

Reflective Pedagogy Community of Practice: Engaging Faculty and Staff in Reflective Pedagogy to Prepare for Eportfolio Launch

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To prepare faculty and staff for using eportfolios in classes and with co-curricular experiences, we engaged faculty and staff in a Reflective Pedagogy Community of Practice. Participants reviewed and discussed the literature on reflective pedagogy, particularly related to using eportfolios. Participants documented their learning about reflective pedagogy in an eportfolio and shared their eportfolio with other participants for review and feedback. Materials and discussion prompts used during the community of practice sessions are provided. The assessment indicated that participants felt that the amount of work and the number of sessions that the group met were reasonable and that they learned a lot from the readings, discussions, eportfolio creation, and peer review of others' eportfolios. This model to prepare faculty for using reflective pedagogy with eportfolios can be adopted by other institutions.

Keywords: reflective pedagogy, eportfolio, community of practice

INTRODUCTION

Over the last several years, Capital University's Signature Learning (i.e., general education) committee has worked toward implementing eportfolios to document student learning across Signature Learning courses and co-curricular activities. However, Matthews-DeNatale, et al. (2017) cautioned:

The easiest way to implement eportfolios is to add them into a course or program without modifying the curriculum; for example, by requiring students to attach assignments in their eportfolios and submit them at the end of each course. However, this approach is unlikely to significantly improve student learning because students are simply using eportfolios as a digital dropbox (p. 15).

Heeding this warning, we recognized that one missing component of the eportfolio adoption process was developing campus expertise in reflective pedagogy, which is central to the effective use of eportfolios. Thus, the purpose of this project was to engage faculty and staff in a Reflective Pedagogy Community of Practice (RPCoP) in which participants learned about reflective pedagogy, mainly as related to the use of eportfolios, and created their eportfolio about their experience in the RPCoP, which they then shared with other members of the RPCoP for review and feedback.

This paper briefly reviews the literature about communities of practice, reflective pedagogy, and eportfolios and then describes our project and outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Why a Community of Practice?

“A community of practice is a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it as they interact regularly” (Kezar et al., 2017, p. 291). Oliver et al. (2018) offered a narrower conception of a community of practice (CoP) that is more relevant to higher education: Specifically, the interactions among members of the CoP are designed intentionally to improve teaching and learning. CoPs often cut across traditional institutional divisions to focus on learning rather than employee positions. CoPs make professional development a source of social support for employees that can alleviate feelings of isolation (Oliver et al., 2018) and promote a sense of belonging to the profession; for example, Luguetti et al. (2019) highlighted how CoPs could foster identity development related to being a teacher.

CoPs promote the social construction of knowledge (Brooks, 2010) that includes three components: Mutual engagement, which occurs when people work together to teach and learn from each other; a joint enterprise, which occurs when the community works toward a collective outcome; and a shared repertoire, which includes common resources, language, artifacts, and routines (Wenger, 1998). Kezar et al. (2017) described the principles and practices of effective CoPs. These effective practices include allowing the community to evolve naturally, creating space for conversation, embracing different levels of participation, having both private and public spaces for CoP members, participant reflection on their contributions to the CoP, sharing a passion for learning and the CoP topic, and attending to the natural rhythm of the group.

CoPs have been employed in a variety of educational contexts, such as with teacher educators (Gallagher et al., 2011; Oliver et al., 2018), statistics teachers (Bakogianni & Potari, 2019), and science, engineering, and technology education (Kezar et al., 2017), as well as for general faculty professional development (Brooks, 2010). We used a CoP model to learn about reflective pedagogy in preparation for integrating eportfolios into the university’s Signature Learning curriculum and co-curricular activities. Capital University has had success with the CoP model in various contexts. We use CoPs to promote best practices in implementing high-impact practices on campus (e.g., internships, study abroad and study away, community engagement). CoPs facilitate conversation among faculty and staff who teach courses and offer co-curricular experiences related to program learning outcomes (PLOs) for our Signature Learning program. A CoP was used to develop an interdisciplinary social justice minor. In addition, we have a CoP to promote affordable learning using Open Educational Resources and digital library material instead of traditional textbooks. The CoP model provided the type of learning environment that we wanted to promote among participants and offered the flexibility that more formal structures (e.g., elected university committees) lack.

Reflective Pedagogy

Reflection offers a way for students to de-construct and process complex material (Bradley, 2009), reformulate their learning to make deeper associations between learning activities and course content (Sánchez-Martí, et al., 2018), and to make connections with the material they previously learned or with their life experiences (Buyarski, et al., 2017). Reflection highlights the multidisciplinary nature of complex problems (Bruno & Dell’Alversana, 2018). In addition, reflection promotes higher-order critical thinking skills (Dahl, et al., 2018); however, Dahl et al. also noted that reflection results from critical thinking, implying a feedback loop where reflection and critical thinking amplify each other.

When done in the context of work environments, such as internship sites and community-based student projects, reflection can transform work environments into places of deep learning. It can improve the work that students do in those environments (Siebert & Walsh, 2013). Perusso et al. (2020) referred to this as *reflection-on-action* – when students understand how their actions shaped what happened in the work environment. Work-based reflection also promotes a professional identity (Bruno & Dell’Alversana, 2018; Lengelle et al., 2013; McGuire, et al., 2009; Siebert & Walsh, 2013) through its focus on students’ whole experience (Perusso, et al., 2020). This means that one way to help students succeed in their careers is by helping them develop reflective practice.

Reflective learning environments shift the focus of a course from the faculty member to the student’s experience of learning (Bruno & Dell’Alversana, 2018), with students having agency in what and how they learn. In addition, reflective learning environments have been created across many disciplines, such as accounting (Bisman, 2011; Jackling et al., 2015), business (Perusso et al., 2020), education (Sánchez-Martí et al., 2018), marketing (Dahl et al., 2018), psychology (Bruno & Dell’Alversana, 2017, 2018), and social work (McGuire et al., 2009).

However, not all reflection is the same: “[John] Dewey reminds us that reflection is a complex, rigorous, intellectual, and emotional enterprise that takes time to do well” (Rodgers, 2002, p. 844). Bruno and Dell’Alversana (2017, 2018) described five levels of reflective practice. The lowest level is a *non-reflective practice* in which students simply report an event, phenomenon, or experience – there is no reflection. *Declarative reflective practice* includes a description of the student’s internal experience without elaboration. Students who engage in *relational reflective practice* make comparisons about their learning – either comparing their thinking before and after an experience or comparing how they think about a situation versus how others might consider that situation. In *interpretive, reflective practice*, students interpret their behaviors in the context of their learning. Finally, the highest level of reflection, *critically reflective practice*, is about gaining a new perspective or constructing new knowledge. Rodgers (2002) added that reflection occurs in the community and requires interaction with others. Faculty can foster sophisticated reflection in students by providing repeated reflective experiences (Bisman, 2011; Bruno & Dell’Alversana, 2018) and feedback about their reflection (Bruno & Dell’Alversana, 2017).

In addition to the need for faculty to build a learning environment that targets higher levels of reflection, there are other barriers to implementing reflective practice in classes. Davis (2003) argued that the time it takes faculty to develop effective reflection activities, then read and grade them is a key reason why faculty do not adopt reflective pedagogies. Davis made the point that other pressures that faculty experience, for example, developing and sustaining a research and scholarship agenda required for promotion and tenure, make it unlikely that faculty can adopt a time-intensive pedagogy. Now, 20 years after Davis’s work, many faculty experience additional pressures to help recruit and retain students and collaborate with college administrators to address issues of student mental health and lack of college preparedness following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even though reflective practice tends to result in more significant learning gains and insights than non-reflective pedagogies, we recognized that we could not assume that faculty would adopt reflective pedagogy independently. We identified the need to provide the time, space, and community to support faculty adoption of effective reflective pedagogy.

Eportfolios

Reflective practice can occur without a portfolio; however, we were interested in how student learning can be strengthened through reflective practice that cuts across courses and co-curricular experiences – eportfolios deliver both the structure and the portability to make that happen. Buyarski et al. (2017) argued that eportfolios enhance metacognitive skills, which are needed for students to make learning connections across potentially disparate experiences, while Matthews-DeNatale et al. (2017) echoed this and added, “self-directed learning also can be improved through an iterative and guided eportfolio process of inquiry, reflection, and integration” (p. 16).

Eportfolios are software that allows students to include artifacts (e.g., written assignments, multimedia files, artwork, musical recordings) and reflections about those artifacts to demonstrate they have met the student learning outcomes in an academic program (Yang et al., 2016) and through co-curricular experiences. Chang et al. (2013) demonstrated that eportfolios are an effective knowledge management tool.

Eportfolios provide other benefits. For example, eportfolios are an authentic learning experience for students (Farrell & Seery, 2019; Yang et al., 2016) in which students select the artifacts that best exemplify their learning (Roberts et al., 2016). Or, as Lopez-Fernandez and Rodriguez-Illera (2009, p. 608) said so eloquently: “eportfolios are recognized as being a technological tool that allows the student to manage their learning experience.” The student-driven artifact selection can cultivate students’ intrinsic motivation for learning (Yang et al., 2016) and enhance students’ self-regulation (Farrell & Seery, 2019). Eportfolios encourage student autonomy (Lopez-Fernandez & Rodriguez-Illera, 2009; Yang et al., 2016) and creativity as students curate the presentation of their work. Students engage in collaborative knowledge building by sharing their eportfolios with their peers (Chang et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2016).

Buyarski et al. (2017, p. 8) asserted, “Perhaps the strongest endorsement for the use of eportfolios is the current realization that, in this rapidly changing world, higher education needs to produce graduates who are self-directed learners and autonomous thinkers.” It is through the process of evidence curation and reflection that students demonstrate their self-direction and autonomy.

We would be remiss if we did not address the assessment of student learning outcomes. Accreditors and regulatory bodies across higher education have emphasized the need for colleges and universities to demonstrate that students are learning what they say students are learning. Eportfolios are one way to address the need to assess student learning (O’Sullivan et al., 2012). Yang et al. (2016) argued that eportfolios serve both a formative and summative assessment function related to student learning. At intermediate steps in creating the student portfolio, the student can obtain feedback from faculty and peers about their selection of artifacts and reflection about those artifacts; this feedback has the potential to guide subsequent additions to the eportfolio and thus is formative. At the end of a student’s degree program, the overall portfolio can be used for summative assessment (O’Sullivan et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2016).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Capital University began a successful general education reform in 2016, resulting in two interconnected pathways: The Ethics and Society Pathway (ESP) and the Criticism and Culture Pathway (CCP). All students, regardless of major, take the courses in both pathways. In the ESP, students take three courses that focus on the program learning outcome (PLO): *Students interact knowledgeably and ethically with people and ideas from many cultures, religions, and identities*. The courses that comprise this pathway are a first-year ethics course, a second-year cultural pluralism course, and a third-year global systems course. The CCP addresses the PLO: *Students analyze, contextualize, and engage with human cultures*. The courses for this pathway include a second-year arts course, a second-year religious foundations course, and a third-year humanities course. For both pathways, faculty have spent the last few years developing class activities and reflection prompts that target the respective PLO and can be used across the courses.

The faculty identified a couple of needs during the conversations about these pathways. First, the faculty wanted a way to track and assess student learning across the courses in each of the pathways. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the faculty wanted a way for students to reflect on how their learning

in the earlier courses in each pathway influenced their learning in the courses later in the respective pathway. Third, the faculty noted students' co-curricular experiences also contribute to the two pathways, and therefore, we wanted a way to capture student learning in these co-curricular experiences. An eportfolio was a great tool to meet all three of these needs, particularly the program-level student learning outcomes (Matthews-DeNatale et al., 2017).

However, to implement an eportfolio effectively, we saw two hurdles: One, we had to ensure that faculty could apply the reflective pedagogy used with eportfolios. Two, we needed to train faculty to use the eportfolio tool. The eportfolio tool we use is *Anthology's ePortfolio*, which comes with a suite of other *Anthology* tools that the university has adopted – this means that all students have access to the same tool without having to pay for an eportfolio.

The first action we took to help us over the identified hurdles was to participate in the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) *ePortfolio Institute* so that we could work with a mentor to guide portfolio implementation. As part of our *ePortfolio Institute* project, we developed a Reflective Pedagogy Community of Practice – this is what we describe below.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

Why did we do a Reflective Pedagogy Community of Practice (RPCoP) and not an Eportfolio Community of Practice? Landis et al. (2015) reminded us that:

Reflection has long been viewed as a cornerstone of most ePortfolio practices in higher education, whether for supporting learners in making connections among learning experiences or enabling authentic assessment of learning within programs (p. 107).

In other words, sophisticated student reflection is necessary for effective eportfolios. However, the literature on reflective pedagogy indicated that many faculty are unlikely to learn and adopt it independently. Thus, we needed to make the time and space for faculty to do this. In addition, we planned for a staged rollout of the eportfolio – faculty could use reflective pedagogy in their classes even if they were not yet an eportfolio user. As part of the RPCoP, participants also created their eportfolios focused on their learning in the RPCoP – in the spirit of “practice what we preach” (Reynolds et al., 2019) and as a way to have faculty and staff get comfortable with the technology.

Our AACU *ePortfolio Institute* team applied for and received an internal grant to give stipends (i.e., \$300 for each participant) to the faculty and staff participating in the RPCoP. After securing the funding, we advertised to the campus community to recruit participants. We worked specifically with the director of Signature Learning to help recruit faculty and staff who teach in the Signature Learning program. The AACU *ePortfolio Institute* team also compiled the readings for the summer group and had our institute mentor review the agenda for the RPCoP. Participants were recruited in the two months before summer. We had enough funding to support everyone who applied, provided they had teaching responsibilities and/or engage students in co-curricular experiences.

Demographic information about the RPCoP participants is in Table 1. We wanted a cross-section of the institution that included faculty and staff and full-time and part-time employees.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE RPCOP PARTICIPANTS

Area or Discipline	Employment	Position
assessment & student success	full time	staff
community engagement	full time	staff
seminary admissions	full time	staff
university pastor	full time	staff
signature learning (general education)	part time	faculty
signature learning (general education)	part time	faculty
biology	full time	faculty
education	full time	faculty
English	full time	faculty
music education	full time	faculty
nursing	full time	faculty
philosophy	full time	faculty
psychology	full time	faculty

The RPCoP met four times during the summer of 2022. Each session had a different focus. To prepare for each session, participants had readings to do; all readings were on a file-sharing site for participants to access. Participants receive the discussion prompts before the meeting. Each of the first three sessions included the group working together to develop reflection prompts for our eportfolios. Before the fourth session, participants created their eportfolios. These eportfolios were shared with the group. Some participants also agreed to have their eportfolios shared publicly during presentations of this work. The session focus, readings, and discussion prompts are below.

Session 1: Understanding Reflection

1. Readings

- a. Batson et al., (2017). *Field Guide to eportfolio*. Chapters:
 - i. Buyarski et al. The promise of eportfolios for student learning and agency. (p. 7-13).
 - ii. Matthews-DeNatale, et al. Redesigning learning: Eportfolios in support of reflective growth within individuals and organizations. (p. 14-24)
- b. Eynon et al. (2014). Reflection, integration, and eportfolio pedagogy. *Connect to Learning*.
- c. Landis, et al. (2015). Examining the role of reflection in eportfolios: A case study. *International Journal of eportfolio*, 5(2), 107-121.
- d. McGuire et al. Pedagogy of reflective writing in professional education. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 9(1), 93-107.
- e. Pavlovich, et al. (2009). Developing students' skills in reflective practice: Design and Assessment. *Journal of Management Education*, 33(1), 37-58.
- f. Rodgers (2002). Defining reflection: Another look at John Dewey and reflective thinking. *Teachers College Record*, 104, (4), 842-866.

2. Discussion Prompts
 - a. How do you currently use reflection in your teaching or activities with students?
 - b. What have you gained, and what have your students gained from this practice?
 - c. What difficulties have you encountered when using reflection in your teaching or activities with students? Or, what has prevented you from using this pedagogical technique?
 - d. What was the most important thing that you learned from the readings? How could you put that information into practice with your students or yourself?
 - e. What do you hope to gain from this community of practice?

Session 2: Telling One's Story

1. Readings
 - a. Cicchino (2021). Creating a Professional Personal Brand Worksheet. Auburn University, University Writing Center.
 - b. Cicchino (2021). Selecting and Contextualizing Artifacts for Faculty and Staff eportfolios. Auburn University, University Writing Center.
 - c. Reynolds et al. (2019). Building bridges: Creating connections by building our portfolios. *The AAEEBL eportfolio Review*, 3(1), 30-40.
 - d. University of North Carolina Wilmington (no date). Critical Reflection Prompts and Resources. University of North Carolina Wilmington, Applied Learning Center.
2. Discussion Prompts
 - a. What makes a “good” reflection prompt?
 - b. What are some ways to help students go deeper with their reflection? What has to occur in your classes or activities to make it safe for students to engage in a deeper reflection?
 - c. What are some non-essay-based ways to have students reflect on their learning that might be effective for helping students achieve your student learning outcomes?
 - d. What concerns do you have about using non-essay-based reflection in your classes?

Session 3: Eportfolios and Rubrics

1. Readings
 - a. Critical Reflection Rubric from Kember et al. (2008). A four-category scheme for coding and assessing the level of reflection in written work. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33(4), 369-379.
 - b. Rubric for evaluating integrative thinking and reflection. Middle Tennessee State University.
 - c. eportfolio Project. (2015). eportfolio Project Formative Rubric. Auburn University, University Writing Center.
 - d. eportfolio Project. (2016). Summative eportfolio rubric. Auburn University, University Writing Center.
 - e. Powell et al. (2019). eportfolio high-impact practice taxonomy. IUPUI eportfolio Program.
2. Discussion Prompts
 - a. How does a rubric to assess student reflection differ from a rubric to assess a student portfolio?
 - b. What would a rubric for your eportfolio and the work of your colleagues look like?
 - c. What would a rubric for your own classes or activities with students look like?
3. Additional Session Activities
 - a. The university's educational technology specialist showed the group how to access and populate their eportfolios.

Session 4: Reflection on Learning

1. Readings
 - a. Group members reviewed the eportfolios that everyone created.

2. Discussion Prompts

- a. What was the experience of reviewing the work of colleagues like? How does this experience compare to reviewing student work? What is the student experience of reviewing other students' work like?
- b. After reviewing the work of your colleagues, what would you want to do differently for your own portfolio?
- c. What are some examples from the portfolios that would be particularly relevant or effective for the work that you do with your students?
- d. What changes have you made or will you make to your classes or activities with students based on what you learned during the Reflective Pedagogy Community of Practice?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants were asked to complete a survey after the fourth RPCoP session. The survey asked about the workload related to participating in the RPCoP: 83% of participants reported that the amount of reading and additional work (i.e., eportfolio creation) was “just right,” and 17% said that the amount of reading and additional work was “too much.” For the number of sessions, two-thirds of participants said they were “just right” and one-third said there were too few sessions.

Participants were asked whether they learned from the readings, discussions, eportfolio creation, and peer review of others' eportfolios. Participants agreed they learned from the readings, discussion, and peer review. One participant was “neutral” about learning from the portfolio creation, but the rest agreed that they learned from it. Creating the portfolios engaged participants in a series of reflective practices about reflective pedagogy, allowing participants to enact the role of the student. It is worth highlighting that the CoP structure provided flexibility in its format and purpose for participants to take on this role. In these responses, participants reported a greater understanding of reflective pedagogy and motivation to implement reflective practices.

Concerning the changes that participants planned to make to their classes, participants wrote that they would “include reflection in every class” and “provide space for emotional reactions to reflection.” Recognition of the need for space to process emotions related to reflection is consistent with John Dewey's conception of reflective thinking (Rodgers, 2002). Participants wrote that their most important learning was related to reflection as a way to make meaning, seeing how their reflections brought out the richness of the readings and developing ways to help students integrate course content with existing knowledge. In addition, participants said that they learned the most from the eportfolio examples of other participants. These reports suggest that participants increased their facility with reflective pedagogical practices and found elements of the CoP structure useful. Since the CoP had broad participation across faculty and staff divisions and full and part-time status, participants could learn from colleagues who might not have been present in other structures.

We reflected on how well our RPCoP aligned with the principles and practices of effective CoPs described by Kezar et al. (2017). The group likely did not meet for long enough to accommodate natural evolutions to the group. The group had space for conversation, and participants reported learning from those discussions. The RPCoP had private space during the discussions, and for the readings and other materials, people wanted to share. Some of the group's work, particularly example eportfolios, have been shared publically. There was a lot of participant reflection on their contributions to the CoP during the discussions, in the eportfolios, and in the final assessment. All participants were committed to the topic of reflective pedagogy. Finally, by having the group develop the reflection prompts for the eportfolios, we attended to the natural rhythm of the group.

CONCLUSION

The RPCoP elevated our Signature Learning eportfolio initiative, advanced work that began before participation in the AACU *ePortfolio Institute*, included participants across the institution (i.e., staff and faculty; full and part-time employees), and fostered good pedagogy, regardless of the immediacy of eportfolio adoption on participants' classes. As an effective model for helping faculty and staff prepare for using eportfolios, we plan to have additional RPCoPs in the future. We also hope that other institutions can adopt this model.

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