

In the Classroom 76

Using Digital Badges in Your Classroom

SEE THE SHOW NOTES AT: <http://tubarksblog.com/itc76>

Stan Skrabut: Well, welcome back. Thanks ever so much for taking time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot. As I tell you all the time, I know you're probably doing other things, and you're still hanging out with me and I really appreciate it. This week, I want to take a look at digital badging as a tool for your academic tool chest. I have been around the concept of badging my whole life. In some cases, it was serious business. In other cases, it was just for fun. I thought we should just take a look at this particular topic.

First of all, what are digital badges? According to Wikipedia, digital badges, also known as ebadges, or as ebadge are validated indicator of accomplishment, skill, quality or interest that can be earned in various learning environments. You may want to equate digital badges like certificates, that you complete something you get a certificate, kind of the same mindset. I know in higher ed, we put a lot more weight on the idea of certificates. This is probably dialed back just a little bit. You complete a little course, you may get a certificate. You participate in a conference, maybe you're a speaker, you may get a certificate.

This is the idea with digital badges. Like I said, throughout my life, I have been influenced by badges or the concept of badges. I want to just give you a rundown of four major programs where I've had some badging layered on. Although I've done some digital badging, these are not digital badges. These are more of these tangible badges. The first is scouting.

Scouting is where most people recognize the idea of badges. That you earned merit badges as a boy scout because you completed certain skills, or there is certain knowledge that you demonstrated. That is where most people think of badges. I was a scout for a little bit. When I was a young boy, I earn badges as part of Cub Scouts, WEBELOS, and even when Boy Scout. I didn't stay with the boy scout program, but I was earning badges. To earn a badge or an advancement, you had to complete specific requirements.

You had to demonstrate these requirements to someone else, and they would sign off on it. Once you've completed all the requirements, you earn the badge. Everyone had to complete the same requirements, and so that is key. Everybody demonstrated the same form of knowledge and skill requirements. As a kid, I was certainly proud to earn those and display those. I have to say, even through my adulthood, and I'll talk about some of those instances here in a few seconds. When I earned a badge, this type of more formal recognition, I was certainly proud of that.

I know a lot of other people who recognize this and are proud of those types of accomplishments. As I mentioned, I didn't stay in Boy Scouts. I left Boy Scouts and

joined a program called the Civil Air Patrol. This was when I was entering high school. Now, Civil Air Patrol had a formal recognition program that took the form of awards, medals, ribbons, and certificates. They use these to recognize people for heroism, service, program, achievements. They also had occupational badges, and I'll talk about that in a second.

Their decorations, these were awards or recognitions for individuals who completed heroic acts or had exceptional performance. They were given out to members who clearly stood out from others, and who contributed most to the success of the program. There was also unit citations. These were awards that were given to entire units that stood head and shoulders above other units. In addition, Civil Air Patrol had Achievement Awards.

These Achievement awards helped move individuals through the different parts of the CAP program. You can tell by somebody's uniform when they wore their ribbons how far through the program they got. For somebody who was a leader in that program, I could go in and immediately identify where there were gaps in somebody's learning and guide them through different parts of the program. These Achievement Awards, you had some for the cadet program and the cadet awards were awarded throughout the 16 achievements in the cadet program.

They were named after famous aviators or aviation leaders. In order to earn one of these ribbons, these awards that cadets had to complete knowledge and skill activities that related to leadership, aerospace education, moral development, and physical fitness. On the adult side of the house, CAP had five levels to its senior member professional development program and each level was recognized with a ribbon.

In order to achieve one of those ribbons, individuals had to meet certain criteria related to Command and Staff assignments, leadership specialty development, experiential activities, and other requirements. They recognize and strongly encourage that individuals took an active role in the running of the unit at these different levels. The other thing about this professional development recognition is it was also tied to the promotion.

In order to advance in rank in the Civil Air Patrol program, move to higher levels, you had to participate in the professional development program. The awards had prerequisites also that you in order to get the next highest professional development award, you had to complete the awards from the levels before you. They kept working on those. Aerospace education. Civil Air Patrol, one of its core missions is aerospace education. It wanted to make sure that individuals were advancing and learning about aerospace education so they develop a recognition system, ribbons that were tied very much to certain activities that they had to do in the aerospace education program.

Then, really designed on the cadet program but also well, it was really for all members is they had activity awards. If you participated in the International Air Cadet Exchange Program, you earned a ribbon. Not everybody in Civil Air Patrol earned

these ribbons. Everybody had the capacity to do this, but only a select few actually did it, and both senior members and cadets were able to do this.

The same was with the National Cadet Competition Ribbon. They had ribbons at different levels if you participated at the wing, at the region, and the national level there were ribbons and class cadets that went on those ribbons. They did that for the National Cadet Competition, as well as the National Color Guard Competition. Civil Air Patrol for the cadets had a wide variety of special activities. Variety of schools from aviation schools to learning about different Air Force specialties that were recognized with cadet special activity ribbons.

Then all cadets, before they get through achievement number eight of the cadet program had to attend an encampment. Once you attended the encampment, you earned a ribbon. Every time you went to an encampment, after that to participate on stuff, for example, you earned additional class for your particular ribbon. The Civil Air Patrol also recognized for service. If you were a unit commander at different levels, you earned a Command Service Ribbon. For the time that you were in Civil Air Patrol after certain periods of time, you earned their longevity ribbon, the Red Service Ribbon and that measured your time in service in Civil Air Patrol.

They definitely wanted you to stay in CAP for a period of time. Air search and rescue. If you participated in searching for people who were lost, there was a ribbon for that. If you found somebody definitely a ribbon. Counterdrug missions, disaster relief, homeland security, there was all recognitions for the amount of time that you participated in those different activities. For pilots, if they were out there promoting aviation by doing orientation flights for cadets, there was a ribbon for that. Community service. Not only supporting Civil Air Patrol but going out above and beyond in helping the community in other ways, that could be also formally recognized.

Participating in the council. This may be an idea for higher ed is participating on committees, and councils, and different leadership in that, they had a ribbon for that. Then recruiting. Keeping the membership up, there was a ribbon for that. I also mentioned occupational badges. Civil Air Patrol had different occupational badges. They typically had three levels, a basic, a senior, and master ratings. There was these badges for pilots, so you could visually recognize pilots that were there.

Observers, so an additional part of the crew, the ground teams. This was all related to search and rescue. Additionally, the cadets, when they soloed an aircraft, they earned a set of wings themselves, this distinctive set of wings. Then each of the specialty tracks. Public affairs, logistics. Now, I can't even think. Communications, operations, they all had corresponding badges, and each one of them had a different level, a basic, a senior, master level that each had criteria. Once you completed that criteria, you moved up to the next level. The nice thing about this recognition program, most of it was worn on your uniform.

As I said, somebody can look at you and you were basically a resume. They could see this immediately and let you know-- you could see how much they have done in the program simply by what badges they displayed. The military has always been

using badges in order to do the exact same thing. I spent 20 years in the Air Force. There was a lot of badges. You were aware of all the badges that were involved in the military. In some cases, you were pursuing the criteria in order to achieve that recognition. It can be motivating because it outlines a clear path on how to get to the next level, how to further your education or how to further your advancement in a particular program.

Badges in the United States Air Force are specific for the uniform that signify aeronautical ratings, special skills, career field qualifications and serve as identification devices for personnel occupying certain assignments. That comes from the regulation. Like Civil Air Patrol-- Actually, Civil Air Patrol modeled itself after the Air Force. They are awarded in three degrees or three different skill levels. There's always room for advance that you have a basic knowledge level and you're working your way to a master knowledge level. They just keep making it more difficult in terms of knowledge and skills that you have to have.

The Air Force also awards declarations and ribbons. Like I noted, you can see how long somebody was in the Air Force, what they do, what they did, and how well they do it. It is a visual resume. The nice thing, because the criteria is the same across the Air Force, there's immediate credibility that you can walk into somebody's office, see their "I love me" wall. You have an idea of what they have done and what they're capable of doing.

The Air Force has a 242-page document formally outlining this program. That's how serious they take it. From that document, they outlined their objective. The objective of the Air Force Awards and Declarations Program is to foster morale, provide incentive, and esprit de corps. Individuals or units considered for awards and declarations under this program must clearly demonstrate sustained and superior performance. The program is limited to units, organizations, and individuals. When it comes time for promotion, your earning of different awards helps you get promoted. Your movement through these different paths help you get to the next path. Really powerful stuff.

I want to share a couple of quotes here with you. One of them is Napoleon Bonaparte and his recognition of the importance of awards. He also thought highly of wars too I guess. Basically, he said, "A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of colored ribbon." He was probably one of the first to recognize the impact or power of these devices. Whether they're medals, ribbons, badges, whatever you call them, he understood the importance of that.

General George Patton, he also understood the importance. In one of his documents that he sent to unit commanders, he had noted in there that declarations are for the purpose of raising the fighting value of troops. Therefore, they must be awarded promptly. Have a definite officer on your staff educated in writing citations and see that they get through. He was definitely making sure that his folks were recognized for the things that they were doing.

The Air Force, they had not only these awards but also they had badges, these occupational badges. They had aviation badges. You've seen the pilot wings, also

for the aircrew. If you graduated from special schools, they had patches that you wore. Test pilot school or weapons school, you earn these badges. They had joint service badges. Somebody who was dealing with explosives, the explosive ordnance disposal, EOD, they had their unique badge. Scuba divers, parachutists, free-fall parachutists, these were joint service badges that the different military, they had the same criteria and so folks earn those.

The occupational badges. Every specialty, every job in the Air Force had an occupational badge. With this, you were able to see how much training and education an individual went through. You were able to visually recognize this. There's also a long list of duty badges. If you worked at the headquarters for the Air Force, they had a badge. Air Force commanders had badges. If you were an instructor for military education or professional military education, there was badges, or if you taught junior ROTC, there's certainly a badge. If you're a recruiter, there was a badge. If you performed on honored guard, badges. Fire protection, badges. All kinds of different things.

Then, they had their duty tabs. They wore them on the sleeves of their uniform so you can see if somebody was a combat controller or dealt with the medical field or security forces, they had those. They had also special marksmanship competition badges and outstanding airman badge. One of the 12 outstanding Airman of the Year, you earned a badge for that.

As far as declarations in ribbons, you had your military declarations for acts of valor, heroism, exceptional or meritorious service, and outstanding achievement that deserves special recognition. Once again, this is for those folks that are clearly and distinctly outstanding.

Unit awards. Pretty much the same type of award. It was done for these acts of valor, heroism, but it's for the whole unit. The whole unit got the award, not just specific individuals. Participating in campaigns. If you participated in-- You're in Iraq or Afghanistan, there were campaign ribbons for those. Individuals who served in Vietnam or Korea, certainly recognition for that. Also military service and how you advanced through that. Like I said, you could tell if somebody had completed their professional military education and how many levels that they have done on that. You can see how long somebody's been in service, how well they have done their job.

All this was easily recognized through a badge. The last program happened to be a martial art that I'm in, Bujinkan Budō Taijutsu. This particular martial art recognize advancement with a combination of badges, belts, and titles. There was really three primary belts. You had a white belt, a green belt, and a black belt. The white belt was definitely for absolutely beginners, mu-kyu. For the green belts, that went from 9th kyu to 1st kyu, and then black belt was from 1st Dan on up.

The badges reflected the levels within the belt. There was a red and white badge with silver or gold stars. That helped identify what level a student was from 9th kyu to 1st kyu. Then you had a red and black badge with silver stars reflecting 1st Dan to 4th Dan and a red silver and black badge with gold stars reflecting 5th Dan and 9th

Dan. There was a teal, orange, and green badge with gold stars reflecting 10th Dan to 15th Dan and the golden-red badge is reserved for the Sōke.

Then you had different titles. You had Shidoshi-Ho which were in assistant instructors. They were from 1st Dan to 4th Dan if they had a Shidoshi-Ho certificate. They could advance individuals. Then, Shidoshi which was instructor, they had passed the Godan test and could award students up to 4th to degree black belt. Then you had Shihan. These were master instructors. They were 10th Dan to 15th Dan and there was different levels within that. Finally, Sōkewho is the grandmaster. There's only one Sōke.

That was my personal journey through badges and how badges affected me, but I'm not the only one. A lot of different organizations are using badges, businesses are using badges. IBM has a whole different levels of badges for different skill sets. Salesforce also has a badging system. EY, which is a global leader in insurance, tax, and transaction, and advisory services, they have different badging requirements. And, you know, Educause, they have badges for participating in leadership, participating in different ways in the program. Being a speaker, being a presenter, being a reviewer, all these things are weaved into their badging practice.

Why badges? Why badges in the classroom? Let's talk about that. I see badges as a great way to promote lifelong learning. Badges are kind of like an e-portfolio. They're pulling things from kinds of different places because learning is not just what's happening in the classroom. Learning is experiential. Being part of an internship or job shadowing or on the student council, leadership positions in there, lots of different things where badging comes into play. It also recognizes skills and knowledge not necessarily displayed on a transcript. Transcripts don't necessarily display all the things that students are learning.

You typically just have a title for the class. What does that mean? Where a badge actually has more detail. You can tie evidence to a badge. I see that as a really powerful tool. Why use badges? They recognize skills, they can recognize accomplishments and provide students with a tangible reward that acknowledges an achievement. It can be for skill, a competency, it can be for completing a task and I'll give some examples a little later. I'm certainly backing all this up with a list of articles that I'm going to put into the show notes, so please check those out, and you can find those at ITC 76.

Badges can be an assessment tool. Depending on how you build your course, how these badges are tied together, you can also do adaptive learning that they have to complete this badge requirement before you open up different parts of the course, it can be used to assess different levels on how well they know the material. There's a lot of flexibility in designing the badge which can be complicated in its own right.

You can assign badges for project completions, maybe a huge classroom project or it could be something in the extra-credit realm that if students want to learn more about a particular part of your course that you can set them on an independent badging learning path, and it can be used as a motivational tool. The nice thing about badges is they can be shared outside the class, that you can put them on a

website, you can put them on LinkedIn. You send them through email, lots of different ways that you can share these things where people get an idea of what you had to accomplish and what knowledge you've picked up along the way.

Here are some benefits from dealing with badges, and most part comes from Holli Vah Seliskar article *Using Badges in the Classroom to Motivate Learning*. I talked about enhancing a portfolio or ePortfolio and badges are a way of doing this because they tie back to this evidence, and you can demonstrate that evidence. You can set specific learning goals. You can set a learning path in front of them and they have to submit work. Once they've completed this, then they've earned this particular badge.

Part of this is you can set up challenges in front of students in order for deeper learning. Not all students are going to achieve a badge and that's fine. Badges are not necessarily for everyone, but with a badge, you can set up a learning path maybe to take somebody deeper and set up this independent learning that I mentioned. Badges also at the end of the day can signal achievement to potential employers, let potential employers know what's available, what a student has learned or come to know or have been able to demonstrate in terms of skill.

As the military has done with a good badging system that you can identify identity and reputation within certain learning communities. Individuals who are very active in a learning community, you can set a req-- Not requirements but when they meet certain criteria, maybe be an active poster, somebody that's helping out people, they may get recognition for that as they're demonstrating their knowledge. You can also use badges to give privileges. Maybe before a student has access to a chemistry lab, maybe they need to get a badge on lab safety before you open the doors for that, ways that you can use that.

Going back to this idea what's the purpose of a badge, very often badges are thought of as rewards, but they can also really be used to help with goal setting and developing that reputation, status affirmation and instruction, and group identification. Being able to recognize within your group, this is really hard when you're first starting out but if you're established, there's a lot of universities and colleges that are using badging that after a while these badges have certain recognition that somebody really-- Some of these badges are hard to get and when you get that, there's some states involved in that.

Like I said, badges also promote lifelong learning that extends beyond the classroom and bring these different accomplishments to light. I have a badge backpack as Mozilla used to call it, and I have a number of different badges that are in there for different courses I took, different activities I participated in. I have that and I can always link out to it and show other people. This idea of badges they have to have some type of meaning, skill attainment. Here are some ideas that you may want to consider. For a writing class, an English class, when somebody has mastered APA formatting, maybe that's a badging opportunity.

They could subsequently go learn about MLA formatting for documents. Now you have two different learning opportunities that rather than require students to write a paper in a specific format, maybe give them the option where they can demonstrate

their mastery. Then encourage them to use a different format for the next paper, and so they learn something different. In some classes accounting for example, nowhere in accounting does this talk about the fact that they're using QuickBooks as a tool. In our college, they're using QuickBooks. The fact that they're using QuickBooks, you can badge on that.

In our communications program, one of the tools that they're using is Adobe Creative Suite but it does not talk about that in any of the course descriptions that they're using Adobe Creative Suite. Lab safety skills, that's another skill that they could have attained. Lab safety that may be opening the doors where they can use the lab. Participation, you can have them earn badges for participating in many different events in a certain category or participation on student government, could have another badge for leadership on student government, so different ways that they can do this.

Achievement, when they have completed a variety of criteria may be talking about ecology, and they had to learn about water ecology, air ecology, soils, that maybe when they have achieved all that, they've got that achievement which is certainly tied to knowledge. As far as levels, you can have different types of levels in your badges where you have basic, intermediate, advanced, and build that criteria. That way you know, they have to demonstrate things over time different way. You can also have it where in one case they had participation, application, and sharing.

One was at a very basic level just simply participating, and then a more advanced level was them actually applying it. Then the master level is where they're sharing that knowledge with others. How do you implement this? First of all, why do you want to do badging? You have to narrow down what you're planning to use badging and how you want to put it together. Then you need to see if there's any technology available. In the show notes, I provide links to a variety of badge platforms, but you may already have something established on the campus that you can tap into. They may already have criteria that they have assigned in order for you to do that.

Speaking of criteria for your badge, you need to identify the criteria. It's the who, what, when, where, why, how, you got to outline all that in regards to your badge. What evidence do they need to demonstrate for the outcomes or the criteria? You may have a badging constellation where your badges are stackable. With these badges, maybe they demonstrate three to five basic tasks. Once they've completed all those, they get a higher-level badge. That's what a constellation does.

Are their levels see your badges? Do you have a beginner intermediate and advanced opportunity through your badges? Can people repeat the criteria in order to have multiple tries at the badge or can they earn the badge multiple time? Things that you need to be aware of. Developing your ecosystem, this goes back to that platform. What are the technologies you're going to use, and what's the approval process? You don't want to make it, so it's cumbersome that it becomes a chore to do.

How can you weave this into how you're normally assessing students? You're not creating a crazy amount of work for you. The cool thing about badging is the fact that

you can build complex systems. You can build badges that only a select few are able to attain. You can set these different levels for your badges and make it complex and make it a very rewarding system that individuals had to-- There was a challenge to it, they had to meet that particular challenge in order to get the badge.

Badging does not come without criticism. One of the facts about badges is really anybody can create a badge and hand it out. How do you make this a trusted credential? That's one of the big criticisms of badges, and I think that comes back to having very clear outcomes written and tying that evidence back to that, then you're developing trusted credentials. Others complain that it's an extrinsic motivator. Folks are just chasing the badge and it's not really for their accomplishment and mastery but as an intrinsic motivator.

Yes, certainly possible, but for some folks, that's maybe what you need. It'd be ideal if everybody walked into a classroom and were intrinsically motivated to do everything, even when it's not their specialty when it's not their love to be able to do this. It would be great, but it's not realistic. Sometimes you have to balance it out with some extrinsic motivators and badges can be one of this.

There's others that critique the fact that some people use gamification. I'm a fan of gamification and they feel that students are doing it just to earn the badge rather than focusing on the material presented. Once again, that is a design, a thing that can be handled in design that students-- You can build a badge where you can focus on the learner, you can focus on the criteria to get that individual to earn the badge.

There is nothing saying that you can't tie in specifications grading, for example, where it's a go-no-go either you did it or you didn't, but I know for civil air patrol, cadets had to repeatedly retake different parts of the criteria until they finally were able to master it in order to earn the badge. You can set up those different milestones in order to test that. Then finally some badges are meaningless, they mean nothing at all.

If you showed up as a warm body for the whole term, you got a badge, that's really not so meaningful. I don't encourage meaningless badges. I encourage that you go out and actually set good criteria for your courses that are really tied to learning and learning objectives. I would look for those things in your course that really tied to lifelong learning. It could be you learning a new piece of software. It could be learning a concept. Like I said, learning how to do APA formatting, versus MLA formatting, versus Chicago.

Those are skills that they can take, and they're useful over a lifetime. They're things that employers can recognize that you can demonstrate that, in fact, I do know how to do this. I think that's where badging comes into play. This was a long episode. I really appreciate you hanging on, I think badges are another tool in your tool chest that you can use. It may not be for everybody, but I do believe that there's a place for it. Thanks for hanging on with me on this. Before I go, here's a quick plug for my book.