David
NIGUIDULA

DEMONSTRATING STUDENT MASTERY

with Digital Badges and Portfolios

Foreword by
HEIDI HAYES JACOBS

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DEMONSTRATING STUDENT MASTERY

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Foreword

With perfect timing, *Demonstrating Student Mastery with Digital Badges and Portfolios* has arrived to assist the burgeoning number of educators standing at the intersection of personalized learning and digital documentation. Throughout the nation and world, teachers and administrators are searching for meaningful ways to collect exemplars of student learning and provide responsive feedback. More importantly, questions are emerging about how to involve students in collecting these meaningful artifacts, reflecting on what they reveal, and taking action to propel their learning journey. Certainly, there are and have been many outstanding professionals engaged in determining the best way to select and compile portfolio collections over the years. There is in my view, however, one educator who stands out as the pioneer and the most knowledgeable person I know in the field of digital portfolios design: Dr. David Niguidula. As a visionary in his initial work at Brown University with Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools in the 1980s, David saw the power of integrating digital sharing with its immediate access and ease of compilation with the incentive to have students "own" their learning and monitor their pathway to mastery.

With his technology know-how and pedagogical understanding, David was ready to respond when the Rhode Island Department of Education determined that it would require a digital portfolio of learners as a graduation requirement. David and his organization stepped up by creating an online platform, Richer Picture, to engage school faculties with learners to begin to build a body of work reflecting each child's journey. The platform has been and continues to be an active presence throughout the nation and overseas

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as an easy to navigate yet sophisticated model for engaging whole schools and systems. The range of the platform's use and the years behind its development have in turn provided David with exceptionally unique experience that backs up the strategies and insights he shares in the book. He truly knows how to engage professionals in co-creating with their students a vibrant collection of work that authentically shows the learner's journey.

I recall seeing a Rhode Island 1st grader, Carlene, working hard reading through a short story, demonstrating her ability to sound out words in the story. Recently David shared Carlene's graduation portfolio where she was presenting a TED-style talk about what makes a "true" education. Rhode Island was the beginning, but David has uncovered best practices, having worked with thousands of educators, observing the nuances of motivation and the power of feedback for learners of all ages.

David's work has had and continues to have a significant influence in my professional life. He has been a trusted colleague in my work on curriculum mapping that supports big picture vertical and cross-grade level connections in K–12 using electronic platforms. Portfolio reviews are instrumental in considering how to inform curriculum maps with evidence of student work in order to address gaps in planning. What's more, we share a commitment to modernizing choices for curriculum and assessment to meet the needs of today's learners. Our young students know what century they are living in and do not wish to be time traveling backward when they enter a school building. Given the active and prominent role of students in David's badge and portfolio selection process, there is a constant opportunity to rethink curricular and assessment choices to craft them as contemporary.

With these years and years of experience, David has written the exceptional book in your hands (or on your screen) to assist you and your colleagues at all levels wishing to launch a digital portfolio program that has fidelity to the learner. He has shaped power in the digital portfolio as a place not only to collect evidence of how students are growing and meeting challenges but most importantly to "show who the student is as an individual learner." The integrity of his work is evident throughout the book. David is sincerely committed to documenting the authentic journey of our learners.

The title, *Demonstrating Student Mastery with Digital Badges and Portfolios,* goes straight to the fundamental purpose of the book: Human beings need feedback to monitor learning. To know if we are moving toward mastery of proficiencies and knowledge that are of importance to us, we need clear striking signals. Hence the focus on badges is central to involving

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students directly in stepping back and reflecting on their learning journey. Given school settings where they move year to year under the care of many teachers, the need for portfolio collections is utterly essential to see the big picture.

Perhaps the timeliest outcome of the book is how it operationalizes *personalized learning,* which has become a desired goal but often meanders in definitions and vagueness when it comes time for implementation. What David has developed is a process of genuinely engaging student *voice* in the *choice* of setting goals, selecting work, receiving feedback, earning badges, and setting new targets. We are fortunate to have the practical and inspirational *Demonstrating Student Mastery with Digital Badges and Portfolios* to guide creative educators on how to launch and sustain efforts to help our learners navigate their futures.

—Heidi Hayes Jacobs

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1

Setting the Vision

What does mastery look like?

What can portfolios tell us about students as learners and as individuals?

On a day in June, a 9th grader named Amanda sat down with two teachers for her end-of-year review. Ms. C had been Amanda's social studies teacher. Mr. G didn't know Amanda because his science classes were typically taken by 10th and 11th graders. These two were teamed together because they came from different grade levels and departments and could provide different perspectives, but the school guaranteed that each student would have a familiar face on the review team. After everyone settled in, Ms. C asked Amanda to log in and open her digital portfolio.

On the opening screen, displayed in Figure 1.1, the teachers could see Amanda's progress shown as a set of digital badges.

At Amanda's school, the badges are divided into two categories. The top row lists the schoolwide badges; these represent the competencies that every student should master. On her first day of school, Amanda learned about her school's vision for what it would mean to graduate—what every student who walks across the stage should know and be able to do. Whenever Amanda or any of her classmates open their portfolios, they see the badges that represent the school's competencies—that is, the specific academic, social, and career-readiness goals that every graduate should possess. Each student uses the digital portfolio to document his or her progress toward that vision.

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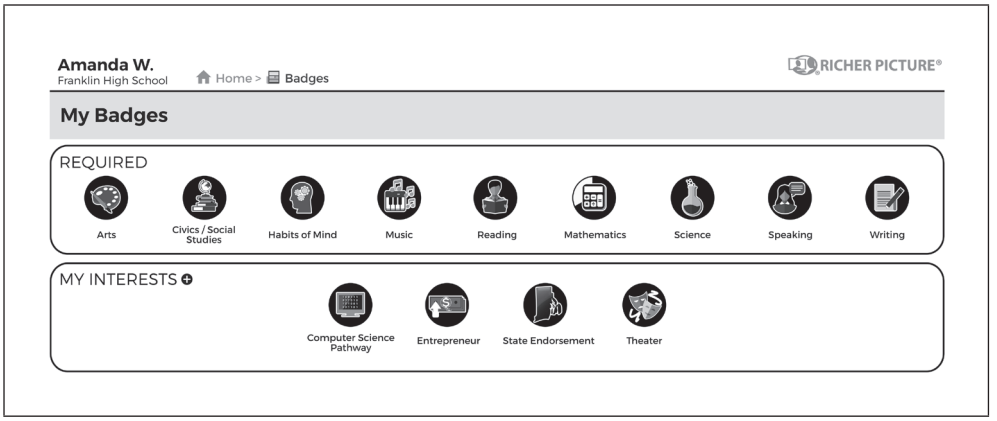
FIGURE 1.1 | **Amanda's Badges**



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The bottom row of badges represents how Amanda personalizes her education. These badges represent the pursuit of her particular interests: Amanda is in the process of completing the school's pathway in computer science, and she has participated in after-school activities for entrepreneurship and theater. She is also pursuing a state endorsement in BiLiteracy, meaning she needs to demonstrate proficiency in two languages; her state has defined several endorsements that can be attached to a student's diploma if the student completes specific requirements in an academic, career, or technical field. The badges in this row come from both elective courses that Amanda selects and the activities that Amanda participates in (both in and out of school). Although every student at Amanda's school has the same top row, each student will have a different combination of badges in the bottom row.

Throughout the year, Amanda added work to her portfolio; most of it was from her class assignments and projects, but some was from outside class. Each piece of work she added was connected to one or more of the school's competencies. If the work was approved by a teacher, then it could count as a step toward earning the badge. Some badges have detailed requirements. For example, to earn the writing badge, every student needs to submit samples of persuasive, narrative, and reflective essays. The requirements for other badges might have choices built in; to earn the arts badge, Amanda could choose to complete the requirements in music, theater, or visual arts.

At this point, we can see that Amanda has completed many of her badges at the bronze level for this year because the badge is entirely filled in. (In

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this case, the bronze category refers to an introductory level of competency.) Notice, though, that the math badge is only partially filled in, indicating that the work is still in progress.

As Ms. C and Mr. G looked at the badges, they talked with Amanda about her overall progress: What did she find hard? What was she most proud of? Then they turned from the general to the specific.

Since September, Amanda had added two or three entries from each of her classes, meaning she had more than a dozen entries from the year. For this session, however, Amanda selected four particular entries that she wanted to share with Ms. C and Mr. G. As she brought each piece of work to the screen—a short story from English, a complex algebra problem, a civics project looking at voting patterns, a portrait of her brother—she explained why she thought these pieces were her best pieces from the year. The teachers prompted her occasionally, asking about how a particular entry connected to the school's expectations or asking her to provide more detail about a given assignment. For the most part, though, the teachers just let Amanda talk. A soft-spoken student, Amanda began by talking more to the screen than to the teachers. But by the end of the session—just 15 minutes later—she was looking directly at the teachers and describing her overall sense of what she had accomplished this year.

At another school, Robert, a 12th grader, was preparing his own presentation. He had just finished spending eight months working on his senior year capstone project. His panel included two teachers, the assistant principal, and a community member (who had been a mentor to other students' capstones). His project focused on environmental issues—specifically, how the shrimp and shellfish population near his New England community had been devastated in recent years.

During his presentation, Robert described how he had found a local researcher who was studying how to repopulate the shellfish breeding grounds. He projected pictures from his portfolio that showed him on the beach with the research team, learning how to identify and count the spawning generations; he also had prepared graphs and charts that showed the change in the shellfish population over time and what the researchers hoped to accomplish in the future. When he was done, the teachers asked him some detailed questions about the work, about the research paper he had written, and about what he believed was his "learning stretch."

In a third location, a younger student, Sasha, was getting ready for her student-led conference. As a 5th grader, she had done this before; her parents

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and her teacher were sitting together before a laptop at her desk. Sasha started by talking about the work that displayed her strength as a learner. She ran a video from math class that showed her standing at a whiteboard, describing a word problem. As the clip played on the computer, the group watched Sasha identify the most important information, come up with an equation, and generate the answer. The teacher noted that Sasha's entry was a part of the "problem-solving" badge. (Although Sasha's entry for that badge had focused on fractions, other students had earned the badge by explaining how to find the lowest common denominator or how to create different graphs from weather data to test a hypothesis.) Next, Sasha talked about the work that made her proud, a piece of writing that had required several drafts before she was happy with it. She was able to pull up her previous writing and note the differences between what she had done before and what she was doing now.

A Better Conversation

Digital portfolios and badges are a means to an end. The end, in this case, is the kind of conversation that all three of these students had with their teachers and parents. Consider Amanda's discussion with Ms. C and Mr. G. For 15 minutes, this 9th grader was the center of attention. She had the chance to talk about her accomplishments with teachers whose job at that moment was to help her reflect on her skills. The questions before the teachers were general ones that all schools care about: Is this student meeting our expectations? Is she on track to move to 10th grade and on to graduation?

For this session, however, the question was about one specific student: Is *Amanda* meeting our expectations? When the question is personalized—when the student is sitting face to face with a teacher—the question about meeting standards and mastery moves from an anonymous yes/no judgment to a conversation about how to help Amanda advance to the next level. This is the end this school has in mind: allowing Amanda to receive specific, personalized feedback about her work and concrete suggestions about how she can move forward.

Not incidentally, this approach uses technology, specifically, digital badges and portfolios. Our work in digital portfolios extends back to the 1990s (Niguidula, 1993; 1997), when many schools were just beginning to use e-mail and word processors and very few had local networks, let alone connections to the internet. In those early days, a great deal of time was required for students and teachers to get familiar with the necessary technology tools to

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save files on a network or create a digital video. Technological advances have greatly reduced the learning curve to use any platform, and current portfolio and badge platforms give great power to students and teachers as they create, organize, and communicate about their work. But through the years, we have learned a crucial lesson: When schools think of implementing digital portfolios as primarily a technology initiative (as opposed to a personalization or assessment initiative), they will have a more difficult time. We have learned that the best educational technology projects start with the *education*, rather than the *technology*. In this age of accountability, where educators feel they spend hours upon hours focusing on complying with state mandates, digital portfolios offer a refreshing alternative. The portfolio is a representation of what's happening in the student's world; the student entries are typically either responses to assignments created by the teacher or projects initiated by the student. The portfolio can cover the full range of what we want a student to know and be able to do—not just the limited standards that are measured by standardized tests. The badges within the portfolio can represent the wide range of experiences that students have each year. The portfolio is an opportunity for students to create work, curate what they have done, and captivate an audience with their accomplishments and growth over time.

What Is a Digital Portfolio?

A digital portfolio is more than a collection of student work. The portfolio needs to have a purpose, something that will help the student figure out what to put into the portfolio and let any reader of the portfolio know what to expect. Specifically, *the portfolio needs to contain evidence that a student is mastering a set of expectations, while at the same time showing who the student is as an individual learner.*

The goals provide the structure of the portfolio; the individuality comes in as students select the pieces they want to put into the portfolio. Let's look at four types of portfolios from different grade levels. (Note that you can see a number of these examples in more detail in the Appendix.)

Best Work Portfolios

One easy way that schools get started is by asking students to select their best work. For example, an elementary school portfolio could structure its digital portfolio as shown in Figure 1.2.

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FIGURE 1.2 | **Elementary School Badges**

To get ready for your student-led conference, please include your best work from this term. Each entry should have a reflection that answers the question "What does this entry say about me as a learner?"		
	Reading	My Work * Reflection
	Writing	My Work * Reflection
	Math	My Work * Reflection
	Social Studies	My Work * Reflection
	Science	My Work * Reflection
	Phys Ed/Health	My Work * Reflection
	Music	My Work * Reflection
	My Choice (Select an entry that shows how you grew as a learner, and explain why.)	My Work * Reflection

Essentially, the student is asked to select a best piece from each subject area; clicking on the "My Work" link in the right column then leads the portfolio's reader to the actual student entry. Because the portfolio is digital, the student entries can be in any medium—audio, video, presentations, word-processed documents, images, and so on. If the student originally did the work on paper, a quick picture taken with a smartphone or tablet can capture the work digitally and ready it for upload.

At one school, the portfolios were prepared twice a year for parent conferences. For the youngest students, the Reading entry contained a video of

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the child doing an independent reading. We can see the student open the book and tell us the title, and we watch as she moves through the words. Does the student read fluidly, or are there points where she struggles? When a word is unfamiliar, does she look for clues in the context or in the illustrations? If the student is asked questions about the reading, does she show that she understood the text?

Video is a powerful medium; as we watch, we can take in a great deal of information. We can watch the student's body language and see where she looks confident and where she seems unsure. We can also hear the pauses when she's trying to figure out a sound, and we can sense the relief when she gets it. Clips as short as 30–60 seconds can give parents a strong sense of a student's abilities.

The portfolio can also let the student focus on a particular skill or ability. For example, one school wanted to put more emphasis on problem-solving skills in math. In one class, students started doing problems of the week—open-ended word problems that required a little more analysis to solve. Students collected their work in a binder. For the digital portfolio presentation, they selected one of their pieces. The teacher then asked the student to walk through the problem and answer three questions: Can you tell me what this problem is about? What do you need to do to solve the problem? Can you show me your math work? This interview was then captured on video. In this case, what's significant is that the teacher used the portfolio to focus on a particular skill rather than on specific content. It didn't matter that one student's problem was about fractions and another's was about measurement. The focus was on the problem-solving process; allowing the student to select the specific problem for the interview gave the student a voice in what the portfolio was going to look like.

Not all entries need to be on video; plenty of portfolio entries are done with paper and pencil (or pen, marker, or crayon). What good portfolio entries tend to have in common is that they are *performances* of some kind. The performance may be brief, but it's a way of showing more than a typical recall-based quiz or test can show. The student is demonstrating his or her skills and knowledge.

Now let's consider a high school example. Figure 1.3 shows a list of what a student must demonstrate to graduate. Students need to have one sample in each category. Some work samples could fit more than one expectation, but students at this school need to have a different sample for each expectation.

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FIGURE 1.3 | **Secondary School Badge Requirements**

Expectation	Requirement	Work Sample	Completed
Acquire, analyze, and evaluate information and ideas to effectively solve problems.			
1.1	Acquire and apply knowledge and skills within and across the curriculum.	--	
1.2	Work actively and cooperatively to achieve group goals.	My Work	★
1.3	Apply problem-solving strategies.	--	
1.4	Synthesize information from multiple sources and formats to complete authentic learning tasks.	--	
Communicate information clearly and effectively using a variety of 21st century skills.			
2.1	Demonstrate an understanding of texts.	--	
2.2	Write clearly and concisely.	My Work	★
2.3	Speak, listen, and interpret effectively.	--	
2.4	Communicate through an art form (visual, music, dance, drama, graphics).	--	
Value and demonstrate personal and social responsibility.			
3.1	Make informed life and career decisions (ILP) (each year).	--	
3.2	Recognize and respect the diversity, cultures, and individuality of others.	--	
3.3	Participate in community service, leadership roles, and/or school activities.	--	
3.4	Make appropriate choices affecting one's wellness that contribute to a healthy lifestyle.	--	
Use digital tools to access, evaluate, and effectively apply information.			
4.1	Use technological tools to access information.	My Work	★
4.2	Use technological tools to evaluate information.	--	
4.3	Use technological tools to communicate information.	--	

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This school's requirements are not simply about academics. There are four broad categories that ask the student to demonstrate how he or she can "acquire, analyze, and evaluate information," "communicate information clearly and effectively," "demonstrate personal responsibility" and "use digital tools." These categories are each further divided into three or four specific expectations.

The right-most column in the table is marked "Completed" and is represented by a badge. For a student to earn that badge, a teacher has to sign off. The school has developed schoolwide rubrics for each of the expectations; using that rubric, each student entry needs to receive a "meets expectation" or better rating (in this case, a "3" or better on a 4-point scale).

Most of the student entries come from classroom assignments. Each teacher in the school has identified three or four "portfolio-worthy" tasks from each full-year class. These specific portfolio assignments are associated with one or more of the expectations; thus, students know if they do well on this assignment, they will be able to earn one of the badges. Students at this school carry a typical course load of five or six classes; because there are four tasks in each class, over four years, students will have up to 80–100 opportunities to earn badges.

Since the expectations are broad, they're not limited to a specific subject area. To demonstrate expectation 2.3—"speak, listen, and interpret effectively"—one student could include a traditional oral report from an English class, another student might use a debate from social studies, and a third could show coaching skills that she uses with younger members of the basketball team. This list of requirements deliberately does not indicate *where* the student has to demonstrate these skills; the tasks could come from any class—all teachers are expected to have tasks and score them using the common rubrics. The school has turned the portfolio and expectations into a true schoolwide endeavor. Individual teachers are still focused on their specific classrooms and curricula, but now there is a common point of conversation. Everyone in the school community uses the schoolwide expectations as a reference point for their work. (For schools that have developed curriculum maps, this set of common expectations can provide a key point of analysis when doing a map walkthrough. Chapter 6 explores this idea in more detail.)

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Subject Portfolios

A portfolio can also be structured around goals within a specific subject area. For example, a writing portfolio could ask a student to complete entries that show each genre (see Figure 1.4).

FIGURE 1.4 | **Writing Portfolio Contents**

	To complete your writing badge, you must meet each of the requirements listed below.	
Met	**Genre**	**My Work**
☑	Research Paper	Final Draft Research Paper
☑	Response to Literature	The Stand: Literary Criticism
☑	Creative Work (original story or poetry)	Original Myth
☑	Persuasive Essay	The Crucible Essay
☑	Reflective Writing	Transcendentalism Assignment

This school has identified five genres; students need to select their best example of each. The portfolio could well contain more than one example for any one of the genres. The student might collect the pieces over, say, the last two years of elementary school or the first two years of high school and decide at different points which Response to Literature was currently his "best."

Each school has to determine its own definition of what makes an entry acceptable. In this case, do the samples need to come from English class? Do they need to come from school at all, or is a screenplay or story the student wrote outside school acceptable?

Similarly, other curricular areas can define portfolios, as we will see in Chapter 2. From math to art, from physical education to career and technical areas, subject portfolios can contain the evidence containing the most essential skills, knowledge, and habits.

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Project-Based Portfolios

Student voice is a crucial component of any successful portfolio system. One great way that schools can begin to personalize learning is to encourage students to participate in project-based learning.

Most schools already engage in some level of project-based learning, typically through some existing structure, such as science fairs or model United Nations. An increasing number of schools are going further and establishing capstone projects, in which every student creates an independent project representing a learning stretch in an area of their own interest, or follow project structures, such as the Buck Institute for Education's "Gold Standard" (Larmer, Mergendroller, & Boss, 2015b) or the quests as defined in *The Quest for Learning* (Alcock, Fisher, & Zmuda, 2018)

A digital portfolio, in this case, lets the student track progress through the steps of the project (see Figure 1.5).

FIGURE 1.5 | **Capstone Project: Portfolio Contents**

Capstone Project		
Milestone	**Link to My Work**	**Approved**
Proposal: letter of intent and project goals	My Work	☑
Preliminary topic and central questions	My Work	☑
Sign of commitment	My Work	☑
Fieldwork log	My Work	☑
Journal entries	My Work	☑
Mentor responses	My Work	☑
Research paper	My Work	In progress
Overall reflection		
Final presentation		
Evaluation	Self-Evaluation	Reviewer Evaluation

Source: Narragansett High School, Narragansett, Rhode Island. Used with permission.

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Here, the structure of the portfolio is organized around the project milestones. Over the course of the year, the student will complete these tasks and move closer toward earning the project badge.

The key to this kind of portfolio is flexibility. At the beginning, the student establishes specific goals that the project will meet. The school has created the project milestones to provide a general framework, but the student's proposal will identify exactly how those milestones will be met. For example, a student's project focused on ocean science research will probably involve fieldwork in a lab or at the beach, whereas another student's project on dance will involve studio time.

Entries for the project portfolio are added as the student goes through the year; they typically aren't put in all at the end. The actual evidence can include photos or videos of the work in the field (such as photos of collecting specimens for the ocean research project or images from a rehearsal for the dance project), as well as written pieces, such as journal entries, as the student moves through the project. Again, the specific form will depend on the student's choice.

A digital portfolio enables a school to keep track of these myriad conditions. Next to each milestone, the student submits a link to his work. Each submission is reviewed; when it's approved, the student moves to the next stage. In the end, the student submits a self-evaluation, describing how the project has met the goals that he set, while the teacher (or other reviewers) gives a final evaluation and (hopefully) approval.

In this case, the digital portfolio helps schools expand their boundaries. The goals and topic are generated by the student; the work is often done outside school altogether, perhaps with a mentor who is not a teacher. There is a great deal of independence; the portfolio helps students by providing a structure and helps teachers keep track of each student's progress. At the same time, putting the portfolio online provides an appropriate level of accountability. Uploading the actual evidence enables teachers and administrators to gain insight into the student's work, as well as the struggles and triumphs that occurred along the way.

These various types of portfolios can be linked, as we will see in Chapter 2. To earn a badge, a student can submit both projects and individual classroom assignments; the evidence in the portfolio can contain both student-generated and teacher-generated entries. A project portfolio could well be a demonstration of the expectations listed in the "best work" portfolio. The variety of

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projects and assignments within a portfolio are limited only by the imagination of the students and teachers.

All these digital portfolio structures offer a way of organizing the contents so that the student work tells a story about the student's achievements. This structure not only helps the student decide what goes into the portfolio but also helps the audience—whether they're teachers, parents, or the students themselves—make connections among the various artifacts.

Why It's Worth It

Throughout the rest of this book, you will see how schools have successfully put badges and portfolios in place. But before starting on the details of *how* to work with portfolios, let's consider three reasons *why* it's worth the effort.

Promoting Personalization

When done well, digital portfolios and badges provide an opportunity for true personalized learning (DiMartino & Wolk, 2010; Kallick & Zmuda, 2017; Zmuda, Curtis, & Ullman, 2015). The portfolio, again, is a collection of work; the badges are a set of expectations to meet. Students could fill a portfolio with independent projects that show growth over time. The expectations behind the badges need not be limited to state requirements; students could define their own requirements as well. This process works well in both traditional and unconventional settings. Even in the most traditional schools, allowing a level of student voice in the process is crucial to students seeing the portfolio as something that represents something personal about themselves, instead of just another thing to do.

From a teacher's perspective, a digital portfolio provides a way of better understanding each student's strengths and weaknesses. When teachers see the badges of the class as a whole, the visual provides a quick sense of the class's current status. What areas do the students need to work on? Where have they already been successful? The portfolio also allows for a "deep dive" as needed. Moreover, patterns may surface in past work that may not have been obvious before. One student's portfolio could reveal, for example, a great ability to write fantastic stories but a reluctance to describe anything personal. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of individuals, and of the class as a whole, enables the teacher to adjust the teaching according to each specific class's needs.

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The digital portfolio has advantages for students across all ability levels. Some students may be looking for artifacts that show their successes; colleges are now beginning to incorporate digital portfolios (called *virtual lockers*) into the admissions process (Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success, 2016). For other students who might struggle on traditional measures, the portfolio provides an alternative way to express their abilities. For example, evidence of a student's oral communication skills may be included to supplement his or her written skills, and the portfolio can be updated to show progress as often as needed.

Perhaps, however, this initiative particularly benefits the so-called average student. When students present their portfolios in end-of-year reviews or parent conferences, teachers often say, "I didn't know that about you!" Simply being able to talk to students about their overall reflections and what they consider to be their best work can provide a level of personalization that doesn't typically occur in regular classroom interactions.

Creating a Common Vision

Many schools go through the motions of establishing common expectations. Curriculum guides are printed; standards are posted at the front of the room. Digital badges, however, require that teachers and students come to a common understanding about what the expectations actually mean—and they have to define what work is going to be "good enough."

When students earn a badge online, they need to produce the evidence that led to that badge. Typically, the evidence comes from classroom assignments and projects. Thus, teachers need to provide *opportunities* to earn those badges. This means that the classroom assignments need to be linked to the school's expectations and, often, to common rubrics.

This is an opportunity for teachers to start looking at one another's assignments. Collectively, a set of teachers can share assignments and discuss which tasks will be most useful for their pool of students. In addition, teachers can review student work, and students need to feel assured that work that would earn a badge in one class will be honored in other classes. Chapter 4 will look at calibration exercises that help teachers align their assessments. Emphasizing a *common* vision means that teachers cannot feel they are doing this work in isolation; the portfolio provides a window into what's happening in other classes. In portfolio reviews, teachers need to engage with the collective understanding of what the expectations mean.

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Similarly, students can no longer treat expectations in the abstract. They need to earn badges; to do this, they need to complete the requirements; to complete the requirements, they need to understand the expectations. As the process becomes more personalized, students will necessarily become more engaged with the expectations. It's not unusual for students to ask for opportunities to earn a badge: "What can I do to show my problem-solving skills?" The activity of collecting and assessing work creates a level of engagement with the school's expectations—for students, teachers, and parents.

Promoting Culture Change Through Conversation

It's easy for students and teachers to get lost in the modern curriculum. Many schools feel overwhelmed by the number of new things they're being asked to juggle: new standards, new curricula, new initiatives, new technologies. Everything feels like it's one more thing to add.

Badges and portfolios enable schools to focus. Typically, teachers will designate a few—two to four—key assignments for the portfolio. At the elementary level, this may involve looking at a couple of independent readings at different points of the year; at the secondary level, teachers may think about culminating assignments or projects. As a starting point, teachers can look at existing assignments.

Badges help schools implement the idea of planning backward (McDonald, 1992). Starting with the vision of what students should know and be able to do, teachers can designate the assignments and projects that will demonstrate those skills and knowledge. Students know these are opportunities to earn a portion of their badges; thus, teachers and students alike are looking at these performances a little more closely.

Because the student work is going into a portfolio—and may ultimately be used in the reviews or conferences—teachers and students know that this work may have value beyond the immediate grade in the classroom. We know from many years of research on authentic assessment (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Falk, 1995; Wiggins, 1998) that an audience motivates students to focus a little more. Teachers feel similarly about the assignments included in the portfolio; it's a glimpse into their own classrooms. If colleagues are going to see the work, they would like to make sure that their assignments are portfolio-worthy.

For administrators looking to transform their schools, the badges are an opening for new conversations. Principals can go to department- or grade-level groups of teachers and simply ask, What assignments are you currently

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giving that will help students earn a badge? It sounds simple, but unpacking that question can get at the heart of the teaching process. More fine-tuned questions can follow: Which two or three assignments do you want to focus on? What is important about those assignments? What are students demonstrating? How do these assignments link to our school expectations? None of this needs to question the specific selection that the teachers make; rather, the conversation can help teachers clarify what's truly important for students to take away from their classes.

Badges are exciting to many educators for a variety of reasons. Michelle Riconscente, Amy Kamarinen, and Margaret Honey (2013) surveyed a variety of badge initiatives and found that "the appeal of badges is multifold" (p. 5) and that motivations include the following:

- Keeping up with "changing workforce demands."
- Providing incentives for "the acquisition of specialized skills."
- Overcoming "the shortcomings of standardized tests."
- Recognition that "learning experiences . . . span various contexts."

I would also add that badges appeal to those who understand that many fields are rapidly changing; it's easy to add a new badge for a new programming language or a scientific skill that is just emerging.

Badges also acknowledge the changing landscape of education; "credits" are no longer limited to the classroom. As Sheryl Grant (2014) put it,

> The openness and portability of digital badges underpins how people learn anywhere, anytime, within and beyond traditional schools in a networked society. Until open digital badges emerged, learning happened anywhere, anytime, on multiple devices, in many contexts, but a standardized form of *recognition* did not. (p. 20)

Schools as institutions can provide the credibility and authority to place value on the badges.

The presentation of portfolios can be an opportunity to showcase best work—and reflect on progress. The online component of digital badges and portfolios means that students, teachers, and parents can engage with the student's progress at any time. There is also something to be said for a face-to-face conversation where the student is at the center. It's an opportunity to look beyond reading, math, or music in isolation; it's a chance—rare at the elementary level and almost nonexistent at the secondary level—for teachers

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and students to talk about their work as a whole. For students, the process of curating the work for presentation, including the reflection on what the work represents, is powerful; the idea that teachers and parents have set aside time to hear about each student's goals and progress can be life changing.

Matt Renwick (2017) describes an elementary school where students sit with teachers at multiple points—six times in all—through the year. He describes a 2nd grade student, Calleigh, sitting with her teacher, Janice, to discuss the student's writing. The teacher and student look together through a set of Calleigh's samples, and they begin to talk about her strengths. Calleigh is focused on her actual handwriting; she can see how her penmanship has improved from one piece to the next, and when asked what she wants to work on next, she says, "spacing." The teacher gently starts to discuss the actual content of the writing, praising her for her organization and explaining to Calleigh what organization actually means. Janice then is able to help Calleigh identify an area for improvement—to look at how she ends her essays. Through this conversation, Calleigh is able to reflect on her own work. As Janice guides her toward looking at the content as well as the handwriting, Calleigh can start to understand what makes a compelling piece of writing. Through such a process, schools can return, even just a bit, to being more student centered.

Schools that are successful in implementing portfolios start with a vision of what they want to achieve; the educational purpose needs to be clear to teachers and students, administrators, and parents. While the big picture provides the framework, the details are where schools make it happen. Let's look further at how we schools can define digital badges and their requirements in the next chapter.

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How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students, 2nd Edition by Susan M. Brookhart (#116066)

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