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# DIVERSE LEARNING EXPERIENCES POWERED BY MICRO-CREDENTIALS

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# RECOGNIZING SOCIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

## Continual education is essential for *everyone* in *every* industry in the 21st century.

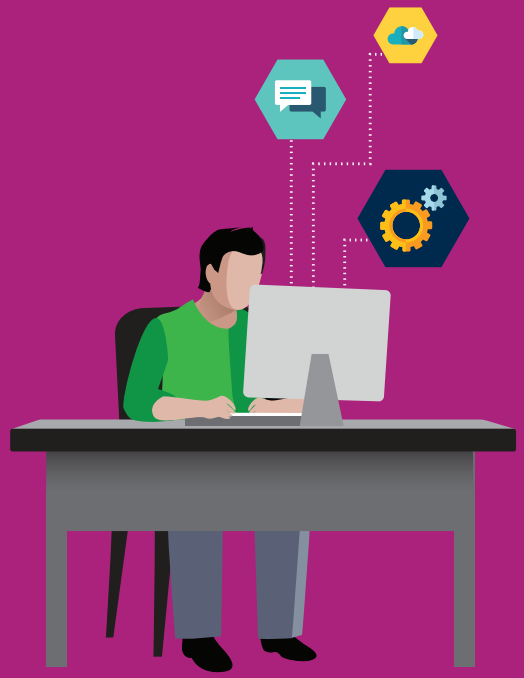
Educators regularly learn from one another. As learning expands beyond the classroom, it is essential to recognize specific competencies and expertise gained from professional learning communities, online courses and other innovative, education-oriented environments.

The most effective learning for educators **takes place within communities**, where teachers learn from and with other teachers. There is a desire for participants of professional learning communities (PLCs) and learning experiences (including **Edcamps**, online chats, conferences and workshops) to demonstrate and translate learning into actions that impact student outcomes. Micro-credentials are increasingly being used by teachers to take charge of their own learning to demonstrate diverse and informal professional learning experiences.

### EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES:

- Edcamps
- Conferences
- Online chats
- Workshops

Source: Booth and Kellogg



Educators can continue to add skills and competencies to their digital portfolios, increasing their value to current districts and other prospective employers. Micro-credentials are telling their professional learning story.

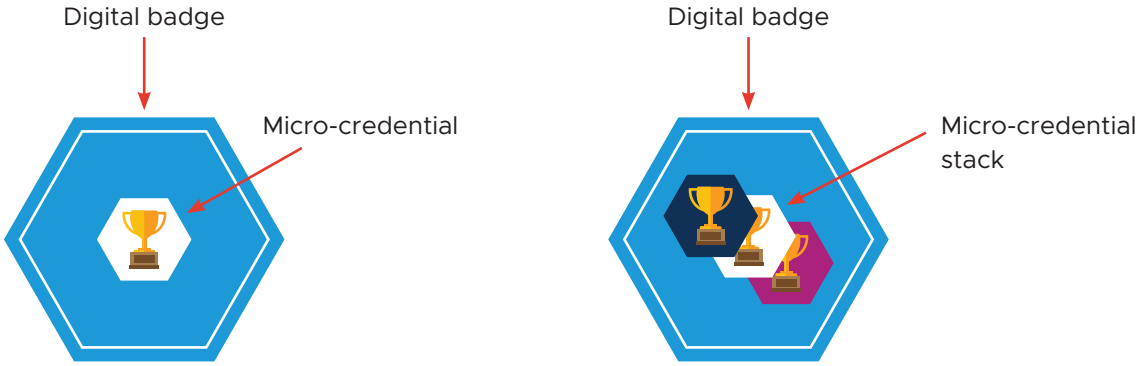
# UNPACKING MICRO-CREDENTIALS, DIGITAL BADGES AND OPEN BADGES

So how exactly are micro-credentials used today in professional development? What does the future hold? Before we answer these questions, let's unpack micro-credentials, digital badges and Open Badges.

## Micro-credentials are commonly confused with digital badges.

**Credential Engine Registry** defines micro-credentials as "a subset of field-specific knowledge, skills, or competencies; often developmental with relationships to other micro-credentials and field credentials." The evidence of continuous learning comes in many forms, and needs to be effectively contained, recognized and delivered to acknowledge educator practice. It can be, but does not necessarily need to be, issued as a digital badge.

According to the **Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory** (HASTAC), a digital badge is a validated indicator of an accomplishment, skill, quality or interest that can be earned in many learning environments. Digital badges offer a simple way to recognize online learning, both formal and informal. Think of a digital badge as not only a line on your resume noting a particular skill or competency, but also visual evidence documenting how that skill was obtained.



**Open Badges** are digital badges that allow for packaging and sharing evidence of learning, ultimately providing recognition. They provide the data structure that enables districts, schools and organizations to understand and recognize educators' diverse learning experiences. Much like digital photos that contain metadata like the location and date the photo was taken, Open Badges are digital images that contain metadata that represent the educators' learning experiences. These digital badges look like images and are shared online. The metadata inside make it possible for people and machines to understand educators' achievements.

Badges are an efficient technology used to issue micro-credentials. They are portable, shareable, and ultimately provide the most effective vehicle to display dynamic data demonstrating teacher knowledge and skills.

### EARN

Earn Open Badges for skills you learn online and in person.

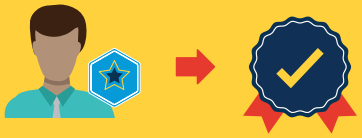
### ISSUE

Anyone can create and issue Open Badges to recognize the achievements of others.

### DISPLAY

Share your Open Badges as verifiable records of your learning.

### UNDERSTAND



Verify Open Badges and accept them as records of achievement.



Source: openbadges.org

# A CONTAINER OF SKILLS AND EXPERTISE

**Think of a badge as a shipping container.**

This 60-year-old invention transformed how food, goods and materials were distributed and exchanged throughout the world. Prior to shipping containers, goods were shipped on a pallet in any shape or form that would fit. This made the pallets difficult to stack, making it impossible for the shipping company to determine how many could fit on a boat.

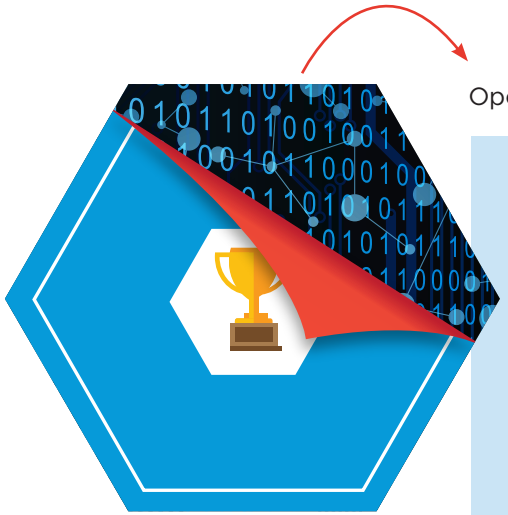
The invention of shipping containers made scalability a reality. The contents of any container, nearly limitless in variety, can be packaged, tracked, transported and delivered. The recipient can then see exactly what is in the container on a manifest posted on the outside of the container.

And, much like shipping containers, Open Badges offer a way to document, recognize and distribute educators' unique accomplishments and skills.

# OPEN BADGES AS MICRO-CREDENTIALS

While Open Badges can recognize varied learning experiences, micro-credentials are a popular use case. As a "container," a micro-credential can stand on its own or it can be stacked to link together learning experiences. Open Badges as micro-credentials are useful for this because the metadata within each of the micro-credentials can be related and referenced.

A digital badging system like Participate offers a holistic approach that supports teachers and their schools. It provides micro-credentials that demonstrate a focused competency (e.g., balanced literacy) or a micro-credential that demonstrates a larger subset of skills and competencies (e.g., dual language). An effective digital badging system can be the foundation of teacher-focused learning design and supports a shift to competency-based professional development.



Open Badge with metadata

Metadata includes:
- Badge name
- Badge image
- Badge description
- Badge criteria
- Earner's name
- Course title
- Issue date
- Issuer name
- Issuer description

**MICRO-CREDENTIAL:**
Credential that addresses a subset of field-specific knowledge, skills or competencies; often developmental with relationships to other micro-credentials and field credentials.

**DIGITAL BADGE:**
Digital recognition designed to be displayed as a marker of accomplishment, activity, achievement, skill, interest, association or identity that is shareable online.

**OPEN BADGES:**
A verifiable digital badge containing metadata in accordance with the Open Badges specification that recognize learning wherever it happens.

**METADATA:**
Data that describe and reference other data. With Open Badges this includes information such as issuer, recipient, date issued, description and criteria.

**Alamance-Burlington School System** in North Carolina developed a system to offer more than 200 blended courses throughout the 2017-18 school year, all designed and implemented by teachers for teachers. Using the Open Badge as "container" and portfolio, learning that happens in face-to-face, teacher-led workshops can now be captured digitally.

Teachers learn from their peers and earn micro-credentials after providing evidence of learning and reflection.

Teachers can also use each micro-credential to build a growing portfolio of learning. Nearly 200 micro-credentials were awarded at the first of three workshops.

## VISUAL SYMBOLS OF DIVERSE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

There is sometimes tension between an educator's desire to learn and the types of learning experiences school districts can recognize. In order to decrease this tension, outcomes of new forms of learning must be captured and packaged in ways that make it relatively simple for districts and organizations to recognize.

Millions of Open Badges have been issued by organizations, businesses and nonprofits around the world since 2010, with almost one million badges hosted by Mozilla Backpack alone.

In the past five years, districts and states have begun to issue micro-credentials in the form of Open Badges to support flexible and competency-based professional development. Micro-credentials **serve re-licensure needs** and offer more innovative ways to provide continuing education credits (CEUs). This allows teachers to concentrate on specific areas of need through personalized learning pathways, while providing districts and states a robust system to validate educator competencies.

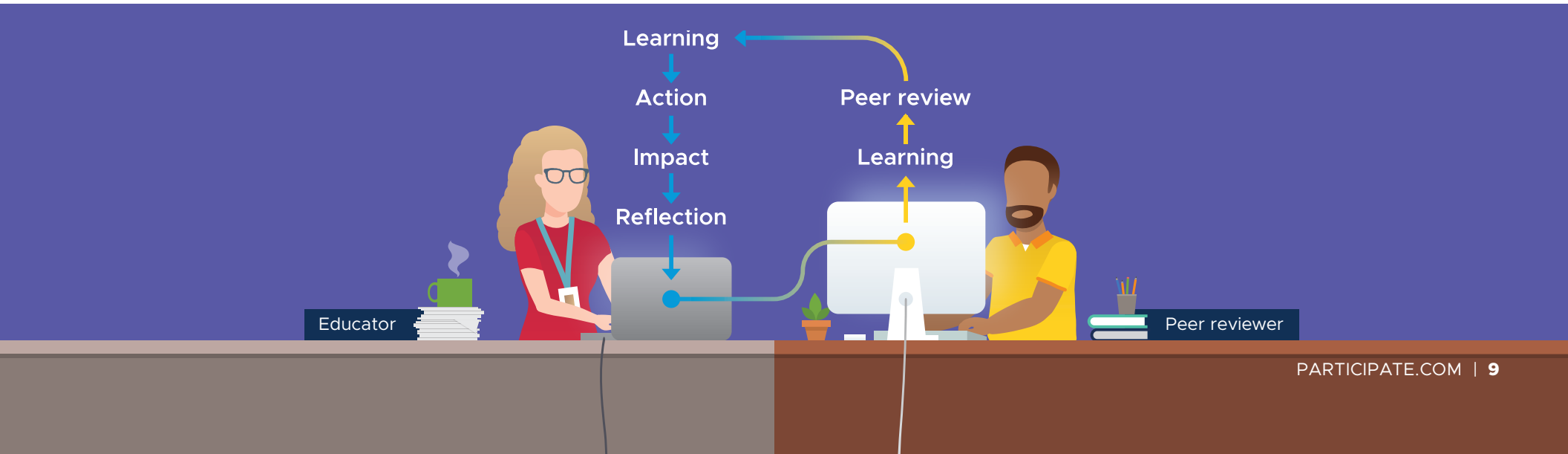
## EMPOWERING EDUCATORS TO REVIEW AND RECEIVE FEEDBACK FROM PEERS

One of the continuing challenges in the expansion of digital badging systems is trust. Who is validating the micro-credential? How do we know the evidence displayed in the metadata indicates a particular competency?

In some systems, a few experts are in place to review the work before the micro-credential is awarded. This is not always scalable or equitable. A peer review system is a simple way to build trust into the infrastructure, grant educators the power to drive their own learning, and ensure they are building the knowledge, attitudes and skills outlined in validated competency frameworks. The process of reviewing a peer's work is also a form of professional development.

**Participate's Certified Review program** empowers teachers as experts and places collaboration where it belongs—at the center of professional learning. Experienced educators are trained and work alongside their peers to offer feedback and support. The review process completes the full course cycle for teachers as they apply new concepts impacting their classroom practice, submit evidence of their learning, reflect on their experience and receive feedback from a trained peer reviewer before earning their micro-credential.

Participate's ultimate goal is to improve the experiences of teachers and to recognize and foster development of their expertise, classroom practices and impact on student learning.



Badges on the Participate platform are viewable, downloadable, shareable and printable, and are more dynamic in capturing and stacking diverse learning experiences.


Viewable


Downloadable


Shareable


Printable

## THE FUTURE OF MICRO-CREDENTIALS AS OPEN BADGES IN EDUCATION

**Open Badges 2.0** advances the current data structure to provide more detailed information about achievements. In Open Badges 1.0, the evidence shared through badge completion is limiting, only allowing one link to evidence.

The Open Badges 2.0 structure allows for a more comprehensive narrative of the learning experience the micro-credential represents.

This system makes assessment of educator work simpler and more streamlined, giving a more detailed picture of what an educator actually learned. As an example, Open Badges on the Participate platform are viewable, downloadable, shareable and printable, and are more dynamic in capturing and stacking diverse learning experiences.

While Participate has been an active supporter and issuer of Open Badges since the beginning, we recognize that the technical underpinnings, the specification and the understanding of how to use them are still growing. The ecosystem continues to evolve and thrive due to the need for a credential that captures and represents all types of learning.

# THE LANDSCAPE AHEAD

We are optimistic now that **IMS Global** has taken on the stewardship of the **specification**. Their experience in managing interoperable standards plays a significant role in the interconnectedness of learning platforms. Open Badges can help bridge diverse educational experiences if the specification remains open and continues to align with the needs of professional development and informal learning spaces.

The work on the specification and in Open Badges has been primarily focused on the issuing organizations and their earners, but not on the consumption of badges or the interplay between issuing, earning and consumption. The power of Open Badges is that they can be understood by any platform. This translates to teachers' ability to demonstrate competency and pursue additional professional opportunities regardless of district or platform where they were obtained. The real power lies in their ability to tell a teacher's story of a unique professional learning journey.
The next challenge is to ensure that teachers have easy and accessible ways to share that story with diverse audiences.

Currently, Open Badges can be shared across many platforms and networks. The **Mozilla Backpack** provides an example of a consumption application that understands and displays badges. **Digitalme** currently maintains this software, but also understands that the backpack **is not intended to be the keeper of all badges**. We are encouraged by their efforts to push beyond the backpack. We are also keeping a close eye on blockchain and decentralized technology projects like **Blockcerts**, **Open University** and the research being done by **BadgeChain** to push forward the thinking on the storage and consumption of Open Badges. Participate is also actively working with educators to better understand how they would like to share their accomplishments.

As technology continues to shape the future of education and learning experiences become increasingly diverse, micro-credentials as Open Badges offer unique ways to showcase educator skills and accomplishments outside classroom walls.

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## LEARN MORE

If you are interested in incorporating Open Badges and micro-credentials into your professional learning programs, contact us at **communities@participate.com or participate.com/contact**.