

Closing the Book on Another Chapter

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It's strange to say that I am almost done with my Master of Arts in Education. Looking back and reflecting on the two years of classes that I have taken, I cannot believe how much I have learned and how quickly it went. I waited three years from when I got my bachelors degree until when I decided to start a Masters program. Some of my peers that I graduated from my undergrad with were already done with their Master's before I even started. I was intimidated to say the least; my main role in the classroom was about to switch back from being a teacher to being a student again. Even though I considered myself a life-long learner, I still had fears. My main fears were if I was choosing the right program for me, being able to balance the workload with being a full time teacher and new wife, and taking on the role of an online learner. With that said, I couldn't be happier with my choice to go to Michigan State for my online degree.

Choosing Michigan State was a fairly easy choice once I saw the Masters of Arts in Education coursework. Coaching volleyball has always been a passion of mine; when I saw a concentration in Sports Leadership and Coaching I knew I was interested. I didn't know if I would love the program but I knew that I had to start somewhere. I liked that I could not only take classes in coaching, but I could also take courses in mathematics and technology, two of my newer passions.

I learned more and did more work than I ever thought I would. I had some classes that I absolutely loved and some classes that I was glad to get completed. When I started the program, I chose a concentration in Sports Leadership and Coaching. I also selected various courses in teaching mathematics and using technology. I thought I would get a refresher in most of these topics while gaining some new insights from my professors and peers on their experiences. Little did I know, I would be learning not only about the subject matter in each class, but the art of online learning and applying what I learned in each and every one of my classes to my math classroom. When choosing my courses, I thought about which ones would help me improve as a both teacher and a coach. While my experience at MSU would not have been the same without all of my courses, I'd like to highlight some of the ones that had the biggest impact on my learning.

One of the first courses I took was **Creativity in Teaching and Learning (CEP 818)** in Fall 2012. Up until that point, I mostly considered myself to be right brained and a linear thinker, not necessarily creative

per say. While I'm usually pretty good at coming up with activities to use to teach math in my classroom, I was very excited to learn new ways to be creative while I was teaching math; I was excited to learn about what I thought was creativity. However, I had most of it wrong. This ended up being such an interesting course; it pushed me to answer questions such as, "What does it mean to be creative? Is creativity born or can it be developed/ learned/ nurtured? What is the relationship between creativity, play and humor? How can we become more creative in teaching?" In this course I was challenged to apply principles of creativity to teaching and learning about high school math, just in different ways than I initially thought.

I remember in the first few weeks of the course being surprised at the number of mathematicians I was reading about in the textbook, *Sparks of Genius: The Thirteen Thinking Tools of the World's Most Creative People*, by Robert and Michèle Root-Bernstein and thinking – 'who knew that mathematicians were creative?' While taking this class I was constantly sharing facts and stories with my students. There is a famous quote from Einstein, "Do not worry about your difficulties in math, I can assure you that mine are still greater." I always thought this was Einstein being humble or inspiring, however, I learned that he did indeed have weaknesses in math and that for many scientists, physicists, mathematicians, etc, mathematics and formal logic are often the secondary to creative thought. I emphasize this theory with my students on a regular basis.

While I learned to always make time for relaxation and reflection in order to become a more creative person, and the importance of both passive and active observation in order to become more creative, the most important thing I took away from this course was from a TED Talk we watched the very first week of class, Ken Robinson stated that, "We need to teach creativity to help counter the unpredictability."

The following fall, I took the course, **Psychosocial Bases of Coaching Athletes (KIN 855)**. This was my second sports leadership and coaching course; the first was **Physical Bases of Coaching Athletes (KIN 856)**. Physical Bases of Coaching was extremely interesting and focused on the physical principles of training and athletic performance. While I loved learning about the biomechanics of movement, principles of training and program design, strength and conditioning, and sports medicine and injury prevention, it was only applicable to the volleyball court, not my classroom.

However, in Psychosocial Bases of Coaching, I was able to make numerous connections between being a coach and being a teacher. I was surprised at the similarities that I was noticing and couldn't wait for

the next unit. We started the course discussing and investigating our own coaching philosophies; it was exciting to see the connections between my teaching philosophy and my coaching philosophy. I was able to identify the basic beliefs that guided my behavior on the court. I thought about the role of winning, the importance of the development of skills, and creating an enjoyable experience for athletes. I focused on introducing various life skills into my coaching, specifically, communicating effectively, making good decisions, problem solving, goal setting, leadership, and time management. These are all qualities that I strive to help my students gain a better knowledge and understanding of in the classroom and as it turned out, I wanted my athletes to be able to focus on the same qualities.

We spent a great deal of time discussing ethics, where again I made many connections between coaching and teaching. As a teacher, I feel that sometimes there are things more important than the math that I'm teaching, ethics is one of those things. Teaching ethics is, more often than not, done through example. There was a lot of focus on how to be ethical as a coach, which forced me to answer tough questions about what I thought was right for me and my athletes.

One of my favorite parts of the course was focusing on understanding, motivating, and communicating with athletes. We learned different skills and strategies that I was excited to implement in my classroom before I got the chance on the volleyball court. I specifically liked the GROW Model, where you asked your athletes (or students) four main questions – GOAL: what do you want? REALITY: what is happening? OPTIONS: what could you do? And WILL: what will you do? I think this is applicable on both the volleyball court and in the classroom. I am excited to use it again next year.

The next course which strongly impacted my educational career was **Learning Mathematics with Technology (CEP 805)**. This class combined two of my passions, mathematics and technology; during it I was able to create my first ever website. We had many great articles to read that I was able to make connections to. While we were reading the articles and discussing with our peers, we were working on our technology website. I was excited to make a collection of technology resources that were tailored to my own classes. I organized my favorite resources into three categories: pre-calculus & calculus resources, algebra/geometry resources, and general teaching resources. The resources ranged from applets designed to better student understanding to websites designed to help teachers stay organized in the classroom. Each resource had a technology evaluation written by either myself or one of my classmates.

Along with the website, we wrote reflections each week, which I really enjoyed. They were guided and we had set questions to think about and answer. Those reflections inspired me to do something similar with my students; this school year I plan on having my students write more reflections during class; in fact, they will be creating their own blogs and updating them throughout the school year.

Last, but definitely not least, is **Capstone (ED 870)**. As I'm finishing up this course, I can easily say that it has been one of my most enjoyable classes. The main component of the Capstone course is to make an electronic portfolio. Seeing my website come together in these past few weeks has been extremely gratifying. I am so proud of the work that I've done not only in this class but in all of my other courses as well. We started with the basics, an about me page, a resume, a transcript and then moved to more reflection on our past courses. I loved formally reflecting on the last two years, both on my teaching and on the classes that I've taken. Sometimes you get so used to doing things a certain way you forgot where you learned them or how you did things before. The reflection process reminded me where many of my activities and ideas started.

Ironically, as I was reflecting over all of my courses and coursework, I noticed for the first time the importance of reflection in each of those classes. I always knew the importance of reflection, however, I never considered myself great at reflecting. Looking at how easily reflection came in each of those classes and this one especially, I am starting to change the way that I think. Reflection has become part of my learning; being a good teacher requires constant and meaningful reflection. As I look back, I can't help but to also think about the future. I'm excited to see what lies ahead, or what my next chapter leads to.