

## Review: Greg Goodman's *Reducing Hate Crimes and Violence Among American Youth*

by Sherryl Houdek

Greg Goodman

*Reducing Hate Crimes and Violence Among American Youth*

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“Listen, listen to my story” was the beginning of a long journey that I walked with a former student of mine many years ago. Those words echoed in my mind as I began reading Greg Goodman's *Reducing Hate Crimes and Violence Among American Youth*. His book captures the essence of the horrible reality of the abusive, tragic, and often-unbelievable “unknown” home life in which many of our “troubled youth” grow up and mature today.

Having spent eight years as a public school secondary teacher, six years as a junior/senior high principal, and six years as a superintendent in both a public and private school, I have shared many of the same concerns that Goodman writes about in this reality-based document.

The book contains stories from several youths—their words, heart and soul, of their troubled lives. The youth speak with little emotion, strong articulation, and a *blasé* attitude about the life they live, not only at home but also on the streets and in schools. Their stories are similar: abusive family members, single parent families, drugs, alcohol, poverty, and most often a fight for survival. The stories told shed a glimmer of hope and light for educators who need to recognize and deal with the underlying causes of the problems surrounding our violent, at-risk youth. The author concludes by documenting the purpose and need for alternative education and by seeks our commitment to at-risk youth.

Goodman begins the book with unedited interviews from several troubled youth. Their words are straightforward. Violence is a part of life. Weapons, gangs, and drugs are their connection to

surviving. Home is not a sanctuary and neither are traditional schools.

Goodman goes on to describe the traditional school environment, including how teachers teach, how curriculum is delivered, and why the traditional format just doesn't “have what it takes” to meet the needs of troubled youth. The alternative education environment is laden with teachers and administrators who not only teach but counsel as well. These educators know how “to listen, to understand, and to care” within the alternative education environment. Goodman does not suggest that educators in traditional schools do not listen, understand, or care; he merely points out that the time and numbers of students in traditional schools do not permit the in-depth relationships that must be established between educator and student to make a difference. The educator must know and understand where the student is coming from both emotionally and physically. The educator must develop a trust with the student—a trust that only comes from being able to connect and commit with students. The educator must understand the diversity and the multiple cultures in which our youth are raised today. Boards and administration, when developing an alternative education format for trouble youth within a community, must understand the need for specialized educators, smaller classes and the alternative delivery of education in order to make a difference.

In addition to the voices of troubled youth, Goodman shares the experiences of teachers, counselors, and administrators. All serve to support his commitment to “creating transformational agency through critical praxis.” He ties together the

connection and purpose for alternative schools. He believes traditional schools have their purpose but that “the reform comes from the recognition that the impersonal mass production that society forces on the school system just will not work for some students” (D. Minnis, Afterword, p. 143).

Drawing on his many years of experience with troubled youth, alternative education environments, and his research and teachings, Goodman’s recommendations to the K-12 educator are limited in scope, but powerful. His suggestions are simple and direct. Administrators, teachers, school boards, communities, and parents will recognize some of the stories told and how the problems affect our traditional schools. As with Goodman’s youth, one of my students began with “Listen, listen to my story” when he turned to me, when his story began to unfold. We did create an alternative education for him. It worked. He survived. He graduated. He has expressed his gratitude.

Goodman provides educators the basics of an alternative educational environment. Quotations from “troubled youths” reinforce Goodman’s proposals for what must be done to meet their educational needs. Creating “transformational agency through critical praxis” is a must for educators.

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