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THU: Open Digital Badges – A practical proposal for the use of open digital badges in an ASB Online Academy course (Debbie Grieve)

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[Dr Simon Ball](#)

30 January 2014

Open digital badges that contain meta-data as evidence from authentic assessment allow individuals to demonstrate their learning and skills in a variety of settings and across disciplines both formally and informally. This helps paint a richer picture of the skills people possess unlike traditional certifications. The openness afforded by digital badges makes them networked and allows them to be shared across the web for employment, education or lifelong learning (Knight, 2013).

Whether you agree with this statement or not, it is hard to ignore the developing trend toward open digital badges as an alternative accreditation method. However, many questions surrounding their use and long-term credibility and sustainability still exist. This conference session will examine some of the latest research and findings in relation to the implementation of open digital badges and explore how these can be used to develop a viable program of implementation via a practical proposal for our own ASB Online Academy instructors.

The ASB Online Academy is an American School of Bombay (ASB) initiative. The ASB Online Academy has developed a unique program of online learning opportunities for a diverse international audience across three learning strands: Professional, Student and Adult. Due to the global, transitory nature of our program and our school, researching the use of open digital badges in an online learning environment was an obvious step toward supporting a more open and portable approach to obtaining and sharing achievements and credentials.

This conference session will explore key elements of this practical proposal offered to ASB Online Academy instructors, in order to encourage them to introduce open digital badges into their online course design. We will explore the evidence that informed the guidelines produced for our instructors. The proposal will be in the format of a Prezi presentation that walks through the key components required for designing badge empowered learning environments (Finkelstein et al., 2013). Selected, relevant elements of this will be shared during the conference and will focus on:

- Evidence of open digital badge approaches already adopted by educational institutions:
 - o The University of California, Irvine (Carey, 2012)
 - o Purdue University (Tally, 2012)
- Exploration of the potential of open digital badges in order to accelerate 21st century learning

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environments including:

- o Alternative models of assessment (Hickey, 2012)
- o Individual Learning Pathways (Finkelstein et al., 2013, p13)
- Key challenges facing the wider adoption of open digital badges as a sustainable and credible accreditation alternative:
 - o Validity and credibility (Casilli, 2012)
 - o Authentic, openly accessible meta-data (Sharples et al., 2013, p 12)
- Insight into specific guidelines provided to ASB Online Academy instructors

Attendees will leave the presentation with ideas for a workable implementation strategy based on the latest research that could be adapted for their own institution as required.

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[Jo Jacob](#)

8:25pm 10 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

I have only just understood what Open Badges are as Chris has created some badges for us to apply for apparently! Now I am really intrigued as I can see potential applications in a lot of my work. I can see also that, for some learners, it may be quite motivating if they are not used to achieving much.

My only experience of this was in Edmodo, where I have awarded people badges for achievements such as giving a presentation. They were employed adults working in a traditional industry, and I am still not sure what their reaction was to being awarded badges! The Edmodo badges are a bit lightweight compared to Open Badges, so I can't wait to find out more.



[Debbie Grieve](#)

11:35am 11 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi Jo,

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Yes, I saw those badges too and am looking forward to see how the concept of them is received by participants in this course - great data! I wasn't aware of Edmodo's badges so will check that out also. The concept of badges is at such an interesting point I think and we are learning so much....

Deb



[Chris Pegler](#)

1:45pm 11 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hm. Could it be coincidence that Debbie and Jo are the first into the fray to claim their Cloudworks H818 conference participation badges?

<http://cloudworks.ac.uk/badge/view/32> Testing this system out? Congratulations both.



[Avril Sweeney](#)

10:23pm 11 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi Jo, I'm interested in your presentation and added it as a favourite. I don't know much about digital badges but I am interested to learn from you. Good luck with your presentation. Avril



[Nicola Morris](#)

10:32pm 11 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Deb, I have previously gained a couple of badges which I applied for out of curiosity more than a need. It started as a fun but did make me want to complete the more optional task which had been set and as a result meant I was applying my learning and reflecting on it. Looking back I can still recall what I had to do for the badges which indicates they had an impact. As a freelance tutor it would be useful to have a way of creating a badge to push learning that little bit further. Look forward to your talk Nicola



[Jonathan Vernon](#)

5:42am 12 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

On the one hand I am attracted to badges for the appeal they have, on the other having been brought up with intense badging from the age of 8 'suffered' at a boarding school my natural response, personally, is to run a mile. I think we had a combination of merits and demerits, both gold and black stars. Which is the nub of my neurosis! We have badges - positive, but we do not have the opposite, the equivalent of the Dunces' Hat. For good reason. Am I mistaken or are Americans unreservedly positive - especially with the achievements of young people? Reflecting on this I can only see good in always finding, without reservation, the good in a thing and to reward and recognise that too. A rambling, circuitous reflection but ultimately it is getting my head in the right place. Badges are for grown-ups - look at the army. But, open to abuse? What on earth is Charles Windsor doing with a chest full of medals for which he has done very little?!



[Cara Saul](#)

4:37pm 12 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Rather like badges as accreditation and incentive when they are well managed - Scouts good example. Scout badges really help build confidence, because the choice of badges is so large everyone can find badges that appeal and that will allow development



[Debbie Grieve](#)

7:12pm 12 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Thanks everyone - Jonathan, I do see your point and enjoyed your reflection. Investigating the use of badges has been an interesting journey and we are yet to see their full impact in our own pilot course. I am keen to see how our participants react to the awarding of badges and whether or not they help us change the hierarchy of our class and start issuing badges to each other.....

My biggest concern at this stage is the time involved. The instructor that developed our badge stamps and badges with meta data for our pilot course spent a HUGE amount of time designing, setting up the infrastructure etc etc and all this without knowing how 'openly' they will be adopted by our participants.....interesting stuff. I look forward to sharing some of our journey with you tomorrow - not sure it's going to fit into 10 mins though, eek!



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

6:37pm 13 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Following the live presentations, we asked each speaker to respond to questions posed by audience members. In the short time available, it was not possible to put all of the questions submitted to the speaker for a response. We asked all speakers if they would respond to the unanswered questions here on Cloudworks. Here are all of the questions asked during the session:

- ▶ Can you give examples of educational achievements you intend to badge?
- ▶ What currency do you think badges can have outside of the course? Some are sceptical and think of Scout and Girl Guide badges?
- ▶ Is it the case that a 'negative badge' for want of a term, could never be accepted or have a use? In games there are always consequences for achievement and for failure?!!
- ▶ Is there such a thing as an interim badge?
- ▶ Are badges only really for young 'uns? Do adults really want badges - or is it just me who can't see the attraction for adults?
- ▶ Are badges rewarding work students would do anyway ie. do they really motivate?



[Debbie Grieve](#)

2:59pm 15 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Dear all,

Here are my responses:

1. In our pilot course, we have awarded interim badges for individual's achievements - this could be learning one or more specific tool used in the course or completing a specific task - these are specific to each learner as each person's journey is different. These interim badges (not offered for sharing on the OBI and do not have evidence attached) allow us to recognise their personal learning journey.

2. I think it's too early to tell what currency they will have beyond the course. My research so far, has found little in terms of evidence of this stage - who and how many people are sharing and networking their credentials. We plan to hold forums with our learners to identify what value the badges held for them and how/if they shared them. Would love to know if anyone has had experience of this.....

3. I think there is a need to discuss the concept of a negative badge - if we are rewarding with badges, how to let someone know that something hasn't gone too well. Do we just stick to feedback? Maybe - not sure I like the idea of a 'negative' badge - seems to permeant and failure or errors should not have to be permanent but a way of learning.....

4. See point 1 for interim badges -

5. Again, I think it's too early to tell how/if adults will adopt badges in the longer term. Kids see the connection between these and gaming concepts/principles I am sure but with adults, I am not so sure. I feel at this stage, whilst many will recognise their benefits in relation to demonstrating more than just traditional/formal learning - how open and how much people will actually be prepared to share is yet to be seen. From what I can tell, we now have a number of technological infrastructures to support the pedagogy but the next stage will be gathering the data to find out their true value in the eyes of the earner. It's a critical point.

6. I think if they are planned and designed properly, badges can do more than just motivate. I think the planning and designing of the pedagogy is key otherwise they hold little value and are *just* rewarding what they would do anyway. With a properly designed pedagogical framework they can do more and more significant motivation comes from the individual pathways they can support (see academic refs).

Hope this helps answer some questions. More than happy to continue the conversation here or directly. Thanks!

Deb



[Ian Hoffman](#)

9:28pm 16 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi Deb

Was wondering if you were worried at all about over-assessing with the introduction of stamps to recognise improvements?



[Helen Johnson](#)

9:59pm 16 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hey Debbie, I think I am finally getting to grips with the whole stamp/badge concept (but

maybe that's wishful thinking!) Do you know if they are only used in online learning or are they also applicable for blended learning courses? I'm also aware of courses where the tuition is all done face to face but any work to be graded is submitted online and returned online. Is there any reason why badges wouldn't work there as well? Thanks



[Jo Jacob](#)

10:28pm 16 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

It occurred to me that there is a very sensible adult application for this - in-house organisational learning and development.

Every company will have in-house training that they mandate their staff to take. I work in education, so staff will usually have to have updates in safeguarding, health & safety etc, plus annual staff development days with lots of different topics. I also work with a company where, every so often, many staff have to have updates in using small tools etc.

Open Badges could be a way of tracking and accrediting all this internal training which often goes unremarked. Some of these achievements and badges could be transferrable.



[Debbie Grieve](#)

8:03pm 17 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi Ian,

Thanks for your question. It's a good one. In the design and approach used for our current pilot course, I don't think we have but it is most certainly something we must always bear in mind. Initially, during the design phase, I think we likely had but following a discussion with Daniel Hickey, our instructor reduced the number used and the way they were used.

We will most definitely have to consider this as part of our review and ask our students the same and review on a continuous basis as this process evolves for us.

Thanks!

Deb



[Debbie Grieve](#)

8:07pm 17 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi Helen,

Great question! I don't think that badges have to be used purely in an online learning environment and don't see why they couldn't be used to recognise learning in different formats - indeed this really would be fundamental to the longer term viability of such an awards/accreditation alternative. I see the blended example working in a similar manner since participants will already be familiar with some degree of an 'online' element. I think the challenge will be how to communicate and implement the process of badges in a course where there is little or no online element.....I wonder if there are already examples of these. I must investigate next! Thanks

Deb



[Debbie Grieve](#)

8:09pm 17 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi Helen - I totally agree! In fact, we are looking at the use of badges in our own PD programme on site too.....I hope to learn more about that when I am there next week.

Deb



[Helen Johnson](#)

1:08am 18 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Thanks Debbie, if you come across anything I would be interested to hear about it. I am thinking that if students are already used to use an online system to check their grades and see what work they have outstanding, then the badges would be fairly natural for them. But maybe if it was only somewhere you went when you 'needed' something they would lose some of their motivational value. If I ever get the opportunity I'll try it and see!



[Debbie Grieve](#)

12:13pm 18 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi Jo (not Helen, sorry!) - I totally agree! In fact, we are looking at the use of badges in our own PD programme on site too.....I hope to learn more about that when I am there next week.

Deb



[Cara Saul](#)

11:18am 25 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Debbie I wondered what you thought of the public use of badges - in forums blogs and websites to endorse the skills and expertise of people? I find I am beginning to notice more badges when I visit sites. Depending on the context and if I recognise the badges they possibly do have an influence on me. I have begun to see them included on some CVs.

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