Making and Sharing Connections: Review of *Leveraging the ePortfolio for Integrative Learning: A Faculty Guide to Transforming Student Learning* by Reynolds and Patton (Stylus, 2014)

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This article contains a review of the book, Leveraging the ePortfolio for Integrative Learning: A Faculty Guide to Classroom Practices for Transforming Student Learning. The book provides a set of stories, reflections, and resources around ePortfolio development at all stages of implementation. The authors, Reynolds and Patton, deliver their concrete experience around integrative learning and ePortfolio use. They also provide faculty and staff with a series of realistic and vetted instructional practices, that when applied to ePortfolio processes, have shown tremendous power to transform student learning. Publisher: Stylus (Sterling, VA, 2014). ISBN-978-1-57922-900-9. List price: $95.00. 164 pages.

Over 40% of all higher education institutions in the United States have invested resources in ePortfolio instruction and development (Rhodes, Chen, Watson, & Garrison, 2014). These institutional commitments to ePortfolios are demonstrated by significant budgets, expanding faculty participation, and the numerous programs involved in their use. Most of these commitments are attached to purported increases in retention, completion, digital identity management, preparation for employment, and graduate school opportunities (Eynon, Gambino, & Török; 2014, Hartman, 2013; McAlpine, 200; Wells, 2015). These commitments and claims make it clear that the stakes are high for institutional players in the ePortfolio game. Practitioners across the globe have proceeded to develop a plethora uses for the ePortfolio in hopes of meeting the above stated goals. Administrators are looking for solid data and best practices to drive their decisions around funding and the continued proliferation of ePortfolio use on their campuses. This level of investment and hope around the potential of the ePortfolio has spurred a recent call from Bryant and Chittum (2013) for an increase in research regarding empirical data around their use. The authors, Reynolds and Patton specifically addressed these calls, indicating that "administrators of programs and institutions will find this book useful by providing a framework for understand the roles ePortfolios can play in improving student learning" (p. xv).

In the years leading up to the publication of Reynolds and Patton's book, *Leveraging the ePortfolio for Integrative Learning: A Faculty Guide to Classroom Practices for Transforming Student Learning* (2014), we see evidence of a several other research and writing efforts to promote fundamental practices in relation to the creation and instruction of ePortfolios. As early as 2004, we saw publications such as Heath's (2004), *Electronic Portfolios: A Guide to Professional Development and Assessment.* This tool

for professional development provides frameworks on which educators can develop ePortfolios and guides educators through their organization, presentation, technology, and portfolio design. In 2007, we saw another volume by Stefani, Mason, and Pegle, entitled *The Educational Potential of e-Portfolios: Supporting Personal Development and Reflective Learning,* in which the authors argued that students can utilize ePortfolios to exploit technology for both professional and personal purposes. The book by Cambridge, Cambridge, and Yancey (2009), entitled *Electronic Portfolios 2.0: Emergent Research on Implementation and Impact*, provides us with research from across 20 educational institutions in which the authors examined ePortfolio use and the effects it had on multiple student practices such as reflection, integrative learning, establishing identity, and organizational learning. Cambridge et al. (2009) also described how institutions have responded to multiple challenges in ePortfolio development, from engaging faculty to increasing the scale of their practice.

In 2010, we saw two strong publication efforts. First, Buzzetto-More's (2010) book *The E-Portfolio Paradigm: Informing, Educating, Assessing and Managing With e-Portfolios,* which focused on ePortfolios as a way to document both individual and organizational progress towards goals, marketing of talent, assessment and evaluation, professional development, examination of the efficacy of operations, and support for learning. Second was Cambridge's (2010) *ePortfolios for Lifelong Learning and Assessment,* which depicts an educational vision that is specifically supported by ePortfolio use. Drawing on work across the disciplines and exploring international ePortfolio practice, Cambridge (2010) suggested future directions for higher educational institutions in terms of curriculum, assessment, and technology. A slightly more recent guide can be found in Penny Light, Chen, and Ittleson's (2011) book, *Documenting Learning*

With ePortfolios: A Guide for College Instructors, in which the authors indicated that ePortfolios can take on roles in higher education at both an institutional and student level. This book provided guidance for instructors specifically working in online settings around creating and implementing ePortfolios as they discuss strategies to help faculty assess and design significant ePortfolio experiences for both themselves and their students.

Although these prior books have relevant information designed to help faculty and administrators understand the use of ePortfolios and provide visionary examples of how to set up ePortfolio programs on a campus, Reynolds and Patton's (2014) book targets faculty pursuing pedagogy that specifically incorporates the elements of integrative learning practices. The abbreviated and practical nature of Reynolds and Patton's (2014) book and its information and activities are a striking shift from some of the lengthier ePortfolio books focused on multiple topics that we have briefly reviewed. Tying "knowledge-age" skill sets and "21st century learning" with ePortfolio practice is common, both of which claim integrative learning as an essential skill (Harasim, 2012; Mentkowski et al., 2000; AAC&U, n.d.). How to achieve these specific skills revolves around the key instructional practices brought to us by Reynolds and Patton (2014). In many ways, this focus on integrative learning practices and activities renders this text an ultra-relevant guide for ePortfolio practitioners everywhere, regardless of the type of ePortfolio they seek to promote and instruct. The foundational nature of integrative learning, which helps in creating connections that can champion personal and professional growth, are not likely to expire in the near future, making this slim guide a must have.

As the process of researching and documenting what ePortfolios can accomplish for both institutions and students continues, Reynolds and Patton (2014) have offered us an insightful throwback to their essential core practices related to ePortfolios—integrative learning. In their book, they provide a practical guide for faculty and staff who want to help their students integrate their learning. The authors argue that reaching the goal of integrated learning rarely, if ever, just happens without some significant strategies employed in a classroom setting. With their combined 30 years of practical ePortfolio experience, they offer us concrete and vetted practices known to create successful transformational learning through integrative learning, which they have both facilitated and witnessed. This guide was designed to provide ideas to any educational professional who can easily review the suggestions and solutions included, and get to work applying them immediately.

Reynolds and Patton worked together at Portland State University in the University Studies General Education Program (UNST), where full-scale use of ePortfolios has been taking place for well over a decade. Along with their colleagues, they pioneered the use of ePortfolios across first-year learning experiences. They worked closely together when Reynolds was the Mentor Director and Patton was starting up their dual enrollment first-year experience high school program. Both have gone on to hold various prestigious positions across higher education and are active in giving national conference presentations, and workshops and in consulting with universities across the country and in Canada and Japan, with Reynolds also recently providing these services in the Middle East. In their book, they capitalize on the relationships they have built, both inside and outside of Portland State University, to provide us with an ensemble of these shared practices. The book includes dozens of references to students' and colleagues' experiences, outlining multiple step-by-step successful real-world experiences that include examples, frameworks, protocols, and rubrics. The conclusion one could draw while reading their book is that they have crafted a response to years of consulting around the topic of ePortfolios, and those have been fashioned into a toolkit of resources, all contained in this slim single volume. The result promotes a feeling of being invited into a group of ePortfolio super-users for an authentic "lets get down and dirty" workshop session.

The book is broken into four cohesive sections and is first and foremost about integrative learning, and the concepts and activities presented are useful for integrative learning even without an ePortfolio in the mix. As Reynolds and Patton (2014) have indicated, "the true work of creating a transformational ePortfolio is not in the actual making of the ePortfolio . . . but in the process of integrating one's own learning," which allows students "to be able to connect knowledge they are learning and apply it to the problems of the day" (p. 3). Many of the activities can be used straight from the book with little to no adaptation. The topic of ePortfolio facilitation is delivered as a leverage point in education to address integrative learning practices. Yet, they also present ePortfolio use as sitting squarely in the center of practices and professions such as personal branding, managing online identities, digital literacy, and digital storytelling.

Part One of the book (Chapters 1-3) includes descriptions of the key concepts of the ePortfolio and integrative learning, and shows how the latter can be included in both classrooms and programs. This section of the book includes a description of ePortfolio, as well as a definition of integrative learning, a discussion of its, importance, and an account of how it is assessed. There are some succinct resources and tables that allow

us to overview quickly the types of ePortfolios in use, a substantial selection of ePortfolio examples, and further institutional breakdowns of how they are currently applying ePortfolio practice on their campuses. In their segment, *Beyond College,* they touch on lifelong learning as it is related to the ePortfolio. Further discussion around how to make integrative learning a goal in courses or programs includes a rubric that identifies ways in which integrative learning can be demonstrated and provides a framework and criteria for judging that work.

Part Two (Chapters 4-7) includes classroom practices and assignments that support the actual development and scaffolding of integrative learning. In "Fostering Reflective Practice" (Chapter 4), the authors have provided the Guiding Principals of Reflection to illuminate reflection as a learning process and to help students develop reflective practice skills in students. In Chapter 5, "Making Connections or Integrating Knowledge," they focus on "intentionally building links between prior understanding of material and the material that is currently being learned" (p. 75) And provide a sampling of activities that help learners make connections between course content-personal lives, course-course connections, course-major connections, and bridging theory and practice. Although they recognize the seemingly opposing qualities of structure and autonomy, they also help us to see that even though "we don't have full control over student engagement, we do have control over how we structure our activities and how we motivate our students" (p. 91). They drew from self-determination theory to generate activities that promote self-directed learning and provide types of structure that are appropriate to the beginning, middle, and end of the ePortfolio phasing process. When discussing digital presence, they address the need to educate students about how to manage their presence on the Internet, and role of communication, such as presentation, design, appearance, audience and appropriate content selection.

Part Three (Chapters 8 and 9) addresses the practical and functional aspects of helping students create their ePortfolios, including activities for creating effective ePortfolio structures and issues of privacy and control. The authors define privacy as "deciding who can see the ePortfolio," and control as "who is allowed to access it and when" (p. 117), as well as offer sage advice on how to regulate both of these processes. Templates are a common occurrence with ePortfolio use and development, and these, including their pros and cons, are discussed, and portfolio structures are provided. With so many platforms available, it is good to see the inclusion of a section on choosing a platform for your needs. They round out this section with a discussion on ePortfolios for faculty, the selection and use of free web-based software, and sharing their own program-wide protocol.

In Part Four (chapters 10 and 11), the authors journey into the all too familiar waters of assessment; while clearly this is not the focus of the book, the offering of ePortfolio-specific rubrics is valuable. Touching on the mechanics of assessing reflective practice, they offer rubrics to score writing and student journals, and an additional holistic assessment rubric. They define holistic assessment as "looking at the construction, design, and work as a complete artifact" (p. 138). They end their book with the prediction that "ePortfolio use will continue to grow" (p. 149) and offer a few gems in the way of parting thoughts. The references they provide for the work they are presenting are a treasure trove for researchers and practitioners.

Reynolds and Patton (2014) clearly spell out their audience for this book as faculty and staff at high schools, colleges, or universities. Practitioners who are at the beginning of their practice can capitalize on Part One of the book, which concerns pedagogical practices, whereas advanced users can benefit from Part Two, concerned with improving existing pedagogy. As integrative learning often involves learning that happens outside the classroom, student affairs professionals can also benefit from the significant amount of content provided about how to facilitate integrative learning. For administrators, beyond the aforementioned framework for understanding the role of ePortfolios in improving student learning, the sections around course, program and institutional assessment provide a helpful set of active rubrics. Additionally, those who help develop teaching with faculty and staff, such as trainers and instructional designers, can benefit from the content relating to ePortfolio structure, privacy, and control.

The scope of the book and the number of resources and suggestions available within are top notch. Yet, in many ways the book focuses heavily on program-level efforts that lack connections to and dialogue with the overlapping internal institutional and external digital identity-based climates a practitioner may inhabit. Institutional level policies and practices can, and often do, have an impact on program level delivery and instruction. Since the publication of this book we have seen a continued expansion of the use of ePortfolios in educational settings. Along with this expanded practice, issues that have been attached to their instruction and use have become more pressing to address. As an ePortfolio practitioner, an area I found to be underdeveloped within the book is in regard to the topic of privacy and control, about which this book offers us a single paragraph. As practice has begun to expand to encompass entire institutions and third-party hosts, administrators and executive teams are noting that there is ambiguity about what goes into an ePortfolio, who can view its contents, and who owns that content. Participating faculty and students alike may both ask

specific and salient questions around who is ultimately responsible for ePortfolio content created at, or hosted by, higher education institutions and third-party platforms. These questions may breed some discomfort around a lack of institutional policy (Kift et al., 2007). Addressing such concerns should be approached before extending access to external audiences such as potential employers and program evaluators. Batson (2002) identified this security as a primary concern and urges us to remember that maintaining the security of personal information is an important consideration.

As many institutions opt to select third-party web hosts and platforms to achieve their ePortfolio initiatives, the concerns over who owns and can access the information in them becomes more complicated. In this era of big data, the topic of "digital dossiers" and the ability of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to aggregate your online information and activity through third-party providers is a current and critical concern (Solove, 2002). Future publications could include insights on the creation of policies or guidelines that can help along program or institutional level conversations in regard to collaborative ePortfolios and intellectual property. In the United States, additional layers of existing law such as the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) bind us. Creating internal institutional level policy that addresses security, privacy, ownership, intellectual property, and digital rights can produce an environment for both practitioners and creators to proceed with the development of ePortfolios with less ambiguity. An institution's responsibilities under FERPA need to be considered in the creation, hosting, and sharing of ePortfolios (Fiedler & Pick, 2004).

As the culture of promotion and tenure begins to turn its eye toward ePortfolios, other considerations may be to link these integrative classroom practices with a faculty member's personal practice to help model the way for students (Martino, 2015). Additionally, this book exposes the institutional-facing nature of many integrative learning portfolios, which could be enhanced by balancing the instructional supports and topics for creating learning ePortfolios with equal opportunities for creating personalized showcase ePortfolios (Chen, 2016). Without this balance in learning vs. showcase practices, the "learning ePortfolio" is often co-opted to provide the student with an ePortfolio that tries ineffectively to address multiple audiences and intents.

When reading through this book, one becomes strongly connected to the stories and narratives that Reynolds and Patton have produced and begins to feel welcomed into a group of elite super-users. The attention to details and the clear goal of enhancing student experiences through integrative learning shines through on each page. There are consistent reminders that this process is academic but also both creative and fun. With integrative learning identified as an essential skill, these authors remind us "it is not really a matter of should we address the need, but how we address the need" (p. 150), which they have done here with great skill.

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