



**Coaches Create and Sustain a Community of Practice**

*Des entraîneurs établissent et maintiennent une communauté de pratique*

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**Abstract**

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a learning entity in which people are involved in ongoing interactions with others while they engage in their activities (Wenger, 1998). The purpose of this article is to explore, from the perspective of two coaching leaders within a figure skating club, how a CoP was created and sustained. Eight in-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted with the coaches. This case study paves the way to understanding that a CoP can be developed and sustained by coaches when they are in an environment where collaborative coaching and learning is the norm and where coaches entering into the system expect it.

**Résumé**

*Une communauté de pratique (CP) est une entité dédiée à l'apprentissage dont les membres participent continuellement à des interactions avec autrui tout en menant à bien leurs propres activités (Wenger, 1998). Cet article examine comment une CP a pu être établie et maintenue du point de vue de deux entraîneurs en chef d'un club de patinage artistique. Huit entrevues approfondies à questions ouvertes ont eu lieu avec les entraîneurs. L'étude de cas révèle que les entraîneurs sont plus à même d'établir et de maintenir une CP lorsqu'ils évoluent dans un contexte où l'entraînement et l'apprentissage collaboratifs constituent la norme et où les entraîneurs nouvellement arrivés tiennent ceci pour acquis.*

**Introduction**

This paper explores how a Community of Practice (CoP) was created and sustained by sport coaches. To aid in understanding why it is noteworthy to have coaches create and sustain CoPs for ongoing learning, the review of literature focuses first on benefits, challenges, and dimensions of a CoP before examining the research on CoPs related to coach learning. Etienne Wenger originally developed the concept of Community of Practice through his analysis of situated learning (Wenger & Lave 1991). Underlying the concept is the notion that the individual, the activity, and the socio-cultural environment are indivisible and all play a part in learning (Lave, 1988; Rovegno, 2006). Wenger (1998) noted that individuals could learn by

having membership in structured social frameworks of co-participation called Communities of Practice. A CoP is composed of a group of individuals who work closely together with “a sense of mission – there is something people want to accomplish or do together that arises from their shared understanding” (Allee, 2003, p. 116). Through on-going interactions, members in a CoP find resolutions to common issues that deepen their knowledge and potentially change their practice (Nichani & Hung, 2002).

Members involved in a CoP can benefit in many ways: They are able to get help and support to deal with challenges; they have access to the expertise of other members; they contribute as part of a team and develop confidence in their approaches; and they have fun through meaningful participation and feeling a sense of belonging (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Indeed, being a member of a CoP has shown to help with solving problems more quickly because less time is spent trying to find information to solutions since members seek one another’s help. Furthermore, members tend to make better decisions and devise better solutions, and take risks in trying new endeavors since they know that the community will support them. Ultimately, members develop an ongoing practice that helps them in regard to a long-term strategy and professional identity (Wenger et al., 2002).

Due to the collaboration and sustained engagement that occur within CoPs, it has been suggested that members’ understanding of knowledge may be somewhat homogeneous, and members may have trouble communicating with or understanding non-members (Fischer, 2001). Therefore, while CoPs may empower members to learn from one another, they may also create barriers for newcomers to the group, and may limit the potential perspectives of members regarding different issues (Fischer, 2001). Nonetheless, CoPs can be valuable to both individuals and organizations in terms of problem solving, sharing best practices, developing professional skills, and recruiting and retaining top talent (Wenger et al., 2002).

McDermott and Archibald (2010) provided some suggestions for companies to increase operational effectiveness of CoPs, including setting aside time for participation in CoPs; training a leader who can direct the group, connect the members, and facilitate discussions, but who does not have authority over others; holding face-to-face events for members to communicate in a trusting environment; and using simple technology that is easy to use and familiar to members to enhance communication (McDermott & Archibald, 2010). These suggestions may sustain CoPs, and may also help individuals in CoPs to learn. O’Sullivan (2008), in an article on suggested implications of CoPs for the lifelong learning and development of physical education teachers proposed that physical education teachers in “communities of practice must be supported and encouraged to share their expertise, organize and plan around common goals, generate a stronger voice to influence quality experiences for young people” (p. 30). She recommended a need for research that identifies how professional learning communities are developed.

Of key importance, members engaged in a CoP are working as a community, undertaking similar work, and learning through interacting in a social framework (Wenger, 1998). There are three dimensions that define a CoP (Wenger, 1998): mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Mutual engagement means that the individuals involved in the CoP share knowledge and expertise. The members become aware of their own expertise and the expertise of the other members, and develop an understanding of how they can use their own expertise to help others, and how they can learn from others’ expertise. Joint enterprise means that the sharing of expertise is understood, negotiated, and transformed by members over time. Finally, shared repertoire means that there is a collection of stories, shared vocabulary, cultural symbols, routines etc. that the group may discuss and share (Culver & Trudel, 2008a).

In Canada, coach education programs are competency-based, meaning that coaches are assessed and certified based on what they can *do* with the information that they learn in the programs. Within the competency-based coach education programs, one of the core competencies in learning to coach includes *interacting*, in which coaches' engage in communication with others for ongoing development (CAC, 2012). Through participation in the social environment, coaches create knowledge and attribute meaning to what they learn (Callary, 2012). Indeed, research has shown that coaches learn much of their knowledge for their practice through informal social learning opportunities (e.g., Callary, Werthner & Trudel, 2012; Erickson, Côté, & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Nash & Sproule, 2009; Werthner & Trudel, 2009).

Some research into how coaches learn has explored the way coaches learn from others in a CoP (e.g., Culver & Trudel, 2008a; Culver, Trudel, & Werthner, 2009; Lemyre, 2008). It has been suggested that a CoP could provide an interesting forum for coach learning, particularly coaches of youth sport. Culver and Trudel (2008b) noted that youth sport coaches should share information with other coaches in order to help the development of their young athletes. However, the authors noted that the competitive nature of sports often filters down into the youth sport environment so that coaches are reticent to share information, making it a difficult task to form a CoP composed of coaches.

Other studies that have explored the use of CoPs in sport settings demonstrate just how worthwhile but difficult communication between coaches can be. Culver (2004) conducted a study with alpine ski coaches in which she acted as a facilitator to develop two CoPs (one during camps in the summer months, and one during the competitive winter season). Meetings increased the interactions between the coaches and provided structure to optimize their learning opportunities and the coaches found value in the interactions. She found that the two groups were able to share information and learn, albeit the experience manifested itself differently in-season, where shared information was more organizational in manner, compared to off-season (in the summer), where storytelling was a more common form of communication. However, when the facilitator was no longer present, the group sessions lost their emphasis on coach learning and became more organizational. Therefore, the role of the facilitator was considered crucial in helping the coaches manage their opportunities for learning (Culver, 2004).

In a study exploring a sport leader's attempt to foster a CoP in youth baseball, it was found that a visionary leader was able to change his sport's culture by bringing coaches together to work towards their athletes' development. The coaches learned how to share their expertise and work towards common goals in order to help all the teams and athletes develop better baseball skills (Culver et al., 2009). However, when the visionary leader left, the collaborative learning environment dissolved because there was no facilitator to continue acting as leader with this group of coaches (Culver et al., 2009). A third study by Lemyre (2008) explored how a karate club could develop a CoP. The author noted that the hierarchical nature of the culture in karate was the biggest obstacle in forming a CoP, with little sharing of tasks and negotiating of meanings. As a result, the CoP did not work in this club (Lemyre, 2008).

From the literature on CoPs within sport coaching settings, it is unclear whether CoPs are sustainable or even able to form without a facilitator. However, in her examination of the process of lifelong learning of five Canadian women coaches, Callary (2012) found that two coaches from the same club appeared to be working within a Community of Practice. How did this CoP form without any purposeful facilitation? How was the CoP maintained? Since the CoP formed and sustained by these coaches seemed to counter the literature on the difficult nature of

maintaining a CoP in sport settings, the purpose of this article is to explore, from the perspective of two coaching leaders within a figure skating club, and how a CoP was created and sustained by the club coaches. The literature is clear that a Community of Practice holds considerable potential as an opportunity for meaningful ongoing learning. Hence, this paper heeds to the call for research in exploring how a CoP can develop, and adds to our understanding of the factors that make possible establishing and sustaining a CoP for coaches in sport settings.

### **Methodology**

This research used a constructivist paradigm that enables one to understand learning as happening in everyday life because learning involves changes in the learner as a result of engaging in various experiences (Light, 2008). Using a constructivist paradigm, this study could account for informal learning situations to describe the process that the coaches underwent in creating and maintaining a CoP.

For this article, two participants' data were re-analyzed from data collected for a larger dissertation research study (Callary, 2012) on the process of lifelong learning of women coaches. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University's Research Ethics Board. Purposeful sampling (Polkinghorne, 2005) was used to identify women coaches who had been coaching for a considerable time (over 15 years) as their primary job. The participants in this article have been de-identified by the use of pseudonyms, as has the club. The participants were two figure skating coaches from the Groupley Skating Club. One coach, Gretchen was the Director of the skating club and she had been coaching at the club for 24 years. Prior to her coaching career, she had been an athlete at Groupley. The other coach, Jasmine, was the Director of the learn-to-skate program at the Groupley Skating Club and she had been coaching there for 32 years. She had skated at another club as an athlete but had come to Groupley at the start of her coaching career. These two coaches were the only coaches who were interviewed for the dissertation study that shared a common sport and coached at the same club. The coaches knew one another and knew that they were both part of the larger study, but the data from their individual interviews were not shared with each other.

Four in-depth, open-ended interviews lasting approximately two hours were conducted with each participant (eight interviews in total). Polkinghorne (2005) has suggested that several interviews enable researchers to collect rich and in-depth data. These interviews explored the experiences that the coaches had had throughout their lives and how they had learned from their experiences. Questions were created and crosschecked by two supervising professors to enhance trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007). These questions included, "How have you developed your knowledge as a coach? Tell me about a time in your life that you had to make a tough decision. What did you learn? Did you change as a result? How?" From these interviews, the coaches described, among other things, their coaching environment, the way that they coached together, and how they learned from other coaches. The questions were not specific to learning from being engaged in a Community of Practice because the research study did not initially seek to discover information about CoPs or whether a CoP existed within the coaching environment. However, probing questions in each interview uncovered further evidence of the social environment that played a part in the coaches' learning and could be analyzed within the framework of a CoP.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants were given the opportunity to read, comment on, and change their transcripts to clarify their meaning. Ensuing the analysis of the data for the dissertation study, it was inductively discovered that two coaches

spoke of a learning community within their club. Indeed, qualitative data should be sufficiently flexible to explore the phenomenon (in this case learning) in a broad sense; so that the research design may continue to be emergent even after data collection has been completed (Patton, 2002). Following Patton's (2002) recommendations for inductive analysis, the researcher examined the dissertation research data anew for undiscovered patterns. She thus immersed herself in the interview transcripts of the two participants in regards to engaging with and learning from other coaches within their club, which exposed the CoP to which these coaches belonged. Patton (2002) has noted that while we cannot generalize from single cases, unusual and unique cases can present a great deal of insight from which we can learn. CoPs are unusual in coaching environments (Culver & Trudel, 2008a) and both participants, as part of their interviews on their learning experiences, discussed dimensions inherent in CoPs. Therefore, the participants' transcripts provided rich data from which to analyze findings regarding the above-mentioned research questions in order to explore, confirm, and finally draw up a creative synthesis (Patton, 2002) of how the CoP was created and sustained in this case.

An inductive analysis was performed on the transcribed interviews of both coaches (Patton, 2002) to code for information pertaining to lifelong learning through social experiences with other coaches within the club. From each interview transcript ( $n=8$ ), any learning experience that included other coaches or the club environment was coded. The codes from both participants were merged (while keeping the names of each participant linked to the code). The learning experiences comprised the first order of coding. It was important that these codes included the situation from which the learning experiences derived to provide context in terms of social learning. For example, if the learning experience was that coaches came to seek out each other's knowledge based on their strengths, the situation was the meetings that the coaches held to discuss coaching issues. From the coded data on the learning experiences and the accompanying situations, five themes emerged: (a) how the coaches began to work together and learn from one another; (b) a culture of collaboration at the club; (c) ongoing communication between the coaches; (d) a trusting environment that enabled coaches to be open to learning; and (e) the challenges in working and learning from other coaches. These themes were grouped according to three sections: How the CoP was formed; how the CoP was sustained; and the challenges to sustaining the CoP. In this way, the data was condensed according to Patton's (2002) recommendations, from broad codes of social learning pertaining particularly to coaches interacting with one another to examining the data in terms of the theoretical framework of a Community of Practice.

## Results

The results are presented in three sections. First, the CoP was formed by way of a formal structure that ensured that coaches worked together and communicated with one another. Second, the CoP was sustained through maintaining a culture of on-going communication, trust, and confidence for the purpose of experimentation with what was being learned. Third, there were challenges to sustaining the CoP.

### How the Community of Practice was Formed

The formation of the CoP was a by-product of Jasmine's objective to improve skaters' performance at the club. As the Director of the learn-to-skate program, Jasmine noticed that the

skaters were having trouble moving from learn-to-skate to the competitive level. The skaters were comfortable with their group lessons in learn-to-skate, and were not well prepared to do the work in private lessons that was necessary to succeed at the competitive level. Jasmine also noted that the skaters did not necessarily choose a main coach who was the best match for them. Jasmine said that in watching a coach and skater working together, and in knowing the personalities of both individuals, she thought: “there’s a student who would probably work better with a different coach. What is a better way of doing this? How can we make it easier for the parents to choose an effective main coach?” So, Jasmine created the program “Amazing Juniors” to act as a bridge between the learn-to-skate program and the competitive programs. Every week, the coaches rotated between each skater. In this way, the skaters and their parents could make better decisions about which coach to hire when they moved to the competitive level. Furthermore, the coaches could, together, better support the individual skaters. Jasmine explained,

At first, the coaches weren’t all that keen on it, because they thought it was going to be a competition to see who could get the most skaters. But it hasn’t worked out that way because ... parents have different ideas about what they want in a coach. It’s been a really good change to the program.

As a consequence of the Amazing Juniors, the coaches learned to discuss coaching issues with each other, learned how to deal with the skaters, and developed trust in one another as coaches. They then began to work in teams at the competitive level, so that each skater had a main coach, a choreographer, and a resource coach who only worked on specific skills. Gretchen, as the main coach for a number of skaters, noted that she communicated on a daily basis with the coaches who worked with each of her athletes. She also brought back detailed information on the choreography or the technical execution at the various competitions so the other coaches would have an opportunity to learn as well.

Jasmine’s plan to start the Amazing Juniors pushed coaches into working together. Indeed, when Jasmine learned to coach, she was invited to coach side-by-side with her two mentor coaches in order to learn from them. However, despite her good experiences, that environment was not sustained because it was not necessary that the coaches work together. According to both Jasmine and Gretchen, before the Amazing Juniors program was implemented, mentoring between coaches was very informal and left to the discretion of individual coaches, which largely resulted in coaches working on their own. The prescribed structure of the Amazing Juniors program, and later the competitive program, ensured the coaches had the additional support needed to share and learn from one another.

### **How the Community of Practice was Sustained**

Three interconnected themes regarding the upkeep of the CoP emerged from Jasmine’s interviews. First, the club maintained a culture where it was the norm to learn from other coaches, to mentor, and share information. From within this culture, the second theme, on-going communication, emerged. To keep each athlete’s plans and training progressing, regular communication was required and helped the coaches learn from one another. Third, the trust created by regular, structured, and on-going dialogue provided the coaches with a sense of confidence, which, in turn, helped them experiment with new ideas and techniques. In this way, the CoP was sustained.

Jasmine was one of the most senior coaches at the club and was able to maintain the culture of the club because she was responsible for hiring for the learn-to-skate program. She

liked to hire former skaters from the club. The coaches often came from within a pool of people already experienced with the culture of the training environment. She explained,

I always hire people who have been helping in my program for the last couple of years; they understand how we run the program. It's easy for me to bring those people in. They have an understanding about how it works, right from the beginning. And then it's an easy transition from learn-to-skate into our other programs.

Since most of the coaches were former athletes at the Groupley Skating Club and had been at the club, often for more than twenty years, they already knew how to work with one another because that was the coaching model.

It was the norm to learn from other coaches; therefore, decision-making was often shared to get others' input. In this way, coaches did not feel like there was one coach who was "all-knowing", and this created an open learning environment. Gretchen explained how she and Jasmine both shared the decision-making with the group of coaches. Gretchen said,

We'll have coaches meetings and if we identify the need to hire a new coach, we'll all sit down as a group and discuss it... I look at it as contributing to the overall health of the skating club. Jasmine would do the same as the director of the learn-to-skate program. And we also have Kara as the coaches' representative on the board. Let's say someone had a conflict with me, and they don't feel like they can go further with me, they could go to Kara. So, that takes away some of the pressure that the coaches have to deal with their superior. I'm not their boss, I don't tell them what they have to teach or how they charge their athletes or anything, they're self-employed.

The shared decision-making, respect, close relationships and understanding of individual differences in how each person coached allowed Gretchen and other coaches to feel safe in that environment and learn through what was a Community of Practice.

Jasmine also felt that it was important for coaches to understand that effective communication was the key to the coaches working well together, the club functioning well, and ultimately the skaters progressing in their careers.

We do the best we can to have open lines of communication so everyone knows what they're doing with an athlete. There are definite roles with what coaches are doing with the athletes, and it changes as the season progresses too... So, the biggest and most important thing is open lines of communication... It's important that everybody knows the main goal for that athlete. Within the goal setting of the year, every one has to be involved in that so that we know where we're trying to end up and we know how we can try to get that done.

Jasmine elaborated on how the coaches used each other's strengths to learn from one another. For example, Jasmine said,

Scarlett, who was an international level skater, is now coaching at our club and she has her degree in Kinesiology. We talk about what I do with them on the ice and what she's doing with them off the ice. I'm learning from her, because she's giving me information from a scientific, kinesiology perspective.

In this way, the coaches sought out advice and information from other coaches with differing expertise.

At the Groupley Skating Club, it was a trusting environment, open to learning. This openness translated into conviction that other coaches were capable of being in charge in the event that the main coach was absent. Jasmine said,

I think that in our sport, there's a lot of solicitation of students, but not in our club... We work so well together, and the parents know that if I'm going to be away, I'll make sure that their skater is taken care of. They know that they can trust everyone on staff.

This ability to trust one another also translated into confidence. In order to continue learning from one another and help their skaters, each full time coach, even if they worked predominantly with competitive skaters, also worked with the learn-to-skate and Amazing Juniors programs to help mentor the younger part-time coaches. Jasmine explained how they could gain confidence in working together in a collaborative environment.

I think the fact that we're able to work so well as a group, that empowers each of us individually. So, collectively, we come up with ideas and then we individually go to work with our skaters. That makes you feel like you're on the right path, and that's empowering... Even though we are in an individual sport and we're individual coaches and sometimes our skaters are competing against each other, we still need to feel like we're part of a team. Because to be successful, there has to be a common cause, and for us, our common cause is that we want our skaters to be the best they possibly can be, so we push each other in a positive way. To make your skater the best she/he can be, you have to give her/him every opportunity she/he can have, and that means opening doors for the skaters, and it means opening doors for yourself too.

Indeed, feeling safe at the club increased her confidence and ability to learn.

When you feel comfortable in your environment you're probably more confident in what you're going to be doing. Confidence in coaching, I think, is a big part of how I do learn. If you have the confidence, you will challenge yourself to do more... To be a better coach, you're constantly pushing the borders, and you're constantly trying to find new and better ways of doing things. I think if you're feeling comfortable about where you're at, you're feeling confident.

The coaches' feelings of trust and security, stemming from their culture of collaboration and ongoing communication, gave them the opportunity to take risks in order to further their learning and development.

### **The Challenges**

While the closeness of the coaching group was a benefit to learning and allowed the CoP to be sustained, it also came with its own challenges. Gretchen and Jasmine both noted how well they knew the other coaches both professionally and personally. Indeed, both coaches noted that while it was an advantage that the coaches met regularly to discuss any issues and problems that arose, Gretchen also noted,

We have issues and problems. We try to discuss them but... sometimes, someone might not like the decision one coach made, and in some ways it's not good, because sometimes the coaches don't want to speak out and say what they think because they don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. Most of the time, we respect each other's friendship and professionalism because it's taken a long time to build and there's a lot at stake.

While the coaches sometimes shied away from conflict, keeping potential learning opportunities to themselves and not bringing up disagreements, the opposite could also happen, where the coaches bickered like family members. Small inappropriate conflicts generally were not conducive to learning, but came as a by-product due of the closeness of the group, which mostly was helpful to learning, as Jasmine said,



At times I refer to us as a dysfunctional family because sometimes it turns a bit unprofessional because we know each other so well. Sometimes emotions get in the way. But generally, it's a good working group with a high level of trust, which in coaching you don't see all that often.

Jasmine did note one instance, before the CoP had been formed, when she had been the main coach and another coach had undermined her coaching and "stolen" her athlete. Gretchen also noted that there were some coaches who seemed to be inconsistent and with whom she preferred not to share athletes, so that she tended to engage in collaboration with certain coaches more than with others. However, for the most part, both coaches noted that they were able to learn a great deal from the coaches with whom they interacted.

### Discussion

The two coaches in this study discussed how they learned from what appeared to be a Community of Practice. They received and shared information with other coaches to help their athletes' performance, but in doing so, the participants in the study were clear that this also helped to further their learning. Lemyre, Trudel and Durand-Bush (2007) suggested that a CoP could be an interesting approach to nurturing learning and helping to develop youth sport coaches. However, Culver and Trudel (2008a) explained that in the sport and coaching world, sharing of information takes place more commonly in "informal knowledge networks" or "networks of practice" in which coaches give and receive information, but have informal relationships with one another without any mutual engagement or joint enterprise that binds them together. In this study, the coaches were not engaged in informal relationships because they knew the other coaches at the club well and worked together, and they had common purposes for learning. Nonetheless, the literature on CoPs in sport settings argue contrary to the results discussed in this article: Communities of Practice tend not to form or, when formed, tend not to last for lengthy periods without a facilitator (Culver & Trudel, 2008a). Therefore, it must be asked: Did the coaches at the Groupley Skating Club really have a Community of Practice, focused on learning, and adhering to the three dimensions proposed by Wenger (1998)? The results demonstrated that the focus of the coach interactions was on learning, where the coaches shared information, and provided feedback and advice to each other that allowed them to understand how to work more effectively with different athletes. The coaches shared their knowledge and expertise so that they had *mutual engagement*, the first of Wenger's (1998) dimensions. Indeed, Jasmine and Gretchen both discussed how they came to understand what they each contributed to an athlete's training, which illustrates the notion of a *joint enterprise*, the second of Wenger's (1998) dimensions. Finally, the length of time that the coaches had worked together and known one another allowed them to have common stories and routines that they could discuss together, creating a *shared repertoire*, the third of Wenger's (1998) dimensions.

Since this skating club was successful in creating and sustaining a CoP among the coaches, how might other clubs replicate this environment? While Jasmine was the leader who implemented the structure that created a CoP, it was the structure of the club's programs itself that held the CoP together. Certainly, the context of the club, where a coach worked one-on-one with an athlete, specifically targeting certain issues, while another coach worked with that same athlete on another issue, promoted a certain necessity for communication between coaches. The

coaches were required to work together to help athletes excel, which created a need for on-going communication and interaction. The structure also ensured that it was in the best interests of the coaches to help other coaches learn, which would result in ensuring their athletes would progress. Furthermore, as a coach generally worked with an athlete one-on-one and then debriefed with the other coaches on what was accomplished on a daily and weekly basis, the dialogue and subsequent learning among the coaches was on going. This debriefing process was an important aspect of the program. In Culver and colleagues' (2009) study, it was determined that ongoing debriefing helped the coaches share information that subsequently allowed them to learn through the experiences of all the coaches within the CoP. It is recommended that debriefing become a regular part of training for coaches' ongoing development and learning.

The CoP at the Groupley Skating Club was sustained for three reasons: a culture of collaboration between coaches, ongoing communication, and a trusting environment that enabled the coaches to try out new ideas and develop confidence in their coaching. Creating and maintaining a culture of collaboration between coaches is perhaps the hardest aspect for competitive sport clubs to adopt. The results from previous studies noted that the competitive culture of sport is the main reason that collaboration between coaches is stifled (Culver & Trudel, 2008a; Culver et al, 2009). According to studies conducted on youth sport coaches, coaches report that they trust, share, and learn coaching information from only a few select people (Lemyre et al., 2007; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001), and that this is a roadblock in creating networks of learning (Trudel & Gilbert, 2004). Without a culture of sharing, it is almost impossible to engage in ongoing communication specific to helping coaches create a trusting environment and learn. At the Groupley Skating Club, Jasmine hired coaches who had been former skaters at the club, and so the coaches coming into the club knew that it was expected that they would work together. The club coaching structure ensured that regular communication occurred and that the environment was one that was open to learning.

While the coaches spoke of shared respect and support, there were still challenges such as specific personality differences between coaches that made the CoP difficult to sustain. It may not be possible or even encouraged to hire from within clubs in other sports programs; however, it is possible to go broader than our clubs in this matter - our Canadian coach education programs could promote, emphasize, and teach the importance of collaboration and inclusivity as a means for coaches to help themselves, other coaches, and their athletes. Work sharing and team coaching pods could enable such collaboration (Gilbert & Trudel, 2005). Nash and Sproule (2009) noted that contextually relevant material in coach education courses help increase student interests in learning. O'Sullivan (2008) has also noted that professional development for teachers has often been viewed as something that is done to them, rather than having teachers as key stakeholders in their own development. Providing opportunities for coaches to collaborate in contextually relevant experiences that are then related back to educational outcomes would perhaps help coaches see the benefit of collaboration for their own ongoing development.

## **Conclusion**

The results describe the way in which a Community of Practice was created and sustained in a figure skating club by developing and maintaining a culture of collaboration, ongoing communication, and a trusting work environment where coaches felt confident and open to continuing learning. Future research could delve more deeply into the issues involved in

sustaining CoPs in those rare instances when they arise. For example, in this study, the coaches developed sub-groups with whom they chose to interact more frequently, and it would be useful to explore this type of sub-grouping among coaches more deeply to understand the nuances of CoPs within sport settings. This case study demonstrated that CoPs can develop and be sustained when coaches are in an environment where structured collaborative coaching and learning, including regular debriefing sessions between coaches is the norm and where it is expected by coaches entering into the system.

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