

Title of Session: Alternative/Correctional Ed Forum

Moderator: BJ Berquist

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BJB2: If you're here for the Alt/Correctional Ed discussion, you're in the right place

BJB2: let's start with introductions

ShereeR: OK

BJB2: I'm an art teacher in a male juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania

SarahBK: Hi, everybody. My name is Sarah, I teach at Rosepine High School in Louisiana

NaturesGst3 joined the room.

ShereeR: I am Sheree. I am a teacher in St. Petersburg, Florida. I teach at a center for severely emotionally disturbed grades K-12

BJB2: we're just doing introductions, Nature

BJB2: Sarah, you said earlier that you teach business?

DavidWe: I'm David Weksler. I work with math and science teachers, mostly, and I've known Bj for almost 8 years, I think. I'm in New Jersey, near NYC

ShereeR: Opps!! How could I forget that part. I am the art teacher too. Therefore, I get ALL the students grades k-12

NaturesGst3: I'm April, I work at a tiny (and I mean tiny) rural school in Missouri. I currently teach 8-12 Science, but could be teaching art next year....I just finished my first year of teaching

SarahBK: yes and the school board wants our business department to teach alternative kids

SarahBK: GATES program

BJB2 wonders if Sheree finds a great difference between the Kinders and the 12s?

DavidWe: Congratulations, April, on your first year

NaturesGst3: thanks:)

BJB2: ahhh...GATES is gifted and talented...a real challenge

DavidWe smiles

SarahBK: no..GATES is for kids that will not complete the traditional high school program

BJB2: the title of this discussion is Alternative/Correctional Education Forum

SarahBK: that is the acronym for the program

BJB2: oh, thanks, Sarah. I wasn't familiar with a different acronym

ShereeR: Well, I definitely have my opinions about all this stuff. Personally, I can't believe I have to teach Kindergarteners who are already "labeled". However, they show me why...It is so sad.

BJB2: perhaps we should define who our students are...the ones who end up in alternative and correctional facilities

NaturesGst3: at the school I teach I think we have 30% or more who are on IEP's, a lot of them BD....but I found a lot of the students other teachers labeled as "bad" really didn't give me too much grief once we settled the respect issue

SarahBK: I teach in a rural school and most of our students get sent to the alternative school

BJB2: Sheree's students have severe handicaps...and are probably not much different from my guys, but they are placed in a structured environment that works with the disabilities

BJB2: Sarah, how would you describe the students who get sent to alternative school?

SarahBK: this year our school had a higher number of special ed kids enter our school

SarahBK: they are kids that get in fights, drugs, behavior

SarahBK: violent

BJB2: why do you think they do that?

ShereeR: Well to distill my students, I would have to say that the primary issue is behavior disorders. To say they are "at risk" would be an understatement. My students

have all been in regular schools and regular special ed classes, but for whatever reason (?????) they have been assigned to the SED center instead of being allowed to go to the regular school of their choice.

NaturesGst3: bj I think they do that because they hurt, and they don't know how to express themselves in a constructive way

SarahBK: many of the kids do have behavior disorders

BJB2 nods to April and Sarah. Sheree, can you tell April and Sarah why these kids hurt?

SarahBK: I also feel that they do not know how to express the multitude of things happening in their life, so they act out in the only way they know how.

BJB2: good description, Sarah.

BJB2 . o O (boy, it's really easy to feel sorry for these kids, isn't it?)

SarahBK: I would like to understand why some kids behave the way that they do

SarahBK: yes...it is

ShereeR: Oh my goodness.....WHY????????????????.....The answer to that question could be written as a thesis. If I could have my kids 24/7, I MIGHT be able to make a substantial difference in their life. However , the variables are so extensive...I am almost overwhelmed.

SarahBK: I generally am drawn to the kids with difficult home lives.

DavidWe smiles

SarahBK: I want to save them...but know that in most cases I will not be able too.

NaturesGst3: in my classes I have so many kids coming from broken homes, violent homes, severe poverty homes

DavidWe . o O ("saving" is a difficult thing)

BJB2: hmmm...let's try these reasons for starters....physical abuse, mental abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, drugs, learning disabilities, behavior disabilities, poverty, gangs, no parental supervision, no parents

ShereeR: Well, I learned a long time ago, I can't SAVE them. However, I can put little seeds of hope in their ears.

SarahBK: Many of the students do not really open up about the things that are happening in their lives

BJB2 listens to how Sheree plants the seeds

SarahBK: I have learned that too..I help the ones that want to help themselves

BJB2 . o O (potatoes?)

NaturesGst3: lol

DavidWe . o O (eyes?)

ShereeR: BJB.....Yep.....all of the above.

BJB2: one thing is that most of the kids have never experienced success in school

BJB2: so we provide an opportunity for success

BJB2: we provide a safe place for learning

SarahBK: the kids that get sent to alternative school want to stay there

SarahBK: sometimes they perform other offenses to go there

BJB2 nods to Sarah...it's the same with any place where a child feels safe and successful

NaturesGst3: all the time last year at the beginning of different classes I would have "life lessons"we would talk about respect, how to deal with anger or depression

SarahBK: it is the one-on-one attention that they like

BJB2: good, April

BJB2: yes, attention is important, but it can also suck every ounce of energy out of you if you're not careful

SarahBK: how do you get them to open up and express the severity of their emotions

ShereeR: I have taught a long time. Even though there has been times when I was discouraged, there have been many times when a former student repeats words of wisdom that I told them. I know for SURE that I can't change the world in full, but I can change a few thoughts. That may result in the change of direction in a few lives.

SarahBK: I have students that message me all the time to talk

DavidWe: That's a real challenge, Sarah

DavidWe nods

SarahBK: They say that they can't relate to their parents

SarahBK: or that their parents wouldn't understand

BJB2: Sarah, that is a double edged blade...unless you are trained to truly counsel students, you have to be careful...some kids can become suicidal or homicidal if you trigger certain emotions

NaturesGst3: sometimes I feel overwhelmed when I have 9th-10th grade girls asking me how to tell if they're pregnant

SarahBK: I tell them to talk to our counselor

BJB2 . o O (I'd also take what the kids say with a grain of salt, Sarah)

SarahBK: I do

SarahBK: I know most of their parents..they are fellow educators

BJB2: the parents probably feel just as alienated, but it's not your place unless you're a counselor

BJB2: Sheree, are we on the same page here? There is such a fine line between 'helping' and child and enabling him

SarahBK: no, it is not and I tell them that and refer them to the school counselor if it is a real problem

ShereeR: Sarah, my kids tell me stuff that would curl your toes. The reason they confide in me, "an almost old lady" is simple. I look at them straight in the eye. I talk to them everyday and ask them how they are doing. I ask questions about their lives. THEN, it is a miracle. They figure out that I care about them. The eventually realize that I want to hear what they have to say. It is obvious when they come to that realization because they start telling me all their secrets!

SarahBK: I ask them those same questions

SarahBK: I have a teen-aged son and I hope that his teachers ask him everyday how he is

SarahBK: or at least acknowledge him

BJB2 nods

SarahBK: to let him know he is important and that they are glad he is in their class

BJB2 . o O (which we should do with ALL our children)

SarahBK: many of my students have broken homes, single parents, and many of them have lost parents

SarahBK: so sometimes it is necessary to let them know that you care

NaturesGst3: what I've done in my classes is have written up on the board "how are you doing", and the students have 10 minutes or so to write me and tell me, I let them know at the beginning that I will not show them to anyone, only if they threaten themselves or someone else, but that if they want to curse in the letter that is fine and I also tell them (and do) throw them away at my house where no one from school can read them

DavidWe: students with two parents can have problems, too, right?

SarahBK: yes...

ShereeR: BJB, I am sure you know this already. "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree". Many of the parents I have encountered have shown signs of being intimidated by school situations. They had a rotten school experience. Therefore, they come as parents to their child's school and all those old feelings come back.

DavidWe agrees with Sheree

BJB2 agrees.

SarahBK: Yes, that is true. I had a horrible school experience when I was younger and it affected my whole school experience.

BJB2: part of that is that an abused child will become an abusive adult.

SarahBK: I wanted to become a teacher just to prove that not all teachers were like her

BJB2: sounds very wonderful, Sarah...don't ever lose that feeling!

DavidWe: There was a wonderful program in Philadelphia that had parents learning how to tutor their children (at an elementary school - big Latino population) which lead to parents getting their high school diplomas or GED

ShereeR: This type of situation is so obvious to me. If I am in a parent conference and I feel this kind of situation, I jump in. I look at the parent and smile. It is a way of

connecting. I sometimes even move to a seat closer to them and/or touch them on the shoulder. This is just to let them know, I am harmless. I am here to help them.

NaturesGst3: wow...that's a great program

DavidWe: Learning how to help their children is a natural motivator

DavidWe: Gives them a positive reason to be in school

ShereeR: You would not believe how receptive these parents are. They just smile big smiles and are so thankful that they have found a friend.

SarahBK: I never see any parents

SarahBK: I teach over a 100 kids and never see but maybe 5 parents in a school year

BJB2: Sheree, do you engage the parents in the lessons?

NaturesGst3: I see some on open house, very few on parent/teacher conferences

SarahBK: and those 5 are for the students who excel in my class

ShereeR: Oh my.....I have you beat.....I teach 250 and see about 5 parents a year.

SarahBK: I teach keyboarding so it is very hard to fail my class but I do have students manage it

ShereeR: However, I have taught for enough years that my parent experiences are starting to mount up. LOL

SarahBK: So, how do I spot the kids that maybe potential kids in jeopardy

NaturesGst3 smiles

SarahBK: We had a student at our school that was carving into his skin

BJB2: that's a red flag

SarahBK: to make permanent tattoos

SarahBK: we reported to counselor and she had conference with him

NaturesGst3: some of that can be to take an emotional pain and turn it into a physical pain....it is easier to comprehend physical than emotional

ShereeR: I see very few parents in "open house" situations. I see most of my parents in behavior or IEP situations.

BJB2: speaking of IEP's...

SarahBK: the student also wrote in English class that he wanted to kill whoever invented English

BJB2 grins...I know a lot of people who feel that way, Sarah

SarahBK: lol

SarahBK: true

SarahBK: thinking of getting plus 30 in English

BJB2: IDEA has some interesting regulations that are being mandated...

ShereeR: Sarah, I hate to tell you this, but that kind of behavior is terrible, but not uncommon at all.

NaturesGst3: I think my largest class is 17...:)

BJB2: one that I feel is an excellent idea, but might be difficult to fund, is transitions

SarahBK: April...lucky you

SarahBK: what are transitions?

NaturesGst3: I did say it was a tiny rural school:)

ShereeR: BJ, go on???

BJB2: the transitions regs suggest that the IEPs are student led

NaturesGst3: led.....?

BJB2 . o O (transitions is providing services to help the child move from school to work...or school to independent living)

BJB2: the student does the talking in the IEP...takes ownership for what he needs and how he will get there

NaturesGst3: hummmm

ShereeR: Well, IEPs are supposed to have student input now. However, when you are dealing with students with severe disabilities, it is difficult to include their thoughts on their own IEPs

BJB2 agrees...but many students are able to participate in an active way.

BJB2: so many of my kids are 'institutionalized'...everything is done for them

ShereeR: That would be wonderful if that concept could actually come to fruition. However with some students, it would be more than a challenge.

BJB2: they have lost the ability to make decisions, make choices, plan for the future

SarahBK: Would there be limits as to what the students could suggest

BJB2: probably should be able to set realistic goals

NaturesGst3: I can see that with some of my students bj...one student who has a para expects her to do everything for him when he is really capable of doing quite a bit

BJB2 . o O (I think this is an important thing for all students to do..not just kids with IEP's)

ShereeR: I totally understand what you are saying BJ. However, SOME of the students can't do for themselves. People have done and do for them because there is no other choice.

SarahBK: What if the student has a chronological age of 15 but a mental age of 5

BJB2: then the disability is severe and the parents or guardians have to be involved

SarahBK: would their suggests to their IEP be taken into consideration or would the SPED person make the decision

NaturesGst3: all I'm going to have to scoot....got to get my kids to bed....it's been a pleasure talking with you all....I hope to come back soon:)

ShereeR: BJB, believe me. I am a "tough love" kind of teacher. I don't allow for excuses or cope out reasons of victimization. However, I have also encountered students who are so far gone, they can't make any decision (let alone a good decision).

NaturesGst3 left the room (signed off).

BJB2: it should be a team decision, Sarah...the student, the parents/guardian, and the IEP team

BJB2 nods to Sheree...but not ALL

BJB2: if we say that a child has an IEP and that means they are helpless, then we are 'labeling' too

SarahBK: I have participated in an IEP meeting for a student and I know that many of my colleagues felt uncomfortable that the student was present

BJB2 thinks that teachers don't understand the purpose of an IEP

BJB2: I did a survey of kids in one of my lower classes...and only one child would admit or even knew he had an IEP

SarahBK: Sometimes I think we are left out of the loop

SarahBK: our kids carry them in their binder

SarahBK: which I think is illegal

SarahBK: or should be

ShereeR: The student SHOULD be there. It is their own educational plan! How can anyone expect the student to buy in or participate in the plan if they are not a part of the process?

BJB2: how can a child learn what resources are available to them in the community, in school, through agencies, if they are not allowed to be active participants?

SarahBK: That is true if they are capable of understanding

BJB2: I don't think carrying a binder is the answer...and I'm not being a pollyanna

BJB2: but I don't think we challenge our students enough

SarahBK: I didn't think that you could carry a confidential document around

SarahBK: I mean when I get an IEP on a student I must take preventative steps so that nobody sees it

SarahBK: and yet these kids were just carrying them around

BJB2: if we approach education with the attitude that all children can learn, then that means we can teach to that child's level of ability

SarahBK: well, it has been nice chatting...must go and see about my son

BJB2: I understand the confidentiality of IEPs

SarahBK: bye

BJB2 waves bye to Sarah

BJB2: thanks for joining us

SarahBK left the room (signed off).

BJB2 sighs

BJB2: I admire the way you build trust and confidence with your students, Sheree

DavidWe agrees

BJB2: how do you avoid being overwhelmed with it all?

BJB2 . o O (today was our last day with the kids...I'm exhausted)

BJB2 thinks Sheree is multitasking

BJB2 . o O (thinking about her retired car riding around the countryside like Benny the bus)

ShereeR: Well.....

ShereeR: It is funny you mentioned not being overwhelmed.

ShereeR: I was just talking to someone about that today.

BJB2 listens

ShereeR: Actually, I have never had a problem with that until this year.

ShereeR: The kids are getting worse and more severe.

ShereeR: I am worried about this.

BJB2 nods. It's like working with terminally ill people

ShereeR: I know for sure I can't take them home with me.

DavidWe: very difficult

BJB2: yes, it is, David

ShereeR: All I can do is do the best I can and have faith that something will make a difference.

ShereeR: The part that is the saddest is that I have "job security". There are so many kids in the system that need help. It is scary.

BJB2: I guess that's the bottom line...do the best we can for the time we have them

ShereeR: That is all you can do BJ.

BJB2 nods...the unidentified kids who slip through the cracks...that is where I was headed at the beginning of the discussion

BJB2: they're the ones we end up getting

ShereeR: When I was younger and more naive, I thought I could save the world. Well, older is wiser. I can't change the WHOLE world. However I can change little, tiny bits at a time.

BJB2: well, we haven't solved the problems of the world, but it was good to talk about what we do...and what we do well.

ShereeR: In my area of behavior disorders, GIRLS slip through the cracks a lot.

BJB2: I don't work with any girls...they're more difficult to deal with than boys

BJB2: if you get a chance, see the movie Juvies

ShereeR: The boys are obvious in their attention seeking behaviors. Girls are more discreet and/or have a different set of behaviors. They tend to be quieter or less disruptive. Many have behaviors that result in rage directed inward.

BJB2: <http://www.juvies.net/>

ShereeR: Since that isn't disruptive, the teachers tolerate or ignore the signs of trouble.

BJB2 nods

ShereeR: However, the girls I do get are a real trip@@@ LOL

BJB2: Hubby is heading for bed so I'm going to have to log out. It's been great talking to you again, Sheree. Nice to see back in TI

ShereeR: Bye bye!

Shereer left the room (signed off).