

My Experience

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The toughest part is not knowing. Not knowing what to expect. Not knowing how to reach the end. I am the first in my immediate family to get a bachelor's degree and will be the first in my extended family to get a master's degree. There was no path to follow after high school, which meant I had to research and create a path to follow. This meant that I was always looking forward, I would always go into any area of my life with a plan and an idea of what I want the outcome to be. There was always a clear objective for me to achieve, whether in my bachelor's degree, in my athletic career, or within the teams I coach. As I began the journey into the Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning Master's program I knew the ultimate end goal was to become a collegiate head soccer coach for a Division I or Division II NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) program. The struggle, for me, coming into a School of Education Master's Program was, what would I get out of the program and how would this help me reach my end goal of collegiate coaching?

Those two questions, what would I get out of the program and how would this help me reach my end goal, kept popping into my thoughts early on in the program. Especially, when people would ask what my masters was in, I would answer with "It's a master's program within the School of Education" and before I could say one more word the common response would be "Oh, you want to be a teacher". My natural response was, "Not exactly, I want to be a college soccer coach", and as the answer floated away from my mouth and hit their ears, it would leave a shocking and confusing expression upon their face. Every time I found myself in this situation I shared their confusion and became unsure of where I was heading in this program.

Being unsure of what to expect and not knowing how the end would turn out, I made it a challenge for myself to find at least one piece of information from every class I took and apply it to my life as a coach. I would search through every article and reflect upon my experiences as a coach and a player. The first class I took in the program, EDUC 570 *The Reflective Educator*, made me dive deep into my past experiences through education and soccer. The most instrumental realization that I found in my final paper, for the class, was that growing up I never heard the purpose behind what I was learning. Teachers and coaches told me what to do because they said it was “important”, however, they never gave me the reason why it was “important” and why it relates to my future. Little did I know; this theme of purpose and specificity would play a major role in my master’s journey.

Dr. John Kornfeld’s 585 class on, *Curriculum Development*, made me re-evaluate the trainings I plan, exercises I use, and the specific content I put into trainings. I also reflected on my trainings growing up through the sport and saw that there was a curriculum in place, even though I did not notice it at the time; there was a certain way that trainings were run. I began to question my trainings and myself; Why did I use these exercises? What was the purpose of the exercises? How could I make trainings more consistent and in depth? If I could not come up with the reasoning behind my trainings and exercises, then I had to repurpose the exercise and add the key questions I was going to ask. If I was going to expect the players to know the answers to the topic of that training and understand the training, I had to provide proper content and language that would lead to a better education. Dr. Kornfeld’s curriculum development project was the main reason for my re-evaluation of how I conduct trainings. The curriculum project required me to give specific answers to my: rational(why), goals,

content(what), scope and sequence(when), learning activities(how), assessment, and resources. Along with this assignment, there was an assignment where I had to dissect a piece of curriculum and find the importance of the curriculum and if it made sense for the group it was created for. Dr. Kornfeld's class challenged me to think more in depth on my training topics, as well as, the curriculum other coaches wanted to implement. I realized that while some of the information for trainings or curriculum may have been good it was not always given with a purpose or did not have clear expectations in the end. This reflection on my trainings, planning, and curriculum has made me a better educator on the field because I make sure to give the purpose to the players, have the proper guiding questions for my players, and have an overall plan for the direction of the team.

The most challenging of classes was EDCT 552, *Educational Technology Praxis*. This class took a look at technology use inside and outside the classroom. The first few weeks of class were daunting and made me think, how will I use this in any shape or form? I know I can use technology at the collegiate soccer level with video analysis but was not aware of any type of use at the youth level, where I currently coach. For the class, we were asked to do a final project where we create or incorporate some form of technology into our setting. I could not make sense of how I would incorporate technology and then I was faced with a challenge, the new team I took over had a huge video rig to record games. This video rig reaches 20 feet in the air and stares down at the field, like a hawk on its pray. The parents record the games and then upload them to YouTube for everyone to watch. This was an awesome concept and tool to have, but how could I use this properly? The challenge of the video made me research platforms where we could hold proper discussions on the video with different topics related to

soccer; the result was Wix, a free website creating platform. While, unsure of what the implications would be, I was excited to try something new for my players and teach them in another way besides on the field training. The structure of topics and discussions made me think differently about the game, especially at the youth level. How would players respond? What will we learn? Where do we start? The biggest thing was to start very open and let the players solve situations themselves and recognize our strengths and our areas of improvement as a team. From there the players were also asked to self-reflect on their strengths and areas of improvement. This class has made me more aware of outside technology resources available to use and enhance learning for players, which is something I have never thought of incorporating before at the youth level.

Through all my reflecting within the program, both on education and as a player, I began to see the connection between coaching and teaching. My first thought was that there is not much difference between a teacher and a coach besides the setting; one is surrounded by four walls and one is surrounded by four lines. Dr. Karen Grady's class, EDCT 586 *Teaching and Learning: Research and Application*, made me see teaching and learning very differently with a reading entitled "*Of Stand-up Comics, Statisticians, Storytellers, and Small Girls Walking Backwards: A New Look at the Discourses of Literacy Research*", within this reading the excerpt, "Small Girls Walking Backwards", stood out to me and made education and learning really shine in a different light. This excerpt described a young girl testing her own experiment by walking backwards on the sidewalk and while she had no instructions she was testing her own hypothesis by seeing how far she could walk backwards without running into anything (Ruddell, 1999). It was this reading that made it very clear that teaching/coaching do not have

boundaries. Our job as educators is to help people become lifelong learners and let people create and test their own hypothesis. Dr. Grady's class was a huge eye opener and big turning point in framing the way I see education as a coach, especially with the self-made research paper that was required for the class. The research question that I based my work around was do athletes believe that weight training, endurance running, and speed/agility training are all important to the sport of soccer? I got to hear from current players and their perspective on the workouts they were currently going through in their Spring Collegiate Season. Majority of the responses from the athletes were about how the endurance training and the weight training programs did not always relate to the sport. The findings in this research became the driving force for my cognate project, which is to develop a New Collegiate Spring Program, where athletes have specific trainings that will prepare them for their collegiate career and life after their career.

At the start of this program there was this sense of unknown potential, no idea of where I was heading. I had no clue where the Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning program would take me and there was a fear of not knowing but, at the same time, there was a freedom in not knowing. I had no set goals besides to gather information, reflect on myself, and relate everything back to my career and my life. I found through the Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning program that education is boundless, "Both teachers and children should be involved in learning and researching, in searching out the questions that are significant in their lives" (Short and Burke, 1991). We, educators and children, can affect learning in many forms, as long as, we provide a proper purpose to our trainings/lessons, we relate to those that we teach/coach, we provide guidance for students/players to reflect on themselves, and allow

students/players to find solutions, along with questions of their own. We help one another improve and grow from our own experience.

Resources

- Ruddell, M. R. (1999). Of stand-up comics, statisticians, storytellers, and small girls walking backwards: A new look at the discourses of literacy research. In T. Shanahan & F. V. Rodriguez-Brown (Eds.), *48th Yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 1-16). Chicago, IL: National Reading Conference.
- Short, K. & Burke, C. (1991). Learning-centered curriculum. In *Creating curriculum* (pp. 55-70).