

Invitational Inclusive Education: First Steps on a Journey to Develop Perspectives and Practices



Citation

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Abstract

This article invites all educators to consider the implementation of the tenets of Invitational Education (IE) as a firm foundation and precursor upon which can be built an Inclusive Education climate and mindset which encourages success for all students. This eighteen month study of two professors from Ohio's Muskingum University shares from inception to implementation, the idea of creating a graduate course for teachers and administrators which merges the practices of Inclusive Education and Invitational Education. The course, entitled Invitational Inclusive Education (IIE), seeks to convince teachers that a belief in and application of IE greatly enhances the chances for a more inviting teacher acceptance of inclusive practices (including co-teaching) for students with special needs. Teacher response to the course has been very positive resulting in the development of the term IIE, as well as a draft tool which helps to define stages of teacher acceptance of inclusive practice.

We have both lived both perspectives. Professionally, one was more grounded in Invitational Education while the other was more focused on Inclusive Education. But we had both made personal decisions as we first worked in the public schools and then in higher education to try to be professionally inviting to our students and colleagues. We had both lived the lives of parents of children with disabilities and had experienced the sorrow of our children being “unintentionally disinvented,” as well as the pure joy of our children being...and feeling “intentionally invited.” We struggled when our children or our students were either not given access to the general curriculum or provided with sufficient accommodations and modifications to most effectively access that curriculum. We celebrated when we saw practices that resulted in their effective inclusion and their academic and social success.

As university faculty responsible for both graduate program development and for teaching courses in those programs we began to consider what the two bodies of theory and practice – Invitational Education and Inclusive Education – might look like if they were examined more thoroughly by experienced teachers, not as unrelated perspectives, but as complementary ones. Perhaps they could, or even should, be merged in a way that the merger was more than the sum of its parts. We agreed to call the merged perspective Invitational Inclusive Education, or IIE, wondering whether anyone other than the two of us would embrace the “merger.” Our educator preparation unit’s mission statement – “develop teacher leaders who encourage, equip, and empower all students” would certainly support an exploration of these topics in advanced programs completed by experienced teachers and prospective administrators. Where would we begin?

This article shares the progress of a two-year journey of two professors to merge the practices of invitational and inclusive education into a graduate course for experienced teachers and prospective school administrators. In it we share our rationale and fundamental beliefs about this merging, the degree to which the course has been accepted by teachers and what we learned from the process. We also talk about the teaching schedule conflicts and that the original two professors had to find second generation instructors willing to offer the course. It concludes with a recommendation to explicitly add the principles of Invitational Inclusive Education (IIE) to programs and professional development opportunities that seek to enhance the practices of experienced educators as well as other topics for further study.

At the heart of the matter is a belief that if invitational education is in place, inclusive practices and other services for students with disabilities are more easily implemented and supported. Invitational practice tends to set the scene for an inclusive and accepting mindset which can refer to any set of traits attributed to a subset of the larger student population. More importantly, an inclusive mindset may refer to any set of attributes and finally lead to accepting everyone. It is the broadening of the mindset for an inclusive approach beyond more than disability to one of possibility.

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Invitational Education/Perspectives/Conceptual Underpinnings

Invitational learning takes a theoretical stance regarding the marvelous possibilities within each person and applies this stance in countless helping relationships designed to enrich existence and facilitate development (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990, p.3) The International Alliance for Invitational Education, established in 1982, consists of educators from across the world. The Alliance encourages educators to support a theory of practice intended to establish, sustain, and encourage the development of classroom and building and environments that cordially summon students to realize their potential in all areas. Invitational Education (IE) is most widely applied in educational settings and its roots emerge from Invitational Theory.

Shaw and Siegel (2010), summarizing the work of others in the field of IE, indicated that Invitational Theory is “a set of congruent suppositions about constructive human thinking and behavior that when applied across a multitude of human endeavors increases the probability for positive outcomes” (p. 106). The further belief is that the positive impact can increase significantly when applied reliably, consistently, and authentically (Shaw and Siegel, 2010). When Invitational Theory is related to a school setting we apply the term Invitational Education. Three interlocking foundations support the basis for IE: the democratic ethos, perceptual tradition, and self-concept theory. Extensive explanations of these three aspects are explored in the Purkey Novak book, Inviting School Success (Purkey and Novak, 1996). In a school climate where inclusive involvement, shared activities, and mutual respect are consistently practiced, IE will flourish as the democratic ethos already inherently pervades the climate.

Beyond the climatic aspect, the other two foundations are related to the individual. The perceptual tradition is based on the assumption that all human behavior is a function of the perceptions that exist for an individual at the moment of acting, particularly those perceptions held true about themselves (Purkey and Novak, 2008). Shaw and Siegel point to many writers whose works support “the perceptual tradition” (Shaw and Siegel, 2010). The third foundational element is self-concept which Purkey and Novak describe as the picture people construct of who they are and how they fit in their perceived world (Purkey and Novak, 2008). External to the individual, the IE framework includes five principles and belief we hold about others which are key to an inviting environment.

“People are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly.

1. Educating should be a collaborative, cooperative activity.
2. The process is the product in the making.
3. People possess untapped potential in all areas of human development.
4. Potential can be realized in examining the messages sent by people, places, policies, programs, and processes.”(Purkey and Novak, 1996 p.3).

The five principles seem to provide an acceptance of all students and a belief that they can succeed when involved in a collaborative and cooperative environment of activities which honors process and seeks to find the potential in each student. The potential can be enhanced with appropriate messages in the areas of people, place, policy, program, and process.

Consistent with many processes and strategies focused on student success, IE is delivered and modeled and encouraged through the student / teacher relationship. Purkey and Novak list five propositions for the educator to assume in building a positive relationship and an inviting stance. The five propositions (optimism, respect, trust, care, and intentionality) interact with each other and grow stronger when applied with consistency (Purkey and Novak, 2008).

Finally, in the implementation of IE and its impact on students, appropriate teacher invitations and behaviors are significant variables. The “invitation” metaphor is defined by Shaw and Siegel as an intentional and caring act of communication by which the sender seeks to enroll the receiver in the positive vision of the receiver set forth in the communication. It offers something beneficial for consideration. Perhaps the quality of the invitation can be labeled by considering the behaviors as described in “the ladder” found in the literature of Invitational Education. The ladder’s four levels of functioning include: Intentionally Disinviting, Unintentionally Disinviting, Unintentionally Inviting, and Intentionally Inviting.

The movement toward more inclusive education

The principle of educating children with disabilities in their least restrictive environments (LRE) has been a major tenet of federal special education law since the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94: 142) in 1975. Although the concept of providing a free and appropriate education (FAPE) to children with disabilities in the same school setting as their peers or in the most similar setting that the support they need will permit seems a relatively straight forward principle, the early implementation of PL 94:142 resulted in many children with disabilities being segregated from their typical peers. Often students with disabilities in segregated classrooms and even segregated schools were provided with a parallel curriculum

with materials written in a less complex fashion or taught with an emphasis on academic and social life skills needed to function as independent adults in society (US Department of Education, 2007).

Special education teachers with considerable expertise in the nature and needs of learners with disabilities and an extensive range of academic and behavioral support and learning strategies were expected to teach multiple subjects to students in multiple grade levels without the same level of content knowledge and skills as required for the general education teacher. Students with disabilities who were thought to have the cognitive potential to be successful in the general education classroom with the general education curriculum were mainstreamed sunk or swam. Thus neither the goal of receiving an education with typical peers nor receiving an education of comparable rigor with support was reached.

As PL 94: 142 was reauthorized several times over the last three decades, the principle of LRE remained central to the provision of FAPE. To try to minimize the excessive segregation of students with disabilities, the concept of “access to the general curriculum” began to be emphasized across the nation. For students with disabilities to maximize their potential, they needed to be able to be provided with an education based on the general education curriculum with specific supports provided that would be needed to address academic and/or behavioral challenges as defined by their Individual Education Programs (IEPs) (US Department of Education 2007).

Many agreed that access to and instruction in the general education curriculum for the vast majority of students with disabilities would be best provided by the general education teacher who had both depth and breadth of specific content knowledge and skills if it were coupled with the learner and learning expertise of the special education teacher. Several arrangements of combining the general education teacher and the special education teacher have been tried over the past few decades with each one bringing its unique set of challenges to teachers, students, and parents. The practices unfolding in special education were not inviting in part due to the obstacles to inclusion. The practices failed to align with the basic underpinnings of Invitational Education that all children were able, and valuable, and deserved respect. The five propositions of optimism, respect, trust, care, and intentionality were not evidenced in the processes and procedures of special education (Purkey and Novak 2008). At best, the federal legislation gave lip service to the belief that all children can learn.

Concept and Course Development

Building the Platform

Over the year that preceded the development of the course that we have described in this article, EDUC 606 – Invitational and Inclusive Education, we had many conversations in which we shared our beliefs that quality inclusive settings for students, while challenging to establish, are better for the vast majority of students with disabilities. We talked about how an inclusive mindset was the “right” thing to do if we truly honor student diversity. It is a frame of mind that goes beyond the placement of just students with special needs. With enough conversations, we became convinced that if an invitational approach were initially embraced by a building/staff, the staff would be much more likely to support inclusive practices for students with exceptionalities and with other differences who face the challenges of acceptance. The acceptance and appreciation of and access for all students was the goal!

Muskingum University’s Teacher Leader Masters’ Degree program for already licensed teachers earning their master’s degrees had just been redesigned to include invitational education. We thought it was time to increase the number of graduate programs that had the opportunity to explore both invitational and inclusive education so we proposed adding EDUC 606 to the set of core courses required of all MAE students. We recommended piloting a new course in which invitational and inclusive practice would blend those perspectives to determine its receptivity by graduate students. We wanted to avoid the reaction that this was just a notion of merging perspectives dreamed up by two professors. We truly believed that such a merger of perspectives could truly make a difference in teacher practice. By the end of the course we expected the participants to be able to demonstrate specific knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values (Appendices A-C).

Piloting the Course

The first section of Invitational and Inclusive Education (IIE) was offered in the early spring term of 2009 to 30 graduate students with the course scheduled three and one half hours one night per week for ten weeks. The class was a mix of experienced teachers and inexperienced teachers, with one challenge we were not expecting, five adults who were not public school educators, but rather graduate coaching assistants and adult educators in service professions.

From the first night of the first class to the most current section three years later we began with a class norm that we would all be learning from each other. Further, collaboration would be critical as we explored how both invitational and inclusive approaches to education might enhance the

development and achievement of diverse learners and focus on the application of the principles of these related frameworks to P-12 instruction and educational leadership.

Also from the beginning, we built the case for teachers to collaborate in the provision of inclusive education by introducing and modeling the basic principles and practices of co-teaching (Friend, 2007) into the course structure. Across the country, co-teaching was being implemented as an inclusive service delivery option which would increase access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. During the pilot section of the course, we co-taught every session, modeling all six of Friend's (2007) co-teaching approaches.

With our students we examined the belief that if invitational education and practice were in place in a school, it could establish the platform to support the mindset needed to provide quality inclusive education for students with disabilities, and similarly an acceptance of all people.

Course Format and Learning Activities

Education 606 started as a one semester – one night per week – 3 ½ hours per evening graduate course being co-taught every class using one more of Marilyn Friend's co-teaching approaches (Friend 2007). For a summer option, we developed the semester-long course into a full-day week-long session and co-taught 75% of sessions. Another variation of the semester course was ten weeks with 50% of sessions co-taught. Due to a scheduling problem the course had to be re-formatted to a fully on-line offering which also included co-teaching. Class enrollments have held firm at 30+ students with the online class being 42 students. The course content delivery intentionally began with invitational education to build the foundation of support consuming about 40% of the course content and then moved to inclusive education with the remaining 60%. The learning activities for our students blended the two bodies of content. The activities included:

- Teaching the principles of co-teaching practice and modeling Friend's six approaches.
- Sharing principles of special education as "A Moral Imperative."
- Using videos and websites to reinforce key concepts.
- Providing Self-assessment using the IE Ladder.
- Personalizing discussion using "four corner press."
- Using admission tickets for "four corner press" goals.
- Utilizing peer feedback and review of individual theory into practice projects.
- Expecting team project presentations.

Course Assessment Projects

Students were asked to complete two projects both of which were designed to demonstrate professional growth related to selected standards from the Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession. First was IIE Education Implementation Assessment Tool – Team Project designed to provide a sequence of steps that led to in-depth understanding of one of the five Ps and the skills needed to analyze and evaluate the presence (or absence) of the attributes of that P, as well blend the perspectives and language of IIE. Second was IIE Theory into Practice Project – Individual project designed to demonstrate knowledge of key concepts related to inclusive and invitational education and the skills needed to merge both perspectives and implement them in instructional settings.

Lessons Learned

Perspectives from the Initial Instructors

We intuitively realized that we were on the right track with our thinking. The class participants heartily embraced the merger of the two perspectives and began to use the IIE language, some of which we had created. In hind sight reflecting upon the experience, we realized the impact of our own learning curve and were pleased with the reactions of our students.

Creating a new course required a huge investment of instructor time and a willingness to learn each other's content. That investment has paid off. We now can switch formats, schedules, and content with ease and we both feel competent to address all aspects of the course. A huge investment of time to conceptualize ways to present the connections to the students was needed. Merging the two theories required intentionality on our parts and significant energy on the part of the participants to make connections

Graduate students truly believed that they were contributing to this new body of knowledge and in one class created the IIE ladder as their conceptual understanding of IIE. We were thrilled beyond words with their level of understanding and conceptual representation and through further research are drafting definitions for each of the four steps. (ATTACHMENT A)

The students were willing to listen to new ideas and try to immerse themselves into the conceptual frameworks to try to understand. We put our toe in the water and went with it, knowing we had to be credible. Personal perspectives were important.

We selected textbooks that focused on the basics – practitioner oriented, yet provided the principles around which the practices were built. It was important to have

activities enabling them to develop and use the skills needed to quantify learning related to the merged perspective.

We realized we had to create...and re-create in order to promote understanding. We listened to their questions and re-conceptualized to address their questions and any misconceptions. We were truly building the bridge while we walked on it. We found ourselves teaching for the "ah-ha!" There were many examples of ah-ha's as evidenced in the student quotes and their development of the IIE ladder. It was a higher level thinking course at the synthesis level which invited them to participate in the research. This empowered them to feel like they were a part of something, new and different. The on-line delivery added a unique set of challenges. For many of our students, this was their first experience navigating an online Blackboard course. We were merging the work of Friend, Purkey, Novak, and Schwartz into our own vision and students were unfamiliar with their theories. Additionally, we were modeling Friends's 6 types of co-teaching through Skype and asking them to work as teams to complete projects by Skyping. There were too many variables to create a coherent learning experience without having face to face experiences for answering questions, clarifying ideas, and revising on the spot. Their feedback pointed out their confusion, and we began to simplify and also create some visual graphics which merged the theories of practice and explained the which many students to their We learned that clarity is more difficult to build on line with a course that requires a new set of beliefs After having co-taught the course four times, we each had changes in our own teaching schedules and other instructors were asked to teach the new course which was attracting enrollments of 25-30 students. We met with the two new instructors to share our design, resources, handouts and syllabi. Both had special education backgrounds but invitational education was a new topic for them. We provided transition for their first two classes and met with them at the end of the first semester to see what they learned and have next included a few comments from that discussion.

Perspectives from the second generation of Instructors'

- ❖ They followed our format using the pre-post instrument to measure beliefs and in conversations with them following the second time they instructed the course, they stated that "minds were changed" as a result of the course content and activities. They saw a difference in what the teachers believed. They also indicated there was an intention on the part of many of their students to share their learning's with their colleagues and to implement the practices in their buildings and classrooms.

- ❖ They had both read about and taught co-teaching, but actually "doing it" learned how it is different from "co-presenting. They were willing to accept the challenge. They now view IE as "the foundation for any program."
- ❖ "We had better be inviting and inclusive...but you need IE first." Together with them, we brainstormed ways to build this mindset.
- ❖ "You can't bluff your way through it" was the reaction of one instructor as he affirmed the quality of the thinking required but more importantly, was his suggestion that there is more to it than meets the eye when you begin to work with inclusion.

Perspectives from the Students (EDUC 606 Graduate Students)

STUDENT A *"This course was a much needed review of all the classes taken during my undergrad career. Even though observations, labs, and student teaching were required to back the concepts learned, nothing beats getting the information as you are practicing in the field. There were moments throughout the course that I said to myself, "I see that every day" or "I understand why we do that." The course was a two month step in the direction for me to become intentionally inviting. I can explain why things are effective and why they may not be. I am more confident to participate in school-wide discussions of various topics. The course was a push for me to move ahead as a strong teacher because I do have what it takes."*

STUDENT B *"The book Disability to Possibility really aligned individual stories with the [IE] tenet which were meaningful to me. I really looked in depth at things that are so important, but sometimes overlooked. The tenets really made me think about proper inclusion. The group and individual projects really made me take an in depth look at my own building and how I can improve it. Many people think that it is easy to be invitational, but I learned that it really is an art and science that is essential in all settings."*

STUDENT C *"I learned a lot about co-teaching and the proper ways to implement it and different ways that it can look. I also learned the benefits of it and how our children can grow from properly executed co-teaching. This class has inspired me to want to help my district to become more inviting and have inclusive classrooms. The knowledge from this class will benefit my students and district long beyond this semester."*

STUDENT D *"Another thing that I found really interesting was to see how inviting and inclusive practice just seem to be so closely related. It seems like the more you foster one idea,*

the closer you can get to achieving the other. An inclusive environment will be inviting and vice versa! You can work for one part directly and indirectly achieve the other.”

Recommendations and Conclusion

In general, our students agreed that this approach resulted in a far better mindset for students and teachers. Further areas of study to consider might include: How will school be different for students and teachers in a building that embraces IIE? How will their relationships with each other change? Could effective implementation of IIE help reduce bullying? We should reach out to past participants of IIE to see what has been implemented and the impact it is making. We should add IE to the content of co-teaching.

The acknowledged power of IIE was perhaps best recognized by our second generation professors one of whom said “Once

you know about this, nothing else makes sense. You cannot imagine not doing it. It becomes the lens through which you view all that is done in the classroom.”

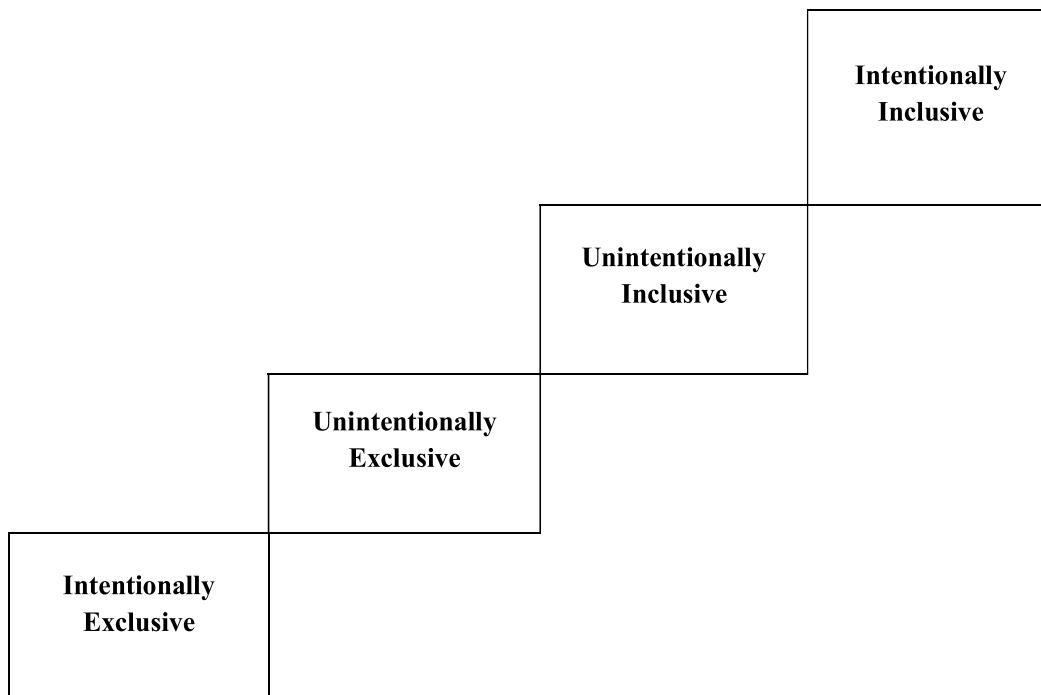
Finally, we liken the mindset created by merging Invitational Education and Inclusive Education to a quote attributed to Dr. Carl Rogers (1974) who, though not speaking of IE, captured the essence of the healthy working relationship of student and teacher for which IIE holds great potential.

“An idea whose time has come: the gradually formed and tested hypothesis that the individual has within himself vast resources for self - understanding, for altering his self - concept, his attitude and his self-directed behavior and that these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided.”

ATTACHMENT A

Muskingum University

Education 606 Invitational Inclusive Education IIE



Appendix A
Muskingum University
Education 606

Candidate Knowledge Indicators

The candidate will demonstrate knowledge of:

- The benefits of establishing positive and inclusive climates.
- The aspects of the school's culture that impact embracing the philosophy of inclusion and the implementation of inclusive practices.
- The "four corner press" and its relationship to the professional educator/service provider/coach.
- The Five P's and how an invitational approach is evident in these five elements of school or other professional environment.
- Care, Respect, Intentionality, Trust, Optimism (CRITO) as the teacher's/professional's stance in establishing student/client relationships.
- The benefits of establishing positive and inclusive climates.
- The aspects of the school's culture that impact embracing the philosophy of inclusion and the implementation of inclusive practices.
- The "four corner press" and its relationship to the professional educator/service provider/coach.
- The Five P's and how an invitational approach is evident in these five elements of a school or other professional environment.
- CRITO as the teacher's/professional's stance in establishing student/client relationships.

Appendix B
Muskingum University
Education 606

Candidate Skill Indicators

The candidate will demonstrate skill in:

- Using strategies that promote successful collaboration and teaming among students and staff.
- Identifying approaches for engaging and inviting students, including student participation in classroom and building activities.
- Determining aspects of establishing an inclusive environment.
- Determining appropriate models of co-teaching for specific instructional sequences.
- Identifying tenets of inclusive education that meet the needs of their current students.
- Developing tools to determine the extent of implementation of IIE in specific settings.

Appendix C
Muskingum University
Education 606
Candidate Disposition Development

The candidate will develop attitudes and values enabling him/ her to:

- Realize the power and responsibility of teachers and principals to establish positive, encouraging, and inclusive learning climates for all students.
- Recognize the values of respect, trust, optimism, intentionality, caring and fairness in creating school environments.
- Appreciate the roles played by families and the larger community in establishing inviting and inclusive school cultures.
- Value common principles of invitational and inclusive education and the shared practices associated with both perspectives.
- Value inclusive education more as a moral imperative than a legal mandate.

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