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First Year Writing

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Literacy through Volleyball

Through my eyes, literacy has always been something that involved reading and writing, and mostly in the class room. However, after taking this course, it has opened my eyes to see that literacy surrounds us in our everyday lives. From my personal experiences with literacy, and mostly those that include volleyball, I would define literacy as the importance of how people perceive communication around them either verbally or nonverbally. For example, literacy can be found in sports. For most sports, if not all, there is some sort of communication that is needed to be successful. Being that volleyball has always been an important role in my life, I had never realized how literacy has shaped me to be the person I am today.

It all began in 2002, when my older sister Stephanie, joined her first volleyball team ever. She was in fourth grade, I was in kindergarten, and all I ever wanted was to be just like her. I began attending every single one of her practices and frequently I was able to jump into the drills and play along with them. Soon I began to discover that my skills were developing rather quickly, but her team had so much more knowledge of the game than I did. I knew what a bump, set and spike was I just could not comprehend how these girls were communicating to put these three strategies together in a rhythmic pattern. It was kind of like I had all of the pieces to the puzzle but I just did not know how to put all of the pieces together.

Considering all I ever wanted was to be just like my big sister, it is only right that I began to play on my own team. Once fifth grade hit, I finally had the courage to join a team of my own. The team I started off with was called Holy Trinity CYC. Ten girls with the desire to play, and no idea where to begin. There was so much frustration amongst us from having no idea how to work next to one another. I can remember thinking to myself, “I barely know this girls name so how am I supposed to play next to her?” This is when it hit me that communication can be the barrier to the growth of our team’s success. At this point in my life, the communication was extremely self-centered meaning that the only purpose for communicating was to let the girls beside you know that you were getting the ball. This needed to expand if the team were to be successful because literally every ball touched should have some type of verbal communication and/or nonverbal communication that goes along with it.

Year by year, the game that I once knew as a game mostly centered around my abilities evolved into a game that could only be successful through team effort. Here I mean in the beginning of play when I was younger the goals were simple bump the ball over the net. As I got older the requirements were to receive serve with a pass, set the ball to another player who can spike the ball over the net at the opponent. From fifth grade to eighth grade, I was always the quarterback of the team, known as the “setter”. I was the one that controlled which one of my hitters was going to get the ball. When I began high school my freshman year, this all changed drastically for me. Suddenly I was the starting libero on the Varsity team. “What just happened? I went four years being a setter, the quarterback, the person who controlled the court and now you want me as your Varsity libero?” As I began to adjust to my new position, I realized that my role of communication also had to change. I went from just controlling the offense, to becoming the spokesman of the team. From the backrow, I could see everything, so it was my job to guide

my teammates on what they could not see. I had to tell each one of the hitters where to hit using words like “line, cross, left, right” I also had to let the team know if the setter on the other team was live meaning the setter was in the front row giving her many advantages, or tell them if she was dead meaning in the backrow. From my new position I had the best view of where the ball would be served and needed to be the first to call this out so my teammates could prepare for the next touches of the ball. Without volleyball literacy, the average person would feel like a person going to a different country for the very first time where they speak a different language, but to me the phrases we use are “perfectly clear, perfectly natural. It’s my mother tongue.” (Tan, 1)

As I am beginning my coaching career, I have noticed that this is where all of my volleyball literacy is going to tie in. I am currently coaching a select volleyball team for the St Charles Stars, and they are 11’s, fifth graders. Watching them learn on the court is amazing and takes my mind back to that little Fifth Grade girl who wanted to be just like her big sister but didn’t have all the clues. Up to this point in my life, my volleyball knowledge has continued to grow, all the pieces were spliced together to create a well-rounded player on the court, but now I am teaching it, and these 11 year olds are just in the beginning of their careers in the sport, so now I have to break down everything I have learned so they can understand it at their age. This is extremely difficult. I find myself using terms that I did not even learn until I was in high school so of course these girls have no clue as to what I am saying.

The sport that I once knew is now growing in strength of skill at such a fast pace that it is necessary to get across to the younger generations that these are essential tools needed to prepare them for their opportunity in college play, if that is what their ultimate pursuit is. College coaches are recruiting at a much younger age than when I was a fifth grader. With this being said, I have used my advanced knowledge of the game to find ways of teaching these younger

girls so they can understand how to incorporate the skills into their game play as if it were second nature. Basically I have had to reteach myself and scaffold everything I have learned in my years of playing volleyball, to be able to give back to the future generations of athletes.

Through volleyball, I am able to look at literacy in a whole different light. I can finally understand that literacy is not just reading a book and writing papers, but that it is so much more than that. It is how we relay information to one another in everything we do in life. Volleyball has taught me that successful use of communication achieves the end goal needed. Through this communication, I learned not only how to be a leader but how to lead; I learned how to speak up for myself and how to speak up for those who could not speak up for themselves. Communication through volleyball, now has also taught me how to teach/ communicate the sport to others by learning that I had to break it down to the basics. Literacy takes place daily in our lives, and until I had to communicate in volleyball just to be successful, I never would have realized this as a fact.

Works Cited

Tan, Amy. "Mother Tongue." (n.d.): n. pag. Web.