

## My Continuing Journey

I vividly remember the spring of 2016 when I decided to pursue a master's degree in education. At the time, that was as specific as I could be in naming my goal. I had no exposure to different types of programs or coursework and had spent little time considering what would fit my needs and desires best. I knew only that after working at [Millbrook School](#) for four years, I was ready to return to the classroom as a student in an effort to better understand myself as an educator and maximize my ability to meet the demands of my work at Millbrook. Over the course of that spring, I examined different options and, in the end, selected [Michigan State's Master of Arts in Education \(MAED\)](#) for a variety of reasons, namely that I could participate in this program while simultaneously continuing my work at Millbrook and that it had come highly recommended from a previous alum of the program. I was surprised at my level of nerves upon receiving the email containing my admission decision in the early summer and excitement upon the eve of my first semester's start that fall. Both of these reactions gave me early indications that I had made the right decision.

Pursuing my MAED degree has enabled me to reflect on my roles as a teacher, coach, advisor, dorm head, and administrator at Millbrook. Prior to entering the program, I would describe my work in each of these facets of school life as grounded in good intention but lacking in supporting experience and subsequent analysis. I thought I knew what being a successful educator would look like but had little idea about the many steps necessary to achieve that goal. The coursework of the MAED program exposed me to writings, discussion, and thought through which I was able to answer many of these questions as well as better understand myself.

Beginning my career in education as an English teacher placed me in the classroom with little instruction as to the practices that made for successful classroom education. Other than a three-day seminar for new teachers, I relied on my experience as a student and the wisdom of my colleagues to guide my early explorations in classroom leadership. The four years that I spent in the English classroom and my subsequent transition into the Admission Office gave me a more balanced perspective on the workings of a school that guided my desire to devote one of concentrations in the MAED program to [P-12 School and Postsecondary Leadership Concentration](#). Participating in this concentration enabled me to explore and analyze various organizations and leadership philosophies and consider how to best apply these lessons to become an effective team member and leader in my current roles.

An easier transition for me was that of becoming a coach. I had spent time as a camp counselor and volunteer assistant coach in years past so was more familiar and comfortable in assuming the role of coach. This familiarity, however, also meant that I knew how much I didn't know. I was interested in further exploring the science of coaching to better understand what qualities and practices made for great coaches. This desire led me to name my second concentration in [Sport Coaching and Leadership](#). My coursework in this concentration enabled me to explore many aspects of coaching, from most effective practices to develop physical skills in athletes to best practices to ensure that participation in sport leads to positive development for youth

athletes. Participation in these courses heightened my passion for the art of coaching and appreciation for several of the great coaching role models I was lucky enough to have over the course of my athletic career, as well as several of my current colleagues.

During the time I have spent in pursuit of the MAED degree, I have been struck by how much of the content of my courses is applicable to several of the roles that I have at Millbrook. Learning about the [SAMR](#) framework in [CEP 815 – Technology and Leadership](#) has an easy and clear application to classroom learning, but also prompted me to think about the role of technology in the dorms and our students' social lives. Focusing on the classroom, SAMR asks an educator to examine just how they are utilizing technology in their instruction. Is it simply present as a novel substitute for skill instruction that they can impart otherwise, or have they capitalized on the integration of technology to redefine the lesson entirely, creating a new, previously impossible task? It was this kind of question that prompted me to examine the role of technology in our students' (and our own) lives. Was technology and the consistent use of devices a substitute for engaging in life around us, or could we capitalize on these tools to redefine the possibilities of engagement?

Attempting to answer this question is an ongoing process. On the one hand, we recognize that technological literacy is a crucial skill for students to have in this, the [Digital Age](#). On the other, we believe that excessive engagement with the Web creates the possibility for negative consequences that no adolescents, and few adults, are equipped to manage. As such, we search for the appropriate balance and look to educate our students on these consequences, while also exposing them to the powerful opportunities that a tool such as the Internet presents. Thus, while CEP 815 – Technology and Leadership initially made me reflect on my practices in the classroom, it also enabled me to explore these questions of technology and leadership in the larger educational setting.

A second class that had a large impact on me, for a similar, larger application, was [KIN857 – Promoting Positive Youth Development Through Sport](#). In this course, I examined methodologies that enabled youth sport coaches to utilize their instruction in athletics to leave their athletes with positive long term and lasting development. Just as I initially approached Technology and Leadership with a classroom mentality, I entered Promoting Positive Youth Development Through Sport focused solely on my role as a coach. Reading authors such as [Tom Farrey](#) and [Joe Ehrmann](#) (also mentioned on my [Future Learning Goals](#) page) and engaging in the class discussion exposed me common issues in youth sports, as well as organizations attempting to combat these issues by providing intentional, accessible, positive youth sport programs and coach training programs. Designing the “Millbrook Grand Slam” baseball camp (available on the [Showcase](#) page) enabled me to consolidate these lessons into one comprehensive program that could impart baseball instruction in a methodology that left the participants with lasting positive assets off the field as well.

Working in this course and designing the “Millbrook Grand Slam” program made me consider how to promote positive youth development outside of sport as well. Specifically, it opened my eyes to the opportunity present to me as the Dorm Head of [Harris Hall](#), which houses our ninth-

grade boys. As I designed the “Millbrook Grand Slam” program, I asked myself how I could best incorporate similar practices and ideologies into life in the dormitory, specifically during our weekly dorm meetings. This led to more explicit programming with the student leaders (upperclassmen) in the dorm such that we now break the dorm into small groups (a student leader serves a facilitator for each group) and take the time to engage with an idea or issue that is pertinent to these ninth grader’s lives as they transition into life at Millbrook (ninth grade is the youngest grade that Millbrook serves). Promoting Positive Youth Development Through Sport reinforced and helped shape many of my coaching practices and also served to highlight other areas of life at Millbrook that offer similar opportunities for intentional, explicit development instruction.

Finally, the third course that most impacted me during my time in the MAED program was [EAD822 – Diverse Students and Families](#). This course was different from others in that it provided me with exposure to educational issues that immediately apparent in my current environment. Much of the content of this course dealt with looking beyond the traditional definition of parental engagement in a child’s education to understand different cultural norms and appropriately value the influences and resources that a diversity range of families bring to a school community. We also brainstormed ways to engage parents who may feel intimidated or unable to engage in a school community. In my final paper for this course (“Increasing Parental Engagement”, available on the [Showcase](#) page), I outlined the importance of parental engagement and offered three steps that a school could take to make parental engagement more accessible.

Working at a boarding school, parents are not as immediately present as in other school communities. Despite this, Diverse Student and Families underlined for me the importance of parental engagement in every child’s education, regardless of the setting. While there can be a temptation to view a boarding school education as a simple relationship between teacher and student, for it to have the lasting impact that we all hope, it must involve the parents. Working through this course made me appreciate the analogy that our [Headmaster](#) likes to draw for our new parents: the teacher, student, parent relationship must be a triangle, with each point informed and involved. When the triangle gets flattened to a linear relationship, important perspectives and insights go missing. While my work at Millbrook is with a more homogenous student population than many of the case studies this course examines, the foundational principles were clearly applicable to Millbrook.

These three courses were powerful in their ability to help me look outside the immediate content and gain perspective on another role that I have. Throughout the MAED program, it is engaging in this type of thinking that I have enjoyed the most. Analyzing the skills and traits of the best coaches has made me a better dorm parent, identifying useful tools in the classroom has enabled me to better analyze the influences acting upon our students and ourselves, and examining the roles of parents in a child’s education has helped me to understand the variety of support systems that help to place children in optimal positions to succeed as students. In all, analyzing each individual role that I embody, and identifying those skills and traits that make one successful in that field, has given me a greater understanding of the skillset that makes for

a strong educator, while also giving me practical methodologies to instruct the students with whom I interact.

The Master of Arts in Education program has been as rewarding as I hoped. While challenging, it has provided me with the opportunity to examine myself and others and, through this thinking, writing, and discussion, gain the clarity of why I work in education (for a more elaborate account of this process, see the [Goal Reflection](#) and [Future Learning Goals](#) pages). As I begin in my Goal Reflection Essay, my goal remains to “be the most effective educator that I can.” When writing that goal, I had little idea of what that meant or how I could achieve it. The MAED program has given me the tools to more specifically frame that goal for myself as well as introduced me to tools that will help me continue in this quest. Most importantly, working in the MAED program has shown me that this is not a goal with a fixed ending. Much like working with students in the classroom, athletes on the baseball field, or ninth-grade boys entering boarding school and a dormitory for the first time, this is a journey that may never end. It is, however, the passion for and desire to engage with the journey that slowly allows one to accumulate the tools one needs and, in the end, makes it worthwhile.