the field who discuss theoretical positions, empirical findings, and impacts on school and classroom practice. Different volumes address issues relating to the diversity of student need within heterogeneous classrooms and the preparation of teachers and other staffs to work in inclusive schools. Systemic changes and practice in schools encompass a wide perspective of learners in order to provide ideas on reframing education so as to ensure that it is inclusive of all. Evidence-based research practices underpin a plethora of suggestions for decision-makers and practitioners, incorporating current ways of thinking about and implementing inclusive education.

While many barriers have been identified that may potentially inhibit the implementation of effective inclusive practices, this series intends to identify such key concerns and offer practical and best practice approaches to overcome them. Adopting a thematic approach for each volume, readers will be able to quickly locate a collection of research and practice related

to a particular topic of interest. By transforming schools into inclusive communities of practice, all children should have the opportunity to access and participate in quality education in order to obtain the skills to become contributory global citizens. This series, therefore, is highly recommended to support education decision-makers, practitioners, researchers, and academics, who have a professional interest in the inclusion of children and youth who are marginalizing in inclusive schools and classrooms.

I am particularly excited to recommend Volume 9 to you as it deals with an issue that is so rarely addressed in depth when making decisions about inclusive education. Yet the importance of ethics in decision-making cannot be underestimated. Based strongly upon on principles of equity, justice, and care, the authors in this volume analyze critical issues related to the ethics associated with the practice of inclusive education. The wide range of topics discussed provide a timely reminder to all those involved with inclusion as to the sensitivities needed when making what are often emotive decisions. Volume 9 goes further than simply reviewing critical issues, though, as the authors provide important suggestions for ensuring that inclusive education is a positive and rewarding opportunity for all stakeholders.

Chris Forlin  
*Series Editor*

## INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 9

This volume presents diverse theoretical and empirical works of ethics and equity within inclusive education. Inclusion is deemed as inherently ethical, premised on principles of care, fairness, justice, and equity. Arguably, inclusion is a human right, as educational opportunities can be correlated with socioeconomic, position in society, and in turn, quality of life. Consequently, issues of access are paramount, as students, regardless of age, gender, race, religion, status, ability or other, must have equitable opportunities to receive quality education that advances their academic and social development. Within an inclusive society, difference is acknowledged and considered an asset, with each individual making a valuable contribution to that society. Inclusion demands full and active participation that is meaningful.

While educational systems and schools internationally have adopted the practice of inclusion, the extent to which access is granted and inclusive practices are implemented differs. Numerous variations of inclusion result in differing experiences of access and meaningful engagement. Although many students with different learning needs are physically included in general education classrooms alongside typically achieving peers, physical presence does not equate to equity and inclusion. In fact, students with special needs placed in general education classrooms, without adequate programming, supports, resources, and specifically where bias and prejudice exists, may be more disadvantaged or oppressed than those who are learning in segregated environments. Issues of care, fairness, and equity are questionable, as the needs and best interests of these students may not be served in such contexts, posing ethical questions, challenges, and dilemmas.

Within the teaching profession, ethics are central, as teachers maintain a position of power and privilege in the classroom, with many countries internationally having established codes and guidelines. Teachers have an influence over the most vulnerable and impressionable members of society. Inclusion cannot be understood outside of the context of ethics, as fundamental to its premise, are issues pertaining to equity and justice. Yet, ethics is often absent in considerations of inclusion and inclusive education.

Volume 9 of the *International Perspectives on Inclusive Education* series provides an examination of international conceptualizations of professional ethics in inclusive education. Drawing on different interpretations and understandings of ethics in teaching and learning, with students who have different learning needs, we are challenged to perceive inclusive practices through an ethical lens. Ethics and its implications to equitable learning experiences and opportunities for *all* students, its complexities, and its possibilities are central to the discussions. Topics and issues addressed in the volume prompt us to consider the scope of inclusion and what this means for our students globally, as we strive toward a more equitable and socially just society. Authors are scholars, academics, practitioners, and consultants who work in inclusive and special education, teacher education, and practices within the field of psychology. Their work in this field is highly regarded and we are grateful for their contributions to this volume. We appreciate the diversity and richness of their perspectives as they expand our knowledge in an area that is evolving. Discussions include Indigenous ethics, epistemologies and inclusive pedagogies, inclusionary practices for students at the elementary and secondary level with intellectual and developmental disabilities, extensive support needs, and those who are gifted, the value of technology and multimodal pedagogies in increasing accessibility to learning, notions of co-teaching, assessment practices, and ethical challenges. Ethical complexities that occur within inclusive classrooms and schools need to be examined and analyzed in order to further our objectives and aspirations toward effective and successful inclusion for *all* learners.

For me, the dedication of a volume to ethics and equity in inclusion demonstrates promise, and indicates progress in the field, as we shift past debates about the relevance of inclusion and questions of access, to an analysis of our practices, with considerations of ethical principles. Acknowledging the relational nature of inclusion, the uniqueness of all learners, and the importance of difference, as well as an appreciation for the many ways of knowing moves us that much closer to a future where *all* individuals are valued.

Agnes Gajewski  
*Editor*