

Curriculum Connections

The Last Straw: Student Personal Narratives ...

About the program ...

The Last Straw is a collection of personal narratives of young women students in a Women's Studies, Health and Fitness Class. The book chronicles the struggles and circumstances that led the students to seek an alternative school setting in which they could build relationships and make connections with each other and their teachers. Prior to disclosure of the narratives, a trusting classroom environment was built through trust exercises, writing activities and physical fitness classes. The collection of stories was published through an on-line publishing company. Each student writer received her own personal copy of the book.

Narrative excerpts from *The Last Straw* ...

"It took me a few years to come back to reality, but I finally made it. My life is still a puzzle I am trying to put back together. I know that it will work out fine eventually. Until then, I have to keep my head up, and move up, not down any more. I now know that there are second chances and hope for everyone."

"I definitely hope that others can get something out of my story. Life is better once you try harder."

Impact on student learning and school culture ...

- As a safe and supportive learning environment was established, the students felt increasingly respected, accepted and willing to share their stories; they clearly valued the processes of writing and publishing.
- Using the power of story, the students connected with others who had experienced similar challenges and learned that their personal stories were valued.
- Daily physical fitness and journal writing were integral to the students' success. The importance of these kinds of activities is also articulated in the ministry's [Health and Physical Education curriculum document](#). Fitness classes were held at a nearby gym. The gym instructors developed positive, empathetic relationships with the students, contributed to a shoe drive and collected workout clothing for the young women. Through these relationships, the students experienced first hand the value and power of community partnerships.
- Participants in the program commented that the bonding and acceptance that took place during class transferred to other situations during breaks and outside of school.

More excerpts from *The Last Straw* ...

"Every step you take you are either changing or creating your future."

"I used to be full of hatred
But now I am full of love,
I used to be a bad influence
But now I am a role model."

To find out more, contact ...

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