Foreword

At least among students and their families, diversity is less the novel than the norm in today’s classrooms, including those in the United States. Transnational migration is a global phenomenon and the U.S. is no exception. Already at 55, the U.S. diversity index, which reflects the probability that two randomly selected persons of a country are of a different race or ethnicity, is expected to reach 70 by 2060.

The population of current and graduating teachers, on the other hand, does not reflect either the U.S. population or the American classroom. Although minority students account for more than half of all public school students, in the U.S., just 17 percent of the teachers who serve them are minorities and, these teachers are leaving the profession at rates higher than ever before. More often than not, U.S. teachers, like many others, are typically monocultural; have lived only within 50 miles of their birthplace; have not studied (and in some cases have not been exposed to) another language; have had few, if any, classes on culturally responsive teaching; seldom engage in metacognition; and have little or no exposure to critically reflective thinking about their fast changing environments or their teaching practices.

Accordingly, the answers to questions about where to begin in building and renewing teachers’ capacities for cross-cultural competence and social justice are as diverse as the student populations which they educate today. The purpose of this scholarly handbook is to reflect that diversity in the perspectives, theories, local and global realities, research outcomes, and informed recommendations that are presented in the many chapters of this postmodern and enlightening compilation.

As a reflective practitioner and an advocate for teacher education that intentionally interrogates candidates’ and practitioners’ assumptions about the whole student, I am pleased to note that more than one-quarter of this handbook offers chapters that directly or indirectly address teachers’ biographies. Meaningful praxis in highly diverse classrooms is complex, demanding, soul-searching, and, at times, even threatening to teachers’ identities. Consequently, issues such as colorblindness and micro-aggression toward Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students and families are ones with which we, as teachers and teacher educators must wrestle. Without metacognition, self-reflection, and critical thinking about longstanding assumptions few teachers survive the intricate and persistent challenges of diversity.

Today’s and tomorrow’s teachers will need to better understand both themselves and their own socialization in a particular culture if they are to prepare themselves for cross-culturally promising practices in their particular venues of practice. That socialization is no less a lens or a filter on their realities than is the presumption that teacher education need not account for the increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, cognitive, and academic diversity of post-millennial classrooms. Pivotal to these understandings are capacities for introspection, critical thinking, assumption testing, and reflection on the hidden influences of socialization. Among chapters’ topics of the handbook that are pertinent to these and
related issues are ones that address: minority teachers in the profession, resiliency theory, cross-cultural assumptions, self-study, critical race theory, and micro-aggression.

Teaching is also both local and global. Students are learning in a world that is increasingly interconnected and that fact may be the best hope for lasting solutions to emergent and worldwide challenges including: global warming, the transnational spread of disease, and global hunger. In turn, each of these challenges and solutions will have local impacts on significant variables such as jobs, careers, climate, and agriculture. Once again, these challenges necessitate teachers who bring a critical lens to teaching as they prepare students for scientific, evidence-based approaches to problem solving.

In like manner, global education implicates cross-cultural understandings of challenges and resolutions, from race relations to religious beliefs to cross-cultural differences and understandings. Such dynamics are, therefore, the foci of selected handbook chapters that variously address: professional development for global education, global literacy skills, and worldwide efforts to develop high-quality teachers.

On the other hand, nothing much happens locally or globally without language. And so, literacy remains fundamental to the capacities for discourse that students will need to communicate their ideas, to frame the problems of their day, to articulate their theory and research based solutions to pertinent dilemmas, and to report their successes and their learnings to a global audience. Not surprisingly then, multiple and multimodal literacies are increasingly demanded of both teacher and student in this interconnected world of ours. Among topics explored by handbook chapters that address multifaceted literacy issues are: ways to increase the diversity of the literature to which young children are exposed, pedagogical challenges for teachers of indigenous groups and heritage language speakers, the social justice dispositions of teachers for young learners, strategies that emphasize English literacy across a diversity of home languages, and ways to maximize multimodal literacy development tools.

Of course the lynchpin of global interconnectedness and post-millennial discourse is technology. Yet, despite the ever-increasing diversity of our world, neither access to technology nor opportunities for postsecondary education in technology are indicative of digital equity. Like the teacher population, the North American pool of professionals with degrees in technology is personified by its lack of diversity and it is likely that this fact has much to do with the dearth of field interest in equitable, national and international access to technology, particularly for members of under-represented groups. Both of these engaging topics, as well as related, educational issues, are the primary focus of two handbook chapters.

Ultimately, what students need to know in this progressively diverse world in which they will function must be translated into the curricula, and the differentiated practices, that their teachers will emphasize in their various subject, group, and specialty areas of praxis. Accordingly, a purposive range of handbook chapters also emphasizes cross-cultural and social justice parameters associated with these milieus, including: math education, special education, and gifted classrooms.

In sum, both teachers and teacher educators who ply their craft in a progressively transnational and cross-cultural world will find great value in the many rich chapters of this timely and purposive handbook. Especially, pertinent and significant are the emphases on topics of post-millennial education in highly diverse settings.

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