

background, so Andrew pitched it to the right people.”

Cahill and McKenzie worked with Marzano to plan a comprehensive range of activities for the Navigators, including an overnight aboard the full-rigged ship *Joseph Conrad* and culminating in two separate trips aboard the schooner *Brilliant*.

One of the most intensive activities, though, was a five-month “apprenticeship” program. Each month, groups of three or four students paired off with the Museum’s master tradesmen to learn traditional skills: blacksmithing, carving, coopering, ropework, or navigation. Each group focused on applying their new knowledge to the construction of the program’s boats.

It was challenging work in the beginning for both the students and the master tradesmen. For the instructors, the challenges were obvious—supervising teenagers working with white-hot metal or sharp chisels demands constant attention. As for the students, their time in the Museum’s workshops demanded an equally tricky task: learning to fail correctly.

Instead of viewing a misshapen barrel stave or a lumpy line splice as a failure, students were taught to frame their mistakes as learning opportunities. “Many of our students came in thinking that everyone else was the problem,” Marzano said. “That’s partly a defense mechanism, but it doesn’t leave the door open to healthy self-critique.”

It was during quiet moments of focus and self-assessment in the Cooperage or at the forge that the door to self-critique



THOUGH MANY OF THE STUDENTS IN THE NAVIGATOR PROGRAM HAD NEVER BEEN ON A SAILBOAT BEFORE, THEY SOON ADAPTED TO LIFE ABOARD.

gradually opened. By the third or fourth apprenticeship session, many of the students were beginning to think about themselves in new ways. Rather than focus on their weaknesses or failures, they instead began to focus on their strengths. More importantly, they began to think about how to use their new-found strengths to benefit their fellow Navigators.

The students found an opportunity to refine this mindset during two short trips aboard *Brilliant*. Getting the students offshore was a priority for Marzano. “Being on the water draws something from inside of you,” he said. “It allows you to escape the world and return with perspective and focus.”

As Navigator Skylet Lee sat on *Brilliant*’s deck during her anchor watch, she found herself with no shortage of fresh perspective. It was her first time on a boat like *Brilliant*, and she channeled the new sights, sounds,

and feelings into a spontaneous poetic meditation. “The boat is as beautiful as can be/... the moon is bright/and the sun is set/I love it.” That poem, and the moment in which it was created, couldn’t have happened in a classroom.

For Marzano and his colleagues, those moments of introspection are far more rewarding than any test scores. Success is measured in other ways, too: one Navigator missed only four days of school this year, compared to 100 last year.

A new class of Navigators has begun their journey at the Museum this fall. In the meantime, the challenge shifts to helping last year’s students transition out of the Navigator Program and into high school. Marzano and his team know some students will still need the support the program provides, and they’re working on ways to make sure students will have access to the resources they need. To help with that transition, the Museum has already awarded guest passes and a week of *Conrad* Overnight Sailing Camp to two deserving students. Marzano, though, is thinking even more long-term and hopes to establish a scholarship for Navigator alumni, to be used for whatever higher education the students choose to pursue.

As for the boats, the school is amassing quite a flotilla. The students successfully completed all three craft and hope to get them out on the water soon. And while the boats are nice, they were never the program’s true focus.

“I am not the same Jayvon as the first day of school,” Jayvon Chapman wrote in an assignment for English class. “I feel if I [wasn’t in the Navigator program] my grades would not be as good and I would not get the extra push the Navigator teachers gave me.”

Or as Hamden Middle School Principal Dan Levy put it, “They built themselves as well as the boats.”



INTERPRETER TIM REILLY WALKS TWO STUDENTS THROUGH THE FINER POINTS OF LINE SPLICING.



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