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Discourse communities occur everywhere, simultaneously, and everyone is either in one community or not in another. As Stanford professor James Paul Gee states in one of his articles, “You are either in it or you’re not”(487). One cannot have one aspect in common with the community and simply be a part of it. The way I see it one needs to meet most, almost all characteristics to be considered a member of the discourse community. In my research I decided to observe the pick-up basketball games that are played at the UCF gym on multipurpose courts. There are many people that play there daily and most people there know each other. They can be thought of as the “regulars”, who on any given day if I were to go I would most likely see them there. Just as people who go to a restaurant very often, the workers know them already and what they like, and may call them a “regular” customer. I was researching this area to see if the people that play here are part of a community, and if this community was in fact a discourse community meeting all or most of the criteria.

**Methodology:**

To gather my data I went to the multipurpose courts at the UCF gym multiple times and observed the players and the environment around them. I took notes on the things people said, what they wore, and even asked some questions. I also tried to look for a type of text that everyone can use to communicate or understand the rules or keep track of the game. I asked some common players what were some specific words or phrases that they thought everyone who played there would know and understand. Also if this language could give them an advantage to help them win. Another question raised was if everyone playing on these courts had a common goal or reason for playing. Was it simply for exercise? Or did everyone want to win and it was more competitive than it seems. When interviewing some people I recorded their answers on my phones recording device. This way I can analyze their answer to see if it can help me determine if it meets the requirements of a discourse community. John Swales identifies six characteristics the defines individuals as a discourse community. Swales’ proposes, “a discourse community has…common public goals…intercommunication among members…participatory mechanisms…utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims…specific lexis…suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise”( 472-473). I used my observations and recordings with these parameters in mind to analyze my research. I believe these really help define a discourse community but a community can have most and not all and still be considered a discourse community.

**Findings:**

Initially, it was clear to see a common theme in the appearance of the players. Everyone had basketball shoes, most people wore higher than normal socks, and basketball shorts. Also almost everyone there was either playing or waiting to play. No one was just watching. The people waiting to play were “picking-up” or picking players for their team when its their turn to play. It was obvious if someone came to play in something inappropriate, such as jeans, they would not be accepted or get “picked-up”. The next clear observation was the lexis, or the language of the community. There were many words teammates would say to each other that they needed to communicate. Words such as, pick left, pick right, switch, help, rebound, double, are all examples of words a team on the defensive side will say to each other to help their defense be more efficient and work together effectively. A word such as the one “help”, is used when a defender makes a mistake or gets beat and needs another teammate to help him cover his own man. If one did not understand the context of this term they would not be able to help their teammate properly and thus, could let the other team score easily and ultimately lose the game. This is one observation that immediately told me that this specific lexis is vital to the common goal of winning, which is another piece of evidence I gathered. When I asked multiple players why they play here instead of other courts, they almost always responded by saying “the good competition”. That question was always followed by what are your goals when playing against “the good competition”? They overwhelming answer was simply, “to win”. This answer to me was what made the other parts of this community fall together. It made sense that someone in jeans, would not be able to play well, and thus negatively help the others achieve the common goal. In a regular basketball league, a scoreboard may be a common text that all players utilize and understand. It helps them know the score at all times and how much time they have left. A scoreboard can be found in any basketball gym but it is not used during pick up games. This is a good example of understood knowledge publicly known by the players. As they score, the people on the court must keep the score counting in their head. Different baskets are worth different amounts of points so this is another factor that comes with knowledge of the game. Knowing these different point systems is crucial to understanding who is winning and who is losing. Although these pick-up games do not use a scoreboard they have other means of a so called “text”. There are no referees to call fouls or violations, so all players must know the rules and they must call, verbally, a foul against them themselves, or a violation they see. The other players usually agree with the call or respect their call. This also implies that all players know the basic rules of basketball and can play abiding to them.

**Conclusion:**

Throughout my research all my evidence pointed to the multipurpose basketball courts as their own discourse community. Specifically, the pick-up games that go on there daily, have most if not all of the characteristics that are needed. The specific lexis allows teammates to communicate and help each other reach the goal of winning the game. Also as analyzed in James Paul Gee’s article, a specific lexis can give someone an advantage. In Gee’s example a restaurant’s workers may use their higher lexis about menu items to alter a customer’s decision. Thus, this gives them an upper hand in achieving the goal, as in the basketball games knowing the language will help your team work together more efficiently to win and achieve their goal. The actual winning became the clear main goal of the public community. Everyone played competitively just to win the game and continue to play more basketball. Also the desire to win was enhanced by the fact if you were to lose, you would have to wait and may not get another chance to play that day. A scoreboard allows all players involved in the game stay notified on the score and how much time they have left. Also since these pick up games do not use a scoreboard a type of unwritten rule book is used when they must call their own falls because of the lack of officiating. Discrepancies in a foul called would be harder to resolve if most people did not understand the rules. I believe these characteristics do not occur in the general public so this discourse community is rather tough to be a part of. I agree with Gee as I quoted earlier that one is “in or out” of a community, and can’t be in a small part of it. For example, one can’t simply wear the correct basketball attire and be picked-up to play. One with no skill or no prior knowledge of how to play correctly, will only negatively hurt the other members and ultimately will not be accepted. This research can help out new comers to the gym who want to play competitive basketball for fun. With this information one can know all the different aspects needed to be accepted by the community. Just as I did, I came wanting to play and when I first started, no one knew me so it was hard to play a lot. I had to do a lot of waiting and proving of my membership. I gradually learned all these characteristics and know have even made some friends that will pick me up to play so I play faster without waiting and play for more time as well. This is just one example how one can benefit from understanding this environment and its discourse. Based on my research, the pick-up games at the multipurpose courts at the UCF gym, evidently carry most of the aspects of a discourse community and therefore I believe they are their own discourse community.

Works Cited

Gee, James P. “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction .” *Journal of Education*. 171.1 (1989). 481-494. Print.

Swales, John. “The Concept of Discourse Community.” *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Boston: Cambridge UP, 1990. 466-478. Print.

Interview transcription

Me: Are there any basketball specific words or phrases you use during a game?

Player: Yes

Me: can you tell me some examples?

Player: um…pick left, pick right, back screen, go through, outlet, cut, swing it, help, switch….

Me: do you think if a teammate does not know these terms it could hurt your teams chances of winning?

Player: Yes

Me: Why?

Player: because in basketball communication is a big part to winning. Especially on defense, it’s a team effort and you need to be looking all around at every moment so your teammates need to help you see whats behind you and coming your way.

Me: Do most people who play here know this language?

Player: yes, everyone I play with.

Me: do you believe everyone playing to win?

Player: yes because if you lose you have to wait a while and if you win you play more.

Me: how would someone that does not know the rules of basketball be able to compete

Player: he would probably not be able to play at all, he would slow every one down and keep making mistakes cuz there are no refs here we have to call our own fouls and violations.