Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice

Volume 8, 2002

The International Alliance for Invitational Education

The ***Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice*** (ISSN-1060-6041) is published once a year, by the International Alliance for Invitational Education, School of Education, PO Box 26171, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27401-6171. Subscriptions for non-members are $35.00 per year; IAIE members receive the journal as part of their membership. Send address change to The International Alliance for Invitational Education, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27402-6171.

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The ***Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice*** promotes the study and research of invitational theory and application. It publishes articles to advance invitational learning and living and the foundations that support this theory of practice, particularly self-concept theory and perceptual psychology. Authors should submit manuscripts in triplicate to the editor. Guidelines for Authors are found in the journal.

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Editorial

For Better or Worse: Our Marriage with Conflict

The current strife at home and around the world has conspired to limit the reasonableness of presenting conflict as a positive and invigorating experience in our lives. Conflict seems to be pressing on us from all potential sources: religious, regional, economic, political, ethnic, racial, class, family, workplace, and moral.

However, we must still view conflict as an essential experience of life, a precursor to change, and the most direct route to amelioration. All substantive decisions are imbedded in a context of conflict. After all, a decision is nothing more than a choice between two or more competing possibilities and competing possibilities confronting one another is just another way of saying "conflict." Engaging in conflict is simply engaging in the fabric of life: making choices, determining the superiority of one course of action over another, and sorting the relative value of possibilities. All reason concludes that being able to experience conflict with something more than an encoded genetic response is one of the events that separates humanity from other social forms of life on this planet.

Take, for example, the life of the bee. Happily our bee scours the countryside for pollen palaces and, when discovered, returns to the hive to do an intriguing dance to let the others know of the discovery. Our little bee does not expect a celebration of its good luck and exploring prowess. It does not seek special recognition. It is not burdened by the choice between sharing or keeping the discovery a secret. It does the dance because it is a bee with a discovery to share. The bee simply acts: no choices, no decision, no conflict.

Science fiction has created fictional societies where human-like creatures operate devoid of the burden of thought, conflict, and decision. Followers of the television series Star Trek: The

Next Generation will readily identify this theme with the deadly Borg, a civilization of drone humanoids assimilated from various parts of the universe. With the Borg all decisions are a result of a collective consciousness controlled by an elusive queen. Only the queen experiences conflict, only the queen makes decisions, only the queen carries the burden of right and wrong. The Borg drones just "do." They do not suffer from conflict because all choices are made for them. It is not without reason that science fiction writers pose this type of civilization as the darkest of our fears. That fear is a world where we are free of freedom and the conflicts that freedom of choice brings.

Finding a concise way of presenting the topic of conflict in an ameliorative light is an elusive goal. Our social norms have attempted to cast conflict as impolite and we have developed a system that promotes the sycophant, the flatterer, the go-along, the "team player", the toad, the bee, the Borg. As much as we may choose to avoid conflict, a world without conflict doesn't seem that attractive. Part of the difficulty in resolving our negative feeling about conflict is our tendency to enjoin "conflict" with aggression, hostility, and anger. While the latter are certainly outcomes of conflict, I would characterize those outcomes as ineffective and possibly inappropriate strategies for *dealing* with conflict.

Fortunately for us, there are scholars and practitioners who are working on developing strategies for resolving conflict. Invitational education has as its core a respect for the perception of others even if the perceptions are demonstrably inaccurate or hurtful. In those cases, we respect the individual, but engage in a series of activities that invite the individual to deal with the perceptions of others, to assist in understanding how others think and feel, and to appreciate how each of us have developed our personal beliefs and attitudes. These are fundamental building blocks to effective communication that leads to appropriate and helpful strategies for satisfying coexistence.

Let me complete this introduction to the current volume by establishing a few generalizations about conflict that will make reading this issue more profitable. First, we must keep in mind that conflict is foremost a difference of perception. The difference might arise from a difference in what is "real" or "really happened". The difference may focus on a possible resolution or course of action. It may be a difference of values, of religious truth, of morality, or of a differentiation between right and wrong.

Conflict can be internal or external. Inner conflict is certainly problematic when a person has competing concepts of what to think, how to feel, and what to do. Resolving inner conflict is a life skill that can determine satisfaction or misery. External conflict involves competing perceptions among individuals. There may be conflict within conflict. Two groups may be in conflict but within a single group there may be many competing perceptions also. Conflict is rarely so simple as to be dichotomous.

Every decision is an attempt at resolving conflict. To be sure, come conflict may be trivial (e.g. choosing a school mascot) but may involve great emotional energy and contain a tremendous investment of dignity and worth by the individuals involved. While most conflict is resolve amicably, one never really knows what the effects of a single decision are nor what the cumulative effects of a series of decisions will be.

Conflict can be ameliorative (making things better) or pejorative (making things worse). Whether a solution makes things better or worse is primarily determined by the view of the individual in conflict. A resolution can be effective, that is, it obtains the stated outcome, yet result in increased conflict among parties particularly when the emotional perceptions of events are subject to internal swings within and among participants. To whit, "I may have wanted it then, but now I want something else." Conflict is resolved amicably so frequently that we generally do not attend to those incidences with the same intensity as conflict that is mishandled. Thus, we tend to think of conflict in pejorative terms. We

also lose the opportunity to generalize from the successful conflict resolution strategies we employ daily.

Some conflict neither makes things better or worse and can't be resolved. This type of conflict must be managed. That is, the conflict will continue but negative outcomes are mitigated and some positive outcomes remain a possibility. A rather good example is the National Council of Churches where many competing theologies are set aside for an agreement on the common good contained in the shared beliefs. The conflict in theology remains, hence the many denominations. However, points of agreement are singled out and are used to promote the common welfare and achieve ideals impossible to obtain singly. Managing conflict is often overlooked yet it remains a critical strategy. Managed conflict is found in most families as parents and children seek out coexistence in an uncommon worldview.

We have been taught how to avoid conflict when, in many cases, we should engage the conflict to build understanding and friendships. We have "polite society" and hierarchical power structures that govern many of our social relationships.

However, by emphasizing avoidance of conflict by compliance, silence, and capitulation, conflict is avoided, but it tends to grow, thus making the handling of major conflict more difficult. Preferably, we handle conflict incrementally by engaging a sequence of many small resolvable conflict situations so that way the "stakes" are minimized in any one situation. Also when we are finally confronted with conflict after avoiding it for a substantial part of our lives, we haven't developed the appropriate skills to employ in those situations. Also, our emotions can become "undisciplined" and run counter to reason and our best interests.

Finally, we need to constantly remember that conflict is not aggression, is not the sole purview of the curmudgeon, and is absolutely essential for growth. While aggression can be a response to conflict; so is forgiveness, assistance, compromise, and friendship.

Our first article deals directly with conflict within the context of social work counseling employing invitational education's "5 C's" Lynn Linville demonstrates how the use of a sequence of strategies can permit those who may have made poor choices can be invited to re-examine pervious decisions and be assisted in asserting more helpful actions and attitudes. It is interesting to note that invitational theory continues to develop and a sixth "C" has been added. Conciliation is the ultimate invitation to heal emotional wounds by establishing new bonds of mutual concern.

Frank Howe provides an analysis of conflict within the marriage framework. He analyzes the results of destructive habits and provides inviting alternatives.

Elaine Tung establishes the need for life skills in her homeland of Hong Kong. With the repatriation of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China, the educational system has instigated a renewed focus on successful living and social skills in a rapidly changing world. Ms. Tung demonstrates how successfully invitational education has been integrated into the life skills program at her institution.

Finally, Giovanni Valiante and Frank Pajares provide a reflective analysis of the influence of grade level, gender, and gender orientation toward children's inviting thoughts and behaviors. They reveal interesting effects of gender and gender orientation toward caring and social responsibility.

Certainly this volume of JITP demonstrates the universality of inviting behaviors and the benefits that inviting behaviors can bring. However, inviting stances need to be valued, taught, and practiced if those benefits are to revitalize a world that has in the past been dominated by aggression. We have much to do before our dreams of an inviting world are realized.

Phil Riner

Editor

Special Note: The Board of Trustees of the International Alliance for Invitational Education has authorized a change in the publication of this journal. Starting with this issue, *JITP* will be published once a year in August/September. The scope of each issue will attempt to address invitational education issues through empirical investigations, practitioner reports, theoretical analyses, and case studies.

An Invitation for Social Workers to Employ Conflict Management

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For many years social workers have been searching for a way to reach clients who are not inclined to cooperate with any welfare program that produces change in their way of life. Social workers may use a broad base of knowledge that will enable them to incorporate invitational theory in their work. This article looks at how a social worker is able to use conflict management as described by William Purkey and John Schmidt in their book on invitational counseling in order to better engage the hardest to reach clients.

Due to the Welfare Reform Act, social work programs have seen changes in the type of services delivered to the poor and disadvantaged. These changes have been keenly felt by social workers throughout the country. Workers often find themselves on the frontline in dealing with conflict. This paper draws on the experiences of social workers in Forsyth County, North Carolina. As the welfare roles are reduced, the social worker is faced with providing services to clients with the most barriers and/or to those who are the most resistant to change.

The data collected was from a cross section of social workers in Work First Program in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The workers consisted of 20 female workers and 5 male workers. The social workers wrote about the problems they experienced in dealing with their clients. Each worker is the case manager for approximately 50 to 100 clients.

Workers continue to look for techniques to reach a resistant client. Active listening is imperative when trying to reach a client.

However, the workers often find communication with the client to be difficult and the result to be inadequate. The client continues to rely on information gleaned from many years of receiving public assistance. Welfare reform is forcing them to change. A client can no longer receive assistance without participation in work or work related activities. Therefore, the clients are compelled to participate, whether they desire to or not. The result is that the clients must make a decision based on what they see as the best choice. March and Simon (1981) noted "The organization and social environment in which the decision maker finds himself determines what consequences he will anticipate, what ones he will not; what alternatives he will consider, what ones he will ignore" (p.137). The social worker must remember that the choice to participate is that of the client.

The key that the social worker may be looking for to reach clients who are choosing to ignore welfare reform, may be the use of conflict management as described by Purkey and Schmidt (1996). It is important to note that social workers in the study use many of the techniques that are described in that text. However, additional insights are needed in order to reach those clients who are likely to be without income when public assistance ends. Purkey and Schmidt describe the process of conflict management as including the following: concern, confer, consult, confront, and combat. Each level will be addressed in this paper as a guide for combining social work with invitational theory to reach the desired goal.

Concern

Concern is the first step in the intervention when frustration or conflict begins. The social worker must try to discern if the clients are frustrated because they feel they cannot participate due to barriers. In this case, listening to the client, expressing genuine concern for the client's view, and offering alternatives at the proper time may help the worker gain the client's confidence at this lowest level. The client must be receptive to the ideas. If the social worker tried to present the program to clients when they are angry

or upset then the timing will have foiled the best attempt to assist the client. Clients must not feel that their concerns have been trivialized. Their concerns are real. If the social worker can assist by finding the resources and support necessary to help the client, the social worker may be able to help the client down the road to self-sufficiency without proceeding to the next step of conferring.

Confer

Conferring means that a client and the social worker will have a one-to-one conversation. Positive interaction must be part of a meeting between the social worker and the client. The client should not be preached to but greeted with a genuine smile, eye contact, and firm handshake (Purkey and Schmidt, 1996). Many social workers have been conferring with the client as a natural part of their caring service. However, welfare reform pushes the worker to meet specific goals within a time limit. That time limit is important but the greatest concern should be on what a client needs to say. Clients may confide in the social worker that they are in an abusive situation or that they have a substance abuse problem. The social worker then uses positive interactions to help the clients identify their concerns. The process of conferring includes these elements: (1) ameliorating the concern through informal, private, one-to-one discussions; (2) establishing that each person has a clear understanding of the nature of the concern; (3) determining whether or not both parties know why this situation is a concern; (4) agreeing on what both parties want to happen for the concern to be resolved; and (5) determining where these is room for compromise (Purkey and Schmidt, 1996, p.134.). When the social worker uses these skills, many issues often are resolved at this level. However, the worker may find that the client still may not respond. If the problem is not resolved then the next step should be pursued.

Consult

Consulting is more formal, and an agenda is planned when the client and the worker meet. The social worker must be able to take

time to work with the client in this problem solving consultation. The biggest concern is that all involved are committed to problem solving. The problem solving consultation may use the formal process as follows: (1) an introduction phase of identifying the concern, (2) exploration phase of seeking alternative ways of handling the conflict, (3) an action plan in which the participants accept responsibilities, and (4) an evaluation phase during which the parties contact one another and express their satisfaction or discontent with progress being made to resolve the situation (Purkey and Schmidt, 1996, p. 134). Everyone involved must know the expectations and consequences that may result if the conflict resolution fails. That means that the social worker may need to conduct a formal meeting to ascertain the reason why a client is failing to cooperate (Purkey and Schmidt, 1996). If a client fails to follow through with the plan then the social work may use the conflict management model incorporated in invitational counseling by moving to the next step of confronting the client with the deficit between current behavior and needed behavior.

Confront

Confronting a client is a more forceful response, and therefore, contains a greater element of risk. Confronting a client about failure to follow through may be productive when the individuals understand that the reason for the confrontation is to try to resolve the problem. In order for a social worker to have an impact, the meeting must stay focused upon the responsibilities of the person and not on the excuses for failure to follow-through on the agreement (Purkey and Schmidt, 1996). “Self-responsibility is the key; blame and excuses are counterproductive” (Purkey and Schmidt p.136). If responsibility is accepted, the social worker can assist the client in making a new plan toward self-sufficiency. A previous plan may be used if there is a chance that it will be successful. If, however, the plan is not followed, the next level is combat.

Combat

The social worker is in an active state at this time. Purkey and Schmidt's use of the word "combat" is as a noun (com' bat), meaning that the situation, not the individual, is declared unaccepted and in unquestioned need of change. This is the highest level of conflict management. At this level, the social worker must cautiously focus on the situation, not the individual, in order to avoid bitterness and resentment. The social worker must be aware that some clients will be hostile and will try to use this confrontation as a defense mechanism. The client often believes that brute force will be an easy way to end the conflict and become hostile. The client may feel that the social worker is threatening his or her way of life. Again, the social worker needs to continually stress that the current status of the situation cannot persist and change must occur.

What a Social Worker Can Do

Purkey and Schmidt (1996) serve as guides to explore ideas that social workers may use to talk with their client. The social worker does not want conflict. However, there is no way to avoid some conflict. The goal of the social worker is to stop conflict at its lowest possible level, ideally at the level of concern. The following guidelines were gleaned from the study's participants and are offered to assist the social worker in resolving conflict at this level, or, if necessary, at higher levels.

- The social worker needs to welcome conflict. Conflict may help the social worker get at the root of problems that have kept a client from fully participating with a plan.
- A social worker must use a sense of humor in order to prevent the client from moving to the next level of conflict.
- All too often conflict is not understood. The job of the social worker is to understand the problem that is causing the client to be resistant to change.
- The social worker must listen to the client in order to find out what areas need to be addressed in order to help the client resolve issues.

- The social worker must be empathetic. A worker cannot just hear what a client is saying, but must look deeper and understand how the client sees the problem.
- The social worker must accept how the client sees the situation and develop plans that will enable the client to change perceptions if the perceptions get in the way of the client's ability to deal with the current situation.
- The social worker must remain open and optimistic to the client. Open lines of communication means that conflict may be minimized.

Clients may have ideas that the social worker has never thought about, and the ideas may enhance the client's chance of being successful. The social worker and the client may be able to bring new ideas to the table together. The client's feedback is essential to his or her success. The ideas presented in this paper represent ideas that may allow a social worker to move away from the tradition of advising clients what to do, and inviting clients to do what best meets their true growth needs. Clients need to understand that when a plan is negotiated, the social worker will hold them to that agreement. Conflict may escalate but, by being persistent in inviting resolution (rather than tolerating poor personal life choices), the social worker may guide the client to solve his or her difficulties independently sometime in the future.

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Work First Employment Service Workers of Forsyth County Department of Social Services. Winston-Salem, NC. Personal interviews on various dates.

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The Value of Intimate Relationships and the Challenge of Conflict

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The value and importance of human intimacy is examined as a complex combination of passion, commitment, friendship, and love. Models of healthy and unhealthy conflict in relationships are offered as well as suggestions for moving from unhealthy expressions of conflict to healthy ones.

Human intimacy is a complex combination of passion, commitment, friendship, and love in which two individuals experience a compelling desire for ongoing close interaction with each other. Such interactions typically span the full range of human activity. Intimate relationships are social, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. They support work, leisure, and learning. Unfortunately, popular media (television, movies, books, magazines) often offer a modern view of the risks of intimacy, which seems to imply that attempting to find a life-partner is fraught with such peril and low probability of success that one might better spend the time learning how to be comfortably alone. There is a great sadness to such a widespread perception. We are in fact social creatures. At the very center of our social system is, or should be, deeply caring relationships. Intimate relationships provide mutual support, mutual fulfillment, and promote positive growth and development. These relationships are the bedrock of the fundamental social system: the family. It is important then to affirm the value of intimacy and to identify ways to maintain a healthy intimate relationship. As a beginning, let's examine some of the benefits of such relationships.

Mutual Support

Individuals involved in significant intimate relationships provide to each other a sense of concern and compassion in times of stress and difficulty. This readiness to be supportive gives evidence to an emotional bond that leads each to care about the other's concerns and values. If an issue is significant to one, it is by definition significant to the other. This is not to imply husbands and wives or other intimates necessarily share all interests. In fact this is usually not the case. Differing interests appropriately foster and validate the individual's uniqueness within the relationship. What it does mean is that when one partner is distressed the other feels discomfort as well, and when one partner is happy or excited the other shares in that joy.

Individuals involved in significant intimate relationships provide each other a sounding board for thoughts & feelings. There is not only an empathetic, shared, emotional experience but a willingness and interest in helping each other explore areas of concern and develop useful ideas, perceptions, and plans of action. Individuals involved in caring relationships not only care; they act with each other to negotiate life's challenges as successfully as possible.

Individuals involved in significant intimate relationships provide protection from the physical, social, and emotional pains that afflict us from time to time. In word and in action there is evidenced a genuine desire to protect each other from harm whenever possible. An Irish proverb asserts, "It is in the shelter of each other that the people live." Daily acts of protectiveness (reminders of outside obligations, carrying heavy items, picking up some cold medicine at the market) are regularly evidenced in caring relationships.

Mutual Fulfillment

Individuals involved in significant intimate relationships provide a sense of completion or wholeness to each other. We are social creatures with strong emotional and physical drives toward intimate bonding. Meaningful companionship contributes significantly to one's sense of well being. The mutual awareness that two people hold each other in high regard and will actively work for their mutual benefit provides each with a sense of security. This security brings confidence in their ability to successfully meet needs and discover life's joys.

Individuals involved in significant intimate relationships provide each other the opportunity to construct a new social system. Family is the most significant social system to which we belong. As individuals grow and develop, their roles within the family change. Through adolescence and early adulthood, individuals appropriately transition out of the tight social network of their family of origin. Formation of an intimate adult relationship provides the opportunity to continue the experience of new and fulfilling family relationships throughout the life span.

Individuals involved in significant intimate relationships augment each other's sense of value or self worth. The support and concern inherent in such relationships increase and bolster one's sense of self worth but does not create it. A healthy relationship is composed of two individuals who begin with a positive sense of self, as opposed to two individuals whose self-doubts or insecurities are allayed by their developing partnership. All significant relationships experience times of uncertainty, especially in the formative stages. Uncertainty about the value or stability of the relationship should not translate into uncertainty about the value or stability of oneself.

Promoting Positive Growth and Development

Individuals involved in significant intimate relationships encourage continued mutual development of skills and knowledge. Through their ongoing interactions each seeks and facilitates opportunities for improvement, gain, and growth for themselves and for the other. Through encouragement and genuine interest the individuals support each other's efforts to acquire new skills and life competencies. By believing in each other they give permission to try when success is not assured and provide comfort and reassurance when setbacks occur.

Individuals involved in significant intimate relationships also encourage the discovery of new or untapped aspects of self. As a subset of the above consideration, each encourages the other to expand possibilities, interests, and capabilities, which lead to a strengthened sense of self worth, a better functioning individual, and a better functioning relationship. Areas of dissimilar interest can intrigue and entice partners to explore new possibilities, new forms of expression, and new areas of growth that might not have been considered without exposure to a valued model such as a loved one.

Involvement in significant intimate relationships promotes interdependence. The nature of such relationships promotes a mutual reliance on each other as a source of strength, support, and fulfillment but does not demand or expect that either or both become dependent on the other for positive feelings or experiences. The life of each is greatly enhanced through the relationship. Each is a competent, capable individual whose possibilities and opportunities are expanded through the cooperation, support, and encouragement available within the relationship.

With these benefits attached to intimate relationships, there is a great deal of individual investment in maintaining this rich source of personal satisfaction. What then are some of the reasons why

relationships lose their vitality or in some cases actually become destructive to the individuals involved?

Sources of Conflict

Failure to Clearly Communicate Expectations or Needs

Conflict often occurs in a relationship when one or both individuals are unable to successfully articulate what it is they want from the other. As noted above intimate relations are a rich source of support. When partners do not effectively communicate what kinds of support are needed it lessens the chance that such support will occur.

Failure to Legitimize Another's Expectations or Needs

When a relationship becomes unbalanced it may no longer be viewed as a mutually supportive experience. Individuals may cease to perceive the relationship as a combination of mutual expectations but rather attempt to define the relationship based solely on one's own expectations.

Failure to Meet Another's Expectations or Needs

When, due to a lack of understanding, a lack of interest, or a lack of skill, one or both are unable or unwilling to meet significant expectations of the other, serious conflict is likely to result. Significant expectations are those that an individual views as essential to maintaining the supportive character of the relationship. Such expectations can differ quite markedly from relationship to relationship and from one individual to another within a relationship.

The occurrence of conflict within a relationship is not unusual, nor is it necessarily threatening to the stability of the relationship. The manner in which conflict is identified and addressed is in fact a significant measure of the health of the relationship.

Healthy Conflict

Healthy relationships demonstrate persistent attempts to resolve conflict rather than maintain or ignore it. Both parties seek to resolve problems with confidence in their ability to do so and respect for each other's point of view. The fact that conflict occurs is not an overwhelming or paralyzing experience. There is evidence of trust in self, trust in the other, and trust in the relationship. Blaming is of much less interest than mutual acceptance of the problem and mutual discovery of solutions.

Healthy relationships contain persistent attempts to clearly communicate one's perceptions about the conflict. Communication about one's concerns is relatively direct, clear, and specific. Successful problem solving is seen as dependent on successful communication of one's perceptions. Reliance on hints, guesses, or behavioral acting out is avoided or at least minimized. There is an understanding that to be understood one must be open, honest, and direct.

Healthy relationships make persistent attempts to seek perceptions of the other about the conflict. A genuine attempt is made to seek and understand the other's point of view. Successful problem solving is further seen as dependent on successfully listening to and understanding of another's perceptions and point of view. There is a reluctance to accept uncertainty and active attempts are made to seek clarification.

Healthy relationships show persistent attempts to seek resolutions that respect the rights of each partner and recognize the responsibilities of each. Individuals in healthy relationships see workable solutions that share responsibility and mutually meet needs as far as possible. Fairness and respect are important concerns for both.

Healthy relationships display persistent attempts to seek, acknowledge, and tolerate the possibility of differing expectations within the relationship. Each realizes that the other may have some conflicting needs, interests, and expectations, which will require tolerance and understanding. All desirable change, from one perspective, may not be possible or even desirable from another. As long as these differences are not too great and are not considered central to the relationship, the relationship may still flourish.

Healthy relationships acknowledge that the relationships may dissolve if differences are too great. There exists an awareness that in any developing relationship essential differences may interfere with the ability of each to mutually support the other. There is also an understanding that if this is so, the relationship may need to be dissolved. Individuals typically will work earnestly to prevent this. However, when necessary, such dissolution will occur without excessive blame or self-recrimination. It likely will be viewed as a sad but appropriate change in the lives of both. In contrast, unhealthy relationships commonly evidence distinctly different manifestations of conflict.

Unhealthy Conflict

Manifestations of unhealthy conflict often focus mainly on the needs or expectations of one party. Either through mutual agreement or through coercion, one party becomes the central focus of the relationship. Meeting that singular set of needs and expectations builds a glaring deficit in the notion of mutual fulfillment and creates an emotional storage bin for resentment and discontent.

Unhealthy conflict is also found where there is disregard for the rights of the other party. Because of the distorted unilateral focus, one party inappropriately loses rights and assumes responsibilities of the other. The misperception that one individual's needs are more important than the other's leads to the mistaken conclusion that this favored individual's rights proportionately outweigh the other's.

Unhealthy conflict often assaults the dignity and self worth of one or both partners in a relationship. As a means of maintaining this imbalance partners attack the dignity and the human value of the other in order to justify the relationship's concentration on only one set of needs and expectations. The devaluing of one is an attempt to justify the emphasis placed on the other.

Unhealthy conflict often fails to acknowledge personal responsibility for one's actions. One or both parties fail to accept ownership of problem behavior such as assaultive or degrading attacks. The perception of one person being responsible for the feelings or behaviors of the other becomes mistakenly legitimized. Messages are given and accepted that feelings and behavioral choices of one partner are "caused" by the other.

Unhealthy conflict often focuses on altering partner’s perceptions rather than discovering and understanding them. Within this distortion of balance and abandonment of mutual respect, concerted attempts are regularly made to shape another's perceptions to fit one's own, without discovering the nature of the other's perceptions or considering the possible validity of these differing perceptions. Altering feelings and perceptions takes precedence over discovering, validating, and respecting feelings and perceptions.

Relationships that contain unhealthy conflict often seek to control partners and not to negotiate for solutions. Ongoing efforts are made that attempt to require compliance to one's expectations as opposed to gaining agreement to mutual expectations. Various forms of coercion or seduction are viewed as legitimate tools to manipulate another's behavior.

Manifestations of unhealthy conflict often oppose the right to differ. One or both parties see differing perceptions or opinions as an inherent threat to the continuance of the relationship. A strong perception persists that disagreement within a relationship is by

definition commensurate with the disintegration of the relationship.

Couples experiencing unhealthy conflict often reject the possibility that the relationship can change or dissolve. As a corollary to the previous erroneous assumption, one or both parties see the termination of the relationship as an intolerable threat to one's sense of self worth and well being. A strong perception persists that disintegration of the relationship is by definition commensurate with the disintegration of the self.

Finally it is important to acknowledge the resiliency and dynamic quality of human relationships. Even if a relationship has many qualities of unhealthy conflict it does not automatically mean doom for the relationship itself, or the individuals in it. Inviting behavior provides some fundamental ideas on rebuilding a troubled relationship.

Re-establishing Equilibrium

Self Assessment

Initially each individual needs to ask a set of questions aimed at identifying how one contributes to the current difficulties. Such questions include, "How do I contribute to unhealthy conflict? Do I inflict pain or attempt to control? Do I invite or allow this behavior?" The goal is for each party to acknowledge how and when their personal behavior is problematic.

Partner Assessment

Secondly, an honest assessment of how each partner perceives the other is likewise important. How does each contribute to unhealthy conflict? Does one attempt to inflict pain or control? Does one solicit or allow this behavior? The goal is to acknowledge and find ways to honestly share mutual perceptions of the other.

Affirm and Maintain Mutual Respect

Each party must propose and practice respect for self and others while overtly verbalizing the worth of each person in the relationship. Each must make conscious attempts to act on the belief that each person is of equal value. Unhealthy relationships often operate on unstated "rules of engagement" which directly violate the expectation of mutual respect. Overtly stating the importance of mutual respect makes it difficult to covertly violate this principle.

Affirm and Maintain a Commitment to Change

Partnerships can be salvaged best if the couple caringly and assertively invites each other, with the possibility of a healthy relation by using conflict resolution. At the same time, each should withdraw from the prospect of continually maintaining the current unhealthy relationship. An unhealthy relationship need not end if it can be healed. Partners need to assure each other of their honest commitment to establishing a supportive, caring relationship.

Withdraw from Control & Abuse

An equally important message a partner must sometimes deliver is the refusal to remain in harm’s way. Various forms of abuse or control may be evident in unhealthy relationships such as:

Social Control: Including attempts to control whom one sees, where one goes, or attempts to limit or control the nature of contact with others.

Emotional Control or Abuse: Withholding positive affect or inflicting emotional pain as a means of controlling behavior within the relationship.

Physical/Sexual Abuse: Violence, degradation, forced acts, forms of imprisonment or other such attempts to use pain (physical or emotional) as a means of control.

When a relationship becomes highly controlling or seriously abusive, it becomes dangerous for both. The abusive partner is also in danger from increasing isolation, sense of guilt, and fear of loss of intimacy. Even relationships such as these with seriously troublesome problems are not beyond repair. However it is usually necessary to seek safety and healing within the context of a professionally based support system.

Summary

Conflict in intimate relationships is expected, perhaps unavoidable. From time to time, as two individuals attempt to negotiate the challenges and concerns life presents them, they naturally develop differing perceptions and differing notions of how best to meet their mutual needs. What is certainly avoidable is the expression of conflicting views and needs in a manner that is harmful to either party, and destructive to the relationship. Individuals who truly care about each other, who hold each other's best interest at heart, and who value the support and fulfillment of a significant intimate relationship, approach conflict as a problem to be solved, not a threat to be ignored or overcome. They find ways to resolve differences while respecting each other and trusting in the power of the relationship as a support through difficult times. Conflict for such individuals often becomes a growth point that serves to strengthen the relationship and ready it for future challenges.

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Lifeskills for Prospective Teachers

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The author presents an international perspective on life skills education arguing the development of a healthy self-concept and skills in self-reflection are necessary for living in a world of rapid change.

In an era of accelerating change we need to be more aware of the impact of change on our environment, personal life, and the relationships among individuals, organizations and families (Leider, 1994). Life skills offer self-empowerment in relating to self and others while providing coping strategies for understanding the past, managing the present, and creating the future. It is essential for a person to acquire life skills and take charge of one's own life (Nelson-Jones, 1995; Hopson and Scally, 1981; Leider, 1994; Corey, 1995; and Eagan, 1998). This paper defines what life skills are, why life skill education is important, and how invitational theory can provide a strong foundation for life skill curricula. A special emphasis is placed on teachers in Hong Kong that represents a rapid changing society mingled with the cultures of the East and the West. The paper also describes how the life skills programme is implemented in the Hong Kong Institute of Education (the largest teacher education institute in Hong Kong) so that prospective teachers can equip themselves with the basic psychosocial competence skills. It is anticipated that this Life Skills Model could be shared among counterparts who believe in positive human values, inviting and affective education, and the holistic development of an individual in the new millennium.

Defining Life Skills

Life skills are defined as a repertoire of life management and problem solving skills involving personally responsible choices, mental wellness, and learning processes so that people can attain their full human potential and become equipped to deal with change throughout the life span. Life skills instruction is a psychological and developmental task based on positive human values and life adjustment as it relates to the study of human relationships, work, and leisure in multiple dimensions. This differentiates the current definition from more behavior-based tasks such as tying shoes, navigating public transit, and work related skills. The advocated repertoire of competence skills involves enhancing self-esteem, communicating and cooperating with others, acquiring and using information, assessing conflict management, decision-making, problem solving, self-management, and promoting physical and mental health. Furthermore, life skills also include the acquisition of some guidance and counseling and self- helping skills. The ultimate goal of life skill education is to improve quality of life in a humanistic and inviting way while developing holistically a person for the well being of the society as a whole.

Life Skills Helping

According to Richard Nelson-Jones (1991), "Life skills are personally responsible sequences of choices in specific psychological skill areas conducive to mental wellness. People require a repertoire of life skills according to their developmental tasks and specific problems of living" (p.13). Thus, life skills empower individuals to become more competent, caring, productive, and contributing members of society. Life skills education assists individuals in making responsible choices while maximizing their happiness and fulfillment at different stages of life. Life skills involve the processes of thinking, feeling, and acting that develop an *attitude* favoring positive change, *knowledge* revealing how to change, and *skills* in realizing desired changes. It focuses on the problems and the potential of people focusing on a person's

strengths in the hope that change and self-development will eventually take place. Applied areas for life skills comprise: "(1) feeling, (2) thinking, (3) relationships, (4) study, (5) work, (6) leisure and (7) health" (Nelson-Jones, 1991, p.13).

Life Skill Model for Responding to Change

Life skills are subject to interpretation and there is no one single formula to define what life skills are. Western theorists of education (Leider, 1994; Hopson and Scally, 1981; and Nelson-Jones, 1995) have developed life skills frameworks from different perspectives. (Leider, 1994) argued life skills "help individuals respond to the challenge of today's rapid change" (p.4) and life skill processes present the "concept of change and self-management in a personal action plan" (p.5). Leider's model of change focuses on ways of dealing with change, discovering purpose in work and living, creating a personal vision, and tracking daily priorities. It helps individuals to improve in areas of time management, values of life, vitality and leisure interest, purpose of life, career goals, and spiritual life.

Life Skill Teaching Programme

Hopson and Scally (1981) contributed significantly to practical life skills teaching in the U.K. and across the globe in the post-industrial society since the early 1980's. They focused life skill instruction on developing a range of personal competencies that will equip young people to take charge of their lives, manage their own careers, and fulfill a variety of life-roles in the rapidly changing world. They discussed life skills in relation to five specific areas: education, work, home, leisure, and the community. This programme could be delivered through a series of planned lessons or workshops, such as Life Skills Teaching Programs (No. 1 to 4) (Hopson and Scally, 1989).

Instead of a deficiency model of education or socially conforming adaptive model, teacher educators in Hong Kong have taken a

proactive, career-oriented, and practical model to introduce the life skill framework for growth and development. Education must attend to personal competence and self-empowerment because current educational change demands a switch from an academic, subject-oriented curriculum to a more practical, needs-based curriculum. It is hoped that teachers, in turn, could help school children learn life skills so that they would become more self-empowered, more creative, innovative, and committed members of human community.

Life Skill Counseling and the Five-Stage Life Skill Helping Model

Richard Nelson-Jones considered that a skilled person should possess an awareness in each of these areas: responsiveness, realism, relating, rewarding activity, and right-and-wrong. He later advocated life skills counseling as a "people-centered approach for assisting clients and others to develop self-helping skills" (Nelson-Jones, 1993, p.31). He designed DASIE, a five-stage life skills assistance model for helping clients to manage problems and change. The model (Nelson-Jones, 1993) includes five activities: "(1) develop the relationship, identify and clarify problems; (2) assess problems and redefine in skills terms; (3) state working goals and plan interventions (4) intervene to develop self-helping skills; (5) end and consolidate self-helping skills" (p. 38).

The Skilled Helper Model and Counseling Approaches

In a similar vein, other theorists identified different venues for helping people develop strategies for helping themselves. Egan and Cowan (1979) developed a skilled-helper model with three stages: understanding the current scenario, identifying the preferred scenario, and taking action. They also developed six areas of skills: physical development, intellectual development, self-management, value-clarification, interpersonal involvement, and small-group involvement. Corey (1995) also developed a group of counseling processes based on different contemporary counseling models such as psychoanalytic approach, existential approach, person-centered approach, Gestalt therapy, transactional analysis, behavioral approach and reality therapy.

Paradigm Shifts from Cognitive Domain to Affective Domain in Education

The developmental education movement emphasizes human development in different terms. Western cultural development coupled human development theory with the need for career and life management skills to meet with the changing society, and thereby encouraging the development of life skill education in schools. This represented a paradigm shift of emphasis from an academic and subject-based cognitive domain to a more practical and need-based affective domain in education. Psycho-education (Ivey, 1976); human resources development (Carkhuff, 1987); life skills training and development education (Hopson & Scally, 1981; Leider, 1994; and Nelson-Jones, 1994) group process and practice to counseling and psychotherapy (Corey, 1990; Egan and Covwan, 1979; and Gazada, 1989); personal and social education (Watkins, 1995); invitational education (Purkey & Novak, 1996); and the whole school approach (Gybers, 2000) all served similar purposes and continually emphasized the respect of human values and development.

Invitational Education for Life Skill Helpers

Purkey (1970) has continually developed the invitational education approach to help with an emphasis on the importance of the self-concept approach to teaching, and learning. *Self-esteem building* is one of the key skills young people have to acquire for healthy growth and development. Purkey and his colleagues have brought life skill programs alive with the support of positive human values and communicating proactively through five P's - people, places, programs, policies, and processes. The incorporation of the concept of invitational education and values of affective education in the life skill programme is a further amalgamation of humanistic education in the current developmental education reform worldwide and in Hong Kong (Purkey and Schmidt, 1996; and Purkey and Novak, 1996).

Theoretical Concepts Underpinning Life Skills Counseling

Nelson-Jones developed life skill counseling in a more psychological way and attributed his thoughts to the merger of others' work in the helping profession as follows:

> The emphasis on the importance of supportive helping relationships and sensitively attending to clients' feelings shows the influence of Carl Rogers' person-centered approach. The emphasis on thinking skills is derived from the writings of Albert Ellis, Aaron Beck . . . among others. The emphasis on action skills represents the influence of the behaviorists. The emphasis on personal responsibility, choice and courage has origins in the work of Viktor Frankl, William Glasser, Abraham Maslow (1962) . . . Harry Stack Sullivan, Gerard Eagan and Robert Carkhuff were forerunners in presenting stage models of counseling sessions

and the counseling process (Nelson-Jones, 1995, p. 350).

An Eclectic Approach to Life Skill Education

As presented here, life skills cover the broadest spectrum of personal competency skills and include various aspects of the study of work, leisure and self-management as well as the ability to relate self to the community. Life skills can also be viewed as a self-help process, a proactive curricular activity, an experiential group process, and a whole school approach. Based on the above rationale, the Hong Kong Institute of Education has developed the conceptual framework of the life skill module to be incorporated in the initial teacher education program.

Life Skills for Prospective Teachers in Hong Kong

Contextual Background of a Changing Hong Kong Society

A life skill programme is essential in Hong Kong. Recent events represent turbulent change. Hong Kong experienced the change of sovereignty from the British Colony to a Chinese Special Administrative Region in 1997 (Tung, 1997). During the transition period, not only were there political changes (such as national identity crisis) there was an economic crisis in the Asian Pacific region and a concurrent rise in the unemployment rate. There were concurrent social changes such as the change of family structure as a result of more Hong Kong investment across the border in China. Youth and children were further affected under the current education reform movement that resulted in the abolition of some public examinations. Teachers are now faced with students bringing a broader array of problems to the classroom. There is a demand for "whole child" development and a switch in emphasis from an academic, subject-centered curriculum to a more practical, needs-based curriculum geared to the changing demand of the economy and society. Ranges of personal competency skills are needed to equip students to fulfill a variety of life roles in the

rapid changing world. Coupled with the ever-changing educational policy and a seldom-reduced teacher-pupil ratio, pre-service teachers (and even in-service teachers) have had to equip themselves with a repertoire of skills to cope with demands and challenges to teach in the turbulent society.

Rationale for Incorporating Life Skill Module in Formal Teacher Education Curriculum

The implementation of life skill modules in teacher education is in congruence with the rationale of the Chief Executive's policy guidelines issued by the Hong Kong Government and Education Department, respectively. There has been an appeal for whole person development (HKSAR/PRC, 2000) and life-long learning (Education Commission, 2000) apart from the traditional knowledge acquisition. The desired attributes of a teacher now include a sense of mission in education, moral character, love and care of school children, and positive life views. As such, the life skill programme prepares and supports the development of quality schoolteachers before they go out to teach (Hong Kong Institute of Education, 1997).

Government policy (Education Commission Report No. 4, 1990) has made appeals for a more interesting curriculum that caters to the needs of students. The Guidelines on Whole School Approach to Guidance (1993) pointed out that students at school should not merely attain academic success but also social and emotional maturity. According to Gybers (2000), the first step toward these goals is an educational system that protects the self-esteem of students and reinforces their positive behaviors. As a result, it is hoped students will form an inner self that is positive, self-motivated, and self-disciplined. In a similar vein to life skill teaching, the Guidelines on Civic Education in Schools (1996) aims to help students develop learning skills and an inquisitive mind that will enable them to reach well-thought conclusions and to communicate with others effectively. The Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools (1997) elaborates that students need to develop personal

fulfillment, well being, and a sense of enjoyment. As such they need a growing awareness of their sexuality while developing a regard for interpersonal responsibility. This is compatible with the implementation of life skill programmes.

Teaching the Life Skill Module in a Teacher Education Institute

In Hong Kong, life skill programmes are implemented in a variety of ways. They have been introduced in classroom teaching, in informal or formal curricula, in guidance activities, and in extra-curricular activities in schools. It is common for the student affairs office or counseling service to play a significant role in organizing life skill activities for prospective teachers based on the individual needs and interests. However, it is likely to be more cost-effective for the academic departments to develop the systematic life skill programmes in the formal curriculum for all prospective teachers concerned.

The Hong Kong Institute of Education envisioned the importance of life skills for human development and pioneered the implementation of life skill programmes for student teachers for more than a decade. Currently, life skill programmes are taught in the domain of General Education under the Department of Educational Psychology, Counselling and Learning Needs. With a team of lecturers specializing in guidance and counseling, the life skill model continues to be refined and modified to meet the needs of students in the local Asian Chinese context. In addition to western reference materials and textbooks, materials from Hong Kong and other Asian countries are also used.

Life Skill Teaching: A Hong Kong Instructional Module Beliefs and Objectives

A set of core beliefs establish the fundamental context of the Hong Kong approach:

- Every person is unique, valuable and worthy of respect
- Each person is primarily responsible for what happens to him or her
- Any undesirable situation may contain some opportunities for personal growth
- We are responsible for managing stress and anxiety
- Failures are potential learning experiences from which we can grow and learn
- Tomorrow will not be the same as today
- We have to monitor our own well-being and development periodically.

Without the above beliefs and philosophy of life, any helping programme would seem like a body without a soul as the inner meaning of the programme has not been taken to the heart.

Life skill modules are designed to meet the fundamental personal and learning needs of prospective teachers. Students are expected to be able to understand the importance of self-development. They should identify and acquire personal and teacher-related skills and competencies in self-assessment essential for teaching. They need to know the nature and scope of life skills in the modern society to acquire the appropriate skills and resources to empower themselves, and to demonstrate various levels of reflectivity skills in interpersonal and societal situations.

Contents of Life Skill Module

The Hong Kong Institute of Education has developed the conceptual framework of life skills around four main major categories: Learning, Relating, Working (and Playing), and Developing Self and Others. Each area is subcategorized into three dimensions: Self-development, Self-in-Group and Self-in-Society. The development of life skills is interwoven with the acquisition of eight ma-

jor competency skills according to the local context and needs: acquiring and using information, assessing involvement, making decisions, making judgment, communicating with others, cooperating with others, promoting interest, and critical thinking.

A typical life skill programme covers the following topics:

- Understanding self: understanding and developing the personal and professional self; building social skills, and coping with change
- Study and work: time management, utilization of information and resources, managing study projects, and skills for cooperation, collaboration, and networking
- Becoming a professional teacher: taking initiative and basic leadership skills, developing professional responsibility, and being a life-long learner

Teaching-Learning Process and Assessment

The life skill programme is a 2-credit module with a 2-hour session each week lasting for 15 weeks or a total of 30 hours. In delivering the module, a variety of approaches such as experiential learning, mini-lectures, group discussion, and case studies are employed. Assessment of students is based on a self-regulated reflective journal and a completed group project. Evaluation criteria include finding evidence of the student's attitude to learn and develop, skill/knowledge development, and utilization of skills as evidenced in journals. The programme is considered a success if participants are able to reflect on what they have learned and state that they have changed in a positive way. According to the evaluation questionnaires on the life skill module, most students gave positive feedback. They found the module lively, practical, and enjoyable.

New Vision and Mission of Implementing Life Skill Programs

With the issuance of the Chief Executive's new 2000 Policy Address (HKSAR/PRC, 2000) and with the Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong (Education Commission, 2000) appealing for holistic education for the new century, life-long learning and all-round development, it is certain that the design and implementation of life skill modules in the teacher education programmes are appropriately targeted.

Conclusion

The rapid changing Hong Kong society is mainly characterized by the pluralistic, multiple-optioned, and individualistic orientation to the information era. Coupled with the political, social, and economic changes in the post-modern era, life skill education is judged essential to all groups in the region. Life skill programmes cover a broad spectrum of competence skills, including learning about self, relating to others, and handling rapid social changes. It also includes the basic respect for human values, self-management, study, work, and leisure. Inclusion of life skills education in Hong Kong teacher training programs represents a substantive expansion of the traditional emphasis on academic subjects. Although the results of life skill programmes have not been empirically established due to the newness of their introduction, the inclusion of life skills goals and beliefs in the curriculum constitute a formative step to the education for the whole child in Hong Kong schools.

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Inviting One's Self and Inviting Others: Influence of Gender, Grade Level, and Gender Orientation

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The purpose of this study was to provide a developmental perspective on students' invitations of self and of others using data obtained from cohort groups of students ranging from Grades 6 to 8, to determine whether invitations differ as a function of gender, and to discover whether these gender differences can be accounted for by differences in gender orientation beliefs (N=528). Inviting one's own self decreased as students progressed from Grade 6 to 8. Girls were more inviting of others than were boys, but this difference was rendered nonsignificant when gender orientation beliefs were controlled. Instead, girls and boys with a feminine orientation were more inviting of others. Findings support the contentions of researchers who have argued that gender differences in academic self-beliefs may be a function of the stereotypical beliefs that students hold about gender, rather than of gender.

When invitational theory first emerged from the collective swell of the humanistic movement, its primary focus was giving teachers the tools to cultivate and nurture positive self-concepts in students. As time passed and researchers revised their views of academic functioning, this "teacher-as-agent" approach evolved into a more reciprocal model of functioning which viewed schools as "functioning wholes" and networks of human communication.

In this more recent conceptualization, the entire environment, including teachers, students, administrators, and the community at large, serve as "signal systems" which send messages to students. Inviting messages tell students that they are able, valuable, and responsible, and invite them to participate in their own development. Disinviting messages, on the other hand, subdue students' creativity and inform them that they are incapable, worthless, and that they cannot participate in their own development. This reciprocal view places communication (the role of talking and listening) at the center of invitational theory, and suggests that individuals can be inviting of themselves and others with the messages that they send and receive. "With its emphasis on reciprocal communication, an inviting message is an effort to establishing a cooperative interaction" (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p. 10).

With its roots in perceptual psychology, this interactive view in which individuals interpret sensory information, collectively construct meaning, and regulate themselves partly through self-regulating talk is consistent with prominent views of psychological functioning. For instance, the past few years have seen a gradual shift in the educational community from a Piagetian model of learning in which students independently construct meaning, to a more Vygotskian model in which language and socio-cultural factors mediate thought. This view of individuals "co-constructing" meaning through social interaction is consistent with Purkey and Novak's (1996) observation that "individuals help create one another" (p. 11).

Researchers have previously situated the invitational construct within broader theoretical networks that emphasize the influence of social factors and the interpretation of social messages. For instance, Pajares (1994) made connections between invitational theory and Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. He concluded that inviting messages help create and strengthen self-efficacy beliefs whereas disinviting messages weaken self-efficacy. Pajares and Zeldin (1999) further strengthened the relationship with social cognitive theory when they investigated the self-efficacy beliefs of

women in mathematics and science careers. They reported that invitations were not only instrumental in the development of self-efficacy, but that invitations from others re-emerged as self-invitations that women used down the road. The clear pattern to emerge from these various lines of inquiry is that the social messages that students receive in the form of invitations and disinvitations powerfully influence the beliefs that they develop. These beliefs then filter experience, and serve as guides for future behaviors (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1992).

To assess the invitations that students report sending to themselves and to others, Wiemer and Purkey (1994) created the Inviting/Disinviting Index (IDI). Valiante and Pajares (1999) conducted exploratory factor analysis and reported that the inviting self and inviting others scales of the IDI possess internal consistency and provide a reliable assessment of invitations.

When Valiante and Pajares (1999) investigated gender and grade level differences in the invitations students reported sending themselves and others, they discovered that girls and boys did not differ in the degree to which they report inviting themselves, but girls were more inviting of others. This was consistent with theoretical contentions regarding the relational and individual postures to which boys and girls are differently socialized, the view that girls perceive themselves as the center of an intricate relational web, and findings that girls function from an ethic that is built on care and on social responsibility (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1988). Findings were not consistent with those of Wiemer and Purkey (1994), who found no gender differences in invitations. However, their respondents were counselor education graduate students, so it is likely that a difference in samples account for discrepant findings. Valiante and Pajares also found that Grade 6 students reported being more inviting of themselves and of others than were Grade 8 students. This finding was consistent with results obtained by various researchers regarding the transition through middle school. In general, researchers report that middle-school students suffer a decrease in self-beliefs as they make their way through the

middle grades (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1997; Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991).

But gender differences in self-beliefs can be confounded by other factors, however. For example, numerous researchers have argued that some gender differences in social, personality, and academic variables may actually be a function of gender orientation (the stereotypic beliefs about gender that students hold) rather than of gender (see Eisenberg, Martin, & Fabes, 1996). Gender differences in variables such as moral voice tend to disappear when gender stereotypical beliefs are controlled (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1997). Eccles's (1987) model of educational and occupational choice posits that cultural milieu factors such as students' gender role stereotypes are partly responsible for differences in course and career selection and in confidence beliefs and perceived value of tasks and activities.

To determine the degree to which gender differences in self-beliefs may be a function of gender stereotypic beliefs rather than of gender, researchers have asked middle school students to report how strongly they identified with characteristics stereotypically associated with males or females in American society. They have reported that gender orientation beliefs rendered nonsignificant differences favoring girls in their self-efficacy beliefs about their language arts competence and about the use of self-regulatory practices. Instead, a feminine orientation was primarily associated with self-efficacy beliefs. These results foreshadow the possibility that gender differences found on the invitations that students send others may be accounted for by differences in the beliefs that students hold about their gender rather than by their gender per se.

In this study, we first aim to replicate the findings of Valiante and Pajares (1999) by investigating gender and grade level differences in the invitations that middle school students send to themselves and to others. Second, and the primary focus of our study, if gender differences are detected, we seek to discover whether these differences are a function of the stereotypic beliefs that students hold about gender rather than of gender.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants were 529 students in a public middle school in the Northeast (255 girls, 274 boys; 171 Grade 6, 176 Grade 7, 182 Grade 8). The socioeconomic status of the school and of the area that the school served was largely middle class, and students were primarily White. Students' ages ranged from 11 to 16. Instruments were group administered in individual classes during one period. All items were read aloud by the first author. The study took place during the second semester of the academic year.

Instruments and Variables in the Study

To assess Invitations of Self and of Others, we used an adapted version of the Inviting/Disinviting Index (Wiemer & Purkey, 1994) along the lines suggested by Valiante and Pajares (1999) as a result of their factor analysis. Valiante and Pajares contended that the difference between invitations and disinvitations can be explained by the reverse scoring of each of the items. Students who disagree that they are disinviting on a particular item are actually reporting that they are strongly inviting (a response of "never" to "I don't pay much attention to other people's needs" indicates the same thing as a response of "always" to an item that could be positively phrased "I pay attention to other people's needs."). They concluded that being inviting and disinviting can be viewed as mirror images and recommended that removing the negative wording would help reduce the instability in the disinviting items. Moreover, they found that Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the inviting scales had modestly higher internal consistency (.72) than did the disinviting scales (.69 for disinviting self; .63 for disinviting others).

Consequently, our adapted version of the IDI consisted of two scales each with six items (see Appendix 1), one scale measuring

being inviting to one's own self and the other measuring being inviting to others. In addition, we altered item wording in line with the recommendations of Valiante and Pajares (1999) and increased the 5-point Likert response scale to 6 points that ranged from 1 (never) to 6 (always) (see Albaum, 1997, for rationale on increasing points on a Likert scale). Test-retest reliability has ranged from .68 to .83 for the scales of the original IDI (Wiemer & Purkey, 1994) and .41 to .59 for those of the adapted version (Schmidt, Shields, & Ciechalski, 1998). We conducted exploratory factor analysis of our adapted IDI and found that two factors underlay items. The first factor included the six inviting others items, with factor loadings ranging from .36 to .70. The second factor included the six inviting self items, with factor loadings ranging .42 to .82. Interfactor correlation was .54. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .81 for the inviting self scale and .76 for inviting others.

Gender Orientation beliefs were assessed by asking students to report how strongly they identify with characteristics stereotypically associated with males or females in American society (see Harter et al., 1997). Early on, researchers used gender orientation as a unidimensional construct measured using a single score such that low masculinity indicated high femininity (see Constantinople, 1973). Modern researchers agree that gender orientation is not unidimensional. Rather, they contend that masculinity and femininity are orthogonal variables that represent two distinct dimensions of individuals' self-conceptions. An individual can possess both high masculinity and high femininity (termed androgyny) or, conversely, low masculinity and low femininity (termed undifferentiated) (Ballard-Reisch & Elton, 1992; Harter et al., 1997). For the present study, gender orientation was assessed with items used by Pajares and Valiante (2001). These items were first used in various studies by Harter and her colleagues (see Harter et al., 1997) and adapted primarily from the short form of the Children's Sex Role Inventory (CSRI) (Boldizar, 1991) (sample masculinity item: "I like building and fixing things"; sample femininity item: "I am a warm person and express these feelings to those I feel close to"). Pajares and Valiante reported that factor loadings for the 7

femininity items ranged from .55 to .80; loadings for the 7 masculine items ranged from .43 to .66. The interfactor correlation was -.09. Cronbach's alpha reliability was .76 for masculinity and .88 for femininity. In the present study, we obtained .76 for masculinity and .86 for femininity.

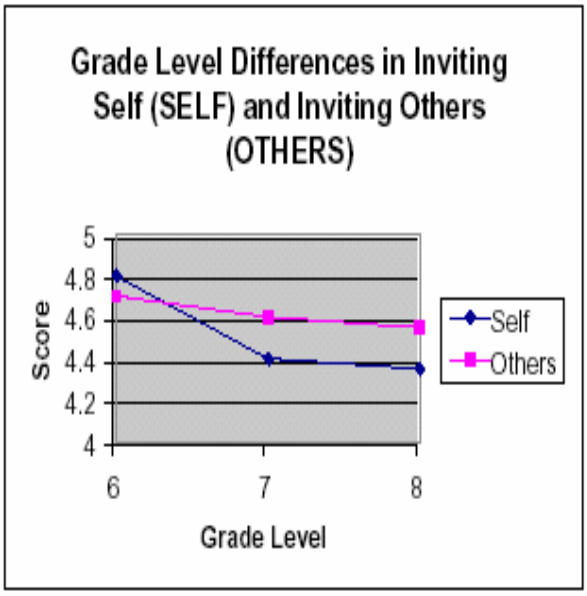
Analyses

To determine whether inviting self and inviting others differ as a function of grade level and gender, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted. This was supplemented by a trend analysis. To determine whether gender differences in inviting self and inviting others could be explained by gender orientation beliefs, MANCOVA was conducted with femininity and masculinity as covariates.

Results

Means and correlations for the variables in the study are presented by gender on Table 1. The MANOVA conducted to discover gender and grade level differences in the invitations detected significant multivariate effects both for gender, Wilks' $\lambda = .94$, $F(2,522) = 17.18$, $p < .0001$, and for grade level, Wilks' $\lambda = .96$, $F(4,1044) = 5.99$, $p < .0001$. Their interaction was nonsignificant. Analyses of variance revealed gender differences favoring girls on inviting others, $F(1,523) = 22.10$, $p < .0001$. Girls and boys did not differ as regards their self-invitations. Results are illustrated on Table 2. As can be observed on Figure 1, grade level differences revealed that students' self-invitations decreased steeply from Grade 6 to Grade 8. Trend analyses confirmed the significant linear trend, $F(1,523) = 19.81$, $p < .0001$.

Figure 1



The MANCOVA conducted to discover whether gender differences were a function of gender orientation also included grade level, masculinity and femininity as covariates, and the interactions of gender and grade level, gender and masculinity, and gender and femininity. All interactive effects proved nonsignificant. Consequently, the interactive effects of gender with the covariates were removed from the follow-up ANCOVAs. There were multivariate effects for masculinity, Wilks' $\lambda = .95$, $F(2,519) = 14.67$, $p = .0001$, femininity, Wilks' $\lambda = .64$, $F(2,519) = 147.96$, $p = .0001$, and grade level, Wilks' $\lambda = .96$, $F(4,1038) = 5.66$, $p < .0001$. As we expected, the multivariate effect for gender was nonsignificant, supporting our contention that gender differences in inviting others are nullified when gender orientation beliefs are controlled.

ANCOVA results confirmed that gender differences previously found in inviting others were rendered nonsignificant when controls for femininity and masculinity were included in the model. Instead, a feminine orientation had a pronounced effect on inviting

others (ω^2 = .32), $F(1,520) = 291.65$, $p < .0001$. The effect of masculinity, though significant, was negligible (ω^2 = .01), $F(1,520) = 7.07$, $p = .008$. As expected, gender orientation beliefs had no influence on grade level differences. Results are provided on Table 3.

Discussion

We had three aims in this study. First, we wanted to obtain a developmental perspective on students' invitations of self and of others using data obtained from cohort groups of students ranging from Grades 6 to 8. As we noted earlier, the middle school years are critical in the development of students' self-beliefs. Second, we wanted to determine whether invitations differ as a function of gender. And third, we hoped to discover whether these gender differences can be accounted for by differences in gender orientation beliefs, the stereotypical beliefs that students hold regarding masculine and feminine behavior in Western society.

Trend analysis revealed a significant downward trend from Grade 6 to Grade 8 in the invitations that students report sending themselves. This pattern replicates previous findings that generally show a decrease in self-confidence and self-beliefs as students progress through middle school (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1997; Wigfield et al., 1991) and replicates the findings of Valiante and Pajares (1999), who also reported that Grade 6 students were more inviting of themselves than were students in Grades 7 or 8.

What is it about the transition from late childhood to early adolescence that should result in a marked decrease in students being self-inviting, self-forgiving, and self-celebratory? In 1902, Charles Horton Cooley introduced the metaphor of the *looking-glass self* to illustrate the idea that our sense of self is primarily formed as we develop self-beliefs that have been created by our perceptions of how others perceive us. That is, the appraisals of others act as mirror reflections that provide the information we use to define our own sense of self. Hence, we are in very great part what we think

other people think we are. For Cooley, the growth of a child's sense of self is deeply influenced by the beliefs and actions of others. This, then, is the great blessing or tragedy of self construction and development—that we become the kind of person we see reflected in the eyes of others.

Cooley's (1902) conception of the looking-glass self brought to the forefront of psychological thought the critical role of social comparisons in the development of self. If Erik Erikson (1968) is right, the start of a adolescence in the West marks the beginning of a powerful quest for self-identity. As they seek this self-definition, young adolescents switch their gaze from their parents' mirrors to those of their peers. It is not surprising that these newly reflected images are less forgiving and more demanding. In school, the start of adolescence also marks the start of social-comparative practices that can shake the foundation of a nascent identity. These practices include standardized, normative assessments, ability grouping and lock-step instruction, and the use of competitive grading practices. In all, the new social comparisons and schooling practices work in tandem to diminish the positive self-views with which young people enter adolescence.

As we noted earlier, motivation researchers have reported that students academic self-beliefs decrease in the transition from elementary school to middle school (Wigfield et al., 1991). Pajares and Valiante (in press) recently found that students experience a loss of confidence in their self-regulatory practices as they progress through middle school. In general, researchers have provided a portrait of early adolescence that is characterized by loss of confidence and self-value. If our findings are correct, it seems that early adolescents also become less inviting of themselves as they begin their search for self-identity.

Effective self-regulation requires students to engage in continual self-observation, self-evaluation, and self-correction. The capability for self-influence through the use of self-regulatory strategies gives individuals the power to shape their own destinies, but

only insofar as they have the appropriate cognitive and motivational tools to bring that influence to bear. It is on this front that invitational theory can make powerful contributions, for being inviting to oneself is in itself a cognitive and motivational technique that has been associated with optimism, self-efficacy, value of school, and a mastery approach to learning (Pajares, 2001). In light of these findings, we urge teachers to help students learn effective self-regulatory skills, and to make being inviting of themselves a key component of the skills being taught. Modeling what might be called "self-regulating invitations" is one way that teachers may help to reverse the negative developmental trend seen in our sample of middle school students.

Of course, educators have long known that, when classroom structures are individualized and instruction is tailored to students' academic capabilities, social comparisons are minimized and students are more likely to gauge their academic progress according to their own standards rather than compare it to the progress of their classmates. To some degree, students will inevitably evaluate themselves in relation to their classmates regardless of what a school or teacher does to minimize or counter these comparisons. In cooperative and individualized learning settings, however, students can more easily select the peers with whom to compare themselves. Individualized structures that lower the competitive orientation of a classroom and school are more likely than traditional, competitive structures to increase confidence and raise students' perceived self-value.

Consistent with the findings of Valiante and Pajares (1999), we detected no differences in the degree to which boys and girls were inviting of themselves. Girls were more inviting of others than were boys, but these differences were rendered nonsignificant when gender orientation beliefs were accounted for. Instead, a feminine orientation had a powerful relationship with being inviting to others.

Researchers have long observed that fields in the areas of mathematics, science, and technology are typically viewed by students as being within a male-domain (see Eisenberg et al., 1996). In these areas, a masculine orientation is associated with confidence and achievement because masculine self-perceptions are themselves imbued with the notion that success in these areas is a masculine imperative. Conversely, the process of writing is associated with a feminine orientation in part because writing is viewed by most students, particularly younger students, as being primarily within a female-domain. As a consequence, a feminine orientation is associated with motivational beliefs that are related to success in writing.

It seems reasonable to suggest that being inviting to others is viewed by students, particularly early adolescents, as a feminine concern. Socialization practices are responsible for girls being more likely than boys to perceive themselves as relational and relationship-oriented, to function from an ethic of care rather than an ethic of justice (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1988). Consequently, being inviting of others is part of how being feminine is stereotypically construed, i.e., as being caring, nurturing, inclusive, and forgiving of others.

Our findings suggest that both girls *and* boys will be more inviting of others to the degree that they espouse what is today considered a traditional feminine orientation. That is, to the degree that they believe themselves capable of caring about others. We believe that a girl who eschews this injunction is as unlikely to care for others as is a boy who espouses a traditional masculine orientation. Conversely, boys who have been socialized toward an ethic of caring and social responsibility are as likely to be inviting of others as are girls who espouse a traditional feminine orientation.

Invitational theorists contend that optimal personal and academic functioning depends on the messages that individuals send and receive, and that everything in schools serves as signal sys-

tems that invite students to succeed or, conversely, open the doors to failure. Invitations and disinvitations contain both explicit and implicit messages about participation, value, and responsibility. No doubt they are also imbued with messages about gender and gender appropriate behaviors. We believe that one important challenge before parents and educators is to alter students' views toward caring and social responsibility so that they are perceived as relevant and valuable both to male and to female domains. A challenge for all educators, and for the broader culture, is to continue to expound and model gender self-beliefs that encompasses both the feminine expressiveness and the masculine instrumentality that are critical to a balanced self-view.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-order Correlations for Variables in the Study by Gender

	Girls						***Boys***	
	M	**SD**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**SD**	**M**
1. Inviting Self	4.48	0.97	--	.55***	.33***	.41***	1.02	4.52
2. Inviting Others	4.78	0.74	.55***	--	.25***	.62***	0.83	4.46
3. Masculinity	4.32	0.84	.33***	.25***	--	.22**	0.69	5.17
4. Femininity	5.01	0.76	.41***	.62***	.22**	--	1.03	4.34

Note: Means for inviting self, inviting others, masculinity, and femininity reflect the 6 points of the Likert scale. *p < .05, **p < .001, ***p < .0001

Table 2

Analysis of Variance of Invitations of Self and Invitations of Others as a Function of Gender and Grade Level.

Dependent Variable: Inviting Self					
Source	df	SS	MS	*F*	ω^2
Gender	1	.15	.15	.16	.00
Grade Level	2	21.73	10.86	11.37***	.04
Gender*Grade level	2	3.78	1.89	1.98	.00
Error	523	499.85	.96		
Total	528	525.47			
Dependent Variable: Inviting Others					
Source	df	SS	MS	*F*	ω^2
Gender	1	13.89	13.89	22.10***	.04
Grade Level	2	1.50	.75	1.19	.00
Gender*Grade level	2	.76	0.38	.61	.00
Error	523	328.55	.63		
Total	528	344.84			

Note: Model R-square for Inviting Self = .05; for Inviting Others = .05.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$. ***$p < .00001$

Table 3

Analysis of Covariance of Invitations of Self and Invitations of Others as a Function of Gender and Grade Level, with Masculinity and Femininity as Covariates.

Dependent Variable: Inviting Self					
Source	df	SS	MS	*F*	^{2}
Gender	1	.21	0.21	0.28	.00
Grade level	2	15.82	7.91	10.51***	.03
Gender*Grade level	2	2.48	1.24	1.65	.00
Masculinity	1	21.89	21.89	29.07***	.04
Femininity	1	57.90	57.90	76.89***	.11
Error	520	391.55	0.75		
Total	527	517.43			
Dependent Variable: Inviting Others					
Source	df	SS	MS	*F*	^{2}
Gender	1	.46	.46	1.20	.00
Grade level	2	1.21	.61	1.58	.00
Gender*Grade level	2	.67	.33	.87	.00
Masculinity	1	2.71	2.71	7.07*	.01
Femininity	1	111.72	111.72	291.65***	.32
Error	520	199.19	.38		
Total	527	343.94			

Note: Model R-square = .25 for inviting self; .42 for inviting others. *$p < .05$. **$p < .001$. ***$p < .00001$.

Book Review:

Inviting Educational Leadership: Fulfilling Potential and Applying Ethics to the Education Process

by John M. Novak

L. C. MacFarlane (University of Potchefstroom)
M. P. van der Merwe (Rand Afrikaans University)

John Novak is unequivocal about his vision for schools and their role in society: “S chools can either be part of the solution or part of the problem.” If schools are to be a part of the former, then they need to be unconditionally invitational. Invitational Education is the theory that informs his book *Inviting Educational Leadership: Fulfilling Potential and Applying Ethics to the Education Process.*

If educational leadership is to be truly successful, leadership will acknowledge that there are specific invitational ideals required as founding principles. There are five core invitational principles which underscore the notion that education is fundamentally an imaginative act of hope aimed at inviting all stakeholders to continuously savour, understand, and better their expectations.

The book is divided into three parts in order to deal comprehensively with the theory and practice of invitational leadership. The first part, entitled “Inviting Educational Lives”, expounds the democratic ethos, perceptual tradition and self-concept theory that is integral to the theoretical framework and practice of Invitational Education. The second part, entitled “Leading and Managing Educational Life”, examines the relationship that invitational leaders have with themselves and the notion of intentionality. It also considers the nature of inviting relationships, and suggests particular skills for managing conflict and philosophical differences. The educator’s association with values and knowledge is then illumined. Ways in which schools can be structured and re-structured

in order to invite an optimal educational experience are suggested. Finally, the symbiosis between invitational schools and their communities is discussed. The third section of the book, entitled "Dare to Lead for Education", summarizes the book's contents and exhorts the reader to strive for the realization of the potential of Invitational Education.

In Novak's book, prominence is given to the importance of caring, democratic relationships or 'doing-with' relationships as opposed to 'doing-to' relationships. The style of the book embodies this principle: each chapter is preceded by an overview of the chapter, and concluded with conversational-style question and answers that expands the topics addressed in the chapters. Novak makes a point of indicating that his book is neither the panacea for leadership problems in education, nor is it the final authority on educational leadership. Instead, the emphasis is on discussion and encouragement of the reader to think in new and optimal ways about leading invitationally. Even the language of the book is invitational: the book is easy to read and readily comprehensible. In these stylistic aspects the reader is cared for and taken into consideration in the same manner as which Novak urges educational leaders to treat other stakeholders of education.

Ultimately, *Inviting Educational Leadership* is an inviting conversation about the merits of human interaction for educational purposes. In true Invitational style, it is incomplete: the reader needs to respond to the novel approaches outlined and think further. As such, it is an irreplaceable tool for every educator wishing to do more than merely teach or manage.

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The *Journal for Invitational Theory and Practice* is published once a year and promotes the tenets of invitational learning, self-concept theory, and perceptual psychology. Articles that examine and expand the theory of invitational learning and development, investigate the efficacy of invitational practices, and relate these beliefs and findings to other theories of human development and behavior are encouraged.

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