

Integrative Learning & ePortfolios: Empowering Learners to Work Toward Leadership, Social-Justice, & Social Change Goals

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Goals

- Describe action research process
- Demonstrate the impact of portfolio-based integrative learning on students
- Discuss implications for ePortfolio use

Portfolio Terms

Integrative Portfolio-based learning a “deep” learning process that supports students in reflection, identifying evidence of their learning, surfacing tacit knowledge, connecting their values to formal and informal learning, applying knowledge & skills across different contexts, and demonstrating their capacities to others

Professional Portfolios: A compendium of “artifacts” that showcase a person’s knowledge, skills, & capacities to others

Context of the Research

A graduate school of social work engaged in a 5-year social-justice curriculum change process

The Curriculum Change Goals:

- Generate pedagogies & methods for supporting social-justice-related professional practices
- Integrate academic courses & field internship work
- Create leaders & change agents capable of transforming organizations, institutions and society

The Social-Justice Curriculum Change Process

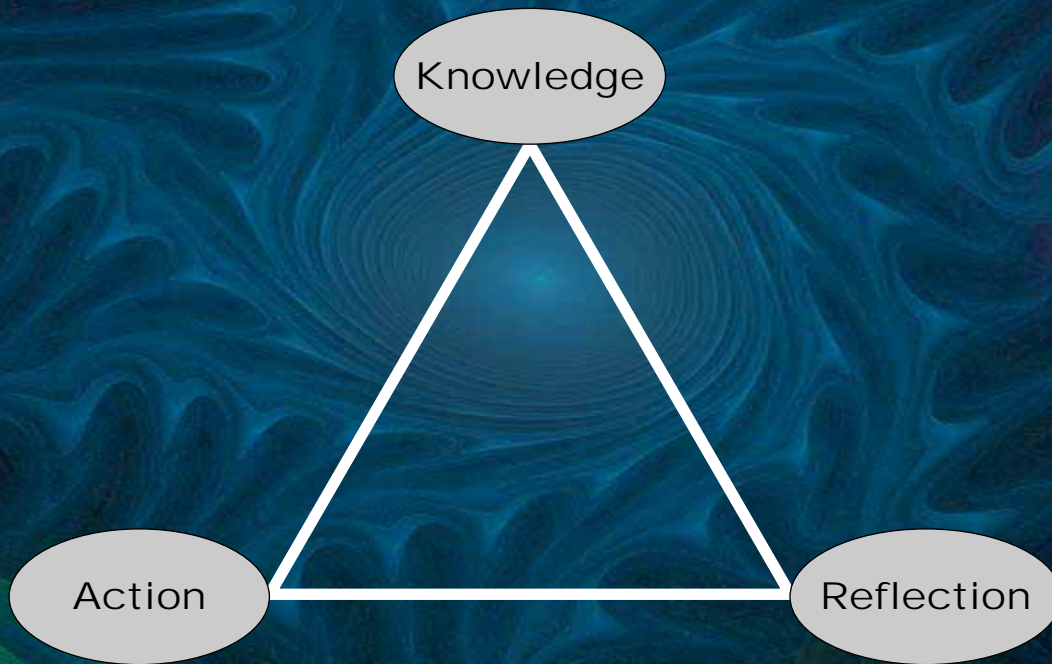
Conducted as a formative “learn as we go” approach facilitated by 5 yrs of action research activities:

- Evaluating the impact of courses on students’ learning
- Interviewing faculty re: their understanding of social justice-related goals & pedagogies
- Following students learning up close & over time
- Documenting organizational challenges & strengths
- Developing & implementing methods/pedagogies to support the change

Action Research Questions

- What aspects of consciousness (mental schemas) do students need in order to create positive social change?
- What types of learning experiences best facilitate students’ development as leaders & change agents?
- What types of actions & professional practices do students engage in as leaders & change agents?
- How can portfolio-based learning & ePortfolios be used to facilitate, identify & demonstrate the personal, institutional and social impact of social-justice learning?

Praxis: A Framework for the Study



Methods

Student-focused action research

- Engaged in several cycles of curriculum design, implementation, evaluation & modification over 5 yrs.
- Used different types of qualitative methods (n=136)
- Examined the development of students' mental schemas & professional practices

Action Research Cycle 1:

2001: Designed initial social justice courses

2002: Implemented & evaluated impact of these courses; conducted 19 focus groups w/111 students. Found students lacked a sense of agency: needed more opportunities for dialogue & reflection, as well as support for integrating their academic & field-based learning

Methods

Student-focused action research

Action Research Cycle 2:

2003: Designed & Implemented Integrative portfolio seminar with pedagogies for dialogue, reflection & integration; interviewed 25 integrative seminar students as they entered the MSW program

2004: continued to evaluate the impact of integrative seminar & overall curriculum on the same 25 students

Action Research Cycle 3:

2005-2006: continued to evaluate impact of curriculum & seminar; interviewed same 25 students as they were graduating; refined seminar pedagogy

Findings

In successful integrative portfolio seminars, students:

1. Surfaced, articulated, & documented their hopes, dreams, aspirations, and underlying values
2. Connected academic learning with tacit (lived) knowledge
3. Identified & integrated different forms of knowledge
4. Imagined & documented alternatives to specific problems in their field internship sites
5. learned to recognize and engage constructively with different types of conflict & tension

Findings

elements of Integrative learning necessary for developing social change capacities:

1. Dialogue & Collaboration - Exploring social justice concerns & questions
2. Seeing growth & development in self & others - learning to give & receive honest feedback
3. Creating personal philosophy statements
4. Developing portfolio artifacts that showcase the knowledge & skills gained from courses & field work
5. Created portfolio artifact Summaries - brief (1-2 page documents)

Findings

Students Develop Mental Schemas for Leadership & Social Change Roles:

As students progressed, they developed:

1. perception of themselves as historical beings
2. identities as a change agent
3. an awareness of different types of power
4. critical-systems-based thinking
5. Skills w/addressing conflict: their limited perspective
6. cultural humility
7. A capacity to engage w/ tension, ambiguity, complexity & disequilibrium

Findings

Students developed professional practices Informed by social-justice goals

As they progressed through the program, students:

- shifted from wanting to help people, to wanting to work toward “changing society”
- Felt responsible & accountable for creating change
- Assessed problems & envisioned specific possibilities & alternatives in their field agencies
- Articulated their vision & plans to others
- Worked collaboratively & strategically to create change

Findings

Students developed professional practices informed by social-justice goals

As a result of their integrative learning, students:

- Built an IT infrastructure for a state agency –saved millions
- Started their own successful non-profit organizations
- Created & implemented institutional policies to increase access to medical care & government services
- Gained strategic positions in federal government aimed at changing unjust policies

Implications for ePortfolios

2005: Piloted Open-Source Portfolio tools in several integrative portfolio seminars:

Found that the tools could be used to:

- Calibrate students expectations re: leadership & social justice-related roles, actions, practices & competencies
- Facilitate work-flows for different elements of the portfolio process (i.e. creating philosophy statements)
- Demonstrate students' knowledge, skills, & accomplishments to others

Implications for ePortfolio

Challenges with regard to the OSP tools include:

- Faculty wanted to use ePortfolios to demonstrate competencies; students wanted to use ePorffolios to showcase professional roles and attributes
- Challenged with how best to augment & support feedback & dialogue sessions through use of the OSP tools