

**MAKING NATIONAL, STATE, DISTRICT, AND LOCAL PLANS
WORK USING THE SIX REALMS OF MEANING AS IT
RELATES TO STRATEGIC PLANNING IN EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP**

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ABSTRACT

The curriculum for general education based on the idea of the realms of meaning or logical patterns bring a variety of structures in knowledge and disciplined understanding. Curriculums adjusted for differences in culture, situations, learning levels, aptitudes, and the amount of enthusiasm brings consistency and unity in the learning experience (Kritsonis, 2007). No one plan is best for every teacher and for all students in all situations. Good teaching lies in guided discipline.

Introduction

The role of the school administrative team is most often associated with educational leadership. Leadership roles can be enacted by all stakeholders within the school community, including the student population (Levin, 1998; Wallin, 2003). The six realms of meaning (Kritsonis, 2007) cover the range of possible meanings and comprise the basic competencies that general education should develop in every person. A philosophical theory of the curriculum for general education based on the idea of logical patterns in disciplined understanding is presented in *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007). There are patterns or structures in knowledge and an understanding of these typical forms is essential for the guidance of teaching, learning, and constructing the curriculum. The various patterns of knowledge are varieties of meaning, and the learning of these patterns is the clue to the effective realization of essential humanness through the curriculum of general education (Kritsonis, 2007).

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to discuss significant aspects of the six realms of meaning as it relates to strategic planning in educational leadership.

Planning Initiatives

The six realms of meaning are viewed as six fundamental patterns of meaning (Kritsonis, 2007). These patterns are sequential and provide the foundation for all meanings that enter the human experience and emerge from an analysis of possible distinctive modes of human understanding. The patterns are symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics, and synoptics (Kritsonis, 2007).

The entire school or organization's future is at stake in strategic planning (Center for Organizational Development and Leadership, 2007). Strategic planning in educational leadership determines where a school is going over the next year or more and how it's going to get there (McNamara, 2008). A postmodern approach for academic and administrative departments would be to implement plans and strategies that are narrowly focused and vital to their future. A plan too broad would allow for planning initiatives to go amiss from the correct course of focus or persons could get stuck and not be able to move forward (Center for School or Organizational Development and Leadership, 2007). A framework for strategic planning of higher education centered on leadership, communication, and assessment is predictive of making national, state, district and local plans work (Center for School or Organizational Development and Leadership, 2007). Steps in the framework according to McNamara (2008) would include the following:

1. mission, vision and value statements,
2. collaborators and beneficiaries,
3. environmental review,

4. goals,
5. strategies and action plans,
6. plan creation, and
7. outcomes and achievements.

If a person is to achieve the highest excellence in anything at all, the basic realms are required. The six realms bring meaning in knowledge and disciplined understanding to the development of the complete person. The controlling idea of general education for the development of complete persons emerges from a philosophy of man and his ways of knowing. In the first realm of symbolics, a complete person should be skilled in everyday language with the use of speech, symbol, and gesture, able to study math and learn one to two foreign languages. The second realm of empirics would allow the student to study several of the social sciences such as Physical Science, Biology, Psychology, and Social Science (Kritsonis, 2007). Among the four disciplines in the third realm of esthetics, music, art, literature and the arts of movement in physical education could be studied. "Literature is one of the best sources of insight into personality and culture" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 366). The student would be factually well informed, capable of creating and appreciating objects of esthetic significance. The first three realms require detachment as the knower (Kritsonis, 2007). The knower stands apart from what he knows. This view is held by the modernist. The modernist divorces the knower (English, 2003).

In the fourth realm of synnoetics, the student could gain personal insight through working with skilled guidance counselors or thorough a social activity. The student is endowed with a rich and disciplined life in relation to self and others. Synnoetics requires active participation and engagement. To know and to be are one and the same in personal existence. Ethics or moral knowledge is the fifth realm where a student is able to make wise decisions and to judge between right and wrong. His moral conduct is a universal responsibility. It is what ought to be done and it is right action. In the sixth realm of synoptics, the student would possess an integral outlook of which epistemology - the theory of knowledge, and metaphysics - what is real, are the primary basis for its function (Kritsonis, 2007).

The First Realm: Symbolics

The six realms follow in sequential order. The first realm is symbolics. Ordinary language, mathematics, and various types of nondiscursive symbolic forms are in the first realm. Ordinary language means the forms of discourse employed in everyday speech and writing. One uses language to communicate. A person can be defined by his understanding of language and how well he communicates it. Kritsonis (2007) stated that the chief method of acquiring knowledge of a language is to observe its use in daily life. Nondiscursive symbolic forms are gestures, rituals, expression of feelings, facial expressions, signals, values, insights into the domains of personal knowledge, manners and customs, dreams, myths, and rhythmic patterns. A complete person expresses and communicates using his or her skills in speech, symbols, and bodily gestures. Speech is defined as an intellectual activity. Symbols in relation to the meanings being expressed, constitutes its vocabulary. In order for an

individual to understand math, the symbols and functions must be understood. Systems of mathematics are designed to achieve complete precision in meaning and rigor in reasoning (Kritsonis, 2007). Discursive language refers to language used in customary speech for communicating ideas.

The scope of curriculum in general education allows each person's participation in the meaning of the social whole of the educational community (Kritsonis, 2007). Integrity and the need to be learned in certain essentials would allow for leadership that defines roles and responsibilities essential to the effectiveness of the strategic plan. Board members, community leaders, teachers, parents and students actively participate in creating and organizing guiding principles for continuous effective leadership, communication, and assessment.

Students will interact with college instructors, peers, cooperating teachers, and schools. Any deficiencies would be attributed to the planning process and not to the plan itself (Center for School or Organizational Development and Leadership, 2007). Shortcomings in leadership, communication, or assessment can often be attributed to breakdowns in the process whether it is communication, understanding of language (a bilingual individual would be a valuable interpreter), or personal knowledge. Communication skills will be displayed through speaking, writing, and class experience.

Successful communication requires attention to each group that is likely to be affected by the planning process and the plan's goals (Center for School or Organizational Development and Leadership, 2007). This would allow for easier adaptation and commitment to change by all persons because all the participants are deeply involved in the developmental process. This broader-based ownership in which participants feel valued and involved makes it easier to commit to change (Lindsey, Robins and Terrell, 2003).

Lindsey, Robins and Terrell stated in their book, *Cultural Proficiency, A Handbook for School Professionals*, that what is required in a strategic plan is informed and dedicated staff that are committed and involved in leadership. They take time to think, reflect, assess, decide, and change, and actively participate in work sessions where the educational community is contributing distinctive ideas, beliefs, feelings, and perceptions (2003). To monitor a plan's progress and assess its outcomes, ongoing attention to assessment is necessary. These appraisals for assessment provide guidance for developing pre-planning strategies. They allow for monitoring the planning process and judging whether a plan's activities and strategies are successful in fulfilling the school or organization's goals. Strategic planning, according to Center for School or Organizational Development and Leadership (2007), can include conducting a review of the school or organization's political, social, economic and technical environment. In an initial review, an analysis of the school or organization can be completed. The planning phase can look at factors that are driving forces in the environment, strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats regarding the school or organization. The mission, vision and value statements are updated as needed. The Center for School or Organizational Development and Leadership (2007) suggests that an environment that has a diverse leadership team fostering readiness and receptivity and has an understanding of decision making processes and boundaries would aid creating successful plans for

schools and organizations. Sizing up previous plan's successes on current efforts helps to keep a historical perspective on efforts of change.

Mission statements are brief written descriptions of the purpose of the school (McNamara, 2008). The mission statement is a specific purpose statement that is part of the overall mission statement. The value and vision statements are part of the mission statement. Vision statements are usually a compelling description of how the school or organization will or should operate at some point in the future and of how

customers or clients are benefiting from the school or organization's products and services. Value statements suggest how people ought to act in the world with integrity, honesty, and respect as well as list the overall priorities in how the school will operate. For example, an overview of a sample basic strategic planning model (McNamara, 2006) can be described as a basic model that would be used by schools or organizations that are very small, busy and inexperienced in strategic planning. The planning would be carried out by top level administrators and executives.

The basic strategic planning process according to McNamara (2006) would include the following steps: (1) Identify the purpose of the school or organization, which is also called the mission statement. The statement should describe what student or employee needs are intended to be met and with what services. The mission statement can change through the years as the school or organization changes to society's needs. (2) Select goals that must be reached in order to accomplish the mission. These goals would address major issues facing the school or organization. (3) Identify the specific approaches or strategies to implement to reach the goals. In this step, the external and internal environments of the school or organization are examined closely. Steps to strengthen financial management can also be addressed. (4) Identify specific action plans or functions of each department to on how each strategy would be implemented. At this stage committees can be organized to monitor if objectives are met. (5) Monitoring and updating the plan is the final step in this plan. Reflection by planners is conducted to see to what extent the goals and objectives are being met and if the action plans are being implemented. At this stage feedback is important. A school or organization may generate a survey addressing school or organization satisfaction (McNamara, 2006).

The Second Realm: Empirics

The second realm of empirics would allow the student to study several of the social sciences such as Physical Science, Biology, Psychology, and Social Science (Kritsonis, 2007). These sciences provide factual descriptions, generalizations, and theoretical formulations and explanations as it relates to the physical world, of living things, and of man. It requires ordinary language and mathematics for their expression. These sciences are based upon observation and experimentation in the world as it pertains to matter, life, mind and society. This realm includes abstract cognition. The postmodern approach believes that science is one way to go about seeking truths (English, 2003). This belief is not always superior to other forms of knowing. Truths are constructed and tested in many ways including logic and intuition. These truths are anything but very temporary

understandings that can be modified over and over again (Kritsonis, 2007). In a strategic plan for educational leadership, field experiences include observation in public schools. Meta cognition skills require that students will review, analyze research, and summarize the thoughts of other researchers as well as scrutinize their own research findings.

The Third Realm: Esthetics

Among the four disciplines in the third realm of esthetics to be studied by the student are music, art, literature and the arts of movement in physical education.

Kritsonis (2007) stated one of the best sources of insight in personality and culture is literature. The student would be factually well informed, capable of creating and appreciating objects of esthetic significance. The esthetic realm causes delight in the observer. It deals with the contemplative perceptions of particular significant things such as forms of modern art, forms of movement (ballet, modern dance) and other possibilities of esthetics forms provided by new artistic forms (rap music) and freedom of expression. These things are unique objectifications of ideated subjectivities (Kritsonis, 2007). School beautification projects, school uniforms, enrichment programs and vision and mission statements strategically posted around school help to beautify school sites and ultimately enhance the learning environment. The beautification process can be applied to organizations as well.

The Fourth Realm: Synnoetics

In the fourth realm of synnoetics, the student could gain personal insight through working with skilled guidance counselors or thorough a social activity (Kritsonis, 2007). The student is endowed with a rich and disciplined life in relation to self and others. Synnoetics requires active participation and engagement. To know and to be are one and the same in personal existence. Kritsonis (2007) stated that synnoetics signifies direct awareness or relational insight. This fourth realm encompasses our relationships with other people, what one knows and how to reply to it. It embraces personal knowledge (Michael Polany) and the I-Thou (Martin Buber) relationship. In meaningful relations, knowledge objective world is intimately bound to the eyes of the beholder, his politics, culture, language and conceptual affective awareness state, i.e. consciousness. The knower and the known are inseparable (English, 2003).

Team building, decision making, goal setting, conflict resolution and diversity awareness reveal relationships to other people and should be addressed in a strategic plan. Identifying critical stakeholders, skill of members, pros and cons of making a choice and having a process to deal with different opinions are key skill sets. Clarifying issues, seeing the other person's perspective, identifying common ground, identifying what can be changed and what cannot be changed are essential in plan creating and school or organization. Highly controlled social mechanisms give way to threatening intimate personal relations and being true to self. A growing need and emphasis is needed on the personal dimensions of understanding.

The Fifth Realm: Ethics

Ethics or moral knowledge is the fifth realm where a student is able to make wise decisions and to judge between right and wrong. His moral conduct is a universal responsibility (Kritsonis, 2007). His decisions are based on what ought to be done and it is right action. "With enlarged powers and wider possibilities of choice, the importance of moral concern increases" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 649). Ethics includes moral knowledge and moral meanings and expresses an awareness of relation, perceptual form and obligation rather than fact. Morality deals with personal conduct based on free, responsible, deliberate decision. The postmodern approach preserves one's ability to exercise choice over one's personhood, outlook on life, sexual orientation, continued existence, thought processes and basic integrity as a unique human being. Empirical knowledge is needed to understand that factual knowledge is an important resource in the improvement of understanding in personal relations and morals. This knowledge is necessary in making wise decisions. These decisions are based on consideration of alternatives and the prediction of consequences. "Moral decision presupposes a free and integral self-in-relation, and becoming a person depends upon making moral choices" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 592).

The Sixth Realm: Synoptics

The sixth realm of synoptics is where the student would possess an integral outlook of which epistemology - the theory of knowledge, and metaphysics - what is real, are the primary basis for its function. Meanings in the sixth realms are comprehensively integrative and include history, religion, and philosophy. Empirical truths, esthetic (beauty), and synnoetic (personal knowledge) meanings are coherent wholes in this realm. Man is revealed by the choices he has made in the context of his given circumstance. The postmodern approach considers that human diversity and difference are beneficial to the pursuit of modern truths and are a threat to governance, authority or rule. Any threat to diversity would be to veer toward antidemocratic persuasion. Feyerabend (1999) and his view on epistemological anarchism believed that there was no view too absurd or immoral that he refused to consider or act on and no method was indispensable. As people are faced with change, the requirement for the perspectives of history, a larger vision of faith, and the critical comprehension afforded by philosophical reflection are needed more than ever (Kritsonis, 2007).

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, there are patterns or structures in knowledge and an understanding of these typical forms is essential for the guidance of teaching, learning, and constructing the curriculum. The purpose of this article is to discuss significant aspects of the six realms of meaning as it relates to strategic planning in educational leadership. According to Kritsonis, the six realms of meaning are viewed as six fundamental patterns of meaning. These patterns are sequential and provide the

foundation for all meanings that enter the human experience and emerge from an analysis of possible distinctive modes of human understanding. The patterns are symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics, and synoptics. The various patterns of knowledge are varieties of meaning, and the learning of these patterns is the clue to the effective realization of essential humanness through the curriculum of general education of the complete person (2007).

The entire school or organization's future is at stake in strategic planning (Center for Organizational Development and Leadership, 2007). A postmodern approach for academic and administrative departments would be to implement plans and strategies that are narrowly focused and vital to their future. Strategic planning in educational leadership determines where a school is going over the next year or more and how it's going to get there (McNamara, 2008). A plan too broad would allow for planning initiatives to go amiss from the correct course of focus or persons could get stuck and not be able to move forward Development and Leadership, 2007).

Logically, unless project leaders are successful in creating a commitment to the initiative, a plan that's impressive on paper may fail to achieve its goals (Center for School or Organizational Development and Leadership, 2007). Without careful communication, planning, school or organizational change is likely to meet with resistance by colleagues. The epistemological concern of fostering a culture of continuous assessment is imperative in fulfilling goals in educational leadership. Success in solving the problems of life (Kritsonis, 2007) is best achieved by those whose imaginations are kindled. Kritsonis said,

A human being is in essence a creature who creates, discovers, enjoys, perceives, and acts on meaning. These meanings are of six general kinds: symbolic, empirical, esthetic, synnoetic, ethical, and synoptic. The educator can seize the opportunity to battle such areas as fragmentation, surfeit, and transience of knowledge, by showing what kinds of knowledge are required for full understanding and how the essential elements may be distinguished from the unessential ones in the selection of instruction materials. (2007, p.74)

The six realms of meaning as it relates to strategic planning in educational leadership are indicative of making national, state, district and local plans work for the success of all students to achieve goals in scholarly disciplines.

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