# National Promise for Student Academic Achievement and Success: Connecting Learning Utilizing the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*

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**ABSTRACT**

**Learning is an activity that does not take place in isolation. Educators who teach with an integrated curriculum model have been able to expand their subject areas to include academic disciplines from all areas of intellectual inquiry and discourse. Utilizing the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) curriculum model, educators can plan learning activities structured around a sound epistemological basis for student academic achievement and learning.**

## Introduction

The six realms of meaning cover the range of possible meanings and 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 discuss six philosophical strategies for implementing the realms of meaning as a process for selecting curriculum for the development of the complete person. Selecting a curriculum involves the integration of a knowledge base that will motivate and inspire students not only to master factual concepts of a subject's knowledge base, 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.

## Integrated Curriculum Model

Through an integrated curriculum model as seen through the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007), students have an opportunity to learn more about a subject in its entirety rather than splinters of its truth in solidarity. An integrated curriculum model will allow the educator and student to "seek perspective through space by studying the relations of things in space, or though history by studying the relations of events in time" (Durant, 1944, p. vii).

"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 curriculum ought to have a quality of existence that when exposed to new truths and sciences, the learning opportunities for students will continue to surmount to higher and more unique levels of understanding and discourse.

Utilizing all six realms of meaning in the curriculum interchangeably allows the student to develop the skills of analytical reasoning, evaluation, synthesis, and comparison. "A comprehensive outlook is necessary, for all intelligent decisions about it shall be included and excluded from the course of study" (Kritsonis, 007, p. 6).

"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

> a curriculum developing the above basic competencies 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 sprit and to the pervasive modern sense of meaningless. (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 15)

School districts must have a curriculum in place that will guide students to become proficient learners. *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 achievement.

The ultimate goal of any educational program is to improve curriculum in schools. To improve schools, curriculum content must be selected with meaning" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 7). Academic achievement can be sustained and accelerated when the appropriate curriculum structure is infused within the domains of the required knowledge level of an approved and mandated curriculum for a school district and academic classroom.

## Learning and the Ways of Knowing through Realms of Meaning

### Symbolics

The first realm of meaning that is essential to the development of an exemplary secondary 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 secondary high school curriculum. Advanced mathematics, speech communications, English grammar, and multi-cultural studies all employ the symbolic realms of meaning and interpretation.

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. To employ the mathematics *symbolic* structure in the classroom, the constructivist approach to learning is an effectual model of learning for student academic achievement and success. For example, by applying the language of symbols to the students understanding of math, an interconnectedness among the disciplines begins to emerge. "Even at the most basic level, in order for a student to understand math, he/she must first recognize the symbols used and what their functions are" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 137).

### Empirics

The second realm of meaning is *empirics.* *Empirics* include 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 learning on the higher levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Blooms). When science curricula is introduced in the secondary classroom, the subject areas usually include Integrated Physics and Chemistry (IPC), advanced

Chemistry, Biology, and Anatomy and Physiology and constitutes subject matter that includes content necessary for the education of the entire person being educated.

"The methods of theoretical science are remarkably similar to those of mathematics in that imaginative construction of conceptual schemes when deductive elaboration occurs" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 191). Realizing the interconnectedness between the realms of meaning illustrates how an integrated curriculum can benefit the overall student's learning objectives and create a standard for academic achievement and excellence.

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 and awareness of the subject that moves to the higher levels of meaning and understanding.

For the student's complete education, the importance of science in the curriculum is "aimed at ringing some order and ineligibility 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 will allow a student to master new subject areas at levels of higher learning and achievement opposed to simply learning base facts and methodological structures affiliated with the fundamental basics of a particular subject matter,

**Esthetics and Synnoetics**

The third and fourth realms of meaning essential to the curriculum of a well-rounded and complete person are the realms of *esthetics* and *synnoetics*. *Esthetics* recognizes beauty in the form of music, the visual arts, the arts of movement, and literature. Benjamin Franklin believed that once the necessities of life are taken care of, men and women should then take "time now..to cultivate their minds by the finer arts and sciences" (Aldridge, 1965, p.80).

Connections to other learning disciplines can be made though the *esthetic* realm by applying a critical perspective to learning and integrating the curriculum to provide an artistic or musical connection to the curriculum. In history, we find that Napoleon was a connoisseur of the arts. "Napoleon liked opera better than concerts; he had little ear or voice for song, but it was part of the royal décor that the ruler should attend opera occasionally, to meditate and be seen" (Durant, 1975, p. 279).

The *synnoetic* opportunity gives the student time to reflect upon their own personal lives in order to find meaning in the world around them. As students become more reflective, they can learn to be more tolerant of others. *Synnoetics* also infers "relational insight or direct awareness. It is analogous in the sphere of knowing to sympathy in the sphere of feeling" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12).

Benjamin Franklin was a man of *synnoetic* virtue and caring. "Respectful of age, tender toward youth, and affectionate toward women of any age, he warmed toward any

human being who earned his esteem and showed no great partiality toward his immediate family" (Aldridge, 1965, p. 83).

### Ethics

The fifth realm of meaning involves the study of *ethics*. "*Ethics* includes moral meanings that express obligation rather than fact, perceptual form, or awareness of relation" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 13). For Plato, one's ethical duty was simply "doing one's own duty" (Hare, p. 43). 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).

### Synoptics

The last realm of meaning is *synoptcs.* "*Synoptics* refers to meanings that are comprehensively integrative. This realm includes history, religion, and philosophy" (Kritisons, 2007, p. 13). In the *synoptic* realm history, religion, 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 ways in which philosophy, religion, and history affect their world on a day to day basis.

When students learn about Napoleon in history, they also can be taught that "Napoleon was a progressive force, establishing political stability, restoring morality, discipline character, modernizing, clarifying, codifying, protecting life and property, ending or mitigating feudalism, reassuring persons, aiding industry, maintaining a sound currency, cleaning and improving administration and the judiciary, encouraging science and art" (Durant, 1975, p. 176). When a curriculum is truly integrated, the boundaries of a particular discipline can be merged and integrated into other subject matters.

## Concluding Remarks

An integrated curriculum based on the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) holds great promise for those educators willing to take a postmodernist approach to education. In this essay, the author has shown how initially unrelated items can be read, studied, understood and then integrated into the curriculum. By integrating various aspects of the life and times of famous historical and literary figures such as Benjamin Franklin, Napoleon, and Ayan Rand into this document, I have demonstrated how an integrated learning model can enhance student learning and achievement. When an integrated curriculum model is used in the classroom, student knowledge, learning, and cognitive ability will increase.

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