

Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice

Volume 6, Number 2, 1999

Editorial

William B. Stafford	Long Shadows	71
---------------------	--------------	----

Articles

W. Cris Cannon John J. Schmidt	Invitational Counseling: A Fresh Vernacular for Marriage and Family Therapy	73
Dana L. Frakes	Humor in Counseling: A Review Review and Examination from an Invitational Perspective	85
Suzanne Degges White	Inviting Self-Efficacy in Children: Taking Competition Out of the Game	93

EARLY BIRD ANNOUNCEMENT

We're counting down the days until our
Year 2000 World Conference

October 12-15, 2000

Conference Theme:

Rediscovering Joy in an Age of Accountability

The Year 2000 World Conference on Invitational Education is co-sponsored by the International Alliance for Invitational Education, Guilford County Schools, NC, and the Department of Counseling and Development, School of Education, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Featured presenters at this exciting World Conference include Zacharie Clements, Betty Siegel, John Novak, William W. Purkey, Jack Schmidt, Judy Lehr, and Eddie Collins among others. Many leaders in Invitational Education will be presenting general sessions and invited workshops.

Our Year 2000 World Conference on Invitational Education will be held at the **Greensboro Marriott Airport Hotel, October 12-15, 2000**. Greensboro, NC is a beautiful city, especially during October when autumn leaves are at their peak. Many local attractions are available for participants, including historical Blandwood Mansion, the magnificent North Carolina Zoo, which is a 30-minute drive from Greensboro, and the highly acclaimed Children's Museum. For detailed conference information, please contact:

Jeannette Gann, Conference Director

120 Franklin Blvd. Greensboro, NC 27401

(336) 370-2321

Editorial

Long Shadows

The long shadows of fall are beginning to descend reminding us that the leisurely pace of summer gets ratcheted up a few notches. For many of us, activities this time of the year take on a life of their own and we are caught up in a myriad of tasks. Your International Alliance for Invitational Education is also caught up in the increased tempo. The Leadership Institute held in Ottawa, Canada was a sell out this October, and plans for the next World Conference scheduled for October 12-15, 2000 is already building a head of steam. A pre-publication announcement of *Invitations to Dialogue: The Legacy of Sidney Jourard*, which is sponsored by the Alliance, will also be found in this issue of the journal.

The first article of this issue of the journal, "Invitational Counseling: A Fresh Vernacular Marriage and Family Therapy", is co-authored by W. Cris Cannon and John J. Schmidt. The authors submit that the Five P's of invitational education (i.e., people, places, policies, programs and practices) provide both a stance for marriage and family counseling and a point of focus for both counselor and clients as they thread their way through the mazes of marital and family discord. Two brief case studies enhance the authors' presentation. Those interested in marriage and family counseling will find this article of particular interest.

Dana L. Frakes addresses the difficult issue of "Humor in Counseling: An Invitational Approach." In a well-documented article, Frakes carefully attends to both the possibilities and hazards of the counselor's use of humor in the counseling setting from an invitational point of view. Inappropriate humor could lead to an "orange card" of sarcasm, and too much humor could detract from the counseling process. Counselors particularly will find this article worthwhile, but the implications are clear for other person-to-person interactions.

Suzanne Degges White presents a unique study of children in her article, "Inviting Self-Efficacy in Children: Taking the Competition out of

the Game.” White created a noncompetitive game of physical skills for elementary school children and got each individual child to predict her/his likelihood of subsequent success in future tries of these physical skills. White examines age and gender differences in the children’s predictions of future success in this simple, but well-structured experiment.

The long shadows of fall may be encroaching upon us, but the reader will find some interesting reading in the pages that follow. Enjoy.

William Stafford
Editor

Invitational Counseling: A Fresh Vernacular for Marriage and Family Therapy

W. Cris Cannon

*Crievewood Baptist Church
Nashville, TN*

John J. Schmidt

*East Carolina University
Greenville, NC*

This article presents invitational counseling as an approach to use in marriage and family therapy. The language and basic tenets of invitational counseling are reviewed, and its compatibility with marriage and family therapy is illustrated with examples and case studies. The Five P's, (people, places, policies, programs, and processes) are suggested as a model for assessing marriages and relationships in the beginning of the counseling process. The article also proposes that invitational counseling be used as both a problem-solving and educational approach in working with couples and families.

Invitational counseling is a recently developed approach that offers a model for “professional helping within which counselors can incorporate compatible approaches for establishing helping relationships” (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996, p. 3). Its foundation is based on perceptual psychology, self-concept theory, and invitational education (Purkey & Novak, 1996). As a philosophy of professional practice, invitational counseling offers a fresh vernacular for appropriating related theories into various helping relationships.

The purpose of this article is to suggest that invitational counseling has value for marriage and family counseling. Invitational counseling is a personal approach to helping based on the idea of extending positive messages towards oneself and others. For this reason, “invitational counseling is as much a particular ‘stance’—a therapeutic attitude or disposition—as it is a methodology” (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996, p. 3). It is the language par-

ticular to this stance that offers marriage and family counselors a potentially fresh vernacular for working with couples, parents, and children.

As an initial presentation suggesting the compatibility of invitational counseling with marriage and family therapy, this article is limited in its scope and is, therefore, not a comprehensive review of the literature or research on this topic. Indeed, invitational counseling is a recently proposed model with relatively few research studies to establish its efficacy (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). In contrast, marriage and family therapy has numerous theories and models of practice available, many of which have been researched and presented in the literature for decades. This article is intended as a preliminary thought piece to encourage discussion and research efforts that might investigate the usefulness of invitational counseling in marriage and family therapy.

Marriage, family, and relationship counseling are, in a sense, much like gold mining. An experienced counselor realizes that the presenting concern is often the exposed part of deeper difficulties that must be carefully unearthed for consideration by the couple or family. In marriage counseling, for example, common perceptions of specific problems may lead couples into therapy, but their perceptions of the overall relationship must be examined if counseling is to be successful. There is a correlation between marital satisfaction and the perceptions that each marital partner holds about the marriage and the marriage partner. Some research suggests that long-term marriages survive and flourish because both parties in the relationship share common perceptions of satisfaction and meaning. For example, Lauer and Lauer (1990) gathered data from 100 couples who were married 45 years or more. They found the following variables were identified by the couples as important to their marriages: (1) being married to someone they liked as a person and enjoyed being with, (2) commitment to the spouse and to the marriage, (3) a sense of humor, and (4) consensus on various matters such as aims and goals in life, friends, and decision making. At the same time, it is important to consider the perception of the relationship that is held by each partner, because women and men may determine their perception of the marriage in a different fashion (Merves-Okin, Amidon, & Bernt, 1991).

Encouraging couples and family members to focus on their perceptions and to examine the perceptions of others seems appropriate in therapy because frequently miscommunications, misunderstandings, and inaccurate interpretations of events exacerbate the concerns and issues presented. Invitational counseling, as noted, is founded on perceptual psychology and self-concept theory, making it compatible with marriage and family theories that emphasize perceptions of individual marriage partners or family members and the effects of these perceptions on the family system.

A Fresh Vernacular

Invitational counseling believes the client's own perception of his or her situation as the key element for the counselor's consideration. At the same time, the essence of one's self-concept is one's perception of his or her personal existence, and the continual process through which a person's self-concept grows and expands throughout life.

Perception and self-concept are interactive factors that play an essential role in marriage and family therapy. The difficulties that couples have, or that families experience, are often as much a function of how they view themselves and others within the family or the relationship as they are of actual events.

In addition to the vernacular of perceptual psychology and self-concept theory, invitational theory delineates four levels of functioning that include helpful and harmful behaviors. The most harmful level of functioning (Level I) is to be *intentionally disinviting*. It includes anything that demeans, defeats, or destroys another person. For example, a spouse who always ridicules in public and finds some insidious satisfaction from putting his or her partner down is an illustration of this destructive level. At a higher level, *unintentionally disinviting* persons (Level II) might mean well, but they are unaware of their "disinvitational" stance. As an illustration, when parents behave this way, they do things that thwart children's development without meaning to. A mother, who continues to feed a young child capable of feeding himself or herself, unintentionally extends dependency and hinders responsible development.

At the third level, *unintentionally inviting* persons usually mean well and are somewhat effective in what they do, but they lack clear purpose and direction. This uncertainty prevents them from gaining self-knowledge and repeating successful events in their relationships.

The highest level of functioning, to be *intentionally inviting* (Level IV) towards oneself and others, allows for clear purpose and direction in all relationships. The spouse, who consciously and consistently does positive things and behaves in ways that elevate the self-worth of his or her partner, is functioning at the highest level.

While the four levels of invitational counseling appear similar to earlier empathy scales created by counseling theorists (e.g., Carkhuff, 1969), the concept of counselor and client intentionality adds a dimension that permits the exploration of purposeful versus careless behaviors. In this way, the levels can be used in marriage and family counseling to ask partners and parents to explore and evaluate their behaviors not only in terms of “inviting” and “disinviting” qualities but also in respect to their degree of intention.

Among all the aspects of invitational counseling, the language created by the Five Factors may have the most importance in marriage, family, and relationship counseling. The Five Factors, commonly called the Five P’s, include people, places, policies, programs, and processes.

The Five P’s offers a way to help couples assess and understand the present state of their relationships. For example, in marriage counseling couples might evaluate and compare the Five Factors of their relationship as a way to appreciate each other’s perceptions. This appreciation may encourage them, with a counselor’s assistance, to work on a more inviting posture in dealing with concerns about their relationship. As the couple learns to be more inviting towards each one another, they are able to address more serious difficulties.

Invitational Theory and Marriage and Family Therapy

Invitational counseling offers a comprehensive assessment tool through the use of the Five P's: people, places, policies, programs, and processes (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). Used mainly for assessing individual perceptions within large settings, the Five P's are applicable in marriage and family therapy because the factors that affect relationships among individuals are the same ones that influence marriage and family relationships.

How people perceive themselves and others directly affects the atmosphere within a family setting. Additionally, how other people function—friends, teachers, bosses, fellow workers, administrators, and so forth—affects each person who, in turn, takes this dynamic “home” and consequently affects the overall family. As an illustration, the husband who is upset at his boss for unreasonable work demands meets his daughter's concern for pleasing her baseball coach, as well as his wife's worry over her sick father, and the interaction of all these matters has an impact on the family. All of these “people” issues influence the overall dynamic of the family system.

Places focus on physical environments where people live, work, go to school, shop, and worship. All these factors have an effect that is played out, among other places, in the family system. Concern about physical security at a child's school, for instance, heightens parental concerns about safety in general. Such anxiety affects the family system in both known and unknown ways. Similarly, the atmosphere of a couple's home in terms of comfort, security, order, and other aspects contributes to, or detracts from, the health of the overall relationship.

Policies are “regulations, codes, orders, mandates, rules and edicts created by those in authority” (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996, p. 100). An understanding of marriage and family policies offers insight into the function and dysfunction of relationships and family systems. A husband's policy of “wanting dinner on the table the minute he comes home from work” might inhibit a wife who has decided to return to work instead of staying

home. The manner in which individual policies are discerned and the power implicit in those policies are important dynamics within the marriage or family system.

Programs are developed as a method of delivering services and information to groups and organizations. An assessment of how external programs affect the family's inner functioning and the family's response to those situations is key to understanding and intervening in the system. For example, an after-school program in which the child wants to participate influences the family because of budget-stretching costs and structural changes that parents make in rearranging their schedules to pick up the child. Similarly, the wife's decision to attend community college to upgrade her work skills may provide the positive benefit of a larger salary, but also affects the family in terms of the mother's presence and quality time.

Processes refer to the routines, rituals, procedures, and practices that affect individuals and their quality of life. The marriage and family counselor has responsibility to assess and understand the countless processes at work within a given relationship or family system. To illustrate, the parents of a young boy were in conflict about ways to have the child take responsibility for getting himself ready for school in the morning. This daily event had become a major battle. The couple framed the problem as a disagreement about who had responsibility to ensure the boy was up and ready for the school bus. Notwithstanding this problem, the couple did not have a way to state their concerns openly and make logical decisions. When the counselor inquired, "What process do you use to resolve this conflict when it happens?" the parents sat silently with no response. At this point, the immediate task was to create a procedure for mutual decision making to avoid further conflict in this area.

As an assessment tool, the Five P's offers two important components for the counseling process. First, it presents the gift of time. The assessment takes time to put into words one's thoughts about people, places, policies, programs, and processes. In talking about these areas, clients share the perceptions they hold about these five areas of life. The counselor sets the overall parameters of the assessment process by inquiring

about the Five P's, but clients create the agenda as each area is shared. The counselor who cares enough to listen to a client's agenda creates the most valuable quality of counseling: empathy.

When counselors talk with clients about the Five P's, they discuss factors that are common in clients' daily lives and experiences. Rather than immediately delving into threatening areas, counselors begin the helping process from the clients' own view. Such a stance by the counselor is itself inviting, and embodies the heart of invitational counseling even in the initial stages of assessment. In their research of marital therapy dropouts, Allgood and Crane (1991) learned that the admission of marital problems to strangers increases anxiety that often leads to premature termination of counseling relationships. Thus, counselors must give a certain amount of time and attention to the creation of a relationship as they begin the process of therapy.

The second important quality that the Five P's offers to the assessment process is the chance for clients to tell their own story. As a non-obtrusive means of assessment, the Five P's enable the marriage and family counselor to encourage clients to discuss each area in the context of their life together. The counselor's opportunity to listen to the Five P's, as well as the client's perception of his or her situation, allows time to consider a range of interventions that may be helpful.

Combining the Five P's of the marriage or family system offers counselors a comprehensive assessment of each partner or family member, which, in turn, suggests appropriate ways for addressing concerns or solving problems. Counselors view the interplay of the Five P's as each unveils key perceptual issues for marriage partners and family members. The result is a comprehensive picture of the couple's relationship or the family system, including factors inside and outside the relationship as well as each member's perceptions of these factors. In troubled relationships, the difficulties of one member affects the entire system and everyone needs to be directly or indirectly involved in the search for a solution.

Integration of Invitational Theory

As noted, one distinctive contribution of invitational counseling to marriage, family, and relationship counseling is the assessment opportunity it offers in the form of the Five P's. Invitational counseling also offers an instructional possibility that can be integrated with other marriage and family interventions. The following cases illustrate the use of the Five P's as an assessment method and how the five levels of functioning can be taught to couples and families. The first case demonstrates the use of the Five P's with a couple, and the second shows how the levels of functioning can be used to instruct clients about inviting and disinviting behaviors.

Ralph and Jane

Ralph and his wife, Jane, had been married for four years; they had no children. Committed to their careers, Ralph was a manager at an investment firm and Jane served as a paralegal for a local attorney. The couple came for counseling because, as they described it, "We argue over little things and we don't feel good about one another any more." Without a definite complaint or problem identified, the initial sessions consisted of confusing words, feelings, and attitudes with no real sense of direction.

Beginning with the third session, the counselor asked the couple to frame their concerns using the Five P's. Ralph and Jane were in agreement about the "people" in their lives and the roles played by these individuals that included work acquaintances, friends, fellow church members, and families. While the "places" of their lives differed due to work and friendships, this area also proved to be a point of agreement and strength. Ralph and Jane were aware of the various "policies" that work-places and family brought to their marriage, but they found these to be powerful structures that brought support to their lives. As for "programs," Ralph and Jane had divided their lives and their calendars into personal and professional areas, and both felt good about the balance in their lives across programs of work, church, and family.

At this point, two important things occurred. First, Ralph, Jane, and the therapist had a focus for the counseling relationship. Rather than continuing the unfocused discussions that began the sessions, they now had clearer direction. Second, Ralph and Jane began to realize that they agreed about many aspects of their marriage, which was strong in ways they had been unaware. There was a true and positive energy about the areas they felt they had mastered in terms of “people,” “places,” “policies,” and “programs.” This vigor helped remove some of the anxiety about their marriage and framed the counseling process in a more positive light.

When the discussion moved to the “processes” of their relationship, Ralph and Jane saw that this was an area of difficulty for them, and it affected other areas of their marriage. When they were angry or had a disagreement on an issue, Ralph and Jane would argue, withdraw from one another, stop speaking, and then in a few days act as if nothing had ever happened. When the next problem occurred, the past unresolved issues were highlighted to the extent that a feeling of general frustration about their marriage resulted. The counselor asked them for an example of an unresolved problem and its effect, and they mentioned a disagreement about going to Jane’s family every Sunday to have lunch. When the counselor inquired what process the couple used to resolve their conflict, they replied in unison, “We don’t have any process!” This was the moment in which the real issue of their marital struggle came to light. It informed the present discussion and framed future counseling sessions. Ralph and Jane needed to create a process for sharing their concerns and making mutual decisions in their marriage.

With the Five P’s providing structure, Ralph and Jane were able to examine aspects of their self-beliefs and perceptions about the status of their marriage and their place as individuals within that relationship. Some of these perceptions were confirmed by each, which offered strength and hope for their marriage. Where perceptions differed, Ralph and Jane realized that those differences offered opportunity for further investigation. Consequently, invitational counseling allowed Ralph and Jane to isolate their concerns in a guided fashion and encouraged them to understand each other’s perceptions for future problem solving.

Marv, Mary, and Meg

A second, but no less important contribution of invitational counseling, is the teaching of invitational concepts to couples and families. While people are often aware of specific conflict that leads them into counseling, they are frequently unaware of the status of their broader relationships. Helping clients become mindful of basic relational issues by considering the spectrum from “intentionally disinviting” to “intentionally inviting” behavior is an educational process. As such, invitational counseling is an educational approach as well as a therapeutic one. The ability to educate couples and family members and help them assess the status of their relationship is as significant as focusing on the concerns that initially cause them to seek counseling.

Because invitational counseling is a relatively new approach to therapeutic relationships, research is lacking to demonstrate its efficacy. However, some research indicates that children can learn the basic tenets of inviting and disinviting behaviors and, when taught the basic concepts, children’s perceptions about using positive behaviors towards others may become more favorable (Schmidt & Shields, 1998).

An example of this educational process is seen with the family who came for counseling about their intense anger whenever they disagreed. Marv, the father, admitted that he flew into a rage when anyone disagreed with him. Mary, the mother was aware that she used her own anger to protect her fourteen-year-old daughter, Meg, from her husband’s rage. Mary and Meg effectively formed a powerful alliance against Marv.

By teaching this family the Levels of Functioning (from Level I intentionally disinviting to Level IV intentionally inviting), the counselor helped them move from the immediate focus on anger to positive ways of communicating their feelings. Once the family became aware of communication patterns and chose more effective styles, each member was able to discuss the power dynamics of their relationship more openly. By removing the threat of being “blown away by Dad,” as Meg put it, intentional

invitations laid the groundwork for deeper dialogue about other issues within the family.

Conclusion

Invitational counseling is an approach founded on self-concept theory and perceptual psychology that may have value for marriage and family therapy. It could be especially useful as an assessment model to help couples and family members evaluate various factors about their relationship, and as an educational intervention by which people learn positive strategies to address areas of concern.

As invitational counseling is used with marriage, family, and relationship counseling, there are areas for further consideration and development. For one, a reconfiguration of the Five P's to express a family viewpoint might be helpful. More explicit creation and definition of a "Family Five P's" could be facilitative in family counseling. As a part of such study, an expanded consideration of programs might be warranted. Purkey and Schmidt (1996) considered programs as things designed by organizations to define and describe their service delivery systems. Yet, families also create and sustain their own programs, which need to be considered in therapeutic relationships. The current definition of programs within invitational counseling does not adequately address the family programs that arise within family systems. A delineation and description of family programs could make invitational counseling more useful for marriage, family, and relationship counseling.

References

- Allgood, S. M. & Crane, D. R. (1991). Predicting marital therapy drop-outs. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 17, 73-79.
- Carkhuff, R.R. (1969). *Helping and human relations: Selection and training* (Vol. 1). New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
- Lauer, R. H., & Lauer, J.C. (1990). The long-term marriage: Perceptions of stability and satisfaction. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 31, p. 189-195.

- Merves-Okin, L. A., Amidon, E., & Bernt, F. (1991). *Solving problems in couples and family therapy: Techniques and tactics*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Purkey, W. W., & Novak, J. M. (1996). *Inviting school success* (3rd Ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Purkey, W.W. & Schmidt, J. J. (1996). *Invitational counseling: A self-concept approach to professional practice*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Schmidt, J. J. & Shields, C. W. (1998). Integration of guidance lessons using invitational concepts in a friendship curriculum. *Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice*, 5, 107-122.

W. Cris Cannon is Senior Pastor of Crieveview Baptist Church, Nashville, TN and is principal in Cris Cannon Consultations, a counseling and consulting firm. Jack Schmidt is professor and chair of the Counselor and Adult Education Department at East Carolina University in Greenville, NC.
Correspond to Cris Cannon at 480 Hogan Road, Nashville, TN 37220.
e-mail: cannons@bellsouth.net

Humor in Counseling: A Review and Examination from an Invitational Perspective

Dana L. Frakes

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Integrating humor into counseling situations can be beneficial to the counseling process. This article presents and discusses some of these benefits and their applications as well as precautions to take into consideration when using humor in clinical settings. The therapeutic uses of humor are examined from the perspective of invitational theory. The author suggests that humor is a clinical tool that is inherently inviting, and thus has high potential for utility in invitational counseling.

Having a good sense of humor has long been correlated with positive mental, emotional, and physical health (Dimmer, Carroll, & Wyatt, 1990; Johnston, 1990). If humor and laughter are associated with healthy living, it stands to reason that humor can be a useful tool in counseling situations. Because of the many inviting aspects of humor, the use of humor is particularly applicable in conjunction with invitational theory. This article offers an overview of the benefits that humor can bring to counseling as well as some of the potential disadvantages. A discussion illustrating how the therapeutic uses of humor correspond to invitational theory is then presented.

Advantages and Precautions of Using Humor in Counseling

The literature illustrating the numerous benefits of using humor in counseling is abundant (Dimmer et al., 1990; Johnston, 1990; Keller, 1984; Rutherford, 1994; Schnarch, 1990; Thomson, 1990). Perhaps the greatest advantage is the ability of humor to build rapport with clients by strengthening the counselor's alliance with them (Johnston, 1990; Rutherford, 1994). Using humor with clients can prevent a counselor from being seen as a judge or arbitrator (Schnarch, 1990). As Rutherford (1994) stated, humor "equalizes the relationship" between the counselor and client (p. 209). Laughing with clients can reflect the counselor's good will

towards them. This also may indicate that the counselor is comfortable with his or her own shortcomings (Schnarch, 1990). Keller (1984) stated that taking a humorous approach to therapy can reduce the clients' hostility. By loosening the stereotypical roles of the counselor and the client, tension and anxiety in both the counselor and client can be significantly reduced (Dimmer et al., 1990).

Because of the non-threatening aspects of humor, (Johnston, 1990), it has the potential to facilitate communication between clients and counselors as well as reduce clients' resistance to therapy. Clients may find that clinical insights are more acceptable when phrased in a humorous context (Schnarch, 1990). According to Rutherford (1994), humor is therapeutic in that it alleviates the intensity of serious discussions that are otherwise difficult for clients to engage in. Discussing uncomfortable or painful memories may be easier for some clients when approached from a humorous angle (Keller, 1984). Additionally, humor encourages the expression of emotions and can therefore facilitate emotional catharsis in clients (Dimmer et al., 1990).

One benefit of humor that is significant to psychodynamically-oriented counselors is the fact that humor can often be a key to the unconscious (Johnston, 1990). Clients' jokes can reveal much about them, which might not be discovered easily through other means. Clients disclose important aspects of themselves through humorous comments or innuendos they make during a counseling session. Humor is sensitive to repressed feelings, and can be an outlet for many clients to break free of social and personal taboos (Keller, 1984). For this reason, using humor in therapy works well for clients who present sexual concerns (Dimmer et al., 1990). Humor has the ability to reduce the guilt that clients may feel concerning their sexual problems as well as their inhibitions when discussing those problems or concerns (Keller, 1984).

In addition to these theoretical benefits, there are practical uses of humor in counseling. Jokes are an excellent means of "breaking the ice", particularly with new clients (Dimmer et al., 1990; Rutherford, 1994). A major advantage of humor is its ability to alter and widen a client's perspective by reframing problems into a positive context (Rutherford, 1994).

Humor has the potential to be an excellent means of demonstrating alternative points of view and courses of action (Thomson, 1990). Practical uses of humor facilitate the development of clients' insights into their own lives (Johnston, 1990). It is often beneficial for counselors to end therapy sessions on a positive note, and using humor is perhaps the most effective way of accomplishing this (Rutherford, 1994).

Humor can be used for diagnostic and assessment purposes within a counseling session (Rutherford, 1994; Schnarch, 1990). Counselors can learn much about their clients by observing their ability and willingness to take a step back from their problems and laugh at them. Clients' reactions to therapist humor can also provide insights for the therapist, particularly if defensive or offensive reactions are manifested (Schnarch, 1990). An inability to laugh or joke may be an indication of an emotional disturbance (Rutherford, 1994). Conversely, a sense of humor often indicates social interest (Rutherford, 1994).

Promoting humor in clients can be an effective preventative measure. As a general rule, people are drawn to those who can make them laugh. Therefore, by fostering a sense of humor in clients, counselors can help them develop a more extensive social-support network, which in turn has the potential to increase their self-esteem (Johnston, 1990; Keller, 1984; Rutherford, 1994). Humor is effective as a method of coping and stress reduction for many individuals (Rutherford, 1994; Thomson, 1990).

The physical act of laughing has been found to be associated with good mental and physical health (Johnston, 1990). Chemical secretions called endorphins, which reduce physical stress and generate euphoria, are released into the bloodstream when one laughs (Johnston, 1990). Laughter promotes emotional freedom and is incompatible with depression (Dimmer et al., 1990; Rutherford, 1994). If a person is laughing, it is impossible for that person to be depressed in that instant. Laughter also has many positive physiological effects; it builds the immune system, increases heart rate, and stimulates circulation (Johnston, 1990).

Though these and other benefits of using humor as a therapeutic device advocate its use in counseling, there are precautions that must be

given consideration when integrating humor into therapy. Utilizing humor as a therapeutic tool requires skill. It takes practice to learn to use humor appropriately and therapeutically (Schnarch, 1990). The use of humor may be exploited by clients to divert the counselor away from core issues (Schnarch, 1990), to avoid uncomfortable feelings (Dimmer et al., 1990), or to reinforce clients' maladaptive defense strategies (Johnston, 1990). In addition, the counselor's use of humor has the potential to undermine her or his credibility (Johnston, 1990).

There are additional considerations for counselors using humor clinically. Humor should be used with caution in group settings. Although humor fosters group cohesion, laughter is contagious and joke-telling can easily get out of hand (Johnston, 1990). Multicultural issues must also be contemplated in any counseling environment (Dimmer et al., 1990). What is considered humorous in one culture can be construed as something quite different in another.

Because the potential power of humor in therapeutic situations, there are practical guidelines to remember when using humor for therapeutic purposes. It is important that counselors use humor gradually with each client and constantly assess its effects (Johnston, 1990). As with any counseling strategy, humor should be used in moderation. The overuse of humor will neutralize its therapeutic effect. The importance of spontaneity when utilizing humor in therapy is emphasized in the literature (Johnston, 1990; Rutherford, 1994). Spontaneous humor has profound effects, though it is imperative that spontaneity does not interfere with the appropriateness of the humor (Johnston, 1990).

Also essential to using humor appropriately, counselors always consider their clients' needs, personality, and issues before using humor (Dimmer et al., 1990). For example, humorous techniques are not used in therapy with clients who require a formal approach to counseling, who feel invalidated or misunderstood by authority figures, or who have cognitive deficits (Schnarch, 1990). In addition, humor is used prudently with clients who have a high defiance potential (Schnarch, 1990). Keller (1984) has found that addicts are resistant to therapeutic uses of humor and often experience paranoia that is exacerbated by therapist humor.

As Gomez, Gomez, and O'Connell (1994) stated, it is important to remember the difference between "healthy humor and hostile wit" (p. 292). Humor often reflects aggression, and it is imperative that counselors avoid this form of humor at all costs. An example of this type of harmful humor is sarcasm. While humor used in a healthy manner tends to reduce clients' anxiety and strengthen the therapeutic alliance, sarcasm induces the opposite effect (Schnarch, 1990). Hence, therapists' use of sarcastic humor can be devastating to the productivity of therapy.

By maintaining awareness of the precautions involved in using humor in therapy and by following the guidelines provided, the potential drawbacks are easily avoided and humor's potential as an effective therapeutic tool may be successfully employed.

Humor from an Invitational Perspective

Because of its inherently inviting properties, humor can easily be utilized with an invitational approach to counseling. It is possible to invite humor intentionally without causing adverse effects (Dimmer et al., 1990). The model incorporated by invitational counseling is integrated in its nature, meaning a wide variety of approaches can be applicable within this type of counseling (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). Therefore, humor is a viable option for use in invitational counseling. Applying humor in an inviting manner can reap all the previously discussed benefits.

Invitational counseling is based on invitational theory, which is defined by four elements that counselors must bring into the counseling relationship: optimism, respect, trust, and intentionality (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). These four elements interact with each other dynamically, allowing the counselor to create a helping relationship with the highest potential for benevolence. Integrating humor into any of these elements can further increase the counselor's potential for helping.

Optimism is characterized by a belief that all individuals are valuable and capable and should be treated as such (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). As has been mentioned previously, humor reflects the counselor's good will,

and makes it clear that the counselor is not there to judge clients, but to accept and value them as they deserve (Schnarch, 1990).

Within the element of respect are appropriateness, responsibility, and acceptance (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). Invitations to clients must occur at appropriate moments, and this is especially true for humorous invitations (Johnston, 1990). Responsibility is an important aspect in respecting individuals. From an invitational standpoint, each person is ultimately responsible for his or her own behaviors. However, counselors are responsible for facilitating their clients' development (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). Both the client and counselor's responsibilities must be acknowledged in counseling situations, and framing these responsibilities in a humorous manner may relieve tension and anxiety and facilitate communication of these responsibilities to the client (Schnarch, 1990). Finally, accepting individuals goes hand in hand with respecting them. Humor is beneficial in showing the counselor's acceptance of clients, and laughing with them makes this acceptance evident.

Invitational counseling operates from the assumption that counseling is a collaborative process and requires mutual trust between the counselor and the client (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). A trusting relationship is established by a series of inviting actions on the part of both the client and the counselor. One way to encourage the client's trust is to allow them to lead the counseling session in any direction they choose (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). Clients may decide to take the session into many humorous directions, and responding to this humor demonstrates the counselor's acceptance, which in turn builds the client's trust (Keller, 1984). It is important to remember that blaming others or making excuses, even when phrased in humorous contexts, should be avoided by both counselors and clients. Neither is inviting and both can damage the trust between the counselor and client (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996).

The last element of invitational counseling, intentionality, is perhaps the most significant. Invitations given without intentionality are unsubstantiated and mean nothing. What good is an invitation if it was not given on purpose? In accordance with invitational theory, a client's potential can best be recognized in counseling settings that are designed specifically to

facilitate that client's development and affirm his or her value (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). Using humor intentionally is a fundamental aspect of some counseling techniques. Examples of these techniques include modelling (Johnston, 1990), paradoxical approaches (Dimmer et al., 1990; Gomez et al., 1994), and humorous metaphors (Schnarch, 1990; Gomez et al., 1994).

Victor Borge once said, "Humor is the shortest distance between two people" (Keller, 1984, p. 7). There is no better way to explain the profound impact that humor can have in facilitating relationships between individuals, as well as its potential for building rapport in counseling situations. For counselors, using your humor and inviting the client's humor are ways to demonstrate the optimism, respect, trust, and intentionality that establish both an inviting and successful counseling relationship. Based on the evidence in the literature, it seems that humor has an undeniable and important place in invitational counseling.

References

- Dimmer, S. A., Carroll, J. L., & Wyatt, G. K. (1990). Uses of humor in psychotherapy. *Psychological Reports*, 66, 795-801.
- Gomez, E. A., Gomez, G. E., & O'Connell, W. E. (1994). Adler, natural high, and other humanistic psychotherapies. *Individual Psychology: The Journal of Adlerian Theory, Research and Practice*, 50 (3), 288-296.
- Johnston, R. A. (1990). Humor: A preventive health strategy. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*, 13, 257-265.
- Keller, D. (1984). *Humor as therapy*. Wauwatosa, WI: Med-Psych Publications.
- Purkey, W. W., & Schmidt, J. J. (1996). *Invitational counseling: A self-concept approach to professional practice*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.
- Rutherford, K. (1994). Humor in psychotherapy. *Individual Psychology: The journal of Adlerian theory, research and practice*, 50 (2), 207-222.
- Schnarch, D. M. (1990). Therapeutic uses of humor in psychotherapy. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy*, 1 (1), 75-86.

Thomson, B. R. (1990). Appropriate and inappropriate uses of humor in psychotherapy as perceived by certified reality therapists: A delphi study. *Journal of Reality Therapy*, 10 (1), 59-65.

Dana L. Frakes is a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in the Department of Counseling and Educational Development.

Inviting Self-Efficacy in Children: Taking Competition Out of the Game

Suzanne Degges White

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

The predictive power of self-efficacy beliefs of children aged 4 to 10 was investigated using common schoolyard activities. Participants were 24 elementary school-aged children and 4 pre-kindergarten-aged children. Age-appropriate tasks included the standing broad jump for both groups, a targeted ball kick for the older group and basketball dribbling for the younger group. Results indicated that until around the fifth birthday, the age at which most children begin formal education, the ability to predict performance was not reliable. The school-aged children were more accurate in their predictions and, as a group, illustrated the role of peer support and self-confidence in developing self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy has been defined as the beliefs we hold about our ability to produce designated levels of performance (Bandura, 1994). By believing in ourselves, we can often achieve higher levels of accomplishment than our past performance might predict. Because what we believe about ourselves in one facet of our lives often carries over to self-attitudes in other areas, it is important that we find schools, work settings, circles of friends, and activities that foster a strong sense of self-confidence, self-assurance and self-respect.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to determine how strongly self-efficacy predicted children's achievement on particular athletic skills tasks. I also wanted to determine if there were any significant differences between the sexes in self-efficacy predictive reliability, and if there were any differences between two discrete-age groups (pre-kindergarten and

elementary school-aged children) in self-efficacy predictive power. The participants in this study were all younger than eleven years of age.

By choosing athletic tasks, in which virtually all children have situational experience, there is a lack of trepidation about the requirements by the participants. In addition, by choosing skills practiced during recess and other contexts such as kickball, hopscotch, etc., the participants have a particular level of competency that could be measured in the first trial.

Background

Children's academic performance has been the subject of several investigations of self-efficacy research (Pajares, 1996; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Pajares (1996) determined that measures of self-efficacy are a reliable predictor of the outcomes of particular tasks. Zimmerman et al. (1992) found that students' perceived efficacy to achieve, combined with personal goal setting, influenced academic achievement. Few studies, however, have investigated whether similar results would be found in another important realm for children, the playground. Competition for grades, structured after-school classes, and recreational league coaches who push winning, all place children into "me-against-thee" situations. Adults measure children against older siblings, the kid next door, and the teacher's pet. Being judged by teachers, coaches and parents may not make a child's world an inviting place. This study looked at a sample of school children and placed them in "win-win" situations. The only measurements made known to each child were those of his/her own performance. Participants asked questions regarding how the winner would be chosen and wanted to know if there would be prizes. I informed the group that I would only be looking at each child's performance measures in relation to their future scores and that I would not rate any child's performance against another's. I also affirmed that they were all winners.

What I quickly discovered while conducting the research was that in a non-competitive, non-pressured environment, children would naturally support each other in their endeavors. The participants behaved as if they felt special and honored to be chosen to be part of this study. This was

reflected in their eagerness to participate at each session and their vocal expressions of thanks to the program director for choosing them for the experiment. They were excited to get out of the school cafeteria and into the bright sunlight. They were willing to give encouragement to each other as each child took her/his turn at each event. Children did not verbally express any "better than me" frustrations or any "better-than-you" gloating. As each child was moving into a new activity, the other participants would offer encouragement and attention to his/her performance.

This study replicated the design of earlier studies done with children in an athletic/physical skill environment, including Watkins, Garcia, and Turek (1994) and Miller (1993), but involved a different participant group than other studies. One earlier study investigated the self-efficacy of young, male baseball players, between the ages of 9 and 17 (Watkins et al., 1994). The participants in this study were avid baseball players enrolled at a baseball camp. The researchers were testing the boys as they practiced at the batting cage station of the camp facilities. The results of this study indicated that self-efficacy only modestly related to the second trial of each of two sets of hitting. They also found that previous performance modestly predicted subsequent hitting performance. Hitting performance, however, significantly predicted self-efficacy measures.

Major differences in the design of the Watkins et al. study and the current study were the tasks involved, age of the participants, and the setting. The elementary school children participated in this study on their school playground and performed tasks that they typically would not practice repetitively in and of themselves. There was no sense of outright competition, as would be found in a sports camp, and the locale was familiar, thus possibly decreasing anxiety levels regarding performance.

Another earlier study used participants who were competitive swimmers (Miller, 1993). Miller tested the participants on skills to which they devoted many hours of intensive practice. Miller divided the swimmers into skill-level groupings to determine if ability worked with self-efficacy to predict outcome. Miller determined that self-efficacy did indeed relate to swimming speed for all subjects regardless of ability. His results support claims that the higher self-efficacy, the better the performance, and

reciprocally, the lower the self-efficacy, the poorer the performance. Miller's results challenge Bandura's belief (Bandura, 1982) that only high skill participants show efficacy determinant functions.

Method

Participants

Of a participant pool of 32 children, 28 completed the study. The 4 children not completing this study were not present during the second week of testing. One group was composed of 24 elementary school-aged children. This group consisted of 12 boys and 12 girls. Their ages ranged from 5 years 1 month through 10 years 7 months. A second group was composed of four boys who were between 4 years 2 months and 4 years 7 months.

Apparatus

For the standing broad jump event, I placed a cushioned mat on the ground of the school or park playground. A cardboard pole was marked at 6-inch intervals and numbered from 1 to 19. As the children jumped beside the measurement device, their score was equal to the interval number in which their heels landed. I chose an absolute scale of measurement to make it easier for children to judge their abilities and to get the focus on personal achievement, not real-world competition. Without focusing on feet, inches or centimeters, children could easily judge where each distance demarcation was located on the cardboard tube. This simple scale made it easier for children during the self-prediction phase of the study as they could see clearly the zone into which they had jumped the week before by allowing them to make a prediction using whole numbers.

For the ball kick event, I used three basic playground-type balls (e.g., Four Square balls). For the target zone, I placed two orange sports cones 114 centimeters apart. The children stood 4.5 meters from the cones as they kicked the balls toward the target area.

For the basketball-dribbling event, the children used a regulation size basketball.

Procedure

The children in this study participated in two separate athletic tasks that were determined by their age. All children performed the standing broad jump. The children stood with their heels at the end of a mat and then were asked to jump as far as they could. Each child made a practice jump before completing the measured trial. Their score was based on where their heels landed as they ended their jump.

The second athletic task for the older group of children ($n=24$) was to kick a ball towards a target zone. The children stood 15 feet from the target zone as they kicked the ball. Each child briefly practiced kicking in an unstructured format before scoring began. The measurement of ability was the number of times that the child was able to kick the ball through the cones out of three attempts.

For the four youngest children, the task was to dribble a basketball as many times as possible without losing control of it or taking a step.

The procedure consisted of three steps: (a) initial baseline measurements of performance, (b) self-prediction of next performance, and (c) measurement of their second skill's tests.

The older children's baseline skill's performance abilities were measured on an afternoon after school. One week later they gathered together again and each child was individually shown his/her performance scores from the previous week and then asked to make a prediction of how they would perform that afternoon. They chose their response from three choices: (a) less well, (b) same or (c) better. They then performed the same tasks as they had the previous week and their new scores were recorded.

The younger group of children completed all phases of the study in one afternoon, but the procedures followed the same order. Because

young children generally have a shorter attention span and less reliable memory for brief, unremarkable events, I judged that more reliable results could be received by completing the study on a single afternoon rather than carrying it out over a week.

Results

Results from the current study show that ability to predict performance appears to increase with age. For the school-aged children, there was little difference in self-prediction reliability between the sample of boys and of girls used in this study.

School-aged participants

Analysis of the results, see Table 1, shows that the majority of school-aged participants were able to predict future performance. Seventy-five percent of the school-aged females were able to predict their performance on the ball kick test as well as two-thirds of the males being able to predict their performance in the ball kick activity. Two-thirds of both the females and the males were able to predict their performance on the broad jump activity. For the standing broad jump task, the chi-square results were not statistically significant ($1, N = 24 = 1.0, p = .32$). For the ball kick task, the chi-square results were similar, ($1, N = 24 = 0.65, p = .42$), with no statistical significance. With consideration given to the small sample size, it is important to note that the chi-square results did indicate that self-prediction of performance occurred somewhat more frequently than would be expected if left simply to chance. Implications for additional research exist and will be discussed in another section of this paper.

Pre-kindergarten participants

This group showed considerably less ability to predict performance accurately, although the participants had just completed their initial skills assessment. For the younger group of four, only a single participant could accurately call on self-efficacy to predict his performance, as evidenced in Table 2. Not surprisingly, this subject was the oldest of his group and

he even succeeded in predicting performance in both categories, jumping and basketball dribbling.

Table 1
Predictive power of self-efficacy for performance
of school-aged participants

	Standing broad jump			Ball kick	
	Total	Predicted 2 nd outcome	Did not predict 2 nd outcome	Predicted 2 nd outcome	Did not predict 2 nd outcome
All	24	16	8	17	7
Girls	12	8	4	9	3
Boys	12	8	4	8	4

	Standing broad jump		Ball kick	
	Predicted 2 nd outcome	Did not predict 2 nd outcome	Predicted 2 nd outcome	Did not predict 2 nd outcome
All	67%	33%	71%	29%
Girls	67%	33%	75%	25%
Boys	67%	33%	67%	33%

Table 2
Predictive power of self-efficacy for performance
of pre-kindergarten participants

	Total	Standing broad jump		Ball kick	
		Predicted 2 nd outcome	Did not predict 2 nd outcome	Predicted 2 nd outcome	Did not predict 2 nd outcome
All	4	1	3	1	3

	Standing broad jump		Ball kick	
	Predicted 2 nd outcome	Did not predict 2 nd outcome	Predicted 2 nd outcome	Did not predict 2 nd outcome
All	25%	75%	25%	75%

Discussion

The most interesting and encouraging phenomena witnessed during the sessions with the older children were their willingness to follow rules and the perceptible development of pride in themselves. As I took the children outside onto the playground from their school, they expressed their excitement and interest in the experiment. They exhibited a supportive attitude towards each other and towards completion of the tasks. They offered to help in any way they could, including retrieving balls kicked outside the immediate kicking zone and resetting the broad jump measuring device if it had been knocked out of line. They encouraged the other children in their performance and showed respect as the children prepared to jump or line up a kick.

The younger children were more distracted and less involved in the procedure. The single child, who showed acumen in self-prediction, also exhibited a high measure of self-confidence and self-efficacy in other athletic and interpersonal activities. Observation of his interactions with both adults and the younger children indicates a greater level of maturity and cognitive development as compared to the other children in his age group.

Comparing the results of the two groups of children indicates that self-prediction of performance is a cognitive process that develops as children mature. The older children in the sample expressed a strong interest in their performance and indicated that they wanted to do well. Only two incidences were reported in which a child in this group predicted that they would do less well than their original baseline measure, and only one of these children was accurate in this prediction. At the second meeting when they viewed their previous week's scores and were asked individually to predict their performance on the second trial, they all responded in a similar pattern. They would check their baseline score, look thoughtfully at the skill station, glance back at their previous score and then give an estimate of future performance. They were obviously considering carefully what they felt capable of achieving. The younger children, all boys, showed a sharp contrast in their behavior.

These pre-kindergarten children were informed of their previous score and then without hesitation would give a quick one-word response (“less,” “more,” or “same”) and immediately begin their next task.

Future studies, done with a larger sample of children using a similar age range and an equal number of boys and girls in each age group, could investigate further whether gender, cognitive developmental level, or age is responsible for the differences in self-prediction. The older children’s success in self-prediction contrasts markedly with the inability of the younger group to predict performance. These results indicate that further research should be done to determine how self-efficacy develops as a child matures.

References

- Bandura, A. (1994). Self-efficacy. In V.S. Ramachaudran (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Human Behavior*, 4, (pp. 71-81). New York: Academic Press.
- Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American Psychologist*, 37 (2), 122-147.
- Miller, M. (1993). Efficacy strength and performance in competitive swimmers of different skill levels. *International Journal of Sports Psychology*, 24, 284-296.
- Pajares, F. (1996). Self-efficacy beliefs in academic settings. *Review of Educational Research*, 66, 543-578.
- Watkins, B., Garcia, A., & Turek, E. (1994). The relation between self-efficacy and sport performance: Evidence from a sample of youth baseball players. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 6, 21-31.
- Zimmerman, B. J., Bandura, A., & Martinez-Pons, M. (1992). Self-motivation for academic attainment: The role of self-efficacy beliefs and personal goal setting. *American Educational Research Journal*, 29, 663-676.

Suzanne Degges White is a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in the Department of Counseling and Educational Development.

Announcing
the release of

**Invitations to Dialogue:
The Legacy of Sidney M. Jourard**

Edited by Anne C. Richards and Tiparat Schumrum

ISBN 0-7872-6768-7

IAIE and Somatics Society member price \$29.95*

**price subject to change without notice*

I now believe there is no biological, geographical, social economic, or psychological determiner of [the human] condition that [cannot be transcended if a person] is suitably invited or challenged to do so.

Sidney Jourard, 1968

Disclosing Man to Himself

To order today call

1-800-228-0810

or

fax 1-800-772-9165