MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCY BUILDING PORTFOLIO

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the development of an electronic multicultural competency building portfolio can enhance and promote 21st century learning skills.The multicultural competency building portfolio will be discussed as one way for teachers, lifelong learners and other professionals to become more multiculturally competent and technologically literate through the multipurpose use of developing the portfolio and using it to document 21st century learning skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2003) identified cross-cultural skills and global learning among other skills and competencies as critical to the educational development and advancement of society. With the growing diversity in the United States and the ever widening impact of globalization and technology, the challenge for schools, higher education institutions, and the business sector is to find ways to enhance multicultural growth and development.

The utility of electronic portfolios to serve in this capacity is great. Portfolios can be used to meet the needs of a variety of audiences and interests. They require active participation that helps transfer knowledge by bridging theory to practice. In this way they are self-organizing that enhances reflection. The Web enables access, collaboration, and outreach like never before. The electronic portfolio has a unique capacity to capture things. Like a camera in some ways and a storyteller in others, the electronic portfolio's strength is its ability to weave the power of the Web, multimedia, and artifacts to display a trajectory of growth and development in creative ways. Diez (2004) refers to the electronic portfolio's creativity as a mirror, map, and sonnet. This potential can be used to manage personal learning, capture multicultural histories and ideas, and elucidate values, beliefs, and worldviews in ways that encourage feedback and greater understanding. While training and other resources are essential for continued growth, portfolios can be used to document effectiveness and chart progress.

Another aspect of portfolios are their reflective capacities. Reflection has become a critical component to teaching, learning and professional practice (Prokopetz, 2018) Reflection is considered a critical competency component in culturally relevant practice (Paris,2012).Schon (1983) connects reflection with a readiness and understanding to act in an informed manner. This has been commonly referred to as knowing-in-action or reflective practice. Portfolios are great tools to demonstrate this knowing-in-action. Portfolios are both product and process, and

involves the transference of culturally based experiences into artifacts aligned to criteria or standards. Reflection is required at every stage and level of this process (see Figure 1).
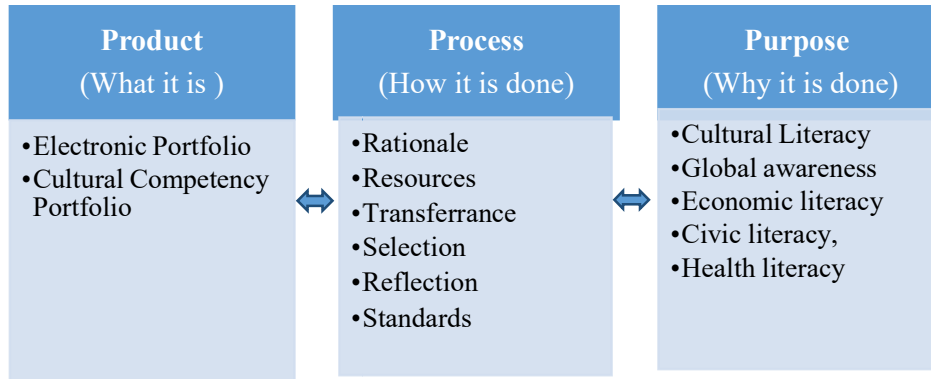
Product (What it is)	Process (How it is done)	Purpose (Why it is done)
• Electronic Portfolio • Cultural Competency Portfolio	• Rationale • Resources • Transferrance • Selection • Reflection • Standards	• Cultural Literacy • Global awareness • Economic literacy • Civic literacy, • Health literacy

FIGURE 1: Functions of electronic portfolios as both product and process

2. IMPACT OF PORTFOLIOS

Electronic portfolios have taken the education and business establishment by storm. From higher education to K-12 classrooms to business and industry, the use of electronic portfolios have revolutionized the way we teach, learn, document, assess, and grow (Dorninger, & Schrack, 2008). Certain professions have typically required a portfolio like teacher education, literary and artistic endeavours, while others are adopting it as a relatively new learning strategy, such as in certain health related professions as nursing. The writing and arts related programs in higher education have regularly used portfolios to assess student work or even for admission to academic programs. For example, admission to some Master of Fine Arts programs requires a writing portfolio upon admission. Other professions that require samples of work or demonstration or documentation of skills includes the modelling profession, architects, computer scientists, photographers, counselors, educators, and more recently nursing. Serge Ravet, of the European Institute for eLearning (EifEL) described the impact of electronic or digital portfolios as a critical practice in some of the national learning policies countries (Ravet, 2005).

According to portfolio researcher Helen Barrett (2004), "An educational portfolio contains work that a learner has collected, reflected, selected, and presented to show growth and change over time, representing an individual or organization's human capital" (p. 1). The portfolio process that Barrett describes heightens reflection and self-assessment considered essential for maximizing and empowering human capital (Banks, 1997). The Stanford Center for Innovations in Learning in Berkeley California refers to this process as folio thinking (Stanford Center for Innovations in Learning, 2002).

This revolution in the use of portfolios is not solely an American phenomenon. Consider the DigiFOLIO project referred to as the Comenius 2.1 Project that spans the whole of Europe. The main purpose of the Comenius 2.1 project is to consider the possibilities that digital or electronic portfolios can bring to teacher professional development (Costa et al., 2006). A

second, but equally important aim is how digital portfolios can create new knowledge or new competencies and not just evaluate them.

The Comenius 2.1 Project is supported by the European Commission as part of the framework of the Socrates Program. The Project and resulting partnership of the following five European countries, Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, the Netherlands and Portugal worked together to better understand the possibilities of electronic portfolios for professional growth and development of teachers in the areas of information communication technology (ICT) and teacher improvement. The genesis or the vision behind the Comenius 2.1 project was formed around the need to better understand and address the needs of the lifelong learner within the context of a knowledge society. Cultural and technological literacy, which I argue that the multicultural competency building portfolio can help build and sustain, are deemed critical competencies in a knowledge society.

According to the DigiFOLIO report, the use of the electronic portfolios between the participating countries varied depending upon their ICT capability, attitudes toward technology, and the culture and context of the institution. However it was generally accepted that digital portfolios were versatile enough to have an expanded role in education and other industries. In other words, these multimedia enhanced portfolios could be used for more than a tool for documentation, but could offer a vast array of new possibilities for professional development for teacher and student learning, as well as organizational learning and professional development. Using portfolios as a way to build and assess multicultural competencies is one example of this expanded role.

The DigiFOLIO report held that "…digital portfolios promote active participation of the learners by helping them to assume a sense of ownership and control and they definitely contribute to improve assessment and motivation as well as enhance learners' involvement in their own learning process (p. 8). While the target audience of the Comenius 2.1 project is teachers, the educational gains and contributions reported from the use of electronic portfolios for professional development are equally applicable to other professions (Fish, 1998).

3. MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCY BUILDING PORTFOLIO AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SKILLS

Papers in this format must not exceed twenty (20) pages in length.

One way digital portfolios can be equally applicable to other professions is their ability to capture 21st century skills. The purpose of the multicultural competency building portfolio is to help lifelong learners develop and document key skills and competencies that are needed for success in the 21st century and beyond. The multicultural competency building portfolio is an electronic portfolio specifically designed to focus on 21st century skills as defined by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003b). The multicultural competency building portfolio is multifunctional and can be used in education, business, or by any organization that is concerned with the development and assessment of skills that are deemed critical for a global, diverse, and highly technological world.

This section describes what 21st century skills are and how they form the basis for the multicultural competency building portfolio. An important aspect of portfolio development is the nature of the skill and competencies involved (Barrett, 2004). Portfolios are not scrapbooks

full of randomly selected artifacts. Typically portfolios are organized around a set of mutually defined standards or competencies. The standards or competencies for the multicultural competency building portfolio are outlined in the framework for the Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

A study conducted by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills found that 99 % of voters agreed that 21st century skills are critical to America's economic sustainability (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003a). Perhaps this strong consensus around the need for 21st century skills is the recognition that the United States is a diverse, global, and highly technological society. According to the U.S. Census Bureau about one in every three residents in the U.S. is a minority (U. S. Census Bureau, 2007, p.1). The 2006 former Census Bureau Director Louis Kincannon described the minority population in the U.S. as "larger than the total population of all but 11 countries" (U. S. Census Bureau, 2007, p.1). Knowledge of diverse cultures provides the skills and dispositions necessary to communicate, understand and respect people from different countries and cultural groups. Technology extends reach to faraway places and peoples as well as possessing the capability to facilitate communication and understanding between them (ITEA, 2003).

So how can developing an electronic portfolio facilitate both reach and understanding? Our understanding of what a portfolio is and how it can be used must be broadened. Once paper and pencil collages, the current multimedia nature of the electronic portfolio enhances its ability to tell, describe, and capture in unique ways. Yet it must be more than a tool for documentation. The very process of collecting, selecting and reflecting of artifacts focused on 21st century skills can be useful in the process of increasing multicultural understanding (Coleman et al., 2006). Specifically the portfolio development process can aid learners in identifying their strength and weaknesses, becoming more self-reflective, as well as developing transferable life skills. These skills will help learners meet the challenges present in a global, multicultural, and highly technological world.

What are these essential skills needed for success in 21st century and beyond? The Partnership for 21st Century Skills is a coalition of stakeholders in business, industry, and academia. The mission is to serve as a catalyst to promote integration of the knowledge, skills, and abilities in the K-12 school curriculum that are needed in the kind of plug and play world that Thomas Friedman describes in his bestselling book "The World is Flat" (Friedman, 2006). The Partnership for 21st Century Skills bases their argument for 21st century skills upon three interrelated principles. The first is that the world and the education that is needed to sustain it, has changed and will continue to do so. The second and third core principles are that global competition is tightening thereby creating workplaces that need diverse skills, peoples, ideas, and training (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003b).

Using these core principles, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills developed a framework that identifies key 21st skills and competencies. This framework forms the conceptual basis and backbone of the multicultural competency building portfolio. The framework includes core subjects and interdisciplinary themes that cross-cut them. The framework also includes three broad categories of skills and competencies meant to further define what 21st skills look like in the workplace and across the lifespan (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003b).

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills identified the following interdisciplinary themes as crosscutting throughout all 21st century core subjects. Core subjects compose the curriculum in

most secondary schools such as English, reading, and language arts, foreign languages, mathematics, science, history, government and civics, and geography. However, the interdisciplinary themes of global awareness, economic literacy, civic literacy, and health literacy are cross-cutting across all core subjects. The focus of the interdisciplinary themes is to add depth and relevancy to an often outdated K-12 school curriculum (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003b).

In addition to the core subjects, and the interdisciplinary themes, the 21st century skill framework also includes another group of skills or competencies that serve as the foundation for the multicultural competency building portfolio. These foundational skills are also meant to be cross-cutting and interdisciplinary, but are focused more on higher order thinking skills as well as practical competencies that lifelong learners need in order to master a more complex and diverse world. These skills are grouped under three broad categories; learning and innovation skills, information, media, and technology skills, and life and career skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003b).

Each major category consists of more specific competencies that further define the broader category. For example critical thinking, problem solving, and communicating effectively in diverse environments are three more specific skills grouped under the larger category of learning and innovation skills. These sub-skills or benchmarks further define what is meant by 21st century learning and innovation. Understanding and correctly interpreting media messages is grouped under the information, media, and technology skill set, along with other competencies. Social and cross-cultural skills which include global learning or awareness along with other competencies are included in the life and career skills category. These three major categorizations of 21st century skills, learning and innovation skills, information, media, and technology skills, and life and career skills, form the basis or organizing element for the multicultural competency building portfolio. These categories and their relationship with the multicultural competency building portfolio are discussed in detail in the next section (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003b).

4. LEARNING AND INNOVATION SKILLS

An ETS report (2007) entitled, "America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future." The report examined how three socioeconomic and social and cultural forces were having a profound impact on America's ability to be innovative and creative in the face of global and technological change. The three forces that the ETS report identified were demographic disparities in skill levels in core subject areas like reading and mathematics, increasing inequalities of wealth, and widening demographic shifts. According to the report these interconnected forces could hamper the ability to be innovative and creative, as well as to communicate and collaborate effectively. These are some of the learning and innovations skills deemed critical by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

The learning and innovation skills identified by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2003b) are problem solving, critical thinking, creativity and innovation, and communicating and collaborating effectively. These are considered essential cognitive competencies needed to be effective in all walks of life and deemed critical for cross-cultural skills, such as deconstructing stereotypes and utilizing the collective efforts and intelligence of others. The scope of this problem is much broader that the multicultural competency building portfolio can address and will certainly require much broader solutions. However there is evidence that the development

of a digital portfolio focused on key learning and innovation skills can help (Coleman, et al., 2006).

Coleman, et al (2006) describe the results of study that examined the ability of portfolios to enhance counselor's ability to utilize multicultural counseling techniques and ideas in their practice. The portfolio was administered as a part of the overall training process of the counselors that included specific training in multicultural and cross-cultural techniques. The portfolio was used as a product (summative) and process (formative) to stimulate multicultural competency in counselors-in-training. The control group used another design called case formation that required them to develop cases instead of portfolios. The researchers concluded that using portfolios as a pedagogical tool to develop and measure multicultural competency was more useful than more traditional approaches.

The nature of the portfolio process was found important in supporting this conclusion. In order for the multicultural competency building portfolio to be effective it must also be used as a pedagogical tool that is accompanied by professional development or training in the desired key 21st competencies. Further supporting this constructivist approach is the idea that the learner is actively involved in the development of their own portfolio and therefore their own learning. The multicultural competency building portfolio would require a collaborative approach that would empower learners to work together on achieving certain outcomes through a feedback process and sharing ideas about artifacts and resources.

One highly interactive approach is to pair learners with a peer from another culture to co-develop a multicultural competency building portfolio using any of the collaborative Web 2.0 networking tools like wiki. Teachers can work with other teachers from another country. Business partners can work with partners from another culture or country. Technology affords worldwide reach and access. Using the 21st century skills as an organizing tool for the multicultural competency building portfolio increases the functionality and flexibility of this portfolio to serve multiple needs and users. This approach supports problem solving, creativity in the use of artifacts, and utilizing the utilizing the collective efforts and intelligence of others to solve problems.

5. LIFE AND CAREER SKILLS

The life and career skills deemed critical for the 21st century are flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, and leadership and responsibility. Again, the multicultural competency building portfolio must be viewed as one among many tools to develop and sustain these skills.

There are three important aspects of portfolio development that pertain to the life and career skills as well as to other 21st century skills. They are the portfolio's ability to capture experiences over time, the emphasis on reflection and the self-organizing aspect of portfolio development. These aspects of portfolio development process are extremely important as many life and career skills evolve and change over time as do skills n general. The longitudinal aspect of portfolio development makes it a versatile tool to capture emerging skill development. It is also an excellent tool to develop and record the meaning making process of reflection and self-development (Schon, D. (1983).

For example Caruso (1999) describes an ethnic awareness portfolio exercise which required participants to collect and display cultural artifacts as the basis of their portfolio over a period of

time. Participants chose five items that most represented them as an individual and went through a process of decoding what those items meant. The process aided in constructing a more positive and holistic view of ethnic identity. However, just collecting, selecting and reflecting, is not enough. The developing or incurring of social and cross-cultural experiences that will undergird the artifacts selected was critically important in the ethnic awareness portfolio. Selecting from repertoires of past multicultural experiences may be good, but is the development of more multicultural ones that represent growth. Equally important was how participants made meaning of these experiences in relation to the artifacts that they choose (Schon, 1987).

Another way the multicultural competency building portfolio help can develop initiative, self-direction, and leadership is through the self-organizing aspect of many portfolios. Portfolios are organized by the learner, not for the learner. While most portfolios whether used in business or education, have some guiding set of standards, principles, or criteria that guide the development, it remains largely a self-directed process (Stanford Center for Innovations in Learning, 2002).

For example portfolios used in preservice teacher education utilize the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards as a set of ten performance based licensure standards developed in collaboration with key stakeholders in teacher education. These standards articulate principles and benchmarks of what novice or new teachers should know and be able to do in the PK-12 classroom (Campbell, Cignetti, Melenyzer, Nettles and Wyman, 2004). The development of teaching portfolio must then involve the learner's active involvement over time in saving, selecting, collecting, reflecting, and refining artifacts to demonstrate competence.

Alverno College's Diagnostic Digital Portfolio (DDP) program is another example of how portfolio development can be both self-directed, organized, and innovative (Ricketts, et al, 2008). These are critical elements of the portfolio process needed to enhance multicultural understanding (Banks, 1997). Founded on the Franciscan tradition of social justice and service, the small women's college located in Milwaukee Wisconsin serves a large population of minorities. The DDP is used in an open enrollment as a way to help students and the college measure learning outcomes across time. An important feature of the DDPs is the ability it provides for students to track, monitor and reflect on their learning throughout their experience at Alverno College (Ricketts, et al, 2008). Some of the portfolio structure is provided in the development of the eight outcomes that students must provide evidence for. Several of these outcomes support the development of multicultural skills and abilities, such as social interaction, developing a global perspective, and effective citizenship. Research studies on the DDP at Alverno College have found noted that the strong self-assessment and reflection aspect of the process builds learning, helps the transfer of knowledge and skills, and creates a stronger sense of the personal and professional self (Ricketts et al., 2008).

The multicultural competency building portfolio would also retain this self-organizing and reflective capacity. This is significant and contributes greatly to its utility in helping learners to become more culturally aware (Rickards et al., 2008). Whether a portfolio is developed for a business application or an educational objective, the developer must make deliberate decisions around what goes into the portfolio and what does not and then support these decisions with reasons and reflective statements. For example selecting artifacts that supports the ability to be able bridging cultural differences and then reflect on that experience is a critical element in what

is termed as reflective learning (Schon, 1987). Self-reflection can lead to a greater awareness others that in turn can lead to a greater appreciation and respect of others.

6. INFORMATION, MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY SKILLS

With the increasing capacities in reach and access, the amount of digital or electronic information is rumored to double each hour (Jukes, 2007). With the doubling capacity of electronic information, everyone must be technologically and media literate. Being technologically literate means being able to locate, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information and express ideas in compelling ways (ITEA, 2003). Being media literate is being able to use the cognitive processing skills of cultural awareness, reflection, and analysis to make sense of the many messages that you are bombarded with. The International Technology Education Association commissioned a poll in 2001 and found that 76% of people believed that it was important that everyone understand and be able to use technology (ITEA, 2003).

Electronic or digital portfolios are ideal to aid in this process. Electronic portfolios are enhanced with multimedia and the power of the internet. The traditional portfolio represents a compilation of evidence or artifacts that documents the progress, and achievement toward a specific endeavor. The multicultural competency building portfolio is designed to show growth and achievement toward certain 21st century skills. The inclusion of graphics, sounds, or other digital objects in electronic portfolios createsa platform that enables users to learn new technology skills, while enhancing other 21st century skills like creativity and innovation.

7. CONCLUSION

The multicultural competency building portfolio is a portfolio that directly focuses on achieving certain cross-cultural or multicultural 21st century skills. The competencies outlined in the framework of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills serves as the organizing tool for the multicultural competency building portfolio. The versatility and innovativeness of the digital portfolio can be used to aid in the development and assessment of a variety of 21st century skills. However, portfolio development is just one tool among many in the development of 21st century skills. Clearly just developing an electronic portfolio, even one focusing solely on 21st century competencies, will not completely provide all the knowledge, skills, and training that is needed to be needed to be effective in a complex and diverse world. Effective training, or professional development, positive interaction, curriculum integration, enforcement of policies and development of best practices, and other infrastructure are needed in workplaces, universities, and society to build and sustain these 21st century competencies.

However the digital or electronic portfolio has something to offer in the process. As a product and a process, developing an electronic portfolio, especially one that includes 21st century outcomes, can be a highly useful multipurpose tool in encouraging reflection, extended self-other exploration, as well definition of a portfolio to more than just a compilation of artifacts to be measured or documented. To be sure the portfolio serves as an excellent tool for assessment. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills recommends portfolio assessment as a key method of providing evidence for meeting or mastering certain 21st century outcomes (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003).

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