



MAP ACADEMY

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**[Episode 31: Youth Development is About Helping Students Reach Their Full Potential](#)**

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**Nick:** Welcome back to *Education Disruption*. We're following the journey of Map Academy, an alternative high school in Massachusetts that reconnects students to their education and provides the supports they need to succeed, serving students up to age 24.

In this episode, we're exploring the concept of youth development and how, for students who often have trauma that has caused them to struggle in traditional school, a key part of helping them develop socially and emotionally is establishing trusting, understanding, and **[00:00:30]** non-judgmental relationships with adults. Map Academy provides staff and students time to build relationships, foster trust, and nurture connections, which creates the space needed for real growth.

Meet Anre Dowell, a community support partner at Map.

**Anre:** We see students as a young adult. The wraparound support is very necessary, I think, just because obviously education is very important, but mental health and physical health is as well.

**Nick:** Anre came to Map with experience **[00:01:00]** mentoring youth.

**Anre:** I was a therapeutic mentor and I worked at the Department of Youth Services. I had some experience working with youth that experienced trauma and difficulties growing up in life. Checking in every day and seeing how they're feeling and how they're doing and what's their goal for the day helps, because that's what I do for myself, personally. If I see a student struggling, I always ask, "What's going on?" or, "What can I do to help you," or, "Help me help you."

**Nick:** **[00:01:30]** Anre says a lot of the time school is at the bottom of the list of priorities for many students.

**Anre:** Education, at times, or school at times isn't the first thing or the first priority on their mind. It's, "How am I going to eat tonight?" or, "How am I going to get work?" or, "Where am I going to sleep?" You just never know the situation, and some of them have been through a lot. I experienced a lot in my personal life.

**Anthony:** Hi, my name is Anthony Demers, I'm 16, and I'm a student at Map Academy.

**Nick:** Anthony has had a lot of **[00:02:00]** upheaval in his life that he's had to navigate.

**Anthony:** Last year, I started living with my grandparents because my mom wasn't doing very good. This has been the second time I've lived with them. But then I got back with my mom, and then I had to go again a year ago. That really messed up my mental system and the way I was, so I didn't really work as well as I wanted to in school.

**Nick:** We asked Anthony if the teachers at his old school were able to support him while he attempted to continue his education despite so much happening at home.

**Anthony:** Some would, but some would just really, on my bad [00:02:30] days, they really would just come at my neck and just make me more mad about the situation, or they would just non-stop won't leave me alone. They would just throw work in my face.

**Nick:** Anthony told us if the teachers had a little more context into his situation, they may have taken a different approach.

**Anthony:** I feel like they could have asked. I can't guarantee I would have told him anything, but maybe if they asked, I would have said a couple of things so they would know better or know more.

**Nick:** Eventually, Anre was able to build a connection with Anthony at Map.

**Anre:** It was definitely tough in the beginning, but [00:03:00] him and I grew a bond from sneakers, from clothes, just his past... I guess trauma that he had, and he actually opened up to me about it. I figured out, "Okay, this is where it's all coming from. It's not me, it's what he's been through."

**Anthony:** I was always an angry kid. I always had built up anger even when I was happy or sad or even excited. I always had some anger inside of me, that didn't really show until [00:03:30] I was really angry enough to show it. There's times I cussed out a couple of teachers at my old school.

**Anre:** I would say I always go for the reason why. "What makes you upset? Why are you upset? What can I do to help you?" He can say this and say that, and I'm just patient with him. I'm like, "Okay, that didn't work. Let's try again because I'm still going to be right here. I'm going to be here tomorrow, and we're going to figure this stuff out, because you can't take your anger out on someone else, [00:04:00] because that person isn't the reason why you're mad. You have to figure out why you're mad."

**Anthony:** I think it was the first month of the year, he was talking to me, because I was mad about something in school. He was talking to me, and I was just ignoring him. I had my head down and I was just sitting there on my phone. He was like, "Hi, how you doing?" I was tapping my foot, and he would just sit there and just keep talking to me, like, "How was your weekend?" Then it got to the point where I was just like, [00:04:30] "Okay, I just have to talk."

Then I talked to him and he started talking back and he started giving me advice about school like, "School is not for everybody, but you have to do good in it no matter what, because it's just how you succeed in life." And I agreed with that completely.

**Nick:** Anre says this persistence is how he can start building a relationship with some of the most closed-off students.

**Anre:** If you walk in and you keep going back, and it's like, "Okay, this person is not going to give up on me, so I guess I can't give up on myself," and then eventually we'll build a [00:05:00] bond. That's what I do with the kids now. I'm going to keep coming back, I'm going to keep showing up

and I'm going to keep checking in, I'm going to keep pushing you until I can't push you anymore. Then you're like, "Okay, I got it."

The evolution of change, there's just so much growth, and it's an adjustment. I look at it as — I give this kid probably two to six months to figure out, navigate, even getting comfortable enough to say, "I don't want to work on that today. Today, I'm just going to focus on just doing this, or I'm not going to do anything [00:05:30] today. I'm sorry. I have a lot going on and I have to manage this before I can do that." And it's okay.

**Nick:** We asked Anthony when he knew Map was different.

**Anthony:** Probably had to be the first month I was here, or the first couple of weeks. They cared for me more than my work, but they also pushed me to do my work, too. At my old school, you were never allowed to be in a room by yourself, you always had to have a teacher with you or there had to be a teacher next to the room you're in. Here, if they trust you enough, or they know you're going to do work, they'll leave you in a room by yourself, and you can turn out the lights and just do your [00:06:00] work.

**Anre:** A lot of students are coming from, I wouldn't say bad experiences, but experiences that they weren't comfortable with. That's why they made the transition to Map Academy, to start over and do something fresh.

**Anthony:** The way I tell people about Map Academy is that you don't have to do work, but they will push you to do work. I tell them that the teachers there are nice, and they're not rude, and they will help you in more than just school, they'll help you in life, and they'll try to help you succeed in life. Anre gives me [00:06:30] a lot of advice about outside of school, about work, saving my money up. I'm not really good at saving my money. I'm 16-year-old with a job that gets \$500 on his paycheck. That really goes really fast.

**Anre:** We were having a conversation. He just started working, and he was like, "I want to buy this, I want to buy that. I want to buy this and that." I'm like, "Dude, save your money." He's like, "What do you mean save my money? I'm working for it." I said, "I know you're young, but there was always a quote that I stand by because it just helped me navigate how to [00:07:00] spend." Don't get me wrong, I spend sometimes, but the quote was, "If you can't buy it twice, you can't afford it." That's what Jay-Z said. Once I heard that, I was like, "Well, he is right." If can't buy that thing twice, I can't afford that. I'm like, "Dude, if you can't buy it twice, you can't afford it because another bill is going to pop up, and you have to prioritize what you spending on."

**Anthony:** I took that very heavy. I listened to it, broke it down, listened to it [00:07:30] again, and then I realized what it meant. I am trying to save my money as we speak right now. It is hard, though, like I said, but I am trying.

**Anre:** I see people for who they are, and I try to meet them in the middle. I find something that's common between us. If not, I will ask you something that I don't know anything about, just to meet you at your level, and then we can navigate from there.

**Nick:** This is a daily process for many students. That constant persistence from staff like Anre is a [00:08:00] major part of what pushes students towards success at Map.

**Anthony:** If I'm mad or angry, some will just leave me alone so I feel better, but Anre, he will literally push me to talk. He won't leave the room, he won't stop looking at me, he'll literally sit there, look at

me, and talk to me until I talk back. Which I don't mind. I'd get aggravated when he did it and then I slowly just stopped really caring, I kind of left it alone. Then it got to a point where I just said, "Okay, I need to talk to him so he can leave." [00:08:30] Now it's to the point where I talk to him just so we can actually talk.

**Carlie:** Oh, yeah, he always annoys me until I somehow improve myself in some way.

**Nick:** Now meet Carlie.

**Carlie:** Hi, my name is Carlie. I'm a student at Map Academy and I'm 17.

**Nick:** Like Anthony, Carlie also works closely with Anre.

**Carlie:** Whether it's with credits or finding new people, getting myself out of bad situations, getting myself into good situations, everything like that. My old school, it was just a really hard environment. The [00:09:00] teachers, they weren't really there as much as they should have been. They just gave you the work and they were like, "If you know it, you know it. If you don't, you don't."

That was really hard for me, especially with math, I struggle a lot with math. My teacher would just write it down for me, and she'd be like, "This is what you do." Instead of helping me sitting down with me, helping me through it, they just threw information at you and expected you to take it all in at once. That was really frustrating for me and a lot of other people as well, because not a lot of people learn like [00:09:30] that. Whereas Map Academy, it's made for everybody who learns in every which way.

**Nick:** Carlie says at her old school she was growing increasingly frustrated by the one-size-fits-all teaching model.

**Carlie:** I'm a very visual learner, personally. I prefer paper over computer. I need to be shown, I need things to be broken down for me, and they just weren't willing to do that at my old school.

**Anre:** The first day she came in, or the first few weeks she came in, she was eating by herself in the back of the room. I'm like, "What is she doing?" I don't know her. Never met her before. And I'm like, "Why is she eating over by herself?" I told her, I was like, "From now on, we're going to eat together." She said, "Why would we do that?" I said, "Because you're eating by yourself and I want to be your company, and we can get to know each other better." She said, "Okay, cool."

**Carlie:** I definitely open up to Anre a lot. He and I have a really good relationship. I see him as an older brother almost. [00:10:30] The first day we met, I was sitting all alone. I was new, I was sitting alone in a room, and he had come in and he said that he was going to eat lunch with me every single day until I started hanging out with people and found my own group of people.

**Anre:** We did that a few days, and then she started meeting other people. Eventually, she just ditched me. There was times where I'd go back there and she was gone with her friends. I'm like, "What the heck? You're going to leave me now? I thought we were cool." Then she joked around, and I was like, "That's perfect, because what you did [00:11:00] was my plan in the beginning for you to get out in the community. Because you didn't want to sit with me one-on-one, you wanted to go be with the girls or the guys and just hang out." And it worked. And our relationship has grown over the years. I look at her as a little sister, because I have a little sister that's 14 and 24. I see them in her, and I try to help her the best as I can and push her to her max potential.

**Carlie:** When I first got here, I was really reluctant to learn because I was so [00:11:30] behind coming from my old school. I was just really stressed out in general, and Map really helped me just look at things in a bunch of smaller pictures rather than the whole picture in itself. From when I first started to now, I've gotten so many more credits, I've learned so many more things. There are some classes I'm still reluctant to learn about, but I do it.

**Nick:** Anre has seen Carlie's growth firsthand.

**Anre:** She communicates better, speaks up for herself and advocates for herself. She's working. [00:12:00] She's going to try to get a license this summer. She's in a small competition with her twin brother, but they get along, but they don't get along, but at the end of the day they love each other because they're twins. She wants to be her own person, and she definitely is becoming her own person for sure, and she has a lot of potential. She doesn't know it yet, she sees it a little bit, but when she gets there and gets to her like, "I am really good at this," or, "I am a really strong young woman," [00:12:30] the world is hers.

**Carlie:** I really like just how the whole place works in general. I like how all the teachers are really accepting. I like how they'll help you out rather than watching you struggle.

**Anre:** I'll say I've changed a lot just professionally within the education system, and just adapting to the model of Map Academy, and be able to do this one day, do that the other day and just be okay with it. Just being fluid and not have to [00:13:00] worry about making a mistake — because you make a mistake, we'll figure it out.

**Nick:** It's a learning process for the staff as well. Co-founders Rachel and Josh take a very hands-on approach in developing their staff, and Anre says he's seen growth in himself.

**Anre:** With Rachel and Josh, the open communication line, it helps a lot. Growing as a professional — because I was young. I wasn't that young, but I was young in just the outlook of working with youth in general. Like I said, [00:13:30] I worked at DYS fresh out of college, and then I was a therapeutic mentor two years after that. I was still learning. I'm still growing. I'm still learning.

**Nick:** For Anthony, he's finishing his first year at Map strong.

**Anthony:** It feels good that I finished the year with eight credits. I know that there's some people that it's their first year and they don't have as much as me. I'm just very proud of myself that I know I could do better. That's what I'm going to do next year is push myself to do better than I did this year.

**Anre:** He's figuring [00:14:00] out, "I have to do this. I have to do that. I've seen people that's very close to me make some mistakes," and he knows that, and he's aware of it, and he wants the best for himself, and he has a lot of potential as well. He's going to do big things once he figures out, "Okay, what's my purpose in life?" If he takes everything serious, which he is doing now, he's going to take the world and he's going to do a lot of damage with it, because he is a [00:14:30] strong personality kid, and he's funny too. I think both of them are going to do really good things for Map Academy, and for their future, and their family.

**Carlie:** It took me a little bit to get used to because I had been in my old district for my whole life. It was weird being out of there. I got used to the idea of here I can graduate when I'm ready. I think that was one really big thing that got me like, [00:15:00] "This is my school. I can do this. This place this for me."

**Anthony:** Now that I finished the year, I am striving for more. I wish I could have told my past self to do more credit, to do more work and more tasks in the beginning of the year than I did. I want to do better not only for myself, but for my grandparents too, and the teachers here, and my girlfriend, and my little brother, to show my little brother that his brother is more than just a clown or more than just a goofball that just doesn't do work. I'm going to teach him that I'm actually a **[00:15:30]** hard worker, not only in school but outside of school too.

**Nick:** We'd like to thank Anre, Anthony, and Carlie for sharing their stories with us. We'll be back with more *Education Disruption*. Until then, please subscribe and give this podcast a rating on your favorite podcast platform. This is Nick Tetrault. Our editor is Susie Blair. Our executive producer is Kristen Hughes, and this is a Hairpin production. **[00:16:00]**