

Title of Session: Alternative/Correctional Ed Discussion Forum

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Title of File: 20030626alted

Date: June 26, 2003

Tappedin transcript 2003.06.26 19:27:02

Room: ASO

BJ: Welcome to tonight's Alternative/Correctional Ed Discussion...

BJ: the topic for tonight is maintaining mental health of educators while teaching behind razor wire

BJ: we always start all the discussions here with introductions

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

AnneMH: GED/literacy in a medium-size county jail...also graduate student

TiffanGuest1: I'm a Master's student at SDSU (570 also) and in the Military- anyone I'm training is only a semi-captive audience

MichaelMc: As we have already mentioned, I am in the Masters program at San Diego State University and recently have obtained my teaching credential. Looking forward to getting in the classroom. Never gave much thought to this topic, but sounds VERY interesting. This is my first experience with Tapped In so we'll see how it goes.

AnneMH: me too I expect to mostly lurk tonight

BJ: The topic as listed on the calendar is: "Classrooms Behind Razor Wire - Coping skills for correctional educators." We'll discuss how the climate of a jail/penitentiary might play on the psyche of correctional educators, how the environment has changed you and your colleagues, and how those changes have colored your level of trust and perceptions in your relationship with society

AnaE: finishing teaching credential...visited many alternative ed facilities...not yet led instruction in any

DavidAP: finishing credit to clear credential , just starting to teach

BJ: The topic is specifically for correctional educators, but the stress level for public school educators is pretty high too...it's easy to get overwhelmed

BJ: I'm going to show you a survey from Taiwan that gives you an idea of what teachers in general can experience

BJ: <http://www.taiwanheadlines.gov.tw/20010529/20010529s3.html>

BJ . o O (click on that hyperlink to open a new web window)

TiffanGuest1: Interesting- what exactly is "deviant teaching behavior"?

BJ smiles...crazy teachers!

AnneMH: I wonder how applicable the Taipei study is to North America

AnneMH: but interesting paper

BJ: Anne, I'd bet it's very relevant

AnneMH: elaborate if u would

BJ: Educators all over the world struggle with the same issues...

AnaE: have you observed this in your personal experience?

BJ: motivating students, coping with stress, violence, etc

AnneMH: sorry but I really think the Far East is different

BJ nods to Ana...through my conversations with educators here in Tapped In.

BJ: Many of the members of Tapped In are in Asia

TiffanGuest1: I've lived in Japan- yes it's different, but a lot is the same. They have major testing and a different system, but don't teachers here stress a bit come standardized testing and SAT time?

AnneMH: correctional educators?

MichaelMc: I agree partially to Anne, but it's not just particular problems, but the presence OF PROBLEMS.

BJ: although the cultures are greatly different, the behaviors are similar

MichaelMc: agree BJ

BJ: Anne, I'm just referring to educators in general

AnneMH: ok can we address correctional culture

BJ: when you put those problems behind razor wire and lock the teachers in with the kids, the problems are magnified

BJ: would you agree with that comment, Anne?

AnneMH: sure

BJ . o O (just speaking from personal experience)

BJ: so, how do you cope? How do you deal with the constant pressures?

BJ . o O (any suggestions?)

AnneMH: also we are kind of out the mainstream...people understand teachers in general...they may question why we do what we do...hence lack of social support

AnneMH: I have a rich fantasy life ha ha

AnneMH: also try to do a lot for me outside of work

BJ: good comment, Anne. I agree that we can become as isolated as our students

AnneMH: and leave work at the office

BJ: Hi, Elizabeth. Welcome

elizabethr: Thanks. Sorry I'm so late.

AnaE: I agree

BJ nods to Anne. Anyone else have some coping mechanisms?

AnaE: It seems that you would have to have a few things figured out on the inside as well

AnneMH: ?

AnaE: I'm not sure how to explain that

BJ: When I was young(er) and my children were small, I found that every behavior they exhibited was reflecting the criminal behavior of my students...I was losing touch with how 'normal' kids behave

AnneMH: tough one, that

TiffanGuest1: In my experience training new military folks (where sometimes the trainers come out as nutty as the trainees from the stress), it helps to try and remember "real life"- knowing that THIS is not the same reality as everyone else has.

BJ . o O (I'd like to get back to Ana's comment in a bit)

BJ laughs...yes, Tiffany!

BJ: My way of connecting with 'normal' was to volunteer at a day camp during the summer

AnaE: that would be a different experience

BJ: I had forgotten what a child laughing in joy sounded like

TiffanGuest1: Wow-

BJ: that helped me a lot to get grounded again.
AnaE: is it that bad?
BJ: want to take that one, Anne?
AnaE: you've painted a pretty grim picture thus far
AnneMH: I dunno...good days & bad days
TiffanGuest1: How different is your experience in correctional education versus "alternative" schools?
BJ . o O (correctional ed is not for the feint of heart)
AnneMH: I guess I got guts so they say
BJ: if the alternative school is for 'at risk' children, there is not much difference
AnneMH: but I get so much back from my students
BJ: except that the kids go home every day
AnaE: that's is good to hear...
TiffanGuest1: Anne- what do you get back? Could you elaborate?
AnneMH: just the excitement when they learn
AnneMH: mostly
AnneMH: and appreciation from them
BJ agrees with Anne...what most of our kids have missed is a childhood...a time to feel safe and secure
AnaE: can someone clarify for me the difference between correctional and alternative ed
TiffanGuest1: Have many of them not really truly learned a lot before?
AnneMH: scr***ed over a lot before
MichaelMc: I am having a difficult time envisioning what every day life is for you.
BJ: they've been told they are failures a thousand times...if you can help them to have positive educational experiences you see them light up
AnneMH: I'm amazed by what my students don't know
AnneMH: but they do have strengths
AnneMH: yes bj
BJ nods...we also learn to measure success in very small increments
AnneMH: true
BJ . o O (often two steps forward and three steps back)
AnneMH: in the beginning I took my work home a lot...now I m better about that
BJ: bottom line is these are hurt and injured children and our job is to help them heal
TiffanGuest1: A friend of mine taught severely emotionally disturbed special ed kids- she was always wiped out, but said it was really rewarding when they actually made progress. Same for this population?
BJ . o O (education is almost secondary)
AnneMH: I feel drained at the end of a day
BJ: Yes, Tiffany, it's similar. One of the main differences she may have had is parental support
AnaE: that's lacking in so many educational settings
AnneMH: yeah our folks often have nobody any more
AnneMH: exacto
TiffanGuest1: Only about half- most of the students were that way for a reason.
AnneMH: referencing intergenerational issues?

BJ nods to Ana. That's why I think many public school teachers experience some of the same issues

AnaE: I agree

TiffanGuest1: Is there any parental involvement in your line? If there is any, how is it manifested?

BJ: Anne?

MichaelMc: Have either of you taught in a public school? If so, what similarities in teaching styles do you find most effective, or is it a completely different approach you have to take?

AnaE: I know a few inner city middle school teachers that could deal with this

AnneMH: mine is rare b/c I teach adults but sometimes parents call me

AnneMH: sometimes I have father s & sons, mothers & daughters together in class

BJ: I teach adolescents. Parents are invited to IEP meetings and are allowed visits on a limited basis...

BJ: but the location of the institution is very rural and it's difficult for working parents to get the travel time

AnaE: do you think limiting their parent's involvement helps or hurts?

AnaE: either? neither?

BJ: depends on the child and the parent

TiffanGuest1: What about the rural setting? How does that influence the students and/or your teaching and coping with the issues?

AnneMH: I'm in a midsize city

AnaE: I am wondering if the correctional setting itself contributes to the student's negative self worth

MichaelMc: interesting

BJ chuckles...most are inner city kids...they think they have gone to hell and it's surrounded by cow manure

AnneMH: yeah

AnaE: hee hee

MichaelMc: ha ha

AnneMH: can we talk about other stressors?

TiffanGuest1: That's great- I'm afraid a lot of us would feel the same way!

TiffanGuest1: Anne- is your environment a stressor- the location of the facility in the city (compared maybe to the rural setting)?

AnneMH: the city is not that bad but I get sick & tired of the jail atmosphere and the electronic doors, etc.

DavidAP: t seems that those kids that find themselves in such a setting have worked a long time to keep the state of low self worth alive and real

AnneMH: drugs help

AnneMH: everybody I teach seems to be an addict

MichaelMc: laughs. . . for you or them

AnaE)

AnneMH: yeah I wish

BJ laughs...both!

AnneMH: something legal but realllly good

DavidAP: has some yoga or meditation program been introduced to alleviate the stress of educators?

AnneMH: reminds me of how lots of cops are alcoholics

TiffanGuest1: Is your education in conjunction with dealing with the last topic- maybe the drug or alcohol dependencies of the students?

BJ: I think Anne has one of the most important coping skills...a sense of humor!

AnneMH: shanks

AnaE: I agree

AnneMH: yoga & meditations would be cool too

BJ: or any form of exercise

DavidAP: no additives involved

AnneMH: big time I love the treadmill

MichaelMc: just going to say that BJ

BJ: we do have lots of counseling that takes place...

AnneMH: ?

AnaE: educators?

BJ: anger management, drug addiction, victim's awareness, etc.

BJ: for the kids

AnaE: o

TiffanGuest1: How about for the teachers?

AnneMH: yeah

DavidAP: counseling helps...gives options...direction...it's great

AnneMH: I know a lot of co's who need anger management

AnaE: BJ what do you do on a day to day basis

AnaE: Anne too

BJ: many are children of abuse, neglect, and/or have serious mental health issues

AnneMH: I teach GED/literacy also supervise volunteer tutors

AnaE: to sustain your mental health

AnneMH: oh

MichaelMc: Is concern for your own safety ever a stressor or concern?

AnaE: sorry-unclear

BJ: Our classrooms are very structured...and the teachers have been trained to spot potential problems

MichaelMc: Physically that is.

AnneMH: I feel very safe

BJ: I also feel safe...but not to the point of being careless

AnneMH: see above re. taking care of me, hobbies, etc. music, theatre, movies

TiffanGuest1: So physical safety isn't one of the major concerns you have?

AnaE: I think it's interesting that you both feel so safe

AnneMH: yeah u got to keep ur guard up

AnaE: many teachers in the general pop lack that

AnneMH: I give respect & I get it

AnaE: great policy

BJ nods to Ana

MichaelMc: very important Anne

BJ: yes, that is a street code...the kids understand it

TiffanGuest1: Ana- very true- as those here in San Diego learned the hard way at Grossmont High and Granite Hills

MichaelMc: What are the consequences you enforce for poor behavior?

DavidAP: I don't feel so safe, except when there are other teachers or support staff around

MichaelMc: Noted Tiffany

BJ: worst case is that the child is removed from school for 24 hours...never longer

AnaE: lock down?

AnneMH: what can I do--lock them up? not much really, in terms of homework completion. worst case for behavior is remove from class.

AnneMH: my students are in class voluntarily

BJ: usually, if a kid looks like he's going to blow or lose control, we get him out of the room and send him to someone else to deal with so the class isn't disrupted

MichaelMc: might be a silly question, but what is the age range? Are they separated according to this? Grades?

AnaE: when you are teaching, how many grade levels do you have at a time?

AnaE: great minds Michael

AnaE)

MichaelMc: yes Ana

BJ: my kids are 11- 18 years old

elizabethr: (I know I missed the intros...just to fill you in on why I am here...I am considering a position teaching in an alt. middle school (mostly expelled kids) next year. I would be switching from a regular ed. elementary school. It has been very helpful observing your discussion.)

MichaelMc: at one time BJ

AnneMH: mine are 18+

BJ: they are divided into groups according to reading levels, unless they are trying to get a GED

AnneMH: btw, most of my students are so happy to be in class I always get good behavior

AnaE: do a lot of students work toward that option BJ (GED)

MichaelMc: happy to be in class? they should come talk to some kids I know about school!!!

AnneMH: lol

AnneMH: even like taking tests!

BJ: they have to be 16 and they have to have parental permission to try for the GED

DavidAP: I don't think that the deeper lessons have been learned in San Diego or else where. The bullies that made the problem by systematically ...daily working on destroying a personality to the breaking point...they got off scot-free.

BJ cringes...sounds horrid, David

TiffanGuest1: Good point- the greater education system definitely feeds into the alternative/ correctional system...

AnaE: interesting point David

AnneMH: one day we'll all live in a big prison

BJ: it's probably easier in some respects to teach in a correctional facility

AnaE: I was thinking that

AnaE: but only in some ways
AnneMH: than public schools?
MichaelMc: it's less political probably
AnaE: teaching is challenging
BJ nods to Anne...we have more structure and support from staff and admin
DavidAP: the prison we live in is that we BELIEVE in the present REALITY and keep feeding it
MichaelMc: I think that you all have the same vision.
AnneMH: bj I envy your position
AnaE: what?
MichaelMc: Sometimes that is lost at the public level.
DavidAP: Just like in the Matrix.
TiffanGuest1: And in some public schools (like inner city Washington DC) there's not a lot of support from the community or anything else regarding the school
BJ: I think we need to refocus the discussion...
AnneMH: ditto
MichaelMc: triple
AnneMH: raise a ?
BJ: the purpose was to look at coping skills to help us survive
AnaE: we've addressed a few
AnaE: life outside, exercise, yoga, etc
TiffanGuest1: Any recommendations?
AnaE: I still am curious about what you guys (BJ and Anne) do on a daily basis
AnaE: to survive
AnneMH: bj & others, do you feel that you, too, are "doing time" when at work?
MichaelMc: Here's a question? Standards!!!!!! What do you know to teach?
BJ: I did, Anne, until I found Tapped In...
DavidAP: If we are not actively working on solving the problems in our surroundings then we are contributing actively/or passively in FEEDING THE PROBLEM.
AnaE: explain BJ
AnaE: please
BJ: I was feeling as locked up as my kids...alone in the classroom all day with little or no contact with other adults and little opportunity for professional development
DavidAP: Yes, I do and get that from other teachers.(of doing time)
AnneMH: like the officers
AnaE: the facility doesn't sponsor staff development days?
TiffanGuest1: Ah- no "faculty room lunches"- who do you talk with without a school full of people doing the same thing?
AnneMH: ha
AnneMH: yeah my colleagues' idea of PD is fishing and kegs
AnaE: putting that one on the resume
AnneMH: so bj what do you get from tapped in other than this monthly forum
MichaelMc: only delays the problem and gives you headaches
AnneMH: for free
BJ: yes, there are professional development conferences...once or twice a year. I've found a way to continue the dialogue between the conferences

DavidAP: most of us need more time with our selves... some space to recoup.
AnneMH: that's cool
MichaelMc: Do you have families?
AnneMH: I'd like to do what u do, bj
MichaelMc: How does that affect them?
BJ: through TI I've learned to be a bit more assertive...
AnneMH: my kids r grown
BJ: I've become the moderator for the Juvenile special interest group listserv for the correctional education association...
BJ: I've gotten involved in the Blanket the World with Peace project...
AnneMH: ?
BJ: Just a sec and I'll get the url
AnneMH: cool I d like to be more active but my schedule is horrible
AnneMH: politically I mean
BJ . o O (net is slow tonight)
BJ: btw, my kids are also grown...I'm a grandmother!
AnneMH: kewl
AnaE: BJ this is off topic, but do you feel the budget crunch on education in your setting
BJ: check this out when you have time: <http://www.tappedin.org/info/teachers/hatsoff/>
AnneMH: ok thanks
BJ: Ana, we are fortunate in that we have not felt the budget crunch, but it's coming.
DavidAP joined the room.
TiffanGuest1: Very cool BJ
BJ: The peace project meets here in Tapped In on the first Thursday of each month
BJ: I was invited to put up a display of the Hats off to Peace project at the Pennsylvania Department of Education building
BJ . o O (it was up for the month of May)
DavidAP joined the room.
BJ: Our time is about up...wow, that was a fast hour!
MichaelMc: While I have the opportunity, I really admire you all for the work you do. You all seem to have such passion. With that passion, however, seems to come a lot of mental fatigue. I can only recommend doing what I do when I am stressed. Surround yourself with people who are positive.
AnneMH: yeah find some for me
AnneMH: pls
AnneMH: lol
MichaelMc: lol also
AnaE: thank you so much for sharing your experiences with us BJ and Anne
elizabethr: If I could ask an off topic question...Does anyone use NovaNET software to teach?
TiffanGuest1: Good luck everyone- you guys are impressive for what you do!
AnneMH: I don't use puters at all
AnneMH: unfortunately
AnneMH: is it good?
AnaE: Goodnight!

BJ: sorry, Elizabeth. Are you familiar with MarcoPolo?
elizabethr: I'm trying to find out myself, Anne.
DavidAP: staying around people that are positive is super important
BJ: let's end on that positive note :-)
elizabethr: Apparently it is used in a lot of alt. schools.
elizabethr: Yes, I love MarcoPolo!
BJ: thank you all for joining the discussion.
AnneMH: well I get a certain amount of that in graduate school, but everybody has their own lives...not like we hang out all the time, David
MichaelMc: Thanks for letting me sit in.
TiffanGuest1: good night :)
AnneMH: thank you bj
BJ: this group meets once a month...you are welcome to join us any time
DavidAP: positive note, positive note , positive notes (there's three)
BJ smiles. Thanks, David
DavidAP: good night and thanks for the session!
elizabethr: Thanks BJ. If I take this alt. ed. job I'm sure you will see me here a lot.
AnneMH: ok
AnneMH smiles
BJ: you can log in any time to talk, Elizabeth
elizabethr: I would love that, BJ.
MichaelMc: Cool. Thanks. Take care. SMILE ANNE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
AnneMH: take care, hope to be in touch.
BJ: Thanks, Anne
AnneMH: thank you!
AnneMH: wow this went off topic like crazy
BJ: sometimes it helps to just yak....even if it went off topic
AnneMH: yeah---but I was prepared for give & take on the subject
BJ: did you want to talk about anything specific, Anne?
BJ listens
AnneMH: thinking
AnneMH: just the various stressors
AnneMH: do I want to stay in this field even
AnneMH: we can talk another time
BJ: I have a coping philosophy if you care to hear it
AnneMH: pls
BJ: the first year, you feel very sorry for the poor little children
BJ: the second year you want to choke every one of the sob's
BJ: the third year you reach a happy medium
AnneMH: makes sense
BJ: I find I am constantly going through that cycle, but the highs and lows are getting more moderated
BJ: I also try to think how nurses work with terminally ill people
BJ: our clients are like terminally ill patients...you know most will never make it
AnneMH: sad to think
AnneMH: tho often true

AnneMH: I read the obits everyday
BJ: but you try to touch their lives and give them something positive
AnneMH: yes
BJ: and if you are successful one time in a year, it seems to wipe out all the failures
BJ . o O (measuring success in small increments)
AnneMH: I wish we could feel that we are stopping the cycle in some way
AnneMH: you know?
BJ nods sadly...that would be nice, but again, not very realistic....
AnneMH: not just keeping ourselves in jobs
BJ: my kids talk about their uncles and fathers locked up in other institutions...
AnneMH: r u online a lot?
BJ: it's like they want to grow up to be like their dads
AnneMH: yeah me too
AnneMH: or reject, but they don't
BJ: I'm here in TI a lot
AnneMH: I can log on at the univ lib but not from work
AnneMH: I'm in Dayton Ohio
AnneMH: sorry, kvetching
BJ: go for it! Kvetching is good for the soul
AnneMH: but I do feel that I'm at the bottom of the totem pole
BJ: how long have you been there?
AnneMH: whereas sergeant & lieutenants don't even have a college ed
AnneMH: going on 4 yrs
BJ understands
AnneMH: nobody had the position before me
AnneMH: co's laugh at me
AnneMH: it s gotten better tho
BJ: I've been at Loysville for 20 years
AnneMH: wow
AnneMH: they see I'm here to stay
BJ . o O (before any of my students were born)
AnneMH: yeah
AnneMH: I want to get a master's in english and do something else
AnneMH: 5 years should be enough at that place
BJ: are there other teachers in your prison?
AnneMH: no, just the volunteers
AnneMH: plus I'm only part time
BJ: yes, I can understand that time limit
AnneMH: no benefits
AnneMH: getting old for that
BJ: yikes...no wonder you want to leave
AnneMH: yeah
AnneMH: I'm real interested in arts/drama education
AnneMH: think it can be very therapeutic
BJ: cool. I agree
AnneMH: you teach art?

BJ: I wish we had an art therapist at school. Yes, I teach art

AnneMH: I'm into literature, theatre, etc.

AnneMH: wish I could work that into a career

AnneMH: w/ the therapy aspect

BJ: you probably could...let me show you a couple sites

AnneMH: awesome

BJ: go to <http://www.backflip.com/members/bjberquist>

AnneMH: ok

BJ: there is a folder for ArtsSites - Correctional Ed

AnneMH: ok

BJ: take a look at CreateNow!

AnneMH: in that folder?

BJ nods

AnneMH: ok

AnneMH: I should go home I m famished

BJ hugs goodnight. Take care. Stop in when you get a chance

AnneMH: hugs

AnneMH: will do!

AnneMH: ciao