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

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Abstract

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

Keywords: interpersonal knowledge, intrapersonal knowledge, emotional intelligence, coach education

Introduction

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

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

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

Coaching as a Social Endeavour

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

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

Reflective Practice in Coach Education

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

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

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

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

Communities of Practice

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

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

Communities of Practice in Sports Coaching

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

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

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

Research Aims

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

Method

Methodology

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

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

Participants

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

Procedure

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

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

Cultivating a Community of Practice

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

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

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

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

Data Collection

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

Data Analysis

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

Trustworthiness of Data

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

Results

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

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

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

Interpersonal Knowledge

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

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

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

Bill I do that a bit

Jim It's a TEFL thing that we use a lot in the classroom, called eliciting…

Bill EF what?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Clive No, because she is sensing that I'm frustrated.

Wendy Right so if you weren't frustrated would she be quite happy?

Clive Yeah, she doesn't know any different does she?

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

Chris What is her goal?

Clive She's just really keen.

Bill To please Clive…(GT4)

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

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

Jim Oh, good stuff mate

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jim What should I have done? (GT1)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Intrapersonal Knowledge

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

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

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

> I'm getting a little bit frustrated at the moment because I feel like I'm stuck in a rut. I've got a mould and a way that I want people to ski and its interesting talking in these sessions, because Clive has a completely different way of working to me. I'm trying to shape people into a particular way... and it's probably not always the most effective way of doing it… I feel like I'm doing the same thing day in day out, things I know work. (Jim, GT3)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion

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

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

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

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

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

663 enterprise evoked a level of reflection that allowed Clive the opportunity to start thinking
664 differently about his practice, and develop interpersonal knowledge and the competence of
665 his client.

666 Storytelling was presented as a sub-theme to evidence the development of
667 interpersonal knowledge, however as discussed earlier the act of storytelling often generates
668 intrapersonal knowledge through the reification of tacit knowledge. Gilbert (2008) noted that,
669 "great coaches are great storytellers, so it is natural that they will enjoy listening to – and
670 reflecting on – sport stories" (p.520). In the way that storytelling is infectious, one tale acting
671 as a catalyst for the next the coaches consistently used stories to set the coaching issues
672 (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). These stories often defied one-dimensional resolutions, they were
673 contextually rich and represented situations to which the group could relate (Douglas &
674 Carless, 2008). Jones et al. (2012) indicated a need to use more real-life problems in coach
675 education as the setting for learning and the application of theory. In the current study the
676 issues raised by Clive in his story of the challenges of managing difficult characters when
677 skiing off-piste are less likely to have been discussed in the objective, often decontextualized
678 setting of formal coach education (Jones & Turner, 2006). Storytelling is also instructive in
679 how an individual makes sense of what was otherwise a privately constructed interpretation
680 of events. With this in mind one could argue that although Jim appeared to be the recipient of
681 learning as a result of Clive's solution, Clive himself reified his experience, which reinforced
682 how he might manage similar incidents in the future and develop the character of his clients.

683 **Summary and Conclusion**

684 In summary, Côté and Gilbert's (2009) model for coaching expertise provides a clear
685 way to view the knowledge a coach requires in order to be successful. However, despite
686 recent work that suggests that interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge contribute to
687 transformational leadership in youth development (Vella, Oades, & Crow, 2013) there

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

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

While containing limitations, this study provides evidence that a cultivated CCoP can 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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