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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at some factors which may affect teachers as they attempt to informally invite moral development. Such invitational education, it is noted, stresses the importance of teacher behaviors which intentionally bid students to see themselves as valuable, able, and responsible persons who can behave accordingly. Using pilot study data from interviews with primary school teachers, part I of this paper examines how they handle difficult human relations situations, what they perceive as the ideal way to deal with these situations, and what perceived constraints prevent them from behaving in this ideal manner. Part II looks at written critical incidents submitted by teachers to see if there is a shift in their basic perception of self, others, purpose, and frame of reference in relationship to non-moral and morally transgressing situations. The final part of the paper attempts to bring together the implications of the first two parts to provide suggestions for inviting moral development. The study contains five charts, references, and seven appendices. (Authors/JM)

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Informally inviting moral development:
Teacher perception and behaviour regarding
the handling of moral transgressions

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Abstract

Informally inviting moral development: Teacher perception and behaviour regarding the handling of moral transgressions

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Invitational education stresses the importance of teacher behaviours which intentionally bid students to see themselves as valuable, able, and responsible persons who can behave accordingly. It expects teachers to maintain this stance even in the most difficult situations. Situations where students commit perceived moral transgressions are often difficult for teachers to handle, but can be an important impetus for invitational and moral education. However, for this to happen, teacher perceptions and behaviours need to be examined.

In Part I of this paper, pilot interview data with ten primary teachers show they were able to name a number of situations in which it was difficult to remain intentionally inviting, stated they behaved at times in less than inviting ways, were aware of more inviting ways to handle these situations, and were able to state constraints which they perceived made it difficult for them to be inviting.

The second part of this paper presents pilot perceptual data submitted by sixteen teachers regarding non-moral and morally transgressing

situations. These findings show a tendency for teachers to shift toward more negative perceptual orientations when they approach morally transgressing situations. This negative shift is seen to be most prominent in incidents involving stealing and least prominent in incidents involving cheating.

The final section of this paper builds on the data from the previous sections and provides some perceptual and behavioural factors which need to be considered if teachers are to intentionally invite the morally transgressing student. The claim is made that these are often the students who need invitational and moral education the most, but receive it the least. Understanding and developing programs for teachers stressing perceptual and behavioural components of both invitational and moral education is stressed as a means to better informally invite moral development.

Informally inviting moral development:
Teacher perception and behaviour regarding
the handling of moral transgressions

Invitational education stresses the necessity for teachers to intentionally transmit messages which bid students to see themselves as valuable, able, and responsible persons who can behave accordingly. In fact, the claim is made in the Second Edition of Inviting School Success that the authors "can think of no circumstances where a professional can justify his or her intentionally disinvolving behavior" (Purkey and Novak, in press). Perhaps this continual performance of intentionally inviting actions may be attainable for many teachers during normal transactions with students. However, real difficulty in maintaining this inviting stance may occur as teachers face difficult situations.

Situations where students commit perceived moral transgressions are often difficult for teachers to handle in an inviting manner. In addition, as a part of the informal curriculum, the teacher's handling of moral transgressions can be an important aid or deterrent in a student's moral development. If, as Vallacher (1980, p. 21) points out, people tend to evaluate themselves in terms of both competence and morality, then a self concept approach to teaching and learning has a special obligation to pay attention to moral development.

This paper looks at some factors which may affect teachers as they attempt to informally invite moral development. Using pilot study data

from interviews with primary teachers, Part I of this paper examines how they report they handle difficult human relation situations, what they perceive as the ideal way to deal with these situations and what perceived constraints prevent them from behaving in this ideal manner. Part II of this paper looks at written critical incidents submitted by teachers to see if there is a shift in their basic perceptions of self, others, purpose, and frame of reference in relationship to non-moral and morally transgressing situations. The final part attempts to bring together the implication of the first two parts to provide some suggestions for informally inviting moral development.

Part I: Being inviting in difficult situations

A goal of invitational education is for educators to "have developed the ability to approach even the most difficult situation in an inviting manner" (Purkey and Novak, in press). Obviously this is more easily said than done. Thus, in order to get a better understanding of perceived difficult human relation situations from a teacher's point of view, ten teachers from two Ontario elementary schools were asked to individually discuss a number of difficult classroom incidents. These ten semi-structured interviews, conducted by authors of this paper, used the following questions as an interview guide:

- 1) Describe a "difficult to handle" human relations situation that occurs in your classroom.
- 2) How do you handle it when things are going less than perfect?
- 3) What do you think the ideal way to handle it is?
- 4) What constraints prevent you from handling it in this ideal way?

Each interview took about thirty minutes. Each interviewee spoke in depth about three to five difficult situations.

In looking at the results of the pilot interviews in terms of invitational education, several points need to be noted. First, teachers brought up a variety of incidents, incidents which could be categorized (with some difficulty) into the following five non-exclusive categories:

- 1) Annoying behaviour.... attention-seeking, acting like a baby, interrupting.
- 2) Poor quality of work.... not working, doing sloppy work, not paying attention.
- 3) Class control.... distracting others, challenging the teacher.
- 4) Dishonesty.... lying, cheating, stealing.
- 5) Abusive behaviour.... physical, psychological damage to another.

Second, the teachers mentioned that at times they handled these situations in less than inviting ways (they communicated messages to students which informed them that they were less than valuable, able and responsible). The usual forms of these disinviting behaviours were such actions as yelling at students and demanding that they stop or do certain things.

Third, except in one instance, the teachers could provide an example of an inviting way to deal with the difficult human relations situation. They mentioned that ideal handling of difficult situations usually required time, energy, imagination, feeling non-threatened, a desire to listen to students, and the need for more information. In the one instance where the teacher did not provide an inviting solution, she

mentioned that yelling at the student was the ideal solution because only then would he realize the seriousness of stealing.

Fourth, teachers were able to mention a number of constraints which affected their less than ideal handling of difficult situations. These constraints can be categorized accordingly.

- 1) Time.... the problem requires an instant solution and/or would take the teacher away from some other task.
- 2) Energy.... the teacher is tired because of the time of day or worn down because the difficult behaviour keeps reoccurring.
- 3) Imagination.... a creative solution could not be thought of at the time.
- 4) Feeling threatened.... the teacher feels vulnerable and alone in handling difficult situations.
- 5) Not wanting to listen.... the teacher does not feel close enough to the student to want to listen or the teacher feels that nothing worthwhile will come of it because of the student's inability or lack of veracity in communicating.
- 6) Need for more information... an understanding of the child's past and present situation is needed to put the behaviour into perspective.

In summary, the teachers interviewed in this pilot study were able to mention a number of situations in which it was difficult to remain intentionally inviting, stated that they behaved in less than inviting ways at times, were aware of more inviting ways to handle the situations, and were able to state factors which made it difficult for them to be inviting. The next part of this pilot study sought to inquire deeper

into teacher perceptions about difficult situations.

Part II: Basic perceptions and moral transgressions

The inviting approach to education has its roots in perceptual psychology (Purkey and Novak, in press). This tradition strongly stresses that people behave according to how they perceive a situation. Research along these lines done by Combs and others (Combs, et al, 1969) emphasizing basic perceptions of effective teachers has been previously linked to invitational education (Novak, 1978, Wasicsko, 1978). The pilot study reported in this section looks at basic perceptions of teachers in non-moral and morally transgressing situations.

In looking at basic perception of effective and ineffective teachers and others in the helping professions, research done by Combs and others (Combs, et al, 1969, Dedrick, 1972, Gooding, 1964, Koffman, 1975, Usher, 1966) indicated that these groups could be differentiated from each other in terms of perceptions of self, others, purpose and frame of reference. Quite basically, effective teachers identified with others, saw their students as able, had a larger frame of reference, and were people oriented (see Appendix A). Furthermore, these perceptual characteristics could be distinguished through a critical incident examined by a trained perceptual rater (Wasicsko, 1977). The focus of inquiry examined in this section is "Do teachers keep the same perceptual orientation when they are dealing with non-moral incidents and moral transgressions?"

Procedures

Thirty teachers from an Ontario county were given a packet requesting

that they write three critical incidents from their own teaching experience. Every packet had instructions for an open-ended incident (Appendix B) and two of five morally transgressing incidents (cheating, physical abuse, disrespectful treatment, stealing, psychological abuse). These are found in Appendices C - G. These teachers were requested to return these packets the next week.

Packets were received from twenty-six teachers. Their incidents were coded and randomized with instructions removed and then given to two independent, certified, perceptual raters who were to evaluate these according to the perceptual rating scale (Appendix A). Raters were told to rate what they could and leave blank those incidents which did not provide sufficient information. An average of two raters' scores per item were used to make comparisons.

Results

Comparisons were made between the ratings of the non-moral incidents and the supplied moral transgressing incidents regarding perception of self, others, purpose and frame of reference. The results were as follows:

Perceptions of Self: Identified → Unidentified

Out of 28 comparisons -- 22 moved to the negative
 5 moved to the positive
 1 remained the same

Table 1A - Direction and change from non-moral incidents to moral transgressions.

Direction &
 Magnitude
 of Change

Number

-3.5	-3	-2.5	-2	-1.5	-1	-.5	0	+0.5	+1	+1.5	+2	+2.5	+3	+3.5
1	0	5	3	3	5	5	1	3	0	1	1	0	0	0

Table 1B - Change according to categories (Identified -- Unidentified)

Type of Moral Transgression	Cheating	Physical Abuse	Disre-sentful	Stealing	Psychologi-cal Abuse
# moved to the negative	4	8	4	4	2
# moved to the positive	2	3	0	0	0
#---no change	0	0	1	0	0

Perceptions of Others: Able -- Unable)

Out of 28 comparisons -- 19 moved to the negative
 6 moved to the positive
 3 remained the same

Table 2A - Direction and change from non-moral incidents to moral transgressions.

Direction &
 Magnitude
 of Change

	-3.5	-3	-2.5	-2	-1.5	-1	-.5	0	+ .5	+1	+1.5	+2	+2.5	+3	+3.5
Number	0	2	3	7	4	3	0	3	4	1	0	1	0	0	0

Table 2B - Change according to categories (Able -- Unable)

Type of Moral Transgression	Cheating	Physical Abuse	Disre-sentful	Stealing	Psychologi-cal Abuse
# moved to the negative	4	7	2	4	2
# moved to the positive	0	4	2	0	0
#---no change	2	0	0	1	0

Perceptions of Purpose: Larger -- Smaller

Out of the 27 comparisons -- 20 moved to the negative
 5 moved to the positive
 2 remained the same

Table 3A - Direction and change from non-moral incidents to moral transgressions.

Direction & Magnitude of Change	-3.5	-3	-2.5	-2	-1.5	-1	-.5	0	+ .5	+1	+1.5	+2	+2.5	+3	+3.5
Number	1	2	1	3	8	2	4	2	0	2	0	1	2	0	0

Table 3B - Change according to categories (Larger -- Smaller)

Type of Moral Transgression	Cheating	Physical Abuse	Disre-sentful	Stealing	Psychologi-cal Abuse
# moved to the negative	4	9	3	4	1
# moved to the positive	2	2	0	1	0
#---no change	0	0	1	0	1

Frame of Reference: People -- Things

Out of the 27 comparisons -- 20 moved to the negative
 6 moved to the positive
 1 remained the same

Table 4A - Direction and change from non-moral incidents to moral transgressions.

Direction & Magnitude of Change	-3.5	-3	-2.5	-2	-1.5	-1	-.5	0	+0.5	+1	+1.5	+2	+2.5	+3	+3.5
Number	2	2	4	2	3	5	2	1	1	3	1	1	0	0	0

Table 4B - Change according to categories (People -- Things)

Type of Moral Transgression	Cheating	Physical Abuse	Disre-sentful	Stealing	Psychologi-cal Abuse
# moved to the negative	3	8	4	4	1
# moved to the positive	2	2	0	1	1
#---no change	1	0	0	0	0

Changes For All Categories

Out of the 104 comparisons -- 81 moved to the negative
 22 moved to the positive
 7 remained the same

Table 5A - Direction and change from non-moral incidents to moral transgressions.

Direction & Magnitude of Change	-3.5	-3	-2.5	-2	-1.5	-1	-.5	0	+ .5	+1	+1.5	+2	+2.5	+3	+3.5
Number	4	6	13	15	18	15	11	7	8	6	2	4	2	0	0

Table 5B - Total Change for Moral Transgression:

Type of Moral Transgression	Cheating	Physical Abuse	Disre-sentful	Stealing	Psychologi-cal Abuse
# moved to the negative	15	32	13	16	6
# moved to the positive	6	11	2	2	2
#---no change	3	0	2	0	0

Discussion

From the results of this pilot study there are indications that these teachers tend to shift their basic perceptual orientation to the negative when they approach situations in which students commit perceived moral transgressions. That is, teachers feel less identified with the morally transgressing student, see these students as more unable, tend to take a narrower perspective in these situations, and tend to be more concerned with the impersonal aspects of affairs. While this was true for all of the transgressions, it was most prominent in incidents of stealing and least prominent in incidents of cheating.

More controlled research using perceptual incidents, interviews and actual classroom observations is certainly needed.

Part III: Suggestions for informally inviting moral development

In a previous paper (Bennett and Novak, 1981) the assumptions and implications of invitational and moral education were connected. The need for educators to systematically intend and extend attractive, affirmative, and fair messages was stressed. In addition, the suggestion was made that students be invited to participate in just environments through reasoning about perceived real problems. It would seem then, that a teacher's handling of a morally transgressing situation could be an important source for informally inviting moral development. There are however, some complications which would need to be resolved in order for this possibility to become an actuality.

The results of the pilot research of the previous two sections

indicate that teachers may not approach morally transgressing students with the same perceptions they approach non-transgressing students. In addition, teachers may often know an inviting way to handle a morally transgressing situation but fail to behave in an inviting manner. If a goal of invitational education is to have educators approach even the most difficult situation in an inviting manner, then perceptual orientations and institutional and personal constraints need to be seriously considered.

First, in terms of perceptual orientation, teachers need to be able to discuss in a challenging but non threatening way their "lived world" experiences of handling morally transgressing situations. These open-ended discussions, led by someone knowledgeable with the principles of invitational and moral education, could focus on how both teachers and students might perceive each other's actions. Particular attention would have to be paid to situations where students continually act unfairly with each other and the teacher. If, as Combs and others (1974, 1976, 1982) suggest, people are always striving for more adequate perceptions, then these discussions might provide a vehicle for educators to develop deeper-seated beliefs which enable them to be inviting, fair and firm in difficult situations.

As teachers explore their basic beliefs about morally transgressing students it is important that they find practical strategies for dealing with the constraints they face in handling these situations. These might include the following:

- (1) Time.... finding firm but fair ways to stop immediate situations and put off their resolution to a more appropriate time.
- (2) Energy.... developing procedures for students to handle many of their own conflicts. Also providing ways for teachers to "recharge" themselves during the day. Suggestions regarding how to send and accept invitations to oneself and others personally (Purkey and Novak, in press) might be most appropriate.
- (3) Imagination... providing teachers with examples of creative solutions to difficult morally transgressing situations.
- (4) Threat.... developing a support system of other teachers, administrators and parents for handling difficult situations.
- (5) Listening.... aiding teachers with development of skills in listening and moral reasoning questioning.
- (6) Information.... finding new ways for teachers to understand students' lived world. The use of the repertory grid of personal construct theory might be most useful here (Kompf, in press).

In the Second Edition of Inviting School Success (Purkey and Novak, in press) it is noted that students who often need invitations the most, receive them the least. This would seem especially true for the morally transgressing student. As educators are allowed to share and explore their basic perceptions about the morally transgressing student, and as they are able to develop more adequate support and strategies for handling these difficult situations, they can become an important source for informally inviting moral development. The challenge is great, the obstacles are many. Continued work in this area would enhance both the theory and practice of invitational and moral education.

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APPENDIX A

PERCEPTUAL RATING SCALE

RATER _____ DATE _____ PROTOCOL # _____

PERCEPTIONS OF SELF:

IDENTIFIED

The teacher feels a oneness with all mankind. He perceives himself as deeply and meaningfully related to persons of every description.

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

UNIDENTIFIED

The teacher feels generally apart from others. His feelings of oneness are restricted to those of similar beliefs.

PERCEPTIONS OF OTHERS:

ABLE

The teacher sees others as having capacities to deal with their problems. He believes others are basically able to find adequate solutions to events in their own lives.

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

UNABLE

The teacher sees others as lacking the necessary capacities to deal effectively with their problems. He doubts their ability to make their own decisions and run their own lives.

PERCEPTIONS OF PURPOSE:

LARGER:

The teacher views events in a broad perspective. His goals extend beyond the immediate to larger implications and contexts.

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

SMALLER

The teacher views events in a narrow perspective. His purposes focus on immediate and specific goals.

FRAME OF REFERENCE:

PEOPLE

The teacher is concerned with the human aspects of affairs. The attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and welfare of persons are prime considerations in his thinking.

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

THINGS

The teacher is concerned with the impersonal aspects of affairs. Questions of order, management, mechanics, and details of things and events are prime considerations in his thinking.

APPENDIX B

Open-ended Incident

I would like you to think of a significant past event which involved yourself in a teaching role and one or more other persons. That is, from a human relations standpoint, this event had special meaning for you. In writing about this event, please use the following format:

- First Describe the situation as it occurred at the time.
- Second What did you do in the particular situation?
- Third How did you feel about the situation at the time you were experiencing it?
- Fourth How do you feel about the situation now? Would you wish to change any part of it?

APPENDIX C

Moral Transgression: Cheating

Think of a significant past teaching event which involved you and a child who cheated or lied to you. In writing about this event please use the following format:

First: Describe the situation as it occurred at the time.

Second: What did you do in the particular situation?

Third: How did you feel about the situation at the time you were experiencing it?

Fourth: How do you feel about the situation now? Would you wish to change any part of it?

APPENDIX D

Moral Transgression: Physical Abuse

Think of a significant past teaching event which involved you and a child who was physically abusive to another child. In writing about this event please use the following format:

- First: Describe the situation as it occurred at the time.
- Second: What did you do in the particular situation?
- Third: How did you feel about the situation at the time you were experiencing it?
- Fourth: How do you feel about the situation now? Would you wish to change any part of it?

APPENDIX E

Moral Transgression: Disrespectful

Think of a significant past teaching event which involved you and a child who was very disrespectful to you. In writing about this event please use the following format:

- First: Describe the situation as it occurred at the time.
- Second: What did you do in the particular situation?
- Third: How did you feel about the situation at the time you were experiencing it?
- Fourth: How do you feel about the situation now? Would you wish to change any part of it?

APPENDIX F

Moral Transgression: Stealing

Think of a significant past teaching event which involved you and a child who stole something from the classroom. In writing about this event please use the following format:

- First: Describe the situation as it occurred at the time.
- Second: What did you do in the particular situation?
- Third: How did you feel about the situation at the time you were experiencing it?
- Fourth: How do you feel about the situation now? Would you wish to change any part of it?

APPENDIX G

Moral Transgression: Psychological Abuse

Think of a significant past teaching event which involved you and a child who made racial slurs or was psychologically abusive to another child. In writing about this event please use the following format:

First: Describe the situation as it occurred at the time.

Second: What did you do in the particular situation?

Third: How did you feel about the situation at the time you were experiencing it?

Fourth: How do you feel about the situation now? Would you wish to change any part of it?