Coaches’ Development through a Community of Practice: An Example from a Baseball League

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The Issue:
How do we get coaches to work together to develop athletes through developing their coaching practice?
Overview

• Preface
• Communities of practice
  – General
  – Sport
• LTAD
• Changing the culture
• The example of Quebec’s Midget AAA Baseball league
• Implications for coach education
Three Modes of Interacting

• **Networks of Practice (NoPs)** – “People… have practice and knowledge in common… are mostly unknown to one another… links… more indirect than direct…. Coordination and communication… quite explicit”  
  (Brown & Duguid, 2000, p. 141-2).

• **Informal Knowledge Networks (IKNs)** – “Loose and informal because there is no joint enterprise that holds them together, such as development of shared tools”  
  (Allee, 2003, p. 115).

• **Communities of Practice (CoPs)** – “Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by *interacting on an ongoing basis*”.  
  (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Learning System (SLS) (Wenger, 2000)</th>
<th>Modes of Interacting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A team/club</td>
<td>• Coaches’ Community of Practice - <strong>CCoP</strong> (mutual engagement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A league</td>
<td>• (few interactions)</td>
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</table>
| A national sport structure              | • Informal Knowledge Networks - **IKN**  
|                                         | • Networks of Practice - **NoP** |
| Global                                  |                      |
| An international sport structure        | • **IKN**  
|                                         | • **NoP** |
Communities of Practice

- *Learning processes* “are indivisible from the production processes being learned” (Lave, 1982, p. 186).

- *Membership:* “participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98).
What holds a CoP together?
3 Dimensions

• **Mutual engagement**
  – Engaging in a common practice, but not in a common way

• **Joint enterprise**
  – Collectively negotiated, not unanimous
  – Brings uniqueness

• **Shared repertoire**
  – History of a CoP’s mutual engagement
  – Tools, routines, words, actions, stories, ways of doing things, symbols
CoP’s in Sport: What can this mean for coach development?

• Shift:
  – Individual to community
  – Competitive to collaborative

• Exchange with confidence
• Exchange with coaches at the same level
• LTAD: Coaches need to work together
  – Same stage
  – Different stages
  – Avoid diverging objectives
An Attempt to Change the Culture: QC Midget AAA Baseball

- The League: 15 & 16 year old males (Train to train stage); 6 teams; coach + assistant; supervisors

- The Leader: TD
  - 5 years in place
    - Knowledge
    - Respect
    - Personality (control)
What the coaches said:

- “André led with an iron fist and it worked very, very well. He was VERY demanding when it came to player development” (LC)
- “With André it was ‘By the book – HIS book! One way for all payers, all teams and all coaches” (C 1).
- “André really, really believed in the uniformity of the teaching” (C 4)
“A league to develop players and coaches” (LC): The Structure

- Coach and athlete selection (TD)
- Coach and athlete commitment
- Coaches for each specialty
- Winter: Gym, lessons plans
- Florida camp, mid-season coach meetings
- The rules
  - All players play
  - # of pitches
- The games
Sharing First – Competition Last

• “Under André, there was always communication between the coaches… always sharing information » (LC)

• “When the coaches played against each other, they were able to exchange. It even to the extent that one coach might say to the other coach, ‘Pitch to the inside of my batter. He is not able to hit there; he needs to learn’” (LC)

• “There was only one real competition; the end of season tournament. That was the final report” (LC)
Quality Supervision: Practice & Games

- The most important thing is… the receptiveness of the coaches to criticism” (LC)
- “We cannot necessarily forge the personality of a coach” (S 1)
- “We got to put in some straight guidelines and apply it to the rule. (S 2)
- “When supervision is well done, I receive a report and send it to all the supervisors, so they are all aware of that, for example, Laval needs to work on stealing bases” (LC)
The Baseball CCoP

• Mutual engagement: Gym start, Florida camp, Mid-season meetings, supervision
• Joint enterprise: Coaches and supervisors put the global development of all league players first.
• Shared repertoire: Language, rules, plans, technique, tactics, etc.
Challenges

• Changing the culture: Getting the whole community to buy in.
• Need the structure AND the leadership
  – Set up culture and opportunities for sharing – camps are for the development of coaches AND athletes
  – Get coaches excited about sharing – value
• Resistance: e.g. Ice hockey
• Move away from.........
Knowledge (K) sharing

Inner circle: Coaches share K

Outer circle: Coaches need to poke for K

“"It’s hard to talk to those guys"”

“I am more than willing to help them out”
Implications for Coach Education in the NCCP

• The role of the mentor = facilitator
• Clear directives: Strong leadership
  – Have at least 2 coaches from club go together to workshop
  – Coaches take discussion back to club/association
  – Put structure in place for exchanging and negotiating the local coaching practice
• Investigate
“The best thing about focusing on development is that at the end of the line, everyone wins!” (LC)
The 3 Modes of Interacting for Coach Education: Maximizing Learning

Networks of Practice + Informal Knowledge Networks + Communities of Practice = Learning (best scenario)