

## Social Pedagogies in ePortfolio Practices: Principles for Design and Impact

Randall Bass

### **Preface by Bret Eynon**

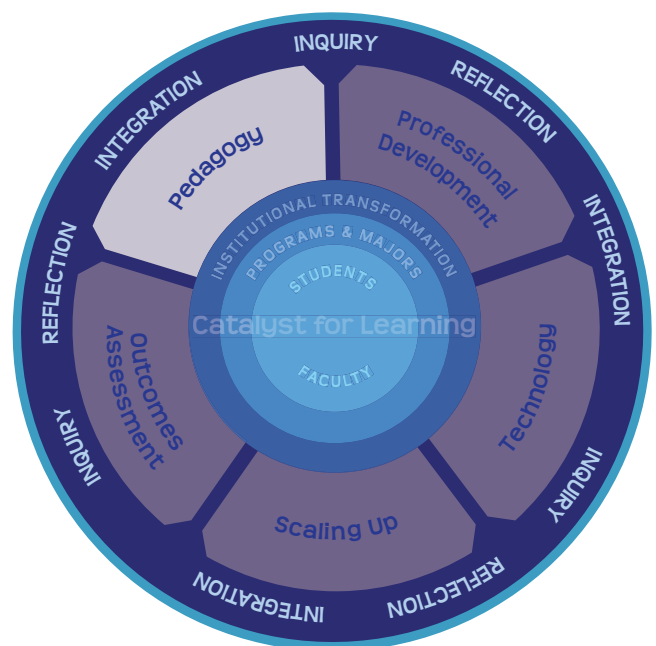
*ePortfolio practitioners have traditionally treated the reflective portfolio as solitary and private. Sometimes educators review the ePortfolio, sometimes not - and reviews are often focused less on dialog or substantive exchange and more on checking to see that all assigned tasks are “completed.” The audience for the portfolio may be distant and unclear, although students hope employers will look at the portfolio after they graduate. While this practice is not without value, it also has notable drawbacks:*

- *It postpones active audience engagement with the portfolio for semesters or years;*
- *It scaffolds no intermediate stages where students can rehearse the process of engaging with an audience;*
- *It cuts portfolio development off from the energy of social learning.*

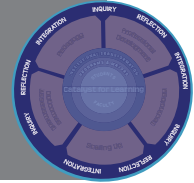
As Web 2.0 and social media exploded in use, Connect to Learning (C2L) faculty explored new approaches that would break the boundaries surrounding ePortfolio development. Studying Carol Rodgers’ principles of meaningful reflection, they found she argued for the value of “reflection in community.” (Click here for more on [Rodgers and reflective ePortfolio pedagogy](#).) Engaging in a series of online dialogues with C2L Senior Scholar Randy Bass, they considered the idea that ePortfolio practice could be enriched by what he and Heidi Elmendorf termed “social pedagogies”, which engage students in authentic tasks where representation of knowledge for an authentic audience is central to the construction of knowledge.

C2L faculty across the country developed, classroom-tested, and refined a range of social pedagogy practices that use the ePortfolio as a site for interaction, exchange, and collaboration. Preliminary data from the C2L Core Survey suggests that social pedagogy dramatically enhances the value of the reflective portfolio. Actual engagement with meaningful audiences through the ePortfolio correlates strongly with deeper and more integrative forms of student learning. For a discussion of C2L data and findings, see [The Difference That ePortfolio Makes](#).

In the essay that follows, Bass provides an introduction to social pedagogy and then reviews those practices, analyzing themes and patterns of use. “As these kinds of practices become more prevalent and developed,” Bass suggests, they will “reshape what we think of as the purpose and nature of ePortfolios, as sites for student sensemaking and “learning to be.”



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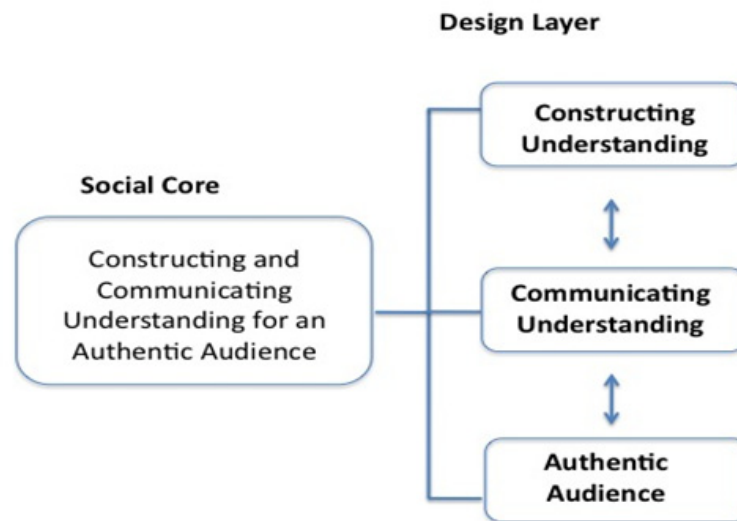


## Social Pedagogies in ePortfolio Contexts

In the Catalyst framework, integrative social pedagogy is a foundational concept for the ways that ePortfolios make student learning visible. Utilizing ePortfolios in conjunction with social learning practices expands the boundaries of what we understand to be the potential and value of ePortfolios. By stressing ePortfolios as integrative social pedagogy, we ask: What might it look like to take the social dimension of ePortfolios as seriously as integration—and to understand the importance of social learning for integration? What would it look like to put social learning at the heart of all the connections that we see as central to ePortfolio learning on our campuses?

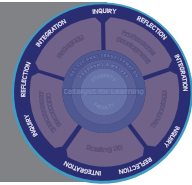
Early in the history of Connect to Learning, we had a working assumption that social pedagogies are integral to fostering deep learning. Our Core Survey findings and the creative emerging practices on [campuses are starting to bear this out](#). We take the term social pedagogies to mean “design approaches for teaching and learning that engage students in authentic tasks that are communication-intensive, where the representation of knowledge for an authentic audience is absolutely central to the construction of knowledge in a course”.

This is the “social core” of these practices, an intricate interdependence among three key ideas: **constructing understanding** (ways that students deepen their understanding of core concepts by engaging in the ways of thinking and practicing in a field); **communicating understanding** (ways that students make their knowledge available for others); and, **authentic audiences**, (audiences other than the instructor).

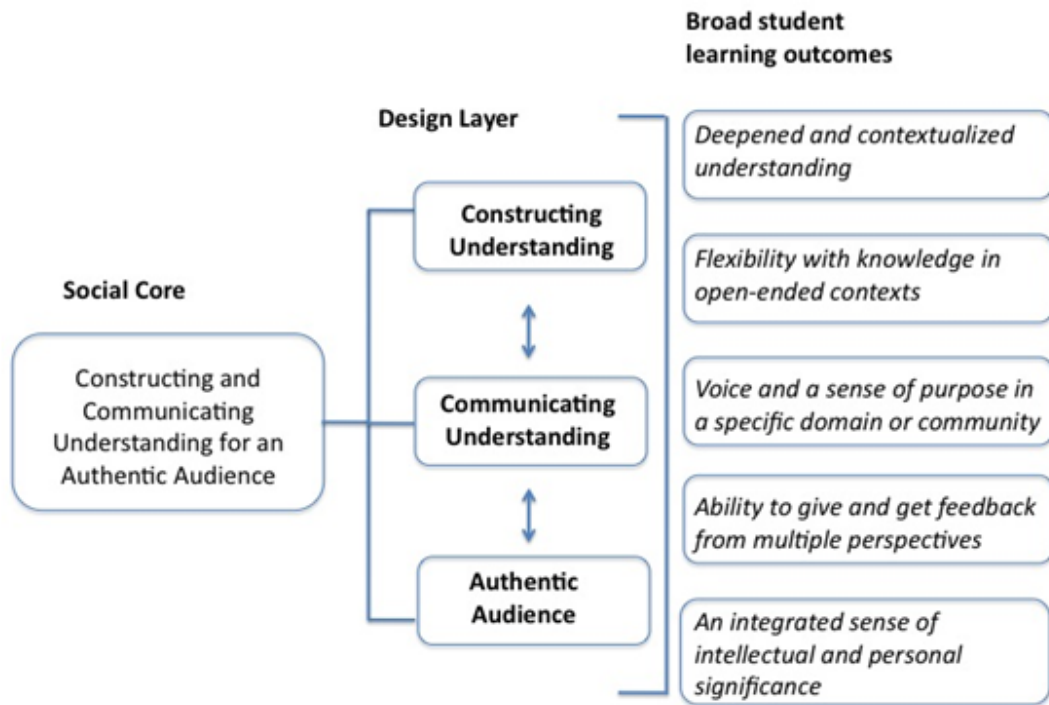


Social pedagogies are most effective when undertaken by students through “iterative cycles of engagement, often with the most difficult material.” Similarly, “Social pedagogies strive to build a sense of intellectual community

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within the classroom and frequently connect students to communities outside the classroom.”<sup>ii</sup> In the context of ePortfolios, social pedagogies are also increasingly design approaches that help students deepen their reflections, build links across courses and semesters, and bridge between formal curricular and co-curricular learning.



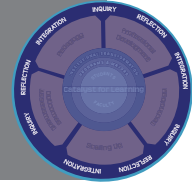
Social pedagogies can be implemented using all kinds of technologies (as well as pedagogical practices that involve no digital technologies). Either way, social pedagogies are associated with a set of outcomes that help deepen and contextualize learning, strengthen students’ sense of voice and agency, and find intellectual and personal significance in their learning.

These outcomes, consonant with the kinds of learning associated with ePortfolios throughout the Catalyst model, are intensified when using social pedagogies with ePortfolios, where student work is lifted out of isolated assignments or bounded courses, where learning processes can be archived and made visible, where reflection is the norm, where communities are developed, and where courses and experiences, both curricular and co-curricular, are explicitly connected as part of a larger educational narrative.

As stated in the introduction to the [Catalyst essay on ePortfolio as Integrative Social Pedagogy](#):

C2L’s fundamental premise is that deepening the integrative qualities of student learning

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makes that learning more transformative and enduring; that integration is promoted through reflection, by inviting students, in disciplined and systematic ways, to make connections that intensify their learning; and that reflection is more meaningful when it makes learning visible to others.... Integration, reflection and social learning are at the heart of C2L's ePortfolio practice.

And again in the findings essay, "[The Difference That ePortfolio Makes](#)": "[W]hen social pedagogies are being used, it suggests, students are more likely to report that ePortfolio deepened their engagement with ideas and course content, and that the course engaged them in higher order integrative learning processes."<sup>iii</sup>

Early in the C2L project, we found few established practices involving ePortfolio and social pedagogies, especially with respect to the use of reflection in the context of community. Now there is a growing range of rich examples, as well as a sophistication and robustness, around integrative social pedagogies in ePortfolio contexts. This essay describes some of the principles of design and characteristics of these exemplary practices in order to better promote social pedagogies within the ePortfolio community.

## Principles for Design and Impact: Social Pedagogies in ePortfolio Contexts

In April 2013 we asked campuses to share polished social pedagogy practices with these questions in mind: What makes these practices work? What might make them more successful? What else is going on in the course of the ePortfolio practice that makes these particular practices effective (thinking about the larger ecology)? What preliminary insights can we draw from these practices about the core principles of a social pedagogy for ePortfolio?

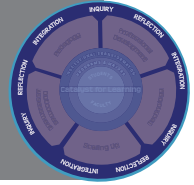
Here is some of what we're learning from these polished practices, grouped under three headings: Process and Audience, Purpose and Identity, and Learning Culture. In each area there are principles of design or impact along with links to examples of practices found elsewhere on the Catalyst site.

### Process and Audience

**1) ePortfolios enable social pedagogies, providing an intermediate space between public and private.** ePortfolios are particularly well-suited for social learning interactions because they can be situated as intermediate spaces, somewhere between entirely private and totally public. Guided by faculty students rehearse what it means to connect with an audience and consider what their ePortfolio looks like to others. Inventing ways in which ePortfolios can serve as sites for communication, collaboration, and exchange is a significant task for the ePortfolio field as a whole.

This intermediate space of ePortfolio learning and interaction enables students to engage in stages of reflection and layers of social learning. This helps students realize the impact of one of the principles of reflection—"reflection in community." Community is critical to reflection—as Carol Rodgers stresses in her synthesis of John Dewey—because it allows for the affirmation of one's ideas, helps learners benefit from diverse perspectives and new ways to see, and provides a testing ground for ideas and understanding.<sup>iv</sup>

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**2) Social pedagogy practices have at least four distinct layers or versions of “authentic audience” that can play out in ePortfolio contexts.** Working with this idea of ePortfolios as an intermediate space, faculty at the project campuses have devised practices that engage at least four different kinds of audiences and interactions.

## 2a) Faculty and Peer Feedback

The most common social pedagogy associated with ePortfolios is the use of faculty and peer response and social interaction to deepen individual work. Faculty feedback (frequent and targeted feedback) is one of the most important factors for improving learning in any context. And our Core Survey [findings](#) corroborate this, showing that high levels of faculty feedback correlated with deeper engagement. Faculty feedback by itself is important but not fully a social pedagogy in the way we are using the term.

When peer feedback is introduced it significantly enhances the experience. As argued in “[The Difference That ePortfolio Makes](#),” “The addition of peer feedback helps elevate this point to a broader understanding of the importance of the social element in student learning.”

Examples in the polished practices are plentiful. For example, in [Guttman’s Arts in NYC assignment](#) students “respond to each other’s comments via the course ePortfolio and use each other’s ideas to generate insight and analysis into their own writing.” [Northeastern’s Master’s level education courses](#) use a layered, or staged, reflection approach, where “social pedagogy precedes individual reflection.”

## 2b) Collaborative Work

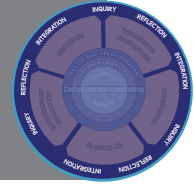
Another powerful form of audience and social learning is team-based work to create collaboratively-produced artifact. For example, in [Boston University’s](#) General Studies second year capstone team projects, “students spend the last four weeks of their sophomore year working in groups of 5-7 to research a contemporary problem and write a paper that describes the problem and its contexts and proposes a real-world solution.” ePortfolios play a crucial and unique role in the process by allowing students to “keep logs of their progress (what they read, who they interviewed, what they wrote), and they also archive all drafts they write on their portfolios.” This kind of sharing and archiving enables the students to make their thinking visible to each other (creating a more coherent end product) and to the faculty, who can better mentor the projects as a result.

At [Lehman College](#), students preparing to become science educators, “co-construct” a collaborative portfolio that uses evidence to document and illustrate shared professional practices in the context of ... an audience they select.” The emphasis in the collaborative process is to provide real evidence (baseline and post-baseline) of personal and professional development that integrates learning science with learning how to teach science.”

## 2c) External Audiences

Some social pedagogies make use of an external audience, which raises the stakes on production and intensifies the way students learn to be accountable for their thinking and communication. For example, at the [University of Delaware](#) “teacher candidate students” have a “defense of mastery presentation-style ePortfolio” that provides “a high stakes setting that replicates a position interview process.” At [Hunter College](#), students in an Advanced German Through Translation course “develop their understanding of

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themselves as learners by posting in-depth reflections on the challenges they have faced as translators and the problem-solving strategies they have developed to meet those challenges.” In the end, the portfolios are public and the instructor strives to “simulate an authentic audience for each translation that the students do, providing them with translation briefs based on ‘real-life’ commissions that translators receive.”

## 2d) Knowledge Communities

Another powerful kind of audience—one that builds on all the previous ones—is the formation of students into an expert-like “knowledge community of practice.” For example, in [Pace University’s](#) social pedagogy in a microbiology course students spend eight weeks developing an “expertise” on a specific kind of bacteria, developing and presenting through an ePortfolio”. In [IUPUI’s](#) art history capstone, students engage in extensive “peer review...to begin to understand a singular paper as part of a wider research possibility” and... ”to understand research as a way of thinking rather than as a page and word limit’.

At [Northeastern](#), “[I]n the Ed.D. program, one faculty member who teaches Entrepreneurial Leadership involves groups of students in the development of ePortfolio case studies. Toward the end of the course, groups use Google Hangouts to broadcast and record a panel discussion with educational innovators about the case, and the recording is also embedded in the ePortfolio case. These cases become part of a library that future students can draw upon in their learning.” At [Virginia Tech](#), they have created a program called “Zip Line to Success,” that quickly integrates transfer students in part by involving them in a final group research project, “where students combine their interests and their disciplinary backgrounds to pursue a research topic from multiple perspectives. The students present their research through the medium of an electronic portfolio.”

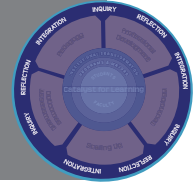
The creation of a true knowledge community of practice has not particularly been a priority in ePortfolio practices; yet this feels like an important—if not profound—emergent area, highlighted by integrative social pedagogies.

## Purpose and Identity

**3) Integrative social pedagogies contribute to giving students a sense of purpose.** If there is one essential quality that makes high-impact practices high impact, it is that they help students find a sense of purpose in their learning. You can see it from the very first year—for example, at [Manhattanville College](#), where Sherie McClam uses ePortfolio and social media to help her students work for “social action and social change.” And several Master’s level ePortfolio practices use social pedagogies and ePortfolio assignments to galvanize their students’ sense of agency in a given field.

This primary objective—to develop a sense of purpose—helps remind us that social learning pedagogies are not only about process (peer review, revision, etc.), but about learning processing. In particular, it is especially powerful to see in the campus practices how social pedagogies help students find new meaning in their learning experiences—by connecting and reframing them. It is a foundational premise of social pedagogies that helping to make sense of an idea or an experience for others is critical to making sense of knowledge and experience for oneself.

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**4) Social pedagogies help students “learn to be” in a discipline or professional area.** The role of social pedagogies in addressing learning outcomes is nowhere more evident than when practices make explicit connections between thinking in a field and learning to embody that field. This is captured, for example, in the description of the [IUPUI](#) art history capstone, where “the social pedagogy of peer feedback and subsequent discussion thus serves an important purpose of the course: strengthening students’ professional identities by helping them learn to be peer reviewers of others’ writing about art.” This connection—elsewhere expressed as the synthesis of “metacognition and professional-identity development”—is one powerful way to articulate the relationship between “constructing understanding” and “communicating understanding” at the core of social pedagogies.

Several of the practices address the relationship between knowledge-building, metacognition and identity quite explicitly. What is especially powerful here is knowledge development through social pedagogies—where students understand how to translate their ideas for others, negotiate with peers around meaning, and internalize standards for quality and excellence that belong to communities of practice.

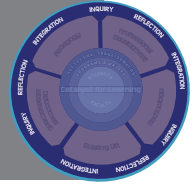
### Learning Culture

**5) Social pedagogies are typically integrative of multiple learning goals and outcomes.** We usually talk about social pedagogies being integrative because they help students make connections across knowledge areas and connect disparate learning experiences (coursework, co-curricular, etc.). But it is also clear in these practices how often social pedagogies help students (and faculty) meet more than one learning goal for a course or a program—often meeting many at once. For example, at [LaGuardia Community College](#), students make video presentations on anatomy knowledge that “explicitly supports three core competencies: oral communication, critical literacy and technological literacy.” Or, to take an extreme case, the [University of Delaware](#) teacher candidate portfolios lead students to demonstrate the “application of all the competencies obtained throughout their academic program.”

**6) Social pedagogies are especially powerful when they are distributed throughout the learning culture.** Nowhere is social learning more pervasive than in the [Three Rivers Community College](#) use of integrative social pedagogy throughout their nursing program, from current students sharing letters of orientation with entering students, to information literacy assignments, to presentations on content and reflections on clinical growth. Assignment after assignment, horizontally and vertically across the curriculum, a social ethos permeates the program.

**7) Social pedagogies lead to a distinctive kind of evidence in ePortfolios themselves.** In [LaGuardia’s](#) practice outlining the Anatomy video assignment, Professor Preethi Radhakrishnan describes her experimental design, carried out in parallel sections: one with the social learning assignment and one without; a comparison of exam scores showed that “reflection and critical thinking does boost and deepen learning of ‘hard concepts.’” That’s one compelling form of evidence of impact.

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A few practices speak directly about what the evidence looks like in the ePortfolios themselves. For example, the [Northeastern](#) social pedagogy practice explains: “The ePortfolio helps the teacher see how a student distills and derives individual meaning from the large body of work generated in a fully online course, using that experience to negotiate the development of individual and professional identity. Sometimes this process is observed in the student’s writing, but the evidence can also be visual.”

## **Social Pedagogies as a Growth Area for ePortfolios**

Overall, social pedagogies intensify the impact of ePortfolios as sites for integrative student learning. As these kinds of practices become more prevalent and developed, they will also reshape what we think of as the purpose and nature of ePortfolios, as sites of student sensemaking and “learning to be.” Although still emerging on campuses, we are starting to see social pedagogies as a critical influence on the way that ePortfolio practices are evolving for a new paradigm of learning and knowledge-sharing at the heart of higher education and indeed our whole culture.

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### Citation

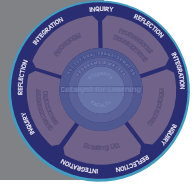
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Retrieved from <http://c2l.mcnrc.org/pedagogy/ped-analysis/>

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# Social Pedagogies in ePortfolio Practices: Principles for Design and Impact



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