Being Professionally Inviting with Others

From the position advocated in this book, the primary purpose of education is to summon people cordially to realize their potential, meet the democratic needs of society, and participate in the progress of civilization. This is best accomplished by building on the three areas already considered. When these three are functioning at an optimal level, the stage is set for being professionally inviting with others.

Practical strategies for inviting others professionally are so numerous that they have been compiled in a separate book: *The Inviting School Treasury* (Purkey & Stanley, 1994). The *Treasury* is a desk reference that provides more than 1,000 concrete suggestions arranged under 110 topics with 600 cross-references. Each suggestion is designed to improve student academic achievement.

Because the process of being professionally inviting with others is the central focus of this book, it is necessary to go into greater detail in this area. The examination of the fourth area uses self-concept as a springboard.

Earlier, reviewed evidence indicated a significant relationship between self-concept and school achievement. Students' perceptions of themselves as learners apparently serve as personal guidance systems to direct their classroom behavior. A professional understanding of self-concept theory coupled with skills for interpreting how students view themselves as learners are important tools for teaching.

Ways to be professionally inviting with others are suggested by research provided by the *Florida Key* (Purkey, Cage & Graves, 1973), an inventory of student behaviors designed to infer students' self-concepts as learners. The *Key* has been used since 1972 to compare disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged pupils (Owen, 1972), analyze professed and inferred self-concepts of students (Graves, 1972; Harper & Purkey, 1993), compare Caucasian and African American students (Finger, 1995), to study students identified as disruptive and nondisruptive (Branch, 1974), and determine the efficacy of invitational education (Stanley & Purkey, 1995).

The *Key* limits itself to the situation-specific self-concept that seems to relate most closely to school success or failure: self-as-learner. In

making deductions about self-concept, most researchers have focused on global self-concepts rather than on situation-specific self-images, such as self as athlete, self as family member, self as learner, or self as friend. By observing only global self-concept—which is many-faceted and contains diverse, even conflicting, subselves—investigators have sometimes overlooked the importance of these subsystems.

In the *Key* research, four factors that relate significantly to school performance were derived through factor analysis. These factors were labeled (1) relating, (2) asserting, (3) investing, and (4) coping. Examining these four factors is useful, for they suggest ways in which educators may be professionally inviting with others.

Relating

The first factor identified on the *Key* as having the greatest significance to the self as learner is *relating*. As measured by the Key, the relating score indicates the level of trust and appreciation that the student maintains toward others.

Students who score high in relating identify closely with classmates, teachers, and school. They express positive feelings about learning, and they think in terms of *our* school, *our* teachers, and *my* classmates (as opposed to *the* teacher, *that* school, or *those* kids). Getting along with others is easy for those who score high on relating. These students take a natural, relaxed approach to school life. They stay calm when things go wrong, and they can express feelings of frustration or impatience without exploding.

Students who score low on relating seem unable to involve themselves in school activities or with teachers and other students. One teacher depicted such a student as follows:

> *Two summers ago, I tutored children who were having problems learning to read. Looking back, I can see how their reading problems were related to how they saw themselves. One boy, John, who was ten years old, was not well liked because of his habit of criticizing others to make himself feel important. His poor self-concept and failure to relate to others were graphically illustrated one day when a huge whipped cream fight was held on an empty hilltop. Whipped cream filled the air for twenty minutes or so as forty kids, each with two or three cans, went wild. After the cream had settled, and later that day, John told me he had to spray whipped cream on himself as no one else made a point of doing so.*

To be ignored, even in a whipped cream battle, can be a most painful experience.

To be overlooked or ignored by others is an intolerable situation for most people, and they will go to great lengths to gain acceptance. When the desire for positive human relationships is unfulfilled in conventional ways, students are likely to try less conventional or socially unacceptable ways. For example, according to Cartwright, Tomson, and Schwartz (1975) and others, the potential delinquent joins a gang to gain a feeling of status denied by the larger society. This phenomenon has been echoed by Hull and Young (1993) who reported that alcohol is used by social drinkers and alcoholics alike to reduce feelings of personal failure, isolation, and worthlessness.

The following passage from *Manchild in the Promised Land* by Claude Brown (1965) illustrates the pathetic efforts of one young girl to buy human relationships:

> *I found out that Sugar would bring candy and pickles to class and give them to Carole, so Carole liked her and wanted me to like her too. After I got used to Sugar being ugly and having buckteeth, I didn't mind her always hanging around, and I stopped beating her up. Sugar started coming around on the weekends, and she always had money and wanted to take me to the show. Sometimes I would go with Sugar, and sometimes I would just take her money and go with somebody else. Most of the time I would take Sugar's money then find Bucky and take him to the show. Sugar used to cry, but I don't think she really minded it too much, because she knew she was ugly and had to have something to give people if she wanted them to like her. I never could get rid of Sugar. She would follow me around all day long and would keep trying to give me things, and when I didn't take them, she would start looking real pitiful and say she didn't want me to have it anyway. The only way I could be nice to Sugar was to take everything she had, so I started being real nice to her (p. 55).*

Literary descriptions as well as scientific research clearly show that human relationships profoundly influence self-concept and school

achievement. Although forcing students to relate to each other in positive and productive ways is undesirable and probably impossible, teachers can create an enabling atmosphere in which relating is facilitated. Adelman and Taylor (1993) have documented the importance of an enabling component in human learning, as have Haberman (1994) and Noddings (1992).

A specific teacher behavior that invites feelings of belonging in students is the use of "we" statements to suggest group membership. Encouraging students to involve themselves in school activities promotes a feeling of *our* curriculum, *our* decorations, *our* rules, *our* efforts to keep things clean. Instructional programs can be developed and presented in ways that encourage students to play a cooperative part. Cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1989) has demonstrated the value of working together to enrich academic achievement while improving interpersonal relationships.

Finally, creating the proper atmosphere for relating involves removing barriers. Skill is necessary to avoid a mismatch between the communication system of the classroom and that of the minority-group student. Teachers may be unintentionally disinviting when they appear to be condescending, patronizing, or over-friendly. "That English teacher tries to be helpful," a student commented, "but she always talks about how 'you Blacks can be proud of what you've done.' It shows me that she is constantly aware of the differences and thinks in terms of labels." Teachers who want to be inviting with others work to avoid expressions and actions likely to be offensive to minority-group members. This requires sensitivity to how things seem from the other person's point of view. Teachers who understand the importance of relating work to remove barriers and to encourage positive relationships in the classroom.

Asserting

> *That which gave me most Uneasiness among those Maids of Honor, when my Nurse carried me to visit them, was to see them use me without any Matter of Ceremony, like a Creature who had no Sort of Consequence.*
>
> **Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726/1961, p. 95)**

The second factor identified in the *Key* research, *asserting*, describes another aspect of self-concept-as-learner—the one that characterizes students' sense of control over what happens to them in the classroom. Students who score high on the asserting factor speak up for their own ideas and are not afraid to ask questions in class. They actively participate in school activities and talk to others about their academic interests.

The importance of asserting oneself has been stressed by Alberti and Emmons (1990) who define assertive behavior as those personal actions that enable one to act in one's own best interests, to stand up for oneself without undue anxiety, to express one's honest feelings comfortably, and to exercise one's own rights without denying the rights of others. Alberti and Emmons view assertive behavior as affirming one's own rights (in contrast to aggressive behavior, which is directed against others) and the "perfect right" of every individual in interpersonal relationships. Beyond affirming one's own rights, assertive behavior also involves the ability to express feelings of positive regard, appreciation, and love—to let others know their presence invites a celebration.

Advantages of assertive behavior have been documented by research (Cotler & Guerra, 1976; Seligman, 1975, 1990). Seligman, who has formulated theories of learned optimism and learned helplessness, states that the experience of internal control is essential to both positive self-esteem and good psychological health. Negative self-regard and psychological depression are the likely results of feelings of helplessness. The problem with learned helplessness is that when one learns to believe that one lacks control, this belief persists even when circumstances have altered so that it does become possible to assert oneself. As Seligman (1990) has documented, optimists do better in school and succeed more at life tasks. One's optimistic feelings of control over what happens to oneself as a student are strongly related to school success.

Assertive behavior can be learned, as Alberti and Emmons (1990) have demonstrated, and can be taught by teachers who invite dialogue and expression of different viewpoints in the classroom and who respect the students' right to express these viewpoints. Class activities that stress moral reasoning, democratic decision-making, and cultural appreciation

have been strongly advocated by Bennett and Novak (1981), Berman and LaForge (1993), Kohlberg (1969), Kohlberg and Turiel (1971), Lappé and DuBois (1994), Lickona (1991), Novak (1994), Wood (1992) and others. Many teachers have used such activities to encourage students to explore their own values, rights, and responsibilities.

Teachers can also encourage assertive behavior in their students by teaching them how to express themselves in socially acceptable ways without aggressing against others or denying others' rights. Some children learn to assert themselves early, as evidenced by the words of a little girl, overheard on a playground: "Just because I don't know how to jump doesn't mean that I always have to turn the rope!" Significant differences exist between assertion and aggression. Both teachers and students benefit when they understand these differences and employ assertion rather than aggression in interpersonal relationships. When students are encouraged to assert themselves in socially acceptable ways, their feelings about themselves and their abilities are likely to improve along with their academic performance.

A way to encourage student assertion is to teach students how to avoid or bypass roadblocks to learning. A big problem for many students, especially those who are highly anxious, is what to do when they do not know the correct answer. In oral reading, a student who does not know a word will usually stammer, stutter, and suffer painful pauses until the teacher or another student supplies the answer. Much of this effort is counterproductive and can sometimes be avoided if the teacher invites students to jump over the difficult problem and keep going. In oral reading, for example, the student can bypass the unknown word by replacing it with the words *hard word* and keep going. In a multiple choice test, the student can be told to select an option and move on. The important thing for a student is not to get blocked or hung up on an endless regression that often leads to lowered performance and self-confidence.

One final method useful in enabling students to assert themselves is to show them that going from something to something is much easier than going from nothing to something. By getting started, even if the start is poor, students begin their journey toward improvement and quality outcomes. Contrary to the standard advice that "If it's worth doing, it's

worth doing well," encouraging students to do things poorly, at least in the beginning, may be helpful. Doing things well results from first doing things poorly.

Investing

The third factor identified by the *Key* research is the creative part of self-concept-as-learner: *investing*. This factor encompasses student willingness to speculate, guess, and try new things. Students who score high in investing seek out things to do in school without the prompting of extrinsic rewards such as tokens, gold stars, grades, points, or praise. Their reward appears to be the activity itself. Teachers can encourage students to invest themselves in learning by posing open-ended questions.

Open-ended questions do more than require students to regurgitate known facts. Open-ended questions are varied and interesting and ask students to interpret meanings, give opinions, compare and contrast ideas, or combine facts to form general principles. Here are a few examples: What would it be like if we were all born with only two fingers on each hand? What if the South had won the Civil War? What if the earth's axis shifted five degrees? What if the supply of oil was exhausted? What if a license were required to have a child? What if the world became a one-party democracy? Or, even more simply, "What is justice?" "Loyalty?" "Happiness?" "Truth?" Such questions can stir student imagination, create excitement in the classroom, and encourage all students to invest themselves in the discussions. Asking provocative, open-ended questions is an excellent way to summon student investment in learning, particularly when the questions are followed by sufficient wait-time. Dependably inviting teachers use a variety of methods to encourage investing. Some of these techniques are presented in Appendix A.

Coping

Coping, the fourth and final factor identified by the *Key* research, indicates how well students seem to be meeting school requirements. Students who score high in this area apparently possess an image of themselves as able and willing to meet school expectations. They believe in their own academic ability and take pride in their classroom performance. They usually pay attention in class, do their work with care, finish

what they start, and expect success from their efforts. Students who score high in coping have discovered and use an important tool of learning: reading. They often pursue reading independently, even when it sometimes interferes with other school activities.

Coping is another name for school success, a subject emphasized throughout this book. What has not been sufficiently emphasized is that no single factor is more relevant to feelings of coping than the act of coping itself. By successfully coping with school expectations, students develop a sense of competence. "I know I can spell," an elementary school student wrote. "I got a good note one time." This sense of competence is a significant part of positive self-regard.

The feeling of competence gained through doing something that works is particularly valuable for children in the elementary grades. When children are successful at leading a class activity, giving a weather report, passing out material, collecting milk money, taking the roll, delivering a note, or storing playground equipment, they are using learned skills to do things that work.

Things that work in higher grades include planning and preparing a complete dinner in home economics, plotting a lot in math class, changing spark plugs in auto repair class, reading a French menu in a foreign language class, or executing a double reverse in football. One student described the process of learning something that works as follows:

> *My first two years at school I was terrible at physical education. "Any girl can kick better than you," I was told. I was always picked last for kickball teams because I could not kick the ball into the air (a firm rule was no grounders). On one particular day in third grade, my teacher, who was sitting with another teacher watching the game, saw that I was soon about to take my turn and undoubtedly kick grounders until I was out. This lady (all six feet of her) called me aside and showed me how to kick under the ball. When I got up to kick, the ball sailed in the air! I'll always remember that teacher who took the time to show me that I could do something that works!*

Any honest success experience, no matter how small or in what area, helps students discover that they can cope with life's expectations.

There are times, of course, when students are not coping and it is necessary to point out their errors. But teachers should not view this as an inconsequential act. Pointing out mistakes, as Dewey believed, "should

not wither the sources of creative insight. Before individuals can produce significant things, they must first produce" (cited in Hook, 1939, p. 19). As Elkind (1981) indicated, the stress from fear of failure makes it difficult for children to take the risk of learning. In the classroom, this means that to do things well, students must first *do*. Dependably inviting teachers recognize that experience emerges from inexperience, and that learning is a process of trying things out and finding what works and what does not.

Rather than focusing on mistakes and criticizing poor performance, teachers who are dependably inviting encourage students to feel confident in coping with errors and overcoming them. One high-school girl told how this was accomplished for her: "I was being auditioned for a part in our high-school musical. I was very nervous and worried about getting the part. At the end of my song my voice cracked and I thought my acting and singing days were over. The director looked at me and smiled, saying 'Let's just hope you hit that note on opening night.' It was definitely the warmest feeling I've ever experienced." When students understand that making mistakes is normal, expected, and understandable, they can develop positive and realistic self-concepts as learners.

The four factors of the *Florida Key*—relating, asserting, investing, and coping—identify techniques that teachers can use to enable students to develop positive self-concepts as learners as well as to encourage academic achievement.

Summary

Chapter Six has highlighted the importance of the person in the process. Four basic areas of functioning were presented: being personally inviting with oneself, being personally inviting with others, being professionally inviting with oneself, and being professionally inviting with others. The successful educator is one who artfully blends and synchronizes the four areas and can thus sustain the energy and enthusiasm of the long-distance inviter. The chapter concluded by identifying practical strategies for inviting school success built around the four dimensions of the *Florida Key*: relating, asserting, investing, and coping. Chapter Seven will present two models for next century schools.