

Badging has potential to help teachers achieve teaching goals

Applying the concept of 'badging', as used by such social media sites as Trip Advisor and Fit Bit, could potentially catalyse a professionalism revolution in the South African teaching industry.



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Riaan Jonck, CEO of Pearson Education South Africa, says, “In South Africa, the teaching industry is struggling to tackle challenges relating to motivation, recognition and support, poor working conditions, pay and a perceived lack of growth opportunities and resources. The upshot is that students end up failing and teachers become disheartened and leave the industry. It is worth mentioning that these challenges are not just confined to South Africa but play out all over the world.”

Traditionally, badging has been associated with groups such as the Boy Scouts where badges are awarded for completing certain tasks or for being proficient at certain activities. Social media companies work according to a similar premise. Those who engage with their portals or programmes earn points via certain activities in order to earn badges, which gain in significance the more a person participates.

In most cases, the activity and badges can be viewed by an associated community, which can interact and/ or compete with the participant. The activities and achievements can also be shared via other social media platforms such as Facebook, thereby engaging greater social interaction and recognition.

Jonck explains that badging in an industry such as teaching could be achieved through activities such as attending workshops, conferences, research, courses, community work, reaching time related career goals or volunteering. When a teacher has completed a specific activity or task, he or she would be awarded points and earn badges.

“Over time, a number of smaller badges could be used to earn a bigger badge which could possibly equate to a qualification. Teachers would in turn earn the respect of their peers and employers and possibly be entitled to higher pay, both of which are strong incentives in their own right.”

He hypothesises that the badging concept could even be taken a step further and conceivably be used to achieve and maintain a teaching ‘licence’. Teachers would be expected to earn certain badges every year, failing which they would risk slipping down the ‘rankings’.

Although this aspect of such a system would initially probably be viewed as a threat, over time it would certainly professionalise the industry and probably go a long way towards making it more prestigious, which is what many industry stakeholders want.

Jonck explains that a badging system could also act as a community platform for interaction with other teachers and educational professionals who could provide much needed support and guidance. It could be argued that teachers that are encouraged and guided in this fashion stand a far greater chance of staying in the system and becoming lifelong learners themselves.

Interestingly, badging taps into the ‘gamification’ trend which has been used by many industries seeking a fun and interactive way in which to engage with their audience. A fun, game-like platform would probably be viewed as non-threatening and entice more teachers to sign up.

“In a nutshell, badging has the potential to help teachers achieve their teaching goals and expand their career on an ongoing basis, thereby fostering an environment for lifelong learning and professionalism. Importantly, it could provide more teachers with the tools to teach effectively and therefore improve the chances of students achieving their goals.”

At this stage, such a system is purely theoretical, although frameworks such as that supported by ‘Educause’ in America do exist.

“There are a number of industry experts who are lobbying for such a system, as the benefits far outweigh the negatives. Ultimately it will take political willpower and industry buy-in for something along these lines to really take root and bear fruit,” concludes Jonck.

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