

Sustaining Communities of Practice for OWIs: Emphasizing a Distributed System for Self Care

Jennifer Burke Reifman, U.C. Davis

Emerging OWIs Need Appropriate Training

OWI Principle 7: “Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) for OWI programs and their online writing teachers should receive appropriate OWI-focused training, professional development, and assessment for evaluation and promotion purposes” (Hewett, 2015, p. 17).

New OWIs need proficiency in 3 areas:

- (1) writing instruction experience**
- (2) ability to teach writing in a digital environment**
- (3) ability to teach writing in a text-based digital environment**

What is a Community of Practice?

“A social learning practice”
(Lave & Wenger, 1991)

“Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2011)

Community of Practice (CoP) Foundations

- **A Domain of Knowledge:** “joint enterprise as understood and continually renegotiated by its members”
- **Community:** “the relationships of mutual engagement that bind members together into a social entity”
- **Practice:** “the shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time” (Wenger, 1998)

Communities of Practice & OWI

Melonçon & Arduser (2013): Applied CoP to Online Business writing courses for sustainability

Stewart, Cohn, & Whithaus (2016): “ a community of practice approach to online writing instruction (OWI) validates teachers’ knowledge of their materials and their students’ learning, and creates an opportunity to privilege instructor agency alongside the use of shared course shells”

Melonçon (2017): Described “community of practice (CoP) as a model that can be used to develop and **distribute** professional development and training opportunities for contingent faculty.”

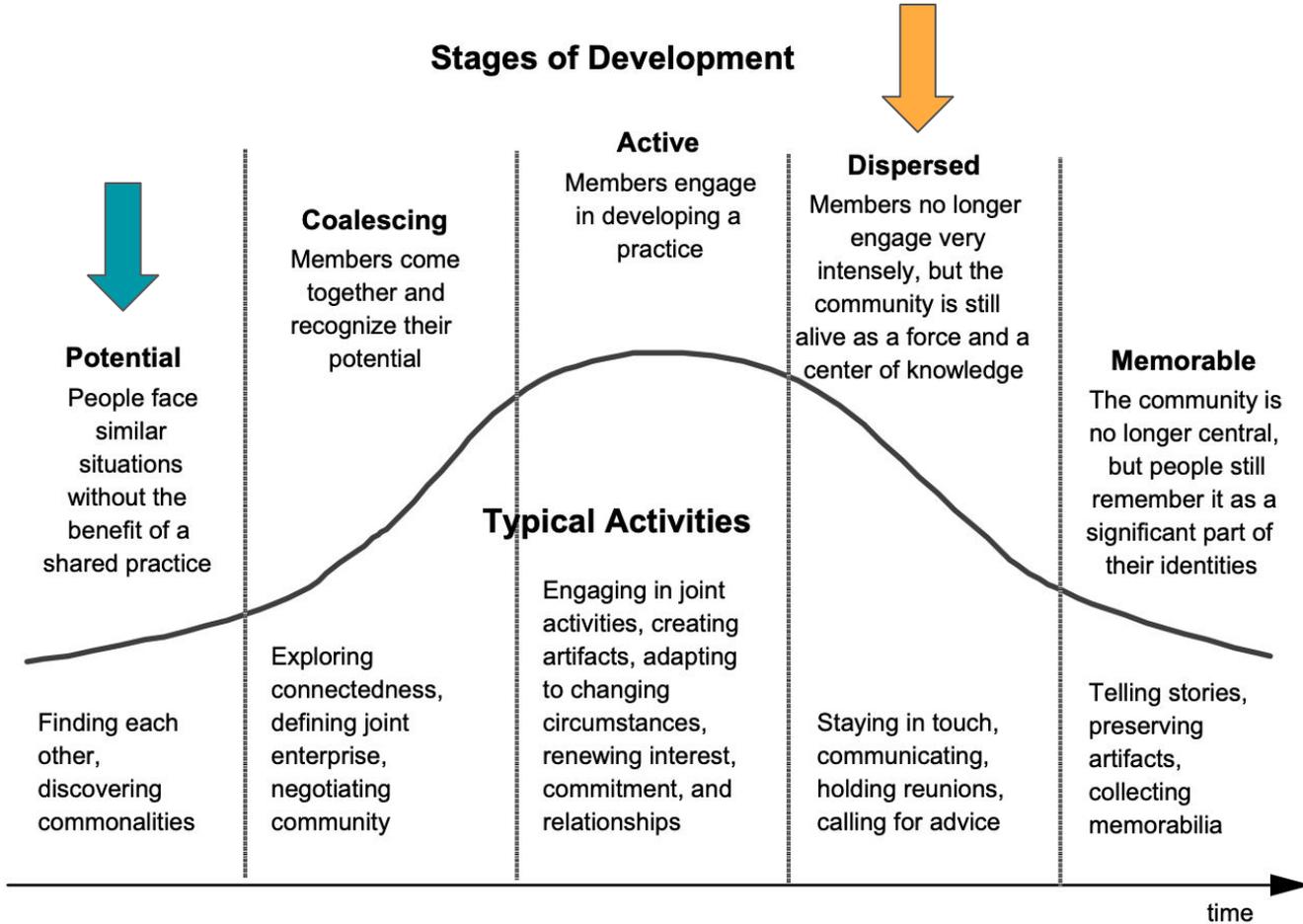
What do they look like?

For Stewart, Cohn, & Whithaus (2016), CoPs included:

- (1) bi-weekly meetings to reflect upon the experience of teaching the course
- (2) Mentoring Program of experienced instructors paired with new instructors before and during the first few weeks of a term
- (3) Teaching journals



Stages of Development



The Problem

CoPs rely on constant buy in and maintenance by participants and institutions; the reason the use of CoP has been critiqued in school settings is because it's very difficult to replicate true apprenticeship practices.

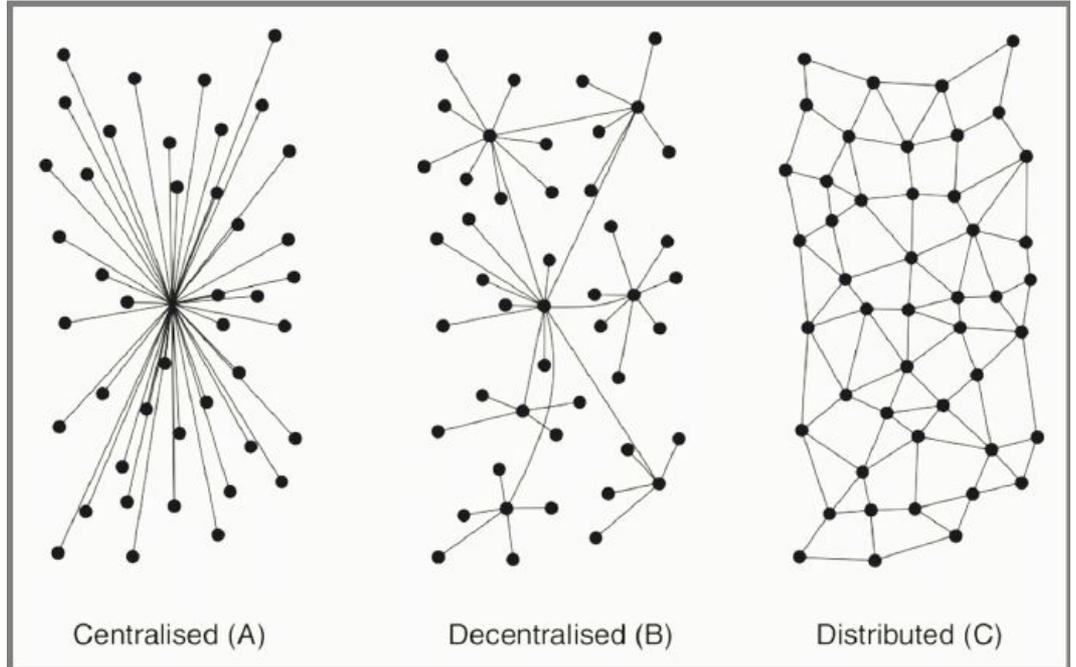
There are:

- Labor issues/issues of unpaid work
- Complications with rotation of teachers
- Scheduling issues, etc.

How? A truly distributed system

A Distributed System whose components are located on different working times and toward a common goal where there is:

- Repetition only when needed
- A decentralized sense of time
- Concurrency of components



Strategies for CoP Sustainability

(Other than more money or
time)

1. Create Distributed Community Practices
2. Leverage Technology to Support CoP

Distributed Community Practices

In order to value the expertise and instructional approaches of each member and reduce labor on the part of experienced OWIs, consider a more distributed set up:

- A take-one, leave-one mentality to sharing curriculum
 - A list of SLOs with example assignments for each one
 - Downloadable modules that can be modified and mixed and match
 - Reading/Assignment Databases
 - Share and not duplicate efforts (Rice, 2015)
- Leverage asynchronous work & consider time fluidity
 - No need to have meetings to convey information: try communal Google Docs or Discussion Boards to ease new OWIs in
- Decentralize the Leadership

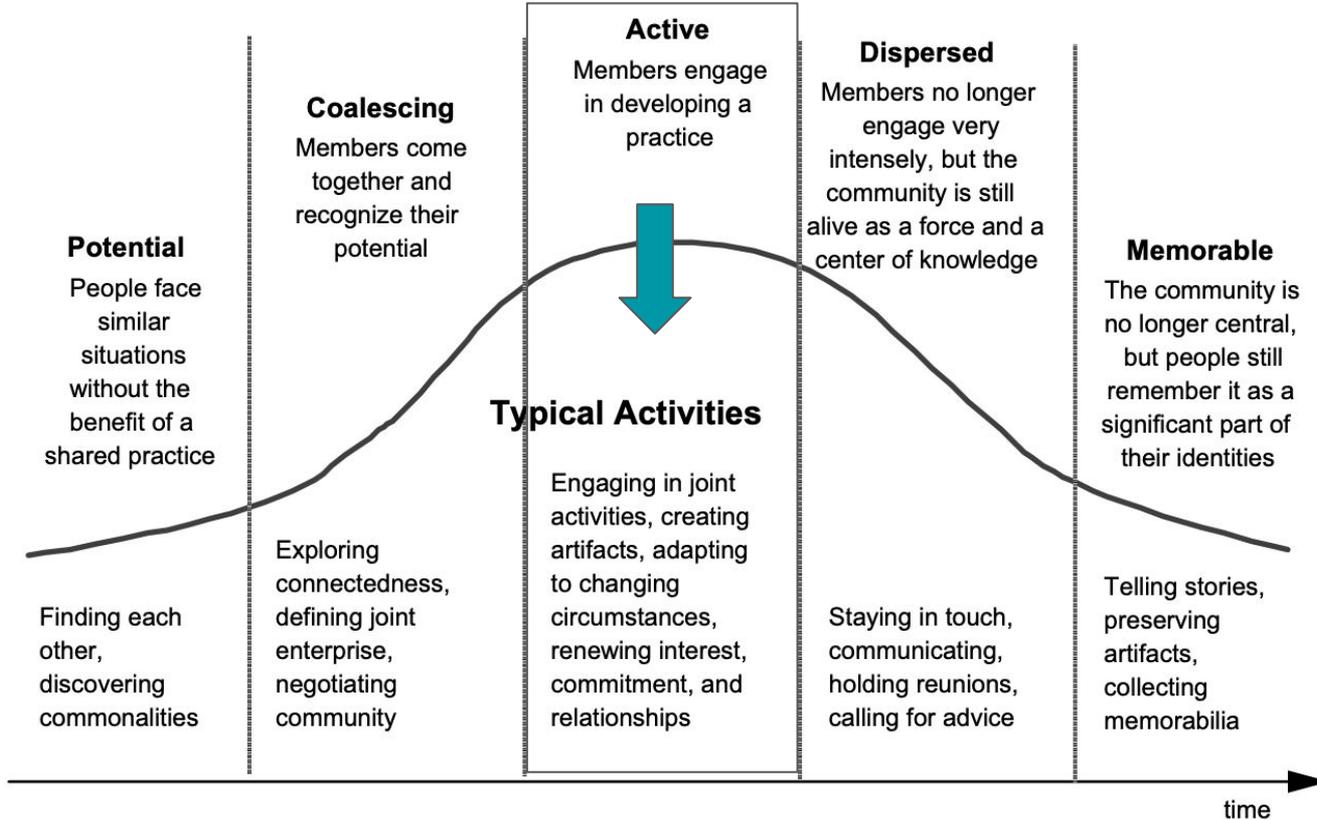
Leverage Technology

Sustained Communities of Practice rely on archived resources, which are best served by a central location that connects each participant. Technology helps to sustain CoP efforts (Wenger, White, & Smith, 2010):

- **Sharing Resources:** Canvas or LMS shell, Google Folder, Department blog, Etc.
- **Connectivity & Communication:** Slack, Discord, etc.

These technologies also allow CoPs to archive and document their work

Stages of Development



Distributed
Communities of
Practice
=
Self Care

“One solution that helps
offset the **labor** involved in
developing online courses
is the communities of
practice (CoP)”
(Hutchinson, 2019)

Thank you

References

Hewett, B. L., & DePew, K. E. (Eds.). (2015). *Foundational practices of online writing instruction*. Parlor Press LLC.

Hutchison, A. (2019). Technological Efficiency in The Learning Management System: A Wicked Problem with Sustainability for Online Writing Instruction. *Computers and Composition*, 54, 102510.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge university press.

Meloncon, L., & Arduser, L. (2013). Communities of practice approach: A new model for online course development and sustainability. *Online education*, 2, 73-90.

Meloncon, L. (2017). Contingent faculty, online writing instruction, and professional development in technical and professional communication. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 26(3), 256-272.

Rice, R. (2015). Faculty professionalization for OWI. *Foundational practices of online writing instruction*, 389-410.

Stewart, M. K., Cohn, J., & Whithaus, C. (2016). Collaborative Course Design and Communities of Practice. *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching and Learning Journal*, 9(1).

Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning as a social system. *Systems thinker*, 9(5), 2-3.

Wenger, E. (2011). Communities of practice: A brief introduction.