

Aristotle, Philosophy, and the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*: A National Study on Integrating a Postmodernist Approach to Education and Student Academic Achievement

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ABSTRACT

“The fundamental task of any educational institution is to determine the manner of defining and organizing its curriculum. At the outset the obvious fact that there is more to learn, more to teach, and more to put in the curriculum than time available presents the educators with hard choices” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. v.) Therefore it is imperative that new paradigms for educational curriculum designs, teaching models, and educational delivery systems be investigated to ensure that the most appropriate levels of meaning and understanding are delivered to the students in our classrooms. Utilizing a post-modernistic approach to education, this article lays a beginning foundation and treatise on how to successfully integrate a curriculum based on philosophy, postmodernism, and the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) curriculum selection guide.

Introduction

Integrating a philosophical basis for learning can enhance a student's ability to understand and effectively utilize the prescribed school curriculum. It is imperative that educational administrators who lead and contribute to the efficacy of the next generation's education be skillfully taught to apply knowledge and understanding to a holistic framework which focuses on the axiology of a district and the epistemological and strategic learning pedagogies prescribed by a district. Using a post modernistic approach to education with a philosophical approach to education allows students the opportunity to reach higher cognitive levels of academic achievement and success. Using an integrated approach to education through philosophy, postmodernism, and the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) can effectively provide a dynamic curriculum structure that can dramatically and positively affect the school's curriculum and learning community.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to examine the heuristics of the realms of meaning curriculum philosophy integrating this knowledge with postmodernism ideologies in order to see how ancient learning can be tied into today's curriculum and postulate a modern day formula for student success and achievement in a range of academic achievement which supersedes basic knowledge and transcends to the level of higher knowledge and cognitive thinking skills.

The Challenges of a Fragmented Curriculum

In today's educational society, learning is fragmented into segmented constraints of subject matter with little or no connection to the real world. In most curriculums, subject mastery simply consists of being able to repeat stated facts recorded in a text book. This type of instruction will only produce learners who think at the basest levels of the educational learning pyramid. Without the ability to apply the knowledge learned in the classroom to larger areas of problem solving and academic achievement, the next generation of students will not have the proper skills and education to be informed citizens, competent workers, and moral and ethical individuals.

Today's educators are fully aware of the challenges that face them each and everyday. However, a synoptic framework of educational delivery is needed that will focus on student needs and will provide an axiological perspective on how to make

changes that will improve, direct, and inspire new generations of teachers and students to think creatively, critically, and responsibly.

Philosophy and Education

Since the inception of time, man has searched for meaning and structure not only personally, but generically and for society as a whole. This search for meaning has known no time frame for conception and continues to this day to be the driving force for the accumulation of knowledge, wisdom, and purposeful life activities. “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). Integrating philosophy and the axiological perspectives of reflective scholars into the curriculum provides a process of disciplined inquiry that can philosophically and empirically change the dynamics of education from a delivery system that is linear, unproductive and filled with base level learning opportunities into a curriculum and teaching delivery system that is dynamic, purposeful, and that meets the needs of both current and future academic philosophers, teachers, students, and administrators.

Integrating the Ways of Knowing and the Realms of Meanings with an Educational Curriculum Philosophy and Delivery System

“Studying educational philosophy can help teachers and other educators focus on questions that are speculative, prescriptive, and analytical; it can help enlarge thoughts so better personal choices can be made; it helps in self-evaluation of beliefs and self-knowledge” (Kritsonis, 2002, p. 91). By evaluating the philosophies and philosophers of both past and present generations, today’s educator can develop a framework for effective academic leadership with the end result of affecting positive and productive academic change in today’s diverse and highly challenging academic centers for student learning and achievement.

The challenge for implementing a successful philosophy and educational theory for learning is that there are many ideas, mantras, and mandates for learning that have been passed down from one generation to another. Postmodernism ideas and venues challenge the educator to think outside of the box and seek new ways of viewing old problems. “To this end, postmodernism is a kind of open-bordered approach to inquiry” (English, 2003, p. 4).

A Post-Modernist Approach to Educational Theory and Education

“The postmodernist approaches theory with the idea that metanarratives (theories) are essential for the establishment of professional practice, and that many theories can contain practices which will prove beneficial to educating children in a variety of settings” (English, 2003, p.4). From a theoretical perspective, the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) offers six realms of learning and inquiry that can form the basis of a critical learning and highly effective curriculum model.

“The six realms cover the range of possible meanings. They may be regarded as comprising the basic competencies that general education should develop in every person” (Kritsonis, 2002, p. 15). It is interesting to note that while the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) is a current work of epistemological scholarship, the basis for the concepts employed in this educational framework can be seen to allay with great works of literature and educational philosophies of the past. When students, teachers, and administrators learn to take a constructivist approach to education and merge the knowledge and philosophies of the past with the current metaphysical world of educational study and ontology, educational leaders and student participants will find new meaning, challenge, and hope in the educational progress and current intellectual designs for academic achievement and success. Thinking outside of the box and through the telescopic lens of postmodernism, educational leaders can design a curriculum that offers depth, meaning, and purposeful understanding of life both in the spiritual, physical, and mental aspects of the educational process.

Metaphysics

Before Christ, men and women of understanding sought to know and understand the basis for life and meaning in the form of knowing truth and its application to life, meaning, and understanding. Aristotle has been quoted as saying, “The study of truth requires a study of causes” (Loomis, 1971, p. 11). Educational inquiry should be focused on more than current issues and trends. When students are challenged to look at the causes of a transaction, why the action has occurred, the consequences of the occurrence, and how the new knowledge can be applied to new situations, then it can be rightly stated that the student has mastered the constructive concepts of learning and academic proliferation and intellectual success.

A Postmodernist Perspective of Aristotle, the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* and Curriculum Selection

There are many philosophical perspectives in regards to learning, meaning, and ultimate happiness and joy. Postmodernism suggests that “there is no single quality that may be designated as the one essence of meaning” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 10). There are however patterns of meaning. These patterns “emerge from the analysis of the possible distinctive modes of human understanding. These six patterns may be designated respectively as symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics, and synoptics” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 11).

Aristotle and the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*

One of the greatest proponents of an epistemological and axiological framework for student learning and academic achievement was the Greek philosopher Aristotle. “Aristotle believed in a spiritual explanation of the universe, but one obtained by careful investigation and analysis of observed phenomena” (Loomis, 1971, p. i). In agreement with Aristotle’s primary focus of meaning and purpose in education, Dr. Kritsonis states that “human beings are essentially creatures who have the power to experience meanings. Distinctively human experience consists in a pattern of meanings. Furthermore, general education is the process of engendering essential meanings” (Kritsonis, 2002, p. 7).

Aristotle, Symbolics and Classical Greek Instruction

Understanding the philosophical basis for an educational system can help to improve the academic success of students on a wide spectrum of learning abilities and styles. Combining philosophy with other modes of instruction can also provide a new and intriguing way to present educational concepts. The *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) is a curriculum model that can easily be studied in tandem with philosophy. To understand this new construct, the realms must be examined and related to philosophical frameworks and constraints.

The first realm of meaning is *symbolics*. “*Symbolics* comprises ordinary language, mathematics, and various types of nondiscursive symbolic forms, such as gestures, rituals, rhythmic patterns, and the like” (Kritsonis, 2002, p. 11). Aristotle believed in discourse. Throughout his lifetime, “rhetoric continued to interest Aristotle” (Masters, 1982, p. 20). He wrote a treatise on *Rhetoric* that is reflective of his view on communication, literature, speech, and communication. Just as the realms model of learning supports an integrated curriculum, Aristotle believed that “rhetoric and literature

are closely connected: Aristotle wrote a historico-critical book *On the Poets* and a collection of *Homeric Problems*” (Barnes, 1982, p. 20).

Speech and rhetoric were important tools of learning for Aristotle. He believed that communication and language were two components essential to fundamental meaning and appropriate and meaningful intellectual discourse. “One of Aristotle’s main claims in the *Gyrrlus* was that rhetoric should not excite the passions by fine language but should rather persuade the reason by fine argument” (Barnes, 1982, p. 20).

Aristotle and Empirics

The second realm of meaning is *empirics*.

Empirics includes the sciences of the physical world, of living things, and of man. These sciences provide factual descriptions, generalizations, and theoretical formulations and explanations that are based upon observation and experimentation in the world of matter, life, mind, and society. (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12)

Aristotle himself was an avid proponent for scientific discovery and discourse. Aristotle “made and collected observations in astronomy, meteorology, chemistry, physics (and) psychology” (Barnes, 1982, p. 3). His most famous works however were in the areas of biology and zoology. “His studies on animals laid the foundations of the biological sciences; and they were not superseded until more than two thousand years after his death” (Barnes, 1982, p. 9).

Aristotle and Esthetics

The third realm of meaning is *esthetics*. *Esthetics* contain “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” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12). According to Aristotle, “Art imitates or represents human life, and in particular human actions” (Masters, 1982, p. 83).

“Aristotle is often accused of providing a narrowly intellectual view of the good life: Home and Phidias – or Rembrandt and Bach-will not, in his opinion, served as examples of success or as illustrations of *eudemonia*” (Barnes, 1982, p. 83). The accusation that he had no artistic or esthetic bent toward learning “may well be unjust, for

the ideal of contemplation advanced in the *Ethics* is perhaps large enough to encompass a life of artistic or literary genius” (Barnes, 1982, p. 83).

Aristotle and Synnoetics

The fourth realm of meaning is *synnoetics*. *Synnoetics* embraces the conceptual ideal of personal knowledge espoused by Michael Polanyi and the “I-Thou” relationship attributed to Martin Buber. Aristotle responded to the world around him with intellectual curiosity and resolve. Aristotle believed that “a man’s noblest aim is to immortalize himself or imitate the gods, for in doing so he becomes most fully a man and most fully himself” (Barnes, 1982, p. 2). The synnoetic, philosophical structure of Aristotle’s life, philosophy, and happiness also states that “we must not listen to those who urge us to think human thoughts since we are human, and mortal thoughts since we are mortal; rather, we should as far as possible immortalize ourselves and do all we can to live by the finest element in us – for if it is small in bulk, it is far greater than anything else in power and worth” (Barnes, 1982, p.2).

Aristotle and Ethics

The fifth realm of meaning is *ethics*. “*Ethics* includes moral meanings that express obligation rather than fact, perceptual form, or awareness of relation. In contrast to the sciences, which are concerned with abstract, cognitive understanding, to the arts, which express idealized esthetic perceptions, and to personal knowledge, which reflects intersubjective understanding, morality has to do with personal conduct that is based on free, responsible, deliberate decision” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 13).

Aristotle’s views on ethics are chronicled in the book known as the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is one of Aristotle’s most famous works. “The purpose of all ethics, we are told at the outset, is the search for that good that everyone aims to get out of living” (Loomis, 1971, p. 85). Knowing right and wrong is important for all generations. Teaching students the ethical dimensions of life can add meaning and knowledge to the other areas of the curriculum and surmount a basis for ethical discourse and discussion throughout the curriculum.

Aristotle and Synoptics

The sixth realm of meaning is *synoptics*. Synoptics is an integrative curriculum and includes the areas of philosophy, religion, and history. History allows the reader to interpret the meaning of past events with current discourse and make judgments on the relevancy of current events and their meaning to one's own present day life and activities. "Religion is concerned with ultimate meanings, that is, with meanings from any realm whatsoever, considered from the standpoint of such boundary concepts as the Whole, the Comprehensive, and the Transcendent" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 13).

Aristotle, the great philosopher, encompassed all of the attributes of a great synoptic thinker. Aristotle expressed his belief in God and his divine order for creation and life. He concluded that all must believe in God. Aristotle believed in theoretical truth and knowledge. According to Aristotle, "everyone believes that God is one of the causes and a first principle of things, and either God alone or above all others possesses this science" (Loomis, p. 10). Evaluating life on a synoptic realm gives evidence that his thinking in today's society would be considered creative, intellectual, and post modernistic.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, there are many challenges that face our educational system. Meeting these challenges will demand a new approach to educational leadership and administrative curriculum development. By thinking outside of the box and applying new strategies to old problems, educators can be successful in integrating the curriculum, knowledge and educational strategies needed to meet this new and demanding age of educational accountability.

Through a post-modernistic view of education, the philosophical framework of the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) curriculum philosophy, educators can seek to creatively and succinctly tie axiological views of curriculum structure into the learning process that will add value, meaning, and accomplishment to the educational communities and student learners we have been given the opportunity and responsibility to teach.

This philosophical model for learning can be translated into student academic achievement when educators take courage, step "out of the box" of their tried and true methods of educational leadership, and resolve to make new changes for a new age of integrated learning, success, and meaningful learning in the academic and educational setting and community.

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