

Inviting School Success: Invitational Education and the Art Class

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“Effective teaching may be the hardest job there is”
(William Glasser)

It is acknowledged, nationally and internationally, that Invitational Education is actively practised in many schools. However, there is a paucity of articles describing the relationship between Invitational Education and specific disciplines at the elementary and high school levels. As such, this article attempts to address this shortcoming by discussing how and in what manner Invitational Education is applicable to the Art classroom. Applying the principles of Invitational Education, the Art classroom can become a classroom that not only facilitates students in achieving their potential but, in addition, create a positive and enhancing learning environment for all students and teachers.

Introduction

Invitational Theory/Education is a student-centred approach to the teaching-learning process. Founded on the ideas and concepts of the Perceptual Tradition (Combs, 1962; Combs, Richards, & Richards, 1988), Cognitive-Behavioural Approach (Ellis, 1970; Meichenbaum, 1974) and the Self-Concept Theory (Jourard, 1968, 1971; Rogers, 1969; Purkey, 1970), invitational theory affirms the “power of human perception and its impact on self-development” (Schmidt, 2004, p. 28).

Invitational Education is a theory of practice for communicating caring and appropriate messages to facilitate individuals to achieve to their full potential as well as for identifying and changing those forces in schools which would defeat and destroy potential.

Invitational education has four main interrelated areas which when working together and at a balanced level can create an optimally inviting and positive learning environment and experience for the whole student (physical, social, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual). The four main areas are the Four Assumptions, Five P’s, Levels of Functioning, and Four Dimensions. These areas all have an impact on the way in which teachers can enhance the learning process and development of their students in a positive way, and in our view is particularly applicable and important in an Art room.

Invitational Education is applicable particularly to the Arts as the aim of an Art class is to excite and stimulate curiosity and inquiry into artworks, as well as self-assessment of their own processes (of art making) and ideas. As Maaka (1999) states a major aim of a teacher is to “create classrooms that ex-

cite curiosity and inquiry, and invite self-assessment” (p. 6) and an Art room should not only be a place of art production and theory but a place of inspiration and resource for the young artist.

The aim of an Art room for students is to not only learn the theories of artists, artworks and the processes, but to experience art for themselves, learn and discover through practice and experimentation, freedom of choice and expression of opinions and ideas without ridicule. An Art room should be a place where young artists (students) can come and discover art for themselves, gaining their own independent and individual meaning from the information presented to them and their own experiences of life and art. “Independence, creativity, self-reliance and self-evaluation are all encouraged, and children take responsibility for their own learning and development” (McInerney & McInerney, 2006, p. 472). An Art class should be more than learning about different artists and artworks, it should be a place of personal discovery, where students can grow and develop their beliefs, opinions and ideas in a caring and supportive environment.

The Art Class and the Four Assumptions

The four assumptions of invitational theory give a consistent and structured stance from which teachers can then create and maintain an optimally inviting environment. The four assumptions are:

- Respect; People are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly.
- Trust; Education should be a cooperative, collaborative activity where process is as important as product.

- Optimism; People possess untapped potential in all worthwhile human endeavours.
- Intentionality; Human potential can be realised by creating and maintaining places, policies, processes and programs, specifically designed to invite development, and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, both personally and professionally (Purkey & Novak, 1996, pp. 50-55).

Respect, trust, optimism and intentionality should be a part of every school, and important to every teacher in their actions as this is the basis of a good student-teacher relationship and helps to promote positive behaviours, self-concepts and environment, consequently heightening the students achievements (Lawrence, 2006; Purkey & Novak, 1996), as “No aspect of education is more important than the feeling on the part of the teacher that the individual student is important, valuable, and *can* learn in school” (Purkey, 1970, p. 52).

An Art room needs to be a place of trust and respect as this is an important part of an artists work for if they do not feel as though they can trust or have respect for and of their peers, then they are less likely to fully express themselves in their artworks and discussions. Art is about personal expression, a class might all be doing the same task or painting, but will all end up with a different ‘answer’ by producing a work with an individual style, colour, mood and interpretation. However, before this work can be produced the students need to feel as though they can trust and have respect for those around them. “Research shows that people need to feel a strong sense of trust, in an environment of empathy and

understanding to self disclose” (Gregory as cited in Jarvis, 2006, pp. 138-139). This can be reinforced and lead by the teacher through talking about their own personal art practices and experiences, showing their own work and presenting their opinions and ideas, inviting the students to comment, critique, discuss and debate these. “Teachers must make an extra effort to communicate to these young people a feeling of trust, positive regard and respect” (Purkey, 1970, p. 53). By showing oneself to the students demonstrates trust and respect for them, it opens an avenue for them to do the same.

It is important to reinforce that art is not about your ability or lack of ability to draw things realistically, but it is about personal expression of opinions and ideas in a creative or imaginative way- expression is an ability of all. This can be demonstrated to the students by presenting them with a range of artworks from the ‘child-like’ and ‘pop-art’ to the ‘high art’ of the Renaissance, as well as through art theory and history. As teachers we need to place equal or in some cases more emphasis on the processes used, developed, or discovered, as well as the effort put as this is just as important as the product produced (Jarvis, 2006; Maaka, 1999; Purkey, 1970).

Intentionality is a key to art, this is an environment where you are invited to express yourself in a personal, unique and creative way. This can be assisted or denied by the scope of the task, the layout of tables and chairs, artworks around the room, the tone of voice used, body language, and many other factors. However, by intentionally conducting ourselves in a positive and optimistic way, setting up the room to fit the task as re-

quired, and being able to adapt the task and allow for individual interpretation promotes the growth and discovery of potential and consequently a work of art. Cogan (as cited in Purkey, 1970) states, “students with warm and considerate teachers produced unusual amounts or original poetry and art” (p. 53).

The Art Class and the Five Ps

Invitational education has identified five key areas that exist in every environment and contribute to either the success or failure of each individual. The five areas are:

- People; People are an integral and important factor to life and experiences. People create a respectful, optimistic, trusting and intentional society.
- Places; Physical environment, classrooms, offices, hallways, common rooms, libraries, playing fields, etc, all have an impact on us and how we feel. Making changes to the physical environment offers opportunity for immediate improvement.
- Policies; Codes, rules or procedures, written or unwritten used to regulate the ongoing function of individuals and/or organisations. They communicate a strong message regarding the value, ability and responsibility of both groups and individuals.
- Programs; Maintain a wider scope of the needs of people by ensuring that programs are monitored and achieve the goals for which they were designed without negative labelling and stereotyping.
- Processes; Focuses on the way in which the other four P’s are conducted. The manner in which things are done and the atmosphere created (Purkey & Novak, 1996, pp. 6-7).

The Five P's are a combination of elements that work together to democratically and ethically invite the realisation of human potential (Purkey & Novak, 1996). People is the most critical of the five P's as the dynamics of a whole group or individual can be influenced by just one person (be it students, teachers or parents).

People can influence in either positive or negative ways and it is the teacher who is the role model to their class of the standards of behaviour and treatment they expect. As Purkey (1970) notes "that the teachers beliefs in himself and his students are crucial factors in determining his effectiveness in the classroom . . . those who are more accepting of themselves tend to be more accepting of others and perceive others as more accepting" (pp. 45-46). By believing and demonstrating a positive, accepting and open-minded attitude through our actions and interactions to and with others, it will consequently influence those around us in a positive way, and this is critical for any classroom, particularly those that require personal expression, like art. This can also take the form of the way in which we speak to the students, as well as our non-verbal actions (body language and facial expressions) as "the effect of the teacher's non-verbal behaviour is a particularly powerful influence" (Lawrence, 2006, p. 74) and can often contradict our verbal messages. There is a strong need for teachers to be consciously aware of this mixed message as "the style of teacher in that interaction helps develop children's understandings" (Jarvis, 2006, p. 34).

However, people are not only influenced by others, but by their physical

environments. The classroom "environment can be used to give reality, relevance and practical experience to learning" (Jarvis, 2006, p. 65). The classroom is the easiest thing to change to give a positive influence. An Art room should be a place of inspiration and resource for the young artist. This can be created through filling the room with natural light, posters of key art terms (such as the elements and principle of design) and artists of a variety of periods and styles, student's work of all grades and ability levels, as well as having some resources and equipment out on benches or tables at all times. By having a bright and warm environment it invites those who enter it to share in the experiences of the class and others by being able to view work produced and have the access to materials reinforces the positive messages, such as 'you are welcome in my class, feel free to pick a pencil or paint brush and express yourself'.

This environment is not possible without policies to reinforce and monitor these ideas. The policies employed in a class can be written or unwritten, and contribute to the running of the class and the overall atmosphere in a positive or negative way. As Bill Rogers notes (as cited in McInerney & McInerney, 2006) that "the classroom and school-wide rules should not be imposed arbitrarily from above, but should evolve from commonly held values" (p. 265). By maintaining positive policies and including students in the creation of policies about the operation of the class, such as getting out equipment or materials and their purpose or use, treatment of others, responding and asking for help and so on, it makes those involved feel as though they are respected and have a sense of personal 'ownership' which

“will help develop a positive classroom climate and that peer encouragement to uphold them is preferable to teacher enforcement alone” (McInerney & McInerney, 2006, p. 267). The policies employed in an Art room need to allow and invite the student to express their opinions free from fear of judgement or ridicule, as well as experiment with the different materials and resources in new ways, while maintaining a safe environment.

The programs that we introduce into our classrooms or have established are often influenced by policies of academic achievement levels, or for those with ‘special needs’. This can impact on the way in which we teach students who are apart of these programs, as well as the way in which they view themselves and others. Maintaining and making sure that programs that are introduced within the class do not discriminate or label the students in a negative way, as students see it as “more humiliating to be placed in ‘special classes’ then to remain in the regular class and receive low grades” (Purkey, 1970, p. 41). Art is a class in which the program topics and artworks need to be sensitively chosen as some artworks can reinforce negative messages and stereotypes and others can reinforce positive messages and stereotypes. The works or periods chosen to study need to be sensitive to the needs of the class in regards to self-concepts, religion, stereotyping, meaning, images/representation (too shocking or age inappropriate) and any other known factors of the individuals of the class.

The processes by which we monitor and maintain the other four P’s functioning is crucial. By maintaining a positive attitude, cooperative, caring and respect-

ful environment, with programs and policies to suit the needs of the students the teacher is “in a much better position to build positive and realistic self-concepts in their students” (Purkey, 1970, p. 46) and consequently increase their levels of involvement and achievement (Jarvis, 2006; Kleinig, 1982; Purkey, 1970).

The Art Class and the Levels of Functioning

Invitational theory not only focuses on the people, places, policies, programs and processes it identifies four levels of functioning in both personal and professional living. This provides a way to monitor the five P’s and assist in applying Invitational Education by allowing the teacher to consciously assess their own behaviour and the influences that this is having on their students and self-correct this behaviour or attitude. The four levels of functioning are:

- Intentionally Disinviting; A negative and toxic attitude designed to demean, defeat and dishearten, both verbally and non-verbally.
- Unintentionally Disinviting; Accidental discouragement and undermining of others, both verbally and non-verbally.
- Unintentionally Inviting; Accidental support and encouragement. Generally function in effective ways, however cannot explain or determine why it is effective.
- Intentionally Inviting; Seek to consistently display the assumptions of Invitational Education. (Purkey & Novak, 1996, pp. 55-60)

The invitational stance determines the level of personal and professional functioning. By being aware of the dif-

ferent levels of functioning we are able to self-assess how we are projecting ourselves to others, and have the means by which to change.

Being intentionally inviting involves consciously maintaining the Four Assumptions and the Five P's in such a positive and intentional way to create an environment to which each individual is graciously called upon to develop physically, intellectually, socially, spiritually, and emotionally (Lawrence, 2006; Purkey & Novak, 1996; Purkey, 1970). This requires constant re-evaluation of the way the environment and in which the people, programs and policies interact, assessing their positive influences and potential negative influence in the teaching-learning environment.

The Art Class and the Four Dimensions

The main goal of Invitational Education is to encourage individuals to better their lives both personally and professionally. The four dimensions are:

- Being Personally Inviting with Oneself; Need to invite ourselves before we invite others. Need to view ourselves as able, valuable, responsible and open to experience. It also means taking care of one's health (mental and physical).
- Being Personally Inviting with Others; Requires that the feeling, wishes, and aspirations of others be taken into account.
- Being Professionally Inviting with Oneself; This begins with ethical awareness and a clear and efficient perception of situations and oneself. It is important to maintain and continue to expand your knowledge base.

- Being Professionally Inviting with Others; Requires careful attention to the policies introduced, programs established, places created, processes manifested and the behaviours exhibited. It involves honesty and treating each person as an individual. (Purkey & Novak, 1996, pp. 104-111)

The four dimensions focus on the both the personal and professional aspects of people's lives and maintaining a positive and inviting stance in all of our endeavours. As Rosenthal and Jacobson (as cited in Purkey, 1970) noted from their research that "the teacher, through his facial expressions, postures, and touch, through what, how and when he spoke, subtly helped the children to learn" (p. 48). This is influenced by what the teacher believes about himself and his students, both from personal and professional experiences and knowledge, and expressed in verbal and non verbal ways (Moss, English, Ferguson, Godinho, & Hay, 2004). As a teacher, we need to be constantly conscious of our attitude and things that might influence our behaviour on a particular day or in a particular situation or context as we can unintentionally disinvite rather than intentionally invite (personally and professionally).

Through being personally and professionally inviting with oneself we open ourselves to new ideas, opinions, processes, procedures and experiences which help to shape and develop our own self-concept and beliefs which is reflected to those around us by both verbal and non-verbal actions. Being personally and professionally inviting with others, not only allows them to get to know you on both a personal and professional level, but also creates an op-

portunity for others to accept and become personally and professionally inviting with you. In the words of Sidney Jourard (1964):

You can know me truly only if I let you, only if I want you to know me. If you want me to reveal myself, just demonstrate your good will . . . your will to employ your powers for my good, and not for my destruction. (p. 5)

Conclusion

Invitational Educational is a promising basis for any school or classroom as it focuses on the development of the student as a whole (physical, social, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual), rather than pure academic achievement and conformity to a set of rules. The Art class is a place where this is highly applicable as creating art is a personal journey, and a discovery of individual and personal opinions and ideas, and without an inviting, trusting, and caring environment this is unattainable, and therefore students creativity and work will be inhibited.

Learning can only be done by the student and it is the teacher's role to create the conditions for a productive, interpersonal and free learning envi-

ronment. "The more we understand ourselves, the more likely we are to understand those whom we are privileged to teach" (Jarvis, 2006, p. 37) and consequently are able to create an environment that not only promotes learning in a positive way, but develops the students self-concept and ideas in a positive and constant manner. This requires the teacher to be constantly reassessing their personal beliefs and views, being conscious of their verbal and non-verbal cues, the layout of the class, the styles of activities, kinds of rules established, the types of feedback and assessments given, as well as the time they spend with each student. By creating an environment that is positive and inviting to all who enter it can result in higher attainment and achievement levels among students and teachers (Lawrence, 2006; Purkey, 1970), and as Lawrence (2006) notes "that where the interaction is positive the child achieves more and is better behaved" (p. 67). It is our jobs as Art teachers to make this class an inviting and caring environment in which students can find comfort and inspiration (which is a key to self-expression and realisation) and by practicing Invitational Education we can achieve this and help our students develop as a whole person.

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