

# A Qualitative Study of the Aspects Influencing the Implementation of Invitational Education in Schools in the United States of America

G. M. Steyn

*University of South Africa*

*Professional development (PD) for the improvement of educational practice has attracted a great deal of attention in recent years. Although experts acknowledge the importance of PD, many PD programmes have little effect on educational practice. This article identifies influences on the effective implementation of Invitational Education (IE) within the framework of professional development that were identified during a qualitative study in schools in two states. Specific categories affecting the effective implementation of professional development in IE include the role of leadership, the role of teachers, in-school and out-of-school conditions and requirements of PD programmes for IE.*

## Introduction

Internationally there has been an increased emphasis on the role of education in cultivating expectations for all learners' success and teacher accountability for students' learning (Partee & Sammon, 2001; Anonymous, 2001/2002). Since educators have the most direct contact with learners the enhancement of educators' knowledge, skills and attitudes is considered a critical step in improving learner performance (King & Newman, 2001; Ribisch, 1999; Anonymous, 2001/2002). The professional development (PD) of educators is seen as an essential ingredient for creating effective schools and improving learners' performance (Rhodes & Houghton-Hill, 2000; Wood & Millichamp, 2000; Birman, Desimone, Porter & Garet, 2000). PD focuses on the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of teachers, leaders and other school staff so all learners can learn and perform at high levels (Sparks & Richardson, 1997; Ho-Ming & Ping-Yan, 1999; Somers & Sikorova, 2002). In essence, PD includes formal, systematic programmes designed to promote personal and professional growth of staff members.

IE and its concomitant Invitational Learning (IL) are strategies thought to positively transform classroom climates (Asbill &

Gonzalez, 2000; Brandt, 2003). When principals choose to behave in an inviting manner, the school climate is enhanced and total school settings are positively transformed (Campbell, 1997; Asbill & Gonzalez, 2000). Since IE is regarded as the product of conscious and well planned thought as well as regular evaluation, based on a strong commitment to certain basic values, it presents an appropriate approach to address this issue (Novak & Purkey, 2001).

Unfortunately efforts to improve schools frequently focus on a search for quick fixes, which, it is hoped, will transform educational institutions (Rhodes & Houghton-Hill, 2000; Wood & Millichamp, 2000; Birman et al, 2000). Many of these efforts ignore the people involved and concentrate on the systems in which they work (Brinson, 1996; Purkey & Strahan, 1995). However, programmes and materials have not consistently shown to realize effective change; the people in the education system do. This implies a focus on the knowledge, skills and attitudes people need to implement and sustain human interaction.

The aim of previous studies by Steyn (1993 & 1994) was to analyse the *product* of the inviting approach, in other words, the characteristics of an inviting school.

The aim of this study is to identify the aspects that influence the *process* of implementing and sustaining IE effectively in schools. A large body of knowledge concerning PD exists that can be employed when using IE as an approach to achieve the aims set out in effective PD interventions.

### **Factors Influencing the Professional Development of Teachers**

All professions require a continuous update of knowledge and skills including teaching (Sparks & Richardson, 1997; Somers & Sikorova, 2002). It is universally acknowledged that an educator's professional development does not end at the initial pre-service training (Ho-Ming & Ping-Yan, 1999; Somers & Sikorova, 2002). Over time the knowledge and skills of staff members in schools are subject to deterioration, while new developments in educational thinking render their skills outdated or inefficient (Campbell, 1997). Moreover, educators will not change the way they teach unless they learn new ways to teach (Sparks & Richardson, 1997). Figure 1 provides an outline of key factors that will influence the effectiveness of a PD programme. The following major categories are identified: transformational leadership; educators' commitment to change; in-school conditions; out-of-school conditions; and requirements of PD programmes themselves. How each of these categories impacts PD is briefly described in the following sections.

#### **The Role of Leadership**

Quality leadership is required for effective PD in schools (Bernauer, 2002). It provides an orderly and nurturing environment that supports educators and stimulates their efforts (Bernauer, 2002). The leadership model used in the Canadian study of Yu, Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) includes various transformational leader-

ship dimensions that could influence educator commitment and have an effect on PD. They are:

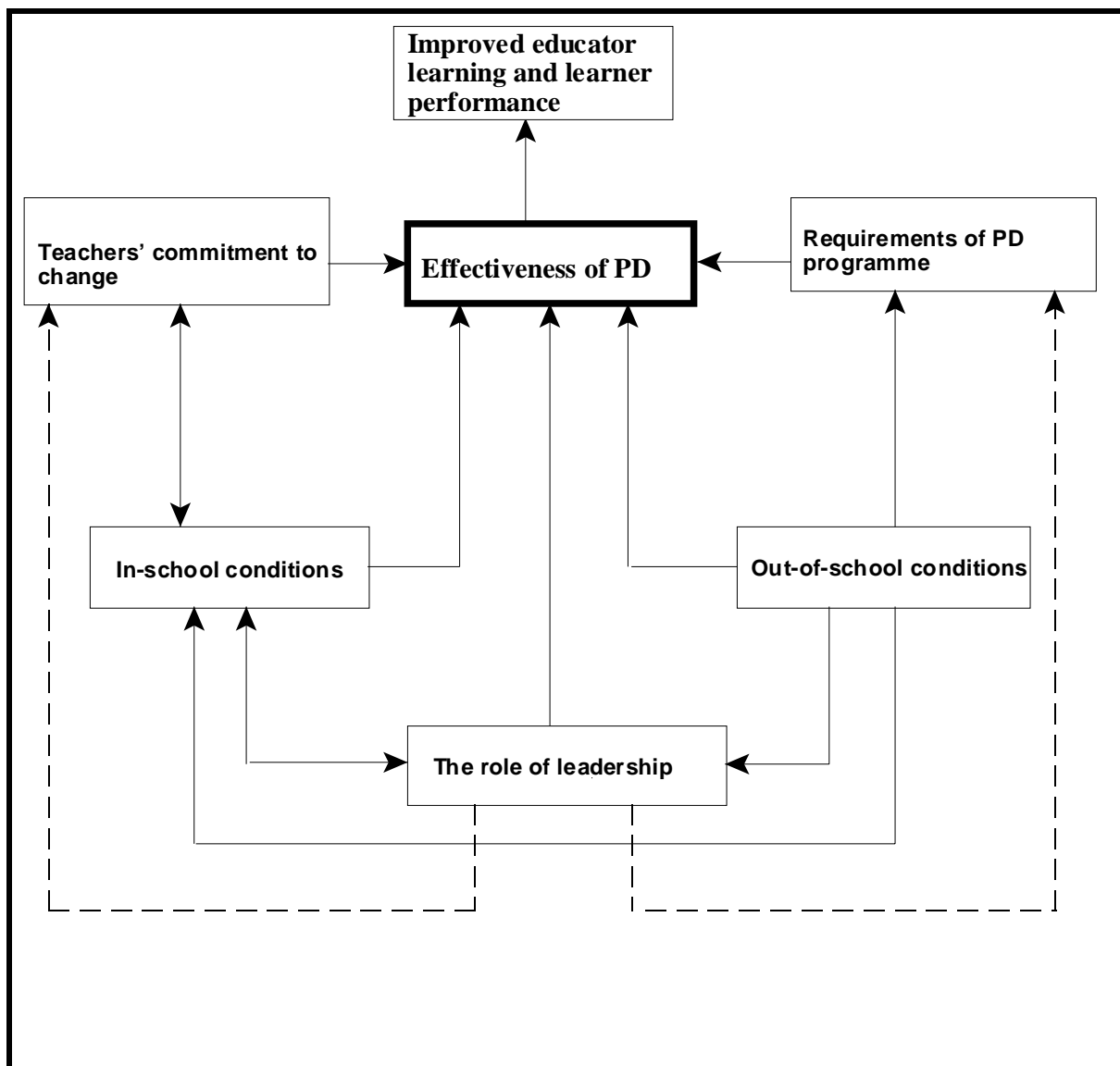
- *Charismatic leadership: identifying and sharing a vision:* leaders exert a profound influence on followers, the school's performance and climate by the force of their personality, abilities, personal charm, magnetism, inspiration and emotion (Dubrin & Ireland, 1993; Dreher, 2002).
- *Cultivating the acceptance of cooperative goals:* 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; Bernauer, 2002).
- *Creating high performance expectations:* expectations of excellence, quality and high performance on the part of staff (Anonymous, 2001/2002).

***It is universally acknowledged that an educator's professional development does not end at the initial pre-service training.***

- *Providing individualised support:* emotional, psychological and logistical support to educators so that they continue developing new habits (Sparks, 2003; Somers & Sikorova, 2002; Pehkonen & Törner, 1999; Professional staff development: A key to school improvement, 1999; Somers & Sikorova, 2002; Washington, 1993).
- *Providing an appropriate model:* Examples are set for staff to follow which are consistent with the values leaders advocate (Yu *et al*, 2000).

- *Strengthening school culture.* Leadership is overwhelmingly important in establishing a positive school culture (Campbell, 1997).

There is a positive relationship between a principal's actions and teacher affective outcomes such as feelings of trust, respect,



**Figure 1:** Factors Influencing Professional Development

job satisfaction, empowerment, higher levels of commitment to organizational goals and perceived principal effectiveness (Bernauer, 2002; Campbell, 1997; Asbill & Gonzalez, 2000; Edwards, Green & Lyons, 2002; Mahoney, 1997; Bjork, 2000).

**The Role of Teachers**

Since teaching is 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; Bernauer, 2002). Sharing stimulates teachers' reflection and broadens their perspective (Ho-Ming & Ping-Yan, 1999; Dixon, 1998; Blackmore, 2000). It contributes towards 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; Rhodes & Houghton-Hill, 2000).

Apart from the crucial role of teachers in implementing PD, the conditions within a school can also play an important role in the effectiveness of PD. Yu, *et al.* (2000) include mediating variables such as school culture and school environment which affect educator commitment to change.

### **In-School Conditions**

Research reveals some variables concerning in-school conditions that may influence the effectiveness of PD.

- *School culture*: the shared norms, values, beliefs and assumptions shared by role players of an organisation that shape decision-making and practices (Yu, *et al.*, 2000; Duff in Smith & Lowrie, 1998). The school culture should be positive and humane: psychologically comfortable, with warm human relationships, and professionally supportive, giving people the necessary resources and opportunities to collaborate and learn from others (Brandt, 2003; Partee & Sammon, 2001; Somers & Sikorova, 2002; Anonymous, 2001/2002).
- *Regular PD*: Since ongoing development is a characteristic of effective PD, it is obvious that such programmes should be presented regularly.
- *Collaboration*: Educator collaboration and support are required for PD to be effective (Rhodes & Houghton-Hill, 2000; Brandt, 2003; Richardson, 2003). Collaboration will contribute towards the development of a positive school culture (Robinson & Carrington,

2002; Rhodes & Houghton-Hill, 2000).

- *Feedback*: Staff development is most effective when it is a continuous process that includes individual follow-up through supportive observation and feedback (Moore, 2000; Robinson & Carrington, 2002; Richardson, 2003; Lam & Pang, 2003; King & Newman, 2001).

Schools form part of a larger system in which they have to meet goals set by education authorities.

### **Out-of-School Conditions**

Conditions outside schools have the potential to influence the functioning of schools which may impact PD in schools. Schools are strongly influenced by policies and programmes of authorities that change the control patterns, enrolment fluctuations and policy directives (Lam & Pang, 2003). The quality of teaching and learning depends on people and structural and technical resources which are influenced by community context and policies and the programmes of other external role players (King & Newman, 2001). These necessary resources include the availability of necessary funding (Lam & Pang, 2003). Funds to support PD may be provided by educational authorities or outside agencies, or raised by individual schools.

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### **Professional Development Programmes**

The growing body of research on PD has provided consistent guidelines for planning and implementing PD programmes that may lead to the improvement of practice. The importance of active participation during presentations and feedback to teachers on their development is widely supported (Moore, 2000; Redding & Kamm, 1999; Lam & Pang, 2003; Birman *et al.*, 2000; King & Newman, 2001). Teachers need blocks of time without responsibilities for optimal learning to take place (Professional staff development: A key to school improvement, 1999). For PD to be effective, certain structural aspects are important.

- *Form*: For PD to be effective, programmes should be longer and have more content focus, active learning and coherence (Birman *et al.*, 2000).
- *Time*: Quick fixes may not produce the desired results (Blackmore, 2000). PD should also take place over an extended period of time (Birman *et al.*, 2000; Blackmore, 2000; Richardson, 2003; Russell, 2001).
- *Type of training*: A successful PD programme will comprise a variety of different models, each meeting the needs of different educators and achieving different outcomes (Shaw, 2003; Somers & Sikorova, 2002).

### **What is Invitational Education?**

Invitational Education can be described as a philosophy and set of activities aimed to promote a total school climate that is welcoming, a place that intentionally engages people to realise their individual and collective potential (Purkey & Strahan, 1995; The Concept of Invitational Education, 1998; Friedland, 1999). As such it is deliberately directed to broader goals than students and their performance alone (Purkey & Strahan, 1995).

IE consists of certain key assumptions for communicating caring and appropriate messages intended to invite the development of the relatively endless human potential (Friedland, 1999; Novak & Purkey, 2001; Kok & Van der Merwe, 2002; Purkey & Strahan, 1995). It also aims to make schooling a more exciting, satisfying experience for all students, staff, parents and the community (Purkey & Strahan, 1995). The assumptions of IE are:

- **Respect**: People are able, valuable and responsible and should be treated accordingly (Novak & Purkey, 2001).
- **Trust**: Education is a collaborative, cooperative activity (Novak & Purkey, 2001).
- **Optimism**: People possess untapped potential in all areas of development (Friedland, 1999; Novak & Purkey, 2001).
- **Intentionality**: Human potential is best realised by places, policies, processes, and programmes that are specifically designed to invite development and by people who are personally and professionally inviting with themselves and others (Novak & Purkey, 2001; The Concept of Invitational Education, 1998; Friedland, 1999).
- **Care**: the process is the product in making (Novak & Purkey, 2001).

### **Methodology**

The schools participating in the study have received the prestigious Inviting School Award School from the International Alliance for Invitational Education in the USA. Thus, these schools have succeeded in demonstrating the principles and practices of Invitational Education. In the quest for quality in schools and school improvement, attention should be given to the aspects required to bring about effective change to create an inviting climate for effective learning.

## Research Question and Design

This study addressed the research question: Which aspects influence the effective implementation of Invitational Education in schools?

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 (Schurink, 1998) and a phenomenological approach was followed in order to understand participants' personal meanings which were constructed from their 'lived experiences' (Johnson & Christenson, 2000; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Phenomenology aims at obtaining a deeper understanding (the *verstehen* tradition) of the meaning of everyday human experiences (Patton, 2002); in this case the factors that participants believe influence the implementation of IE.

## Sample

Purposeful as well as convenient sampling was used selecting information-rich cases for the study (Johnson & Christenson, 2000; Patton, 2002). Inviting schools were selected from among IE award winners with the assistance IAIE board members and consultants. Two elementary schools (School A and School B), a Ninth Grade School (School C), and a High School (School D) were selected from Kentucky. Five inviting schools in New Mexico were selected: two early childhood centres (School E and School F) and three elementary schools (School G, School H and School I). Thereafter, the researcher contacted the principals of the schools through e-mails to arrange for the visit. The schools typify many problem areas in American schools (Shipengrover & Conway, 1996). All the schools have a diverse population of students in terms of income,

culture and national heritage. Family income ranges from substandard poverty to high income.

## Data Collection

Data were mainly collected through interviews using an interview guide that included: The role of leadership, the role of staff, the influence of external and internal school conditions and the requirements of the PD programme on IE. Interviews serve the purpose of enabling people to report information about their beliefs and experiences (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). The following interviews were conducted before the research reached data saturation where no new relevant data were discovered:

- Principals of all nine and one assistant principal (School C)
- Selected teachers at each school.
- An IE consultant in New Mexico

The type of interview (individual or focus group) was determined by the timetable and particular circumstances of the school. A general question opened the interviews: Which aspects influence the effective implementation of Invitational Education? The natural flow of conversation was followed.

The interviews with the principals, individual teachers and the consultant lasted about sixty to ninety minutes. The focus group interviews lasted about ninety minutes. Permission was granted by all respondents to take down field notes and to tape record the interviews (Warren, 2002; Patton, 2002; Johnson, 2002). These notes were expanded by the researcher immediately after completing each interview, as a verifying measure. All the interviews were transcribed on a computer (Johnson & Christenson, 2000).

## Validity and Reliability

Guba’s (Poggenpoel, 1998) 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) and are summarised in Table 1 (Poggenpoel, Nolte, Dörfling, Greeff, Gross, Muller, Nel & Roos, 1994).

ENTER TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

**Data Analysis**

Data was composed of the transcribed interviews and researcher’s field notes were segmented and inductively coded (Johnson & Christenson, 2000; Patton, 2002). The first step in the phenomenological analysis was epoche (eliminating personal involvement by becoming aware of prejudices or assumptions) (Patton, 2002). In the second

Strategy	Criteria	Application
<i>Credibility</i>	Reflexivity	Field notes taken
	Triangulation	Interviews conducted with principals and teachers at nine schools, field notes, literature control
	Checking	Literature control of description of TQM in education
	Authority of researcher	Previous experience of qualitative research
<i>Transferability</i>	Nominated sample	Purposeful, non-selective sampling with Superintendent of district
	Comparison of sample	Sample reflective of community
	Dense description	Complete description of methodology including literature control and verbatim quotes from interviews
<i>Dependability</i>	Dependability audit	Question checking with literature and school in pilot study, data analysis protocol
	Dense description of research method	Research methodology fully described
<i>Confirmability</i>	Triangulation	As discussed
	Triangulation	As discussed
	Reflexivity	As discussed

TABLE 1: STRATEGIES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

step, phenomenological reduction (bracketing) took place by placing pre-conceived ideas within brackets (Patton, 2002). This was done when reading the transcripts and

field notes for the first time in order to identify the data in pure form (Poggenpoel, 1998; Patton, 2002). Significant comments were grouped into categories

and units of meaning were put into these major categories (Johnson & Christ-enson, 2000). A number of sub-categories within each major category were then identified.

## Findings

### Role of Leadership

Principals, experienced and beginner teachers endorsed the crucial role of leadership as indicated in the following examples: “It [IE] starts from the top” (beginner teacher, School A); “The leader is the first and foremost” (Principal, School B); “The principal is really the pin” (experienced teacher, School G); “Leadership of the school, that’s it. The school flows as the leadership flows” (principal School D); and “Leadership plays the biggest part...you need someone to spear-head the initiative” (beginner teacher, School D). The IE consultant took it further: “If the principal is not in favour of it, it is not going to happen at a large scale.” Furthermore, what leaders need is a “...passion for IE...to get people involved you have to have a passion.”

Transformational leadership is required for effectively implementing IE. The principal—teacher relationship in transformational leadership is characterised by charisma on the part of the principal, inspiration by the principal, and intellectual stimulation between the principal and the staff. Effective leadership in implementing IE requires role models, a vision and creating a school environment that is conducive to IE.

*Acting as a role model:* Exemplifying IE is an important requirement for leaders when implementing IE. A beginner teacher of School A succinctly described leaders’ roles: “If they [principals] want people to do good things, they should do it” School A). Others supported her view: “If he [the principal] is not first of modelling IE and demonstrating it, [it won’t happen]... He

has to model it, he has to be creative” (principal, School A). Two other teachers took it even further by saying “He should be the face of IE” (experienced teacher, School A); and “She should walk her talk and get her hands dirty. They [the staff] will respect her more” (principal, School B). The principal of School D was, however, adamant with his remark “If the leader doesn’t do it, there is no way others would do it”.

Principals also accepted their responsibility to serve as role models of IE as exemplified by the following: “I have to walk the talk. I am the head leader and have to set the example” (principal, School G) and “So I am setting an example, I try to demonstrate how to treat people. I set the example and tone of the school” (principal, School C).

The IE consultant explained how she acted as role model, drawing from her experience as a principal: “As a principal with a desire to create an inviting school, it was necessary to begin with myself. I know that I had to model the message ... I then started with my own space, the office”. She added colour, created a cosy haven and added carefully chosen items. People began to notice the difference and commented on it.

Literature confirms the importance of principals providing an appropriate model whereby an example can be set for staff to follow (Yu, *et al.* 2000). It also endorses the necessity of principals’ support of teachers during the process of change (Robinson & Carrington, 2002; Brandt, 2003; Gerber, 1998; Richardson, 2003; Somers & Sikorova, 2002; Washington, 1993). Principals acting as role models and supporting teachers are therefore essential for a school to become an inviting school. Serving as role models is one aspect of leadership. They also need to know where the school is heading.



*Significance of a vision:* Principals striving towards IE in their schools require a clear vision. The importance of a vision was supported by many participants. Two principals explained it 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 (School G).

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 (School E).

A typical skill of an effective leader is to provide a vision and to inspire people to work more effectively, which can also be applied to becoming an inviting school. The inspirational nature of the vision then holds the empowered, autonomous professionals together in meeting their goals (Robinson & Carrington, 2002). The shared vision and values of staff members affect their actions, which subsequently have an influence on the school culture (Smith & Coldron, 1999).

*Creating the climate for IE:* Both principals and teachers referred to the principal's key role in creating an inviting atmosphere in the school. "We [principals] set the tone, set the way, the direction. As leaders we take teachers to areas they wouldn't normally go ... I am instrumental in setting the climate, the tone and example for teachers ... I provide leadership that is participating ... We work to-

gether" (School C); "The principal sets the whole tune for the building" (experience teacher, School H); and "I know the principal influences the atmosphere in the school. I take a lot of stress on myself to maintain a positive atmosphere" (principals, School I). A beginner teacher of School A took it even further: "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".

***Principals striving towards IE in their schools require a clear vision. The importance of a vision was supported by many participants.***

To re-culture 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; Bernauer, 2002). IE and invitational learning (IL) are maintained by the Alliance for Invitational Education as a means for re-culturing classrooms and climates in schools (Asbill & Gonzalez, 2000; The Concept of Invitational Education, 1998). The IE philosophy also aims to promote a total school climate that is welcoming, a place that intentionally energises people to realise their individual and collective potential (Friedland 1999). When principals choose to behave in an inviting manner, the school climate will be enhanced and total school settings will be positively transformed (Campbell, 1997; Asbill & Gonzalez, 2000). Principals can also work towards fostering a climate where teachers feel safe and able to work cooperatively and professionally (Edwards, *et al.* 2002). The vital role of teachers in implementing IE can not be

disregarded, as one principal commented: “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.”

### **Role of Teachers**

*Teachers are the wheels of IE:*

Throughout the interviews the interaction between the principal and the staff as well as the importance of teachers in the implementation of IE was explained. The principal of School E asserted:

The principal, you know, sits in a little office, but they [the teachers] make it happen ... 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 [the teachers].

The key role that teachers play was also supported by the following responses:

“Teachers are the wheels of the programme. It happens in the classrooms ... They are the action parts” (experienced teacher, School G;

“The most important thing is teachers. They are not an add-on, they deliver instruction to students” (principal, School D);

“It would be impossible to implement IE without the teachers. Teachers have to buy into it” (IE consultant).

The principal of School A, however, warned: “You won’t have a 100% buy into IE”.

Principals can help teachers to realise that they can make a difference in student performance when being inviting. Since teachers are the ‘action parts’ in classrooms, their role is vital for the effective implementation of IE. IE can lead to a pattern of beliefs and expectations of teachers in the schools that guide their

attitude and behaviour (Drejer, 2000). The effectiveness of their influence, however, depends on their attitude and commitment in implementing IE.

*Teachers’ attitudes and commitment:* A few participants explained the importance of staff’s attitude and commitment 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 have 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 implementing IE, as indicated for other PD programmes. Various other authors support the importance of attitude and commitment in change initiatives (Ho-Ming & Ping-Yan, 1999; Yu, *et al*, 2000; Pehkonen & Törner, 1999; Blackmore, 2000). Introducing IE will be impossible without teachers’ commitment, even if these programmes are well designed and implemented.

Creating an inviting school environment requires the cultivation of shared values and the development of an appreciation for the value of staff working together and caring about each other.

*Collaboration between staff members:* Collaboration between staff in the school is an assumption of IE. Two 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 (beginner teacher, School C).

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).

Although teamwork is acknowledged, the quality of relationships can be vital when implementing IE. A teacher of School G and the principal of School C respectively referred to the influence of teacher relationships:

I think that how teachers get along is seen between the lines by students. If a staff member has conflict it will affect students. Staff should realise that their behaviour affects students and the invitational school.

A little negative talk, negative action of teachers can really pull the school down. I try to be a positive role model, treat teachers with respect, brag on them a lot.

Team members can utilise strengths and complement each other's knowledge and skills in becoming inviting schools. When everybody participates in school transformation, everyone experiences a genuine sense of ownership of the process (Purkey & Strahan, 1995). According to Purkey and Strahan (1995), "membership" is a hallmark of an inviting school. However, the most powerful predictor of learner performance is the quality of relationships

among staff (Barth in Purkey & Strahan 1995).

Since people are the most important aspect in IE, it is essential to select the right staff members. The importance of hiring the right people was supported by various participants. The IE consultant succinctly expressed her views as follows:

Hiring, inducting and indoctrinating new staff members are crucial in sustaining the IE spirit. The most effective way to assure continuity is to appoint the right staff members ... The hiring of the right staff applies for all positions in the school. Lots of time you can't hire them, so then you have to train them. Everyone is equally important, the janitor, the secretary, it takes everybody on board.

The principal of School I supported this: "Hiring new staff is important ... You have to find the best candidate. If we hire the right people, students are successful, the climate will take over. You don't create an inviting school. You have an inviting school". A teacher also warned against incorrect appointments: "Don't hire sour apples. It takes one person to put a sour apple in the barrel to make the whole barrel sour" (experienced teacher, School C).

The shared values of members in a school community affect their actions, which subsequently have an influence on the school culture (Smith & Coldron, 1999; Robinson & Carrington, 2002). As such it is essential to identify people who have the potential to work collaboratively in achieving the aims of IE.

Apart from the aspects described above, the success of any innovation depends on maintenance of the desired culture in the school.

## **In-School Conditions**

Many participants explained the important role of in-school conditions for the effective implementation of IE. They referred to the physical surroundings as well as the climate of the school. Regarding the physical conditions participants agreed that they can affect the effective implementation of IE. “The physical conditions can have an influence” (experienced teacher, School F). A teacher was more explicit in her views: “Surroundings play a key role. If the school is run down, you don’t care about it and you don’t want to be there” (experienced teacher, School A).

The influence of school climate was highlighted by other participants: “Every school has its own culture, identity and I don’t say it’s correct or incorrect, but it influences the implementation of IE” (experienced teacher, School G) and “Without a culture, a tone in the school, IE is impossible” (principal, School E).

This latter view was explicitly supported by the principal of School G.

Long ago before Mr X became the superintendent I knew climate is important. The climate was deadly in another school – the people had a smile on their faces but they stabbed you in the back. I would always work on the school climate.

The IE consultant agreed with the importance of the tone of the school for effective IE, stating:

If it is not there you have to create it ... Everything and everybody adds to or takes away from the climate ... The ultimate purpose for creating an inviting school is to create an optimal learning environment ... Ideally, the factors of people, places, policies, programmes and processes should be so intentionally inviting as to create an environment in which

every person is cordially invited to develop intellectually, socially, physically, psychologically and spiritually.

Although changing the climate of the school to become inviting is possible, two participants (beginner teacher, School D and principal, School F) agreed that it does take time and requires the “right staff” in the school. This contradicts what another teacher said: “A diverse group of people doesn’t need to affect IE. It may make it harder ... Any school can implement it” (experienced teacher, School A).

Research shows that teachers are most productive when they work in an environment of caring, support and trust. A friendlier and supportive school environment may diffuse hostility and alienation, which makes the school more inviting, less threatening and more rewarding (Friedland, 1999; Anonymous, 2001/2002; Brandt, 2003).

Apart from the in-school conditions, out-of-school conditions have the potential to influence the effective implementation of IE.

## **Out-of-School Conditions**

There seem to be different views on the effect of out-of-school conditions on the effective implementation of IE, ranging from a negative to a more positive view. A number of participants referred to the negative effect of out-of-school conditions on the implementation of IE.

Schools are under a lot of pressure. Our nation has passed the mandate: ‘No child left behind’ ... The school may be inviting, but if the school has failed academically that is another story. It is hard to fight public perceptions. The school could eventually close down ... It is now

very difficult to maintain an inviting environment.

Such conditions may have a negative effect when the stress levels are more and there is pressure on testing. We then rush over some kids and focus on the curriculum only. We will not be inviting because we want to make the grade for the school, district and state. There is a lot of pressure and this is not inviting (principal, School B).

***Research shows that teachers are most productive when they work in an environment of caring, support and trust.***

Regarding the effect of mandates on their performance, two teachers expressed their feelings succinctly as follows: “I’m too tired, too overwhelmed” (beginner teacher, School C) and “My plate is full. I have so many things I am responsible for. I can’t handle it” (experienced teacher, School B). An experienced teacher of School E blamed government: “Legislature makes decisions but have no idea what they are mandating. If people feel helpless, they can’t feel inviting”.

Other participants acknowledged the effect of out-of-school conditions, in particular the state mandates, but believe that “IE can work with a lot of mandates” (experienced teacher, School A). Other responses include the following:

They [out-of-school conditions] have less effect than other things. All these mandates, changes in politics, they lie heavily on teachers and principals and require more paperwork. It can affect their mood ... They can have an impact on people’s attitudes. If people feel angry, overloaded, these feelings can

affect their attitude towards the school and that will affect their job satisfaction. If a person can rise above that, OK. As a principal I protected the teachers as much as possible so that they can do their job (IE consultant).

Our state and federal mandates are out of our control. We have to make them work. I don’t agree with tests. We have to do academics, academics, academics to raise test scores. If the states give lemons, we need to make them palatable, make it a pleasant experience. So, we motivate, motivate and motivate. I encourage teachers to do it with a smile ... The pressure to excel, to succeed academically has increased 10-fold (principal, School G).

Yet some participants felt that out-of-school conditions do not or should not have an influence on the implementation of IE, as one principal said: “We don’t want to use excuses. Nothing is mandatory in [this particular school]” (principal, School D). Other participants supported this view:

If you let it happen, such conditions may influence us ... If we keep caring as the main focus, and see the children as the most important factor, we can try to help children achieve ... We know we must also work towards standards” (experienced teacher, School G).

They [out-of-school conditions] haven’t affected us, they didn’t put restraints on us ... We have an upbeat administration” (experienced teacher, School A).

One should keep in mind that the latter school is an Early Childhood Center and is not affected by mandates. The response

could be different should such mandates become applicable.

The quality of teaching and learning depends on people, structural and technical resources that are influenced by community contexts and policies and programmes of external role players. Such demands have been accompanied by an emphasis on school cultures that cultivate these expectations for learner success and reflect staff members' new responsibilities to account for students' learning. To be realistic, implementing IE under such external conditions can therefore have an impact on its effectiveness.

Although the influence of external conditions is acknowledged, schools retain the responsibility to provide effective development programmes to implement IE.

### **Professional Development Programmes**

Instituting a professional development programme such as IE needs to meet certain requirements to make the implementation effective. A number of participants described the way in which they think IE programmes should be instituted and the spirit maintained once it has been established in a school.

*Best ways of instituting IE programmes:* A few participants referred to the importance of having a place away from school to inculcate IE. The IE consultant said:

From my experience I learned that one of the best ways to move a group of teachers from the awareness and understanding levels to the application and adoption levels to get all staff on board is to have a retreat dedicated to IE. Much can be accomplished where staff meets away from school... It will take an effort on their part, but it's worth it ... It can speed up the process by one

year, a three-day retreat. Get people in the retreat where they are away from usual worries and chores. It can be very basic. It doesn't need to be fancy.

The idea of having a retreat away from school was supported by a teacher. She also elaborated on when, how and by whom such programmes should be presented:

You have to make professional development appealing. I went to a retreat ... I don't want to catch up work once I get back to school ... I love a hands-on workshop. I don't like to be lectured to, I want to participate ... I would like to have someone who is not on the staff who has a lot of experience, who doesn't have attachments to the staff, who is not biased. It should be a venue away from the school (experienced teacher, School G).

A principal was more explicit about the time IE programmes should be presented and elaborated on the inviting atmosphere of such programmes.

At the beginning of school or in summer teachers are more relaxed to implement IE. If individuals' minds are too overloaded it won't work... For the workshop have food, feed the body and soul, we all like to eat ... Also make it aesthetically pleasant to everyone ... Keep it within two hours (principal, School G).

The assistant principal of School C disagreed: "We feel comfortable at school to be trained by people in our own building. We feel more comfortable to ask questions."

The IE consultant referred to strategies for the introduction of IE. "First I think they should read the fastback [a publication] of

IE. They [the staff] also need to see the video journal of education on IE". The importance of a video on IE and visits to schools that have successfully implemented IE was also supported by a beginner teacher, School A.

One thing you need is a video of IE showing how it's working. You should make visits to schools that are working. This is the first thing. You have to show that it is working. If an outsider comes in, they could say it won't work. You can talk, talk, talk, but until they see it, it won't work.

Others, however, believed that the principal can 'bring' the approach to the school, be the 'seed' and continue to endorse it, even when resistance is experienced. The principal of School G remarked:

We have to bring awareness of IE to the school. We have to start with the principal. All I can do is to bring the knowledge there ...There is a lot of resistance. You will have to keep presenting it. You keep presenting it. It will take two to three times. The staff may call it fluff.

A few participants referred to the qualities of a presenter of IE programmes since "the presenter is crucial" (beginner teacher, school D) and "he or she can make you buy it or turn you off" (experienced teacher, School H). The following qualities of an effective presenter were identified: "The presenter has to be accepted by the group and should be an invitational person. He should be full of excitement and warm" (beginner teacher, School C); "The presenter has to be funny and model things" (experienced teacher, School A) in the programme; and "The presenter should be honest and show it is hard. He should show where difficulties are and how they should be addressed" (principal, School G). Presenters can, however, be expensive

and "come and go", therefore some participants believed that members of staff such as councillors could present such programmes.

What also came to the fore was the need to have feedback after such programmes were presented as an experienced teacher of School G explained: "You need to review and discuss what ideas you have developed so far. Feedback is a good thing".

It is obvious from the responses that participants have different views on where, when, how and by whom programmes should be implemented. Literature also differs in this regard. Trent (1997) and Sachs (1999) recommended that staff go to another geographical setting for a few days, away from the day-to-day routine. Burke (1997) and Ribisch (1999), however, believe that PD cannot be conducted in the same type of environment for all teachers. This implies that schools have to select programmes for IE that suit them best.

Although IE awareness training is essential, a continuance to inculcate certain inviting values and practices is required.

*Necessity to continue IE inculcation:* Receiving the IE award does not mean that the school has "arrived". It is even more important to demonstrate what it is to be inviting after the honour has been bestowed on the school. Two teachers mentioned the necessity of maintaining the IE spirit in the school.

We are now lacking it [the spirit of IE] 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, many 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).

The principal of School I referred to the way in which her school attempts to sustain the spirit of IE.

We do maintenance in different ways. We started with [IE consultant] and brought her back for a refreshment course. She reinforced it and the next year we plan to take it on ourselves, I mean the workshop. You have to give invitations in small doses. They [teachers] can otherwise be overwhelmed ... We also have periodic meetings one-on-one ... We also got sponsors for The Atlanta Conference.

***Schools have to select programmes for IE that suit them best.***

An experienced teacher of School E elaborated on this comment:

A one time shot is not enough. You need a mentoring programme and a person who is committed to help and support us [teachers]. This is especially true for isolated cases of uninviting behaviour ... Being inviting is intentional, it doesn't always come naturally.

The responses of participants regarding continuity of PD are supported by literature. They claim that PD is most effective when it is continuously done with the necessary individual follow-up through observation and feedback. The methods employed will, however, depend on the needs of the staff.

## Conclusion

It is clear from the findings that although different educational institutions formed part of the study, they all agreed upon the major aspects required for the effective implementation of IE as a PD programme; that is the role of leadership, the role of teachers, in-school and out-of-school conditions and the requirements of a PD programme on IE.

The leadership role describes the principal as a visionary, leading the school community in its development to use more effective teaching and curricular strategies and supporting educators' efforts to become inviting. A vision of becoming inviting is vital for the success of the programme. 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. Their attitude and commitment towards IE cannot be underestimated. One



of the most important things that professionals can do in inviting schools is to work together and learn from one another.

A positive school culture can be conducive for the effective implementation of IE. Otherwise, valuable time and resources will be spent in achieving only minor growth of staff. The inviting school culture should be humane, that is, psychologically comfortable with warm human relationships and professionally supportive, offering people have the necessary resources and opportunities to collaborate and learn from others. It is also true that an inviting culture can be taught, and there-

fore PD programmes have a role in transmitting this school culture.

The mandate "No child left behind" and other mandates to improve the quality of learning can put schools under pressure to perform academically. It implies that other initiatives such as IE have the potential to be resisted by staff that already experiences a lot of pressure. The influence of principals, the attitude of staff and a school culture receptive to change should, how-ever, not be underestimated when de-scribing the possible negative impact of out-of-school conditions on the effective implementation of IE.

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*G. M. Steyn is professor in the School of Education at the University of South Africa. Correspondence about this article may be sent to [steyngml@unisa.ac.za](mailto:steyngml@unisa.ac.za)*