

TRUST-RESPECT-OPTIMISM-CARE- INTENTIONALITY

The Oncourse System of Collaboration
& Governance: Grounded in the 5 Basic
Assumptions of Invitational Education®

Rev. Charles K. Miller, President and
Co-founder

From its inception, Oncourse Education Collaborative set a course creatively unique and distinct from most agencies and businesses. The three co-founders mutually agreed that we would function as a true collaborative with the mission to connect and build collaborative relationships and partnerships with others to better serve children and youth.

No egos or hidden agendas. No corporate politics or power plays. Instead, we replaced these negative forces with the moral principles of Trust-Respect-Optimism-Care-Intentionality to connect and build these important relationships and partnerships with others. The positive emphasis is on people and how we can work together to improve our services to others.

We put the above five moral principles into practice using the Invitational Education® model as our guide and direction. Below is a summary of these five important moral precepts as embraced by Invitational Education®.

Trust takes time and effort in building healthy, collaborative relationships and partnerships that last. *It is established and maintained through the interlocking human qualities of **Reliability, Genuineness, Truthfulness, Intent, and Competence*** (Arceneaux, 1994).

Respect is the recognition that *people are valuable, able, and responsible and should be treated accordingly. A democratic society emphasizes the inherent worth of people, believes in their self-directing power, and stresses the importance of personal and social accountability* (Purkey & Novak, 2008).

Optimism represents hopefulness and confidence. *People possess untapped potential in all areas of positive human endeavor. Challenges, problems, and concerns may be invitational opportunities in disguise. Human potential, while not always apparent, is always there, waiting to be discovered and invited forth* (Purkey & Novak, 2008).

Care is the ongoing desire to link significant personal means with worthwhile societal ends (Purkey & Novak, 2008). Warmth, empathy, and positive regard are the traits of a caring individual.

Intentionality explains the how of Invitational Education® that brings together the trust, respect, optimism, and care that are essential to being an efficient professional (Schmidt, 2002). We are to be intentionally inviting with ourselves and with others both personally and professionally. *In fundamental practice, it is the focus on people, places, programs, policies, and processes that transmit messages promoting human potential. By encouraging development, human potential can best be realized* (Purkey & Novak, 2008).

The co-founders of Oncourse have intentionally embraced the above 5 moral principles as defined by Invitational Education® as our guide for the governance and management of our agency. We operate by consensus, strongly respecting and affirming one another as we share our thoughts and decisions.

We relate to the members of our board of trust and honorary advisors in the same manner. As we move forward, our goal is to conduct all Oncourse business and communication in this manner including board of trust meetings.

To many, our mission will seem unrealistic, innocent, and naïve. Far to the contrary, the three of us together boast more than 80 years of professional experience including an abundance of residential service with at-risk children and youth. We know by experience that when the negative forces including egos, politics, hidden agendas, and power trips are in play, very little gets accomplished—and children and youth pay dearly for the foolishness of adults.

We also know from experience and practice, when negative forces are removed from the equation of decision making and governing, great things can and do happen. Dreaming Dreams becomes Reality in practice. It takes effort and it takes time. Above all, it takes Trust-Respect-Optimism-Care-Intentionality!

Reference

Arceneaux, C. J. (1994). Trust: An exploration of its nature and significance. *Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice*, 7,12-15.

Purkey, W. W. & Novak, J. M. (2008). *Fundamentals of Invitational Education*. Kennesaw, GA: The International Alliance for Invitational Education®.

Schmidt, J. J. (2002). *Intentional helping: A philosophy for proficient caring relationships*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.

Oncourse Develops Staff!

Circle of Courage Training at your site. Call us today!

Collaborative Relationships

Liz Roper, Co-founder

Charles' article is a great segue on the topic of building community collaborative relationships and partnerships to better serve our children. Parents frequently are under utilized as part of the support package in educational, therapeutic, and court ordered settings.

For a child who has been arrested or referred to juvenile courts, it is important that parents participate, advocate, and support their child. In fact, court personnel seem mindful of parents who are a strong presence in court. Interviews with police also indicate that officers may be more likely to charge, release on strict conditions, and/or detain the young person whose parents show no interest in becoming involved, downplay the gravity of the situation, or deny that their adolescent child could have committed a crime (Harvell, Hendy, & Rodas, 2004).

Unfortunately parents often receive little guidance as to how they can effectively participate in the juvenile justice system and few accommodations are made to include them. It's not that parents don't want to be involved with their child, but barriers can exclude them. Parents of children in the juvenile justice system frequently come from single-parent families and are of lower socioeconomic means. Frequently childcare and transportation are an issue in addition to time away from their job. Moreover, as more non-English speaking families come to Tennessee and the USA, language is also a barrier.

Parents love their children. Parents are instrumental in developing their child's interests, motivation, and self-management, but they don't always know how to support their child, or how to interact with the agency while the child is

receiving services, or how to maintain control once the child comes home. We must collaborate with our parents through two way communication, decisions, and workshops on a regular basis, so that the child increases in academic achievement and has an overall increase of well being.

To turn around our “at risk” youth to “at promise” youth, we must build their skills, so that they can function as successful and productive adults. Children must know how to persevere, interact appropriately, and have solid education skills and vocational certification. Children must be shown how to access information and resources for areas such as schools, jobs, transportation, housing, medical, and other needs. The list goes on and on. We must work with our parents, so they will know how to support their children when they return home.

Agencies that work with families to develop effective parenting skills, promote school success, and provide reinforcement and greater supervision show success in reducing problem behavior and increasing school achievement. As agencies serve children from all over and not just locally, a variety of communication methods should be used to engage them –phone, newsletters, on site activities, internet, etc.

- To begin the communication process, agencies should make contact with the parents or legal guardians on the first day when their child first arrives.
- The counselor, child, and parent should share on regularly scheduled conference calls, so that the parent knows their child is safe, is informed about how their child’s day is scheduled, who to contact for what, obtain information about school and therapy-the issues and progress, and jointly create and carryout the discharge plan to transition the child back to the community.

- Ask your parents or legal guardians what skills and resources they need to support their child while at the agency and upon discharge. Use a survey to gain the information. Training and meetings can be built around their needs: supervising school work, selecting high school classes for graduation, setting post secondary education goals, obtaining financial assistance, career exploration, delinquency prevention, special needs, mental health, substance abuse, advocacy, leisure time, developmental milestones, maintaining discipline at home, accessing community resources, etc.
- Invite parents regularly to visit your agency- school open houses, parent-teacher conferences, progress reports, workshops, treatment team, counselor meetings, on site visits, etc.

*International Alliance for Invitational
Education World Conference*

October 24-29

Eastern Kentucky University

Richmond, KY

www.invitationaleducation.net

Policymakers Dilemma

R. Scott Lee, Vice-President and Co-founder

A recent edition of *Education Week* (June 8, 2011) ran the headline “Panel Finds Few

Learning Benefits in High-Stakes Exams” (p. 1). No practicing educator is surprised by the findings of the Congressional Blue Ribbon Commission. We are all aware that many of the high stakes testing incentives found in the No Child Left Behind act were bound to fail. Educators are hopeful that this will be the opportunity for policymakers to actually listen to professionals when developing systems of accountability.

The biggest problem with the current bubble-test based accountability system is that it does not serve students, families or educators. Current systems provide very little connection to achievement. Their major value is their ability to quickly quantify a small amount of student exposure to content. If testing systems actually were to be connected to learning they would look more like a driver’s license exam. In order for a sixteen year old to earn a driver’s license they must take a test to show knowledge of rules and expectations. If this is passed then they actually take a driving test behind the wheel in a car. Yet we have high stakes accountability systems for high school graduation that are less connected to skills that graduates need.

I am not advocating that we do not have accountability systems. But our current high-stakes bubble testing systems do not provide the types of information that is really needed to assess either what students are learning or how well educators and schools create a learning climate. Unfortunately for some policymakers, the types of assessments that would provide real insight into learning and accountability cannot be bubbled and computer scored. Until policymakers start thinking of accountability in ways that master educators do they will experience continued disappointment. Valuable assessment systems involve a process. As effective teachers establish mentoring relationships with students they use curriculum standards to create challenging and enriching learning experiences for all students. The

students then construct a product that can be assessed to determine learning. The teacher’s assessment is then used to guide the student on the next learning task. Meanwhile a team of teachers will use the student’s work to assess and inform their own practices to enlighten their ongoing professional development.

This is the dilemma. Policymakers want a pound of responsibility while only paying for the current system which provides an ounce of accountability. To really have the whole pound they will have to create an accountability system that is similar to what effective teachers already do. They will have to develop an accountability system that responsibly informs professional practice. The question will remain, do policymakers really want the pound or will they have an ounce and say it’s a pound?

Tennessee Council for Exceptional Children Conference

October 13-15

Chattanooga Convention Center

Please visit our website

www.oncoursecollaborative.org

Opinions of authors may reflect personal opinions. Diversity of opinion and scientific inquiry is valued by the Collaborative and authors are invited to provide commentary comment independently.

For comment or additional copies please contact us at our address below.

© 2011 Oncourse Education Collaborative