

Foreword

For many years now, I have greatly admired the work of Jim Scheurich and Linda Skrla. This book, *Leadership for Equity and Excellence*, reaffirms for me why. With passion, wisdom, and perseverance, they challenge all of us as educators to examine our beliefs, attitudes, and practices about the students in our charge. Professors Scheurich and Skrla make clear that there should be only one agenda for every classroom, school, and district in America, and that agenda must be driven by the single belief that equity and excellence are the same. All our students—regardless of culture, race, ethnicity, economics, language, gender, or lifestyle—must be educated to attain well-defined and high standards of learning. To have any other agenda or to do anything less perpetuates a public educational system that expects more of some students, mainly white and of wealth, than of other students, mainly of color and/or in poverty.

What sets this book apart from other writings about school leadership and successful schools is the authors' unflinching appraisal that there is great hope, in the midst of great hypocrisy, that American schools can narrow and eventually eliminate the achievement gap. The authors have personally studied schools and districts that have, over time, created educational methods, programs, and expectations that have significantly advanced the educational achievements of all students. No longer are the highest achieving students in these schools only those who are traditionally expected to do well, and no longer are special needs programs filled with students typically viewed as "high risk" due to their poverty, language, race, or ethnicity.

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The authors are correct in pointing out that although most educators easily mouth the words “All children can learn,” relatively few educators have endeavored to study and change the very practices that keep all children from actually doing so. This book is a ray of sunshine through the fog of complacency among those who think that we are doing the best that we can for poor students and students of color. The complacent might think that classrooms and schools can help produce an exceptional student or two who rises above his or her underachieving group, but such educators rarely think that these gains can be made across the board in the same proportion as is the case among the “good” students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds with college-educated parents.

Scheurich and Skrla shake the environmental or genetic rationale about educational attainment to its hollow core and go beyond exhortations into explaining what schools can do. They provide chapter after chapter of easily understood strategies drawn from examples of classrooms, schools, and districts that have already greatly improved. The authors demonstrate how leaders in such schools mobilize faculty, staff, and community to openly study inequities among students, and how standards, curriculum, and assessments are used as levers for identifying and improving student achievement. The authors describe how leaders promote purposeful and collaborative classrooms among teachers, administrators, and parents to improve instruction, create with others a climate of care, and use accountability and “equity audits” to continuously scan for inequities across multiple domains of student learning and activities.

Jim Scheurich and Linda Skrla are independent thinkers. They kowtow to no political or ideological group. One is hard pressed to categorize them as politically left or right or educationally progressive or conservative. Where else do you find authors who argue forcefully for clear academic standards, tests, and assessments, for curriculum alignment, and for accountability, who at the same time argue equally hard for

collaborative and flexible ways for determining instructional practices, and who vent with moral indignation against “teaching to the test” and using classrooms and schools as “testing factories”?

This text is not “pie in the sky” theoretical conjecture but an examination of real people in real schools who will no longer tolerate inequities of achievement in their own classrooms, schools, districts, and communities. This book is both eloquent in its simplicity and deeply moving in its call to action. When I read this book, I can hear the evocative strains of Ron Edmonds’ effective schools research combined with the heroes and heroines of the women suffrage, child labor, and civil rights movements. I hear the challenge of those, known and unknown to us, who had the courage and stamina to turn the tide of how humans think about each other.

Myles Horton (1998, p. 114) wrote, “A large social movement forces people to take a stand for or against it, so that there are no longer any neutrals.” Jim Scheurich and Linda Skrla, with so many others who have pushed forward the equity and excellence movement in education, are clearly, and once again, asking each educator to take a stance—no more neutrals allowed. Do you believe that all children can learn? Do you believe that all children can learn to high predetermined standards? If you say that you *do* believe, or are at least willing to consider such a creed about the educability of all humans, then take this book with you. It will provide you with a world of practice—drawn from schools, faculty, and leaders who make the belief the practice of their work. Over and over again, this is a book whose time has come.

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