ABSTRACT

Educational leaders are faced with the challenge of establishing educational guidelines through curriculum selection and implementation that will provide the framework for student academic achievement and learning success. Therefore, one of the most pre-eminent questions for all educators is how to identify and select a curriculum model that will challenge, inspire, and motivate today’s student to excel academically and in a manner conducive with the requirements for living in a society that requires a high degree of sophisticated learning and critical reasoning skills. This essay lays the foundation for the importance of an integrated curriculum model to enhance student academic achievement and success. The theories of educational leadership and design for an integrated curriculum model are based on the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* and cover the range of possible meanings that comprise the basic competencies that general education should develop in every person. “A complete person should be skilled in the use of speech, symbol, and gesture (*symbolics*), factually well informed speech (*empirics*), capable of creating and appreciating objects (*esthetics*), endowed with a rich and disciplined life in relation to self and others (*synnoetics*), able to make wise decisions and to judge between right and wrong (*esthetics*), and possessed of an integral outlook (*synoptics*). These are the aims of general education for the development of complete persons” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 15).
Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to show how a curriculum based on the philosophy of the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) leads to an integrated curriculum which then leads to higher academic achievement and success among students who utilize this model. The *Realms of Meaning* (ROM) model provides the theoretical basis to provide a framework for student academic achievement and success based on the constructivist principles of building upon the basic foundation of a student’s understanding and intellect and then adding to that base new knowledge to strengthen academic learning and understanding.

The ROM curriculum model is composed of six strategic categories that provide structural meaning and learning in the academic classroom. Selecting a meaningful curriculum model involves the integration of classical and disciplined subject matter that will motivate and inspire students not only to master factual concepts, but also a curriculum that will inspire students as well as their mentors and teachers to have a hunger and thirst for a deeper understanding and mastery of a prescribed curriculum that will in turn motivate students to take their knowledge to new levels of application, synthesis, and evaluation. Through an integrated curriculum model as seen through the *Ways of Knowing the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007), students have the opportunity to learn more about a subject in its entirety rather than splinters of its truth in singularity.

The Importance of this Study

“Since the 1950’s, many educators have continued to call attention to the explosion of knowledge” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 150). With knowledge doubling approximately every 15 years (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p.150), educators must make choices on what should be taught, to whom, and when. Educators must be able to present and organize a knowledge base appropriate to student needs and learning abilities in order to maximize academic success in the classroom.

Historically, the principal has always been considered the educational and curriculum leader of the school. Today, however, “given the national and state standards movement, and the need to upgrade the curriculum to meet these standards, school principals’ attention has increasingly focused on curriculum, especially aligning curriculum to state standards and high-stakes tests” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 25). In order to be successful in this endeavor, educational leaders must establish the criteria for the curriculum in their schools that will meet the sophisticated learning needs of all students.

Choosing the philosophy of the curriculum for one’s school organization is fundamental to all student learning and success. The administrator must first be able to establish his or her philosophy of the curriculum. “Philosophy is central to curriculum because the philosophy advocated or reflected by a particular school and its officials influences the goals or aims and content, as well as the organization of its curriculum”
(Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 30). Therefore, it is imperative that educational leaders are well versed and founded on the curriculum principles of various programs related to student learning and achievement. By evaluating the various programs and curriculum philosophies available to educational leaders and schools across this nation, curriculum leaders can help to formulate the best and most effective plan of action in regards to preparing and planning for student achievement through the application of curriculum philosophy, structure, and implementation curriculum policies and guidelines.

The Rationale for an Educated Society

The rationale for an educated society is to prepare individuals from their youth to be critical and analytical thinkers in order to be able to make sound and rationale decisions in their independent lives and ventures. In order to prepare the adolescent student with the skills needed to succeed in a complex and sophisticated society, critical thinking skills and higher level cognitive abilities must be developed in order for the student to succeed in his or her personal, private, and career adult lives. To accomplish this goal, educators must start with addressing what is taught in the classroom through the sound and reasoned articulated educational curriculum for the student learner. The curriculum model therefore becomes the foundational cornerstone of all learning and academic achievement.

An Historical Perspective for Curriculum Development

“In times of great change, society looks to its schools to help its citizens adjust” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 273). As early as 1859, Herbert Spencer elaborated on the attributes of a successful education and curriculum. His published essay “What Knowledge is of Most Worth?” outlined five important characteristics of the educated student which included: (1) direct self-preservation, (2) indirect self-preservation (for example, securing food and shelter, and earning a living), (3) parenthood (4) citizenship, and (5) leisure activities” (as cited in Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 274).

After World War I, The National Education Association’s Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education in 1918 issued its own report emphasizing the need for “(1) health (2) command of fundamental processes (3) worthy home membership (4) vocational education (5) civic education (6) worthy use of leisure and ethical character” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 274). After the Great Depression, The Purpose of Education in American Democracy report was introduced that challenged schools to encourage “inquiry, mental capabilities, speech, reading, writing, numbers, sight and hearing, health knowledge, health habits, public health, recreation, intellectual interests, aesthetic interest and character formation” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 275). In 1944, at the close of World War II, educational goals were concerned about
“democracy and world citizenship, as well as those related to the general needs of children and youth” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 275).

In 1983, one of the most disturbing reports relating to the condition of the American educational school system was released in the *A Nation At Risk* report that shocked both the political, educational, and general citizenship of this country regarding the educational trends of our modern educational system. Based on the fact that our nation was falling behind in educational leadership, the commission offered strong directives to the nation on how to implement effective change and structure in the nation’s educational economy. Major changes were directed toward the structure of the curriculum emphasizing the fact that curriculum is a major component of all learning and academic achievement and excellence.

Today’s most current legislative reform effort has been proposed in the form of the “No Child Left Behind Act.” This federal legislation has far reaching implications for all school leaders and educational entities. To comply with this legislation, educators must ensure that all children must be educated in a manner that allows students to master grade level academic requirements and succeed in classroom goals and objectives as demonstrated on various educational assessment tests such as the mandated state *Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills* test in Texas.

The emphasis on curriculum reform made by our legislators highlights the importance of curriculum and curricular reform. The necessity of having a sound curriculum foundation is paramount in helping students to achieve academically and socially not only during their required attendance in our public school system, but also in the future where they will be required to contribute to society as fully educated, functioning, and productive adults.

**The Application and Development of an Integrated Curriculum Philosophy**

“The complexity of curriculum and the complexity surrounding curriculum can only be processed by having some theoretical understanding” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 172). Curriculum theorists organize learning categories in order to be able to utilize these divisions more effectively in the study and development of curriculum. “George Beauchamp has asserted that all theories are derived from three broad categories of knowledge: (1) the humanities, (2) the natural sciences, and (3) the social sciences” (as cited in Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 172). Beauchamp concludes that “from these basic knowledge divisions come areas of applied knowledge – architecture, medicine, engineering, education and law” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 172).

This framework coincides with the curriculum model developed by William Allan Kritsonis, PhD, based on Philip Phenix’s *Realms of Meaning* (1964). In the Kritsonis framework for learning, six realms of meaning can be categorized to incorporate all levels of meaning and purpose in education. The realms of meaning include *symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics, and synoptics*. Through these six realms of meaning, a sound and substantial integrated curriculum philosophy and program can be
developed that can perpetuate student academic achievement to deeper and more sustained levels of learning and academic success.

The Realms model is inclusive for all subject areas and translates to use in both elementary and secondary curriculums. Through the use of an integrated curriculum philosophy based on the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007), student academic achievement and content mastery can be taken to new levels of academic excellence allowing students to master not only the basic content areas of a subject matter, but also to understand the subject in a more holistic and higher cognitive level of academic mastery and achievement.

**Post Modernism and a Unitary Philosophy of the Curriculum**

*Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) can be considered a postmodernist approach to education and curriculum theory. “Theory embraces both the structure of language (its langue), and its ability to describe things in order to communicate and influence others (its parole)” (English, 2003, p. 15). In this approach to learning, the curriculum theory becomes “a kind of open-bordered approach to inquiry” (English, 2003, p. 4). A postmodernist approach to curriculum implementation and delivery will allow an integrated and unified curriculum model for student learning and achievement.

“A unitary philosophy of the curriculum is important for many reasons” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 6). A person is essentially an organized totality and not just a collection of separate parts. The Greeks were one of the first historical groups to implement this concept of a holistic curriculum outlook through the development of “a model education” (Magee, 2001, p. 38). A model education for the Greeks was established around “the principle of ‘all-round education’ that was to become the ideal for the rest of Europe” (Magee, 2001, p.38). The ‘all-round education’ model was a philosophy of education that included all disciplines and integrated the knowledge of the student with the classical disciplines which included music, the arts, science, and literature.

In today’s society, the Greek’s all-round principle of education can be seen and incorporated through the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) curriculum model. This model uses a constructivist approach to education that builds upon the intellectual and academic discipline of an area of expertise and knowledge and adds to that knowledge base a deeper awareness of the curriculum through curriculum integration. Through an integrated curriculum model, education can become meaningful and purposeful to the students who benefit from a curriculum philosophy that is both purposeful and meaningful.
Holistic vs. Fragmented Models for the Curriculum

The ultimate goal of any educational program is to help students achieve a rational and practical grasp of the academic disciplines in order to help prepare the student for work and cooperation in the adult world. “Given the enormous volume of knowledge available to be learned, the educator is faced with the task of choosing a minute fraction of this total cultural stock for inclusion in the course of study” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 17). Choices must be made by educational leaders on what to teach from the vast amount of knowledge available and how to deliver this knowledge base in the most efficient and effective manner.

There are two forms of curriculum implementation that currently exist in today’s academic classroom. The first form of curriculum implementation is to offer a fragmented, isolated view of a subject matter. This curriculum model focuses on individual academic disciplines based “on facts, concepts and generalizations of a particular subject or group of subjects” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 11). In this model there is no attempt to connect the relationships between curriculum in other fields within the content area being studied.

The second form of curriculum implementation and design is an integrated model that is comprehensive and interdependent upon the various subject areas to be mastered in the academic setting. “No matter what the content, we can design active linkages between fields of knowledge” (Jacobs, 1989, p. 5). For example, Shakespeare can be taught “with an eye to the history of the times, the arts, the values, the role of science, and the zeitgeist rather than simply sticking with specific passages” (Jacobs, 1989, p. 5). Rather than just teach a singular academic topic such as the historical nature of Napoleon’s reign, an integrated curriculum will add to this historical perspective the addition of the music, arts, literature, science, history, religion, and philosophy of the time. Employing the Realms of Meaning framework through this integrated approach to curriculum development will allow students to gain a deeper understanding of the curriculum and its holistic contributions to meaningful learning and understanding of the assigned academic goals and objectives of the curriculum.

“A curriculum planned as a comprehensive design for learning contributes as a basis for the growth of community, while a fragmented program of studies engenders disintegration in the life of society” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 6). The importance of a curriculum that is integrated is that it is “designed to satisfy the essential human need for meaning. Instruction in language, mathematics, science, art, personal relations, morals, history, religion, and philosophy constitutes the educational answer to the destructively critical spirit and to the pervasive modern sense of meaningless” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 15).

Schools districts must have a curriculum in place that will guide students to become proficient learners and critical analytical thinkers. “A curriculum approach reflects a holistic position or a metaorientation, encompassing the foundations of curriculum (the person’s philosophy, view of history, view of psychology and learning theory, and view of social issues), domains of curriculum (common and important knowledge within the field), and the theoretical and practical principles of curriculum” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 2).
One holistic approach to curriculum design and implementation is based on the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) curriculum philosophy. *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) can provide an integrated curriculum model that can greatly enhance learning and student academic achievement. When students are challenged, they will many times work harder in their coursework to master academic goals and higher achievement levels in their coursework. Centuries before our current educational system came into being, the ancient philosopher Aristotle once contended that “all men by nature desire to know” (Magee, 2001, p. 36). This desire still exists today, even in our most unassuming student. The challenge for the educator is to make the epistemological study of the coursework meaningful and applicable to not only ones personhood, but also to the world in which the student participates and lives.

**Analyzing and Developing a Curriculum Framework Through Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning**

“Each generation gives new form to the aspirations that shape education it its time” (Bruner, 1977, p. 1). In today’s highly competitive and technological state, the premier question in regards to education and educational pursuits is simply stated: “What shall we teach and to what end?” (Bruner, 1977, p. 1). For many in education, the answer to this is that we should seek to teach that which is meaningful and relevant to the student. “It is critical that students see the strength of each discipline perspective in a connected way” (Jacobs, 1989, p. 5). This categorization of subject matter has been espoused by many educational leaders and curricularists as the most strategic and effective guideline for curriculum implementation and delivery.

**Understanding the Realms of Meaning in Relationship to Curriculum Development**

“The organization of knowledge into areas, bodies of information, or classifications has occupied world thinkers for centuries, from Plato and Aristotle to Whitehead and Russell” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 151). The ancient philosophers organized learning into three distinct classes of learning and information: “(1) theoretical, such as science and math, (2) practical, such as politics and ethics; and (3) productive, such as music and architecture” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 151).

As the epistemological nature of learning and knowledge has increased, a wider view of the curriculum structure has emerged. An early book by Philip Phenix organizes knowledge into six patterns or “realms of meaning” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 151). These realms include symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics, and synoptics. These categories of learning are built upon the humanistic facet of learning and curriculum development. Phenix believed that “focusing on these dimensions permits
optimal individual development” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 291). In the realms curriculum philosophy integration of knowledge is foundational to all aspects of learning and design.

Building upon the first premises of learning established by Phenix, William Allan Kritsonis has recast “the original work in Kritsonis’ own version, unique perspective, style, and flare,” according to English (as cited in Kritsonis, 2007, p. vi). Kritsonis’ *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007) offers a holistic view of the curriculum that provides a sound philosophical basis for all higher level learning and cognitive academic student achievement in the general education classroom.

To understand the holistic philosophy of this curriculum structure, each realm must be identified and discussed in order to see how each categorization of learning builds upon each subject area in order to facilitate “depth and knowledge of skills….rather than a “superficial acquaintance with a variety of fields” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 291).

**Symbolics**

The first realm of meaning that is essential to the development of an exemplary curriculum is the realm of *symbolics*. “The first realm, symbolics, comprises ordinary language, mathematics, and various types of nondiscursive symbolic forms, such as gestures, rituals, rhythmic patterns” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 11.) The symbolic realm directly impacts large areas of the required curriculum for both elementary and secondary academic requirements. Advanced mathematics, speech communications, English grammar, and multi-cultural studies all employ the symbolic realms of meaning and interpretation.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, a linguistic philosopher (1889-1951), was a prominent proponent of the importance of linguistic mastery for an educated society. Wingenstein compared language metaphorically to a creative tool. “Language, he said, is a tool that can be used for an indefinite number of different tasks, and its meanings consist of all the various things that can be done with it” (Magee, 2001, p. 205). When teaching symbolics to a class, it is important to relate each level of meaning with an example of inter-relatedness from another aspect of the integrated curriculum model. This way learning becomes meaningful, purposeful, and useful to the engaged student learner.

Even ancient philosophers realized the basic need to establish a symbolic structure of learning for all academic achievement and success. Plato, a protégé of Socrates, espoused the need to establish the symbolic structure of learning as a foundational cornerstone for all learning and masterful understanding of curriculum and knowledge.

Plato was once quoted as saying “let no one enter here who is ignorant of mathematics” (Magee, 2001, p. 25). To employ the mathematics symbolic structure in the classroom, numbers, shapes, and symbolic directives such as the plus sign, minus sign, and multiplication sign can all give the meaning and direction needed to solve detailed, academic mathematical problems. “Even at the most basic level, in order for a
student to understand math, (the student) must first recognize the symbols used and what their functions are” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 137).

Once a student learns to understand and demystify theoretical concepts through the use of symbolic structures, the student can move towards a more thorough understanding of the curriculum. By mastering the basic concepts of a subject and then relating this matter to other academic disciplines, students can rise to more academic challenges and move from the realm of basic knowledge to the level of academic mastery that incorporates true mastery of the subject matter and an academic knowledge base and awareness of the subject matter that translates to higher levels of meaning and understanding.

As with language whose rules are based on intuitively simple concepts such as ordering, substituting, transposing, and the like, so too the deep understanding of any subject depends upon such intuitively simple concepts as cause and effect, transitivity, and equivalence. (Bruner, 1977, p. xiii)

**Empirics**

The second realm of meaning focuses on the world of *empirics*. Empirics includes the sciences of the physical world, or living things and of man. When the empirical realm of learning is integrated with the other realms of meaning, students begin to move toward new learning levels and maturation of academic achievement based on the higher levels of thinking and subject matter utilizing the ability gained through integrating the knowledge base and developing the skills to analyze, process, and evaluate the new information on a higher and more sophisticated mastery level.

Aristotle is reported to be “the man who mapped out sciences and formulated logic” (Magee, 2001, p. 32) and is a source to be studied and quoted while exploring the empirical aspects of the scientific and explicative word. “The methods of theoretical science are remarkably similar to those of mathematics in that imaginative construction of conceptual schemas with deductive elaboration occurs” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 191). *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) illustrates how an integrated curriculum can benefit the overall student’s learning objectives and create a standard for academic achievement and success.

For the student’s complete education, the importance of empirical knowledge is that this realm of study is “aimed at bringing some order and eligibility out of what appears to be a miscellaneous and unrelated profusion of phenomena” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 197). The empirical realm intertwined with the other realms of meaning still allow a student to master new subject areas at levels of higher learning and achievement opposed to simply learning basic facts and methodological structures affiliated with the fundamental basics of a particular subject matter.
Esthetics

The third realm of meaning essential to the curriculum of a well-rounded and complete person is the realm of esthetics. Esthetics recognizes beauty in the form of music, the visual arts, the arts of movement and literature. The esthetic realm stresses the creativity and beauty of everyday language, application, and artistic rendition.

Nietzsche has been quoted as saying, “Dancing in all its forms cannot be excluded from the curriculum of all noble education, dancing with the feet, with ideas, with words, and need I add, that one must also be able to dance with the pen” (Nietzsche, 2008, p. 1). Connections to other learning disciplines can be made through the esthetic realm by applying a critical perspective to learning and integrating the curriculum to provide an artistic or musical connection to the curriculum.

Synnoetics

The fourth realm of meaning is found in the synnoetic realm. In the synnoetic realm, “education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to the other” (Chesterton, 2008). The synnoetic realm of meaning gives the student time to reflect upon their own personal lives in order to find meaning in the world around them. This reflection translates into the mastery of academic knowledge and pursuits in that the meaning from the curriculum can be obtained when it can become integrated into the scope and schematic outline of one’s own academic, personal, and professional lifestyle.

To engage learners, the synnoetic realm of meaning is critical to the academic success of the engaged student. Because the synnoetic realm stresses the importance of understanding the inter-relationships of life and learning, the words of the philosopher Benedict Spinoza ring true regarding the synnoetic realm of meaning. “I have striven not to laugh at human actions, not to weep at them, nor to hate them, but understand them” (Magee, 2001, p. 93). A student instructed in the synnoetic realm will realize that man is a multifaceted creature capable of both great philosophical heights and mean and angry denotations of character. Alexander Pope once quoted on behalf of his friend Francis Bacon, he was “the wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind” (Magee, 2001, p. 75).

A synnoetic realm is both intuitive and realistic. When students are able to see the multi-faceted aspects of emotion, relationships, and inter-relatedness of subject matter in their curriculum, learning becomes more meaningful and levels of academic mastery can expand to include more cognitive higher level thinking skills and applications.
Ethics

The fifth realm of meaning involves the study of ethics. “Ethics includes moral meanings that express obligation rather than fact, perceptual form, or wariness of relation” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 13). Gaining a perspective on moral issues for many is an individual and personal choice. Ethics “is a code of values to guide man’s choices and actions, the choices and actions that determine the purpose and the course of his life” (Rand, 1964, p. 13). Right and wrong are deliberate actions. Moral choices made by an individual have “both personal and impersonal elements” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 438).

In the classroom setting, “certain standards of conduct are taken for granted as the basis of the social system, and a variety of sanctions are used to encourage adherence to these standards” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 439). Ethical structure in the classroom adds to the overall meaning and understanding of all curriculum material in that students learn that making the right choices at the right time can provide the framework for success and achievement in any subject area or academic curriculum challenge presented to the student during his or her school career. “With this focus on ‘right behavior’ students should, via the various programs being offered, gain understanding and internalization of those moral values and habits that will be required for maintaining their well-being” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 389).

It is important to note that morality is not simply a codified list of accepted behaviors and norms.

A moral person has feelings for herself and others. A moral person has awareness, understanding, and appreciation of those values and ideas that are essential for productive relations with others and for the meaningful and authentic construction of our own persons. (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 389)

Synoptics

The sixth realm of meaning is synoptics. “Synoptics refers to meanings that are comprehensively integrative. This realm includes history, religion, and philosophy” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 130). In the synoptic realm history, religion, and philosophy can be brought forth in a district’s overall curriculum learning plan for student academic achievement and success. To expand learning for students in the synoptic realm, educational leaders can challenge their students to read and study about the way in which philosophy, religion, and history affect their world on a day to day basis.

Classical literature offers another viewpoint of how the synoptic version of interrelated activities can be realized in an integrated curriculum. Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) marked the historical trail of literature by writing in a time period that “marks the road from Romantic to modern poetry” (Wilkie & Hurt, 1988, p. 915). Religion and faith played an important role in the life of Tennyson which was reflected
both in his poetry and life. His was not a perfect life, but a life of both trials and victory. Tennyson’s poems echoed not only synoptic frameworks of written word and prose, Tennyson’s works ultimately became “a way of exploring religious, philosophical, and social issues including the compatibility of science with faith and of spiritual with intellectual progress” (Wilkie & Hurt, 1992, p. 947).

Literary works such as “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave” employs a synoptic view of history while incorporating at the same time an artistic literary voice for past sentiments of the people who lived in specific and important historical time periods. This deep level of understanding of the curriculum adds value and substance to the overall curriculum framework and delivery.

This narrative contains many affecting incidents, many passages of great eloquence and power; but I think the most thrilling one of them all is the description Douglass gives of his feelings, as he stood soliloquizing respecting his fate and the chances of his one day being a freeman, on the banks of the Chesapeake Bay-viewing the receding vessels as they flew with their white wings before the breeze, and apostrophizing them as animated by the living spirit of freedom. (Wilkie & Hurt, 1992, p. 1007)

Employing a synoptic view of history with an integrated model of curriculum delivery ensures that greater depth and meaning can be generated through the pertinent and relevant integration of knowledge and the curriculum. When a curriculum is truly integrated, the boundaries of all academic disciplines can be merged and integrated into a dynamic and holistic pattern for successful learning and academic achievement and success.

From Experience to Practice: An Analogy of Curriculum Integration

A student engaged in a deeply aligned curriculum has the opportunity to experience meaning and depth in the curriculum. This purposeful plot of study advances the concept of critical thinking and teaches the student to be both an ambitious and independent academically motivated student. An analogy for an integrated curriculum can be made between the connection of a well produced movie and its similarities to an integrated curriculum model of learning.

An integrated curriculum is modeled very much like a movie script and animated production. Through the spoken word (symbolics) the message begins to emerge from a written guide or script. The empirical realm is then added by the scientific knowledge needed to bring the production to the theatrical movie screen. It is assumed that the ethical requirements for the production have been satisfied. The esthetic realm becomes apparent as symbolic music sets the tone and mood of the production giving the eager viewer hints of plot foreshadowing and action to come. The synoptic realm can ultimately propose a philosophical meaning or purpose to the script leading to credibility and meaning to the movie production. In education, as in other realms of life, the integration of meaning in a particular project or design gives depth to meaning, advances
critical thought, and provides the opportunity to deeply express ideas and concepts that potentially can add meaning and purpose to the lives of other human beings.

The Significance of the Study

With the onset of so many curricular choices, Bruner’s challenge of priority still remains: “What shall we teach and to what end?” (Bruner, 1977, p.1). With the explosion of knowledge upon us and the rapid pace of society requiring more from its educational system than ever before, “all people must realize that dealing with these trends and the issues therein requires time for analysis, time for experimentation, time for acceptance” (Ornstein & Hunkins, p. 400). In today’s society, parents are calling for more assistance from their schools and educators.

They want schools to assist their children in becoming moral and ethical beings: They want their children to be stewards of the earth. Parents really want their children to be modern and postmodern renaissance people. To meet these requests requires deep thinking and careful and time-consuming action. (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 400)

Therefore, the significance of this study lies in the fact that choosing either a fragmented or holistic curriculum model will ultimately decide what degree and level of achievement our students are able to ascertain to in the academic classroom. If, as this study ascertains, there is a relationship between student academic achievement and success utilizing an integrated model of instruction, then educators have a significant tool to use in determining the academic framework for student learning and academic achievement and success.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, an integrated curriculum model based on the Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning (Kritsonis, 2007) holds great promise for those educators that seek to reach out to new and far-reaching curriculum philosophical strategies and academic designs. Stepping “outside of the box” and looking toward a more post-modernistic approach to education, curriculum can be enhanced to meet the academic and social needs of not only the individual student, but also to the general society as a whole.

All disciplined inquiries can be integrated to improve student academic learning and achievement. A curriculum philosophy based on Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning (Kritsonis, 2007) can add meaning and depth to the learning process.
When an integrated curriculum model is used in the classroom, student knowledge, learning and increased cognitive ability can increase.

“There is a cacophony of voices each seeking to influence the talk and action of schools” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 399). Therefore, the issue of curriculum reform remains a challenging and provocative topic for both educators and politicians alike. “In reflecting on reinventing education, the politics and sociology of education, moral and spiritual education, standards and testing, and technology and the curriculum, it is evident that these issues are complex and demand sophisticated understanding” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 399). It is therefore imperative that research studies continue to see what effect curriculum interventions and philosophies have on the overall well being and academic success of students being educated in the general education classrooms of the United States of America.

For those educators who pursue excellence, implementing the curriculum philosophy of Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning (Kritsonis, 2007) can help to organize the vast array of knowledge and learning opportunities available to students in the general education classroom. To educators seeking to increase student knowledge and academic awareness, an integrated curriculum philosophy holds great promise for the future.

The philosophy of the Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning (Kritsonis, 2007) “will definitely be useful for leaders in education throughout the United States and abroad” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. xi). Understanding the concepts of an integrated and interdependent curriculum philosophy can be beneficial to anyone “in formal education or outside of it, who seeks perspective on knowledge in the modern world and who is in search of order and meaning in his own life” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. xi).

References


