



Education Disruption Podcast / 7.30.2020

[Episode 19: Supporting Older Working Students So They Can Succeed](#)

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Nick: Welcome back to *Education Disruption*. At Map Academy, they know their students have full, complicated lives outside of school with real pressures, responsibilities, and challenges, which makes succeeding in a traditional school setting almost impossible. Inflexible schedules, mandatory attendance, demand for compliance, and the arbitrary attachment to where and when learning happens, often lead to students dropping out. The Map model is flexible [00:00:30] and adaptive. They meet students where they're at. Like Gustavo. He moved to the US when he was 15 from Brazil.

Gustavo: To be honest, we was having a bad time. Not a good time or bad; like having a hard time. A lot of bills to pay and no money, no job. My mom already lived here before. She asked me, "Gustavo, do you want to move to America?" I was like, "Wow. Of course." [chuckles] [00:01:00] That was my dream to be honest, because I feel safe over here. I'm free to go out, driving my car with a chain because in Brazil people rob you. I think over here, America gives you a lot of opportunity to be great.

Nick: From the minute [00:01:30] they arrived, there was pressure on Gustavo and his family to earn money. They all got jobs, and they all worked a lot.

Gustavo: Then I start working to pay bills and pay all the money that my mom spent to come here and get a house and start a new life.

Nick: By the time he got here at 15, he was no stranger to working to support his family.

Gustavo: Oh yes. I got my first [00:02:00] job when I was 12, 13. I was a [unintelligible 00:02:05], learning. I feel like I grew up really fast. I wished to be playing with my friends as a kid. I just feel like by a day I just turned into a man, working and helping my family.

Nick: Gustavo was in an impossible situation. There weren't enough hours in the day to earn what the family needed and go to school, especially when [00:02:30] you're working up to 60 hours a week.

Gustavo: Every day after school to close. Restaurants, they close like 12. I'm in the kitchen. We had to clean it up, so I used to get out really late. That's why I couldn't wake up to go to school. When I was working a lot and I had a lot of absence, I couldn't wake up at the right time, [00:03:00] and I was like, "I got to drop out," because I was not getting money because I had to go to school at 6:00,

6:30, 7:00 to two o'clock, and that's a lot of time. I couldn't be working and get a lot of money to pay bills, so my [00:03:30] mom took me off. I didn't want to. My mom took me off of school.

For my mom, she just wanted me to go to school to learn English so I could work and get a better job and make more money. Then it got really hard. After I learn a little English, right after that my momma then took me out and made me just stay working. Yes, [00:04:00] that was really hard.

Nick: At this point, Gustavo was working three jobs, but despite that, Gustavo, like a lot of Map's older students, made the brave decision to return to school for himself.

Gustavo: Yes. I save a lot of money then I bought a car. I was just by myself. I was making my choices. After I turned 18, I decided to go to Map by myself so I could [00:04:30] have a future.

Nick: We asked Gustavo what it was like returning to school at Map Academy.

Gustavo: I love it. Meeting new people, making new friends and all that, that was very good. From the school that I used to go, the teachers, they wouldn't care if you ain't doing good, if you're having bad times, [00:05:00] but the teachers from Map Academy, they make sure you're good. They make sure your family is good, you're doing good. Map Academy helped me a lot because of that. I had more time, I was free. I could work, I could go to school.

Shawn Kain: It's funny when I think about the progression over the year with Gustavo. Right away he didn't like me.

Nick: That's Shawn Kain, a humanities teacher and special [00:05:30] education teacher at Map.

Shawn: I don't think he like teachers really. He was just standoffish. I think he felt like we were looking at him with a skeptical eye, all that. It took a while, I would say a good month or so, before he would just interact.

Gustavo: He's really always supporting, and he makes sure that he's not annoying anybody. [00:06:00] I don't know. Shawn is very good. I love him as a person, as a teacher.

Shawn: The tension he felt, I think, with the teacher-student relationship was he's a hard worker and is usually good at what he does, so he felt slightly embarrassed about the work that he was producing because he didn't feel it was up to par.

For me, again, I was seeing a kid who was really smart, really hard worker, and I was super impressed by how quickly he was learning. [00:06:30] Once he could feel that, and we started to make progress that way, he wanted to work all the time. He was pushing me to like, "Hey, let's work through this together." He's someone who craved learning and wanting to get better.

Stephanie King: His work ethic is just through the roof.

Nick: That's Stephanie King, a pathways coordinator at Map.

Stephanie: Anything he decides to do moving forward, he's going to do amazing, and they're going to love him. He just works so hard and works multiple jobs. Really, since I've met him, there's just been [00:07:00] multiple jobs where it's a lot of labor. Those are some tough jobs but he doesn't see it like that. He would just be back at school the next day and be like, "I worked a 12-hour shift but I'm ready to get some work done."

Gustavo: My mom always teach me since I was young to be a hard worker.

Shawn: For students like Gustavo, who in the traditional setting are often marginalized and then feels some shame and he's not able to get past that, but for us, he was [00:07:30] motivated. He is a motivated kid who is willing to work multiple jobs. Who, if he was to show up at 10:00, he'd work his butt off for two hours, as hard as he can, getting stuff done. For motivated kids who are older, even though they have some of that negative baggage from schooling in the past, who can get over the hump a little bit, Map can be huge for those reasons.

Gustavo: Yes, they waited for me. Every time I go into the school they always waited for me. They was, "Gustavo, you're here. [00:08:00] Let's get some work done." I got a job and now I start working ten o'clock. I could go to the Map eight o'clock, bang some works, get some work done to 9:30, 9:40, and then go to job. That's how it works.

Stephanie: When you see someone like Gustavo when he was coming in, and you're like, "I really need to catch him," I feel like that's such a big part of Map Academy, is [00:08:30] again, having that flexibility and being able to adapt to anything that the student needs. When he would come in he would work a 12-hour shift. He would get out at 1:00 in the morning, go home, take a little nap, and then come to school. I'd see him around like 10:00 in the morning or something like that, and he would just be ready to go.

When I would see him just making sure, "How was work? How's everything going? What can I help you with? What can we do today or I can print out for you so you can take it home?" Just having [00:09:00] that ability to be adaptable, really, to whatever they need at the time that you're able to see them is really important.

Gustavo: She always had time to walk with me. While I was walking around too, she'll be saying like, "Gustavo, come walk with me. I know you're not doing anything right now." Yes, she helped me a lot too.

Nick: We asked Shawn if it was a challenge adapting curriculum for a student like Gustavo, [00:09:30] who's an English as a Second Language learner.

Shawn: Yes, it was but it's a good challenge. We had other support as well. A woman, Maria, she was working with him directly to give him some language-based support, and she would support us as professionals in how we interact. I would be direct, like, "Listen, I need you to tell me if you don't understand so I can explain in a different way." Again, once we got past that initial tension he was very forthcoming about, "I don't understand this. I don't understand that," or, "Can you explain this further. [00:10:00] It was all good once that relationship was developed.

Gustavo: That was so hard for me, but the good thing, I learned more English after I started going to the Map Academy.

Nick: Map puts every student at the center of a web of support. It's an all-hands-on-deck approach to make sure every student's needs are being met. We asked why this approach is so important for a student like Gustavo.

Shawn: Oh, it's a big deal. If I don't actively communicate with the team of professionals that I'm working with, then it would [00:10:30] fall apart. I worked directly with multiple people in the humanities department that once Gustavo and I developed a pretty good relationship, they were in communication and were working with Gustavo on similar assignments. Maria also, obviously being a big part of that network. We're all part of the same team. It seems like it would be very

difficult to organize, and in some ways it is, but with the web of support and the communication [00:11:00] and a good team, it organically comes together and it feels really comfortable.

Gustavo: I feel like all of the Map Academy teachers, they are all really good. That made me want to show up.

Shawn: When you have a whole school that's built around a common mission and philosophy of helping kids that need to be, sometimes have a schedule that's not going to fit in these clear-cut limits of a traditional schedule, you have to develop systems and [00:11:30] protocol that allow for you to do that, and that's what Map is. It's a huge task. Obviously, it's a big challenge, but that's what our intention is. That's what we're trying to achieve.

Life goes on outside of Map, where they have all those practical things that they have to do. Then if they can show up at school and have people who can sit down and listen carefully to what they need and build a routine around what they need so they can pick up right where they left off, it's a huge resource to the community. [00:12:00]

Nick: We wondered what it's been like for Gustavo to work so hard for all these years to support his family.

Gustavo: Feels good, to be honest, to help my family, my mom, because I know my father is struggling in Brazil. I make sure he's good. I send money to him.

Nick: That brings us to current day. Gustavo is a graduating senior in the class of 2020. We asked him how he's feeling about the future.

Gustavo: My father went to the army. [00:12:30] I grow up always with my mindset like that. Like, "I don't want to belong to the army."

Stephanie: He has always wanted to be a member of the National Guard. That is something that is amazing and is a great opportunity. When students have that interest, I try to connect them with representatives from their branch locally.

Gustavo: The people from the army went to the Map Academy one day, and we had a really good conversation. I'm a little excited. Like [00:13:00] a lot. [chuckles] I'm so excited.

Stephanie: He was really interested in special forces and machinery and weaponry, but I think the National Guard was really interested that he is multilingual. That he can speak Spanish, Portuguese and English. That could help the military in so many different ways.

Gustavo: She's always supporting me like, "Gustavo, you got to do it. You're so close." She always getting me [00:13:30] up, so I really appreciate her.

Nick: We asked Gustavo what his mom thinks of his plans.

Gustavo: She's happy. She's happy that I went to the Map Academy by myself.

Stephanie: He's just so generous with everything, and I feel like that is something that he learned from his family. Seeing that and being able to talk more with his mother and his brother, and really seeing that you can see where that came from.

Gustavo: I don't know. I can't wait. I [00:14:00] want to join the army. I can't wait to graduate and start working on my future.

[music]

Nick: Map Academy is a free, public charter high school in Plymouth, Massachusetts, that believes with the right support all students can succeed. If you enjoyed this show and you're interested in hearing other inspiring stories from **[00:14:30]** Map Academy, please subscribe to this podcast and give us a rating. This is Nick Tetrault. Our executive producer was Kristin Hughes, and this is a Hairpin production.

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Rachel: Hey, this is Rachel, co-founder of Map Academy. As you can probably tell from that episode, Map is a really unique school, and we're constantly looking for new talent to join our team. If you or someone you know works in education and wants to make a **[00:15:00]** difference, check out our website, themapacademy.org, and take a look at our Careers page. From there, you can check out current openings, a staff referral program, and find a form to get in touch. We're always looking for talented teachers and youth development staff that are ready to do high school differently and serve the students that find their way to us. Thanks for listening.

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[00:15:30] [END OF AUDIO]