

How Invitational Education Helped our Professional Learning Community Share Effective Scientific Concepts to Optimize Learners' Success

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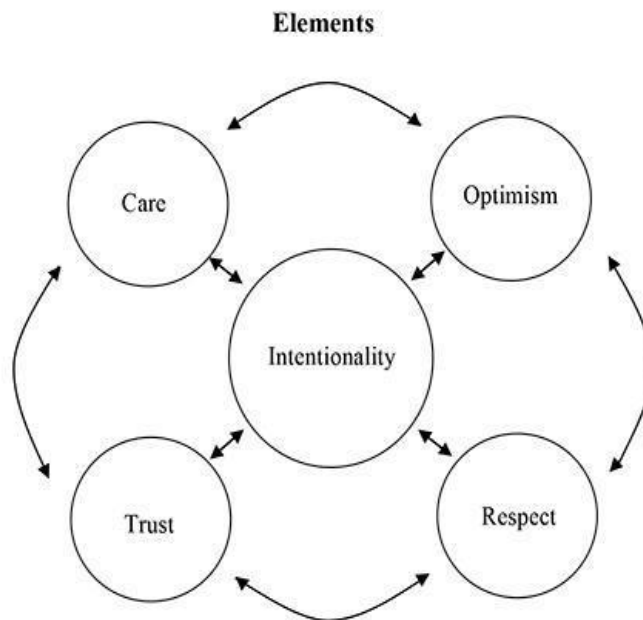
Advocates of Invitational Education theory and practice believe consistent application of an ICORT mindset upon an institution's people, places, policies, programs, and processes (5Ps) can optimize and sustain success for all stakeholders. Given a professional learning community (PLC) is impacted by and also influences all of an institution's 5Ps, this reflective essay describes the benefit of applying IE principles prior to implementation of a PLC seeking to sustain student success and school effectiveness.

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Five factors provide a specific framework believed to contribute to school success or failure (Purkey & Siegel, 2013). The five powerful factors—people, places, policies, programs, and processes (the Five P's) become highly significant due to their separate and combined influence (Purkey & Siegel, 2013). Interdependently, the Five P's provide limitless opportunities for evaluation and development of organizational climate. Grounded in "Invitational Education theory, the Five P's "address the total culture or ecosystem of almost any organization" (Purkey & Siegel, 2013, p. 104). Educators trained to develop their emotional intelligence as part of their professional leadership repertoire can proactively utilize both their cognitive and metacognitive skills (Brackett & Katulak, 2007).

[Invitational Education \(IE\) theory](#) contributes to school effectiveness by the way that its leaders demonstrate care for, and support of, the efforts of others (Halpin, 2003; Purkey & Siegel, 2013). The basic elements of IE theory exhibited by an inviting leader include intentionality, care, optimism, respect, and trust (ICORT). Implementation of IE theory promotes ICORT (Purkey &

Novak, 2016; Anderson 2021) and thereby provides a means of summoning people to realize their relatively boundless potential in all worthwhile human endeavors ([Burns & Martin, 2010](#)). An effective professional learning community (PLC), therefore, can be the spearhead in a school's desire to make better possible.



According to William Watson Purkey, Invitational Education (Purkey & Novak, 1984; 1988; Purkey & Stanley, 1991) is a theory of practice designed to create a total school environment that intentionally summons people in schools to realize their relatively boundless potential. Invitational Education (IE) addresses the global nature of schools, the entire gestalt. The purpose of IE is to make schooling a more exciting, satisfying, and enriching experience for everyone involved in the educational process.

Mindful of Invitational Education theory and practice (Purkey & Novak, 2015), Kay R. Pace School of the Arts intentionally seeks to address the needs of all scholars through provision of a variety of wrap-around services and activities. Opportunities are provided for scholars to optimize their talents through the arts available to them through the school's programs. These school programs provide the opportunity for every student to achieve success through dance, drama, instrumental music, vocal music, art, and creative writing. Not only does each scholar have the opportunity to participate in each major, but academic teachers integrate the arts during core

classes. Using fine arts in schools and the application of IE theory helped Kay R. Pace be perceived as an inviting environment. Subsequently, the school achieved one of the highest scores in the state of Georgia.

Every stakeholder at Kay R. Pace School of the Arts learns to focus upon intentionally inviting students to do their best and become responsive during daily engagements. An example of this is when members of the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) come around to each class to celebrate any student who had a birthday during the previous month and gives out “Paw Pops.” As a community, the school invites parents to come into the classroom to watch and interact with their scholar as the teacher gives the instructions and encourages active, whole classroom participation in the activities. Further opportunities for volunteering throughout the school are embraced by parents whenever the need arises. During the school’s Fall Festival, parents regularly donate food items, candy, or their time, to make the event a success for all stakeholders.

So, let’s discuss the starting point for how IE helped stakeholders at Kay R. Pace School of the Arts become more intentional in their invitations: Invitational Education is centered on five assumptions that give it purpose and direction. These assumptions guide our mindset so our interactions with the 5Ps of any institution would be guided by an intentional, caring, optimistic, respectful, and trusting (ICORT) mindset (Anderson, 2021). As a result, this consistent ICORT-driven mindset impacts our interactions as expressed by the four dimensions of the Four Corner Press (Purkey, 1999). The goal of Invitational Education is to encourage educators to enrich their lives in each of four basic dimensions:

1. being personally inviting with oneself,
2. being personally inviting with others,
3. being professionally inviting with oneself, and
4. being professionally inviting with them.

The four dimensions work together to give power to the whole movement or any initiative. When one of the four dimensions may demand special attention, the overall goal is

synchronization to orchestrate these dimensions to seek balance and harmony

The Four Corner Press

Invitational Education® encourages individuals to enrich their lives in each of four vital corners:

Being personally inviting with oneself	Being personally inviting with others
Being professionally inviting with oneself	Being professionally inviting with others

The first dimension of the Four Corner Press is being personally inviting with oneself. How many times have you been told that you must like yourself before you are able to like someone else? Embracing this dimension meant that the teachers at Kay R. Pace School of the Arts learned to view themselves as able, valuable and responsible and to be open to experience and living. Educators who adopted the Invitational Education model intentionally sought to reinvent and inspire themselves personally.

In the second dimension, being personally inviting towards others, requires that the feelings, wishes, aspirations of others be considered. Getting to know colleagues on a social basis, sending friendly notes, forming a carpool, remembering birthdays, enjoying hoopla at a faculty party, practicing politeness, celebrating successes are all examples of Invitational Education in action. This can also include showing empathy for others.

Being professionally inviting with oneself is the third dimension. This can take a variety of forms, but it begins with ethical awareness, a clear and efficient perception of situations and oneself. Invitational Education also requires that educators not "rust" on their laurels. Too many times we see in the news that a teacher has lacked their ethical awareness and has done something that has harmed either a student, another colleague, or out in the community and has brought shame

to the profession. With IAIE, we encouraged transparency during training so that teachers and staff can learn ethical awareness through their profession and with each other.

The fourth dimension of Invitational Education, which is arguably most important to students and parents, is being professionally inviting towards others. When being professionally inviting with others one must treat people as valuable individuals, acting carefully, ethically and respectfully. This easily generalizes to all People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes (5 Ps).

Focusing upon the 5 P's, the first: People, include more than the faculty and staff working as a school family. Several schools have team building programs that include more than the teachers. Staff can include janitorial staff, secretaries, and cafeteria staff, as well as administrators.

Places include the environment of the school grounds. This is not limited to just the classroom, but the play area, restrooms, hallways, and cafeteria. Think also of displays that celebrate student accomplishments or identify how things are done well at the school.

Policies must be clearly known and effectively communicated. Changes to any policy should help stakeholders feel empowered. At Kay R. Pace School of the Arts families are kept informed through newsletters, bulletins, phone calls and direct meetings. Communication is more than discussing their learner's attendance, grading, promotion, or discipline. A lack of clarity regarding active or changing policies can be perceived as disempowering rather than intentionally inviting.

When it comes to educational programming, the involvement of parents is strongly encouraged. At Kay R. Pace School of the Arts, we found this helps to create safer schools, better curriculum, and more effective community outreach, wellness, and enrichment opportunities for all stakeholders.

Finally, processes are how things are done in any organization or institution. Schools are not an exception to this reality. The key is to be effective rather than efficient with people (Covery, 1990). At Kay R. Pace School of the Arts, faculty and staff know that activities and procedures should be designed to honor and include everyone. Ideas, suggestions, and concerns are welcomed in this evolving, Inviting School. The school community's ICORT mindset consistently exhibited through engagement with all the 5Ps is what allows effective participation in a professional learning community that seeks to optimize student learning and thereby exemplifies how Invitational Education makes it a better institution. So how do we exhibit an ICORT mindset?

It is now recognized that intentionality, care, optimism, respect, and trust (I-CORT) should be the [Invitational Education](#) leader's consistent mindset (Anderson, 2019, 2021) to exhibit the personally and professionally inviting behaviors (Purkey & Novak, 2016) that promote "increased learning outcomes and personal growth" (Shaw, Siegel, & Schoenlein, 2013, p. 33). I-CORT must be evident throughout the five powerful factors: people, places, policies, programs, and processes, which Purkey and Siegel called the "five P's" (p. 104). Intentionality is the philosophy that the quality of mental states, including thoughts, beliefs, desires, and hopes, exists in one's being and is directed towards some object or state of affairs. teacher and instructional leadership preparation programs should explicitly implement invitational leadership theory within their curriculum. Another implication for future practice can be derived from the invitational leadership's assumption of intentionality. Citing Stillion and Siegel's recommendation for all leaders becoming "well-versed in the issue of intentionality" (2005, p. 9), it is reasonable to advance the definition presented by Day, et. al., (2001), whereby intentionality is "a decision to purposely act in a certain way, to achieve and carry out a set goal" (p.34). Our schools' stakeholders now embrace that an invitation is additionally defined as an intentional act designed to offer something propitious for consideration.

From an IE theory perspective, the exhibition of intentional care is foundational. What might it look like in practice? Stakeholders at Kay R. Pace School of the Arts are expected to demonstrate concern by sharing warmth, empathy, positive regard, and interest in others, specifically with the intention of helping them reach their potential.

Educators know the value of optimism. Optimism is more than positive thinking; it's a way to combat learned helplessness that is created when one approaches a challenge with a defeated mindset. Realistic optimism should be the educator's goal. Dweck's growth mindset emphasizes optimism. Teaching students about the concept of a growth mindset can be highly beneficial and is not limited by age. In fact, Dweck (2006) suggests it can be introduced to students at a young age and should ideally be integrated into the entire educational experience. It's never too early to start teaching children about the concept of a growth mindset. An example of growth mindset creating optimism is when a student has a learning disability and is struggling with a concept or skill. A beneficial approach for the student's needs may be scaffolding (Bruner, 1979) to first accomplish a simpler task. Once the student successfully accomplishes this task, he will have an opportunity to have experience growth and be more optimistic towards the next task. From

experience, we know a novice violin student learning how to play, benefits from the fingerboard being labeled with finger placements. After successful learning and practice, the student will start to remove the labels and play the instrument without this visual aid.

Thinking aloud also teaches optimism in the classroom. The teacher can model situations, demonstrating optimistic thinking in action. Students or individuals can learn to be aware of the positive things in their lives. Acting out scenarios can help students understand that even though they face problems and obstacles, there is always something good to find and build upon. Simply stated, optimism helps people succeed.

Inviting schools expect the exhibition of mutual respect. People are valued as able, valuable, responsible, and thereby treated accordingly. An indispensable element in any successful school is shared responsibility based on mutual respect. This respect is manifested in the appropriate behaviors exhibited by everyone in the school and through its places, policies, programs and processes. Whenever a school or its teachers fail to promote mutual respect with their students' parents, students are more likely to exhibit disrespect as well. When a school and its teachers are truly an Inviting environment, parents will show respect in kind, thereby helping their learners want to exhibit respect for their teachers. However, whenever a teacher is intentionally or perhaps even unintentionally disinviting to students or their parents, the lack of respect results in less successful relationships in the future. Being the adult in the room, the inviting teacher wants to always model respectful behavior.

Trust in a relationship is how education thrives through cooperative, collaborative activities. The process is valued as much as the product. Positive relationships with students help create a safe learning environment within the classroom. In terms of academic learning, trust significantly promotes students' acquisition of knowledge. Trust in the academic educational process goes beyond gaining knowledge; it also aims to help students become more confident. Like all people, students need the feeling of trust from the teachers. If students do not feel comfortable, they will not be able to safely discuss their needs. Trust is one of the most important parts of a teacher-student relationship.

This is also true for every stakeholder involved with the school. Parents need to feel trust in their children's teachers, administrators, and school staff. Whenever parents trust their child's teacher, they are more likely to feel comfortable and confident leaving their child in the care of the

school. This is why the International Alliance for Invitational Education (IAIE) celebrates [inviting schools!](#)

Invitational Education (IE) recognizes the interdependence of human beings. Proponents of IE recognize that demanding of others without involving them in the process is a lost cause. Even if in the short-term the effort to control people is successful, the energy expended is usually disproportionate to what is accomplished. Each individual should be embraced as the ultimate authority on his or her personal journey. Through an intentionally inviting environment, each person will find the best ways of being, becoming, and achieving her or his human potential.

So, implementation of IE theory and practice allowed Kay R. Pace School of the Arts to embrace the value of a [professional learning community](#) (PLC) that focuses upon reducing learning overload and achieving the "[learning for all](#)" mission. Creation of this type of PLC involves collaboration, shared responsibility, and a commitment to applying scientific concepts and psychological tools. An educator is a potential member of the school's PLC. Therefore, as a developing [servant leader](#) and effective teacher, you are invited to access, review, and add the following strategies to your developing "pedagogical toolbox:"

- Ensure the school has a Clear Mission and Vision. Clearly define the mission and vision of the school regarding "learning for all." Emphasize the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment.
- Help strengthen, or form, a Collaborative PLC. Bring together teachers, administrators, psychologists, and other relevant staff to form a collaborative PLC. Foster a culture of openness, trust, and shared responsibility within the PLC.
- Offer to provide or participate in Professional Development. Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for educators to learn about scientific concepts and psychological tools related to reducing learning overload. Seek out experts or arrange workshops to enhance the understanding of cognitive science and psychology in education.
- Utilize Data-Driven Decision Making. Collect and analyze data related to student learning, engagement, and well-being. Use data to identify areas where learning overload may be occurring and tailor interventions accordingly.

- As a valuable member of the school's PLC, encourage implementation of Evidence-Based Practices. Model the implementation of evidence-based teaching strategies that align with scientific principles of learning and memory. Share research findings and encourage educators to adapt their instructional methods based on the latest evidence.
- Help to create Support Systems. Establish support systems for both students and teachers. Provide resources for teachers to manage their own workload and stress, fostering a positive environment for both educators and students.
- Inspire utilization of Student-Centered approaches. Remember what you cherished as a student! Model a shift towards student-centered learning approaches that allow for individualized instruction. Use psychological tools such as positive reinforcement, growth mindset interventions, and mindfulness practices to enhance student well-being.
- Willingly, initiate collaboration with Experts. Collaborate with psychologists, educational researchers, and other experts to gain insights into effective strategies for reducing learning overload. Create partnerships with local universities or research institutions for ongoing support and collaboration.
- Model Parent and Community Involvement. Involve parents and the community in the mission to reduce learning overload. Educate parents on the importance of a balanced approach to education and seek their support in promoting student well-being.
- Practice continuous Reflection and Self-Improvement. Foster a culture of continuous reflection and improvement within the PLC. Regularly assess the effectiveness of implemented strategies and adjust them based on feedback and outcomes.

Research by [Comer \(1998\)](#) and Reeves (2008), reaffirmed the earlier findings by [Edmonds \(1979\)](#) and [Lezotte \(1991\)](#) that the basic beliefs of effective schools are important for school improvement. The Effective Schools Model promotes district-wide, systemic restructuring that provides continuous improvement, thereby ensuring every child has access to a quality education and an equal educational opportunity. The seven correlates, which embrace and enrich an effective PLC, have been shown to provide schools with a comprehensive framework for identifying,

categorizing, and solving the problems confronting schools. Kay R. Pace School of the Arts demonstrates that a relevant curriculum and an intentionally inviting school climate makes a PLC more effective. Again, you are intentionally invited to access, review, and add the strategies listed above to your developing “pedagogical toolbox” and become part of your school’s improvement plan through Invitational Education theory and practice.

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