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# Learning to Fiddle in a Community of Practice

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### Article abstract

This article explores some of the specific dynamics and processes experienced by Canadian old-time fiddlers as they learn to fiddle in a community of practice (CoP). Based on an analysis of interviews with several fiddlers at the Kenosee Lake Kitchen Party fiddling camp, we explore two elements of fiddling that the fiddlers identified as crucial to the development of expertise as an old-time fiddler: a danceable quality and personalizing a tune. Danceability allowed for historical continuity of the community's practices, while making a tune your own provided a way to introduce new ideas and practices into the CoP, resulting in growth and change.

# Learning to Fiddle in a Community of Practice

RACHELLE LANDRY and JODY STARK

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*Résumé : Cet article considère quelques dynamiques et processus particuliers que vivent les violonistes « à l'ancienne » lorsqu'ils apprennent à jouer dans une communauté de pratique (CdP). À partir d'une analyse d'entrevues menées auprès de plusieurs violonistes du camp de violon « party d cuisine » du lac Kenosee, nous examinons deux éléments que les violonistes ont identifiés comme essentiels au développement du savoir-faire d'un violoniste « à l'ancienne » : il faut que les airs soient propices à la danse, et qu'ils soient personnalisés. La « dansabilité » a favorisé la continuité historique des pratiques de la communauté, tandis que le fait de « faire sien un air » a procuré un moyen d'introduire de nouvelles idées et pratiques dans la CdP, permettant ainsi croissance et changement.*

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Fiddling has been part of the cultural life in what is now Canada at least since European colonizers, trappers, and settlers came to Turtle Island (Fuoco 2007; Giroux 2013; Johnson 2006). While in earlier times, individuals mostly learned to fiddle through an informal process of enculturation in their homes and community,<sup>1</sup> in the contemporary moment, there is a network of

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*This article has accompanying videos on our YouTube channel. You can find them on the playlist for MUSICultures volume 50, available here: [http://bit.ly/MUSICultures\\_50](http://bit.ly/MUSICultures_50). With the ephemerality of web-based media in mind, our online content may not always be accessible. We apologize for any inconvenience.*

individuals, performance groups, and organizations that teach and promote various styles of “old-time” fiddling in Canada. In the Canadian context, the term *old-time* seems to be generally understood as instrumental dance music featuring a fiddle (Giroux 2013; Johnson 2006).

The Canadian old-time fiddling network is made up of associations and individuals that regularly run fiddling groups, teach fiddling in studio settings, and organize fiddling jams, jamborees, and fiddling contests. In addition to local fiddling contests, which are often part of a regional contest circuit (Giroux 2013), there is also a national competition organized each year by the Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Association. During the Canadian Grand Masters, old-time fiddlers from various regional contest circuits compete for the title of grand master fiddler. The Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Association contest was first held in 1990 (Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Association 2019) and serves as a kind of gathering place for expert fiddlers from various old-time fiddling traditions in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

A vital part of the contemporary fiddling network in Canada are the fiddling camps that have sprung up across the country over the last fifty years in response to a perceived decline in interest for playing traditional and old-time music (Lalonde 2017; Lederman and Smith 2014). Meghan Forsyth (2011) reported that there were thirty-seven traditional music/dance camps taking place in 2011 in Canada, most of which had been established in the 2000s. However, post-pandemic, this number seems to be roughly half that with some of the camps offering online sessions or only shorter fall/winter camps.<sup>3</sup>

Another way to think about this network of people, organizations, and events might be to consider that all across Canada, there are fiddlers ranging from novice to expert who are members of specific *communities of practice* within an extended network or *landscape of practice* of organizations and individuals who are engaged in teaching and learning old-time fiddling (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015). Adding to previous scholarship that focuses on the transmission of music traditions (e.g., Garrison 1985; Schippers 2010; Veblen 1991), we are specifically interested in better understanding the experience of the learner within the social system in which old-time fiddlers are situated.

In this article, we will discuss some of the specific dynamics and processes experienced by old-time fiddlers as they learn to fiddle in a community of practice. One of us (Rachelle Landry) is a Métis fiddler from Winnipeg, Manitoba, who has just completed her teacher education, and the other of us (Jody Stark) is a music education scholar of Hungarian and Scottish descent who is deeply interested in experiences and processes of learning. In the summer of 2019, Rachelle attended the Kenosee Lake Kitchen Party, a traditional

music camp in Moose Mountain Provincial Park in southeast Saskatchewan, where she interviewed fourteen fiddlers ranging from novice to expert about their experiences of learning to fiddle. Through our analysis of the transcripts from Rachelle's interviews, we sought to understand how the fiddlers' learning trajectories were impacted by learning to fiddle in a community/landscape of practice. In the following, we will explore how the fiddlers in our study negotiated the competing dynamics of *continuity* and *voice* through an examination of their use and understanding of the concepts of "danceability" and "making a tune your own." These two concepts were often mentioned by the participants in our study, and we came to see them as part of the shared repertoire of practice within this specific community/landscape of practice, and therefore as implicit in learning and identity construction for the learner, and for continuity and change in the community/landscape of practice.

## Research Methods

The Kenosee Lake Kitchen Party (KLKP) is held at a church camp in Saskatchewan over two weeks in August each year. The camp is organized by a volunteer non-profit organization and is directed by Saskatchewan fiddler and camp founder Michele Amy. Michele is a musician of Métis descent from Forget (pron, Forjay), Saskatchewan, who teaches fiddling in her community. Michele is the founder and administrator for the camp. She started KLKP after having a transformational experience at the Emma Lake Fiddle Camp and returning home to teach others. When her students wouldn't travel to go to camp, she brought camp to them and KLKP was born.<sup>4</sup> KLKP is one of two summer fiddle camps in Saskatchewan currently running; the other camp, Fiddlyness, runs at Ness Creek, north of Prince Albert (the Emma Lake camp no longer runs). Campers at KLKP range from children to adults, and they have the opportunity to participate in group lessons, as well as music and dance workshops. Campers can also do other activities like arts and crafts, swimming, and canoeing. Every evening, there is a concert featuring camp clinicians and personnel, and the concert is followed by an old-time dance, a campfire, and a jam session. Clinicians hail from all across Canada and sometimes from other countries such as the US or Scotland. Campers are thus exposed to a variety of styles of old-time music.

Once we received ethical approval from our institution, camp director Michele Amy gave Rachelle permission to collect data for this study while she attended one week of camp in the summer of 2019. Rachelle paid to attend the camp and participated in camp activities including jams, lessons, and dances

where she assumed the role of participant observer. She also invited several campers and instructors to participate in semi-structured one-on-one interviews for the study. Each participant (and a parent in the case of participants who were under the age of eighteen) consented verbally and in writing prior to being interviewed, and fourteen fiddlers were interviewed during the week. Participants included the camp director Michele, several instructors and instructors-at-large (volunteers who often have been instructors in previous years that serve as mentors and camp counsellors), adult camp participants, and children who attended the camp.

In our discussion for this article, we mention ten of the fiddlers Rachelle interviewed. Background information on these fiddlers is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Fiddlers in this Article

Fiddler and Role at KLKP	Biographical Details
<b>Michele Amy</b> KLKP Camp Founder and Director <a href="http://www.micheleamy.ca/">http://www.micheleamy.ca/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fiddle teacher from Saskatchewan</li><li>• Took piano lessons as a child and completed RCM grade 10</li><li>• Took up fiddling as an adult and began teaching others what she was learning at Emma Lake Fiddle Camp (which no longer runs)</li><li>• Started KLKP in southern Saskatchewan</li></ul>
<b>Booker Blakely</b> Instructor-at-Large	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fiddler from Saskatchewan</li><li>• Mom taught conservatory piano</li><li>• Took violin and, later, fiddling lessons</li><li>• Was preparing to compete in the Canadian Grand Masters at the time of the study</li><li>• Taught fiddling for the Frontier School Division at the time of the study</li></ul>
<b>Mitchell Dureault</b> Instructor-at-Large <a href="https://www.mitchelldureault.com/">https://www.mitchelldureault.com/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fiddler and fiddle teacher from Saskatchewan</li><li>• His grandfather Paul Dureault was a well-known fiddler around Wolseley and Moffat area</li><li>• Took conservatory violin lessons growing up</li><li>• Attended KLKP as a youth and learned to fiddle at camp and from recordings</li></ul>
<b>Tristen Durocher</b> Instructor <a href="https://www.facebook.com/tristen.durocher">https://www.facebook.com/tristen.durocher</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Métis fiddler from Northern Saskatchewan</li><li>• Was given his great-grandfather's violin when he was eight</li><li>• Learned by listening to recordings and attending fiddling camps</li><li>• Has competed at the John Arcand Fiddle Fest and CGMFA contest. In 2019, he was a Grand Masters finalist</li><li>• Taught fiddling for the Frontier School Division at the time of the study</li><li>• Is an activist working to raise awareness about suicide in northern Indigenous communities**</li></ul>

<b>Patti Kusturok</b> Instructor <a href="https://www.pattikusturok.com/">https://www.pattikusturok.com/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Champion fiddler and fiddle teacher from Manitoba</li> <li>• Took Suzuki and conservatory violin lessons as a child but also exposed to fiddle music in her home</li> <li>• Was apprenticed by Reg Bouvette, Graham Townsend, and other fiddlers as a young fiddler</li> <li>• Has won the Manitoba fiddling championship six times, the Pembroke competition three times, the North American competition three times, and was the first woman and Western Canadian to win the Canadian Grand Masters</li> <li>• Inducted into the Manitoba Fiddle Association Hall of Fame (2010) and the North American Fiddlers' Hall of Fame (2016)</li> <li>• Long-time board member of the CGMFA</li> </ul>
<b>Stacey Reed</b> Instructor <a href="https://nboldtimefiddle.com">https://nboldtimefiddle.com</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiddler and fiddle teacher from New Brunswick</li> <li>• Began fiddling at age four and step dancing at age five</li> <li>• Released her first album at age nine and another at age twelve</li> <li>• Played in New Brunswick Youth Orchestra for two years and spent summers on the contest circuit in Ontario</li> <li>• Graduated from Berklee with a degree in music management</li> <li>• Artistic director and manager of the Lumber Jills and founder of the New Brunswick Old Time Fiddle Co. music conservatory</li> <li>• Nominated for two East Coast Music Awards as a member of the group Banshee, which she joined at age fifteen</li> </ul>
<b>Lisa Smith*</b> Camp Participant (youth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Began taking fiddling lessons at age seven</li> <li>• Diagnosed with speech disorder involving motor functioning</li> <li>• Lisa's mom felt that fiddling had helped with Lisa's motor skill development and maybe her reading level</li> </ul>
<b>Donna Turk</b> Instructor <a href="http://www.donnaturk.ca/">http://www.donnaturk.ca/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiddler and fiddle teacher from Calgary now living and teaching studio lessons in Forget, Saskatchewan</li> <li>• Studied Suzuki and conservatory violin before joining a fiddling group</li> <li>• Briefly studied classical violin at university</li> <li>• Served as the director of the Bow Valley Fiddlers in Calgary for fourteen years</li> <li>• Involved in teaching fiddling in Indigenous communities in the north and teaches adult students in her home studio</li> </ul>
<b>Karen Warner</b> Camp Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public school string teacher from Manitoba</li> <li>• Taught private violin and strings and orchestra in a public school</li> <li>• Later in her career was hired to start a fiddling program in a school in Winnipeg</li> <li>• Began attending fiddling camps and jamborees</li> <li>• Initially began learning fiddling tunes that matched her technical ability and gradually learned standards as she attended camps</li> </ul>
<b>Lucas Werner*</b> Camp Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A young fiddler of Indigenous ancestry***</li> <li>• Began taking fiddling lessons at age seven and had been playing for six years at the time of the study</li> <li>• Has mostly learned to play by ear but was also learning to read staff notation</li> <li>• Had recorded a CD and won first place in a fiddle competition in his home province</li> </ul>

\* Pseudonym; no identifying details provided to protect anonymity and privacy.

\*\* See <https://leaderpost.com/news/local-news/tristen-durochers-quest-for-suicide-plan-driven-by-deeply-felt-pain> and <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/tristen-durocher-ruling-1.5721465> for details about Tristen's suicide awareness activism.

\*\*\* We are intentionally obscuring identifying details to protect the privacy and anonymity of Lucas and Lisa, the two minors in the study that we mention in this article.

Each participant was interviewed once, and interview questions were based on Schippers's "Sample Questions for Interviewing World Musicians on Learning and Teaching" (2010: 173–74). Schippers's questionnaire was chosen because it focuses on transmission. Data collection questions were modified slightly for participants under eighteen years old. Interviews were transcribed and member checked by participants, including youths and a consenting parent. All adult participants elected to use their real names in this research, but we assigned a pseudonym and intentionally obscured identifying details for the three participants who were minors at the time of the study.

After collecting and transcribing the interview data, we began our analysis by writing a narrative portrait of each participant, and then coded transcripts, field notes, and portraits for themes. We next explored the design and workings of the camp as a community of practice and then moved on to learning pathways and issues of learning and identity. We engaged in hermeneutic part/whole analysis to compare data and emerging themes against Schippers's questionnaire (which served as a framework), research questions, the literature, the narrative portraits, and across participants (Ellis 1998; Patterson and Williams 2002; Smith 1991). Themes that emerged out of our analysis included musical biculturalism, cultural brokering, identity and belonging, and the importance of continuity and voice in learning to fiddle.

The continuity and voice in learning to fiddle theme, in particular, inspired us to argue that learning to fiddle involves learning to signal continuity with past practice (via the concept of "danceability") while at the same time developing a unique voice through a variety of strategies (thereby "making a tune your own"). These two elements of learning and practice were important both for the individual in the process of learning to fiddle and for the community of practice. For the individual, they served as mechanisms for the negotiation of identity, and for the community, they served as structures of historical continuity and also growth. In fact, continuity and voice were part of the mutual engagement and joint enterprise of the members of the community of practice and were also implicated in the shared repertoire of learning practices favoured by members of the community.

Before going further, we feel it is important to say a word about our unit of analysis. In planning to undertake this study, we theorized KLKP as a community of practice or CoP (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998, 2000). This framing served us well as we sought to explore how KLKP functioned as a CoP for our larger study. However, when we began our analysis related to our second area of inquiry regarding the participants' learning trajectories, the subject of this paper, we chose to view participants as members of a larger community or network of communities, of which the Kenosee Lake Kitchen

Party was but one small part. Etienne Wenger-Trayner and colleagues (2015) captured our thinking: “This focus on communities of practice has been highly productive but, in our view, has led at times to too great a focus on single communities and on the apprenticeship trajectory from periphery to heart of the community of practice” (1). Just as these authors go on to suggest, the participants in our study were members of multiple interrelated communities, and their learning and participation trajectories were far more complex than their involvement in KLKP. Etienne Wenger-Trayner and colleagues theorize the idea of *landscapes of practice*, “which consist of many different communities of practice and the boundaries between them” (2). This is how we imagine what we call “the old-time fiddling community” in our exploration of the participants’ experiences of learning and identity construction. In our discussion of the participants’ learning experiences, we move back and forth between these two units of analysis: KLKP, a specific community of practice, and the landscape of practice consisting of the larger network of practice we are calling “the old-time fiddling community.”

### Legitimate Peripheral Participation in a Community of Practice

Lave and Wenger’s community of practice (CoP) theory served as the theoretical framework for our study, and the concept of learning as a process of *legitimate peripheral participation* (LPP) was helpful in theorizing the study participants’ experience of learning to fiddle at camp and in the broader old-time fiddling community/landscape of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998, 2000; Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015). Lave and Wenger (1991) conceive of LPP as a socially situated and socially constructed process through which humans not only learn from others, but also develop their sense of self. In this way, learning is the “historical production, transformation, and change of persons” (51) that takes place within relational social structures, or communities/landscapes of practice. Individuals within a CoP are viewed as practitioners who legitimately contribute to the shared enterprise of the community of practice, and their *legitimate participation* in the practices of the CoP determine their level of belonging. The degree of legitimacy practitioners experience in the community is dynamic and negotiated via “continuous interaction” with other members of the CoP (Wenger 1998: 53).

The word *peripheral* in the term LPP speaks to the agency, location, and trajectory available to practitioners within a CoP. It is intended to signal “that there are multiple, varied, more- or less-engaged and -inclusive ways of being located in the fields of participation defined by a community” (Lave



and Wenger 1991: 35–36). In other words, Lave and Wenger conceive of practitioners as being situated within a given social world with a potential centripetal trajectory from “newcomer” to “old-timer,” and they suggest that the trajectory of an individual within the community influences their identity and learning. In LPP, learning is an integral part of participation in the social world where “identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another” (53). Identities, then, are related to practice and are therefore negotiated within a community of practice.

A *community of practice*, is, at heart, a group of people who interact with each other around a common purpose or goal (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002: 4). Members of a CoP are *mutually engaged* in a *joint enterprise* which is facilitated through a *shared repertoire* of practice. This shared repertoire, rather than being a body of pieces or tunes, consists of the collective resources developed and shared by members of the group to make meaning related to the practices of the group. These resources may include routines, specific words and phrases, procedures, stories or folklore, artifacts, actions, gestures or concepts (Wenger 1998).<sup>5</sup>

CoPs can be conceived of as “relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” that together constitute a landscape of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98). Members of CoPs, then, are practitioners (in this case, fiddlers) engaged in learning the practices valued by the group by legitimately participating in the practices of the group. Wenger (1998) notes that learning and practice are closely related in that “learning is the engine of practice and practice is the history of that learning” (97) and thus, “communities of practice can be thought of as shared histories of learning” (86). At the same time as members engage in practice via legitimate peripheral participation in the CoP, they are also negotiating their membership and identity in the group.

As the study participants learned and/or taught fiddling and participated in jams, competitions, performances, and other events, they were not only negotiating belonging and their identities but also engaging in a communal process of negotiating meaning regarding what constituted expertise and good practice within the community. We are arguing that this negotiation was facilitated by the dialectical negotiation of continuity and voice, which was part of the shared repertoire of practices members of the CoP used for teaching and learning fiddling.

## Learning to Fiddle: Negotiations of Meaning and Practice

The fiddlers that we interviewed were engaged in LPP within the KLKP community and in the landscape of practice we are calling “the Canadian old-time fiddling community.” As we detailed above, LPP in this community/landscape of practice involved a negotiation of meaning with regard to what constitutes acceptable practice for contemporary “old-time” fiddling in Canada. This negotiation occurred on many levels in the context of coaching novice fiddlers, setting and interpreting the rules for the Grand Masters and other fiddling competitions, choosing judges and the winners for the aforementioned contests, learning well-known fiddle tunes and writing new ones, and deciding who the clinicians should be at various camps and jamborees, including KLKP. The negotiation of acceptable fiddling practice was facilitated through a number of practices and reflected in the processes of learning danceability and making a tune your own, two themes that came up consistently in our conversations with the participants.

Danceability and making a tune your own were part of the shared repertoire of practices that allowed community members/practitioners to reproduce the practices and artifacts valued by the community (i.e., styles, tunes) and, at the same time, also facilitated innovation and change of those same practices. We now turn to an exploration of how the participants in our study experienced this negotiation of meaning as they learned and/or taught the practices of the community, and we conclude with some reflections on the impact of continuity and voice at the level of the CoP and the landscape of practice.

## What Constitutes Expertise as a Fiddler?

Among the participants for this study, there were several acknowledged expert fiddlers. These expert fiddlers manifested a kind of expert knowing-in-action that is learned by doing and, as such, does not belong to the realm of propositional knowledge (Schön 1983).<sup>6</sup> Donald A. Schön suggests that, over time, practitioners acquire a repertoire of “examples, images, understandings, and actions” which they can draw on to make sense of a specific situation or problem when it arises (138). The expert/old-timer is thus able to approach an unfamiliar situation as familiar and thereby quickly make sense of the new. For fiddle players, the ability to hear and/or play a tune and connect it to the underlying dance form is one example of such a repertoire. Other examples might include being able to recognize and execute certain identifying elements

of various fiddling styles, recognizing that an ornament or technique (or even an element from another style) might work within a specific form or melodic/harmonic progression, or being able to respond in the moment while performing with others.

Learning to draw from one's repertoire of practice was evident in the two main elements the participants discussed related to the development of expertise: a danceable quality and personalizing a tune. We see the first as being implicit for continuity of practice within the CoP, and the second as being related to the ongoing process of constituting one's voice and identity within the community, which, in term, facilitated growth and change in the CoP.

### A Danceable Quality

First and foremost, acceptable practice required continuity with fiddling practices of the past. The quality of playing had to clearly signal a grounding in the specific tradition and dance form related to a specific tune or style. Although there was some room for innovation, there seemed to be a general consensus that when someone played with expertise, there was a danceable quality to their playing. This was true regardless of whether a fiddler was playing for dancers in the moment. For example, Booker shared that his supervisor, who oversees the fiddle program at Frontier School Division in Manitoba, characterized a good performance as follows: "If people aren't dancing to your music, you're probably not doing it right." Mitchell agreed. He shared that in order to be "authentic," fiddle music had to first be "danceable."<sup>7</sup> For Patti, who actually played for dances growing up, the idea of dancing was always foremost on her mind: "I think about these dance halls that used to be packed with people on Saturday night. Always playing and wanting to make people want to dance. That's the whole thing. You want to make people want to dance or at least tap their foot." Good practice meant that one incited foot tapping, hand clapping, and dancing with their playing. Sherry Johnson (2006) notes that even though what constitutes a danceable quality may be open to interpretation, the connection between old-time fiddling and its roots as dance music remains strong.

Danceability was also a useful tool for teaching. Patti shared how she used this concept in her teaching as a goal for her students to work toward. She described her thought process in trying to help her students evoke the shared history of the community/landscape of practice as follows: "Okay. What am I doing here? I'm playing this waltz and it sounds like a waltz and people want to dance to it but when this guy plays it, it doesn't sound like that." Helping her

students to make a connection with the dance origins of fiddle music was one of Patti's main strategies in teaching fiddling.

While a danceable feel was important regardless of the style of fiddling or the dance form, it is perhaps important to note that some of the regional fiddling traditions the participants discussed have remained closer to their roots as dance music than others. According to the participants, these styles tended to be straighter and more predictable than those that are now most often played as performance music. For example, Booker talked about fiddling music from Ontario. He saw this music as being strongly "rooted in step dancing," which meant that the fiddle was expected to play the tune without much variation and with a steady tempo even when they were not accompanying dancers. He contrasted this with his local (Métis) fiddling practice, in which "people will play with tempo, they'll push, pull, they'll have fun with rhythms. But if you've got someone clogging along with you, like, you got to be on it, you've got to be on the beat, it's got to be that way."<sup>8</sup> Stacey also mentioned the connection between dancing and fiddle music in home province of New Brunswick: "Our music was meant for dancers.... So the music that was played is less in the ornamentation-style of things, and more straight, because it was meant to ... showcase ... the dancers." Stacey explained, "that's what we do in old-time fiddling [from New Brunswick]. Like, the melody is meant to be very pure." This "pure melody" style is part of what she was committed to teaching to her students in the interests of safeguarding a New Brunswick fiddling tradition. Thus, the danceable aspect of feel served as a mechanism of conservation of the fiddling traditions valued by Stacey and the other participants.<sup>9</sup>

## Making a Tune Your Own

In contrast, a second component of expertise was the human component brought to a tune by a specific individual. Donna explained, "When I play a tune, I know that I play different than everybody else.... Like it's not the same because we all have different feel." Stacey agreed. She explained the process of making a tune her own:

The ultimate goal is to identify your own style, by blending styles that you've been influenced by. So the tunes are generally mine because they're a mix of not just my style, but they sound like a little bit of this person and a little bit of this person, and I'm listening and I'm picking up things that I really like from this artist, and maybe a little pattern that I like from another artist,

and I'm taking all these things and I'm combining them into, you know, my own little melting pot, and making my tune out of that.

Patti's process was similar. Her first teacher told her "not to try to copy any players but to take what I liked from many different players and to form my own style." In this sense, developing one's voice as a fiddler was closely related to listening: Stacey and Patti's learning process depended on knowledgeable listening to the music of acknowledged experts in the fiddling community.

The participants also saw expertise in this sense as connected to where one is from or relating in some way to a certain fiddling tradition. On the one hand, one's voice could be expressed by evoking a regional flavor when playing a standard tune. For example, Karen shared that she enjoyed "how people from any different part of Canada can maybe know the same tune but do a different version of it." On the other hand, it could be that fiddlers intentionally diverged from a specific style to make a tune their own. For example, Mitchell explained that fiddlers sometimes intentionally take "bits and pieces from different musical backgrounds and cultures that [they] really enjoy" and incorporate these elements into their version of a tune from a different style. He offered an example: "Some people will take the Métis music, for example, and it's a very specific style.... There are no cuts, there's no rules, there's no Scottish ornamentation, but it's really fun to play that ornamentation in it." Lisa, who was still a novice by the community's standards, shared a story about her use of a variant on this strategy while playing at a coffeehouse with her friend. The girls spontaneously embedded the tune "Whiskey Before Breakfast" in the middle of the pop tune "Riptide" by Vance Joy. Lisa and her friend added their own personal touch "fooling around in the moment," as Mitchell called it. This seemed to be a common strategy to personalizing a tune.

Mitchell noted that he would learn the tune in question "as close to a basic standard as possible" and then add his own ornamentation. Sometimes, a personal touch came out of a mistake while playing on stage that sounded "kind of cool." Mitchell indicated that he would "store that in my head for later then come back to it." Like Stacey and Patti, Mitchell had engaged in a substantial amount of listening that resulted in a deep understanding of various fiddling styles enabling him to engage in a kind of *bricolage* in making a tune his own.

Tristen tended to focus on adding ornamentation as well, but he also focused on altering dynamics to add a certain drama to the performance. Tristen explained, "You do that while you're playing even a reel or a jig, so then it makes the sound a little bit more alive, and that takes some practice. You have to be comfortable with a tune before you start changing it and rearranging it."

The participants in the study made it clear that developing one's voice was something that was learned over time. Like Lisa, Lucas was just starting to learn how to add elements to personalize tunes in his playing. He shared: "I don't usually ... change it too much. I just add little triplets and stuff." He also talked about occasionally adding slurs between the notes. Those who were newer to fiddling tended to closely imitate recordings and their teachers, while moving from imitation to adding their own personal "feel" over time. Karen explained that she mostly imitated at this point in her journey "because I don't have that depth of the background. I'm coming into this relatively late in my life, right? I don't have those years of experience to draw on in fiddle so I can put my own spin on it." However, she was starting to compare versions of tunes and take elements from both versions to make a tune her own (note that, once again, this process is based in listening). She added, "The more I progress in fiddle, the more I am assimilating a whole bunch of stuff and making it my own ... in fiddle, a melody can be played twenty different ways."

Even though developing one's voice required continuity with the music of fiddlers of the past, because "good" practice in the community/landscape of practice also allowed for innovation and diversity, individuals were able to contribute to the vocabulary of practice of the community, and experience belonging within the community/landscape of practice. Donna perhaps summed it up best when she shared, "I ... feel like I have something to offer musically. And it may not be the same, it may not be authentic to what you think is authentic but it's authentic to me because it's coming from a place of heart." We consider this notion of authenticity in what follows.

## Continuity and Change within a Community of Practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that the trajectory from "newcomer" to "old-timer" experienced by certain members of a CoP requires access to diverse activities, old-timers, and other members of the community along with "information, resources and opportunities for participation" (101). This is true of other trajectories as well.<sup>10</sup> Because one of the aims of the Kenosha Lake Kitchen Party is to preserve and transmit a specific practice (Michele Amy, Personal Communication, August 16, 2019), and preservation of this practice depends on transmitting a certain shared repertoire of practice to newcomers, access to community resources and opportunities to participate in the practices of the community were relatively open and transparent at KLKP. Michele intentionally designed structures in which newcomers had access to old-timers and other community members and in which newcomers could legitimately

participate in a variety of activities. This is also the case in the broader landscape of practice where, like Michele Amy, other “old-timers” have created structures, including fiddling groups, music schools, camps, jamborees, and competitions, to allow for access, participation, and opportunities for interaction between community members at different points in their trajectories and different levels of membership in the CoP in question. For example, Johnson (2006) describes the way that fiddling contests in Ontario provide a point of contact between old-timers and younger generations of fiddlers. Johnson notes that judges at fiddling contests are old-timers who provide “stylistic stability” by serving as judges (503), while other old-timers compete in classes specifically for older fiddlers, thereby serving as models of practice. Johnson notes that these older fiddlers also participate in multi-generational jams with fiddlers of different ages and skill levels over the contest weekend, thus further serving as models and providing a chance for younger fiddlers to learn tunes.

All of the above-mentioned structures serve to facilitate what Wenger (1998) calls “generational encounters” whereby “different generations bring different perspectives to their encounter because their identities are invested in different moments of that history” (157). While KLKP and many fiddling contest associations state that their aim is to “preserve” old-time fiddling, Johnson (2006) points out that this term is generally used in the sense of “to keep [the tradition] alive” rather than meaning to safeguard and transmit a specific repertoire of practices or conventions such as bowing technique, specific tempi, style of ornaments, playing certain tunes, and other stylistic elements (358).<sup>11</sup> This somewhat flexible definition of the tradition of old-time fiddling allows for individual and local interpretation and even evolution of style and practice within the community/landscape of practice over time.

When learning the practices valued by a specific CoP, fiddlers listen to recordings and performances of old-timers and/or play along at jams, trying to replicate the “feel” of the tune and performance (including danceability) while also maybe adding a few personal touches depending on their level of competency. As Karen describes above, over time the novice fiddler builds their repertoire of tunes and gradually moves away from replicating performances to adding their own touches via the strategies outlined above (ornamentation, bricolage of elements from different players and styles, adding varied dynamics and other interpretive elements) while attempting to give their playing a danceable quality. Novice fiddlers and newcomers to the community add personal touches as they are able, which are then evaluated by old-timers and other community members in lessons, clinics, and competitions, and either accepted or redirected as they are measured against a shared repertoire of various

fiddling styles recognized by the CoP/landscape of practice (e.g., Country, Old Time, Cape Breton, Swing, Métis, Bluegrass, French Canadian).<sup>12</sup>

These generational encounters are sites of negotiation for continuity and change related to the practices of the community. While we did not see explicit examples of this negotiation specific to the practices of KLKP, likely due to the limited timeframe of our study, we did see evidence of negotiations in the broader landscape of practice within, for example, the rules for the Grand Masters Fiddling Competition. The 2019 rules outline the following criteria for evaluating performances with an important footnote:

Criteria that judges will be listening for:

Intonation

Technical Ability

Danceability\*

Overall Accuracy

Emotion and Feeling

Variety of Tunes (from one specific fiddle style or a variety of styles)

\* The CGMFA understands that not all fiddle styles lend themselves to dancing and if you play such a tune, you will not be penalized for this. With that being said, dancing and fiddling go hand in hand with most styles, so adding some danceable tunes is recommended.

We interpret the footnoted comment as representing a negotiation within the community regarding what constitutes acceptable fiddling practice related to the notion of danceability. Perhaps even more interesting is the note that follows:

Guideline on Improvisation: Competitors may use improvisation while preserving the meter and fundamental structure of the piece. The CGMFA does not encourage excessive improvisation. If improvisation is used, competitors will be judged on the extent to which improvisation is effectively employed in light of the three pillars of the Competition.

It would seem that newcomers to the community/landscape of practice are bringing the practice of improvisation into the community, necessitating negotiation of the second element of practice we have discussed above, that of personalizing a tune. In fact, Giroux (2013) suggests that this is not the only negotiation of what constitutes acceptable fiddling practice at the Canadian Grand Masters. Whereas the CGMFA used to require competitors to perform in



*the* old-time style, Giroux notes that the rules changed in 2009 to accommodate a variety of styles.<sup>13</sup>

Returning to Karen's comment above as well as the descriptions of learning of many of the participants, it is important to note that both the negotiation of continuity and change and the practice of learning to fiddle are organized in large part around the practice of learning fiddle tunes. In fact, at first glance, it might appear to a novice fiddler or an outsider that learning to fiddle is uniquely about learning tunes. This is the primary way that learning to fiddle was talked about and experienced by the fiddlers in our study, and we assert that this is also true in other Western (and we assume many non-Western) musical practices, although the musical material might be conceived differently as "pieces," "arias," "standards," "songs," or something else depending on the musical practice. Tunes are essential artifacts in the practice of fiddling and, as such, "carry a substantial portion of that practice's heritage" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 101). However, being able to reproduce tunes is not enough to be considered as having expertise as a fiddler, as we have tried to show above in our discussion of the process of learning to fiddle. Expertise also requires "the development of knowledgeably skilled identities in practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 55). In fact, the concepts of danceability and personalizing a tune served as both a guidepost and as a structure for intentionally negotiating one's identity-in-practice within the community.

Practitioner identities are not fixed or unidimensional: They are directly related to practice, imply a degree of membership, are negotiated through participation in a CoP, are related to one's trajectory of learning within the community (past, present, and future), and correspond with other aspects of identity from other elements of one's life (Wenger 1998). The fiddlers in our study had unique trajectories within the community. Some, like Patti, Stacey, Booker, and Lucas, came to see themselves as fiddlers early in their trajectory as musicians. Others, like Michele and Karen, added "fiddler" to their identity later in their journey, while still others like Donna strongly identified with two different musical communities concurrently, at least initially. It is precisely this diversity of identity trajectories within the community/landscape of practice that resulted in the negotiations of practice organized around the concepts of danceability and making a tune one's own, which allowed for conserving practice of the community, on the one hand, and change and growth, on the other.

## Conclusion

Fiddling camps and other learning structures in the old-time fiddling community provide an entry point for people from various backgrounds to learn to fiddle and to locate themselves in relation to the community/landscape of practice of old-time fiddling in Canada. Through their legitimate peripheral participation in camps such as KLKP, as well as participation in fiddling contests and other events and learning opportunities, practitioners have access to sites for negotiation of identity, voice, legitimacy, and shared practice. This negotiation takes place via generational and peer encounters that, while allowing for construction of membership and identity, also provide spaces for negotiations of continuity and change within the practices of the community. Within these encounters, old-time fiddlers gain access to an evolving community history and have the opportunity to contribute to growth and change of the community's shared repertoire of practice. The notions of danceability and making a tune one's own are part of the joint enterprise and shared repertoire for teaching and learning within this community/landscape of practice. As such, they provide structures for learning the practices of the community while also providing a way for practitioners to contribute to changes in practice and meaning. While community members engage in negotiations related to what constitutes acceptable practice, they are also negotiating their identity in relation to the community.

The processes of researching and writing this article have provided us with a fascinating opportunity for thinking about how learning is shaped by interaction and social structures, on the one hand, and how learning and practice within social organizations are shaped by their members, on the other. Communities of practice theory and the negotiations inherent within the process of LPP may, in some measure, help to make sense of the marked stability of teaching and learning practices within various musical communities of practice such as university faculties of music, piano studios, and school band programs, to name but three examples.

A central insight that we have gained by engaging in this research is that, given the right circumstances (i.e., opportunities for legitimate participation and for peripheral movement), individuals within communities of practice can have a marked impact on the practices and values of the community. In fact, this is precisely how change happens. Tracing how a specific community of practice uses part of their shared repertoire to maintain continuity and incite growth and change has been useful to us in our work as musicians and music educators. We trust that it will be useful to others as well. 🍁

## Notes

1. For example, Doherty (1996: 99) describes how Cape Breton fiddlers learned prior to the 1970s as a process of “absorbing” this particular musical tradition.
2. Thank you to one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for making this point. Readers can find the rules for the CGMFA contest at <http://cgmfa-acgmvc.ca/wp-content/uploads/CGMFA-2019-Competition-Rules-Final.pdf>.
3. This is based on an informal internet search for fiddle camps in each province and territory in February 2023. The largest number of camps seems to currently be in British Columbia and Alberta.
4. Information about the Kenosee Lake Kitchen Party can be found at <https://kenoseekitchenparty.ca/>.
5. An example might be the elements of music in the Western classical music tradition. Catherine Schmidt-Jones (2013) defines the elements of music as follows: rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, and texture. In addition, experiential frameworks of the individuals in this study are important to consider.
6. Donald Schön’s description of knowing and expertise seems relevant here: “Every competent practitioner can recognize phenomena ... for which he cannot give a reasonably accurate or complete description. In his day to day practice he makes innumerable judgments of quality for which he cannot state adequate criteria, and he displays rules for which he cannot state the rules and procedures” (1983: 49–50).
7. We can’t help but read Mitchell’s comment about authenticity as being an implicit assumption that good practice is grounded in the community’s history.
8. Booker’s quote also points to the way that fiddlers might play the same tune in different ways, depending on the circumstances. Many thanks to Dr. Laura Risk for this valuable insight.
9. Johnson (2006) seems to agree. She suggests that Canadian old-time style tends not to have a lot of melodic variation precisely because of the strong connection between fiddling and dancing that has persisted into the present.
10. See Wenger (1998: 154–56) for a discussion of various trajectories.
11. See chapter 7 of Johnson’s doctoral dissertation (2006) and Johnson (2008) for a discussion of these elements.
12. This list of styles has been taken from the rules of the Grand Masters Fiddling Competition, which can be downloaded at <http://cgmfa-acgmvc.ca/rules-regles/>.
13. Many thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for this insight.

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\* Names are pseudonyms