

**William Watson Purkey:  
In Memoriam**

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On April 7, 2024, the field of education lost a giant of a man who influenced education in profound ways. He practiced what he preached by being a genuinely inviting man. I was privileged to know him for many years.

In 1985 when I was teaching Kindergarten in Conifer, Colorado, my principal, Jim Fay, introduced me to a book by William and John Novak called *Inviting School Success: A Self-Concept Approach to Teaching and Learning* (Purkey & Novak, 1984). They suggested that teachers could be intentionally disinviting, unintentionally disinviting, unintentionally inviting, or intentionally inviting. He and Betty Siegel had developed Invitational Education based on the perceptual tradition, which is the idea that people behave based on the way they perceive the world. It was also based on self-concept theory, as well as the democratic ethos.

While I had always sought to create a warm welcoming environment for my students, I had not put a name to it. When I began using Invitational Education and focused on being *intentionally* inviting in my classroom, the parents of my students asked, “Jenny, what are you doing?” They noticed a difference right away.

In 1989, while attending the National Staff Development Council conference in Chicago, Illinois, Dr. Purkey was offering a workshop on Invitational Education. I decided to attend because I enjoyed his book so much. He presented in a lively and engaging manner. He talked about teachers giving “blue cards” containing inviting messages to students and “orange cards” containing disinviting messages. He also talked about how to be inviting to oneself and to “never pass up a drinking fountain,” among many other things.

As a result of hearing Dr. Purkey speak, I decided to join the International Alliance for Invitational Education. The most amazing thing . . . every year after paying my dues to the Alliance, I received a typewritten letter with a handwritten note at the bottom signed by Dr. Purkey. I saved and treasured them, never thinking I would be able to meet him again. During those years, I continued focusing on creating an inviting atmosphere for my students.

During the mid-1990s, while presenting my research on Cognitive Coaching<sup>SM</sup> at the American Educational Research Association (AERA), I happened to see a meeting for the Invitational Education Special Interest Group (SIG). I attended it and met wonderful, inviting people. Their officers were rotating off and they needed new officers. A gentleman and I volunteered to become Chairs for the SIG. Thereafter, I held various SIG offices. The best part was having the opportunity to talk with Dr. Purkey about the SIG. Never in my wildest dreams had I thought I would be able to meet and talk with him. I had revered him for so many years.

In 2005, a friend within the SIG, Dr. Tommie Radd, said that if I was going to work with the Invitational Education group of AERA, it should attend the IAIE World Conference, which was held in Hong Kong that year. One of Dr. Purkey's doctoral students, Dr. Peter Wong, had taken Invitational Education to Hong Kong, and many schools had begun applying IE theory and practices. During that IAIE World Conference, I got to know Dr. Purkey, Dr. Novak, Dr. Siegel, and many other members of the Alliance. What a joy! I learned not only from the seminars and talks they gave but also from the inviting way they treated everyone in attendance. As a result of my experience in Hong Kong, I started attending the annual IAIE conferences. One of the joys of attending was seeing Dr. Purkey, his wife Imogene, Dr. Siegel, Dr. Novak, and others in the Alliance.

Thereafter, Dr. Purkey invited me to serve on the Advisory Council and then nominated me for the Board of Trustees. I could not believe it! He also invited me to continue updating the Invitational Education Archives, which contains all of the research studies, articles, and books that have been published in the field of Invitational Education. (*If anyone would like a copy, please send an e-mail to me at [jedwards@fielding.edu](mailto:jedwards@fielding.edu) with "IAIE Archives" in the Subject line.*) At every turn, I found Dr. Purkey to be inviting and willing to model the invitational mindset he had developed.

I devoured Dr. Purkey's books. In 1996, he and John Novak updated their book, *Inviting School Success* (Purkey & Novak, 1996). In 2000, he wrote a fascinating book on how students self-talk (Purkey, 2000). He and Dr. Siegel wrote a book in which they applied Invitational Education and Theory to the field of leadership (Purkey & Siegel, 2003). Recently, he, John Novak, and Joan Fretz wrote *Developing Inviting Schools: A Beneficial Framework for Teaching and Learning* (Purkey et al., 2020). I had the privilege of being asked by the publisher to provide feedback on the book before it was published.

I had always been fascinated with the use of language and, as a result of my studies, decided to write a book on using invitational language with students called *Inviting Students to Learn: 100 Tips for Talking Effectively with Your Students* (Edwards, 2010). I desire was to contribute to the field of Invitational Education. When the publisher asked what I wanted the title to be, I said it could be anything; however, it needed to have the word “Inviting” or “Invitational” in the title.

Going forward a few years, Dr. Sheila Gregory and I noticed that the focus of Invitational Education had been on providing strategies that were inviting teachers of students in grades K-12. However, nothing was available for those in higher education. Since many of the people in the International Alliance for Invitational Education taught in universities and shared Invitational Education with their students, including teacher candidates, we decided to invite people in the Alliance to write articles for an edited book on how those in higher education were using Invitational Education (Gregory & Edwards, 2014). Since it included articles from around the world, we named it *Invitational Education and Practice in Higher Education: An International Perspective*.

A few years later, when Dr. Purkey wrote his autobiography, *My Rubber Knife Life* (Purkey, 2019), he invited me to write a review of the book for the *Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice (JITP)*. In it, he told the story of being a class clown. This and other adventures helped lead him develop invitational theory and practice.

I will greatly miss Dr. Purkey. I think of him often. He taught me to be intentionally inviting in everything I do. He has positively impacted the lives of countless individuals around the world through his seminars, his articles, and his books. Most of all, those who knew him had a rare opportunity to know a man who practiced what he preached. He exemplified Invitational Education. Truly, the field of education has lost a giant of a man.

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