

“On the Move Again”

By Andy Blain

As I finish my online Masters Program at Michigan State University I begin to move forward in my learning, career, and coaching life. Ralph Waldo Emerson stated, “Life is a journey, not a destination.” This rings true in my life as I reflect on my learning throughout the Master’s program and start to think about what I will do next, as both a teacher and a learner. Lifelong learning is truly a unique element in which I feel equipped for, but not an expert in, nor will I be for many years to come. The Master’s of Arts in Education program as a whole, as well as specific courses have helped me to gain a tremendous amount of knowledge and have challenged me moving forward. I have always been interested in movement, whether in regards to athletes, sport, or learning through movement in physical education class. Understanding the body’s signs of fatigue, how it is composed of numerous elements, or how learning can take place through kinesthetic means is what has been my motivation to learn and become more knowledgeable as an adult. The Master’s program has been very influential, composed of challenging classes, helpful educational techniques, and a push from staff to make something better of myself as a professional teacher, coach, and person.

Kin 854 Legal Administration Issues of Coaching taught by Professor Rick Atkinson is one particular class that has helped me grow as an educator and as a coach. The class focused on legal issues in coaching, athletic administration, and legal responsibilities of the teacher/coach. In my personal teaching career of physical education and health, this proved extremely beneficial because it alerted me to various legal duties that the teacher/coach should be aware of. From minimal issues of inspecting field conditions/facilities to assuming legal risks that a student may take when entering certain athletic events are just some of the helpful and informative ideas learned in the class. Being a physical educator, this class was very beneficial because it helped me to plan, protect my students, and create an overall safe environment in which my students participate on a regular basis.

KIN 854 and Professor Rick Atkinson alerted me to legal responsibilities that coaches have towards their athletes. Coaching negligence, breach-of-duty lawsuits, and pre-post observations of equipment are all wonderful examples that I use every day in my job as a swim and dive coach. Aside from the technical, mental, and psychological advantages that coaches should teach towards, it is also their responsibility that they understand the risks associated with being a coach. Expanding upon this knowledge and using it every day will only make me a wiser and more effective coach where my athletes feel comfortable and motivated by my planning out of possible major hazards. This course also helped me acknowledge the ever-present issue of hazing among all age groups of sports. Recognizing hazing rituals, setting the standard for teams, and establishing routines are all vital aspects that I will use from this class as a lifelong learner and coach. My objective, as stated in my resume, is “To ensure all students are given an equal

opportunity to develop physical skills, social skills, and problem solving skills by participating in sequential physical activity that is motivating and challenging.” I believe that athletes, students, and all people can learn through physical movement when they are exposed to a high quality education and feel confident, safe, and prideful in what they do and how they grow individually as well as a group.

Another class that has helped me as a professional teacher, working coach, and individual intrigued by movement was my Kin 856 Physical Bases of Coaching class. The class taught me about a wide variety of physical elements that can go into a successful coach and constructing work-out regiments for athletes based on how they respond to detailed training. I have been coaching now for 11 years and it has been a very important part of my life. In my opinion, coaching athletes to become better at their sport, better overall individuals, and better suited to prevent physical injuries are truly points of interest that I will continue to build upon. Reaching out to athletes through physical activity and certain exercises can equip our current athletes to be wiser about how they train their bodies. I believe this is an important role of a coach.

The class focused largely on biological breakdowns of how the body reacts to various forms of training, diet, stress, sleep, and water intake. Since training and muscle type differs from person to person it is vital that I understood how to vary training routines to best suit each individual athlete. Another section of the course focused on diet and how training sessions can be adversely affected by what one puts in their body. Since I have been coaching high school swimmers for 11 years I have seen some of the foods that they put in their bodies. I can remember through lectures and readings saying that the second best option to improve physical performance outside of physical exercise was that of nutrition. Proper nutrition is applicable to everyone, including the athletes that I coach and the students that I teach in my health classes. Being able to understand and explain the types of protein athletes should consume after a competition, what a pregame meal should consist of, and what other types of nutrients an athlete puts in their body can improve athletic performance, aid in less recovery time, and make for an overall healthy individual. As a coach and teacher, this is very valid information that I can implement with my students and athletes.

Finally, this class influenced me especially when it came to preventing injuries. Injuries happen in sports and recreation due to improper warm-up, lack of cool-down activities, lack of water, heat stroke, and numerous other factors. Since these injuries occur, it was extremely important for me to understand how to properly prepare the body in order to prevent or lessen the risk of injury. The class helped me comprehend that the types of exercises, the time dedicated to each exercise, the frequency of certain exercises per day/per week, and the intensity of the exercises performed all have to be regulated and built upon in order to prevent sports injuries. Building up athletes through dynamic stretching, resistant band exercises, and proper hydration are some of the major themes that I have taken out of this class to use with my swimmers.

Another class that aided in my educational journey was KIN 855 Psychosocial Bases of Coaching. This challenging, yet exciting class focused on the importance of coaching and being able to recognize and adjust coaching styles based on psychological factors, social environments, and physical tools of athletes. The class introduced me to various coaching pedagogies, strategies, and methods. The course had excellent examples and information on feedback, which I feel is such a vital part of the classroom and the coaching world. The type of feedback given and

whether it was positive, negative, general, or specific proves to be helpful because it tells the athlete or student what they are doing right and what they can improve. I believe that the sheer importance of bettering oneself is what being a lifelong learner is all about. Learning from past experiences through valuable feedback can prepare and equip anyone for the future and its challenges.

KIN 855 asked difficult questions, challenged previous assumptions, and made me think critically about how to apply the knowledge learned in the class to my life as a teacher and coach. Motivation and how to use it was one of the main staples of the class. Since motivation can change due to positive and negative factors, I felt it was my responsibility to understand as many kinds of motivational challenges as possible to make sure the ones that I coach and teach could effectively cope with situational factors that would come up in school or at athletic events. Even for me, motivation is always something that needs to be monitored to make sure you are where you want to be. The class taught me the importance of staying motivated, how to help my athletes strive to do their best despite certain environmental factors, and how my students can build upon positive experiences to move forward in learning.

One other class that had a dramatic impact on my teaching, coaching, personal, and professional life was ED 870 Capstone Seminar taught by Professor Koehler. The class did a wonderful job tying in numerous elements of my Master's program. The class helped me to understand and take pride in all of the work I have done in the past as a part earning my Master's degree. Through the capstone course, I was able to further recognize the importance of becoming a lifelong learner as well. Looking back at all of the courses I have taken and seeing all the coursework examples, showcase pages, and essays of various topics from reflective essays in the construction of the professional portfolio has helped me to appreciate what it means to be a lifelong learner. The class, to me, is a challenge in morphing form in the fact that using technology to demonstrate knowledge in certain areas must always be updated, challenged, and learned. This challenge to adapt and comprehend material both from the past and into the future will aid me professionally as a teacher/coach and as a human being.

The class is very relevant and has influenced my teaching already to this day. Since technology is everywhere and usually within a palm's distance for our students, I think it is imperative to teach by incorporating technology in some way, shape, or form. The class and its instructors have offered a tremendous tool in web-design that is easy, fun, challenging, and relatable to the students that I currently teach. The ability to display past, present, and future work is a great tool to have when moving forward professionally for myself, as well as my students as it is my goal to get them ready for a global workforce. Using technology and electronic data is a very valuable tool to make sure learning is taking place for students and effective instruction is being delivered to all students. It is truly amazing how my views of technology being a physical education teacher have changed for the better. There is always some way to motivate kids with technology even in the physical education classroom. Overall, the class is an exemplary showcase of my past work and accomplishments, but at the same time it is only a stepping stone in my learning as a teacher, coach, and individual.

In summary, the online Master's of Arts in Education program at Michigan State University has been a tremendous experience. I can say with pride that I am a wiser person for taking the classes that I have as a part of this program. It is not an end however, it is only the beginning. Moving forward and applying the knowledge that I have learned from the classes is something that I need to examine every day and every hour that I teach and coach. This self-

reflection on teaching and coaching practices, challenging myself with meaningful professional development, and attending coaching clinics to learn the most up-to-date material is how I plan to be “On The Move Again”.