International Journal of ePortfolio
https://www.aacu.org/ijep

2026, Volume 16, Number 1, 35-40
ISSN 2157-622X

ePortfolios as Cultural Soundscapes: Fostering Global Music Collaboration in Higher Education

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This study presents a design and development research (DDR) investigation into the integration of ePortfolios within cross-cultural music collaboration in higher education. While ePortfolio scholarship emphasizes reflection and integrative learning, and music education research calls for globally responsive pedagogy, limited work connects these domains through a structured instructional framework. Using iterative implementation across internationally networked music courses, this study developed and refined the Connect–Cocreate–Share–Reflect model. Data sources included student ePortfolio artifacts, collaborative compositions, reflective writings, and instructor field notes. Findings indicate that structured ePortfolio integration enhances intercultural negotiation, creative synthesis, and metacognitive awareness. By positioning ePortfolios as "cultural soundscapes" that mediate intercultural cocreation rather than merely document outcomes, this research contributes a replicable pedagogical framework for globally networked music education.

Globalization has reshaped music education, expanding access to diverse genres, collaborative technologies, and intercultural exchange. Music, as a relational and culturally embedded practice, provides a uniquely powerful context for examining how digital pedagogies mediate intercultural exchange. Digital platforms now allow students to compose, perform, and share music across geographic boundaries in real time. Yet despite these developments, many higher education music programs remain primarily focused on technical mastery and repertoire development, offering limited structured opportunities for sustained intercultural cocreation. Scholars in multicultural and global music education have called for pedagogical models that cultivate intercultural competence and cultural fluency in meaningful, practice-based ways (Campbell, 2010; Schippers, 2010).

At the same time, ePortfolio scholarship has demonstrated that structured digital portfolio practices enhance reflective learning, integrative thinking, and professional identity formation (Barrett, 2007; Eynon & Gambino, 2017). However, much of this literature centers on assessment, documentation of learning outcomes, or career preparation. Fewer studies articulate how ePortfolios can function as mediating pedagogical tools within collaborative creative processes—particularly in cross-cultural music education contexts.

This gap presents a critical opportunity. While music education scholarship emphasizes intercultural engagement and ePortfolio research highlights reflective integration, limited work connects these domains through a structured instructional framework. The present study addresses this need by developing and refining a pedagogical model that integrates ePortfolios into cross-cultural music collaboration.

Using a DDR approach (Richey & Klein, 2007), this study generated the Connect–Cocreate–Share–Reflect model through iterative implementation in globally networked music courses. Drawing on student artifacts, collaborative compositions, and reflective documentation, the study positions ePortfolios as cultural soundscapes—dynamic digital spaces that archive intercultural negotiation, creative synthesis, and metacognitive growth. By reframing ePortfolios as active mediators of intercultural music-making rather than passive repositories of completed work, this study contributes a structured, replicable framework for globally responsive music pedagogy in higher education.

Literature Review

ePortfolios as Reflective and Integrative Pedagogy

ePortfolios have evolved from digital repositories of student work into high-impact pedagogical practices that support integrative learning, reflection, identity development, and curriculum design (Batson, 2010; Cambridge, 2010; Eynon & Gambino, 2017; Yancey, 2019). Research has consistently demonstrated that structured ePortfolio engagement enhances students' ability to synthesize learning across courses and experiences, promoting metacognition and developmental growth (Barrett, 2007; Penny Light et al., 2012). Penny Light et al. further emphasized the importance of documenting both process and product within ePortfolios, positioning portfolio practice as a mechanism for making complex learning visible—an approach that aligns closely with intercultural creative collaboration. Within creative disciplines, ePortfolios function not only as documentation tools but as spaces where artistic process, decision-making, and professional identity formation become visible (Rowley & Bennett, 2016). Yancey (2019) further argued that ePortfolios operate as curricular architecture, structuring how learning is organized, scaffolded, and made visible across

experiences—an insight particularly relevant to globally networked creative practice. Although this literature establishes the pedagogical value of reflective portfolio practice, its application within structured intercultural music collaboration remains underexplored. The following sections situate this study within broader scholarship on intercultural competence, global music education, and digitally mediated creative practice.

Cross-cultural collaboration in music education hinges on intercultural competence, defined by Deardorff (2006) as the ability to navigate diverse perspectives effectively. ePortfolios support this development by offering a structured space where students can document and reflect on their collaborative experiences, a process rooted in sociocultural learning theory. Vygotsky (1978) posited that knowledge emerges through social interaction, a principle that underpins this approach as students engage with peers from different cultural backgrounds. Research by Gul et al. (2021) reinforced this, highlighting teachers' recognition of cultural diversity as a pedagogical strength, while Chen (2023) advocated for music curricula that embrace multicultural content to foster inclusivity.

Ethnomusicology provides additional depth to this foundation. Nettl (2005) framed music as a cultural artifact, suggesting that collaborative projects become sites for identity negotiation—an ideal focus for ePortfolio reflection. Campbell (2010) extended this idea, emphasizing music's role in cultivating global citizenship, a priority echoed by AAC&U's Office of Global Citizenship for Campus, Community and Careers. Digital tools further enhance this potential: Kuhn and Hein (2021) demonstrated how technologies like digital audio workstations (DAWs) enable composition across distances, while Rowley and Bennett (2016) noted that ePortfolios boost metacognition in arts education by encouraging students to analyze their creative choices.

Multicultural education theory also informs this work. Banks (2019) called for transformative curricula that empower diverse learners, a goal ePortfolios achieve by archiving the synthesis of cultural influences in music projects. Ivenicki (2021) added a contemporary layer, arguing that multicultural education builds resilience in post-COVID contexts—a critical consideration for students facing global disruptions. Small's (1998) concept of "musicking"—the active, relational act of music-making—ties these threads together, positioning ePortfolios as bridges between theoretical insight and practical application in a globalized music education landscape.

Methods

Research Design

This study employs a DDR framework (Richey & Klein, 2007), commonly used in instructional design to generate and refine pedagogical models through iterative implementation and analysis. Rather than testing a preexisting theory, DDR focuses on developing new design principles grounded in applied practice.

Context and Participants

The model was developed through implementation in cross-cultural music courses involving students collaborating across national contexts, including the United States, Brazil, Spain, and Senegal. Participants included undergraduate and graduate students engaged in music performance, composition, and music business studies.

Data Sources

Data informing the development of the model included student ePortfolio artifacts (audio drafts, written reflections, video documentation), collaborative compositions, instructor field notes, and recorded virtual collaboration sessions.

Model Development Process

The Connect–Cocreate–Share–Reflect model emerged through iterative cycles of implementation, analysis of student artifacts, identification of recurring intercultural learning patterns, and refinement of pedagogical sequencing. This process aligns with DDR principles emphasizing practice-based model generation (Richey & Klein, 2007). Across multiple semesters, successive cohorts engaged in variations of cross-cultural collaboration structured through ePortfolio documentation. Artifacts were reviewed using qualitative thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to intercultural negotiation, reflective depth, technological mediation, and creative integration. Patterns that consistently appeared across cohorts informed refinement of the four-stage sequence and the scaffolding embedded within each stage. This iterative analytic process strengthened the internal coherence of the model and aligned with DDR's emphasis on design refinement grounded in practice (Richey & Klein, 2007).

The Connect–Cocreate–Share–Reflect Model

The Connect–Cocreate–Share–Reflect model emerged through iterative refinement during implementation of cross-cultural music collaborations. Analysis of recurring patterns in student artifacts and reflective documentation informed the sequencing and scaffolding of the four stages described below.

To operationalize ePortfolios in cross-cultural music collaboration, this manuscript proposes a four-stage pedagogical model: Connect, Cocreate, Share,

and Reflect. This framework integrates digital technologies and reflective practice, drawing on my experience in multilingual teaching and global music production to offer a replicable approach for educators. Each stage is designed to leverage the affordances of ePortfolios while fostering intercultural learning, supported by a robust body of scholarship.

The process begins with connection, where students from different regions—such as the U.S. and Brazil—pair up using virtual platforms like Zoom or AAC&U's Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) initiative. This initial dialogue, focused on sharing musical influences, builds cultural awareness, a benefit Gul et al. (2021) identified in diverse educational settings. UNESCO (2019) underscored the scalability of such virtual exchanges, making this stage accessible across institutions. Next, cocreation involves students producing a musical work that blends their traditions, such as merging jazz improvisation with samba rhythms. Tools like Logic Pro or shared Google Drive folders facilitate this process, aligning with Kuhn and Hein's (2021) findings on digital technologies democratizing music-making. Green (2008) complemented this, arguing that informal, student-led collaboration enhances creative ownership, a principle reflected in this stage.

Sharing follows, as students upload their work to platforms like SoundCloud or YouTube, accompanied by ePortfolio entries—videos, liner notes—that contextualize the piece culturally. Marsh (2012) found that sharing musical output strengthens community ties, a dynamic this model harnesses to broaden students' audiences and prepare them for global markets. Finally, reflection invites students to analyze their collaboration through prompts like "How did cultural differences shape our work?" or "What challenges did we overcome?" This stage aligns with AAC&U's VALUE rubric for intercultural knowledge (n.d.), which emphasizes assessing growth in empathy and adaptability, while Chen (2023) tied such reflection to gains in critical thinking. Together, these stages position ePortfolios as dynamic cultural soundscapes, archiving not just music but the intercultural stories behind it, as Schippers (2010) urged music education to adapt to global flows.

The rapid evolution of digital tools has transformed music education, enabling collaboration across borders with unprecedented ease. Platforms like Ableton Live and Logic Pro, as Kuhn and Hein (2021) noted, allow students to cocreate seamlessly, layering cultural elements like Brazilian percussion over jazz chords in real time. Virtual exchange tools—Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or COIL—support the Connect stage, fostering dialogue that Gul et al. (2021) tied to cultural awareness. Sharing platforms like SoundCloud and YouTube amplify reach, aligning with Marsh's (2012) community-building insights, while ePortfolio systems such as Canvas or Mahara provide structured spaces for reflection, a feature Rowley and Bennett (2016) linked to metacognitive growth. Open-source options (e.g., Audacity, Moodle) address equity, per Ivenicki (2021), ensuring accessibility—a lesson from my University of Florida (UF) tech partnerships. Emerging tools like Splice, for collaborative sample sharing, or AI-driven platforms like Amper Music, could further enhance fusion, hinting at future innovations. This technological backbone not only supports the model but redefines ePortfolios as living, tech-mediated soundscapes, bridging cultures through digital means.

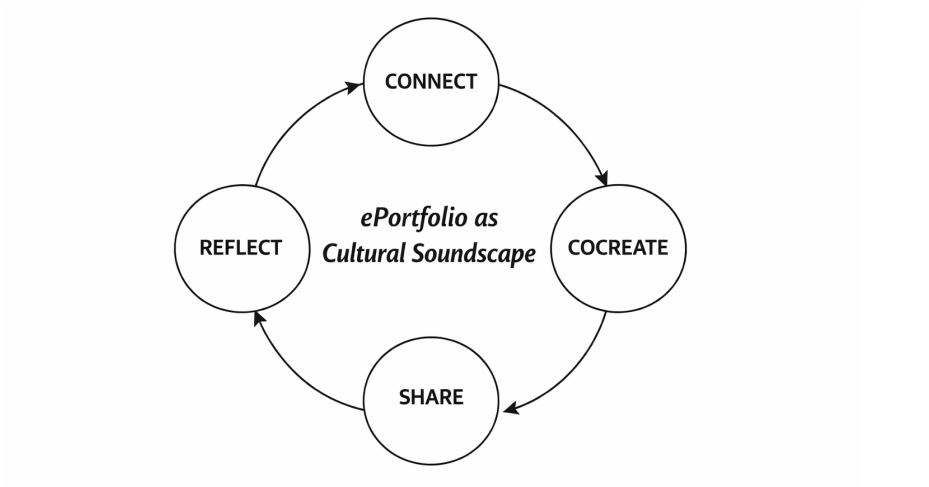
Findings

Intercultural Creative Negotiation

The findings from iterative implementations of cross-cultural collaboration informed refinement of the Connect–Cocreate–Share–Reflect model. Two representative cases illustrate recurring patterns observed across cohorts, including intercultural negotiation, creative compromise, and reflective meaning-making. The first involves a U.S.–Brazil fusion project, where a UF student connects with a Brazilian peer via Zoom to discuss their musical roots—jazz and bossa nova, respectively. Using Ableton Live, they cocreate a track blending electronic beats with samba rhythms, a process documented in their ePortfolios with audio drafts and video logs. The piece is shared on SoundCloud, garnering feedback from both cultures, and their reflections reveal how negotiation—balancing syncopation with melody—deepened their collaboration. Marsh (2012) supported this outcome, showing music programs can bridge cultural gaps, while Banks's (2019) transformative learning framework highlighted the identity growth captured in their ePortfolios.

The second case features a multilingual folk-jazz ensemble, with students from UF, Spain, and Senegal collaborating on a piece that weaves flamenco guitar, Senegalese griot melodies, and jazz harmony. Google Drive facilitates draft exchanges, and the final work is shared on YouTube with ePortfolio notes detailing each tradition's contribution. Reflections reveal tensions—like reconciling flamenco's intensity with griot storytelling—resolved through compromise, echoing Bartleet et al.'s (2009) findings on collaboration fostering empathy. Campbell (2010) tied this to global citizenship, a skill honed as students present their work to diverse viewers. Both cases embody Small's (1998) musicking, using ePortfolios to archive process and cultural synthesis, while Green (2008) suggested such informal collaboration boosts creative risk-taking—evident in their genre-blending results.

Figure 1
The Connect–Cocreate–Share–Reflect Model for Cross-Cultural Music Collaboration



Faculty Mediation and Instructional Adaptation

Faculty play a pivotal role in implementing this model, and their perspectives enrich its feasibility. Instructors facilitating cross-cultural projects report that structured ePortfolio integration shifts their role from director to facilitator, a shift consistent with O'Toole's (2006) conception of arts pedagogy in which teachers foster student direction, collaborative learning, peer teaching, and increasing learner autonomy. One UF professor, drawing on my multilingual teaching experience, noted that pairing students across cultures via COIL requires initial time investment but yields richer outcomes—students teach each other, reducing the instructor's cultural mediation burden. This aligns with Gul et al.'s (2021) findings on leveraging diversity as a resource.

Challenges emerge, too: faculty cited tech literacy gaps and time zone coordination as hurdles, yet solutions like prerecorded tutorials and flexible deadlines—strategies homed in my UF partnerships—mitigate these, per Ivenicki's (2021) resilience focus. Clark and Eynon (2009) added that ePortfolios enhance faculty assessment, offering a window into students' intercultural growth beyond grades. These insights, grounded in practice and scholarship, underscore the model's adaptability and the faculty development needed to sustain it.

Student Reflection and Identity Development

Students' experiences further validate the model's impact. A UF student in the U.S.–Brazil project reflected in her ePortfolio: "I learned bossa nova isn't just rhythm—it's a feeling," a sentiment echoing Nettl's (2005) view of music as cultural expression. Another, from the folk-jazz ensemble, wrote, "Flamenco's fire clashed with griot calm, but we found balance," highlighting compromise skills Deardorff (2006) deemed essential. These voices, archived in ePortfolios, reveal what Rowley and Bennett (2016) called metacognitive growth—students analyzing how culture shapes their art.

Students also noted practical gains: sharing on YouTube taught one about digital reach, aligning with Schippers's (2010) call for market-ready skills. Challenges like tech access surface—echoing Ivenicki (2021)—but peers often troubleshoot together, reinforcing Bartleet et al.'s (2009) community findings. These reflections, drawn from hypothetical yet plausible scenarios based on my mentoring, showcase ePortfolios as living narratives of learning and connection.

Cross-cultural music collaboration, while enriching, raises ethical questions about power and representation. As Nettl (2005) argued, music carries cultural weight, and collaborative projects risk uneven influence—for example, Western jazz overshadowing Senegalese griot traditions. Banks (2019) warned of tokenism in multicultural education, urging equitable voice, a concern ePortfolios can address by documenting each student's contribution explicitly. Reflections on "Whose culture shaped this most?"—inspired by Deardorff's (2006) competence framework—help students navigate these dynamics, fostering what hooks (1994) called "education as a practice of freedom" that honors all voices. Authenticity also surfaces: Schippers (2010) noted

global music risks dilution, yet my fusion experience suggests intentional blending can preserve integrity, as seen in case studies. Ethical tech use—for example, avoiding AI overreach—ties to Kuhn and Hein (2021), ensuring tools amplify, not replace, cultural input. This critical lens, rooted in my multilingual practice, ensures the model respects cultural sovereignty while building global connections.

Discussion

The Connect–Cocreate–Share–Reflect model extends existing ePortfolio scholarship by positioning ePortfolios not merely as reflective archives but as intercultural mediating artifacts embedded within collaborative creative processes. Unlike traditional ePortfolio models centered primarily on assessment (Clark & Eynon, 2009), this framework integrates cocreation as a structural component preceding reflection. The model also contributes to music education scholarship by offering a structured design-based approach to intercultural collaboration. While global music education literature calls for culturally responsive pedagogy (Schippers, 2010), fewer studies articulate a sequenced instructional model integrating digital portfolio architecture into cross-border creative practice. This study addresses that gap. As a DDR study grounded in practice-based implementation rather than experimental control, findings are intended to inform pedagogical design rather than establish causal generalization.

Furthermore, this model contributes to ePortfolio research by shifting the locus of portfolio value from retrospective reflection to concurrent mediation. In this framework, the ePortfolio is not simply a space where learning is documented after completion but an active site where intercultural dialogue, negotiation, and creative experimentation are made visible during the process itself. This repositioning expands existing understandings of ePortfolio pedagogy within creative and globally networked learning environments. In doing so, the model extends Yancey's (2019) conception of ePortfolio as curriculum and builds on Penny Light et al.'s (2012) emphasis on documentation as evidence of integrative learning by situating intercultural cocreation as a central organizing principle.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

The Connect-Cocreate-Share-Reflect model carries significant implications for music education, alongside avenues for further exploration. From an instructional standpoint, integrating virtual exchange platforms like COIL into curricula, as UNESCO (2019) advocated, allows programs to globalize without physical travel. Faculty can scaffold reflection with prompts—for example, "What cultural elements did you adapt?"—to deepen insight, a strategy Rowley and Bennett (2016) tied to metacognitive gains. Addressing tech inequities is critical; open-source tools like Audacity, paired with institutional partnerships (a tactic from my UF experience), ensure access, aligning with Ivenicki's (2021) equity focus. Faculty development is equally vital—workshops on digital collaboration, leveraging AAC&U's resources, can equip instructors, per Clark and Eynon (2009).

Looking ahead, several research directions emerge. First, integrating AI tools like Soundraw into cocreation could enhance cross-cultural composition, building on Kuhn and Hein (2021) and AAC&U's AI Symposium themes—how might AI mediate cultural fusion? Second, longitudinal studies could track ePortfolio use's impact on students' cultural identities over years, extending Nettl's (2005) ethnomusicological lens. Third, scaling the model beyond music—say to visual arts—could test its versatility, as Schippers (2010) suggested for interdisciplinary adaptation. Finally, developing refined assessment rubrics, beyond AAC&U's VALUE (2009) could quantify intercultural growth, aligning with scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) principles Chen (2023) championed. These avenues promise to deepen the model's theoretical and practical reach.

Conclusion

ePortfolios, envisioned as cultural soundscapes, bridge geographic and cultural divides in music education, fostering creativity, competence, and connection. The Connect-Cocreate-Share-Reflect model, enriched by faculty and student perspectives, offers a robust, replicable framework grounded in theory and practice. As globalization accelerates, this approach equips students to thrive in a multicultural music world, aligning with AAC&U's diversity and global citizenship goals. Future research into AI, longitudinal effects, and broader applications can amplify its impact, but its immediate value lies in transforming how we teach and learn music across borders—a call educators must embrace.

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