

MOOC Badging and the Learning Arc

Post posted Nov 16, 2012, 9:32 AM by Simon Cross:

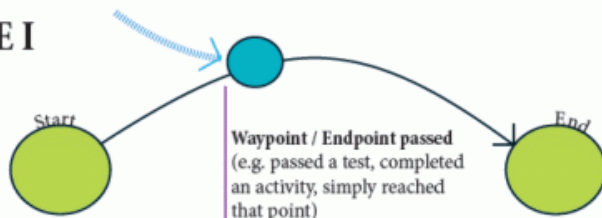
By Simon Cross and Rebecca Galley, 2012

Additional Author note (2014): The Open Learning Design Studio (OLDS) MOOC was created in late 2012 and launched in early 2013 (for an evaluation of the MOOC see [Cross, 2013](#)). During the design process the decision was taken to include a suite of digital badges that participants could earn as they worked through the course. As part of this development it was necessary to theorise the potential roles and uses of a badge and how these could fit with participants' learning arc. This work was captured in a blog post at the time ([Cross and Galley, 2012](#)), however, due to uncertainty about how long the original site will remain live, the post has been reproduced here as an archive copy. A more recent paper in the International Journal of e-Assessment by Cross, Whitelock and Galley (2014) titled '[The use, role and reception of open badges as a method for formative and summative reward in two Massive Open Online Courses](#)' builds on the work outlined below.

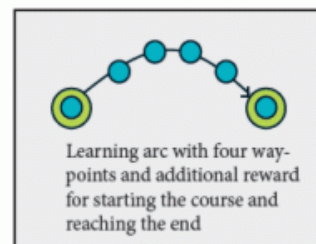
In a [recent blog post](#) Rebecca Galley introduced the OLDS-MOOC Badging Strategy and the nine badges that will be associated with the MOOC. The first part of the post expands on some of our thinking behind the strategy by using a pictorial representation to explain the place of the badges in the course. This is predicated on (a) the idea that a course, just like a novel, a movie or a video game, contains a broad central 'story arc' - a 'learning arc' or journey with a start (beginning of course) and an end, and (b) the idea that there are different types of badge that have different relationships with this learning arc. The second part reflects some of our initial critical consideration of what the roles and benefits of badges may be. As the post is intended as a discussion piece, we welcome your thoughts and responses.

The first type of badge we considered was of it as a reward for achieving something on the main learning arc - for example, reaching a particular point or level or doing a particular activity. This, in a sense, rewards achievement and is shown on the story arc as a single point:

TYPE I

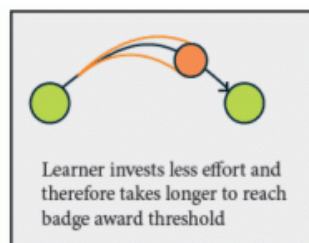
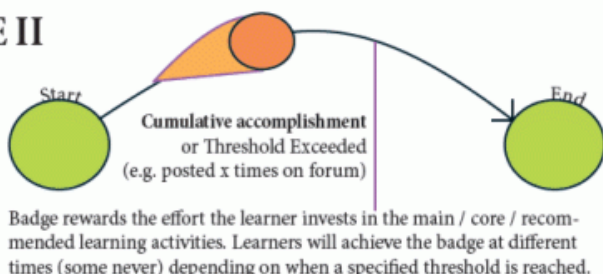


Badge recognises a point in the learning arc (the designed learning) that has been reached and passed. The badge may be defined in such a way that the learner can refer to previous work (dashed arrow)



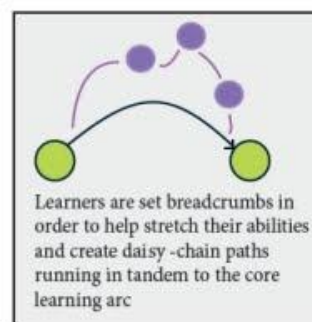
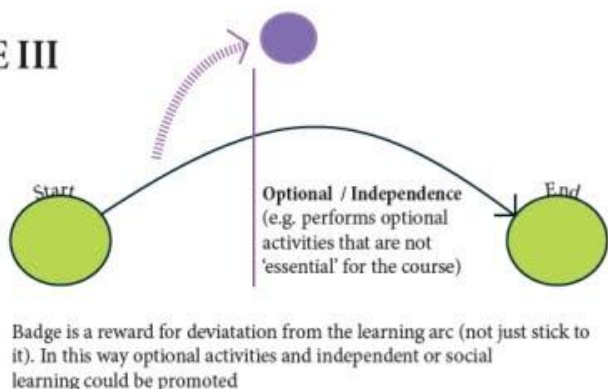
We thought the second type of badge could be to reward sustained, cumulative effort or, as Rebecca says in her post, to reward endeavour. The OLDS MOOC contains three Type II badges that reward 1, 3 and 6 weeks of participation.

TYPE II



A third purpose for a badge may be to encourage deviation from the main learning arc - to help the learner explore the academic and social space around the course itself and even to make their own paths. The OLDS-MOOC has three such badges: 'resource gatherer', 'collaborator' and 'reviewer'. Each seeks to promote and reward exploration, deeper learning and independence.

TYPE III



The OLDS-MOOC strategy seeks to offer badges associated with each of these three types and we are looking forward to seeing how they are received.

In developing the above models we found ourselves also thinking about what other 'roles' (besides pedagogic roles) badges may have. I have attempted to pull these thoughts together in the table below. This table considers the benefit to the receiver (learner) and the creator (awarder) and, where relevant, groups roles which at this level seem to offer similar benefits. You will notice that as we move down the table we consider more broader structural issues - for example, in thinking of a badge as a means of association or as a way for established social structures or hierarchies to retrench and perpetuate themselves. We would be very interested to hear your thoughts and expect this to inform our evaluation of the badging strategy used in this MOOC.

Role of Badge	Benefit of the badge	
	Receiver (learner)	Creator (awarder)
1. As a motivator / 2. To promote engagement / 3. To prevent withdrawal	Greater sense and understanding of achievements, skills learnt and progress being made. Can set intermediate milestones and waypoints in the learning journey	A solution to the 'motivation issue' for open courses that have no formal (or at least teacher marked qualification-related assessment). The drop-out rate for such courses is much higher than for traditional courses (even up to 90-95% of registrations).
4. As a meaning maker / 5. Signifier of learning objectives	Badges help show learners what the awarder think are most important to the subject/ competency being studied. It can give greater meaning to the learning	Badges can help describe what is important and can be constructively aligned with learning outcomes. Achievement of a badge may be seen as evidence that an outcome has also been achieved
6. As a low-cost option	The learner does not have to pay for assessment, nor potentially even study (or pay for) a course to receive the badge	Awarder does not need to mark, moderate, grade or award. This means less to no time spent on assessment and on maintaining the structures that support assessment and award
7. As a low-effort option	The learner does not have to enrol in a course if they have previously done something that demonstrate they meet the badge criteria.	Courses are repeatable with less effort from the awarder (less to no time required for assessment)
8. As a valuer	In a similar way to a qualification or certificate, a badge can help the learner to value what is being learnt	Both the existence of a badge and uptake of it by learners, can help confer value to something that is clearly import to the awarder (otherwise why create the badge)
9. As a symbol of identity / 10. As a means of association	A shorthand to represent achievement, effort or skills and a way of associating with, and simultaneously distinguishing oneself from others	Helps ties the learner to the awarder and in so doing deepens the association between them and others holding the badge. For social or political groups for whom the goal of a qualification/award is not the primary purpose, badges can provide shared goals (or other foci) around which badge-seekers and badge-achievers can associate.
11. As an empower	Enables learner to gain status within a group by achieving	Awarder gains status by being seen as an awarder and, potentially, this

	badges deemed of value to the group.	may help challenge and shift the authority/power to recognise achievement/skills. The awarder does not need to have formal qualification granting powers to create badges. May also allow individuals to attempt to determine the identify of a group.
12. As an entrencher	Those learners who can gain badges sooner (e.g. who already have the skills) place themselves at a competitive advantage over those who cannot. Rather than empower, this may simply entrench an existing hierarchy or social/professional structure.	Institutions, individuals or groups with established authority, status, wealth or power may use badges to entrench or even extend this. This privileges 'super-players' at the detriment of small independents.

To reference this report:

Cross, Simon and Galley, Rebecca (2012) MOOC Badging and the Learning Arc. Blog post 16 November 2012. Available from: <http://oro.open.ac.uk/42038>