

**Title of Session:** Alt./Correctional Ed - The Silence Speaks

**Moderator:** BJ Berquist

**Guest Speaker:** Amy Hill

**Title of File:** 20031016alted

**Date:** October 16, 2003

Room: On Tap Cafe

**AmyGst3** joined the room.

**BJ:** Hooray...hi, Amy

**AmyGst3:** Hi there!

**ShereeR:** Hello

**AmyGst3:** My computer seems to be running really slowly. Excuse any delays.

**BJ:** You're in the right room now at least, Amy!

**BJ:** Welcome to the Alternative/Correctional Ed discussion group.

**AmyGst3:** Yes, this is true. : )

**BJ:** Our guest for this discussion is Amy Hill. She is going to tell us about the website The Silence Speaks.

**BJ:** We usually start all discussions with introductions

**BJ:** I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania

**AmyGst3:** I'm a public health/violence prevention consultant and a film/videomaker in California

**ShereeR:** I am an artist / art educator at a special ed school for severely emotionally disturbed in St. Pete, Florida

**AmyGst3:** What ages of children do you each work with?

**ShereeR:** Oh sorry, I usually add that to the intro. K-12

**BJ:** I work with 11-18 year olds

**ShereeR:** Our school goes to age 22

**RobM** joined the room.

**BJ:** welcome back, Rob!

**ShereeR:** However, the older kids may be chronologically older, but emotionally they are around eight years old.

**BJ:** Amy, can you give us a little background on your program?

**RobM:** Rob Morris, Teacher/Facilitator, Forward Bound Program, an evening high school alternative.

**BJ:** Amy?

**BJ:** while we wait for Amy, I'm going to show you the url for the Silence Speaks website

**BJ:** [www.silencespeaks.org](http://www.silencespeaks.org)

**BJ:** This is a site with some powerful messages.

**BJ:** Sheree and I were discussing how moving some of the images are.

**BJ:** Everyone get the page ok? Any comments?

**RobM:** I looked at the site earlier this week and was impressed with the diversity of stories.

**ShereeR:** BJ, do you know if Amy is involved with this site or did she find it to share?

**BJ:** this is Amy's site

**ShereeR:** Oh WOW. I hope she gets back online. I would love to hear her talk about it.

**RobM:** I have a very immature bunch of adolescents right now and I am hesitant to have them view this site if only for the opening graphic.

**RobM:** There is great value in the pages and stories, I am just trying to

**RobM** left the room (signed off).

**BJ:** I had asked Amy if she was familiar with CreateNow!

**BJ:** have you heard of createnow, Sheree?

**BJ:** Amy is back

**BJ .** o O ( now we just have to get her here )

**AmyGst2** joined the room.

**BJ:** you did it!

**BJ:** Sheree is very anxious to hear about the Silence Speaks, Amy

BJ hopes Amy's connection is better

**AmyGst2:** you know what, it's not, I don't think. We'll see . . .

**BJ** crosses her fingers

**AmyGst2:** if not, i am [amylenita@concentric.org](mailto:amylenita@concentric.org) . . .

**AmyGst2:** and the web site is [www.silencespeaks.org](http://www.silencespeaks.org)

**BJ:** Amy, do you know Jill Gurr? She runs CreateNow!

**AmyGst2:** No, I don't. What do they do?

**BJ:** [www.createnow.org](http://www.createnow.org)

**BJ:** they link up at risk kids with producers, playwrights, musicians, etc.

**AmyGst2:** Sounds very cool. In terms of Silence Speaks, the premise is using video as a form of art therapy.

**AmyGst2:** We teach people with little to no computer experience how to create short digital videos.

**AmyGst2:** The difference between our workshops and more typical video production is .

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**AmyGst2:** in our workshops, participants are 100% in charge of their pieces, at all times .

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**AmyGst2:** Meaning, they write the scripts; they select the images; they record the voiceover narration; they select music . . .

**AmyGst2:** and we just teach them how to edit. Mostly people use still images, sometimes a little video.

**AmyGst2:** We have worked with kids as young as 11, and adults as old as 65.

**BJ:** Sheree and I were discussing how powerful the images are...

**AmyGst2:** Youth really seem to pick right up on it, being as tech. savvy as they are.

**AmyGst2:** Yes, they are powerful. I have seen those stories a million times, and some of them still make me cry, every time.

**BJ:** do you ever have problems with the emotional end? People not being able to handle facing their demons?

**AmyGst2:** We are very conscious and careful about this.

**AmyGst2:** I have worked with/consulted with a number of therapists and social workers .

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**AmyGst2:** to develop guidelines for screening people for the workshops.

**AmyGst2:** This means we do not work with people who are still in, or very recently out of, crisis.

**AmyGst2:** We have an "application" of sorts, that questions people about the story they want to tell, about whether they have shared it . . .

**AmyGst2:** about what support they need, about how they feel about disclosing . . . etc.

**AmyGst2:** Thus far we have had no major problems. I can't say people do not go through a LOT . . .

**AmyGst2:** The workshops are VERY intense and emotional. I like to have a trained counselor on hand . . .

**AmyGst2:** To be with people if they need a time out, need to talk, etc.

**BJ:** sounds like a good idea

**AmyGst2:** So really people self-select. They don't sign up unless they are "ready."

**AmyGst2:** But I think there IS a shift from when they go into the workshop, and when the leave . . .

**BJ:** do you feel any of the participants do the videos for the sympathy/attention?

**AmyGst2:** in terms of how they feel about showing their work, etc.

**AmyGst2:** That's a good question. Only once have we encountered a dynamic like that, and well, it was a guy.

**AmyGst2:** None of the women I have worked with have ever come across like that . . .

**AmyGst2:** If anything, they are SO deeply grateful for the opportunity to tell their stories with words . . .

**ShereeR:** Amy, do you think these works are more therapeutic for the video creators or the viewers?

**AmyGst2:** and images, and music, all in a safe space.

**AmyGst2:** That's a good question too. I think it depends. I think it's always therapeutic in some way, for the participants . . .

**AmyGst2:** but I don't know if I'd call it therapeutic for viewers. I actually worry sometimes that it's the opposite . . .

**AmyGst2:** meaning, that without context, proper introduction, etc., showing the pieces is totally inappropriate.

**AmyGst2:** I had an experience with this recently. I was doing some consulting for a school-based digital storytelling program . . .

**ShereeR:** Do any of the participant videographers continue with similar work after their "Silence Speaks" project is completed. Are they artists? or do they go back to their lives?

**AmyGst2:** and one of the regular teachers just whipped on some very intense stories, for this group of young people . . .

**ShereeR:** Oh that would be terrible.

**ShereeR:** Hello? Amy gone again?

**BJ** hopes not

**ShereeR:** Oh geesh, well maybe another night. Bye bye

**ShereeR** left the room (signed off).

**AmyGst2** left the room (signed off).

**BJ** left the room (signed off).

Editor's Note:

It was unfortunate that Amy had a bad connection to Tapped In and was unable to complete the discussion. However, she sent the following URL with an article about Silence Speaks: <http://www.digitaldividenetwork.org/content/stories/index.cfm?key=237>

If you would like to know more, Amy has asked that you email her directly at [amylenita@concentric.org](mailto:amylenita@concentric.org)