Invitational Education as a Logical, Ethical and Democratic Means to Reform

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A pervasive feeling exists that whatever is being attempted in education is not working and needs to be changed in dramatic fashion. Educational reform has become faddish and conflicting in the explanations of what is needed. Many reforms ignore that people are involved and concentrate solely on the systems in which people work. Invitational Education seeks to assist individuals and their relationships with others. It is rooted in the foundations of democratic philosophy and it is imperative that those tenets are directly applied in any educational reform initiative.

"A Nation at Risk" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) ushered the educational community into years of educational reform which still continue. Although there are many reports calling for reform, there are few that explain how to get from where we are to where everyone seemingly wants us to be (Nehring, 1992). There is a pervasive feeling that whatever is being attempted in education is not working and therefore needs to be changed in a dramatic fashion. Educational reform has become faddish and the reports are often conflicting in their explanations of what is needed. Large numbers of reform solutions, when instituted, tend to worsen the problems that they were supposed to fix. Unfortunately, many reforms ignore the people involved and concentrate solely on the

systems in which they work. Oftentimes, little attention is paid to what is readily available and logical to use.

Novak (1992) observed:

> Dissatisfaction with conceptualizations of school practices that negated the heart of the educative process, led to the development of an alternative framework that was more sensitive to the perceptual realities and ethical responsibilities of participants in the educative process. (p.77)

That framework has become the field of Invitational Education. Texts have been written, hundreds of conferences have been held, and an International Alliance for Invitational Education has been established. Invitational Education stands poised to become one of the most logical, ethical and democratic philosophies to enter the arena of educational reform. Lewis (1989) reminded educators that a commitment to the role of student, or to the role of a professional working with students, is the only thing "sacred" in the current scene of restructuring. Invitational education puts people first and endeavors to assist students and professionals in their quest to fulfill their individual potentials.

Invitational Education

What then is Invitational Education? Purkey and Novak (1988) describe it as:

> Invitational Education is a metaphor for an emerging model of the educative process consisting of four value-based assumptions about the nature of people

> and their potential...Invitational Education provides both a theoretical framework and practical strategies for what educators can do to create schools where people want to be and want to learn. (p. 11)

"We believe it offers a defensible approach to the educative process and a practical way to make school 'the most inviting place in town'" (Purkey & Novak, 1984, p. 2).

Why would an understanding of this be helpful to educators? Short (1994) stated that in a democracy anyone wishing to reform the field of education should realize that:

> ...the role of school leaders...is not to know what's best and to impose it on others, but to lead groups of people through inquiry and a synthesis of research to a common understanding about what is most worth doing in school and how to go about achieving this. (p. 504)

This model can assist school leaders in doing that. Invitational education also shares a great deal with the notion of "school culture" in that it can also be construed as a "pattern of beliefs and expectations of the members of the school community that guide their predominant attitudes and behaviors" (Lomotey & Swanson, 1990, p. 68).

The Framework of Invitational Education

Four assumptions provide the framework for Invitational Education. They are value-laden and deal with the nature of people and what education can be. These assumptions are rooted in the ideals of a democracy.

First, "people are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly" (Purkey & Novak, 1988, p. 12). If educators do not believe this to be true in regards to students, then the students quite often will conduct themselves according to the educators'

expectations. If, however, educators accept this assumption, success will more likely be the reward as educators will discover methods ensuring the achievement of this outcome for each individual. Mortimer Adler (1982) reminded educators that children are indeed unequal in their capacity to learn, but if treated individually, they are always capable of improving their situation (Noll, 1991).

Second, education should be viewed as a "collaborative, cooperative activity" (Purkey & Novak, 1988, p. 12). All individuals in the educative process should be invited to have a say in the planning and implementation of their own destiny. Carl Rogers (1983) wrote that an individual must be allowed freedom to choose alternatives, stating that even if the choices are few, that their freedom exists (in Noll, 1991). Dictated standards of behavior demanding conformation do not enjoy the high rates of success attained by collaborative ventures. Tyranny fails when democracy is possible.

Third, "people possess untapped potential in all areas of human endeavor" (Purkey & Novak, 1988, p. 13). A great deal of what educators do is based on the perceived potential of the stakeholders in the educational process. The curriculum, physical environment, programs offered, and rules and regulations reflect assumptions. If those assumptions are raised, then a more inviting atmosphere is created which will help ensure a more successful educational process for all involved. It is of paramount importance that educators never anticipate a limit to the potential of any individual.

Fourth, "human potential can best be realized by places, policies, and processes that are specifically designed to invite development, and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally" (Purkey & Novak, 1988, p. 14). This assumption points to the main emphasis of invitational education: hu-

man relationships and achieving individual potential. "An invitation convinces children that their uniqueness has a special integrity of unquestioned value...the message helps youngsters view their qualities, characteristics, and descriptions of self in the most positive fashion imaginable" (Wilson, 1986, p. 11).

The Four Elements of Invitational Education

The aforementioned assumptions form a framework, serving as support mechanisms for the four elements of Invitational Education. The acronym "TRIO" is used when referring to trust, respect, intentionality, and optimism. Collaborative school cultures are built around educational leaders, male or female, who exhibit the four elements in building relationships (Fink, in press). Each of the elements will be examined in turn.

Trust is generated by consistency. Teachers who are trusting of their students are more committed to helping them, and that type of teacher commitment will instill a greater confidence and trust amongst the students (Hoffman, Sabo, Bliss, & Hoy, 1994,). James Herndon (1971) admitted that schools often are the places where students learn not to trust others, and that they must learn trust through the teacher. If educators are consistent in their practices and patterns of action, an environment of dependability and predictability will result. Invitational leaders, who trust that people are capable and responsible, and that an individual's choices predetermine their behavior, "trust others to behave in concert with these preconceptions" (Fink, in press). In inviting schools, supervision is low-key, regulations are fair and understandable, and students are empowered with the responsibility of their actions. There is evidence that trusting students with responsibilities encourages them to live up to expectations. Short, Greer, and Michael (1992) also mentioned that building trust is a necessity in the empowerment of schools.

"Respect is a given—an undeniable birthright of each person" (Purkey & Novak, 1988, p. 15). "It expresses itself in respecting the individuality of teachers and others within a collaborative environment" (Fink, in press). When students err, they should be consulted as to how and why their behavior was inappropriate. A collaborative effort results in suggestions for improvement and, if necessary, disciplinary measures in line with what has already been discussed and agreed upon. In invitational education, penalties avoid measures that demote self-esteem, such as corporal punishment, and steer towards a loss of privileges. Instead of being regarded as a punishment, the consequences of an unacceptable action are representative of the preservation of individual rights and accepted as such (Wilson, 1986). Discipline need not be viewed as a means of control over a student as much as it should be viewed as a means to guide a student, by meeting their needs to achieving greater self-control (Ryback, 1993). James Herndon wrote of his students "I don't want to get them under control, I want them to see some reason for getting themselves under control" (1968, p. 113). There should also be a balance of attention given to acceptable and desired behaviors equal to that given to negative behaviors.

The third element is intentionality. Educators adhering to this model must do things on purpose, in completing and implementing activities and making decisions. "Invitational leaders support policies, practices, programs, structures, cultures which intentionally create an environment and provide opportunities for all students to function fully as citizens in the post-modern world" (Fink, in press). If educators make decisions from a intentional position, they can better understand when they are capable of being more flexible and if the situation necessitates flexibility. "The measure of an invitational leader is the ability to create a learning organization which is

inclusive, responsive to its context and flexible in dealing with change" (Fink, in press).

Optimism is the most important element and often the most difficult to cultivate. Goethe has been quoted as saying "if we take people as they are, we make them worse...if we treat them as if they were what they ought to be, we help them to become what they are capable of becoming." Being optimistic does not mean naively focusing on unattainable goals, it means accepting the actual occurrences of day-to-day life and maintaining a positive outlook. Stockard and Mayberry (1992) wrote that having high expectations for students in skill acquisition and achievement tend to illustrate highly effective schools. Optimism and faith are the basic tenets of theologies and philosophies around the world and are a necessity in education reform.

The Perceptual Tradition and Self-Concept Theory

The theoretical foundations of invitational education emanate from two perspectives: the perceptual tradition and self-concept theory. A Freudian would conclude that people do what they do as manipulated by internal dynamics of the unconscious. A behaviorist would proffer that environmental stimuli influence behavior, "that behavior is caused by stimulus, response, reinforcement and reward" (Arceneaux, 1992, p. 88). Fink cites Fullan when he writes "since change in organizations is about change in people, attention to their perceptions of reality and particularly their sense of self are fundamental to successful 'change agentry'" (Fink, in press). The perceptual tradition maintains that people act according to their perception of the world at the point of action stretching "far beyond sensory experience to include such perceptions as beliefs, values, feelings, hopes, desires, and the personal ways in which persons regard themselves and other people" (Combs, Avila, & Purkey, 1978, pp. 15-16). It stresses ultimate responsibility for one's

actions as it empowers individuals to make and accept the benefits and consequences of their decisions. This theory suggests "that each person is a conscious agent who considers, constructs, interprets, and then acts" (Purkey & Novak, 1988, p. 17).

Self-concept theory is a unique system of perceptions of self and one's personal world. "It is the organization of perceptions about self that seems to the individual to be who he or she is...it is composed of thousands of perceptions varying in clarity, precision, and importance in the person's peculiar economy" (Combs, et al., 1978, p. 17). How people view themselves determines how they view all that is around them and how they relate to, and interpret, what is observed. Purkey (1970) wrote that people's behaviors are closely linked to a system of beliefs. Based on this assumption, teachers' beliefs regarding themselves and their students must, therefore, become important factors in determining classroom effectiveness (Purkey, 1970).

Fink (in press) addresses the question of motivation as it relates to free will. Daresh and Playko agree with Fink in their interpretation of motivation by stating "no one ever truly motivates another person ...ultimately, whether or not a person works harder rests in that person's own choice" (1995, p. 155). Fink writes: "to say that one person can motivate another is to deny free will" (in press).

The Four Ps

When moving from theory into practice, emphasis should be placed on places, people, policies, and programs, known in Invitational Education publications as The Four Ps.

Places

The visibility of places creates a perfect beginning point for introducing invitational education (Purkey & Novak, 1988). Stockard and Mayberry pointed to the educational environment as having an effect on children's learning (1992). Changing signs in the school so that they are more inviting, ensuring the cleanliness of the buildings, making sure that the grounds are attractive and kept, comfortable and efficient office layouts and furnishings, fresh paint, and intimate cafeteria seating arrangements are all visible, noticeable, and desirable. A school can demonstrate the cultural diversity of its population by creating beautiful murals on the walls (Stanley, 1994). All will enhance the working and learning atmosphere. "Modern science is confirming that our actions, thoughts, and feelings are indeed shaped not just by our genes, neurochemistry, history, and relationships but also by our surroundings" (Klag, 1995, p. 3).

Policies

Policies include "the rules, codes, and procedures used to regulate the ongoing functions of organizations" (Purkey & Novak, 1988, p. 22). Policies tell students, educators, and members of the community what the expectations of the school are, and how they affect each person. Policies must be appropriate, democratic, and caring. They must be reached collaboratively and be sensitive to whom they affect. Stanley urged school leaders to ensure that policies concerning attendance, suspension and promotion are not only fair, but understood by the individual students that are affected by them (Stanley, 1994). Wayson, Mitchell, Pinnell, and Landis explained that often policies in a school are used in an effort to prove that some children cannot learn (1988), and this must be avoided.

Programs

Programs refer to two different practices. First, educators should be aware of, and constantly monitor, any programs that label students especially if they segregate those students from others. Rather than trying to get children to fit into some type of existing model, the school should endeavor to alter its instruction so that it caters to the individual child (Stanley, 1994). Although sometimes a necessity, separating children from their peers can lead to the stigmatization of those involved. Students can experience a psychic numbing by being placed in a low track that separates them from the opportunities afforded those in the higher tracks (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Secondly, community-based service programs are known and utilized by invitational educators. Everything from Big Brothers/Sisters to free dental care, from The Salvation Army to retired volunteers can contribute to a schools' welfare and the welfare of its students. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development recommended that partnerships should be formed between schools and community services to make sure that students have access to available health and social services (1989).

People

People come first. In an inviting school, educators know and use students names often. Not to do so seems to deny students their dignity as unique human beings (Stanley, 1994). Courtesy and civility are the rule in a school where there is an emphasis on the wants and needs of the students and faculty. Nehring pointed out that the goal of educators needs to be that elusive intersection of student interests and academic aims, and to create an environment where both can thrive (1989). If places or policies or programs inconvenience or inhibit learning, they should be altered. People, in schools or in any democratic institution, are the main order of business.

The Four Corner Press

Is there a long-range plan for implementing these theories in a school in order to make it more inviting? Yes. It is called the Four Corner Press. The elements of this plan focus on the behavior of the educator and include: (1) being personally inviting with one's self; (2) being personally inviting with others; (3) being professionally inviting with one's self; and (4) being professionally inviting with others. "While these corners are simple to describe, they are not easy to implement ...the goal is to balance the demands of the four corners and to orchestrate ways to blend them together" (Purkey & Novak, 1988, p. 26).

Personally Inviting—Self

Being personally inviting with one's self means taking care of one's self. "A call to education is the most important self-invitation many educators have ever issued" (Aspy & Aspy, 1994, p. 82). If an educator leads a monotonous life, chances are they are boring to others. The way in which teachers view themselves is in direct correlation to their ability to assist students who are striving to realize positive self-concepts (Purkey, 1970). Students tend to learn from the kind of person they wish to emulate (Smith, 1995). Educators should strive to have a positive presence, foster their own self-esteem, and live life to its fullest. John H. Wilson suggested that educators take time for thoughtful reflection (1986). Wilson's advice is in league with Achilles, Brubaker, and Snyder when they mentioned reflection and discussion as a means of streamlining understanding (1992).

Personally Inviting—Others

Being personally inviting with others can simply mean being able to give and accept praise in interaction with others. "One additional

aspect ...is to develop and maintain unconditional regard and respect for other human beings" (Purkey & Novak, 1984). People require nurturing and should be open to that fact, and willing to give it to others. Cultivating friendships is a method useful in satisfying this corner. People desire to share who they are and should invite others to share of themselves (Wilson, 1986).

Professionally Inviting—Self

Being professionally inviting with one's self means being a lifelong learner and explorer. Standing still in professional development, means losing ground (Purkey & Novak, 1988). Satisfying this corner could involve traveling, piloting new programs, reading and writing as part of a group, or participating in an educational exchange with another district. Drawing from one's own talents and interests, a membership in a professional group could be attained and an active role played (Wilson, 1986). Ann Weaver Hart suggested that school leaders must take the opportunity to examine their careers, their personal and professional development, and their special needs as working adults (1993).

Professionally Inviting—Others

Being professionally inviting with others can be accomplished by taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the previous corners. The manner in which educators communicate, in a "common shared language" (Brown, 1990), with others indicates how inviting they are. The same is true in how an educator evaluates another. An educator who is professionally inviting with others looks at existing programs and policies to see if they are inherently fair, understood, and appropriately administered. "In effect, they [school leaders] may behave situationally as a manager, facilitator, counselor or change

agent depending on circumstances, but they remained steadfast in their stance with themselves and others" (Fink, in press). "'Inviters' know that all people deserve and need invitations to abundant life" (Aspy, 1994, p. 116).

Invitational Education - A Conclusion

Whenever a model or program is held up to an educator as the "answer" to the problems faced by the educational community, that educator should be wary. There are countless devices, and schools of thought, claiming to rid the profession of its evils, and all should be greeted with some hesitancy. Perhaps the answer lies not in encompassing any one school of thought, but in being able to glean bits and pieces from each. Perhaps educators can apply the beginnings of what they understand about invitational education and make a difference in the lives of themselves and in those with whom they work.

Invitational education seeks to assist individuals and their relationships with others. If that leads to a reform movement in education, so much the better. It is not the introduction of radical new concepts. In many ways it is the acknowledgment of what has always been there, even though it is often overlooked. It is rooted in the foundations of democratic philosophy and it is imperative that those tenets be directly applied in any educational reform initiative. If enough educators wish to improve their lot by using these principles and attitudes in their personal and professional interactions, then invitational change will come about. This type of reform ensures that schools everywhere will become "the most inviting places in town."

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