

Mr. Gillespie

Literacy Narrative

*Major Paper Assignment #1*

April 21, 2018. This was the day I waited 8 years for. It was the day that my team and I won the Inspire award for FTC robotics. FTC stands for First Tech Challenge and it is the name of a division in FIRST. What does this have to do with the paper? Technically nothing, it's partially me just gloating about the fact that we won. But we'll stop here with that.

Most people stereotype robotics with fancy robots that fight like in the movie *Real Steel* with Hugh Jackman, or the TV show *Battle Bots* where the robots literally tear each other to pieces. But FIRST robotics is different. FIRST stands For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology. FIRST robotics is a worldwide STEM program that gets students, all the way from elementary to high school, involved with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. In FIRST we don't just do the robot. We have an engineering notebook that documents our entire season, outreach, and a presentation that we must give to a panel of judges. These 3 parts of robotics have helped shape my speech and writing identity.

When I first started robotics, I too was thinking about making a badass bot that'll crush everyone else's. And then I realized that was not going to happen. In fact, the first thing I did was sit down and write out all the possibilities with my team on how to approach that season's game. And things moved along from there. I would start to build the robot and then I would have to go write an essay for a sponsor. I would start simulating matches and then I would go and write my progress in the Engineering Notebook. Now don't get me wrong, we built a cool robot. It was a custom-built machine that was made using a laser-cut wooden frame, 3D-printed parts, and other neat designs. But everything I did with the robot, had a little bit of writing to go with it.

So, I got accustomed to it. I started using a stronger vocabulary and was able to write larger essays with ease. This came in handy when I got my first internship. It was an engineering internship at UCF. At the internship we worked on simple things from a rocket kit all the way to seaperch robots which were robots designed for underwater use. But the first thing we had to do was write about our past engineering related clubs or activities, and the first thing that came to my mind was the engineering notebook.

Now the engineering notebook isn't like your usual notebook that you write notes in. This notebook documents the journey taken from start to finish of a project. And the members of the team must fill it out. No exceptions. This notebook alone taught me documentation, the importance of failure, and how powerful words can be. The engineering notebook was one of the strongest pieces of information I've written. Now I didn't write this alone. 400 pages of written information about the robot, team, programming, events and more. I can't do all of that on my own and still be alive. My team of 16 students, including me, made this. We were like "the layers of a discourse community" (Channing Trainor pg.1). Trainor also says that "Each layer of the veterinary discourse community must negotiate the role or niche of the specific community", and I completely agree with him on that view because without all the members on my team the notebook would not be complete. It wouldn't have all the different views and opinions that anything would need to have a good story. Which includes the public opinion. This leads me to Outreach.

In robotics we are supposed to reach out into the community and spread the word about STEM. Every few weeks we'll go out to meet with companies for sponsorships or volunteering. At these events we would have to interact with different people all the way from children to presidents of companies. This setting gave me the chance to expand my speech patterns and to

learn how to engage a conversation with a child and a business man and keep both parties intrigued at the same time. The pressure got to me quickly because I never knew what questions they were going to ask and what would be the best possible answer to give to them at that time. But I slowly got better and was able to clearly think through on how to approach a stranger, engage in a conversation, spread the word about STEM, and sometimes even make a new friend. Speech isn't something people are blessed with. It's something that must come with practice. Only because of these events am I able to talk in front of thousands of people and give a speech about 11 kids and their journey through robotics.

Now I want to go back to the importance of failure because this was a big step towards my writing strengths. I was an average high school student that did okay in classes. I would do my homework the class before and study for exams the day before. If I passed I was happy if I failed I felt miserable. The same happened with robotics. If I did my part right I would be happy but if it failed I felt miserable. Only this time I wasn't the only one failing, my team was. And I have definitely failed more than succeeded. But every time I did fail I would try again. Every time a part broke on the robot I would try to fix it. I would keep trying new ideas until I succeeded. I felt Just like how Sherman Alexie did when he wrote, "I refused to fail. I was smart. I was arrogant. I was lucky.". Every time I failed I would write about the failure in the notebook. I would take pictures and document key notes on the positive and negative effects of this design. This method slowly engraved itself into my mind and now every time I do assignments I am always looking for positive and negative effects. This way I could keep track of all the mistakes I made, and I would eventually end up with a design that doesn't falter or break down after a few tries. So now whenever I fail in anything even outside of robotics related things, I write it down.

All of this leads to the presentation. At every competition we must give a presentation that describes our journey in 10 minutes to a panel of judges. 10 minutes isn't much time for a journey that lasts 8 months and that's only if you have been a team for one season. Presentations are quite simple right? You just give the information and then you're done. Maybe if you're in school that's all you need, but in the real world you must communicate and collaborate with your co-workers. Expand on your points and go above and beyond to get your information across the table. People can tell how much effort you put into a project when they hear you talk about it. Some people just do the basic minimum to survive. While others go to the next level with their work. Every time I stepped up to say my part of the presentation I would feel my heart pounding and my body heating up just from thinking that I could screw it up right here, right now. But as Sherman Alexie once said, "I am smart. I am arrogant. I am lucky. I am trying to save our lives", and I would push through my part of the presentation with a clear and confident voice. The presentation to me was like the final obstacle and I was always too frightened to take it head on. But after practice, writing through the engineering notebook, and talking to many strangers. The presentation was just another speech that I killed.

So, did my team and I really win the Inspire award? Not really. Our well written engineering notebook and presentation skills won it. It's kind of funny how the top award of a robotics competition isn't judged by the robot performance, but by how we deliver the story of the robot.

Work Cited

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