The Most Dramatic Changes in Education Since Socrates

Allen Schmieder

JDL Technologies, USA

THE CURRENT CONTEXT

This is an urgently needed topic. It is the author’s conviction that, currently, there are no 21st century schools and, even worse, there is no substantive and widely held vision about what such schools should look like, and what the role and competencies of teachers in those schools should be. So, the tendency of most educators writing about needed 21st century teaching competencies will be to pretty much “rear-range the deck chairs on the Titanic.” Most will be driven by another equally repugnant cliché, “Technology is only a tool,” and they will try to determine how this misunderstood tool can best enhance out-of-date and fast-aging approaches to K-12 curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This is not to say that the wonderful array of traditional teaching competencies and skills that have enabled teachers to have generally done such an impressive job of teaching our children over the last century will cease to be important. The ability of teachers to understand and connect with students; to impart considerable knowledge and wisdom about their subject; to provide them with good adult role models; to cultivate their motivation for learning; to encourage their sensitivity toward, and appreciation of, individual and cultural differences; to prepare them for post-secondary education and/or the world of work; and even, to sometimes be “the sage on the stage,” will remain critical competencies as long as there is a teaching profession. But just as technology has dramatically transformed society, the way we work, the way we live, even the way we think about things, schools must be dramatically transformed in the way they work, in the way content is processed, and maybe most importantly, in the way teachers teach and students learn.

Given the context of this book, it should be noted that one of the major factors in any positive reform and improvement relative to the dramatic changes that are needed in teacher preparation will be the way that colleges of education respond to the challenge. They have the capacity to accelerate and lead this desperately needed reform; but, they and their host institutions (which have historically failed to give them the priority and support that they deserve) can continue to underestimate the technology-centered revolution that is taking place (albeit, much too slowly) in schools, and thus impede the inevitable changes that are needed to effectively prepare both teachers and students to thrive in the 21st century.

GENERAL 21ST CENTURY TEACHING COMPETENCIES

21st century teachers:

- must recognize and understand the rapidly increasing globalization of our world, and know how to infuse international and multi-cultural lessons and activities into their teaching;
- must have, and relentlessly reflect, a personal philosophy that all students have unlimited potential and the personal growth and development of every student is of critical importance;
- must help develop, and effectively use, curriculum and instructional approaches that customize education for every student;
- must be able to develop a classroom climate that places the highest possible emphasis on human rights, diversity, character-building, and individual responsibility;
- must be able to “take the lead” in developing a dynamic community of learners in which teachers, administrators, students, parents, and business and community persons work together to enhance the learning and growth of those involved during the regular school day;
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