Open Badges – a New Way of Recognizing Informal Learning in Lahti University of Applied Sciences

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- Located in Lahti, 8th largest city in Finland
- Over 5,000 students, appr. 400 staff members
- Professional Bachelors and Masters Degrees
- Study fields:
  - business
  - design and communication
  - social and health care
  - technology and engineering
  - no longer student intake: fine arts, music, hospitality management
Open Badges - a new concept of making skills and achievements visible online

- Growing need to recognize learning taking place in informal and non-traditional environments
- Evidence-based and verified digital representations of skills and achievements
- The learner at the center: tokens of skills and achievements visible online and not tied to school systems
An Open Badge is an image embedded with metadata.

- Metadata links to webpages, detailing who issued the badge, and what skills the learner has acquired (evidence-based and verified).

- Learners can share the badge on their e-portfolios, websites, social networking profiles etc.
Open Badge - digital image with linked metadata

Open Badge Infrastructure (OBI) developed by Mozilla

- Acts as a validator between issuers and earners
- The infrastructure is open, not dependent on a specific operating system
- Anyone can set up an open badge management system and issue open badges
  - for example schools, companies, networks
- To manage and issue open badges in the pilot, Lahti UAS chose to utilize the cloud-based Open Badge Factory platform developed by Discendum Oy
Mozilla Backpack can be used by the earner to collect, manage and display open badges.

From the backpack, badges can be displayed in websites, e-portfolios etc.

Images: http://backpack.openbadges.org
Interactive Technology in Education (ITE) -conference is the largest conference in Finland related to information and communication technology in educational use. Conference is annual and it challenges professionals working in the educational and pedagogical field to network, share experiences and views about how to build new ways to support and develop learning.

During the three days conference there is workshops, forums, theme seminars, posters and exhibition. In the exhibition area is introduced the latest educational technology solutions, equipment, programmes and other contents related.

ITE2014 Speaker badge is awarded for a person who has given a presentation in ITE-conference.
The open badge concept is complex

- Open badges can take on a number of meanings depending on their implementation and function. In educational context, open badges can be seen as
  - a motivator for behaviour (related to gamification)
  - a pedagogical tool (promoting particular learning activities)
  - an alternative or supplement to traditional credentials such as diplomas
- The process of earning a badge is a form of feedback
  - well-designed badges can serve as signifiers of what knowledge and skills are valued

Ahn, Pellicone & Butler 2014
Piloting Open Badges in Lahti UAS

- Acknowledging learning and skills of students and staff members and finding new, more effective ways of making skills and informal learning visible
  - supplementing the existing credentialing system (not to create an overlapping system to the ones we already have, i.e. course credits)
  - to promote particular learning and as a motivator for behaviour
Involving students in the design process

- A graphic design student designed the templates for the digital images.
- Students studying in student-driven projects in M.Idea media center have been involved in the design process.
- A group of IT students made requirement specification for an open badge management system and compared different options for open badge management systems based on Mozilla’s Open Badges Infrastructure.
  - cloud-based Open Badge Factory platform was selected.
Career Planning Open Badge

- Issued in December 2014 to 14 international students who participated in a mentoring programme (in Get employed! –project)
- Developed the student’s competence in job search, knowledge of Finnish working life and professional networks and communication competence with work life mentors
- Competence which otherwise did not fit clearly into existing credentialing schemes
Planned open badges for students and staff

- A set of open badges to represent IT students’ project skills and understanding of different roles needed in IT projects
- Taking different roles in IT projects constitute lower level badges
- Lower level badges grouped together qualify for a higher-level 'Project Master' badge
- Recognizing and validating staff competence in strategically important areas of expertise
- Teachers who create Creative Commons - licensed open learning material
- Teachers acting as pedagogical mentors for colleagues
Conclusions

- Costs of implementing a badging system include not only the maintenance and administration of the open badge management system, but also time spent evaluating the quality of the learning and work qualifying for a badge.
- An open badge strategy is needed to build guiding principles for open badge creation and issuing in order to create a meaningful, consistent and sustainable badge system and badges that further relevant learning goals.
- Open Badges provide an opportunity for branding the university.
- Follow-up on the recipients of open badges is needed to examine the processes through which badges become used as credentials and how learners and other stakeholders experience badges.
Thank you!

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