Teaching the Realms of Knowing: Framing Thinking in the Classroom

Deborah L. Pierce

“No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.” – Albert Einstein

Further Divisions of Each Realm

Each realm can be further divided depending upon the lesson or the use of the model. One can also focus on the various intersections between the realms.

Examples:

- **Personal Realm:** (Note: As a pedagogical tool, this realm provides one way to structure personal relevance into learning. What is your personal experience with this exercise/reading/topic, etc.? What are the questions which are arising for you? How can you bring your personal experience into the conversation regarding this topic? How does this apply to you personally?)

- **Collective Realm:** How is this topic viewed by various groups, e.g., social, political, religious, ethnic, cultural? Has it changed over time, i.e., during different historic periods? Do we see similarities or patterns of collective understanding?

- **Scientific/Academic Realm:** Is this topic viewed differently between disciplines or by type of research/researchers, e.g., quantitative vs qualitative exploration. Are there similarities in research in different disciplines or are there interdisciplinary elements being utilized? Would collaboration between disciplines make this stronger?

Intersections Between Realms: Where does the experience of researchers, humans in general, and your own understanding overlap? Where does it differ?

Three Realms of Knowing

- **Humankind’s Collective Experience**
- **Scientific/Academic Research**
- **An Individual’s Personal Experience**

Example Applications

Supporting Critical, Creative, and Global Thinking as well as Encouraging Interdisciplinarity: This is the basis for many of the applications below. Note that the information and perspectives of these realms can change over time, for example, an individual has the opportunity to continually add to their own personal knowing as well as understanding more about other realms. In turn, the viewpoints from other realms can also change due to new discoveries, understandings, and cross pollination.

Understanding the “Other”: Whose voice am I hearing? Within and between each realm there are similarities and differences. How do these relate? How do they influence my thinking or the ideas and thinking of a specific group or realm? How do they influence those outside the realm or group?

Discussions: Whose voice am I hearing? Is this only my opinion or is my viewpoint based upon or related to other realms of knowing? Do I have sufficient perspective to argue a point or do I need to inquire into other realms of knowing before I can firmly understand the topic? What perspective is missing? From which realm are others speaking?

Research: Whose voice am I hearing? What realm is represented in the article, book, presentation, web blog, etc. I am reading/watching, etc.? What realm am I attempting to study? How do the different realms relate? How do they differ? How are they similar?

Experiences of Instructors Using the Model

The model has been used successfully from K-12 classrooms through graduate seminars. It has been used as a framework for research projects, discussions, and individual assignments as well as being used as a philosophical approach to looking at all materials in a specific course.

All of the instructors who have tried the model have come away excited about the possibilities of its use in the classroom.

A colleague who used the model in a graduate level education course found it led to richer and deeper discussions.

I have found the model really helpful during discussions that have focused too heavily on personal opinion. It’s a great way to frame questions around what is happening in the classroom at the moment and also helps students with metacognition. Example questions: How do we know this? From what realm are you speaking? What would someone from “X” realm potentially have to contribute? What are the elements from the various realms that assist us in understanding human thinking on this topic?

When I have used the model to frame entire courses, the level of global thinking and understanding outside of a single realm raises significantly in most students.

Student Feedback

- “This class stretched my thinking quite a bit... In many cases the way that I look at both my life and the world was significantly altered.”
- “This [course] got me asking questions, which is hard to do.”
- “[The class] made me look deeper into my own interests as well as see the value of others ideas.”
- “Most of the learning that I will take away from this experience comes from those beautiful moments when I realized, ‘wow, I have never thought about it that way before.’ I experienced this numerous times...”
- The most useful part of this class was: “Learning about different perspectives or general ways of thinking.”