Contemporary Social Forces Reform the Curriculum Leadership

Zhuojing Zhang¹,∗
¹Liberty University, USA

Abstract. Curriculum leadership is a crucial skill for school owners, principals, and lead teachers, as they are responsible for designing what is learned and how it is taught. To emphasize curriculum leadership, social forces play an indispensable role in reforming curriculum. As external factors, social forces affect the entire teaching and learning process at schools and require curriculum leaders to be knowledgeable about society’s challenges and trends. In this paper, recent academic papers are reviewed with a focus on social forces that shape and reform curriculum leadership. Ten existing social forces are reorganized and categorized to have a better structure for the paper review, covering the aspects of cultural diversity, the power of nature and technology, and universal values. The influence on various aspects of curriculum leadership by social changes is depicted to maintain a steady educational motivation and objective. Meanwhile, the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic has suddenly changed our lives, and adequate technology use and parents’ involvement are essential to engage children in learning performance.

1. Introduction

Curriculum leadership is a key capacity of school owners, principals, and lead teachers for effectively designing what is learned and how it is taught. Aside from focusing on the microcosmic view of curriculum, which is about the syllabus and the academic calendar, the curriculum leaders are responsible to consider higher-level factors to influence the entire teaching and learning at a school. Acting as steersmen of schools, curriculum leaders should be knowledgeable about society’s challenges and trends, and identify their strengths and weaknesses to adjust their schools’ education direction and content.

In this paper, the focus is on contemporary social forces that shape and reform curriculum leadership. Recent peer-reviewed and published research papers related to this topic are collected. This literature review is initially inspired by “Social Forces: Present and Future” in [1], which provides several social force aspects for readers. However, the structure and logic of those social forces are underorganized. To achieve a better systematical presentation, the essential elements of those social forces are reorganized and categorized by providing hierarchical levels to group them.

Fig. 1 depicts the reorganized outlines of social forces from [1] covered by this paper. There are three newly proposed father categories: 1) Cultural Diversity; 2) Power of Nature and Technology; 3) Universal Values. The first two categories are external fact-based. The “global village” enables traveling or residence across countries much easier, leading to cultural diversity worldwide. With the rocketing development of technology, people’s lives are dramatically changed. Meanwhile, various environmental issues have also gradually become key concerns for the public. Regardless of the rapid social change, the third category covers how to keep a steady educational motivation and objective. For instance, even though there was no “cultural diversity” issue (the 1st father category) in a region, that is to say, if inclusive school and education had been fully achieved, the “universal values” (the 3rd father category) are still a key concern.

Accordingly, this paper first covers the curriculum leadership influenced by the rapid and objective social changes, and then explores the core but unchanged part of the curriculum. In particular, developing the charac-
term of love at school is essential to reduce crimes and violent accidents, such as maintaining a good relationship with family members (i.e., love family) and lifetime learning (i.e., love self-improvement). It is worth noticing that these three categories are not separated but mutually affected. For example, awakening people to equal rights can be also regarded as a part of universal values. Another instance is that the technology revolution can lead to values and moral issues like high-tech fraud or game addiction. Fig. 2 illustrates the word cloud of the content words in the titles of all surveyed papers in this paper based on their appearance frequencies, depicting the content emphasis. Furthermore, The unforeseen COVID-19 Pandemic suddenly changed our lives. Adequate technology use and parents’ involvement are important to engage children to distance learning.

2. Cultural Diversity

In this section, research studies on cultural diversity or multicultural education are reviewed. Three aspects from [1] are included, which are “Global Interdependence”, “Ethnic and Cultural Diversity”, and “Equal Rights”. Even though they are mutually overlapped to some extent, the reviewed papers are categorized into these respective subsections. The order of these three subsections follows from facts to values. The fact of global and domestic migration results in global interdependence and ethnic and cultural diversity. This factual diversity arouses the necessity of possessing social justice and equal rights in our values.

2.1 Global Interdependence

The authors in [2] mentioned that there were 258 million immigrants and refugees in the world in 2017. This enormous amount of people brings diverse cultures and perspectives from their original places to new ones, leading to increased ethnic and cultural interaction and conflicts. The researchers in [3] advocated that teaching diverse students should be through their own cultural filters, raising a tight culture and knowledge share across countries. To this end, global citizenship education (GCED), launched by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2012 [4], provides an interdisciplinary and ethical framework equipped with worldview and higher-order competencies that enable individuals to be informed and responsible members of the global community. The goal of GCED is to “contribute to a more inclusive, just and peaceful world” [5].

The scholars in [6] focused on virtual exchange-based foreign language education and applied a transnational model guided by the principles of global citizenship education. The approaches of virtual exchange in foreign language education include E-tandem [7], telecollaboration [8], and bilingual–bicultural [9] methods. However, these models were not sufficient to support foreigners to have adequate sophisticated competence in their second language learning for future employment rather than a tourist level only. For example, bilingual–bicultural required equal demand of both learners to learn the other’s native language. Such a kind of pairing was difficult. Due to the shortage of literature on E-tandem and telecollaboration methods, the author provided two detailed case studies in his school in which E-tandem and telecollaboration methods have been used for over 15 years. Both methods failed to stimulate learners’ active contribution to the learning process. Instead, they are always passive observers and collectors of intercultural communications. The author believes that the global citizenship concept should be involved in the virtual exchange procedure, providing learners with the ability to “live and work in the globalized world” [6]. Therefore, the author proposed a transnational model with 7 characteristics to integrate the GCED concept for foreign language education.

2.2 Ethnic and Cultural Diversity

There are four types of leadership frequently appearing in the reviewed papers related to this category, which are culturally responsive school leadership [2, 10, 11], inclusive school leadership [2, 10–14], transformational leadership [2, 15], and transformative leadership [11, 12, 14]. Culturally responsive school leadership “focuses on how school leaders can effectively serve minoritized students” [16]. Inclusive school leadership “supports inclusion, social justice and democratic processes” [17]. Transformational leadership is different from transformative leadership. “Transformational leaders make schools as they are better” [18], while “transformative leaders focus on schools as they might be” [18].

Fig. 3 illustrates the reshaped relationship among these four types of leadership based on the explanations from [19] and [17]. Compared with traditional leadership, culturally responsive school leadership emphasizes the involvement and influence of the community side [19]. The three other types of leadership are more about school internal leadership and share some common values and properties as well [17]. Critical pedagogy is also a key concern and a valuable tool in teacher practice [20].

To scrutinize the implementation of various leaderships above, the scholars in [11] provided the principals’
perspectives on integrating social justice with the school curriculum in rural primary school communities. A total of 12 principal participants were interviewed in this study, four for each of three countries, the U.K., Jamaica, and Spain, and all of them were from rural areas. All principals agreed that the school location and size were the factors for social justice implementation. One on hand, a smaller school size brought teachers and parents close and very supportive. On the other hand, a smaller school size did not have much cultural diversity, and teachers did not have real instances to teach social justice. The interviewed principals confirmed the importance of supportive government funding and policies, like free textbook programs and food supplements for children in low-income families. The authors advocated “connecting curriculum to society” and “making social justice explicit in the curriculum” and regarded a curriculum as a “social justice tool” [11].

2.3 Equal Rights

The authors in [13] proposed a school leadership framework with the theory and practice of dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit) [21], which was originally proposed for common equal rights in society. The author’s focus is the school setting. The author briefly reviewed two previous theories to address the racism and ableism issues separately, but there was no one theory that jointly targeted these issues, which are essential concerns of equal rights in school and do not always appear individually. The proposed DisCrit school leadership framework encouraged principals to acquire a critical understanding of the inter-dependence of racism and ableism. The framework contained “rejecting notions of normalcy”, “problematizing singular identities”, “applying an interdisciplinary lens”, and “activism and resistance” [13].

A historical perspective was provided in [10] to look at culturally responsive leadership. She reviewed three representative culturally responsive leaders from three different countries, which are Gertrude Ayer in the U.S., Lloyd McKell in Canada, and Len Garrison in U.K. Gertrude Ayer was the first African American woman principal at New York City during the depths of the Depression. She promoted intercultural education and race relations work in Harlem. Under her management, parents with different backgrounds were involved in the school’s curriculum as well. Lloyd McKell is an immigrant originally from Trinidad and Tobago within the first wave of African Caribbean immigrants to Canada. He was the Executive Officer for Student and Community Equity at a school district in Toronto. His proactive actions to consider African Canadian students’ needs face rebels from the dominant public. Len Garrison was from Jamaica and emigrated to the U.K. during his childhood with the notable wave of immigration from the Caribbean. He was recognized in cultural education history for his contribution to multicultural and anti-racist curricula and the foundation of “Anti Racism in Practice”. The author then summarized the shared properties of their success as culturally responsive leaders. All of them are “public intellectuals”, “boundary spanners”, and “advocacy leaders” [10]. They proactively leveraged public media and forums to advocate their viewpoints. They also devoted themselves to bridging the gap between the school district and community sites. The author finally provided two suggestions for curriculum leadership preparation. One was to cultivate potential educational leaders from the talent pool. The other was to provide “new community-based practicum experiences”.

3. Power of Nature and Technology

This section includes the themes of the natural environment and technological revolution. Natural environment can provide a wealth of educational resources, such as opportunities for experiential learning and field studies. By incorporating environmental education into the curriculum, educational leaders can help students to understand the importance of environmental protection and conservation, and to further cultivate informed citizenship [22].

3.1 Natural Environment

The authors in [23] investigated the role of lead teachers in environmental education using two case studies in two primary schools in South Africa. Even though environmental education is a hot topic, its definition in curriculum implementation is unclear. Teachers faced difficulty in instructing students’ environmental knowledge, unlike teaching languages or mathematics with well-defined curricula. In the case studies, two teachers were interviewed, respectively. Both of them taught the environmental content within a real environment, like taking the students to the nearby rivers or gardens. Furthermore, one teacher supported teaching this content without specific environmental education topics but integrated it into the context of natural science lessons. They also agreed that the school’s environmental education policy is critical to conduct effective teaching. An interview-based study was conducted in [24] to reveal the critical role of teachers and environment club coordinators in environmental education. Three coordinators in secondary schools were recruited. The findings indicated that: 1) the views of the sustainability coordinators should have a focus on ecocentrism, in order to proactively promote environmental education; 2) a principal’s support in terms of funding and time allocation is essential; 3) not all teachers realize that environmental education is important under the social-political tensions.

3.2 Technological Revolution

The authors in [25] discussed the considerable potential of education digitalization, defined as the use of technology to enhance online learning experiences without sacrificing the quality of the educational process.
positive values and crucial characters, rather than content-based and outcome-driven pedagogy. The new core competencies framework has three dimensions, “autonomous development, civic participation, and cultural foundation” [27] and six modules, “learning to learn, healthy living, assuming responsibility, innovation and practice, humanistic understanding, and scientific spirit” [27]. With those theoretical pillars, the fundamental mission is to “develop morality and cultivate humanity”.

In [28], the scholars examined the role of class time in teaching morality in the broad curriculum in Japan. This paper first defined broad and narrow concepts of moral education. The broad definition is to “cultivate morality in virtues such as feeling, judgment, attitude, and the will to actively contribute” [28], while the narrow definition is the class time of moral education. The narrow definition is the “cornerstone” of the broad definition as moral education was introduced into the written curriculum in 2015 [28]. The practice of moral education was examined by means of interviews and classroom observations. There were 74 interviewees participating in this study and a total of 17 schools were observed. The observation and interview results indicate that service learning, such as serving food, is a practical way to fulfill moral education because students can learn from special activities. Class time is a good place for reflection and discussion for a better understanding of those activities. The curriculum can guide the teaching orientation from teaching “how” to “what” to promote caring relationships between teachers and students [28].

4.2 Crime and Violence

The researchers in [29] presented the status of integration of domestic violence in the curriculum for basic degree police students in several European Union (EU) countries which are the partners in an EU-funded IMPRODOVA project. It is common that courses for the basic level of police students are comprehensive and applicable to general situations. However, the author claimed that domestic violence content is also important for entry-level students to build the competence of knowledge and skill sets specific to their own countries. The author detailed the current status of domestic violence content in the curriculum of each country. In France, there is no specific course about domestic violence for entry-level police students. In Austria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Portugal, and Slovenia, domestic violence is transformed into various formats and included in the curriculum of police education. For example, a German police education institute offered a module on the prevention of domestic crime and violence. The author discussed and cited some previous studies and remarks to support the thesis at the end.

The school violence occurrence in public secondary schools in Kenya was characterized in [30]. The authors recruited a total of 341 public secondary school students and 88 teachers and conducted a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach for data analysis. The surveyed results show that school violence can be caused by “re-

Figure 3. Reshaped relationship of reformed leaderships embracing cultural diversity. The bottom gray dashed box is reproduced from [19]. The upper white dotted box is reproduced from [17]. In the realm of school leadership, three leadership types for inclusion are illustrated. Moreover, critical pedagogy can influence teacher practice.

4. Universal Values

4.1 Values and Morality

In [27], the researchers reviewed the new national curriculum for high school education in China in 2018 and its changes. Before the new curriculum came out, the educational goal in the past 20 years was moved from fundamental knowledge and skills to qualities. Compared with quality education, the new curriculum advocated competencies. This new educational direction reforms the objective of education into the ultimate function of education, which is to cultivate a whole person with
source competition, political difference, sexual discrimination, and zero-tolerance to cultural diversity” [30]. They have the forms of “verbal abuses, physical fights, bullying, and arson attacks” [30]. The findings indicated introducing peace education into curriculum design for conveying peace values to the students and community can have more probability to eliminate the school violence risks at an early stage. The authors advocated that the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Education (KICD) should consider integrating peace education content in all subjects to ameliorate the current condition of school violence and reduce future potential crimes in society.

4.3 Family

In [31], the authors employed a descriptive survey research approach to study the impact of divorce on the academic performance of elementary school students in an economically underdeveloped region of Nigeria. A total of 249 elementary students were recruited in this study to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire was examined by three specialists in the technical and educational sectors who focus on curriculum studies and counseling. The analyzed results indicated that female students were more able to adapt to their parents’ divorce than male students. The negative effects that were brought to students contained lateness and truancy caused by emotional distractions, parents’ absence in school meetings, and financial issues.

The relationship between parental quality and their child’s human capital was investigated in [32]. A child’s human capital is defined as the test performance at the end of her/his childhood (age 18). The given equation of a child’s human capital can be formulated using several obvious factors: the amounts of each parent’s consumption, each parent’s time spent on their child, and financial investment in their child. However, the authors focused on three other factors which were not easy to be formulated in the proposed model, which are parental death, parental divorce, and family size. The children in the data used in this study were born between 1974 and 1991. There were more than 600k children data entries in this database, in which 6,173 children lost their mothers and 16,414 children lost their fathers before the age of 18, respectively. They stated that divorce could be regarded as a similar negative impact of a parent’s death on the child’s human capital, and a larger family size enables parents to have more flexible time for their child. The findings included: 1) a parent’s education level can become more significant when the parent’s interaction time with the child increases; 2) a child of older age more adapt to parental health; 3) the mother’s education level becomes more important when the parents get divorced or in larger families.

4.4 Self-Directed Learning

In [33], the researchers investigated the effectiveness of the new curriculum guideline on self-directed learning (SDL) for 12-year basic education in Taiwan. The high school students were divided into three cohorts with 3,694, 2,892, and 3,434 students, respectively. In each cohort, experimental and control groups are split. The three experiment groups experienced different time spans of SDL. The evaluation metric was the self-directed learning readiness scale (SDLRS), which is a 58-item 5-point Likert scale. The representative findings included that 1) the new curriculum has positive effects on the improvement of students’ SDLRS; 2) senior students have higher scores than junior students; 3) female learners show better self-regulation.

The scholars in [34] advocated the necessity of integrating SDL into the undergraduate medical curriculum in India. The authors introduced the concept of SDL, explained why SDL is necessary for medical students, listed the components of SDL, and reviewed models of SDL. In particular, according to Garrison’s SDL model [35], the authors rephrased five essential tasks to the fulfillment of the SDL. They are 1) “set learning goals”; 2) “locate and access resources”; 3) “execute learning activities”; 4) “monitor and evaluate performance”; 5) “reassess learning progress” [34]. The authors also illustrate how to implement the SDL, including building concepts among students and teachers, curriculum placement to integrate SDL sessions, and group-based or individual explorations. Regarding the assessment SDL, SDLRS or the Oddi Continuing Learning Inventory [36] can be used.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

In this paper, recent academic papers are reviewed to examine social forces that impact curriculum and further reform curriculum leadership. All surveyed papers are categorized into the nine reorganized social forces grouped by three new categories, comprising cultural diversity, power of nature and technology, and universal values. To highlight the main themes of reviewed papers, a word cloud of all surveyed papers is provided. The review outlines the impact of social changes on various aspects of curriculum to ensure a consistent educational objective and motivation. The impact of the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic is also covered, specifically on distance learning. This paper aims to provide an overarching picture of social forces influencing curriculum leadership in a structured way. School leaders should carefully consider the specific situation of their own schools, such as racial composition, geographic location, teacher resources, school district environment, parental support, etc., and focus on certain aspects to develop a more dedicated curriculum. Furthermore, as illustrated in Fig. 3, curriculum leadership is just one piece of the puzzle. The ultimate goal of improving student performance requires joint efforts from society and schools. Besides the existing social forces, the reviewed papers have not sufficiently covered the following topic, which can be a potential research direction.

Asian Hate. Asian hate is an emerging concern worldwide after the pandemic. It is important for us to realize that addressing anti-Asian hate nowadays is also crucial for creating an inclusive environment in
classrooms and schools. Regarding the representative theme of social justice, the voices and needs of Black people, many predecessors and successors have devoted their entire lives to this goal. Compared to that, the voice of the emerging anti-Asian hate is overall moderate. Recently in [37], teachers tried their efforts to integrate social justice for Black and Asian people into their curriculum. Even though this integration was only conducted in the Chinese classes for foreigners, it was still a pioneering trial. Although there was some difficulty for some learners who did not have much historical background, teachers still positively motivate themselves to introduce the content of social justice to their Chinese classes.

References

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