

**IMPLEMENTING THE WAYS OF KNOWING THROUGH THE  
REALMS OF MEANING TO STRATEGIC PLANNING IN K-12**

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**ABSTRACT**

**The educational environment has become increasingly complex, demanding, and multidimensional. The *No Child Left Behind Act* has expanded the federal role in education and increased accountability for achievement results. Academic achievement is the cornerstone of the educational organization. Strategic planning, implemented using Dr. William A. Kritsonis' *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007), can align the educational organization's thinking to ensure stability, establish priorities, and achieve long term academic success.**

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## **Introduction**

The *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) offers a pragmatic framework to strategic planning that will move educational organizations in innovative directions. In developing a strategic plan, an educational organization must implement Dr. Kritsonis' (2007) six fundamental patterns of meaning designated respectively as symbolics, empirics, esthetics, synnoetics, ethics, and synoptics. Strategic planning is the process in which an educational organization determines its current status, envisions its long-term goals, makes projections for the future, and develops strategies to achieve those future aspirations. Strategic planning must be flexible and practical and yet serve as a guide to implement programs to evaluate the educational organizations progress. A strategic plan intertwining the six fundamental patterns of the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) constructs innovative analytical and critical thinking that will improve and enhance the performance of educational organizations.

## **Purpose of the Article**

The purpose of this article is to discuss ways in which strategic planning implemented by utilizing the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (Kritsonis, 2007) creates a high performing educational organization. Skilled strategic planning makes a current assessment of needs, develops the educational organization's future thinking, builds commitment, and serves as the guiding document for the educational organization. Effective strategic planning includes articulating the educational organization's vision, mission, and values to set a course for future aspirations.

## **The First Realm: Symbolics**

The first realm of meaning is symbolics. Dr. Kritsonis (2007) states that ordinary language such as gestures, rituals, and rhythmic patterns allow people to communicate on a personal level. Effective leadership is the cornerstone of an educational environment. Eaker and Gonzalez write about learning leaders.

They create systems and processes to engage collaborative teams of teachers in 1) clarifying the essential knowledge and skills students are to acquire for every course, grade level and unit of every instruction 2) developing frequent common assessments to monitor each student's learning on a timely basis, and 3) implementing a school-wide plan of intervention to guarantee students receive additional time and support for learning as soon as they experience difficulty. (Eaker & Gonzalez, 2007, p. 6)

The leader's ability to articulate the educational organization's vision, mission, and values to propel the organization into its preferred future is essential. A vision statement is a description upon which the organization aspires. It emphasizes where the educational organization will be at a specific time in the future. The organizational mission supports the vision and it describes the purpose of the organization. The organizational values state the organization's intentions and the organization's core

priorities in the organization's culture.

Implementing the strategic plan requires the use of symbolics. The vision must be clearly communicated within the educational organization. The vision needs to capture the present status of the educational organization, and serve to guide the direction of the organization. As a means of setting a central goal that the educational organization will aspire to reach, the vision helps to provide a focus for the mission of the organization. The vision should resonate with every member of the educational organization. The educational organization must clearly communicate its expectations so that members are able to perform effectively. The strategic planning is effective when it energizes and engages the educational organization.

This information is clearly communicated so the educational organization works as a collective body to be successful. The educational organization's mission is a precise description of the organization's purpose. It clearly and succinctly describes the business of the organization. Each member of the educational organization should be able to verbally express the organization's mission. Value statements define how people are expected to interact within the organization. The organization's values are used to evaluate the organization's policies and actions. Effective organizations identify and develop clear and concise shared values so that members of the organization understand expectations. The vision, mission, and values must give the educational organization spirit. The spirit will ignite the educational organization into action.

### **The Second Realm: Empirics**

The second realm of meaning is empirics. Empirics encompass facts and discovering the truth. Dr. Kritsonis says, "These sciences provide factual descriptions, generalizations, and theoretical formulations and explanations that are based upon observation and experimentation in the world of matter, life, mind, and society" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12). According to Dr. Kritsonis (2007), science is concerned with matters of fact and facts refer to data of observation. Educational data collection is vital for strategic planning in educational organizations.

Strategic planning, with an emphasis on empirics, provides an understanding of the design of the educational organization's assessment of needs, finances, and it allows the organization to set specific data-driven priorities. The educational organization is obligated to be data driven to aide accountability within the organization. It is essential to the strategic planning of an educational organization to conduct a continuum of critical analysis of the system, policy formulation and appraisal, management and monitoring, and evaluation. Gathering data and analysis of the current situation of the organization and the critical issues pertaining to the organization's status and functioning is required in an educational organization. The strategic planning process requires a multi-method approach in gathering comprehensive data. These multi-method approaches include standardized testing, observation, surveys, interviews, document collection, and other formal and informal measures of organizational status. Findings and remedial options are formulated to provide policy orientations. As the system is analyzed, future direction can be established. Specific programs may be developed or resources may be mobilized based upon the information obtained through the data analysis. A continuum of monitoring, review, and analysis takes places. The learning leadership understands that the organization must continually change (Eaker & Gonzalez, 2007). The more

data educational organizations collect, the more effectively the organization can improve. Assessment is required to constantly improve the strategic planning and ensure the execution of the educational organization's vision.

### **The Third Realm: Esthetics**

Esthetics contains the various arts, such as music, the visual arts, the arts of movement, and literature (Kritsonis, 2007). Esthetics, art, is the recognition of the beauty of the aforementioned and it is unique to each person. "The term 'visual arts' designates the fields of painting, drawing, graphic arts, sculpture, and architecture, in which the artist shapes tangible materials into objects of esthetic importance" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 299). Physical education, health, and recreational activities are all closely interrelated resources for the enrichment of the individual persons and in the life of society. Dr. Kritsonis says that health means wholeness which may be regarded as personal wholeness (2007).

It is essential that strategic planning of an educational organization include a commitment to the development of the whole child. The educational organization is obligated to encourage and enable students to become responsible and actively engaged members of society. An educational organization should build a community of children who are valued and nurtured learners. Educational organizations must consider students well-being and incorporate social, economic, and health concepts into strategic planning. The complexity of well-being makes esthetics an important component in strategic planning. The academic achievement of students should support their exploration of perspectives and cultures from around the globe. The educational organization must be prepared to create citizens who are broadly and deeply educated, who can think critically, be creative, communicate across cultures, and apply the knowledge they acquire to the global society.

The educational organization needs to include the arts in its strategic plan. It is imperative that educational organizations make meaningful connections across academic disciplines and everyday life. The arts can reinforce skills that connect learning to the real world. The additional positive effects of art education on student learning include attendance, communication, and critical thinking. Art education also requires discipline and skill which carries over into the community. A study conducted by Allen, Edmonson, and Fisher (2009) revealed art to benefit students' verbal and linguistic skills. Allen, Edmonson, and Fisher's findings were,

The nature of fine arts classes was to help students better demonstrate ideas, feelings, and emotions through expressive use of their body and creative skills. This training could be beneficial to students in the form of written expression through TAKS writing and also help students in the reading portion of the TAKS. (Allen, Edmonson, & Fisher, 2009, p. 47)

### **The Fourth Realm: Synnoetics**

The fourth realm is synnoetics. Dr. Kritsonis describes synnoetics as "...meanings in which a person has direct insight into other beings (or oneself) as concrete wholes existing in relation" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 393). Synnoetics can easily

be ascribed to strategic planning. It is imperative that an educational organization understand its present position to understand its future aspirations. Critical analyses of the educational organization's internal and external environments provide information to assess the organization's current needs and needs for future planning. The heart of strategic planning is flexibility and ongoing evaluation of both the strategic plan and the planning process to ensure the organization's success. Dr. Kritsonis clearly states, "A person is a being who both remembers and anticipates. He is related not only to himself as present, but also as past and as future" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 397). This statement can be applied to the educational organization as well. The educational organization must have knowledge of itself to provide the best educational opportunities today, tomorrow, and into the future. The educational organization must gain a historical perspective to determine how previous perceptions influenced current initiatives. The educational organization must also understand the external environment, the global market, to meet the needs of students and prepare them for global challenges.

### **The Fifth Realm: Ethics**

The fifth realm is ethics. According to Dr. Kritsonis, "The essence of ethical meanings, or of moral knowledge, is right deliberate action, that is, what a person ought to voluntarily do" (2007, p. 443). An educational organization must incorporate ethics in its strategic planning. The educational organization must establish policies or codes of conduct. Steven Bowman (2008) explains that the best way to describe ethics is by utilizing the following four words: rights, obligations, fairness and integrity. He goes on to say that these words have energies underlying them that seem to get at the basis of ethical considerations.

Ethical standards are important to ensure that the educational organization operates within the law and is viewed by the public as an ethical organization of learning. Codes of ethics within educational organization are necessary for promoting ethical teaching practices. The educational organization must conduct a continuum of evaluation to promote ethical standards within the organization. Ethics provide justification for the actions that occur within the organization. Ethics provide the base upon which the vision, mission, and values are created.

Some other important ethical codes that are addressed in educational organizations are honesty, integrity, and respect. These beliefs are the very foundation of culture and civilization. The educational organizations must encourage students to collaborate across disciplines and learn the viewpoints and contributions of others. This combination of depth in learning fosters critical thinking skills, creativity, integrity, responsibility, and ethics.

### **The Sixth Realm: Synoptics**

Synoptics is the sixth realm. Dr. Kritsonis says this about synoptics, "This term comprises meanings having an integrative function, uniting meanings from all realms into a unified perspective that is, providing a "single vision" on "synopsis" of meanings" (2007, p. 483). Dr. Kritsonis relates that history is concerned with the understanding of past events. The historian must describe, order, and interpret events

(2007). Understanding the past of the educational organization is a basic premise for strategic planning. By reviewing the organization's history, the strategic planning builds upon past accomplishments or failures to broaden the organization's reach. This type of planning builds a bold and aggressive educational organization to keep pace with social, economic, and demographic trends with proactive performance measures that gauge organizational success.

The educational organization's strategic planning method should include a thorough analysis of the organization's history and current situation. The educational organization must review important milestones to determine their influences on the organization. Effective strategic planning requires the educational organization to visualize the organization's future status by looking back at its past history. It is necessary for educational organizations to be committed to being more responsive to society. Educational organizations are obligated to provide educational services required by present and future citizens to make the contributions needed to sustain society. The educational organization will meet these obligations by properly utilizing resources provided by taxpayers. Although Miech is skeptical about strategic planning in education, he writes, "Strategic planning can also play an important public relations role in education. For example, strategic planning in education can help improve school-community relations by involving parents and community members in the formal strategic planning process" (Miech, 1995, section 8). The strategic plan can bridge the gap between the schools and the community. The strategic plan also includes the educational organizations commitment to providing access to a broad range of educational services.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, education is a focal point for American society today. The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001, signed into law by President Bush in 2002, is a reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (Education Week, 2004). The *No Child Left Behind Act* has expanded the federal government's role in education. This came about because of the wide concern about the state of education. This legislation is expected to target every public school in America. At the core of the *No Child Left Behind Act* are a number of provisions designed to ensure broad gains in student achievement and to hold states and schools more accountable for student progress (Education Week, 2004).

The need for effective strategic planning is critical for all educational organizations. The constant challenges in education and pressures of student achievement will be guided by a well-developed strategic plan that serves as an integral part of day-to-day leadership and future aspirations in educational organizations. Dr. Kritsonis' *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007) provides a pragmatic framework that connects strategic planning to the six realms of meaning. The six realms provide the foundations for strategic planning that will be vision, mission, and value driven which will create a successful educational organization. The strategic planning aligns the organization with the environment and explores perspectives and cultures from around the globe to achieve long-term stability. Strategic planning is an ongoing process. Strategic planning in an educational organization will provide a framework to support high-quality, student-focused education.

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