

Implementing the Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning– A Philosophy for Selecting the Curriculum for General Education

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ABSTRACT

All educators should be concerned about curriculum. Curriculum is the path to giving students the best possible education enveloping an in-depth learning experience. Dr. Kritsonis's *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* provides a guide for schools to select curriculum that is appropriate, rigorous, and enriched. Through alignment, Dr. Kritsonis's demonstrates the ease of connecting curriculum across subjects. *The Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* by Dr. Kritsonis enables all educators to have the skills necessary in selection of curriculum (2007).

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 (empirics), capable of creating and appreciating objects of esthetic significance (aesthetics), 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 (ethics), and possessed of an integral outlook (synoptics). These are the aims of general education for the development of complete persons.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this essay 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. “A philosophy of the curriculum requires a mapping of the realms of meaning, one in which the various possibilities of significant experience are charted and the various domains of meaning are distinguished and correlated” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 11). The realms of meaning will provide a foundation for the type of curriculum that will lend itself toward noteworthy human experience, from the person’s perspective.

Philosophical Strategies

Strategy 1-SYMBOLICS: Symbolics is the first realm of meaning and consists of ordinary language, mathematics, and nondiscursive symbolic forms.

Ordinary language is made up of common vernacular. “By the term ‘ordinary language’ is meant the forms of discourse employed in everyday speech and writing” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 111). A person must have the skill to organize words in order to communicate with others in verbal and written form. When one can understand the language, then it is possible to convey messages. Curriculum must build a student’s vocabulary, which will improve language. Practice and classroom discussions will give students a strong foundation to socialize in the community. “It is important to provide the language student with opportunities to participate actively in the life of groups who use only the language he seeks to learn” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 116).

Mathematics uses symbols as its language. “The symbolic systems of mathematics are designed to achieve complete precision in meaning and rigor in reasoning” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 135). A student of mathematics must be able to recognize the symbols and their functions. Eventually mathematics becomes a language of its own. “The subject matter of mathematics is, then, formal (abstract) symbolic within which all possible propositions are consistent with each other” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 139). Mathematics is logical and conclusions are logically and rationally conceived. Curriculum must enable students to understand the subject and have the ability to express reasons behind operations.

“The 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. 153). Educators must teach students that communication is articulated through gestures, facial expressions, and bodily posture. Nondiscursive symbolic forms have subjective meanings. The curriculum gives students the opportunity to express themselves through a creative means without using words.

Symbolics need to be taught to allow students to organize symbols to communicate more effectively in the everyday world that they will soon be exposed.

Teaching this realm to students allows students to organize symbols to communicate more effectively in the everyday world in which soon they will exist.

Strategy 2-EMPIRICS: Empirics is the second realm of meaning and consists of physical science, biology, psychology, and social science.

Empirics encompass facts and discovering the truth. “Physical science provides descriptions of the world as experienced through the activity of physical measurement” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 181). With physical measurement there is a universal agreement and it includes a mathematical formulation. Teaching students “the discovery and formulation of general patterns among quantities derived from the process of physical measurement” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 198) is physical science.

Biology is the study of living things. “The systematic study of living things naturally begins with the attempt to order and simplify the enormously variegated and confusing world of life by the use of descriptive classifications” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 206). Classifying living things is known as taxonomy. The ability to understand dynamic principles of the development of organisms and theoretical understanding of living things and creatures inhabiting the earth, gives students a comprehensive essence of biology.

Psychology is a subject about the mind and mental aspects of living things. “The meanings obtained in this field are empirical, descriptive, and theoretical” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 239). The subjectivity of psychology makes it a controversial field.

“The social sciences, chief among which are social psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science, are clearly in the domain of the sciences of man” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 249). Social science is concerned with how people define their lives, and what they make of themselves through society and culture. There are two categories of the social sciences: sociology and economics. “Sociology is concerned with interaction among persons, each of whom takes account of others as individuals with attitudes and expectation toward himself” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 254). Supply and demand are the basic tenets of economy. “The fact of scarcity necessitates acts of choice as to what and how much shall be produced, by whom, with what resources, and by what methods, and to whom the products shall be distributed” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 262).

Strategy 3-ESTHETICS: Esthetics is the third realm of meaning and consists of music, the visual arts, the arts of movement, and literature.

Teaching music to students is in hopes of giving them a well-balanced education. It is from each individual’s perspective whether or not music has esthetic meaning. “Although a knowledge of music theory, including an ability to analyze patterns of rhythm, melody, harmony, and tone color-the basic elements of all music-may be helpful, such rational competence does not in itself disclose esthetic meanings” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 295).

“The term ‘visual arts’ will be used here to designate the fields of painting, drawing, graphic arts, sculpture, and architecture, in which the artist shapes tangible materials into objects of esthetic importance” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 303). The esthetics of art comes from the viewers’ opinion. Students are taught to understand the concepts that are reflected in concrete pieces; therefore, an appreciation can at least be given. “Artists

and their works need to be understood in the light of their specific aims and not in terms of any universal and permanent standards of validity” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 325).

“The term ‘arts of movement’ is intended to include all intentional activities, undertaken for esthetic purposes, in which the desired expressive effects are communicated by the movement of the human body” (Kritsonis, 2007, pp. 335-336). Educating students to move their bodies in connection with their minds incorporates intellectual and motor components deliberately working together. The arts of movement will grow coordination and motor skills. “The arts of movement, physical education, and health and recreation activities are all closely interrelated resources for the enrichment of esthetic meaning, both in individual persons in the life of society” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 355).

Communicating through literature is the way to reach the greatest number of people. “Since language is a highly developed means of expression for purposes of general communication, the literacy artist has the advantage of employing a commonly accepted and widely understood medium” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 363). The reader must find the esthetic qualities that are intellectually stimulating in literature.

Strategy 4-SYNNOETICS: Synnoetics is the fourth realm of meaning and consists of personal knowledge. This realm does not clearly define courses for personal knowledge, and pulls from psychology, literature, religion, and philosophy for this promotion. “It is not customary to offer courses in relational insight, personal knowledge, or existential awareness, nor are there standard scholarly associations devoted to the pursuit of such knowledge” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 385).

Synnoetics is having understanding about self and about the perceptions of others. “It is important to remember that in personal insight the simplest and most untutored people can be as competent as, or even more competent than, people who have devoted much time and thought to the perfecting of this aspect of life” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 407). Synnoetic meanings are subjective, being properly socialized will aide in having insight to one’s self.

Strategy 5-ETHICS: Ethics is the fifth realm of meaning and consists of moral knowledge. “Moral meanings are studied in moral philosophy, and ethics-the critical analysis of moral judgments-is one of the standard branches of the discipline of philosophy” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 385). Choosing right deliberate actions, what everyone should do, describes ethical meaning. “Moral conduct is a universal responsibility” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 448). Students are taught this conduct through the modeling of all educators. “The ethical domain is not defined by what conduct is about, but by the fact of its being deliberate and subject to the judgment of right and wrong” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 453). Right and wrong are the essence of society.

Strategy 6-SYNOPTICS: Synoptics is the sixth realm of meaning and consists of history, religion, and philosophy. “This term 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” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 483).

History is dealing with time. When history is taught, students learn about what has happened in the past. Telling the whole story about an event that occurred, allows for insight and learning for future events.

Religion integrates all the realms of meanings. “Religious meanings comprehend or include all things, and that a religious attitude with respect to any given thing is to consider it in the light of all that is, i.e., from the standpoint of the Whole” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 507).

Philosophy is holistic and concerned about all human experiences. “Philosophy has its distinctive ways and ends that mark it as a recognizable and autonomous field of inquiry” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 529). Devoted to interpretations of meaning, philosophy provides students with the opportunity for critical and analytic thinking.

Characteristics of effective school encompass many issues, but curriculum is at the forefront since it drives learning. Administrators must be committed to the development and improvement of instruction. “Emphasis on instruction in the basic skills including: the school having a commitment to the basic skills as instructional goals; and basic skills being the foundation for higher order thinking skills” (Kritsonis, 2002, p. 11). Assessing student achievement and aligning curriculum across subjects and grades will allow educators to monitor student performance. Educators must know what they will teach students, and have access to the materials necessary. “The four fundamental questions of The Idealized Curriculum (Holistic) are: What shall be taught? How shall it be taught? When shall it be taught? How shall what is taught be evaluated?” (Kritsonis, 2002, p. 203).

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion using the six realms of meaning as a guide in selecting curriculum will capture students’ interest and afford them the opportunity to use their imagination. “The desirable goal is well-roundedness and variety of interests, and the curriculum should be correspondingly broad and diverse” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 561). Pulling together the curriculum into a coherent whole is what educators are called to do. The realms of meaning will allow each student to realize his essential humanness.

References

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