

Invitational Education: A Model for Teachers and Counsellors

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Introduction

Education is fundamentally an imaginative act of hope (Purkey & Novak, 1996)

Invitational Education is a significant and relevant theoretical model for application by teachers and counsellors. It is a theory of practice that addresses the total educational environment: social, physical, cognitive, spiritual, and emotional. Developed by William W. Purkey (Purkey & Schimdt, 1996; Purkey & Novak, 1996) Invitational Education is a democratically oriented, perceptually anchored, self-concept approach to the educative and counselling process.

Based on perceptual psychology and self-concept tenets, Invitational Education provides a model of educative and counselling practice to promote people to realise their potential in all areas of worthwhile endeavours.

Perceptual psychology postulates that each person creates their own reality through their perceptions of what they believe to be real (Combs, Richards, & Richards, 1988; Combs & Gonzales, 1994; Kelly, 1955, 1963; Jourard, 1971). Furthermore, a person's behaviour is contingent on how an individual perceives and interprets his/her experiences. Purkey and Novak (1996) identified three assumptions of the perceptual psychology approach that are relevant to working with individuals in a school setting:

1. Behaviour is based on perceptions. Individuals behave according to their subjective perception of the environment (internal and external).
2. Perceptions are learned. One's interpretation of the environment is learned and therefore can be unlearned given new information and new experiences. This particular assumption embraces the idea that a change in perception will bring about a change in behaviour.

3. Perceptions can be reflected upon. Being aware of one's past and present perception and being able to go beyond them allows for further development and understanding of oneself, others, and the world.

Thus, from the perspective of perceptual psychology it is clear that to understand an individual's behaviour we need to know how that individual perceives and interprets his/her life experiences. An individual's personal interpretation or frame of reference is more important than "objective reality" because an individual responds to their perception of reality and not to reality itself (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996; Seligman, 1991).

Self-concept consists of each person's unique system of perceptions about the self in relation to one's environment. A person seeks to maintain a consistent self-concept by assimilating or rejecting perceptions that do or do not fit preconceptions, but a person's self-concept can change and develop as a result of inviting or encouraging acts.

The Inviting School

Invitational Education focuses on five environmental areas (5 "Ps") that support or hinder an individual's success or failure. The areas identified involve people, places, policies, programs, and processes (Purkey & Lehr, 1996; Purkey & Novak, 1996).

"People" assesses respect, caring, and the honouring of diversity and refers to the positive or "inviting" influence of the teachers and support staff in the school. "Places" relates to the physical aspects of the school. "Policies" refers to the procedures, codes, rules, written and unwritten, used to regulate the ongoing functions of individuals and organisations. "Programs" refers to the curriculum for students to develop both academically, physically, and socially inviting environment. "Processes" refers to such issues as cooperative spirit, democratic activities, values, and attitudes of students, teachers, administrators, and support staff.

The Inviting School Survey (Purkey & Fuller, 1995) was developed to assess how teachers, administrators, support staff, and students perceive the level of “invitation” in schools across the five areas (5 “Ps”) identified in the Invitational Education paradigm.

The Inviting Counsellor/Teacher

Invitational Education emphasizes that human potential can best be realised by creating and maintaining places, policies, processes, and programs, specifically designed to invite development, and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally.

The Invitational Education model identifies four levels of functioning in personal and professional living of counsellors and teachers:

1. Intentionally Disinviting (Deliberately discouraging; Busy with other obligations; Focused on students’ shortcomings). Teachers and counsellors who deliberately attempt to make students feel incapable, worthless, and irresponsible.
2. Unintentionally Disinviting (Well-meaning, but condescending; Obsessed with policies and procedures; Unaware of students’ feelings). Counsellors and teachers who “have their hearts in the right place” but whose methods contradict their good intentions by inadvertent discouraging messages conveyed through labelling or stereotyping, nonverbal signals, or other signals.
3. Unintentionally Inviting (Well-liked and reasonably effective; Inconsistent and uncertain in decision-making). Counsellors and teachers who are “naturals”, but who are unaware of the nature and good effects of their behaviour. Because they do not see the sources of their successes and failures, such individuals are blocked from professional development, and they often lack the consistent pattern of behaviour many students need in order to formulate their own identities.
4. Intentionally Inviting (Optimistic, respectful, and trustworthy; Able to affirm yet guide students). Teachers and counsellors who explicitly invite students, teachers, administrators, and parents and are able to adjust and evaluate their invitations as necessary.

Summary

The goal for most teachers and counsellors, of course, is to be intentionally inviting as much as possible. The intentionally inviting person makes a determined effort to make the

school an inviting place that stresses the importance and uniqueness of students, encourages parental involvement in the school, and nurtures the creativity of all. The intentionally inviting teacher and counsellor: listens with care, acts “real” with students, possess self-understanding and self-acceptance, handles rejection well, and effectively manages stress.

Invitational Education emphasises that teachers and counsellor's beliefs and attitudes about people --- including trust, respect, optimism and intentionality (positively enhancing) -- - are paramount in enabling the client to become his/her best self:

- Respect:** People are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly.
- Trust:** Education should be a cooperative, collaborative activity where process is as important as product.
- Optimism:** People possess untapped potential in all worthwhile human endeavour.
- Intentionality:** Human potential can best be realised by creating and maintaining Places, Policies, Processes, and Programs, specifically designed to invite development, and by People who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally.

In conclusion, Invitational Education is a process for communicating caring and appropriate messages intended to summon forth the realisation of human potential as well as for identifying and changing those forces that defeat and destroy potential.

An Invitation

Individuals interested in learning more about Invitational Education and/or becoming a member of the International Alliance for Invitational Education (IAIE) are requested to contact the IAIE Australian Coordinator: Dr Ken Smith, Australian Catholic University, 03-9953-3257 (Tel), 03-9953-3495 (Fax), or k.smith.patrick.acu.edu.au (Email).

Additional information regarding Invitational Education and the Inviting School Survey (ISS) may be obtained at the following websites:

<http://www.invitationaleducation.net>

<http://www.radford.edu/~inviteru>

<http://www.invitationaleducation.net/iss/index.htm>

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