

## THE INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR INVITATIONAL EDUCATION 2014 ANNUAL WORLD CONFERENCE ONCOURSE TO NASHVILLE -- MUSIC CITY USA

The Co-Founders of Oncourse Education Collaborative are honored and privileged to host the International Alliance for Invitational Education (IAIE) World Conference in Nashville during the Fall of 2014. The annual conference in Nashville follows the 2012 destination to Hong Kong and 2013 to Orlando, Florida.



IAIE is a chartered, non-profit organization *with the unique mission of creating and maintaining truly welcoming relationships and environments that enhance life-long learning, promote positive organizational change, cultivate personal professional growth, and enrich people's lives.*

Invitational Education® is a theory of practice. *IE® maintains that every person and everything in and around schools and other organizations either adds to, or subtracts from, the process of being a beneficial presence in the lives of human beings. Ideally, the factors of **p**eople, **p**laces, **p**olicies, **p**rograms and **p**rocesses should be so intentionally inviting as to create a world in which each individual is cordially summoned to develop intellectually, socially, physically, psychologically, and spiritually.*

IAIE and IE® are based on the ethical principles of **trust-respect-optimism-care-intentionality**. The positive emphasis is on people and the professional and personal relationships we build together. These five ethical principles form the foundation to develop and build those relationships with one another.

We are equally honored and privileged to have Belmont University in Nashville serve with us as our co-sponsor to host this conference. Our collaboration together is based on a mutual desire and respect to provide a welcoming and inviting conference environment that will enrich and positively impact the lives of the participants both professionally and personally.



*Belmont is a student-centered Christian community providing an academically challenging education that empowers men and women of diverse backgrounds to engage and transform the world with disciplined intelligence, compassion, courage and faith.*

The university's core values of **Integrity-Inquiry-Collaboration-Service-Humility** are upheld as essential to intellectual, spiritual, personal and corporate life. Belmont's core values and mission statement serve as strong companions with those of IAIE and Oncourse.

As we make preparations for IAIE's World Conference arrival date to Nashville in 2014, our overriding priority will be to meet the conference needs of our participants. Current thought is to offer special interest sessions for university students and professors, public and private school staffs including alternative educators and residential care staffs, mental and physical health care staffs, and for our international participants.

A leadership symposium is also under consideration as a part of the conference with Invitational Theory as the catalyst for dialogue. The discussion would include how to implement the theory in offices and businesses, hospitals and mental health facilities, places of worship, schools and universities, and government entities at the local, state, and federal levels.

Clearly, our intended audience represents a diverse group inclusive of government officials. Invitational Theory and IE® are not just for educators—they are for everyone who wishes to work and live in an inviting and welcoming environment that cordially summons each of us to develop our full potential intellectually, socially, physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

As we move forward with our plans for 2014, we want to hear from you. Our goal is to offer our attendees vital and practical information that can be implemented and used in professional and personal settings following the conference. As a prospective attendee, you are invited to offer your thoughts and suggestions for conference sessions relating to IE® and its application and implementation. My contact information is below.

We will keep our readers periodically updated with IAIE conference information. See you in **Nashville 2014**.



**Rev. Charles K. Miller**  
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IAIE 2014 Conference Director

## Welcoming Environments: Is Your School Family-Friendly?

**Liz Roper, Co-Founder**

Recently the U.S. Department of Education approved new educational achievement goals written by ten states including Tennessee. The waiver allows us to move from Adequate Yearly Progress goals to Tennessee goals which will affect students, schools, and teachers. See the “Final Approved Waiver Request, Jan. 19, 2012” on [www.tn.gov/education](http://www.tn.gov/education). Tennessee will focus on two key objectives:

- Growth for all students each year, and
- Closing the achievement gaps by ensuring faster progress for those groups of students who are furthest behind.

Involving parents is another piece of the pie in improving achievement. The Tennessee goals will provide more flexibility for school districts to address problem areas, and encourage student and school achievement which is a beautiful thing. Research shows that when parents are engaged and are equal partners in decision making that students and schools benefit.

In this article we will look at strategies that promote welcoming environments and engaging parents. Not all the parents had successful school careers. For some parents being on a school campus brings back unpleasant memories. And for the immigrating parents, the American school is a new experience.

Many public schools receive Title I funding for parental involvement. The school staff and some parents make the decisions as to how the money will be spent to improve achievement. Some districts actively seek much parental input while other districts barely involve the parents in these decisions.

What school considerations can be implemented to appeal to parents and others serving as legal guardians? Well, let's start with the school building. Is there adequate parking for parents and are there signs throughout the building to help parents navigate the premises? Is there a sign marking the front entrance?

Let's consider communication...

\* Have the front office and all school employees been trained to help parents in a polite manner? Are the parents given various guest badges upon sign in to represent parents, volunteers, and other visitors? Is there an open door policy for parents? Do the teachers provide parents their contact information and when they are available? Do the teachers or principal return parent calls promptly?

\* Do schools use multiple means to communicate with parents? Is there a monthly or quarterly newsletter or automated phone system announcing school news and upcoming events?

\* Do parents have electronic means to access their child's assignments, grades, and attendance? Are parents provided frequent progress reports? Do the teachers contact parents quickly if there's a concern?

\* Are parents polled for input or through surveys for training needs and school decisions?

\* Is there a variety of parent training such as interpreting test scores, courses, child development, assisting their child with school work at home, and transitioning to the next level or placement?

\* Are parents asked to serve on committees such as the School Improvement Plan, Parent Involvement Plan, and Safety Committee? Are parents asked to volunteer: in the classroom, cafeteria, hallway, bus, field trip, etc.?

\* For schools with non-English families, are translators available throughout the school day and during parent-teacher conferences? Does the building reflect the diversity of the school population?

The schools can improve parental involvement by:

1. Building Relationships
2. Linking to Learning
3. Addressing Differences
4. Supporting Advocacy
5. Sharing Power

Parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them. Parents are more likely to become involved when parents understand that they should be involved, parents feel capable of making a contribution, and parents feel invited by their school and children.

References

**Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide for Family-School Partnerships** by Anne Henderson, Karen Mapp, Vivian Johnson, and Don Davies 2007; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997

## Teaching and Neuroscience

### Creating a Brain Responsive Learning Environment for At-risk Students

**R. Scott Lee, Vice-President and Co-Founder**

Recently I participated in a PersonBrain Model class with a group of teachers in Georgia. PersonBrain is a professional development program created by Dr. Paul Baker that combines current research in neuroscience with research on developing resilience in at-risk/at-risk youth. The PersonBrain Model demonstrates how every interaction between an adult and youth affects brain development. Specifically these interactions either promote development of inner discipline or influence a negative emotional state.

Following the program participants made some interesting comments. As many of us know if you really want to know what people think then listen to the side comments on the way out. This group's thoughts fell along two major thoughts. The first

typical remark was “I wish I had learned more about brain development years ago”. The other was “My supervisor/administrator/principal should have been here too”.

Good teachers are thirsty for useful knowledge that will enhance professional practice. But often our practices are based on tradition rather than scientific research. While some of our professional traditions are finding scientific validation others are not. The comments reminded me of an event that occurred early in my teaching career. I was teaching in a high poverty middle school with many students who are often referred to as “struggling readers” (although I don’t like this term). When the principal showed up for the first classroom observation I was happy he chose the day he did. I had planned a guided reading activity straight out of my college content area reading textbook. The lesson went as planned and provided what I gauged to be the right amount of challenge for the students. When I had my post observation conference I was stunned by the poor feedback from the principal. He told me that reading in class wasted valuable instructional time. I was instructed that reading should be assigned for homework instead. He expected more teacher centered activity and showed no interest in discussing data regarding student reading levels or supporting literacy. I can only suppose that the principal truly believed that a social studies teacher had no business trying to teach literacy-somehow this was someone else’s job.

Had this administrator participated in the PersonBrain Model he might have learned that neuroscience research continues to validate practices in classrooms that involve students being active participants in learning. Active brain development is promoted by a teacher who engages, maintains and models a warm, respectful relationship with students. These are the teachers whose professional practice is supported by science. Yet when I visit schools I observe that this type of daily professional practice is only encouraged and supported in some schools or practiced in some classrooms.

The evidence continues to reinforce the theories promoted by Oncourse have scientific validity. Neuroscience corroborates the approaches of the Re-ED model, the Reclaiming Model, Invitational

Education and other like-minded approaches to education. No amount of bubble testing or lobbying by those who oversimplify learning will change that.

To learn more about the neuroscience implication of educating at risk children and youth referenced here I recommend:

*The Hopeful Brain: Relational Repair for Disconnected Youth.* (2011). By Paul Baker, Ph.D and Meredith White-McMahon, Ed. D. Published by Pretext Publishers: Cape Town, South Africa. The book is available at the Reclaiming Youth Bookstore – [www.reclaiming.com](http://www.reclaiming.com) and other booksellers.

For more information about how to bring the PersonBrain Model to your school or organization, please email Scott at [oncource@mindspring.com](mailto:oncource@mindspring.com) and I will gladly put you in contact with a PersonBrain Practitioner.

## Oncourse Professional Development

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