

Research Article

Creating and leading a learning environment in diverse Foundation Phase classrooms in a South African school

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Abstract

Leaders and teachers are exploring ways to organise their learning spaces as well as their methods of teaching and learning. We aim to explore leaders and teachers' experiences of an invitational learning environment in culturally diverse Foundation Phase classrooms in the South African context. In this study, the Invitational Learning Theory was used as a theoretical framework. An interpretivist research paradigm was used to portray the lived experiences and personal responses of the participants. Interviews were undertaken with Foundation Phase teachers and School Management Team to elicit in-depth information on their experiences on the creation of a conducive learning environment. Additionally, observation and visual data formed the data collection instruments. Data were coded, examined and emerging themes identified. Findings highlighted the need to improve the '5Ps' as advocated by Novak and Purkey. The learning environment is a qualitative determiner for success. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to ensure leadership for learning is conducive to teaching and learning.



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Introduction

One of the seminal changes that occurred with the advent of a democratic government was the change in the South African education system. The government-driven interventions have arguably been about ensuring that all learners have equal opportunities for quality education. According to Taylor (2003), a major challenge for the post -1994 government was to redress the inherited inequalities through social and educational reform. They also argued for the consideration of the creation of non-discriminatory school environments into which access was gained based on the rights of the child to education rather than on race, colour, creed or religion.

South Africa is characterised by its vast cultural diversity as it is unusual for a classroom to be filled with learners from only one cultural background. Children in most classrooms today come from a wide variety of backgrounds (Mistry & Sood, 2016); this situation is also prevalent in most South African schools. South African schools have an environment of learners from multicultural, multilingual backgrounds and social contexts (Smart, 2019). Ginsburg (2015) states that when a learning environment acknowledges social behaviour and recognises cultural awareness, learners can become 'knowledge builders', instead of 'knowledge resisters'.

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School leaders and teachers are exploring ways to organise their learning spaces as well as their methods of teaching and learning to accommodate all learners within a diverse school system. This paper aims to explore teachers' and school leaders' experiences of an invitational learning environment in a culturally diverse Foundation Phase classroom within the South African context.

South African classrooms are made up of learners from different cultural backgrounds, creating a classroom filled with cultural diversity; thus, requiring the teacher to become the agent of inclusivity. They are confronted with the idea of having to be conversant with the importance of culture in forming learner identity and creating a culturally responsive classroom atmosphere. Therefore, creating an invitational learning environment in a culturally diverse classroom is a multi-faceted and complex task. Achieving an inviting learning environment is fundamental to creating positive emotions towards learning, ensuring a more effective holistic development of learners, with improved academic results (Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Miller & Cunningham, 2011). Research by Haigh (2007) suggests that positive learning environments can improve educational experiences and that learning is enhanced when learners are positively encouraged or invited into the educational environment.

Explanation of an Invitational Learning Environment

Invitational Education is a learner-centred approach to the teaching and learning process. It is a theory of practice for communicating caring and appropriate messages to encourage individuals to achieve their full potential, including identifying and changing those forces in schools that would hamper or defeat potential and success (Hunter & Smith, 2007).

Purkey and Novak (1996) mentions that invitation education recognises five domains which include everyone and everything in a school environment. The domains include, people, places, policies, programs and processes. An invitational learning environment is created by school leaders and teachers to promote teaching and learning (Haigh, 2011). The five domains listed below exist in almost every environment that contribute to the success or failure of human endeavour (Purkey, 1991). These domains referred to as The five 'Powerful P's' directly impact and influence the behaviours and actions of every stakeholder (school leaders, teachers, learners government officials and non-governmental organisations) towards the successful creation of a leading and learning environment. The Powerful P's, according to Haigh (2011) creates an ecosystem in which the individual exists.. The table below gives an outline of each domain.

Table 1.

<i>The Five Ps Identified by PurkePeople</i>	Places	Policies	Programmes	Process
Teachers and staff (both teaching and non-teaching).	Physical attributes of the classroom and school.	Written and unwritten rules regarding procedures. This includes policies on grading and discipline.	Curriculum and content for learners. This includes programmes of wellness and parent participation.	Examines how the other four Ps are conducted.

- People; people are an integral and important factor in creating and leading a learning environment. They play an important role in creating a respectful, optimistic, trusting and the intentional environment – in this instance the learning environment in a Foundation Phase class in a South African school.
- Place; places refer to the physical environment, the foundation phase classroom, offices, hallways, toilets, playing fields, library, etc all have an impact on how an individual feels within this environment. Purkey and Novak agree that making changes to the immediate physical environment offers an opportunity for improvement.
- Policies; refer to codes, rules or procedures either written or unwritten that is used to regulate the ongoing function of individuals in the school environment. These policies communicate a strong message regarding the value, ability and responsibilities of school leaders, teachers and learners.
- Programmes in a school maintain a wider scope of the needs of people by ensuring that programmes are monitored and achieve the goals for which they were designed without negatively labelling and stereotyping.
- Processes; focus on how the other four P's are conducted. How things are done and the atmosphere created (Purkey & Novak, 1996).

Each of the five Ps identify elements that school leaders and teachers are expected to respond to for successful invitational teaching and learning. The invitational theory seeks to explain the phenomena and provide a means of intentionally summoning people to realise their boundless potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavour (Purkey & Siegel, 2013).

Invitation learning aims to make these domains intentionally inviting by encouraging teachers and school leaders to become active participants in creating a conducive learning environment. This invitation is measured through four levels: intentionally inviting, unintentionally inviting, intentionally disinviting and unintentionally disinviting and the five powerful 'Ps'. This paper will use the five powerful 'Ps' to measure the extent of the invitation to create and lead a learning environment in diverse Foundation Phase classrooms in a South African school (Purkey, 1999). The principles of the invitational theory that will be considered are respect for people and their differences, the trust expressed through cooperation and a sense of community as well as optimism regarding the learner's untapped potential and intentionality and the five Powerful 'Ps' (Haigh, 2011).

Creating and Leading a Learning Environment in a Diverse Classroom

The learning environment within a school is important in developing a healthy conducive atmosphere where education is easily attained. Mejia (2016) believes that the importance of school leaders in creating this environment is crucial to the success of invitational teaching and learning. School climate, according to Egwu (2015) is seen as a major determiner of classroom behaviour and learning; it describes the environment that affects the behaviours of teachers and learners. Adelman and Taylor (1997) agree that understanding how to establish and maintain a positive classroom climate is seen as a basic requirement to improving schools. School leaders and teachers represent the mechanism of change; and the tone of the classroom environment commences with the teacher. They are responsible to ensure that the school climate reflects the physical and psychological aspects of the school. School leaders must ensure that their schools embrace a positive appearance, form good relationships between teachers and learners, ensure responsible leadership and decision making, encourage the creation of a conducive learning environment, sustain a positive attitude and culture to encourage school-community relations and participation (Egwu, 2015).

Cross and Hong (2012) agree that school leaders play a decisive role in helping teachers to be happy at their jobs, supporting them in every aspect of curriculum implementation and management. Teachers who are unhappy or feel that they lack the support from school leaders tend to perform poorly and it reflects on their learners' learning (Michael, 2020). Researchers, Fernet et al. (2016) has found that dissatisfied teachers find their careers becoming a burden to them; however, when teachers are recognised, acknowledged and supported they tend to be intrinsically motivated. It must be noted that teachers who are satisfied with the decisions and the degree of support provided by their school leaders show a more positive attitude towards teaching (Cross & Hong, 2012). When teachers perceive and experience collaboration and cooperation from their school leaders they enjoy a sense of security and a feeling of belonging. Purkey and Novak (2015) state that a fundamental aspect of invitational education is understanding that human existence is a collaborative activity and all human beings are interdependent. A positive inviting relationship takes both time and effort to create a trustworthy pattern of interaction between the school leader and teacher. School leaders and teachers are likely to succeed when they make creating and supporting high-quality teaching their utmost priority in a diverse foundation phase class (Hunter & Smith, 2007). There is agreement that if school leaders know what needs to be done and doing it requires vision, resourcefulness, creativity and some humility, the possibility of invitational success is greater (Scribner et al. 2011). In her study, Mejia (2016) found that most school leaders adopted an inclusive leadership style to school management in promoting an inviting school climate. School leaders indicated that they made an effort to meet their staff frequently and allowed them the opportunity of contributing to the success of teaching and learning – this to them was empowering teachers to be part of the leadership action plan (Mejia, 2016; Egwu, 2015). Leaders also believed that to create a healthy environment for teachers and students it is important to make them feel comfortable and valuable. In an inviting environment, the school leader is a good listener, available to teachers, being responsive to their needs and having an open-door policy that encourages all teachers to be part of the success in the school (Mejia, 2016). Most people are able, valuable and responsible and should be treated accordingly. Purkey (1991) states that the success in a diverse foundation phase class is determined by mutual respect for all role-players. This respect and acknowledgement should be manifested in all aspects of places; policies, programmes and processes that exist within the school environment (Purkey & Novak, 1996). Snow et al. (2021) believe that constructive leaders act legitimately in the interest of the organisation (school), supporting and enhancing the goals, tasks and strategies of the organisation. They ensure that their staff is motivated, enjoy job satisfaction and engage in behaviours that are inviting, respectful, and intentionally working towards the common goal of ensuring successful teaching and learning (Fernet et al. 2016).

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides an overview of perspectives and research results regarding the proposed topic (Ferreira, 2012). For this paper, the Invitational Learning Theory was used as a theoretical framework. The Invitational Education Theory was developed by Purkey to create a total school environment that intentionally summons people in schools to realise their relatively boundless potential (Purkey & Siegel, 2013). Haigh (2011) agrees that invitational learning is based on the Invitational Learning Theory that argues that learning is made meaningful when learners are invited and accepted into the learning environment using improved strategies. Invitational Education (IE) is a theory of practice that aims to create and maintain a humane school environment that intentionally and cordially invites individuals to realise their unlimited potentials in all areas of worthwhile human endeavour (Purkey & Novak, 2015).

This theory identifies and defines five major domains namely, people, places, policies, programmes and processes, known as the powerful five 'P's'. These five domains are essential in understanding and implementing the invitational theory (Purkey & Novak, 1984). Invitational theorists agree that people are able, valuable and responsible and should be treated accordingly. Educating should be a collaborative, cooperative activity between the relevant stakeholders. The process is the product in the making; people possess untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavour and this potential can be realised by places, policies, programmes and processes specifically designed to invite development and by people who are intentionally inviting themselves and others, personally and professionally (Purkey & Novak, 2015; Purkey & Novak, 1984; Purkey & Schmidt, 1990).

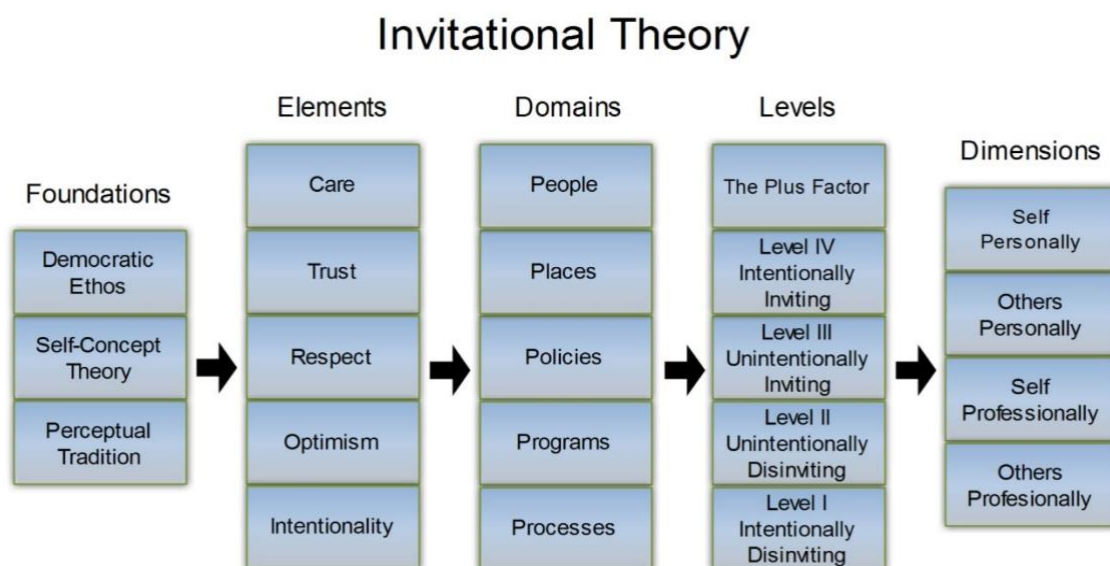


Figure 1.

Invitational Theory Source: (Purkey & Novak, 2015)

Aim and Problem of Study

The main purpose of the study was to explore how school leaders and teachers organise their learning spaces as well as their methods of teaching and learning to improve the quality of education. This study looked at Foundation Phase schools that were culturally diverse within the South Africa context. These schools accommodated learners from different cultural backgrounds and ethnicity. The study is underpinned by Purkey and Novak's Invitational Learning Theory which argues that invitational practices have a significant impact on the quality of learning and teaching (Purkey & Novak, 1996).

Method

Research Model

The researchers agreed that a qualitative research method of a descriptive nature was most suitable to be used in this study since it provides an in-depth study of the phenomenon using an interpretivist research paradigm (Maree, 2017). The descriptive design allowed the researchers to gain a detailed account of the experiences from the participants regarding the creation and leading of an invitational learning environment in their schools. A case study approach was used as an intensive study about a person, a group of people or a suit, aimed to generalise over several units (Gustafsson, 2017).

Participants

A sample of three (3) Foundation Phase teachers and four (4) school management teams comprising of two (2) principals and two (2) heads of department members were invited to participate in this study. The sample consisted of teachers from Grades 1, 2, and 3 and the school management teams from two schools in the Tshwane District of the Gauteng Province in South Africa. The criteria in selecting the participants were very specific; teachers had to be actively involved in attempting to create an environment that is inviting and conducive to teaching and learning; school leaders were supportive and flexible to teachers using different approaches to ensure a positive climate in their schools. School management teams also had to allow teachers to be creative and innovative in the approach to creating an invitational learning environment. The participants were selected using purposive sampling since this study required participants who would accurately represent the population in question (Battaglia, 2011).

Table 2.

Structures of Participants

Participant No	Gender	Age	Code
P1 or School Leader1 (SL1); S-A (School A)	F	56	P1-F--SL1-SA
P 2 or School Leader (SL2); S-B (School B)	M	58	P2-M-SL2-SB
P3 or Head of Department (H1); S-A (School A)	F	48	P3-F-H1-SA
P4 or Head of Department (H2); S-B (School B)	F	58	P4-F-H1-SB
P5 or Teacher (T1); S-A (School A); Grade 1 (G1)	F	34	P5-F-T1-SA-G1
P6 or Teacher (T2); Grade 2 (G2)	F	32	P6-F-T2-SA-G2
P7 or Teachers (T3); Grade 3 (G3)	F	26	P7-F-T3-SB-G3

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

Semi-structured Interview From

The semi-structured interview form was developed by the researcher (one of the authors) together with the research supervisor. The semi-structured interview form collected biographical data and questions pertaining to the 5Ps (Appendix 1 – School Management Team; Appendix 2 – Teacher). There were a total of 27 questions for SMTs and 29 for teachers.

Observation From

The observation schedule was adapted from Purkey and Novak's Inviting school survey document. Both the researcher and the supervisor finally agreed upon the observation schedule (Appendix 3). There were 11 areas that the researcher observed.

Data Analysis

Using Creswell's steps in data analysis, the data were transcribed and analysed by organizing and sectioning responses into units, synthesising them, identifying patterns as well as ascertaining which data was of importance and needed to be shared (Creswell, 2012).

Ethics

Permission for the study was granted by the ethics committee of the University of Pretoria and the Gauteng Department of Education. All participants were formally invited and they gave written informed consent. They were also made aware that their participation was voluntary and that they were not obligated to remain throughout the study. All seven participants consented to participate in the face-to-face interview and classroom observation. They were also guaranteed their anonymity and that during the reporting phase pseudonyms would be used. The following codes were used to protect the identity of the participants. For school leaders P1-F-SL1-SA (P1 – participant 1; F – female; SL1 – school leader 1; SA – School A); Heads of Department (P3- participant 2; F-female; H1 – Head of Department 1; SA – School A or B will indicate school B); and for Teachers (P5-7 – participant number 5; 6 or 7; F – female; T1-3 – teacher number 1, 2 or 3; SA-B – School A or B; G1; 2 or 3 – Grade 1; 2 or 3).

Procedure

The researcher conducted one interview and observation with the participants during the period 5-30 March 2019. The sites were school A and B in the Gauteng Province. The table below indicate the dates, times and venue for both interviews and observations.

Table 2.*Data Collection Process*

Participant	Interview Date	Observation Date	Time	Venue
P1-F-SL1-SA	05.03.2019		14:00	School A
P2-M-SL2-SB	08.03.2019		14:00	School B
P3-F-H1-SA	12.03.2019		14:00	School A
P4-F-H2-SB	15.03.2019		14:00	School B
P5-F-T1-SA	20.03.2019	20.03.2019	09:00-10:00	School A
P6-F-T2-SA	22.03.2019	22.03.2019	09:00-10:00	School A
P7-F-T3-SB	30.03.2019	30.03.2019	09:00-10:00	School B

Results

The study explored how school leaders create and lead a learning environment in diverse Foundation Phase classrooms in a South African school. In this section, the themes that emerged from the data analysis are presented. The data consisted of interview questions and the participants responded to each of these questions.

Understanding of Invitational Teaching and Learning

Since the concept of invitational teaching and learning is vaguely used in the South African school context it was important to the researchers to elicit the participant's understanding of this concept. During the face-to-face interview, participants were asked what was their understanding of 'invitational teaching and learning'. The response varied from both school leaders and teachers.

Both the school leaders agreed that invitational teaching and learning is about making sure that the school environment is positive and that everyone on their staff were happy. They both agreed that as school leaders it was their responsibility to invite everyone into their schools. It was not only about the teachers, it included the learners and the general workers who helped to make sure that the school is 'inviting'. Probing further, the researcher asked the school leaders about the school climate and to this probe, both school leaders indicated that their understanding of the school climate is the atmosphere that they create in ensuring that the learning space is safe, welcoming, receptive and appealing to everyone who enters this space. They both agreed that the 'invitational learning' and 'school climate' were terms that were about creating schools that can accommodate diversity and cultural acceptance. P1-F-SL1-SA also highlighted that his school was made up of 96% of learners who came from an African background and therefore as school leaders they are required to create and lead a learning environment that accommodates cultural diversity. Both these school leaders concurred that there was no place for a 'racial divide' in their schools. They had embraced and accepted all persons who enter the school as equals and as a rightful citizen in this country.

In response to the same question to heads of departments, P3-F-H1-SA indicated that 'invitational learning' was a new concept to her. She had not heard of this concept; however, she assumed that it was about inviting teachers and learners wholeheartedly into the learning environment. She went on to state that in the Foundation Phase, everyone has to show love, warmth and respect for each other, including the learners. P4-F-H2-SB in her response indicated that her understanding of 'invitational learning' was making learning easy and accessible to all learners. She indicated that the policy on inclusive education speaks about accommodating all learners and therefore 'invitational teaching and learning' was about making sure that all learners can understand what was being taught and that they must be able to learn something new each day. She further indicated that 'invitational teaching and learning' was about creating a school that is a pleasure to attend; however, she reiterated that 'that would be the ideal situation'. In the same vein, she indicated that we cannot say the same for our schools with the limited resources and large numbers.

According to all three teachers, their understanding of 'invitational teaching and learning' is making sure that their classroom space was child-friendly and accommodating. The teachers agreed that they must invite their children into their classrooms for successful invitational teaching and learning. The young learners must not be afraid, they must see school as a pleasure and fun place to be. All the foundation phase teachers indicated for them invitational teaching and learning were more about making sure that every learner had the opportunity to learn and that every learner was respected in the classroom. They also stated that their classrooms were very diverse and therefore they must invite everyone as 'equals' and that each child 'has the right to be in the class'.

The photographs below illustrates the classroom environment in both the schools.

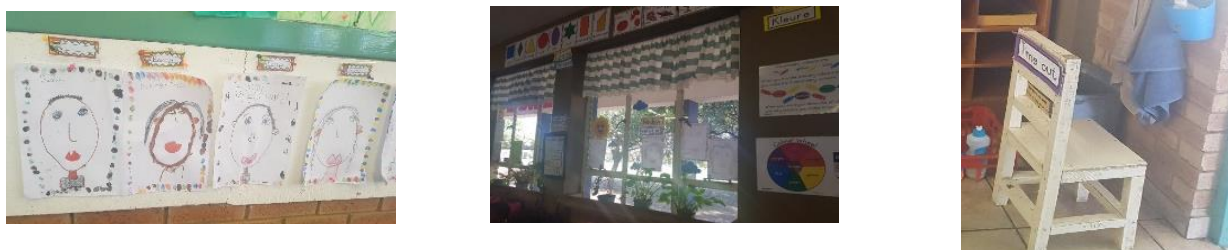


Photo 1.

Classroom Environment at Schools

The artwork displayed in these classrooms were mutually agreed upon with learners to be displayed. All three teachers indicated that their school leaders gave them the opportunity to create a friendly learning environment. The researcher observed the both learners and teachers, were mutually responsible to create an invitational learning environment. The time-out chair was used as a mean of disciplining learners rather than using corporal punishment – which is against the law in South Africa.

Support to Create and Lead a Learning Environment in a Diverse Foundation Phase classroom

The term support may refer to a variety of instructional methods, educational services or resources provided to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This term may also refer to several academic-support strategies that can be implemented in an educational environment. It is an act of showing that you believe, respect, acknowledge and appreciate the work or activity done by a staff member or learner. Support is also defined as providing comfort and encouragement within a learning environment.

According to the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) policy on Standards for School Principals, this policy clearly articulates the crucial role principals (school leaders) play in ensuring that their school environment is conducive to teaching and learning [30]. When the participants (school leaders) were asked how did they support their teachers to create a positive learning environment in their schools, the responses from both the school leaders and heads of department are presented below. The quotes are verbatim. P2-M-SL2-SB indicated,

as a leader in my school, it is my responsibility to ensure that my teachers and learners are safe in the school environment. We are living in a neighborhood that has a high crime rate. I have made sure that my school is well-fenced and we have a security guard at the gates. No person is allowed on the property without providing their personal details and reasons for wanting to enter the property. In this way, I make sure that my teachers and learners are working in a safe and conducive environment without fear and threat". In his response to school safety, P2-M-SL2-SB stated, "my school is built within the community and we have security guards and electric fences around the perimeter of the school. We have strict rules of entry into the school. Learners and visitors enter the school through the pedestrian gates that are controlled and monitored by a private security company. My school has a school-friendly policy; an anti-bullying policy and a safe-school policy. These policies help to ensure that the school environment is safe and secure for teaching and learning.

When the research probed into their management style and how they created and led a learning environment in their schools, both P1-F-SL1-SA and P2-M-SL2-SB indicated that they had adopted a democratic leadership style that encouraged participation by all staff and learners. They both believed in ensuring that all their staff members are given equal respect and opportunities to be active participants in contributing to the positive climate of their schools. They believed that for a healthy school environment, teacher's voices must be heard and appreciated. Every teacher has an input into the educational success of the school and therefore both P1-F-SL1-SA and P2-M-SL2-SB indicated that by empowering teachers to share their inputs they are becoming part of the leadership action plans of the school. Both school leaders agreed that creating a positive environment in their schools was about giving teachers freedom and flexibility to try out new methods and approaches to enhance teaching and learning. P1-F-SL1-SA stated,

these young teachers coming from universities are always teaching us new methods they have learnt at their institutions. For example, play-based learning is being successfully implemented in the Foundation Phase classroom. I am really proud of these young teachers with their new methods. I, therefore, give them an opportunity to do demonstration lessons for the older teachers in the schools". In his school, P2-M-SL2-SB shared his experience with the researchers by stating, "We have three young teachers from different South African universities. They have come to my school and introduced technology for teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase. On their own initiative, they got iPads sponsored for their learners in the Foundation Phase. I have now allowed teachers to use technology for teaching and learning. It is really

interesting to see how children are working with technology. I am hoping to set up a computer laboratory for the intermediate and senior phase classes in the school.

Both school leaders agreed that their leadership style is inclusive, flexible and adaptable. They do not see themselves as ‘policy pushers’ but as adapting the policies and guidelines to improve and invite classroom success. They concurred that the education system is changing and that they need to be flexible and pragmatic in the way they lead their schools. School leaders also shared their views that in the past decade, school leaders were mere ‘headmasters’, but today they see themselves as instructional leaders and promoters of innovative and creative teaching strategies. They have indicated that they were willing to change their views of how schools should be managed thus keeping up with 21st-century education.

Both heads of the department agreed that they were very supportive of their foundation phase teachers. They both believed that their leadership style was envisioned by ‘lead by example’ and the use of a mix of directives and asking for opinions. They supported their teachers by allowing them to be flexible in adapting the curriculum to the needs of learners. Although the DBE has developed several policies to promote quality teaching and learning, teachers are using the Policy on Inclusive Education: White Paper 6 as a guideline to adapted and accommodate all learners in their diverse classrooms. P3-F-H1-SA shared her excitement by indicating to the researcher,

my Foundation Phase teachers decided to decolonise the curriculum by introducing cultural mathematics and games in their lessons. I can see the joy and excitement in the diverse foundation phase classroom. Learners are playing cultural games in mathematics for example ‘Upuca’ – a traditional game among Xhosas as well as Africans in the South African countries with different names per culture. This game develops mathematical concepts, skip counting, one-to-one correspondence, eye and hand coordination and hand motor skills. Another game is ‘Black toti’ – a children’s game played in rural South Africa. Through this game, children learn sorting, counting and balancing, logic, time management and concentration skills. This game also demands planning, motor skills, self-regulation, teamwork and time management.

P3-F-H1-SA also highlighted the excitement among the learners during play in their diverse classrooms. She stated that learners were beaming with pride because they can identify with the teaching and learning activity.

Both heads of department agreed that to create a leading learning environment, there must be flexibility, adaptability, acknowledgement, recognition, praise and reward to ensure that learning within a diverse environment is successful. They too agreed that although the DBE policies were there as a mandate for implementation, they also allowed for a degree of flexibility for implementation. This was well articulated in the inclusive education policy. With a diverse cohort of learners in the foundation phase whose home language is not the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in the school, school leaders, heads of departments and teachers must be willing and flexible in how they approach teaching and learning in their classroom.

According to the three teachers (P5-F-T1-SA ; P6-F-T2-SA ; P7-F-T3-SB) , they all agreed that their school leaders and heads of department have been very supportive in their interventions of creating an invitational teaching and learning environment within their diverse foundation phase classroom. P5-F-T1-SA said,

my head of department allowed me the freedom to try as many methods as possible to improve teaching and learning. Most of my learners cannot speak English and I had to code-switch in my class. Although the policy indicates that we should teach in the medium of instruction, I am allowed to code-switch. I am also given the opportunity of inviting a parent in my class to assist me with the language barrier and or translation of mother-tongue language’ (P5-F-T1-SA).

P6-F-T2-SA and P7-F-T3-SB stated that their heads of department allowed them to display posters with different languages and cultures in their classes. Learners in the foundation phase are exposed to various posters that depict different religious and cultural practices. All these teachers also indicated that they have introduced African literacy and ethnomathematics into their curriculum with the support of their school leaders and heads of departments. They found that their learners can identify with games, stories and practices from their cultural background, thus, making learning contextual, fun and exciting.

According to school leaders, heads of departments and teachers they believed that they have organised their learning spaces to accommodate diversity, inclusivity, adaptability, flexibility and innate pride and joy within their learning environments. They agreed that it was through supportive leadership that they were able to create and lead a learning environment that accommodated the principles of inclusivity as articulated in the DBE’s policy on inclusive education.

Discussion

To create and lead a learning environment in a diverse classroom in South African schools, this study used the five domains of Invitational Theory that exist in almost every learning environment. School leaders are in an ideal position to implement five powerful 'Ps' – people, places, policies, programmes, processes (Purkey & Novak, 1984).

People (especially school leaders and heads of departments) can influence the learning environment positively or negatively. School leaders are role models in their environment (Hunter & Smith, 2007) and they set the standards for behaviours, attitudes and actions. If school leaders are trusting, encouraging, motivating and believing in the teaching staff, the attitudes of teachers towards positive teaching and learning are encouraged (Cross & Hong, 2012). It is important to note that teacher's beliefs in themselves and their learners are crucial factors in determining the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the classroom (Purkey & Novak, 1984). Similarly, school leader's belief in themselves and their teachers will ensure a positive outcome and success to invitational teaching and learning. It is agreed that if an individual is more accepting of themselves, they tend to be more accepting of others and therefore see others as more accepting and approachable (Purkey & Novak, 1984). In this study, the researcher concurs with Purkey, that most school leaders and heads of department showed trust and acceptance of their foundation phase teachers and believed in their potential to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their diverse classrooms. The researchers believe that believing and demonstrating a positive, accepting and open-minded attitude through school leaders' actions and interactions with and with others, will eventually influence everyone in the environment to act and behave positively towards invitational teaching and learning.

The creation and leading of an invitational learning environment are significantly influenced by the physical environment in which teachers and learners meet and work together (Purkey, 1999). It is important to nurture a sense of emotional and psychological safety in the learning environment to facilitate effective teaching and learning opportunities (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2015). A safe and productive learning environment requires the creation of participatory and collaborative learning opportunities so that teachers can feel connected and appreciated (Purkey & Novak, 1984). Findings in this study indicated that school leaders ensured that their schools were safe environments for invitational teaching and learning. Schools leaders ensured that they developed safety policies for both teachers and learners. Schools leaders ensured that their schools were well guarded and protected against school violence or criminal activities by employing security services. Teachers were delighted to be working in a safe environment, thus concentrating on ensuring an environment conducive to teaching and learning (Haidari & Karakus, 2019). Both school leaders and teachers identified the 'place' domain of an invitational learning environment as extremely important. From the study, it was found that teachers created an environment that embraced various cultural backgrounds, languages and practices within their diverse classrooms. They included cultural games, ethnomathematics, African literature and other resources in their teaching programme. Through school leader's support and encouragement, teachers created a safe and conducive environment that acknowledged and recognised all learners within a diverse classroom. Hunter and Smith (2007) concur with the teachers in this study that having a bright and warm environment invites those who enter it to share their experiences. This was evident when heads of departments in both schools allowed teachers to introduce a variety of learning strategies (for example, indigenous games; African stories) and posters displaying different cultural practices in their classrooms.

Purkey and Novak (1996) think that no environment is possible without policies to reinforce and monitor different ideas. Policies employed in all South African schools are developed by the Department of Basic Education. However, in this study, the schools abided by the written policies and also school leaders allowed the implementation of invitational teaching and learning through unwritten policies. They argued that the department of education's policy allows school principals and teachers the flexibility of adapting the curriculum to the needs of the learners (DBE, 2001). Most school leaders in this study believed that school-wide and diverse classroom rules should not be imposed arbitrarily but should evolve from commonly held values and principles of the school community. At a classroom level, teachers indicated that they prepared 'classroom ground rules' to ensure and maintain discipline and order in their diverse classroom to promote invitational teaching and learning through mutual respect, tolerance and trust. These ground rules were developed together with the learners in their classes. According to Chandra (2015), classroom management aims at establishing learner self-control through a process of promoting learner behaviour and achievement.

All participants agreed that through democratic and inclusive leadership in their schools, they were able to manage to create an invitational teaching and learning environment. There was a high degree of commitment from school leaders and teachers together to sustain a positive learning environment through respect, implementation and

acceptance of written and unwritten policies in their schools. The success of creating a positive learning environment is the responsibility of every staff member (Mejia, 2016).

Invitational programmes are described as enriching, stimulating, engaging, developmental, interactive and constructive. This study found that school leaders allowed for teaching and learning programmes to be enriching and stimulating to learners (Purkey & Novak, 2015). Teachers were given the opportunity of adapting the National Curriculum Statement: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement to include content that is relevant to the life-world of the learners (DBE, 2001). Purkey and Novak (2015), agree that relevance is a key factor in intrinsically motivating teachers to accommodate the learner's real-life situation in their teaching and learning. Hunter and Smith (2007) state that when programmes are introduced in schools, these programmes must ensure that no learner is discriminated against or experience bias or prejudice. Teachers must also avoid stereotyping when implementing invitational teaching and learning in a diverse foundation phase classroom. Since school leaders and heads of department were flexible in their approach to teaching and learning, teachers were afforded the opportunities of trying out various strategies in their classroom, including cooperative teaching and learning. Teachers were benefitting from visiting and observing each other's lessons. It must be acknowledged that cooperative learning, an aspect of invitational education creates opportunities for group and individual accountability (Purkey & Stanley, 1991).

The processes by which an individual monitor and maintain the other four 'Ps' functioning is crucial (Purkey & Novak, 1984). Through the maintenance of a positive attitude, cooperation, caring and respectful environment, with programmes and policies to suit the needs of teachers and learners, school leaders are in a better position to encourage, positivity among their staff to invite school success (Purkey & Novak, 1996). Through collaborative working, educational change and effectiveness depend on people who show respect, trust and willingness to work together in an enabling environment (Yin, 2008). Collaboration and cooperation are interdependent with invitational education (Purkey & Novak, 2015).

Conclusion

A people-centric environment focuses on people within the environment, thus making them the number one priority. In their work, Purkey and Novak (2015) emphasise the importance of people in an organisation and their contribution to success or failure. It is of utmost importance that people are treated with respect, care and tolerance. Each individual comes into a learning environment with different ideologies and philosophies; therefore, school leaders must embrace these ideologies and philosophies for the benefit of the organisation (school environment). The first step in creating an invitational learning environment is to build a relationship with the staff. The relationship should be based on mutual trust, knowledge and understanding. When school leaders acknowledge the individuality of each staff member and invite them into a positive, safe, welcoming and conducive environment – there is guaranteed success for the creation of an effective learning environment.

In the book *Inviting Classroom Success*, Purkey and Novak (1984) state that to create an invitational learning environment that is not toxic, school leaders and teachers must work collaboratively and cooperatively. This study found that school leaders

- Adopted a very inclusive management approach to creating and leading a learning environment in a diverse classroom in a South African school.
- They showed flexibility in their leadership style, believing in the potential of newly qualified teachers, embracing new teaching methodologies and strategies to accommodate learners in a diverse classroom.
- Human potential can best be realised by places, policies, programmes and processes specifically designed to invite development and by people who are personally and professionally inviting with themselves and others.
- School leadership is an enormous responsibility and requires a visionary leader to shape the academic success for all learners and teachers in their school.
- They responsible to create a climate hospitable to education
- School leaders need to manage people, data and processes to foster school improvement (Wallace Foundation, 2013) and
- be focused on instruction and forge partnerships with communities and stakeholders.

The major challenges faced by school leaders in most South African schools are overwhelmed teachers, irate parents, school violence, teacher absenteeism and passive bullying. Against all odds, school leaders are working tirelessly together with their staff and communities to ensure the promotion of quality teaching and learning.

Recommendations

The authors recommend that the Powerful 5Ps is a good strategy for all school leaders and teachers to implement in their classes. In any situation the Powerful 5Ps, if implemented democratically will create an invitational learning environment. It is also recommended that every staff member in an organisation should be professionally inviting with oneself – this would provide the individual with an opportunity for self-growth and professional development to create an invitational learning environment. It is also recommended that all school leaders, heads of departments and teachers need to be professionally inviting with others. At management level, school leaders and heads of department should create an open-door policy in their schools and to accept less-than-perfect behaviour of human beings. This applies also in a diverse classroom where teachers begin to understand and accept all learners and their diverse background.

Recommendation for Further Research

Since this study was limited to one district in a well-resourced province in the country; it is recommended that further studies of a similar nature be conducted in the rural provinces of the country. The authors envisage findings that may not be congruent to the more affluent provinces due to the lack of resources and appropriately qualified and appointed school leaders; heads of department and teachers which impact on school management and the promotion of invitational teaching and learning.

Limitations of Study

The research was limited to addressing the phenomena in two schools in one district in the Gauteng Province in South Africa. Provincial dynamics differ vastly from other provinces. For this reason, this study should be conducted in deep rural schools in the different provinces.

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Appendix 1.*Semi-structured Interview Form-School Leadership and Management*

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule: School Management Team

Instructions:

1. Kindly respond to all questions.
2. The interview schedule consists of 7 sections.
3. Mark with an “X” where relevant

Section 1

Biographical Data

1.1 Age

1.2 Gender

Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
Male	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.3 Post School leader
Head of Department

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 2

General

2.1 What is your understanding of an invitational learning environment?

Section 3

People

- 3.1 How do you promote relationship characterized by trust and respect between learners?
- 3.2 How do you make educators feel invited in work place?
- 3.3 How do you promote an atmosphere of care among staff members?
- 3.4 Do you feel that staff members can approach you with problems?
- How do you ensure this?
- 3.5 What is your role when encouraging teachers to create inviting learning environments?

Section 4

Places

- 4.1 How much importance do you place on creating an aesthetic and inviting/conducive classroom?
- 4.2 How would you describe a physical environment that is inviting?
- 4.3 How would you describe the physical attributes of your school?
- 4.4 What could you improve at your school in terms of the ascetics?
- 4.5 If these the above- mentioned things were improved, what impact do you think it would have on the teachers and the learners?
- 4.6 Would you like to share any other information about the school environment?

Section 5

Policies

- 5.1 How do your school policies create inclusion?
- 5.2 How do you approach discipline amongst learners?
- 5.3 How do you ensure consistency in treatment of learners?
- 5.4 How do you promote tolerance and equality in the school?
- 5.5 How do the school policies protect learners and teachers?
- 5.6 Would you like to share any other information about the policies in your school?

Section 6

Programmes

- 6.1 How are your school programmes enriching and stimulating?
- 6.2 What steps do you take to ensure programmes are engaging and constructive?
- 6.3 How would you change current programmes in your classroom to be more enriching and constructive?
- 6.4 Do you have programmes that are aimed at teacher development needs?

Section 7

Processes

- 7.1 How do you maintain a democratic ethos in the classroom?
- 7.2 What do you do to ensure educators feel encouraged?
- 7.3 How do you ensure collaboration amongst teachers?
- 7.4 How do you encourage cooperation between teachers?
- 7.5 How does you support teachers needs in creating an invitational learning environment?

Appendix 2.*Semi-Structured Interview Schedule : Educator*

Instructions:

4. Kindly respond to all questions.
5. The interview schedule consists of 7 sections.
6. Mark with an “x” where relevant

Section 1

Biographical Data

1.3 Age

1.4 Gender

Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
Male	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.5 What grade do you teach?

Section 2

General

2.1 What is your understanding of an invitational learning environment?

Section 3

People

- 6.1 How do you promote relationship characterized by trust and respect between learners?
- 6.2 How do you show learners that you care for them?
- 6.3 How do you promote an atmosphere of care in the classroom?
- 6.4 Does your relationship with colleagues effect your attitude towards your job?
- 3.5 How does the school management team make the work environment conducive to teaching and learning?
- 3.6 Would you like to share any other information regarding the people in your school?

Section 4

Places

- 4.1 How much importance do you place on creating an aesthetic and inviting/conducive classroom?
- 4.2 How do you create spaces that are personal and warm as well as functional and efficient?
- 4.3 How do you feel about the way your school grounds, bathrooms and other physical attributes look?
- 4.4 What could you improve at your school in terms of the ascetics?
- 4.5 If these the above- mentioned things were improved, what impact do you think it would have on the teachers and the learners?
- 4.6 Would you like to share any other information about the school environment?

Section 5

Policies

- 5.1 What classroom policies do you have in place that create inclusion in the classroom?
- 5.2 How do you approach discipline amongst learners?
- 5.3 How do you ensure consistency in treatment of learners?
- 5.4 How do you promote tolerance and equality in the classroom?
- 5.5 To what extent do you feel the CAPS policy document is consistent and promotes equality?
- 5.6 How do the school policies protect learners and teachers?
- 5.7 Would You Like To Share Any Other Information About The Policies In Your School?

Section 6

Programmes

- 6.1 To what extend to you feel the content of what you are teaching is enriching and stimulating?
- 6.2 What steps do you take to ensure lessons are engaging and constructive?

6.3 How would you change current programmes in your classroom to be more enriching and constructive?

6.4 How does your use of the CAPS policies make provision for enriching, stimulating and culturally responsive teaching and learning?

Section 7

Processes

7.1 How do you maintain a democratic ethos in the classroom?

7.2 What do you do to ensure learners feel encouraged in the classroom?

7.3 How do you ensure collaboration amongst learners?

7.4 How do you teach cooperation between learners?

7.5 How does the SMT support your needs in creating an invitational learning environment?

Appendix 3

Observation Form

Educator observation sheet— *Adapted from The Inviting school Survey*

How does the teacher show learners care?

- Learners are recognized as individuals , this is seen in the personalized birthday charts , each child’s photo is displayed on their month.
- Another part of the classroom has a pin board where learners can share photos of their families.

How does the teacher promote elements of trust and respect?

- The teacher shows learners respect by taking time to help each child.
- Each child has a job, shows the teacher trusts the learners.

How is the classroom visually inviting?

- Lots of bright visual media is placed on the walls.
- Fun educational posters.
- Pretty, age appropriate decorations.

How does the teacher ensure learners are treated equally and consistently?

- Discipline is consistent, learners who break the rules are given the same punishment.
- All rules apply equally to all learners.

How is the space made warm and personal as well functional and efficient?

- Each desk has a little dustbin which minimizes unnecessary movement, also helps the learner feel ownership and care.
- Classroom is kept clean and neat.
- Designated areas for learning.

Describe the classroom policies that ensure inclusion?

- Class rules ensure inclusion such as “ Take turns with others” and “ Treat others with respect”.

Describe the discipline in the classroom?

- Very strict sense of discipline in the classroom , which made it hard to read the environment at times , not much movement or conversation , may convey a sense of distrust to learners.
- Teacher keeps problematic learners engaged by getting them to read and answer questions.

How is content presented in an enriching and stimulating manner?

- Teacher uses teaching media to make the lesson stimulating

Describe how lessons are engaging and constructive?

- Teacher varies her tone of voice to keep learners engaged
- Teacher herself is engaged in her lesson makes learners interested

How are learners made to feel encouraged?

- Learners are encouraged to participate through questioning techniques , by asking questions learners are encouraged to be involved.

How is collaboration amongst learners encouraged?

- The majority of lessons are taught in a group setting on the carpet. Learners are encouraged to give their opinions on what others have answered.

Other notes:

