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**National Recommendations: Strategies for  
Implementing the *Ways of Knowing Through  
the Realms of Meaning* for the Development of  
Professional Personnel**

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**ABSTRACT**

School leaders have the all important task of being the gatekeepers of the educational process: harnessing the development of its most important resource—the people working in schools. Training professional personnel in education is a vital function of the human resource management function. It is the task of the school leader to cultivate staff that is well- trained and ready to work within an era of high- stakes testing. As a result, ten recommendations on developing professional personnel are made based upon the text *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007) by Dr. William Kritsonis to improve the quality of the training that school leaders provide to staff across America.

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## Introduction

School leaders have the all important task of being the gatekeepers of the educational process: harnessing the development of its most important resource- the people working in schools (personnel). The goal of developing quality training for school staff must encompass what Dessler (2003) believes as the “principles of learning that are useful for training include: Make the material meaningful, make provisions for the transfer of training, and try to motivate trainees” (p. 212). Since most of the school’s employees’ time is spent at work, the school leader is responsible for developing and nurturing their skills and talents at the workplace. Because of this, the development of professional personnel is an extremely important human resource function for leaders to provide and should be crafted with guidance.

## Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to discuss ten creative ways for school leaders to design and implement staff development by using principles embraced in Dr. William Kritsonis’ text *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007). Dessler (2003) says that staff development utilizes “basic training techniques include on-the- job training, apprenticeship training, informal learning, job instruction training, computer-based training, electronic performance support systems, and distance and Internet- based training” (p. 212). By garnering this information, Kritsonis (2007) stresses that the foundations of developing professional personnel should be embedded with “the appeal to imagination has everything to do with finding materials that have unusual power to speak to persons in the depth of their being by giving them a vision of a new order of life in which they can participate” (p. 751). As a result of this, ten recommendations are provided for the development of professional personnel in schools.

## Recommendations

**Professional development must be based upon sound educational research and embrace a sense of belonging to a community.** Young and Cassetter (2004) advocate that high- impact staff development activities “reflect the best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership” (p.155). The latest, yet most insightful methodologies for improving schools are embedded in educational research. The effective school leader selects research techniques to improve their school that is grounded in literature from the leading experts. Kritsonis (2007) emphasizes that staff development must embody research that provides staff members with presentations where “effective teaching requires extraordinary insight into the profound depths of the human mind and a level of understanding far different from the judgment of practical life” (p.751). Young and Cassetter (2004) advocate that the purpose of staff development is to “enable teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards” (p. 155). By establishing expert teams to study and implement the research during training, school

leaders are able to create a sense of fulfillment for their staff that cultivates a feeling of “belonging to a community in which the various meanings are realized” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.560)

**A framework must be established that systematically analyzes staff development training content, methodology, environment, participation approaches, and overall implementation and evaluation.** Staff development must be strategically planned to encompass a strong overview of the school’s strengths and weaknesses among its staff members. Young and Cassetter (2004) highlight that the “cues for designing programs can be derived from system policy, research and practice, value trends, career stages, and the external environment” (p. 179). As a result, this framework must lend itself to “find a solution to the problem posed by quantity by means of a principle of quality in curricular materials” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.642).

**Organizational development needs must be diagnosed and have a method for evaluation.** Kritsonis (2007) writes that staff development should embrace a sense of fulfillment in “that it consists in many-sidedness. The desired goal is well- roundedness and variety of interests, and the curriculum should be correspondingly broad and diverse” (p.561). The school leader’s role in creating professional development for his staff is in accurately determining his organization’s strengths and weaknesses in a realistic light and discovering ways to continually evaluate its effectiveness and rate of implementation. However, Young and Cassetter (2004) purport to school leaders that “it is important to stress that staff development occurs over time, goes through several stages, cuts across a wide range of development issues, and includes changing positions and personal needs of employees” (p.162).

**Professional Personnel must be able to assist staff in the instructional process by training them to find meaning in their jobs and in the curriculum.** Fullan (2001) writes that the “single most important factor ensuring that all students meet performance goals at the site level is the leadership of the principal” (p. 126). This point is further illustrated by Bennis and Nanus (2003) who advocate that the “quality of fostering organizational learning by example may be one of the most important functions of leadership” (p. 191). School leadership must take into account many factors as they plan for staff development. According to Kritsonis (2007), “the educator needs to understand human life as a complex of meanings and to know the various realms of meaning encompass. He also needs to be aware of the enemies of meaning that arise within the human situation and to organize instruction in such a way as to overcome or minimize the threatened meaninglessness” (p. 55). As a result, the administrator must have a strong grasp of the six realms of meaning- *symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics, and synoptics* and how each component must be indoctrinated into the school’s curriculum during a quality staff development.

Administrators have to explain to teachers in staff developments, etc. that the curriculum in which is being exposed to young children must embrace the first realm of meaning that is utilized in all six realms- *symbolics*. It is a deep understanding of language and symbols. Kritsonis (2007) writes “knowledge of language comprises four elements: use, meaning, symbol, and communication.” (p. 109). The true purpose of

mathematics, also a part of symbolics, is “designed to achieve complete precision in meaning and rigor in reasoning” (p. 131). Educators must embrace the notion that ordinary language is either discursive or nondiscursive. Discursive language, according to Kritsonis (2007), “is used in customary speech for communicating ideas in a consecutive, connected fashion, following the principals of common logic” (p. 153). Nondiscursive language is symbolic forms “used in all the arts and for the expression of feelings, values, commitments, and insights in the domains of personal knowledge, metaphysics, and religion” (p. 153).

According to Kritsonis (2007), the second realm of meaning is *empirics*. He writes “empirical meanings require ordinary language and mathematics for their expression.” (p. 175). Science is the medium for empirics and incorporates physical science, biology, psychology, and social science. “The scientific enterprise is aimed at the discovery of truth” (p. 175). However, “all empirical propositions are provisional, temporary holding good only within the limits established by prior tests and always subject to new revisions in the light of new evidence” (p. 177).

The third realm- esthetics- encompasses music, the visual arts, the arts of movement, and literature. The administrator should be skilled at discovering the beauty and creativity in the work every staff person. Kritsonis writes “in the esthetic realm, on the other hand, the object of knowledge is the singular particular form. The primary concern is not with types of things- not with the classes of things- but with the unique individual objects” (p. 277). Staff development should be conveyed in a positive light and allow learners to embrace their uniqueness and express their beauty in their respective fields.

The fourth realm of meaning is *synnoetics* or personal knowledge. Administrators should give their staff a sense that “personal knowledge is gained by not only understanding how others, whom one considers significant, sees one as well. If the people that one considers important shun him or her, then he/ she is not likely to accept himself/ herself as important” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 400). The role of a strong administrator is one builds the self- esteem of his workers. Since leadership is influencing the behaviors of others, administrators must be mindful of how their actions affect others under their watch.

The fifth realm of meaning is *ethics* or moral knowledge. Administrators must believe in doing what is right at all times. This belief should be imparted at all professional staff during training. As the primary leader of the school, the administrator must model what he/she expects from his stakeholders. Ethical administrators produce ethical staff members. This results because an expectation has been put into place. This is further illustrated by Kritsonis (2007) when he adds that “the central concept in the realm of ethics is obligation or what ought to be done. The “ought” here is not individual but a universal principle of right” (p.438).

The final and sixth realm of meaning is *synoptics*. It embraces history, religion, and philosophy. Kritsonis (2007) defines synoptics as “a term that comprises meanings having an integrative function, uniting meanings from all of the realms into a unified perspective, that is, providing a “single vision” or “synopsis” of meanings” (p. 479). The administrator must be able to explain to professional personnel the historical reasons for learning certain skills and attributes within the confines of his philosophical and religious ideas for selecting a particular topic. Since synoptics is completely integrative with all of

the other realms of meaning, it completes the knowledge circle, yet is able to digress into any of the other realms.

If the six realms are not embraced, staff members will be left feeling frustrated, according to Kritsonis (2007), due to ambiguity, no empiric or absolute truths, art that demonstrates morbidity, confusion, etc., a sense of people not relating to self and others and only thinking about benefiting self, morals that are indoctrinated with doubt and skepticism, history, religion, and philosophy that are biased, and the overall depersonalization and fragmentation of self (losing one's identity) in the educational system (p. 70). "If any one of the six is missing, the person lacks a basic ingredient in experience" (Kritsonis, 2007, p.563). However, school leaders must stress in trainings that the primary goal of schools is to educate people to establish meaning for themselves. This point is further stressed by Kritsonis (2007) when he writes that "the object of general education is to lead to the fulfillment of human life through the enlargement and deepening of meaning" (p.10). Learning at trainings should not be fragmented, but should aim to develop the complete staff member as a whole person. Based on the writings of Phenix (1986), "a complete person should be skilled in the use of speech, symbol, and gesture, factually well informed, capable of creating and appreciating objects of esthetic significance, endowed with a rich and disciplined life in relation to self and others, able to make wise decisions and to judge between right and wrong, and possessed of an integral outlook" (p. 8). The development of the complete person is what a strong knowledge of the instructional process should ideally produce.

**Administrators must prepare and deliver staff development in learner- friendly environments that take into account the professional levels of teachers.** As teachers progress professionally, administrators must be recognizant of the various types of differentiated staff development that must occur on their respective campuses. Speck (1996) explains that administrators selected to operate schools need to differentiate staff development on how adults learn (p. 33). Teachers, like students, have different learning styles. However, unlike students, staff training on the professional level should take into account the Adult Learning Theory. Administrators should also take into consideration that staff development as Kritsonis (2007) writes "should be planned so as to take account of the particular tasks confronting the person at the stage of life in which he is living" (p. 612).

The best learning for teachers in all phases must be in a learner- friendly environment. The learning environment in which the staff development training is to be taught should be teacher friendly. This type of setting will improve achievement and comprehension levels. Learning conditions in the schools where the staff development is presented should provide an ample amount of light, fresh air, and have convenient work space. Administrators and teachers should have access to instructional materials. Classrooms should be equipped with teacher aides so that teachers can solely focus on learning new teaching strategies. In addition, each classroom should have updated technology to assist in teacher learning. Computers, electronic devices, and other programs can be used as a technology tool to reinforce key ideas seen in class. Hopefully, this will lead to strong gains in student achievement and teacher expertise.

**Administrators must believe in creating staff development trainings that involve stakeholders in the decision- making process.** Kearney, R. et. al. (1994) reveals that

“participative decision- making provides personal benefits to the individual employee as well as desired organizational outcomes” (p. 44). School leaders hired should give credence to the idea of professional ownership of individualized training. Veteran teachers know the skills that they are lacking and will acknowledge training. They appreciate self- selecting staff development better than participating in those that are mandated. By having the ability to be a part of the decision- making process, teachers will be able to enjoy what Phenix (1986) calls “the principle of appeal to the imagination.” This “calls for the selection of materials that are drawn from extraordinary rather than from the experience of everyday life. They should be such as to transform ordinary perspectives rather than confirm them” (p. 346).

Staff development should inspire teachers to think outside themselves and their current situation. “It has everything to do with finding materials that have unusual power to speak to persons in the depth of their being by giving them a vision of a new order of life in which they can participate and by which their ordinary existence can be transfigured” (p. 350). The goal of developing a staff training that speaks to the learners’ imagination is to provide a means for teachers to question what they are learning and to be given the chance to change their ways of thinking. This would allow teachers and staff to become critical thinkers who are engaged in the learning process.

**Professional personnel must train staff to able to work with diverse groups of people, make work meaningful, and encourage methods of inquiry to others.**

Kritsonis (2007) believes that school leaders need to train diversity- conscience educators to “understand people in their actualities, in their possibilities, and in their idealities.” The leader must know “how to foster desirable changes in them” (p. 29). School leaders and staff should always be willing to learn new and better ways to work with different types of cultures and races to improve student achievement. As a result, administrators must allow themselves and their staff members to be immersed in another culture to better understand their experience. This knowledge will provide administrators with multicultural tools to better educate their staff members.

Additionally, Phenix (1986) emphasizes the idea “that for the most effective learning curricula need to be designed as far as practicable to take into account each person’s particular aptitudes and enthusiasm” (p. 275). He further gives credence to his argument when he writes, “Students learn best what they most profoundly want to know. Phenix (1986) writes “their learning efficiency is in direct relation to their motivation. Hence, the materials of instruction should be selected in light of the students’ real interest” (p. 345). This ideology conveys a strong message to educators in the staff development planning and integration process. The research -based presentation needs to be chosen in a manner that will maximize meanings for teachers. If teachers’ interests are taken into account when planning training for staff development, then school leaders will see more learning occurring in the sessions and teachers will be better prepared to implement new methodologies and improve student achievement across all disciplines.

Phenix (1986) writes it best when he states, “His real longing is for meaning, and whether he recognizes it or not, all his striving, whatever its apparent object, is directed toward the enlargement and deepening of meaning” (p. 344). This should be the primary goal of all educators when planning staff development for the school. Teachers strive to attain a sense of meaning in all discipline taught and discussed within the classroom. If

teachers are able to define their own meanings in the six realms, then administrators can truly say that they have done their jobs. Moreover, when teachers can validate their knowledge with meaning, they are able to make sense of their environment, take ownership of their learning, and are motivated to learn more about the unknown that surrounds them.

Finally, school leaders should design staff development that has methods of inquiry as a means to incite active engagement by teachers in their own learning process. The suggestion is that teachers learn better when they are not just passive recipients of information. Teachers are able to construct their own knowledge through methods of inquiry and become active participants in their own learning. Methods of inquiry should be included in a staff development that organizes studies according to disciplines. School leaders should take a special note to teach inquiry in staff development as what Phenix (1986) calls “a program of guided rediscovery, in which the student discovers for himself what others have found out before him” (p. 336). Moreover, Phenix (1986) emphasizes that this level of inquiry must not only be reenacted under similar conditions as others before him, but also should include looking at the teachers’ prior knowledge and level of advancement in the subject area (p. 337). As a result, this process will give teachers the opportunity to discover new information to implement into the classroom and to validate prior knowledge.

**The professional personnel should have staff developments that have teachers analyze the curriculum and look at representative ideas in each subject to be taught in schools.** Phenix (1986) writes, “Each person should be highly trained in a specialty instead of comprehensively like a generalist” and that the “depth of knowledge and skill should be the goal, rather than superficial acquaintance with a variety of fields.” (p. 268) As educators, professional personnel need to take into consideration the main ideas that represent each field. The concepts emphasized in the training must be indicative of the discipline being taught. Moreover, these concepts should help the learner (students) formulate other ideas about the subject. In essence, they are used as building blocks of knowledge. Additionally, school leaders should help guide teachers in selecting specific examples while delivering the curriculum to exemplify the representative ideas to students.

**The curriculum for staff development training must maximize meanings for staff members.** The curriculum must have the following components in it to maximize meanings: mastery, belonging to the community, many-sidedness, integrity, and quality (Kritsonis, 2007, pp. 560-562). Mastery enables staff members to learn how to establish a meaningful life “that in which the person finds one thing to do and learns to do it well” (Kritsonis, 2007, p.560). By belonging to a community, staff members will not feel isolated, but a part of the process. “Each individual plays his part and is required to develop competencies that best equip him to contribute to the whole” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 561). Staff members must be trained to address the many-sidedness of the curriculum by keeping in mind that it “should be correspondingly broad and diverse” and understanding should be gained “of many different fields” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 561). Integrity and quality, the last two components, allows staff members to improve their own self-efficacy and life not only at the workplace, but also in all aspects of their life.

**Strong school leadership must be viewed as a vital force in establishing long-lasting change in staff members through training.** Bennis & Nanus (2003) believe that “leaders can energize learning behavior by rewarding it when it happens” (p. 192). School leaders have to keep the momentum going after staff development ends. “The leader must reinforce long- range thinking, innovation, and creativity” (Bennis & Nanus, 2003, p. 192). “The patterns of growth” must be seen in employees as staff development is given throughout their career (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 621). Each employee must see progress in their growth as an individual. This is the essence of how the school organization grows. If the people in the school are well- trained, then job satisfaction on the job is improved and students, ultimately, benefit in a large way.

### Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, professional development in schools is the foundation for developing personnel in America’s schools. William Kritsonis’ book *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007) is an exceptional text that aides school leaders in cultivating a professional staff. Ten key recommendations are given to school leaders to change the quality of training in order to systematically improve schools. Professional personnel will be developed if school leaders design their staff developments to be grounded in sound educational research and sense of belonging to a community, have a framework, have an appropriate assessment and evaluation of the school’s weakness and strengths, an understanding of the instructional process through each of the five realms of meanings, be given in a learner- friendly environment, embraces diversity, analyze representative ideas in the curriculum, maximize meanings, and view school leadership as a vital force in establishing long- lasting change. These ideas will cultivate a climate of change and improve job satisfaction and longevity.

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