

**National Agenda: A Holistic Approach for the
Development of a Campus Improvement Plan using
Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning as the
Framework**

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to examine *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007) by Dr. William Allan Kritsonis as a framework that transformational educational leaders can use to guide members of the Site Based Decision Making Team through development of the Campus Improvement Plan. The Campus Improvement Plan serves as a blueprint for holistically addressing the needs of the campus as it strives to bring its vision to fruition. The six fundamental patterns of the meaning outlined in the book: symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics and synoptics offer succinct guidelines to ensure that all aspects of the Campus Improvement Plan are addressed appropriately and implemented effectively.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to outline how progressive educational leaders may utilize the text, *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* by Dr. William Allan Kritsonis (2007), to serve as an outline to guide members of the Site Based Decision Making Team through development of a Campus Improvement Plan. The Campus Improvement Plan is a crucial document that serves as a blueprint for holistically addressing the needs of the campus as it strives to bring its vision to fruition. Symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics and synoptics, the six fundamental patterns of the meaning outlined in the book offer succinct guidelines to ensure that all aspects of the Campus Improvement Plan are addressed appropriately and implemented effectively and successfully.

Significance of the Campus Improvement Plan

What is a Campus Improvement Plan (C.I.P.)? The Campus Improvement Plan is one of the most significant and powerful documents on a campus. The Campus Improvement Plan drives the direction of every program in the educational setting as stakeholders seek to fulfill the mission of the campus. Fulfillment of the mission of the campus results in the realization of the vision for all stakeholders (parent, faculty and staff members, student, community members and business members.) The Campus Improvement Plan also establishes the expectations and goals for every stakeholder of the building.

Kritsonis asserts: “World-wide, people are aware of the need for the most effective possible education system . . . “(Kritsonis, 2007, p. vii). Educational leaders on a world-wide scale are continually seeking the most progressive and innovative instructional and motivational strategies available to reach students. Kritsonis goes on to establish

. . . if we are to meet the challenges and demands of life in a highly precarious and rapidly changing world . . . Today there is a far more fundamental justification for basing the curriculum upon the best available results of critical scholarship than in the past. (Kritsonis, 2007, p. vii)

One cannot ignore that in today’s technological world, students have a heightened need to be equipped with even more advanced skills to thrive holistically as individuals.

This assertion demonstrates that when developing instructional plans, it is imperative for educators to seek out the best and most accurate researched information. Present society calls for a post-modernistic approach to developing educational programs. Hence, *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* by Dr. William Allan

Kritsonis (2007) encourages developing instructional programs that target the needs of all stakeholders at a campus holistically. For instance: “If 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, 2007, p. 15).

Throughout the text, *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*, Dr. Kritsonis (2007) develops criteria for addressing the needs to develop individuals that are whole or complete.

A “complete person” should be skilled in the use speech, symbol, and gesture (symbolics), factually well informed (empirics), capable of creating and appreciating objects of esthetic significance (esthetics), 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) . . . (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 15)

In the Campus Improvement Plan, steps to integrate the curriculum to target every realm with further impact the development of students as individuals that are complete and not lacking in any aspect. The six realms of meaning address such a range that when each aspect is targeted the outcome is the “development of whole persons” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 15)

Kritsonis especially targets curriculum development and states, “Curriculum must be selected that makes sense and has meaning for the student” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. x). Kritsonis also suggests, “(a) curriculum developing the above basic competencies is designed to satisfy the essential human need for meaning” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 15).

Ensuring fulfillment of the mission statement and fruition of the campus vision by developing a comprehensive Campus Improvement Plan can be accomplished by adhering to and addressing symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics and synoptics as developed in *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*. In order to address the holistic needs of students, all realms of meaning must function as tenets.

Symbolics

“The first realm, symbolics, comprises ordinary, mathematics, and various types of nondiscursive symbolic forms, such as gestures, rituals, rhythmic patterns, and the like” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.11). Addressing symbolics will target ordinary language, mathematics, and nondiscursive symbolic forms. The realm of symbolics explains and highlights effective communication strategies. This encompasses instructional sessions with the teacher and student, peer mediation sessions, school assemblies, conferences with parents and teachers, and collaborative team meetings. When the school culture is firmly established, the school leader must methodically and strategically implement changes through development of the Campus Improvement Plan. The principal understands when developing the C.I.P. that she must be the person for promoting the implementation of the research based best educational practices.

While guiding the process for developing the Campus Improvement Plan, this realm allows the administrator to be open to suggestions and not inhibit productive communication. The communication from the instructional leader conveys that all stakeholders are respected and valued as an integral component of the organization. When meeting with the Site-Based Decision Making Team, the administrator demonstrates absolute expertise and finesse in enlisting feedback from all stakeholders and implement avenues to ensure positive dialogue is occurring.

Change develops through shared decision making and collaboration. Self-efficacy is an essential component to employees having a sense of worth in an environment and each individual's perspective should be valued. Effective communication is an essential component for the educational leader to successfully utilize Theory Y management strategies to foster effective collaboration when establishing a shared vision that is stated in the Campus Improvement Plan.

Symbolics also address communication instruments in the building such as technological media and visual aids that may be used for instruction throughout the building. Strategies for building communication efforts with business partners and community members are also addressed in this realm.

Symbolics is comprised of mathematics as well. Symbols and visual aids are paramount forms of expression in mathematics. With regard to mathematics, the Campus Improvement Plan will reflect the use of symbols and visual aids as tools that are imperative to assist students in grasping conceptual mathematic skills.

Behavior expectations are addressed in the realm of symbolics. Symbolics provides avenues for educators to communicate expectations for students regarding all facets of school. Procedures for daily operations will also be established in this realm for all stakeholders. Gestures will also be addressed in this area.

Empirics

The second realm empirics, includes the sciences of the world, of living things, and of man” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.12). In this realm, instructional strategies target physical science, biology, psychology and social science. By targeting this realm, educators work to make sure that all data provided to students is current and factual. All of the necessary tools, equipment, technology and resources available to assist students in accessing current data are made available and factually stated in this realm. Guidelines for supporting teachers in staying abreast of the most current research based information are made readily available in this realm.

The emphasis on physical science in this realm seeks toward “. . . discovery and formulation of general patterns among quantities derived from the process of physical measurement” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.178). In the aspect of physical science, “(a) great amount . . . is based on measurement. Precise calculation depends on precise data collection” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 188). “Much of physical science deals with how thing work and why they work that way” (Kritsonis 2007, p. 194) To target this realm, the

Campus Improvement Plan would reflect thinking skills that target inquiry-based instruction that allows the instructor to serve as the facilitator while students test their hypotheses. “Meanings in biology, as in all other sciences, are empirical, factual, descriptive, and ultimately general and theoretical in orientation” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 202).

The Campus Improvement Plan address Psychology with knowledgeable experts that are equipped to address the psychological needs of students. The social sciences address sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science. (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 245).

Esthetics

“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 section, the Campus Improvement Plan targets the need for students to develop an appreciation for beauty exemplified in the arts. Kritsonis mentions, “Humans teach their children the arts to help them achieve what we consider a well-rounded education” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 284). He explains “. . . exposing them to new and interesting forms of sensory satisfaction” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 284). This is an integral aspect of esthetics.

To target this realm, the Campus Improvement Plan must make provisions for students “. . . to spend large amounts of time developing their talents. Teachers encourage student’s expressiveness in order that they may gain confidence and appreciation” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 290).

Another dimension of esthetics is the art of movement. The human body functions as an instrument in the arts of movement. (Kritsonis, 2007). Components of the Campus Improvement in this regard will reflect the following when addressing the arts of movement. “The goal of such education is personal wholeness or organic well-being of the mind and body, which is the essence of health” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 334). Kritsonis explains the scope and span of this dimension as follows: “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 and in the life of society” (Kritsonis, 2007, p 334).

Provisions for students to identify beauty are also apparent in literature. “Literature is the art in which language is the medium of esthetic expression” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 362). In this realm the Campus Improvement Plan will have measures in place that signify that “. . . a student must see beyond editing and factual representation” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 374).

Ultimately, the esthetic realm seeks to find the beauty in aspect of humanity and nature and reveal that to students. The Campus Improvement Plan must reflect a curriculum, instructional strategies, character education program and safety plan that seek to help students discover the beauty of every aspect of existence. This also signifies the beauty in each individual student. Every student responds differently to sensory stimuli.

Teachers must be knowledgeable and intuitive to highlight the beautiful and esthetically pleasing aspect of every instructional interaction.

Synnoetics

“The fourth realm, synnoetics, embraces . . . ‘personal knowledge’ and the ‘I-Thou’ relation” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.12). Given the enhanced accountability standards, all stakeholders in educations must embrace innovative interpersonal techniques and intuitive skills to target the individual needs that exist in a campus. The Campus Improvement Plan must reflect practices that will prove successful with the new incoming generation of students. Presently, children are inundated with information and external factors that greatly detract from many educational constructs. Educators must be proactive and strive to be “ahead of the curve” in discovering strategies to personally engage students in individualized meaningful learning activities.

Respect for the teacher’s autonomy is cared for in the Campus Improvement Plan. The Campus Improvement Plan reflects respect for educators and their philosophies. When educators are an integral part of campus goal setting it demonstrates that teacher efficacy is paramount. “Selective abandonment” occurs with dignity and respect.

Principals focusing on synnoetics in their Campus Improvement Plan have strategies that are post-modernistic or “out of the box.” When principals refrain from adhering to strictly defined roles regarding stakeholders, campus leaders are able to fully utilize the gifts and talents of every stakeholder in the organization. Consequently, members of the organization demonstrate flexibility and accept changes when needed.

With regard to the realm of synnoetics, the campus leaders will provide for strategies that evoke inspiration for students, teachers and all stakeholders by allowing venues to help them make meaningful personal connections that not only meet their cultural, economical and emotional needs, but also appropriately respond to their need for personal knowledge, meditative thought, cognition and relational insight (Kritsonis, 2007).

Ethics

“The fifth realm, ethics, includes moral meanings that express obligation rather than fact, perceptual form, or awareness of relation” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.13). Concepts targeted in the character education component of the Campus Improvement Plan target morality. The character education section will outline a plan that emphasizes personal conduct that is free. Kritsonis (2007, p. 450) states, “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, many people rationalize and excuse to break the ‘little’ laws.”

To target this tendency, the Campus Improvement Plan addresses the need for all citizens to act as upright citizens at all times. The Campus Improvement Plan will emphasize the benefits society as whole experiences when its citizens conduct themselves with regard to the rights and needs of other.

In this realm, effective quality character education programs are designed that illustrate appropriate behavior as well as demonstrate appropriate responses to situations while simultaneously instilling values. When students conduct themselves with self-discipline, they reap numerous and oftentimes immeasurable benefits. One reward is an enriched and wonderful life.

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 meanings into an integrated vision and commitment. (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 442)

Synoptics

“The sixth realm, synoptics, refers to meanings that are comprehensively integrative” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 13). At the outset of the Site Based Decision-Making Team Meeting to develop the Campus Improvement Plan, the administrator facilitating the meeting presents current research and trends regarding techniques for assisting students in ascending the levels of Bloom’s taxonomy, utilizing all of the multiple intelligences and technological advances in education to ensure every student’s success. The administrator provides an overview of professional development sessions that will assist educators with strategies to engage all students in learning and utilizing effective classroom management procedures.

The educational leaders can work to a largely influence synoptics while developing the Campus Improvement Plan and heavily define the school’s culture. When implemented in the Campus Improvement Plan, the preferred educational philosophies upheld in the educational setting will greatly impact and affect the school culture. For instance, if the principal in the educational structure strongly believes in the educational philosophy of addressing the multiple intelligences, students will most likely receive an education that strategically targets their individual talents.

The school culture is multi-layered and has numerous historical implications. The school culture develops over time and forms a basis for the traditions practiced in the organization. Focusing on synoptics in the Campus Improvement Plan helps educational leaders to establish and/or foster a campus culture that reflects and addresses the needs of all stakeholders.

School culture is an extremely important component to the overall effectiveness of an educational institution. The educational values of a campus are evidenced through the school culture. The school culture greatly impacts all stakeholders at a campus because the culture determines the climate. The school culture encompasses such facets, as the vision, mission, goals, history, spirituality and philosophy that are in place at a campus (Kritsonis, 2007). Synoptics can be succinctly described in the Campus Improvement Plan.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* by Dr. William Allan Kritsonis (2007) offers a guidebook that transformational educational leaders can use to guide members of the Site Based Decision Making Team through development of the Campus Improvement Plan. The Campus Improvement Plan serves as a blueprint for holistically addressing the needs of the campus as it strives to bring its vision to fruition. The six fundamental patterns of the meaning outlined in the book: symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics and synoptics offer succinct guidelines to ensure that all aspects of the Campus Improvement Plan are addressed appropriately and implemented effectively, succinctly and successfully.

References

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