

Personalizing Professional Learning with Digital Badges

In 2013, the North Carolina state legislature passed HB 23 requiring the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to develop and implement digital learning standards for teachers and school administrators¹. The legislation includes a requirement to provide professional learning to teachers that aligns with the new standards. In accordance with the law and the State's articulated priority to move toward digital learning environments, DPI is creating digital competencies and is working to innovatively implement them to model appropriate technology use and personalized learning for teachers.

The Friday Institute for Educational Innovation (FI) seeks to enhance classroom practice by developing models of effective technology implementation, creating innovative professional development opportunities, and fostering collaboration and community among district and school leaders, instructional technology facilitators, and teachers. One model the FI is currently exploring is the use of badges for competency based professional learning. The FI believes that offering badges will help educators by clarifying the ongoing competencies they are developing. The badges will also provide educators credit and recognition for their growing capacities and skills². Educator badges are a signal of competency within a specific skillset. This represents a paradigm shift wherein teachers gain personal agency to continuously identify, represent, and share professional improvements.

The FI and DPI are partnering to merge competency based professional learning with the digital competencies.

Why transition professional learning?

The 20th century model of education is based on the "assumption that teaching is necessary for learning to occur."³ Many educators earn their initial accreditation when they complete their an education degree program and gain credit for attending subsequent, sanctioned professional development workshops and courses. The workshops tend to be "sit and listen," and as research repeatedly demonstrates, may increase attendees' awareness of new or changing expectations but do not lead to changes in educational practices.⁴ More importantly, professional educators receive little to no recognition for how they continue to informally cultivate new professional skills throughout their service.

Digital technologies have made it possible for students and educators alike to learn anywhere, anytime.⁵ Educators can now create their own learning through their personal learning networks (PLNs), open education websites, and through massive open online courses (MOOCs). Despite digitized shifts in how one can pursue knowledge, little has changed with how we credential educators who acquire new knowledge and skill sets. We continue

¹ Full text of house bill 23 available at <http://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2013/Bills/House/PDF/H23v0.pdf>

² Digital Promise Report, 2015

³ Thomas and Brown (2011). A new culture of learning: Cultivating the imagination for a world of constant change.

⁴ Darling-Hammond, Wei, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009

⁵ Thomas, D. and Brown, J.S. (2011). A new culture of learning: Cultivating the imagination for a world of constant change. p. 34

to quantify professional educator learning based on seat time or credit hours, thereby only acknowledging learning pursued through traditional methods and institutions.

In order to disrupt professional learning and empower educators to grow as individuals, education agencies should provide rigorous, relevant, self-directed, and personalized learning pathways. Digital badges provide one solution to the incongruity between how we know professionals learn and the current requirements. Badges are relevant and useful ways to recognize newly attained skills and knowledge.⁶ Badging programs enable teachers to capture their own learning and determine with whom, when and where it is shared. Badging lays the groundwork for revolutionizing how educator professional learning is offered and sustained.

What are badges?

Badges represent a broader movement in education from recognizing seat time as a measure of completion to competency based professional learning. Rather than requiring educators attend a certain number of **hours** of professional learning experiences, badging requires educators to demonstrate mastery of a certain number of **skills**.

In a badging eco-system, there are badge issuers, badge earners, and badge consumers. Badge issuers are the organizations designing, evaluating, and awarding the badges. Badge earners are the students, teachers, or leaders doing the work to earn the micro-credential. Badge consumers are those who care about the badges earned and who assign value to them.⁷

Badges must be both portable and stackable. Portability means that the badges are stored in so that outsiders can view the badges and connect the learner to new opportunities. Stackability refers to the ability of badges to be built upon, indicating broader and deeper knowledge in a particular area.

Badging for educators means different things to different groups. At a basic level, however, badges operate by (1) outlining or defining a singular competency or skill, (2) providing avenues for educators to gain information about that competency or skill, (3) requiring educators to submit artifacts demonstrating mastery and implementation of that competency or skill, and (4) awarding badges to physically represent the completion of a micro-credential.

⁶ Davidson, D. and Goldberg, D.T. (2009). The future of learning institutions in a digital age. MIT Press: The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Reports on Digital Media and Learning. p. 27

⁷ <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/DigitalBadges.pdf>