

Invitational Learning

General

Invitational theory was firstly introduced by [William Purkey](#) in 1978¹⁾ and describes an **educational framework** of learning/teaching relationships **based on human value, responsibility and capabilities**. The word *inviting* was chosen because it comes from a Latin word *invitare*. Translated, it means *“to offer something beneficial for consideration”*, but its definition implicitly involves *“an ethical process involving continuous interactions among and between human beings”*²⁾.

Learning is in the context of invitational learning observed in social context, where **learners should be invited by the teacher to develop their potentials**.

What is invitational learning

Invitational theory is grounded in two theoretical foundations³⁾:

- *The Perceptual Tradition* (“human behavior is the product of the unique ways that individuals view the world”⁴⁾)
- *Self-Concept Theory* (“maintains that behavior is mediated by the ways an individual views oneself, and that these views serve as both antecedent and consequence of human activity.”⁵⁾)

and four assumptions⁶⁾: trust (that one will find his own best way of accomplishing things), respect (of other people since they are able, valuable, and responsible), optimism (since people possess practically unlimited potential in all areas of human endeavor), and intentionality (to act intentionally in order to offer something beneficial to others).

This human potential should be developed through the educational process, which is characterized by the so-called **five P-s**. The *five P-s* represent **environment factors** which influence one's success or failure in the educational process, depending on how *inviting* they are. *Invitation* here is described by Purkey as *“a summary of messages, verbal and nonverbal, formal and informal, that are sent to students with the intention of affirming for them that they are responsible, able, and valuable.”*⁷⁾ The *five P-s* are⁸⁾:

| People | Places | Policies | Programs | Processes |
|--------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Teachers and educational staff | Physical aspects of the school and classroom | Written and unwritten rules about procedures | Curriculum for students | How the other four P's are conducted |

Each of the *five P-s* can, depending on how *inviting* really is, formally be assigned to one of the four different categories:

- **Intentionally disinverting** - people, places, policies, programs and processes focused on students' shortcomings or deliberately discriminating and making them feel less valuable.
- **Unintentionally disinverting** - people, places, policies, programs and processes driven by **good intentions**, but doing more harm than good. For example, obsessed with unnecessary formalities, being chauvinistic or unintentionally sending **discouraging signals** to the

students.

- **Unintentionally inviting** - people, places, policies, programs and processes **unaware of the reasons for their success** or failure. This makes them look inconsistent and difficult for students to look up to them and to try to model them.
- **Intentionally inviting** - people, places, policies, programs and processes that are **inviting** and can and know how to adjust their *invitations* when necessary. *"Ideally, the factors of people, places, policies, programs, and processes should be so intentionally inviting as to create a world where each individual is cordially summoned to develop physically, intellectually, and emotionally."*⁹⁾ At this ideal level of practicing the invitational theory, it becomes invisible and it seems it requires hardly any effort although this is never true. This is the so-called **plus factor**.

What is the practical meaning of invitational learning?

In Purkey's words, *"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"*¹⁰⁾. Invitational learning suggests that teachers should, in order to facilitate learning, **provide the learners with an environment that is optimally inviting**. Respect, trust, optimism and intentionality are elements that will ensure that and should be a part of every educational process.

But to achieve this, one must start working on himself and learn to be:

- **Personally inviting with oneself** - this means one must literally start by learning to become inviting to himself. This includes making the **right decisions** in life, **relaxing**, devoting **free time** to the things he enjoys, regular **exercising**, spending time with **friends**, working with **nature** etc. Only after understanding this concept by oneself, one can offer it to others.
- **Personally inviting with others** - being polite and caring for **others' feelings** and points of view, **sharing** their excitement and happiness.
- **Professionally inviting with oneself** - being aware of one's own **profession** and its **ethical aspects**, attempting to improve related professional **skills** and **knowledge**, reading literature, writing articles, **attending conferences** etc.
- **Professionally inviting with others** - treating people as valuable individuals, acting carefully, ethically and **respectfully to all five P-s**, but also **strongly promoting the same attitudes** among others, cooperating with others professionally, remaining optimistic, and **behaving ethically**.

Keywords and most important names

- **Invitation theory, invitation, respect, trust, optimism, intentionality, five P-s, intentionally/unintentionally, inviting/disinviting, personally/professionally inviting with oneself/others**
- [William Purkey](#)

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