Digital Badges: One Year of Stylized Growth

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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One great year of stylized growth through SSLA Digital Fluency Badges is nearing completion. SSLA (Saskatchewan School Library Association) challenged educators, particularly teacher librarians, to consider Digital Badges as an Essential Accessory, a style statement showcasing Digital Fluency learning.   Underlying the educator's need to learn were the skills students need to lead digital lives. Today's students are immersed in technology… communicating, socializing, accessing information, creating and producing digital content including music, videos and podcasts, and reading e-books. Thus, students need to be able to use technology readily, efficiently and strategically. They need to know how and when to use technology to construct knowledge, to collaborate, to communicate ideas and to create viable meaningful digital solutions to their authentic challenges.

The Launch

The official launch occurred in late fall, 2014 when a video introducing SSLA Digital Fluency Badges was sent to SSLA members and School Division contact personnel. Registration began in early November. Registration quickly expanded beyond teacher librarians. Over 100 teacher-librarians, teachers, library clerks, consultants, administrators, and public sector librarians are currently participating. Several educational and outside agencies recognized the value of this professional development opportunity and purchased institutional memberships, enabling interested personnel for their school division or agency to participate without additional cost.

The Learning

Recognizing that today's learning needs to occur in a myriad of formats and at varying places, SSLA's Digital Fluency Badges enabled participants to self-direct their learning. As Gabriel Diaz-Maggioli (2004) states when considering professional development, "teachers differ from one another in terms of their theoretical and professional knowledge and the stages they are at in their careers". SSLA digital fluency badges

incorporate her recommendations by embedding professional learning into daily instructional practices, while being flexible enough in choice to tailor learning to personal needs and motivations. Participants had over 60 digital tool and application tasks (which focused on developing digital age skills embodied in ISTE Standards) to select from as they worked on earning badges in the following six digital fluency areas:

- Career and Citizenship Fluency Champion
- Collaborative and Connected Fluency Crusader
- Creative and Innovative Fluency Campaigner
- Information Fluency Impresario
- Media Fluency Mover
- Solution Fluency Superstar

As Sawyer (2001) states, professional developers need to encourage participants to take the initiative in identifying and acting on their own individual needs. As such, in developing SSLA Digital Fluency Badges as a professional growth opportunity, SSLA focused on empowering participants to act upon their own needs and interests in their pursuit of professional growth. Participants investigated self-selected digital tools and applications, applied their learning purposefully by incorporating the digital tool or application into their teaching or professional practice and then submitting evidence of learning as stated in the task completion requirement.
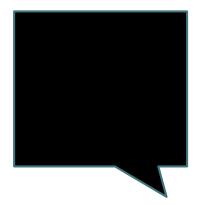
The Response to Learning

SSLA is very pleased with the positive response to the SSLA Digital Fluency Badging project. Through feedback provided in various formats including an on-line survey, participants indicated that they found the tasks and badges to be appropriate and relevant to their needs as educators, professionals and support personnel. Participants have stated,

There's lots to choose from, tools I can and will use from both current and tried-and-true standbys. Lots I hadn't

There's a great mix for both the new to technology person and those who are

The demos and explanations were very useful. It's easy to get around and find what you

I'm working on two more, hope to get them finished soon.

I loved doing this, the badges were interesting. I could work at my own pace.

This was great PD for me, I'm always looking for new tech tools and ideas to use.

The areas of task choice, navigation, site aesthetics and professional relevance all met with satisfied and highly satisfied responses. Thus far, the area that seems to be the most frustrating for our participants is the login process. Unfortunately, due to a piracy attempt during site development and the initial online access, we were put in the position of requiring participants create and login using a Credly account. This has resulted in a more time-consuming and sometimes confusing login process. We appreciate the feedback and are continuing to work with site development and maintenance to ensure speedy and efficient login procedures.

Creative and Practical Tasks! Participants are revisiting current practices and finding many new ways to use digital tools and applications to enhance teaching practices and

support student learning, as indicated by the popularity of tools and applications entered through task submissions. Padlet continues to be a popular tool for note-taking and brainstorming with large and small groups. Extension activities shared by badging participants include KWL activities, identifying thick and thin inquiry questions and using the notes to set criteria for further tasks. HaikuDeck, a tool for creating and sharing presentations, provides educators and students with quick access to Creative Commons licensed images to use when building short, simple but very attractive slide decks used to present information. Participants are accessing public domain images found at Pixabay to complete collages that support curriculum outcomes including sharing and learning in second languages. Digital citizenship skills are being embedded when teaching students about BibMe, a quick access citation tool. Visual representations are often a guiding factor in selecting a digital tool. Therefore, Piktochart, Canva, PicCollage, Skitch and ThingLink are popular digital tools used to support creative and innovative digital fluency skills. They are used in the planning and representing phases of learning, as well as for library and classroom promotion activities. As more participants are moving towards cloud-based services, DropBox and Google Drive provide opportunities for file-synchronization and collaboration with students and other professionals. Badging participants are curating digital collections for quick access by themselves and their students through EdShelf, Feedly and Diigo. Teacher Librarians are introducing themselves and their library by using Gamis created through Tellegami. To simplify scheduling, participants are finding Doodle a great digital tool. In conclusion, this brief sampling of the tasks submitted demonstrates the varied usage and interests of Digital Fluency Badge participants as they incorporate digital tools and applications into their professional practice to improve professional productivity, and, to support digital literacy and the students' ability to use technology to navigate, evaluate, and create information.

In celebration of the success and learning of SSLA Digital Fluency Badges participants, a "Badges and Beverages" evening was held in early June. Congratulations is extended to all who have participated in this project thus far and are enhancing their teaching practices and student learning by incorporating technology to improve student achievement. As excitement and task engagement continue to grow, we look forward to supporting professional growth through this project in the years ahead.

Moving Ahead With Badging: The Essential Style Accessory

Digital badges, the essential accessory for today's educators. As a statement of accomplishment and learning, SSLA is pleased to provide participants of Digital Fluency Badging a digital showcase of their growth as a professional. In order to support future growth, SSLA will continue to up-date tasks, and add new digital tools and applications to extend digital options. Style segments (videos detailing up-to-date coverage of technologies and instructional ideas) will feature digital tool or application tasks within specific Digital Fluency Badges. SSLA is committed to continuing to provide this professional learning opportunity which enables participants to earn digital badges through learning about technology tools and applications, and then applying the learnings to teaching or professional practices in order to deepen student understanding of learning outcomes. The digital badges will continue to be offered as an essential accessory, an online representation of learned skills as participants pave their personal learning pathways and master digital literacy skills embodied in the ISTE Standards and Saskatchewan's Technology in Education. SSLA will continue to provide participants with the option to choose the technologies that they need or are interested in, within this self-directed learning experience and in a time frame that is conducive to their schedule.

If you have not registered and are interested, please visit www.ssla.ca/Badges.

Sawyer R.D. (2001). Teacher decision making as a fulcrum for teacher development; exploring structures for growth. *Teacher Development*, 5(1), 39-58.

Diaz-Maggioli, Gabriel (2004). *Teacher-centered Professional Development*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.