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Football, More Than a Sport

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What comes to mind when you think of a group of people that have your back, work towards the same goal, communicate with you and provide to you an in-depth assessment of your performance? The army? A hobby or club? A sports team? Well, in fact, all have the potential to qualify as a discourse community. Requisites must be met in order to earn the title of a discourse community. Linguist John Swales (1990) offers dissection of discourse and the application to a community. Criteria most essential is to meet the six characteristics; which includes communal goals, a form of intercommunication, genres, reciprocates feedback, specific lexis, and has a form of hierarchy. Applying to a characteristic must be earned and it demands a committed group to be named a discourse community. Members that have been submerged into their discourse community have been required to gain competence. Expanding one's competence connotes gaining knowledge and experience about their topical organization. This competence transpires with time and understanding of the community. I, for example, remember as a young kid dreaming of the opportunity to play football for the high school. Since then, I have immersed myself in the football discourse community and have gained competence pertaining to the sport. I have played all four years of high school for the team and I am now a captain. The football program is a community that constantly grows. Not just players and coaches. I would consider the following, or the fans, of the football program to be part of what populates the community and more people want to become involved with football every year. The football program unconditionally qualifies to be a discourse community because it applies to all of the requisitioned characteristics and through the years has earned the title due to the commitment of its people.

The football program is comprised of communal goals. These goals are everything from shaping the players into better men and athletes to winning football games for the community on Friday nights. Collectively, the community desires to play a fun game, have good sportsmanship, learn good habits on and off the field, and create a brotherhood with teammates. The foundation of the football community is based on our commonality of goals; this includes the desire to win as a program, not just a team. If we are able to accomplish the fundamental goals, such as being able to look out for each other and giving support to the community, Friday night wins are just a bonus. Football programs that are as fortunate as the Anthony Wayne High Schools' have qualified, with the dedication of those involved, to be labeled a discourse community. The goals that we set together help shape the culture of our team and leave a legacy for our program. This legacy is what will

help shape the direction of the discourse community in the future. The existence of the community is developed from the many characteristics required by Swales (1990).

Additionally, an intricate system of intercommunication exists amongst the community (Swales, 1990). Players, coaches, and those who have been involved are able to communicate. Forms of the intercommunication include locker room meetings, group texts, the lingo, or lexis we use, chalk drawing of plays, and even hand signals. In the outer ring of the discourse community, there are websites (The AW Fullbackers), news articles, and, at games, the football program gives information on the team throughout the year to keep the community updated. This is the intercommunication that is crucial to a discourse community. Swales believes in the balances of each complexity of a characteristic. The intricacy of the system that derives communication is one that is relied on to promote function within a group. Every community requires a way for members from any area to be able to interpret or deliver news. This is a piece of essential criteria in the list of characteristics of a discourse community.

A genre used by a discourse community could be similarly compared to a medium of communication. In an analogous way, book pages are the genre of communication for an author, a genre for discourse communities are the platforms in which communication is broadcasted. The football discourse community uses newspapers and team websites to update the community and fans about how the team is doing and any new information. Within the core of the team, we use chalk drawings of plays to break down our jobs on the field. Film is also a big portion of how the team exemplifies genre. Watching film of other teams and our own shows an example of the genres used in the football program.

Providing information and feedback to the discourse community is a necessity for continual growth. Football qualifies in this aspect because the players, as well as the fans, can receive information and feedback from multiple sources. We watch film of our practices and games to learn from our mistakes so that we can better ourselves as athletes. This utilizes a tool called Hudl that allows us to put all of our film as well as film from other teams into one place. We study the tendencies and game plan of other teams throughout the week with Hudl. This tool allows us to receive feedback from our coaches about our performance. This is considered one of the most influential tools when determining the success of our program. When the team understands the mistakes that were made through feedback, it allows us to all grow drastically.

The lexis that are learned within the discourse community provide essential communication. Just like any profession, the football program has a specific lexis that is only truly understood by those within. The lexis for an American family and a Chinese family are very different. This is the terminology that they use to things

that pertain to what goes on in their lives. In this same way, football has a specific lexis, which differs from any other discourse community. There are a lot of strategies required and the lingo used will be implemented in order to execute the strategic plan. We must have plays memorized and the calls that correspond. This is communicated through hand signals, short words, and other verbal keys. These keys and signals are the lexis used for the football program. Terminology is broadcasted between players, coaches, and other people who know it. A lexis can be specific to the community. For example, a 4-3 cover 4 defense could mean nothing to some people, but I and other football players understand it completely. The lexis that is terminology particular to a discourse community is one of the most important characteristics (Swales, 1990).

Every discourse community must meet the requirement of having a hierarchy established (Swales, 1990). The football discourse community has a hierarchy that has been developed over the years. The peak of the community is the head coach, then followed by the rest of his assistant coaches. They have most of the power and are the ones that make the paramount decisions for the team. Following the coaches are the team captains. At the end of the summer every year, we vote three team captains decided by the rest of the team. This year I was elected as one of the captains. Becoming a captain this year is a tribute to the importance of gaining competence. After I put in the grunt work, I worked towards expanding my competence and the repercussions were in my favor. The role of the captains is to make sure the team is on the same page and get the momentum rolling when it is low. As captains, we must control the team and be leaders for the younger players. We have the seniors, juniors, and then sophomores that proceed in the order of authority. The hierarchy is prioritized off of seniority, but still allows authoritative spots to younger members. The football program truly attributes the way a discourse community is formatted and exemplifies how a hierarchy is organized.

A discourse community is a title that must be earned by a committed group of individuals. Rules have been established to declare what is required of a group to be titled a discourse community. The members of the community require competence. One must be knowledgeable about the community and be able to verbally interact with other members. Competence is obtained after time and understanding. In my own experience, I have learned the importance of gaining competence. As I became more knowledgeable about football, my younger teammates began to look up to me more and I could give them insight that would assist them. Competence is a quality that must not be overlooked in a discourse community. It has great value and creates a knowledgeable community. In addition, there are the six characteristics of a discourse community that must be met to consider an activity as a community (Swales, 1990). The football program exceeds the expectations of each characteristic. The communal goals of the program are

embedded in the culture that is created and consists of the coaches, players, and supporters. Intercommunication is a part of the foundation. The players and coaches have a great stream of communication, while the whole team has outlets to communicate to and from the following of the program. The genre expands from chalkboards to film. The community receives feedback in multiple forms. The program is fluent with the lexis and highly aware of the hierarchy. The football program consists of members with experience and competence that pass their legacy on to the future and it epitomizes every characteristic requirement set for a discourse community.

References

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