



Thank you

FOR YOUR
INTEREST IN
CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Seen, Heard, and Valued*.

[LEARN MORE](#) about this title!

Emotionally Safe Environments

Create Environments Where Students Feel Welcomed and Empowered





Learning Intentions	Success Criteria
I am learning about becoming intentionally inviting in my classroom.	I can describe the elements of invitations and implement strategies to be intentionally inviting in my classroom.
I am learning specific ways students are excluded and harmed in the educational system.	I can describe ways that students in minority populations in categories of ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, and race experience harm and exclusion.
I am learning about how to establish a collaborative classroom culture in which everyone's voice is heard, protected, and barriers and risks are minimized.	I can identify and put into place specific strategies to establish an emotionally safe classroom.

It's important to acknowledge that this chapter barely touches the surface of dispositions, reflections, and actions to value diversity of all kinds and protect those who are harmed by exclusion and hate. To be truly welcoming of all groups requires careful reflection of the biases we each hold—and we all do. Regardless of how informed, empathetic, and “in-the-know” each of us feels we are on the complexities of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, we really are in our infancy as a society, and as individuals, in this work. In fact, in many ways, *because* we need to advocate for the erasure of exclusion, hate, and discrimination hurled at specific groups of humans shows we are only at the starting line. This chapter offers the most basic but important steps we can take in our classrooms to embrace, value, validate, and protect each of our students.

THE FEELING OF EXCLUSION

Take a minute to imagine yourself as an elementary student in a classroom where everyone is celebrating an upcoming religious holiday, but it isn't one that your family celebrates. Think about how you would feel as a middle-school student in a classroom in which you are the only person in that classroom, including your teacher, with your skin color. Imagine yourself being new to the language of instruction as an incoming high school student. How would you feel if you were in a highly competitive environment, but you were struggling to keep up? Perhaps some of these are your own experience, or maybe you've never had any of these experiences. No amount of *imagining* exclusion can produce the emotions of experiencing the feeling

SEEN, HEARD, AND VALUED

of being different and excluded. And being excluded on occasion in no way can compare to the cumulative trauma that builds over time from being excluded over and over because of race, religion, ability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Reflecting on and “sitting with” the perspective of those who are excluded, dehumanized, or devalued for each of these reasons is worthwhile to feel the urgency of the work in cultivating welcoming, safe, and inclusive classrooms for students across the full range of variability.

When we think of inclusivity, it's natural to envision ways to provide access for students who have academic or physical needs. Naturally, there are procedures in place to make sure the buildings and physical spaces are safe. Although this is certainly a key feature of equitable classrooms, the precursor to inclusive instruction and assessment is establishing culture that is safe in ways beyond physical or academic accessibility—one that is *emotionally safe*. We see emotional safety in classrooms that are welcoming, inclusive, where all learners feel heard and are comfortable using their voice, making mistakes, and feel supported by their teacher and their classmates. In a safe environment, we see diversity of all types as a valued and the perspectives of students from the range of variability as a meaningful contribution and a strength.

Students who feel excluded or disliked because of a difference from a majority group may live with these feelings of stress throughout the school day. Even if the feeling isn't as intense as an acute trauma, the slow-burning stress over time takes a toll not only on the ability to learn, but also on a person's health and wellbeing (Suliman et al., 2009). We may notice the exclusion of some of our students, but many students feel sadness, depression, and exclusion without our ever knowing they experience this. Without a sense of belonging and safety, students who feel unwelcomed likely will not feel comfortable enough to express their needs. To create equitable, inclusive classrooms where everyone is embraced, we can't wait until we need to react to an obvious conflict or expressed stress. We have to assume this probability and plan proactively. Establishing a culture that values differences is one that

intentionally brings calm to the classroom and a space for all students to participate free from fear of humiliation or teasing.



REFLECTION

What do you think of when you feel that a place or people are “inviting?” How would you describe that setting? Those people? The interactions?

What do you think of when you feel that a place or people are “disinviting?” How would you describe that setting? Those people? The interactions?

BEING INTENTIONALLY INVITING

William Purkey and his colleagues coined the term “Invitational Education” in the 1970s. Their aim was to lead schools to be so intentionally inviting that the both students and families were voluntarily engaged with their school enthusiastically. And they found great success with the practices they honed over many years. Being intentionally inviting is a concept that a district or school can use to improve relationships with families and students, but it’s also one we can use to reflect on and strengthen our individual classroom practices. Invitational Education includes the four elements of trust, respect, optimism, and genuine caring (Purkey & Novak, 1996).

ELEMENTS OF INVITATIONS	
Trust	To be inviting, we show students we trust them and we develop students’ trust of us by being reliable, consistent, personal, authentic, and honest. Trust can be difficult to gain if students have had a string of poor experiences in school and they’ve lost their trust in a teacher in the past.
Respect	Invitational classrooms show respect for all students. We do this by holding the belief that all students are valuable human beings and deserve to be treated accordingly.
Optimism	All students are capable of engaging and learning. Invitational classrooms show an expectation of positive, high outcomes for each student.
Caring	We show students that we care through our warmth, empathy, and genuine interest in them.

There are numerous ways every day that we naturally show our students each of the elements above. By becoming *intentional* about these elements within our spaces, content, and the way we teach and interact to invite our students, we create an environment that is not only safe, it’s warm and welcoming to each student. Every action we take within the walls of our classrooms can be categorized as intentionally or unintentionally inviting or disinviting.

INTENTIONALITY OF INVITATIONS	
<p>Intentionally Inviting I acted in a way on purpose to enhance the positive outcomes or potential of a person.</p>	<p>Unintentionally Inviting I didn't plan to, but I acted in a way that enhanced the positive outcomes or potential of a person.</p>
<p>Intentionally Disinviting I behaved with the intent to disrupt the positive outcomes or potential of a person.</p>	<p>Unintentionally Disinviting I accidentally did something that disrupted the positive outcomes or potential of a person.</p>

Because we are human, everyone acts in each of these quadrants at some point in our lives. The goal is to become more inviting and more intentional about being inviting in our classrooms.



ACTION

Consider each of the quadrants of intentionality with invitations. What is an example of each, from either an action that you've seen or one of your own for each quadrant?

INTENTIONALITY OF INVITATIONS	
Intentionally Inviting	Unintentionally Inviting
Intentionally Disinviting	Unintentionally Disinviting