

Title of Session: Alt/Correctional Ed-National At-Risk Education Network

Moderator: BJ Berquist

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Room: After School Online Room

BJ: Anyone here for the Alternative/Correctional Ed Forum?

RamonaT: Yes

KellyRo: Yes, I am here for the Alternative/Correctional Ed forum

BJ: My guest speaker hasn't logged in yet, but we'll see if we can take a look at some of the information he was going to discuss

BJ: a reminder to click on the Actions menu and detach your chat window

BJ: we usually start all discussions here with introductions

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

RamonaT: I am Ramona Thompson from Louisiana teaching special ed

AnneMH joined the room.

BJ: Hi, Anne. We're just starting introductions

AnneMH: Great.

SusanR joined the room.

BJ: Hi, Sue. We're just doing introductions, although I think some people are being shy

SusanR: Thanks BJ. I am a k to 8 Occasional Teacher from Ontario, Canada.

AnneMH: I am pursuing an MsED in secondary English education; I have worked in a variety of ABE settings, most recently in a county jail. I am very interested in correctional education.

BJ: The topic for today's discussion is the National At-Risk Education Network

BJ: did anyone have an opportunity to visit the site before this discussion?

BJ: www.AtRiskEducation.Net

AnneMH: Sorry, unfortunately not.

RamonaT: Yes, I looked over the information on the site briefly.

BJ: Any thoughts you wanted to share, Ramona?

RamonaT: I was interested in the topic because even though I teach sp. ed in middle school, we still have at risk kids.

BJ nods to Ramona. There are a lot of at-risk kids out there for a variety of reasons

KellyRo: Yes, I briefly visited the site. The topic interested me b/c I previously taught in a private inner city school in Ft. Wayne IN- had a lot of at risk kids.

BJ: often, inappropriately addressed special ed needs are one of the reasons

BJ: 80% of the students in our institution are special ed

RamonaT: Our school has a changing population and the number of at risk kids is rising

BJ: o O (that is a guestimate, not a hard statistic)

BJ: how is the population changing, Ramona?

RamonaT: We are getting more students from dysfunctional families

AnneMH: Dysfunctional or malfunctional?

BJ: Let me share this quote from Anthony about at-risk students:

BJ: The definition of at-risk is broadened to not only mean at-risk of dropping out of school, but also at-risk of not succeeding in life. Obviously many people who have gotten

a diploma have not been well prepared to deal with life, and if education continues to bury its head in the sand with the belief that children are well-served just to have academic content thrust at them then our welfare and prison counts will continue to swell in number.

RamonaT: That appears to be a problem in our school, the teachers are having a difficult time teaching the so called abnormal student

BJ: what do you think is meant by "not being prepared to deal with life"? How can we meet this need?

AnneMH: My (limited) experience in public schools showed me that adolescents don't care about content--it generally doesn't relate to their lives in any way.

AnneMH: Perhaps life skills, including budgeting, parenting, job prep, and emotional intelligence?

BJ: The NAREN site lists four topics

BJ: Prevention of violence and aggression

RamonaT: I have had high school students who said that they did not like certain subjects, but when ideas which intrigued them were introduced in an interesting way they were very interested.

BJ: Counseling and Communication skills with youth identified as being at-risk

BJ: Working with families to re-engage students identified as being at-risk

BJ: Cross-cultural issues in working with youth identified as being at-risk

BJ: Where would dysfunctional families come in?

KellyRo: I would say working with families to reengage students identified as being at-risk

BJ agrees with Kelly...not an easy job!

KellyRo: I am not sure what it means to reengage students, though

AnneMH: It seems to me that parents have often given up on at-risk kids and expect someone else to pick up the burden.

BJ: anyone have any input on Kelly's question?

BJ: Anne, often at-risk kids come from overwhelmed and at-risk parents

AnneMH: Exactly.

BJ: this is from the statistics on the NAREN page

BJ: States Census school enrollment projections for the year 2000 were 53,445,000 children. This means that the population currently at-risk of dropping out could be as many as 6,680,625 children. The financial future of high school dropouts is grim. Charts illustrating significant differences in potential monetary success can be found on the About NAREN page.

RamonaT: Some of the parents I have worked with have tried many different approaches and the child is not receptive and then turns to others for help and others are like Anne says.

BJ: the NAREN page has some other sobering statistics on youth at-risk from a bad start

AnneMH: As a teacher in a public school my time & resources were limited for helping students.

SusanR: At risk students must be identified early..at the kindergarten/grade one level..early intervention pays off I believe.

BJ nods sadly to Anne...schools are being asked to take on more and more responsibilities. But, if they don't, who will?

AnneMH: Perhaps interagency collaboration would be helpful.

BJ: yes, Sue, early intervention is great...if the staff is trained to recognize the at-risk students

BJ: yep, that's important, Anne

KellyRo: I am more full of questions than I am answers, so I want to ask Susan what kind of early intervention is available?

BJ: knowing how to spot learning difficulties is one kind, Kelly

SusanR: small group teaching for students at risk...ie small language and math groups for weak students

BJ: I think teaching to multiple intelligences is also important...recognizing that not all children learn in the same way or at the same rate.

SusanR: at the primary level rather than at the junior level

BJ: Another program that I recently read about is the Backpack Buddies...

BJ: where schools send home food for the weekend

KellyRo: O.K.- my son's school does that

BJ: o O (it's hard to believe that in this land of plenty there are starving children who don't eat when school is closed.)

AnneMH: That's cool....I wonder how it's funded.

SusanR: we have a breakfast program

RamonaT: This may be off base, but what does NAREN say about drug usage and at risk kids.

BJ looks at the article about Backpack Buddies

BJ: In 1999, 31% of 12th graders, 26% of 10th graders, and 15% of 8th grade students reported having five or more alcoholic beverages in a row in the previous 2-week period.

AnneMH: Wow.

BJ: In 1999, 26% of 12th graders, 22% of 10th graders, and 12% of 8th graders, had used illicit drugs in the previous 30 days.

BJ: America's Second Harvest is one sponsor of Backpack Buddies

AnneMH: Thanks.

BJ: I think also private industry also contributes to the program..."Last week, the Hasbro Children's Foundation, which is a charity of Hasbro Inc., approved a \$95,000 grant to help America's Second Harvest with a national backpack pilot program."

AnneMH: But man does not live by bread alone.

BJ: Local food banks also contribute

BJ: True, Anne, but it's hard for little ones to learn when they have tummy aches and dizziness from being hungry

AnneMH: I totally agree.

SusanR: Our breakfast program is successful.

SusanR: At least they can concentrate

KellyRo: The classes in my son's school were just asked to bring in different items (canned goods/ health and beauty, etc+ backpacks). then those who knew of need saw to the distribution of the backpacks. I thought it was a cool program

AnneMH: But, I've had at-risk students from middle-class & well-to-do families. There was no nutritional need.

BJ nods to Susan. I think most breakfast programs are successful. It's the times when kids aren't in school that are the problem.

RamonaT: I agree Anne and those kids are the hardest to work with

AnneMH: Why do you say that?

SusanR agrees with Anne

BJ: right, Anne. I don't think anyone is saying that poverty is the only factor contributing to at-risk students

AnneMH: (although I know statistically it is very significant)

RamonaT: Many times these kids are neglected because the parents are too busy and the kids find other activities

BJ: I think part of the problem is the lack of values education in the home.

AnneMH: Bingo.

BJ: here's a stat that leaves out an important issue:

BJ: An estimated 1,600,000 United States children have an imprisoned father and 200,000 have an imprisoned mother. Most children with incarcerated parents live in poverty before, during, and after their parents' incarceration.

SusanR: Schools need a successful Character Education program.

BJ: What do you think they left out that has to do with values/Character ed?

AnneMH: Schools?

BJ: what about positive role models?

AnneMH: good point.

BJ: many of these kids want to grow up to be like dad or mom...which in a healthy family is good

RamonaT: Positive role models is hard to find for some one parent families

BJ: Ramona, these at-risk kids could be exposed to lots of positive role models...what about the teachers?

BJ: we often spend more time with the kids than their parents do

RamonaT: That is true but they also need some from their own ethnic group and community

AnneMH: This may seem off-topic, but in Montessori schools I saw children learning to care about, respect, and be kind and courteous to others....I didn't see that in regular schools.

AnneMH: Yes, Ramona.

BJ: you and Ramona have valid points. Both are important.

AnneMH: I don't believe that, without major changes, our schools can make a difference for at risk students

BJ: NAREN has some support vehicles...I don't know how available they are or if they have a fee involved

SusanR: Often at risk students spend a good part of the day grouped together in SELC (special Education Learning Centers)..which can reinforce negative behaviours.. they need to see positive role models

BJ: but if you go to their site, <http://www.atriskeducation.net/>

BJ: and scroll to action goals, you can see what they are attempting to do

BJ: another support mechanism is this forum, which is held once a month on the third Thursday

AnneMH: Which I appreciate!

RamonaT: It has been interesting to chat with others on this topic

BJ smiles. Thanks, Anne. Please join us next month, Ramona....

RamonaT: Thanks, and goodbye

KellyRo: thank you, BJ for "standing in"

BJ: our guest will be Rachel Williams who has studied the effects of arts programs on incarcerated women

AnneMH: next month?

BJ: thanks, Kelly

SusanR: Thanks BJ!

BJ nods to Anne. May 20