

Teaching and Learning On and Off the Field

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Jane Addams, a women's rights activist, anti-war activist, philanthropist, and Nobel Peace Prize winner, says that "America's future will be determined by the home and the school. The child becomes largely what he is taught; hence we must watch what we teach, and how we live." Her quote has guided me through my Masters of Arts in Education (MAED) and helped me understand that teaching is much more than subject matter. Since I have minimal experience in teaching, gaining confidence in my abilities and understanding the nuances of the profession were imperative. As an educator, there are many aspects to master including, but not limited to, classroom management, year-long learning, disciplinary actions, subject matter and many more.

Addams reminds us that the child is a product of what he is taught; as educators we must teach students about respect, confidence, teamwork, ethics, and how to face and overcome challenges and failures, along with many other life lessons. I know that my concentration in

Sport Leadership and Coaching has enabled me to learn how to best influence students so that they can be successful in life both on and off the field. This concentration was perfect for me. Athletics have always been a large part of my life and I know how influential coaches can be in a child's life. An education program that allowed me to understand the nuances of coaching was important for me because of the influence both teachers and coaches can have on a child's development. One of the strengths of the Masters was my ability to take a wide variety of courses to further my learning. I was fortunate enough to take classes from different departments that had significant impact on my overall learning and development as an educator.

In the fall of 2013, I enrolled in two courses that proved to be influential. One course, Teaching School Subject Matter with Technology (TE 831), taught by Erica Hamilton, taught me not only how to use new technologies but also how to successfully incorporate them into the classroom. I have to admit that I was skeptical of using technology; however, I knew that its use is becoming more widespread. I thought TE 831 would be a good introduction on how to use technology effectively. I could not have imagined how much information I could learn in one semester. Hamilton's love and dedication to her subject matter easily translated to my studies. I learned how to use a wide array of technology like Vodcasts, Golgster, Edmodo, VoiceThread, Quizlet, plus many more. I interacted with students across the globe and Hamilton herself with live video chats. I had the opportunity to learn how to re-purpose lesson plans to include technology. The challenge was making sure that the technology added another dimension to the lesson and understanding the affordances it offered. I was also able to see how I could use technology in sports. I developed lesson plans and drills using technology that will allow athletes to develop in their sport.

We studied many theories in order to fully understand the process on integrating technology into the classroom. Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) "attempts to identify the nature of knowledge required by teachers for technology integration in their teaching, while addressing the complex, multifaceted and situated nature of teacher knowledge" (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). This particular theory was incorporated in many classes during my masters. Other theories we explored were the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) and Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition (SAMR). All three of these

theories were used as a foundation of knowledge to help successfully integrate technology. This class gave me the confidence and knowledge to use technology effectively in the classroom.

The same semester, I was enrolled in Promoting Positive Youth Development through Sport (KIN 857) with Dr. Daniel Gould. This was one of the requirements for my concentration and was one of the most beneficial classes I took during my MAED. I studied the current trends in athletics for children as well as problems and issues. In my life playing sports, like education, was about more than what it seemed like at the time. Although becoming a great softball player was important for me, becoming healthy and active, developing relationships, building on teamwork and trust, learning to lead and follow, as well as how to both win and lose graciously were more important. I learned how to encourage positive youth development for a wide variety of athletes of all ages, different psychological, sociological, and emotional needs.

My beliefs on the harms of early specialization were confirmed and how we as a society should not focus on winning at all costs. In his book, *Game On: How the Pressure to Win At All Costs Endangers Youth Sports* (2009), Tom Farrey, an ESPN analyst, explored how the United States as a society does not emphasize participation and personal growth through sports; rather, we push specialization and winning. This has led to the demise of our national teams, increases burn out and the likelihood of injury, among many other negative outcomes. Gould challenged us to create a program that would promote positive youth development to counter many organizations focus on winning. I created a program entitled SPYDER, Supporting Positive Youth Development with Elementary Recreation. This after-school program exposes students to a wide variety of sports while incorporating time for homework. It examines the participants, costs, staffing, and programming details as well as discusses ways to properly evaluate the organization and its impact on the students and society. It was essential to me that both athletics and academics were involved in creating a youth program. Students need to understand that although athletics are fun and encourage many positive traits, academics still must be the main priority. Gould helped show me that the children's needs and development must come first whether on or off the field.

Another course that had a positive impact on me was Psychology of Classroom Discipline (CEP 883) taught by Dr. Vicky Mousouli. This course allowed me to evaluate the type of environment I create in the classroom. With my undergraduate degree in Psychology, I had prior knowledge of many of the frameworks presented in this course and used this experience as well as new skills I learned to create a classroom management plan. This plan focused on behavior standards/expectations, physical arrangement/environment, student-student relationships/peer learning, student-teacher relationships, and parent-teacher relationships. All of these facets of teaching are essential in maintaining order, and this paper allowed me to explore my own beliefs on classroom discipline.

The concept of discipline easily translates to athletics as well. Learning how to handle students or athletes with behavioral problems is part of the job. Many disciplinary issues stem from outside the classroom and off the field. They can act out because they do not feel valued by their teacher/coach, they do not understand content or what is asked of them, they lack intrinsic motivation, or may not feel safe in their environment. I learned that as a coach and teacher, you must understand the needs of the children and learn how to bridge the potential problems, whether by setting up parent-teacher meetings, counseling, working with them one-on-one, or finding another individual solution. In understanding the psychology of discipline, I am more confident in my ability to successfully teach and coach students to the best of their abilities.

The last course that had a significant impact on my learning was Leading Teacher Learning (EAD 824) with Dr. Nancy Colflesh. What set this course apart from the others was the focus on the bigger picture of education. In my other classes we focused on how to teach subjects, use technology, manage a classroom, and discipline students; it was all about the individual student or class. Leading Teacher Learning focused on the importance of creating a true professional learning community within a school or community. Teachers' main focus is on the student's education; however, I learned that the educator's education is just as necessary. This course taught me the importance of collaboration and trust and that neither happen overnight. Through the book *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* by L. B. Easton, I found countless resources, strategies and protocols to help foster and create true collaboration.

I was challenged to create a year-long professional learning plan for an elementary school in my area. I had to take into account the previous learning, or lack thereof, the level of trust that existed among teachers and administrators, and the current school culture. I was given a budget of \$5,000 and had to write a memo, create a proposal, and budget the entire year of learning. In the end I proposed using Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) and Classroom Walk-Throughs to increase collaboration among staff members and use the positive thinking to encourage professional development. Ultimately I wanted to create a stronger learning community for professional growth and ultimately benefit student learning. This opportunity allowed me to see the importance of continuing education and how collaboration and trust is key at all levels. I look forward to using the knowledge I learned from this class as an educator in my professional career.

While all the classes that I took during my MAED were influential in my learning at Michigan State, these four classes in particular challenged my thinking and how I viewed education. The variety of classes across disciplines allowed me to gain a wide variety of knowledge that will help me tremendously in my first classroom experience. Taking courses from the teacher education, kinesiology, educational psychology, and education administration departments have proven to be an invaluable experience.

The online format of this program helped show me the affordances of technology in the classroom. I was both inexperienced and naïve about the benefits of using technology for education. The online format, although a challenge at times, proved to help me understand the nuances and potential constraints of technology. Online learning requires dedication, self-motivation, time-management, and the ability to adapt to what is needed. My knowledge of technology was relatively limited to Word, Powerpoint, some apps, and a basic idea of video editing. In my two and half years in the program I can now say with confidence that I will be able to effectively incorporate technology into the classroom.

The MAED has challenged me to become the teacher that I strive to be. Without a doubt this program has given me the confidence to pursue a career as an educator. I hope to live by Addams' words and be aware of what I am teaching and how I am doing so. Whether I am incorporating technology into a lesson plan, coaching athletes, or developing a professional learning plan, I know that I am prepared to take on the challenges that come along with the teaching profession.