

Title of Session: Alt/Correctional Ed Forum

Moderator: BJ Berquist

Title of File: 20051117alted

Date: November 17, 2005

Room: Alternative/Correctional Ed Group

CathyJW: I was interested in this topic because there is an alternative school in our district. I've worked there a few times (as a substitute) and I really like it. At first, I thought it was for "bad" kids but I was mistaken.

BJB2 listens

BJB2: what changed your mind about the kids being "bad"?

CathyJW: I would be very happy if I could get a job there (I graduate in December, I know I already told you that a few times but I just like the way it sounds). Anyway, when I went to work there the first day, I was worried someone might shoot me or knife me or something. Then I learned that these kids just need a smaller student/teacher ratio and some extra tlc.

BJB2 nods to Cathy

BJB2: most kids that are 'at risk' and fail in the school setting have some kind of learning disability

BJB2: often they also have social and emotional issues too

CathyJW: The school itself is new, very modern (I live in a title I district) and has everything needed for integrating technology into the classroom, something I am very interested in. Plus, it is so much easier to teach a class of 10 or so kids instead of 30.

BJB2: I agree...I've taught in a correctional facility for 22 years

CathyJW: I agree about the issues and I think the alternative setting is perfect for them, although the school I'm talking about only allows them to stay 2 years, then they have to mainstream back into the regular campus.

ReginaL joined the room.

BJB2: the classes are structured and the kids experience success...often for the first time in an educational setting

CathyJW: Exactly, and that is so rewarding for both the student and the teacher!

ReginaL: hello

BJB2 waves hi to Gina

BJB2: glad you could join us, Gina.

ReginaL: me too

ReginaL: hello Cathy

CathyJW: I'm sorry, I lost my note on emotes so I can't wave, but Hi Gina!

BJB2: let's do introductions

ReginaL: I am not good with them either... but waving back

BJB2: to emote start the line with a colon followed by the action

BJB2: for example :waves

CathyJW: I'm Cathy Wright, a student at the University of Houston, a wannabe teacher of grades 4-8, language arts. Someday soon, I think. Yes, I was on last night, but not the librarians group, I was on the other one about the same time. :waves

ReginaL: I am Gina... a teacher media & tech specialist in a prison in southern DE

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

ReginaL: BJ and I have been able to meet in real time at conferences

BJB2: Gina, Cathy was telling me she is interested in working in an alternative school

BJB2: she likes the small structured classes

CathyJW: Oh dear, I guess I'm in the wrong spot. I thought alternative ed meant like the alternative school I was describing.

BJB2: you're in the right place, Cathy

ReginaL: lots of different alternative programs

ReginaL: what were you describing.. just got here

BJB2: and alternative programs are the first step/last step before incarceration

BJB2: Hi, Rick. Welcome

ReginaL: hello Rick

BJB2: are you here for the Alt/Correctional ed discussion, Rick?

CathyJW: Good -- because it's all very interesting -- what I was talking about was the alternative education school in my district. I've worked there a little as a substitute and it's really neat. smaller class size, really good kids, just need a little extra help to get where they need to go.

ReginaL: I have really found that I like working with adults....

BJB2: Cathy also mentioned that the alt school is new with state of the art technology

ReginaL: but have taught all levels ages exceptionalitiee

CathyJW: Yes, and the fact that so much \$\$ has been spent in this school is exceptional because it is a Title I district, i.e., poor.

BJB2: we're not going to try to talk you out of applying to an alternative school, Cathy

BJB2 . o O (we just want you to go there with realistic expectations)

CathyJW: Actually, right now I'd go to work anywhere.

ReginaL: I have come to realize I am in a "growth industry" .. is unfortunate.. so many incarcerated..

BJB2 smiles and nods...we also wish you well in finding a job!

BJB2 agrees with Gina. Nothing would make me happier than to be out of a job because no kids were being locked up

CathyJW: Just curious, about what reading level is the average incarcerated person?

ReginaL: I have been blessed ... some wonderful opportunities came my way after finishing my bachelors and certificate program...

ReginaL: many of our start below 5th grade on either math or reading or both

ReginaL: a few come in almost ready for the GED

ReginaL: or with 18 hs credits...

BJB2: good question, Cathy. It varies from preK to college

ReginaL: it varies.. but many many low functioning men (and women) in this county... but it is a male facility

BJB2: how do students get referred to your alternative program, Cathy?

ReginaL: BJ... what was your first teaching job??

CathyJW: My understanding is they have to be at least 2 years behind in school, at risk for dropping out; plus there are those that are at risk due to emotional problems, pregnancy (or both).

BJB2 nods. Thanks

ReginaL: we are just starting a family literacy/parenting program for our students.. today I got about 5 letters of interest in my pile of new enrollments.. more than ever at one time

BJB2: the primary focus in our school is reading/literacy

BJB2: congrats, Gina!

BJB2: the second focus is math

ReginaL: reading, writing literacy.. is my favorite to teach

BJB2: but the driving force for alt ed is IDEA

BJB2: one of the components of IDEA is transitions...

BJB2: moving from school to career or work, independent living, social skills

ReginaL: yes.. as a result of IDEA we are picking up young men with previous special ed placement before they are sentenced

ReginaL: DE only has prisons.. no jails..

ReginaL: we had 6 men come in that are under 21 this week.. only one was spec ed...

ReginaL: but we must serve them within 2 mos...

ReginaL: all the meetings , IEP's..etc

BJB2: only one was labeled sped....do you do any testing?

ReginaL: yes

ReginaL: we didn't used to do it when they were in pretrial though

ReginaL: then we had 6 months to get started.. now just 30 days to get started.. 30 more to be tested.. and instruction started.

ReginaL: I am not he spec ed person.. but I was..

BJB2: the time thing is pretty tight. That's another part of IDEA, Cathy

ReginaL: and my office is in the pretrial bldg

BJB2: Are you familiar with IDEA, Cathy?

CathyJW: yes, let's see, individuals with disabilities act?

BJB2 nods.

BJB2 . o O (I'm glad you didn't ask me!)

BJB2: Gina, in K-12 we're also constrained by NCLB

ReginaL: we don't seem to have to deal with that... at the adult facility..

BJB2 nods. It's a challenge

ReginaL: I have cold feet... (not kidding) it got cold her today.. and I came up without my slippers.. going to go.. might be back....

BJB2 hands Gina some warm socks

ReginaL: Cathy.. I don't come to these meetings enough, but am going to in the future.. hope to see you here or there.. soon

ReginaL: thanks

ReginaL: good to see you..

ReginaL: and meet you

BJB2: Gina, got a message from John Platt today

ReginaL: name is familiar

ReginaL: from a leadership conf I think

BJB2: they're starting a Masters Program in Spec Ed for JJET

ReginaL: JJET?

BJB2: right..that's when I met him too

BJB2: www.jjet.org

BJB2: they're the ones doing the special ed certification through the U of W Florida

BJB2: online courses

ReginaL: wow

BJB2: sorry to go off track, Cathy...wanted to share that info with Gina before she left

ReginaL: I would love to teach some of the courses.. is right up my alley... do teachers have to be onsite?

BJB2: I'll post more to the CEA lists, Gina

BJB2: I don't know...contact John. I'll get his email for you...just a sec

ReginaL: thanks... I found the site already...

CathyJW: That's ok, it's all good stuff

ReginaL: but do send it please

ReginaL: thanks... see you .. sooner or later..

BJB2: Cathy, have you done your student teaching?

ReginaL: <---- going for booties

ReginaL left the room (signed off).

BJB2 waves goodnight to Gina

CathyJW: no, I'm graduating w/o certification and going to work under emergency certification

BJB2: The most important thing to keep in mind when teaching at-risk kids...

CathyJW: I'm 50, I went back to school to finish my degree a few years ago

BJB2: is that you have to provide them with positive experiences in learning, engage them actively in the lessons...

BJB2: and provide a positive role model

BJB2: the rest is icing on the cake

BJB2: I was an alternative student also, Cathy...didn't get certified till I was almost 50

BJB2: . o O (alternative college student as in OLD)

CathyJW: old is better

BJB2: yeah, it sure is...don't have to deal with the other stuff kids have to work through

BJB2: and we have experience

CathyJW: I think it helps in working with at risk kids

BJB2: I will tell you one drawback to working with at risk kids...

BJB2: I find I go through three year cycles

BJB2: the first year you feel so sorry for the battered and injured child

BJB2: the second year you want to kill every one of the SOBs

BJB2: the third year you reach a compromise

CathyJW: sounds so true!

BJB2: it's almost like dealing with terminally ill people. 80% of incarcerated kids will be locked back up

BJB2: this is really frustrating....

CathyJW: that's the sad part

BJB2: but it teaches you to focus on the moment....do what you can in the time you have

BJB2: I mentioned transitions earlier...

BJB2: I feel that transitions is really important and you have a greater opportunity to offer a good program in an alternative school

BJB2: parenting classes, budgeting, lifeskills

CathyJW: what are transitions

BJB2: moving from one phase to another...school to work, school to college, school to independent living

CathyJW: ok

BJB2: learning to find social services in the community that can support your needs

BJB2: Any other questions or concerns? It takes a special person to be able to teach in an alternative setting and not get burned out and fried to a crisp

BJB2: you seem to be looking at the opportunity in a realistic way and should do well

CathyJW: Yeah, I think it could kind of take over your life but it appeals to me for some reason.

BJB2 . o O (but it is emotionally exhausting sometimes.)

BJB2 smiles and hugs Cathy.

CathyJW: Yeah, but that's teaching, right!

BJB2: yeppers! In the inner city schools all the kids are at risk

BJB2 . o O (and they don't have 10-12 kids in a classroom)

CathyJW: It was great talking with you, gotta go get kids focused on homework

BJB2 waves goodnight. Please keep me posted on how it's going

CathyJW: Great == I will.