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The Contribution of Technology to the Development and Sustainability of an Occupational Therapy Community of Learners in Doctoral Education

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Abstract

This case study describes the pivotal role of technology in developing a community of practice (COP) designed for post professional occupational therapists that enabled doctoral students, alumni and faculty to share information and insights about topics, initiatives and research critical to the Occupational Therapy field. The COP evolved through ongoing development of the post-professional occupational therapy doctorate (PPOTD) program at Jefferson University in Philadelphia.

The conceptual foundation for the COP moved beyond an initial focus on course delivery to an emphasis on development, implementation, and sustainability of a vibrant learning community. Transformation of the COP was greatly facilitated through the evolution of technology that supports the online and on-campus meetings of participants. The COP became a vibrant learning community through the linkage of its conceptual foundation with the affordances of available technologies.

Objectives

After attending this session, participants will:

Objective 1: Discuss the evolution of a learning community designed to promote leadership of students in a post-professional occupational therapy doctoral program.

Objective 2: Understand ways that effective use of technology can help develop and sustain post-professional learning communities in occupational therapy

Objective 3: Apply examples of strategies and lessons learned from the learning community described to current or future program development in their home institutions.
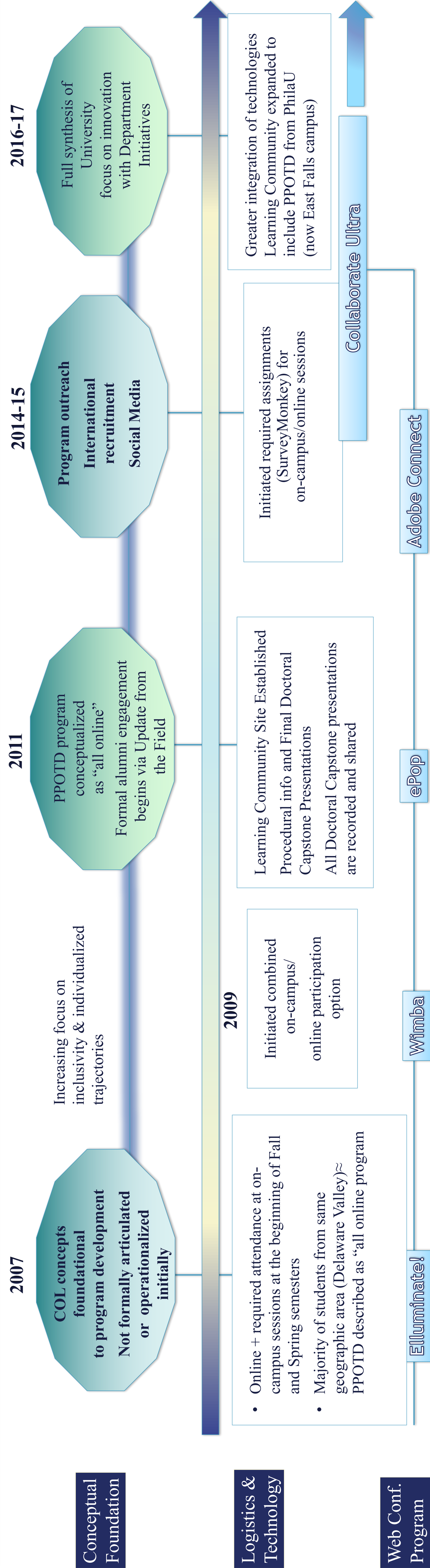
Background: Communities of Learning

"Communities of Practice are 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).

*"It is key that there is **learning** that takes place. Think of **Community** as a verb, an action of bringing together of different voices, to be diverse and learn from one another. In the Jefferson Program, there are researchers, and students at various points of their learning, and educators and alumni and faculty and guest speakers who come together for this common purpose of learning from one another both from their practices and their perspectives and also to better understand each other. This crossing of the boundaries (whether based on policy, practice, research, or geographic silos) – however we are crossing those boundaries, those are **learning points** where we have a tension to understand–how to translate the research into the practice or to understand the differences from state to state. These tension points become the **learning opportunities**."*

Sandra Schefkind, OTD, OTR/L FAOTA
Reflection on the Jefferson PPOTD Learning Community

Evolution of Learning Community Development

2007 — COL concepts foundational to program development Not formally articulated or operationalized initially

2009 — Increasing focus on inclusivity & individualized trajectories

2011 — PPOTD program conceptualized as "all online" Formal alumni engagement begins via Update from the Field

2014-15 — Program outreach International recruitment Social Media

2016-17 — Full synthesis of University focus on innovation with Department Initiatives

Conceptual Foundation
- Online + required attendance at on-campus sessions at the beginning of Fall and Spring semesters
- Majority of students from same geographic area (Delaware Valley)≈ PPOTD described as "all online program

Initiated combined on-campus/ online participation option

Learning Community Site Established
Procedural info and Final Doctoral Capstone Presentations
All Doctoral Capstone presentations are recorded and shared

Initiated required assignments (SurveyMonkey) for on-campus/online sessions

Greater integration of technologies Learning Community expanded to include PPOTD from PhilaU (now East Falls campus)

Logistics & Technology
Elluminate! | Wimba | ePop | Adobe Connect | Collaborate Ultra

Web Conf. Program

Sample of Jefferson PPOTD Learning Community Sessions

Faculty and Faculty-Student Presentations

Your Action Processes in EBP: How You Implement EBP and Encourage Others to Do So in Your Clinical Environment	Dr. Rebecca Sinko, OTD, OTR/L Instructor, Advanced EBP
The Integral Place of Objectives, Outcomes, and Measurement Tools in Project Development and Research	Dr. Toth-Cohen, Dr. Mulcahey, Dr. DeAngelis
Data Driven Decision Making in Occupational Therapy: Introduction and Case Example	Dr. Roseann Schaaf, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA; Joanne Hunt, OTR/L OTD
Leadership Panel : 3 Student-Faculty Pairs. 3 student-faculty pairs (coursework/mentoring relationship)	

PPOTD Alumni Presentations

Leadership and the Distinct Value of Occupational Therapy	Dr. Michelle Gorenberg, Dr. Lisa Tebo
Leadership and OT Practice: The Role of Communication for an Effective Leader	Dr. Michelle Gorenberg, Dr. Lisa Tebo
Leadership Opportunities through Communities of Practice	Dr. Sandra Schefkind
PPOTD Alumni Panel Leadership Discussion	Dr. Elke Hooydonk, Dr. Michelle Marshina, Dr. Sandra Schefkind

PPOTD Student Project Presentations

Awareness and Use of Electronic Health Records in Entry-Level OT and OTA Curricula	Louis F. Dmytryk MS, OTR/L, RT (R)
Development and Evaluation of an Occupational Therapy Arthritis Self-Management Program	Sakina Bohra OTR/L, CHT
How Are Animal-assisted Therapy Best Practices Being Integrated into Pediatric Occupational Therapy Practice?	Sara Jasin Shue, MS, OTR/L
Development of an OTD Residency Manual.	Lydia S. Navarro-Walker, OTR/L
Development of a Manualized Intervention to Enhance Diabetes Self-Management. Expert and Consumer Reviewed.	Carol Siebert MS, OTR/L, FAOTA
Development of a Community of Practice Manual for Occupational Therapy: Application and Potential Impact.	Sandra Schefkind MS, OTR/L, FAOTA

Sample PPOTD Responses
"What was your take-home message?"

"The continued need for there to be a bridge between academics/research and clinicians. Both in helping clinicians without EBP backgrounds to understand the importance, but also in conducting research that will address the needs and constraints that clinicians face, so they will be more likely to use it."

"Currently, I am part of a rapidly growing outpatient clinic; however we lack consistency amongst therapists. This decrease in consistency could affect our overall reputation and our ability to effectively treat children. This has made me think that we need to relook at how we are implementing assessments."

"The theoretical framework, Authentic leadership, puts the critical life events in an important role. Although leadership continuum in South Africa looks different from US and my personal experiences, the role of critical life events should be important for everyone."

"Interesting how many factors can influence use of a supported program. Aligning yourself with likeminded, and open-minded professionals may make the difference between taking on new roles and risks as a clinician and becoming stagnant in your practice."

Next Steps/Work in Progress

Qualitative Data Analysis in Progress

Fall and Spring Semesters 2015-2016 and 2016-2017
PPOTD Learning Community Meetings (2 per Semester)
Student Reflections Each Semester (n = 285)

Coding Methods Adapted from Grounded Theory for Qualitative Content Analysis*
Ongoing NVivo analyses of qualitative reflections for each meeting presentation (for publication)

Coding Categories Identified

New or Enhanced Learning
Statement(s) indicating that some aspect of the project methodology or implementation was new or surprising to the participant or added to or deepened participants' existing knowledge or understanding

Contribution to OT Profession
Statement(s) indicating that some aspect of the research or project will contribute to the OT profession, such as direct references to Vision 2025.

Connections to Personal and Work Experiences
Statements explicitly connecting current or past personal or work experience to some aspect of the project. This may include statements indicating changes made to current program or work-related policies or procedures as a result of participating in the learning community

*Schreier, M. (2012). Qualitative content analysis. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.