

The influence of educational leadership in inviting schools in the United States of America

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Recent conceptions of educational leadership demonstrate a move away from traditional authoritarian models of decision-making towards more collegial views on role relations between principals and their staff. Many educators maintain that Invitational Education (IE) represents one such conception by providing a structured, systematic educational delivery system and a strategy to create a school environment of caring, support and trust. This qualitative study looked at the role of principals and staff in four schools in the Scott County district and one school in Fayette County in Kentucky and five schools in New Mexico in the United States of America. These schools were selected for investigation because they had been awarded the prestigious Inviting School Award from the International Alliance for Invitational Education.

Keywords: Invitational Education; professional development; educational leadership; qualitative study; inviting schools

Introduction

In the past it was assumed that only top managers had the competence to make decisions and that staff were hired to do what managers instructed them to do (Frazier, 1997:21; Ericson & Marlow, 1996:121; Robinson, 1998:14). There was an emphasis on direction and control, a preference for mechanisation and the treatment of staff as an extension of the machine.

More recent conceptions of educational leadership demonstrate a move away from authoritarian models of decision-making towards more collegial views on role relations between school principals and staff (Blase & Blase, 1997:139; Ericson & Marlow, 1996:125). The all-powerful control of a principal is giving way to a situation where members of staff are encouraged to make meaningful decisions in schools (Guaspari, 1999:61; Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999:41). According to Fullan (Sparks, 2003b:57), the single factor common to effective change is that relationships are enhanced. When this happens, schools improve (Sparks, 2003b:57). If relationships are poor, ground is lost (Sparks, 2003b:57). Invitational Education (IE) seeks to assist people in their relationships with others (Brinson, 1996:91). Moreover, the relationships of the adults who inhabit a school have more to do with the school's quality and character and with the accomplishments of its learners than any other factor (Novak & Purkey, 2001:16).

Principals who transform schools as organisations into something more participative and inviting always go through a shift in their thinking about their staff members and themselves (Wheatley, 1999:6). This transformation encourages shared responsibility and a leadership style that will create an interactive, inviting working environment (Sallis, 1997:78). Education must involve staff so that they feel empowered (Friedland, 1999:145). Constantly controlling staff is contrary to their developmental needs and creates a disinviting climate (Friedland, 1999:15; Brinson, 1996:85). Furthermore, where leadership is shared, collaboration can be more effective than an organisation dominated by a single individual (Swift, Ross & Omachonu, 1998:82). Collaboration is given an essential component of IE which is a radical departure from the traditional paradigm (Drejer, 2002:209; Novak & Purkey, 2001:16).

This article describes the way in which inviting schools have succeeded in leadership and staff collaboration with a view to creating an inviting school environment. The main research question of the study described in this article is: What roles do the school leadership and the staff play in sustaining inviting schools? To understand this question, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of IE.

What is Invitational Education (IE)?

The philosophy of IE has been applied in more than a hundred schools throughout the world, predominantly in the United States of America (USA) and Canada (IAIE State/Country Coordinators, 2004:32-34; Purkey & Strahan, 1995:5). IE is a theory of practice that emanates from the self-concept theory and the perceptual tradition (Kok & Van der Merwe, 2002:1; Novak & Purkey, 2001:9,10). It is deliberately directed towards broader goals than learners and their performance

alone (Purkey & Strahan, 1995:1). The aim of IE is to create an entire school environment that intentionally invites success for everyone in the school. Figure 1 illustrates the various components of IE.

IE consists of certain key assumptions about communicating caring and appropriate messages intended to encourage the development of human potential (Friedland, 1999:15; Kok & Van der Merwe, 2002:1; Novak & Purkey, 2001:9,10; Purkey & Strahan, 1995:1). These assumptions of IE provide a guiding theory for school development, although Novak and Purkey (2001:16) regard IE as a practice that is still emerging. The five assumptions are:

Respect: People are able, valuable and responsible and should be treated accordingly

Respecting others means to value the essential nature of human beings (Drejer, 2002:209). It starts with self-respect that builds integrity, uniting an individual's thoughts, feelings and actions into a new cycle of personal empowerment. Self-respect leads to respect for others, which is a principle of harmony in many traditions (such as *ubuntu* in African tradition) (Drejer, 2002:208). A change in a person's attitude can begin a new cycle of respect, transforming the energies in and around people (Drejer, 2002:207). The power of respect enables everyone to become a change agent (Drejer, 2002:208).

Trust: Education is a collaborative, co-operative activity

Education should involve all staff members so that they all feel empowered (Friedland, 1999:145). Constantly controlling staff is contrary to their developmental needs and creates a 'disinviting' climate (Brinson, 1996:85; Friedland, 1999:15). Interpersonal communication enhances an atmosphere of trust in which people share information and work together to promote organisational effectiveness (Drejer, 2002:209).

Optimism: People possess untapped potential in all areas of development

In order for principals and teachers to be optimistic about what each learner can become, they should create places, policies, programmes and processes to nurture everybody — allowing them to develop their unlimited potential (Friedland, 1999:16; Kitchens, 1998:38).

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 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; Novak & Purkey, 2001:15).

Care: The process is the product in making

According to IE, means and ends are interrelated and cannot be separated in behaviour (Novak & Purkey, 2001:14). In IE care is the con

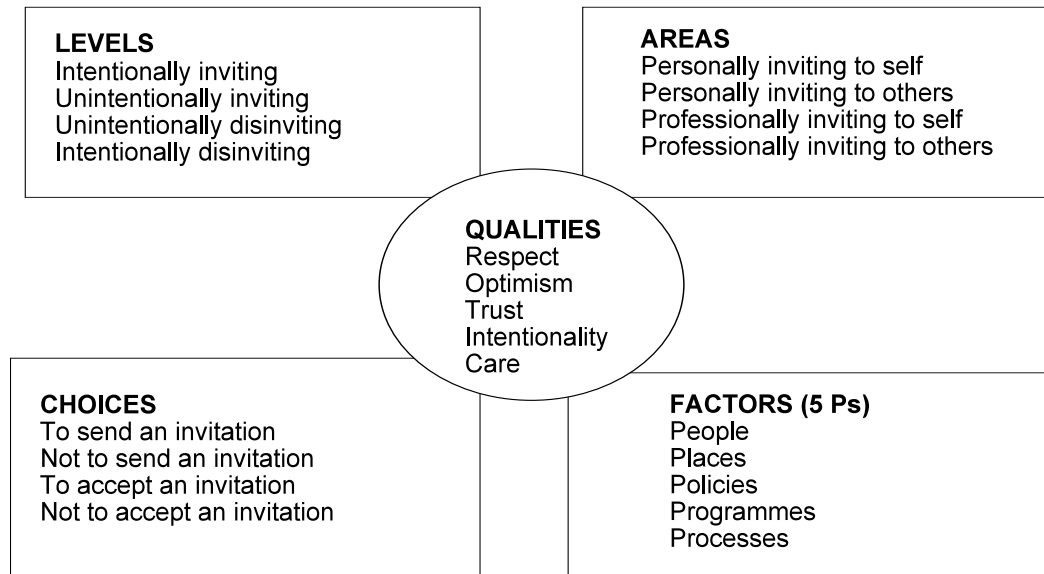


Figure 1 Components of the model for Invitational Education

tinuous desire to fuse means with ends. Furthermore, Patterson and Patterson (2004:75) show that educators and learners are most productive when they work in a caring, supportive and trusting environment.

As mentioned before, IE is a philosophy and a set of activities aimed at promoting a total school climate that is welcoming, i.e. a place that intentionally energises people to realise their individual and collective potential (Friedland, 1999:14; Purkey & Strahan, 1995:2; The Concept of Invitational Education, 1998:39).

Research design

A qualitative research design was deemed most suitable for this study since it allowed the researcher to gain insight into the perceptions of principals and teachers on the factors influencing the realisation of IE in their schools. Field research was undertaken within the habitat of the subjects (Schurink 1998:240). The research did not aim to explain behaviour in terms of universal laws, but rather to understand the meanings and intentions that underlie everyday action.

Sample

Purposeful as well as convenient sampling was used for the study. Initial contact was made with a prominent invitational education consultant in the United States of America (USA) who identified five inviting schools in New Mexico. She also advised contacting a board member of the International Alliance of Invitational Education who then assisted in identifying inviting schools in Scott County and a school in Fayette County in Kentucky, USA. The stated aim of Scott County is to become an inviting school district. Permission to visit inviting schools in the district — two elementary schools (School A and School B) and a ninth grade school (School C) — was obtained from the Superintendent of Scott County, Kentucky. He identified and informed the schools about the proposed visit. The International Alliance board member identified an inviting high school (School D) in Fayette County, Kentucky which the researcher contacted electronically. The invitational education consultant provided the contact numbers of the five inviting schools in New Mexico: two early childhood centres (School E and School F) and three elementary schools (School G, School H and School I). Thereafter, e-mail contact with the principals of these five schools was used to make the necessary arrangements for the study.

The schools typify many of the problem areas in American schools (Shipengrover & Conway, 1996:4). All the schools have a

diverse population of students in terms of income, culture and national heritage. Family income ranges from substandard poverty level to high income.

Guba's (Poggenpoel, 1998:351) model for trustworthiness was used to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. The four strategies to ensure trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Poggenpoel, 1998:351).

Data collection

Data were mainly collected through semistructured interviews with principals and beginner and experienced teachers. These comprised the following participants:

- *All principals of the nine schools*
- *Teachers at each school*

The principals were asked to identify experienced and beginner teachers. Depending on the school's programme, interviews were conducted with individual teachers or in focus groups. In Kentucky the following interviews were conducted: School A (three beginner teachers and two experienced teachers in focus groups); School B (three experienced teachers in a focus group); School C (one beginner teacher and two experienced teachers in a focus group); School D (a focus group interview with two beginner teachers and two interviews with experienced teachers). In New Mexico the following interviews were conducted: School E (two separate interviews with experienced teachers); School F (an interview with an experienced teacher); School G (two separate interviews with experienced teachers); School H (an interview with an experienced teacher); School I (an interview with an experienced teacher).

- *An IE consultant in New Mexico*

A general question opened the interview: Which factors influence the effective sustainment of Invitational Education? Depending on the response to the question, interviewees were prompted to elaborate on the role of leadership and staff in their school.

The interviews were conducted at the identified schools during April 2004. Principals were interviewed in their offices, whilst interviews with teachers (focus group and individual) were conducted in specially arranged venues. Care was taken not to disrupt classroom teaching. Permission was granted by all participants to take down field notes and to record the interviews on a tape recorder. These notes were expanded by the researcher immediately after completing each inter-

view as a verifying measure. All the interviews were transcribed on a computer.

Data analysis

Data (the transcribed interviews and field notes) obtained from the different interviews were coded using bracketing (placing preconceived ideas within brackets) when reading through the transcripts and field notes for the first time (Poggenpoel, 1998:337). Significant comments were grouped into categories and units of meaning were placed within these major categories (Poggenpoel, Nolte, Dörfling, Greeff, Gross, Muller, Nel, & Roos, 1994:132). A number of subcategories within each major category were then identified. A literature control was conducted to identify the contribution of this study to that of previous research conducted on school leadership and IE.

Results and discussion

This study focused on the particular role played by the principal and staff in sustaining IE in inviting schools. The major categories which emerged from the data were: the principal as the 'face of IE'; the vision of the principal; school culture; 'feeding the teachers'; teachers' attitudes and commitment; working together; and revisiting IE. This focus was triggered by a statement of the IE consultant when she referred to Barth (Purkey & Strahan 1995:4): "The quality of adult relationships within a school has more to do with the quality and character of the school and the accomplishments of students than any other factor".

The principal as the 'face of IE'

The successful implementation of IE depends on how it is modelled by the principal. The particular role of the principal was referred to by various participants. The IE consultant clarified it as follows:

It is more likely to be successful if the principal is highly into it. If the principal is not in favour of it, it is not going to happen at a large scale. The principal can start educating people in IE and can plant seeds to understand IE ... The principal has to continue to model IE ... You can start with places. I started in my office, a tiny little square room. I put bright colours on. I made it my office. People walked by and saw it was different and inviting. I went out of the office and started to change other areas. It was a visual thing that they could see.

The principal of school C elaborated:

As a leader we take teachers to areas they wouldn't normally go. So I am setting an example, I try to demonstrate how to treat people ... I treat teachers in front of students the way I want them to treat students ... I try to be a positive role model, treat teachers with respect, brag on them a lot.

Other principals supported this view with the following comments: "If the leader doesn't do it [IE], there is no way others would do it. What is emphasised gets done." (School D); "The leader is the first and foremost ... she should walk her talk and get [her] hands dirty. They will then respect you more." (Principal, School B); and "If he [the principal] is not first ... [in] modelling IE and demonstrating it, it won't happen. He has to model it. He has to be creative in modelling it" (School A).

The idea of the principal modelling IE is also supported by both beginner and experienced teachers, for example: "It [IE] starts from the top. If they want people to do good things, they should do it." (beginner teacher, School A); and "He [The principal] is the face of the school. He should be the face of IE" (experienced teacher, School A).

In order to model IE, the principal must 'buy into' IE. Participants explained this as follows: "To me the principal is everything, if he doesn't believe in it, nothing happens" (beginner teacher, School A); "Leadership plays the biggest part, because if the leader doesn't think IE is important, others won't. You need someone to spearhead the initiative" (beginner teacher, School D); "The principal is really the pin, he should be fully convinced of IE" (experienced teacher, School G); "If the principal does not back it, IE does not have an

opportunity to bloom" (principal, school F); and "The principal has to buy into IE and has to support it ... if the principal doesn't back it, it won't work" (experienced teacher, School B). The notion of support by the principal when implementing IE was also confirmed by other participants: "Feedback and support are very important. It has to come from the principal" (experienced teacher, School C).

Quality leadership is required for effective IE in schools (Bernauer, 2002:89; Washington, 1993:252; Gerber, 1998:170). Yu, Leithwood and Jantzi (2000:371) recommend that principals provide an appropriate model for staff to follow which is consistent with the values of leaders. Literature confirms the importance of the way in which principals support teachers through the process of change (Sachs, 1999:26; Robinson & Carrington, 2002:239; Brandt, 2003:10; Gerber, 1998:170; Richardson, 2003:401; Professional staff development: A key to school improvement, 1999:388; Somers & Sikorova, 2002:103; Anonymous, 2001/2002:18; Washington, 1993:252). The creation of a vision by principals serves to support staff to understand that they are making a meaningful contribution (Smith, 1999:221).

The vision of the principal

Principals striving towards IE in their schools require a clear vision. The importance of a vision was supported by many participants. The principals of Schools G and E, respectively, explained this as follows:

You have to start with the people. If you don't have a common vision, you won't accomplish your goal ... I always say we don't have a good school because of me, but the principal has to be the key leader in sharing the vision and continuing motivating people towards the vision. The principal has to articulate the vision. I have to walk the talk. I am the head leader of the school. Once you get the people on board, it's shared leadership.

For invitational learning it takes inviting teachers to see the rainbow, to have a dream. You have to see the outcome. You need to have a vision. You have to believe in it.

The IE consultant commented on her previous experience as a principal after redecorating her office to make it more welcoming:

IE starts with a person with a vision and a passion for creating an inviting school ... You can enrol others in the vision ... The next step was to enrol others in my vision ... Don't let nay sayers get you down. There will be teachers who are apprehensive towards IE.

Charisma is the characteristic that describes leaders who are able to exert a profound influence on followers, the school's performance and climate by the force of their personality, abilities, personal charm, magnetism, inspiration and emotion (Dubrin & Ireland, 1993:280; Drejer, 2002:207). Charismatic leadership also provides a vision and a sense of mission which is critical for the implementation of change initiatives (Mester, Visser, Roodt & Kellerman, 2002:73; Professional staff development: A key to school improvement, 1999:388; Richardson, 2003:401). Furthermore, a skill of an effective leader is to inspire people to work more effectively and to obtain ownership (Mahoney, 1997:98). By implication ownership refers to team members experiencing the meaningfulness of their task. According to Kirkman and Rosen (1999:59), meaningfulness, which parallels meaningfulness at the individual level, refers to the team experiencing their task as important, valuable and worthwhile.

The inspirational nature of vision may encourage emotional arousal processes (Yu *et al.*, 2000:370). Moreover, the common mission holds the empowered, autonomous professionals together (Robinson & Carrington, 2002:241). Daugherty (1996:83) believes that for institutions to function effectively, stakeholders should be directed towards a shared vision, goal or objective which is done through both short-term and long-term strategic planning. What is required, however, is an organisational structure and culture that encourage ownership of the work by the 'worker' (Greenwood & Gaunt, 1994:70). The shared values of staff members affect their actions which subsequently have an influence on the school culture (Smith & Coldron, 1999:252; Robinson & Carrington, 2002:241).

School culture

Without effective leadership, efforts to change the school culture will most likely fail (Bernauer, 2002:90). Principals provide an orderly and nurturing environment that supports teachers and stimulate their efforts. The principal of School C explained it as follows:

We [principals] set the tone, set the way, the direction ... I set the example and tone of the school. I'm leading them [the teachers] to places where they don't want to go. Growth is painful. We work together ... I am instrumental in setting the climate/tone and example for teachers. Morale is a big, big component in the school. A little negative talk, negative action of teachers can really pull the school down. I try to be a positive role model.

The principal's key role in setting the tone is also confirmed by the following statements: "The principal sets the whole tune for the building" (experienced teacher, School H); "The principal sets the tone and culture in the building by what he or she believes" (principal, School A); "You need a battery to start it. You also need people who don't mind change. If the principal is not willing, if he doesn't have friendly people in his office, it is difficult. You may take the unfriendly face from the office to the classroom" (beginner teacher, School A); and "I know the principal influences the atmosphere in the school. I take a lot of stress on myself to maintain a positive atmosphere" (principal, School E).

Leadership is overwhelmingly important in establishing a positive environment (Campbell, 1997:27; Drejer, 2002:207). Patterson and Patterson (2004:75) concur that it is the principal's cardinal influence that determines how the dynamics of the school culture develops. Brandt (2003:15) believes that the school culture should be humane, i.e. psychologically comfortable with warm human relationships, and professionally supportive where people have the resources they need and the opportunities to collaborate and learn from others. In addition, a positive, humane school culture is a requisite for all areas of endeavour in schools (Campbell, 1997:28).

Principals earn their position as cultural leaders through credibility, expertise and relationships (Patterson & Patterson, 2004:75). When educators admire, trust and respect principals for their personal and professional values, these principals receive credibility. The school culture is influenced through expertise when educators acknowledge principals' exceptional teaching skills. Principals' ability to influence the school culture through relationships is seen when they 'connect' with educators as colleagues, communicate openly, show trust and confidence in them and share knowledge with them (Edwards, Green & Lyons, 2002:69; Patterson & Patterson, 2004:75).

To 'reculture' schools means to develop collaborative work cultures that focus in a sustained way on the continuous development of teachers in relation to creating and assessing learning conditions for all learners (Fullan in Robinson & Carrington, 2002:240; Bernauer, 2002:90). IE and invitational learning (IL) are maintained by the Alliance for Invitational Education as a means for reculturing classrooms and climates in schools (Asbill & Gonzalez, 2000:24; The Concept of Invitational Education, 1998:38). The IE philosophy aims to promote a total school climate that is welcoming and to create a place that intentionally energises people to realise their individual and collective potential (Purkey & Strahan, 1995:2; Friedland, 1999:14). When principals choose to behave in an inviting manner, the school climate is enhanced and total school settings are positively transformed (Campbell, 1997:27; Asbill & Gonzalez, 2000:25). Principals can also work towards fostering a climate where teachers feel safe and able to work co-operatively and professionally (Edwards et al, 2002:81).

Clearly when principals support change and engender a culture that promotes sharing and mutual support and create structures that encourage collaborative endeavour, learning at the organisational level is much augmented (Lam & Pang, 2003:89). Principals can therefore establish the desired school culture by "feeding the teachers, because they feed the students" (beginner teachers, School A).

'Feeding the teachers'

Throughout the interviews the interaction between the principal and

the staff as well as the importance of teachers in the implementation of IE was stressed. The principal of School E asserted:

The principal, you know, sits in a little office, but they [the teachers] make it happen. In Invitational learning it's about the kids. If we can invite them to learn, my goodness. Here's the deal: not only to attend conferences, but the principal has to see that it's carried out. You have to keep on reminding them.

Other participants also confirmed the importance of 'feeding the teachers': "Teachers are the key people and I feed the teachers and teachers feed the children. They have the most impact. They are behind closed doors. I have to feed the information ... Teachers can nurture the parent community and bring them to school" (principal, School G); "Teachers are the wheels of the programme. It happens in the classrooms. They are the action parts. Their role is very important" (experienced teacher, School G); "It would be impossible to implement IE without the teachers. Teachers have to buy into it" (IE consultant); "Teachers are the frontline" (principal, School D); "The most important thing is teachers. They are not an add-on. They deliver instruction to students" (principal, School D).

Current trends in the principal's leadership show a shift from bureaucratic managerial styles to different leadership styles that reflect human dignity and promote collaboration in decision-making (Campbell, 1997:27; Asbill & Gonzalez, 2000:15). Furthermore, principals can help teachers realise that they are making a difference with learners and foster feelings of efficacy (Edwards et al., 2002:82). There is also a positive relationship between a principal's actions and teachers' affective outcomes such as feelings of trust, respect, job satisfaction, empowerment, higher levels of commitment to organisational goals and perceived principal effectiveness (Bernauer, 2002:90; Campbell, 1997:27; Asbill & Gonzalez, 2000:14; Green & Lyons, 2002:69; Mahoney, 1997:98; Bjork, 2000:26; Edwards et al., 2002:68-69; Yu et al., 2000:370). Mahoney (1997:96) confirms this by stating: "Successful leaders are able to commit people to action." Furthermore, IE can lead to a pattern of beliefs and expectations among all roleplayers in the schools that guide their attitude and behaviour (Brinson, 1996:83; Drejer, 2000:208).

Teachers' attitudes and commitment

A few participants explained the importance of the attitude and commitment of members of staff in the effective implementation of IE.

The attitude of teachers is the biggest thing. If we complain about pay, yes, we don't have enough funds, but we can discuss it without being negative. Commitment is a huge thing. Attitude and commitment go hand in hand. If you have a bad attitude, you are not committed (principal, School C).

The attitude of teachers has to be positive. We were trained to follow guidelines of IE. It was discussed outright, it looked at our attitude ... A willingness to participate is important, a willingness to learn about IE. Just being positive is a major step. There are many things to be negative about (experienced teacher, School A).

Teachers' attitude and commitment are at the centre of change (Ho-Ming & Ping-Yan, 1999:38; Yu et al., 2000:369; Pehkonen & Törner, 1999:262; Blackmore, 2000:3). According to certain studies, there is a strong relationship between how teachers view themselves and how they view others, that is, teachers with a low self-esteem hold a correspondingly low opinion of learners (Trent, 1997:109). Furthermore, Ho-Ming and Ping-Yan (1999:38) believe that programmes directed towards change will be futile without teachers' wholehearted commitment, even if these programmes are well designed and implemented. This implies that principals in schools must be competent to influence teachers' attitudes and commitment to change (Campbell, 1997:27; Yu et al., 2000:369).

Creating a caring and inviting community requires the cultivation of shared values and the development of an appreciation for the value of working together and caring about each other (Robinson & Carrington, 2002:241; Bernauer, 2002:90).

Working together

Collaboration among staff in the school is one of the assumptions of IE. A few of the participants expressed their perceptions of staff working together.

If you have a faculty that don't work together, it's a hard obstacle to overcome. You can't start IE without team-building. Teachers have to know others on a personal level (experienced teacher, School C).

If you don't have teachers who practice what they preach, there will be no faculty involvement. You need enough faculty members to buy into it [IE] to work. It can spread from there (beginner teacher, School D).

Teachers play a major role ... If we become a team, a family, working towards the process, we will make it. Also remember that one apple spoils the barrel ... You need to include and invite everyone. People make the building, not the building the people (principal, School H).

If you are not part of it, have ownership, it [IE] won't work. Everybody should be involved (experienced teacher, School A).

Since teaching can be a 'lonely profession', there should be opportunities for teachers to share their achievements and problems in employing new strategies for change to happen (Robinson & Carrington, 2002:240; Bernauer, 2002:90). Sharing stimulates teachers' reflections and broadens their perspective (Ho-Ming & Ping-Yan, 1999:40; Dixon, 1998:164; Blackmore, 2000:3). W Edwards Deming, the American 'guru' of Japanese management principles, also advocates a team concept that supports the cooperation of staff in order to improve processes and products continuously (Purkey & Strahan, 1995:4; cf. Blackmore, 2000:4). This collaboration contributes to the development of a positive school culture that is committed to change and the creation of better learning opportunities for all learners (Robinson & Carrington, 2002:240; Rhodes & Houghton-Hill, 2000:431). It is well documented that teams can improve quality, efficiency and job satisfaction (Swift *et al.*, 1998:82; Coppersmith & Grubbs, 1998:10; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999:62). The focus is on individuals and teams accepting joint responsibility for the quality of work (Browell, 2000:62). They utilise strengths and complement each other's knowledge and skills, which encourage more effective teaching and enhance ownership of their own professional learning (Robinson & Carrington, 2002:240; Bernauer, 2002:90; Blackmore, 2000:3). One of the most important things that professionals do in successful schools is to learn from one another (Bernauer, 2002:89).

Collaboration as an end in itself should not be the goal, but rather whether staff have added knowledge and contributed towards other people's development (King & Newman, 2001:88; Sparks, 2003b:57; Rhodes & Houghton-Hill, 2000:431). Staff in collaborative schools view each other as a resource with the collective value of providing high quality education for all learners (Robinson & Carrington, 2002:240; Shelton & Jones, 1996:100).

In conclusion, the most powerful predictor of learner performance is the quality of relationships among staff (Barth in Purkey & Strahan, 1995:4). When everybody participates in school transformation, everyone experiences a genuine sense of ownership of the process (Purkey & Strahan, 1995:4). According to Purkey and Strahan (1995:4), 'membership' is a hallmark of an inviting school.

Apart from the aspects described above, the success of any innovation depends on maintenance of the desired culture in the school. Principals should provide support to educators to enable them to continue developing new habits during the implementation dip that reduces effectiveness before the new procedures become routine (Sparks, 2003a:43; Somers & Sikorova, 2002:103; Pehkonen & Törner, 1999:260; Professional staff development: A key to school improvement, 1999:388; Somers & Sikorova, 2002:103; Anonymous, 2001/2002:18; Washington, 1993:252).

Revisiting IE

Receiving the IE award does not mean that the school has 'arrived'. It is even more important after the honour has been bestowed on the

school to demonstrate what it is to be inviting. It implies that all roleplayers should still be actively involved in sustaining the spirit. A few participants mentioned the necessity of maintaining the IE spirit in the school.

Teachers set the example for new teachers. We are lacking it and have to get back to IE to continue with IE. IE has to be revisited ... We have to see if we still have the same vision and mission. Initially we were excited, but we are now several years from that. We don't have the same enthusiasm as before. The spirit may die. If you don't have continuous development, it may die. You have to understand the concept, but you need to have a strong tradition to keep us inviting. Continuous encouragement is needed ... It's human nature to slack off on things. We know what it is to be inviting, but it is not the same as in the beginning. In the beginning we had more discussion, surveys ... to follow through is very important. Don't stop with surveys. Our school was more successful when we were more inviting (experienced teacher, School C).

We need continuous teacher orientation. I miss the hows and whys ... I read it [IE] in the handbook, so I remember it being mentioned, but since then the only time I have heard it was when we sat down as a team. How can I take this even further? It would benefit us all if we go back and revisit IE (beginner teacher, School C).

According to the literature, staff development is most effective when it is a continuous process that includes appropriate training, individual follow-up through supportive observation and feedback, staff dialogues, mentoring and peer coaching (Moore, 2000:14; Richardson, 2003:401; Rhodes & Houghton-Hill, 2000:431; Anonymous, 2001/2002:18; Brandt, 2003:10). Sustaining and supporting the changes, improvements and lessons learnt is crucial for its effectiveness (Sparks, 2003b:56; Bernauer, 2002:92; Russell, 2001:3; Somers & Sikorova, 2002:103).

Conclusion

Within the framework of IE, school transformation is an ongoing process (Purkey & Strahan, 1995:6). Its success depends on various factors. Internal factors, leadership and staff collaboration positively contributed to the inviting atmosphere in schools. The leadership role describes the principal as a visionary, leading the school community in its development to employ more effective teaching and curricular strategies and supporting teachers' efforts to become inviting. A vision to become inviting is critical for its success. Principals also play a key role in creating and sustaining a positive school climate in which teaching and learning can take place. Although it is accepted that leadership is the key to any school reform, little change is possible without the active role of teachers (Robinson & Carrington, 2002:247; Rhodes & Houghton-Hill, 2000:427). Their attitude and commitment towards IE cannot be underestimated. They need to take ownership of it. One of the most important things that professionals do in inviting schools is to work together and learn from one another.

In conclusion, a missing component of inviting school development programmes is a commitment to a strategic approach to develop staff systematically so that they not only understand and change their approach, but are also able to take responsibility for shared vision, leadership and management of the school community. Leadership and teamwork among teaching staff, essential components of IE, also may have the capacity to bring about immense change in South African schools. The experience of IE by the inviting schools in the USA described in this study could be a promising option for South African schools, which seriously need to provide quality education.

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