

Title of Session: Alt/Correctional Education Forum - Classrooms Behind Razor Wire

Moderator: BJ Berquist

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Room: ASO

LoriD: Hi, I am really lost in here, I need to find the chat that was to start at 8.

BJ: Lori, what time zone?

LoriD: Central time zone

BJ . o O (you've missed the K-3 resources discussion. The Alt/Correctional Ed discussion is just starting here in this room)

LoriD: Yes, that is the one that I want-The correctional ed. I think that I would be better suited for that than the art one.

BJ smiles. We have one more participant and then we can get started, Lori

LoriD: How does this work? Are you the moderator or are you the one with all of the knowledge that tells us what we don't know?

RebeccaHo joined the room.

BJ chuckles..I'm the moderator, Lori

BJ waves hi to Rebecca

BJ: one of the most wonderful features about Tapped In is that we all learn from each other

RebeccaHo: Hi. I've just found my way here. Please forgive.

BJ: no problem, Rebecca. We haven't started yet.

BJ: We always start all the discussions here with introductions

BJ: I'm an art teacher in a male juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania

BJ . o O (and a helpdesk volunteer)

AnneMH: I'm a ged teacher & volunteer coordinator in a midsize county jail

AnneMH: also graduate student

RebeccaHo: I'm an educational technology student at San Diego State University, but I live in Rochester, New York. I'm going to be lurking, if that's alright.

BJ nods to Rebecca. I hope you'll ask questions or give input if you want

BJ: Lori?

RebeccaHo: Thanks, I appreciate it.

LoriD: I am a grad student taking online courses at U of Missouri and a middle school tech teacher

BJ: This discussion group started last month to talk about the special stressors that alt/correctional ed teachers face

BJ . o O (the topic of this discussion is teaching behind razor wire)

BJ: btw, if the text scrolls too fast, click on the actions drop down menu in the upper right of your screen and scroll down to DETACH

LoriD: I must say that I am interested in this because I often have students who are placed in juvenile facilities and wonder how they keep up with their school work.

BJ: that will make your text window larger and easier to read

BJ: great, Lori. I'm glad you've joined us

BJ: Anne, can you tell me again what you mentioned is your greatest stressor?

AnneMH: in my e mail today?

BJ nods to Anne

AnneMH: I mentioned secondary stress from our students & their families and tertiary stress from colleagues

AnneMH: do u relate, bj?

BJ: absolutely, Anne.

CorkyF joined the room.

LoriD: Do you find it difficult to teach when you know that education is way down on the priority list of your students?

BJ: although regular ed teachers have a related stress, I don't think they quite have the level that we experience

BJ: Lori, we'll get to that in a sec

BJ: welcome, Corky. Can you please introduce yourself to the group?

CorkyF: hi, I am a student in an Ed Tech Masters program thru the Univ of Missouri

CorkyF: just visiting as part of an exercise and looking into the Tapped In resources

BJ: the first thing that many people don't understand is that correctional educators have to wear a coat of emotional armor from the time they pass through the double locked gates in the morning till they leave in the afternoon

BJ: teaching behind razor wire puts a different kind of pressure on not only the students, but also the staff

BJ: would you agree, Anne?

AnneMH: definitely...but my armor is permeable

BJ nods...it's tough not to let the kids/students get to you.

AnneMH: well, and they give, too

BJ: let's look at Lori's question about education being a low priority...do you feel that is true, Anne?

AnneMH: depends on the person

AnneMH: how many other issues they have

AnneMH: some are quite dedicated

BJ: Most of our kids love coming to school. The 'other issues' Anne mentions are mainly what keep them from learning in the outside world

AnneMH: yes

LoriD: I find that the students that I have that end up in detention centers usually do not care about their education and do not do any homework.

RebeccaHo: Anne, what ages do you work with?

AnneMH: 18 and up

BJ: detention centers are a little different...they are traditionally very short term facilities, if that is what you're referring to, Lori?

BJ: My students are 11 - 18

BJ: the average stay is 6 to 9 months

LoriD: Yes, sometimes. I have had students gone for 6 or more months and then others gone for a week or 2. I work with middle school students

BJ nods to Lori. The longer term residents are easier to work with because you have time to allow them to experience success in learning

AnneMH: so true

AnneMH: but sometimes even if you just have people for a short time you can make an

impact

AnneMH: agree, BJ?

BJ: we aren't bleeding hearts, but most of our students have experienced drug abuse, physical abuse, neglect, have learning disabilities, and come from disrupted family situations

BJ: yes, Anne..sometimes you feel that sweet magic of having reached a kid...

AnneMH: yes...providing any kind of positive modeling, caring, etc.

BJ: and you see the lightbulb go on

AnneMH: yeah

BJ: we also talked a lot last time about measuring success in small increments...

AnneMH: right

BJ: and the success is usually measuring the social impact we have, more than the academic impact

AnneMH: not easy to document the academic!

BJ: that's a topic for a whole other discussion, Anne!

AnneMH: ok

BJ . o O (we won't get into testing and nclb tonight)

CorkyF: how does your environment significantly differ from say inner city poor? I live in the New Orleans area, probably the worst public schools in the country

RebeccaHo: I've never worked in an educational setting, but I remember dealing with kids that didn't seem to see their future in terms of longer than a few months at a time.

They didn't seem to think they'd live to see adulthood. How do you reach kids like that?

AnneMH: environment in what sense?

CorkyF: these detention facilities are 24 hr holding? student desire? family support?

AnneMH: my students are poor, minority, etc.

AnneMH: bj?

BJ: Corky, many of the inner city teachers face similar problems...the difference is that the kids who choose to drop out can and do

BJ: many of my students are also poor and minority, Corky

BJ: my facility is a residential facility...all residents are court committed for felony convictions

AnneMH: my students come voluntarily to class--not mandated

CorkyF: so are your coping skills and/or training going to be different?

CorkyF: from the inner city teacher

BJ: yes and no, Corky.

BJ . o O (how's that for a definitive answer ;-))

CorkyF: okay, 1st the yes

BJ: yes in that we all work with similar children with similar backgrounds and histories

CorkyF: obviously you work w/ older students (beyond HS). are they grouped by age though?

AnneMH: mine, no

BJ: I work with 11-18 year olds...most are still mandated to go to school or are working toward their GED

AnneMH: most of my ss are in their 20s or 30s

CorkyF: do you have the whole spectrum at once? in your room

BJ: my students are grouped by reading abilities

AnneMH: I have a one-room schoolhouse....

AnneMH: multilevel

CorkyF: okay, and then is the goal a GED, or other target?

BJ: and I have a whole school with all the core subjects, plus art, shop and life skills

AnneMH: improving basic skills, getting them closer to GED

AnneMH: jails traditionally have less programming than prisons (for adults)

BJ: one of the issues that is different is that we are very good at what we do...

CorkyF: and you are at a jail Anne?

AnneMH: yes

AnneMH: elaborate, pls, bj...

CorkyF: and how do you measure it?

BJ: Anne can bring her students along because they know she's going to meet their learning needs...

BJ: and they're motivated...sometimes release is based on achieving a GED

AnneMH: yes

AnneMH: but they also think about college, careers, that the ged will make possible

BJ: in our school, most of the students increase their reading and math levels by 2 or 3 grades in the 6 - 9 months we have them

BJ: and then what happens, Anne?

AnneMH: I don't always find out...another source of displeasure!

AnneMH: but sometimes they like me so much they come back lol

BJ nods...they get released

AnneMH: and come back through the revolving door

BJ: there is an 80% recidivism rate

BJ . o O (which can be a little stressful)

CorkyF: so considering the stress of your environment and the noted recidivism, do you both ENJOY your jobs?

AnneMH: I think there need to be more services for releasees

BJ: we work so hard and the residents or inmates are released right back to the same environment

BJ agrees with Anne

AnneMH: yes I do enjoy it

BJ: Yes, I love my job and I love working with the boys...

AnneMH: you have to accept working within an institution tho

AnneMH: not for everybody I guess?

CorkyF: hmmm..... if you don't mind, what type of payscale are you on?

BJ nods solemnly

AnneMH: not at liberty

BJ: I'm on the local public school district pay scale

AnneMH: but scale with other adult educators

CorkyF: I am a Coast Guard officer, thinking about post retirement options, teaching in HS is preferred

BJ: but many facilities pay below union scale...especially if they are private

CorkyF: obviously a big pay cut, so your pay is in line w/ other educators

AnneMH: bj, can i share a recent incident?

BJ listens to Anne

AnneMH: off topic--sorry

AnneMH: ?

BJ: another way of coping...we need to network and talk!

BJ . o O (about all topics)

CorkyF: okay, one final question, what type of turnover in the teaching staff in your facilities?

AnneMH: one of my women student's boyfriend had committed suicide...and she got his goodbye note after he was found

AnneMH: sorry my typing is slow today

BJ: oh, no. She must have been devastated!

AnneMH: yeah big time

CorkyF: do you have grief counselors for that type of event?

AnneMH: she's known me for years...she felt comfortable w/ me

BJ thinks Anne was the grief counselor in this case, Corky

AnneMH: we have MH for emergencies only

AnneMH: I just wish I could do more

CorkyF: MH = mental health?

AnneMH: yes

AnneMH: we have chaplains...volunteers

BJ: many of our residents have mh issues.

AnneMH: ditto

BJ: btw, the turnover is actually very low, Rebecca

BJ . o O (teacher turnover)

BJ: I'm in my 20th year

AnneMH: celebration

RebeccaHo: I'm not surprised, It's hard to leave people you care about.

CorkyF: very good, how many teachers (is that the right term?) at your facilities?

BJ: right now we're experiencing a lot of teachers approaching retirement age

BJ: there are 17 teachers in the school I'm in

AnneMH: mine is a very small program...me & university volunteer tutors...& I'm part time

CorkyF: well guys, thanks for letting me chat w/ you. I am going to explore another room for now. take care

AnneMH: cheers

AnneMH: bj can u go back to how good we are etc?

AnneMH: or new topic?

BJ smiles...we are, Anne!

CorkyF left the room.

AnneMH: elaborate...

AnneMH: ?

BJ: sorry...had a problem in reception

AnneMH: k

BJ . o O (I need two more hands!)

AnneMH: would be ungainly

AnneMH: try ur feet

AnneMH: j/k

BJ laughs

AnneMH: I'm gonna turn over now

BJ: was there something else you wanted to talk about, Anne?

AnneMH: wow I am going thru a lot...

AnneMH: where to start

AnneMH: can u share your major stressors praps?

BJ: well, I work in a classroom by myself...no guards or other adults in the room...

AnneMH: safety?

BJ: and I always have so much to do that I rarely have time to socialize with staff

AnneMH: ditto that

BJ: no, I'm not concerned with safety...we have a good support system

AnneMH: radio etc?

BJ: but it can be very isolating and hard to keep excited about learning and teaching when you have no one to share your experiences with

AnneMH: right

BJ: I play music and have all the toys, including TV, video, dvd, etc.

AnneMH: in class?

BJ: yep.

BJ . o O (I'm very fortunate, I know!)

AnneMH: I don't have dvd

AnneMH: wish i did

BJ: well, I don't have any dvd's to play yet, but I have the player ;-)

AnneMH: lol

AnneMH: It'll be obsolete in 10 minutes

BJ nods.

AnneMH: u said Tapped In helped u a lot

BJ: yes, TI has been my window to the world...and has helped me on my own professional development journey

RebeccaHo: May I ask who defines your curricula?

BJ: each teachers writes their own curriculum, although we are supposed to follow state standards

AnneMH: likewise

AnneMH: freedom of a sort

BJ: but you almost have to teach on an individual basis because of the high student turnover

RebeccaHo: So you have some flexibility in figuring out what your students connect with?

AnneMH: I do

BJ: yes, I do, too

AnneMH: I don't teach the same thing all the time that would be so boring

RebeccaHo: My guess is that a standard curriculum would go over something like a lead balloon.

BJ: it's not so much that, Rebecca...

BJ: as the students we have have been there...and it didn't work for them

AnneMH: yes

RebeccaHo: That would be my assumption.

AnneMH: sometimes mine have been in other adult ed programs & their needs were not met...go figure

BJ: they need individual instruction designed to meet their learning styles

BJ chuckles...hard to believe, Anne!

RebeccaHo: I would think that your students would need something much more real-world to seem useful

RebeccaHo: Do you make use of a lot of contextual education techniques?

AnneMH: well--not so different from what I'm learning in a school of ed

BJ: Rebecca, our advantage is that our classes are much smaller

BJ: these are the kids/adults that in a public school are ignored because the teacher can't get to them

BJ: so they turn off to learning

AnneMH: one of my students was so impressed because he saw I had spent my own money on materials

AnneMH: they know I care

AnneMH: but not love-dovey

BJ: they may be learning disabled, need interdisciplinary lessons, or some other way to meet their needs

BJ nods to Anne

BJ: any other questions, Rebecca?

BJ: did I answer your comment on why I find Ti so fulfilling, Anne?

AnneMH: yes

BJ: TI takes me out of the box

RebeccaHo: No. I'm glad you let me sit in. I'm impressed with what you do.

AnneMH: you see my problems with getting online tho!

BJ: thanks, Rebecca.

BJ nods to Anne.

RebeccaHo: Thanks. I'll be signing off now. Take care.

RebeccaHo left the room (signed off).

BJ: any time you want to chat, Anne, let me know

AnneMH: ok, great