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# *Preface*

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The authors in this volume share one central attribute—making education inclusive and successful for all children, youths, and adult learners in our schools. What enriches this volume is each author’s unique perspective on circumventing and overcoming barriers to student achievement. Selected chapters represent these authors’ academic research, creative ideas, and concrete, practical strategies to improve the lives of educators and, thereby, the communities we serve.

This volume presents the work of practitioners, scholars, and academics (often the same person) who have been actively engaged in the work of equity. Each author is an authority in his or her own right and has made contributions to the field of social justice. These authors are respected for their accomplishments of serving the historically underserved and for their impact on changing school systems to make them responsive to the educational and social needs of children, youth, and communities.

Our school systems—public, private, and parochial—in the United States and Canada are the single best way for all students, with an emphasis on those who are historically marginalized and excluded, to become fully participating citizens. The history of our two countries has been successfully confronted in a way that achievement gaps, long kept under wraps by educators and policy makers at all levels, are now front-and-center topics that we are successfully confronting and making steady, albeit uneven, progress. In recent years, the language used to confront barriers to students’ access to education has evolved from legally based terms borne from the civil rights movement and the foundation created by desegregation and integration to the broader terms of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access. Whatever the current language, when applied to education, our work as educators and as citizens of democratic societies has been and must always be about closing access and achievement gaps. While we celebrate instances of progress, much work remains to be done. Sometimes the work involves educators acquiring knowledge and the skills needed to be successful when working in school communities with

cultures different from those of the administrators, teachers, and counselors in the schools. More often, the challenge for the educators is the deeper work of viewing the communities and culture with which we come in contact as having worth and deserving of high-quality education. I am reminded of a colleague who reported a recent conversation with a district-level administrator who wasn't interested in "doing diversity" because the district's focus for the year had to be on closing the achievement gaps. It is apparent that we still have a long way to go in moving from the now-stated cliché "all students can learn" to the newly held belief that "all educators can educate all learners."

One of the major gifts of the accountability movements of the past decade has been the uncovering of access and achievement gaps. The blame game has ended and our collective work must be about our role in acknowledging the presence of the gaps and learning to be more effective, both individually and collectively. It is not coincidental that such gaps are expressed in terms of racial, ethnic, gender, and social-class data. The disparities are often described as gaps in reading or mathematics achievement; however, those gaps become a different reality when some demographic groups are overrepresented in special education programs and English language development programs and underrepresented in gifted and talented classes. This volume provides readers with experts' approaches and strategies to confront barriers to access and inclusion.

The selected chapters for this volume are arranged into three sections: chapters important for all educators, chapters that speak directly to teachers and those who support teachers, and a closing chapter that provides the opportunity for you, the reader, to reflect on your practice.

My fervent hope is these readings will inform, motivate and challenge you to first critically examine your personal belief systems and instructional practices and then the policies, programs, and practices of your schools and school districts. Engaging in personal reflection and in dialogue with colleagues are necessary steps to creating socially just schools.