

A Broad Approach to Specific Lessons

Carolyn Moss

MSU MAED – ED-870

Synthesis Paper

27 February 2013

I never wanted to be a teacher. When I was younger I never saw myself in my teachers' shoes. I never really saw myself anywhere, and so I wandered. I spent a good three years after graduating college wandering. When I finally tired of living the wander's life I realized that what I was enjoying and what I was good at was passing along information, was giving instructions, was opening minds to new knowledge. I realized I while wandering, I had been teaching. I had been taking my experiences from all over the world and from a wide range of topics and imparting them to others. I enjoyed that so much that I started teaching. I found that my very extensively moving life had brought a lot of knowledge from a lot of different directions and teaching allowed me to share it all. But I soon realized that wanting to share the skill and knowledge I had gained was not the same as being able to. Wanting to and effectively doing something are very different. And that is what brought me to attain a Masters in education.

When I first started my journey through this program I was a rather cocky individual. I had already been teaching for three years and figured I had been in the trenches enough to know all I needed. Trenches, literally. Those three years of teaching found me in a classroom with no idea of what I was doing. I knew the topic very well and became quite good at classroom control, but had no instruction or idea on things like motivation, creativity, or technology. The holes I did not know I had also extended to the athletic fields. I had been an athlete my whole life and

played NCAA lacrosse so I figured I knew everything there was to know about a team. As I have gone through this program I have discovered that while learning by doing is a very strong method, the 'trenches' aren't always up to date on the best ways, methods, to do something.

Two years after I first started at MSU I have found myself in a very different situation. I had moved halfway across the country and found a new job. I am now out of the trenches. And the knowledge I have gained through this masters has not only filled a few holes from my self-taught method but opened many more doors to approaches and devices I would not have ever thought to incorporate in my teaching. In the classroom my main focus has shifted from simple digestion (without regurgitation) of information, to retention and continued curiosity. I have moved my focus for my students from simply getting through it, to being intrigued by it. On the athletic field I have not only found new ways to control and run a group of athletes, and not only ways to motivate based on different factors of those athletes but I have learned all the responsibilities I hold as a coach. While I do not regret a minute of those three years of trial by fire and I know the skills learned there have truly shaped the type of teacher I am and will continue to be, I now understand how much more I can offer to students because of this education. I know the doors that can be opened for them by being open to them myself.

The first class that really made an impact on my overall experience through this program was CEP-882: The Nature and Design of Compelling Experiences. I took this class as an elective in the spring of 2012 and at that point it was taught by Dr. David Wong. The class was run very well in how the material was presented and

structured. The projects were focused on getting us [students] to see something commonplace in new light, to take a normal experience and make it compelling. We read lots of articles, books, and papers written by and about artists, educators, musicians, actors, directors, architects, and even philosophers. As part of individual and group work I completed many different projects that revolved around this central idea of turning the ordinary extraordinary.

My final film for the class was created on the premise of taking my everyday, boring, walks with my dog to a new and compelling level. I used a good amount of technology to film but also then edit and manipulate the footage to create an intriguing and different viewpoint for my audience. I believe that specific project, as well as others throughout the semester, really instilled in me a new way of thinking. I had always focused on trying to find amazing hands-on activities or projects for students to do, with the thought that although they had to take down boring notes this activity would be a highlight to look forward to. I think this class brought an understanding that everything can be compelling if looked at and worked properly.

This idea, that I as a teacher don't have to find amazing pre-done activities to integrate something compelling into lesson, has really changed how I lay out lessons. Instead of just getting through the boring stuff to get to a fun activity I have been working to make each part of the lesson, even the dreaded notes, intriguing. These compelling experiences for them have the ability to leave them with a further curiosity. If the topic can be viewed in such a way that the student walks home wanted to know more than I have done my job, this class certainly helped me with that.

This past fall I took a second elective called Creativity in Teaching and Learning (CEP-882), which was taught by Dr. Punya Mishra. Creativity in Teaching and Learning was probably the one class that integrated the most instruction on technology in the classroom within the focus of creative expression. I really enjoyed the projects because I do not have the strongest background in technology and being able to integrate new features with a creative spin will, and already has greatly benefited my students' learning. The class went through a series of modules each focusing on a different view of creativity from Perception and Modeling to Patterns and Embodied Thinking. Each module offered a different form of technology to be explored and exploited at the same time as discovering how to re-work a topic in that creative model.

One of the first projects I completed for the course has actually become a common use in my teaching. We were to photograph an everyday object in a way that made it very hard to initially recognize that object. I took three photos of an old stoplight. Each student posted their own images and we tried to guess what they were of. It was a simple exercise in abstracting but from it I took a greater understanding of breaking down a topic. In my classes I started taking smaller chunks of information, sometimes with pictures, and making sure everyone understood those smaller pieces before moving on. Then by the end they could build it into a whole piece. That method has resulted in a greater comprehension and retention for my students. Its often fun for them to look back at the small piece and now instantly know what larger topic it is incorporated into. To bolster retention using this method I will often do abstracted pictures for quiz reviews.

The next set of classes that I took shifted in a different direction. What started out as a side concentration in Sports Leadership became my primary focus. As my interests in learning more about Sport Leadership and Coaching grew, as did my curiosity in the courses offered. The first course that truly taught me more than any other throughout the program was KIN-854: Sport Law for Administrators and Coaches. I took this class in the spring of 2012 and it was taught by Dr. Rick Atkinson. While I had been an athlete in college and a high school athletic coach for three years, I was very impressed by the sheer volume of information presented that I did not already know. The information that was covered fit perfectly in with the current needs of athletic coaches and covered topics many might not think of as falling in their basket of responsibilities.

Through highlighting those responsibilities this class spent a large portion of time focused on Risk Management. One assignment that stood out to me was a simple exercise of looking through a set of photos the professor had taken at the MSU indoor track center and commenting on what was a risk and what should be done to prevent injuries that could result. Besides the things I found to fix, the collaborative nature of the online course offered up dozens of different, and unseen by me, views from my classmates. Although a simple exercise it left a lasting impression on me. Like most of the other information given I had not realized how much responsibility a coach has and how far it extends beyond skill instruction. I went that evening to a volleyball practice and instantly found many things to fix in the gym I worked at. I believe the strength of the class is founded in the forced

awakening for coaches, and administrators, to understand how much they have to be aware of beyond the team.

Another class from this masters program that has and will continue to enrich my teaching career was the Psychosocial Bases of Coaching Athletes (KIN-855). This was a second of my core classes in Sports Leadership and Coaching and I took it in the fall of 2011 when it was taught by Dr. Marty Ewing. The strength in this particular class resided in how the material was presented. It worked in a chronological order that started with psychology of young athletes, and then proceeded to social aspects regarding them, and even touched on the physical restraints and limitations that can be exhibited. The class then used that knowledge as a starting point to work on topics like motivation. The key was that we were not just learning about plain motivation, but motivation in the context of different social situations or behaviors, motivation related to different psychological issues, and then motivation related to different physical factors. So the end result was that I learned how to motivate athletes from all different backgrounds, starting points, and circumstances.

A project that I enjoyed and learned a great deal from was a field observation paper. We were to observe a coach to learn and track their uses of social reinforcement. I attended a football pre-game practice and took notes of how often he used negative versus positive techniques. I was watching mainly for the results in the behavior and control of the group. I had been a replacement head coach for a boys lacrosse team the year prior and while we did well at games I was admittedly out of my league running practices. I learned from this assignment how ignoring bad

behavior and reinforcing good will eventually rule out most bad behavior. As the athletes vie for attention they learn that not only do they get no attention for poor behavior but they those who are behaving get all the attention. I found the assignment to be very well structured by the professors to lead me to these answers. While I am sure I could have read about the strengths of positive individual and group reinforcement versus negative the exercise of going out and observing it first hand really stuck with me.

The control of a classroom, which I had down pat from my three years prior, had not extended to the athletic field. I did not originally understand the difference between the two and how approaches needed to be adjusted just as outcomes from the students/athletes were different. By going through this class I have definitely picked up on those differences and find a very happy balance between how I deal with students in the classroom and how I deal with them on the field.

Now that I have reached the end of this program and get the opportunity to go through the courses and highlights from my fellow students and group members' classes and progress I have found that I took a very broad approach to my masters education. I did not stick to one concentration or content area but took classes across the board. Looking back I am very grateful for that option from the program. I think the strength in my degree, in five or ten years, will be the assimilation of these different classes. While a Sport Law class is very different from a Compelling Experiences class they both have shown me that I don't know everything and that opening doors for myself most definitely results in open doors for my students.

Now that I have stopped wandering and found an occupation, and life, that excites and intrigues me I am very grateful for the knowledge from this program to continue that life to the best I can. I have the tools now to not only teach my students but also ensure that they are enjoying, retaining, and staying curious about the topics. Outside the classroom on the athletic field I now I am getting more than just skills across to my athletes but really motivate them in a positive manner. I am also confident that the environment I am providing for these young athletes is safe and constructive for their growth. Overall, after two years of what seemed like endless papers and projects and readings I am very satisfied with the decision to take on this program. I am very happy with not only the knowledge passed but also the confidence to do my job to a higher standard.