

Developing a Curriculum for At-Risk and Low Performing High School Students: Teaching Shakespeare to At-Risk Students Utilizing Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning

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ABSTRACT

The “No Child Left Behind” educational initiative has put greater accountability on educational leaders to ensure that all students are learning and successful in the classroom. To ensure the success of all students, this study develops a system of how to integrate higher level thinking into a format compatible with the needs of at-risk and low performing high school students. Teaching strategies, methodologies and curriculum material based on the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*, written by Dr. William A. Kritsonis, will give students and teachers an exciting and credible framework for learning and succeeding in the classroom. Teaching Shakespeare and higher level cognitive thinking skills to at-risk and low-performing high school students utilizing the philosophies of *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* will garner great success and academic achievement for students engaged in the search for knowledge, truth, and meaning.

Introduction

To successfully begin a program that will meet the needs of all students in today's educational classroom environment, it is necessary to develop a curriculum that will challenge and inspire students to seek excellence in their academic endeavors. William A. Kritsonis, PhD, has written a very powerful and insightful book on how to effectively address the learning and educational needs of all students in the general education classroom.

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how to integrate the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* into an educational philosophy in higher level curriculum studies in order to help at-risk students succeed and flourish, not only in their academic pursuits, but also in their life goals and future career aspirations.

Realms of Meaning: The Heuristics Approach

“The object of general education is to lead to the fulfillment of human life through the enlargement and deepening of meaning” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.3). To be efficient and purposeful in planning a curriculum, educators must ensure that they have a well developed curriculum that gives students the opportunity to learn heuristically, and to apply their new knowledge to the world around them in which they live.

As our world seemingly becomes more impersonal and therefore meaningless in many of its pursuits, it is important to help ground our students in meaningful study that will increase their ability to effectively interact with their world and environment in order to achieve the highest possible level of meaning and fulfillment.

The foundation of all educational instruction should be focused on student learning and achievement. “Today the focus on education at all levels and for students of all abilities is increasingly upon excellence and adequacy of knowledge” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. vii). The “No Child Left Behind” act mandates educational administrators and teachers provide a meaningful education and academic success rate among all students, regardless of their innate inclination towards academic achievement and success.

A Challenge to Educators: Designing and Implementing an Effective Curriculum

In an age where simplistic thinking and “fill-in-the-blank” tests rob our students of the opportunity to be creative problem solvers and thinkers, *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*, can be utilized as an effective tool for learning and provide an effective philosophical basis for all classroom learning and meaning.

It is therefore incumbent upon educators to provide a thorough and complete education to the students who are entrusted in their educational care. Curriculum selection should be based on the highest good for all students, regardless of their ability level. Making a decision on what to present to the students in the form of a curriculum is one of the most challenging decisions facing administrators and teachers today.

An unprecedented amount of knowledge is available to anyone who is literate and able to read and understand vast amounts of material. Educators must judiciously choose what materials should be taught and read in the classroom. “The first principle for the selection of the material for instruction is that all of it should be drawn from the organized scholarly disciplines” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.661). Utilizing the philosophy of *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* gives an organized structure of the components that should be included in an organized and dynamic curriculum.

The fundamental patterns of meaning can be organized into six realms of meaning. The first realm of meaning is *symbolics* and encompasses ordinary language, mathematics, and nondiscursive, subjective symbolic forms. The second realm of meaning is *empirics*. The subjects of psychology, biology, physical science, and the social sciences are all included in this realm of study.

The third realm of meaning focuses on *esthetics*. Understanding *esthetics* allows us to see and understand our world through the avenues of literature, movement, the visual arts, and music. *Synnoetics*, the fourth realm, centralizes its focus on our personal knowledge. The fifth realm is about *ethics* and how moral knowledge affects the quality and characteristics of our life on a day to day basis.

The sixth realm of meaning is *synoptics*. *Synoptics* takes an in-depth view of history, religion, and philosophy, and provides the opportunity to study these disciplines in the light of their relationship to other disciplines and their contributions to the realms of meaning included in a disciplined and familial approach.

The Art and Mastery of Teaching Shakespeare

“Shakespeare is hard. Even seasoned scholars differ on subjects ranging from the meaning of individual words to the implications of entire plays” (Rosenblum, 2005, xiii). However, students who struggle in their general academic classrooms can be taught to read and understand Shakespeare. Utilizing the book, *Ways of Knowing Through the*

Realms of Meaning, teachers can develop curriculum models that will address how to engage at-risk students in learning and in meaningful conversation and communication regarding the study of William Shakespeare and his timeless, poetic and thematic writing style.

The Six Realms of Meaning and the Teaching of Shakespeare

Just as there is order and purpose in the universe, there must be order and meaning in learning. “Six fundamental patterns of meaning emerge from the analysis of the possible distinctive modes of human understanding” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.11). Teaching students to understand and seek out knowledge through the application of utilizing and understanding a subject matter in an organized and sequential manner can allow students to be successful who otherwise were not succeeding and are at-risk of academic failure.

The study of Shakespeare lends itself to the development and implementation of a curriculum guide and study based on the six realms of meaning. Each pattern represents a form of human understanding and knowledge that can be taught and illustrated utilizing the writings of William Shakespeare.

Symbolics The First Realm of Meaning

“The first realm, *symbolics*, comprises ordinary language, mathematics, and various types of nondiscursive symbolic forms such as gestures, rituals, rhythmic patterns, and the like” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.11). Discursive symbolics refer to how speech is utilized in ordinary communication. “Nondiscursive symbolic forms are used in all the arts and for the expression of feelings, values, commitments, and insights in the domains of personal knowledge, metaphysics, and religion” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.151). By utilizing symbolics in our interpretation of Shakespeare, we can provide an ordered system of learning that will enhance a student’s knowledge and understanding of William Shakespeare and his literary accomplishments through the written word.

Discursive Symbolic Forms

The obvious feature of all literature is that it is composed of language that is intended to communicate meanings and ideas to those who read and study its content. In

Shakespeare, language played an integral part in understanding its relevant meaning and application. As the English language emerged from its classical roots, new words were added to accommodate the new learning and understanding of the 16th century scholar. Shakespeare himself helped to add many words to our English language.

“Demonstrations of Shakespeare’s verbal inventiveness are based in part on his so-called neologisms, or words first recorded in his works and therefore possibly invented by him” (Rosenblum, 2005, p. 91). Today’s student can understand how new vocabulary can emerge. New words that have emerged over the last few decades include Internet, computer, cell phone, and computer disc. When students understand how modern language has evolved into our present day vernacular, comparing Shakespeare’s own inventive words can add meaning and understanding to the discursive symbolic meaning found in Shakespeare’s writing.

Seeing Shakespeare’s writing as a canvas of creativity can inspire students to seek deeper meaning in their studies and academic disciplines. “Some words that we think of as part of the general vocabulary of English made their first appearance (or at least their first appearance) in Shakespeare’s works” (Rosenblum, 2005, p.91). Words credited to Shakespeare’s creativity include “assassination, fretful, laughable, duteous, dwindle, domineer, and amazement” (Rosenblum, 2005, p. 91).

Nondiscursive Symbolic Forms

Symbolics not only focuses on the discursive concepts and applications of ordinary language, but also provides an opportunity for expression through the use of nondiscursive symbolic forms. Types of nondiscursive symbolic forms include the use of signals, bodily gestures, and facial expressions. In Shakespeare, the stage positioning and bodily gestures of the actors aided the audience in understanding the thoughts and feelings of the actors not known by other characters in the play. For example, bodily gestures in the form of “asides” were powerful tools of communication in Shakespeare’s theatrical writings and prose.

In today’s society, students have the opportunity to see and understand the thoughts and feelings of characters in moments translated outside of the main action of the play. Many movies today aimed at the teenage audience will use “asides” by the main characters in order to add depth and psychological meaning to their product.

A technique to connect non-discursive learning methods to student’s overall learning achievement and mastery would be to divide the students in groups and brainstorm movie names that utilize this dramatic and literary symbolic tool of “asides.” When students see that Shakespeare utilized symbolic tools to help create meaning and understanding, they will be better able to identify and understand Shakespeare’s deeper meanings and intonations in his writings.

Dreams

“It is important for an educator to realize that everyone dreams, including the teacher. In order for students to have genuine interest in a subject, it must appeal to their imagination, not to the teachers” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.754). In a *Midsummer Nights Dream*, dreams are used to describe bizarre happenings that had to do with fairies. This non-discursive symbolic form is another way to add meaning and clarity to student’s global understanding of Shakespeare’s plays. Students can connect with times they may have dreamed themselves and what these dreams have meant to their own personal lives and understandings.

Empirics: The Second Realm of Meaning

Kritsonis (2007) explains the second realm of meaning.

Empirics includes the sciences of the physical world, of living things, and of man. These sciences provide factual descriptions, generations, and theoretical formulations and explanations that are based upon observation and experimentation in the world of matter, life, mind, and society. (p.12)

Psychology and the social sciences are also important parts of the *empiric* philosophy and second realm of meaning.

In the psychological realm, Freud’s interpretation of Shakespeare opened new opportunities for study and reflection. According to Dunton-Downer and Riding, Freud

focuses on Hamlet’s supposed Oedipal complex. His approach freed scholars and critics to study Shakespeare and his characters through an ever imaginable prism from Marxism to feminism. Indeed, in recent decades, near-scientific analysis has come to dominate academia’s view of Shakespeare. (2004, p. 37)

At-risk students can be challenged to see the correlation between political science, psychology, and science in their study of Shakespeare. As the students began to emerge to a new level of academic achievement, they will see that all learning is connected. Creative teachers can utilize hands-on activities and group discussion and interaction to reinforce the ideas that the world of Shakespeare was multi-faceted and worthy to be studied and understood.

Included in the realm of *empirics* is the area of the social sciences. “Social science deals with the world of culture and society, a world of which human beings are themselves the architects” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 245). Sociology studies people, their needs and values, and their family structures and how individuals can relate to

themselves, their families, and the world at large. When studying sociology, it is important to note that “the chief aim of sociology is to provide an array of relatively precise descriptive and explanatory categories for understanding the exceedingly diverse and complicated phenomena of social behavior” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 246).

Students today live in a world where wealth is not always distributed evenly or fairly. Many of our students in today’s classroom are considered middle-class. Open discourses on what it is like to be a member of a particular class can help students further enjoy and gain a better understanding of the multi-layered characterization of Shakespeare’s literary figures.

Esthetics: The Third Realm of Meaning

Most every student in today’s educational community can identify with art, music, and dance. “In the *esthetic* realm the functional curriculum makes use of the arts as means of self-expression, affording psychological release and better integration of vital energies” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.765).

The third realm of meaning, *esthetics*, has much to offer in the realm of communicating to today’s teenage population. *Esthetics*, as defined by Kritsonis (2007),

contains the various arts, such as music, the visual arts, the arts of movement, and literature. Meanings in this realm are concerned with the contemplative perception of particular significant things as unique objectifications of ideated subjectivities. (p.2)

Shakespeare is filled with beautiful and artistic metaphors, symbolic images, and graceful forms of artistic literary renditions. Kritsonis (2007) says:

Of all the arts, probably the most widely influential in the communication of meaning are the arts of literature. Since language is a highly developed means of expression for purposes of general communication, the literary artist has the advantage of employing a commonly accepted and widely understood medium. (p.363)

Many students, who do not excel academically, are dramatically gifted in other areas. Therefore, by highlighting the connection of art, movement, and literature found in Shakespeare, students are given another avenue of expression and opportunity for success by learning and applying their own artistic talents to classroom learning objectives and goals.

Pageantry and staging became an important part of in the performance of Shakespeare’s plays. Roseblum (2005) states:

From the 1850's to World War I, Charles Kean, Henry Irving, and Herbert Beerhom Tree produced Henry VIII in a manner of extravagant opulence that had not been known before and would not be attempted afterwards. They spent lavishly on realistic sets and costumes. (p. 298)

This beauty and pageantry “was by far the most ambitious presentation as to splendor of background and pageantry” (Rosenblum, 2005, p. 299). Pageantry and beauty used in Shakespeare’s plays is another example how understanding the applying the *Third Realm of Meaning: Esthetics*, can be used to enhance student learning and appreciation of Shakespeare drama and theatrical productions.

The Visual Arts

“A new art form was created in the 18th-century known as bardolatry symbolizing its connection with the “Bard.” Artists such as Henry Fuseli, William Blak, and later, John Everett Millais helped to enshrine Shakespeare as England’s great poet” (Dunton-Downer, and Riding, 2004, p.472). These artists reproduced prints that depicted characters and scenes in Shakespeare’s most famous plays. The trend continued throughout the 19th century. “French Romantics like Delacroix, Classeriau, and Moreau were also depicting key moments from Shakespeare plays. By the end of the 19th century, the fashion for Shakespeare in art had run its course” (Dunton-Downer, and Riding 2004, p.472).

Artistic beauty can also be seen in the writings of Shakespeare through the descriptive use of words to describe natural beauty and metaphorical comparisons. Artists have long provided their constituents with beautiful, naturalistic pictures and paintings of nature and her surroundings. Artistic imagery is pronounced in *Romeo and Juliet* when Juliet is overheard musing about the fair young man that she has met. “That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet” (Act II, Scene II).

Many students feel that they are not capable of understanding higher-order, cognitive thinking material and texts. They therefore give up and sometimes refuse to cooperate with administrators, teachers and school officials. However, when students began to explore the six realms of meaning and find that they can achieve meaning and significance in their learning, they become motivated and inspired to try harder in their classrooms and to worker harder for academic success.

Music and the Arts

Shakespeare was also influential in the area of musical composition and performance. Plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have inspired musical composers and artistic choreographers for hundreds of years. "Purcell's 1692 *Fairy Queen*, was based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" (Dunton-Downer and Riding, 2004, p. 207). Numerous movies and Broadway plays have derived their inspiration and story lines from Shakespeare's writing. "*The Comedy of Errors* gave Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart their story for *The Boys from Syracuse* in 1938, while a decade later Cole Porter borrowed from *The Taming of the Shrew* to write the musical *Kiss Me Kate*" (Dunton-Downer and Riding, 2004, p. 207). With such a rich heritage of modern theatrical plays, musicals, operas, and modern day themed movies, connecting the curriculum with students everyday world will be easier, making students learning more significant and long-lasting.

The Art of Movement

Movement is another form of *esthetic* symbolic communication. Shakespeare's romantic and philosophical play about young love has been immortalized through "Prokofiev's ballet *Romeo and Juliet*" (Dunton-Downer and Riding, 2004, p. 473). Teenagers will be able to relate to the communication of meaning through dance.

Literature Shakespeare and the Fairy Tale

Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning encourages the creative use of all genres of literature to create meaning and understanding in a subject matter. One symbolic tool used to create meaning is the fairy tale. Fairy tales are rich in imagery and can communicate life lessons in creative and visionary manners.

The story of *King Lear* lends itself to connecting it to the fairy tale genre. If one compares the story of Cinderella with the story of *King Lear* one can find relationships that may not have been seen or enjoyed by the student learners in previous studies.

Comparing Cinderella and King Lear

In the story of *Cinderella*, there was a beautiful young girl everyone called Cinderella. She was treated as a step-child and was not loved by her step-mother and step-sisters, who were evil and cruel, and therefore not very beautiful. All is not lost for Cinderella. A handsome prince is charmed by her beauty. He falls in love with her, they are married and they live happily ever after.

In another kingdom, there was a king who was near death. He had a deep love for his three daughters and believed that they loved him, too. Two of his daughters, unknown to him at the beginning, were very evil, and did not really love their father. They professed their love for their father and were given great portions of land as an inheritance. When the third daughter was asked to express her love for her father, she could not find the words. Although she loved her father deeply, she could not express herself except to say "my love's more richer than my tongue" (Act I, Scene I).

At the end of the story, the King saw the treachery of his two daughters who professed a love they did not possess. His remorse was penned by William Shakespeare in these words, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child" (Act I, Scene IV). He realizes that the one true daughter, who has by this time married to the King of France, is the only daughter who truly loved him.

The Fourth Realm of Meaning: Synnoetics

High school students are in a transitional time period in their lives. Personal relationships become more important to the teenager's everyday life. High school students are emerging into young adulthood. Emotions and relationships are extremely important during this time period.

According to Gajowski (2004),

Shakespeare places as great a value on the sanctity of personal relations in the History Plays as in the tragedies, because he intuitively understands that order depends, not on concepts of hierarchy and degree, but on the fabric of personal and social relationships which is woven by ties of marriage, kinship, and friendship, by communal interests of loyalty and trust. (p. 20)

The synnoetic realm of meaning is structured in order to show general education curriculum how relationships, feelings, and emotions are reflected in learning, literature, and the general education curriculum. "The fourth realm, *synnoetics*, embraces what Michael Polanyi calls "personal knowledge" and Martin Buber the "I-Thou" relation" (Kritsonis, 2007, p.12).

Relationships are key to understanding Shakespeare. The “I-Thou” relationship affects your thoughts, feelings, and relationships with another person. The “I-It” relationship analyzes how you are able to relate with the objects that enshrine your personal lifestyle and philosophy. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the “I-Thou” relationship is seen countless times. In Act II, Scene II, Romeo laments, “It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.”

A primary goal of the study of *synnoetics* is to learn about one’s self and his or reaction to everyday life scenarios and happenings. In one of Shakespeare’s most notable quotations, Hamlet decries to himself, “to be, or not to be: that is the question.” (Scene I, Act III). Hamlet, in a period of self-reflection, begins to mediate on what he sees in himself. He reflects on everything his soul and spirit feels in “his mind’s eye” (Act I, Scene II). The universal need to know one’s self and to be true to that self is a universal principal of survival for mankind.

“For most people, literature is more influential than any other cultural resource for growth in personal knowledge. Drama, poetry, the novel, and biography exert profound effects on the consciousness of human relatedness” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.426). Shakespeare’s writings are filled with the psychoanalytical personality descriptions and nuances of individual characters that are portrayed in such a way as to make them viable figures to understand and to mirror and compare our own reactions to life challenges and unexpected tragedies and grief.

Synnoetics allows for character exploration by assessing one’s knowledge of himself and his environment. Kritsonis (2007) states,

In Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, one can see by means of the various characters, the revelation of personality running the gamut from nobility to foolishness, modesty to arrogance, generosity to greed, loyalty to treachery, compassion to cruelty, love to hate, and honesty to deceitfulness. (p.428)

Because Shakespeare is a pronounced and influential dramatist, studying his plays and characters can give insight into personal meaning and existence.

Students taught that there is room for personal meaning and reflection in literature will be more apt to study and apply the literary concepts to their own lives when they know that what they are reading has meaning and purpose that can directly relate to their daily existence and lifestyle.

Shakespeare is a literary giant in terms of his penned contributions to the field of exceptional drama and written discourse. Shakespeare is responsible for significant plays that run the gamut of classification from tragic drama, stimulating historical plays, amusing and entertaining comedies, as well as heart wrenching romantic stories about love, sacrifice, and commitment, such as found in the story of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Utilizing Shakespeare and the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* will help high school students to better analyze characters and situations in order to make better decisions in their own personal life. A teacher can use the story of *King Lear* to discuss how greed can affect family relationships. Inner feelings about love and relationships can find a fertile soil for discussion in the love story of *Romeo and Juliet*.

High school students have mostly learned by this time that there is evil and good in the world in which we live. Literature gives at-risk and low performing students the opportunity to see that their inner feelings and ambitions are not significantly different from characters they read about in their literature studies.

The Fifth Realm of Meaning: Ethics

The fifth realm of meaning, *ethics*, has to do with moral conduct and knowledge based on morality. Understanding morality and applying ethics to our everyday experiences provides insight into our decision making processes. “The realm of ethics, then, is right action. The central concept in this domain is obligation or what ought to be done” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 452).

In Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, there are moral decisions made by Macbeth and his wife, Lady Macbeth, that corrupt the human nature and allow evil consequences to abound. “It is said that every person is endowed with a native intuition of the right which, if he attend to it and obeys it, will enable him to know right from wrong” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 441). Disobeying one’s conscience can lead to guilt and despair. Macbeth succumbed to murder. Guilt and remorse came quickly. According to Kritsonis (2007),

Authentic moral meanings are reestablished only when the extraordinary mystery of unconditional obligation is recognized and when the secret inward claim of conscience is reinforced by the consideration of moral dilemmas where the easy justification of prudence and custom do suffice. (p. 766)

Morality and the study of right and wrong are critical themes worthy of study in our society. Students who learn to make sound decisions based on their own logic and reasoning skills will have a deeper understanding of how their moral decisions affect their own personal lives and the society in which they live.

Synoptics The Sixth Realm of Meaning

The sixth realm of meaning is *synoptics*. *Synoptics* “comprises meanings having an integrative function, uniting meanings from all the realms into a unified perspective, that is providing a “single vision” or “synopsis” of meanings. The chief synoptic disciplines are history, religion, and philosophy” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 479).

History

Shakespeare used his plays to influence and fortify public opinion on political events taking place on the world stage. At-risk and low performing high school students will benefit from the study of Shakespeare's historical dramas because they will gain historical knowledge coupled with the ability to make literary interpretations of Shakespeare's meanings utilizing the framework of the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*. According to Rosenblum (2005),

Shakespeare's primary concerns in *Henry VIII* lie in the uses and abuses of power in relation to justice, injustice, conscience, and truth, and not so much the legitimacy of the monarch's authority that he had explored in the history plays covering the reigns from King John to Richard III. (p. 294)

Shakespeare's plays bore some resemblance to historical correctness. However, Shakespeare did use literary license at times to rearrange chronological orders and to define characters in a way that would fit his story line rather than history's exacting standards for accuracy. Shakespeare's digression from historical fact is evidenced in the Henry IV plays. Rosenblum (2005) further explains,

Shakespeare makes three important alterations to historical characters: Falstaff, Henry IV, and Hotspur. Supposing Falstaff to have been based originally, for whatever reason, on Sir John Oldcastle, Shakespeare changes the age of this character. Oldcastle died at the age of thirty-five, yet Shakespeare presents Falstaff as being much older. (p. 235)

At-risk students benefit from reading Shakespeare by understanding that Shakesperian literature is multi-faceted. Shakespearian studies allow a student's knowledge and understanding of the curriculum to be enhanced to a degree that the student recognizes the significance of his learning and the reason for his or her commitment to the discipline and acquisition of meaning and knowledge.

Shakespeare's knowledge of history gives him an added advantage to incorporate historical events with literary excellence. Students who study Shakespeare's history plays will find that they are immersed in studies that cross the line of the academic disciplines. While Shakespeare is studied in English classes, his work is equally important to those who study World History.

Religion

According to Noble (1935),

Opinion has differed somewhat sharply as to the extent of Shakespeare's Biblical knowledge. Some have maintained that he knew much, others that such acquaintance with the Bible as he exhibited was no more than might be expected from an intelligent listener in an age when Biblical subjects were much discussed. (p.18)

However, "much of the greatest music, painting, and architecture has been inspired by religious faith and has served to inspire others to a similar devotion" (Kritsonis, p. 504).

Biblical allusions are pronounced in Shakespeare's writings. "Allusion is made in *King John* to the sun standing still, without mentioning Joshua. Five times, most notably by Cleopatra, reference is made to the reply by the Shunamite woman to Elisha's inquiry as to her dead child's health" (Noble, 1935, p.21). It is clear that Shakespeare's reflections and knowledge of the Christian Bible were influential in his writings. Scripture referential usages in Shakespeare enriched the overall language and depth of meaning of his writings.

In the story of *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth tries to rid herself of guilt and responsibility. "A little water clears us of this deed" (Act II, Scene II). This incident of cleansing and purification can be seen when Pilate washed his hands to symbolize his relinquishment of responsibility from the crime of sentencing Jesus to death.

Philosophy

All levels of human experience fall within the realm of philosophy. Philosophy challenges the individual to develop and "construct a synoptic view of the entire range of expressible human experiences, insofar as they can be interpreted within the categories of rational discourse" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 535). Analyzing and interpreting philosophical viewpoints requires a higher level of thinking than is generally displayed by at-risk and lower performing students in the high school academic arena. Teaching students through *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* can clarify and enhance a student's ability to gain a deeper understanding and knowledge of the subject matter.

According to Dr. Kristonis, there are three main components of interpreting philosophy: analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. Utilizing the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*, students can be taught to analyze a selection of reading material, evaluate the material based on their experiences, and then apply their new learning to their own daily life experiences and life goals.

Well-known famous quotes from Shakespeare exhibit how philosophical ideas can be translated into the human psyche. Philosophical inquiries allow the student of philosophy to think deeply and develop life goals and edicts that can help the student to exhibit sound judgment and make wise decisions.

Jewels of wisdom and expression are replete in Shakespeare's writings. Famous quotes with philosophical meanings and intent from Shakespeare's play, *As You Like It* include "The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool" (Act V, Scene I). Deeper reasonings and philosophical understandings can also be found in the play *Julius Caesar*, "Men at some time are masters of their fates: The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings" (Act I, Scene II).

The Value of Utilizing *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*

"Disciplined understanding leads to further insight; undisciplined thought does not" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 665). *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* offers a framework for curriculum study that adds meaning and direction to the study and mastery level of a given subject area. Teaching students to critically view their world is an important part of the total education process. Kritsonis (2007) defines the complete person. He says,

A complete person should be skilled in the use of speech, symbol, and gesture (symbolics), factually well-informed (empirics), capable of creating and appreciating others (synnoetics), able to make wise decisions and judge between right and wrong (ethics), and possessed of an integral outlook (synoptics). (p. 15)

A school curriculum firmly based in these realms of meaning will prove to be an affective component of a strong and vibrant curriculum for the at-risk and underachieving high school student.

Concluding Remarks

A productive society is a literate society. Today's student must engage in higher-level cognitive thinking in order to be able to successfully live and compete in today's technologically advanced society. It is incumbent for a society to prepare future generations to think creatively, apply knowledge responsibly, and to teach students the importance of critical thinking utilizing the philosophies based on the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*.

In order to ensure that our citizenry is prepared to meet the challenges of the future, educators must provide an avenue of learning that is conducive to the challenges of the 21st century. The philosophical basis for *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* provides a framework for a creative, structured approach to education.

“Knowledge can be derived from a variety of sources. However, knowledge has permanent value leading to greater meaning and greater understanding when drawn from the fundamental disciplines as exemplified in the realms of meaning” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 716). Now teacher’s can utilize the philosophy outlined in *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* to structure learning so that the classroom educational goals will be met and students will be engaged in active and creative learning.

The final outcome of education should be a populace of educated, well-versed students who are able to read, analyze, and synthesize meaning in the daily construct of their life existence. “Knowledge can be derived from a variety of sources. However, knowledge has permanent value leading to greater meaning and greater understanding when drawn from the fundamental disciplines as exemplified in the realms of meaning” (Kritsonis, 2007, ix).

The students in our classroom are filled of potential. Unleashing the potential within the student is the educator’s greatest challenge in this new century of explosive knowledge and discovery. “A revolution of quantity has taken place, demanding a wholly different orientation to learning” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 648). This knowledge explosion has been accelerated with significant advances in technology. Incorporating technology into the classroom can greatly increase the learning capabilities of all students, especially those considered “at-risk” in today’s high school classroom. Utilizing the structure found in the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* book by William A. Kritsonis, PhD, students can research new material for study in an organized and easy to understand format.

As school leaders seek to make decisions on what to teach in the curriculum, “the curriculum designer must spend more time narrowing down what material to teach than looking for material to teach” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 644). This poses a particular dilemma for educators who seek to find a way to teach students who are already struggling to be academically successful. “When a person is faced with a huge mass of bewildering material that he cannot master his frustration begets a feeling of hopelessness and despair” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 642).

To turn academic frustration into academic achievement, utilizing the concepts of *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* can provide a structure for academic achievement and success in the classroom. Teaching Shakespeare using the structure of the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* can significantly increase academic achievement, even for at-risk students.

The future will go to those who are prepared. By uniting the curriculum through the structure found in the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*, “the educator can seize the opportunity to battle such areas as fragmentation, surfeit, and transience of knowledge, by showing what kinds of knowledge are required for full understanding” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 74). Students can be inspired to gather knowledge

from classic literature and to apply their new knowledge to the overall purpose and meaning of their education.

Shakespeare studies, cloaked with the philosophy and curriculum structure of the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*, can be mastered successfully by at-risk students. Students can be creatively challenged to learn using this structure. Teachers can be inspired to apply new heuristic methods of teaching to their curriculum. In the end, great teachers will keep in mind that “students do not fantasize about what they already have. The successful teacher will take them where they have not been!” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 762).

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