

The Past and Pending
By Sabrina Shisler

“What you are is what you have been. What you’ll be is what you do now.” This Buddhist saying accurately encompasses how I feel as I reflect on what I have learned throughout my education and what I plan to do in the future. Since I am about to receive my Masters of Art in Education with a concentration in Sports Administration and Coaching through Michigan State University, an evaluation of what knowledge and skills I have gained is needed. Once I have discussed the most influential courses I have taken in the past five years, I will analyze the method in which I learned the material, online learning. Lastly, I will discuss how my past has helped me determine what I plan to do in the future as a life-long learner.

The most influential courses I took as a part of my masters degree program through Michigan State include: the teacher education, TE, courses I completed while student teaching, KIN 856 which covered the physical bases of coaching, KIN 854 which discussed the major legal and administrative issues coaches face, and ED 870 which allowed me to experiment with online publishing while analyzing my educational history and future.

The student teaching year was more significant to my growth as a science teacher because of the teacher education courses (TE 802, TE 803 and TE 804) taken during that experience. TE 802 and 804 helped me evaluate the effectiveness of different teaching methods. Joyce Parker and Amelia Gotwals assisted each of us in developing scientific inquiry and application lesson plans. Once the lesson plan was implemented, we assessed the effectiveness of the lesson. The instructors also helped with creating organized and all-encompassing unit plans.

Each unit plan required us to identify the state standards, the big ideas, and major activities that would be part of the unit. The first unit plan I wrote for this class can be viewed on my coursework page of my online portfolio at <http://sabrinasliser.weebly.com/coursework.html>. The final unit plan, which includes an analysis after implementation, can be viewed on that same page. Constructive feedback was given by the instructors in order to identify strengths and weaknesses in the plans and analyses.

TE 803 focused more on the many roles a teacher plays in a community, outside of content instruction. Communication with parents was given considerable attention in the class. One of the assignments required us to consider how to reach the bottom third academic achievers in class. My analysis can be viewed by going to my online portfolio. The most helpful part of TE 803 was creating a resume. Instruction on what makes an outstanding resume and feedback once one was created was given by the instructor, Gary Sykes. Since a person's resume will give administrators the first impression of that person, the resume I created for this class was most influential in getting me an interview for the job I now hold. Michigan State has developed a very effective education program that helps teachers find jobs in a tough job market. The student teaching year is long and economically taxing, but well worth the time and money. The gradual increase in teaching responsibilities coupled with classes once a week helped me to develop effective teaching practices that have led me to become the teacher I am today.

One of the courses I took in order to obtain the Sports Leadership and Coaching certificate, KIN 856, centered on the physical bases of coaching. Issues such as nutrition, biomechanics, physiology, and anatomy were discussed. The instructor, Scott Riewald made the

course very intriguing and interactive. The assignments ranged from breaking down the movements of an athlete using Dartfish software to identify the muscles used during certain athletic motions. In between those projects, dynamic warm-up routines were developed and a pamphlet on proper nutrition was created. The nutrition pamphlet I created can be viewed on my online portfolio at <http://sabrinashisler.weebly.com/coursework.html> under the KIN 856 heading. Each student chose which sport to explore common injuries that occur; I chose tennis. It was nice how the class was set-up so that each person could focus on the sport that interested him/her to make the class more useful. I was able to investigate many aspects of tennis that I had not thought about in the depth required for the assignments. Many ready-made tools were developed for this class that I could use as a head tennis coach in the future. Some of these tools include a ten-step dynamic warm-up routine, a strength and conditioning circuit that focuses on strengthening muscles that commonly are injured in tennis players, and the nutrition pamphlet already discussed. I found this class enjoyable and useful; I would recommend KIN 856 to any coach.

Another kinesiology class that I found informative and surprisingly likable was KIN 854, which discussed the many legal issues that can arise for coaches and athletic administrators. Since so many accidents can happen while playing sports, it is important for a coach and school district to be protected in case an athlete or spectator is injured during a sporting event. I had never considered all the legal obligations a school district has to protect not only the athletes, but also the spectators. In a time where it is a common occurrence to hear talk about suing others, it is important for a coach to know how to protect herself against lawsuits and to have an understanding of what makes a lawsuit have merit. After reading the course description, I

thought the class would be dry and boring. The instructor Rick Atkinson did a very nice job changing my first impression of the course. Assignments had us think as lawyers or athletic directors in order to utilize the concepts that were covered in each module. Real-life examples of cases were used for the assignments. While I would never consider a job change to become a lawyer, I did find the process of viewing a situation from many different angles enjoyable and transferable to many other aspects of life. Being able to view a problem from many points of view is useful in any profession, especially teaching and coaching. Problems arise where the answer is not known immediately, which means that many perspectives on the same problem can be very helpful in the process of choosing a solution.

One of my favorite assignments for KIN 854 required us to take on the role of athletic director for Michigan State. An Equity in Athletics Data Analysis (EADA) report was provided and we were to decide which athletic program would be eliminated while taking into consideration the legal obligations the university has to uphold all facets of Title IX. I enjoyed looking at an actual EADA report for MSU and found the profits (or mainly deficits) for each sport shocking. The only two sports that actually make money for MSU looking at the total revenues versus total expenses are men's football and men's basketball. I was not surprised that those two programs made money for the university, but I expected some of the other sports to generate some overall revenue. My analysis of the report can be viewed on my online portfolio at <http://sabrinishler.weebly.com/coursework.html>. KIN 854, which came after a disappointing KIN 855 in my schedule, was refreshing and reinforced the idea that the instructor and course organization make all the difference in the experience for the students.

The last course I took for my masters degree was the Capstone course ED 870. This class introduced me to many different web publishing tools, had me analyze the impact my masters courses have had on me, and deliberate what I plan to accomplish in the future. I was pleasantly surprised at how easy Weebly is to use for web publishing. It is so user-friendly that I am considering creating a classroom website that allows students the ability to download homework assignments and view the lesson for the day. My school district is getting new grading software that may make this website unnecessary because the program will provide those same features, so I will wait to see what the new program is like. The analysis of what I have learned and how my goals have changed throughout my masters degree has helped me to plan for my future as a life-long learner. I plan to continue learning about how technology can be used in the classroom in order to make my teaching practices more effective for the students. This realization of my interest in the use of technology made me consider the effectiveness of the method of learning I have experienced for the past five years, online learning.

Online learning was effective for me, but it caters to a certain type of learner. Students that can learn by reading and are self-motivated would benefit from online learning because it allows for a flexible schedule. I appreciated the fact that assignments could be completed whenever I had time for them. The flexible format allowed me to teach, coach, and travel during times when I was enrolled in masters classes. Online learning is not for everyone. Kinesthetic and visual learners would struggle with online learning. A person must be able to read articles and textbooks in order to obtain the information needed to succeed in a class that is online. Most courses had PowerPoint presentations for each module and at least one reading assignment.

Some of the instructors included audio for the PowerPoint presentations, but all (except for the Capstone course) required reading of articles and/or books.

The effectiveness of online learning is also very dependent on how the instructor uses the technology. Most discussion forums and assignment drop boxes were on the ANGEL website, so I experienced the many different ways the site could be utilized by the instructor. The main variation in how the instructors used the ANGEL website was how feedback was given. Some left feedback in the drop box for the assignment, others sent emails with the assignment plus feedback attached, and one instructor posted feedback where grades were shown for each assignment. All methods of feedback dispensing were effective as long as the feedback was substantial and helpful. Even though I never formally met any of my instructors, they made a huge difference in my learning and enjoyment of the courses.

Many courses required discussion posts and responses to peer posts in order to get valuable conversation stimulated. One course did not assign any portion of the grade to discussion posts, so there was not any discussion about topics that could have been helpful to all students. This made me realize that in order for students to have the motivation to post responses in discussion forums, the students must have some extrinsic reward, such as points that contribute to the overall grade. Overall online learning can be effective, but the course must be properly organized so that there is an appropriate amount of information covered in each module and stimulates useful discussions.

My experiences with online education and teaching in a traditional classroom, have made me realize what I plan to do as a life-long learner. Technology is a part of society and will only continue to become more important in everyday life. Students need to be prepared for the world they will face as adults. Incorporating technology in the classroom will help students prepare for the future. Schools are behind on technology-driven classrooms, but some are trying to implement innovative ideas. Many schools in Michigan have switched to online summer school. This is a cost-effective method of instruction for schools because they do not have to pay for air conditioning, busing, and electrical expenses. I worry about secondary education being solely online; students still need the social experiences they get in middle and high school in order to develop as people. Online learning works well for higher education because the students are adults that have hopefully already become self-actualized.

Education is more than just content transfer; students learn skills and processes that can be transferred to areas of their lives outside of formal education. The use of technology is an important skill to learn. So many new technologies are being invented that I feel most of my future formal learning will be in the use of these new technologies in the classroom. My experiences with online education through the completion of my masters degree have led me to this realization of the importance of the use of technology in teaching. John Wooden said, “Be observing constantly. Stay open minded. Be eager to learn and improve.” What a great motto for anyone, but especially for a teacher!