



Students at Risk? What about Teachers?

Deirdre Abbey Hagstrom

I often read about students who are at-risk in the classroom. One student teacher surveying my school estimated that 90% of my students were at-risk. When I told another teacher at work, he asked: "What exactly does 'At-Risk' mean?"

I ventured to say an administrator told me once that an at-risk student was one who knew or fraternized with someone who had a criminal record or had been in jail. Well, I am a teacher at-risk, because many of my students have been in jail, have been locked up, have been committing crimes, or are committing crimes as we read this. I talk to these students every day.

Another characteristic of at-risk students is that they do not have anyone to identify with at home. They do not have a mentor, do not belong to an organized religion or community group. As a teacher, I usually speak to children all day, then the same at home. I have no mentor myself, as I haven't found the time to cultivate one. I'd like to belong to a community group, but they meet on nights when I'm carpooling or taking education classes so that I can understand the at-risk child. I participate in church services and Sunday school activities, but all the praying I do still doesn't help me through a day with at-risk students.

Finally, at-risk students have little faith or hope in the future. They see their

mission in life as bleak and have poor self esteem. I am the at-risk teacher whose professional idealism of teaching middle class values through well-thought-out stimulating lessons is ineffective. No matter how many ways I try to incorporate innovative teaching or gear ideas to students' ways or learning styles, it seems as if I am not capturing enough interest in learning. This doesn't help my self esteem, either.

So the next time you read about the at-risk student, know that there, in the same classroom, is the at-risk teacher, fighting the same battle.

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