RECOGNISING LEARNING THROUGH OPEN BADGES

BY ELIZABETH ROBINSON

Over the past year or so, open badges have emerged as a means of providing learners with digital credentials. Open badges are presented as an image with embedded metadata which provides details of what the recipient had to do to earn the badge.

The Australian Institute of Training and Development (AITD) has embraced open badges and advocates their use as a meaningful way to recognise lifelong and lifewide learning. Over the past few months AITD has been working with Joyce Seitzinger and Mark Smithers from Academic Tribe to map out badge opportunities for AITD. After planning, designing and piloting, the AITD badge program is now operational, using Open Badges Infrastructure (OBI) protocols so that the badges can be used and recognised in many ways.

How does AITD use badges?
Each year hundreds of people attend AITD's *Essentials* and *MasterClass* courses receiving a paper certificate to indicate their attendance at the course. AITD is now providing course participants with a digital badge which they can add to their digital backpack, place on their LinkedIn profile and display on their website and elsewhere.

Using the imagery designed for AITD courses, a set of colourful honeycomb shaped badges were developed so that they would dovetail with one another and be instantly recognisable as AITD badges.

AITD piloted issuing badges through Credly with volunteers who completed our Instructional Design Essentials course. We then invited participants of our *eLearning Essentials* course to claim this badge once they had completed the necessary coursework.

When the 2015 *Mentoring Program* finished in November 2015 mentors and mentees who completed the program can claim a badge to demonstrate their involvement.

This is just the start of AITD's plan to acknowledge individuals through open badges. Beyond recognising participants in AITD learning activities, from 2016 AITD members will be issued with a membership badge upon joining and renewal. We will also be acknowledging professional contributions, such as the many volunteers who contribute to the work of AITD, through open badges. We are keen to explore other avenues where badges could be used and invite members to provide ideas.

Why badges?
Some people may be wondering why AITD is engaging in open badges. Badges are often misunderstood and dismissed as a fad or gimmick.

AITD recognises that open badges have merit and can provide individuals with an eportfolio to track and showcase a learner's achievements, interests and passions. Displaying your badges makes your eportfolio visible to your colleagues, peers and potential employers. Badges also connect you with others, broadening your personal learning network. For example, the AITD membership badge will show that you are part of a dynamic community of connected professionals.

In his 2014 article "Get badged!" Ryan Tracey describes the main reasons for engaging with open badges. He writes that open badges can motivate learners and recognise informal learning, as well as credential in house training. He also points out that badges are task oriented, demonstrating that specific tasks have been done, and badges are portable so they can be carried with you.

Open badges are becoming increasingly popular and are part of a growing badge ecosystem, giving a flexible way of providing a learner with recognition for their on the job training, online learning and volunteer activities. In her recent article "Organisational Learning with Open Badges" Joyce Seitzinger described this ecosystem, pointing out that in March 2015 over two million badges had been issued worldwide by over 14,000 badge issuers.

AITD recognises that not everyone will jump on the badgewagon and get involved in open badges. But we do invite you to explore open badges and consider how they can be used by both yourself and your organisation to recognise lifelong learning. We also invite you to earn badges from AITD by getting involved in AITD courses, membership and other activities.

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