

Lifetime Learner

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Two years ago, at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and the nationwide shut down, I began to investigate masters' programs. I just started my first head coaching job at a high school in Chicago and have been teaching for a total of five years. Knowing that an in-person master's program was out of the question until the nation and world can recover and understand what to do to keep us safe, online learning was my only option to move forward with earning my degree. I was very motivated pursuing my masters because of the downtime that occurred suddenly with work and more time at home. I thought of going back to school and actually being able to apply more knowledge that I will take away from my masters immediately. I had a lot of prior knowledge from my undergraduate experience and degree in Kinesiology and P-12th grade Physical Education and movement development that I can use in the classroom. While I had the ideas and concepts in mind, I needed to push my knowledge and find new ways to apply these concepts as an educator and leader.

I began searching for an online program and when I found Michigan State University's online master's program, I knew that it was for me. The first obvious aspect of this program is that it is completely done online. I could continue to work from home in a safe environment, continue to tend to my child from home, and at the same time further my own education. The second aspect of this program that sold me was the concentration areas and multiple courses that I could choose to complete this program. I chose concentrations in P-12 and Postsecondary leadership and Sport Leadership and Coaching. I have passion for both, but the overall theme is leadership. As an educator you must be willing to grow yourself and become a better leader for our future leaders.

The first concentration that convinced me this was the correct program for me was the concentration in P-12 and Postsecondary Leadership. Working with students on diverse types of leadership skills and communication is a life skill and important aspect in the Physical Education world of teaching. Giving the voice, tools, and knowledge to students to be successful leaders in anything they do really gives me a sense of purpose. I was looking to see if I can expand myself to become a more impactful leader for my students. This concentration is a steppingstone to becoming a school administrator or advocate for all my students and beyond.

The second concentration that called to me was the sport leadership and coaching concentration. My career has consisted of being a division I athletics and coaching track and field. I have spent a great deal of time working in the physical education department and also coaching at several different schools. As a coach and a physical education teacher I wanted to further my knowledge,

strategies, and information that I could use and create new memories with my students and athletes. As I am going through a new chapter in my life, I want to extend my knowledge to educate and coach. I also want to refresh my ways of thinking about student athletes. When I looked over the courses for this concentration, I knew it would be a perfect fit for me. I was looking for resources, methods, theories, and the best practices for leadership in these program concentrations. I knew that Michigan State's online master's program was for me.

Growth Through Education...

Throughout my master's program there were many courses that stayed with me on a personal level and questioned and challenged my beliefs in education how to stimulate it to the real world. My first course that I took and was impactful was Concepts Educational Inquiry (ED 800) that focused on inquiry in education. It was during this course that I took a deeper look at the deeper meaning of education and what is my purpose as an educator. This course allowed me to express my thoughts of how we learn as students and educators. We studied the concepts introduced by John Dewey to E.D. Hirsch, methods written in novels by Vivian Paley, and lastly movies such as Whale Rider. I was exposed to more educational philosophies, and I was forced to examine and reshape my own ideals. Gardner and Dewey promote education where students are immersed in experience and learn facts along the way. This idea stuck with me and related to this ideal use in my classroom and my coaching style, with a little dash of direct instruction. I found that great balance and this is most important.

As I questioned and examined my beliefs based on these theories, I found myself realizing how much I believe in the ideas of Dewey and the importance of children being active and engaged learners who can immerse themselves in the educational experience. Dewey explained that "Nature wants children to be children before they are men . . . Childhood has ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling, peculiar to itself, nothing can be more foolish than to substitute our ways for them." Connecting his ideals in the curriculum and educational experiences along with the ideas of progressive education helped me balance everything as an educator, when the children can develop as real, active learners, and build a sturdy foundation for lifelong learning.

Adding to my new educational ideal to my future leadership, I need to grow my knowledge for an understanding of the demographic of students and athletes I will be working with and their own personal situation that make them unique. Understanding that I am working with students and athletes in the city of Chicago, IL and they need more needs, opportunities, and acceptance from their teachers and get that extra shoulder or motivation that will be in their corner for success. The course of the Racial Achievement Gap (EAD 830) showed the ups, downs, errors, and the disadvantages set up in the education system in the low-income school districts. This opened my eyes to more of the administration issues that leaders in schools face every year that

serve in low-income communities. I developed more awareness of this achievement gap with the amount of testing that burdens the gap, and I became an active advocate for changing this discrepancy in our school district in Chicago.

Building Leadership Through Athletics.

As I moved into my Sport Leadership and Coaching concentration. There were many courses to which I could relate. My first course into my concentration was Legal and Administrative Issues for Administrators and Coaches (KIN 854). During this course we had to think, plan, manage, and navigate through an athletic director's eyes to understand the needs of the athletic facilities to keep every participant and athlete safe while at the event. I constructed a risk management plan for a full year of sports. This plan entails meetings with coaching staff from all sports, inspecting equipment, and planning the season schedule. This gives me the opportunity to use my coaching and organizational skills and apply it to potential future employment opportunities. Working as a coach in low income and urban community schools for the last eight years gave me insight on what is important to the student-athletes in these communities. Just have the opportunity to show their talents outside the classroom and excel on the court, field, or track.

Psychosocial Bases of Coaching (KIN 855) This helped myself, as a coach, get on more of a personal and psychological level with my athletes. I developed a communication analysis to get a better understanding of what my athletes need from me. Using the GROW Model of communication and utilizing principles of motivational interview to build rapport. I personally know all that about the athletes and their needs to be successful. I am very confident that I will grow as a coach and develop my program to its best potential and make the athletes feel proud to be a part of the team that I coach.

Positive Youth Development through Sports (KIN 857). I fell in love with all sports the first time my family got me into sports and playing. I love moving and the rush I get while playing. I also loved those other children loved it as much as I did and we worked together on a common goal, which was to compete. My love of this sport has taught me so much, provided so many experiences for me, and taught me so many valuable life lessons. As I entered the world of coaching this course helped remind me that youth sports should be fun, supportive, educational, and a family like atmosphere to help children in a positive way. I learned that positive youth development “inspires a nation of healthy, happy, and competent adolescents on their way to productive and satisfying adulthoods” (Roth 2004, p 3). By the end of this course and also engage them as positive, active role models in the school community and not just develop athletes but student-athletes. This course helped me gain the knowledge of the theories and skills that can develop a track athlete in any event they participate in. Also, skills they need to succeed in life. I was able to create a dynamic warm up for the girls that I coach, and the team captains lead this warmup series at the start of every practice. This course helped me learn the proper

technique to educate my athletes. As an athlete and an educator, I believe in all of these projects that I created throughout this course, and I went through myself as a division I athlete. My athletes see my passion for the sport and them to be successful. With this course I developed a program that will grow with my team as the years continue.

Continuous Journey...

As I have been reflecting on what I have learned in this program over the past two years it will take a novel on how much I have learned, implemented, and grown from this program. All the courses had a profound impact on me, this entire program has affected me as a learner, educator, and coach. I enjoy learning and growing through the two years, but my learning will stop once I walk across the stage this spring. My education will continue on a daily basis through my students and my athletes. I am always interested in new styles and learning techniques that will smoothly become a part of my style of leadership and coaching. The world of education and leadership is constantly changing, and this program has taught me that I can easily adjust and redefine what I need to help others be successful. I must continue my role as a learner by learning from my students and athletes to guide them achieve their educational and athletic needs. I have reflected on this information and applied it in an educational setting. I know that my will be a lifetime of learning and growing in which, I am constantly challenging myself as a coach, educator, and leader by adapting to the ever-changing needs of my students and athletes.