

# How can digital badges help us to keep track of non-formal learning?

All around us we hear people talk about how education should try to adapt itself better to the needs of our ever-changing society. And I do agree that we need to alter the way we look at education. By [Nicole Verhoeve](#)

The speed with which the world and therefore the economy changes is at times mind-boggling. Government wants schools to focus on world citizenship, in an attempt to stop polarization of our society.

Businesses want schools to focus more on skills and attitude because the jobs they are now offering will have changed tremendously in a few years.

Schools realize that formal learning alone does not provide all that their students are going to require in the future.

So how can we incorporate skills and attitude, world citizenship and 21st-century skills into our curriculum in a way that works for all stakeholders?

As a Brainport school located in the heart of the Brainport region, we prioritize connection to tertiary education and job opportunities in that region. Local governments, education and employers have joined forces to come up with a mission for internationalization in education. Working in the Brainport region demands an open attitude to people from other countries.

The workforce available here is simply not enough to fill up all the job openings at the big international companies like ASML, Vanderlande, etc. That results in a mix of cultures in the workplace, which demands an open attitude from its employees to other cultures.

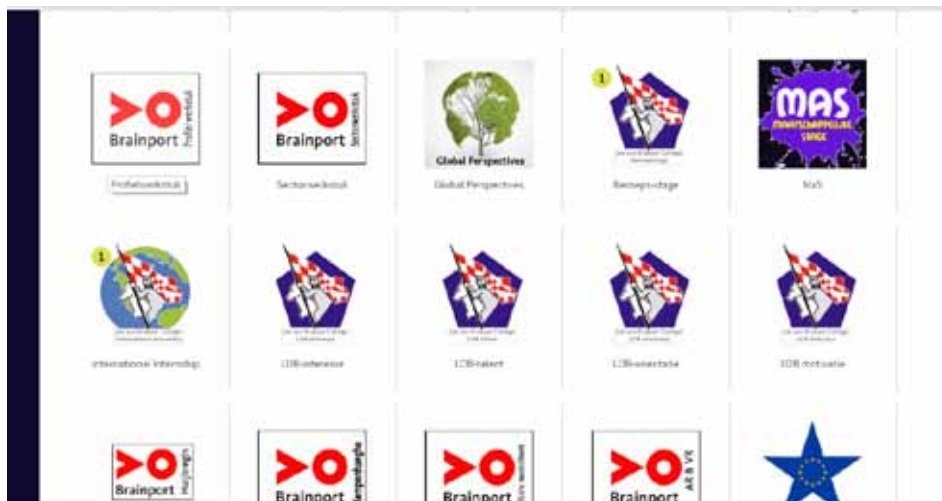
How can we train our children to become interculturally competent, and more so, how can we teach them in a way so they can prove that they are? Soft skills are difficult to showcase so we need to come up with a solution in order to help our students and teachers.

Being a bilingual school, we are used to paying attention in our curriculum to intercultural competences that form the bases of the CFEC scheme. But we also notice that this CFEC hasn't inspired the students to work on developing their skills or reflect on their attitude.

Neither did the cando-statements stimulate our teachers to adapt their curriculum to allow students to work on their skills and attitude.

The eio-numbers even troubled the teachers; they felt they would drown in them. Through a Key action 2 project called Go2b, we developed a way to use badges as a method to validate non-formal learning.

For that, we revisited the underlying intercultural competences of CFEC and decided which of these competences were of importance to our students. Selecting those, we



paid attention to include all the items that are necessary to a bilingual school.

All the extra-curricular activities that we invest so much of our time in need to be scrutinized for whether they in fact do give our students the opportunity to grow in their intercultural competences.

That forces our teachers to revisit programmes and check whether they have incorporated enough learning opportunities for our students to show growth in their skill-set and attitude.

We decided that for all exchanges there should be a similar set-up. This set-up consists of three phases in time:

- a preparatory phase
- an in-exchange phase, and
- a spin-off phase.

Each phase in turn consists out of four areas:

- knowledge
- skills
- attitude, and
- cultural self-awareness.

This underlying structure makes it easier for our teachers to write a programme that is part of the curriculum (preparatory phase), shows the value of the trip (by allowing their child to participate in an exchange, parents

invest in their child's education) and pays attention to the learning outcomes (spin-off phase).

The fact that each badge has a pathway of five tasks helps the teacher to become more aware of the learning opportunities that can be incorporated in each activity that is organized.

The students are taught to reflect on and take more ownership of their personal learning. Uploading evidence to prove their growth in attitude or skills helps them to discuss their personal progress with their teachers and parents. Their evidence can take many shapes and forms: written documents, interviews, photos and film. The tasks stipulate the learning outcomes to the students and still leave them with the autonomy to reach those goals in their own way.

They choose how to evidence their learning. They are owner of their badge. Obviously, after having worked on the development of an exchange badge, we now try to badge other skills such as digital skills, presenting skills, leadership skills, communication skills, etc. The students are encouraged to think about what they have learned and that differs from person to person. Companies want employees who are able to reflect on their learning and growth, so we need to teach our students how to do that, one step at a time.

Working with digital credentialing through a digital badge seems to us a sensible and

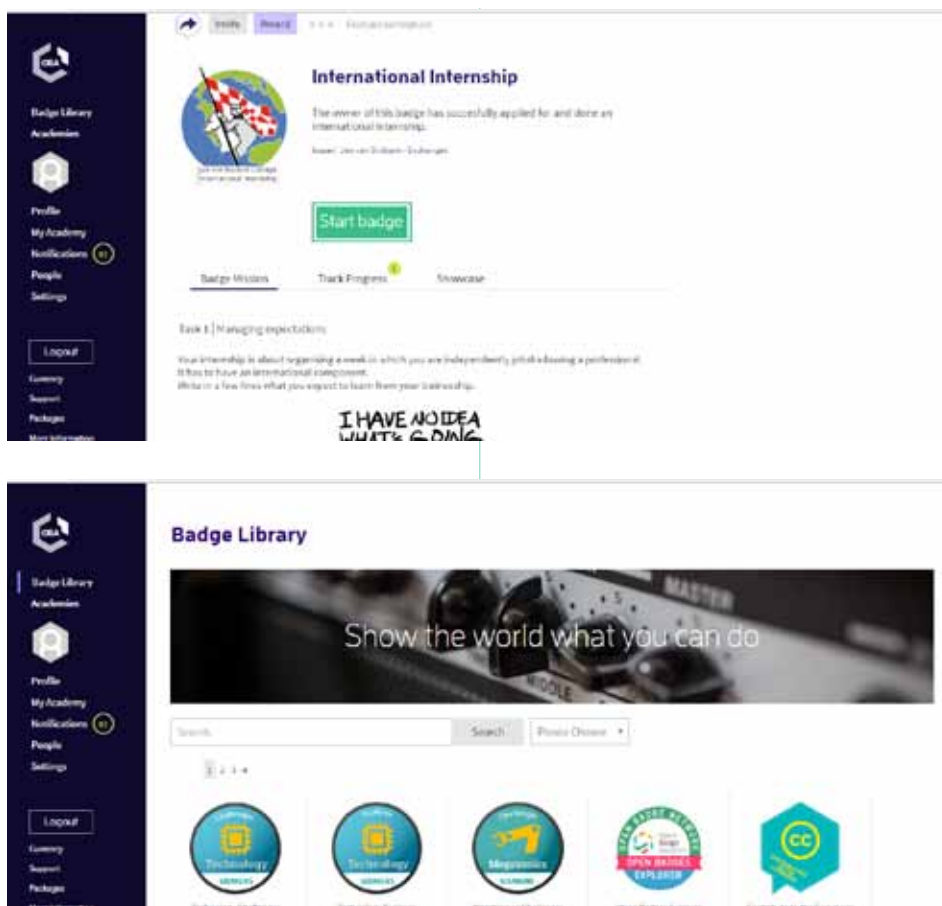
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convenient way to capture non-formal learning. Multiple companies are already keeping track of their personnel's professional development through badges, so why not use badges as the building blocks for a digital portfolio that is free and owned by the student? There is an increasing need for a digital portfolio, preferably one that is transferable from secondary to tertiary education, and afterwards to employment.

A diploma and grades offer companies or educational institutions only a partial insight into who the candidate is and that is no longer sufficient. A plus-document states facts of participation in for instance a student's council or a role as tutor but does not provide evidence what was learned from the experience. Soft skills and 21st-century skills are included more and more often as predictors for future success. In this global market, we need to help our students to showcase themselves.

A lot of digital portfolios are available but we decided to badge the growth in skills and attitude instead. Connecting with companies, we discovered that long travel logs of exchanges will not be read by HR managers or recruitment officers. They want to find out quickly whether someone is capable. They are more interested in learning outcomes than in day-to-day descriptions of activities. Badges incorporate the data that they need, quickly and easily.

Our school has its own badge academy that we can stock with badges fitted to our school's vision. We have to pay a small annual fee but



we can enroll all our students and develop as many badges as we want. Because the academy is part of Open Badge platform, ambitious students can also work on badges that are featured in the public library. After graduating, they can take all their digital badges with them without having to pay.

Working with badges is our school's way to adapt to future opportunities. This way we can do justice to all the hard work our teachers put into developing a curriculum that is befitting a school in the 21st century. We can

keep track of the progress in soft skills without spending too much money or time. To us, it is a convenient instrument for our students to use, for our teachers to work with, for our parents to keep track of their teenagers' development and for future employers to quickly see what the added bonus is of hiring one of our students.

If you are interested in badging or whether badging is a method that would fit your organization, you can contact me, Nicole Verhoeve, at [n.verhoeve@janvanbrabant.nl](mailto:n.verhoeve@janvanbrabant.nl)



My name is **Nicole Verhoeve** and I am the head of the bilingual department havo and vwo at the Jan van Brabant College. In addition to my management position I teach IB English. Currently I am coordinating the Go2B Erasmus project together with Hans Vasse. The two of us are also responsible for the exchange programme with Mumbai, India and Sidoarjo, Indonesia. I promote internationalization in education within the Brainport region.