

# **The Intimate Correlation of Invitational Education and Effective Classroom Management**

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*Critics of Invitational Education and other self-concept approaches to learning have long argued that there is a lack of empirical data to support the claims that approaches to student instruction based on self-concept theory are central to effective learning. Ellis (2001) examines a number of these analyses where self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy are derided as antecedents to successful learning. However, by examining the empirical research on classroom management, all of the critical elements of invitational education can be found. Invitational education is shown to provide a strong, comprehensive, and comprehensible theoretical foundation to a classroom or school-based classroom management plan based on the maturing field of classroom management research.*

## **Misunderstandings Examined**

Self-concept approaches to learning performance have been rigorously criticized for a lack of empirical data to support the claims that approaches to student instruction based on self-concept theory are central to effective learning. Ellis (2001) does an excellent analysis of self-esteem programs, claims, and outcomes noting confusion in the corresponding terminology, theory, and research. However, like most critics, Ellis takes the field of self-esteem research as a singular entity, lumping critical analyses with “feel good” emotionalism, treating the broad research in this field as if the various works were part of a uniform concept, consistently defined, and based on the same theoretical explanations.

Often *the advocates* of self-concept programs as well as their critics use naïve analyses and simplistic slogans to examine the complex relationships between achievement and self-image. Napoleon Hill's (1937) "think and grow rich" approach to success has found repeated popularity. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) popularized this notion of "thinking it so makes it happen" in a landmark study of expectation effects. They subsequently labeled the phenomenon after Shaw's famous Broadway play *Pygmalion*.

The logic of the Pygmalion Effect is simple: if everyone thinks children have talent, children will have talent, and the children will therefore demonstrate that talent. In this mentality, *believing* is all that is necessary to becoming. This misinformed notion has been at the center of many criticisms of self-concept approaches to education. No one has been able to systematically duplicate Rosenthal and Jacobson's research and although a great deal of research has been done on induced expectations (Good & Brophy, 1970, 1974, 2003), the results have been mixed. There are logical reasons for the unstable relationships between self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem and subsequent achievement as examined by many researchers.

Good and Brophy's (2003) research reveals that success expectations did affect the outcomes of instructional events, but the linkage was tenuous and certainly not likely to be causal. What they did find was a medial variable: expended effort. They hypothesized that when teachers or students felt that they would be successful, they were more likely to expend the effort necessary to realize success in the selected endeavor. The success is not based on "belief" but based on the "action" that resulted from the belief. Good and Brophy (2003) refer to this recognition as effort-outcome covariation. In effect, the harder you try the more likely you are to succeed. The more you believe you will succeed; the

harder you will try. Invitational education employs this effort-outcome linkage that is mediated not simply by outcomes, but by the perceptions of the likelihood of various outcomes based on very personal assumptions about how the world operates. Living and learning success is nurtured and supported by assisting the learner in understanding these perceptions and accepting invitations and opportunities to develop his or her abilities.

### **The Problem**

This paper explores whether the invitational education self-concept approach to learning (as understood with the caveats above) is sound, and if it correlates with the maturing empirical research on effective teaching and classroom management.

Success expectations are closely related to self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy; constructs that are essential to understanding invitational education and other approaches to student learning that emphasize the perception tradition (Purkey & Novak, 1996; Purkey & Schmidt, 1987; Purkey & Stanley, 1991; Purkey & Strahan, 2002). The postulate is that we seek out success and avoid failure. Feather (1982) added an additional construct that is also included in invitational education's understanding of the perceptual tradition: This key construct is the perceived value of the outcomes of success. The value of any learning is also largely based on personal perception and judgment. In order to unify the empirical findings, a theory that incorporates perception, self-concept, effort, and behavior is needed. Invitational education supplies a method to obtain that cohesion.

The problem is thus: How can effort-outcome covariation (representing a perceptual outlook focused on untapped ability) be developed within the school environment using what we know about successful teaching and learning?

## **The Method**

The method employed in this study is a derivative strategy based on a jurisprudential model. In this case, the major tenets of invitational education are identified from major texts and theoretical explanations and compared to the collective empirical findings of classroom management and effective teaching research. With that evidence, it is up to the reader to determine the viability of the thesis.

The research on effective teaching and classroom management has matured since the 1970's and has been assembled by a number of researchers and texts (see Cotton 2000; Cruikshank; 1990 as examples.) The Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL) has perhaps the longest continual summary of this research initially compiled by Cotton (1990, 1997, 2000, 2001). (The most current version can be found online at the NWREL website.) The enormity of the research is substantial, has been replicated, and has remained stable for approximately two decades. However, its popularity has lagged due to a professional quirk that is well known: American education is addicted to faddish bandwagon approaches to learning.

The method employed in this paper will be to examine the major premises in invitational education and compare that to supporting (or contradictory) research findings in the NWREL summary by Cotton (2000). This approach has been employed in many fields. Eisner (1985a, 1985b) has argued for a connoisseur's approach to evaluation of the effects of complex problems. In effect, highly trained experts, or connoisseurs, experience and rate the environment and render a judgment. In this case, the value of their judgment critically hinges on the reader's willingness to trust the judgment of the expert and how effective the expert actually

judges. Art criticism, wine tasting, motion picture reviews, policy development, and law-making rely on this or similar approaches.

For this study, it will be assumed that the reader is acting as an expert for his or her own judgment and for any subsequent conclusion regarding the efficacy of the invitational approach. Thus, the information is presented in the form of an argument but the reader is free to structure or restructure the data and form an independent conclusion.

Our legal system provides a poignant example this research approach to complex assessment and evaluation. In a trial by jury, evidence (which is governed by a complex set of rules and examples) is presented to a jury. The decision is made, not on a statistical outcome, but rather by individuals of good will attempting to estimate the truth of various propositions. A single statistical measure rarely has any practical relevance in isolation. Rather, evidence is collected, collated, and examined in relationship to a number of variables involved.

## **The Results**

Using a modified jurisprudential model, keeping in mind the complex interactions of the constructs that compose invitational education, an examination of the research in classroom management revealed a general pattern of correlation with few deviations. The most common areas of non-alignment are in contexts where invitational instruction remains mute such as class size, technical aspects of assessments, and questioning strategies.

The single most notable difference between the pattern of research and the basic premises of invitational education lies in the educator's reaction to inappropriate behavior. While the methods advocated are nearly the same, the level of emphasis in many

summaries of classroom management findings differs with invitational education as invitational education emphasizes greater reliance on student oriented self-analysis/self-correction than that advocated by the included research summaries. The readers should note, however, that the methods themselves are not in conflict, only the degree of reliance that is advocated. (As will be shown, coercion and other popular myths about “discipline” are not being upheld by the research. In general, “rough” solutions tend to create defiance and accelerate the negative effects of the undesired behavior.)

The management research as summarized by Cotton (2000) clearly illustrates that rules with corresponding enforcements or consequences are essential to any management plan. Please note that this research differs from the “get tough” perspectives exemplified by Canter and Canter (1992) and others where the classroom’s ethical development is based on the barter system. That is, each enactment of a sanctioned behavior results in a cost (or consequence) that restricts the freedom and happiness of the offender. In these systems, however, little attempt is made to get the offender to analyze his or her behavior and look for potential solutions.

There is nothing in invitational education, per se, that denies logical and appropriate consequences to misdeeds (Purkey & Strahan, 2002). However, rather than reach for the sanction as an automatic outcome, invitational education advocates for a process where the student is confronted with the misdeed in a way that the initial purpose of the behavior, the outcome, and the impact on others, is carefully assessed by the student.

Consequences as a form of external control are far removed from the optimistic view that students can be led to control and regulate their own behavior, including determining a course of

activity when they make an error in judgment or interfere with the happiness of others (Purkey & Strahan, 2002; Glasser, 1986 & 1998). Consequences in invitational education serve as strategies for assisting the student in reassessing the erring behavior. However, invitational education is still developing its theoretical base in this area. Purkey & Strahan (2002) for example, have written about the “5 C’s” where a sequence of teachers strategies for communication address the disruptive or harmful behavior and thereby lead to amelioration. However, the prevention of confrontations and equipping students with skills to cope with disappointments remain the dominant preferred strategies for invitational education theorists and practitioners (Purkey & Strahan, 2002; Reed & Strahan, 1995).

The primary assertions of invitational learning examined in the paper are (Purkey & Novak, 1996):

- Human potential can best be realized by creating and maintaining places, policies, processes, and programs specifically designed to invite development.
- Education should be a collaborative, cooperative activity.
- People are able, reliable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly.
- People possess untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor.
- Human interactions should be characterized by Respect, Intentionality, Optimism, and Trust.

**Human potential can best be realized by creating and maintaining places, policies, processes, and programs specifically designed to invite development.**

Research Findings (Cotton, 2001):

- Emphasize the importance of protecting learning time when interacting with each other and with parents and students.

- Keep unassigned time and time spent on non-instructional activities to a minimum during the school day; ...keep loudspeaker announcements and other administrative intrusions brief and schedule them for minimal interference with instruction.
- Review testing practices and eliminate excessive and/or redundant testing.
- Keep student pull-outs from regular classes to a minimum for either academic or nonacademic purposes, and monitor the amount of pull-out activity.
- Provide extra learning time outside of regular school hours for students who need or want it.
- Review alternative scheduling strategies (e.g., block scheduling) and make changes based on the needs of students and staff.
- Model respect for efficient time use by keeping conferences focused and short, streamlining internal communications, and aligning personal time use with district and school priorities.
- Offer full-day, as opposed to half-day, kindergarten programs, especially for poor and minority students.
- Place a high priority on school safety, which includes specifies sanctions for violence, weapons, and illegal drugs, as well as more minor infractions.
- Administer discipline procedures quickly following infractions, making sure that disciplinary action is consistent with the code and that all students are treated equitably.
- Take action on absenteeism and tardiness quickly normally within a day.
- Adapt any discipline programs developed in other settings so that they match local circumstances and needs.



- Develop and implement, as needed, projects to prevent violence and gang activity.
- Understand that smaller schools facilitate the reflective dialogue among teachers, de-privatized, practice, and peer collaboration that characterize professional learning communities.
- Assist young people who are not succeeding in school to explore other options, including small alternative schools.
- Recognize that smaller classes are associated with more positive student social behavior and attitudes, as well as higher achievement.
- Know the learning and behavior of students is affected by the quality of the physical environment, especially air quality, heat control, lighting, space, and availability of equipment and furnishings.
- Arrange for physical facilities to be kept clean and reasonably attractive; damage is repaired immediately.
- Maintain a no-tolerance policy for graffiti or other vandalism of school facilities or grounds.
- Arrange for hallways and classrooms to be cheerfully decorated with student products, seasonal artwork, posters depicting positive values and school spirit, etc.
- Use elements of the school building itself to enhance teaching and learning, including bulletin boards, display cases, murals painted by local artists, permanent information panels, interior windows to classrooms, and bas reliefs on building exteriors.

**Education should be a collaborative, cooperative activity.**

Research Findings (Cotton, 2001):

- Require specific kinds of group interaction for routine learning tasks; for tasks whose object is conceptual

learning, fewer constraints are placed on the nature of the interaction within groups.

- Set up peer tutoring and peer evaluation groups to use time effectively and to ensure that students receive the assistance they need to learn successfully.
- Ensure that learning groups exhibit gender, cultural, ability-disability, and socioeconomic balance.
- Provide students training in how to work cooperatively and periodically review strategies for effective group work.
- Involve all school staff in the development of school discipline policies.
- Know that research favors smaller learning environments over larger ones for student achievement, attitudes, and social behavior, as well as teacher and administrator morale.
- Seek to achieve the shared purposes, personal loyalties, and common sentiments that characterize the culture of smaller schools.
- Secure staff and student input periodically on facilities needs-repair, replacement, refurbishing, lighting, temperature, cleanliness, etc.

**People are able, reliable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly.**

Research Findings (Cotton, 2001):

- Set standards, which are consistent with or identical to the building code of conduct.
- Establish rules that are clear and specific; they avoid vague or unenforceable rules such as “be in the right place at the right time.”
- Provide a rationale for each rule, explaining why it is necessary and beneficial.
- Elicit students' views on classroom life and disciplinary fairness and involve them in helping to establish standards and sanctions.
- Maintain a professional demeanor and remain calm when dealing with disruptive students.
- Teach and reinforce positive, prosocial behaviors and skills, including self-control skills, especially with students who have a history of behavior problems.
- Defuse potentially disruptive situations using conflict resolution strategies.
- Provide a written code of conduct specifying acceptable student behavior, including speech, at school, on school buses, at school-sponsored events; discipline procedures; and consequences.
- Make certain that students, parents, and all staff members know the code by providing initial training and periodic reviews of key features.
- Work to create a warm, supportive school environment. The principal, in particular, is visible and personable in interactions with staff and students.

**People possess untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor.**

Research Findings (Cotton, 2001):

- Know that research does not support between-class academic tracking because of its negative effect on the achievement and attitudes of most students
- Review alternative strategies for student and teacher placement and make changes as needed to increase learning efficiency.
- Identify students to receive conflict resolution training and function as peer mediators with their classmates.
- Work with schools to establish broadly representative school-based management teams that draw their membership from administrators, teachers, students, non-certified staff, parents, and community members.

**Human interactions should be characterized by Respect, Intentionality, Optimism, and Trust.**

Research Findings (Cotton, 2001):

- Know that corporal punishment is ineffective, illegal in many settings, and ethically questionable.
- Make certain that students understand why they are being disciplined, in terms of the code of conduct.
- Carry out discipline in a neutral, matter-of-fact way, focusing on the student's behavior rather than personality or history.
- Develop and provide training in and positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior, particularly for those students with a history of behavior problems.
- Assist students with behavior problems to develop social interaction, self-control, and anger management skills.

- Avoid expulsions and out-of-school suspensions whenever possible, making use instead of in-school suspension accompanied by assistance and support.
- Engage in problem solving with each other and with students to address discipline issues, focusing on causes rather than symptoms.
- Strike agreements with parents about ways to reinforce school disciplinary procedures at home.
- Be aware that their support is essential for school-based management to be successful; they communicate vision, trust, and a willingness to help in their interactions with schools.

## **Conclusion**

Research-based instruction as well as school and classroom management can be viewed as one of many applications of invitational theory. In that light, invitational theory is viewed as the vision while classroom and school management practices are viewed as a version. The version-of-the-vision perspective is quite helpful in that it permits us to look abstractly to guiding principles that assist us in developing solutions to specific problems. This interaction between “theory and practice,” where abstractions are interpreted and given embodiment by application, is a complex one and often misunderstood.

Generally, as noted earlier in the interaction of success expectations and assessed value, attempting to isolate a construct from other associated variables is a mistake. Thus, any principle can be misapplied when its application violates another principle or faces a paradoxical implementation. Invitational education theory is a strategy to keep separate empirical findings from being used in isolation and therefore, assists the development of a

comprehensive understanding that promotes effective teacher judgment that promotes effective teaching and learning.

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