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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Belonging in School*.

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“NOTHING ANNOYS PEOPLE
SO MUCH AS NOT
RECEIVING INVITATIONS.”
- Oscar Wilde
The Importance of Being Earnest



2 INVITED

Being welcomed is an important aspect of the social contract between humans. But we can only be welcomed if we have been invited. Some students feel invited into their schools and classrooms; others do not. When students feel invited, they are more likely to experience belonging, which has a positive effect on learning and an effect size of 0.46.

Social exclusion, whether on a large or small scale, hurts. In fact, social exclusion is harmful to the health¹ and academic achievement² of our students in part because the learners do not have opportunities to collaborate with peers, complete homework together, or benefit from the systems of support that others can offer.

Schools can be intentional and ensure that all students feel invited. This includes classroom and extracurricular events. Who gets encouraged to try out for various sports teams? Who gets invited to social events? Who gets assigned to different classes and programs? Each of these are important considerations, and educators are wise to note how the invitations feel to those who receive them and those who do not.

Rachael is the parent of three school-aged children. She glowed when recounting her son Isaiah's receipt of a hand-addressed letter from the school. It was addressed to Isaiah, not his parents. Inside was a letter inviting him to apply to be a member of the safety patrol at his school. And, of course, he applied, and he takes his job very seriously: "Mom, we can't be late! I'm on crossing guard duty today!" But her true delight was in learning that every student in his grade received an invitation. Her son was not singled out because of some perceived leadership skill he was thought to possess. Instead, every student was given the opportunity to develop this set of skills. That's what being invited truly means.

Essential Question:

HOW ARE WE PURSUING ALL STUDENTS' PRESENCE AND ACTIVELY EXTENDING NEW INVITATIONS?

Indicators: Teachers described the following indicators of a classroom and school environment where students feel the invitation to learn. Use these indicators to assess your own environment.

Table 2.1 • What Being Invited Looks, Sounds, and Feels Like

| What Does It Look Like? | What Does It Sound Like? | What Does It Feel Like? |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intentionally crafted environment and learning opportunities• Teacher modeling of inviting behavior• Sending emails and notes, making phone calls to families/ caregivers to participate in learning and other school-related activities and events | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using respectful language and tone in all interactions• Students and teachers using inviting language with others for academic and social opportunities on campus• Asking peers on the playground to join in play• Asking peers to sit with them during lunch or recess | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wanted• Seen• Encouraged• Included• Consistent• Safe |



TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE

Two of these statements are true; one is false. Can you spot the lie?

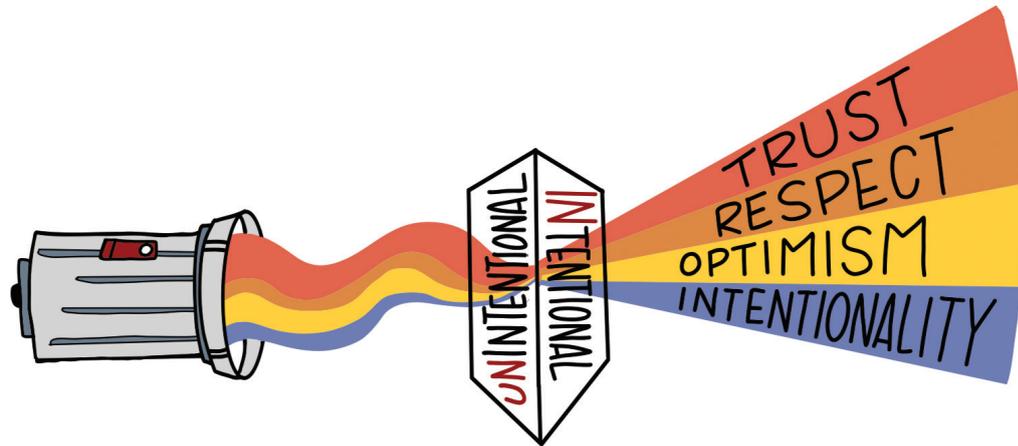
1. Social pain is detected and interpreted in a different region of the brain than physical pain.
2. Students who are disliked by the teacher are more readily rejected by peers than those who are liked by the teacher.
3. A predominant amount of instructional time during reading and math is spent doing independent seat work.

Did you spot the lie? Neural imaging studies reveal that social and physical pain are experienced in the same region of the brain. Social rejection can result in physical pain.³ Ask any school nurse how frequently a student who is experiencing social exclusion or rejection comes to their office complaining about a stomachache or a headache. The somatic pain is real, but its cause may be social in nature.

The fact is that, at times, we as adults are the initial perpetrators of that pain. We disinvite students to learn through words and actions. Some are overt, such as the use of sarcasm with a targeted student. But more often, it is covert, as when we have fewer friendly actions with some students. We hold a pessimistic view of their learning potential and withdraw attention. This is not lost on their classmates, who can reliably report who the teacher likes and dislikes. Further, these classmates often adopt a similar dislike of the student.⁴

We further disinvite students from the learning process when we reduce the rigor of the content we teach. A study of the literacy assignments of 12 million students found that those in high-poverty schools had fewer experiences with grade-level work, even when they had already demonstrated mastery.⁵ The number of assigned minutes of independent seatwork—estimated at 70 percent in one study—doesn't help in our efforts to invite students into learning.⁶

INVITATIONAL TEACHING



Our daily teaching practices—and the language we use when we teach—convey much about how inviting we are. The concept of invitational teaching is viewed through four prisms:⁷

- **Trust:** The ongoing relationships between the teacher and students
- **Respect:** The actions that communicate an understanding of everyone’s autonomy, identity, and value to the learning community
- **Optimism:** The sense that the potential of each classroom member is untapped, and that every member of the classroom is responsible for finding ways to help others reach their potential
- **Intentionality:** The practices, policies, processes, and programs of classrooms and schools that are carefully designed to convey trust, respect, and optimism to all

The concept of invitational teaching has been transformative in making it possible for us to self-monitor our own practices. It scales across two dimensions:

- *Inviting versus uninviting*
- *Intentional versus unintentional*

Table 2.2 • Intentional and Unintentional Inviting and Uninviting

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>1. <i>Intentionally uninviting teachers . . .</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are judgmental and belittling • display little care or regard • are uninterested in the lives and feelings of students • isolate themselves from school life • seek power over students | <p>4. <i>Intentionally inviting teachers . . .</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are consistent and steady with students • notice learning and struggle • respond regularly with feedback • seek to build, maintain, and repair relationships |
|--|--|

Table 2.2 • Intentional and Unintentional Inviting and Uninviting (continued)

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>2. <i>Unintentionally uninviting teachers . . .</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • distance themselves from students • have low expectations • don't feel effective, and blame students for shortcomings • fail to notice student learning or struggle • offer little feedback to learners | <p>3. <i>Unintentionally inviting teachers . . .</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are eager but unreflective • are energetic but rigid when facing problems • are unaware of what works in their practice, and why • have fewer means for responding when student learning is resistant to their usual methods |
|--|--|

Source: Adapted from Purkey and Novak (1996).

We believe there are relatively few *intentionally uninviting teachers* (Quadrant 1), but they are corrosive to their students and the school organization. They need and deserve supports and coaching to change their behaviors. We believe there are also *unintentionally inviting teachers* (Quadrant 3), who are enthusiastic but less reflective about their practice. That makes them more vulnerable to disappointment and adversity. They, too, deserve supports and coaching, before they become intentionally uninviting.

We all seek to be *intentionally inviting teachers* who are consistent, steady, and responsive (Quadrant 4). But there may be times when we find ourselves being *unintentionally uninviting* (Quadrant 2). We do so when we hold lower expectations for some students and distance ourselves from interactions. It is important that we not allow ourselves to be lulled into a false sense of complacency. Rather, we must see our invitations as specific to each student. The fact that we might be effectively inviting *some* students should not be confused as being invitational to *each* student.

TAKE ACTION

Develop and maintain trusting relationships with all your students. Trust runs both ways—we can't demand to know all our students while withholding ourselves. We aren't suggesting that you disclose everything about yourself. Rather, consider how they will get to know you as you get to know them.



(Continued)

(Continued)

Convey your respect for students in every action. Don't be the destructive teacher who says, "I'll give you the same kind of respect you give me." That sounds like a threat. We don't demand respect; we earn it. Instead, make sure that all your interactions are humane and growth-producing. Eye contact, tone of voice, and body language contribute to the message that you care, even when the going is a bit tougher for learners.

Show your optimism for students. Young people have the potential to change the world for the better; it's probably why you became a teacher in the first place. How will you demonstrate a "can do" spirit for them?

Use the 2x10 approach for hard-to-reach students.⁸ For two minutes a day, for ten days in a row, talk to the student about anything *but* school. This process is used for students who need extra care and inviting into learning. Ask about something that is happening in their life and make a connection to your own experiences, if appropriate. More importantly, ask them a question about it. Reflect on changes you see after two weeks. Has your relationship improved?



QUICK START

| | I can start this tomorrow! | I can begin this month | I need to discuss this with others | Resources needed |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|
| Select one area to strengthen to make you a more invitational teacher. | | | | |
| Identify three ways you will share appropriate aspects of your life with your students. | | | | |
| Identify a hard-to-reach student and try the 2x10 approach. | | | | |

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HIGH EXPECTATIONS THROUGH GROUPING

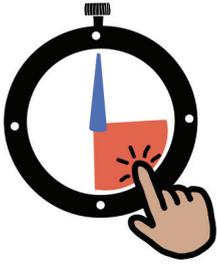


Collaborative learning is an essential part of a responsive instructional framework.⁹ It can convey our intentionality about how we facilitate learning and what our expectations are for students. One major way we signal these expectations is through our grouping practices. The research on high-expectations teaching is significant, and one of the major findings is how grouping practices distinguish teachers with low expectations from their colleagues who hold an optimistic view of their students' potential.¹⁰

It turns out that teachers with lower expectations consistently use ability grouping and assign tasks to groups based on their achievement levels. In doing so, the pace of instruction slows down for low-achieving students, while higher-achieving students advance more quickly. The gap grows throughout the school year, further contributing to a lack of opportunity to learn.

On the other hand, teachers with high expectations use heterogenous groups of mixed abilities. As well, they change the grouping configurations monthly to promote peer relationships. They understand the importance of spreading effective learning approaches through peer modeling.

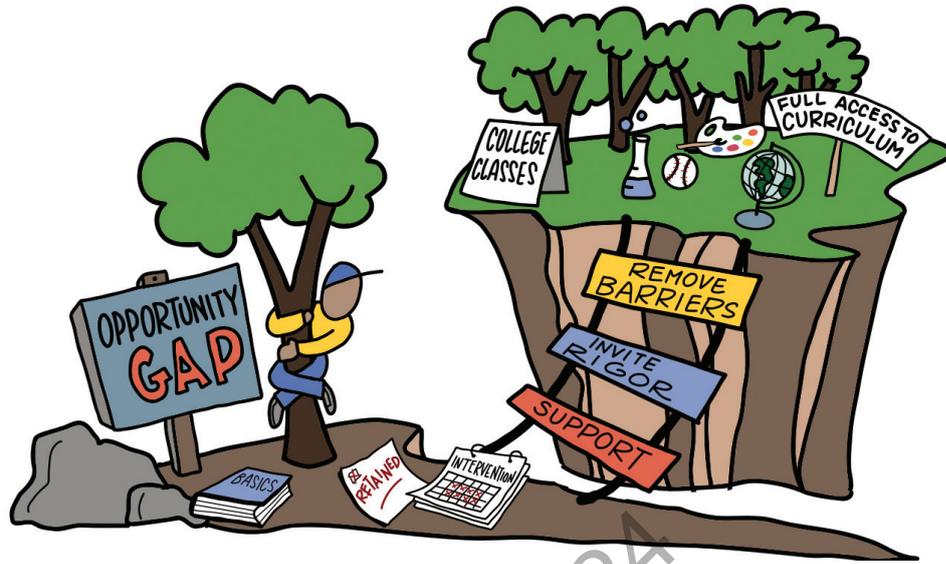
Another challenge of ability grouping is that those who are consistently in the lower-achieving group are given less responsibility for their learning. Instead, they get more directions that are repeated again and again. The tasks tend to be more skill-based and have less demand for application and transfer of learning using critical thinking. A lower quality of work is accepted by the teacher, who substitutes feedback with general encouragement. Overall, this allows students less room to make individual gains on learning goals.



QUICK START

| | I can start this tomorrow! | I can begin this month | I need to discuss this with others | Resources needed |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|
| Identify when you will use heterogeneous groups throughout the day or the period. | | | | |
| Determine a metric you will use to develop an alternative ranking system. | | | | |
| Schedule reminders in your calendar to switch groups. | | | | |

THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN



You can't learn what you haven't been taught.

Did you know that the systematic exposure to less challenging curricula leads to depressed academic achievement over time? There's even a name for this phenomenon: the opportunity to learn. It begins in elementary school, where some students spend more time on the development of discrete reading and mathematics skills but receive fewer chances to apply these across the curriculum, including in science, social studies, the arts, and physical education. They may even be retained in a grade, a widespread practice in elementary school that has failed to show evidence of impact. In fact, ten meta-analyses of a total of 339 studies have failed to reveal a single positive effect size, which is a statistical measure of impact on learning.¹¹ The effect size of grade-level retention is actually -0.29 . Talk about disinviting: *You're not invited to first grade, kid. Sorry.*

It continues in middle school, where well-intentioned administrators assign students who are not making expected progress to double-periods of intervention. Other courses, often in the visual and performing arts, are removed from their schedules. What this approach sacrifices is knowledge building, a known predictor of higher reading comprehension for adolescents.¹² In the meantime, they fall further behind their peers in knowledge gained in other subjects. For these students, the gap continues to grow in high school. The disparities in college preparatory course enrollment for students of color, students living in poverty, students with disabilities, foster youth, and multilingual learners are significant.¹³

In order to address this, some innovative middle and high schools have taken steps to rectify it, including the following actions:

1. Developing strong transition plans between levels of school so that students feel belonging to their new school (such as elementary students visiting their middle schools)¹⁴
2. Staging recruitment campaigns to invite students to take more rigorous coursework
3. Removing access barriers, such as a required teacher recommendation to enroll in advanced coursework
4. Providing additional supports for students who may struggle in those courses

By strengthening the pipeline across a student’s K–12 academic career, we can invite them into a more rigorous learning space.

TAKE ACTION



Use targeted small-group instruction to pre-teach. Monitor progress of students regularly, and respond when you find some students struggling. Plan short pre-teaching sessions for students who aren’t making expected progress to “warm up” a text for them in advance of whole-group instruction. This approach gives learners the further advantage of benefiting from your Tier 1 instruction.

Schedule regular intervals for reteaching. Plan fifteen-minute Mastery Monday sessions for students to regroup about a topic of their choice from the previous week. Have students reconfigure in small groups to reexamine a problem or task they had difficulty with, and encourage them to work together to strengthen their knowledge. Provide scaffolds and direct instruction as needed so that the group is successful. Students who didn’t have a struggle can serve as peer tutors.



QUICK START

| | I can start this tomorrow! | I can begin this month | I need to discuss this with others | Resources needed |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|
| Use encouraging language with all students about their ability to strive. | | | | |
| Invite elementary students to tour the feeder middle and high school they will attend in the future so they can see the many opportunities that await them. | | | | |
| Add discussion of the importance of advanced course enrollment to every middle and high school conference with families/ caregivers, including IEP meetings. | | | | |

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CASE IN POINT: INVITING ALL STUDENTS



During a team meeting, third-grade teacher Araceli Ramirez said, “I see a group of students get on a school bus about two blocks from here, but they don’t come to our school. Does anyone know where they’re going?”

Her colleague, Justin Kempt, responded, “Yeah, they go to a regional program for students with disabilities. Their parents were given choices by the school system, and they decided to go someplace else.”

Ms. Ramirez was shocked. “Why would they not want to be here? It’s a great school with lots of supports. Maybe nobody from the school ever invited them into our school, and their parents didn’t know how amazing we are. They really should be invited to our school.”

Mr. Kempt agreed. He suggested they speak with Mr. Green, the new principal. “Maybe he would be interested. We do have space at our school, and it would be great to have our students get to know kids with more significant disabilities.”

A few weeks later, Mr. Green sent a letter home to the thirty-two students who would have been enrolled in the school but were

instead attending other schools. Some of these students were those identified with disabilities who were attending the regional program, and others had families/caregivers who had exercised other choice options. In his letter, Mr. Green outlined the benefits of the school, and he invited students and their families/caregivers to come for a visit and meet the staff.

The result? Twenty-eight of the thirty-two families/caregivers were so impressed with the invitation that they accepted and enrolled their children in the local school. As one parent said, “We feel so invited and cared for. I know my son is going to be better off connecting with other kids who live in our neighborhood.”

What’s Your Advice?

- What recommendations do you have for supporting the students who will be enrolling based on the invitation?
- What systems should be in place to ensure that students feel invited every year?
- Are there students who should be attending your school who should be invited?

WHAT'S NEXT?

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How are we pursuing all students' presence and actively extending new invitations?

THINK ABOUT

- In what ways is invitational teaching part of your daily instruction?
- How do students experience opportunities to learn in your classroom?
- How have your grouping practices evolved to convey high expectations for all?

START – STOP – KEEP

Based on what you learned in this module, answer the questions that follow.

Start: What practice(s) would you like to start doing?

Stop: What practice(s) would you like to stop doing?

Keep: What practice(s) would you like to keep doing?

