

On Rediscovering Self-Invitations to Education

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According to Michael Shaara (1974), at the end of the Battle of Gettysburg General Robert E. Lee told his closest associate, General James Longstreet, "You and I have no *Cause*. We have only the Army. But, if a soldier fights only for soldiers, he cannot win." Lee's central message to Longstreet was that they felt no deeply held motives that impelled them into battle. The critical element was that they had no self-invitation to their activity. Lee's statement encapsulates a great deal of wisdom that is of particular interest to present day educators who, like General Lee at Gettysburg, are in the throes of a challenging experience that begs the question: How can we succeed?

The Educational Challenge

The current educational challenge is not a product of malingering. Since the issuance of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, educators have been reforming their programs energetically. Some gains have been reported but prominent Americans, such as William Bennett, former Secretary of Education, continue to maintain that the American Educational enterprise has deteriorated since 1980 (Jordan, 1994). Distinguished educational researcher, David Berliner (1993) wrote, "In

recent years, criticism of public schools in America has gained momentum because of low achievement of American students when compared with that of students of other nations" (p. 25). Barber (1993) reported, "Since then (1983), countless reports have been issued decrying the condition of our educational system . . . they have come from every side, Republican as well as Democrat, from the private sector as well as public. Yet for all the talk, little happens" (p. 39). In *Kappan*, Clark and Astuto (1994) stated, "The education reform movement of the 1980s and 1990s has produced disappointing results" (p. 513). Indeed, there is enough responsible unrest to support the contention that educational reform is generating a mighty tempest.

Since many of the recent educational revisions have involved either curriculum changes or legal adjustments such as new teacher certification laws, a look at other aspects of the problem seems warranted. Those further discussions could appropriately begin with a theoretical model that postulates human behavior as a function of skills, knowledge and attitudes. Several studies of educators' skills and knowledge have revealed some deficits, but even where those gaps do not exist or have been remedied, the system still is challenged as being ineffective. The attitudinal dimension offers some hope for explaining the genesis of our educational problems.

The attitudinal dimension is being applied by three schools in Washington, D.C. School superintendent Franklin L. Smith gave three school communities an opportunity to try some new programs and replace as many teachers as they wanted. The principals and neighborhood councils recommended that 107 of 125 teachers be transferred out and replaced. The reasoning for the transfers was described by Principal Helena Jones who said, "They (teachers) have a wealth of knowledge but *they're missing the motivational*, challenging part. Many of them aren't putting children first" (Horwitz, 1993, p. A1).

Having said that teachers have worked diligently, it may seem contradictory to imply that there is an attitude problem. However, when education's present challenge is placed in an attitudinal framework, a unique component is revealed. There is considerable reason to believe that the present context is causing educators to de-emphasize their own self-invitations to education and to shift their emphasis to external demands that are too diffuse and vague to satisfy. This situation may disorient some professionals by presenting them ill-defined goals that make it difficult to focus their efforts toward the education of individual children. This loss of focus leads to depending on the "norm" or group consensus.

Other-Directed Invitations

The ascendance of external invitations developed during the 1960s. Previously, public school teachers were long renowned for their adherence to well-defined personal values and practices, which had two major characteristics: Structured instructional patterns and Judeo-Christian ethics. These traits prevailed relatively unchallenged until the 1960s when significant groups demanded equal recognition. Thus began a steady turn toward both changing structures and pluralism, which required teachers to respond to widely disparate, culturally influenced invitations.

The emerging instructional climate required teachers to respond more actively to a vast array of patrons' invitations. This adjustment led to an other-directed orientation and diminished educators' awareness of their own experience. Teachers no longer used as many self-generated invitations for their professional practices. In sociological terms (Reisman, 1973), educators evolved from inner-direction to other-direction.

Educators' drift toward other-directedness is understandable since American society in general reflects this orientation. A chief symptom is the widespread dependence upon polls that serve to inform the populace about "normal" behaviors. Indeed, mental health is often evaluated in terms of a person's adjustment to societal norms. Frequently, it is considered positive to "just go along with the group." Investigations by Aspy, Aspy and Roebuck (1984) indicated that "just going along" is the most frequent level of involvement among students at all levels. Thus, "just going along" with the other-directed norm desensitizes teachers and students to their own talents, skills and abilities and the need to develop themselves as unique contributions to the larger world.

Self-Invitations

Reisman (1973) also maintained that other-directedness is an insufficient adjustment to a complex society. He advocated autonomy, which is the ability to transcend the social environment so as to ascertain one's internal invitations. This skill allows people to integrate their own thinking with that of others and to create synergistic relationships with them. Carkhuff (1993) referred to the notion of interpersonal cooperation as interdependence that is a condition in which individuals cooperatively integrate their separately generated data into higher order products. That is, each person thinks before merging his or her thoughts with others. The operative phrase is *each person thinks*.

The first step toward becoming a self-invited educator is to locate and solidify personal beliefs about teaching and thereby place one's own experiences more firmly into the educational equation. Generally, the recommendation is for educators to develop the skills appropriate

for inviting oneself. In this context, General Lee's admonition to General Longstreet may point to an especially fertile sector for examination: Do educators need a self-selected goal as a platform for generating their own invitations to education?

Delineating A Self-Invitation

A self-invitation differs from most popular conceptions of motivation because it refers to a personalized path that is important enough to impel a person to strive for a goal long after the attraction of extrinsic motivators has been exhausted. This trait is depicted in Rudyard Kipling's poem, *If*, which says, "If you can make your heart and nerve and sinew serve you long after they are gone." It also can be observed at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., where there are numerous illustrations of the victims' maintenance of a sense of direction far beyond the limits of most motivational theories. A self-invitation can be akin to a primordial urge.

A self-invitation can be differentiated from zealotry. A self-invitation enriches human activities by placing them in the framework of a larger, worthwhile goal. Conversely, zealots' desires shrink perceptions by obscuring everything but a tiny area of distorted personal concern. Finally, a self-invitation can be communicated rationally to responsible people who, though they may not adopt it, can affirm its "worthwhileness."

A self-invitation may be delineated and communicated by use of Carkhuff's (1993) problem-solving matrix. By making values public and assigning relative rankings, groups can insure that their self-invitations have met the test of public scrutiny. This measurable characteristic can enable both individuals and groups to specify a self-invitation through a systematic process:

- Step 1: List and rate on a scale of 1 to 10 the personal or group values involved in the situation under consideration.
- Step 2: Enumerate possible alternative courses of action to be taken in that situation.
- Step 3: Interact your values with your options to determine the option that best fulfills your values.

An example may be helpful to illustrate the process. An elementary school faculty wanted to select a "better" invitation to support school reform. In a faculty meeting, three main values were identified: (a) Whatever innovation was tried, it must facilitate individual skill development; (b) It had to be feasible for the current structure and staffing levels; and (c) It had to provide a motivation for children to participate. The most important value (facilitate skill development) was given a rank of 10, while "feasible" received a rank of 8 and "motivation" a value of 6. Alternatives were discussed: (a) interest grouping for project development, (b) age grouping, or (c) ability grouping. Each alternative was rated on the degree to which it fulfilled each value using the following scale:

- +2 = Completely encompasses the value
- +1 = Moderately encompasses the value
- 0 = Does not affect the value
- 1 = Moderately negates the value
- 2 = Negates the value

Table 1 contains the results of the discussion. The option that most clearly fulfilled their values was project/interest grouping.

Table 1

		Project/ Interest Grouping	Age Grouping	Ability Grouping
Facilitative Skills	10	+2/20	+1/10	+2/20
Feasible	8	+2/16	+2/16	+1/8
Motivational	6	+2/12	0/0	-2/-12

TOTALS	+48	+26	+16
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Self-Selected Invitation To Support Non-Grouping

Using this procedure, educators can examine their personal and group invitations to insure that they meet their goals. Invitations can systematically be explored to assess which are important enough to impel teachers to work enthusiastically. This selection process can be made much more comprehensive by using procedures such as those suggested by Carkhuff (1993). The salient point is that the assessments include personalized data.

Long-Term Effects of Self-Invitations

The long-term impact of self-invitations to education was examined systematically in two separate 35-year follow-up studies of two secondary schools (Aspy & Aspy, 1992). One was a coed public institution, the other an all male Catholic school. The same methodology was used in each investigation. A group of 300 convenient graduates from each school was interviewed by the same person. All open-ended interviews began with a question: What impressed you most about your high school experience? Though the details differed, in more than 95% of the cases the crux of the response was: What impressed me most was a teacher who really cared about teaching. Typical comments were: They had some enthusiasm; they had a purpose; and something excited them. The prime conclusion from these investigations was: Graduates' attributions of teachers' long-range impact are related directly to the learners' estimates of the degree to which their instructors were self-invited to education. *Only those teachers who were perceived as being self-invited (a personally valued reason to teach) had a significant long-range (35-year) impact upon these students.*

Conclusion

There is extensive evidence to suggest that American education is under attack. Recent efforts indicate that educators energetically are trying a wide range of strategies to meet the challenges. The profession has explored and revised its skills and knowledge. Now, there is reason to further examine attitudinal variables.

Since educators have been assaulted by a veritable deluge of criticism, it is reasonable to assume that in some instances morale is diminished. Pipho (1994) described the current situation as a "yelling match." Some teachers may need re-energizing. In this effort the most reliable reservoir of strength will probably be found internally. In order to tap into that rich resource some educators will need to explore their self-invitations to teaching. That is, they can benefit from reviewing the personal reasons that impel them to teach.

The delineation of personal reasons for choosing teaching as a career may be facilitated by a systematic process that considers personal values. Although there is social pressure to de-emphasize self-invitations as professional motivators, their efficacy can be demonstrated in a wide variety of practical settings, not the least of which was the founding of America. Several other items could be added to the list: the institution of public schools, the prevention of Polio, and the battle presently being waged against childhood diseases. At their inception, these self-invitations may have seemed either fantasy-like or inconsequential, yet they are profound.

Many educators enter the profession with a set of high aspirations that are eroded by interactions with people who offer other-directed invitations. Subsequently, the internally generated goals may recede and the intrinsic motivation is not replaced by extrinsic rewards. The

result is a diminution of personal enthusiasm for teaching. The remedy is to reinvigorate those self-invitations.

The body of this statement presents a procedure that may facilitate educators' search for their personalized goals. Of course, the preferred mode for identifying a self-invitation is to "feel a fire in your belly," but when that intuitive process fails, a systematic procedure may help practitioners locate a self-selected course until the flow of events delivers a more naturally energizing alternative.

In short, educators can benefit from claiming their professional territory by defining their personal and group missions. Certainly, patrons can make contributions to the educational process, but teachers, broadly defined, are the people who participate regularly in the steady task of facilitating the positive growth of learners. And broadly defined, education is humankind's most effective answer to its problems. Those who teach are participating in the activity with the greatest potential for elevating people to their highest levels.

A call to education is the most important self-invitation many educators have ever issued. It becomes their *raison d'être*. They are empowered when they boldly assert their personal values and purposes. In short, they are at their best when they forthrightly affirm the reasons they invited themselves to teaching.

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