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Meeting the Challenges of Curriculum and Instruction in School Settings in the United States

Hasan Aydin¹, Burhan Ozfidan², Douglas Carothers³

Abstract

The United States is one of many countries currently undergoing significant changes in educational institutions, particularly in K-12 settings. Most pronounced among these is the impact of unprecedented demographic changes on the curriculum and instruction provided in U.S. schools. Four other factors are also influencing curriculum and instruction including 1) policy changes, 2) emerging new technologies, 3) globalization, and 4) the refugee and immigration issue. Each of these areas provides challenges for both school settings and teacher educators. These challenges and the obstacles they create must be examined and specific recommendations must be developed for teachers, teacher educators, and policy-makers to assist in meeting each challenge. Among these recommendations, research shows that: 1) schools must change the structures, culture, and programs of curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of a diverse student body, 2) researchers in higher education institutions must focus their work to help the federal government, state leaders, and school districts decide upon the most appropriate reforms and changes to curriculum and instruction in school settings, 3) more resources from a variety of sources must be invested in technology-use training so teachers can better prepare students to use technology, especially in the context of new assessments, 4) educators should define and advance an agenda that prepares youth for global citizenship, and 5) the core values of educators must include respect, integrity, commitment and excellence, the promotion of diversity and gender equity, choice, and dignity for all students.

Keywords: *Challenges, demographics, policy, globalization, technology, refugees and immigration, education, United States*

Introduction

There has been a great deal of research on curriculum and instruction. Still, issues including dramatic demographic changes, policy changes, globalization, emerging technologies, and concerns surrounding refugees and immigration remain challenging for both school settings and teacher educators. Little discussion is present in the “literature about the challenges and problems that educators encounter during the implementation process and how these challenges and problems are overcome” (Shilling, 2013; p.21). This study highlights the challenges to curriculum and instruction in U.S. public schools and analyzes both these challenges and the opportunities that exist for teachers, teacher educators, policy makers, and other practitioners as they work to overcome these challenges. In this context, the challenges

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that exist for curriculum and instruction have the potential to result in significant benefits for a new generation of students in a rapidly changing world.

This paper surveys scholarship related to the development of curriculum and instruction in public schools in the United States. It examines the issues and opportunities as well as the goals and strategies for curriculum and instruction and suggests guidelines to help ensure that emerging curricula are responsive to the needs of students in a rapidly changing world. This review also describes the available research on specific concepts that were chosen for analysis and represented the research efforts up to the end of May 2017. It incorporates data derived from various sources, including reviews of literature, books, research center reports, peer-reviewed journals, international and national government reports, conference papers, websites of education departments of each state, and a review of school districts' school improvement initiatives.

Ultimately, reactions to the following five challenges will dramatically influence the context of curriculum and instruction in the United States. These challenges are 1) demographic changes, 2) policy changes, 3) emerging technologies, 4) globalization, and 5) refugee and immigration issues. Beyond curriculum and instruction, Herrera (2012) argues that the extent to which educators succeed in adapting to these challenges may well determine the future quality of life in the United States. She further indicates that each challenge already involves a pattern of current constraints on an "educator's ability to address that challenge while simultaneously offering the possibility of opening the door to promising perspectives for critical thinking about changes in the future for teaching and teacher education in diverse schools and classrooms" (p.1).

Challenge One: Demographic Changes

The demographic profile of America's population, including its public school population, is undergoing rapid and profound changes. According to Hochschild and Scovronick (2005), dramatic demographic changes will occur in the early decades of the 21st century, with racial and ethnic diversity increasing as baby boomers age and birth rates and immigration laws change. Hochschild and Scovronick also assert that school-aged children will be the most diverse segment of the U.S. population. They conclude that that though these demographic changes create the potential for serious disagreements about public education, they also offer the opportunity for the citizenry to strengthen its commitment to public education. Thus, changes in classroom demographics caused by an increasingly heterogeneous student population should be viewed by educators as both a challenge and an opportunity.

The 2014-2015 school year introduced a significant cultural shift: it was the first time that the majority of students in American public schools were not White (The National Center for Education Statistics - NCES, 2015). Because the U.S. teaching force has historically been overwhelming white, this demographic shift presents challenges to an educational system that has historically struggled with educating students who are non-White, who come from a background of poverty, or for whom English is not the native language (Corona, et al., 2017). This demographic change has widened the experiential gap between teachers and their students, presenting challenges for both teachers and teacher educators. In 2011-12, 82% of K-12 teachers in the United States were White but no other racial/ethnic group comprised more than 10% of the teaching force. A drop in White student enrollment has further exacerbated the cultural and experiential mismatch between teachers and their students. Sixty-one percent of students in American schools in 2000 were White, but the percentage of White students had fallen to 49.7% by 2014 (NCES, 2016). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2014) expects this trend to continue and projects that 54.7% of U.S. students will be members of minority groups by 2022.

Thus, a largely homogenous White teaching force is charged with providing instruction to a student body that is increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse. Students “come to class with various levels of competence and academic preparation, different degrees of motivation to succeed in school work, different social skills, and various levels of maturity” (Florin & Hall, 2008, p. 40;). These students also vary in regards to their race, culture, socio-economic status, and belief systems. Even greater than the differences between students, however, are the differences between students and their teachers and between the learning styles and needs of the students and the types of instruction teachers have been prepared to offer (The Keys to Effective Schools, 2007). As stated by Florin and Hall (2008), the traditional instruction is no longer effective for today's diverse learners. These learners require comprehensive programs that include components including guidance and counseling, character education, on-campus medical and social services, a full-time social worker, and multicultural education (Florin & Hall, 2008). These authors further assert that a differentiated curriculum must offer programs to address the social and emotional needs of diverse students as well as meeting their academic needs.

Two issues stand out: the challenge of multilingual classrooms and the need for more teachers of color (Aydin, 2013c; Aydin & Ozfidan, 2014; Faltis, 2014). Recruitment of a more diverse teaching forces, including highly qualified bilingual education teachers and teachers of English language learners, is means of a addressing these challenges (Ozfidan & Burblaw,

2016; Kaya, Y. 2015). As Boser (2014) indicated, “teachers of color can serve as role models for students of color and when students see teachers who share their racial or ethnic backgrounds, they often view schools as more welcoming places” (p.3). Moreover, schools need to develop high-quality preschool programs, especially for young children whose first language is not English. Both of these approaches will enable schools to provide a better education to a diverse student population.

Schools must now prepare students to interact in a more diverse society and collaborate in more diverse work environments. As a result, teacher preparation programs must create culturally relevant curricula and train teachers to deliver these curricula in culturally appropriate ways that increase the engagement of all students. Curriculum and instruction must focus on teaching techniques that employ best practices and emphasize a broad swath of knowledge and skills reflecting the diverse cultural backgrounds of students (Hoffmann, 2017). Thus, a modern, world-class curriculum must be developed that will inspire and challenge all learners and prepare them for the future (Waters, 2009).

Use of specific strategies and tactics to resolve these issues is essential. First, teachers must get to know each of their students as individuals and receive training on the use of culturally responsive instructional techniques. Second, schools must develop cultures, structures, and programs that support diverse students, staff, and faculty and need to develop activities and curricula that provide opportunities to learn about cultural diversity, race, ethnicity, and gender (Nasseh, 2000). Regardless of culture, national origin, or level of English fluency, no student should feel isolated; teachers must be committed to the principle that all students have the right to be engaged in their education and to receive a high quality education. As Nasseh (2000) wrote, schools should “develop processes and programs that encourage diversity and develop a sense of respect, understanding, and responsibility among students” while providing asynchronous educational programs with a multicultural orientation and universal values.

Challenge Two: Policy Changes

Frequent changes in educational policy also influence curriculum and instruction. Among recent changes, implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and 21st-century skills “are not only beneficial to students and teachers but also necessary to prepare our youth for their future careers. In an age of education in which standardized tests determine the success of our schools, allowing students to be creative and to use the power of technology to support necessary skills and learn in unique ways is critical” (Alismail & McGuire, 2015, p. 150).

Historically, U.S. education policies have been continuously debated and revised to reflect a continuously changing society's views regarding appropriate methods of educating students and the overall goals of education. Some of the goals of public education have been to:

- *prepare children for citizenship;*
- *cultivate a skilled workforce;*
- *teach cultural literacy;*
- *prepare students for college;*
- *help students become critical thinkers; and*
- *help students compete in a global marketplace* (The Encyclopedia of American Politics, 2014).

School choice and academic accountability have emerged as two major trends in 21st century educational policy. Research shows that parents want both more educational alternatives and a more active role in choosing schools that they believe will provide better education for their children. Reform groups and federal and state government agencies have been wrestling with the issue of education standards, and whether there can or should be common standards for all educational instruction and achievement” (U.S. Department of Education, 2014a).

Two pieces of legislation have addressed these issues in recent years. The first was the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which was signed into law by President Bush in 2001. This law was based on the premise that student achievement would increase if schools established measurable goals and set high standards for student performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2014a).

Second, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) established a \$4.35 billion fund to support ‘Race to the Top’ grants. Taking effect when the ARRA was signed by President Obama in 2009, this grant program provided incentives for states and districts to develop and implement school reforms. The stated goals of Race to the Top were to encourage and reward states that were creating conditions for education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement; closing achievement gaps; improving high school graduation rates; and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

In addition to these two legislative actions, the development of Common Core State Standards was a third attempt to improve students’ academic performance. Their designers describe these standards as consisting of the highest, most effective standards from around the U.S. as well as from other countries (Common Core State Standards, 2017a). Consisting of

high quality academic standards in English/Language Arts and Mathematics at each grade level from kindergarten through twelfth grade, as of 2017 these standards have been adopted by 42 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Educational Activity (Common Core State Standards, 2017b).

Government and policy-makers have attempted to make effective reforms, many of which also profoundly affect curriculum and instruction. For instance, David (2011) indicated that standards-based reform is based on the belief that curriculum and instruction will become richer and more rigorous if demanding standards for student achievement are set and student performance is measured using accurate tests that reflect the standards. Further, serious consequences were created for schools that fail to increase test scores, forcing educators to pay attention to the content of the tests. The adoption of test-based teacher evaluation frameworks has come about in dozens of states, largely because of federal mandates.

Despite the good intentions, standardized testing may be having unintended consequences. Valli and Buese (2007) have argued that while educators pay attention to the content of high-stakes tests, even the most carefully designed standards are only as effective as the tests that assess how well students have achieved them, and standardized tests can only assess a small portion of the curriculum. Indeed, the 10-year experiment in the use of federally mandated standards and tests under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has been almost universally acknowledged as a failure. Nonetheless, Au (2007) reports that “high-stakes testing will likely remain the coin of the realm for the foreseeable future” (p.6). If the use of test scores to evaluate students is expanded to evaluate individual teachers, the stakes will increase even more.

The challenge, then, “is to ensure that state tests do not continue to distort the curriculum in ways that deprive students of meaningful learning” (Hamilton et al., 2007). Two complementary approaches seem promising with respect to this issue. First, Hamilton et al, (2007) indicated that “one is to improve testing by expanding both the number of subjects tested and items that tap understanding and reasoning; the challenge to do so rests in not increasing the total amount of testing” (as cited in David, 2011, p. 3). Federal policy-makers must encourage states to give adequate emphasis to social science, history, English, art, and music. States should review their curriculum guidelines to ensure that they encourage adequate attention to and time for these areas. They should consider including measures of knowledge and skills in social science and humanity courses, such as language, literature, art, and music among the multiple measures used for NCLB accountability. Second, Karp (2014) argued that Common Core is stalking US public schools as part of the corporate reform project. He also states that educators and policy-makers should fight back by challenging implementation

deadlines, resisting the stakes and priority attached to high-stakes testing, and exposing the truth about the commercial and political interests promoting this approach as a panacea for all that ails public education.

Another issue that researchers have raised is that, while most school districts have made progress toward implementing rich curriculum and textbooks that align with the standards, curriculum developers are still working hard to ensure that all educators in the system understand and embrace a view of curriculum that is focused on outcomes rather than content (Bickford, 2017; The Marzano Center, 2017). In this context, schools must have more intentionality in terms of how they develop and implement policies affecting student outcome in school settings.

Challenge Three: Emerging New Technologies

Emerging technologies also present a challenge to education. Research has shown that today's students are technophiles. They love video games — all fast-paced and addictive — and can't put down their smart phones, iPods, or social networks (Flannery, 2010). Moreover, Murphy (2015) emphasized that development of educational technologies is changing our beliefs about how learning occurs, resulting in increased pressure from the government as well as shifts from teacher- to learner-centered approaches to instruction. In fact, some school districts have adopted "bring your own device" (BYOD) policies that encourage students to bring their own technology with goals of both increasing student engagement and reducing districts' technology costs. As a result, some high school students now bring their mobile devices to school and use them to communicate, collaborate and solve problems, even if they are not part of a teacher's lesson plan (Daggett, 2014).

And educators? They might also love new technologies, but even if they don't, they realize that technology is often the key to unlocking a student's interest. The challenge is in figuring out how to use technology to unlock that interest. Nager (2013) argues that significant challenges are preventing effective implementation of technology on a large scale despite its increasing widespread adoption in virtually every aspect of K – 12 education. According to researchers, though some of those challenges are systemic and some are related to the technologies themselves, teachers and education leaders share in needing to meet these challenges (Nager, 2013).

Moreover, teachers and teacher educators face several challenges in using technology successfully in their classrooms. One challenge that Nager (2013) has emphasized is that teachers and school leaders often see technological experimentation as outside the scope of

their job descriptions. A second is that some experienced teachers prefer using approaches they already understand and do not utilize the technology they have been given (Harwen, 2013). They have been teaching for years and do not want to incorporate something new into their time-tested lesson plans. Some schools are pushing instructors to incorporate technology into their syllabi but when that technology is poorly taught, it is not used at an optimal level. Any teacher given a high-tech program and expected to teach it in the classroom deserves proper training, but sometimes that training isn't provided (Altuna, Aydin, Ozfidan, & Amenabav, 2013). A third challenge for using technology in classrooms is the failure to develop personalized learning. Researchers describe a gap between the vision of delivering personalized, differentiated instruction and the technologies available to make it possible. Therefore, even when K-12 teachers see the need for personalized learning, adequate tools to provide it either don't exist or aren't given to the teachers. (The NMC Horizon Report, 2013). Against the backdrop of these challenges, new digital technologies are enabling new methods of teaching and learning. The conundrum for educators is to develop curricula that do not simply replicate formats from the past but are also sustainable and meet the challenges of the future (Torrison, 2002).

A responsive curriculum goes beyond the ever-changing influences of technology and responds to changes in society and students' learning needs (Aydin, 2013d; Parson & Beauchamp, 2012). This means considering notions, such as allowing more 'white space' to customize lessons using a variety of teaching and assessment methods to better meet student needs. An example of this can be found in Singapore, where technology has been used to permit deeper learning and to make learning more accessible through various e-learning models (Parsons & Beauchamp, 2012, p. 143). In this context, teachers, teacher educators, and policy-makers must embrace the power of technology to make learning relevant for all students and adults. The International Center for U.S. Department of Education (2014b) has suggested that using technology effectively in everyday learning can help students strengthen their learning experiences and build on their intuitive technology skills. Further, using technology thoughtfully for instructional purposes will allow teachers to stretch the thinking of learners in ways that will lead to success in today's increasingly global economy and rapidly evolving digital environment" (Daggett, 2014).

Moreover, e-learning, is "a rapidly expanding type of education not only in the United States, but throughout the world. Although the first virtual classroom was an experiment that used closed circuit television and an early computer network, online education has improved alongside technology (Aydin, 2013a, 2013b; Bolloptedia, 2016; Hossain & Aydin, 2011).

According to the National Center for Statistics (2012) “around 5.5 million college students took at least one online class in 2012. However, this data only accounts for a small fraction of students who participate in online education, as students of all ages, from anywhere in the world, and across all grade levels can potentially take classes online” (Kolowich, 2014).

Because technology is a powerful tool, which allows students to independently access information and knowledge, teachers should give students the opportunity to research and obtain information to develop different skills. As a result, technology could prepare students to “learn how to learn” to get information from different online tools (Alismail, 2015). Jacobsen (2001) argued that using technological tools in teaching gives students the opportunity to engage in the real world, helping them to increase their understanding and develop creativity and innovation skills. Alismail and McGuire (2015) indicate that “education needs to make an instructional shift to ensure that students succeed as the innovators of the future” (p. 150). As a result, educators need continuous professional development that allows them to use the newest continually evolving technology to plan their courses and improve their pedagogy.

Challenge Four: Globalization

Globalization, as a process or product, has challenged all dimensions of all human life and all social systems including the educational system and its core, curriculum and instruction. Malcom Waterz believes that globalization is a social process that has passed all the geographical limitations imposed on social and cultural relations, and people are increasingly becoming aware of these changes (Ranai et al., 2012). In addition, Herrera (2012) indicated that “more than 200 million people worldwide live in a country other than the one in which they were born, with more than a third having moved from an underdeveloped to a developed country and at least another third having moved from one developed nation to another” (Rotermund, n.d.). Most pronounced is an unprecedented migration of people to the developing world that is both a cause and a consequence of globalization, and adapting to globalization poses monumental challenges for both teachers and teacher educators (Herrera, 2012). Today, the United States is one of the world leaders as a receiving country. Reactions to educational challenges embedded in immigration will dramatically influence the course of curriculum and instruction in school settings in the United States.

Because many teachers have little working experience in globalization and diversity contexts, the need to develop culturally responsive pedagogies has become extremely urgent (Santoro, 2009). These inadequacies also contribute to the desire of some teachers to leave globalized and diverse school settings, making those schools more difficult for students, staff,

parents, and communities. As a result, students suffer greatly because of a high faculty turnover rate that often means that they are faced with teachers who are unprepared or unaware of diversity and globalization (Martinez, 2004).

To prevent scenarios like this from happening, teachers must know how to teach culturally diverse students and understand their needs (Herrera, 2012). For “teachers to truly understand the nature of their students’ ethnic differences, teachers must understand the nature of those ethnic identities, cultural practices, values and beliefs” (Santoro, 2009; as cited in Herrera, 2012). To achieve this objective, researchers have recommended that teachers, teacher educators, policy-makers, and communities be better prepared to face the challenges that globalization brings and be prepared to be globally competitive entrepreneurs (Stewart, 2007; Zhao, 2010). In addition, Herrera (2012) argued that stakeholders invoke persistent arguments, which stress that tomorrow’s graduates and their teachers must exhibit global competence with respect to diversity, and teachers must be involved in enhancing the efforts to promote capacity building for global citizenship among and between teachers, students, and societies.

Challenge Five: Refugee and Immigration Issues

Today, the United States resettles more refugees, immigrants and students of color than any other country in the world. In fact, changing patterns of fertility and immigration have combined to put the United States on an unprecedented path to population diversity in which all races and ethnicities are part of minority groups that make up a complex whole (Center for Public Education, 2012). As a result, the nation’s classrooms are becoming more diverse and accountability models have exposed holes in education systems. School districts must now take steps to ensure that their principals and teachers are prepared for the challenges of teaching all students, thus ensuring that those from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds receive a high-quality education (Cooper, 2014; Kaya, 2009).

The “profound change in the demographic makeup of the school population is due primarily to immigration. According to the Census Bureau's 2010 American Community Survey Briefs, in 2010 immigrants made up 13% of the nation's population, an increase from 12% in 2006,” (Center for Public Education, 2012). Moreover, in 2014, the percentage of White students’ enrollment dropped from 61% in 2000 to 49.7%, in 2014 (NCES, 2016). Furthermore, the projection for the public schools by 2022 is that minorities will be 54.7% and the White student population will be 45.3% (NCES, 2014). This poses a challenge because 82% of teachers in the United States were White in 2011-2012 (NCES, 2014).

Because of the scale of the programs and the growing diversity of the resettled immigrants and refugees, service providers face an increasing range of challenges (Capps et al., 2015). Immigrant and refugee students are “often placed into foreign learning environments in which they are forced to adapt to new academic settings while also adjusting to a new culture” (Cooper, 2014, p.iii). Cooper further argued that “often, these students are escaping a violent past and are placed with teachers who have limited training in dealing with such issues”. While it may be difficult to make generalized assumptions about all immigrants’ refugee communities, including their financial and language obstacles, many student groups must work to overcome cultural differences.

Students also face many challenges when they enter school. For example, many are refugees coming from countries that are facing challenges including war, disease, famine, or destabilizing conflicts. As a result, Cooper (2014) emphasized that “educational opportunity either has not been a priority or is nonexistent. Identifying the challenges these students must overcome within the school settings and providing strategies that may help them will allow teachers to reflect on their teaching and adjust as needed to meet the needs of these students” (p.2).

Capps et al. (2015) also have suggested that policymakers, educators, and communities consider improving the access of immigrants and refugees to mainstream education and job training programs, as well as increasing long-term integration prospects with a greater focus on predeparture programs for those immigrants and refugees who often have spent years in camps awaiting resettlement. On a broader level, Capps emphasized the importance of support for the U.S. resettlement program in the face of a surging number of immigrants and refugees worldwide.

Based on increases of immigrants and refugee students in school settings, school districts and policy-makers must recruit more teachers and staff members from diverse cultural backgrounds as well as bilingual teachers and staff members. Moreover, school districts must encourage teachers to understand and educate themselves to be aware of immigrants and refugee students who come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Teachers must read research materials and participate in professional development opportunities to learn more about diverse populations. Such training will not only help teachers eliminate their personal biases and harmful language, it will also increase their ability to accept and welcome students with different beliefs and values. This benefits everyone in an increasingly diverse society.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted some challenging issues confronting curriculum and instruction. Teachers, teacher educators, policy-makers, and families all need to assist in overcoming these challenges to ensure the continued functioning of educational systems that meet society's needs.

This essay addressed five major challenges to curriculum and instruction. The first and perhaps most relevant challenge is posed by a shifting demographic tide in school settings that is leading to increased diversity. This demographic change will require schools to adapt their curriculum and instruction, structures, cultures, and programs to accommodate and meet the needs of a diverse student body. These adaptations will not only assist in serving students, but will also support the social and economic development of society in several ways (Lafer & Aydin, 2012). For example, providing diverse students with a positive educational experience will encourage lifelong learning, and educating all students with peers from differing backgrounds has the potential to improve work and social interactions among people of different races, languages, religions, cultures, and ages.

Second, frequent policy changes also affect curriculum. Although political leaders and school districts have tried to enact reforms that affect change in positive ways, many have failed. Thus, higher education institutions must conduct more research, and then, based on their findings, the federal government, state leaders, and school districts must decide upon the most appropriate reforms and changes to curriculum and instruction in school settings.

A third challenge facing curriculum and instruction is the role of emerging technologies in school settings. The use of social media, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, linkedin, and Hi5 have become a vital part of our youth's lifestyle. As the role of technology in schools has increased, however, differences in its use have arisen between the younger generation of students and the older generations of teachers. This has been described as a divide between 'digital immigrant' teachers and their 'digital native' students. To bridge this gap, the federal government, states, and school districts should increase investment in training to enable teachers to better prepare students to use technology, especially in the context of new assessments (ACT, 2016). Research has also shown that teachers and teacher educators are taking advantage of open resources to expand their curricula with media-rich tools and texts that can be adapted for use with specific lessons. The NMC Horizon Report (2014) documents that teachers who were formerly bound by a framework of standardized course materials now have access to a wealth of digital information that they can use to meet district expectations.

Fourth, particular attention should be devoted to one of the most relevant challenges of curriculum and instruction: globalization with diversity. Herrera (2012) suggests that “the future of this nation may depend on the extent to which students acquire the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to become responsible global citizens”. Accordingly, educators must clearly define and advance an agenda to prepare youth for global citizenship. The goals of curriculum and instruction should be clear, as should the aims of the topics presented in school textbooks (Aydin & Damgaci, 2017; Leek, 2016). These goals should also be malleable to accommodate rapidly changing trends in contemporary global education.

The final challenge examined in this paper relates to the refugee and immigration issue, something that will not disappear quickly in either K-12 or higher education settings. This issue will remain difficult in regards to classroom management and educators must have core values including respect, integrity, commitment and excellence, the promotion of diversity and gender equity, choice, and dignity for all students. Teachers must change in response to changing student populations, and teacher education programs must prepare their students to meet the demands of increasingly diverse K – 12 classrooms. Changes in policy and practice are occurring worldwide to address cultural shifts in the classroom, and many of these changes are teacher-driven.

Public education in the United States requires better-trained teachers who can meet the needs of specific student populations, understand the necessary role of cultural norms and values, and be willing to speak up regarding demographic changes in the classroom. Without these teachers, effective reform to meet global demand is impossible. In this context, curriculum and instruction must adapt so all students can enjoy successful learning while developing as confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives as responsible citizens that make positive contributions to society.

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