The journey from novice to expert in competitive Scrabble players: an investigation of the development of expertise in a community of practice

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THE JOURNEY FROM NOVICE TO EXPERT IN COMPETITIVE SCRABBLE PLAYERS: An investigation of the development of expertise in a community of practice

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

By

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B.Ed. (Secondary)

Faculty of Education
2010
Declaration

I certify that this is my original work and that it has not been submitted for a degree to any other university or institution.

Edward J. Okulicz
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ABSTRACT

This research examined the ways that highly ranked, competitive Scrabble players developed their skills and expertise. Using nine case studies and semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data, the research sought to explore the range of interactions of the experts with other Scrabble players and the curriculum of knowledge that facilitated their journey from novice to expert by building up a case study of the development of both individual players and the community they exist within.

The professional interactions among peers in reference to tournaments, the bonds and friendships that have developed in the social sphere that accompanies club and tournament play, and specific relationships within the community such as mentor/protégé relationships were identified. In addition, the development and maintenance of cognitive and metacognitive skills of the experts, both inside and outside of the community, were explored.

A number of commonalities in the stories of the experts were identified, suggesting that experts have a range of shared habits of participation, and drew heavily upon not just deliberate practice, but also learning from participation, competition and observation, and making use of received wisdom from those who achieved expert status before them. The existence of a community was seen as important, even though the game of Scrabble is an inherently combative, competitive one, and seen to provide opportunities for learning and reflection. The research suggests that competitive practice can form the basis of a productive community of practice that is beneficial to participants, and that for Scrabble players’ development, there is a complex combination of individual and social factors involved in the process.