

Using a Learning Management System in High School Classes

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## **Abstract**

Technology is becoming more and more common in schools, particularly secondary schools, and educators are being challenged to find ways to implement and manage the technology. One system which has been in use for a number of years is the Learning Management System (LMS). An LMS consists of a computer program that supports documentation, tracking, and reporting of training programs, classroom and online events. There are many Learning Management Systems available. They share many of the same features, including being accessible to all users who have access to a computer and internet. I will investigate whether or not the use of an LMS (most specifically Moodle) can be beneficial in a conventional high school class.

## **Why Moodle**

One of the most common LMS in use by schools is Moodle. Moodle is an acronym that stands for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment. It is a free open-source software program that can be downloaded from the internet. It is described as “a Free web application that educators can use to create effective online learning sites” on its website. There are other types of LMS such as WebCT and Blackboard, but these are associated with a cost to use. Schools often prefer Moodle because it only requires a server and they do not need to buy the software. Perkins and Pfaffman (2006) state that it “provides a set of features similar to those of its proprietary competitors but is often easier to use” (p. 34). They advocate the use of Moodle, both for its ease of use and its low cost. The program itself is free; the cost would be in the setup and maintaining of a server.

## **Communication Use**

Communication is an important part of education, perhaps even more so in secondary school courses. The prescribed learning outcomes for many high school courses require that a considerable amount of material is covered in a relatively short period of time. Communication about timetables and assignments is important to keep the student on track for successful completion of the course. Perkins and Pfaffman (2006) discuss how a course management system (also known as a learning management system) can improve communication in the classroom. Four science teachers in Perkin’s high school used Moodle in their traditional science classes. The teachers varied in the way they used Moodle. One teacher used the LMS to post the daily homework assignments, and publish her slideshow presentations and practice quizzes. Another teacher used Moodle to help organize and structure his lessons. Moodle enabled the teacher to keep track of activities and demonstrations he used, as well as which ones

worked well. A third teacher used Moodle to publish his lesson plans complete with objectives, procedures and homework assignments. This teacher noted that his students seemed better prepared for classes because they knew what to expect before they arrived. In all cases, as long as students had access to a computer with an internet connection, they could find out what was happening in their course. One of the benefits was to eliminate confusion about some aspects of the course, including assignments and due dates. Students who were absent were aware of the work they had missed before they returned to school.

Communication was not just improved between the students and the teachers. Parents also had access to Moodle so they knew about the assignments, course material and expectations for students in that class. In that way, communication was improved between parents, students and teachers regarding course work. The teachers also found that Moodle was a useful way to coordinate lesson planning and improved collaboration between teachers in the science department. The course pages were also shared with teachers in other schools, principals, and community leaders. Perkins and Pfaffman (2006) concluded that “Using an online CMS can help to reduce distractions and roadblocks to science learning and improve communication with colleagues, students, and parents” (p. 37).

Selwyn, Banaji, Hadjithome-Garska and Clark (2011) found in their study of the use of Learning Platform (also known as an LMS) technologies that parents did not always feel that communication with the school was increased with the use of an LMS. They conducted in-depth interviews of parents, teachers and administrators. They found that while some parents liked being able to look at the online information and keep up to date with the events in their child’s classroom, other parents found that there was no two-way communication. They said that although they could see what was going on in the class, they had no opportunity to add their

input. Selwyn, Banaji, Hadjithome-Garska and Clark (2011) concluded that using an LMS (Learning Platform) was unlikely to change the involvement of parents in the education of their children. Parents who were involved would remain involved, and parents who were not involved would not become more involved.

### **Course Management Use**

Moodle has many features that can help a teacher manage their course. Brandl (2005) states that “Moodle is a teacher’s dream in terms of course management features that it offers” (p. 17). A teacher can manage assignments, quizzes, student grades, deadlines, time frames for work, and log reports of each student. There is the ability to add many types of content including graphics, video or audio. Moodle also has a glossary module where teachers can create their own course specific dictionaries. Teachers can choose to allow students to contribute to the glossary, or not. There are many ways to assess students’ work. Students can upload assignments, write their assignments in the Moodle editor or hand in their work offline. There is the capability to create quizzes with a wide range of question types including multiple choice, short answer, true-false, matching and fill-ins. Feedback can be available to the student as quickly as a teacher can assess the students’ work. Feedback can be private or made available to all users. Moodle consists of templates where content can be added which make it easy to use. Teachers have many options available to them, and they can use the features that they find most helpful.

In their study of students’ feedback regarding the use of Moodle, Holbl and Welzer (2010) found that students liked being able to access the teaching material and assignments no matter where they were. They also liked having all the teaching material in one place, and felt that using the

LMS was an interesting way to learn. It is interesting to note that students felt that the LMS could not entirely replace face-to-face learning.

Teachers at Byron High School in Minnesota (Fulton, 2012) decided to use an LMS in their classrooms because they did not have the budget for new textbooks. They chose Moodle since it was a free open-source system. Teachers originally anticipated finding required material for their classes on the web, and using it for their lessons. They discovered that the content that they needed was just not available on the web. They came up with a unique approach to creating content. They made their own YouTube videos demonstrating course content and embedded them on Moodle. The students were assigned the YouTube videos as homework. This freed up class time for teachers to help students who were struggling. Fulton (2012) states that the students liked using this method. They also liked the fact that they could access the YouTube videos if they were absent from class, and not fall behind in their course work.

### **Sound Pedagogical Use**

Using an LMS in a classroom setting can help teachers manage their classroom. The LMS does not replace good pedagogical practice, however. Weaver, Spratt, and Nair (2008) conducted a study on the opinions of students and staff of Monash University in Australia on the use of the Learning Management System WebCT at the university. Although the study involved university students, the results could also apply to high school students. Their survey of students revealed that sites that were not well designed or maintained were a source of dissatisfaction for them. Some students in the study were positive about their experience with WebCT; these students had completed a unit that had many quality resources and timely feedback from their teacher. International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) have developed standards for skills and knowledge that will be required of educators as education moves more towards technology.

Teachers still need to have knowledge of their subject area and find creative ways to use technology in face to face, and in virtual environments.

## **Conclusion**

A Learning Management system can be very useful to the classroom teacher. The ability to create different classes and assignments allows for great flexibility. Having all the information and course content available in one place is beneficial to students, teachers and parents. It eliminates excuses for not knowing what assignment and homework is due, and parents have the opportunity to keep track of their child's course work. Of course, the success of the LMS lies with the teacher, and the school. It takes time to create the webpages and find or create the resources for the students. The teacher still needs to be organized and clear, and develop pedagogically sound material.

One of the main advantages of an LMS is the accessibility for all users of the system. It can be accessed from anywhere that there is a computer and an internet connection. This is very useful for students who are away from school for any length of time.

While there are many web applications that can be used in a classroom setting, using one LMS in a school lends consistency of look and navigation. The need for students to create different accounts to access different types of web applications is reduced. The content can be accessed with one password. It is simpler for teachers and students to keep track of the course work. I have used a number of different web applications in my classroom and have found that keeping track of everyone's assignment on different applications can become difficult. Given a choice, I would use Moodle in my classroom setting.

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