

## **Adhering to the assumptions of invitational education: a case study**

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*South African schools are constantly faced with evolving needs and challenges characterised by change. As in other countries, schools in South Africa encounter pressure to 'produce more for less' and at the same time to achieve certain goals and standards. Transforming schools into inviting institutions requires a paradigm shift among the principals and staff. The International Alliance for Invitational Education views invitational education (IE) as a means of changing classrooms into inviting places and altering the climate at schools. I focus on the way in which a primary school in Gauteng province, which received the prestigious Invitational Education award for being inviting, succeeded in adhering to the assumptions of IE. In a qualitative investigation I explored the principal and educators' perceptions of the way in which the school adhered to the four IE assumptions.*

### **Introduction**

South African schools are constantly faced by evolving needs and challenges characterised by change. As is the case in schools in other countries, schools in South Africa encounter pressure to 'produce more for less' and at the same time achieve certain goals and standards (Robinson & Carrington, 2002:239). To transform schools into inviting institutions where responsibility is shared requires a paradigm shift from both principals and staff (Wheatley, 1999:6). This change encourages joint participation and a leadership style that creates an interactive, inviting working environment (Sallis, 1997:78).

The International Alliance for Invitational Education considers invitational education (IE) a means of transforming classrooms and climates in schools (Asbill & Gonzalez, 2000:24; The Concept of Invitational Education, 1998:38). Changing schools to become intentionally inviting for the sake of increased learner performance means developing collaborative school cultures that focus on the continuous development of educators with a view to creating conducive learning conditions for all learners (Bernauer, 2002:90; Fullan in Robinson & Carrington, 2002:240). Since school culture powerfully affects teaching practices and learner outcomes, it is necessary not only to consider the way educators learn but also to reflect on the way the school influences learner performance and educators' practice (Robinson & Carrington, 2002:240). Educator learning means that educators are learning and developing new knowledge, skills and attitudes for the sake of enhancing learner performance in schools (King & Newman, 2001; Robinson & Carrington, 2002).

IE is not an accidental incident. It is regarded as the product of conscious and well-planned thinking, as well as regular evaluation, which is based on a strong commitment to certain basic values about people and how they are educated (Purkey & Aspy, 2003:147). The ultimate aim of IE is to create an

entire school environment that intentionally invites success for everyone in the school (Egley, 2003:58; Paxton, 2003:23).

To change schools into becoming intentionally inviting requires the sustained development of collaborative work cultures in schools (Bernauer, 2002: 90; Fullan in Robinson & Carrington, 2002:240). Like other school reform initiatives, IE is not a quick-fix or simplistic recipe for success (Dupey, 1996: 37). Nevertheless, IE constitutes a significant approach in which education can be restructured and constantly improved for the benefit of both the individual and society.

The main research question examined was: How has a Gauteng primary school, which received the prestigious IE reward for being inviting, succeeded in adhering to the assumptions of IE? To examine this question, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of IE.

### **Invitational education (IE)**

IE is founded on both the perceptual tradition and self-concept theory and acknowledges the power of human perception and its impact on self-development (Kok & Van der Merwe, 2002:1; Novak & Purkey, 2001:9; 10; Schmidt, 2004:27). The perceptual tradition endeavours to understand human behaviour, including the ways in which people usually view themselves (Purkey & Siegel, 2003:27). Of all perceptions, self-concept is the one that affects personal significance and identity the most (Purkey & Siegel, 2003:32). Self-concept includes a person's beliefs about his or her personal existence (Novak & Purkey, 2001:11).

IE is a theory of practice that aims to create and maintain a human school environment that intentionally and cordially invites individuals to realise their relatively boundless potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavour (Friedland, 1999:15; Novak & Purkey, 2001:15; Purkey & Aspy, 2003:148). Its purpose is to make schooling a more exciting, satisfying and enriching experience for everybody involved in the education process (Purkey & Aspy, 2003:147).

More than a hundred schools throughout the world have already received the International Invitational Education award for successfully adhering to the IE assumptions in their schools. These schools are predominantly in the United States of America (USA) and Canada (IAIE State/Country Coordinators, 2004:32-34). Currently three schools in South Africa have received this prestigious award.

The IE approach includes four basic assumptions about communicating appropriate messages that are intended to enhance the growth of human potential (Friedland, 1999:15; Kok & Van der Merwe, 2002:1; Novak & Purkey, 2001:9; 10; Purkey & Strahan, 1995:1). These assumptions, which are rooted in the ideals of democracy and also provide purpose and direction (Brinson, 1996:83; Purkey & Aspy, 2003:149; Schmidt, 2004:27), are:

1. *Respect*: People are able, valuable and responsible and should be treated accordingly.
2. *Trust*: Education is a collaborative, co-operative activity.
3. *Optimism*: People possess untapped potential in all areas of development.
4. *Intentionality*: Human potential is best realised by places, policies, processes and programmes that are specifically designed to invite development and are designed by people who are personally and professionally inviting with themselves and others.

These above elements of respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality provide a consistent 'stance' or framework from which to create healthy human environments (Purkey & Aspy, 2003: 149). In conclusion, IE is both a philosophy and a set of actions aimed at developing a school climate that is inviting, i.e. a place that intentionally uplifts people so that they realise their personal and collective potential (Friedland, 1999:14; The Concept of Invitational Education, 1998:39).

### Research design

As the aim was to gain insight into the application of the IE principles in a primary school in Gauteng province, a qualitative research design, particularly a case study design, was considered the most suitable. This study included the exploration and description of a 'bounded system', a particular primary school in Gauteng (Merriam, 1998:12; Fouche, 2005:272). The case study design assisted the researcher in better understanding the social phenomenon (IE) in its natural setting, with an emphasis on understanding the views of the participants (Merriam, 1998:11; Meadows, 2003:398). Field research was therefore undertaken within the habitat of the subjects (Schurink, 1998:240). The study did not aim to explain behaviour in terms of universal laws, but rather to explore the meanings and intentions that underlie everyday actions regarding the application of IE assumptions.

Purposive as well as convenience sampling was used for the study conducted at the school, which has been implementing IE for more than 10 years. Data were collected mainly through semi-structured interviews with the principal and two focus group interviews with beginner teachers and experienced teachers held on the school premises during 2004. The principal helped to identify suitable participants for the focus groups. The richness and quality of the data may increase in focus groups since members are stimulated by the perceptions and ideas of others within the group (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 186). The respective interviews lasted approximately two hours. To ensure reliability participants were invited to provide feedback on the transcribed interview data.

After the participants had been briefed on the focus of the inquiry, interviews were conducted to explore the staff's adherence to the philosophy of IE. The following question was put to the participants: "Why do you think your school has succeeded in sustaining the spirit of IE after all these years?" The interviewer directed and encouraged dialogue by asking reflective and probing

questions. Because the primary school is an Afrikaans-medium school, all interviews were conducted in Afrikaans and later translated into English, with due regard for the idiom of the language. The researcher also took field notes during the interviews as a back-up.

Bracketing (placing predetermined ideas in brackets) was used to code the data obtained from the different interviews and field notes when reading through the transcripts and field notes for the first time (Poggenpoel, 1998: 337). Meaningful comments were clustered into the four categories (identified assumptions) and units of meaning were classified into these major categories (Poggenpoel, Nolte, Dörfling, Greeff, Gross, Muller, Nel & Roos, 1994:132). Subcategories also emerged from each major category. A literature study was conducted to determine what the study could add to previous research on IE and school practice.

The criteria for ensuring the trustworthiness of the study were credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 93). The tape-recorded interviews and verbatim transcriptions ensured a precise reflection of the participants' beliefs and trustworthiness. This simultaneously provided for dependability, which includes consistency and accuracy of findings. Conducting of a personal interview with the principal and focus group interviews with teachers allowed for data triangulation because data were gathered from different groups by means of different methods.

The primary school in the study received the prestigious Invitational Education award from the International Alliance for Invitational Education in 1993. This urban school is a well-resourced Afrikaans-medium school offering approximately 70 extra-curricular activities. Approximately 1 400 learners attend the school, which is situated in a middle-class community. Most families fall into the middle-income group. There are a few affluent families as well as a number of poorer families that have been exonerated from paying school fees. Various fundraising projects, including contributions from sponsors, the tuck shop, the second-hand clothing shop and the cafeteria, are used to swell the school's funds. The current principal was appointed in 1982. He was responsible for implementing IE in his school prior to receiving the award in 1993. The Education Department funds the salaries of 34 academic and two administrative staff members as well as two workers, while the school pays the salaries of 20 academic and ten support staff members and four workers.

## Findings

Certain major categories and a number of subcategories were identified in the data analysis. For the purposes of this article, certain subcategories were highlighted.

1. **Respect:** People are able, valuable and responsible and should be treated accordingly. Subcategories included: 'Treating people with respect' and 'Empowering other people and the self'.
2. **Trust:** Education is a collaborative, co-operative activity. The subcategories identified were: 'Being a family'; 'Taking the people with you'; and 'Another

day for you and me in Paradise’.

3. Optimism: People possess untapped potential in all areas of development. The subcategories were: ‘The principal’s expectations’; ‘Inculcating learner leadership’.
4. Intentionality: Human potential is best realised by places, policies, processes and programmes that are specifically designed to invite development and are designed by people who are personally and professionally inviting with themselves and others. Subcategories included: ‘Transmission of IE’; and ‘*Testimonials* for learners’. These findings and subcategories are discussed here.

**Respect:** People are able, valuable and responsible and should be treated accordingly. A democracy stresses the inborn worth of all people, believes in their self-directing power and emphasises the value of personal and social accountability (Novak & Purkey, 2001:12). The same is true for inviting schools because they share responsibility that is based on mutual respect and they expect positive outcomes.

#### *Treating people with respect*

An attitude intended to inculcate respect among all role players was evident from the interviews. An experienced teacher referred to replacing fear with mutual respect. She said:

*“We [staff and learners] no longer fear the principal. In the past if you were walking on the veranda and the principal came towards you ... we were scared of him.”*

Teachers now “*treat the children with respect, a factor that also came from the principal*”. For another experienced teacher, this was a “*complete mind shift from the old way*”.

Another experienced teacher believed that “*... it was easier for younger staff to do so [to make a mind shift]. You have to earn respect. You cannot automatically expect a child to respect you*”.

The principal maintained that sincerity in this regard is crucial because “*children are clever enough to see immediately that here is something that doesn’t come from the heart. It has to be a passion*”.

The importance of individual learners is demonstrated *inter alia* by the name tag system for learners. The principal explained: “*We are now putting the child’s name on all their clothing, so that children are called by name.*” He felt this was necessary as the school had become so big (1 400 learners) and was still growing. The principal acknowledged that Eugene Cloete, who was responsible for one of the school’s staff development programmes, had first drawn attention to the practice of learners wearing name tags. The principal felt that learners at the school should know each other. “*A child’s name is important.*”

Wearing name tags supports an invitational stance and endorses the assumption that every learner in the school is valuable (Schmidt, 2004:27).

Respect essentially starts with self-respect that builds integrity, uniting an individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions into a new cycle of personal empowerment (Dreher, 2002:207). Self-respect leads to respect for others, which is also a principle of harmony found in other traditions such as the African tradition, where *ubuntu* is important (Dreher, 2002:208). Respect manifests itself in well-mannered behaviours such as courteousness, graciousness and politeness (Purkey & Siegel, 2003:7).

Shared responsibilities, based on mutual respect, are indispensable in inviting schools (Friedland, 1999:15). This implies that all programmes, procedures and policies at schools should be analysed to ensure that respect is inculcated (Friedland, 1999:15). Moreover, authentic respect has the potential to empower people (Dreher, 2002:209). A beginner teacher explained this as follows: "*The way in which he [the principal] deals with us makes us want to deal with the children in the same way.*"

#### *Empowering other people and the self*

For a principal to be able to empower staff effectively, it is necessary to identify their needs. Personality tests for the staff were applied at this school as a basis for determining the training needs of the staff. According to one experienced teacher, educators also had an opportunity to evaluate themselves "*to see where you stand, how invitational you are*".

When appropriate training courses are identified "*the school pays for it [sic]*". The principal explained his own commitment to ongoing training, saying "*I realised that if the leader does not grow then the school will also not grow*". He explicitly conveyed his commitment to empowering staff:

*"As Maxwell said, if I should one day leave the school and the school does not strive, grow and flourish, then I am greatly to blame because I did not develop the people ... My first task is, I am going to develop the people ... I have now realised that I will have to stay ahead with development ... I think you also have to know where your people want to develop ... I think one has to identify people's strong points and apply and use them there and further empower and train them in the principles that are a passion for them so that they can be worth something to you there. I believe quite deeply in this matter. You know, to light that fire if it is not in a guy's heart!"*

A beginner teacher confirmed the principal's view: "*He is concerned about each one of us. He gave us each a report in which he highlighted everyone's strong points.*"

The principal was of the opinion that the empowerment of staff was allowing him ample time and opportunity to be "*busy with other visionary thoughts*". The way the school coped with "*weak teachers*" was also explained by an experienced teacher:

*"You know with this attitude of Sir's. You may also have weak teachers but they never last long at our school. One sidelines oneself, because he does not check up on us."*

As regards his empowerment of parents the principal stated:

*"I really developed parents in such a way that there are lots of other people who have skills that are much better than mine and that have surpassed me. But this does not worry me because those parents are better assets for the school."*

Since there is ample opportunity for "everybody to shine on one level", it is possible to expect recognition of or feedback on quality work and commitment. A beginner teacher said that the way in which the principal "sees you and thanks you for what you do just gives a person a boost".

Besides providing each staff member with a personal testimonial written by the principal, the staff also circulated a blank form for each staff member to "write something positive" about colleagues during a staff meeting. One experienced teacher claimed that it was a wonderful feeling to "get that list of 50 good things that people said about you".

The professional growth of principals is a requirement for empowering others at the school. The principal explained this as follows:

*"I have always tried to pass it [leadership] off by saying that the principal is not that important. But after Maxwell's presentation my whole way of thinking changed. It was the first of his 21 laws of leadership: 'The law of the lid' that actually gave me a wake-up call because I realised that if I did not develop and grow then my school wouldn't either. So I realised what an unbelievable responsibility I had to continue growing and developing ... I also committed myself even more to really developing my worthiness for leadership even further."*

The principal felt that it was merely his role to guide staff to recognise their own development needs. Once he had done that he expected members of staff to take responsibility for their own development. According to an experienced teacher, people have to have some insight into the nature of their own needs: *"I think this is the source of anything, you have to realise within yourself that you are not measuring up."*

Effective management of people has been identified as a key element of best practice at many leading organisations. Effective management must include assessment of training needs, provision of appropriate training for staff and the empowerment of staff members (Oakland & Oakland, 1998:190; Porter-O'Grady, 1998:5). Literature supports another assumption of IE, namely, that empowerment and teamwork comprise the expression of trust between partners (Porter-O'Grady, 1998:5; Sabo, Barnes & Hoy, 1996:596).

Education also requires the participation of all staff members and learners so that they feel empowered (Friedland, 1999:145). Respect is the core of a co-operative relationship which recognises each individual's ability to accept, reject or negotiate invitations for his or her development (Novak & Purkey, 2001:12). Interpersonal communication, however, enhances an at-

mosphere of trust in which people share information and work together to promote organisational effectiveness (Dreher, 2002:209).

**Trust:** Education is a collaborative, co-operative activity

Trust is viewed as an attitude of confidence in the capabilities and responsibilities of ourselves and others (Purkey & Siegel, 2003:12). It is also vital for effective IE because it acknowledges the interdependence of human beings. Furthermore, collaboration and co-operation serve as catalysts in enabling people to work together in an inviting culture (Purkey & Siegel, 2003:106).

### *Being a family*

IE advocates a 'family model' where schools can develop more successfully through teamwork (Purkey & Strahan, 1995:4; Rhodes & Houghton-Hill, 2000:433). In a family, adults and children learn from one another (Purkey & Siegel, 2003:127). The notion of working together as a family was also described by the principal:

*"I think it is probably a joint effort. You have to reach out to your family ... It is also joint decision making. If we do planning, strategic planning, then we involve the parents, the children and the staff ... So I think perhaps that that is the secret, that it is really a family matter. The Lord has brought together a whole lot of us and a variety of unbelievable talents ... I have only one or two talents and other people have others and so we link up and form a unit that I think presses forward."*

According to the principal the involvement and contribution of learners in the family model *"makes the task much lighter for the teachers"*.

Learners are invited to express their perceptions and experiences of the school to improve school practice. An experienced teacher explained the learners' contribution:

*"Every year the children get a form to complete to anonymously say what they think is positive and negative at the school ... They are straight. They will say it."*

The staff consider the learners' suggestions and comments seriously.

As is the case in real families, the relationship with learners continues even after they have left the school. This was explained by the principal:

*"Many schools let us know about learners' achievements, which is nice but we try to keep an eye on the newspapers and magazines ... I also personally follow up on outstanding achievements ... I want to say personally that we are proud of you."*

This continued relationship, initiated by learners, has become a *"huge problem"* according to an experienced teacher. She said:

*"They [learners] come and sit here the entire day and expect to get the same attention and everything ... Those children say that there is no one who cares about them in the high school and they just feel that they have nowhere to go, no one who they can talk to ... They feel they are alone in the wide world."*

The members of the 'family' in an inviting school view the school as a co-operative institution that values collaboration and co-operation (Purkey & Siegel, 2003:127). They share successes and difficulties. In an inviting family special care is taken of the member who needs support. To effectively function as a family it is important to involve all appropriate role players in the school's functioning.

### *Taking the people with you*

Helping staff to feel empowered and enabling them to develop a sense of pride in and ownership of their work and the school produces educators who are optimistic, involved, committed, able to cope with diversity and willing to perform independently and responsibly (Hardy & LeibaO'Sullivan, 1998:464; Tracy, 1998:13). When the energies and talents of all members of staff are engaged in the pursuit of a school's goals, amazing results can be realised. The principal explained his view on taking 'the people with you':

*"If you are not able to take the people with you, you are going to lose contact with your people. So you have to make sure that you do not move too far ahead of them. I think you first have to ensure that you are among them and then motivate them in such a way that they do something that they almost don't know themselves they are doing. I think one has to be able to make them excited ... so that they can begin to believe in themselves and do things for themselves. It doesn't help if three or four or five of us are excited about something and we don't take everyone with us. But first it is important to be among them to do the thing with them and to take the spade and dig."*

The school uses the following strategies to ensure that people work together:

- *Mentoring:* Introducing staff to IE requires mentoring. A beginner teacher explained:
 

*"When we came here we had a teacher who was our mentor and who told us we were doing invitational education. That is the rule of the school. Look we do things in this way."*

Mentors can help beginner teachers to learn and understand teaching practice (Cockburn & Haydn, 2004:54).
- *Benchmarking:* In developing inviting skills among staff, the school also uses benchmarking. An experienced teacher referred to their visit to an inviting school in the Cape Province. Therefore, best practices in other organisations are uncovered, adopted, implemented and improved when pursuing benchmarking (Frazier, 1997:102; Camp & DeToro, 1999:12.2; Swift *et al.*, 1998:144).
- *Professional development:* The principal explained the importance and necessity of professional development for staff in their school. Educators will not change the way they teach, unless they learn new ways to teach (Sparks & Richardson, 1997:3; Evans, 2002:128).

The creation and sharing of knowledge and values are vital for effective leadership (Sparks, 2003:58). It is through such leadership that principals

form collegial relationships with staff (Edwards, Green & Lyons, 2002:69). Moreover, Egley (2003:66) regards the relationship between the principal and the educators as supremely important. This relationship helps to enhance staff collaboration and a participative leadership style that will create an inviting school environment. Furthermore, collaboration adds to the growth of a positive school culture that is committed to the creation of better learning opportunities for all (Robinson & Carrington, 2002:240; Rhodes & Houghton-Hill, 2000:431). In fact collaboration can improve quality, efficiency and job satisfaction in the school (Swift, Ross & Omachonu, 1998:82; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999:62).

*'Another day for you and me in Paradise'*

Resnick and Glennan (2002:12) believe that principals have the primary responsibility for creating a learning culture for teachers and learners. The principal's passion for a positive teaching and learning culture in the school was explained by one experienced teacher:

*"Sir has this thing he always says in the staff room, that song of Phil Collins, "Another day for you and me in Paradise". He loves to say that. Because then he says you are in paradise ... You know it's terrible at some schools."*

One experienced teacher explained their school culture:

*"Christianity plays a big role, because if you have God's love in your heart, you are inviting. You actually don't look at the children through your own eyes. I think that makes a big difference. The principal always tells the children he loves them very much."*

According to her at a recent assembly he looked at the children and said: *'I love you so much'*. She added that the principal's love for his children was his weak point.

The interviewees agreed that the principal's attitude and collegiality are requirements for an inviting school culture. As one experienced teacher said, *"The culture of a school, it comes from the principal"*.

Another experienced teacher elaborated on the staff's experience of collegiality in the school: *"Here the staff are so happy. We never get tired of each other's company, we meet in the afternoon but it makes us good for the children."*

She referred to the fashion parade that staff had held recently for learners and parents of the school and how everybody had been delighted that the staff were *'prepared to expose themselves in this way'*. Afterwards they had received numerous letters of appreciation from parents and learners.

The school climate is enhanced and total school settings are positively changed where principals choose to behave in an inviting manner (Campbell, 1997:27; Asbill & Gonzalez, 2000:25). Furthermore, when schools are confident about what staff members and learners can become, they create an environment that nurtures everybody to develop their unlimited potential (Friedland, 1999:16; Kitchens, 1998:38).

Optimism: People possess untapped potential in all areas of development

Invitational staff members commit themselves to the continuous appreciation and development of everybody involved in education practice (Novak & Purkey, 2001:14). In this regard Purkey and Siegel (2003:15) explicitly state: "What people desire most is to be affirmed in their present worth while summoned cordially to realise their potential".

#### *The principal's expectations*

The effect of the principal's expectations was explained by an experienced teacher:

*"You know he [the principal] expects only the best from you and then you don't want to disappoint him. He sees the best in you. I think this whole thing permeates [the school]. You can't make a school invitational if it doesn't come from above."*

She also felt that members of staff and learners "are motivated by reward rather than punishment. Everyone flourishes if they receive recognition".

The principal explained the school's commitment to rewarding learners:

*"We are not producing losers and we have also committed ourselves to give prizes to all the children at prize giving. We also look at the learner's character; each learner must have something beautiful in him. We then reward him for that beautiful quality."*

Most motivational procedures recognise the value of positive reinforcement. This theory is based on the law of effect, which believes that those activities that meet with pleasant outcomes tend to be repeated, whereas those activities that meet with unpleasant outcomes tend not to be repeated (Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield, 2002:4; Champoux, 2000:144). However, Reasoner (2004:18) expresses the reservation that positive recognition needs to be deserved and not given generously without good reason.

The principal's expectations of learners also include the development of learner leadership in the school.

#### *Inculcating learner leadership*

Developing learner leadership in the school commences in Grade 1, as an experienced teacher explained:

*"In Grade 1 we choose a new class captain every week. They [learners] don't know that it is alphabetical. For them it is: I am class captain. That is very important. You know a mother told me: My child sleeps with the class captain's badge on his pyjamas. They [class leaders] get a beautiful certificate on which it says that he was class leader. They want it very badly."*

The need to create leaders and the school's strategy were explained by the principal:

*"Everyone has to be a leader in his life, whether he is a father or a mother. We are producing, teaching leaders, we are not producing losers. We now have about 25 committees that function in the school. They [learners]*

*choose one or two or three committees. We [the staff] look at the child's gifts and then we divide them up in the direction of their interests. I wish I could tell you what unbelievable work the children are now busy with. The social committee, for example, collected foodstuffs for poor people and warm clothes before winter. It's a very exciting system. It's a big step forward in a new direction to develop everyone. It's not just ten or twenty children as it worked in the past in South Africa."*

Inviting staff members believe that learners have merely begun to discover their social, intellectual and physical potential. However, if staff are to be optimistic about what individual learners can become, they need to create places, policies, programmes and processes to nurture everybody to develop their potential.

Intentionality: Human potential is best realised by places, policies, processes and programmes that are specifically designed to invite development and are designed by people who are personally and professionally inviting with themselves and others. Purkey and Siegel (2003:19) regard intentionality as vital for IE because it is the element that gives any human activity purpose and direction. Inviting staff members intentionally work to advance learning environments characterised by both purpose and direction (Friedland, 1999:15; Novak & Purkey, 2001: 15).

#### *Transmission of IE*

Inculcating an invitational atmosphere, according to an experienced teacher, begins with the principal, who *"transmits it to the staff"*. The principal also thought that it was his *"task to get people who are perhaps negative to also be positive"*.

She referred to the B+ (Be positive) signs in the school which reminded everyone to be positive. *"Many people become negative about South Africa's principles but how will that help you, you will not grow."*

Another experienced teacher also emphasised the vital role of the principal *"who takes the lead with the vision"*. As principal he has to *'buy into it'* otherwise others will not take ownership. His leadership has motivated them and *'opened their eyes'*. The inviting culture in the school is of such a nature that a beginner teacher believed it to be *"the rule of the school"*.

The principal described the way in which he inculcated the IE culture in the school. He did it by means of the management by wandering around philosophy (Frase & Hetzel, 1990). He explained this as follows:

*"It [wandering around] is much better than class visits because you see lots of things that occur naturally and that you can attend to. Say there is a tap leaking here, there is a window broken, there are chairs lying around ... It's this principle of Paul Kruger [a well-known President of South Africa before the establishment of the Union of South Africa]. I have now encouraged the people to keep their eyes open and to become involved. You can't let it be just one person's responsibility. It is it a collective responsibility."*

As regards this principle the principal said:

*“When walking around in the school, you notice ‘small things’ ... It’s worth a great deal to children if you can at that stage put a hand on their shoulder and say, ‘What’s going on?’ Such little things can sometimes make a world of difference to children’s lives.”*

The principal also referred to places in the school that have changed.

*“Apart from the tuck shop, we have a food kiosk that just sells food to the children. This gives children an opportunity if they are busy with sport at school to sit down there and eat in peace. We try to provide a service for the children.”*

A new administration block was built because *“there were too many people and we really wanted to give the people enough space to be able to do their work effectively”*.

An experienced teacher also described the importance of people in making the school inviting.

*“It’s the people who make the place inviting. The people make the gardens — the people make the place friendly. So if the people are right then all the other things are there.”*

The researcher’s visit to the school revealed that the buildings, classrooms and gardens were in excellent condition.

Accepting and introducing the IE culture may not always be easy for experienced teachers who have become comfortable with their practice. One experienced teacher referred to her experience: *“It was actually really difficult for me in the beginning, because it is different to my nature. I am really more militaristic.”* It required her to *“literally make a mind switch”*. After implementing the IE principles she was of the opinion that *“it is actually an easier way of teaching”*. She believed that with IE *“You have a chance to ... bring the children ‘back’. Children who are not academically strong become a little stronger.”*

When principals choose to behave in an inviting manner, the school climate is enhanced and school settings are positively changed (Campbell, 1997: 27; Asbill & Gonzalez, 2000:25). This necessitates a clear vision as well as effective communication of the school’s vision (Swift *et al.*, 1998:29; Smith, 1999: 221). The creation of a clear vision by the principal supports staff and shows them that they are making a meaningful contribution (Smith, 1999: 221). IE also strives to develop an inviting school climate so that people can attain their individual and collective potential (Purkey & Strahan, 1995:2; Friedland, 1999:14). One such example is the practice of issuing ‘testimonials’ to learners.

### Testimonials for learners

A testimonial system was introduced in the school whereby teachers wrote a testimonial for each learner during the third school term. This testimonial should portray the self-worth and dignity of each learner and should not refer to any academic, cultural or sports achievements. For a beginner teacher it is a real challenge to identify the *‘fruits of the spirit’*. *“You have to look at the*

*child with new eyes because you are looking for the beautiful qualities in the child."*

An experienced teacher and a beginner teacher, respectively, gave the following examples:

*"Stefan, you know it means so much to me when I come in the morning and I see your beautiful smile ... Just something that will make him feel good for the rest of his life."*

and *"I will always remember your beautiful big eyes that sparkle so much every day"*.

A beginner teacher explained that these testimonials were an 'eye opener' when she realised what they meant to the children.

*"The gifts and notes that you get back don't come from the competent children in my class. And you know that child blossomed because of the fact that you noticed her."*

An experienced teacher added, *"... they [the learners] are much nicer to each other because they try to be positive the whole time"*.

Invitational staff members intentionally work to advance learning environments characterised by both purpose and direction (The Concept of Invitational Education, 1998:39; Friedland, 1999:15). They realise that "everything and everybody in and around schools adds to or subtracts from the education process" (Novak & Purkey, 2001:15).

## **Conclusion**

Changing a school culture is an ongoing process in invitational education. Although certain outcomes are measurable, the changes that have the most impact are often intangible. Purkey and Aspy (2003:154) make the following comment:

The changes that truly matter are those that make school a more decent, caring, and humane environment for human beings.

The creation of an inviting school requires the skilful application of the four basic assumptions of IE to a real context though the commitment of various role players (Novak & Purkey, 2001:47). Neglecting to creatively and continuously do so may hinder the process and even eventually destroy the IE spirit at the school.

This study provided a brief overview of the way in which the primary school in the case study had succeeded in applying the four basic IE assumptions and sustaining this effort. With regard to the applicability and usefulness of IE in other school contexts in South Africa, the principal maintained, *"You shouldn't decide before the time that it [IE] wouldn't work. It's better to say let's test it [IE], work hard and see how it works"*.

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