

Meaningful Learning at Jules E. Mastbaum Area Vocational Technical School Pennsylvania

Last spring, Nicole Gaughan, a first-year Philadelphia high school teacher, participated in a CFG Coaches' training. Here's an excerpt from her reflections about her experience along with her students' responses to a prompt she shared with them about a time when their learning was meaningful at Mastbaum...

"As a first-year teacher I came into the school year with high hopes and huge plans. I was quickly snapped into the reality of a living breathing high school in the Philadelphia School District. High hopes and huge plans became small wishes and day-to-day plans. I was overwhelmed and ready to run for the hills...From September to March the viewpoints I learned in college were lost to just trying to survive; that is, until I was introduced to Critical Friends. Just four Saturdays were able to remind me of my original beliefs, and helped me make them a reality in my classroom...Through CFG I have grown to realize that it takes a community to create a good teacher. The training gave me the opportunity to say, "I need help." I also learned that the first take or draft is not the last and final product. Using a Tuning Protocol I was able to change an assignment that I originally thought was great, but had received disastrous results from my students. Listening to other teachers critique my work...I was able to change my project enough that the original goals and objectives are met, and I am now looking forward to next year, working on my revamped, Banned Book Project. Huge plans, here I come again!"

Nicole's students were asked to remember a time when their learning at Mastbaum really meant something to them. Here's what they shared...



I was in shop class and it was the time our teacher taught us how to fix brakes. I was holding the brakes in my hand, and then slowly put them in place. My classmates were watching me and I felt so excited to be in the center of attention. When the job was done I felt proud of myself, and

also proud to be a girl being able to do something like this.

The best time I liked was when we were in English class and we were reading *The Piano Lesson*. Everyone in the class

participated and after we were done reading the book we watched a movie on it. The teacher was reading the book with us and watched the movie with us. It was meaningful because we all paid attention and did all of our work. The teacher gave us a test and we all passed except like three people.



The whole class was in shop and the shop teacher was showing us how to use the knife in a proper way. He was also showing us how to slice, mince and dice celery, carrots and onions. The whole class was participating, the teacher demonstrated cutting the celery, carrots etc. and showed us a couple of ways that you can get cut with a knife while not paying attention. When my mom's making dinner I can help her cut the carrots, celery etc. in the proper way.

The time when I learned a lot was last year in ninth grade. In algebra, I say I learned a lot then because now in geometry I'm taking all my skills from last year and using them in geometry.

I was walking in the classroom and preparing to do my work. Some of my classmates were talking and some were already doing work. The teacher was beginning to speak. When the teacher said to me, "you passed my class." I felt special, because I never thought I was.

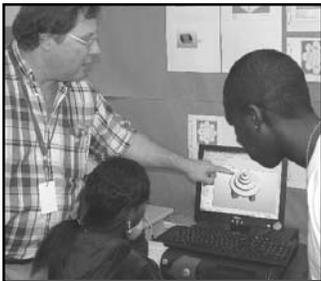
There really wasn't a special day where I felt I learned something new but every day I walk out of my class with something new when we talk together as a class.

A time when I was learning was when I was in geometry. We were learning about angles. Me and my classmates were working in groups and we worked on these angles together. My teacher was helping us and doing work on the board so we could understand what we were doing a little bit better. Me and my classmates were understanding how the measurements and angles were formed. I learned a lot of new things that day.



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What I learned was how to do fishes out of clay. Everyone was doing it and my teacher was helping us out on the shape of it. I learned something there; if I keep on trying, I can do it!



I remember a time in science class when all of the students and teachers got together and talked about a subject. I don't remember what the topic was about but I do know that everyone was getting along and it was a great topic, and everyone was asking questions and

learning. What made it so meaningful was that everyone was learning and not talking or playing around.

A time when I learned something new, that really meant a lot to me, was in my Spanish class. From my experience in this class, I have learned a different language and now I am able to explain some things in Spanish to other people.



The time I learned something is when we were learning how to cut and cook and a guest speaker came and taught us how to make pasta salad. Another time I learned something at



Mastbaum was in ninth grade in world history when we were learning about swords and watching movies. The other time was in English class when we were writing poems and talking about the Blues.

A time when my learning meant something was when I got my shop, when I helped fix a fence for a man that came to the school. He said that he couldn't find anyone that knew how to fix his fence. When I did it I got \$30. My teacher said that I can make way more money than that, when I get older. My classmates must not enjoy my shop as much because they didn't help me. But when they saw me get paid they wanted to work harder. My teacher was



just checking up on me to make sure I was OK. This particular experience was so meaningful when I heard you can make up to \$40 an hour. Now that's a lot of money.

It was in ninth grade when I was in geometry class with people I knew. The teacher and students made it comfortable for me. The teacher was hard but helped us get our work done. I was motivated to get a good grade.



As I look back on this school year I think the most valuable thing I have learned was in my shop. I learned how to



sanitize properly and handle a knife in the proper way. I learned how to make sautéed chicken, muffins, cookies and a lot more. I'm glad I chose the shop I am in. It is easy to get a scholarship if you really want it and work hard at it. My shop teacher also showed me that I need to control my temper. That is another thing I have learned about myself.

One time that really meant something to me was when we went on a class trip to the Franklin Institute. We had a lot of fun when we were in the Omniverse Theater because it made me feel like we were moving when we weren't. When we left we had a snowball fight and it was really fun. My teacher was enjoying herself while she was with us. My classmates were helping the teacher and having fun themselves. The reason this day was meaningful is because it was the first time I had fun while learning.



These excerpts and others were used as text by the staff at a retreat in June.

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