

Hanging In-R. Benson

Reflection

This book is definitely in my top 10! It is written from the point of view of an educator within an alternative setting school. For some students, this place was the last stop before, or because, the educational institution gave up on them.

One of the biggest takeaways from Benson and *Hanging In* was that we may not save every student. He certainly had examples of students he could not reach and make a difference. That, however, does not mean we do not TRY. It may take 100 different versions before we reach a student and that is okay; as long as we don't stop trying, especially if we finally make the breakthrough.

Every difficult student presents a unique situation. No one case will be exactly like another; there are just too many nuances in life for that to be the case. There is the likelihood that cases resemble each other in various aspects and we can draw on past experiences to begin to formulate a plan. The first part of any plan should be to develop a strong, stable, positive relationship with the student(s). This is paramount. Had these students had these strong relationships in the beginning of their school journey maybe they would have never been cases in this book and the many hundreds of thousands that were not focal points of this text.

Relationships matter. Student voice matters. Give them both equal or greater weight than academics.

Notes

6 overarching elements of hanging in

1. Exquisite respectfulness: show and practice utmost respect for ALL in **every** situation; you acknowledge and apologize if you don't show respect
2. Work from student strengths--all students have things they're good at; these can be building blocks of a successful life (see: [Counting What Counts](#))
3. Opportunity for student reflection--provide and challenge students about what they are seeing and understanding
4. Learn from errors--students will make the same mistakes more than once, consequences cannot be damning; ASAP allow students to demonstrate and practice replacement skill
5. Allow multiple interests to inspire diverse solutions--develop a rich menu of strategies, there is not one obvious path
6. Work as a team--multiple avenues for venting, ask questions, celebrate success, brainstorm

-adolescents can identify self-destructive behaviors in others even if they do the same actions and don't ID it in themselves

-adults have ulterior motives, usually this is where the secondary curriculum falls

-being professionally authentic is key to develop relationships

-relationships take time and sincere efforts to be truly forged

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-few adults in these kids' lives have stepped up and given a genuine apology...don't be above apologizing for mistakes

-challenging students can threaten staff unity: they expose our differences--cultural, familial, discipline, respect for institutions and traditional authority

-the responses we get from students give us a strong sense of who we are as professionals; teachers often get their self-worth from how their students perform and react

Students need to be allowed to fail

-see the big picture and work on the details until they get it right

-"they have survived much tougher circumstances than being asked to meet higher expectations by a teacher who is caring" (p. 79)

-teachers can ask as many as 400 questions a day; mostly centered on students guessing what the teacher is thinking

-how many questions do students get to ask? What kind of questions are they getting to ask?

-students often have to expose their thinking to only wrong answers...why not expose their "right answer" thinking?

-everything we do as a school staff is curriculum: our tone of voice, posters we hang, games we play

-we are always being watched for clues on how to be an adult

-friendships are perhaps most critical element to a student's attachment to school community

-challenging students have a small "strike zone" in their ways of being smart. They don't adapt to lessons and people as fast as typical students

-each day we must work to expand their "strike zone"

-sometimes the teacher needs to 'stand still' and let the student find them instead of moving around to meet the student (using lots of different pedagogies which may leave the student guessing)

-situations have similar aspects but NONE are identical; tell stories to pull from experience

-people grow but not overnight, might try 100 different strategies before one sticks

-no guarantee an intervention will work

-sometimes the academic needs come **SECOND** to the child's actual needs

-make directions simple and consistent

-use number scales vs. verbal explanations for points in a range (ex: noise scale)

-experience the classroom through the child's senses---**is my classroom better than the hallway?**

-teacher desk placement: front for a clear sightline through the door and a feeling of accessibility

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- school transitions vs. real world...very few (if any) jobs require a switch in work sites and supervisors (with different rules and expectations) every hour
- in schools, adults listen but mainly for answers to our academic questions

-it is difficult to try again, or put forth best effort, after years of struggle (importance of primary school years)

-sit and watch a student act and react in a class without taking notes

-try to ID a student's feeling before coaching a behavioral change

****sometimes, students just need to "sit this one out"*****

-most workplaces are much smaller than typical US public high schools (mega schools of thousands of students and hundreds of 'supervisors'-teachers)

****skills are more important than sitting through a 2 hour standardized test****

-relationships need building to know how to frame each lesson to engage a student: the challenge, usefulness, life skills, etc.

-average wait time from a teacher after posing a question before they give the answer is **HALF A SECOND**.....slow down

-bureaucratic ritualism: when an organization values consistency of enforcing rules over impact of a rule on a given individual

Temporary exceptions to rules

-is it in the best interest of the individual?

-which lesson is more important to impart at the moment?

-do we have the resources to carry out a different plan? (time, people, etc.)

-can the plan be done safely within the community?

-there are no guarantees when we accommodate...just an implicit hope and trust

-developing relationships and trust often requires teachers to take the risk first

-establish with teachers a minimum number of rules that require instant compliance

-slow down the escalation to suspension process

****students are one thing we cannot control in school****