Revue phénEPS / PHEnex Journal

Vol 16 no 1

Tips for Graduate Students and Early Career Academics in Physical and Health Education: Communities of Practice

Hayley J. Morrison
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
CANADA

Alexandra L. Stoddart
University of Regina
Regina, Saskatchewan
CANADA

Jenna R. Lorusso
University of Limerick
Limerick
IRELAND

Ashley M. Johnson
Queens University
Kingston, Ontario
CANADA

Author Biographies

Hayley J. Morrison (PhD), is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta.

Alexandra L. Stoddart (PhD), is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina.

Jenna R. Lorusso (PhD) is an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences at the University of Limerick and an Adjunct Research Professor in the Faculty of Education at Western University.

Ashley M. Johnson (MA) is a PhD Candidate in the Community-Engaged Health Promotion Research Lab within the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen's University.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide physical and health education graduate students and early career academics in Canada with information on communities of practice, including: benefits to engagement, vignettes from personal experiences, and examples from the PHE field. The paper offers a list of ten top guiding questions and associated tips for forming and sustaining communities of practice gathered from our experiences, research, collaborations, and colleagues. Ultimately, we hope this paper provides readers with insight into how communities of practice, and the critical friendships they can offer, are beneficial for personal and professional growth.

Résumé

L’objectif de cet article est de fournir aux étudiantes et étudiants des cycles supérieurs en éducation physique et à la santé (EPS), ainsi qu'aux universitaires en début de carrière au Canada de l'information sur les communautés de pratique, notamment les avantages de s’y engager, des vignettes d'expériences personnelles et des exemples tirés du domaine de l'EPS. L’article propose une liste de dix questions directrices, accompagnées de conseils, visant à soutenir la création et le maintien de communautés de pratique, inspirées de nos expériences, de la recherche, de collaborations et d’échanges avec nos collègues. Nous espérons que cet article permettra aux lectrices et aux lecteurs de mieux comprendre en quoi les communautés de pratique, ainsi que les amitiés critiques qu'elles favorisent, constituent un levier important du développement personnel et professionnel.

Introduction

Graduate students and early-career academics[1] (ECAs) in physical and health education (PHE) and across academia have reported key challenges such as social isolation (Lorusso et al., 2020; Stylianou et al., 2017); developing an identity (McAlpine et al., 2009); and negotiating the expectations and responsibilities of academic life (Bottoms et al., 2013; Lorusso et al., 2020; Payne & Berry, 2014). In our own research exploring our experiences as graduate students in PHE, we similarly found our work had no bounds, leaving us with many challenges around time, balance, funding, multiple competing roles, and often feeling in limbo (e.g., transient positions, challenges to the field, mental health; see Lorusso et al., 2020). However, we cherished opportunities for growth as learners, which involved having support systems such as family, friends, and colleagues in the field. It has been recommended to support graduate students and ECAs with research training that includes creating and supporting Communities of Practice (CoP; Stylianou et al., 2017). CoP can be defined as formally or informally gathered "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). Research has emphasized how collaborative work and professional learning communities such as CoP can help with teaching situations and provide support to instructors in academia (Lu et al., 2020; McMullen et al., 2022). Furthermore, McAlpine et al., (2009) found that belonging as an academic, or feeling part of a community in academia, could be established by intentional graduate student peer interactions. Therefore, the following paper highlights information on CoP, shares our experiences being part of a community along with the critical friendship the community has offered, and presents tips via guiding questions to form and sustain CoP for graduate students and ECAs.

Our authorship group has been part of an ongoing community which came into existence as the unofficial result of a collaboration to develop a conference presentation for graduate student professional development (presented at the Physical and Health Education Canada Research Council [PHE CRC] in 2017; see Lorusso et al., 2020). Our collaboration continued with regular emails, quarterly calls, and engaging in small projects (e.g., publishing tips for graduate students!). It has lasted as we have transitioned into other roles (e.g. postdoctoral work, assistant and associate professor roles) and still continues today. As a group, we reflected on our academic journeys and the many transitions and pivots that graduate students and ECAs often experience. These transitions are not easy; for instance, it can be isolating moving from graduate student status with a supervisor as a mentor or being part of a lab with fellow students, into a new role (e.g., instructor/lecturer) with a lack of mentorship and close colleagues. Many ECAs experience imposter syndrome in a new job (Mbatha et al., 2020) and the isolation or lack of community that comes with a new position may increase these feelings. Our reflections emphasized the importance and benefits of having a community of practice and particularly, having critical friends in CoP, to support our various teaching, research, and service roles within and beyond academia. We have previously shared some of our community of practice experiences and benefits at an oval table presentation "We're All in This Together: An Early Career Perspective on a Virtual Community of Practice", delivered at the virtual 2022 PHECRC Forum. In the presentation, we discussed how our community has evolved through various phases from supporting the 'nuts and bolts of the job,' to 'lightening the load of the job,' and then creating a mentality of 'thriving, not just surviving' amongst the community. To share that data widely, in this paper we highlight: (a) an overview of

[1] In referring to ECAs, we are using this as an umbrella term and including postdoctoral fellows, tenure track faculty, teaching faculty, and even graduate students.

CoP with examples from the field; (b) an overview of critical friendships as a possible process embedded in CoP; (c) benefits to engagement with CoP, including vignette experiences, and; (d) ten top guiding questions and associated tips for forming and sustaining CoP.

Overview of Communities of Practice

Three basic elements have been identified as essential to CoP, including the interaction among members being *mutual engagement*, having a topic or problem described as a *joint enterprise*, and, lastly, a *shared repertoire*, i.e., creating and exchanging practical experiences or artifacts (Wenger, 1998). O'Sullivan (2008) explains when individuals join together in CoP to engage in conversation and action that involves sharing their practice and collective learning about a topic, it can assist in professional development and educator growth. CoP are more than a formal group aiming to learn about a topic and they are not simply a group of friends getting together; CoP are voluntary but require individuals to engage deeply with a group (Wenger et al., 2002). A community is about inviting interaction - deep dialogue, questioning, curiosity - among members, bringing in new members, and ultimately, internally discovering new 'aliveness' by exploring a range of inquiries throughout a community's lifespan (Wenger et al., 2002).

Examples of Communities of Practice

CoP have been known to support professional development and learning in both K-12 schools (e.g., Goodyear & Casey, 2015) and university spaces (e.g., Tannehill et al., 2015; Patton & Parker, 2017), as well as at various career stages in continuous professional development spaces (Parker & Patton, 2017). However, the PHE research has primarily focused on the use of CoP among K-12 school teachers (e.g., Parker et al., 2022). Listed below are some examples from the PHE field that readers might want to explore further:

- In their 2022 scoping review on learning communities and professional development in physical education, Parker et al. found a plethora (n= 95) of articles which highlight learning communities from the PE profession (2005-2020). These articles are shared in a downloadable supplementary file and highlight various CoP engagement globally while sharing key characteristics about professional growth communities for educators.
- McMullen et al. (2022) highlight their virtual group of physical education teacher educators which was formed in the United States during the coronavirus pandemic. Their work provides a unique take on establishing and sustaining communities through a crisis situation.
- Although not described as a 'community', Lorusso et al. (2023) have shared about their multi-national group of varied physical education professionals (i.e., teachers, teacher educators, and policy-makers) focused on policy. Their work highlights the additional benefits that can be gathered from developing a community across locations and professional roles.

Critical Friendship

Critical friendships can take many forms and have been central to our community of practice. Critical friends can be colleagues who may provide feedback, share materials, and ask/answer questions during professional experiences. They are also trusted colleagues who can give support from another lens (Costa & Kallick, 1993). Critical friends provide/seek different perspectives

from one-another (Bowles et al., 2023), listen and connect ideas from reflections (Ní Chróinín et al., 2024), and challenge ideas respectfully for new understandings (Gonçalves et al., 2025). We see critical friendship as an extension and important aspect of our roles within our community of practice and a way to help facilitate collegial support to think deeply or differently about our work, a topic, or a problem.

Critical friendship is used in self-study research, which is a qualitative research methodology to facilitate teachers, teacher-educators and researchers interrogating their assumptions in relation to the 'self' in 'practice' to ultimately "open up new interpretations and possibilities of practice" (Casey et al., 2018, p. 56). Critical friendship is associated with "one or more critical friends supporting/coaching the transformation of another's teaching… [or] supporting the trustworthiness of research methods" (Petroelje Stolle et al., 2019, p. 20). MacPhail et al. (2024) honed in on the roles, tasks and types of critical friendships to "capture the nuances between multiple enactments of critical friend" (p. 597) for professional development purposes. Their framework and narrative scenarios highlight a 'dual-continuum model' which explores individuals' breadth of experience (varied experiences to similar experiences) and the levels of support (helping) or critique (interrogating) provided in critical friendship, which we consider to be an informative exploration of the range of critical friendships that exist in the literature. Brewer et al., (2021) further share the role of critical friendship in empowering emerging scholars and we found ourselves engaging in critical friendship within our community as ECAs. We were drawn to Brewer et al's., (2021) work as it shares an intersectional approach to critical friendship in academia, identifying "additional intricacies of identity creating one's position in a given setting" (p. 79). Alongside our experiences within our community, we recognized challenges associated with our various positionalities and identities in the bridging of personal and academic spaces that we have felt influenced our experiences in the community. Embracing critical friendship, allowed us to view each other's experiences from our various positions (e.g., early career, female), which ultimately helped to support one another and our understanding how to sustain our community.

Benefits of Communities of Practice

We have first-hand experience with the impact of CoP and critical friendship on our own professional growth as graduate students and ECAs, including helping us to manage the 'nuts and bolts of the job'. Specifically, we have received support in understanding the basic elements or mechanics of our various academic teaching, research, and service roles and responsibilities. For example, we learned from or supported one another in areas such as: job searches and applications, scholarship/grant writing, publication processes, key seminal readings, and important conferences and events.

> **Jenna's Vignette**: At the Banff PHECRC Forum, Ashley and I were both graduate students. At this Forum, she had been elected graduate student representative, and I was elected the graduate student co-chair for the following Forum. Ashley and I connected after the Forum and realized we had many questions about what it meant to be a graduate student in these new roles, and generally, but not enough answers. For example, how do we balance our new service roles with our graduate research and teaching? What do we need to be doing during our graduate studies to benefit our eventual job search? How do we write effectively and productively for publication and scholarship/grants? The list went on. We figured if we had these questions, others might too, so we put out an open call via the PHECRC listserv inviting any graduate

> students interested in being involved in a community to discuss graduate student issues and/or helping to plan a graduate student social at the upcoming Forum to contact us. We were thrilled when six other graduate students from across Canada responded. We were excited to feel less alone and perhaps even gain some new similar age/stage grad student friends! On our first video-call together, we made a plan and commitment to meet about once a month for the year leading up to the Forum to discuss our graduate student experiences and to plan the Forum social, with myself and Ashley taking on the administrative role of minute-taker. Our transcripts from these meetings are littered with statements like 'I thought it was just me who had trouble switching from researcher to teacher in a single day' and 'good idea, I'm stealing that RA hourly log for my next assistantship', all of which speak to how much the community benefited our understanding and fulfilment of the basic roles and responsibilities of the ECA job.

A second example of how our community was supportive throughout academic experiences and transitions was by 'lightening the load of the job'. When discussing our experiences, we found that our peer-peer connections took the form of critical friendships and supported 'lightening the load of the job' and not just for research purposes. For example, we used critical friendship to edit and critique one-another's teaching philosophies, to ask advice about applying for grants or awards, and to debate whether we should take on new tasks or service roles. Alexandra and Hayley also engaged formally in a collaborative self-study project to learn how to teach PETE during emergency remote delivery (see Morrison & Stoddart, 2025). Having both formal and informal instances of being critical friends has showcased how the actual structured engagement of critical friendship was beneficial to our personal and professional growth and has helped with our confidence as ECAs. Likewise, those paired interactions of critique, questioning, and reflection that would come up in our conversations as pairs or as a group in our community of practice, proved to strengthen us individually and collectively contributed to new learning.

> **Alexandra's Vignette**: Having Hayley as a colleague, friend, and, in this particular research situation, a critical friend, was invaluable. Being an ECA and having a high teaching load during COVID was especially stressful. To be able to work through all the phases of how we would bring our PETE online courses to life collaboratively, made me feel less alone and less stressed. The positivity Hayley shared through responses to my self-reflections helped to develop my confidence in what I was doing, and the confirmation that she was going through similar experiences made me feel like I wasn't alone. While we were certainly in each other's corners (e.g., "I love the advice you gave…"; "I want to reiterate that you are a great teacher…"), what also stood out to me was the 'critique' provided through critical friendship. I've always struggled with balancing content, especially in elementary generalist courses where I feel like I need to give our pre-service teachers a comprehensive foundation because they might only get one physical education course (if that). In my reflections I discussed my lectures devoted to adapted PE. Hayley encouraged and challenged me to think about how content is woven throughout a semester, in addition to the lectures solely focused on adapted PE. Her feedback was shared in an open way without judgement; she commented that she was also thinking about these things in her own practice. This example from our critical friendship showcases the necessity of a safe and vulnerable relationship, and how someone provides critique in a non-judgemental way. I knew

she was pushing me out of my comfort zone to help make me a better practitioner with her knowledge on inclusion and adapted PE, but she did it in a way that lifted me up.

Hayley's Vignette: Between April - August 2020, with COVID changing much of what I knew about my role as an academic, I felt like the joy I used to have with my responsibilities for teaching, research, and service was no longer there. Teaching PETE online was going to be a challenge and was not ideal. I was stressing personally with my living situation working from home. And on top of those stressors I was trying to wrap my head around how to transition my very hands-on and participatory research program within schools to a virtual format to keep my momentum of research going. Needless to say I was halted, stuck and stressed because of COVID restraints. I had conversations with both Jenna and Ashley to talk through options on how to adapt my current research projects and teaching to the current virtual world (Jenna gave me tips on virtual research methods and an awesome "Rant" teaching tool I ended up using in my courses; Ashley helped me re-think what I wanted to research all together and helped me adapt my assignments / rubrics for teaching online). After these very helpful conversations I had an epiphany that would possibly lighten the load and stress I was feeling about research and teaching: a collaborative self-study of practice with the one and only Dr. Alex Stoddart who I knew was also going to be faced with teaching PETE online at the same time as me! I threw out the idea to Alex and BAM – our support system for one-another and collaboration was taken to a whole new level. Since August, Alex and I have been working on this project at our own pace. I have felt good that I have been able to do research even though it wasn't my intended plan. Working with Alex on this research has also supported my pedagogy and has been a personal outlet to converse with a colleague who is going through a similar career stage as me.

Lastly, our community was beneficial to us in assisting with 'thriving, not just surviving,' meaning, our community moved beyond supporting the mechanics of our work, actually creating a network that supported us to excel and feel confident in our roles. A trusting and supportive relationship was critical to this 'next level' of our community as it entailed navigating more personal situations. This was organically developed through interactions and communication, which became more enjoyable and worthwhile for us at our career stages. Words such as confidants, deep level, and comradeship were used to recount this stage upon our reflections of our experiences.

Ashley's Vignette: In 2018, information about the Health Promotion Canada Recognition Awards came across my inbox. Taking a deeper look, I saw that there was a Student Award presented to PhD students. The award recognizes individuals with an exceptional academic record as well as exemplary personal leadership qualities both in the classroom and off campus in health promotion initiatives. My initial thought was this would be a good opportunity to gain more recognition in the field of health promotion, as many of my achievements are in the area of physical education and recreation. Next, I started mentally reviewing if I had done enough to be the recipient of the award. Then I considered, who would I ask to support my nomination? Further came these thoughts: I don't want to put more work on someone else's plate. Had I made a significant contribution to the classroom and community? What did my

> contributions look like compared to others at this level? Was I being silly thinking I should apply for this award? Am I being overconfident? I knew that I had a social ZOOM call with my community of practice coming up before the holiday break, so I would ask their input. Hayley, Jenna and Alex would be truthful with me as to whether they thought I fit the criteria. On the call, I brought up the award, sharing the criteria and the work to complete the nomination form. I was met with supportive suggestions on the work I had done to meet leadership in the classroom and off campus. Additionally, there was discussion on things that should be eliminated from the application or perceived gaps. Through this conversation, I was able to voice my concerns and vulnerability and receive honest feedback demonstrating that when a Community of Practice reaches the stage of 'thriving, not just surviving' the relationship can be truly supportive and trusting.

Our reflections have led us to see the strengths that CoP and critical friendship has provided us both formally and informally as graduate students and ECAs. When we think of the characteristics from our vignettes, CoP really were about: (a) having a support system; (b) sharing and collaborating with materials; (c) providing non-judgmental advice and feedback; and (d) learning *from* another person and learning about ourselves *with* someone else. In the following section we outline guiding questions for forming and sustaining CoP.

Ten Top Guiding Questions for Forming and Sustaining Communities of Practice

The following tips are phrased as prompts to think through when forming and sustaining CoP. We have drawn on literature from within and beyond PHE to inform the tips, particularly: Parker et al.'s (2022) scoping review identifying key attributes from CoP in PHE; Wenger et al.'s (2002) principles for cultivating CoPs; Ramani et al.'s (2021) tips for developing a global community in health professions; and de Carvalho-Filho et al.'s (2020) tips for implementing CoP for medical faculty development. We have further woven in MacPhail et al.'s (2024) work on supporting and enhancing professional learning through critical friendship and Brewer et al.'s (2021) exploration of critical friendship in empowering ECA. These tips have been compiled with our experiences at the core and are informed by the literature. As Wenger et al., (2002) assert, "The goal of community design is to bring out the community's own internal direction, character, and energy" (p. 2), therefore, with these tips we simply aim to provide prompts that allow readers to think about their directions, desires and situations.

Tips at a Glance:

1. How do you initiate a community of practice?
2. What is the focus or goal(s) of the community?
3. Who will be part of your community and what size of community is suitable?
4. What is the structure for your community?
5. How will the community be managed and communicate?
6. How might you foster connection and meaningful engagement amongst your community?
7. How might you support a positive and productive community environment?
8. What are the reflection practices of the community?
9. Is there a need to transition the community?
10. How will you celebrate successes?

1. How do you initiate a community of practice?

CoP can be formal and contrived (e.g., working group for new curriculum development) or informal and organic (e.g., graduate students from a course collaborating together outside of class). However, someone has to initiate the community! If you are aiming to initiate a community of practice for the first time, we suggest starting small or beginning by seeking support from individuals you would like to collaborate with, such as our experience shared in our vignettes. One way you could solicit interest is from members in your faculty or it could be through an organization (e.g., PHE Canada student chapters - forming a graduate level chapter; reaching out to your provincial organization [Council of Provinces and Territories] or inviting someone to lunch). If you are looking to join an existing community you may need to put yourself out there and inquire into existing groups (e.g., PHECRC) or talk to people in your faculty about connecting with a purpose in mind.

2. What is the focus or goal(s) of the community?

There can be a range of foci or goals for CoP. Foci may range from being neutral or low-risk (e.g., group of graduate students across your faculty looking for sharing opportunities), generic (e.g., resource sharing for cross-curricular content for a teacher education program), or deep/personally focused (e.g., collaborative self-study project or learning a new skill together like American Sign Language). When you are starting out with a new community, we have found it helpful to begin with a neutral focus, especially if you do not know the people you are connecting with well and, as such, you do not know how to support them and likely will not feel comfortable sharing about or helping with sensitive issues. Even if you are in a community of practice with people you know well, it can be difficult to jump right to more vulnerable topics like areas of growth or struggles with work-life balance. Starting with a general focus allows the group and individuals to set appropriate goals for the community, which will also impact the community's structure, size, parameters, and so on. In our experiences, initiating conversation about facets of the job which are staples in every institution (e.g., taking on a new leadership role) can bring you together to create that strong foundation and move the purpose and goals to something deeper and more personal. You should ask yourself: What do I hope to gain? In Hayley and Alexandra's experience, their community of practice led to a critical friendship. They were also at similar stages in their career going through similar experiences, which made the relationship a good 'fit' and they had a similar purpose to engage in research *and* improve their teacher education practice. In other critical friendships in the literature, folks have had an interest on a particular topic (e.g., infusing indigenous content and treaty education into PETE; Robinson & Walters, 2024), or a similar motivation (e.g., Fletcher & Beckey, 2023 interrogated and analysed how and why they teach PE pre-service teachers to plan in the ways that we do). Finding colleagues with a similar motivation would be a good starting place for forming a new community of practice.

3. Who will be part of your community and what size of community is suitable?

For those looking for general support with a neutral topic like a new teaching strategy, a larger community might be best suited as tailored advice is not required and a range of perspectives might be useful. For those looking for targeted support with a personal topic like accountability, a smaller community, or even one-to-one partnership, might be best. When considering *who* should be part of your community or who you *want* to be part of the community, think about the variance in the roles, characteristics, and/or perceptions you might want. This might include individuals at a similar career stage, individuals with varied perspectives or background experiences, or

individuals with a similar passion and expertise (Petroelje Stolle et al., 2019). Ask yourself, what are you looking for and how might you see yourself in or contributing to a community? What type of people do you want to work with or learn alongside?

Based on the research around building critical friendships, we have adapted MacPhail et al.'s (2024) suggestions for critical friend characteristics as a way to think about what you might need to consider for a small or large community of practice: Can you have reciprocal, collaborative relationships with these individuals? Are you all motivated (intrinsically) to engage in the community? You may also start with the nature of the work, whether it is a voluntary generic topic, a collaborative project or a thesis/dissertation. Peer-peer, student-supervisor, mentor-mentee, or novice-expert are examples of the varied relationships that might be a starting place for who could be in the community of practice. When determining *who* could be in your community, it is essential to make sure your reason for developing the community is clear; this will ensure you and the community members are on the same page.

4. What is the structure for your community?

Alongside the focus or goals of CoP comes the structure - level of formality and time-commitment - of the community. For instance, a *formal structure and non-intensive* schedule might be best suited to new CoP who have neutral goals (e.g., like the nuts and bolts or mechanics of academic work). As the community is just starting out, having a very clear and manageable agenda and time commitment is essential. Such a community might entail having monthly one-hour meetings where community members chat about the strategy and their experiences. In contrast, an *informal structure and intensive* schedule with a high time-commitment might suit an established CoP who are focused on highly personal goals (e.g., job or promotion application). More *semi-formal* communities might be less time-intensive than something formal and have more choice embedded for engagement, members can assist one another with more personal and tailored tasks. For example, if you are choosing to have a smaller one-to-one accountability partner, such a community or partnership might entail meeting to set out monthly work goals and breaking down the tasks needed to complete them. Then you might have weekly check-in emails to see how far one another has progressed on your tasks and get support to achieve your goals. Some examples of support might include Zoom pomodoro sessions where a timer is set for 25 minutes of focused work followed by a five-minute break or chat, repeated as many times as suits you.

5. How will the community be managed and communicate?

Your community of practice is likely to develop individualized strategies that meet the needs of your group, particularly around leadership, communication, and organization. In our experiences with CoP, a designated administrative person amongst the group supports continuity and keeps the community manageable and tied to the meaningful purpose or goals. Having administration in CoP can also assist with retaining members. For new, larger, formal communities meeting about neutral topics for regular periods of time, having a designated administrative person and a single or couple dedicated communication channels, like email and Zoom, might be most appropriate. For those smaller, more established CoP connecting at random intervals for personal topics, the load can be distributed (e.g., one person organizes the timer, another the meeting links) and the communication channels might be multiple and varied (e.g., email, Zoom, text, telephone). MacPhail et al. (2024) explain how individuals might start by getting familiar with each-others' contexts and determine how interactions could take place (e.g., video chats, Google Drive sharing, reflection sharing). Create a plan together for a meeting schedule, interactions, roles, and have a

clear outline for tasks, reflection items, etc. (e.g., prompts for initial reflections or create shared folder for group resource distribution).

6. How might you foster connection and meaningful engagement amongst your community?

A feeling of personal connection and meaningful engagement does not happen overnight within a community of practice; there has to be a phase of building rapport. For this reason, Ramani et al., (2021) argue the importance of making space for social interactions in CoP. For instance, initial meetings could start with an opening activity where members share based on a prompt. These prompts could be different each meeting and could be from a topic related to the community's interest (e.g., share a resource you use in your teaching practice) or an 'icebreaker' of sorts to get to know one another better (e.g., what is the root meaning of your name or were you named after something/someone?). The building of personal connection to stimulate engagement can also be achieved through the "demonstration of interest in each other's wellbeing, acknowledgement of diverse ideas, celebration of others' achievements, and allocation of time for informal interactions" (Ramani et al., 2021, p. 969). Other strategies our community has implemented in this respect include the scheduling of virtual social meetings without a specific agenda, which allow for the natural flow of conversation based on members' needs and wants and usually include a mix of life and work updates. Another high-yield, albeit resource-intensive, strategy for us has been making the effort to attend in-person conferences together (often with the additional purpose of presenting our shared work together).

7. How might you support a positive and productive community environment?

It is important for a community of practice be engaged, and engage as a group in a positive way. There are a number of strategies you might utilize and considerations you might keep in mind to contribute to a respectful and productive environment in your community of practice. Although not limited or specific to CoP, one example is to practice active listening, that is to offer the person speaking your full focus and to reinforce that you are listening through verbal and non-verbal techniques (e.g., restating the speaker's words in confirmation or eye-contact and head nodding while listening). One important consideration to be conscious of is that you will often get out of the community what you are willing to put into it. For instance, if you do not share with the group or do not share vulnerably (as appropriate), how can you expect others to? Related to this, while you want to ensure you are an active participant, be conscious that you are not taking up more than your fair share of the meeting time. While there may be instances when a community elects to focus in on one member's concerns for the majority or entirety of the meeting, be sure that this is the case before you take up that space, otherwise, step back and ensure other members get their time.

8. What are the reflection practices for the community of practice?

In order to determine if CoP are working as desired, reflection regarding the group's ability to meet the intended purpose and related goals is a critical step of the process. This does not necessarily need to follow a formal procedure; even informal reflection can allow members to gauge whether the community of practice is on the right track. Ramani et al. (2021) recommend reflecting during action (i.e., while work is being done or activities are ongoing), on action (i.e., evaluating the work or activities after completion), and for action (i.e., using lessons learned to plan ahead for future work or activities). Continuous reflection within the community will assist with goals being met, potential conflicts being resolved before escalating, and an ability to adapt

workload, ideas, and action. Consider co-developing reflection questions as a community and then launching them via on-line forms (e.g., Google Forms; for a larger community) or a reflection meeting (for a smaller community). Determining ahead of time how reflection will work in the community of practice you are involved with (e.g., formal/informal, frequency, method, etc.,) will help set you up for success! Reflecting and debriefing together can also help you strengthen your community or even better understand who you are and how you engage with CoP in the future.

9. Is there a need to transition the community?

The aforementioned reflection might reveal a need for the community to transition in some way. That is, it may be an appropriate time for the community to change its purpose, alter its structure, adjust its membership, take a hiatus, or even to intentionally conclude. For example, a decline in attendance or in the quality of participation might suggest that it is appropriate to refocus the community's purpose or restructure its format. Similarly, when the original purpose of the community has been met or the needs or contexts of the group members have shifted, it might be appropriate for the community to reconstitute, pause, or even conclude. We recommend that decisions around transition be discussed openly as a collective, just like all other decisions within a community of practice. We recognize that pausing or concluding a community that has been highly enjoyable and fruitful can be difficult, but offer the reminder that doing so (when the time is right) can allow for the opportunity to celebrate and honour what has been achieved (see next tip) as well as can create space for engagement in new CoP. As mentioned in our vignettes, it has been our experience that our community of practice engagement has been the starting point for our engagement in other rewarding communities and meaningful connection with others beyond our original community.

10. How will you celebrate success?

In academia, we are often so busy working on one task (or several) and then transitioning to the next item on our to-do list, that we do not stop to celebrate what we have accomplished. CoP can be a great avenue to support and spotlight what members are doing professionally and personally. Additionally, you might even achieve successes together as a community of practice. In fact, Ramani et al. (2021) recommend seeking out early opportunities for newly formed CoP to experience success together. Facilitating a win together early on can set the tone and get the group's momentum going. In our community of practice, one of our first wins was getting our group's presentation abstract accepted. This paved the way and inspired continued work (e.g., publishing our investigation of our community in Lorusso et al., 2020). Importantly, CoP are meant to be a supportive endeavour; celebrating success is not about competition, but rather about thriving together. Whether your CoP are celebrating the submission of a manuscript, getting an interview, or following through on a block of writing time, highlighting the wins of the community, and of particular individuals within the community, can lead to a more positive environment (and stronger community of practice).

Conclusion

As seen through this paper, CoP have many benefits for graduate students and ECAs such as providing a support system in uncertain times or having a critical friend to help you reflect on and improve your teaching. We have provided guiding questions and tips for forming and sustaining CoP, ranging from how to initiate a community to considerations of size, goal, structure,

connection and reflection practices. Now, it is up to you to reflect on your goals and learn from the shared examples from the PHE field if and when a community of practice can serve you on your journey in PHE.

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