

## **From Prior Learning Assessment to Open Recognition: An Introduction**

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For more than 20 years, ePIC has been an international forum for advancing the vision and practices of inclusive recognition, taking it far beyond its academic roots in Recognition of Prior Learning, or RPL (or pick your acronym: PLA/PLAR, RVA, RAC, VPL, APEL, etc.). RPL is primarily about validating informal learning for formal institutional acceptance. Inclusive or “open recognition” expands this narrow academic scope to encompass appreciation of the intrinsic value of lifewide learning, the diversity of individual contribution, and the activation of human potential.

This potted history helps frame the proceedings of ePIC 2025, which we’re honored to feature in this special issue of *PLAIO*.

ePIC began as a two-day conversation hosted by Serge Ravet and Maureen Layte in Poitiers, France: ePortfolio 2003 was “the first international conference entirely dedicated to the ePortfolio.” According to Serge, “We were actively exploring ePortfolio as a tool for individual learning and self-development with practitioners around the world, and it just made sense to bring people together in one room to have a more effective conversation.” Don Presant first joined the conversation in 2004, when it expanded its scope to become the ePortfolio and Identity Conference, or the ePIC that we know today.

However, by 2010, ePortfolio practice had evolved to become less of an empowering instrument for identity formation and personalized lifelong learning and more of a tethered reflective learning tool for postsecondary students under the firm control of the academy. Self-actualization had become “reflection as performance.”

Fortunately, in 2011, the invention of Mozilla Open Badges provided a new, more inspiring path to opening up recognition practices, and badges began to revitalize the ePIC conference, starting in 2012. Early adopters explored Open Badges as a more accessible, modular, and lifewide canvas for recognition.

Inevitably, fences began to appear on this new commons for recognition: Open Badges were soon formalized by educational institutions as “micro-credentials,” assessed certificates of standards-based learning from “trusted providers,” whose value was

promoted as inherently superior to other forms of recognition. Oxygen for other forms of recognition was becoming scarce!

By this time, the annual conference had organized itself under the collective label of the Open Recognition Alliance and began to double down on the concept of recognition as a practice, whose principles were increasingly documented in:

- The [Bologna Declaration on Open Recognition](#) in 2016, a cheeky echo of the Bologna Accord, which gave rise to the [Open Recognition Charter](#), adopted by the government of Normandy
- The [Paris Declaration on the Equality of Recognitions](#) in 2024
- The [Open Recognition Manifesto](#) in 2025, covered in this issue of *PLA/O*

Maureen Layte unfortunately passed on in 2010, and the ePIC conference is now co-produced by Don Presant and Serge Ravet, who actively curate relevant speakers and themes, while leaving the conversation open to new influences. Deb Carr has joined the team more recently, using her ideas and contacts to make the conference an even more global one. The themes of ePIC 2025 provide insight into the active concerns of today, some of which are new and some of which are “old friends”:

- The hype and real impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on Recognition
- Recognition and epistemology: whose knowledge is important?
- How to “do no harm” in recognition practice
- Recognition FOR/AS learning, a connective, appreciative human practice that can activate, engage, and build confidence in lifelong learners
- Developing a standard for Open Recognition
- Developing the “Recognition Function” within organizations and the professionalization of recognition practices
- Decoupling credentialing from post-secondary education: “breaking up the monopoly”
- Work-Based Learning and recognition: “developing skills in the flow of work”
- Open recognition and UNESCO’s Global Convention on Higher Education
- How can funders better support more flexible approaches to recognition?
- The Open Recognition Manifesto: “Recognition is not a privilege — it is a practice of justice, reciprocity and emancipation.”

Following the 2025 conference, ePIC has moved to a biennial schedule: the next European conference is planned for October 2027. In alternate years, such as 2026, this opens up opportunities for other events inspired by ePIC and related to recognition around the world, such as:

- International Day of Recognition (Virtual, June 9)
- [ePIC APAC Summit](#) (Melbourne, August 27-28)
- ePIC Canada (Ottawa, September 28-29)
- Decolonising Recognition (Cape Town, October 19)
- [Forum francophone des Open Badges](#) (Besançon, June 2-4)

Ultimately, ePIC is less about the technology of Open Badges and more about the connective human practice of recognition—making it more flexible, more inclusive, more respectful, more appreciative of human potential, more humane.

We thank all the speakers and delegates who made the ePIC 2025 conversation so memorable, and we look forward to continuing this conversation well into the future.