



## Welcome to *JSD* — please make yourself uncomfortable

For those of us who work on *JSD*, each issue is a learning journey. We talk about the meaning of the words we use, from whom we want to learn, which articles to feature. For some topics, we're confident that we have solid, in-house expertise. For others, we acknowledge our need to engage in study and discussion. Social justice is certainly one of those topics.

Our writers were among our primary teachers on this topic. The research done by Stephanie Hirsh and Shirley Hord to write the chapter from which "Building hope, giving affirmation" (p. 10) was adapted was enormously beneficial to our discussions about what we mean by the term "social justice." As with any topic, the perspectives and voices of the people who fill these pages expanded our ongoing development as learners.

It's exciting to work on a topic that pushes us, that makes us ask real questions about what we believe. To go another step and examine if our beliefs align with our words and even our actions is a great experience, if at times unsettling.

I have to remind myself that there is no reason I should be comfortable when I encounter something sensitive,

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new, or challenging. If I'm comfortable, how much am I changing? How deeply can I be examining my beliefs or stretching my knowledge if I don't experience some disequilibrium? Sarah Nelson confirmed this for me when she and Patricia Guerra spoke with me for our online-only Q-and-A (see more in the box at right). As Nelson said about assisting educators in developing their cultural proficiency knowledge: "This is a lengthy process — it's a lot of hard work. If you are working on this and at no point you are uncomfortable, then you're not doing the learning."

In the end, there isn't anything in this issue itself that makes me uncomfortable. As I read a definition of social justice that includes the goals of developing participatory citizens along with providing equitable academic opportunities (see p. 11), I am energized rather than anxious. When I read about strategies that take educators into communities to learn about cultural assets (p. 36) or that give teachers a way to hear student insights (p. 42), I know that readers take away practical, actionable knowledge. Reading how schools, districts, and individual educators have made progress in creating socially just learning environments is inspirational; learning about replicable models is always useful.

I don't know many educators who would disagree with the goals of everything we discuss in this issue, or

### Beginning the journey

Patricia L. Guerra and Sarah W. Nelson, who write *JSD*'s cultural proficiency column, are the subject of this issue's Q-and-A feature, offered exclusively online. Nelson and Guerra outline a process of beginning a social justice journey and offer reasons for hope. Read their words online at [www.nsdc.org/news/jsd/](http://www.nsdc.org/news/jsd/).

who would argue with the idea that education is a civil right. But then there is the next step to move systems in a direction where all students have access to everything we want schools to accomplish. Once we dig deeper, challenging beliefs and long-held assumptions, starting with ourselves, we encounter something more difficult. This is when I get uncomfortable. Looking in the mirror, acknowledging who I am and where I come from, I can't pretend I don't have biases. The discomfort of that truth and the guilt that accompanies it creates anxiety. And those moments of anxiety are necessary. If we aren't willing to take that scary leap — every one of us — then change can't happen. We can't take the later steps in the process if we won't take the first step. We all hold assumptions, and we all have biases. As you read this issue of *JSD*, I invite you to make yourself uncomfortable. You have peers who will support you along the way. ■