

12-15-2016

Prepared Practitioners: An Evaluation of the Professional Development Experiences of Sport-Based Youth Development Practitioners

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Recommended Citation

DeRosa, Danielle A., "Prepared Practitioners: An Evaluation of the Professional Development Experiences of Sport-Based Youth Development Practitioners" (2016). *Master's Theses*. 1028.
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RUNNING HEAD: PREPARED PRACTITIONERS

Prepared Practitioners: An Evaluation of the Professional Development Experiences of Sport-
Based Youth Development Practitioners

Danielle DeRosa

B.S., University of Connecticut, 2009

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science

At the

University of Connecticut

2016

APPROVAL PAGE

Master of Science Thesis

Prepared Practitioners: An Evaluation of the Professional Development Experiences of Sport-Based Youth Development Practitioners

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2016

Acknowledgements

I am surrounded by so many loving, caring, thoughtful and dedicated people. It is because of this network of encouragement that this project was possible. My family members, both core and extended, have each played an instrumental role in my development, I am so grateful for their unconditional love and support. My advisor and lead investigator for this study, Dr. Jennie McGarry—her patience, guidance and willingness to continue to push me to think harder, dig deeper and make connections was a crucial component of my finishing this study. I would also like to thank Dr. Laura Burton and Dr. Sarah Woulfin for serving on my committee and providing me with thoughtful feedback and suggestions for my research.

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Abstract

Professional development for Out-of-School time (OST) staff is a comprehensive term that can refer to a variety of education, training, and development opportunities (Bouffard & Little, 2004). As a way to develop staff, organizations spend time and resources to provide opportunities that encourage the acquisition of knowledge and growth. One theory that has been looked at for its impact on professional development is the Community of Practice (CoP) is a framework (Wenger, 1998). With its focus on learning as social participation, CoP framework defines itself along three dimensions; joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire (Cheng & Lee, 2013; Akerson, Cullen, & Hanson, 2009; Wenger, 1998). The following research study utilizes a qualitative approach to examine ways in which the professional development of a sport-based youth development organization (Community Sport) housed at a large Northeastern public university aligned with the CoP framework. Through the use of focus groups and practitioners' journals, the researcher collected information on the professional development of Community Sport. Through data analysis, the researcher found that the professional development of Community Sport aligned with the tenets of the CoP framework. The findings of this study discuss the ways in which the tenets of CoP were supported by the professional development of Community Sport and other insights the research gleaned from the use of CoP framework.

Chapter 1: Introduction

To some, sport is seen simply as a game or a hobby, a diversion from other activities in which we participate in, a way to stay healthy and exercise. To others, sport is so much, more than a game, more than a pass time, more than a distraction. Sport can be a tool to unify and transform, its power unmatched by other means. The late Nelson Mandela believed that sport has the power to change the world, knowing this first hand in his own use of sport to attempt to dismantle the institutional racism that was present in South Africa's post-apartheid society. Mandela used sport as a tool for national reconciliation to unite members of a once segregated civilization, to bring together those of different cultures across racial and ethnic bounds and to re-image South Africa as a nation (Bond, 2013).

While sport is a powerful tool, it cannot be used to combat societal ills on its own. The power of sport has to be tapped into or stimulated, the game has to be carefully constructed and managed to have a potential to impact others (Edwards 2015; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011; Kidd 2008). In order for the power of sport to be seen to its full potential it needs good people; well trained coaches and practitioners who are willing to create a nurturing atmosphere and support youth-centered activities that are explicitly designed with intentional outcomes and clear goals (Perkins & Noam 2007; Cote, 2002; Caccamo, Bartlett, Globe, & Pullar (n.d.)). There have to be caretakers and invested individuals to allow for sport to truly see its potential as a conduit to other outcomes through care and fair play (Parry, 2012).

While many organizations spend a significant amount of time and resources developing their staff, evaluating the impact and effectiveness of staff development is a more recent trend (Bouffard & Little, 2004). In the field of education, we see formalized systems and structures for teacher preparation and professional development. In addition to pre-service training, once

teaching professional development underscores policies and procedures within the school, areas of administrative importance, and best-practice within the field (Wilson & Berne, 1999). Many of these systems can be driven by public policy, this is seen in the No Child Left Behind act of 2001, when it was required that all teachers received “high quality” professional development (Borko, 2004). Despite demanding “high-quality” professional development, there was a lack of direction in terms of content that would satisfy that directive (Borko, 2004). While there seems to be an apparent system that is oftentimes informed by policy, it is still argued whether teacher professional development is impacting teaching performance or providing support to teachers in the way that they need it, or that it takes into account teacher learning (Borko, 2004; Knight, 2002; Wilson & Berne, 1999).

In the case of OST practitioners, including SBYD practitioners, the path is not so clear cut, as these practitioners are likely from a multitude of professional and academic backgrounds (Bouffard & Little, 2004; Huebner, Walker & McFarland, 2003). SBYD programs can play an instrumental role in the development of healthy and thriving youth. The experiences provided through these activities can enable positive development, however program staff and volunteers must be intentional in the implementation of programs (Perkins & Noam, 2007). While sport is recognized as a setting ripe with opportunity for teaching youth developmental outcomes, there is not a consensus on the ways in which we train practitioners and more specifically the impact of large-scale coach education or training (Falcão, Bloom & Wade, 2012).

The Problem

Professional development for OST staff is a comprehensive term that can refer to a variety of education, training, and development opportunities (Bouffard & Little, 2004). Peter (2009) describes professional development as:

A spectrum of activities, resources, and supports that help practitioners work more effectively with or on behalf of children and youth. Professional development formats include workshops, conferences, technical assistance, apprenticeships, peer mentoring, professional memberships, college coursework, and additional diverse offerings. (p. 36)

While many institutions and organizations mandate professional development for their staff, it is critical that we better understand the professional development that staff is participating in to assure that it is time well spent, and that the learning taking place can be transferred to workplace responsibilities.

It is the hope that through successful professional development, both the practitioner and those whom the practitioner serves benefit. As a result of multiple research studies in the out-of-school time settings, there is a connection between staff training and staff quality of programming, as well as the staff/student relationship. The *Annie E. Casey Foundation*, in collaboration with *Cornerstones for Kids* and the *Harvard Family Research Project*, worked to develop a multi-year project to determine the relationship between well trained practitioners and child outcomes (Weiss, Klein, & Little, 2005/2006). The study concluded that high-quality relationships between staff and children lead to better child outcomes, and that professional development is one key activity in workforce development. While we understand that OST professional development is essential to program quality and student impact, we also know that the relationship between staff training and student outcome is not a direct connection (Weiss, Klein, & Little, 2005/2006).

Conceptual Framework

Communities of practice (CoPs) are everywhere. They are in our workplaces, schools, and within social settings (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011). Some CoPs are a formal convening with a distinguished rhyme and rhythm to meetings, consistent members and content of meetings, while others lack such formalities. The primary focus of CoP as a concept is on learning as social participation, looking at participation as engagement in events and certain activities (practice) with certain people (community), but also as the process of being active participants in practices of a social community and constructing identities in relation to these communities (Wenger, 1998).

In looking at the CoP framework, a CoP defines itself along three dimensions; joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire (Cheng & Lee, 2013; Akerson, Cullen & Hanson, 2009; Wenger, 1998). The CoP negotiates its meaning and relevance. These are continuously regenerated by its members, and this mutuality also creates accountability among members and membership. Mutual engagement speaks to the engagement that happens and holds members together in the creation and existence of the CoP. Wenger (1998) explains, “practice does not exist in the abstract. It exists because people are engaged in actions whose meanings they negotiate with one another” (p. 73). The practice endures because there are invested community members who engage in action whose meaning they negotiate with one another, each member brings their own unique identity to the practice and also gains a unique identity through the process of engaging as a member in the CoP. In bringing unique identity and experiences to the community members are able to share ideas or questions, ask questions and seek to learn new information, and admit ignorance in the pursuit of learning from others (Cheng & Lee, 2013). CoPs are a joint enterprise meaning that the common sense of identity and purpose is shared by group members, with the understanding of the practice being a result of a

continual and collective negotiation by members (Cheng & Lee, 2013; Wenger, 1998). Lastly, CoPs define themselves with some shared set norms that include routines, words, ways of doing things, artifacts and symbols, this shared repertoire tends to evolve and adapt over time and is heavily influenced by the members of the practice (Cheng & Lee, 2013; Wenger, 1998).

Purpose of Study

This study uses the Community of Practice framework to better understand the professional development that Community Sport staff members receive. Using a qualitative approach, it looks at the ways in which Community Sport PD aligns with the components of the CoP framework to consider the benefits of cultivating a CoPs as a vehicle for formal professional development among members of the organization so that the invisible learning can be understood as a way to enhance the quality of the work that is produced and work life among the people who are producing it (Boud and Middleton, 2003).

RQ 1: How, if at all, does the professional development of Community Sport align with the Communities of Practice framework?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The current study is informed by multiple fields, including Out-of-School Time (OST), sport-based youth development and professional development.

Out-of School Time

Out-of-School Time (OST) is defined as programs that represent a wide array of offerings for young people to participate in, these programs can occur in the time before school, after school, on weekends, and during school breaks (NIOST, 2009). OST programs occur in a variety of settings including schools, community organizations, faith-based organizations/churches, parks and/or recreation centers (Weiss, Klein, & Little, 2005/2006). The term OST encompasses many programs that function in the after-school hours for students, a critical timeframe during the day for youth that oftentimes bridges the gap from time spent in school engaged in structured activities and evenings spent at home with parents, family and/or other caretakers (Mahoney, Lord & Carryl, 2005).

Hall, Yohelam, Tolman & Wilson (2003) suggest that in effective OST programs the following key elements are present for youth: safe and stable location, basic care and services, caring relationships, relevant and challenging experiences, networks and connections, high expectations and standards, opportunities for choice among activities and contribution, personalized and high quality instruction. While effective programs share key elements, these programs can address a wide range of activities and programming from engaging youth in social and civic development (Hall, Yohelam, Tolman & Wilson, 2003) to physical activity and healthy life-style (Mahoney, Lord & Carryl, 2005). Beyond providing a space for children to engage in safe activity during out-of-school hours (Mahoney, Lord & Carryl, 2005), research suggests that

youth engagement in OST programs can offer much more than safety to its regular program participants (Greene, Lee, Constance & Hynes, 2013; Mahoney, Lord & Carryl, 2005; Broh, 2002).

Youth participation in OST programming has been linked to opportunity for identity exploration (Greene, Lee, Constance & Hynes, 2013), gains in both human and social capital (Broh, 2002), stronger connection between school and/or school community (Greene, Lee, Constance & Hynes, 2013), and healthy lifestyle (Mahoney, Lord & Carryl, 2005). For example, a two-year longitudinal study considered the outcomes of youth engaged quality after school programs, the study included nearly 3,000 youth enrolled in 35 elementary and middle school after school programs located within 14 cities across 8 states. Findings from the study indicate that when compared to their peers who were regularly unsupervised afterschool, students who participated in high-quality after school programs (alone or in combination with other activities) demonstrated significant gains in standardized math test scores (Harvard Family Research Project, 2008). Additionally, regular participation in after school programs was associated with improvements in students' work habits and task persistence (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007). In a longitudinal study of over 400 youth participating in 25 after-school programs in Connecticut found that youth who participated in after-school programs were more likely to experience reductions in obesity when compared to their counterparts who did not participate in after-school activities (Mahoney, Lord & Carryl, 2005).

While considerable research supports OST programming for youth and adolescents, there are still elements of OST programming that are not as well understood. Some program features yield better outcomes for youth, specifically staff practices that are crucial in OST programming (Akiva, Cortina, Eccles & Smith, 2013; Stone, Garza, & Borden, 2006). In a mixed-method,

multi-city study led by the Harvard Family Research Project, it was found that high-quality relationships between skilled staff and OST program participants were linked to better child and youth outcomes (Weiss, Klein, & Little, 2006/2007). In addition, Little (2004) conducted interviews with OST national experts to gain a better understanding of the landscape of OST. She found that staff recruitment as well as staff training and development were two of the most important factors in quality OST programs. Knowing that staff development is crucial, many have noted that staff practices are complex and therefore difficult to understand (Akiva, Cortina, Eccles & Smith, 2013). The challenge is not identifying that staff development is needed, but rather how to create useful and impactful development for both staff members who are planning the programs and youth who are participating in them.

Sport-based Youth Development

Sport is the most popular organized activity in which youth participate (Larson & Verma 1999), however it is important to note that not all sport opportunities for youth are the same. Sport-based youth development (SBYD) is a subset of OST that offers participants the opportunity to use sport to aid in the learning of life-skills and positive youth development (PYD). SBYD programs offer youth the chance to experience sport and physical activity within the context of caring relationships and carefully planned and facilitated learning (Noam & Perkins, 2007). In their document *Front Runners: Leaders of the Sport-Based Youth Development Pack* (n.d.), Up2Us, a national collation of sport-based youth development organizations, offers that model SBYD programs have the following key characteristics as part of programming: trained coaches, intentional programming, physical and emotional safety, and strong administration and context. While the use of sport is the common denominator among SBYD organizations, many practitioners and scholars in the SBYD field see sport skill

development as secondary learning to the life skills that are acquired through participation. Oftentimes sport serves as the hook to attract participants (Noam & Perkins, 2007).

While sport is often considered a tool for promoting PYD, as previously noted, this connection is not innate and heavily depends on programmatic and contextual factors which require intentionality in planning on the part of the staff, coaches and adults involved (Jones, Edwards, Bocarro, Bunds & Smith, 2016; Edwards 2015; Kidd 2008; Noam & Perkins, 2007). A criticism in SBYD literature focuses on the lack of research examining the process of youth development. We know that youth are developing life skills as outcomes of SBYD, however how that development is achieved and the context surrounding it is less understood (Jones et al., 2016; Coakley, 2011). Furthermore, the training of the staff and coaches involved in SBYD is a critical component to understanding how development is achieved (Jones et al., 2016), knowing that there are many factors that need to be addressed when aiming for an environment to nurture PYD.

Fry and Gano-Overway (2010) examined the relationship between young athletes' perceptions of a caring climate and its impact on their sport experience. The researchers evaluated the climate of various soccer teams through collected survey data related to enjoyment of participation, level of commitment to the team and behaviors and attitudes toward coaches and teammates. 184 youth (ages 10-17 with an average of 8 years of experience in community-based soccer) participated in the study and the researchers found clear support that a caring climate contributed positively to overall youth experience and was positively connected to their enjoyment of participation on the team, commitment to playing soccer, and attitude toward the coach(es).

In most cases, youth participation in sport can be bursting with positive development such as physical, social, intellectual and emotional development, however this is not always the case (Fraser-Thomas, Cote & Deakin, 2005). In fact, sport involvement has also been linked to negative consequences in these same areas. Some negative trends that we have seen in participation are athletic burnout, which can be a result of over-commitment or sport activity that stresses high commitment (Fraser-Thomas, Cote & Deakin, 2005; Coakley, 1992), sport-related injuries, eating disorders (Fraser-Thomas, Cote & Deakin, 2005), and the acceptance of violence and aggression as part of the game (Gardner & Janelle, 2002).

Knowing that sport is a powerful tool for the youth that engage, it is critical to examine the factors that contribute to youth experiences in effort to underscore the importance of positive development in youth sport. In looking toward a model of positive youth development through sport, some factors that contribute to youth experience in sport are program design and the influences of parents and coaches (Fraser-Thomas, Cote & Deakin, 2005). In both OST and SBYD, there is recognition that the adults involved in the planning (coaches and staff) play an important role in creating high-quality and beneficial programs, both of which are vital for improving student learning outcomes (Bouffard & Little, 2004). Knowing that the adults who construct and plan the activities for youth have such an important role, we must continue to consider tangible ways in which we can provide professional development to these practitioners. With that said, in this study I pay attention to the planning and PD for SBYD practitioners.

Professional Development

Upon completion of formal education, once in the workforce almost all professionals continue learning. For some, this is a formal process and for others an informal one.

Professional development in the context of OST is a broad term that captures a broad array of education, training and development opportunities (Bouffard & Little, 2004). In the OST field, there is no question that a quality staff is a key component to excellent programs, in fact, research validates that in OST settings there is a relationship between the capacity of adult/youth relationships and degree of youth achievement (Stone, Garza, & Borden, 2006).

While there is no doubt that professional development in OST is important, there are challenges in operationalizing an effective professional development plan. There is agreement that staff characteristics can be impacted by professional development and are critical to high-quality youth development, yet there is not a consensus around what the characteristics are or how youth development workers should acquire them (Astroth, Garza, & Taylor, 2004). Furthermore, there isn't uniform or formal agreement around what OST staff should know or what activities they should participate in to acquire appropriate skills and knowledge (National Afterschool Association, 2006). For some, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a pathway to continued formal professional development after initial certification, however not all SBYD or OST practitioners are initially certified with a uniform approach (Rangeon, Gilbert & Bruner, 2012). Some of this inconsistency and lack of a uniform training approach can be explained by acknowledging that the path to becoming an OST or SBYD practitioner is not singular (Bouffard & Little, 2004). Huebner, Walker, and McFarland (2003), add that there is an absence of common educational prerequisites and pre-service training for practice in the field, and also note the eclectic nature of OST practitioners.

While evaluating professional development in the area of OST is relatively new and somewhat complicated by multiple variables such as lack of formalization in PD as well as a group of practitioners with varied experience and educational background that they are bringing

to their practice, the field of teacher education has a similar target audience. Professional development for teachers has a longer history of a formal practice. While there are certainly differences among paths to the classroom for teachers, pre-service teachers must graduate from accredited higher education program and satisfy state-specific certification to teach in the majority of public schools (Huebner, Walker, & McFarland, 2003). There are nuances and differences that exist between teachers and sport-based youth development practitioners, this is a factor that limits the direct transferability of findings from professional development in OST and professional development for classroom teachers. With that said, there are also similarities that exist such as the aim to engage youth in an educational setting to achieve positive development. With this said, allowing for productive information sharing between strategies and tactics for professional development among both fields could be beneficial to the understanding and development of professional development across the two fields.

The field of teacher development has called for a commitment to teacher learning and visible outcomes of learning, this pressure or call to action has come from a myriad of sources, one being the movement of increased reform and standards (Wilson & Berne, 1999). Although standards and reform have been a driving force to teacher professional development, there are still questions that beckon for answers (i.e., how we design and implement the professional development, Borko, 2004). For example, No Child Left Behind (2001) mandates that all teachers engage in 'high quality' professional development, yet there is little information around what constitutes high quality professional development or directives for districts to institute professional development of this caliber (Borko, 2004). Similarly, resources for OST professional development are being allocated to planning and implementation (Hochberg &

Desimone, 2010; Borko, 2004), but oftentimes the effectiveness or impact of professional development is not known or understood.

In the area of teacher professional development, there is agreement around several factors that constitute effective professional development (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010; Desimone, 2009), however there is still much to learn about structures and context of professional development, particularly when looking at how to facilitate large scale efforts for student achievement (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010). Like OST practitioners, teachers participate in a variety of professional development opportunities, ranging from full-day or part-day workshops sponsored by the district, summer or weekend workshops, graduate coursework and joining professional organizations or associations (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010; Wilson & Berne, 1999; Little, 1993). While it is known that each of these development opportunities offer the chance for learning to take place, there is little research that looks at what teachers learn across learning opportunities (Wilson & Berne, 1999). We know that engagement in professional development is valuable but clearly not a one-sized fits all approach for learning, making it necessary to continue to refine the various opportunities for professional development to best meet the needs of those in the field.

In addition, it is important to consider how learning can be social and information can be shared among practitioners in a multi-directional model. In the world of sport coaching education, time spent participating in formal certification programs or processes is minimal when compared to the hours logged learning through the actual practice, on the field and through the experience of others. This learning is classified as non-formal or informal learning situations and falls under the umbrella of Continued Professional Development (CPD), and the time spent amasses to hundreds of hours (Bertram & Gilbert, 2011; Rangeon, Gilbert & Bruner, 2012).

While there have been a few smaller studies that looked at concerted, formalized efforts in the youth sport community to provide coaches with an infrastructure to facilitate more informal learning, there is no evidence that these efforts are large-scale or wide-spread (Rangeon, Gilbert & Bruner, 2012). Furthermore, Armour (2010) suggested a list of recommendations for ongoing professional development for sport coaches, however they were generic in nature and did not provide specific ways to operationalize. There have been similar observations made in the setting of teacher education, where learning can happen in formal settings, but also through practice, in conversations with colleagues, and in the larger school community (Borko, 2004).

Communities of Practice

In thinking about our learning as social (i.e., how we acquire knowledge about ourselves and others through social interactions, Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011; Wenger, 1998), we know the opportunity to work with others who have similar interests in learning can be quite beneficial. Wenger (1998) sees Communities of Practice (CoPs) as a group of people who have a shared passion or interest in something that they do as well as a shared commitment to learn how to do it better through interactions with colleagues and/or peers. CoPs are defined along three dimensions: joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire (Cheng & Lee, 2013; Akerson, Cullen & Hanson, 2009; Wenger, 1998). Thus the community is a group with a shared identity, and it is created and reinforced by its members through engagement in shared routines, rituals, symbols, and artifacts working together to create a group culture (Cheng & Lee, 2013; Wenger, 1998).

CoPs are not a new learning concept; in fact, we have seen these communities throughout recorded history as ways for social learning to occur. In organizations CoPs are significant to

how the establishment functions, whether they are formally recognized or not (Wenger, 1998). While CoPs tend to form organically among practitioners of shared interest as ways of informal learning, they can have an impact on the capacity one has to complete their job (Boud & Middleton 2002; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger 1998). Given the impact that CoPs can have, there is a desire to better understand how CoPs start and function.

The desire to adopt dimensions of a CoP in the formal setting to experience the benefits of social learning can be met with challenge, as there are facets of the communities that cannot be imposed or created, but rather emerge or develop informally through the practice of the group (Cheng & Lee, 2013; Wenger, 1991). The organic development of a CoP does not mean that organizations cannot influence development; in fact, we are seeing more and more of an emphasis on the support of CoPs from the management or supervisory levels within organizations (Cheng & Lee, 2013; Fontaine, 2001).

Given that the terrain of learning through CoPs is ripe with opportunity, there are a number of researchers that have looked specifically at facets of CoP to identify best strategies and practice to aid in the launch and support of a CoP. Some research begins to reframe how and what we consider professional learning to be and the place that the CoP framework has within the reframing. To consider how CoPs can be used to improve teacher learning, Cheng and Lee (2013), developed a questionnaire that was given to one hundred and twenty-five teachers across 35 primary schools. The goal of the study was to better understand strategies that can be used to cultivate a CoP by evaluating the effectiveness of using projects that were designed to build a CoP among those who were participating in the group. By examining ways in which content and process facilitation have impact on a CoP, the found that content facilitation was a predictor for all elements of a CoP and process facilitation only as a predictor for joint

enterprise and shared repertoire. The findings of this study provide insight on how to operationalize a CoP and provided school leaders with implications for a practical guide to do that.

Also in the field of teacher learning, Akerson, Cullen and Hanson (2009) investigated the influence of a CoP professional development program on science teachers' views of the practice and also the teaching of the practice. While the CoP on its own was not an effective way to change teachers' practice or knowledge, it did create a supportive environment that facilitated change when also paired with modeling of the desired practice and critical reflection.

Furthermore, Cuddapah and Clayton (2011) used the CoP framework to explore how a cohort of professionals working through an alternative education certification program. As alternative teacher certification programs become more popular, it was of interest to see how a CoP could act as a support to the professionals as they acclimated to their new profession. While there is systematic support for new teachers through formal mentoring networks, the practicality of these programs is variable. By observing a cohort of students and recording data in the form of field notes, insights from the data demonstrated the interactivity of Wenger's CoP elements, the significance of the component of community, and insight on what legitimate peripheral participation looks like in a community of only novice members.

Much of the body of literature on CoPs take a closer look at how CoP emerge and function within organizations; however, Schenkel and Teigland (2008) explored the relationship between CoPs and organizational performance, an area of research that is not as understood. To better understand this relationship, the researchers gathered data using interviews, a survey and company records from a large Scandinavian contracting firm. It became apparent to the researchers that identifying and gathering data from all involved in a CoP can at times be

challenging due to their informal and organic nature in addition to the ability for CoP members to be outside of normal organizational bounds. Through gathering data and analyzing all three sources of information, the results indicated that three of the four CoPs operated under “stable conditions” (i.e. consistency in physical location that allowed for face-to-face interaction) and therefore saw improved performance. The fourth CoP experienced a physical move during the data collection that impacted its communication channels. As a result, the CoP did not demonstrate increased performance. The findings from this study also emphasize the importance of face-to-face interactions in site that are co-located to be a significant factor in the development and maintenance of CoPs, which is an interesting observation, because there is also a trend within CoP for functionality through online platforms, which are able to connect individuals regardless of geographic location.

In this study, I use CoPs to look at the professional development of a sport-based youth development organization. Using CoPs as a lens to view the professional development will help me see the ways in which informal learning have an impact on practitioners and will deepen the field’s understanding of appropriate and impactful methods for professional development for sport-based youth development practitioners.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Subjectivity Statement

The current study aims to better understand the professional development experience of sport-based youth development practitioners employed by Community Sport. The research examines work that I have been personally involved in, as I am a Community Sport employee. My role within the organization is to develop and deliver all professional development for the organization's staff. It is my goal to create opportunities for organizational learning that is both relevant and informative.

I acknowledge that because I am the designer, coordinator, and oftentimes facilitator of Community Sport's professional development, this may have had some influence over the participants' contributions to the study. For example, because staff recognizes my investment in the success of professional development, they may have been reluctant to be completely forthright or critical in their responses in practitioner's journal entries or focus group comments. To try to account for this, I positioned the study as an opportunity to learn more about professional development as a way to enhance and improve. In addition, at the start of each focus group situated myself as someone who was interested in honest feedback of the professional development for betterment of the program. It is also worth mentioning that during the timeframe that the data was collected, I had a reduced visible role in the organization's professional development and was not present at a majority of meetings.

Study Site

A sport-based youth development organization housed at a large Northeastern public university served as the setting for this study. Community Sport, located with the School of

Education is a sport-based youth development program (Coakley, 2011; Perkins & Noam, 2007). Utilizing the power of sport for its staff and students to make connections with in the community (Perkins & Noam, 2007), Community Sport partners with four community organizations to operate programs that operate during in-school and after-school time in the nearby city of Northford.

The Community Sport staff is primarily undergraduate and graduate students. The organization also employs 5 professional staff, however, their positions in the School of Education are such that they also spend their efforts on other initiatives. Community Sport considers all its undergraduate and graduate staff to be part of the General Staff. The organization has a subset of staff, Community Leaders, who are tasked with running the day-to-day programming and operations at Community Sport's partner sites. Community Sport is an organization whose employees represent diversity in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity, experience and educational backgrounds; for example, some staff are doctoral students in the sport management department while others are undergraduate staff in a discipline that does not have as strong of a connection to sport or youth development. To add to the diversity in educational background, there are also staff members who are not currently enrolled as college students and have committed to a year of service through an AmeriCorps program.

For this study, all participants involved worked at Community Sport as Community Leaders. As part of their employment, Community Leaders participated in two professional development opportunities per month. The first opportunity for professional development, General Staff meetings, occurred at the start of each month and included all staff members employed by Community Sport. These meetings lasted for 45 minutes, and the content was a blend of updates and information that staff needed to function in their roles, as well as the

opportunity to consider larger themes that impact the work of the organization and the role of the partnership between the campus and the community. In addition to the General Staff meetings, Community Leaders had an additional opportunity for professional development at the mid-point of each month for a Community Leaders meeting. These meetings, which were 90 minutes in length, allowed the Community Leaders the chance to join again as a group to discuss topics that are relevant to their role as sport-based youth development practitioners and build on skills that they use as practitioners. At the first Community Leader meeting of each year, staff were asked to reflect upon what they would like as content is these meetings. The organization views this time as a shared occasion for learning, and tries its best to capture the interest and desires of the staff (see dates and themes of all professional development in Table 2).

Community Sport invests a considerable amount of time, energy and resources developing and delivering professional development opportunities for its staff. Strategic and relevant training sessions focus on personal, social, professional, and partnership development. Not only do the practitioners have to be well informed in regard to youth sport, physical activity, nutrition education and sport-based youth development; they also need to understand the context in which they are using the sport or physical activity, as well as their own bias, privilege and relationship to power that undoubtedly impacts the relationships that they form and the work that they are a part of. It is my attempt in this study to identify the essential components of Community Sport staff development, specifically within monthly meetings amongst Community Leaders, to better understand participants' experiences and how to improve upon efforts to provide empowering and informative staff development.

Until now, most of the evaluation around Community Sport's professional development has been to explore staff satisfaction and idea sharing for future professional development

opportunities. While this feedback has been extremely helpful, it has done little to gain a deeper understanding of staff experience as well as mechanisms for learning.

Participants

Parameters were set so in order to participate in the study, staff had to be considered Community Leaders within the organization's hierarchal structure, at the time of recruitment, the organization employed 15 Community Leaders and 10 volunteered to participate in the study. Of the 10 participants 5 identified as female and 5 identified as male. There were 2 undergraduate staff members, 4 graduate staff members, and 4 AmeriCorps members. In addition, there was racial diversity among participants; 5 participants identified as white, 3 participants identified as African American, 1 participant identified as Latino and 1 participant identified as Asian American.

Data was collected during a 5-month period in the fall of 2015. To recruit staff, I relied on email communication to share information about participation in the research opportunity. An outlined summary of the purpose of the study as well as what involvement in the study would entail (e.g. time involved, frequency of data collection) was shared. This outline included the completion of four practitioner's journals to be submitted to the researcher via Blackboard, a web-based learning platform, and participation in one 30 minute in-person focus group at the completion of the fall 2015 semester. Prior to the launch of the study, I received IRB approval for the research and written consent from all who participated.

Qualitative Measures

I used two measures to collect qualitative data, practitioners' journals and focus groups. Due to the relatively small sample, the use of qualitative data allowed for further understanding

of a phenomenon in depth, in this case, professional development of Community Sport (Patton, 2002). Both the prompts for the practitioners' journals (see Appendix A) and questions for the focus groups (see Appendix B) were developed as a result of viewing a survey that was created by the *Out of School Time Resource Center (OSTRC)* developed by Nancy Peter and the OSTRC staff. The Out-of-School Time Resource Center has spent over ten years creating, testing, and refining its library of surveys including workshop, networking meeting and conference, all of which are available on their website (Buher-Kane, Peter, and Kinnevy, 2009). I was given permission to use the survey as either an instrument tool or a means to offer insight to areas of research for OST staff professional development.

Practitioners' journals. The practitioner's journal requested participants respond to prompts related to professional development opportunities and their work with the organization once per month. These journals served as a way to document progress in applying new skills that had been acquired through learning. The journals aimed to capture the number of times a new strategy was used or considered, student and/or stakeholder responses to new strategies or reflection on relevance of new knowledge or strategy (Kutner, Sherman, Tibbetts & Condelli, 1997). The practitioner's journals were submitted to the researcher through Blackboard learning software, a digital platform available at the university. All participants in the study were given access to a 'non-class' site, which allowed participants in the study to securely submit practitioner's journals to the researcher through the online platform. The practitioner's journals were submitted once per month; each month the researcher would send an email detailing the question for the journal and prompting the participants to respond. As a reminder, I would send two emails in the two weeks following the initial request to complete the practitioners' journal.

In describing instructions for completion of each practitioner's journal, I outlined the purpose. I also noted that while there was not a word count minimum or maximum, the journals should take about 20-30 minutes to complete. The mean length for the first practitioner's journal was 133 words, the mean length for the second was 160 words, and the mean length for the last was 167 words. The shortest practitioners' journal was 61 words, while the longest was 331 words.

Focus groups. The focus groups were conducted at the end of the 5 month research study and were an opportunity to follow-up on common themes from the practitioners' journals as well as another opportunity to learn more about the acquisition of new skills and learning from professional development. The focus groups were approximately 20-30 minutes long, and included 3-4 Community Leaders per session, in total there were 3 focus groups (see Table 1 for information on focus group assignments).

Each of the focus groups covered similar topics, as they were all guided by the Focus Group Questions (see Appendix B). In the second focus group there were multiple exchanges regarding the frequency of professional development of Community Sport in the past that were irrelevant to the current study. These exchanges were initiated by a member of Community Sport who had been involved in the organization for multiple years. I aimed to redirect and refocus the group, but it is noteworthy that there were three instances in that focus group that did not pertain to the study at hand. Aside from this, the information that was shared during the focus group was relevant to the current study.

The scheduling of the focus groups was primarily based on availability, however there was an effort made to have groups be diverse in terms of gender, race and education level. Each focus group was digitally recorded and downloaded to the researcher's personal laptop. All

voice files and practitioner's journals were immediately destroyed upon transcription. The transcripts were saved on the student investigator's personal laptop using pseudonyms for each participant and other potentially identifying information.

Analysis

All data (focus groups and practitioners' journals), were coded. Focus groups were transcribed verbatim, with minor edits. After focus groups were transcribed, they were reviewed several times to get an overall sense and understanding of each interview. Following this process, both the focus groups and practitioners' journals were coded.

To assist me in the coding process, I used NVIVO, a computer-based qualitative data analysis system, which allows for the recording, coding and linking of ideas (Richards, 1999). I used the a priori codes representing the tenets of CoP, mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. The a priori codes, determined beforehand, allowed for coherence with the study's conceptual framework and enabled analysis that directly addressed my research goals (Saldaña, 2013). This thematic coding process not only allowed me to organize the data into tenets of the framework, but as a result subsequent themes emerged too (Roulston, 2010). This process of coding allowed me to segment the words from the staff before actually bringing meaning to the information that they were sharing (Creswell, 2007). It was through the words that were shared that I was able to make meaning of the CoP framework as it pertains to the staff development of Community Sport and have a more compressive understanding of the data (Creswell, 2007).

Before coding, I looked to other research studies on CoP to see how they defined each code. This information assisted me as I operationalized each tenet. To establish credibility I participated in peer debriefing with two of my thesis committee members (Rubin & Rubin, 1995;

Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, I consulted Dr. Sarah Woulfin in discussing the operational definitions that I had created for each of the CoP tenets, as she is well versed in CoP framework. She and I discussed the coding definitions and through our conversation I was able to refine and tighten the codes before the codes were applied to the data. Next, my thesis advisor (Dr. McGarry) and I each coded one focus group. This focus group was looked to as a sample of text that allowed for the illuminating of any ambiguities (Weber, 1990). Upon individually coding, we collaborated to compare coding notes. Revisions to the initial coding definitions were made as necessary (although they were minor), and the categories were tightened up to the point that maximizes mutual exclusivity and exhaustiveness (Weber, 1990). I believe that each of these means of peer debriefing allowed me to enhanced the rigor of the research (Padgett, 1998).

Once I completed the peer debriefing (with Dr. Woulfin) and joint coding (with Dr. McGarry), I coded my data into the three CoP tenets. During the coding processes, I periodically checked both the operationalized definitions for each code and what I was coding. The continual process of checking helped to assure that I did not drift away from the sense of what the codes meant (Schilling, 2006).

After doing an initial round of coding with the a priori codes, I revisited all transcripts of the focus groups and practitioners' journals. I looked for instances that arose in the data that either ran counter to the interpretations of the CoP, or themes that were not captured in the CoP framework. There was no information that ran counter to the interpretations of CoP or themes within the CoP tenets that were not captured during the initial round of coding.

What I did find was information shared within the focus groups that highlighted strengths of professional development or offered suggestions for improvement of professional development. I believe that as the person who develops and delivers professional development

for the organization, the staff saw me as someone who would be interested in knowing that information, even if it was not specifically asked for as part of the focus group.

Chapter 4: Findings

In presenting my findings, I use the tenets of the CoP framework; mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire, to guide my reporting. By using the CoP framework (Wenger, 1998) to analyze the data I was able to identify the ways in which the dynamics of professional development within Community Sport, as shared by the research participants, aligned with the tenets of CoPs. The combination of the framework as a guiding tool and participant feedback helped me to gain greater insight and understanding of Community Sport's PD.

Mutual engagement

Within the data, I found support for the existence of mutual engagement among the Community Sport staff. Mutual engagement is what binds staff together (Wenger, 1998) and how they interact or engage with each other as it pertains to the practice (Li, Grimshaw, Nielsen, Judd, Coyte & Graham, 2009). In this study, mutual engagement was coded as ways in which staff identify professional development to function and ways in which interaction happens. In talking about the ways in which professional development functions, staff identified aspects of the design of Community Sport's PD that allow for interactions to happen, and also ways in which the initial interaction can lead to continued conversation.

Structures for Mutual Engagement. There are structural conditions that allow for mutual engagement to exist, such as regular professional development meetings and intentional planning of activities for staff to participate in to get to know each other. This begins prior to the academic year with a three-day retreat and then continues throughout the academic year. In sharing about the functionality of Community Sport's professional development, Rose notes in a focus group, "through different professional development opportunities, such as the retreats, staff

and [Community Leader] meetings, and external PD requirements, the [Community Sport] staff members are able to come together and develop and improve alongside each other.”

In addition to the structure and sequencing of meetings, there is also intentional planning that happens so that each meeting can allow for staff to engage in meaningful conversation and share insight amongst one another. Lily comments in a focus group that, “the meetings are structured, so it gives us the space to say things in a way that people probably won’t be offended by it. Yea, so I just think it’s a more structured time to have those conversations.” Later in the focus group, Lily again shares the importance of the professional development, offering that “The fact that we have that space to talk about things [these conversations] are not often happening outside of the room that we are in.” Professional development of Community Sport is structured in a way that allows staff to engage in conversations that are meaningful both personally and professionally. Staff identified that these structures allow them to participate in important conversations with each other.

Lastly, as a community-campus partnership, Community Sport operates between university and community settings. With this said, the entire staff of Community Sport does not always share the same physical space. When coming together for professional development, it assures that staff will be in the same room as each other.

Mutual Engagement as Continued Interaction. As mentioned in the structures for mutual engagement, coming together for professional development allows staff who may not always have the opportunity to regularly interact to touch base with each other. Ruby shares in a focus group more specifically on why this happens, noting that although the staff has a mutual space where they can come together (an office on the university’s campus), it is not always the most effective way to engage colleagues in conversation,

. . .because you're trying to come by the [office] but the people aren't always here, or your schedules don't meet up. So I don't always have the chance to talk to other people who are a part of [Community Sport], and that's [professional development sessions] guaranteed time that I will definitely see them.

Professional development is a common time when staff come together to reflect on their practice and learning. These sessions function as a place to connect to other staff and begin conversations that can be continued beyond the context of meetings. For instance, Ruby shares in a focus group,

I feel like for me it's a conversation starter. So it will go on from there, and the topic will be discussed later on, and it's trying to figure out how I feel about it, how other people feel about it, what did I miss, where can you all fill in some gaps.

An example of PD serving as a conversation starter would be that in one meeting the staff discussed the application of a behavioral framework and as a result of the initial conversation in the professional development setting, there was a follow up discussion in which staff met independently to continue to talk about application of the framework. Lily shares in a practitioner's journal that "though this meeting didn't take place at a [Community Sport] PD meeting, it's a testament that [Community Sport] creates space for its staff to have continued conversations about the issues that are important to us more than once a month."

Although the members of the organization do not always have the opportunity to communicate with each other in their everyday work, professional development is able to act as a mechanism to bring staff together. As a result of professional development staff are able to get to know each other, engage in conversations that are important to them, and then sometimes

these conversations are used as opportunities to continue conversation and encourage further communication. In thinking about the importance of communication and relationship building,

Connor shares in a focus group:

. . .an organization that doesn't communicate, it's just as hard to be successful in meeting your goals. Even if it's just something that someone feels knowledgeable about, the fact that this is an intentional time and space where we are coming together.

In summary, by looking at the ways in which Community Sport staff members work to communicate, it is important to consider what structures are in place to allow the staff to do this. For example, Connor suggests that communication is impactful to the organization and helps it to meet its goals, however he also acknowledges there is an intentional time and space for this to happen. Relationship building is clearly important, as the Community Sport staff demonstrates. They point to the informal and formal structures to support this building of relationships, as referenced by Jake's statement in a focus group that professional development is "almost like intentional relationship building." Mutual engagement can be accomplished by encouraging those engaged in the practice to commit to a professional development program to engage learning and practice activities (Akerson, Cullen, & Hanson, 2009), Community Sport is intentional in the creation of the professional development opportunities so that they create the space for those committed to the practice to work together to learn and grow.

Joint Enterprise

Joint enterprise is a common sense of identity and purpose that is shared by group

members (Wenger, 1998). This is a process that is a result of continual negotiation of the group. In coding for joint enterprise, I looked for ways in which staff shared an understanding of their professional development and a common sense of identity and purpose. Community Sport staff sees themselves as passionate practitioners. In a focus group Connor comments:

You have a group of people who are passionate, I would say the majority, about what they're doing. So anytime there is the opportunity to come together and strengthen your skills, as a practitioner, as a researcher, as a child mentor, the people who you are working with are on the same page and have a passionate commitment toward it.

Connor shares that not only is professional development an opportunity to bring staff together, but also that the staff members are passionate about the work that they do and are committed to it. Through the commitment to the work, staff members are willing to invest in coming together to strengthen skills and learn around their shared work.

In making meaning of what the common purpose of coming together is, staff spoke to the significance of professional development both for the individual and the group. In a focus group Rose shares how the multiple topics that were covered during the span of the study applied to her practice:

. . .all of these are extremely useful to our daily work within the organization.

When we discuss more complex issues such as white privilege and discrimination, these are extremely relevant not only specifically in the work that we do with [Community Sport], but with our development into overall culturally conscious individuals.

Again, Rose is sharing that she sees the value in the professional development and the

engagement in the work that she is doing. She sees the opportunities for professional development as useful and relevant to the work that she does, not only with Community Sport, but to her personal development.

In continuing to describe the meaning of professional development, Lily shares in a focus group that “professional development isn’t only about learning, it is about teaching, so I feel like it’s reciprocal.” In bringing together a diverse group, it is difficult to always deliver content that is meeting each staff developmentally and intellectually where they are. In sharing the purpose of professional development, staff speak to the idea of developing the whole staff in addition to the individual staff members. They share that in professional development with Community Sport there is a culture that PD was not always about each individual staff member, but for the greater good of the organization. Nora commented in a focus group professional development “didn’t always relate to me, or I already knew about that topic, but I could at least appreciate the time that they spent on it, or that other people were learning as well.” To build on what Nora said, Avery shared in a focus group that “sometimes it [a PD session] applies more to what I am personally doing [than other times], but I know that it is for the program as a whole.”

Both Nora and Avery share that despite not always learning something from each professional development session, they see the purpose of the meeting for not just the individual, but for the entire group. Connecting this to what Lily shared, because there is a sense of reciprocity among staff members in terms of learning and teaching, if a topic of discussion is one that a staff member has prior knowledge, there is also the opportunity to facilitate the learning for others. I would offer that in this role of teaching there is an opportunity for learning and connecting to the concepts or ideas in new ways.

In the professional development opportunities, staff members are able to work as a

cohesive group to negotiate and establish a culture. Information about the organization is shared, and values are communicated to staff.

One of the strongest factors and benefits of PD is the culture that it helps establish and maintain within the organization. In order for all members to have a baseline understanding of the culture, climate, attitude, perspective, mission, and purpose [we must] ...come together and reinforce those essential pieces. Further, covering relevant topics that inform the group members of the initiatives and history of the people we are collaborating with is a continuous process that allows even the newest members to be informed of the outcomes that HS is looking to achieve.

(Connor, focus group)

There are many moving parts within the Community Sport organization and also with the professional development. As Connor shares above, “culture, climate, attitude, mission and purpose” are all “essential pieces.” This is a “continuous process” that involves many layers of understanding. In his sharing above he commented on the place of professional development for even the most recently hired members of the organization. In the attempt to communicate all of the various pieces of the organization to staff, there is a place for all to learn and better understand how the organization and the many moving parts function and impact the work.

The Community Sport staff also recognized the value in participation in professional development, as Jake states in a focus group, “I think having an opportunity to come together in a formal space and create the framework/common ground to have these relevant conversations is extremely valuable in the work that we are doing.” Not only are staff members given the opportunity to participate in professional development that is relevant, but they are defining the community that they are a part of as relevant too. By defining the community as relevant and

important, the purpose of professional development is not only for the individual staff members, but also for the larger whole of the Community Sport staff.

Shared Repertoire

Shared repertoire is defined as what is members of the CoP have in common as a result of the coming together in the community—artifacts, stories, understanding, mode of operating, jargon/shortcuts (Wenger, 1998). Data coded as shared repertoire demonstrated participants' connections to each other's work through the sharing of stories, specifically the children and teachers with whom they interacted. In the sharing of stories, they also indicated an understanding and connection to the broader community of which Community Sport is a part.

Through the sharing of stories, not only is meaning made for Community Sport staff, but the staff is also able to make connections to the work and the partners of Community Sport. Professional development is a place that staff can share information and stories with each other to help better understand the work and community, and also make meaning of the work in which Community Sport is engaged.

In their role with Community Sport, staff works to build relationships at individual sites and also between sites in the community in which they work. In looking at shared repertoire, it was clear that for the Community Sport staff, the telling of stories is their shared repertoire and that through their shared repertoire the staff is able to make deeper connections to the work and the students and staff that they serve. It is not unusual for various Community Sport staff members to have separate interactions with individual members of administration, teachers and students. Through professional development meetings, staff members are able to share stories of

the work that they do which increases their understanding. Connor states in a focus group that the sharing that happens in professional development,

just allows me the opportunity to see the different aspects of the same population of children that we're working with. So whether it be people who see those students at the [community site], outside the four walls of a school building, or at the [community site], or in their own classroom, when [Community Sport] kind of have their own classroom dynamic...we only have so much time with the students, so it helps to have these different eyes and environments and settings to understand who those students are...it's something that I would only know through working with and communicating with the other pieces of the [Community Sport] programmers"

For Connor, professional development is a place to better understand the students with whom he works. He acknowledges that there are limits to his work that only allow him to interact with students in particular settings, but through communication with other staff members he is able to hear about different interactions that Community Sport staff has with students and these different perspectives are able to allow him to have a more complete understanding. This sharing of information allows for staff to better understand the scope of a student's day. A more complete understanding is important, as it allows the Community Sport staff a more accurate basis for understanding the behavior of particular students. As Connor shared in a focus group, insight from all of the collective interactions with students and communication among staff enables staff to see the child from "different angles, different views, different perspectives, different settings". As Jake states in a focus group, this information is helpful and insightful in navigating relationships with the students.

I get a lot of insight as to how a student is doing from asking Eli or Connor how they are doing in Community Sport, or asking Lily how they are doing in [reading program] when I'm not there. And all of these different spaces that there is just more time for interaction, and a more accurate view of the kid.

The sharing of stories is not limited to the students that the staff works with, but also the teachers and professionals in the community settings as well. In a focus group Lily comments that professional development:

helps in our communication, or conversations with the teachers too, because the way that one teacher interacts with one [Community Sport] [Community Leader] may be completely different, but if I'm having conversations with that [Community Leader] on how to break the ice with that teacher, those conversations are helpful.

The time to share stories has a significant impact on the work that we are able to do. Through shared repertoire, which in this case was the sharing of stories, Community Sport staff members are able to have a clearer understanding of both the students that they work with and the various teachers and administrators. I believe that because Community Sport is an organization working between two contexts, both the university campus and the community, the ability to share stories to create larger understanding of each context is a huge asset.

Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify the ways in which Community Sport's PD aligned with the CoP framework. To do this I used the three tenets of Wenger's (1998) CoPs to code the data, which was qualitative feedback from the participants. As a result of using this framework I was able to see the ways in which Community Sport's PD aligned with the tenets of CoPs. In using the CoP framework, the power of relationships in professional development was highlighted. Additionally, this research has offered insight and implications for both researchers and practitioners on the role of management and organizational culture in CoPs.

Tenets of Communities of Practice

Mutual engagement was coded as ways in which the participants shared that the professional development of the organization functioned and how staff saw themselves bound together as a group (Wenger, 1998). Staff spoke to seeing professional development as a common time for meeting with their peers. The importance of consistently held meetings helped to mitigate not seeing each other as often while completing roles as SBYD practitioners. Intentional time and space committed to meetings, allowed for initial examinations within the group, often serving as a springboard for continued conversations. It is important to acknowledge that these conversations can be a form of learning and is valuable to the work. Typically, these activities such as sustained conversation, held formally or informally, are regarded as part of the job, however it is imperative to make this learning visible so that we can make a conscious effort to cultivate it (Boud & Middleton, 2003).

As connected with the joint enterprise tenet in the CoP framework (Wenger, 1998), research participants spoke to the meaning that they make of professional development as

practitioners and members of the community. Spending time with peers that are also passionate and committed to their roles as sport-based youth development practitioners was seen as a valuable aspect of the dynamics within Community Sport PD. As participants worked to make meaning of professional development experiences, this allowed for shared understanding of the purpose of professional development and how it impacted them personally and for the betterment of the larger organization. In my research I found that although there is so much variety among staff, professional development is able to offer an element of meaning-making for the staff members, and this is seen as beneficial. Wenger (1998), sees meaning-making transformative in that it is “an experience of identity” and that learning “is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming” (p. 215). If the staff is seeing learning as a process of becoming, then through our interactions with each other meaning is made, and the contributions of the various members in the group allow for staff to shape each other’s experiences. Given that there are members of Community Sport at varying levels of practice specific knowledge, experience and education, their seeing learning as a process is important. It allows for the opportunity for learning to be shared by the group and involve the staff members and the experience that they are bringing to the organization.

The third tenet of shared repertoire was coded as stories that were shared among staff (Wenger, 1998). The sharing of student, teacher and staff stories amongst the Community Sport staff allowed for common resources of information in the organization. This information facilitated learning and as a result staff were able to negotiate meaning (Li, Grimshaw & Nielsen et al., 2009). As a campus-community partnership, individual staff members do not always have the opportunity to interact with students and teachers at the community sites for an extended period of time. However, as shared in the findings section, the sharing of stories allowed for staff

to better understand a larger span of time in a child's day, Connor shared "we can get a full eight-hour glimpse at who that child is between the four or five [staff members]". In addition, when members of the Community Sport staff aim to get clarity around a child's behavior, it is the shared repertoire that acts as the community's memory and enables the staff to quickly access the relevant knowledge needed to interpret behavior or add insight (Schenkel & Teigland, 2008).

Four participants commented on the sharing of stories in professional development and that it was helpful to their work. Ruby, a first year staff member, offers that although others have commented on the ability to hear what is going on with the various students that they work with, there isn't time explicitly dedicated to this sharing of stories in the professional development setting. She states in a focus group, "but unless you are actually walking up to someone and asking 'hey, about [Brittany], what is she doing in this spot', is not something that I am ever going to learn about." As a first year staff member, Ruby's statement speaks to the notion of time involved in a CoP being a factor in one's participation. I believe that there is a culture of informal communication and sharing of stories at staff meetings and beyond, however as someone who has only been involved in the organization for less than a semester, Ruby hasn't necessarily been involved in sharing of stories in this way.

While in this research shared repertoire appeared as the sharing of stories, Wenger (1998), offers that shared repertoire can include "routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice" (p.83). The idea that Ruby raises above is connected to the theme of evolution over time. As someone who is new to the CoP, she does not necessarily have the complete understanding that sharing of stories is part of shared repertoire of Community Sport.

Having been a part of Community Sport for the past 7 years, I believe that there is a strong existence of shared repertoire that exists beyond the sharing of stories, however I don't know that the questions asked in focus groups and practitioners' journals were specific enough to surface what those were. In considering future research, I think that it will be important to revisit the tenets of the CoP framework and the questions asked that would encourage the sharing of information relevant to the tenets.

Role of Relationships and Community in Professional Development

In Wenger's CoP theory (1998), it is the components of the theory; mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire, that result in community (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011). In seeing the ways in which the Community Sport PD aligned with the CoPs framework, something that emerged was that there was an observance of relationships and community that ran through all three tenets.

In their study of novice teachers Cuddapah and Clayton (2011) noted the centrality of community in their study; similar to their findings, it was hard for me to contain the notion of community to a single theme, rather I saw that there was evidence of relationships and community across themes. For example, when looking at CoP tenet shared repertoire, Community Sport staff spoke to the stories of the students that they worked with. I would offer that the relationships among staff members act as a foundation that allows them to comfortably share stories of students among each other to attempt to better understand the students. As mentioned above, shared repertoire was coded as sharing of stories. The lack of explicit direction to share stories suggests that there is a process in which staff become comfortable and get to know each other well enough to share questions about their practice for feedback from others. With this said, I do think that there is the opportunity to better understand the relationships that

staff have with each other and what formal or informal practices are in place to help staff build trust with each other.

The centrality of community offers additional insight as I consider what this means for the context of Community Sport. In engaging in this research, I was interested in better understanding what staff members were taking away from Community Sport's professional development, the relevance of the takeaways to them, and their overall satisfaction with PD. I learned that CoP is much more than the technical knowledge that it takes to get the job done, but instead saw more clearly the importance of the relationships that grow over time and the community that develops around things that matter to the people within the community. It is crucial to see past the more formal structures of an organization and experience the structures as they are defined by the engagement including all of the informal learning that comes along with it (Wenger, 2009).

Continuing with the idea of centrality of community and relationships to the work of professional development, it calls into question the effectiveness of 'one-shot' professional development opportunities. Lumpe (2007) suggests that professional development programs should aim to develop learning in community using research-based strategies. He notes that research has shown the quick-fix or one-time professional development programs are ineffective ways to change practice. Rather, if we aim to develop a CoP to encourage the opportunity for collaboration and working together, this may be a more effective way for teachers to refine their skills (Akerson, Cullen, & Hanson, 2009; Lumpe 2007). Putnam and Borko (2000) recognize that learning is social, and that in order for us to participate in this learning, the level to which individuals are encouraged to interact has a large impact on what is absorbed and how that learning takes place. There has to be intentional planning to cultivate relationships, and the

dynamics of the meetings have to reflect an interactive nature. The structural design of PD should allow for some time during breaks or transitions to allow for members of the community to talk to each other and build relationships, as should there be opportunities to engage in group conversations (Wenger, Mcdermott & Synder, 2002).

There is a similar link to the field of coach education, as many coach education and certification opportunities are delivered to coaches in a traditional teaching approach. While this has been a beneficial way to transfer knowledge, research shows that the trainings have not been as beneficial to nurture the development of effective coaches (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006). In coach training, 'one-shot' training or certification opportunities are very much propelled by content that needs to be delivered to coaches so that they are competent. During this transfer of information, there is less of an emphasis on how the concepts will translate on the individual level. As a result of this, there is a growing body of research examining the value of experiential learning rather than the formal coach education opportunities mentioned above (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006). Experiential learning also allows coaches to activate their own social networks while trying to problem solve as practitioners (Gilbert, Gallimore & Trudel, 2009).

Limitations

There are limitations that should be noted with the findings of this research. First, the sample is a convenience sample, because there were only 10 total participants (about 30% of staff), the findings are not representative of the entire staff of Community Sport.

I have also acknowledged that my dual role as a member of the Community Sport staff and as researcher may have impacted the study findings. To reduce any potential bias in responses from the participants, I framed the aim of this study as one to better understand

professional development as a way to improve and also had a limited visible role during the collection of data. Moving forward, it would be great to have future studies conducted by a researcher outside the Community Sport organization.

If future research is conducted, I would suggest that a second researcher should be added to the team who is not part of the organization. I believe that someone serving on the research team who is not as close to the organization would offer the opportunity of an outsider's perspective. In thinking about any post-thesis research, I will be sure to address this.

Implications for Future Work

This study attempted to see how the CoP framework aligned with the professional development of Community Sport. As a result of the findings of this research, I can see potential implications for both research and in practice.

Implications for research. First, I would be interested in conducting a longitudinal study of the professional development experience of Community Sport members from year to year. Wenger (1998) notes that communities of practice have life cycles. Given that the composition of the Community Sport staff changes each year, it would be interesting to consider the model of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger 1991), and how it aims to account for how newcomers are able to enter, learn from and contribute to an already established CoP (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011). There is a process through which legitimate peripheral newcomers are able to participate in the community as they transform into full participants (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011; Wenger, 1998). In thinking about Community Sport, the welcoming and inclusion of newcomers is essential and any additional support that could be gleaned for this process would be beneficial.

CoPs rely on trust and the ability to help each other, share ideas and work together to solve problems (McDermott, 2000). In considering areas for future research, I would also propose taking a closer look at the notion of trust and how it impacts the ability for Community Sport staff to learn from each other. Furthermore, it would be critical to examine what structures are in place to create the conditions for building trust among staff members.

On a broader level, I believe there is work to be done to continue to understand how we are training sport-based youth development practitioners. Specifically, I would consider investigating the role of experiential learning and the opportunity to engage with peers as a means to better understand and employ best practices. While there are only small scale studies that look at the use of learning communities in youth sport, Gilbert, Gallimore & Trudel (2009) suggest five key components; stable setting, job-alike teams, protocols that provide guidance, peer facilitators and working on athletic goals that are tangible gains in development.

Implications for practitioners. Thinking of the powerful role that CoPs can play in professional development, as someone who develops and delivers PD I was interested to learn more about the function of management in developing and sustaining a CoP. Wenger (1998) makes the case that for CoPs to be successful, they have to be developed by internal leadership and members need time and resources to fully participate. Adding to this, Cheng and Lee (2013), see the role of management in the pursuit of a CoP to be one of coordination and facilitation. CoPs are not a one-size fits all model, rather each community will form based on the needs and experiences of its members (Wenger, 1998). While all CoPs are different to suit unique needs, there are characteristics of successful CoPs along with an awareness of how to support CoPs that

can be an effective tool in an organization's professional development (Akerson, Cullen, & Hanson, 2009).

In their 2002 book *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, made a marked departure from the thinking of prior publications around the role of management of CoPs. In this work they offer that CoPs can be cultivated, and do not always have to materialize naturally. In fact, there can be facets of CoPs that if supported properly, would allow for members to participate more fully. Wenger (1998) notes that in order for members to participate in CoPs, they should have supported time and resources from management. In a focus group, a staff member spoke to the strain on his time in general as a doctoral student. I believe that if the professional development of Community Sport was offered as voluntary opportunities it would be more difficult for staff to commit time to participate.

In thinking about the use of CoP as a professional development tool in sport organizations, I believe that the role of management would have to be carefully balanced. Thinking specifically about Community Sport, we have practices in place that are suggested by the literature. Particularly, I begin to see the role of management has to be one that is carefully balanced. While it is important for time to be allocated to the participation in a CoP, however there is an importance of the informal space for learning and relationship building that is important.

While it is not uncommon for CoP to be supported by their larger organization (Wenger, 1998), a careful balance needs to be established so that the community can still take on a direction of its own. In thinking about this balance, I believe that Community Sport's blend of staff membership sets the direction for its professional development. The professional development team is comprised of myself (professional staff member, could be seen as

management), but also a blend of undergraduate and graduate students. While the professional development direction is in part influenced by the staff members of Community Sport each year in the first staff meeting, the undergraduate and graduate PD team members also continue to provide feedback during the year. In thinking about the experience of the staff prior to working for the organization, it could be beneficial to consider ways to more actively and broadly seek out input from members of the Community Sport staff throughout the course of the programming year. For example, for the staff members that have been involved in the organization for a longer time, or have an educational background in relevant areas, it could be worth asking them to help to facilitate a session, or contribute to the information that is shared with the larger staff.

In addition, it is important to note that perhaps the organizational structure of Community Sport played a role in the data mapping onto CoP. For example, in coding for the tenets of CoP, it was noted that staff who had a longer time of involvement in Community Sport as well as previous experience in the field has more to contribute to the understanding and explaining of professional development and the ways in which it aligned with the tenets of CoP framework. Looking specifically at Connor, he often made statements in both the focus groups and practitioner's journals that aligned with the framework. In looking at all that was coded, he has the highest frequency of statements. As a previous educator and now doctoral student, Connor has had past experience in the classroom, in professional development for educators, and also he is currently studying and reading literature in the teacher education and sport-based youth development fields. I believe that he has increased knowledge of this domain and was able to readily contextualize the role of professional development and draw parallels to the professional development of Community Sport and the CoP framework.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my research allowed me to analyze the perspectives of 10 Community Sport leaders, translate these findings into recommendations for the field, and has given me many ideas for future inquiry (although at this point I am not yet ready to commit to more research!). The combination of diving into literature and personal reflection has allowed me to identify tangible suggestions for how to design, develop and deliver professional development. In addition, this research verified that relationships are impactful to the work of professional development. Relationships do not only influence the outcome of the work, but they make for an environment where the work does not feel so laborious.

As a result of this study it is even clearer to me that relationships matter. Something so simple and that I intuitively know to be true, yet it took me months of reading, research and writing to circle back to. While I was confident in the power and importance of relationships in professional development, this study helped me to better understand some intricacies of relationship and community building and has also surfaced questions for further inquiry and understanding.

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Tables

Table 1

Participant Breakdown

| Participant | Gender | Role in Organization | Number of hours per week | Experience Prior to Community Sport | Focus Group Participation |
|-------------|--------|-----------------------|--------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| Nora | Female | Americorps Member | 35 hours | Undergraduate Degree | 3 |
| Ruby | Female | Graduate Student | 20 hours | Previous professional experience | 1 |
| Rose | Female | Undergraduate Student | 10 hours | N/A | 2 |
| Scarlett | Female | Undergraduate Student | 10 hours | N/A | 2 |
| Lily | Female | Graduate Student | 20 hours | Previous professional experience as educator | 1 |
| Jake | Male | Americorps Member | 35 hours | Undergraduate Degree | 1 |
| Luke | Male | Americorps Member | 35 hours | Undergraduate Degree | 2 |
| Connor | Male | Graduate Student | 20 hours | Previous professional experience as educator | 1 |
| Eli | Male | Graduate Student | 20 hours | Previous professional experience as educator | 3 |
| Avery | Male | Americorps Member | 35 hours | Undergraduate Degree | 3 |

Table 2

General Staff Meetings Outline

| Date | Topic | Objective |
|---------|------------------------|--|
| 9/10/15 | Organizational Culture | To define and discuss organizational culture, and to create messages to share with outside audiences describing the work of Community Sport. Staff focused on sharing the culture of |

| | | |
|----------|---|---|
| | | Community sport in three different areas: as an overall organization, campus specific, and community specific. |
| 10/10/15 | Asset-Based vs. Deficit- Based Approaches | To explore the differences between asset-based and deficit-based mindsets and the importance of incorporating asset-based approaches and language into Community Sport. Staff also discussed specific ways to realistically approach challenges that they face from an asset-based mindset. |
| 11/12/15 | White Privilege | To engage in critical dialogue around white privilege and to examine impacts of white privilege in our society, and specifically within Community Sport. Discussions were informed by individual experience and a pre-meeting reading assignment. |
| 12/10/15 | Structural Racism and Privilege | To encourage collaborative dialogue and critical thought around social issues that are relevant to practice. |

Table 3

Community Leader Meetings Outline

| Date | Topic | Objective |
|----------|----------------------------------|--|
| 9/17/15 | Community of Learners Philosophy | To discuss the community of learners ideology, how it can be adapted to Community Sport professional development meetings, and to examine topics and needs for future professional development meetings. |
| 10/15/15 | Evaluation | To discuss the importance of evaluation within organizations and in particular, Community Sport. The meeting was led by an Assistant Research Professor with [University center for educational policy analysis] whose research centers around issues of equity and access in education and data-driven decision-making. |
| 11/19/15 | Empowering Evaluators | To define terms associated with evaluation and how they can be applied to the work of Community Sport. Through contextual and internal assessment, staff identified important and specific components of work within Community Sport. Conversation was a second installment of October’s meeting to continue |

| | | |
|----------|--------------------|---|
| | | investment in understanding evaluation. |
| 12/17/15 | Program Assessment | To share amongst Community Leaders, the different successes and challenges that they faced throughout the semester within their specific Community Sport programs and in implementing PBIS. The discussion helped identify program strengths and areas for improvement to focus on in the upcoming spring semester. |

Appendix A

Practitioners' Journal Questions

Practitioners' Journal #1: Identify one thing that you have learned recently through [Community Sport]'s professional development that you will continue to use, or will continue to help you as you progress in your role with the organization. What about this skill do you find helpful and why, and how do you see it connecting to your work?

Practitioners' Journal #2: In your role with [Community Sport], has there been an instance that you've recently encountered that caused you to utilize a skill learned or discussed in [Community Sport] professional development? Please explain in detail the context, the skill used, and the outcome.

Practitioners' Journal #3: Share your thoughts regarding the usefulness and relevance of [Community Sport] professional development. In what ways do you see the PD as useful and relevant? What are some suggestions that you have to enhance usefulness?

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

1. What is your definition of professional development?
2. What are some things that you look for in professional development? Do you think that [Community Sport's] professional development includes these? Why or why not?
3. How often do you think about your own professional development?
4. What do you need to do your job better?
5. What are specific examples of how [Community Sport] professional development helps you to do your job better?
6. Reflecting on [Community Sport's] professional development session, which did you find to be the most impactful to your practice? Why?
7. What are some reasons you do not apply what you learn in workshops?
8. What makes a workshop beneficial?