Getting the code: Measuring meaning through content analysis

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August 8, 2009

Meaning in organizations

- Identity

- Framing

- Discourse

- Ideology

- Beliefs and values

- Justification

- Legitimacy

- Reputations

Different ways to measure meaning

- Proxies
  - E.g., founding or adoption rates; prevalence

- Measuring meaning directly through content analysis of text
  - Artifacts/documents (Bechky 2003)
  - Newspaper event analysis

Documents

- Organizational documents convey meaning about an organization's identity, culture, and impression management.

- E.g., annual reports, mission statements, letters to shareholders

Example: Identities of Arizona charter schools

- Goal: measure dimensions of organizational identities in Arizona's charter schools

- Document: State-mandated report cards (issued annually)

- Document audience: Students, potential students, and their families; anyone else evaluating school quality

Childrens Success Academy

Childrens Success Academy
925 E. Bilby Road, Tucson, AZ 85706
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 11368, Tucson, AZ 85734-1368

Director: Dr. Nanci R. Aiken
Schedule: 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM
Web Address: www.csatucson.org
E-mail: csa@dakotacom.net

Grades: K-5
2001 Enrollment: 73
Phone: (520) 799-8403
Fax: (520) 799-8427

❖ School Overview ❖

Mission

Children's Success Academy provides an outstanding school environment that allows all children, especially challenging children, to develop their intrinsic capacities and gifts, and to flourish at the highest levels. The school environment includes the Nurtured Heart Approach (positive behavioral program), the Nurtured Body Approach (nutritional program) and a values-based globally-oriented curriculum that stresses problem solving and community service.

Substantive theme

Organization and Philosophy

- Charter School
- Positive Behavior Recognition Program
- Healthy Nutrition Program
- Values & Service-based Global Curriculum

Instructional Programs

- Technology - Multiple Computers/Class
- School Garden Project

Resources

- Full-day Kindergarten
- At-risk Programs

Target population

- Community Service Programs
- Virtues Project

School/Academic Goals

- Excellence in science and mathematics - 80% of students to exceed grade-level standards (as measured by AIMS and Stanford 9).

- Excellence in language arts and social studies - 80% of students to exceed grade-level standards (as measured by AIMS and Stanford 9).
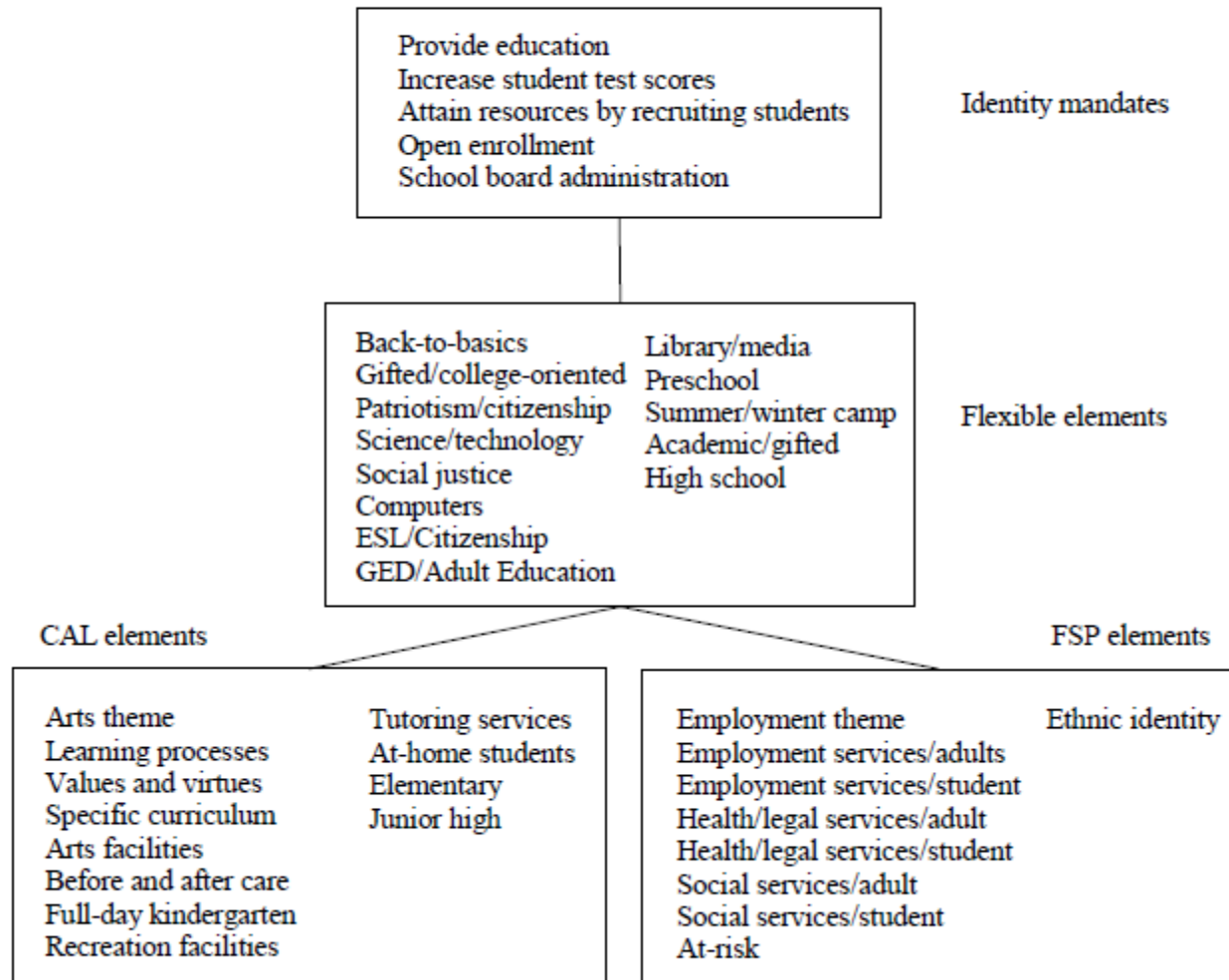
- Excellence in problem-solving skills, as measured by results of academic research and learning to identify and enable community service projects.

- Mastery and fluency in reading and writing English (for ESL students); mastery and fluency in reading and writing Spanish - fourth and fifth grades.

Table 1: Frequency of Organizational Elements of Arizona Charter Schools in 2001

Organizational Elements	Frequency
Substantive theme	
Values and virtues	133
Learning processes	106
Montessori or other curriculum	103
Back-to-basics	98
Gifted/college-oriented	92
Patriotism/citizenship	56
Science/technology	55
Social justice	52
Vocational	47
Arts	26
Resources and services	
Computer support and training	222
Library/media	114
Social services for students	103
Before/after care	103
Recreation factilities	98
Social services for adults	93
GED/adult education	72
Full day kindegarten	68
Arts facilities	52
Employment services for students	51
Pre-school/childcare	50
Tutoring services	45
Health/legal services for students	35
Employment services for adults	24
Summer/winter camp	22
Health/legal services for adults	12
ESL/citizenship classes	8
Target population	
High school	161
Elementary	158
Junior high	134
At-risk	56
Academic/gifted	29
Ethnic identity	18
At-home students	2
Total schools	298

Figure 1: Map of Charter School Organizational Form

| Provide education
Increase student test scores
Attain resources by recruiting students
Open enrollment
School board administration | Identity mandates |

| Back-to-basics   Library/media
Gifted/college-oriented Preschool
Patriotism/citizenship Summer/winter camp
Science/technology Academic/gifted
Social justice   High school
Computers
ESL/Citizenship
GED/Adult Education | Flexible elements |

CAL elements

FSP elements

| Arts theme   Tutoring services
Learning processes At-home students
Values and virtues Elementary
Specific curriculum Junior high
Arts facilities
Before and after care
Full-day kindergarten
Recreation facilities | Employment theme Ethnic identity
Employment services/adults
Employment services/student
Health/legal services/adult
Health/legal services/student
Social services/adult
Social services/student
At-risk |

Newspaper event coding

- Events represent particular moments in time where meaning is conveyed or negotiated.

- Content analysis can be used to track different sets of meanings in the same newspaper coverage of an event
  - Opportunity for framing

- E.g., coverage of boycotts tells both the boycotters' and corporation's sides of the story

Challenges

- Multiple audience issues
  - Documents are snapshots intended for one of many audiences
- Selection issues
  - Survivor bias
  - Organizational bias (e.g., big firms)
  - Journalist bias
  - Impression management bias