# Elements of Diversity
# in Invitational Practice and Research

John J. Schmidt
*Roaring Gap, NC, USA*

Invitational theory uses many elements to define, describe, and delineate its beliefs and practices. For example, the Five Ps of people, places, policies, programs, and processes are consistently cited in the literature and research as the framework for assessing inviting practices (Purkey & Novak, 1996; Purkey & Schmidt, 1996; Purkey & Siegel, 2003; Smith, 2005). Another example is the presentation of four areas of inviting: Inviting Oneself Personally, Inviting Oneself Professionally, Inviting Others Personally, and Inviting Others Professionally (Purkey & Novak, 1996; Purkey & Schmidt, 1996; Purkey & Siegel, 2003). Such elements and components help to explain invitational theory and practices in an understandable language with useable concepts. All these concepts coexist in the approach known as *Invitational Education*.

As an inclusive model of communication and human relations, *Invitational Education*, implies a belief system that embraces, celebrates, and honors diversity. Yet, invitational theorists and writers have not illustrated this proactive stance and genuine acceptance of diverse populations in many publications. Stanley's (1992) twenty-year bibliography of invitational papers, articles, and books indicates some sources that address diversity in the broadest sense. Her compilation produced topics about at-risk students (Almond, 1991; Dorsey, 1991), minority students (Collins, 1988; Reed, 1984), teachers of color (Paxton, 1990), gifted students (Ganopole, 1988; Russell, 1984), students with disabilities (Dixon & Siegel, 1983), and gender differences (Stillion, 1983). Similarly, a cursory review of all eleven volumes of the *Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice* (1992-2006) found an article that addresses multicultural education (Arceneaux, 1992), one that focuses on gender differences (Dickman, 1993), and another that discusses diversity and invitational theory and practice (Schmidt, 2004).

In an earlier article, I stated that the principles put forth by invitational theory and practice present implications for working with people of diverse backgrounds (Schmidt, 2004). I reviewed basic assumptions, concepts, constructs, and stages, of invitational theory in the context of professionally helping diverse populations. The thrust of the article was to take the initial step in addressing "the nuances of applying this approach with students, parents, employees, clients, patients, or other populations from diverse backgrounds" (p, 43). In doing so, the hope was to examine the language of invitational theory, challenge practitioners and theorists to critique invitational concepts, constructs, and strategies from diverse perspectives, and encourage research about applications of invitational practice across diverse populations to verify that these "approaches can be ap-

plied with confidence across student, client, and patient groups" (p. 44).

As noted, this call for research has not yet been answered. Nevertheless, the absence of research has not inhibited authors, including myself, in endorsing invitational approaches when working with diverse groups. In a recent text on counseling (Schmidt, 2006), I described the four levels of invitational functioning from a culturally sensitive perspective, and noted that invitational counseling is an integrative approach that "embraces a broad perspective of the services needed to help clients meet the diverse challenges of today's world" (p. 188). At the same time, I noted that invitational approaches "move beyond alleviation of immediate concerns towards an exploration of relatively boundless potential for future human development" (p. 188).

A lack of research about invitational practices with diverse populations has encouraged the current article. Perhaps what researchers and practitioners of invitational theory require is a schema or method by which to examine behaviors, the Five Ps, or other variables within multi-cultural and diverse contexts. In this article, I propose six elements of diversity (the Six E's) by which researchers and practitioners can assess relationships and organizations in terms of accepting, embracing, and celebrating diversity. These six elements in alphabetical order are: empowerment, encouragement, enlistment, enjoyment, equity, and expectation. This is not an all-inclusive list of elements, but I present it here to begin a discussion of variables to assess from an invitational perspective. I begin with equity.

## Equity

By definition, *equity* refers to behaviors and treatment of people that create conditions of fairness, justice, and non-discrimination. Equitable practices from an invitational perspective ensure access for everyone to participate in programs, fair treatment across places, policies, and processes designed and implemented by the organization, and just action when a person or persons require assistance or discipline. All these conditions relate to what Novak (2002) referred to as a "deepening of an understanding of democracy" (p. 152). Accordingly, invitational practices have "a deep and abiding relationship with participative democracy . . . an educative way of life in that it allows people to gain understanding and develop a more fulfilling character as a result of being meaningful constructors of a social order" (p. 152).

Schools, hospitals, healthcare agencies, and other organizations that profess and practice a deepening understanding of democracy are also likely to demonstrate consistent application of equitable places, policies, programs, and processes. At the same time, equitable organizations are careful not to confuse fair and just practices with the misguided notion of treating everyone the same. Such confusion would fail to recognize the uniqueness that each person brings to a relationship. In contrast, people and organizations that strive for equity take pride in celebrating unique differences that individuals and groups possess and through which they enrich the greater community.

As an element of invitational theory and practice, equity can be evaluated by using existing structures. For example,

organizations might ask if members have equal opportunity to participate in various programs, do they receive fair treatment under current policies, is due process in disciplinary action consistently applied, and does everyone have the right to access places within the organization? In such assessment, people and organizations are careful to observe how *unearned privilege* of a select few might upset the balance of fairness within the larger community (Schmidt, 2006).

Equity is a powerful element of democratic relationships and organizations. Without it, democracy is at most wishful thinking. A second element of invitational theory and practice is *expectation,* which connects with the notion of equity.

## Expectation

Invitational theory and practice have emerged from the perceptual tradition, as explained by several authors (Purkey & Novak, 1996; Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). That tradition places high value on human perception as a vehicle by which people draw conclusions and make everyday decisions. As part of that process, people form *expectations* about situations and relationships based on experience and knowledge. Purkey and Novak (1996) explained, "Perceptions serve as a reference point for behavior. They influence the memories people use to understand the present and anticipate the future" (p. 23). As such, perceptions help us establish expectations of what we believe will likely occur.

When working with diverse populations, we will be successful to the degree that our expectations limit or expand the relationships we form. For example, if we have lower expectations of achieve-

ment for a student because of socio-economic background, ethnic heritage, or family history, the likelihood of establishing a beneficial relationship with that student is minimal. In contrast, if we convey high expectations for all students and make developmentally appropriate decisions that benefit their welfare, we increase chances of being successful—for both the student and ourselves.

As with all the Six E's, we can assess and monitor *expectation* by tracking behaviors, examining policies, and evaluating processes that institutions choose and implement. Fundamental expectations, however, begin within basic human relationships—between a student and teacher, between a counselor and client, or between a parent and child. Finding ways to assess these basic relationships and the degree and direction of expectations within them is essential to understanding how the larger institutions—schools, mental health clinics, and families—operate.

Combined, *equity* and *expectation* are valuable elements in understanding our strengths and weaknesses when relating with diverse populations. They also connect with another element, *enlistment,* which we now consider.

## Enlistment

To *enlist* people, as used here, is not the traditional sense of enrolling in military service, but rather gaining the cooperation and support of people for moving an organization (or a relation-ship) toward common goals. With this definition, enlistment becomes an active stance of creating multiple invitations to involve an expanded audience in the work of the organization. Enlistment is

the precursor of partnerships. Through genuine invitations that we extend equitably across an organization, authentic partnerships have greater likelihood of becoming realities.

Schools, colleges, agencies, and other organizations that embrace invitational theory and practice strive for total involvement of all members and parties in their respective communities. They recognize all stakeholders from the most influential to the most vulnerable, and actively seek input and participation from a wide enlistment that is developmentally appropriate. Such institutions and organizations understand the power of enlistment and at the same time, note the risks associated when certain individuals or groups are overlooked either intentionally or unintentionally.

Current invitational concepts and structures exist to help people and organizations evaluate their level of enlistment. What processes and programs aim at increasing involvement of parents and students in a school? What policies encourage or discourage healthcare professionals to collaborate with patients in making medial or health-related decisions? Enlistment strategies can be assessed to give a sense of how an organization invites a wide audience of participation across its diverse groups. Such invitations relate to the notion of *empowerment* that organizations cultivate for their members.

## Empowerment

The verb *empower* means to give people a sense of power and authority over the decisions they face. It includes notions of self-confidence and self-efficacy that connect with self-concept

theory, another basis for Invitational Education. When used literally, however, the word, empower, takes on "doing to" characteristics as opposed to "doing with" relationships fostered by invitational theory and practice (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996; Schmidt, 2002). The noun *empowerment* may fit more closely with an invitational philosophy. Empowerment is the outcome of establishing and nurturing helpful relationships that combat oppression, negate marginalization, and elevate the elements of equity and enlistment mentioned earlier. Too frequently, individuals and organizations contribute to the legacies of marginalization and oppression by adhering to traditional programs and outmoded policies that overtly or covertly, intentionally or unintentionally, discriminate, degrade, and dehumanize (Purkey & Novak, 1996). Sometimes, organizations, such as schools, group oppressed people and assign causal relationships to their lack of educational development or life success. When this occurs, the tendency is to overstate the effects of life experiences while diminishing the potential of the human spirit to develop, learn, and flourish against seemingly insurmountable odds.

Organizations and individuals that strive to create places, policies, programs, and processes within which people become able to empower themselves would seem to follow an invitational philosophy. At the same time, such organizations and persons would establish methods of assessing how they contribute to this notion of self-empowerment and what nuances exist that help people become empowered. For example, what differences if any exist between the notions of becoming personally empowered and becoming professionally em-

powered? Similarly, researchers might examine differences between empowerment for individual benefit and empowerment for social justice.

Other research considerations proposed elsewhere (Schmidt, 2007) include:
- What programs and services should receive the greatest emphasis and time allotted in nurturing empowerment?
- What do organizations want people, such as students in schools, to become empowered to do?
- How will new technologies influence empowerment of individuals, groups, and organizations?

The element of empowerment is a complex notion that can have either positive or negative outcomes. This is analogous to the contradictory levels of being intentionally disinviting or being intentionally inviting. Worthwhile outcomes of empowerment are realized through the consistent application of equitable practices, appropriate expectations, genuine enlistment strategies, and a fifth element, encouragement.

## Encouragement

Over the past 100 years, many theorists have emphasized the importance of *encouragement* in human relationships. This is particularly true of Adlerian theorists (Dinkmeyer, Dinkmeyer, & Sperry, 1987; Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964; Sweeney, 1998). As Dinkmeyer et al. noted, "Encouragement is the prime factor in stimulating change . . . Encouragement generates the self-confidence and self-esteem that enable a person to act upon his concerns" (1987, p. 70). This stance is particularly important when teaching,

counseling, leading, and otherwise working with people of diverse backgrounds.

To ask people who have experienced oppression, neglect, unfair discrimination, and devaluation to take risks and make substantive changes in their lives is indicative of a courageous stance. Courage is the root of *encouragement*. Although invitational literature has not directly addressed the importance of encouragement, Schmidt (2002) adapted the professional stance of invitational theory and practice, renaming it "An Encouraging Stance," while incorporating the qualities of optimism, respect, and trust into intentionally helpful relationships (pp. 56-61).

Encouragement is an important element to use when applying invitational assumptions and principles with diverse populations because it incorporates the fundamental philosophy of *being with* versus *doing to.* In contrast, praise is a doing to process, and as noted earlier, disenfranchised populations are not necessarily helped when they are "done to." Encouragement signifies a genuine investment and veracity in other people and groups. Praise does not possess this same level of commitment or authenticity. Similarly, encouragement exudes potential for long-lasting effects while praise tends to produce short-term results.

Invitational theory and practices consistently encourage professionals to behave gently, appropriately, and with great care when asking others to change course, accept challenges, learn new information, and make positive contributions to the larger group. In this sense, invitational education takes an inclusive view of the progress of individuals make

as well as broader benefits to the greater community. As such, it embraces positive elements of both individualistic and collectivistic worldviews. Encouragement is a key ingredient that enables professional helpers to bridge the expanse that exists between these two philosophic positions.

The five elements presented thus far—equity, expectation, enlistment, empowerment, and encouragement—are essential in applying invitational theory and practices with diverse populations. They are fundamental components that are greatly enhanced by the last element, enjoyment.

## Enjoyment

In many speeches, books, and articles, William Purkey consistently encourages us to *Live to Enjoy*! (Purkey, 2006). Through his teaching, we learn that although life is reliably challenging, there are countless opportunities to celebrate, enjoy the company of others, and find good cheer. "How easy it is to overlook life's joys," he cautions, "Give more attention to life's small pleasures and wonder" (Purkey, 2006, p. 99-100).

We might apply this lesson to our relationships with diverse clients, students, patients, and customers. Being with people of diverse cultures, backgrounds, religious beliefs, ethnicity, and other characteristics provides abundant opportunity to enrich our experiences and develop more fully our personal and professional lives. Rather than worrying about how we might protect our schools, our communities, or ourselves from challenges that diversity presents, we might spend time in wonderment about all the riches that it brings to our rela-

tionships and development as enlightened and fulfilled individuals. As such, *enjoyment* is another element that compliments equity, expectation, enlistment, empowerment, and encouragement described in this article. Combined, these elements offer professionals, schools, agencies, and other organizations a structure for examining their current posture and considering new behaviors, places, policies, programs, and processes to provide relationships that are more beneficial with diverse populations.

A caution is appropriate when considering the power and place of *enjoyment* in diverse relationships. What one culture finds as joy, humor, and light-heartedness a person or people from another culture might perceive quite differently. Laughter is universal, but activities, behaviors, and situations that elicit laughter vary among world cultures.

## Concluding Thoughts

In this article, I have proposed six elements, the Six E's, of assessing, appreciating, and understanding invitational relationships with diverse populations. The article is intended as a vehicle for discussion and, equally important, as a structure by which researchers and practitioners might develop methods of measuring and evaluating aspects of invitational theory and practice when applying principles and concepts with diverse students, clients, and other groups.

Invitational theory needs more research to support many of the claims that practitioners accept as fact. By using structures such as the Six E's, researchers can investigate places, policies, programs, and processes as related to differ-

ent cultural groups. To start, researchers might use the Inviting School Survey—Revised (ISS-R, Smith, 2005) and perform item analyses using the Six E's. For example, a question might be, "How well do items on the ISS-R translate for diverse populations?" We could generate other research questions, but the point is to generate more research that investigates the application of invitational theory and practices with diverse groups.

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*Dr. Jack Schmidt is professor emeritus of counselor education at East Carolina University and Executive Director for the International Alliance for Invitational Education. This article began as remarks made by Dr. Schmidt at the Closing Session of the 2005 IAIE Leadership Institute in Hong Kong. He expands those remarks in this article. Correspondence about this article may be sent to the author at schmidtjjs@charter.net*