

One School's Journey Along the Inviting School Path

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Nearly ten years ago, Park Street Intermediate School began the journey of instituting processes, policies, and programs intended to support the development of a learning environment based on trust, respect, optimism, caring, and intentionality as described in the literature of Invitational Education. The purpose of this case study is to trace the development of that journey, from inception to the present, searching for those attitudes and actions that either promoted or presented barriers for the implementation of Invitational Education or its continued development.

The theoretical basis for this research lies in the Invitational HELIX, set forth by William Purkey and John Novak in their ground-breaking work *Inviting School Success* (Purkey & Novak, 1996). The HELIX depicts the movement of an inviting school from initial exposure to transformation as a series of stages that begins with awareness, moves to understanding and application, and then to adoption. In addition, schools can be in one of three stages: Phase I: Occasional Interest, Phase II: Systematic Application, and Phase III: Pervasive Adoption. In order to earn the Inviting School Award bestowed by the International Alliance for Invitational Education (IAIE), schools must analyze their progress through the HELIX by examining their people, place, policies, programs, and processes (the “Five Ps”) to see how closely they align with the Invitational Education tenets of trust, respect, optimism, and caring, all pursued with great intentionality. In addition, the Paula Helen Stanley Fidelity Award is earned by schools that continue their commitment to Invitational Education. The HELIX and the awards associated with attaining the goals of Invitational Education provide the background for this work.

The initial questions that provide the structure for this case study are as follows:

1. Who or what has been instrumental in the successful implementation of Invitational Education at Park Street Intermediate School?
2. What barriers to success have been encountered?
3. Has the process gone through specific stages in its implementation and growth?
4. How has earning the Inviting School Award and Paula Helen Stanley Fidelity Award affected the implementation of Invitational Education?

Park Street Intermediate School is located in the middle of Grove City, just outside of Ohio's capital city of Columbus. It has a diverse population of 700 students in grades 5 and 6, with a substantial percentage of students from families who are recent immigrants from Somalia. The initial spark for moving toward Invitational Education was not, ironically, the philosophy of Invitational Education but rather the "Fish! Philosophy" made famous by the Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle (Charthouse Learning, 2015). A video was shown to teachers and staff proclaiming, "Play, Make their Day, Be There, and Choose Your Attitude." Then-principal Ed Gwazdauskas, wishing to capture this enthusiasm in a more structured and school-centered way, began the process of applying for the Inviting School Award. Many teachers were involved in preparing the portfolio documenting how the school was meeting the tenets of Invitational Education resulting in the school receiving the award in 2006.

For the next several years, Park Street was very involved in the international visits promoted by the IAIE, both visiting and hosting young students and their parents and teachers from Hong Kong and South Africa. Teachers and administrators, including the new principal, Clint Rardon, were active partners with faculty from Muskingum University and other local educators in the Ohio Chapter of the IAIE and even hosted the International Conference of IAIE in Columbus in 2010. The school welcomed this current study as a way to reflect on its accomplishments and to determine a future trajectory method.

Focus group interviews were initially held to pilot research questions and generate topics for further exploration. Groups were designated in four ways: Pioneers, Advocates, Newbies, and Naysayers. Pioneers were teachers involved in the early discussions of IAIE and production of the documentation for the Inviting School Award. Advocates were teachers who were strong supporters of Invitational Education and were involved in membership in the Ohio Chapter of IAIE, participated in conferences, and hosted and/or led groups of students in international travel. Newbies were those teachers who were not involved initially in the IAIE process but had picked up some knowledge through professional development and interaction with other teachers. And finally, Naysayers were those not fully supportive of Invitational Education. The staff involved included administrative assistants, bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria personnel, and the school nurse.

Focus group interviews were followed by face-to-face and telephone interviews with individual teachers and administrators. A survey of questions based on the original research questions as well as some generated by the focus group and interviews was administered by the principal to all teachers at the final staff meeting of the 2012-2013 academic year. The plan for analysis included a search for patterns and themes in the

qualitative data, analysis of the quantitative survey, the development of connections to theory, and generation of conclusions. In an effort to apply the knowledge gained from the study, researchers also developed a) recommendations for Park Street for improving the implementation of Invitational Education tenets in the school, and b) recommendations for IAIE's Board of Trustees to help further the message of the organization.

This research was conducted under the guidance of the Muskingum University Institutional Review Board for Animal Care and Human Subjects (ACHS) with financial support from the Board of Trustees of IAIE.

Results

Qualitative

Qualitative data were collected from more than 20 teachers interviewed in focus groups, eleven face-to-face individual interviews, and two individual phone interviews. Using qualitative data analysis through an affinity diagram (Langford, 2001), researchers sorted, organized, and then clustered the data from the focus group interviews, individual interviews, and survey into constructs relating to the data (Dey, 1993). The following themes evolved and a discussion of each follows:

1. Visual Evidence of Invitational Education
2. Invitational Education Activities
3. Learning about Invitational Education
4. Connections with Invitational Education
5. Impact of Invitational Education
6. Intentionality
7. Barriers to Implementing Invitational Education

Visual Evidence of Invitational Education

The interviews and surveys reflected evidence that Park Street is indeed an inviting school. When asked how someone would know that the school follows the philosophy of Invitational Education, participants routinely noted the positive attitude of the staff and students who greet visitors and welcome them to be a part of an activity or event. High above the display cases in the glass tower entry way at Park Street is a large mural painted with smiling student faces and inviting open arms. These cases contain attractive displays of student artwork and photographs of the international visitors and other Park Street adventures. Even the external grounds are well-tended with landscaping, benches, and chairs that enhance the curb appeal and make the school inviting to community members. Construct descriptors, number of responses, and sample quotations are included in Table 1:

Table 1

How Would Someone Know That Park Street Follows the Philosophy of Invitational Education?

| Construct Descriptor | Number of Responses | Sample Quotations |
|------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Staff/student attitude | 8 | “Welcoming staff in the front office ... greet parents ... collaborating for solutions to problems ... pass people and say Hi ... know and like each other ... students polite and welcoming ... we want everyone to feel involved, to be a part of everything” |
| Physical building | 6 | “The glass tower inside the front doors ... the student murals with open arms and directions ... mural is the focal point ... kids take care of building” |
| External grounds | 4 | “The outside parking lot and landscaping were well tended ... the landscaping has curb appeal ... students helped pull weeds so everyone pitched in ... chairs and benches outside are clean” |
| Displays | 3 | “Cases with pictures, character education traits and Hong Kong display ... artwork ...” |

N= 20 (Number of interviewees; some gave more than one answer)

Invitational Education Activities

When asked about activities that support or reflect that Park Street is an inviting school, respondents enthusiastically described many highly engaging group activities. These responses are clustered into three categories: student-focused, staff-focused, and family- or community- focused. Examples of the student activities described were picnics, field days, career days, unified art and music events, and the “Wolf Network” or school broadcasting system. Even holidays take a special twist including Howl Night in which positive goals are set for Halloween. There are also many other opportunities for involvement including the theater club, open gym, and international student exchanges.

Staff events include the monthly “fish lunch,” so named because of the study of the Fish! Philosophy that initiated the monthly event, and a potluck lunch with a monthly theme at which all teachers, administrators, and support staff bring home-baked favorites

to share with others during the lunch break. There are also weekly Friday morning staff breakfasts, pool parties and other summer activities, and notes and flowers sent to teachers and staff suffering an illness or loss of a loved one. In addition, parents and the community are specifically invited to participate in annual events, some with a philanthropic purpose, others to celebrate the talents of students. A Bistro is set up to welcome new families to Park Street, and communication continues throughout the year via Facebook and newsletters. Interview comments regarding activities at Park Street are summarized in Table 2:

Table 2

What Activities Show That Park Street Intermediate Is an Inviting School?

| Construct Descriptor | Number of Responses | Sample Quotations |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Student-focused activities | 8 | “Windsor Park Picnic we take sports equipment and play games ... after school focus groups ... field day and fund day for kids ... career day ... unified arts are together ... band/music to involve students grades 4, 5, 6 to select an instrument ... Wolf network ... student council representative ... speakers for anti-bullying and bus behavior ... international trips and hosting guests ... open gym ... theatre club ... student learning management system with teacher and student videos ... Howl Night vs. Halloween ... personal best kids choose goal and we help them achieve it” |
| Staff- focused activities | 7 | “Fish philosophy activities, breakfast every Friday with teams rotating to bring food ... monthly Staff/Fish lunch with theme ... anti-bullying T shirts to introduce new character education word (Caring was May word) ... pool parties ... no hierarchy ... get together in summer ... Howl night ... calls, messages, flowers, food – we take care of each other ... staff meetings are IE based” |
| Parent/community focused activities | 6 | “Parents are welcome ... community projects and talent show ... parent volunteers ... Friday letter to parents ... bracelet-making business corporate venture |

... Facebook and technology to share with community ... librarians make parents more comfortable ... Bistro to meet people ... committee presentation at Hyatt ... families host international guests ... family nights and back to school night”

N=20

Learning about Invitational Education

Through the interviews it was determined that individuals learned about Invitational Education in different ways, both formally and informally. Table 3 summarizes how respondents learned about Invitational Education with the majority citing the Fish! Philosophy video that was used as an introduction at staff meetings. Others attended IIAE conferences and Ohio Chapter meetings or learned from colleagues about Invitational Education.

Table 3

How Did You Learn about Invitational Education?

| Construct Descriptor | Number of Responses | Sample Quotations |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Fish philosophy/video | 7 | “The Fish philosophy set the stage for IE ... could walk into every classroom and see fish at that time ... first staff meeting included a video of the Seattle Fish Market and their Make Their Day philosophy.” |
| Formal introduction/ | 2 | “My introduction was through the principal... once or twice at staff meetings talk about IE ...” |
| Attending IE meeting/ conference | 2 | “I learned through international programs ... wondered how I could learn more so attended conference.” |
| Heard from others | 1 | “I am not really up on the fish philosophy...” |

N=20

Connections with Invitational Education

The focus on the Fish! Philosophy (Charthouse Learning, 2015) and its impact on

participants led researchers to ask specifically about the relationship between it and the philosophy of Invitational Education. The Pioneer and Advocate focus groups indicated that new teachers did not have a connection to the initiative and offered suggestions of how the principal or other teachers could organize groups to communicate using technology and the Wolf network. A suggestion was offered to create a video with a strong message about IE that could be used in many different ways to communicate the overarching tenets of IE. One respondent compared the current status of the school to a “relationship honeymoon” and another shared that Park Street needed to “rekindle the effort” and intentionality of IE. Many spoke of the clear connection between the Fish! Philosophy (Charthouse Learning, 2015) and Invitational Education, and how Park Street has leveraged both to create a culture that recognizes potential in everyone. Table 4 specifically outlines the clustered responses to the question about the relationship between the Fish! Philosophy and Invitational Education:

Table 4

Have the Fish! Philosophy and Invitational Education Worked Well Together?

| Construct Descriptor | Number of Responses | Sample Quotations |
|----------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Opportunities to expand IE | 7 | “New teachers have no connection to this now ... need a new analysis of how we are inviting ... more catchy phrases and a strong video for IE ... have groups set up with shared IE responsibilities and then staff member in charge of each group ... not as intentional as we used to be ... like a relationship honeymoon ... one-time shot then back to normal ... an idea to use technology such as the Wolf network presentation view/use in morning and tape for later on-demand ... we need an elevator speech ... need to rekindle the energy ... have a special meeting for new teachers and mentors focused on IE ... we see potential in everyone” |
| Fish and IE work together | 4 | “Initially the Fish philosophy and IE were buzz words, now they are a part of how it is. We make everyone feel welcome ... IE is overarching, it is the main program and others fit in it like the vision and mission |

| | | |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Some dissention | 2 | statements ... the Fish philosophy was in place first, it made a good connection with IE” “Some people are not on board ... like anything, you have some on board and some not on board.” |
|-----------------|---|---|

N=20

Impact of Invitational Education

Individuals were also asked if Park Street’s focus on Invitational Education had changed their own teaching practice. Respondents indicated a range from significant change to no change at all. Some stated that IE has made them think differently, while others expressed a desire to make additional changes. Still others stated that they had always focused on students and that it was part of their personality and usual practice and some spoke of the continued need to expand opportunities and to acknowledge all students. Results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

How Has Invitational Education Changed Your Teaching or Changed the School as a Whole?

| Construct Descriptor | Number of Responses | Sample Quotations |
|----------------------|---------------------|--|
| Changes | 5 | “New teachers who come in here appear to fit. They have a ‘pal’ that works with them It made me think differently and showcase my area ... the important thing is that kids feel safe and that they belong. We are their family 7 to 8 hours a day ... we are inviting the world in ... I am 110% in my room and think ‘What am I going to do to make tomorrow better?’ ... This is what I believe in.” |
| Desire for More | 3 | “I’d like to be part of a team that makes IE really strong ... some teachers don’t get a chance; administrators need to figure out a way for all staff to look at all students as just another kid ... still some bullying and behavior issues ... IE is working but how do we make it more intentional?” |

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Already inviting no change | 3 | "I have always done [this] and the only way I have known to be ... my practice has always been this way ... I see kids as customers and it encourages me to push forward ... I think there is a link between IE and student achievement." |
|----------------------------|---|---|

N=20

Intentionality

In individual and group interviews, teachers, staff members, and administrators were asked if they intentionally think about making Park Street an inviting school or if they do it automatically. Many articulated that the culture of Park Street Intermediate is inviting and that the majority of individuals work hard to create an inviting atmosphere. Some expressed regret that they did not support IE more enthusiastically, and several spoke of renewing their efforts to make sure that IE maintains a focus at Park Street. Suggestions to energize the movement included establishing a committee and doing more targeted professional development. These data are reflected in Table 6 organized by three construct descriptors that reflect a range of purposefulness: intentional, some loss of momentum and automatic.

Table 6

Do People at Park Street Think about Making It an Inviting School – or Do They Just Do It Automatically?

| Construct Descriptor | Number of Responses | Sample Quotations |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Intentional | 4 | "IE is more the culture than the IE philosophy, we focus on the word inviting ... the majority of the staff works very hard and knows they are there for the kids ... I was embarrassed and wished I knew more, so I did more, with that group because I didn't want to go in and not be aware ... I do think it's intentional depending on the people – the majority are intentionally inviting." |
| Lost momentum of intentionality | 4 | "We started out being intentional, but it changed over time. We need to define it, know it, learn it, practice it. Then we can checklist it. Is there a stage beyond that?" |

| | | |
|-----------|---|---|
| Automatic | 4 | <p>... We are not as intentional as we used to be ... we need to rekindle the original energy, maybe with a committee for next year ... we need to keep educating people, keep coming up with additional activities ... IE is simmering, we're keeping it warm. We're not really cooking IE."</p> <p>"IE was purposeful at first, now ideas just flow out ... We just had Career Day and kids moved through the building without one problem. ... IE just kind of happens, people adapt to an environment ... We do inviting things naturally. We don't do enough intentionally."</p> |
|-----------|---|---|

N=20

Barriers to Implementing Invitational Education

When participants were asked if there are things that get in the way of making Park Street an inviting school, the overwhelming response was a concern about the time commitment. Additional comments included consistent effort, stress, and the competing issues that are part of an educational setting. Participants expressed the sense that there are too many meetings and too much testing and that there are not enough minutes in the day to get everything done. Finding a balance with all the requirements proved to be a challenge that was articulated by almost half the respondents. Yet others saw the need to push forward and to keep positive, recommending a "refresher" when school begins. These data are reflected in Table 7 organized by construct descriptors in order of most frequently reported such as time, consistent effort, tests and accountability, competing priorities, and some not having an understanding of Invitational Education.

Table 7

What Are Things That Get in the Way of Making Park Street an Inviting School?

| Construct Descriptor | Number of Responses | Sample Quotations |
|----------------------|---------------------|---|
| Time | 9 | <p>"There are too many meetings! ... a lot of staff are frustrated with the amount of professional and staff committee meetings – 6th grade science, math PD, student behavior problems, SIOP, ELL ... we spend</p> |

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| | | a lot of time on testing ... we are constantly on committees, enough is enough ... I hope we can continue the IE program but the day is only so long ... we could do more if we had more time to get together ... time is always an issue ... stress and time- it's a balance game." |
| Consistent effort | 5 | "We do a lot of collecting and tracking data, how are you going to get better? There is a lot of negative, but we need to keep the positive aspect going. We need a refresher at the beginning of each year ... need more training in IE – it wouldn't hurt - I haven't heard anything negative about IE. We need a committee with a strong leader ... We need to reduce the influence of the 'naysayers' ... I want to carry the IE torch. ... It's fun to see our passion in the Ohio IE Chapter. We need to find some way to sustain the drive. What is the next stage after transformation? What do we do now?" |
| Tests and accountability | 4 | "Teachers have OAA priorities, IE is a distraction – another thing we have to do. We need to figure out how to tie IE to test scores. We need to integrate being inviting and doing well on tests with data analysis." |
| Competing priorities | 2 | "Of course things get in the way. There is always someone to challenge the process and some people want to control 'stuff' ... There are so many new initiatives, we're overwhelmed with everything new (new curriculum, new expectations, new priorities)." |
| Lack of understanding | 2 | "Some people are not on-board, it's just one more thing. Some think it doesn't make a difference. Some think it is 'fluff' – that 'feel-good' stuff. ... It would be beneficial to come up with simpler and relevant catch phrases and examples. It would help people understand and remember the philosophy if |

we had visuals, posters, talking points or catch phrases.”

N=20

Quantitative Data

A 12-item survey emerged from the original research questions while other questions emerged from analysis of the focus group and individual interviews. Participants indicated their responses to statements about their experiences at Park Street on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” The survey was administered by the principal at the last staff meeting of the 2012-13 school year to all 40 teachers present. Participants included 32 women, seven men, and one teacher who left the gender item blank. They reported an average of seven years experience at Park Street.

Participants were categorized by their experience and their level of involvement in Invitational Education as evidenced by participation in conferences, the Ohio Chapter of IAIE, or IAIE-related international travel. Characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 8, and results of the survey are reported in Table 9:

Table 8

Characteristics of Teachers Completing the Survey

| Participants | N |
|--|----|
| New (1-2 years) | 8 |
| Some Experience (3-5 years) | 10 |
| Experienced (6 or more years) | 21 |
| | |
| Involved in IAIE through conferences, Ohio Chapter, or IAIE-related international travel | 9 |
| Not involved | 31 |

Table 9*Survey Results*

(Strongly Disagree = 1, and Strongly Agree = 5)

| | New n=8 | Mid n=10 | Older n=21 |
|---|------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1. I am knowledgeable about the 5 P's of Invitational Education. | 2.4 | 3.1 | 3.9 |
| 2. I am knowledgeable about the "Fish" philosophy. | 2.9 | 3.7 | 4.5 |
| 3. People respect all persons regardless of socio-economic status. | 4.1 | 4.0 | 4.4 |
| 4. People respect all persons regardless of race or ethnicity. | 4.3 | 3.6 | 4.1 |
| 5. There is a high degree of trust among teachers. | 4.3 | 3.4 | 4.1 |
| 6. There is a great deal of cooperation among teachers. | 4.4 | 3.5 | 3.8 |
| 7. There is a high degree of trust between teachers and administrators. | 4.5 | 3.2 | 4.1 |
| 8. I am optimistic about the future of our students and our school. | 4.6 | 3.9 | 4.1 |
| 9. The current focus on accountability makes it difficult to be inviting. | 3.3 | 3.1 | 3.4 |
| 10. The new teacher evaluation system will make it harder to be inviting. | 3.8 | 3.3 | 3.2 |
| 11. It comes naturally to be inviting to students and each other. | 4.3 | 3.8 | 4.4 |
| 12. We work hard to be inviting to students and each other. | 4.1 | 3.8 | 3.9 |

Overall, teachers agree that they are knowledgeable about Invitational Education and, at all career stages, they report that they are more knowledgeable about the Fish! Philosophy than they are about Invitational Education. Teachers with more experience also feel more knowledgeable than those with fewer years at Park Street.

There is strong agreement that persons are respected regardless of socio-economic status or race/ethnicity. There is strong agreement that there is trust among teachers and between teachers and administrators; however, those teachers with three to five years of experience, report a lower degree of trust than do the newer or more experienced teachers. The same is true of the level of cooperation and optimism, with those in the middle expressing a lower level. Teachers in all groups agree, but not strongly, that the current focus on accountability and the new Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (Ohio Department of Education, n.d.) make it harder to be inviting. There is strong agreement that it comes naturally to be inviting to students and each other; at the same time, there is strong agreement that teachers at Park Street work hard to be inviting. Means for responses by level of involvement are given in Table 10 below:

Table 10*Means for Responses by Level of Involvement*

| | Involved n=9 | Not Involved n=31 |
|---|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1. I am knowledgeable about the 5 P's of Invitational Education. | 4.1 | 3.2 |
| 2. I am knowledgeable about the "Fish" philosophy. | 4.4 | 4.0 |
| 3. People respect all persons regardless of socio-economic status. | 4.6 | 4.3 |
| 4. People respect all persons regardless of race or ethnicity. | 4.1 | 4.0 |
| 5. There is a high degree of trust among teachers. | 3.8 | 3.9 |
| 6. There is a great deal of cooperation among teachers. | 3.8 | 4.2 |
| 7. There is a high degree of trust between teachers and administrators. | 3.9 | 4.0 |
| 8. I am optimistic about the future of our students and our school. | 4.3 | 4.3 |
| 9. The current focus on accountability makes it difficult to be inviting. | 4.1 | 3.2 |
| 10. The new teacher evaluation system will make it harder to be inviting. | 4.0 | 3.3 |
| 11. It comes naturally to be inviting to students and each other. | 4.2 | 4.3 |
| 12. We work hard to be inviting to students and each other. | 3.8 | 4.1 |

As expected, those who are more involved in Invitational Education also feel more knowledgeable about Invitational Education and the Fish! Philosophy. There is strong agreement that people at Park Street respect all persons regardless of socio-economic status or race/ethnicity, and there is strong agreement in both groups that there is trust and cooperation among teachers and trust between teachers and administrators. Both groups are strongly optimistic about the future of their students. Those involved in Invitational Education feel more strongly that the current emphasis on accountability and the new teacher evaluation system make it hard to be inviting and all strongly agree that it is both natural and hard work to be inviting to students and each other.

Discussion

First and foremost, researchers concluded that Invitational Education is an overarching theme at Park Street Intermediate School. The tenets of trust, respect, optimism, caring and intentionality are firmly upheld, with teachers who consider themselves to be naturally inviting and work hard to create and maintain an inviting school. While, according to their own thinking, teachers are not always intentionally inviting in their words and actions, the inviting atmosphere is pervasive.

As would be expected, people are at different stages in their invitational journeys and have different levels of knowledge, understanding, and participation in Invitational Education. Those teachers labeled as Pioneers and Advocates have a strong affinity for the Invitational Education philosophy and, indeed, very high expectations for themselves, their colleagues, and their administration. Newbies pick up the language and actions of Invitational Education without always knowing that these are related to a specific philosophy.

Student and family/community activities are an integral part of Invitational Education but are not always seen in that context as it is not always understood that many of the school's student-centered and family-friendly activities are a part of their Invitational Education mission. Sometimes other programs, including those related to character education, are seen as separate from Invitational Education rather than falling under the larger umbrella of the development of an inviting school. Sometimes the activities themselves, especially the international trips and visits, are equated with Invitational Education. As one new teacher stated, "I can't do Invitational Education because I have a husband and baby and can't leave them to go to South Africa."

Applying for the Inviting School Award was particularly instrumental in the adoption and implementation of Invitational Education at Park Street. Most of the teachers and all of the administrators worked together to create the scrapbook or portfolio that identified Park Street as an inviting school. This process gave the school's educators a system to analyze their environment and performance and nudged them toward an articulation of a philosophy that most had already internalized. In addition, it gave them validation for increasing the number of extra-curricular student activities, including international trips and family and community events.

Professional development at Park Street with an Invitational Education focus is inconsistent, waxing and waning based on inside and outside influences, especially those external factors that relate to performance on state-mandated tests and evaluations. New teachers are also superficially aware of the tenets of Invitational Education and largely unaware that many of the activities that have become school traditions, such as the fish lunches and family nights at local cultural centers, intentionally support the school's commitment to Invitational Education.

Finally, it is important to note that Park Street Intermediate School has the resources and commitment to renew its dedication to Invitational Education, making it an even more intentionally inviting place for all its people to live, learn, and grow.

Recommendations

For Park Street Intermediate School.

One of the questions to come out of the focus group and individual interviews, “What advice would you give to a school that was trying to become an Inviting School?” was actually asked to help administrator and teachers reflect on ways to rejuvenate their own commitment to Invitational Education. Among their advice to others, and hence to themselves, follows:

1. Create a visual representation of all the elements of programs, policies, procedures, place, and people that could be placed under the umbrella of Invitational Education so that individual items present a coherent and cohesive whole and “not just one more thing.”
2. Promote shared leadership for Invitational Education with a widely representative committee with time and resources to advance Invitational Education among all teachers, staff, students, families, and the community.
3. Plan a consistent schedule of professional development with different tracks for educators at different stages in their knowledge, understanding, and participation in Invitational Education. Show that Invitational Education can be promoted both within the school through book studies and discussion groups and outside the school through Ohio Chapter activities and IAIE annual conferences.
- 4.

For the Board of Trustees of the International Alliance for Invitational Education.

1. Develop materials and activities that support the growth of IAIE members and prospective members in different stages of knowledge, commitment, and participation.
2. Create a yearly incentive to maintain “fidelity” to Invitational Education, perhaps with a short annual report to the Board of Trustees and a sticker or certificate that attests to sustained commitment.
3. Discuss the possibility of coming up with phrases as memorable as those of the Fish! Philosophy. An “elevator speech” of a few clear sentences would do much to help promote Invitational Education among those who are unfamiliar with its concepts.

For Researchers and Theorists.

1. Consider expanding the HELIX and acknowledge that in an imperfect world even the most dedicated can slip off the spiral. Thoughts include a) adding a stage after adoption that includes reflection, revision, and even renewal; and b) adding a Phase IV: Sustaining the Transformation.

For Future Research

A question for further research is, “What is the connection between Invitational Education and student achievement?” Although there is much literature on the relationship between achievement and self-concept, self-esteem, and a positive school climate, there has been little that directly correlates achievement with the philosophy and processes of Invitational Education. In this era of high accountability, such studies would provide support for the wide adoption of Invitational Education throughout the United States and around the world.

Finally, the concept of intentionality is one of the five cornerstones of Invitational Education; however, as we pursued this project, we continuously came up against the question: Does one have to be intentional to be truly and consistently invitational? Does a culture such as we found at Park Street ensure that all persons act in an inviting manner because the stance is so entrenched that invitational actions are habitual? These are questions to ponder further.

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