

Title of Session: School Counselors - Kindness and Justice Challenge

Moderator: Barbara Muller-Ackerman

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BarbaraMu: I'm Barbara Muller-Ackerman, an elementary counselor in NJ. The topic for tonight is The Kindness and Justice Challenge, which is currently being run in schools throughout the country. More than that, I would like to talk about other schoolwide possibilities for character education.

BjB: Character education is a very important topic right now

BarbaraMu: The KJ Challenge is sponsored by the people at Do Something.org. They focus on year-long activities to promote social action and social justice.

BjB: do you find that there are conflicts between parents and the schools on how to do character ed?

BjB: do you have a url for the KJ Challenge?

BarbaraMu: The KJ Challenge focuses on acts which are good and acts which are right-in honor of the works of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

BarbaraMu: Yes. <http://www.dosomething.org>

BjB: thanks

BarbaraMu: Under the community building block, you will find a place where you can register for KJ Challenge.

BarbaraMu: This will allow you to access the curriculum for the program. The K-5 document is a 51 page pdf file and it is a gem! There are middle and high school versions as well.

BarbaraMu: You must register your school in order to access the materials.

BarbaraMu: This is important because the acts of kindness and justice are recorded online by each of the 20,000 schools who participate.

BarbaraMu: You had mentioned that you do a bulletin board for KJ. Do you want to share it?

BjB: wow! I didn't realize there were that many participating schools!

BjB: since I'm in a special school where outside community involvement is difficult...

BarbaraMu: KJ has been building for almost a decade I think and it has really grown as character ed has grown. It began in the school in Newark, NJ and really took off from there.

BjB: what I do is give my kids the challenge by having them write about a time when they demonstrated kindness or justice....by helping someone or standing up for what they believed in

BarbaraMu: I guess that it's how you frame it BJ. It isn't so much that the community has to participate with the school as that the school or student within the school makes a commitment to their community.

BjB: it's interesting to see how difficult it is for kids to think of something they did right when they're so often told that all they do is bad.

BjB: but, when you give them a little nudge, they come up with good stories

BjB: some write raps or draw pictures.

BjB: then we display their work

BarbaraMu: By taking it to the internet and having them record the number, it would also connect them to a larger community of people trying to do the same thing

BjB nods.

BarbaraMu: The Do Something people believe that there is a 5 step path to change system - whether that is to change something in your own self or your community

BjB: do you have to identify the students?

BarbaraMu: No

BarbaraMu: It is the numbers of acts which get recorded

BarbaraMu: All the tally sheets and record keeping system is part of the pdf file you can download

BjB: maybe I'll try the online program next year

BarbaraMu: but there are so many ideas there!! You can choose a day at a time program of virtues which were integral to MLK Jr., or a 2 week project, or longer

BarbaraMu: And the program is wholly interdisciplinary so the arts are very much included

BjB: is this a year round program or is it only active for a short period?

BarbaraMu: If teachers wanted to try a different kind of character program, the 2nd week in February gives a perfect opportunity. (KJ lasts for 9 days from MLK, Jr birthday). The annual Acts of Kindness Week is celebrated then,

BarbaraMu: The people at Do Something are creating year long activities to constantly challenge students-

BarbaraMu: there is a fitness challenge in March and a Tax Day -Financial Literacy challenge in April. But that goes off in a direction other than just character...and works to build the whole person through other facets of self.

BarbaraMu: If you go to the web site of the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation, there is an awesome website. <http://www.actsofkindness.org>

BarbaraMu: Here too, you can download an activity guide, by level, with tons of ideas for the concept of showing kindness. They have a free web site that your class can create. They have a newsletter which has 20 pages of school wide ideas which have been successfully implemented in other places.

BjB is looking

BarbaraMu: They have wonderful downloads of "pass it on cards". The school one is great for elementary where you take the card and give it to someone, who passes it to someone else, and on and on with each recording their name and deed till the card is full. Then the kids can concretely see the ripple effect of their act of kindness.

BarbaraMu: Those are in the graphic download section as opposed to the downloads of documents.

BjB: nice...I've not looked at the website for a number of years. The program has certainly grown in scope and in ideas

BarbaraMu: It really is great- and if you are doing the KJ Challenge, you can import ideas from this site in order to give the students other ideas for kindness activities

BarbaraMu: Are you ready to move on?

BjB nods

BarbaraMu: Many schools focusing in on a year long character program use the 6 pillars of the Character Counts program. <http://www.charactercounts.org>

MichaelOp joined the room.

BarbaraMu: Again, the 6 traits of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship all overlap with the 2 programs we have just been talking about.

BjB: Hi, Michael. Welcome

BjB: Barbara is doing a discussion on Character Education

MichaelOp: Hi bjb - I clicked myself out but had a few more questions

BarbaraMu: Hi Michael- BJ do you want to finish up with Michael? I will just keep typing!

BjB: we're fine, Barbara.

BjB: I'm looking at the Character counts page

BarbaraMu: You can just tie the traits into the Kindness (caring) and Justice (fairness and responsibility to do the right thing) ideas...or caring into the kindness week celebration.

BjB: yes, I see the overlap

BarbaraMu: Playing off of Martin Luther King, Jr., lots of schools use the idea of heroes or role models to engage their students in the meaning of what it is to be a person of character.

BarbaraMu: One program, the Giraffe Project, <http://www.giraffe.org>

BarbaraMu: follows that model.

BarbaraMu: The whole program uses the image of the giraffe, and "sticking your neck out" to reinforce and role model good citizenship to students

BjB likes the idea of sticking your neck out

BarbaraMu: Other year long programs center on the traits and virtues, like Character Counts does- but with different twists. Heartwood Ethics, uses literature as the basis for their lessons to the students.

BjB . o O (risk taking is something that is 'beaten' out of our kids)

BarbaraMu: Ouch

BjB: I don't mean just the students I have...

BarbaraMu: Project Wisdom uses the intercom and messages to the students to reinforce the idea that everything you do is a choice <http://www.projectwisdom.com/>

BjB: I think it's a very common thing...we're not allowed to make mistakes and we're not allowed to fail

BarbaraMu: which would not go along with what you just wrote for your population BJ...but in their own dealings with other peers, the Project Wisdom messages try to empower students to make a better choice

BarbaraMu: There are many samples and free messages on the site at the different levels from elementary to High School

BjB: empowering is good

BarbaraMu: The Wiseskills program focuses on one trait per week; Wise Words is the elementary program and Wise Quotes the older program. These too consist of messages for the students to hear and teachers to use in class meetings and in discussion - in Social Studies, Health, Literacy, where ever they can fit them in

BarbaraMu: <http://www.wiseskills.com>

BarbaraMu: In terms of Character Ed not being an add-on program, but integrated into the curriculum, the Wake County schools, in North Carolina, have produced a matrix which shows how they have done this in each subject area and each grade level

BarbaraMu:

http://www.ncpublicschools.org/nccep/wake_county/curriculum_matrix/subjects_matrix.html

BjB sighs...you have such wonderful resources, Barbara!

BarbaraMu: North Carolina has done a phenomenal job of creating lesson plans for character ed, not only for the school counseling/guidance area, but through out the curriculum. All their lesson plans are on their state web site at

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/nccep/lp/>

BarbaraMu: Thanks BJ

BarbaraMu: Another state that has done a really good job of collecting their model programs and putting them up to share with all of us is Utah. Reading through their model character ed programs really gives you a great range of projects to pick from- from pumpkin walks to year long much more complex activities.

BarbaraMu: http://www.usoe.k12.ut.us/curr/char_ed/utah_schools/model_proj.html

BarbaraMu: Michael- was there anything I could answer for you before we close out. Or you BJ? Otherwise, I am ready to end this one!

BjB: I'm really pumped about the character ed pages....this is for K-12?

BarbaraMu: There are such a wealth of wonderful character ed resources available and with February so dedicated to friendship and caring activities, especially at the elementary level, there is always lots to talk about around building friendship skills and conflict resolution along with character so, pick a topic that works, and I will see you next month!!

BarbaraMu: Are you talking about the NC curriculum?

BjB: any of the resources...do some of them cover k-12?

BarbaraMu: YES! All of them have separate curriculum pieces so that they are both comprehensive (K-12) and developmental.

MichaelOp: Barbara - I have been using Lickona

BarbaraMu: Tom is great

BarbaraMu: He has contributed a lot to the field!

MichaelOp: Early Character Ed book for my graduate Ed Psych class for about 5 years

MichaelOp: It really generates a lot of good discussion

BarbaraMu: He runs great workshops in the summer as well

MichaelOp: I've considered attending

BjB: Michael, you should bring your Ed Psych class to Barbara's February discussion

MichaelOp: I teach the class online and we use all the website and other materials as the primary basis for the course.

BarbaraMu: And his newsletter is very good. They are always willing to send enough brochures and newsletters for a class. I have asked multiple times for counseling conferences and they always send them

BjB: Barbara, Thursday, Feb 26 at 9 ET will be ok

MichaelOp: We are all scattered around Alaska - difficult to share anything in print

BarbaraMu: I would bet, as a counselor, that I probably could add some to those you have as well and, if you want to keep talking, I would be happy to via email.

BjB: Michael, they can log in to Tapped IN to join the discussion

BjB . o O (a lot of online classes meet here)

MichaelOp: If it's alright - I would like to point them in the right direction

MichaelOp: It's a group of 20

BarbaraMu: Sounds great.

MichaelOp: Thanks so much Barbara and Bjb

BjB: I'd be happy to work with you on bringing a class to Tapped In, Michael

BjB: Thanks, Barbara...see you in February

BarbaraMu: I would be happy to schedule a discussion when Michael's class is in session too!

MichaelOp: The challenge for Alaskans is usually the time zone -

MichaelOp: All class members are currently teaching all day - and - can only participate in the evenings

MichaelOp: Often too late for those on the other side of the world

BarbaraMu: Thanks BJ- Thanks Michael. BJ- feel free to share my email with Michael. See you the 26th- unless you want to change it to correspond to Michael-