



Teaching Games with Inner Sense: Exploring Movement Consciousness in Women's Volleyball

Enseignement de jeux par le biais des sensations corporelles internes: Exploration de la conscience du mouvement en volleyball féminin

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The intention of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore movement consciousness within the realm of games and sport pedagogy. Situated within the context of a women's volleyball team who regularly received technical, externally oriented coaching on skill development and tactical plays, questions of what is it like to become aware of internal bodily sensations of breath, balance and rhythm were explored. Players responded favorably to the kinaesthetic intervention as they described improvements in skill performance and feelings of connection to teammates. The most significant contribution of this inquiry is that it provides evidence for furthering research into a model of games pedagogy that aims to dissolve socially constructed boundaries between the mechanics of the external body and the inner sensations of movement, hence, a model that attends to teaching games with inner sense.

Cette recherche phénoménologique avait pour but d'explorer la conscience du mouvement dans un contexte de jeux et de pédagogie sportive. Située dans le contexte d'une équipe féminine de volleyball où l'entraînement et le perfectionnement des habiletés techniques et tactiques étaient le plus souvent menés et dirigés par des ressources externes (réactions de l'entraîneur, activité réussie ou non, environnement) nous avons exploré diverses questions touchant les sensations corporelles internes telles la respiration, l'équilibre et le rythme. Les joueuses ont réagi positivement à l'intervention kinesthésique, ayant constaté des améliorations au niveau des habiletés et du rendement et une plus grande connexion avec leurs coéquipières. La plus importante contribution de la recherche tient au fait qu'elle fournit des données probantes justifiant des recherches plus poussées sur un modèle de pédagogie du jeu qui vise à faire éclater les frontières constituées socialement entre la mécanique du corps externe et la sensation interne de mouvement, c'est-à-dire un modèle d'enseignement du jeu qui met l'accent sur les sensations corporelles internes.

Introduction

The game of volleyball, in the simplest of terms, can be described as a group juggling experience. Players situated on the same side of the net aim to keep the ball in the air as it is passed from one player to the next. When the ball crosses the net, however, it is released with the intention of hitting the ground so that a point may be scored. Hence the rhythm of a volleyball game is very much stop-and-start. The ‘stop’ can be described as collective anticipation waiting for a served ball to be released. The ‘start’ is evidenced in how quickly players move in strategic formation to receive the ball.

One can imagine how tension may be experienced in the stopping moments of the game, moments when the breath has the potential to be held in observable musculoskeletal rigidity. As such pauses prolong, feelings of isolation also have the potential to emerge as questions of doubt or reflection on past plays seep into consciousness. While the field of sport psychology offers insight into the psychological states (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; 1997; Gardner & Moore, 2004) and cognitive set of skills (e.g., Orlick, 1999; Lloyd & Trudel, 1999; Lloyd, 1999; Gould, Damarjin & Greenleaf, 2002; Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) aimed at helping players ease the build-up of tension in games and sport, the predominant focus of a sport psychology intervention is ‘mental’. A movement conscious approach, by contrast, prioritizes the ‘physical’ sensations of movement and focuses attention on the experiential unfolding of a living moment (Lloyd & Smith, 2010). If the breath is held for example in a moment of prolonged tension, enhanced inner or kinaesthetic awareness of the breath, developed through practice, would emerge. The postulation of this inquiry is that such inner awareness within the context of skill and tactical plays may act to dissolve tensions that hinder performance.

Dividing movement into ‘mental’ and ‘physical’ or ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ frames of reference are arguably false dichotomies as no clear divide exists (Shusterman, 2008). But, for the purpose of comparing and promoting interdisciplinarity in pedagogical practices between sport pedagogy, sport psychology and other mind-body disciplines such as yoga, such an orientation is helpful in discerning attention directed toward the outer shape and mechanics of a motion and the inner felt sense of that motion. Metzler’s (2005) text strengthens divisions between pedagogical models and associated movement disciplines. For example, the pedagogical model associated for Sports Education, in which volleyball would conceptually fall, is paired with an externally-oriented, isolated approach to skill development that, once attained, is applied to a game setting. But what if such divisions were questioned? What are the implications and what might be gained in exploring movement consciousness, hence bodily sensations within and ‘under’ one’s stance, for example, as we broaden notions of understanding beyond the cognitive realm in the way we teach games?

Movement Consciousness in Games Pedagogy

To be clear and provide an operational definition, “movement consciousness” may be described as attention drawn but not limited to the sense of bodily motion on a global to cellular level (Conrad, 2007; Cohen, 1993). Kinaesthetic or ‘inner’ movement consciousness focuses (but is not limited to) the sensation of the pathway, cadence, force, and flow of one’s inhalation to the proprioceptive oscillating sway present even within seemingly still postures.

Such an inner movement or kinaesthetic consciousness is most often paired with artistic, expressive and mind-body practices (Arnold, 2005; Alter, 2004; Seitz, 2002). By attending to the sensations of movement within the context of skill and tactical play development where “for the majority of students, training in movement, in the intricacies of the felt sense of the body, or even the ability to touch sensitively is near nil” (Myers, 1998, p. 103) traditional forms of games pedagogy are disrupted. The dissonance between sport and mind-body practices thus have the potential to be dissolved, as pathways for embodied understanding (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, 2005; Laban, 1948; Johnson, 2000; Stern, 1993; Stern, 2002; Stern, 2004; Merleau-Ponty, 1968; van Manen, 1997; Lloyd & Smith, 2006; Lloyd & Smith, 2009) are opened.

Accordingly, this inquiry delves into the lived experiences of volleyball players becoming kinaesthetically aware of movement during practice. By inviting players to engage in activities designed to enhance ‘inner’ movement consciousness within their skill and tactical practice, an experiential and practical component is added to a recent theoretical offering which mapped the felt sense of movement from affective and kinaesthetic registers (Lloyd & Smith, 2010) to the cognitive, decision making focus of the original Teaching Games for Understanding¹ (TGfU) model developed by Bunker and Thorpe (1986). Note that other researchers have sought to move the TGfU model beyond the cognitive realm such as Butler and McCahan’s (2005) exploration of sociocultural learning theory in TGfU as well as Light’s (2005) inquiry into complexity theory and TGfU. What is compelling about Lloyd and Smith’s (2010) theoretical inquiry is that they subtly changed the structure of the TGfU model to not discount, but rather add an affective, movement conscious layer to the original model (see Figure 1). The conceptual shift can be best described in the transposition of “making appropriate decisions to feeling appropriate moments” (Lloyd & Smith, 2010, p. 93).

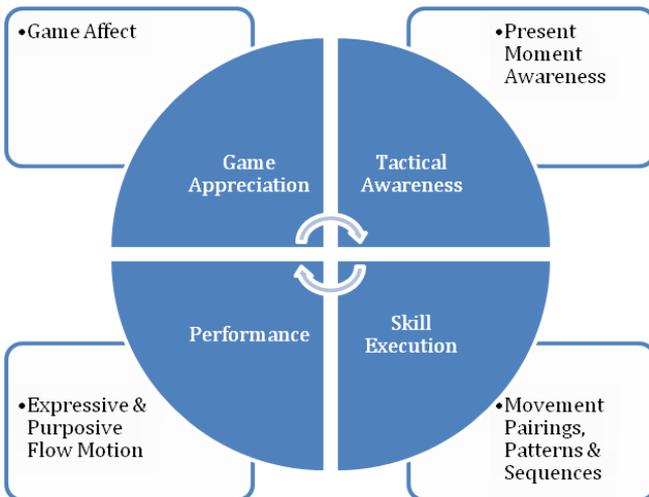


Figure 1. The TGfU-Vitality model (Lloyd & Smith, 2010, pp. 92-93)

- **Game Appreciation to Game Affect:** Students are encouraged to feel the wide range of emotions, or vitality affects, in game-play, preparation to play a game, and in the post-game reflective process.
- **Tactical Awareness to Present Moment Awareness:** Students are encouraged to get ‘in touch’ with the present moment, i.e., not only to know how to create and defend space strategically, but also to emphasize the bodily sensation of connecting with others through space and time.
- **Skill Execution to Movement Pairings, Patterns & Sequences:** Students are taught to become aware of the organic pairing and progressive approach to maturing movement that traces back to inhalation and exhalation and develops into the felt sense of balance within the contractions, extensions, movement patterns and sequences that constitute game-play.
- **Performance to Expressive and Purposive Flow Motion:** Students become aware of the experience of ‘flow motion’ in the rhythms of expressive and purposive game play.

While Lloyd and Smith’s (2010) inquiry offers an affective and movement conscious layer to each of the four components of Bunker and Thorpe’s model, specifically, “Game Appreciation”, “Tactical Awareness”, “Skill Execution” and “Performance”, the focus of this current inquiry into the kinaesthetic sensations within volleyball will focus on an in-depth exploration of the “Skill Execution” TGfU category with enhanced movement consciousness. The pedagogical intent of teaching skills beyond an external frame of reference to include not only an inner felt sense but an organic global understanding of a movement unfolding may be described as follows:

Students are taught to become aware of the organic pairing and progressive approach to maturing movement that traces back to inhalation and exhalation and develops into the felt sense of balance within the contractions, extensions, movement patterns and sequences that constitute game-play. (Lloyd & Smith, 2010, p. 92)

While such a statement was framed by a series of conceptual papers (e.g., Lloyd & Smith, 2009; Lloyd & Smith, 2006; Smith & Lloyd, 2007), the intention of this inquiry is to explore a movement conscious approach to skill and tactical play development through the lived experiences of players practicing volleyball. Accordingly, the purpose of this inquiry is to build upon the theory offered by Lloyd & Smith (2010) that purports a movement consciousness approach to games understanding by phenomenologically exploring the lived experiences of volleyball players invited to become more kinaesthetically aware. Through descriptive accounts of breathing, a sense of balance and the internal rhythm of skills and tactical plays experienced in volleyball practice, movement consciousness, particularly kinaesthetic consciousness within the TGfU category of “skill execution” will be better understood.

Motion-Sensitive Phenomenology: An Attitude and Methodology

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a methodological approach to research that explores human experience as it is lived, in both descriptive and interpretive modes of inquiry (van Manen, 1997). For example, the researcher pieces together

literature, philosophy, and vignettes of lived experience to better understand a phenomenon in question². A new level of understanding in games pedagogy will thus be approached through describing and interpreting how players experience a volleyball practice with enhanced movement consciousness, the phenomenon of interest in this phenomenological study. The adoption of a motion-sensitive phenomenological attitude and approach (Lloyd & Smith, 2006), influenced by van Manen's (1997) human science action sensitive phenomenology, will bring purposeful attention to bodily motility throughout this inquiry. In so doing, repetitive motions experienced in practice that might otherwise be experienced as automatic will be explored with a 'bracketed attitude' in that they will be explored with enhanced, present moment and kinaesthetic awareness.

To elucidate enhanced movement consciousness within a volleyball practice, questions of "What is it like to become kinaesthetically aware of motions performed within the context of playing volleyball?", specifically, "What is it like to attend to bodily sensations of breath, balance and rhythm during a volleyball practice?", will shape a detailed exploration into the sensations of movement within the volleyball context. Such "what is it like" questions invite us to delve past preconceptions of how one is supposed to perform these motions from an external frame of reference and orient us toward the heart of phenomenologically questioning and living these motile experiences (van Manen, 1997; Smith, 1997). By adopting a phenomenological approach, a mode of inquiry based on "re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii), it is possible to experience phenomena with what Husserl described as fresh eyes but in this case more fittingly open receptivity to sense perception.

Note that perception is a term that is interchangeably linked to consciousness, experience, understanding and meaning-making. But unless one steps out of their habitual attitude or approach to meaning-making and experiencing the world, in this case typical ways of experiencing a volleyball practice, one will be limited in terms of what is possible to perceive. The very intention of phenomenology is to take a step back from our past experiences, those clouded by preconceptions and theories influenced by "empirical sciences [including psychomotor methods of analyzing performance and concern ourselves with] how form becomes constituted as an object for scientific cognition in the first place" (Thompson, 2007, p. 81). Exploring the kinaesthetic sensations of form within the volleyball context, therefore, delves beneath what may be externalized to a series of mechanical actions and expands the possibilities of what may be perceived kinaesthetically.

Procedural Guidelines

It is worthwhile to note that framing a study by procedures and methods falls within a positivistic paradigm, as the aim for research following the scientific method is to reproduce repeatable results to show validity and rigor (O'Leary, 2010). Although qualitative research is becoming increasingly accepted as a rigorous form of inquiry, a phenomenologist seeking to publish outside of a phenomenologically-oriented journal must to some extent, appease an ingrained attention to dominant, positivistic approaches to research. Accordingly, the steps guiding this inquiry will be described but with a note of caution. In sharing procedural details, it is important to note that they are not conceived as a 'method' with the goal of reproducing mass repeatable results in future studies, as

that would be an actual antithesis for the intention of this inquiry. Rather than looking to quantitative, external frames of reference that measure validity and rigor within the positivistic paradigm, the goal of phenomenological inquiry, by contrast, is to explore the depths of meaning and draw upon experiential and philosophical text to show rigor, further insight and understanding (van Manen, 1997). As the steps or guiding frames of reference are described, it is hoped that other researchers deciding to expand upon this study and explore movement consciousness in other sports would become receptive to exploring movement as an improvisational dancer might - where guidelines or 'constraints' might not frame only the experience, but also 'enable' creativity [for a more detailed exploration of "enabling constraints" see Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler (2008)]. The aim of improvisational dance, Sheets-Johnstone (1999) explains, is to "form movement spontaneously" (p. 484) so "something which never before was, something which will never be again, thus something that has no past or future performances [but] exists only in the here and now of its creation" (p. 485). With this goal in mind, I wish to share with you the enabling constraints guiding an exploration of movement consciousness in the context of women's volleyball.

Participants

Fifteen players, aged 17 to 26 years, on a varsity women's volleyball team, along with their head coach with 28 years of experience, volunteered and signed consent forms reviewed by the University's Ethics Review Board to participate in this study. Typical of the phenomenological tradition, the intersubjective presence of the researcher (Finlay, 2009) is also worth mentioning as I, in collaboration with the head coach created a series of movement-based workshops aimed at enhancing movement consciousness in the practice context. An intersubjective orientation not only acknowledges the presence of the researcher but also validates how her presence forms part of the inquiry. Drawing upon my background as an international fitness presenter who specializes in kinaesthetic and rhythmical approaches to becoming fit (e.g., see Lloyd, 2008), certification as a consultant with the Canadian Sport Psychology Association (CSPA), and former training in classical ballet, a series of workshops were designed that drew the players' attention to their breath, their felt sense of balance, and rhythm.

Sources of Information

Several sources of information were gathered that contextualized, described and provided further insight into the lived experiences of women's varsity volleyball players exploring aspects of kinaesthetic consciousness. To help orient myself to the lived experiences of volleyball players (an essential step in Van Manen's (1997) approach to phenomenology) and to also form a relationship with the team, an introductory journal activity that asked the players to describe what they felt when they played well and not-so-well in practice and game situations, followed by a group discussion which provided an opportunity for the players to share their reflections, was orchestrated. This activity also acquainted players on the team with better understanding of the lived experience of their teammates. While the content and insights that emerged from this discussion were quite interesting, the extensive reporting of these findings is beyond the scope of this current inquiry. Rather, information gained from this introduction to

the team frames and insulates information gathered concerning the phenomenon in question, exploring movement consciousness, particularly kinaesthetic awareness, in skill and tactical play development.

Data gathered and shared in this study relate to a series of three workshops that were offered which took into account three different aspects of bodily sensation, namely breath, balance, and rhythm, within the context of a volleyball practice. Immediately following each workshop, players were invited to verbally discuss what they experienced in a group. In addition, following the group conversation at the end of each workshop, players were invited to email or complete an open-ended journal-like response that gave feedback on what was experienced. Note that information gathered after each workshop helped to frame the structure of the next workshop. In addition to these sources of information, I, the researcher, took detailed field notes of the workshops as well as observations of the team in both practice and competition.

A Kinaesthetic Intervention

Enhancing Movement Consciousness through the Breath

The first workshop designed for the volleyball players consisted of isolated and applied exercises that were based on deepening their awareness of the breath. Breath awareness was the first focal point of a kinaesthetic intervention as it is central to movement disciplines focused on mindfully deepening one's kinaesthetic awareness (Johnson, 2000). Players were invited to sit and/or lie down to simply attune themselves to the natural cadence, pathway, and temporal quality of their breath. Once the players were comfortable sensing their breath, they were invited to attune themselves to the way they breathed in motions that were specific to volleyball. Players were asked to become aware of their breath in a serve and serve receive based on a recommendation from the head coach who indicated these motions are most notably associated with the building of bodily tension in a competitive setting. Note that prescriptive advice was not given in terms of when they should breath in or out and for how long. Players were asked to explore various pathways, tempos, and qualities of breathing in relation to what worked best for them.

Enhancing Kinaesthetic Consciousness through Balance, the Interactive Dance of Proprioception

The second workshop was designed to situate the awareness of the breath within a deeper, felt sense of postures, actions, and tactical patterns of game play. Several activities were designed to help the volleyball players become aware of the inner kinaesthetic sense of balance as well as the expressive energy a living or dynamic balance has the potential to exude. Influenced by Mullis' (2006) thoughts on enhancing somaesthetic practice through engaging in "precarious balance", as well as his "principle of opposition", activities were designed for players to purposefully act and react in situations where their balance was challenged beyond and within the context of volleyball. The players were invited to balance on top of a stability ball in four, three, and two point positions (e.g., two knees and hands or a combination of one, two or three points of balance between the hands and knees) where rocking and circling motions were emphasized. Such ebbing and flowing actions into moments of sustained balance embody Johnson's (2000) recommendation that we should feel and not force our

way into optimal alignment. Next, the volleyball players were invited to play a mirror, follow-the-leader game in positions and motions that would invoke a feeling of precarious balance. Lastly, a slow motion, imaginary game of volleyball was suggested by the head coach. As a pretend ball was passed, set, and attacked, players were asked to intermittently freeze certain positions at a moment's notice and comment on their multidirectional feelings of opposition as well as interconnection.

Enhancing Kinaesthetic Consciousness through Rhythm

The third and final workshop specifically designed for the team centered on the concept of rhythm. Temporal awareness is pertinent to volleyball, as the ability to keep a ball rhythmically in motion not only adds to the excitement of the game; when a certain play is sustained longer than to be expected, the players and all who are watching are drawn into what Smith (2007) describes as the skin of the moment, where the present moment or the “now” is a palpable duration of “undivided sensation” (Heller-Roazen, 2007, p. 51). Such a sense of flow, a term that is etymologically linked to the Greek word *rhythmos* (Westervelt, 2002), within the context of a start and stop game of volleyball is remarkably difficult to achieve yet is essential for connectivity and success.

A glossary of musical terms was provided to give the players a more sophisticated language for describing various rhythms within the game to help them become more aware of rhythm, specifically the multitude of rhythms within their skills, tactical plays, huddles, and modes of communication. After discussing terms that stood out as significant for the players, specifically ‘accent’, ‘crescendo’, and ‘staccato’, the players were invited to experience their regularly planned warm-up with increased attention toward the accents they felt within the movements themselves (e.g., where the most significant moment or emphasis was to be felt within a walking quadriceps stretch), and how these warm-up movements could be energized by noting moments of hang time or movements that might coordinate with the background music that was always playing but often untapped.

Players were invited to perform volleyball-like passes with scarves, an object that provided a context for players to experience prolonged ‘hang time’ to help develop rhythmical awareness within interactive movement patterns. As the players evolved from passing the scarves directly to each other to the suggestion of varying the trajectories and rhythms with the intention of creating moments of precarious balance in one’s partner, they were able to tune into the potential that a purposive change in the tempo has within the tactical dimension of game play. To help players extend this notion of purposefully changing a rhythm to create a desired affect, such as picking oneself up to engage in the positive exchange of energy required after a mistake is made on the court, players were invited to intentionally change various rhythms on the court as well as in various moments of their day.

Responses to the Kinaesthetic Intervention

Breathing

The breath distinguishes a corpse state of an objectified body (Welton, 1999) from the presence of vitality and life that pulsates through a living body or what Hanna (1988) describes as the somatic body. In Sanskrit, the term “an”

“means ‘to breathe’ [as well as] ‘to live’ and ‘to move’” (Rosen, 2002, p. 21). While references to life and death may appear extreme, the life, or moment-to-moment movements of a play in volleyball are all very much affected by the presence of held versus flowing breath. Furthermore, the way one breathes with intention has the potential to increase a sense of power, energy or emotion as indicated in the following descriptions of players’ lived experiences. Note that for the purposes of this inquiry as well as limitations with respect to length, the lived experience of two to three players per workshop will be highlighted.

Tracy is a very focused player. Before she serves, she does three bounces in succession. Her eyes track these bounces closely and the rest of her perceptual world seems to disappear. A look of calm permeates her face. In this state, she tosses the ball high into the air and her palm greets it with force and precision. Volleyball is in her blood. It is a game that has been played competitively in her family for generations. On any given competitive match or tournament, four or more of her family members are there vicariously living through each and every one of her calculated movements. But more than a familial presence, a close observer can see how volleyball is literally in her blood as her entire being, the visceral responsiveness under her outer form, appears to pulsate in coordination when such a ritual is performed. Today as I see Tracy assume her three bounces I invite her to attend to the breath, not purposefully to change it, but just to be slightly more aware of how it is already part of her well-rehearsed movement pattern. She laughs, seems to be thrown off her familiar automaticity and playfully explores various parts of her serve. Following the workshop, in a journal-like reflection she shares:

I have always taken deep calming breaths as I am walking back to serve, but now I find it helpful to take a short breath in as I toss the ball, and a quick breath out as I hit the ball. I find it more powerful...

Kerry is a player with a strong presence on and off the court. Her good mood has the potential to light up a room. Similarly, moments caught in heated frustration are equally permeable. She sets high standards for herself both on the court and in her personal workouts. For Kerry, every movement, every action on the court played by herself or others MATTERS. When Kerry plays well she is aggressive, determined and according to her she plays best when she feels like “*the game is a personal challenge*”. Observing Kerry in action, one can see her look of determination as well as the pressure that she puts on herself. When asked to focus on the quality of her breath during her serve she described her experience as follows:

Without a doubt my serves are way more consistent when I take some time to focus on my breath. Whether or not the serve itself is better I cannot be sure, but I feel like they end up being stronger and I feel like it is an impossibility to miss.

As she continued to include an awareness of the breath following the workshop she explains the result,

Since learning to use breathing, I have found more power, consistency and calm during movements. In particular, while serving I find that it has helped me have more confidence in my serve. It almost shortens the court.

Such a focus on the breath not only affected the way players performed serves in practice, players also noted how attention to the breath affected the way they moved as a team. Both Louise and Margaret’s journal reflections described

how attention to the breath was experienced by the team as a whole. Louise explains,

Breathing is a transfer of energy, so if every one of us exhales as we make contact with the ball (serving, passing, setting, hitting...), there is some kind of energy that goes through the ball and is passed on from player to player. While exhaling, we can also put verbal energy into the ball (like Nancy, who makes a "HA" when she attacks the ball), which intensifies the feeling of the play. By doing this, I think it would help us stay connected and keep a positive and competitive atmosphere.

Lastly, Margaret notes that,

It is an aspect of our training that a lot of people don't give much importance to, but I believe that breathing has a very big role in any sport, so bringing the team's attention to it played a large role in developing the team.

The breath thus became more than a tool to calm oneself down or build intensity, as it is so often used within the context of sport psychology intervention (Orlick, 1999). The players' reflections on how attention to the breath affected the dynamics of the team indicate that it also holds expressive and cohesive qualities. The 'HA' sound that accompanied Nancy's exhales, for example, did so much more than increase the power of her serve. It communicated the power she was exuding from her motion into the motions of others.

Balancing

A noticeable tension is apparent when the gentle proprioceptive sway that informs our inner kinaesthetic sense is missing. A keen observer can see the difference between a held position that is stiff versus one that is filled with potential energy to move or explode into any direction. As I watch Cathy play Libero, a defensive position who has the job of staying crouched and low in order to receive a served ball, I see variations in her observable sense of bodily balance. When she is playing well she exudes what Game (2001), an English equestrian who regularly experiences postures that give the illusion of a static carriage, describes as the interplay between "balance, alignment, [and] relaxation" (p. 9). The presence of fluidity and vitality is observable in the distribution of weight through the toes and metatarsals, the concavity of the torso, and the vigilante presence of the arms and hands ready to extend yet intertwine as they continue the anterior concave trajectory in the positioning of the shoulders, chest, and head, a bodily presence that affords a bodily cultivation of flow. In comparison, when the proactive and reactive dynamic dance of balance is not present, she exudes a stiff, hunched over squat wherein the weight of the torso is supported by hands pressing into her thighs, a posture that is accompanied by pressing her weight back into the heels. This position surfaces during times of fatigue or frustration. In short, she looks more 'propped' than 'primed' for action. One can imagine how the absence or presence of a proprioceptive dance of balance within such a posture has the potential to either isolate or connect her not only to the play but where she strategically needs to place the ball in terms of the movement sequences that follow her initial contact. Cathy's journal reflection reveals that the feeling of balance helps her "*be more aware of everyone on the team and where they are. That helps to reduce errors of hesitation.*"

Kara is a natural leader on the team who outwardly embraces challenge. This is demonstrated by her choice in taking flights of stairs on a regular basis, even when her hotel room is on the 27th floor. Through the balance workshop she became more aware of her tendency to hesitate and close herself off from moments in play that seem “out of reach”.

During the partner exercise portion of the workshop I saw Kara and Louise playfully mirror each other in progressively more precarious positions where the purpose of the exercise was to keep it going but make it as challenging as possible for each other to maintain balance. Inevitably when Kara was thrown off balance and touched the floor with her hands such moments gave way to a cessation in play. As a facilitator I asked, “Is it possible for you to keep the mirror game moving even after moments when you are feeling off-balance such as when you lean out, dive or roll?” and, “What could you do to keep the game alive?” In response to my questions, Kara not only changed the way she reached beyond her comfort zone and resumed play, her teammates also appeared to be finding new ways to move in and out of unbalanced motions.

Kara’s journal reflection further contextualizes what I observed. She explains: “*In Volleyball, we are often in position where balance is compromised. Awareness of this balance in our body can increase the feeling of control and then, I think, my confidence.*”

Other teammates echoed Kara’s sentiments. Another player, Ann, mentioned:

Balance is such a key aspect to volleyball. We are constantly put in positions where we are against the forces of gravity and our bodies have to fight to stay strong. I liked the ball exercises because I really felt my core firing to keep me stable. These kinds of exercises can also be applied to certain situations on the court, like passing balls outside of our bodies.

Leslie’s journal related the concept of bodily balance to a team phenomenon. When commenting on moments of precarious balance that were felt when simulated game plays were created without the ball and players were asked to freeze at random moments, this is what she described:

I really liked the simulations exercise where we tried to feel the connection between our teammates. At first, I didn’t understand what the exercise was about, but once we got started, I could feel that everyone was connected by our actions. This balance and connection has a direct impact on the way we play; the stronger the connection, the better we play as a team.

She continued by saying,

I don’t believe that one lesson will do anything for the team. I think it is something that should be worked on regularly and individually.

This comment reinforces Shusterman (2008) in his exploration of body consciousness. To open and prepare oneself to engage in the pre-reflective, spontaneous dance of miraculous movement described by Merleau-Ponty (1962), Shusterman contends that disciplined and regular practice such as mindfulness training is required. Knowledge of balance in the cognitive sense, therefore, is but a starting point to feel and refine one’s ability to balance. Deepened bodily awareness develops over a prolonged period of time where a series of planned movements provide proprioceptive feedback on areas where one holds and thus releases tension. However, as Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) researchers and coaches explain (e.g., Light, 2005), isolated and reflective skill-

based practice alone falls short of preparing athletes to perform within the beautiful chaos of the living moment. Given that volleyball is really a group experience of juggling we might also consider the observations of an expert juggler, “You never make mistakes in the same spot. Even if it’s in the same trick that you miss, it’s always going to be a different moment of the trick” (Percelly in Wilson, 1998, p. 110). To ultimately refine the dynamic kinaesthetic sense of balance, therefore, one can conclude that a balance of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of spontaneity and Shusterman’s reflectivity, i.e., a present moment AND reflective practice, would best prepare the athletes to engage in the passing, setting, and attacking motions that constitute the game of collaborative juggling of a ball over a net.

Rhythm

As players learn to sense the kinaesthetic qualities of breath and balance, the way they rhythmically interact with others enables them to think, act, and react in rhythmical resonance with others. Laban, an acclaimed movement educator and philosopher from the early 1900s who has significantly contributed to foundational curricular conceptions of physical education both in Europe and North America, intertwines principles of bodily effort with temporality. He notes that a “person’s efforts are visibly expressed in the rhythms of his bodily motion. It thus becomes necessary to study these rhythms” (Laban & Lawrence, 1974, p. 2) as we aim to cultivate mature, synergistic expressions of movement.

As I take Laban’s advice and begin to observe the rhythms apparent in the players’ warm-up sequence of shuffles, walking lunges, walking knee-ups, walking high kicks, lateral side squats and simulated blocks I note that they do these motions with an sense of automaticity. There is no observable accent or ‘hang time’ and one moment blends into the next with a similar sense of flatness. Rather than stopping the music and gathering the players in for an instructional chat, I take my place in line and perform the warm-up with the team. When it is my turn to traverse the floor I am not only exuberant as my natural joy for movement surfaces, my walking knee-ups match the booming bass of Katy Perry’s “Hot N Cold” and helps to transpose its relative position of ‘background’ to the ‘foreground’. Although a 4/4 tempo is evident, each phase of my knee-up carries a discrete shift in tempo. At the top of the movement, when the knee is lifted I hang in a precarious moment and begin to couple it with a calf-raise. As I continue, the feeling of turning emerges and before long every third or fourth knee-up becomes a pirouette. Laughter permeates the air as other teammates follow in my footsteps as well as their own variations in creating accents in other movement pathways. A sense of lightness and playfulness emerges that was previously absent from the warm-up portion of practice.

Variations in rhythm continue to permeate awareness as we engage in a series of simulated sequences that carry purposeful variations in accent and tempo. The following journal response from Irene reveals how an increased awareness of rhythm facilitates her development as an athlete:

The whole game of volleyball revolves around rhythm. As an individual, I think the biggest example of rhythm in my mind would be passing, and afterwards following through - there is a distinct rhythm in my mind, and whenever I stop myself in the middle and don’t follow through, I feel the lack of rhythm and realize I stopped my feet and didn’t follow through.

Stopping the rhythm of play or not being able to respond or purposefully change the rhythm of a 'slow game' for example was also a significant point raised in group discussion. I suggest to the team that they try to be more aware of what they could do to change up the rhythm both on and off the court. I use the example of walking down the street. I explain, "*If I walk in slow, heavy steps there is a certain mood that is carried. Conversely, if I suddenly speed up, lift my eyes and even experience a skip in my stride, a new sense of energy emerges*". The following journal responses indicate how the players responded to a rhythmical intervention.

Sarah explains,

I couldn't really apply this individually on the court, but I tried to be more aware of it and try and change it in situations where we weren't doing so well. To change up the rhythm, I started to smile and look at everyone in the eyes, even when we lost a point. I don't know if it helped others, but it helped me.

The importance of rhythm in team dynamics was also apparent in Kara's response:

Rhythm is the biggest thing we have been working on. It's something that's really hard to always have, but by becoming more aware of it by doing these exercises, and having reminders, helps us get closer to the rhythm we are looking for.

Lastly, Louise's comments give a sense of what Laban and Lawrence (1974) were addressing, in how observable rhythm gives a sense not only of the level of maturation in the quality of the movement, but the sense of flow that is present.

When I thought of six people moving in a certain rhythm on the court, it occurred to me that rhythm is what brings together breath, flow of motion, and balance. Rhythm is what makes volleyball. We are constantly moving with specific steps... Rhythm is what makes volleyball exciting because it changes constantly. By being aware of this, we now understand that we are the ones who control the game and we are the ones who bring excitement and emotions to the court, not the other team.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The players' responses to the kinaesthetic concepts of breath, balance, and rhythm were exceedingly positive. Several limitations of this intervention should be taken into consideration however, as the performance and ability of the team to experience enhanced kinaesthetic consciousness within the high-pressure situation of competition could be improved. Of primary concern was the time lost in the four-month delay in seeking ethics clearance, a time when I was not permitted by the Ethics Review Board to observe or work with the team. Beginning such an intervention one month and half before playoffs was not ideal. Without having enough preseason time to reinforce mindful practices of breath, balance, and rhythmical motion within their regular practices, warm-ups, and competitions in low-pressure situations, the lasting effect of the intervention did not transfer as well as it could have to high-pressure situations. In looking to refine modes of kinaesthetic intervention with the intention of improving the quality of game play, future team-building discussions and workshops should ideally take place during the preseason training camp.

A variety of reflective measures that provide players with visual images of their bodily movement such as planned peer observation, as well as videotaped identification coupled with internal experiences of kinaesthetic recall are recommended to facilitate individuals' observations and growing sensations of kinaesthetic consciousness. Such modes of reflection will help the players refine the ability to express and sense the micro-moments that collectively shape and cultivate the energetic exchange of energy and the resonating rhythm created by the team.

In closing, it gives me great pleasure to report that the very last game of the season carried a rhythm and sense of positive energy from the beginning of the pep talk to the last moment of the third and final game. Players on the sidelines rarely sat on the bench; rather, the uproar of chants, claps, and dances of celebration filled the air and left an impression on all who were there. I never expected to become caught up in the wave of enthusiasm, outwardly expressing my joy for the game with matching whoops, hollers, claps, and laughter. However, as the game came to a close, simply being part of the emotions expressed and lived on the final day of playoffs brought me closer to the kind of experience that lives and stays with competitive athletes who strive passionately together to achieve the same goal: to live and truly celebrate each moment on the court and the larger game we call life.

Through ongoing research, it is my hope that as educators of students who become varsity athletes and those who perhaps sample sports for a shorter period may experience the surges of life not only in moments such as the last game of a playoff but in what may be considered a mundane or lifeless part of a warm-up or practice. By detailing accounts of how volleyball players became kinaesthetically aware, I hope that these findings inspire coaches, physical education teachers, and teachers of students in teacher education programs to incorporate aspects of kinaesthetic awareness such as attention to breath, balance and rhythm. Thus, as we refine teaching and coaching models that not only take into account the lived sense of space in tactics synonymous with the TGfU approach (Hopper, Butler & Storey, 2009) we might begin to see more attention given to a kinaesthetic sense of understanding, an offering for teaching games with inner sense.

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¹ For those not familiar with the TGfU model, it offers both practical and theoretical guidance for teachers and researchers of physical education interested in games pedagogy. Teachers, for example, appreciate the tactical focus of TGfU as it offers a conceptual approach for planning curriculum around the grouping of games into categories of target, territory, net/wall, batting and fielding (see www.playsport.net for a sample of games grouped in this way). The TGfU model has also been gaining increasing attention in competitive coaching contexts (Hopper, Butler & Storey, 2009) and is becoming an internationally recognized as a hub for research and academic inquiry (e.g., see www.tgfu.net) as it offers a fertile ground for re-conceptualizing physical education pedagogy.

² Note that the focus of a phenomenological inquiry is not to report findings in an exhaustive way showing the busyness and productivity of the researcher. Rather, much time and care is given to the process of piecing together literature, philosophy, and vignettes of lived experience to better understand the phenomena in question.