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Cultivating a Community of Practice
to Enable Coach Development in Alpine Ski Coaches

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27 Abstract

28 Given the enduring focus of coach education on the development of professional
29 knowledge (e.g., technique, strategy, and tactics), the current study aimed to explore how a
30 Community of Practice (CoP) impacted coach development of interpersonal and intrapersonal
31 knowledge. Côté and Gilbert's (2009) definition of coaching expertise was used as a model to
32 observe learning in a community of practice (CoP; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). A
33 total of eight internationally qualified ski coaches (aged 27-44 years) took part in weekly
34 meetings over a period of six weeks, with the lead researcher cultivating a CoP and ensuring
35 coaching issues were the focus of discussion. Meetings were audio-recorded and the data
36 transcribed and analysed thematically. Results revealed that coaches developed both
37 interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge through enhanced emotional intelligence, gaining
38 an athlete-centred approach, storytelling, group reflection and changing role frames. The
39 findings are positioned within the extant literature, with implication for coach education
40 practice identified.

41 *Keywords:* interpersonal knowledge, intrapersonal knowledge, emotional
42 intelligence, coach education

43

44

Introduction

45 Sport coaching has been described as a complex and dynamic undertaking that requires
46 coaches to develop a diverse skill set in order to thrive in an environment characterised by
47 uncertainty (Carless & Douglas, 2011; Horton, 2015; Jones, 2007). Within this dynamic
48 landscape, coaching expertise has been conceptualised by various academics (e.g. Gilbert &
49 Côté, 2013; Schempp & McCullick, 2010) including Côté and Gilbert (2009) who identified
50 three fields of 'knowledge' essential to becoming a successful coach. Côté and Gilbert (2009)
51 defined coaching expertise as, "The consistent application of integrated professional,
52 interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence,
53 connection, and character in specific coaching contexts" (p.316). Professional knowledge is
54 considered to be sport-specific and procedural, such as the technical information required to
55 learn an effective tennis serve, or the tactical understanding to organise a defensive formation
56 in football. Interpersonal knowledge refers to a coach's ability to communicate with other
57 people, which informs the coach-athlete relationship as well as interaction with other
58 stakeholders such as parents, fellow coaches, and administrators. Finally, intrapersonal
59 knowledge is the ability for introspection and reflection, allowing a coach to review and
60 better understand / develop oneself and one's coaching.

61 While professional knowledge is an essential part of a coach's skill-set, it is arguably of
62 limited use without the interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge that affords the coach the
63 acumen to communicate that information to different people in ever changing circumstances
64 (Jones, 2009). According to Grecic and Collins (2013), placing an over-riding emphasis on
65 developing procedural knowledge, leads to a naive coaching epistemology with a learn-drill-
66 do philosophy, as opposed to a more holistic player-centred approach that constitutes a
67 sophisticated coaching epistemology. They argue that coaches subscribing to a naive
68 philosophy will express themselves through transmissive teaching, with the athlete reliant on

69 the coach for positive reinforcement and understanding. Whereas a more sophisticated
70 approach encourages a coach to empower their athletes to develop understanding and to
71 question traditional sources of information (Grecic & Collins, 2013). In order to adopt a
72 sophisticated epistemology of practice, it is suggested that a balance of Côté and Gilbert's
73 (2009) three knowledges is required, as it affords the coach the ability to communicate
74 effectively with the athlete, and possess the capacity to ensure continual development of their
75 own practice.

76 **Coaching as a Social Endeavour**

77 In acknowledging that sport coaching is essentially a social endeavour (Nash & English,
78 2015) that requires interpersonal skills, there is a need for coach education to explore social
79 issues, including for example; how to deal with athletes, parents, and peers who hold
80 conflicting philosophies, and supporting athletes who are experiencing social issues outside
81 of the sport. However, despite the need for better interpersonal knowledge to inform
82 communication and relationship building that can manage these complex social issues,
83 suggestions as to how to develop this type of coaching knowledge remain limited (Morgan,
84 Jones, Gilbourne & Llewellyn, 2013). Suggestions that exist have emerged from the
85 leadership literature (Greenockle, 2010) and been informed by the concept of emotional
86 intelligence (EI). Gilbert and Côté (2013) suggest EI provides a useful way to frame our
87 understanding of interpersonal knowledge in sport coaching. Chan and Mallett's (2011) work
88 highlights in particular, the utility of EI in ensuring high performance in both athletes and
89 coaches. Indeed, in his commentary of Chan and Mallett's (2011) work, Haime (2011)
90 proposed that EI is "the next frontier in high performance coaching" (p. 340). Chan and
91 Mallett adopted Mayer and Salovey's (1997) four-branch model of EI, which includes the
92 ability to: 1) perceive emotion; 2) facilitate thought as a consequence; 3) understand emotion;
93 and 4) manage emotion. Thus, it is stated that a coach in possession of these EI abilities is

94 more likely to understand their athletes, and subsequently behave in a way that encourages
95 effective relationship building and optimal performance (Gilbert & Côté, 2013).

96 **Reflective Practice in Coach Education**

97 In line with professional practice in other disciplines (Kelsey & Hayes, 2015), coach
98 education has attempted to cater for intrapersonal knowledge for some time under the
99 heading of reflective practice, as it is recognised that coaches require reflective skills in order
100 to learn from experience (Gilbert & Côté, 2013; Gilbert & Trudel, 2006). Gilbert and Trudel
101 (2012) indicate that reflective practice is necessary for a coach to engage in to become an
102 expert coach, although they also note that evidence regarding suitable conditions to nurture
103 this type of activity remains rare. In facilitating intrapersonal knowledge, effective reflective
104 practice allows a coach to better understand their own philosophy, approach, and knowledge-
105 base, alongside that of their athletes (Martindale & Collins, 2015). Intrapersonal knowledge
106 also drives self-development and according to Schempp et al. (2006) plays a large part in
107 progressing a proficient coach to the level of expert. It should also be recognised that
108 intrapersonal knowledge often drives the development of the other two knowledges outlined
109 in Côté and Gilbert's (2009) definition of coaching expertise.

110 Despite such conceptual advances in our understanding of interpersonal and
111 intrapersonal knowledge and the recognition of their importance, traditional coach education
112 programs continue to hold an almost exclusive focus on the development of professional
113 knowledge, with limited attention to interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge (Chesterfield,
114 Potrac & Jones, 2010; Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Morgan et al., 2013). Moreover, this focus is
115 more often than not, dictated by coach educators as opposed to the coaches themselves
116 (Jones, Morgan & Harris, 2012; Piggott, 2015). As a result, coaches continue to report how
117 coach education fails to help them gain the interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge
118 required to successfully manage the complex nature of working with people in dynamic

119 environments (Griffiths & Armour, 2013; Jones et al., 2012). Furthermore, Trudel and
120 Gilbert (2013) lament the paucity of unmediated learning environments in coach education
121 that might otherwise foster the development of reflective practices and drive creativity and
122 innovation amongst coaches.

123 If coach education is to address the lack of focus on interpersonal and intrapersonal
124 knowledge, a more detailed understanding of how they can be developed will benefit the
125 training process and enable coaches to become accomplished exponents of their craft
126 (Mallett, Rynne, & Dickens, 2013). Taking a historical perspective on coaching, Day (2013)
127 argues that modern-day coaches have a lot to learn from our Victorian predecessors, in how
128 (what they termed) ‘trainers’, would cultivate their coaching craft through social interaction
129 within tight-knit communities. It has been noted that “craft knowledge was embedded within
130 informal structures...created by coaches engaging in a process of collective learning” (Day,
131 2013, p. 8). Interestingly, socially driven learning of this nature has been advocated by
132 Wenger’s (1998) concept of communities of practice (CoP), which is a conceptual framework
133 suggested as a method to deliver coach education (Culver & Trudel, 2006).

134 **Communities of Practice**

135 Wenger (1998) used CoPs to describe how people learn through social interaction and
136 outlined that such communities needed to possess three defining characteristics: mutual
137 engagement (how community members interact); joint enterprise (common goals); and a
138 shared repertoire (collective outcomes to community proceedings). Within a CoP, learning
139 results from community members sharing experiences, with Wenger arguing that this is an
140 organic process that pervades our daily lives. As an example, a group of parents will share
141 and learn from stories of how to cope with the rigors of bringing up young children,
142 characterised by conversations that may happen outside school, in the coffee shop or online.
143 In this form, CoPs are learning opportunities that occur by chance with no formal

144 organisation. Wenger recognised this and developed his research to explore how the concept
145 of CoPs can be used more deliberately to engender learning (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder,
146 2002). Thus, by cultivating an environment whereby learning within a CoP can flourish, the
147 benefits that were once left to chance could be accessed with more certainty. He particularly
148 notes the value of facilitators to add structure to a CoPs learning opportunities, by offering
149 guidance to community members and encouraging reflection to identify issues for discussion
150 (Wenger et al., 2002). As suggested by Martindale and Collins (2015), “reflective practice
151 has become the central pillar of modern day professional practice” (p. 224) and is central to a
152 coach’s ability to develop interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge. Indeed, Wenger’s
153 discourse suggests that the use of group reflection within a CoP provides the ideal method for
154 developing interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge via reflective conversation. According
155 to Ghaye (2011) a reflective conversation is about articulating private conversations in public
156 company and discussing troublesome aspects of practice in order to transform one’s own
157 work.

158 **Communities of Practice in Sports Coaching**

159 Despite the potential relevance of CoPs to coach education and the links that can be
160 drawn from Wenger’s work regarding how coaches could generate interpersonal and
161 intrapersonal knowledge; the fact remains that very little research exists regarding the use of
162 CoPs as a means of providing coach education. A recent study by Jacobs, Knoppers, Diekstra
163 and Sklad (2015) concluded that when coaches are allowed to set the agenda for coach
164 education, as would be the case in a CoP, there is a greater likelihood of fostering better
165 interpersonal skills. Culver and Trudel (2006) formed a CoP to generate and explore coach
166 learning amongst a group of ski coaches, and this remains the seminal empirical study to
167 suggest CoPs as a model for coach education. They found the presence of a facilitator /
168 coordinator was necessary to nourish the CoP, and while the coaches did discuss

169 interpersonal issues, the study did not explicitly state what type of knowledge was developed
170 or how this occurred. More recently, Bertram, Culver and Gilbert (2016) provided direct
171 evidence that CoPs could offer coaches the opportunity to develop their coaching practice
172 and knowledge. The study reported specifically, that the coaches' communication styles (i.e.,
173 interpersonal knowledge) were developed as a response to being involved in a CoP, which is
174 an encouraging finding and in accord with the current study.

175 The concept of using CoPs as a means to deliver coach education has recently been
176 critiqued by Piggott (2015). He suggests CoP is a framework better suited to *describing* how
177 situated learning occurs rather than as a mechanism to *prescribe* how learning should occur.
178 In other words, while coach education may seek to espouse the principles of Wenger's
179 theory, the idea of cultivating a CoP as a delivery tool for coach education may be limited.
180 He argued that learning within a CoP is dictated by the shared knowledge, repertoire, and
181 existing paradigm of the coaches, and therefore may lack the level of criticality necessary to
182 inspire innovation. Certainly, CoP as a model for coach education is not wholly
183 unproblematic. Indeed, Culver and Trudel (2006) reported how the CoP in their study failed
184 to function without a suitable facilitator in place, with the competitive nature of sport often
185 cited as a barrier to shared learning within a sporting community (Culver, Trudel &
186 Werthner, 2009; Trudel & Gilbert, 2004). Furthermore, the accuracy by which Wenger's
187 (1998) work on CoPs is operationalized in coach education has been contested, with some
188 clarification offered by Culver and Trudel (2008). Whilst Culver and colleagues discussed the
189 similarities between related community activities, such as action learning, action science, and
190 people networking, they concluded that CoPs are characterised by "participants sustaining
191 mutual engagement in a joint enterprise and negotiating meanings around a communal
192 repertoire long enough to share significant learning" (Culver & Trudel, 2008, p.7).

193 **Research Aims**

194 Despite the acknowledged limitations, it is evident that a cultivated CoP holds the
195 potential to be an important vehicle for innovative coach education (Morgan et al., 2013). As
196 coaching is “a social practice created by the interaction of coaches, athletes and the club
197 environment” (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004, p.106), it is logical that coach education
198 should involve quality collaboration between peers in order to deepen required expertise. In
199 the context of extant research, the challenge is not to show that the landscape of coach
200 education needs to change, but to find ways to allow change to manifest in practice. Lee,
201 Chesterfield, Shaw and Ghaye (2009) suggested the need for a cultural change within coach
202 education. However, in order to support this change, confirmation is required to support the
203 suggestion that innovative approaches, including the use of CoPs, can advance coach
204 education and develop interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge (Morgan et al., 2013).
205 Accordingly, the current study examined whether the cultivation of a coach’s community of
206 practice (CCoP) could act as a vehicle to develop the interpersonal and intrapersonal
207 knowledge required to be an effective coach.

208 **Method**

209 **Methodology**

210 A case study approach was adopted to address the aims of this study, which is
211 appropriate when seeking to explain how or why a certain phenomenon works (Yin, 2009).
212 The case study approach is contextual, providing thick description to allow others to relate
213 the findings to their own situation (Taylor 2013). Searle (1999) further identified that a case
214 study approach lends itself to stimulating new research, gives insight into experience and
215 allows investigation of otherwise inaccessible situations. In this instance, the ‘case’ consisted
216 of ski coaches, with the study exploring whether / how they developed intrapersonal and
217 interpersonal skills through a CoP. Accordingly, the case study approach sought to enable a
218 deeper understanding and analysis of the role that CoPs can play in effective coach education.

219 Research indicates that coach education is aligning itself with concepts such as reflective
220 practice, mentoring and CoPs (Jones, 2006; Morgan et al., 2013). It is therefore appropriate to
221 adopt an epistemological approach for the current study, that is framed in a socially
222 constructed paradigm (Lave & Wenger, 1991), whereby data is collected and interpreted
223 through social interaction, and a sharing of experience through story telling (Douglas &
224 Carless, 2008; Gilbert, 2008; Jones, 2009). Accordingly, it follows that qualitative methods
225 have been employed to examine the case study in question (Simons, 2009; Smith & Caddick,
226 2012).

227 **Participants**

228 The study involved eight members of a ski school based in the French Alps, who all
229 consented to take part in the study. They were highly qualified and experienced ski
230 instructors who held the British Association of Snowsports Instructors Level 4 with coaching
231 experience ranging from 5 to 15 years. Seven were male, one was female (age = 27-44 years),
232 and they were engaged in similar work on the mountain, which constituted instructor training,
233 advanced level recreational skier coaching, and off-piste delivery (ski coaching away from
234 the secured runs, requiring expert knowledge of the sport and physical environment). While
235 convenience sampling (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) was utilised, the participants worked with
236 each other, and had previously indicated their desire to further themselves professionally.
237 Therefore, as they were willing / capable participants, the approach was considered
238 appropriate for a study of this type. Pseudonyms have been used to protect their actual
239 identity throughout the study.

240 **Procedure**

241 Once ethical approval was gained from the lead researcher's institution, the participants
242 were contacted in person to explain the purpose of the study and to ascertain their desire to
243 take part. On agreement to take part, they were sent an information sheet which outlined the

244 study in further detail, and which also explained their role within it. It was made clear to
245 coaches that they were free to participate in the CCoP without necessarily being a participant
246 in the research project. In line with ethical guidelines in case study research (Simons, 2009),
247 it was openly communicated that participants could withdraw from the study should any
248 anxiety or emotional discomfort occur. Moreover, the participants were assured that their
249 involvement within the study, and any sensitive information discussed as part of the study,
250 would only be known to other participants and the lead researcher. Thereafter, participants
251 offered informed consent before the study commenced.

252 **Cultivating a Community of Practice**

253 In order to establish a CoP, the lead researcher invited the participants to engage in a
254 series of informal meetings that consisted of round-table discussions. The coaches
255 affectionately referred to the meetings as “group therapy” (GT), which arguably suggests an
256 implicit level of benefit. There was a naturally occurring, six week period of time defined by
257 the low season between school holidays, during which the coaches had more time to engage
258 with the CoP. As a consequence, for the purpose of this study, there were a total of six group
259 meetings that took place weekly and lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. In line with the
260 suggestions of Wenger et al. (2002), the opportunity for learning within the CoP was
261 maximized by the lead researcher occupying a secondary role in the research project; that of
262 CoP facilitator. Culver (2004) recalls her suitability for the role of facilitator, citing her
263 experience and achievements in ski racing as a means of establishing trust, respect, and
264 currency within the facilitator role. Likewise, in this study the lead researcher represented a
265 senior figure amongst the coaches with a greater breadth and depth of experience; both sport
266 specific and in the academic background of coaching. Nevertheless, the relationship was one
267 with no superiority of rank.

268 In order to cultivate the CoP, the facilitator initially organised the logistics of the
269 meetings and provided guidance to the coaches to ensure pertinent reflection occurred during
270 each of those meetings. In line with Culver and Trudel (2006), the coaches were encouraged
271 to prepare topics for discussion at each GT session using the following instructions: prepare
272 to discuss: i) something that has been particularly successful in your coaching during the
273 preceding week / current season; ii) something that has posed a problem during your
274 coaching; iii) an idea that you have not yet managed to realise, about which you would like
275 the thoughts of your peers. These guidelines were re-distributed and reinforced to each
276 participant before each meeting.

277 As the GT sessions progressed all participants were encouraged to raise topics and to
278 contribute to discussion. Meetings were managed by the facilitator who ensured less vocal
279 members of the group had equal opportunity for involvement. The facilitator followed similar
280 procedures to those suggested by Gilbert, Gallimore, and Trudel (2009), that included in
281 particular, the concept of providing structure to guide discussion and learning rather than
282 prescribing the nature of proceedings within the CoP. On two occasions (GT4 and GT5) the
283 facilitator, whilst playing the role of *guide*, introduced discussion points to prompt debate
284 (Culver & Trudel, 2008); this included the presentation of an academic article for discussion
285 (Jones, 2009), and the use of video footage to explore approaches to teaching from different
286 perspectives.

287 As the meetings progressed, the facilitator role became less about organising and more
288 about highlighting themes within discussions. This process was subjective and driven by the
289 facilitator's perception of the situation, whereby the facilitator attempted continually to draw
290 understanding from the broad discussions.

291 **Data Collection**

292 Data were collected over the six-week period in which the GT sessions took place. This
293 occurred during the Alpine winter season between December and January. The duration of
294 the six GT meetings ranged from 60-120 minutes, with each meeting audio-recorded using
295 recording software (*GarageBand version 6.0.5*) on a laptop computer. Attendance at GT
296 sessions was generally high (GT1: 6 attendees; GT2: 7 attendees; GT3: 6 attendees; GT4: 5
297 attendees; GT5: 6 attendees; GT6: 7 attendees). One week after the final GT session, the
298 participants met to provide feedback. This was completed via a group discussion by the
299 participants, without the presence of the facilitator (lead researcher), which allowed them to
300 speak freely without constraint. In addition to the data collected via the GTs and participant
301 feedback, the researcher kept a reflective journal throughout the process, with entries made
302 after every meeting. This process involved deep reflection of participant behaviour, facilitator
303 behaviour, and areas for discussion at future meetings. Such reflections were framed by the
304 direct consideration of whether interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge were being
305 demonstrated / developed.

306 **Data Analysis**

307 All data (from the GT sessions, participant feedback and facilitator's reflective journal)
308 were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which allowed for an in-
309 depth and detailed understanding of the case study. The process of analysis started with the
310 lead researcher transcribing data verbatim and (re)reading the transcripts in order to become
311 fully immersed. Through a process of line-by-line coding, evidence of coach learning was
312 sought (Braun & Clarke, 2006). On further analysis (i.e., constant comparison of codes and
313 themes), data were assigned to the two main themes of *interpersonal knowledge* and
314 *intrapersonal knowledge*. These themes were placed under the overarching theme of *what the*
315 *coaches learned due to the existence of a CoP*, to provide evidence that addressed directly the
316 aims of the study.

317 **Trustworthiness of Data**

318 To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, several approaches were employed. Sparkes
319 and Smith (2014) stress the importance of *disciplined subjectivity* where there is a check on
320 the privilege afforded the researcher in their interpretations and constructions of reality. In
321 this instance, the second author acted as a critical friend to discuss points of interest. Thus,
322 the lead author was challenged to reflect on the processes adopted, and the decisions made
323 during the data analysis, to ensure reflexivity. Moreover, the methodological processes
324 adopted in the study were transparent and documented throughout, which allowed for what
325 Sparkes and Smith (2014) term a “confirmability audit” (p.181). This along with the extended
326 engagement between researcher and participants lends credibility to the data (Smith &
327 Caddick, 2012).

328 **Results**

329 The findings of the study revealed that participants developed interpersonal knowledge
330 through emotional intelligence, an athlete / client centred approach, and storytelling.
331 Furthermore, intrapersonal knowledge evolved through group reflection and changing role
332 frame. However, it must also be noted that at times, both inter- and intra-personal knowledge
333 developed as a result of the same processes, as indicated in the following section.

334 In order for the aims of the study to be fully explored and to understand *what the coaches*
335 *learned due to the existence of a CoP*, it was necessary to first establish that a CCoP had been
336 cultivated. According to Wenger (1998) CoPs are characterised by mutual engagement, joint
337 enterprise and a shared repertoire of knowledge - and each of these requirements were found
338 in the data. Drawing on the author’s reflective journal (RJ), by GT2 there was a sense
339 amongst the group that they were involved in something valuable and were interacting in a
340 meaningful way (mutual engagement), “By the end of the session the guys were buzzing, we
341 went for a drink afterwards and everyone was talking about ‘group’ as it has been christened.

342 I think the team felt they were doing something a bit special”. Further evidence of this
343 emerged later in the process when Jim summed up his experience of engaging with the CCoP,
344 “That’s the beauty of what this has done for me; I’ve got loads of different ways to pitch stuff
345 now. You know, I’m just taking stuff from everyone” (Jim, GT6). In this quote we see
346 evidence of the joint enterprise, and the shared repertoire created by the CCoP.

347 **Interpersonal Knowledge**

348 Interpersonal knowledge is concerned with how the participants related to their athletes
349 of varying ages, backgrounds, ability levels and in different social contexts (Côté & Gilbert,
350 2009). The data revealed evidence of the coaches developing interpersonal knowledge
351 through the CCoP via enhanced emotional intelligence (EI), a move towards an athlete-
352 centred approach, and as a result of storytelling.

353 **Emotional intelligence.** The following extract demonstrated Tom’s ability to perceive
354 and identify emotion in his clients, which informed his interpersonal approach and style of
355 communication. In discussing how to scaffold athlete learning by asking questions, he
356 described to the group how he often recognised that younger people felt embarrassed with the
357 prospect of giving the wrong answer and so instead, said nothing when asked for their
358 opinion. When referring to ski technique, Tom found that miming the answer helped inspire
359 client confidence and encourage reflective conversation during his coaching:

360 **Tom** ...when you’re asking people questions...I’ve noticed now that rather than
361 standing there and waiting for the answer I’ll cheat and I’ll do [act out] what the answer
362 is. So if the question is what do you do at the start of the turn? I’ll stand there and I’ll do
363 this [mimes a turn with his hands].

364 **Bill** I do that a bit

365 **Jim** It’s a TEFL thing that we use a lot in the classroom, called eliciting...

366 **Bill** EF what?

367 **Jim** TEFL – Teaching English as a foreign language. You’re eliciting an answer.
368 You can do it by miming or by stuttering the word, it gives them [the learners] that
369 mental cue...

370 **Tom** Because often they do know it... just recently I had these two teenage girls
371 and they were not that keen to open their mouths, but [I know] they’re thinking ‘what
372 I’m thinking is right because it’s what he’s doing’ and it gives them the confidence, you
373 know.

374 **Trevor** It’s a bit like asking a leading question isn’t it. Like you say Tom, you give
375 them the confidence to answer it – nice. (GT5)

376 While this extract demonstrates how Tom’s emotional intelligence helped shape his practice,
377 by sharing it with the group his confidence has grown. As the discussion continues amongst
378 the coaches Tom comments:

379 Something I’ve picked up from here [the CCoP] is I’ve tried to drop all technical jargon.
380 I try and use words that to them [clients] make sense, I might get slated on a training
381 course for using them but for them it makes sense... I’m a bit more comfortable to step
382 outside my own comfort zone now. (Tom, GT5)

383 **An athlete / client centred approach.** This finding relates to how the coaches developed
384 their ability to place athlete / client needs at the centre of their coaching, thereby enhancing
385 their interpersonal knowledge. For Jim and Clive, and to a lesser extent Tom, this
386 represented a notable change in their practice. The group discussion allowed them to bring an
387 otherwise tacit behaviour into explicit focus. As an example, Clive shared the realisation that
388 he needed to encourage his clients to take responsibility for their own learning in order to
389 succeed.

390 So, last year I had a guy called Leonard, who was probably the most awkward client I
391 have ever skied with. He was just so difficult to teach, he wanted feedback after every

392 pitch, so I turned it all back on him. I set him lots of challenges and helped him to
393 achieve them. I said ‘look I can tell you as much as you want but you need to do it
394 yourself... do you know what I mean?’ Lay off the ski chat and use your communication
395 skills to make them [clients] feel comfortable. (Clive, GT1)

396 Despite Clive explaining how he encouraged this particular client to take more ownership of
397 his own learning, the ability to understand his clients remained an issue in subsequent
398 sessions. However, the following vignette demonstrates how a reflective conversation in the
399 CoP allowed Clive to empathise more with his clients and to set goals that were more aligned
400 to their needs as opposed to his own.

401 I’ve done twelve one-on-one lessons with her, it’s quite a lot of time. So you say [to the
402 client] – ‘let’s start again’. You’ve got skidding and carving [types of ski turn that
403 represent opposite ends of a spectrum, one fast one slow]. Do you understand it?” And
404 you can see her [the client] looking at the sky and she’s like... ‘No’. So you go through it
405 again and she doesn’t get it, so I’m kind of stuck...(Clive, GT4)

406 At this stage of the GT, the other coaches offered solutions but Clive became more frustrated
407 as he had already tried what they suggested. Through discussion, it became evident that
408 Clive’s sessions always had a technical focus; and as far as he was concerned this normally
409 worked.

410 **Trevor** Clive do you think that her enjoyment is being hampered by the fact that she
411 can’t progress or is she quite happy doing what she does?

412 **Clive** No, because she is sensing that I’m frustrated.

413 **Wendy** Right so if you weren’t frustrated would she be quite happy?

414 **Clive** Yeah, she doesn’t know any different does she?

415 **Trevor** Do you think it's important though, that she has a goal that she wants to
416 achieve for her? It sounds at the moment as though she has quite a good relationship with
417 you and she wants to please you.

418 **Chris** What is her goal?

419 **Clive** She's just really keen.

420 **Bill** To please Clive...(GT4)

421 Clive left GT4 with no firm answers to his quandary but with a raised awareness of his
422 practice via the reflective conversation. GT5 saw Clive return and recount how he had
423 experimented with an athlete-centred focus and had instead worked on his client's ability to
424 make small improvements during the sessions. Activities were focused on developing her
425 confidence, which evidently appealed to the client as she experienced obvious and tangible
426 benefits.

427 **Clive** She skied the best she has today and she was more tired because she's putting
428 in more effort.

429 **Jim** Oh, good stuff mate

430 **Clive** But I also noticed myself that the last two sessions have been much more fun,
431 I've been aware that... Don't be frustrated [with yourself] if she's not improving at the
432 level you want her to improve. (GT5)

433 The benefits of reflection within and as a result of the CoP had borne fruit as Clive found a
434 way to focus on his client's needs, and then reduce his frustration. In taking an athlete-
435 centred approach his enjoyment levels had increased, alongside the client's levels of
436 competence and confidence.

437 **Storytelling.** Storytelling was used on a number of occasions by the participants to
438 establish and 'work through' the issue to be discussed and thereby develop interpersonal
439 knowledge (and at times, intrapersonal knowledge) within the CoP. To provide context to the

440 relevant extracts, a passage from the author's reflective journal written after the relevant GT
441 is presented first.

442 I feel I need to document the conditions on the mountain this week and how they framed
443 this evening's discussions. Continued heavy snowfall had created a really dangerous
444 situation with the mountain stormbound for several days before blue skies returned. The
445 eventual change in the weather created a treacherous combination of deep fresh snow
446 with perfect visibility. The coaches knew the snow was only weakly bonded to the
447 slopes, the avalanche risk was high yet everywhere appeared wonderfully enticing.
448 Clive's primary concern was for the safety of his clients. However, he needed to balance
449 this with facilitating the experience they had paid for. The clients expected fantastic,
450 potentially once in a lifetime skiing, with Clive on hand to develop their performance.
451 However, Clive had one client who wouldn't listen to his coaching or to his safety
452 instructions, which was a worrying issue. For me today's exchanging of stories was a
453 seminal learning experience (RJ).

454 **Clive** I'm coaching off-piste and this guy doesn't want to be coached, he's clicking
455 his poles, he's a total activist [reference to learning style], and he's just making my life
456 really difficult, my brain's doing a thousand things, trying to keep them [the clients] all
457 safe, you know... we went into Lievre Blanc [an off-piste route well known in the area to
458 be dangerous], some pretty dodgy pitches and he would ski past me and then he set a slab
459 off [type of avalanche], down this gully, you know...[I said to him] "I've asked you to
460 ski above me, you're a total danger to yourself"...[he had] no idea.

461 **Jim** I was actually in a really similar situation, it was really difficult... I had one
462 client in the group who was an absolute **** [expletive]. He was coaching over me, for
463 example people would ask a question and he'd answer it. I was a little bit anxious... you
464 know we had loads and loads of snow...they'd [the clients] been chomping at the bit the

465 first few days because they hadn't had any terrain to ski and then all of a sudden it
466 dumped a metre [of snow]. He was a fantastic skier... but he was an ***** [expletive].
467 And he overtook me, and the rest of the group followed, I was skiing the route blind, I
468 didn't know if there were cliffs there...

469 **Trevor** But in terms of reflecting on what happened...

470 **Jim** What should I have done? (GT1)

471 Through the process of storytelling Clive then shares his solution, which becomes a part of
472 the shared repertoire of the community and presents Jim with material to inform future
473 practice.

474 **Clive** Well, this guy, on the second day I offered him a refund and it totally changed
475 his attitude. I pulled him aside and I said 'listen mate, you're the best skier in the group,
476 these guys want a lot of coaching but you just want to charge [ski fast]... so if you want
477 a refund, take it...' and he went 'no no, I want to come skiing [with you]'. So I said [to
478 the client] 'it would be quite nice if you had a bit of consideration for the other guys [in
479 the group] because they want coaching, so I wanna try. I'm trying to keep them and you
480 happy... he was like 'OK cool'.

481 **Trevor** It's interesting... you got the reaction you wanted... you felt frustrated and you
482 wanted to be angry but you actually showed him a caring side and you said 'I want to
483 look after you, I want to give you a refund', and you actually got the result you wanted.

484 **Jim** It's clever psychology because you're throwing it back on him. Then he
485 realised he was being an idiot... and I should probably have done something similar [with
486 my client]. (GT1)

487 The following extract is again taken from the author's reflective journal written after GT1,
488 which provides further reflection on the role of storytelling to develop interpersonal
489 knowledge.

490 I read a paper on storytelling (Douglas & Carless, 2008) prior to this evening's session,
491 one quote had stayed with me; 'humans are storied beings and communication through
492 the telling of stories is a fundamental human activity'. This was so evident today when
493 both Clive and Jim painted vivid pictures of complex coaching issues. They shared how
494 they felt and I was excited that they had opened themselves up and shared personal
495 moments so early in this process. (RJ)

496 **Intrapersonal Knowledge**

497 It is implicit within the previous prose that the development of intrapersonal knowledge
498 informed the emerging interpersonal knowledge documented. However, the data evidently
499 revealed that the mechanism by which the participants developed intrapersonal knowledge
500 was often through group reflection, and the coaches becoming more aware of their changing
501 role frame.

502 **Group reflection.** In GT3 there was notable evidence of group reflection that resulted in
503 the coaches (Jim in particular) realising: a) their coaching approach was not always working
504 and; b) their peers often coached in a different way. As an example, the group discussed
505 whether they used an input or an outcome focus when coaching. An input focus would
506 encourage learners to apply a certain technique such as placing more weight on one ski than
507 another, whereas an outcome focus would encourage the learner to concentrate on the result
508 of the input, which might be the shape of the turn or the speed of descent. Pete and Clive saw
509 an outcome focus as a more productive way to ensure learning. However, Jim and Tom felt
510 obliged to give the clients inputs, something more tangible and instant (professional
511 knowledge), especially as they were working in a commercial environment. The following
512 extract demonstrates Jim's reluctance to move away from a technical focus that is associated
513 with professional knowledge. We see through the process of group reflection that Jim's

514 intrapersonal knowledge begins to develop as he realises that his way of working may be
515 limited:

516 I'm getting a little bit frustrated at the moment because I feel like I'm stuck in a rut. I've
517 got a mould and a way that I want people to ski and its interesting talking in these
518 sessions, because Clive has a completely different way of working to me. I'm trying to
519 shape people into a particular way... and it's probably not always the most effective way
520 of doing it... I feel like I'm doing the same thing day in day out, things I know work.

521 (Jim, GT3)

522 In response, Pete explained how he helps clients progress without following a prescribed
523 checklist of technical points that are needed in order to ski.

524 I very much don't teach to a template... for me we're all different, we're built
525 differently, we have different psychological mind-sets and as a result we're going to use
526 slightly different movement patterns to do the same thing... I've always tried to use as
527 few words as possible. So instead of actually saying you're in the back seat [your centre
528 of mass is behind your base of support], you twist the shoulders, and you're making zig
529 zag turns [sharp, rushed turns]... You could get the same result from making them [the
530 client] ski in a smooth arc by just asking them to make a smooth arc? (Pete, GT3).

531 This reflection is driven by a collective reflective conversation within the CoP and is
532 something that would not necessarily have happened had Jim been left to reflect alone. In
533 recounting his thoughts, Pete has helped create a shared repertoire for the group to access.

534 Development of intrapersonal knowledge was also evident for Tom as he listened to the
535 above conversation. With less experience than the other coaches, one could argue that Tom
536 may not have discovered this way of working for some time. However, through engagement
537 in the CoP, he is provided with the shared repertoire emerging from more experienced
538 coaches, he is able to use this to reflect on his own approach and hence advance his own

539 intrapersonal knowledge through exposure to group reflection. “So you’re getting them from
540 *a* to *d* without going through *b* and *c*?” (Tom, GT3).

541 It is important to acknowledge the warning offered by Piggott (2015), that CoPs are
542 sometimes predisposed to reproduce knowledge inherent within the group as opposed to
543 affording a critical lens. While in this case, learning may well have been limited for Pete, the
544 data appears to represent a critical learning experience for Tom.

545 **Changing role frame.** Jim’s frustrations regarding his style of coaching, were not
546 entirely resolved in GT3 however there was evidence that a process of change had started as
547 Jim began to appreciate that his role in the coaching process could be different to his normal
548 way of working. “I’ve been experimenting a lot, I haven’t had an awful lot of success but I’m
549 trying to change” (Jim, GT3). That intrapersonal knowledge was emerging through the CoP
550 can be further evidenced with an extract from the author’s reflective journal that noted how
551 the coaches started to explore their coaching role frames.

552 An interesting dilemma surfaced during the session. Do we as coaches stick to our
553 beliefs even when we only have a client for 3hrs, and so deliver what the client needs to
554 improve, or do we go for a quick fix so that the client leaves the lesson having
555 experienced what they perceive to be progress? Some of the group are quite limited in
556 their teaching by working to templates, while the more experienced coaches talked more
557 about experimenting and working with the client to solve problems. I noticed the coaches
558 become more aware of how they work, with Jim in particular being obliged to question
559 his practice (RJ).

560 Gilbert and Trudel (2001) explained that a “reflective conversation is triggered by
561 dilemmas of practice and is bound by the way practitioners view their professional roles,
562 referred to as role frames” (p.17). In the above extract we can see how such a dilemma of
563 practice drives discussion regarding role frames. In GT5 and GT6 Jim’s role frame changed

564 from a coach-centred way of working where his practice was dictated by professional
565 knowledge, to an athlete-centred approach where he became more aware of what the client
566 was feeling, “you’ve got to read them [the client]... and work out how you adapt to them”
567 (Jim, GT5).

568 One could argue that this was a development of his interpersonal knowledge however, it
569 would not have happened without the raised self-awareness that comes with increased
570 intrapersonal knowledge. It was apparent that this change started in GT3 but was given
571 impetus by an article entitled *The Smiling Gallery* (Jones, 2009) that was used as an artefact
572 to incite discussion. The article reviews the importance of a coach caring for their athletes
573 and emphasises the role of interpersonal knowledge, which is often neglected in comparison
574 to the professional knowledge gained from formal coach education. Jim was among the few
575 who read this article, and in GT6 he was invited to offer a précis for the group. Jim did this
576 articulately and it appeared to have the effect of bringing some of Jim’s own reflections into
577 clearer focus:

578 Well, for me it was about realising that he [the article author] was learning about himself,
579 and how he was being perceived as closed by other people. And I definitely saw parallels
580 in me... and certainly when we’re not 100% motivated I can go a bit introverted... and it
581 really made me think about how you can exacerbate a problem by being closed, it’s not
582 helping the situation. But when he opened up, all of a sudden he got quite a good
583 outcome. (Jim, GT6).

584 As GT6 progressed Jim referred back to the article again, making reference to the importance
585 of relating to people.

586 There’s that thing [in the article] about coaching manuals that I think is interesting. I’ve
587 got all these certificates, passed... ticked all the boxes, know all the drills... I know

588 structure of practice, I know it all but... can I relate to people? And he [the author of the
589 paper] was asking himself that same question (Jim, GT6).

590 Jim demonstrated how he benefited from group reflection as changes in his intrapersonal
591 knowledge were triggered by discussion, which affected his coaching role frame. In turn, his
592 interpersonal knowledge adapted to meet the requirements of this adjusted role frame
593 providing further evidence that interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge are integrally
594 linked and in this instance developed through Jim's engagement in an environment that was
595 conducive to group reflection within the CoP.

596 **Discussion**

597 The purpose of the current study was to explore how a CCoP might act as a vehicle to
598 develop the interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge required to be an effective coach. The
599 results provided evidence that the CCoP generated interpersonal knowledge through EI and
600 storytelling, with a move towards a more athlete-centred approach. Equally, evidence was
601 found to support the development of intrapersonal knowledge through group reflection and a
602 change in role frame. Although distinct examples are taken from the transcript to support
603 each sub-theme it is clear in reviewing the evidence that they are interconnected.

604 In reviewing the data it would appear that both EI and an athlete-centred approach to
605 coaching emerge as outcomes of storytelling, which is directly in line with the work of
606 Douglas and Carless (2008). This suggests that in providing the coaches the opportunity to
607 engage with the joint enterprise of recounting real world problems, the CCoP has acted as a
608 vehicle to drive interpersonal knowledge. Similarly, in considering intrapersonal knowledge
609 the evidence suggests the platform provided by the CCoP encourages group reflection with
610 the consequence of a change in role frame, which in some cases resulted in a change in
611 practice. Group reflection is a concept widely promoted in the literature as a means to
612 generate reflective conversations (e.g. Cropley, Miles & Peel, 2012; Huntely & Kentzer,

613 2013) yet there remains an underwhelming body of research that attempts to document the
614 causality behind changes in coaching practice. Recent work by Betram et al. (2016) goes
615 some way to address this issue by implementing Wenger, Trayner and de Laat's (2011)
616 conceptual framework for measuring the value to emerge from a CoP and attributes changes
617 in coaches' practice directly to interactions with members of the CoP. The results of the
618 current study lend further weight to this proposition, especially in the case of Clive's story of
619 how he changed his approach to working with his female client in GT5.

620 In line with Côté and Gilbert's (2009) *integrated* model for coaching expertise, the
621 notion of interrelatedness can also be seen across the main themes of interpersonal and
622 intrapersonal knowledge. With changes in coaching practice ensuing from storytelling and
623 group reflection, one area of knowledge rarely surfaced without an inherent link to the other.
624 For example, when Tom recounted his story of how he scaffolded the dialogue with under
625 confident teenagers, he highlighted to the group the importance of EI in a way that echoes the
626 four-branch model proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1997); to 1) perceive emotion; 2)
627 facilitate thought as a consequence; 3) understand emotion; and 4) manage emotion. Tom's
628 decision to mime a possible solution demonstrated an understanding of emotion that allowed
629 him to manage the emotional response in his client and increase the *athlete* outcome of
630 confidence (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

631 This represents coach learning in more than one way. First, in vocalising his action Tom
632 contributes to his own self-awareness (intrapersonal knowledge), moving from a place of
633 tacit to explicit understanding. Wenger (1998) refers to this as "reification – the process of
634 giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into
635 'thingness'...around which the negotiation of meaning becomes organised" (p.58). Second,
636 Tom contributed to the shared repertoire of what the coaches saw as appropriate behaviour
637 (Wenger, 1998), which therefore contributed to the development of interpersonal knowledge

638 in the other group members. Not only is this an interesting learning episode but also on a
639 deeper level it represents a fundamental obligation for any coach in considering how they
640 relate to their athletes: “We are to give them the confidence and the responsibility to try; a
641 secure base from which to risk failure” (Jones, 2009, p.388).

642 Here the context of a story and the sharing of experience brought learning to life (Culver
643 & Trudel, 2006; Douglas & Carless, 2008); that the story emanates from the group is even
644 more meaningful representing a bottom-up approach to coach development (Jacobs et al.,
645 2015). Left to the often didactic approach of formal education this topic may well have gone
646 unexplored. Indeed, there is a consistent call in the sports coaching literature for innovative
647 ways to approach coach education (Morgan et al., 2013) and nascent research to support
648 CoPs as a model for on going professional development of coaches (Bertram et al., 2016). To
649 this end the current study demonstrated the value of contextually driven education and of
650 learning through social interaction. Specifically, the results under the sub-theme of *an athlete*
651 */ client centred approach* saw the focus among the coaches shift from exploring professional
652 knowledge to developing interpersonal knowledge. Here through their own reflection
653 (emerging intrapersonal knowledge) the coaches addressed the complexity of coaching
654 (Jones, 2006) and the idiosyncrasy of human behaviour, and began to delve into motivation,
655 the coach-athlete relationship and the importance of goal negotiation. To many coaches these
656 topics remain theory-laden concepts that perhaps resonate with days of formal education and
657 qualification courses (Armour, 2010). However, in this instance, when contextualised by
658 personal experience, such considerations were usefully explored.

659 In the vignette (presented in the results) that documents Clive’s journey towards a more
660 athlete-centred approach we see further evidence of the inter-connectedness of interpersonal
661 and intrapersonal knowledge. Although Clive does not reach a finite solution – there is rarely
662 one proven answer to coaching issues (Trudel, Gilbert & Werthner, 2010) – the coaches’ joint

688 remains a dearth of empirical research regarding how we develop such skills and knowledge
689 (MacNamara & Stoszowski, 2015). In addition to offering a better understanding of how
690 coaches develop interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, the findings of the present study
691 add to the small body of empirical literature regarding how coaches learn through
692 engagement in a community of practice (Bertram et al., 2016; Culver et al., 2009; Culver &
693 Trudel, 2006; Trudel & Gilbert, 2004). When considering interpersonal knowledge, the
694 interpretation of the data indicates that the coaches developed their emotional intelligence and
695 moved away from a coach-centred philosophy towards an athlete-centred approach to
696 coaching. It was also found that this was facilitated through storytelling (Douglas & Carless,
697 2008) within the CoP. When considering intrapersonal knowledge, the results suggest that
698 group reflection was central in increasing the coach's self-awareness and a change of role
699 frame in line with an athlete-centred philosophy. In addition to the findings of coach learning
700 there was some evidence of an impact on the athlete (client) outcomes of competence,
701 character and confidence (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

702 Despite these encouraging outcomes, there were limitations to the study. The use of
703 semi-structured interviews following the six GT sessions to collate the thoughts of the
704 participants would have provided deeper evidence to support the findings. The focus group
705 offered some interesting feedback and insights, however, the fact that this process was
706 conducted with all the participants present may have encouraged overly positive comments
707 from those who were vocal. Additionally, while the study was conducted over a six-week
708 phase of a winter season, a longer period of data collection that ran across an entire season (4-
709 5 months) would have resulted in a more detailed understanding of how interpersonal and
710 intrapersonal knowledge was developed.

711 While containing limitations, this study provides evidence that a cultivated CCoP can
712 facilitate the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge. There are a number

713 of practical implications that coach educators should consider in order to use CCoPs when
714 enabling the professional development of coaches in the future. First, the literature has
715 suggested sport coaching is poorly placed to benefit from the sharing of good practice given
716 the competitive rivalry that often exists between coaches (Culver et al., 2009; Trudel &
717 Gilbert, 2004). In the present study there were no such rivalries, which helped establish an
718 open environment more likely to benefit the coaches. Coaches therefore, should endeavour to
719 develop collaborative relationships with peers, for this will serve to enhance development.
720 Second, having a six-week period for a group of coaches to work together is a relative luxury
721 in coaching; it is suggested that this played an important role in the success of the CCoP.
722 While it is recognised that in the broader reality of coach education such time is not always
723 available, coaches should endeavour to develop their own CoPs (formal or informal) through
724 networking opportunities. Finally, the role of the facilitator has not been fully explored in this
725 paper, yet as has been suggested in previous research (Culver & Trudel, 2006) this is an
726 important function in ensuring the successful cultivation of a CoP and the interpretation of
727 the findings. Therefore, coach educators must consider how to prepare people to be effective
728 in this role.

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