

Glasser's Choice Theory and Purkey's Invitational Education— Allied Approaches to Counseling and Schooling

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*The like views of two illustrious "William's"—William Glasser, M.D. and
William Watson Purkey, Ed.D.—are presented and compared.*

The Theories and Theorists

The most difficult problems are human relationship problems. Technical problems such as landing a man on the moon, are child's play compared to persuading all students like John [who chooses to do nothing] to start working hard in school or helping all unhappily married couples to improve their marriages. Difficult as they may be to solve, however, relationships problems are surprisingly easy to understand. They are all some variation of 'I don't like the way you treat me, and even though it may destroy my life or your life, or both our lives, this is what I am going to do about it.' (Glasser, 1997, p. 598)

Whether a self-perception is psychologically healthy or unhealthy, beneficial or lethal, people cling to their learned self-perceptions, as a drowning person clings to a straw, and act accordingly. It took a long time for people to get where they are, it will take time for them to change. As we explained earlier, it is important for helpers to 'hold their point.' (Purkey, 1990, p.17)

Dr. William Glasser, founder and president of the William Glasser Institute in Los Angeles and author of *Reality Therapy* (1965), *Schools without Failure* (1969), *Choice Theory* (1998), *Identity Society* (1972), *The Quality School* (1990), and scores of other best selling books, articles and monographs, is most famous for his contri-

butions to psychiatry and elementary/secondary school reform.

Dr. William Watson Purkey, co-founder of the International Association for Invitational Education (IAIE) and Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, is also best known for his contributions to school reform as well as counselor education. Dr. Purkey is also a prodigious author: his most notable works are *Inviting School Success* (Purkey & Novak, 1996), *The Inviting School Treasury* (Purkey & Stanley, 1997), and *Invitational Counseling* (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). Dr. Purkey's (2006) newest book is *Teaching Class Clowns (and What They Can Teach Us)*.

Purkey and Glasser have applied their theory and practice equally to classrooms – elementary and secondary as well as to personal therapeutic counseling. Purkey emphasizes the *perceptual tradition* and self-concept theory. Purkey's idea of *understanding things from an internal point of view* is akin to Glasser's thinking and acting under one's own control. Purkey's self-concept theory highlights that there can be no *out there* without what is being experienced and decided *in here*. This is analogous to Glasser's teaching clients and students to understand the choices that they themselves make.

Both Purkey and Glasser cite William Powers' (1973) *Behavior- The Control of Perception* as a seminal influence. Purkey and Schmidt (1990) explain that a person's behavior is based on his or her perceptions and every person behaves in a way that makes the most sense to him or her at a

particular moment. Purkey calls this our *perceptual world*. Correspondingly, Glasser (1998) writes of a person's *quality world* - the *pictures in our head* - to which we turn to try to satisfy our needs. Essentially, both Glasser and Purkey believe that we perceive the world looking for people or things that will satisfy what we want. Glasser writes that all we do from birth to death is *behave*. Glasser's *total behavior* consists of acting, thinking, feeling and one's physiology. We can modify (choose) our thinking and acting and in so doing improve our lives for greater happiness.

External control is very simple. In a relationship it is a belief that what we choose to do is right and what the other person does is wrong. Husbands know what's right for their wives and wives for their husbands. The external control attitude, I know what's right for you, is what people driven by power use when they are in an unhappy relationship. One or both may use it but even if only one uses it consistently it will eventually destroy that relationship. As I said, we are social creatures. We need each other. Teaching everyone the dangers of external control and how it can be replaced with choice theory, is the heart and soul of a successful public mental health program. (Glasser, 2005, pp. 20-21)

Human behavior is always a product of how people see themselves and the situations in which they are involved. Although this fact seems obvious, the failure of people everywhere to comprehend it is responsible for much of human misunderstanding, maladjustment, conflict and loneliness...Since persons behave in terms of their personal perceptions, effective helping must start with the helper's understanding of the nature and dynamics of perceiving. (Combs, Avila, & Purkey, 1978, p. 15)

Positive Self-Concept

Dr. Glasser and Dr. Purkey are humanists. They

seek, find, encourage and applaud development of the most positive characteristics in people whether the person is student, disabled individual, teacher, counselor, parent, peer, therapist, school secretary, school bus driver and so on. For both, the key element is creating and maintaining *success*. Dr. Glasser and Dr. Purkey together are both similar to and different from behaviorists. For the most part, they disregard the practice of analyzing and coming to grips with past history as a requisite precursor to change. Focusing on the *present*, they lay the groundwork, adjust the environment, and teach/encourage *thinking, behaving and acting* which result in better decision-making, productive behavior, success and ultimate happiness. They are different because they do not endorse the practice of external control (S-R) psychology, i.e. those beliefs and techniques promulgated most familiarly by Pavlov, Skinner, and Lovaas. (An exception would be when these concepts and methods are applied to individuals with severe neurological disorders including Per-vasive Development Disorders/Autism Spectrum Disorders.)

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Central to both Glasser and Purkey is the development of an individual's self-esteem. *Self-concept, self-worth, self-image* and *self-esteem* can be used interchangeably to define a person's or student's thoughts, opinions, attitudes and perceptions about his or her own capabilities and successes. Self-concept is often viewed as the basis for action, interaction, behavior and decision-making in most of life's situations. Correspondingly, both stress the qualities of good relationships. Glasser (2005) writes of the *seven caring habits*: supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting and negotiating differences. Habits which destroy relationships are criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, and bribing or

rewarding (to control another). Likewise, for Purkey, good relationships are built and maintained by perceiving others as capable and valuable and responsible while relationships are harmed by demeaning, devaluing, and insensitivity to others.

Both Glasser and Purkey believe that school

success depends upon the degree to which a student's self-concept is *positive*. Success is defined as doing well academically, behaviorally and socially. Therefore, students who choose to behave in ways which provide rewards, success, and acceptance by others are said to have a positive self-concept or *success identity*.

Table 1. Comparison of Selected Nomenclature in Counseling.

Glasser-Choice Theory/Reality Therapy	Purkey-Invitational Guidance & Counseling
Survival	Security
Love & belonging	Belonging; positive relationships
Freedom & fun	Dynamic self-concept; self-as-doer
Power	Self-actualization
Seven caring habits	Trust, respect, optimism
Seven deadly habits	Intentionally or unintentionally disinviting

As an example, an application of theory into practice is found in a school for students with disabilities in Central New Jersey (Zeeman, 2002). During its forty-two years of delivering services, The Midland School program has been based upon developing and enhancing self-esteem in students with multiple disabilities as a prerequisite to academic learning and social skill development. From the moment of student disembarkation from the morning school busses one senses joy and anticipation of a new day. Each smiling face conveys this message. The school's therapeutic milieu reinforces this perception throughout the day. Interactions between students and staff are a critical element in this process. The staff greets all students by name frequently throughout the day when passing in the hall or transitioning to another instructional period. These "greetings" often expand to a one to two minute conversation about something relevant to the student's recent experiences, interests or accomplishments at home or in school. Guidance and support are provided in a proactive, protected atmosphere and even when there is a discipline problem, no privileges or opportunities are ever removed or lost. Weekly psychological counseling and crisis intervention were carried out by a certified Reality Therapist.

Many comparable applications of Choice Theory to special education settings are described in Litwack & Renna (1999).

Building on Strengths

The concept of "mastery" is critical to both Purkey and Glasser and correlates with Brooks' (1999) *islands of competence*—identifying areas where a student excels or experiences achievement. Throughout a school day, student's strengths rather than deficits should be highlighted.

Glasser's *Quality School Teacher* paradigm is **SESIR**: **S**how what to do...**E**xplain how the objective is achieved...**S**elf-evaluate/Evaluate to see where there can be improvement...**I**mprove what you are doing...**R**epeat until the objective is fully or partially achieved. For example, at The Midland School, student peer tutors, interns, volunteers, and teaching associates work with the teachers to provide consistent support, direction, redirection, over-learning, and practice. All the focus is upon having the student experience mastery.

Purkey and Novak (1996) write that *schools*

have personalities just like people do. A school's personality is determined by the five "P's:" *people* (the entire school staff), *places* (the physical environment and upkeep), *policies* (rules and codes), *programs* (community outreach, counseling, daily and extracurricular activities, parent involvement), and *processes* (how things are done). For example, several years ago the Linwood Middle School of the North Brunswick New Jersey Public Schools evidenced low staff and student morale and performance had been unsatisfactory. The principal decided to join IAIE and to learn and apply invitational education techniques. He initiated an open door policy to his office and met with

every staff member. All policies and procedures were free for discussion. There was a dramatic change from *boss management* to *lead management*. Even laughter increased perceptibly about the building. Cultural diversity, rather than being a source of divergence, became celebrated. Trust between student and staff grew significantly. For example, a middle school girl finally had enough confidence in her counselor to seek help extricating herself from an oppressive gang situation. Not only was the school change in a positive direction, but the school and district won the IAIE *Annual Inviting School Award*.

Table 2. Comparison of Selected Nomenclature in Education.

Glasser-Choice Theory/Quality School	Purkey-Invitational Education/Inviting School
Lead-managing teacher	Intentionally inviting teacher; democratic practice
Quality work	Investing; striving toward fulfillment
Warm, supportive classroom environment	Relating; light-hearted teachers
Self-evaluation	Coping; positive self-regard
Students perceive teachers as "on our side"	Personally inviting with students
Work is enjoyable	Cheerleader; celebrate effort

People, according to Purkey, is the area of greatest import. Students seek assistance and grow through interactions with people (particularly teachers) throughout their young lives. Purkey says that no matter how difficult the situation presents itself, do not give up. *Never give up* is also a Glasser principle. One of Glasser's theoretical basic needs-- *belonging*-- is fulfilled when, in a warm and supportive environment, we work hard for those we care for. He goes on to say that, another basic need-- *fun*-- is fulfilled when a student works hard for a person he enjoys and with whom he laughs.

Purkey and Schmidt (1990) write of *respect*, *trust*, *optimism*, and *intentionality*. Respect means that teachers, counselors, and students

have a relationship based upon valuing one another, acting responsibly, and being treated with dignity. Glasser says that students relate best to teachers whom they respect and who value them. Both caution that intimidation or coercion (Purkey's *disinviting* and Glasser's *bossing*) is inimical to achieving a meaningful, successful educational experience. Purkey reminds us that being *intentionally inviting* as a teacher or counselor assists the student in reaching *boundless potential* just as Glasser sees it as a means to achieving a Quality School experience. Glasser (1993) writes "the better we know someone and the more we like about what we know, the harder we will work for that person." (p. 30)

Dr. Glasser and Dr. Purkey are humanists. They seek, find, encourage and applaud development of the most positive characteristics in people whether the person is a typical student, disabled student, teacher, counselor, parent, peer, therapist, school secretary, school bus driver and so on.

Conclusion

Many of these extraordinary similarities demonstrate how two great scholars, developing parallel philosophies, have influenced social science, psychology and education. A principal or teacher creating a Quality School or an Inviting School will be providing success, happiness, and intellectual growth for most students. Counselors or therapists trained in and applying Reality

Therapy or Invitational Counseling will usually see positive results and improvement in the quality world, perceptions, thoughts, actions and lives of their clients.

I believe that to be happy, we must figure out how to get along well and connect with the important people in our lives; that is, to connect to the extent we want with friends, spouses, lovers, children, parents, teachers, bosses and co-workers...the absolute minimum for happiness is one strong, satisfying connection. (Glasser, 2001, p. 5)

Relationships are like gardens, they require cultivation and nourishment if they are to survive and flourish. Our own well-being is dependent on the well-being of those we love and who love us in return. To realize our relatively boundless potential we depend on the continuing nurturing of fellow human beings. (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990, p.45)

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