

# Transforming a Rural Elementary School Through Invitational Education Practices

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## Abstract

This case study discusses the transformative impact of implementing the tenets of Invitational Education (IE) theory and practice upon a rural elementary school and subsequent preparation of teacher candidates. Through the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology the researcher examined the transformative change as IE theory and practice was exhibited and communicated by students, teachers, administration, staff, families, and the community at large. As a result of implementation, the culture and climate of the school became more positive. People of all ages joined and experienced a metamorphosis that extended from the school into the community. Changes included improved student behavior, greater trust between families and teachers, increased parental involvement and an expansion of the school culture into the community. Between 2010, when there had been more than 100 days of Out-of-School Suspensions issued to students for aggressive behavior and 2013, when only 13 days were missed by students due to suspension (according to West Virginia Education Information System data), the elementary school evolved from a low-performing, negative environment into a child-centered hub of learning where the climate reflected familial connection and care beyond academics. This became evident in the interaction between students and their teachers, families with the school, and between employees within the elementary setting. This case study documents that journey through the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology for the purpose of replication at other schools.

*Keywords:* Inviting schools, Invitational Education Theory and Practice, Educational Reform, Quality Schools, School Climate, Rural Schools.

## Introduction

In 2010, the elementary school examined for this case study was ranked 429<sup>th</sup> on a list of low-performing schools as reported by the West Virginia Department of Education. The troubling ranking was based on the state's standardized test scores among 435 reported public schools. Within two years, the school progressed 113 ranks to #316. This encouraged the author to review and document systemic reform as experienced by the elementary school. As examined through the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology, this case study thereby reviews the impact of Invitational Education (IE) theory and practice and *Quality Schools* ideals upon the school and its stakeholders.

Researchers often use hermeneutics and phenomenology synonymously (Van Manen, 1990). A distinction is valuable for this paper. Wilson and Hutchinson (1991) defined phenomenology as the study of human experience, focusing on “lived experience.” It contains a richness of detail and records life’s events factually with no inference. Hermeneutics provides understanding and brings meaning to the events focusing on culture, history, language, and events (Laverty, 2003). Thus, the review of the case study will seek to expand understanding while examining evidence through three main change experiences: Systemically at the elementary school, collectively by the community, and professionally as a principal and then as an instructor and mentor for teacher candidates at the local university.

## **Methodology**

This researcher observed changes occurring within the school setting following implementation of IE practices. A cultural shift transpired within the school’s adults as they adopted the values of intentionality, care, optimism, respect, and trust (I-CORT). As principal, this writer engaged in a hermeneutic cycle by reading for understanding and gaining knowledge, reflective writing to clarify and analyzing the newly gained concepts, and interpreting events, which led to new investigation from existing research (Kafle, 2011; Guignon, 2012; Miles, et.al., 2013). The school morphed into a more joyful place as policies, programs and processes changed. For this case study, the researcher included rich description of lived experience, maintained an open phenomenological attitude and attempted to provide information to replicate the experience (Finlay, 2012).

## **Background**

In 2007, this author became principal at the elementary school, which is in one of the oldest communities in southwestern West Virginia. As the population shifted west, the little hamlet became more impoverished and industrial. The community sought to maintain its rich, historical significance, hosting annual Civil War Days Celebrations. Many community members were generational citizens, having been raised there and raising their own children in the small town. In the late 1990’s, a fracture between the school system and the community’s families resulted during implementation of standards-based reform and the district’s decision to construct a new school building. The proposals resulted in protests, pickets, aggressive Board of Education meeting debates, and unflattering newspaper articles. This created a powerful rift between the school system’s expectation and the community’s desires.

Seven years later, when this writer arrived to serve as the case study school’s new principal, she initially advocated for bringing about community cohesion and school improvement based on her study of Choice Theory, which provided a foundation for *Quality Schools* ideals (Glasser, 1992).

## **Review of the Literature**

### ***Choice Theory and Quality Schools***

As a psychiatrist, Dr. William Glasser worked with delinquent youth. Through those experiences, he theorized that problem behaviors in a classroom could be corrected through building positive relationships (Glasser, 1992). Through *Quality Schools* ideals, teachers model the respect that should be shown to others and held class meetings with students to practice how

to interact with others in the face of conflict. Glasser's research led to his development of Choice Theory and explication of lead management versus boss management detailed through *Quality Schools* ideals. Glasser advocated for changing the culture and climate of the school environment to improve dynamics that impact the place where children were eager to learn, teachers were motivated to develop creative and stimulating lessons, and parents felt that their children were getting a superior education. Glasser considered learning to be a natural process so that with nurturing adults guiding them, students would find school to be a joyful place.

An individual is "driven by five basic needs built into one's genetic structure" (Glasser, 1992, p.43). These five basic needs meet one's physiological requirements and the four psychological needs of joy, power, love, and freedom. According to Glasser, the genesis of all behavior is based in one of the five needs. When teachers understand this concept and can identify why a student is behaving in a certain way, positive change can easily be initiated to help the student experience success rather than conflict.

Glasser urged adults to adopt a stance of "lead management" as compared to the traditional approach of "boss management." The latter is found in many ineffective schools. Changes from adults within *Quality Schools* will transform student behavior because students will seek to do things for teachers they care about and with whom they have a positive rapport (Glasser, 1992).

### ***Invitational Education Theory and Practice***

Shortly after beginning work at the school, the Title 1 Director introduced this writer to Invitational Education theory and practice (Novak, Rocca, DiBiasse, 2006). The pair attended the 2007 IAIE World Conference. In her role as principal, this writer learned that the tenets of Invitational Education (IE) easily blended with *Quality Schools* ideals. IE "abounds with respect for others, optimism, trust, care, and intentionality, resulting in overall positivity" (Purkey & Novak, 2008, p13).

Invitational Education (IE) theory and practice "embraces five democratically oriented basic principles in the approach to the educational process. These include a belief that the treatment of people should reflect that they are able, valuable, and responsible" (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p.3). IE advocates believe every person is worthy of respect. When teachers cherish each individual and students recognize their own value, a classroom becomes a more viable learning environment. Students, with self-respect, will try harder and experience an increased confidence creating a more valuable experience. Education is most effective when it is collaborative and cooperative. The goal of most schools is to create productive citizens. Learning to work together or "doing with" others prepares students for the interaction they need throughout life. Many tasks, which have traditionally been completed in isolation, are being done today in teams. Collaboration and cooperation are learned functional skills that require practice and within an invitational setting, students engage in these activities regularly. Learning is a product in the making. Seeing the ongoing process of learning, one understands that how it is approached and one's attitude about learning, affects the outcome. Students can relate that increased effort naturally results in improved understanding. There is always untapped potential in human efforts. This is the belief that individuals are far more capable than teachers ask of them. All humans have some talents and it is up to the trained professionals in the classroom to extract these skills. This untapped potential

is best extracted with places, programs and processes that reflect intentionally inviting practices. As noted by Purkey and Novak:

The idea that every person and everything in and around schools adds to, or subtracts from, the process of being a beneficial presence in the lives of human beings means that people and environments are never neutral; they are either summoning or shunning the development of human potential. Ideally, the factors of people, places, policies, programs and processes should be so intentionally inviting as to create a world in which each individual is cordially summoned to develop intellectually, socially, physically, psychologically and morally (1996, pp. 3-4).

## Results

### *Synthesizing Quality Schools Ideals and Invitational Education Theory into Practice*

Compared to *Quality Schools* ideals alone, IE theory and practice provided a more structured approach by encouraging an examination of the school's 5Ps: People places, policies, programs, and processes. The most important tenet of IE, intentionally creating an inviting environment, was missing from this case study elementary school. As noted above, this school and its community experienced tremendous conflict and distrust in the past. Teachers felt defensive and always anticipated criticism. Parents exhibited resistance, which fueled tensions in the school and in the community about the school. Students expressed frustration with being torn between the teachers they wanted to respect and their family that expected allegiance.

However, as principal, this writer felt the school environment was ripe for positive change. She knew the system required a complete cultural shift to positively impact the children, school employees, families, and the community. The principal relied upon IE tenets and *Quality Schools* ideals for developing and implementing programmatic behavioral transformation. The Starfish Analogy reinforces how Invitational Education theory and practice should be at the center of a school's "5Ps" whereby each leg of starfish represents one of the IE domains: Programs, Places, People, Processes and Policies. IE decision-makers need to evaluate and incorporate improved domains to bring about the best outcome for the school, community and society. As practitioners of IE, meetings frequently begin with the question, "What is the best choice for our children, our school, our community and the greater society?"

Thereafter, implementation of IE theory and practice began at the school. Using Glasser's theory to understand why children acted out and the intentionality of IE theory to transform the culture and climate, positive changes became evident at the case study elementary school. The principal understood that integrating IE into the practices and operation at the elementary school would take place in stages and require commitment from the majority of faculty and staff in alignment with the "Invitational Helix" (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p.137).

Changes began with an orientation meeting to introduce the concepts the school's teachers and staff. Questions were presented and answered. Teachers were given copies of "Inviting School Success" (Purkey & Novak, 1996). Future meetings were scheduled. Seeking effective implementation of IE theory and practice and *Quality Schools* ideals, as principal this writer met with teachers to explain the needed changes for their class rooms. Collaboratively, new approaches were discussed within a professional learning community. Crucially, the principal

intentionally invited and received a commitment from the school's adults to build a new culture and climate. Previously, the school had an adult-centered, toxic culture as affirmed by the WVDE Office of Healthy Schools. Teachers exhibited pity for the children based on very high rates of poverty and difficult home environments. Many of the children had parents who were either incarcerated or had succumbed to the problems of addiction. Often students were being raised by a grandparent or family friend.

Knowing pity could lead to low expectations, the principal encouraged stakeholders to utilize an IE mindset that exhibited and promoted intentionality, care, optimism, respect and trust (I-CORT), which she knew was integral to bringing about a fertile learning atmosphere. Exhibiting I-CORT throughout the school's people, places, policies, programs and processes would develop child-centered classrooms and a positive school culture. Thereafter, the principal created a leadership team comprised of teacher leaders and provided time for them to meet each week. The principal then intentionally invited business owners, local church people, the food-bank director, the librarian, members of the VFW, historians, and parents, to create a community leadership team and to plan to meet each month. As a result, changes began to occur within and outside of the school.

A school carnival was one of the first events planned to actively engage all stakeholders. Parents desperately wanted a return of this event, which was ended during the period of conflict noted above. Participation and volunteerism soared. Parents recruited community members such as the VFW and the Civil War enthusiasts to expand the carnival.

After school hours, the playground became a meeting ground for local groups: both productive and deviant. So, a high-powered lighting system, funded by a community organization, was installed to ensure that the gathering groups could be seen by others as productive citizens. Community members then became involved in the annual Halloween Parade that proceeded through the town and safely guided classes, stopped vehicle traffic, and filled treat bags.

Member of the VFW volunteered to teach the fifth-grade students proper flag care so that each morning students would respectfully install Old Glory up the flag pole. Then, at the end of the day, take the flag down and fold it according to military standards to make ready for the next morning. The fifth-grade students were excited to explain to younger students how all the red parts of the flag must be covered by the blue background of the stars and convey the symbolism associated with each. Instilling pride and confidence in both the school and nation prepared the fifth-grade students for their transition to middle school.

Church members began a "backpack ministry" to provide nonperishable food to children for the weekend and distributed these packs each Friday afternoon. Another group of teachers created an extensive clothing closet for children who needed socks, shoes, underwear, pants, tops and coats. These items were given with no expectation of cost or return. Teachers solicited new donations regularly from local organizations, whose mission was to help others.

Parents organized monthly movie nights whereby a movie was projected onto the gym wall. Pizza, popcorn and soda was made available for free or very low cost. Everyone spread out blankets or lawn chairs to participate in a night that promoted safe community engagement. The Local School Improvement Committee, as noted above, was comprised of community stakeholders. Members advocated for more child-centered school. So, a students' leadership team was formed and met with the principal every Friday morning for 30-minutes. The team of eight

was made up of four fifth-graders from each of the two classrooms. These students communicated ways that the school could be improved. The students from the leadership team were responsible for ensuring student participation with various aspects of school programs such as making morning announcements, leading pledges, organizing school-wide canned food drives, planning field trips for the fifth-grade, brainstorming schoolwide events, inviting speakers, mentoring younger students, delivering weekly newspapers to classrooms, cleaning up the school grounds, and acting as liaisons between all classrooms and the main office. As a result of the increased responsibility and empowerment, student leaders demonstrated greater buy-in and were eager to meaningfully participate during the Friday morning meetings.

Intent on implementing *Quality Schools* ideals and IE theory and practice, the various school leadership groups advocated for policies, processes, and programs that would highlight citizenship first, school cohesion second, and finally, the value and importance of each individual within the school or the community. These were reinforced through the three pledges that were recited by students and staff every day. The Student and Teacher Leadership Teams decided that everyone had to honor our nation with our first pledge: The United States' Pledge of Allegiance. The second: The Respect and Protect Pledge was intended to remind each other of the relationship to classmates and teachers through two-way responsibility that strengthens mutual respect. Adults in the building were reminded to treat students with respect and expect respect in return. The words of this pledge were: "Self-Control: Every day I will control my words, my actions, and my emotions. My failure to do so could hurt another person's body, feelings, or things. Self-control prevents violence" (Miller, 2011).

Then, before dismissal at the end of the day, a final pledge reminded children and adults of their personal value to the school family. This pledge was adopted from Rita Pierson's TED talk and states: "I am somebody. I was somebody when I came – I will be a better somebody when I leave. I am powerful and I am strong. I deserve the education I get here. I have things to do, people to impress and places to go" (Pierson, 2013). Frequently, when parents were in the building, picking up children at the end of the day, they heard this pledge and gave positive, supportive statements about it.

As more stakeholders became involved in the operation of the school and felt a sense of ownership, excitement expanded. Students decided to conduct a canned food drive to help the local Food Bank. They wanted the activity to be visible to all who visited the school, so they began lining the cans up along the hallway from one end of the expansive building to the other, measuring nearly an entire city block! They called businesses for more canned goods. The media got wind of the students' efforts and came to do a story. Ultimately, the students collected over 2000 cans for the Food Bank. Using his pickup truck, a local pastor needed to make a second trip to deliver all the canned goods!

### ***Data-Driven Feedback***

During these initial activities to reinforce implementation of *Quality Schools* ideals and IE theory and practices, something unexpected but serendipitous happened. The contentious friction present when this writer arrived at the case study elementary school as a new principal was eliminated within seven years. Out-of-School Suspension (OSS) days dropped from 106 days, in 2010 to 13 in 2011. Given that the principal suspended students for fighting, the reduction of

suspension days is evidence of a more positive, less aggressive school culture. In 2012, 15 days of OSS were reported (WVEIS, 2013). The numbers from 2010, 2011, and 2012 are comparable due to similarity in the number of students enrolled each year, which was between 255-266 (WVZoom). The following three years (2013, 2014 and 2015), the number of OSS saw no outstanding changes, yet the population increased to 308. (WVZoom). This data suggests that the culture of the school changed to support a more peaceful, stimulating learning setting.

From an academic performance perspective, student standardized state test scores also improved after implementation of IE theory and practices. For this case study elementary school, the 2010 standardized state-wide test for NCLB purposes exhibited student scores placed it in the bottom ten for all elementary schools in the state. By 2011, the student academic scores climbed more than 25% compared to other public elementary schools in the state. In just one year based on overall state standardized test scores, the case study school progressed from the bottom of the list into the top 75%. This was dramatic growth in that there were 435 elementary schools on the list. Academically, this elementary school moved from #428 to # 316. In 2013, WVDE changed the standardized testing tool so that it became difficult to compare scores year-to-year.

From a school culture and climate perspective, improvement was observed after implementation of IE theory and practices. The teachers, staff, students, families and community had become a team. Adults at this school exhibited intentional care, optimism, trust, and respect. In addition to improved attitudes for learning, people cared more for the school, itself. Fifth-graders planned an afternoon of pulling weeds to help the custodian. This came about because they earned a new responsibility of changing the school sign and decided that it needed more attention as far as landscaping.

Whereas a previous school administrator felt the need to ask a male teacher to walk her to the parking area because she feared community members, as principal, this writer found that she could fearlessly enter the school building alone at midnight or on the weekend. A positive connection with the town people had been established. Bringing I-CORT to all interactions brought hope for a better future for their children, which reduced fear, anger, and tension with the community.

One anecdote of positive change was when this writer's vehicle got buried in snow at the school. While working alone fulfilling principal duties during a blizzard, this writer could not get out of the snowbank that developed while she was working. Community members came to help her because, now, in this town the culture had changed for the better. Suddenly, people were looking out for one another. Truly, implementation of Invitational Education theory and practices transformed the school and the community, helping to transform the town for the better. This example is evidence of the systematic change which occurred at the school. No longer did adversity exist between the school and the community. Collectively, a more positive feeling about the school and personnel was experienced by families as they recognized a common goal between home and school. The principal, from a professional perspective, was open to guiding this school to the vision she had in implementing IE cultural changes and *Quality Schools* behavioral understanding.

Prior to implementation of Invitational Education (IE) theory and practices, relationships between community stakeholders and those running the school was tense. School administrators were considered "outsiders." The relationship was very much "us against them" and adversarial,

which adversely impacted opportunities for student success. Too often, students heard negativity during conversations at home aimed at the school and brought a sour attitude to school the next day. A teacher might be criticized so frequently that the student felt a sense of disloyalty to the family if the student spoke kindly toward the teacher. This often poisoned the relationship between the teacher and the student. But this became a thing of the past as parents became more involved at the school.

A positive home-school relationship is a correlate of Effective Schools (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). Self-reflection made evident behaviors and actions such as building collaborative teams, inviting families to meaningfully participate in important school-decisions, creating a supportive environment that made everyone feel safe, valued, respected and connected. Implementing child-centered instructional practices not only positively changed the school but also the surrounding community. The transformation of this elementary school was witnessed every day after school, as children were picked up by their families. Teachers and parents could be frequently seen in pleasant conversations. One teacher became so involved with families that he organized an annual “Family Day” at the local amusement park for everyone who wanted to join in the fun. His commitment is so ingrained that following his retirement, he continues the practice.

### **Benefits for Future Practice**

Upon self-reflection, the legacy of implementing Invitational Education theory and practice and *Quality Schools* ideals within this elementary school and throughout the community is the intentional care and optimism that empowered individuals to build respectful, appropriate, meaningful relationships, whereby trust evolved and the school transformed from a toxic organization into a place whereby the tenets of I-CORT help all stakeholders reach their human potential. Within an impoverished community, relationships are often the most valuable resource. For families to understand they can trust the schools to put the child first and teach them functional skills brings hope. When families believe in their teachers and feel hopeful, they will become supportive (Payne, 2018).

The success experiences documented through this case study empowered this writer to transition from being the school’s principal to my work for a teacher preparation program. By preparing future teachers and exposing them to the benefits of IE theory and practice during their development as teacher candidates or novice classroom educators, my human potential is being more fully realized. Leaving the case study school’s principalship to instruct and mentor teacher candidates at the local university was an intentional invitation to this writer and those that will be mentored. Invitational Education (IE) theory and practices implemented within the public school, requires an I-CORT mindset and consistent analysis of the 5Ps for systemic reform to become sustainable.

### **Generalization of IE Theory and Practices to the University Setting**

Truly, the use of thoughtful, intentionally inviting communication continues to create opportunities for optimal human potential. It was crucially beneficial to model IE theory and practices to teacher candidates. However, it is interesting to observe how many teacher candidates or novice instructors seem afraid to treat students in a caring, optimistic manner that builds mutual respect and trust. It seems they misunderstand kindness as weakness and fear potential behavioral problems would result, causing them to be viewed as less capable. Too often, inexperienced



teachers express fear being perceived as either unprofessional or they are uncomfortable exhibiting I-CORT. Somehow, they believe a learned “spare the rod and spoil the child” approach is best. The result in such utilization is a stern demeanor and use of forceful language and tone. Therefore, this writer found it invaluable to help teacher candidates understand the positive results from implementing IE theory and practices.

IE advocates know, and the case study documented above proves, there is strength in doing the right thing and it is always right to meet the needs of the child within a classroom and community. Building positive, appropriate relationships changes lives for the better. After family, teachers are the most influential people in guiding a child’s journey into adulthood. An intentionally inviting teacher can make a child feel like she or he can conquer the world. With this level of powerful influence comes awesome responsibility. A teacher may be a child’s only guide to a better destiny.

Too often, a traditional teaching style may encourage an authoritarian approach whereby the teacher is unquestionably in charge. Students are often intimidated, scared to ask questions, or unwilling to risk failure. Creating this classroom culture reduces innovation and critical thinking. In the task of training teacher candidates, this writer found modeling or exemplifying the implementation of Invitational Education theory and practices was critical for improving relationships, revamping a school system’s culture, and optimizing stakeholders’ human potential. Modeling and relating success stories based on IE theory and practices should be ongoing throughout the teacher candidate’s program.

Invitational Education theory provides the opportunity for evidence-based practices. In a teacher preparation program, the professor should be the mentor and role-model. The following exemplifies how this writer served as an IE practitioner that intentionally invited a student to succeed rather than seeking to punish the student based on an arbitrary timeline. During an initial class in which this writer served as the course instructor, a non-traditional student asked for a meeting after the morning class. This student exhibited promise as a responsible future teacher. The student had encountered justifiable setbacks that caused her to delay completion of an assignment by the due date. During the meeting the student shared her extensive notes and asked if she was on the right track for the assignment. Later that evening, she communicated with the instructor that she was stressed about completing the assignment before the midnight deadline. In her role as the course instructor, this writer responded to the student that she had plenty to grade and the student should stop stressing, get a good night’s sleep, and submit the paper the next day. The surprised student responded, “I just don’t know how to respond to that.”

The student had never had this type of affirming reaction from an instructor. That interaction created a teachable moment whereby the instructor told the student to consider the interaction a student-centered approach in which I-CORT guided the communication so the student’s best work good be developed and presented. Ultimately, how would causing the student to rush through completing the written assignment be beneficial when it was clear from her presented notes that she had been working on the assignment and wanted to do it well? An IE practitioner will always know and consider the purpose of an assignment. Was the purpose getting an assignment turned in on time or learning through doing research and critically thinking? This opportunity demonstrated to the student that timelines can be flexible under certain circumstances so that both the needs of the student and the requirements of the assignment can be satisfied. While

this would not work every time, knowing your students, understanding their obligations and treating every opportunity in the most respectful, caring manner produces a connection that is beneficial to all.

When seeking to mentor and instruct teacher candidates, always know the purpose of the assignments. Knowing the true relevance and essential learning outcome empowers the instructor to make allowances and differentiate based on student needs and competencies. In the anecdotal case noted above, the purpose was less about meeting arbitrary deadlines and more about understanding the demographics of the student's student teaching placement. Whenever the specific beneficial purpose of an assignment is known, the instructor can intentionally invite success and the student typically invests greater effort. All instructors can be student-centered, flexible, and differentiating in their approach to teaching. From the teacher candidate's perspective, the lesson learned from modeling intentionality, care, optimism, respect, and trust (I-CORT) was more important than punctuality. Modeling I-CORT provided the teacher candidate relief that would ideally generalize to her future practice in which her students need a student-centered environment facilitated by a flexible teacher willing to differentiate learning based on diverse needs.

Rather than opportunities for punishment through lowered scores, sometimes, assignment deadlines need to be guidelines. The most important considerations should be the exhibited level of competence for the assignment's essential learning outcomes in relation to the needs of the student. A formative process where I-CORT underpins the communication loop quickly separates the responsible stressed student from the irresponsible procrastinator.

Given implementation of IE theory and practices, a school culture exhibits positive behaviors and a familial attitude. An instructional leader can set the tone and climate for the group. In the ideal setting, individuals care for one another and work together so students feel valued and empowered. The community will claim the school when stakeholders feel intentionally welcomed and involved. Teachers feel more supported by parents and their administration when communication is active and empowering. James Comer (1998) made the statement, "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship." Who has greater investment in a child's future than a parent? Teachers MUST access this valuable resource and in doing so, they build relationships that benefit all involved. No parent resists a teacher if the child's best interests is communicated with I-CORT. When teacher candidates can begin their career in education as an advocate for the children in their classrooms, build a culture and climate that is child-centered, and communicate how the people, places, policies, programs, and processes exhibit I-CORT, then everyone has the potential to achieve his or her human potential (Purkey, 2016). Those educated by and within such a system will more likely bring about a better and stronger society.

Through self-reflection, this author pondered the impact of Invitational Education theory and practices on a personal level. The themes of thousands of self-help books range from reflecting, meditating, kindness, love for self and others, compassion, respect, acknowledgment, responsibility, etc. Each seems to be aimed at helping one to become the best person that she or he can be. Through advocacy for Invitational Education theory and practices, students, teachers, administrators and teacher candidates are encouraged to reach their human potential by intentionally implementing a mindset that exhibits care, optimism, respect, and trust so others also may achieve their potential (Purkey & Novak, 2015).

Given gentle urging and an IE mindset that exhibited I-CORT, change began, and excitement was maintained. This case study proves effective leadership of such a change is paramount so that a new culture emerges to replace the old one. Through these experiences, an individual evolves as well.

The most powerful and important change this author found was the increased confidence from knowing that what the school and teacher candidates were doing was for the students' optimal development. A second reflection triggered caution. What becomes of students who pass through a school where a toxic culture prevails? What is the potential damage when teacher candidates are trained to rely upon a traditional teacher-centered approach? When one understands there is a better way, it becomes a moral and ethical imperative to share and utilize best practices. Therefore, a third reflection was one of commitment to IE theory and practice. Invitational Education theory works in practice. Ideally, this case study will serve as either an intentional opportunity for enlightened professional development or humble affirmation to your effective IE practices.

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