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## **Chapter 11**

### **A new approach to assessing Online Intercultural Exchange: Open Badges for soft certification of participant engagement and task execution**

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#### **1. Introduction.**

The challenges to the adoption of telecollaborative activity also known as virtual exchange or Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE) have been well documented (see, for example Guth, Helm, & O'Dowd, 2012, MacKinnon, 2013) and the complexity of shared electronic accreditation explained (Aguirre & Quemada, 2012). Yet, the desirability of participation is accepted (Sweeney, 2012) and there is widespread agreement that OIE is a viable pedagogical model that extends intercultural experiences for those involved and serves the goal of virtual mobility in foreign language higher education. Those experienced in setting up and running OIEs are therefore constantly seeking ways of increasing and sustaining participation in OIEs as part of language curricula. While assessment and official accreditation remain one of the main challenges faced by OIE practitioners, this chapter proposes a framework for recognition of learning efforts based on the use of Open Badges for soft certification of participant engagement and task execution. We see this approach as an important next step to bring OIE closer into the mainstream of formal language education.

Almost two decades of research in OIE for language and cultural learning are - as Lamy & Goodfellow (2010) remind us - characterised by an unusual willingness of those responsible to review the effectiveness of their work and by their readiness to document failure. The latter has been attributed to a variety of factors including differing approaches to interaction among participants, incompatible local learning values, and mismatches between collaborative online activity and individually assessed outcomes (for a comprehensive overview see Lamy & Goodfellow, 2010). It therefore comes as no surprise that navigating such a complex area of activity which usually revolves around the joint completion of several pre-designed tasks requires significant motivational support for learners and educators alike.

With the arrival of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) on the educational scene and their seemingly low completion and high attrition rates, the question of how to support motivation that leads to sustained participation and interaction among online learning partners has received renewed attention. MOOCs offer a range of informal to formal learning opportunities and follow a spectrum of network-, task-, and content-based approaches (Lane, 2012). We propose that task-based MOOCs which emphasise skill-development through task completion, particularly those which rely heavily on learner collaboration, are readily comparable to OIEs. Initiatives to foster learner motivation in MOOCs are therefore worthy of consideration when exploring how skills acquisition in OIE can at least be acknowledged in a semi-formal way whilst the debate about appropriate assessment is ongoing and an agreed approach remains a desideratum.

In this chapter we propose a framework for badging as an incentive for participant engagement with each other and with tasks during OIEs, drawing on Cross and Galley's (2012) badge

typology. To that effect we will take O’Dowd and Ware’s (2009) overview of the main categories of OIE tasks as a starting point and suggest a way in which the various roles of badges as identified by Cross and Galley (2012) can be mapped onto O’Dowd and Ware’s (2009) taxonomy. Our approach is informed by insights gained during a pilot implementation of Open Badges in the context of an established large scale OIE between a French and a British Higher Education Institution called *Clavier*.

Section 2 will discuss the significance of motivation in OIE activity. Section 3 provides a general introduction to badges and their use in education. Section 4 presents Cross and Galley’s (2012) typology of badges and the underlying pedagogical rationale for badge implementation in OIEs drawing on O’Dowd and Ware’s (2009) typology of OIE tasks. In section 5 we briefly present *Clavier* and report on a pilot study believed to be the first of its kind where both tutors and learners were able to earn badges during the exchange. Section 6 proposes a framework for Open Badges in OIE before the final section (7) draws this chapter to a conclusion with some recommendations for the successful integration of Open Badges in OIE.

## **2. Why motivation matters.**

For Downes (2011, n.p.) motivating participants to remain engaged in MOOCs is not an issue:

*“One big difference between a MOOC and a traditional course is that a MOOC is completely voluntary. You decide that you want to participate, you decide how to participate, then you participate. If you're not motivated, then you're not in the MOOC.”*

While this observation might well hold true for the original connectivist MOOCs, also referred to as cMOOCs, which sit towards the network-based end of Lane's (2012) spectrum, the same does not necessarily apply to xMOOCs which operate at the opposite, content-based end. Education providers who offer xMOOCs primarily as an extension of their formal provision have to justify financial outlay and are concerned to maintain reputation. As a result course completion is high on their agenda. They are making increasing use of badges to enhance learner motivation and thus retention rates.

Since 2013, as Sharples et al. (2013) point out in the British Open University's *Innovating Pedagogy* report, there have been "encouraging signs that the tools and infrastructure for awarding badges in online environments are improving" (p.12). Their report explores new forms of teaching, learning and assessment, in order to guide educators and policy makers in productive innovation. They see a clear link between the increasing popularity of badges and the growing interest in MOOCs with badges providing "a way of recognising achievement within MOOCs as well as driving engagement with them" (p. 13).

However, incentivising learning activity is controversial. It is generally accepted that intrinsically motivated students learn better and are more likely to continue to access learning beyond and outside formal provision. According to Deci and Ryan's (2001) Self-Determination theory:

*"...people are motivated from within, by interests, curiosity, care or abiding values. These intrinsic motivations are not necessarily externally rewarded or supported, but nonetheless they*

can sustain passions, creativity, and sustained efforts.”

(<http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/theory> , n.d.)

This resonates with Downes’ (2011) claim cited earlier and suggests that implementing rewards could potentially reduce the learner’s ownership of their learning experience. In a meta-analysis of research into extrinsic rewards and intrinsic motivation, Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (2001) show that whilst there is a risk of undermining intrinsic motivation using reward systems, particularly in young people, there is also good reason to explore the use of creative tasks which provide meaningful learning opportunities, choice and challenge. To do so, one must think carefully about when and how to use rewards. Tasks which provide constructive alignment with desired learning outcomes and are situated within the relevant learning context can offer “a powerful new way to motivate learning” (Hickey & Zuiker, 2010). Open Badges, we propose, offer a new way of acknowledging successful execution of such tasks and can thus consolidate the motivational benefit.

### **3. Badges and badging**

Soft certification in the form of badges offers a flexible mechanism for recognising achievements on the journey to more substantial goals in both formal and informal learning contexts. Recently the tools and infrastructure required for badging have attracted growing interest in the UK and beyond with implementations appearing for mainstream learning environments (Sharples et al., 2013). Badging can also provide an informal alternative to more traditional accreditation or enhance the recognition of learning efforts in areas where development of accreditation is slow

to develop such as OIE. While a growing number of educators is turning to badging to help online courses run successfully and to motivate learners, greater awareness and understanding of badging is still developing with initiatives supported internationally by Mozilla's Open Badges infrastructure and the Badge Alliance. The core technology of a badge backpack which makes badges "portable" is available to many virtual learning environments already such as the Moodlerooms Joule platform which formed the backdrop for the pilot project presented in section 5.

In their work in progress document The Mozilla Foundation and Peer 2 Peer University define a "digital badge" as "an online record of achievements, tracking the recipient's communities of interaction that issued the badge and the work completed to get it." This approach is aimed at motivating learning and signalling achievement both within particular communities as well as across communities and institutions. They distinguish between digital and Open Badges. Open Badges go beyond the concept of representing an evidenced skill online. They allow the badge holder to migrate badges earned from different badge awarders in order to evidence their skills and achievements through their chosen online channels such as personal blogs or e-portfolios. Open Badges are built on an open standard which enables learners to combine multiple badges from different issuers in order to best reflect their overall set of competences.

A badge is made up of two main components: an image file (.png) giving a visual representation of the award and an electronic record which contains the criteria for award and the validator. The information becomes attached to the badge image file as hard-coded metadata which can be

viewed. Those who award badges do so through an electronic mechanism which allows a badge to track back to the metadata.

Badge creation can be very simple, using a free online design tool such as Mozilla's online Open Badge designer. More complex images can of course be created in a variety of ways according to the awarding authority's requirements. Badges typically reward the acquisition of micro-credentials and do not require corporate styles to be applied. The image file is then uploaded to the virtual learning environment at course or site level, associating it with the relevant issuing criteria. It is then available to learners who satisfy the conditions defined. The badge can be awarded automatically using completion information set within the course or site, or manually awarded by those within the system who have the appropriate role in relation to the submission of the corresponding evidence. For example, automated badge award through the completion of a particular activity (e.g. assignment submission, quiz completion) can recognise a waypoint on the learning journey, or evidence evaluated by a user with a specific role within the course (e.g. a tutor or mentor) can also trigger award. The learner will get a notification as a result and further information regarding how to set up their own backpack to which they can export the badge. The learner adds badges to their individual backpack. They can control how and where they display the badges. All badges carry the trackback identifying how and where the badge was awarded and what exactly it has been awarded for. This flexible way of collecting recognition for an acquired competence takes account of the increased access to networked learning opportunities. Badges can be collected from a wide range of communities of practice, not only traditional educational establishments. cMOOC-style online courses are increasingly incorporating badges as recognition of engagement in continuing professional development beyond institutional walls

and schedules. They offer incentives which are particularly appealing for those who cannot access courses, extending learning opportunities to non-traditional audiences and connecting practitioners across geographical boundaries. Learning initiatives such as, for example, the Association for Learning Technology's #octel course can serve the dual purpose of reskilling and acquiring new skills without which many would be unable to access work opportunities. Learning technologists who choose to participate in the course are rewarded for their engagement with Open Badges.

#### **Section 4: Roles of badges and OIE tasks.**

Experimenting with badging for an task-based online open access course at the British Open University Cross and Galley (2012) argue that seeking out opportunities to acknowledge achievements may enhance participant motivation and learning in the following three key ways:

- rewarding the attainment of a way point on a predetermined learning journey (passing a test, completing an activity);
- rewarding effort (cumulative or threshold reached, e.g. number of hours committed, number of exercises completed);
- rewarding deviation from the main 'learning arc' (see below) and hence encouraging and rewarding "exploration, deeper learning, and independence".

They have identified a number of roles that badges can play within an informal learning journey (see Figure X.4.1). Most of these, we contend, also apply to learning at the interface between

formal and informal educational contexts where OIEs are often situated in the wake of the Social Web (Lamy & Goodfellow, 2010).

***[INSERT FIGURE X.4.1]***

### **Roles of badges. Reproduced with permission from Cross and Galley (2012)**

Not all of the roles identified are immediately linked to pedagogical goals. In fact, only the first three are directly related to learner motivation by the authors. Yet, motivational gain can potentially also result from using a badge in order to represent achievement or as an indicator of belonging to a group of learners with whom that achievement is being shared, or, in contrast, to distinguish oneself from those who have not made the same achievement (role 9, “as a symbol of identity”, and role 10, “as a means of association”). Moreover we propose that badge roles 4 and 5, “meaning maker” and “signifier of learning objectives” may have some indirect motivational impact, as they show that a learning objective deemed important by the awarder has been achieved thus making the learning process itself more meaningful. The same indirect impact on learner motivation, we suggest, can be expected from role 8, the badge as “a valuer”, as it is supposed to raise awareness and appreciation of what has been learnt.

Cross and Galley’s (2012) framework for badging draws on the idea that a course or module develops like a ‘learning arc’: “[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 (beginning of a course) and an end”. Their conceptualisation of a course as a journey is apt for OIEs, often compared to joint learning journeys for the participants. Explaining the principles underpinning the Cultura project, for example, Furstenberg and Levet (2010) stress that understanding another

culture goes well beyond simple accumulation of factual knowledge. It is rather the outcome of a dynamic, interactive process of joint knowledge construction which the students undertake together with their foreign partners. Hence, they compare their project website to a “road map” for the learners as “they journey together through the other cultural land” (p. 310).

The Cultura project (Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillet, 2001) is one example of operationalising the learning needed to achieve Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). ICC is the ability to interact appropriately and effectively with people from other cultures and requires a complex set of skills set. Social psychological approaches to ICC draw attention to social identity management, which may have particular relevance to online settings, where presence and identity are mediated through technology. This approach could inform and complement the input from Applied Linguists who analyse linguistic products from interactions. A multidisciplinary perspective on the field of ICC is available in the Handbook of Intercultural Communication (Kotthoff & Spencer-Oatey, 2008). OIE does not seek to measure or assess ICC but rather to provide opportunities to experience and reflect upon intercultural encounters. O’Dowd (2011) explains how ICC can be developed through OIE tasks drawing on the work of Byram (1997). Examples are available on the uni-collaboration.eu site, one of the outputs of the EU-funded (Integrating Telecollaborative Networks into Foreign Language Higher Education) INTENT project (Guth et al., 2012).

Learners engaging in OIE will undertake a learning journey which extends their field of activity beyond their geographical and contextual constraints. A simple task such as sharing with others online a photo of an aspect of their daily routine becomes a starting point for further exploration.

Badges, then, can intersect with this journey at various points depending on the three key ways to enhance participant motivation and learning mentioned above.

**[INSERT FIGURE X.4.2 HERE]**

**Type 1 badge awarded for achievement (based on Cross & Galley, 2012)**

Type 1 is a badge that gets awarded when a learner has reached a specific pre-determined point on their learning journey such as the completion of a single activity or task, or each time a smaller task which is part of a task sequence (represented as a single point on the arc) has been accomplished.

**[INSERT FIGURE X.4.3 HERE]**

**Type 2 badge awarded for effort (based on Cross & Galley, 2012)**

A Type 2 Badge gets awarded after a certain time of active participation in an online exchange for sustained effort and perseverance. Criteria which define the nature of such participation need to be published at the outset of the journey.

**[INSERT FIGURE X.4.4 HERE]**

**Type 3 badge awarded for initiative based on Cross & Galley, 2012**

Type 3 rewards learner behaviour that reflects willingness to engage with the content of an exchange and levels of collaboration with peers beyond immediate task requirements. The badge encourages learners to move outside the parameters of an online exchange and maybe even create their own learning path. Type 3 badges, Cross and Galley (2012) stress, explicitly “promote and reward exploration, deeper learning and independence”.

The methodological approach generally adopted in OIE is task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Mueller-Hartmann, 2007). The introduction of technology into TBLT has led to a broadening of our understanding of tasks. Lamy (2007) regards technology-enhanced tasks as a “more inquiry-based task space” that “encourages learners to exercise agency and enact identities” (p. 263) while Ortega (2009) drawing on Warschauer (2001) suggests we view tasks as projects and quests so as to realise the potential technology brings to language learning. This fits well with the conceptualisation of OIEs as learning journeys.

Yet O’Dowd and Ware (2009) draw our attention to the need for a more thorough exploration of the available task design options in OIEs. They consider how decisions about tasks are reached between the teaching partners involved and what happens during the actual implementation of a task, focusing on aspects such as task negotiation and modification. On the basis of their review of over 40 reports in the literature on OIEs, they synthesize the variety of tasks used into twelve general types which can be carried out both in isolation or as part of a task sequence. They fall into the following three broad categories reflecting the type of communicative activity involved:

- *Information Exchange Tasks* where participants provide their telecollaborative partners with information for example about their personal backgrounds and their home cultures.
- *Comparison and Analysis Tasks* requiring learners to exchange information but also to go a step further and carry out comparisons or critical analyses of cultural products (e.g. books, surveys, films and newspaper articles).
- *Collaborative Tasks* requiring participants not only to exchange and compare information but also to work together to produce a joint artefact or reach a joint conclusion.

The task types identified by O’Dowd and Ware (2009) are not correlated with language proficiency nor do they assume a particular combination of learner cohorts as task execution can involve multiple partners. The three broad categories identified in their taxonomy scaffold the complexity of the OIE activity, helping task designers to locate their intervention such as placement of an Open Badge according to their understanding of learner needs.

Guth and Helm (2010) put forward the idea that in addition to the ‘traditional’ goals of telecollaboration, i.e. the development of ICC and foreign language skills, “a distinguishing feature of telecollaboration 2.0 [...] is the inclusion of new online literacies as one of the goals” (p. 69). Indeed, all OIEs now involve immersive experiential learning opportunities of computer-mediated communication (CMC) which can significantly impact on transversal literacies as defined in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCO) project, i.e. a set of skills required in order to operate effectively in a wide range of environments, both physical and virtual. The project identifies three broad categories of competences as shown in Figure 11.5. OIE tasks often sit in the overlapping areas, requiring a combination of mastery of language and technical tools in order to interact within a heterogeneous group with a degree of autonomy.

**[INSERT FIGURE X.4.5 HERE]**

### **DeSeCo project key competencies**

As a result OIE tasks provide opportunities for developing competences which – due to their very nature – can more easily be captured and acknowledged through Open Badges than

traditional methods of assessment. In addition, badging can help to address potential pitfalls identified in the literature.

#### **4.1 How badges can address pitfalls in OIE.**

As O’Dowd and Ware (2009) point out, approaches to task design vary making it difficult to generalise and transfer experiences from one OIE context to another. This is in keeping with generally observed challenges of task-based learning (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). Informed by their synthesis of task types, O’Dowd and Ware (2009) have identified a number of potential challenges centred upon the decisions made by OIE facilitators as part of the learning design process for an exchange. The implementation of Open Badges, the process of choosing a badge type and positioning it on the envisaged learning arc, can help overcome difficulties by making learning design choices explicit to the learners and designers alike. Moreover using badges encourages reflection upon the facets of a task relevant to achieving the learning outcomes for a specific OIE cohort.

Another challenge that has recently received renewed attention in the OIE literature are gaps in language tutor competences (for an overview see O’Dowd, 2015). Based on his earlier work (O’Dowd 2013) and feedback from over 60 OIE practitioners and experts O’Dowd (2015) has developed a four-way model of the different competences an OIE facilitator requires in order to organise and employ OIEs in the classroom:

- organisational competences
- pedagogical competences
- digital competences

- attitudes and beliefs such as willingness to look for compromise

He concedes that active participation of teachers is not essential in OIE as students usually interact independently online with their distant partners. *Clavier*, is a good example to this effect and confirms the relevance of autonomy highlighted in the DeSeCo key competences. Yet, drawing on Furstenberg & Levet (2010), O'Dowd (2015) reminds us that it is “the teachers’ role to prepare students for their online interaction, to debrief following contact with their partners and to integrate the themes of the interaction into their classes” (p. 66).

We would argue that the use of badges in professional development for CMC-based language learning and teaching in general and OIE in particular could support the systematic acquisition and improvement of the aforementioned competences. This in turn is likely to have a positive impact on the normalisation of OIE activity as part of language learning and internationalisation in Higher Education. The use of Open Badges in Higher Education for recognition of professional development activities such as use of social networking tools has already yielded positive results (Hole, 2014).

In the following section we will present *Clavier* and the experiences arising from the pilot project with badging during its fourth iteration in 2014/2015.

### **Section 5: Implementing Open Badges in *Clavier*.**

*Clavier* is a large scale OIE involving more than 900 students a year between the Language Centre at the University of Warwick and Université Blaise Pascal (for a detailed description see Guth et al., 2012). Participants have access to a shared course area, EWC (Echange Warwick

Clermont) within Languages@Warwick, an environment created to support multimodal interaction (MacKinnon, 2015). The task sequences used in *Clavier* are available on the uni-collaboration.eu site. Here we report on the data collected during the *Clavier* Open Badges implementation.

### **5.1 *Clavier*: objectives and tasks.**

*Clavier*'s primary aim is to incorporate CMC into language learning and to extend the learning beyond classroom walls into the informal spaces of social media. The inbuilt flexibility in terms of learning design allows participants to take greater ownership of the learning process and outcomes and made *Clavier* a good fit for the trial. Learners connect according to their shared interests as discovered through profile details, emphasising the importance of intrinsic motivation and creative tasks (see section 2). While participation is not assessed and task execution is not compulsory, engagement supports the participants' wider learning goals such as finding partners for interaction to improve speaking or writing skills online. Thus *Clavier* has much in common with task-based cMOOCs. The task sequences used in *Clavier* are evaluated collaboratively by staff from both institutions on an annual basis. The task design supports digital skills acquisition for successful CMC-based interaction and language learning. Task execution encourages tutors and students to try out new technologies. As a research-led project, it has been shaped by qualitative and quantitative feedback gathered annually and shared on the uni-collaboration.eu site. Participants have access to EWC from October until the following June. Badges were piloted between October 2014-April 2015 with the two task sequences, *Building connections* ([uni-collaboration.eu/?q=node/1068](http://uni-collaboration.eu/?q=node/1068)) and *Consolidating connections* ([uni-collaboration.eu/?q=node/1093](http://uni-collaboration.eu/?q=node/1093))

## **5.2 Open badge pilot in *Clavier*.**

The research relevant to this chapter and conducted during the trialling of badges in *Clavier* is briefly summarised below. The insights gained have been integrated into the design of the proposed framework (section 6). The technical aspects of badge deployment were largely unproblematic as the portal supports the Open Badges architecture described earlier (section 3). Essential information about awarding badges was shared with stakeholders including tutors, mentors and students. The greater challenge came in deciding how and where exactly badges should be awarded on the learning arc of this specific OIE.

## **5.3 Research methods.**

An action research methodology to piloting tasks and information gathering contribute to refining the task design in *Clavier*. The MERM (Mediated Environments Reference Model) framework (Childs, 2010) a conceptual framework which merges the two models available in Activity Theory and Community of Practice literature, provides a basis for the systematic review of the EWC portal analysing the affordances of the online environment and guiding the task design process (MacKinnon, 2015a). A mixed methods approach was adopted to review the impact of Open Badge implementation in EWC. As behaviour in an OIE is complex, the investigation was influenced by a structuralist perspective (Giddens, 1986) taking into account both what is done as captured by the analytics available and how participants describe their experience. Quantitative information about engagement compared forum participation as reflected in number of views and activity postings for the same period before and after badge implementation. Qualitative survey responses were completed online by badge awardees to collect their perspectives on the experience. The survey was bilingual (French/English) and

administered anonymously. A walk-through interview using a think aloud technique (Garfinkel, 1967) was carried out with 6 volunteers to gather more detailed feedback.

#### **5.4 Results and evaluation.**

Quantitative results show the amount of activity recorded within the portal including both “lurking” (Nonnecke & Preece, 1999) where participants observe activity (Fig X.5.4.1) and active engagement such as posting new contributions or replying to messages (Fig X.5.4.2). Typically within EWC – and in line with what has been observed in MOOCs and other open access courses – we see much higher activity levels in the early stages of the OIE.

**[INSERT FIGURE X.5.4.1]**

#### **Activity levels (views) in EWC pre- and post- badge implementation.**

Figure X.5.4.2 shows the overall amount of posting in EWC during the same period.

**INSERT FIGURE X.5.4.2 HERE.]**

#### **Posting levels in EWC pre- and post- badge implementation**

Qualitative insights were derived from the questionnaire and the walkthrough interviews. Furthermore, screenshots of forum activity document interest in how to earn a badge. The identities of the students are concealed.

**[INSERT FIGURE X.5.4.3 HERE]**

#### **Forum discussion in EWC 1**

**INSERT FIGURE X.5.4.4.HERE]**

## Forum discussion in EWC 2

When comparing overall levels of activity between the 2013-14 and 2014-15 iterations of *Clavier* it is clear that the EWC portal has had higher and more prolonged activity in the period after badges were introduced. This suggests that the award of badges contributes to creating a positive feedback loop which supports posting over lurking, i.e. active engagement over passive viewing. The badge awardee feedback in the survey confirms this. Of 98 students invited, 60 completed the online survey on the badge award experience. Asked to rate their feelings towards badge award on a 1-5 Likert scale (1=low, 5=high satisfaction) 75% reported feeling satisfied or happy (score 3>). Thirteen students reported that getting a badge motivated them to be more engaged, with one adding “*je pense que les badges peuvent motiver les élèves à s'impliquer*” (“I think badges can motivate student involvement”). Conversation about badge award in the EWC forum reflects a general interest in the concept and a desire (even a market, see Figure 11.10) to find out about how to get a badge.

However participant feedback also indicates that badge award criteria and notification were not sufficiently visible. For example, only seventeen of the 60 students (28%) reported that they fully understood why they got a badge with only 28 (47%) reporting that they got a notification at the point when the badge had been earned, despite the system notifying all badge recipients.

Unsurprisingly, follow up interviews with those who had gained badges revealed a general lack of understanding of the concept of badging coupled with genuine curiosity to find out more. A representative comment to this effect comes from the following participant reaction transcribed from one of the walkthrough interviews:

*(User shows badge on her course profile)*

“I was quite surprised when I got it, I wasn’t sure what I got it for.... (*Interviewer asks her to click badge. Clicks badge, revealing award information*) “Now that makes sense!”

By April 2015 a total of 178 badges had been earned.

**[INSERT FIGURE X.5.4.5 HERE]**

### **Badges available and awarded in EWC by April 2015**

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the challenges presented by OIEs are as significant for educators as for students. This is particularly true when varying levels of digital literacy skills and familiarity with CMC for tutors have to be addressed alongside language and intercultural work for students (Kurek & Hauck, 2014). As well as introducing Open Badges, the current iteration of *Clavier* had to meet an additional dimension: the integration of French student teachers during term one. Some tutors felt overwhelmed by the technical aspects of the tasks they had intended to cover such as incorporating synchronous online sessions and – as a result - failed to initiate an opportunity which had a badge attached such as the webinar badge (OIE3). One student reported in the survey:

*“Les badges existent depuis octobre 2014 si j’ai bien compris, mais je trouve dommage que nos profs nous en aient parlé seulement 2 semaines avant la Deadline du Portfolio” (“Badges exist since October if I understand correctly, but I think it is a shame that our teachers only spoke to us about them 2 weeks before the portfolio deadline” (e-portfolio assessment for Clermont students is not connected to EWC participation).*

However, the badges could have been earned independently of teacher guidance if they had been given greater prominence on the EWC portal. Section 5.5 summarises some of the insights gained from running the pilot project.

### **5.5 Insights gained and recommendations.**

The following technical aspects and learning design of badge deployment need to be taken into consideration when using this form of soft certification of participant engagement and task execution in OIEs.

#### **Technical aspects:**

The badge schema should be given a prominent place on the learning platform which forms the backdrop for an OIE so that it is accessible for participants throughout their learning journey and encourages badge collection. Moreover badge award messages need to be pushed out as soon as badges have been earned in order to establish a clear link between the award and the associated task execution. In this way the technical affordances can support the need for immediate feedback. The accessibility and reliability of the technology used in OIEs can significantly affect the outcomes for the individuals involved.

#### **Learning design aspects:**

As the badges are designed to increase and reward engagement type 1 badges should be placed at the beginning of a sequence of tasks. This helps to establish the connection between engagement and recognition of such. The tutors' role in communicating the badging message to students is crucial. Beyond the need to make available and distribute the badge schema to be used in an OIE, they need to explain the value of earning badges during the exchange and beyond (e.g. long term visibility of employability skills directly linked to evidence) to participants. Timing of tasks

and badge placement requires negotiation between the main stakeholders, in the context of OIEs usually the tutors involved in setting up and running an exchange. This is particularly important when badges are awarded for pair or group efforts and require participants to be in step with each other. The resulting badge schema needs to show

- the title of the task or task sequence
- the timings for each step
- the position of badges and their respective purposes
- the evidence required to obtain a badge.

Clearly establishing the overall purpose of an OIE and the objective of each task learners are asked to carry out during the exchange, is a pre-condition for placing badges at the most appropriate waypoints of the envisaged learning arc. In *Clavier* the tasks are carried out largely asynchronously. In line with the goals of OIE tasks (section 4) the underlying aims of the exchange are to increase participant awareness of and familiarity with the various modes of CMC and explore ways of interacting online while learning a language. By designing numerous badge earning opportunities at key points, particularly in the early stages of an OIE it is possible to create a “buzz” among participants which in turn reinforces the role and purpose of badging. Piloting the badge schema is strongly recommended in order to ascertain that the location of badges along an envisaged learning arc is realistic and meaningful. The importance of including time for tutor guidance and recognition of effective embedding of OIEs and innovative practices such as badging into established schemes of work should not be underestimated.

## **Section 6: A framework for soft certification of participant engagement and task execution in OIEs.**

The implementation of badges is described by Halavais (2011, p. 269) as “*a clear way of expressing what is valued by a community*”. He stresses that badge systems carry a set of ethical expectations which should be “*consistent, cohesive and appropriate to the context*” (p. 371). It would therefore be desirable to define a framework for badging in OIE which is useful for any practitioner insofar as it brings the rationale underpinning the learning design to the fore and is applicable across contexts including those captured in Guth and Helm’s (2010) concept of “telecollaboration 2.0”.

The proposed framework takes the task categories summarised earlier as a starting point. It uses examples mentioned by O’Dowd and Ware (2009) and from the task bank on the unicollaboration.eu site to illustrate at what point on the learning journey - or “waypoint” (Cross & Galley, 2012) - a badge could potentially be located and what role it could play in relation to learner motivation. The majority of badges are Type 1 and Type 2 badges, i.e. those that recognise a way point that has been reached or passed, or, acknowledge sustained learning effort. The framework also provides some indication of instances where Type 3 badges might be awarded in a meaningful way, i.e. those badges that are attributed for engagement in the context of an OIE that stretches significantly beyond the parameters of a given task or task sequence. Thus the badges featuring in the framework are those identified by Cross and Galley (2012) which are immediately associated with pedagogical goals for OIEs (see section 4). Within the framework the completion of each type of task can be perceived as a learning journey in itself,

or, as part of a longer trajectory where two or even all three categories of OIE tasks are being covered within a task sequence. In this case a careful decision will have to be made regarding the overall number of badges awarded in the context of a single OIE. Moreover, their individual or cumulative purpose(s) should not only be clearly distinguishable but must also be communicated to the learner in a comprehensible manner.

**[INSERT FIGURE X.6.1 HERE.]**

### **A proposed framework for badging in OIEs**

As the proposed framework indicates, badge roles 1-3 apply across all task types while other roles associated with specific pedagogical goals - roles 4-5, 8, and 9-10 as per Cross and Galley's (2012) typology - are somewhat fluid and will need to be carefully chosen depending on the concrete task or sequence of tasks and contextual factors that shape a bespoke OIE.

### **6. Concluding considerations.**

There is a pertinent need for greater awareness raising of the benefits of Open Badges among educators. Badges offer “a new way to assess critical but hard to measure skills” (Badge Alliance). Skills which come into play during OIEs such as ICC and navigating digitally mediated communication and collaboration fall into this category. Furthermore the Badge Alliance sees badges as “a tremendous opportunity to tell the story of learning across all spaces of a learner's life.” The concept of telling the story of a learning process chimes with the idea of the learning journey which participants embark on together with their learning partners during OIEs.

The requirements of OIE tasks include sustained determination to master the technical aspects of connecting online and the available communication modes to build presence and interact in order to succeed. Often this aspect of access to tasks as a pre-condition for task execution in increasingly multimodal online settings goes unrecognised, leaving only the digitally skilled able to interact and complete the tasks. In such instances there is a risk that badges could act as an “entrencher” (role 12) of the so called second level digital divide (Hargittai, 2002) widening the gap between those who are competent online and those who are not. A large scale European study proposes a typology of internet users which goes beyond the binary division and identifies a more granular set of user types, a phenomenon also referred to as the “new digital divide” (Brandtzæg et al., 2010). It is clear from the OIE which has informed the framework for badging proposed in this chapter that even those who use the internet perhaps for work or pleasure do not necessarily benefit from the learning potential offered by CMC across contexts. Using badges to recognise the incremental acquisition of sub skills needed to carry out OIE tasks can help to gradually build essential digital literacies. Open Badges can play a role in identifying these sub skills during the learning design process and in motivating the learner during its implementation.

At the same time factors influencing extrinsic and intrinsic motivation need to remain balanced so as not to allow badge collection to overwhelm the principal focus of the learning. When aligning badges with learning outcomes in OIEs, learning designers should be careful to avoid “pop behaviourism” (Kohn, 1993) and ensure that the learning remains meaningful. The psychology of collection is recognised as a powerful engaging force. Individuals who collect anything experience positive emotions connected to the thrill of the hunt, the happiness of adding

a new find and the camaraderie of sharing with a collecting community (McHinkley, n.d.). In order to ensure that such a powerful psychological force is used appropriately the findings highlighted in section 5.5 should be observed. Otherwise motivation and engagement risk being replaced by experiences of bewilderment and frustration. How we feel when we experience any activity is widely accepted to have a bearing on our learning experience (Oatley & Jenkins, 1996) and the impact of such feelings has a particular relevance to language acquisition as Krashen pointed out already over three decades ago in his Affective Theory hypothesis (Krashen, 1981).

The framework put forward here is specific to OIE and aims to help identify the most suitable approach to awarding badges in any given context. For those new to OIEs and the concept of soft certification in such exchanges, the tried and tested tasks available on the uni-collaboration.eu site offer a starting point. They provide pedagogically informed learning design choices and should make it easier for novices to decide where exactly on the learning journey badges could be placed. Further resources and principles for badge schema development are becoming available (e.g. Design Principles Card Deck) as Open Badge deployment grows. As Galley (2012) stresses, the overall number of badges and their positioning is vital for achieving the desired impact on participant motivation. The intended badge role could be compromised if placement were misjudged.

Including badges as part of course design however offers an opportunity to the learning designer to reflect upon the assumptions that underpin their approach and to make explicit their intended learning outcomes. In *Clavier* in particular and OIEs in general, participant engagement and task

execution can foster an increased awareness of digitally mediated forms of communication and Open Badges can be aligned with this desired outcome. Ideally learners as co-designers should be part of the course design process. This pilot project suggests that the badge experience for tutors should ideally be separated out from that of learners. A starting point could be the systematic introduction of badges in teacher education programs where OIEs are enjoying increasing popularity as they allow pedagogically informed use of CMC and online tools while experiencing online language learning and teaching from a student's point of view. The feedback from the pilot project underscore the importance of teacher engagement in promoting CMC-based language learning and teaching such as OIE and reflects the findings in CALL teacher education research to this effect (Levy, 1997, Guichon & Hauck, 2011). Last but not least Open Badges bring aspects of gamification to OIEs, providing a new bridge between the informal and formal learning opportunities they offer and thus increasing the potential for learners to take ownership of their progress.

## **Appendix.**

### **Open Badges schema in EWC**

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Oqq\\_i0jjsBhajp0mFogmA5SSowXA21J2ZbHqdB5SkX8/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Oqq_i0jjsBhajp0mFogmA5SSowXA21J2ZbHqdB5SkX8/edit)

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