

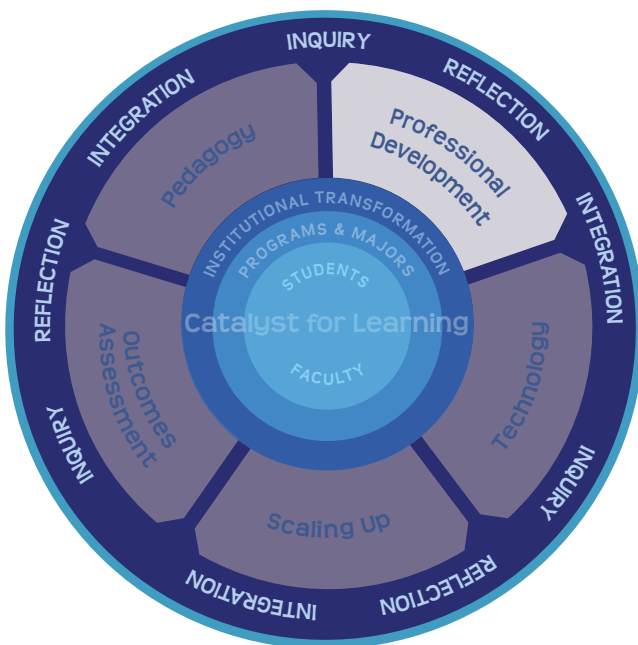
Inquiry, Reflection, and Integration in Professional Development

Bret Eynon, Laura M. Gambino & Judit Török

Professional development and Centers for Teaching and Learning play pivotal roles in advancing effective ePortfolio initiatives and developing an institutional learning culture. ePortfolio is not a “plug-and-play” technology; in fact, many consider it a disruptive force. And effective ePortfolio pedagogy requires faculty and staff to rethink many assumptions about teaching and learning.

Experienced leaders know the power of using student work as the basis for improving pedagogy, practice and curriculum; ePortfolio facilitates this approach to professional development. Engaging participants in planning, testing and reflecting on ways to integrate ePortfolio into their work, professional development helps shift ePortfolio from a disruptive to a transformative practice that enhances student, faculty, and staff learning.

The C2L campuses shared a wide range of professional development [practices](#) and [stories](#), describing ways they help faculty and staff use ePortfolio to build student engagement and learning. We detail these effective structures and strategies in our related essay, [C2L Strategies for Professional Development](#). Looking across the range of professional development offerings in the C2L network, we find the most effective practices demonstrate and incorporate the use of [Inquiry, Reflection and Integration](#). This essay explores the ways these design principles shape professional development practice.

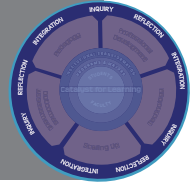


Professional Inquiry

Inquiry is a type of investigative, problem-based learning. When utilized in a professional development context, an inquiry approach provides opportunities for participants to ask questions and explore their own teaching practices while considering related student learning experiences. Professional development programs with an emphasis on collective inquiry ask faculty and staff to use their classrooms as laboratories for scholarly experiments with new pedagogies. Inquiry approaches encourage participants to grapple with new approaches to pedagogy, curriculum design, and assessment. In an inquiry setting, faculty participants are prompted to question and explore new ways of understanding a range of theoretical and practical issues related to teaching and learning.

ePortfolio-related professional development activities on C2L campuses incorporate the principle of inquiry by engaging participants in exploring integrative ePortfolio pedagogy, considering how to fit ePortfolio into their own practice, and investigating the impact on student learning. Such inquiry can take place individually or collectively.

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While serving as the subject of inquiry, the ePortfolio can also make changes in student learning visible. When ePortfolio is put at the center of individual and collective inquiry processes, the focus shifts from teaching to learning. “The use of the ePortfolio has aided curriculum development across departments,” writes the [San Francisco State](#) team, “and has allowed us to move from a more faculty-centered approach to a more student centered one, where we analyze what they are learning, specifically.” Building professional development around on student ePortfolios can engage faculty and staff in powerful conversations about how students learn.

Most C2L campuses combine individual and collective inquiry, asking faculty to explore relevant literature and generate questions, experiment in their own classrooms, and return to the group for shared conversation. For example, a group of faculty in a professional development seminar or “teaching circle” might consider ways to utilize social pedagogy with ePortfolio, help each other develop and plan strategies for experiments in their individual courses, and then meet to discuss their findings. Such groups could be department-based or interdisciplinary in nature. Or faculty might, through a professional development opportunity linked to assessment, engage in exploring the types of student learning taking place in a particular program or department. Through this research process, faculty and staff participants can evaluate whether a program is meeting the set goals, or identify gaps in curriculum and instruction.

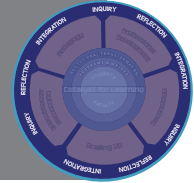
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Collective inquiry is often connected to outcomes assessment initiatives taking place at the program or institutional level of C2L campuses. We see a growing connection between professional development and outcomes assessment. An authentic outcomes assessment process that involves guided inquiry around student learning outcomes often becomes an opportunity for professional learning. And when this process generates recommendations for change in programmatic goals and practices, professional development is often needed to implement the recommendations and consider their effectiveness. [Click here to read more about Outcomes Assessment](#).

[Manhattanville College](#) uses collaborative, cross-disciplinary inquiry as part of their professional development plan. Their Teaching and Learning Circles engage a small group of faculty and staff in collaborative inquiry about understanding ePortfolio uses and pedagogy:

Driven by an inquiry-oriented design process, we ask faculty and staff to participate in a needs assessment process in which they are first asked to identify their instructional/ programmatic goals and outcomes. With these goals and outcomes in place, participants are asked to reflect on the degree to which their current instructional and programming practices are working to meet those goals. Identifying gaps between where they want to be and where

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they are sets up an inquiry process in which they can ask genuine questions about the ways in which ePortfolio can be used as a pedagogical tool to help them bridge that gap or to transform ineffective strategies/practices.

Similarly, at [Virginia Tech](#) ePortfolio leaders designed a new cross-disciplinary professional development approach, the ePortfolio Development Network:

...a year-long faculty inquiry group that spends one week together in the summer and meets periodically throughout the school year...The theme this year is Touchstones, Keystones, and Capstones. This inquiry project includes faculty interested in utilizing ePortfolios beyond their initial implementations, in upper-level and keystone or capstone courses.

Investigative teams or groups may start with a set of questions about teaching and learning and systematically explore them together, or the inquiry structure could be more exploratory and self-directed as participants review relevant research and practices and develop their own research questions. Year-long professional development seminars at [LaGuardia](#) use this model of inquiry, slowly unfolding inquiry into concepts across several months or semesters. The Connected Learning and the ReThinking the Capstone Experience seminars are examples of this process, helping faculty not only implement ePortfolio but also deepen their insights into broader questions of pedagogy, curricular structure, and the process of integrative learning.

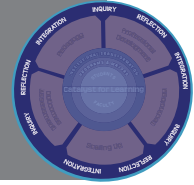
Inquiry into one's own practice sometimes incorporates the creation of professional or teaching faculty portfolios. Professional development leaders in the C2L network encourage faculty and staff to build and maintain their own ePortfolios. In this way, the ePortfolio becomes the space for participants to document their inquiry and reflection process and their learning. This type of professional development is often connected with the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), a systematic and guided inquiry into one's own practice. As a methodical and rigorous inquiry process, SoTL helps faculty gain deeper understanding of their craft. [To review how C2L campuses utilize faculty portfolios and SoTL philosophy in professional development, click here.](#)

Reflective Practice

Reflection is a fundamental component of professional development. Building directly on inquiry, reflective processes help participants examine and make meaning out of their experience. It deepens faculty and staff learning and helps them develop as practitioners. As Carol Rodgers explains:

The function of reflection is to make meaning, to formulate the relationships and continuities among the elements of an experience, between that experience and other experiences, between that experience and the knowledge that one carries, and between that knowledge and the knowledge produced by thinkers other than oneself....The creation of meaning out of experience is at the very heart of what it means to be human. It is what enables us to make sense of and attribute value to the events of our lives.¹

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As part of a larger professional development experience, reflective activities help participants document, make meaning from, and share their learning with each other. The impact can be long-term, helping faculty and staff become more reflective practitioners. Faculty reflections can be written, oral, artistic or multimedia in form, taking place individually or in a community. Reflection allows participants to connect experiences and integrate new knowledge. Through reflection, participants examine their immediate classroom or teaching experiences, and think about the implications and application of high impact practices, integrative pedagogies and classroom-based ePortfolio implementations in their teaching.

In a professional development context, reflection can take place in a number of ways. Shorter, focused trainings often use brief and immediate reflective activities such as post-seminar survey reflections. Open-ended surveys can be useful for quickly eliciting specific faculty learning. Longer, more intensive professional programs allow for staged written and oral reflections, giving faculty and staff the tools and the time to make meaning out of their successes and failures. Peer mentorship programs might also encourage self-reflection, guiding faculty to think carefully about their own approaches to teaching.

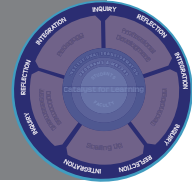
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Attending retreats or conferences together with colleagues can also create excellent opportunities for campus leaders to connect and reflect together about their work in the past, and plan for the future. Whether it takes place in retreats, mentorship structures, or seminar conversations, reflecting in community helps faculty and staff move beyond meaning-making at the individual course level to spotlight broader challenges, such as gaps in disciplinary curricula, college-wide approaches to new technologies, and cross-disciplinary strategies to address General Education and integrative learning goals.

Professional development practices shared by our C2L partners showcase a variety of reflective activities. The [University of Delaware](#)'s semi-structured interview is an example of a reflective practice that focuses on faculty development for a single department/academic program. Through semi-structured interviews faculty reflect on and identify areas for modification on the academic program level, and outline suggestions for change on the institutional level.

Professional development “teaching circles” tend to be more conversational, exploratory and reflective by design. [Pace University](#) and [Hunter College](#) both rely heavily on this technique to introduce faculty to ePortfolio and encourage them to discuss related pedagogical issues. The Pace participants note that “Reflection and Integration are two key principles of the teaching circle curriculum. Regarding reflection, we highlight the Mahara platform’s journal (previously called blog) feature. Participants create their own journals to reflect on each session...”

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Reflection is also an important component in [Northwestern Connecticut Community College's](#) professional development seminars. To allow enough time for richer and more meaningful reflections, the NCCC leaders extended the seminar program to span the entire academic year.

While we want to continue to grow and improve as educators, we need to be able to clearly identify the main purpose of our faculty development around ePortfolio so that we can define why we are doing what we're doing and what we hope faculty, and ultimately students, will gain from this process. For us, the answer to that question was "reflection." ...If utilizing ePortfolio can help faculty become more effective reflective practitioners, then they will be able to both model and guide students in meaningful reflection to enhance learning.

[Guttman Community College's](#) Assessment Days provide an example of institution-wide collective reflection connected to outcomes assessment. At these two-day long professional development meetings, faculty and student success advocates work together to review and assess student achievement of learning outcomes, and reflect on the alignment of outcomes at the assignment, course, and program level. Guttman participants reported that:

Assessment Days reflect Guttman's commitment to use professional development to guide our ongoing assessment work, improve institutional practice and maintain student learning as the driver for all decisions made throughout the institution. The Days have three main purposes: 1) assessing student achievement of learning outcomes in their work on integrated assignments; 2) reflecting on the alignment of assignment, course, program, and institutional outcomes; and 3) identifying successes and areas of improvement for the different components of our academic model.

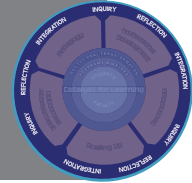
Integrative Learning

Integration, or integrative learning, helps students make connections and learn to transfer knowledge across courses, disciplines, and semesters. Professional development provides opportunities for participants to plan integrative assignments and activities for their students. And it can also help faculty develop more integrative understanding of their practice and the connection between their courses, their department or program, and the institution.

In a professional learning context, integration builds on the reflective, meaning-making process, moving faculty and staff to integrate and transfer their learning. Seen from this perspective, integration refers to the transfer of specific knowledge (about teaching and learning) from a particular classroom or seminar experience to broader contexts, extending to sustained practice, adapting to other courses, and changes in departmental or college practice. Integration is operative when faculty and staff apply insights from specific instances to broader contexts, deepening and sustaining innovations, turning creative, one-shot experiments into broadly-adopted changes.

Integration as "backward design" is a feature of [Pace's](#) Teaching Circles. Participants in their professional development discuss various high impact and integrative learning strategies for their students, and ways to

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integrate and apply new strategies in their classrooms and curriculum, and write:

Integration is one of the most important goals of the teaching circle. Rather than simply use ePortfolio as an add-on, we encourage participants to think about how they might re-envision their curriculum, possibly do some “backward design” in order to incorporate the ePortfolio as both a space for students to process their learning (do the “intermittent thinking” that Randy Bass refers to), and to showcase the products of their learning (and develop some rubrics).

Cross-disciplinary professional development programs provide an opportunity for integration as faculty and staff work with and learn from each other. Integration, in this scenario, becomes an activity of building interdisciplinary communities of practice for change at the departmental or institutional level. These communities allow participants to share and critique each other’s assignments, program designs and assessments in a collegial manner, integrating new learning into their practices. Integration provides an opportunity to implement pedagogical innovations in broader classroom contexts.

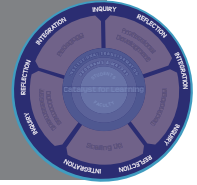
Faculty and staff are expert learners; they have mastered the ability to transfer knowledge from abstract to specific, from observation to theory in their own disciplines. Integration in professional development takes advantage of these expert learning skills to help faculty and staff connect theories about integrative, reflective ePortfolio pedagogy to their courses and professional and co-curricular experiences.

Collaborations between faculty and staff can deepen participants’ understanding of the ways learning takes place within and beyond the classroom. Creating a professional learning community that includes faculty and student services staff, [LaGuardia’s “Art of Advisement: Learning and Implementing Holistic Advisement Skills”](#), a year-long professional development seminar, focuses on integrating ePortfolio into advisement practices. This seminar explores ePortfolio’s role in helping students integrate their curricular and co-curricular learning, and the use of portfolios for improved advisement. The LaGuardia team reports that, “[t]he integration of faculty and staff in this seminar stresses the idea that it takes an entire college community to learn, teach, and support the efforts that provide a meaningful and effective advisement structure for students.”

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Integration is also a key piece of [LaGuardia’s](#) professional development activity, “Holistic Evaluation of ePortfolio through Rubrics.” This activity, which focuses on the assessment of students’ integrative learning, as demonstrated across their portfolios, takes place as one part of a larger year-long seminar on ePortfolio and Integrative Learning. As noted by the LaGuardia team:

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All three PD concepts [Inquiry, Reflection and Integration] surface through this activity. Most obviously, it guides faculty through a collective inquiry into ePortfolio effectiveness as a demonstration of student learning. Integration itself is the focus of the activity, as faculty evaluate the integrative value of student work presented through their ePortfolios and strategize ways to teach integrative thinking more effectively. Finally, the activity affords space for faculty to step back from the work and reflect upon their own teaching.

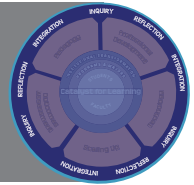
Conclusion

Across the C2L network, we see the importance of professional development in cultivating a robust ePortfolio initiative on a campus. We also observe that ePortfolio-related professional development activities are most meaningful when guided by the design principles of Inquiry, Reflection and Integration. C2L campus examples demonstrate how these principles can come to life through professional development, particularly when collective classroom-based inquiry and recurring reflections guide faculty and staff to construct deeper understanding about teaching and learning. Ultimately, professional development – in combination with attention to the other [Catalyst sectors](#) – can lead to a larger institutional transformation and the development of a vibrant learning organization.

Citation

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