

Appendix F: Examining the Use of the Term the “Real World of School”

We often hear teachers use the phrase the “real world,” as in: “That idea sounds nice, but it would fail in the real world.” On first listening, it sounds like the voice of experience. These teachers have been around the proverbial “block” of classroom life and can attest to how the “real world” operates. The phrase “the real world” and its relation, “it works” (Chapter 3), are signals to listen carefully to the messages beneath the words. In essence the speakers are instructing us to adopt their world-view. It is certainly a convincing rhetorical device. If someone states, “Boy, my students have a hard time being honest in class,” we might think, “Gosh, that teacher is struggling with that issue in their class. Good luck to them.” However, if someone declares, “In the real world people lie anytime they get the chance,” this sounds like a fact with global import. If not guarded against, we could feel that we should stop trusting our current students and any we teach in the future. The truth is: a) the real world is rarely defined by adages that include the phrase “the real world; b) the use of the term “the real world” usually indicates a worldview that is jaded and fundamentally dysfunctional; and c) students are likely paying the price for this.

Figure F.1 represents a side-by-side comparison. The left column characterizes the use of the term “the real world,” implied as representing a reality. The right column represents an effort to honestly characterize the nature of reality.

Figure F.1 Comparison of the term “the real world” to more accurate counter evidence.

The “Real World”	The Real World
<p>A biased perception of what is achievable, given beliefs, experiences, fears, and biases.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “The way things are” is fixed. ▪ Students bring problems and deficiencies to the class that make certain teacher responses and behaviors inevitable. ▪ Some students are not capable of learning. Therefore having positive expectations for them is futile. ▪ “That practice will not work here. I tried it and it did not work with my students.” Or “The only thing that works with these students is. . .” (Chapter 3) 	<p>What is possible given the laws of nature and human behavior.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “The way things are” is socially constructed over time and can change as a result of the collective and individual choices and actions of the members of the group. ▪ While student can certainly bring certain energies and conditioned behavior into a class, in the end the teacher “makes the weather” in the classroom. Just about anything is possible with enough time, desire and skills. ▪ All students can learn given the right conditions. Moreover, the level of expectations the teacher has will affect the relative success of every student (see “Pygmalion in the Classroom” below). ▪ A sound practice will work anywhere. For every teacher who claims that it did not work there is another who found great success with a similar population of students, oftentimes in the same district.

- “These students only respond to external reinforcement and punishment, so I have no choice but to continue to use that.”

Usually a mental construction that one forms to escape feelings of guilt and inadequacy

- Students do get used to certain kinds of treatment and adult interactions, but they will respond to: 1) what feels right and 2) what the situation calls for.

Inherently empirical. The more perceptive and aware we become the more we can see the real world clearly.

As you examine each perspective, consider why so many teachers espouse the “real world” view characterized by the column on the left. These vocalizations are examples of what is referred to in cognitive behavioral psychology as a “reaction formation”. A reaction formation is a basic human defense mechanism in which the unconscious mind, confronted with an unpleasant feelings (in this case guilt, inadequacy, helplessness, hopelessness, anger at parents, anger at one’s own limitations, shame, etc.), seeks relief through the creation of a reactive belief in an effort to compensate for that feeling. In other words, we create a belief structure that says, “My worldview is right (or at least makes me feel better), even if it is not supported by empirical evidence or reality.”

The “real world” view will inherently correspond to a shift to an *external locus of control (LOC)*. As you listen to the plea of the teacher defending this perspective, listen to the tendency to externalize causality. The opposite of this view is characterized by *an internal locus of control*. In an internal LOC the teacher feels an inherent responsibility for the outcomes that occur in his/her class. These distinctions are contrasted as the 1-style (facilitator), 2-style (conductor) teachers using internal LOC, and the 3-style (enabler) and 4-style (dominator) teachers using external LOC.

It is not difficult to see why the challenging task of teaching and exposure to other externalizing individuals can lead a teacher to externalize his/her view for the “way things are.” In the short-term there may be a sense of relief, but it does have a cost. In the long-term, it breeds misery and ineffectiveness. Teachers who cultivate an attitude of internal LOC will be happier at their jobs and more effective with students.