

Digital Badges for Professional Development: Supporting Library Personnel with the CLA School Library Standards

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The Canadian Library Association (CLA) published their innovative and much anticipated guide for school libraries in May 2014. This document, titled [Leading Learning](#), is a comprehensive guide that looks at various components of the school library and how to best move forward by evolving into dynamic Library Learning Commons (LLC). This publication is a godsend to anyone working in school libraries as it covers every facet of the library such as library design, collection development and collaboration with others. It also includes a variety of resources, links, templates and examples to help library personnel improve their school library and better support the 21st century learner. The various elements or categories to be addressed by library personnel are divided into five different learning standards. Then, within each standard, there are various components that contribute to the standard, which in turn helps the school library develop into a library learning commons. Please see an overview of the standards below (Figure 1).

Facilitating collaborative engagement to cultivate and empower a community of learners	Advancing the learning community to achieve school goals	Cultivating effective instructional design to co-plan, teach and assess learning	Fostering literacies to empower life-long learners	Designing learning environments to support participatory learning
Vision for Learning	Planning for School Improvement	Instructional Leadership	Literacy Leadership	Designing for a Collaborative Physical LLC
Design for Collaboration	Principal Collaborative Role	Instructional Partnerships	Engaging Readers	Designing for a Collaborative Virtual LLC
Partners in Collaborative Learning	Teacher-Librarian Collaborative Role	Engaging with Inquiry Approaches	Information Literacy	Designing for Accessibility in the LLC
Student and Community Partnerships	Teacher Collaborative Role	Differentiated Learning	Critical Literacy	Designing for Responsive Print and Digital Collections
School Administration Partnerships	Support Staff Collaborative Role	Technology for Learning	Digital Literacy and Citizenship	Designing for Creativity and Innovation
District Administration and Consultant Partnerships	District Administration and Consultant Collaborative Role	Assessment for, of and as Learning	Cultural Literacy	Designing for Participatory School Culture
		Evidence-Based Practice	Literacy Partners	

Figure 1 Canadian School Library Standards Overview (CLA, 2014)

Quebec School Libraries and the Quebec School Librarians Network (QSLiN)

School libraries in Quebec as well as the rest of Canada have experienced budget cuts over the past few decades. Often, this has resulted in a decrease in personnel or hours allocated by qualified staff. In many cases, individual Quebec school libraries are managed or run by volunteers. It should be noted though that, since 2008, Quebec Ministry of Education has had a librarian hiring grant initiative for librarians to be hired at the board level. This grant has allowed school boards that would not otherwise have the funding to employ a subsidized board librarian on staff to support various initiatives from managing school library staff to implementing literacy initiatives. That being said, some school boards employ library technicians or other staff members, part time or full time while others use volunteers to help manage the individual school libraries. Quebec school libraries range from quite large and updated libraries to travelling carts based on the size and location of the school. Given the diverse situations found at each school board and the added challenge of a being a geographically large province, it is important that we create programs, projects and initiatives that can meet the needs of all who work in and for school libraries.

In the English educational community of Quebec, there is a community-driven educational committee called the Quebec School Librarians Network ([QSLiN](#)) that is comprised of librarians from the nine English public school boards, and any English private school that wishes to participate, and Ministry of Education liaisons that meets approximately every six weeks to discuss ways that school libraries and their personnel can be supported in order to better contribute to the English educational community. This is a committee that arose from requests in the community to find better support for school libraries and in particular, information literacy and digital citizenship. Given the heavy workloads and limited hours that our library personnel are challenged with, a discussion arose about how we could facilitate the process of encouraging our school librarians and other staff and volunteers to take on the challenges of evolving the school library into library learning commons. As a committee, we wanted to find an innovative and easy way to support professional development in order to see our school libraries evolve. Subsequently at one of the meetings, the concept of an online professional development program was discussed and from there the idea of a digital badge program emerged.

Professional Development and Digital Badges

In order to be able to meet the needs of our school communities and remain relevant in this day and age, it is imperative that we as school library personnel, whether at the school or board level, make efforts to remain avant-garde and innovative. In order

to have others believe the school library is the heart of the school then we need to make efforts to ensure that this is the case. Professional development provides opportunities for lifelong learning that can inform and teach us how to do this. As school library staff we are strategically positioned to make a difference in the school dynamic. According to Marge Cox (2015), "As school library professionals, we have the wonderful opportunity to work with the entire staff. This circumstance provides us with the chance to get to know them better than most of the other staff members do. We can help set the tone for the school." (para. 5).

Opportunities for professional development have evolved significantly over the years from only having access to annual regional conferences to including smaller less formal gatherings more often. More recently, additional opportunities have emerged with the advent of online learning such as podcasts, webinars, MOOCs, blogs and wikis (Cox, 2015). Two of the greatest barriers to receiving professional development is time and money (Bellardo-Hahn & Lester, 2012). Creating opportunities for professional development that are economical (or free) and flexible can potentially increase the number of participants seeking new professional learning opportunities. Online learning programs such as digital badges fills this need.

Digital badges as a way to display one's accomplishments emerged in the mid 2000's, but remained relatively unheard of until The [Mozilla Foundation](#) and [Peer 2 Peer University](#) published a [white paper](#) discussing the merits of digital badges. Since then, digital badges have become more pervasive and can be found as a means to display accomplishments online from university courses to travel reviews such as on Tripadvisor. Digital badges offer a unique way to learn or improve new skills or competencies often in an interactive and dynamic way. They allow achievers to be acknowledged for a variety of skills or interests that may not be recognized in a more formal setting or are simply not job-specific (Jovanovic & Devedzic, 2014). Digital badges use elements of gamification to motivate learners by offering choice, decision-making opportunities, immediate feedback, and levelling up as one progresses. It also presents opportunities for community interaction. Digital badges contain a significant amount of metadata that allow others to see important facts such as what type of accomplishment was achieved, how they earned it and who issued the badge (Jovanovic & Devedzic, 2014). According to the Harvard Business Review, digital badges will continue to play a significant role in the future of accreditation (Schrage, 2012). Schrage continues to state that "The ability to measure and assess real learning and skills acquisition in virtual environments" will allow online education to excel (Schrage, 2012, para. 5).

This paper discusses the process by which [QSLiN](#) undertook to incorporate digital badges as a component of our professional development initiatives and desire to see our school libraries evolve and remain relevant. This is the first phase of a pilot project that will allow us to assess the success of our initiative and make any necessary changes before we begin to incorporate the badges into other areas of library professional development.

Part 2

Process

Our working team of three started by reading and analysing the CLA Standards and pulling out the key points and how they might be measurable. After much discussion, these key components were established. Research was then done to find a variety of content that would meet the needs of different types of learners. Once the content was gathered, edited and created, it then had to be arranged in a cohesive manner that made sense, created flow, remained interesting, and was not overwhelming. Once this was accomplished, the platform and badge program to be used had to be established.

Infrastructure

We decided to use [WordPress](#) and the [Credly](#) BadgeOS plugin that allowed us to build a badge program directly on a WordPress site. The [QSLiN](#) website already uses [WordPress](#) so this was a natural fit. Our familiarity with [WordPress](#) as well as the cost factor made this a relatively easy choice. We did look at other options, but felt that our comfort with WordPress would allow us to develop the site and program quicker, reducing labour hours, and create a better quality product due to our previous knowledge. In the end, instead of creating a completely independent site, the badge program is a separate component but still a part of the QSLiN website (<http://qslin.org/digital-badging/>). WordPress also allows for community interaction - participants are allowed to share their accomplishments on the site as well as via social media. As well, when participants submit for higher-level badges (silver and gold), they can do so publicly and allow for comments, feedback and discussions to follow. By using their own free Credly account, participants can also share and demonstrate their skills to a larger global audience along with any other badge they have achieved using the Credly badge platform.

Framework

A framework for the badges was drawn up and revisited numerous times to ensure that the structure continued to make sense and did not appear too unwieldy. As well, the content for each badge was scrutinized to look for overlap and repetitiveness. It was also important to continuously verify that the content maintain the same purpose and ultimate goal of educating library staff to understand what a library learning commons is and what they could do in their day-to-day practice in order to improve their school libraries. While developing the badges, there were many questions that had to be asked such as:

- How does one achieve the badges (what activity, quiz, submission)?
- Is the badge to be automatically awarded or does it have to go to a moderator who then credits the participant? If so, who will issue the badges?
- What information do we need from participants and how can we assure their privacy?
- When a badge requires more than just a quiz or online activity, how will participants submit?
- As the site grows, how will we deal with traffic and storage issues?

We made efforts to answer all these questions and many more in order to deliver a quality user-friendly program.

Essentially, it was decided that each of the five CLA standards would be broken down into their categories. Within each category a participant has the opportunity to achieve a bronze, silver, and gold level badge. Where possible, badge categories were merged in order to simplify the process from both the developer's and the participant's perspective. We wanted each level to emulate the notions presented in the Leading Learning guide of exploration, emerging, evolving, established and leading. It was decided that all bronze level badges were to be approached as an exploration of the concepts to be learned. Therefore, material is presented in a variety of dynamic ways such as interactive videos, Prezis, articles, and forms. Once the content has been explored, a short quiz is taken and a badge is automatically achieved if all answers are correct. For silver level badges, it was decided that it is important to see the concepts and skills applied in some way. For the gold level badges, we decided that the participants should demonstrate how they have been incorporating the concepts for some time and provide evidence of change. Presently, all bronze and silver levels are complete and attainable; gold level badges have been created but will only be uploaded in early 2016. See Figures 2 and 3 for the mock-ups and images for the framework.

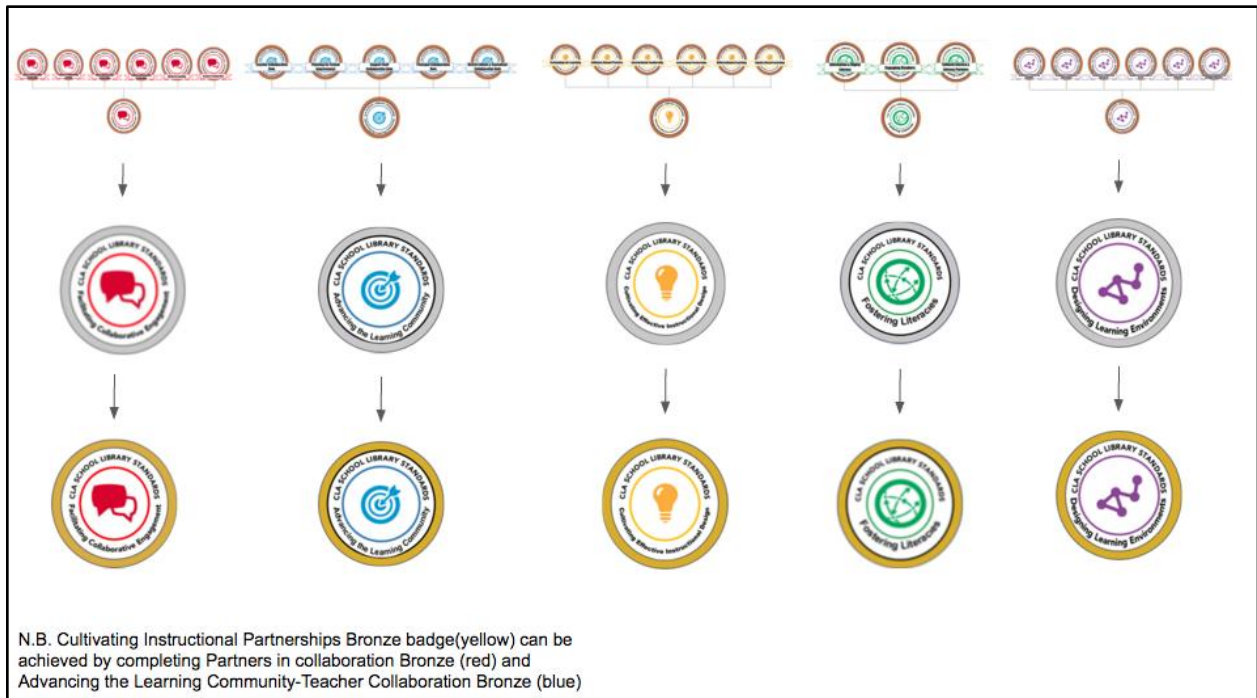


Figure 2 CLA Standards Badge Constellation

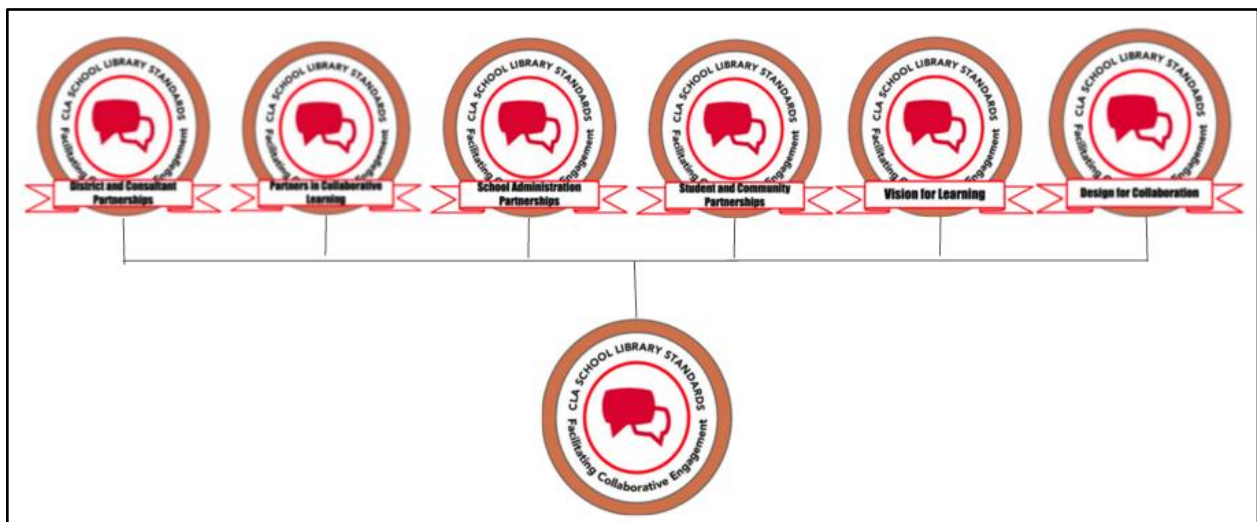


Figure 3 Facilitating Collaborative Engagement (Red) Badge Map

Validation

Once the badges and content were created, gathered, edited, arranged and uploaded, the beta-site was presented to the QSLiN committee for validation. Members went through the process of achieving badges and provided feedback on their

experience. This feedback was then used to tweak the site. As participants begin to use the site, we will regularly seek and welcome feedback to help in creating a product that truly meets the needs of the Quebec and Canadian school library community. The digital badge professional development program was officially launched at the [Congres des milieux des documentaires](#), a Montreal based library super conference for all Quebec library associations, which was held on November 19th, 2015.

Future Considerations

As we continue to make improvements to both the content and design of the badge program, we have also discussed next steps as well as where the initiative should go:

Similar to online webinars or in-person workshops that provide certificates, we would like to petition various library associations and educational institutions to provide a “seal of approval” in order to add greater credence and acknowledgement to the badge program. We feel that this will add greater value to the work and efforts made by participants and encourage participants to engage in a worthwhile initiative.

As we continue to analyze user statistics and feedback, we regularly discuss ways that the program might be improved and added to. For the second phase of this pilot project, we would like to add new related badges that users can earn for deeper exploration and sharing of the various elements within the Library Learning Commons. These can be Quebec-specific badges (each Canadian province having their own education program), or it may be a technology specific badge that would increase the possibility of improving their library.

We would also like to see greater inter-provincial collaboration between associations or school libraries whether on an individual or board/district basis. As each province has unique needs and circumstances, we would like to work with other provinces to help develop badges that meet their specific needs as well. We would like to see this program used nation-wide as we continue to advocate for school libraries and persevere at bringing school libraries to the forefront of education.

While the badge program does not replace the original CLA publication, it does greatly enhance its ability to help guide school libraries forward. Our hope is that it provides an accessible and dynamic way to educate librarians and contributes towards the future of librarianship in the educational community.

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Bios

Sandra Bebbington, MIS



Sandra is the team leader at the Quebec Ministry of Education-DSCA for Digital Citizenship, Information Literacy & School Libraries. Sandra and her team supports the English educational community with the implementation and integration of digital citizenship and information literacy. They also help support school libraries in the QC English educational community in a variety of ways. Having created two online toolkits (www.theinquiryprocess.ca www.digitalcitizenshipquebec.ca) for educators , students and families, her team is now working on two digital badging sites: one for the teaching and learning of digital citizenship and another for school library professional development. Sandra has spent many years working in both school and public libraries;

she wrote her thesis on teen gamers and information literacy. She has been published in the Journal of Information Literacy and she has also taught information literacy and critical thinking at Bishop's University.

Ellen Goldfinch, MLIS



Ellen Goldfinch is a school librarian consultant and freelance writer living in Baldwin's Mills, Quebec. She was Head Librarian at Bishop's College School for 18 years, and school board librarian for the Eastern Townships School Board for two years. She currently does consulting work for the Information Literacy Project, DSCA-MEESR in such areas as School Libraries, PD Badging, and Information Literacy. Her articles have appeared in Library Media Connection and The Book Report.

Julian Taylor, MLIS



Julian has been working in education for over 15 years, primarily as a librarian. He has worked also as a teacher, coordinator, and as a member of the Pedagogical Services Dept in the English Montreal School Board and is currently working at the Quebec Ministry of Education-DSCA on Digital Citizenship, Information Literacy, & School Libraries. Many of his duties in recent years have focused on PD design and presenting to teachers, administrators, and library personnel about online information searching & validation, digital citizenship, and self-directed PD. He has also co-created two different PD badging websites and is responsible for the technical/programming and content creation/addition for both.