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Editorial

Feeling Small…and Believing It

Recently I journeyed to one of Florida's many "oases of joy" to revisit America's leading rodent and relive a single day of a month-long family vacation in 1988. While I couldn't get my son in town for the week, my daughter (who had just graduated from Duke) wanted to compete in a triathlon in central Florida, so at least one of the nestlings could be brought in tow. We were giddy with excitement and nostalgia as we remembered our last exploration of the mouse's world. I was champion of the world, determined to make the day at the park a perfect one and imprint that memory forever. That is, I was like virtually everyone else in the parking lot.

As my wife bought the tickets, the salesperson noted we lived nearby and began a litany of potential upgrades to the basic single day admission. One deal was particularly inviting, we were filled with the excitement of the day and opted for a four-day ticket with the bonus option of upgrading to a season ticket. During the day, I cranked up my imagination, and before I knew it I had grand plans for the entire summer. Soon I had wrangled a commitment from both son and daughter for a self-indulgent passage into the past. No small task since the three households covered Arkansas, Massachusetts, and Florida!

With grown kids assembled we arrived at the part ready to upgrade our tickets only to discover that the "imagineering" of our salesperson had surpassed that of management. The upgrades were three times more expensive than we were told and we were confronted with an unwillingness to fulfill the promise. "Too bad," said the little rodent's representatives while making it very clear they not only did not plan on correcting the situation, they were not going to investigate. I heard, "Yes, you can say whatever you want, *but I'm not listening!*" The upshot is, I felt angry, but the really destructive emotion was that I felt small. Not mouse small, but insignificant, worthless, a total waste of matter, naada! What

drummed into my head was "You don't count, only your money matters. And I've got that, sucker."

Mentally let's move to another venue where nine academic deans and department chairs are having dinner at a leadership retreat. While discussing the "excitement" involved in getting portable classrooms wired to the internet, one chair began to recount her ordeal in getting her house wired for cable, to whit, she had no choice where the cable was to go, "Take it or leave it." Another addressed the phone company, still another an insurance claim, and, before we knew, we had moved around the table several times with horror stories where the central theme was "I don't care what *you* want, this is what *I* will give you." The reader, from personal experience, can probably fill in the details necessary to totally reconstruct the dinner conversation. The group was not composed of the disenfranchised, the outcast, the targets of discrimination, or the recipients of life's worst karma. These were talented, vibrant, intelligent people yet they easily recounted how they were reduced, at least temporarily, to anger, to alienation, and to feelings of insignificance. I wasn't the only one who could be made small; it seems everyone could be made us feel small. Worse, none of the issues that made of feel small were actually very important. My thoughts wondered to those who really were disenfranchised, who were treated poorly in important endeavors, and who were the recipients of deliberate hurt and harm.

The point of these stories is not to vent anger on that silly mouse, the cable guy, the insurance man, or any of the other stereotypes that would make it into Dante's *Inferno* if he were writing today. The point is that every living event, whether a nostalgic frolic to a theme park or the trip to have the car serviced, can pierce the fabric of who we are, change how we react to the world, and alter the way we treat others.

Of course, the phenomenon has a name: It is called rage. We have road rage, air rage, phone rage, cable rage, sports rage, and simply Going Postal. Aside from the potential death and destruction, rage simply makes the most wondrous of opportunities pale into nightmares of absurd proportions. Rage is a reaction to despair and powerlessness. Rage is an assertion of significance tainted by hostility and destruction.

By now, gentle reader, you may be wondering if you are actually reading the kindly JITP or has it too, lost hope? The answer lies in a bit of history. About three decades ago, a group similar to the one described earlier was concerned about the same issues. While they mostly were thinking of children, they universally *refused* to believe that anyone at anytime should be made to feel small, insignificant, or worthless. On the contrary, they celebrated the ability of all people to grow, to learn, to change from hurtful acts to helpful ones, and to celebrate the goodness thereby created. They also went one step further: They developed a notion that if they united, if they studied hard, if they struggled each day to be a role model, maybe, rather than being the problem, they could become the solution. The members of that little group who substituted resolve for resignation were the founders of Invitational Education.

During the ensuing years this little circle has grown and the ideas have become knowledge, the message has circled the globe, theories have been tested, and the world is a bit better for all their activity. This group's reaction to despondency thirty years ago has prompted not just an anecdote to life's hostilities, but also a vaccination to the horrible disease of despair. They called their ideas "inviting" and the process of getting others to be inviting they called "Invitational Education." We have inherited the rich treasury of theory and practice of that group's dedication. Combined with others' works, we are at a stage where we can establish powerful programs to counter the "being small" virus with its "believing it" debilitation. And many, like the authors in this journal issue, continue to add to the dream and reality of an inviting world.

This edition of JITP outlines programs and processes by which the inviting stance can be established in what at times may seem impossible situations. Ronald D. Williamson and Marie Schoffner compile and describe a practical action-oriented list of strategies for implementing a proactive inviting stance for the middle school transition period that seems to defy smooth sailing for so many adolescents. Sonja Beach peeks into the classroom of a preschool caregiver who fosters the natural resiliency of children to overcome the daily challenges by celebrating the efforts of toddlers and nurturing the persistence that accompanies success. Martha Ervin looks at the phone as an inviting tool as she examines the public school receptionists' practices and how they either invite or

repel potential school visitors. Collectively these articles illustrate the many vehicles that convey inviting messages and inviting behavior. I am sure the reader will be distributing copies of their ideas as we go about the work of building the caring world.

As for the mouse misadventure, it did have a warming outcome. No, the little rodent's agents didn't come through. They have whisked me off to the dustbin of the irrelevant, but that doesn't really matter. The bottom line was after the initial setback the family had a wondrous visit. By day's end we came to realize that the joy of those pasts days were not the result of the magic of a cartoon kingdom. Hardly. The joy was in the bonds of togetherness, acceptance, and caring. These practices have no admission fees because they are priceless.

So with this edition, I offer you one more collection of the wisdom that can turn any school, any workplace, and any home into inviting environs where belonging and acceptance is had without the asking.

Phil Riner
Editor

How Inviting Are Inviting Schools? School Receptionists' Phone Etiquette

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Twenty schools, half representing schools selected from the Invitation Education's Inviting School Award winners and half representing area schools in Guilford County, North Carolina, were selected. Twenty receptionists were telephoned and the caller requested to speak to the school principal. Each response was evaluated by the basic criteria of thought to be inviting. Most schools responded within the profile of an inviting school although those that did not did provide an unwelcoming lasting impression.

In the fall of 1999 I was a graduate student at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. During the program I was introduced to Invitational Education and the Inviting School Award. As a class project I decided to compare ten schools that had received the Invitational Education School Award with ten generally comparable schools that had not. My comparison was the etiquette of the school receptionist. I was interested in assessing whether school receptionists act in an inviting or disinviting manner towards a caller. The classification "inviting" is based on an elaborate array of corresponding factors (Purkey, 1996). In my study, receptionists were assessed according to variables such as tone of voice and asking to take a message.

In my study, I offered three ideas for consideration. First, I proposed that if the receptionist acts in an inviting manner the caller would feel valued and respected. To respect is to act respectfully. Second, I proposed that if the receptionist acts in an inviting manner the caller would form a positive impression of the school. Conversely, if the receptionist acts in a disinviting manner, the

caller will form a negative association with the school. The receptionist's manner signals the caller that the school environment is inviting or disinviting. Lastly, I suggested that the Invitational Education Award-Winning Schools' receptionists would exhibit more inviting responses than the non-Invitational Education Award-Winning Schools. This was based on the assumption that the Invitational Education Award-Winning Schools must have exceptional, well-trained receptionists for the school to receive such exemplary status. In order to receive the status as an Invitational Education Award-Winning School, a school must exhibit established inviting characteristics.

Procedures

Twenty elementary schools were called; ten of which are distinguished as "Invitational Education Award Winning Schools," located throughout the country. The remaining ten schools are located in the Greensboro area, specifically Guilford County, North Carolina. After the receptionist answered the phone, I stated my name and asked to speak with the principal. If given the opportunity to speak with the principal, I said: "I am a graduate student in the counseling program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and am researching school receptionists' manners in answering the phone. I would like to know if you trained your receptionist in answering the phone. And, if so, how did you train the receptionist?" Following the phone call, I evaluated the receptionist using the School Receptionists' Response Form, a self-developed scale.

The receptionist's inviting or disinviting manner was based on a number of factors: (1) number of rings before receptionist answers (2) tone of voice (3) stated his/her name (4) stated the school's name (5) stated "Good morning" or "Good afternoon" (6) asked "How may I help you?" (7) accepted the request to talk with the principal (8) assurance to the caller that the principal would be

on the phone soon (9) stated a reason as to why the principal could not be reached (10) asked to take a message if the principal could not be reached (11) recalled and stated caller's name at any point in the conversation (12) any additional comments by the caller.

Following completion of the above variables, I rated the school receptionist overall as: (1) intentionally disinviting, (2) unintentionally disinviting, (3) unintentionally inviting, or (4) intentionally inviting.

Results

Seventeen of the twenty receptionists exhibited intentionally inviting phone etiquette characteristics. The receptionist for each of these seventeen schools, treated the caller in a personal and professional manner. The inviting attributes were rated appropriate due to the receptionist sending cordial signals such as using a friendly tone of voice. In addition, these receptionists handled the phone call in a technically, proficient and precise style. For example, these receptionists made sure to ask: "May I take a message?"

On the other hand, only three of the twenty receptionists acted in a disinviting manner. Two of the three schools in which the receptionist was disinviting were Non-Award Winning Schools. Reasons for the disinviting rating were based on differing reasons. Primarily, each of these three receptionists acted in an inappropriate style. One Non-Award Winning School receptionist did not say "Good Morning" nor did she ask "May I help you?" Yet, the attribute that was extremely disinviting was the receptionist questioning in a derogatory tone "May I ask what this is about? What is your last name again?"

Another Non-Award Winning School receptionist did not say "Good Morning," did not state her name, did not ask "May I help you?", nor did she give a reason as to why the principal could not

be reached. When I said that I would call back to reach the principal, the receptionist hung up the phone without saying anything in response to my comment. This aloof attitude along with the previously mentioned characteristics came across as disinviting.

When I called one Award Winning School, I received a recording machine. I listened to the pre-recorded voice in order to determine the number to push to reach the actual receptionist. It was frustrating and impersonal to receive the recorded voice rather than receiving an actual voice initially. After following the recording's instructions, I talked with the receptionist, however after I had clearly stated my name and was denied access to talk with the principal, this receptionist asked: "Who's calling?" She asked the question, obviously unaware that I had previously stated my name, the answer to her redundant question. The receptionist had not been attentive during our conversation. This error by the receptionist created a disinviting feeling.

The proposition that if the receptionist acts in an inviting manner the caller will feel valued and respected was found to be true. I felt valued when receptionists treated me respectfully. For example, I felt extremely valued when the receptionist at Button Elementary (no school is referred to by actual name) explained that the principal was out of the office, but continued the conversation by asking: "Is this an emergency?" I felt that I was treated in a sensitive yet professional way.

In addition, when the receptionist at Hilltop Elementary said: "Good Morning" in a friendly, upbeat tone of voice, I felt that she treated me in a kind manner. Many receptionists asked "May I take a message?"; thus, I felt that my call was considered important and that my call would be returned.

When the receptionist stated his/her name, I felt like the school itself was inviting; whereby, the receptionist placed himself/herself

on a congenial, first name basis with the caller. Moreover, after the receptionist at Ferndale Elementary said that the principal could not be reached, she proceeded with the inquiry: "Is there something with your call that I can help you with?" This question was notably inviting, because it showed that the receptionist had a keen interest in addressing the needs of my phone call. This receptionist showed concern, an inviting characteristic.

On the other hand, I formed a negative association with schools in which the receptionist acted in a disinviting way. For example, at Fairway Elementary School the receptionist asked in a suspicious and demeaning tone of voice: "May I ask what this is about? What is your last name again?" I instantly formed a negative association with the school, because I was not treated courteously or professionally. It is not the role of the receptionist to know or inquire about the nature of my phone call. By her asking: "What is your last name again?" I felt as though my name was not important initially. I was not treated respectfully, because she was not attentive to my having already stated my name.

Contrary to my preconceived notion, the Invitational Education Award-Winning Schools' receptionists did not exhibit more of the inviting responses than the non-Invitational Education Award-Winning Schools. Differences between the Award Winning Schools and the Non-Award Winning Schools on receptionist etiquette, as measured by the School Receptionist Response were insignificant.

One possible limitation of the study is that the Non-Award schools were all in the southern region of the United States in areas historically known for courtesy and manners and may have impacted the outcomes. Also, inviting strategies mirror much of better practice in the secretarial field as that profession can also be considered a "helping" profession.

Implications

It is reassuring to discover that the great majority of school receptionists in this study treated the caller in an inviting manner according to the School Receptionists' Response Form. For a school to be perceived as a positive environment, many inviting strategies are required of a number of employees. If a school employs inviting strategies, people in and around the school are valued and respected (Anderson, 1998). Inviting strategies must be implemented in all areas of the school environment. An extremely important component is having a receptionist whose phone etiquette is inviting. The receptionist is a caller's initial contact with the school; thus, if the receptionist has inviting phone etiquette, the caller forms a positive impression of the school. When a receptionist has a kind tone of voice and asks to take a message, the caller feels respected. A receptionist's inviting phone etiquette indicates to the caller that the school environment itself is inviting.

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Good Falling:
How One Childcare Professional Invites Positive Self-talk in Preschool Children

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What children say to themselves about themselves is a powerful predictor of self efficacy and self esteem. The development of this "internal dialogue" is impacted by how others evaluate them. Using an invitational theory perspective, this paper describes and explains the invitational techniques, beliefs, and practical applications that one daycare provider has incorporated into her daily interaction with the children in her care.

Invitational Learning

Invitational learning is a component of invitational theory, which is centered around four basic propositions (Russell, 1984):

(1) People are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly;
(2) Education at its best is a cooperative activity;
(3) People possess untapped potential in all areas of human development;
(4) This potential can best be realized by places, policies, and programs that specifically invite development

The focus of invitational learning is on the quality and quantity of formal and informal messages that bid children not only to see themselves as valuable, responsible, and capable of learning, but bid them also to behave accordingly (Purkey & Schmidt, 1984). These messages form internal dialogue, what children say to themselves about themselves. Purkey (2000) calls this dialogue the whispering self, and describes it as being vitally important in understanding the development and maintenance of self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy.

Children's self-evaluations derive directly from the evaluations made of them by others. Such evaluations are embedded in both verbal and nonverbal language, including looks, touch, and tone of voice. Because children tend to believe what significant others say about them, the impact that other individuals and their comments make in the child's early environment can be significant (Purkey, 2000).

Purkey (2000) suggests that structuring an invitational environment for childcare starts with a focus on the "Five Powerful P's":

People: How do childcare professionals view children and the appropriate treatment of them? Additionally, childcare individuals must have a positive view of themselves as caregivers and teachers. This has the greatest impact on children.

Places: A welcoming environment says, "We care about you and we're glad you're here." The physical environment sends important messages to children.

Policies: The rules, regulations, and plans of an institution should focus on meeting the needs of children in a fair, encouraging, and respectful way.

Programs: The institutions activities should be for everyone's benefit and should not label or segregate children.

Processes: The pervasive methods of operations should communicate to the children that they are valuable and responsible, and are able to behave as such.

An Invitational Approach to Day Care

At First Baptist Preschool in Greensboro, North Carolina, day care professional M. Kay Smith is intentionally inviting, making certain that the children in her care believe good things about themselves. From September to May, Ms. Smith and an assistant care for ten children who enter their class before their second birthday and begin the "transitional twos" while in their care.

Before the children arrive Ms. Smith and her aid have begun the inviting process by preparing themselves for the class. They have concentrated on being personally and professionally inviting (Wong, 1998) honing their attitudes to act with specific purpose and intention. Ms. Smith is

prepared to give the children constant and countless invitations (messages) that bid them to explore their untapped potential as valuable persons. Positive learning experiences are integrated into each and every activity, even into the simple act of walking through the door in the morning. She greets the children cheerfully by name and makes them feel welcome and special. "I'm glad you're here," she tells each one. Before anything else takes place, she teaches them that they are valued.

As their parents or guardians leave, the children say good-bye to them. In fact, the children are taught to say hello and good-bye to anyone who enters their room during the day. In doing so, the children learn that leaving is a natural part of life, not something negative they should fear, and parents feel good about not having to sneak out!

After the children say good-bye to their parents or guardians, they immediately wash their hands to reduce the spreading of germs they have brought in with them. This becomes a learning activity that promotes good feelings of accomplishment. Because state guidelines stipulate that washing hands should take fifteen seconds and drying hands should take ten seconds, the children build basic skills by singing the alphabet as they wash and by counting to ten as they dry.

Ms. Smith fills her room with interesting, age-appropriate activities for the children: puzzles, markers, and paper for developing motor skills, and rockers and slides for building strong bodies. During activity time, she and her assistant give attention to each child. They talk to the children about their activities; teach about colors, shapes, and skills; and try to help each child learn something positive about himself or herself and the activity. Afterwards, everyone cleans up together, sharing the responsibilities of classrooms. The activity time and subsequent clean-up time help the children say to themselves, "I can do this!"

Leaving the room to go outside to the playground or to the church's gym presents a unique opportunity to invite positive self-talk within the children. Because little ones can disappear quickly, Ms. Smith counts them before, during, and after the trip. The children eventually learn to count each other, and take great joy in learning such an important responsibility. Learning to stay with the group and to count one another

promotes positive internal dialogue that tells the children they can follow well and can accept responsibility. Every opportunity counts.

Throughout the day, Ms. Smith finds many ways in which to affirm the children. When children are performing tasks, she says, "I can help you do this, or you can do it yourself." The last thing the children hear is that they can do it themselves. Hearing this helps them to develop confidence, competence, and independence, and most of the time, they prefer to try things on their own. When they attempt a task, her response is, "Good job!" She does not say "good boy" or "good girl" because she wants children to focus on their actions and not to just see themselves as "bad" if a mistake is made or "good" if an action has the intended outcome. Ms. Smith never wants the children to be made to feel that they are not good boys or girls if they make mistakes or fail.

Inviting the children to feel respected is an integral part of Ms. Smith's approach to childcare. She teaches them to take turns, to help each other up when they fall, and to speak in civil tones to each other. She makes certain that her requests are always made in a positive way; "Don't stand in your chair," for example, is replaced with, "Thank you for sitting in your chair." The children hear positive, courteous requests that help them understand exactly what is expected of them. She maintains that if the last words the children hear describe the desired activity, then they are more likely to follow directions than if the last words they hear describe undesired activity. Consequently, the child is more likely to receive praise for following directions well.

"Good Falling!"

On the playground, it is inevitable that accidents will happen. When little ones lose their balance and hit the ground, Ms. Smith responds with, "Good falling!" The first time she says that during the year, it elicits strange looks from staff members who cannot resist questioning such an unorthodox response.

"Good falling!" is an acknowledgement that upsets occur on the way to success. Little tumbles occur frequently in the lives of toddlers, but instead of receiving responses of too much sympathy or too much com-

forting from Ms. Smith, her response of praise allows them to see falling as an adventure. She cautions that "good falling!" is not appropriate if children fall when being disobedient, or if falling results in a serious injury. However, during "normal navigation," falling can be just as productive as learning to run, to jump, or to do any other activity; they learn how to run or jump, but they learn how to get up and try again without feeling frightened. The children are empowered to choose messages of accomplishment over messages of fear, and Smith believes it is never too early to learn to make good choices.

"Good falling!" results in self-affirming, positive behavior. Smith recalls an incident when a child fell and began to cry. She tended to him and told him, "Good falling!" When the child fell a second time, he looked at her and whimpered, on the verge of tears. "Good falling!" she said. The third time the child fell, he looked at Ms. Smith, said, "Good falling!" aloud, and got up without crying.

"Good falling!" is a pint-sized lesson with important life applications. In all of life's "falls," not just the physical ones, a temporary loss of balance can become a learning experience instead of a catastrophe.

Conclusion

Any child care facility can be as positive as First Baptist Preschool if day care professionals keep in mind five basic building blocks upon which positive self-talk is built (Purkey, 2000):

(1) children define themselves according to how significant others define them and act towards them;
(2) children's internal dialogue will determine their success or failure;
(3) everything in the childcare facility (or environment) impacts children's self-talk;
(4) changing the way children talk to themselves necessitates changing their entire care environment;
(5) child care facility experiences should minimize negative self-talk in children and invite them to define themselves positively.

Taken together, the "Five Powerful P's" and the five basic building blocks of positive self-talk can be used to transform any childcare facility into a welcoming, inviting place where children thrive in an optimal way. Like Kay Smith, day care professionals can learn to be intentionally inviting to the little ones in their care. They have the power to make a difference!

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Examining Student Transition Programs through an Invitational Lens

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Moving to a new school, while frequently exciting, is also filled with stress and anxiety for students and their parents. Nowhere is this more deeply felt than during the transition from elementary to middle school. Increasingly schools are modifying their transition practices to assure that students are better informed, and feel more secure in their new setting. This paper uses the construct of Invitational Education to identify ways in which school personnel can modify both formal and informal transition activities to assure that students see their new school as welcoming and inviting.

During a recent parent meeting in a western school district one parent described the transition to middle school this way: "It's like moving to another country: the language is different, there are different rules, the culture is different, and you aren't sure you have the proper documents to navigate the border successfully"(Williamson, 1997, p. 3).

Moving from elementary to middle school can be stressful for both students and parents. A recent study of parent concerns about middle level programs found that transitions (between schools and between grade levels) were one of their most significant concerns (Johnston & Williamson, 1998). School transition programs are frequently organized and led by school counselors and school administrators. Their roles lend themselves naturally to frequent and occasionally intense contact with students and parents before, during, and after the transition to a new school.

Concern for the transition of students has been a consistent theme for middle grades programs (Alexander & George, 1981; Carnegie Council, 1989). Given its importance in the life of the middle level school, how is it that the transition from elementary to middle school continues to raise serious concern among parents and community members (Johnston & Williamson, 1998)? What strategies and approaches might be considered to assure that schools become more vigilant in assessing the formal and informal messages telegraphed to students and their parents during the transition to middle school?

Contemporary middle schools are faced by conflicting demands from parents and the community (Beane, 1999; Williamson & Johnston, 1999). They often feel pulled between calls for increased accountability and heightened student achievement and the need to provide developmentally responsive educational experiences for students. Emerging from this milieu is the continuing need, expressed by students and parents, to feel supported during a time of high anxiety: the transition to a new school (Johnston & Williamson, 1998; Shoffner, 1997).

During the past thirty years middle level schools became increasingly concerned with modifying their practice so that a program more aligned with the developmental needs of early adolescent students was adopted. One method endorsed by many schools was Invitational Education, an approach to school life that recognizes that every aspect of the regularities of school life send subtle messages to parents and students (Purkey, 1978).

The Invitational Education Model (Purkey, 1978; Purkey & Novak, 1984, 1996; Purkey & Schmidt, 1987, 1990; Purkey & Stanley, 1991) proposes that the five areas of people, places, policies, programs, and processes create the environmental framework in schools. “People” assesses respect, caring, and the honoring of diversity and refers to the positive or "inviting" influence of the teachers and staff in the school. “Places” relates to the physical aspects of the school. “Policies” refers to the inviting aspects of school rules and regulations. “Programs” refers to preventative programs that emphasize non-violent means of negotiation (e.g., mediation and conflict resolution). “Processes” refers to values and attitudes of school staff. Each of these five areas has a vital effect on in-

fluencing student behavior and views (Purkey, 1978; Purkey & Lehr, 1997; Shoffner & Vacc, 1999).

Middle level school personnel are sensitive to these needs and to the changing dynamics in which they operate. They understand that when students feel cared for and are a respected part of the school, they achieve. They recognize that providing parents with lots of information about their child's school provides an environment that fosters successful learners. A wide range of approaches to the transition of students from elementary to middle school has emerged. Examining these practices through an invitational lens offers one vehicle for greater understanding and sensitivity to the impact of changing schools on the lives of students. The work exemplified by these practices, and that of countless other middle grades educators, can enlighten and inform school practice.

Starting with Core Beliefs

Building broad support among school constituents for changes in school practice is a central theme in middle level education (Clark & Clark, 1994; Williamson & Johnston, 1991). It is especially critical when undertaking an examination of school transition practices.

The presence of clearly articulated beliefs about the schooling of early adolescents, a clear vision for the school, and a distinct sense of mission and purpose provides clear guidance for school programs (Sergiovanni, 1990). Such clarity has been found to be present in effective middle level schools (George & Shewey, 1994). Without agreement and affirmation of these shared commitments, accountability for school programs and success remains low; there are no principles that guide individual and collective action, and individuals remain free to interpret activities undertaken as part of transition programs in a variety of ways.

To examine their operations many middle level schools have convened groups of parents, community members and faculty to examine and reach agreement on the role and function of the school (Williamson & Johnston, 1998). Such diverse groups often hold disparate ideas about a school's practice. As they work together, gather information, debate and discuss their varied points-of-view, they invariably reach some

agreement on a statement of beliefs (Williamson & Johnston, 1998). While neither novel nor unique, the statements represent the interests and needs of the group. Such agreement is critical to cultivating support for revising one's program.

Delineating a set of core beliefs about schooling can be helpful in refining school programs. These values, central to all organizations, serve as the foundation for adopting practices that make school more appealing and welcoming for students (Johnston, 1995; Purkey & Novak, 1996).

The Five "P's" and Transition Activities

The emphasis of the invitational model on developing a comprehensive set of school practices offers a useful model for examining school transition activities. Each of the five components: people, places, policies, programs, and processes incorporates important approaches to reducing the anxiety inherent in changing schools and in establishing the new school as one which is welcoming and caring.

People

One of the most visible ways a school expresses its core beliefs is through the action of the people who work there. These individuals clearly personify organizational values and reflect the most cherished and treasured beliefs of the school. Understanding the power of personal connection, middle level schools have adopted several transition activities that nurture this important relationship. Successful strategies include the following:

• Faculty and staff learn and use student names. Be visible in school lunchrooms and hallways and engage students in conversation about school activities and their personal lives.

• Encourage teachers to welcome students by creating classroom displays that identify students by name and recognize their accomplishments (National Middle School Association, 1998).

• Provide opportunity during the first days of the new school year to talk with other students, getting to know them, their interests, and their hopes about middle school (Williamson, 1993).

• Assign each new student a "buddy" from a higher grade. This "buddy" can act as a "big brother/big sister" to the incoming student and serve as a mentor and role model. Recognize the buddy for their service (Brazee, 1987).

• Bring small groups of elementary students (20-30) to the middle school and allow each one to shadow a student for the entire day. Be sure they stay for lunch so they can become comfortable with cafeteria procedures (National Middle School Association, 1998; Siehl & Gentry, 1990).

• Create classroom groups in the spring and have middle school teachers send postcards or notes to each student in the incoming class during the summer (Williamson, 1993).

• Provide independent time for personal journal entries where students can write about their experiences, apprehensions, concerns and hopes for entering middle school (Perkins & Gelfer, 1995).

Places

Even before their first interaction with school personnel, students and parents form opinions about the school's operation. As they approach the school by either car or school bus they notice the surroundings: the presence or absence of litter, general repair of the building, and the condition of the grass and landscaping. Upon entering an inviting school they notice the presence of friendly signs welcoming visitors and offering directions, the absence of graffiti, the visibility of student work. The physical appearance of school can reduce or induce anxiety about attendance.

Many middle schools are attentive to these details and offer these suggestions for making schools inviting places:

• Hold a scavenger hunt in the school during the orientation session so students can become familiar with the facility (Perkins & Gelfer, 1995).

• Have students participate in a building trivia contest to familiarize themselves with the school and its facilities on opening day or during the orientation program (Williamson, 1993).

• Have welcoming signs and posters, clean hallways, neat displays of student work (Kaiser, 1995).

Policies

Another clear indicator of school priorities is the day-to-day routines. They are comprised of the regular on-going activities of school life and send clear messages about what is valued. Policies serve another useful role; they establish a framework that guides the regular routines of school personnel. Policies are explicit in establishing priorities. Examples of transition activities that reflect policies include the following:

• Keep parents of new students informed by adding them to the mailing list for school newsletters throughout their final year in elementary school (Cooke, 1995).

• Engage parents (both incoming and outgoing) and faculty in continual planning and evaluation of the transition program in order to build support and commitment (Weldy, 1995).

• Assign students to teams and advisory groups with at least one friend from elementary school (Williamson, 1993).

• Talk with students to identify commonly asked questions. Let current students prepare responses and share those with incoming students (Combs, 1993).

• Acknowledge the contributions of parents and teachers who help with transition activities (Kaiser, 1995).

• Provide every family with a school handbook that includes phone numbers, school history, yearly schedule, teachers, schedules, lunch procedures and other practical information (Schumacher, 1998).

• Recognize and reward current students who assist with the transition program (Kaiser, 1995).

Programs

Often the most tangible indicator of school priorities is the programs offered to students. Programs that set high expectations for the success of all students, exclude no one, and maximize opportunities for students to develop both academically and socially reflect a commitment to an inviting environment.

Transition programs for students and their parents are often the first opportunity for interaction with a school. The perceptions they create have lasting impact on a student's success. Examples of successful practices that administrators and school counselors can develop to create an inviting school climate include:

• Attend elementary school award nights and acknowledge the contributions of incoming students (Kaiser, 1995).

• Meet with elementary teachers to identify their concerns and help them shape the transition of their students to middle school (Williamson, 1993).

• Pair each elementary classroom with a middle level class and have the students write letters or e-mail one other (Perkins & Gelfer, 1995).

• Conduct evening open houses where the middle level students display their work or participate in performing groups.

• Use parent information sessions to convey positive messages about the school and its programs (Kaiser, 1995).

• Send a box of locks to the elementary school so that students have an opportunity to practice opening a lock (National Middle School Association, 1998).

• Conduct an unstructured open house prior to the beginning of the school year so that parents and students may tour the building, locate classrooms, open their locker and become familiar with the setting (Schumacher, 1998).

• Have the middle school counselor conduct interviews with each elementary student and follow up with a letter to parents (Siehl & Gentry, 1990), thus making each student a hero or heroine.

• Schedule regular "parent development" sessions that provide parents with information about the school but respond to issues and concerns they have about the new school (e.g., Understanding Your Early Adolescent, Helping Your Child Make Informed Decisions) (Combs, 1993; Cooke, 1995; Shoffner, 1997).

Processes

Schools convey their most significant messages and transmit their most important beliefs by the way they make decisions. The degree to

which students, parents and community are involved in identifying needs and designing strategies to meet those needs represent a school's commitment to processes which are democratic and respect the interests and needs of its constituents. Schools might use the following approaches to enhance their transition programs:

• Provide for a comprehensive transition plan, one that encompasses the entire school year (Kaiser, 1995). Be attentive to needs for information and support once students enter their new school.

• Routinely gather information from parents and students about the effectiveness of the transition program (Siehl & Gentry, 1990)

• Offer parents meaningful roles in school governance (Cooke, 1995).

• Reach agreement among the faculty on opening day routines and procedures for incoming students. Be cautious about overloading students with too much detail and information, thus provoking a negative response to the new school (Kaiser, 1995).

• Talk with faculty about the awards and accomplishments of the incoming students.

• Challenge long-standing beliefs about middle school students by sharing information about the contributions and work of incoming students in elementary school (Midgley, 1988).

• Provide an opportunity for middle school faculty to visit elementary schools, meet the teachers, learn about the program and develop an appreciation for the work of elementary school teachers. Provide similar opportunities for elementary staff to visit middle schools (Brazee, 1987).

• Place significant responsibility for transition activities in the hands of school counselors and teaching staff thus expanding responsibility for the transition (Weldy, 1990). Honor and recognize their contributions.

• Hold meetings at varied times and locations to accommodate the work schedules of parents (Morgan & Hertzog, 1999).

• Mail a schedule of orientation activities to each student’s home so that parents and students are aware of the opportunities to learn about their new school (Morgan & Hertzog, 1999).

• Become knowledgeable about student concerns by surveying incoming students during their last year in elementary school (Leiderman & Terzopolos, 1991; Weldy, 1995)

Formal school transition programs are only one means of helping students bridge the gap from elementary to middle school. They convey important information and perceptions of school life. Of even greater importance, however, are the more subtle, more informal, messages conveyed to students through the regularities of school life: the people, places, policies, programs and processes. Sound transition programs recognize the importance of complementing traditional transition activities with others that utilize the attributes of Invitational Education to telegraph to students that they are supported, cared for, and welcomed in their new setting.

Conclusion

All school personnel, but particularly school counselors and administrators, play critical roles in supporting sound student transition programs. Their leadership can mold and shape school-wide activities that enhance the work of the entire staff in developing and implementing effective transition programs. Invitational Education can serve as an important vehicle to strengthen school-wide efforts to assure that students, and their families, make a smooth transition from elementary to middle school.

It is essential that those most often charged with shepherding transition activities, the counseling and administrative staff, work together, as a team, and collaboratively with the larger school community to support students in their transition to middle school. A collaborative effort, built on a sound understanding of the needs of early adolescent students, is critical.

The transition from elementary to middle school is a significant event in the lives of most early adolescents (Mac Iver, 1990). Together, all school personnel can assure that students receive the information, understanding, and support essential to assure success in their new school. Through greater understanding of school culture and the many formal and informal ways in which culture is transmitted, school leaders can make the transition to a new school more inviting and supportive for students.

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