

Title of Session: Alternative/Correctional Ed - Law Related Education

Moderator: BJ Berquist

Guest Speaker: Jeff Kaufman

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BJ: Welcome to this month's Alt/Correctional Ed discussion group

BJ: The speaker today is Jeff Kaufman. He is going to share the program he presented at the Baltimore Leadership Forum

BJ: o O (for CEA)

BJ: we usually start all discussions here with introductions

BJ: Could you all please introduce yourselves?

JeffK: Sure, let me begin

JeffK: My name is Jeff Kaufman and I teach on Rikers Island in New York City

JohnGuest3: My name is John Stewart and I serve as Supt. of Educ. for the Alabama Dept of Youth Services. Office is in Montgomery.

BJ: I'm an art teacher in a Juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania.

DavidG: My name is David Galarza and I am currently working at Allen-Field Elementary in Milwaukee Public Schools.

CindyL: Hi I am Cindy Lorch. I also work in Milwaukee public schools at Curtin Elementary

DavidG: My only experience with Youth services and correctional facilities is that i have had family experienced the system.

DavidG: But now more than ever to discuss any issue regarding the systems and learn.

TeriH joined the room.

BJ cheers for Teri. Welcome.

TeriH: Hi everyone, I am pleased to be here.

BJ: Teri, can you please introduce yourself to the group?

TeriH: Yes, I am a correctional educator with the Orange County Department of Education. I teach English in a drug treatment facility.

TeriH: Juvenile.

JeffK: Welcome all. Let me first give you a little background

TeriH: I had training in Law Related Education, and use it sometimes, so I am excited about this!

JeffK: I teach criminal law to adolescent detainees waiting trial for serious felonies in the Courts of New York City

TeriH: Is you facility a Juvenile Hall type center?

JeffK: While there has been some difference of opinion over the years about what I teach and its impact on my students no one questions the motivational benefits of teaching law to this population

JohnGuest3: Jeff, what Law related curriculum materials are you using?

JeffK: Basically, materials that I have created for the course

DavidG: How many students do you have?

JohnGuest3: Do you have a book, etc that you use to teach state specific laws for juveniles?

DavidG: in a course?

JeffK: I teach roughly 15 to 20 students in 4 classes each day

JeffK: I use New York State specific materials including the Penal Law and Criminal Procedure Law

JohnGuest3: How well do the students accept those materials?

JeffK: I concentrate on issues that my students are facing in court like plea bargaining, search and seizure, sentencing

DavidG: So that's how they are engaged.

JeffK: The student population range in academic ability from 2nd to 10th grade reading levels

JeffK: Yet, our discussions tend to tie these differences together

TeriH: How long have you been doing this? Are their reading levels improving?

JeffK: Some students, admittedly I lose, but for the most part it is an exciting experience

CindyL: Does teaching criminal law to this population help them in getting off or does it benefit them more on understanding the law so they are not discriminated against?

JeffK: I have been teaching on Rikers for 5 years now. Reading level improvements are hard to assess since our students stay anywhere from a week to several months

JohnGuest3: Do you have assistance from local law enforcement officers, judges, etc.?

TeriH: But, because of engagement, there must be some evidence of improvement?

JeffK: Cindy that is a great question. My goal is not to get them off. They all have lawyers and clearly most are convicted

DavidG: Do they pass or are they assessed in their learning?

JeffK: However, there are times that my students raise issues with their lawyers that they learned in class and benefit from the information

JeffK: One of the problems teaching transitional populations is the difficulty in assessment. Anecdotally I believe there are improvements but we lack the funds (or desire) to seriously assess

DavidG: So it is a self learning course.

JeffK: No not really. I teach and they learn. We just fall short of assessments

JeffK: One of my strategies is flexibility

JeffK: It is important to be flexible to remain relevant and motivating

JeffK: When a student of mine comes from court after a suppression hearing, for example, we go over the procedures he experienced.

JeffK: This will lead to a full discussion on the impact of the Constitution, federalism and state law and a whole myriad of lessons

TeriH: How is a student assigned to your class?

CindyL: Have you helped students avoid being discriminated against because of ignorance of the law or a lazy attorney?

JeffK: Students are assigned to housing areas by Corrections. From there they are tested utilizing the TABE and a rough reading score is obtained. Then they are assigned to classrooms

TeriH: But they are all awaiting trial?

TeriH: Do they take the TABE on exiting the program?

JeffK: All are awaiting trial, probation or parole violation hearings. Our jail is a detention center. Sentenced prisoners go into the State system upstate

TeriH: I bet they are retested there. It would be interesting to see the pre and post scores.

JeffK: Since we don't know when they leave they do not take exit testing. We have suggested periodic testing but our administration was not interested in devoting the resources

TeriH: I bet this empowerment is obvious in the reading scores.

JeffK: When they are received into the State system they are tested. I tried to coordinate with the State but it did not work out

JeffK: I hope so. I try to have the students (who can) read the statutes and pertinent cases

TeriH: Do you use debate about past cases?

TeriH: Supreme Court Cases?

JeffK: I would love to have discussion at a level that would allow debate of cases, but most of my students are incapable of functioning at that level

TeriH: I use this in Character Building, and I find it is also empowering.

JeffK: Yes, US Supreme Court, New York Court of Appeals and US Circuit court cases

TeriH: I have a text that is about a fifth grade level that is wonderful for this. It states the case, and sparks debate. My students are from 14 to 19 and also range in levels from 2nd to 12th.

JeffK: I was saying that when my students go to the law library they come back with challenging questions. Those are some of my best lessons

TeriH: Do you have a law background?

JeffK: I have tried to take my students to the law library but Corrections won't allow it

JeffK: I have studied law for many years. I was also a New York City Police Officer

TeriH: Of course, I would think that would make your curriculum easier. I would struggle.

JeffK: That's true. But what I teach could be learned easily by anyone

JeffK: My students teach me about current police tactics and we share some experiences. These discussions get heated

TeriH: Yet, I encourage the same. And I agree that the lessons should begin where the student's interest begins.

TeriH: Do you recommend any material?

JeffK: That's my point. You can't teach in incarcerated settings in the abstract

CindyL: Do the discussions create more anger, or are they productive?

JeffK: Left unguided the discussions could create problems but most of my students respect what I am doing and go along with it

CindyL: Do you get frustrated that you are unable to assess and see improvements in your students?

JeffK: Many of my students, especially those charged with murder and facing life sentences, get very depressed.

JeffK: I see improvements in my students. I just don't have the documentary evidence

CindyL: Is enough being done to help rehabilitate the children?

TeriH: That is one of the biggest problems in juvenile corrections, turnover is so large that we have to go by gut feelings most of the time.

JeffK: My jail is an adult prison. In New York you are considered an adult if you are over 16. Rehabilitation is specifically not a goal of my institution

JeffK: Our school is run by the New York City Board of Education, and not Corrections. Corrections for the most part cooperates but their interests are very different than ours

TeriH: How many teachers do you have on site? Are they supportive?

CindyL: It seems that our prisons continue to fill up fuller and fuller, but we are doing nothing to solve the problem.

JeffK: Our students are entitled to a regular education until they are received by the State system. They won this right in a lawsuit under which we operate

TeriH: That is one of the reasons I am involved with CEA, we get little support from our institutions. WE need it from each other.

JeffK: We have about 60 teachers and teach approximately 800 students at a time

TeriH: Wow! Our institution is only 125 beds.

JeffK: Our teachers are very supportive and more recently turnover has slowed down

JeffK: Rikers holds almost 10,000 prisoners

JeffK: We only teach the 16 to 19 year olds

TeriH: Are there many teachers there involved with the Correctional Education Association?

TeriH: Do the others have access to education?

JeffK: No. The Corrections Commissioner just issued a statement that educating adults was a luxury we can no longer afford with all of the budget cuts

TeriH: Ouch!

JeffK: New York State does provide GED and ABE to adults but not on Rikers

TeriH: Has that topic ever come up in your class?

JeffK: The right to education has been discussed and I have gone over the lawsuit but I try to stick to criminal law issues

TeriH: I think what you are doing is wonderful.

JeffK: Thanks. I think that like most correctional educators there are some really great days and some days you think about quitting. I try to accentuate the great days

BJ smiles...we've all been there, Jeff!

TeriH: I can agree with that statement.

JeffK: Also I've learned to measure successes with small instruments. It's easy to get discouraged

TeriH: Another reason for encouraging support between teachers.

BJ: Our time is about up. Thanks so much for being our speaker tonight, Jeff!

TeriH: I at least have the experience of seeing students succeed.

JeffK: Thanks so much for having me. Sharing my thoughts has been great for me

TeriH: Yes, thanks Jeff

BJ: If you want to continue the dialogue, join the Alt/Correctional ed discussion group

BJ: there is a threaded discussion list in the group room

TeriH: How do I get there?

BJ: it's a moderated group and you have to be invited to join

[Ed Note: If you are interested in joining the Alt/Correctional Ed discussion group send a request to bjb@tappedin.org. This group is private.]

BJ waves goodnight

BJ: thanks for joining us tonight.