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The Person in the Process

Attention to the beliefs of teachers and teacher candidates should be a focus for educational research and can inform educational practice in ways that prevailing research agendas have not and cannot.

M. Frank Pajares, *Teacher's Beliefs and Educational Research: Cleaning up a Messy Construct*, *Review of Educational Research* (1992, 62, 329)

This chapter looks at the person in the process and considers what is necessary to sustain the desire and energy to function at an intentionally inviting level—to develop the stamina and courage of the long-distance inviter. Being professionally inviting cannot be maintained if it is seen as an isolated series of behaviors an educator performs when he or she comes to school. Invitational education can easily be corrupted by those who have learned its techniques but not its stance. As our colleague Charlotte Reed pointed out, “Invitational education is only one aspect of invitational living.”

Living the inviting process involves orchestrating four basic areas: (1) being personally inviting with oneself, (2) being personally inviting with

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others, (3) being professionally inviting with oneself, and (4) being professionally inviting with others. The educator who successfully employs invitational education balances the demands of the four areas and integrates them into a seamless pattern of functioning. Concentrating too much effort in only one or two of the four areas creates an imbalance.

From an invitational viewpoint, quality education is the product of developing and using oneself in creative ways. The inviting educator can balance and orchestrate the demands of these areas, thereby facilitating optimal personal and professional development in oneself and others. These four areas suggest ways to increase one's “IQ” (Invitational Quotient).

Being Personally Inviting with Oneself

Many people go throughout life committing partial suicide—destroying their talents, energies, creative qualities. Indeed, to learn how to be good to oneself is often more difficult than to learn how to be good to others.

Joshua Liebman, *Peace of Mind* (1946, p. 46)

Countless educators are dedicated, caring, and hardworking, but also experience chronic discouragement, dejection, and frustration. These feelings are summed up in the single word *burnout*, defined by Edelwich (1980) as the “progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose” (p. 14). Sometimes burnout is self-inflicted. Educators who overlook their own welfare are more likely to experience stress-induced illness. Avoiding boredom and isolation, principal components of burnout, are essential in maintaining an inviting stance.

When professionals constantly sacrifice their own wants and needs to meet the demands of others, the sacrifice gradually builds resentment. Teachers have a moral obligation to their students to take care of themselves. This opinion was supported by Knowles (1977), who points out that although more than 99 percent of us are born healthy, many of us later become ill as a result of personal misbehavior and self-abuse. Knowles believes that we have “a public duty” to preserve our own health. Thus, if one aspires to go the distance, to be a long-distance inviter, it is vital to view and treat oneself and one's potential positively.

Being personally inviting with oneself is a tremendously important enterprise for teachers. It is difficult to invite others if educators neglect to invite themselves. If educators believe that the inviting process is important, then they should apply this belief to their own lives—to stand tall, dress well, eat less, become involved, exercise, and find ways to be fully *present* in this world.

In being personally inviting with yourself, keep in mind that the principles of respect, optimism, trust, and intentionality most useful for inviting others also directly apply to inviting yourself. The most important principle is respect for yourself and your feelings. For example, if exercising at night after a hard day of teaching feels terribly difficult, try inviting yourself to exercise in the morning. If this doesn't work, a self-invitation to play a sport, join a health club, buy an exercise bicycle or minitrampoline, or take a long walk each morning or evening might accomplish the same thing. The goal is to send self-invitations that are most likely to be accepted and acted upon. By listening to your own feelings and by varying self-invitations the probability of success is increased.

Although it is beyond the scope of this book to go into detail about the countless ways of being personally inviting with yourself, here are some suggestions for maintaining your own personal energy level and nurturing yourself physically, emotionally, and psychologically:

Take pleasure in stillness. Too much isolation can be bad, but taking time to be alone is helpful. Enjoy silence. Contemplate and meditate on who you are, where you came from, and where you're going. Being at one with yourself can be deeply rewarding.

Keep in reasonable shape. Maintain physical health. Whether you choose an individual effort (long walks, jogging, exercising, gardening) or an organized sport (bowling, tennis, racquetball), it is important to maintain the body in which one lives.

Plan a long life. Take personal responsibility for your own life support system. Be choosy about what and how much you eat. Eliminate cigarettes and other injurious substances. Maintain health care, look both ways when crossing a one-way street, and fasten your safety belt. The greatest proportion of health and safety care one receives is self-administered.

Give yourself a celebration. Make a pledge to do something special for just yourself in the immediate future. It might be a bubble bath, a fishing expedition, a good novel, a shopping trip, a new outfit, a favorite meal, a round of golf, attending a film or play; celebrate!

Recharge your batteries. Handle short-term burnout by talking things over with a friend or counselor whom you consider to have good sense. Just talking about concerns helps avoid accepting a lot of guilt and anxiety. A good friend or professional counselor can help you find ways to invite yourself.

Live with a flourish. Find satisfaction from many sources, such as a hobby or activity unrelated to your professional life. As much as realistically possible, surround yourself with things you like. Laugh a little. Take a few risks, travel, and assert yourself. Avoid drabness.

One additional way teachers might invite themselves personally is by taking time to remember what it was like to be a child and letting their own feelings find expression. The death of a child is tragic, so why kill the child in yourself? Keep the zest for living alive by trusting your feelings, by being open to experience, by being gentle with yourself, and, when necessary, forgiving yourself. After all, errors are primarily sources of information. If one path does not take you where you wish to go, at least you've learned not to take that path again.