

**Abdi, A. A. (Ed.). (2023). *Social justice education in Canada: Select perspectives*.
Canadian Scholars. 240 pages. ISBN: 9781773383071**

Reviewed by: Laura Eaton-Kent & Stephanie Tuters, University of Toronto

Educators and educational leaders face unprecedented challenges in their pursuit of the creation of more equitable and inclusive schools. School leaders across Canada, and in many jurisdictions across the world, face staunch resistance to social justice initiatives and policies. For example, officials at the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) regularly face death threats for their equity policies and practices (Williams, 2022). The former director of the WRDSB, Jeewan Chanicka, states he has received threats from what he understands is “a coordinated network of hate” (Collen & Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2023, para. 65).

These threats and risks to doing social justice work are not new. Educators are regularly in precarious positions at the micro- and macro-political levels as they engage in social justice work (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2015; Ryan, 2012; Ryan and Tuters, 2017; Tuters, 2017). In this ever-evolving landscape, the strategies and approaches needed to support students and educators have become more complex and more urgent. A diverse range of identities and sociocultural backgrounds are present in schools, many of which were historically marginalized and excluded and are now demanding to be recognized and empowered (Fahey et al., 2019). Consequently, there is an increasing need to examine the educational system through the lens of social justice leadership and consider how to better support students and educators.

Abdi's collection of Canadian perspectives on social justice education is timely and represents perspectives that were unfortunately previously marginalized and excluded. Using multiple lenses, this collection provides tools and thought-provoking concepts to help “deconstruct racism, ethnocentrism, ableism, stereotypes, biases and cultural distortions” (Abdi, 2023, p. 221). The fast-paced, easy-to-read chapters engage and inform the reader of current educational issues. These issues are organized thematically so the reader can easily identify the chapters that are most relevant to their learning; however, we recommend a thorough read of all chapters. The use of real-life examples across Canada, such as the incorporation of school board initiatives, policy revisions, case studies, and research projects, provides the reader with relevant and current understanding of social justice education and with actionable items. Through a cross-cultural lens, this book is a valuable resource for many in education, including pre-service teachers, current educators, administrators, and professors of education, inspiring and informing critical thinking in the quest to promote inclusive and equitable education for all. It is a compelling book that helps to contextualize and ground the learning in a usable format.

Abdi's edited collection of 13 different perspectives on approaches to social justice education pro-

vides the reader with a vast range of viewpoints regarding how to support Canada's marginalized communities and how this marginalization impacts the educational and life success of historically marginalized communities. Each chapter provides a different voice for various communities in their goal of dismantling traditional colonial hierarchies that continue to inequitably dominate education systems. The editor separated the chapters by themes that progress throughout the book, with new terms and concepts introduced in earlier chapters and then reoccurring throughout later chapters. The major themes identified in this book include anti-Black racism, supporting Muslim youth, Indigenization and decolonization, supporting Chinese and Asian students, immigrants and refugee rights, ableism, global citizenship, financial equity, language, and preparing pre-service educators and postsecondary education structures.

Throughout the book, there are overarching themes and terms that provide the reader with a breadth of understanding and contextualize social justice education in a novel and much-needed capacity. Ghosh, a leader in the understanding of critical multicultural education, examines the COVID-19 pandemic as an event in history that has had an impact on global imbalance of privileging and un-privileging through the disenfranchisements of marginalized communities.

Dei and Rutherford, as well as Simmons, explore the concept of decolonization through the lens of anti-Black racism. The researchers argue that anti-colonial education is the process of undoing and deconstructing the institutional injustices that permeate white privilege through the reparation of those who have been historically underserved, such as Black and Indigenous people. Yet, this process is far from achieving its goal, with the researchers sharing current examples of how many in-school systems continue to perpetuate and favour colonial ideologies and hostilities toward Black and Indigenous youth. Consequently, a full reform of the system is called upon to drastically change and improve the system through the incorporation of social justice and anti-colonial education.

Similarly, King delves into anti-oppressive education and decolonial Indigenization with the aim of dismantling traditional hierarchies within the education system. However, King's analysis has a strong focus on postsecondary education, providing valuable insights for pre-service teacher and professors who may be engaging in unconscious colonial behaviours. King provides three aspects of Indigenization, namely, Indigenous inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization, to provide a map toward making broad changes in the postsecondary education system.

Cui and Abdi dive into Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital by demonstrating current instances in which such constructs continue the otherization and vilifying of Chinese students in Canada. Cui and Abdi call for the reconstruction of the cultural capital that infiltrates and dominates schools and society, to help dismantle the racist habitus that promotes dominant groups and others or devalues all racialized communities.

Together, the terms and concepts presented by the book's contributors work toward broadly defining social justice education through a critical theoretical lens. While the term *social justice* is represented through different and competitive arguments, collectively the researchers provide a strong understanding of the multifaceted nature of social justice education and its path toward equity and inclusion. This broad and more encompassing conception than has previously guided educational theorization and practice is increasingly important in the current context where many experience discrimination based on identity characteristics. Those attacking and attempting to dismantle social justice initiatives are more successful when social justice leaders and educators are fractured and in contest over approaches. Multiple truths and perspectives must be able to co-exist for the pursuit of social justice to be successful; human rights must be for everyone, not just for some ("Upholding Human Rights for All," 2023).

Abdi's thoughtful collection of diverse researchers' perspectives regarding social justice education delivers an array of arguments and promotes an improved understanding of inclusivity and equity in an academic context. Utilizing a lens of critical theory, the book provides readers, especially those aiming to apply social justice education to their practices, with many strategies to help in their pursuits. This is a relatively novel approach in social justice education where previously there was more focus on building conceptual and theoretical understanding and less of a focus on presenting strategies for change. The concrete strategies are much needed for those working at the ground level in education.

Similarly, the juxtaposition of the multiple perspectives and themes provides a vast frame of reference while simultaneously addressing areas and issues regarding social justice that have not been pre-

viously connected. The use of current Canadian examples provides the reader with relevant examples to draw upon when examining the current state of the education system. For instance, Ghosh's chapter regarding COVID-19 makes connections to a world event that affected everyone yet had the most detrimental impacts on marginalized communities.

Furthermore, the various case studies and examples from school boards across Canada are easy to relate to, regardless of whether the reader is a pre-service teacher, a professor, a working educator, or an administrator. For instance, Gagné and Wattar provide pre-service and current teachers examples of supporting Muslim parents to help bridge the gap in communication and offer support for Muslim youth. Educators can explore the Me Mapping activities and guided prompts and apply the learnings from their study to their own practice to ensure that lessons, activities, and behaviours are free of stereotypes and discrimination.

Abdi clearly applied care and attention; while the chapters are short, they are inherently effective in providing clear arguments, and each one makes a significant contribution to the robust conception of social justice education articulated in the edited volume. The chapters limit unnecessary and/or redundant background or overly theoretical information, yet they provide a solid understanding of the various concepts using language that caters to a wide range of audiences. Although the key audiences are pre-service teachers and professors who teach social justice education, the book can effectively be used more broadly such as for professional development opportunities in schools to enhance teaching practice. The book can be used in its entirety but also as independent chapters, depending on the needs of the reader and user. For instance, the chapters focusing on anti-Black racism can be used independently by professors focusing on Black studies or can be used in conjunction with resources on other forms of discrimination such as Indigenous racism or ableism. The language utilized throughout the book is applicable to all school-community members and limits education-specific jargon. However, when novel or niche terms are used, the researchers provide short and clear definitions of the terms that help build the reader's understanding regardless of their educational background. Moreover, since each chapter is written by different researchers, it provides the reader with broad perspectives of not only social justice concepts and themes but also writing styles and researcher identities. The researchers represent many racial and sociocultural backgrounds, which provide the reader with a holistic understanding of multicultural perspectives, voices, and issues regarding various groups of people who have been historically othered in a way that has historically been avoided (and othered) in educational literature. For example, the focus on ableism is relatively new in the social justice discourse, which provides a novel understanding of how various groups of people continue to be forgotten in our journey toward equity and inclusivity.

This edited volume is a signal that things are changing for the better through the efforts of those like Abdi and the researchers included in this publication. Resistance to social justice initiatives would not be building if these efforts were unsuccessful. Furthermore, the chapters focus on issues regarding both primary and secondary school systems and postsecondary education. Notably, Abdi's collection of perspectives also provides the reader, whether it be the pre-service student or the professor, with a range of tailored discussion questions at the end of each chapter. These questions not only help solidify the understanding of the chapter but also provide an opportunity for the readers to engage in social justice discourses that will further their understanding and challenge their preconceived notions of the education system. Researchers have found that liminal spaces are especially effective in cultivating shared knowledges and offering equal contributions of different perspectives when students are provided with opportunities to discuss their shared experiences and understanding (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017).

In the spirit of critical theory, we would be remiss if we did not offer feedback on this edited volume. Although this edited volume has many strengths, areas of improvement include the notable absence of the voices of the 2SLGBTQ+. Researchers have argued that social justice leaders place little focus on developing inclusive practices for students who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ (Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014). Studies have found shocking disparities between what educational leaders perceive 2SLGBTQ+ students are experiencing and what the students themselves express that they are experiencing (Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014). With the Canadian education system continuing to exhibit heteronormative practices, and educators and leaders experiencing staunch resistance to supporting 2SLGBTQ+ students and educators, this absence must be rectified in the field of social justice education broadly. Grace (2015) argues that sexual and gender differences are still affected by societal and political forces, and school leaders still have a long way to go in achieving a truly inclusive system. Thus, in a collection of socioculturally diverse per-

spectives regarding social justice education, it is unfortunate that the voices of 2SLGBTQ+ members are missing. When discussing social justice education, it is vital to include the voices of 2SLGBTQ+ to counter the heteronormative perspectives that continue to pervade throughout our society and schools. One recommendation is to include the intersectionality of 2SLGBTQ+ voices and Indigenous or Black students, as they are often missed throughout anti-discrimination discourses.

The writing style and language utilized throughout the book is exemplary, albeit with one exception. Specifically, the editor and the researchers should have ensured that language throughout the book is not colonial. For instance, the term *stakeholder*, which is used in the same chapter that focuses on decolonization, has colonial references and negative connotations to Indigenous communities. It references a time when settlers would claim their land by placing wooden stakes into the ground (Creation and Review Committee & Research Committee, 2023). Alternatively, *partners* or *community members* could have been used to avoid the continuation of colonial language.

Overall, Abdi's book offers a unique approach to addressing social justice education. The group of researchers provide an array of perspectives and studies that are useful for a wide range of audiences. The current and relevant Canadian ideas and researcher identities ensure that the reader develops a comprehensive understanding of social justice education and encourages them to critically assess the school system. This book is highly recommended for pre-service teachers, current educators, and professors in their journey to abolishing colonial systems and dismantling traditional hierarchies within the Canadian education system. It offers a deep understanding of the complexities regarding social justice education and promotes opportunities for educators to implement practices that are truly inclusive and equitable.

References

- Abdi, A. A. (Ed.). (2023). *Social justice education in Canada: Select perspectives*. Canadian Scholars.
- Clarke, S., & O'Donoghue, T. (Eds.). (2015). *School leadership in diverse contexts*. Routledge.
- Collen, D., & Canadian Anti-Hate Network. (2023, July 11). *Trustees and students face smears and threats from anti-trans activists*. Canadian Anti-Hate Network. https://www.antihate.ca/anti_trans_activists_target_wrdsb_school_board_waterloo
- Cook-Sather, A., & Felten, P. (2017). Ethics of academic leadership: Guiding learning and teaching. In F. Su & M. Wood (Eds.), *Cosmopolitan perspectives on academic leadership in higher education* (pp. 175–191). Bloomsbury.
- Creation and Review Committee & Research Committee. (2023, April 11). *Terminology in indigenous content*. Province of British Columbia. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/services-for-government/service-experience-digital-delivery/web-content-development-guides/web-style-guide/writing-guide-for-indigenous-content/terminology#Stakeholders>
- Fahey, K., Breidenstein, A., Ippolito, J., & Hensley, F. (2019). *An uncommon theory of school change: Leadership for reinventing schools*. Teachers College Press.
- Grace, A. P. (2015). How can educational leaders support sexual and gender minority (SGM) students in our schools? In D. Griffiths & J. P. Portelli (Eds.), *Key questions for educational leaders* (pp. 73–77). Word & Deed Publishing.
- Hernandez, F., & Fraynd, D. J. (2014). Leadership's role in inclusive LGBTQ-supportive schools. *Theory Into Practice*, 53(2), 115–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2014.885811>
- Ryan, J. (2012). *Struggling for inclusion: Educational leadership in a neo-liberal world*. Information Age Publishing.
- Ryan, J., & Tuters, S. (2017). Picking a hill to die on: Discreet activism, leadership and social justice in education. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 55(5), 569–588. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jea-07-2016-0075>
- Tuters, S. (2017). What informs and inspires the work of equity minded teachers. *Brock Education Journal*, 26(2), 47–61. <https://doi.org/10.26522/brocked.v26i2.605>
- Upholding human rights for all. (2023, September 19). *Open Letter Earth*. Retrieved November 27, 2023, from <https://openletter.earth/upholding-human-rights-for-all-866419a2>

Williams, R. (2022, August 20). Nails in tires, hate mail, death threats — public school board chair facing continued abuse over transgender book meeting. *Waterloo Region Record*. https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/nails-in-tires-hate-mail-death-threats-public-school-board-chair-facing-continued-abuse-over/article_0bf-c4a71-2f38-57e9-b6fa-b691800d9de7.html