

# **National Implications: Implementing Postmodernistic Strategies and the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* for the Improvement of Ethical Conduct for the Improvement of Public Education**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**The intent of this article is to illustrate the effectiveness of using the tenets described in the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* by Dr. William Allan Kritsonis (2007) to improve ethical conduct. Ten recommendations to implement the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007) for the improvement of ethical conduct are provided. Professor Kritsonis details how ethical conduct can be improved by exploring the following realms of meaning: symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics, and synoptics.**

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## **Introduction**

Today students are continually inundated with images of individuals in leadership roles “falling from grace.” Daily, students observe a barrage of images depicting leaders having their reputation tainted on television. These leaders may range from political leaders, business leaders, religious leaders, to local educators. In Now Is the Time for

Ethics in Education, author Amy Haas quotes a 1989 Journal of Business Ethics article, “Given the current ethical climate in business as reflected by the plethora of news stories in the media, the course in business ethics is becoming more important to our graduate and undergraduate business school programs” (Haas, 2005). She laments, “. . . ethical issues in accounting education are not new” (Haas, 2005). With students daily observing a decline in moral behavior from individuals entrusted with leadership positions, measures to improve ethical conduct are needed more than ever in education. Ten recommendations for improving ethical conduct are provided in this discussion. “Ethical considerations are a very important aspect for each one of us” (Bialaszewski, D. & Bialaszewski, M., 2005, p. 1).

### **Purpose of the Article**

The purpose of this article is to illustrate the effectiveness of using the tenets described in the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* by Dr. William Allan Kritsonis (2007) to improve ethical conduct. Ten recommendations to implement the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007) for the improvement of ethical conduct are provided. Kritsonis details how ethical conduct can be improved by exploring the following realms of meaning: symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics, and synoptics.

To begin the discussion an explanation of the six realms of meaning will be provided. These are as follows: symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics, and synoptics.

The first realm is symbolics. This encompasses ordinary language, mathematics, and a variety of nondiscursive symbolic forms. Nondiscursive symbolic forms consist of “gestures, rituals, rhythmic patterns, and the like” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.11).

Empirics are the second realm of meaning. This realm “. . . includes the sciences of the physical world, of living things, and of man” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12). Empirics describes “. . . factual descriptions, generalizations, and theoretical formulations and explanations” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12). The theoretical formulations and explanations are “. . . based upon observation and experimentation in the world of matter, life, mind and society” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12).

Esthetics is the third realm. Esthetics “. . . contains the various arts, such as music, the visual arts, the arts of movement, and literature” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12). In this realm, meanings “are concerned with the contemplative perception of particular significant things as unique objectifications of ideated subjectivities” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12).

Synnoetics is the fourth realm. Synnoetics “. . . embraces what Michael Polanyi calls “personal knowledge” and Martin Buber the “I-Thou” relation . . .” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12). The term synnoetics is derived “from the Greek *synoesis*, meaning ‘meditative thought,’ and this in turn is compounded of *syn*, meaning ‘with’ ‘together,’ and *noesis*, meaning ‘cognition’” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12).

The fifth realm of meaning is Ethics. This realm “. . . includes moral meanings that express obligation rather than fact, perceptual form, or awareness of relation . . .” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.13). In this realm, “morality has to do with personal conduct that is based on free, responsible, deliberate decision” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 13).

The final and sixth realm of meaning is Synoptics. Synoptics “. . . refers to meanings that are comprehensively integrative” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 13). Synoptics consist of history, religion, and philosophy. “These disciplines combine empirical, esthetic, and synoetics meanings into coherent wholes” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.13).

### **Ethics**

For the purposes of this discussion, Kritsonis’s explanation of ethics will be applied. Kritsonis asserts: “Like personal insights, ethics is everybody’s business. Ethical considerations enter into every department of ordinary life” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 453). Regarding ethics, Kritsonis maintains, “While it should be very obvious to people that laws are laws and that many people must conform to them for the good of society” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 450). Kritsonis explains, “(m) any people rationalize and excuse to break the ‘little’ laws” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 450). Kritsonis also states, “World-wide people are aware of the need for the most effective possible education system” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. vii).

Kritsonis shares five main areas of moral concern in this realm. These areas are as follows:

1. Human Rights
2. Sex and Family Relations
3. Class, Racial, Religious, and Vocational Groups
4. Economic
5. Political Life

The following are ten recommendations that educational leaders may utilize to improve ethical conduct to enhance the overall effectiveness of the organization.

### **Recommendation 1 – Leadership**

Ethical Conduct is absolutely imperative for leaders. This need is heightened in education, as educators must model appropriate behavior for impressionable students. Ethical conduct can be improved for leaders in education by having educators clearly establish guidelines for ethical conduct.

Central Office Administrators can collectively and collaboratively provide an overview of how district processes should be handled for campus level administrators. During the overview, expectations can be succinctly stated along with possible consequences for not adhering to principles of ethical conduct. Ethical conduct can be improved by having leaders in education clearly communicate expectations for ethical conduct on the campus level for all stakeholders.

Ethical conduct can also be improved by having individuals responsible for leadership roles in education closely monitor the organization to continually strategize and develop ways to improve ethical conduct. This will be possible if administrators are visible and actively engaged in the organization.

Ethical conduct can be improved when leaders model ethical behavior. A common practice in education requires educators to sign an agreement detailing that his or her behavior will meet high moral standards in and out of the school setting. Implementing and consistently applying fair standards that address any infringement regarding this type of employee agreement can improve ethical conduct.

### **Recommendation 2 – Instruction**

Instructional practices can be positively impacted when ethical conduct is improved. When instructors adhere to principles of ethics instructional strategies will be executed appropriately. Ethical conduct in instruction can be improved by having clear standards in place for implementing appropriate and successful research-based instructional strategies. Instructional strategies that truly and accurately target student needs are consistent with ethical decision making. Instructional practices that maximize student achievement incorporate strategies that utilize all of the multiple intelligences while allowing students to ascend the rungs of Bloom's taxonomy. Administrators can assist improving ethical conduct by reviewing lesson plans and visiting classroom to ensure instructional strategies are being utilized that target principles of excellence in education. In the *Moral and Ethical Dimensions of Socioscientific Decision-Making as Integral Components of Scientific Literacy* (2004), Sadler states,

(b) because morality and ethics are natural aspects of the process of negotiating socioscientific issues; they must be included in any educational program aimed at promoting responsible decision-making. (Sadler, 2004, p. 15)

Sadler also shares even through a background in ethics or moral philosophy might be helpful, it is not necessary. Sadler states that what is necessary, “. . . is the creation of classroom environments in which expression of ideas, including those associated with personal value systems is encouraged” (Sadler, 2004, p. 15). Sadler maintains that when teachers establish, “. . . a tolerant community in their classrooms where students are able to voice dissenting opinions and explore their belief systems” (Sadler, 2004, p. 15). Another approach mentioned by Sadler that instructors may utilize is, “. . . to delve further by challenging students to explore responses of various perspectives to . . . ethical quandaries . . .” (Sadler, 2004, p. 17). Sadler concludes, “Rather than overlooking or actively ignoring the ethical implication . . . educators have a responsibility to address them . . . then attention to morality and ethics must be included in the science curricula” (Sadler, 2004, p. 18).

### **Recommendation 3 – Behavior Management Programs**

In *Values Acquisition and Moral Development: An Integration of Freudian, Eriksonian, Kohlbergian and Gilliganian Viewpoints* (2005), Dr. Herman poses the following questions: “Should values be transmitted or developed?” (Herman, 2005, p. 2). Many educators would argue that the answer to the preceding question is “Yes.” Lapsley offers the following viewpoint, “. . . study of moral functioning has been one of the most enduring and central of all of the various research enterprises to be found within the scholarly psychological literature” (Lapsley, 1996, p. xiii). Over seven decades ago, Dewey established, “. . . the teacher is a trainer of mind, a former of character” (Dewey, 1964, p. 197).

Conduct in school can be positively affected when ethical conduct is improved. Ethical conduct can be modeled and explained to students through well-developed, well-researched, effective Character Education Programs for students. “. . . quality character education programs are designed (to) illustrate appropriate behavior as well as demonstrate appropriate responses to situations while simultaneously instilling values” (Cloud & Kritsonis, 2007, p. 7). Cloud and Kritsonis state, “When students conduct themselves with self-discipline, they reap numerous and oftentimes immeasurable benefits. One reward is an enriched and wonderful life” (Cloud & Kritsonis, 2007, p. 7).

An important point to remain cognitive of is that, “. . . we must pay attention to how, when, and why we choose to take a particular approach to promoting distinct values, in addition to values we choose to impart” (Herman, 1997, p.154).

### **Recommendation 4 - Parental Involvement**

Improving ethical conduct can also be improved by involving parents as viable respected stakeholders. Parents can be apprised of the ethical needs for students and partner with educators to instruct students regarding appropriate behavior. Parents can also engage in focus and study groups with campus personnel to collaboratively establish steps to guide students through ethical decision making.

### **Recommendation 5 – Staff Development**

Improving ethical conduct can also be addressed in staff development sessions. Specific ethical needs can be targeted in staff development presentations. Ethics can also be applied to staff development by ensuring that staff development truly targets the needs of staff and faculty.

Carter poses the question regarding training, “Is it possible to train people in ethical conduct?” (Carter, n.d.) The answer to this question is yes. At the outset of Carter’s article, he established that educators must distinguish the difference between the code of ethics and promoting, “. . . adherence to ethical principles” (Carter, n.d.). Carter explains, “For a workplace learning model of teacher professional development to be most effective . . . teachers need access to professional role models and professional climates” (Carter, n.d.). Carter is a proponent of using case studies to provide ethical training for educators. Carter states, “Ethical decision-making can be described as the intersection of three component” (Carter, n.d.).

Carter suggests the following areas to provide ethical training:

- *Justice approaches* focus on how fairly or unfairly actions distribute benefits to members of a group;
- *Rights approaches* to decision-making assume that each person has a fundamental right to be respected and treated as a free and rational person;
- *Virtue approaches* to decision-making focus on characteristics, attitudes and dispositions - integrity, honesty, trustworthiness - that enable people to develop their human potential;
- The *utilitarian approaches* to decision making advanced by philosophers such as Bentham and Mill, regard ethical actions as those producing the greatest difference of benefits over harms;
- *Common good approaches* to decision-making regard ethical behaviour as that which advances the good of the whole community. Individuals or groups are not to be exploited at the expense of others; and

- *Social relativism approaches* to decision-making regard values of different cultures and groups as being grounded in a particular social context or reality. It therefore becomes difficult for a person from one culture of group to pass judgment on the values of another. (Carter, n.d.)

### **Recommendation 6 - Motivational Strategies**

Ethical Improvement can be attained through implementing effective motivational strategies. Leaders in education can also strengthen ethical conduct in the organization by being well qualified, capable and confident. This will help to establish “buy-in” from employees. Individuals in the organization will feel motivated to conduct themselves ethical due to having leaders that honestly and sincerely “lead by example.” When employees observe that their supervisors acting in conjunction with the tenets they promote, they are more inclined to conduct themselves accordingly. When leaders conduct themselves according to the highest standards of ethics regarding finances, procedures and professional relationships in the organization, employees are motivated to demonstrate similar behavior.

### **Recommendation 7 – Establishing Climate**

The climate in the organization is greatly improved when ethical conduct is improved. When ethical conduct is adhered to, stakeholders trust the organizations and have a sense of safety and security when operating within the organization.

### **Recommendation 8 – Establishing Vision/Campus Improvement Plan**

The campus vision is strengthened when ethical decision making processes are implemented. When ethical principles are in place, all stakeholders have a voice and their suggestions and input are solicited and reflected in establishing the vision. Once the vision has been established that all parties believe in, the organization can begin to smoothly move in the same direction.

The vision of the campus typically drives the direction of the development of the Campus Improvement Plan. “The Campus Improvement Plan will emphasize the benefits society . . . when its citizens conduct themselves with regard to the rights and needs of other(s)” (Cloud and Kritsonis, 2007, p. 7).

### **Recommendation 9 - Extra-Curricular Activities/Fine Arts Program**

Extra-curricular activities are positively affected when ethical principles are in place. Ethical conduct in extra-curricular activities and the fine arts program are above contempt when students adhere to residency standards, grading guidelines and physical guidelines.

### **Recommendation 10 - Personnel Selection**

Hiring practices are greatly improved when ethical conduct standards are in place. Ethical conduct calls for hiring practices to put individuals in place that are best qualified for positions.

Ultimately, when the principles of ethical conduct are adhered to then individuals can experience the “good life” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 442). Kritsonis defines the “good life” as:

The good life consists in the realization of meanings, in all of the realms; in the ability to communicate intelligibly and forcefully, to organize the experience of sense into significant generalizations and theories with predictive power, to express the inner life in moving esthetic constructions, to relate with others and with oneself in acceptance and love, to act with deliberate responsibility, and to coordinate these meaning into an integrated vision and commitment. (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 442)

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, in the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* by Dr. William Allan Kritsonis (2007), tenets are explored that improve ethical conduct. Ten recommendations to implement the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007) for the improvement of ethical conduct are provided. The six fundamental patterns of the realms of meaning outlined by Kritsonis: symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics and synoptics offer succinct guidelines regarding improving ethical conduct.

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