

## Integrative Approach: Using Multi-Paper ePortfolios in Doctoral Dissertations

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the use of Integrative Doctoral ePortfolios as an alternative dissertation format within the Portland State University Educational Leadership doctoral program (EdD). The EdD program focuses on preparing working professionals for leadership roles in education. The traditional five chapter dissertation format, while rigorous, can feel disconnected from the professional lives of these students. This article describes the successful implementation of a multi-paper ePortfolio dissertation option for three recent graduates and discusses the implications for EdD programs.

### KEYWORDS

*doctoral education, dissertation formats, ePortfolio, integrative learning*

The research based five chapter dissertation has been the penultimate marker of success in a doctoral program. As an advisor in a EdD doctoral program, I (Dr. Reynolds) was hard pressed to explain to my advisees the relevance of the five chapter dissertation for their future lives and careers. Truth be told, I had a hard time defending it as the culminating project for any doctoral program. Others have doubts also. Smith (2016) says:

it is beyond time to rethink the fetishization of the dissertation monograph as the culmination of doctoral education. . . . Reaffirming that there is only one way of doing the dissertation—and that is as a proto-monograph—trains and constrains students in a one-model-fits-all version of doctoral education that is no longer adequate to the times. The need is great to ask questions anew, to energize inquiry into the implications of current practices. What is it to be “a scholar” and to be “scholarly” now? (p. 131)

Portland State University offers an Educational Leadership doctorate and has been a Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) member since 2011. The EdD program is focused on helping our students conduct actionable research, especially after they graduate. The key word here is actionable. Most of our students are working professionals and return for their doctorate because they have identified problems or issues occurring in their work settings and hope their doctoral work will help them develop the skills necessary to solve the problems they encounter. While a five chapter dissertation might help students gain and demonstrate expertise in a

narrow topic, it didn't always help them answer the burning question that would help them solve the problems they encountered. Our coursework follows the CPED principles, and students report feeling that the coursework prepares them well for their desired futures. However, the dissertation process can often seem daunting and not particularly useful.

For three of my most brilliant students (Drs. Pirie, Mullooly, and Mizuta), this was especially true. Each of these co-authors in this article were excellent and passionate students. Each had challenging full-time positions and had come to the EdD program to learn to solve some of the problems they were encountering in their workplaces and while they learned a great deal through their coursework and comprehensive exam process, the five chapter dissertation option seemed almost useless in achieving this goal. In addition, all of them were hoping that the EdD would offer them opportunities to change and grow into new positions and wondered how this culminating project would support and allow them to explore future options. Indeed, we almost lost them to the “All But Dissertation” group. A recent change in the Graduate School's guidelines for dissertations allowing multi-paper dissertations provided an avenue for exploration concerning what could be allowed for a dissertation at Portland State. Other institutions had begun to use this format for their dissertations and Portland State's Graduate College has followed. This flexibility allowed for thinking about a more relevant outcome for our doctoral program—one that



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would serve our students well as they continue to advance equitable and evidenced-based practices in the workforce. For our doctoral program, it allowed us to explore the development of an Integrative Multi-paper ePortfolio that satisfied the Graduate School but also allowed for great student agency and expression.

This article will describe the process used to develop a protocol for an Integrative Multi-paper ePortfolio and its acceptance by the College doctoral program committee and the University's Graduate School. Integrative Doctoral ePortfolios have the potential to offer the student and readers a holistic and engaging experience. Through multimedia, video, images, and linked content, it empowers candidates to utilize holistic storytelling, bridging the gap between academic and professional work. This format allows for authentic engagement while maintaining rigor, serving as a powerful tool for equitable and accessible scholarship. In addition, enhanced audience engagement can widen the professional scope of the research implications and applications. Three students utilized this method and each of these newly minted EdDs will share their process and experience. Finally, we will discuss lessons learned.

## THE END BECOMES A NEW BEGINNING

This journey started with Dr. Pirie who successfully defended her five chapter dissertation proposal only to find that she needed to withdraw her study. She developed a case study of the adoption of an ePortfolio platform but soon after her proposal defense she was offered a coveted position at the company that she would be studying for her case study. For ethical reasons, she needed to start over. Starting a new position, raising a child, and experiencing a house fire made it difficult to focus on the development of a new study. She was about to give up. Her area of expertise was ePortfolios and while working on her dissertation, she had also been working on projects and publishing articles.

Our doctoral program had long been contemplating the use of alternative dissertations, and this seemed like the perfect opportunity to request the use of a Professional ePortfolio to the Graduate School. Dr. Pirie and Dr. Reynolds created a template of a possible format that could be used for the proposal and dissertation, fulfilling the goals outlined in our Program and University guidelines. We were rejected. However, in the process, we learned that the Graduate School had recently decided to accept multi-paper dissertations, providing candidates (and their advisors) with a lot of latitude in the requirements:

"In the multi-paper format the papers do not have to be closely related to each other, but it is required that there be both an introductory and concluding chapter that link the papers together with a common theme." (Portland State University Graduate School, n.d.)

Dr. Pirie decided to marry the format of the template we had created in the submission to the Graduate School with these guidelines. The ePortfolio would serve as a container for the multi-paper dissertation but would allow her to be creative and represent her work beyond the audience of her dissertation committee. To satisfy the requirements from the Graduate School, students using the ePortfolio upload a word document with the required Graduate School elements of their dissertation for publication.

## STRUCTURE OF THE MULTI-PAPER DISSERTATION

The structure of the ePortfolio Dr. Pirie initially created was adopted by Dr. Mullooly and Dr. Mizuta. However, each of their ePortfolios had a different look and emphasized different aspects of this structure. One could argue that this structure was more rigorous than the requirements set out for the multi-paper dissertation from the Graduate School. It not only contained the required elements but several other elements, which contextualized the works as a whole, adding to the coherence of the final product. It also allowed the reader to learn about the scholar beyond the formal writing through reflection and visual media. The ePortfolio contained the following ePortfolio pages:

- A Welcome page which included a visual representation of the author and the topic of the ePortfolio
- An abstract and introduction to the entire project. This abstract was used for the required abstract for dissertation publication. The introduction part of this page can be seen as a typical introduction chapter of a five chapter dissertation, focused on defending the problem of practice and highlighting what the articles will contribute in understanding or solving the problem.
- Three published or publishable articles accompanied by an overall reflection and a brief reflection about how the articles fit with their Problem in Practice. These articles could be published already as long as they were done within the time that students were in the doctoral program. They can be co-written with colleagues outside the program, faculty members, or their faculty adviser.
- Conclusion
- Optional: Professional ePortfolio, Final reflections, Student's choice

Each of the students that used this format also created a proposal ePortfolio. In the proposal process for a five chapter dissertation in our program, students are required to basically write the first three chapters of the dissertation—Introduction, Literature Review, and the proposed methodology. Thus, the Abstract and Introduction page is especially important, as it allows committee members to understand the student's Problem of Practice and how the subsequent articles they have written or will write address the Problem of Practice.

An example of one of the student's ePortfolio Welcome page is in Figure One. Note the tabs at the top of the page that leads readers to the pages described above.

Figure 1.





## THE PROPOSAL AND DISSERTATION PROCESS

Candidates shared their Proposal ePortfolio and their Dissertation ePortfolio with their committee members two weeks prior to the oral defense, just as a five chapter dissertation would be shared. In our program, the proposal of a five chapter dissertation consists of the first three chapters of the dissertation—Introduction, Literature Review, and Methods.

Like an oral defense of a traditional dissertation, candidates present a brief synopsis of their proposals in an ePortfolio format. Students provide a walk-through of their ePortfolios and then formal presentations about their Problems of Practice in the context of the articles they have written or intended to write (similar to sharing an Introduction and Literature Review in a five chapter dissertation). For articles that are already published, the proposal ePortfolio contains a copy of the article accompanied with a reflection. For those who are proposing articles, detailed outlines are shared. At the final defense, candidates share their ePortfolios which now contain all of their articles, published or unpublished, along with conclusions that bookend the Introduction. Students have an option to provide other pages. Some have chosen to share a professional portfolio which highlights their professional experience; others share further reflections and other works. For submission to the Graduate School and ultimately Doctoral Dissertation publication, candidates need to download their Introduction, three papers, and conclusion into a print copy.

The structure and process for the Integrative Multi-paper ePortfolio was built as we went! In developing the parameters for the ePortfolio, we took into consideration the practices and processes used by our program and university, as well as the individual students' interest in their topics, methodological approaches and the desired outcome of their degree. For our program, students are required to identify a Problem of Practice for their dissertation project. For the multi-paper dissertation, this still remains, and the introduction to the ePortfolio page provides a clear statement of the problem of practice and highlights how the articles contribute to understanding or solving the problem.

The next section of this article dives into the more personal aspects of the process of using a multi-paper ePortfolio as one's dissertation. Dr. Melissa Pirie, Dr. Sheila Mullooly and Dr. Mandi Mizuta share their student perspectives. Dr. Candyce Reynolds will share her perspective as their advisor.

## THE EPORTFOLIO JOURNEY: INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES

### Dr. Pirie's Journey

I worked on my dissertation for several years. Those years were interrupted by a series of personal circumstances that delayed its successful completion. I made a lot of progress in my program on advancing my knowledge and my career.

Using an ePortfolio for my dissertation provided a flexible, adaptable, and innovative approach and format to meet the requirement of both Portland State University's and CPED's dissertation guidelines and requirements which squarely lined up with both their guiding principles and design concepts. This desire to adjust the format of my research and its outcomes is in keeping with the call to "breathe new life into the dissertation process" in the

*Manifesto for the Humanities: Transforming Doctoral Education in Good Enough Times* (Smith, 2015, p.136). In the University of Michigan Library publication, *Breathing Life into the Dissertation*, Smith (2015) declares,

"What is fast becoming the "new normal" in the everyday life of academic humanists will require people to be intellectually nimble; conversant in digital media, networks, archives, and identities; energized by collaboration; flexible in their modes of address; imaginative in their pedagogical practice; and adept at telling the story about what they do. The challenge is to reorganize doctoral education to meet the imperatives and the opportunities of the 21st-century academy. Since 2010, I have been arguing that expanding the forms of the dissertation must be a cornerstone for responding to these conditions—precisely because it is the hardest nut to crack on the way to transforming the . . . doctorate." (p.136)

Alongside the challenge of representing my research in a multimedia and digital format, meeting the requirements for proposal defense, and final research components, an ePortfolio (which is digital, and contains BOTH evidence and reflection of the authors accomplishments) by nature increases the level of rigor required of a dissertation by involving reflection on the process of researching and creating the ePortfolio, and the end product itself. As Dr. Reynolds is an expert in the field of ePortfolio development and use in higher education and that being the focus of my professional work and academic research study, we believed that the project could be effectively overseen and evaluated. Creating this alternative format to the proto monograph dissertation the College of Education (COE) and Portland State University's (PSU) Graduate School offered future opportunities that more accurately represent its dedication to innovative research and future trajectories of educational doctoral degree requirements. The ePortfolio allowed me to represent the past 20 years of my academic and professional work in a culminating product that could serve others.

Overall, I felt my doctoral experience was a great success. I collaborated on research and developed expertise in the areas of ePortfolios and learning. While accomplishing things that would advance my learning and career, I became more and more discouraged by the dissertation process, which did not seem to align with my future goals nor the work I was already advancing. I was concurrently working on publishing articles and my dissertation. I struggled with the dissertation format and the linear process it required. The format did not appear to serve the work I was doing, the research I was participating in, and I did not see the use of a long five chapter format to my field of research. My motivation and persistence declined, even as I published articles. The ability to reflect on and integrate the value of the process of writing and reviewing the three papers within the product of my multi-paper dissertation in the particular format of the ePortfolio had immeasurable impacts on my overall doctoral experience.

The primary aspects of ePortfolio development that I value

- **A room of one's own**—The ePortfolio that is private, secure, and user owned does indeed afford each learner a room of one's own. A place where you can reflect both privately and publicly, gather formative and summative feedback on your learning, and curate your experiences and skills into a unique digital fingerprint.
- **Folio Thinking**—The process of creating a portfolio allows one to make connections that might not have otherwise been made. This process is what Light et al. (2011) call folio

thinking. Creating a portfolio allows students to collect, organize, and reflect upon their learning. After studying and using this concept for 20 years, the process of folio-thinking has, indeed, become a habit of mind for me. I now collect, organize, reflect upon, and make connections across my experiences regularly. Understanding my responsibility to these actions would not occur in an Learning Management System (LMS) only environment where many of these functions were completed for me, and then lost to me as I lost access to the digital spaces where my learning had occurred.

- **Integrative Learning**—Reynolds and Patton (2014) share with us that intentionally connecting your learning across time and contexts is key to understanding what your learning means to you and others. The creation of my dissertation ePortfolio did exactly this for me in regard to my publications over the past five years.
- **Reflection/the oxygen in the compost piles of our lives**—My experience with producing food and gardening always leads me to think of my life as valuable layers that can become a cohesive whole with the right attention and aeration. In terms of integrative learning, the oxygen we get from churning those layers into rich soil for our futures is directly related to the amount of reflection we are afforded on those unique layers and experiences.

## Dr. Mullooly's Journey

I have an eclectic background and set of interests. I am an artist, have lived in several countries, an advocate and scholar on global sustainability practices, a Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) specialist, program administrator, and multicultural educator. Given that a masters in TESOL Studies is considered the terminal degree in the field, the PSU Educational Leadership doctorate seemed like the perfect fit. It allowed me to explore and build on my deep commitment to social justice through the lenses of my background and experience. With my predilection for diverse ideas and topics, I spent over a year exploring transdisciplinary research frameworks, critical methods for the dissertation, and running pilots in collaboration with the PSU international scholar and student community. Although I saw the connections between transformative international education, futures thinking, and arts-based research, I struggled to express my dissertation problem of practice in a way that was accessible to Dr. Reynolds. I am sure she became frustrated with the number of times I changed topics. I saw the connections between all of my interests, however it was challenging to design a traditional study around them. In the meantime, I had wonderful experiences. I published a collaborative article with a team on a university-wide project, the PSU Futures Collaboratory, and I was building my expertise in multiple areas through taking a diverse set of courses in the COE and beyond as well as getting involved in campus and international projects. All this great transdisciplinary experience, however, was not setting me up well for a five chapter dissertation.

Ultimately, my integrative ePortfolio focused on challenging the problems in the changing global landscape of internationalized higher education and sought to look for new approaches for understanding and addressing the complex problems we face. The COVID-19 pandemic sped up the need to make changes in how we approached our evolving problems and possibilities for human-

centric transformation. My integrative ePortfolio dissertation is a call to action and proposes the use of new approaches to research and educational practice—specifically, critical futures studies (see Equity Futures) and arts-based research (ABR). Design justice principles and participatory action approaches frame and motivate these possibilities.

My ePortfolio dissertation contains three separate but related articles, focused on the use of new approaches to research and educational practice. One of these articles was published in the third year of my doctoral program. The second was under review, and the third article was proposed at my proposal defense and was based on one of my original ideas for the five chapter dissertation. My ePortfolio dissertation imagines the potential of critical foresights and arts-based research to support equity-driven transformation in post-COVID globalized higher education. I wanted my ePortfolio and the articles to provide students, researchers, and practitioners in higher education with values-based ways to process and address the rapidly changing landscape of academia in the public interest of planning, preparation, and responsiveness.

Two years after degree completion, these three peer-reviewed publications and my dissertation have been collectively cited by 11 academic publications—thus far. The ePortfolio allowed me to simultaneously work and study full-time, while publishing along the way and directly contributing to futures-facing scholarship. I cannot overstate how much my dissertation ePortfolio process was informed by Dr. Reynolds' expertise in the field of ePortfolio development and use in higher education. I am grateful for her guidance, mentorship, and friendship. Dr. Pirie's model, which she generously shared as an example to follow, informed the format of my ePortfolio. For instance, her ePortfolio includes a professional folio, so I followed suit. Instead of using stock photography, all the photographs in my folio are my original photographs. I also add further components including my original poetry, a series of poems which are a poetic inquiry into COVID-19 times and lexicon.

Selecting a dissertation format wasn't an "either or" proposition as I was not aware of the alternative format at the start of this educational journey. It was a "yes and" journey because I began writing a five chapter dissertation before I switched to the multi-paper, e-portfolio format. Specifically, the rate of change within the International Higher Education (IHE) landscape and the state of flux institutionally made it challenging for my dissertation to remain relevant while writing a monograph that locks its scope in the first chapter. At the time, the unfolding global COVID-19 pandemic made disparities in IHE all the more prominent and my employment in IHE more precarious. Although some voices in the department suggested the multi-paper ePortfolio dissertation format was less rigorous than the five chapter monograph, that was not my experience. I did not arrive at this option for lack of pursuing the monograph. I began the traditional five chapter dissertation three times over. I explored various critical methodologies as I reframed my problem of practice in each new attempt to humanize international student lived educational experience, amplify transnational student voices, and move away from the dominant fiscal "cash cow" institutional lens in international higher education (IHE). Each time I made it about three chapters in, I became frustrated with the format, and the state of US IHE at large, once more. After so many years of being an educator and administrator internationally and in the US, the graduate student role came, in part, as a shock because I knew that neoliberal realities were not the only viable educational model globally. Higher Education is still considered a public good—and cornerstone of





democracy—in many parts of the world. The multi-paper ePortfolio format has provided me with a means of directly applying peer-reviewed academic publishing I was doing toward my dissertation goals. As a multimedia open-access platform, I retain authorship of my EdD dissertation ePortfolio—beyond the length of my affiliation with my institution, PSU—while being able to share it widely digitally. Unlike traditional five chapter dissertations, my dissertation work was two-thirds already published and one-third about to be published at the time of my final defense; it was digitized, readily accessible, and accompanied by my original photography and poetry. The ease of ePortfolio use contributed to my dissertation committee's sense-making and assessment process, the seamlessness of my interdisciplinary defense presentation, and the collegial atmosphere of my final defense. Later, it successfully pivoted me from higher education to a new career in educational technology, pioneering experiential language learning in immersive Virtual Reality (iVR).

Because a traditional five chapter model is a static, monographic dissertation, the same question regarding editing it post publication would sound absurd. The old adage “a good dissertation is a done dissertation” also comes to mind. As recent graduates will likely concur, a deep sense of exhaustion tends to set in the moment the dissertation is successfully defended. Although I have considered updating my ePortfolio, I decided not to because it's simply an unrealistic expectation of any dissertation publication. The ePortfolio is the parallel equivalent of the traditional dissertation—one, I would argue, which is more rigorous and rewarding. In using an integrative multi-paper ePortfolio instead of a traditional dissertation, I learned to navigate the peer-reviewed publishing process, and I integrated my transdisciplinary scholarship in the fields of higher education, TESOL studies, and fine art. Finally, I found a community of education and policy scholars who focus on integrated, transformative learning, incorporate reflection, creative, and critical approaches, and most importantly seek to share their scholarship, advocacy, and policy work far beyond the scope of traditional academe.

### Dr. Mizuta's Journey

I had found my professional home in the Higher Education sphere when I applied to the doctoral program at the COE at PSU. This would not be my first doctoral program. I started out in a PhD program in Political Science that unexpectedly shuttered. While I loved the topic, I was not convinced that a tenure track Political Science position was what I ultimately wanted, so I did not seek another program. I ended up in several positions in higher education—adjunct writing instructor, program management, student affairs—and when I entered the doctoral program, I was working in evaluation and assessment at an academic hospital and medical school.

Like my colleagues represented in this article, throughout the tenure of my doctoral program, I had incredible opportunities to explore new ways of considering theories and practice that applied directly to my work. I ended up concurrently pursuing study in Collaborative Governance with the School of Public Administration, knowing that it would assist with my newly acquired job in public policy administration. As I learned more about the field, I fantasized about how the models I was learning about in the Collaborative Governance space could be applied to higher education systems in relation to the organizational silos that exist and make collaboration fraught. I began developing a dissertation research project focused on implementing a collaborative governance model to combat silos

at a student affairs department at a local private college. I had started the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and was ready to go. Unfortunately, the college I was using for my study was not able to survive the pandemic economic woes of higher education and abruptly announced its closure. In light of these logistical barriers coupled with my changing career direction, I felt directionless and struggled to determine a new vision that satisfied my research focus, professional goals, and personal drive for academic excellence. Hearing about my colleagues' progress, I began to explore with Dr. Reynolds what an integrative ePortfolio multi-paper dissertation might look like for me.

Given my particular background in political science and my work applying models of collaborative governance in entirely new settings, I proposed three conceptual articles that looked at the need to address silos on higher education campuses, how a new model created by me could be applied to address these silos, and how it could be used to aid in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in higher education. I proposed using the unusual format of the multi-paper dissertation with the ePortfolio to effectively encapsulate my rigorous multi-disciplinary research and professional expertise - a bridge of sorts between the theoretical academic and practical professional worlds that my research inhabited. It proved to be the perfect fit.

The dissertation is traditionally limited to a specialized audience of academics. It usually exists in a manuscript form, through the defense presentation, and hopefully, academic publication. ePortfolios introduce a wider audience to original student research. Instead of an elevator pitch or a link to a dense multi-chapter manuscript, I have an engaging, interactive tool that has made my doctoral research accessible to a wide array of audiences. I distributed the link to the ePortfolio to coworkers, friends, family, and other networking contacts, allowing them to digest my work at their convenience and to the degree that suits their personal or professional levels of interest. As a first-generation college student whose family had not connected with my academic career, my ePortfolio's online, narrative-based presentation granted my family an unprecedented opportunity to participate in my academic journey. Sharing the doctoral moment and this piece of myself was a priceless moment that left us all feeling inspired and better connected with each other.

The ePortfolio's accessibility has unlocked new academic and professional opportunities that a traditional monograph would not have allowed. As a scholar practitioner, it is invaluable to have a platform that creatively and succinctly summarizes my scholarship and its applications to professional settings. Doctoral level scholars increasingly are exploring professional opportunities outside of academia; the ePortfolio serves as an innovative tool to market and display transferrable skills and add value to a company. My ePortfolio link is prominently displayed on LinkedIn, included in resumes and job applications, and used in follow-up after networking moments. It has proven integral in my transition into corporate technology and strategy after graduation, as it translated my research into the technical cultural currency of my industry and unlocked my research to be applied to the precise audience my scholarship was designed to impact.

Unequivocally, the ePortfolio should be embraced as a valid pedagogical tool to demonstrate graduate level proficiency. No degree of rigor is lost through the dissertation process, as it merely becomes a more accessible package for the same research and scholarly activity that is demonstrated through a manuscript. Instead,

I would suggest that the rigor is enhanced because the ePortfolio is a pedagogical tool that requires intentional consideration and execution of clearly demonstrating academic work in a cohesive narrative to both academic and non-academic audiences.

Constructing the ePortfolio started with mapping out the elements of the narrative that were integral to telling my dissertation story. I considered this an exercise in creating an expanded elevator speech of my research and my scholarly journey and outlining the necessary pieces of information vital to communicating my studies to a diverse audience. This practice also proved beneficial to refining my dissertation introduction and crafting my defense presentation. I then considered my creative vision – how did I want to aesthetically enhance my work and my story? I chose simple, modern backgrounds and colors that reflected my personal design sensibilities and used photos that further reinforced my topic and personal reflection. Logistically, I made sure that any design assets I used were royalty free stock images or my own photography and gave proper attribution where applicable to ensure my ePortfolio abided by general online digital asset usage policies. I utilized standard font styles, colors, and sizes and added in alt text to the photos to make the work accessible to all users.

Thought was also given to the lifecycle of the portfolio – how did I want it to exist in the future post-defense? My desire was to create a dynamic piece that could live on in perpetuity with minimal effort. For me, this looked like intentionally crafting content that did not feel outdated or irrelevant post-defense (e.g. copy/pasting a CV into the portfolio text, listing time sensitive professional goals, etc.). Instead, I included an external link to my master CV document that I regularly update as part of my professional practice. Personal content was designed to be a highly curated point-in-time reflection and included elements such as acknowledgements, a link to my writing Spotify playlist, and a few photos that represented meaningful markers of the doctoral journey. I transferred my ePortfolio to a legacy account not contingent upon my school credentials to ensure access after school credentials were deprecated. The result is an evergreen tool that clearly articulates my doctoral work and personal journey.

I am grateful for the self-representation that the portfolio has granted me. As someone who has both multi-disciplinary research interests and a wide variety of hobbies and interests, it can be easy to feel at times that my academic journey did not allow me to fully show up as myself. Utilizing the ePortfolio granted me the opportunity to create doctoral work that felt more representative of my multi-faceted identity as a creative, a scholar, and a professional. Not many can reflect on their dissertation journeys and feel satisfied that the result fully encapsulated both their full selves and their investment in scholarship. Through the expressive platform afforded by ePortfolio, I am proud that the doctoral process did not envelop and minimize me; instead it unlocked the vast potential ahead of me as a scholar, practitioner, and multifaceted individual.

### Dr. Reynolds' Journey (Doctoral Advisor)

I consider my work with doctoral students one of my greatest joys. Witnessing the development of new ideas as well as a student's trajectory to a new vision of themselves is inspiring and life-affirming. The dissertation process is at the heart of the doctorate. It is the culminating artifact that shows the world that one has gained expertise and the ability to manage an arduous journey. More importantly, though, it demonstrates this to the candidate also. Shepherding a student through this process is an honor, and I enjoy

seeing the transformation of the individual as well as the development of the ideas.

As our program is one that engages students that are already professionals, it is exciting to see students develop a new identity as a scholar in practice through the doctoral process. It is also extremely frustrating to work closely with a student who has great experience and ideas and see them lose momentum after their coursework or in the dissertation proposal phase of the program. As you learned from the journeys of my co-authors, life happens and opportunities gained in the doctoral process can take one in new directions.

I did not want these candidates to drop out and all of them were close. For each of them, the idea of making meaning of the work they had been doing during the doctoral program lit a fire under them. I am sorry that we didn't have this option available to begin with. The process of being engaged in the doctoral program allowed all of them opportunities to explore ideas that could be represented in a single monograph. I asked them to complete the equivalent of an Introduction in a traditional dissertation, highlighting the Problem of Practice that their work would examine. This introduction to the ePortfolio and the articles reminded the candidates why they were in the program. It brought together the threads of the work they had been doing throughout the program. Each article in their ePortfolios was accompanied by a reflection that linked the introduction with the content of the paper and further helped the candidates make meaning of the work they had done.

Truthfully, I was concerned about how my colleagues would react to this new format. The candidates spent a great deal of time meeting with the faculty on their committees to explain the newly approved Graduate School format as well as the addition of the ePortfolio. Some were skeptical of the rigor of this choice but open to exploring the option.

The oral proposal defense of all of the candidates was the most collegial and supportive I have ever participated in. The ePortfolio told the story of the candidate's work—the thread of their passions and scholarship was clear. The articles, either completed or a detailed sentence outline for those that were not completed yet, connected to their scholarly agendas, and the faculty could see and appreciate these threads. None of them were asked to change anything in the work they submitted. All of the committee and the candidates had lively discussions about the Problem of Practice and how the articles addressed them. The committee shared helpful hints about writing publishable articles. There was a sense of true mentorship in the process. The defense of the dissertation was similar. Instead of the frenzy of completing all the suggestions of the committees before the Graduate School deadline, these candidates had little to correct in their ePortfolios. For those who had submitted publishable articles, there were a few minor changes to be made, but really very little. They could spend their time downloading the Introduction and the articles to submit in the acceptable format for the Graduate School. They had time to enjoy being called Doctor and being proud of the success they accomplished.

### LESSONS LEARNED

Dissertations are a cornerstone of doctoral programs, but for some students, the traditional format feels restrictive and may not reflect the expertise and rigor expected from a doctoral candidate. An integrative multi-paper ePortfolio can provide a dynamic



alternative that empowers students to showcase their learning in a more comprehensive and engaging way. In addition, we want to underscore the transformative potential of ePortfolios for doctoral students. Seeing one's work reflected in an integrative format empowers them to take their learning to the next step. Our experience suggests that digital portfolios offer several advantages that can enhance the learning experience for students and reshape doctoral programs themselves.

One key benefit lies in fostering a more holistic representation of student learning. Unlike the traditional dissertation, which focuses on a single research project, ePortfolios can function as a personal learning vault. Students can include research papers, creative projects, presentations, and even reflective essays, allowing them to demonstrate how their ideas connect and how their expertise has evolved throughout their doctoral journeys. This is the students' choice as well as a program's choice. The beauty of an ePortfolio is that it can be tailored to an individual or program's needs and desires.

Furthermore, ePortfolios promote accessibility for all and can democratize scholarship. Anyone with an internet connection can access a student's work, fostering wider dissemination of valuable research and fostering a more engaged scholarly community. ePortfolios can also increase student motivation. Students may feel stymied by the traditional dissertation format and can find a more authentic way to connect with the process in an ePortfolio. In addition, the use of dissertation ePortfolios could foster a more interactive and collaborative oral defense space where committees can effectively guide and support student work.

Finally, ePortfolios offer a potential marketability edge. Students can leverage ePortfolios to showcase their research and skills to potential employers in a visually compelling way. Because of the flexible nature of the medium, candidates can rebuild their portfolios to share with potential employers. In addition, the act of creating the portfolio leads to candidates' abilities to talk about their work with potential employers.

ePortfolios are a powerful tool redefining doctoral education. They promote deeper learning, wider knowledge dissemination, and a more collaborative learning environment. In fact, we believe ePortfolios hold immense potential to reshape doctoral education for the better. By promoting a more holistic learning experience, fostering accessibility, collaboration, and student motivation, and providing a powerful career advantage, ePortfolios represent a valuable innovation in doctoral programs.

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