



As an educator, I'm constantly searching for thoughtful teaching styles that grab my students' attention and foster independent learning. Some years ago I decided to try Moodle. I knew I had discovered a teacher's goldmine when, checking over the login files of my students, I noticed that some 25 of them were active *on a Friday night*.

So What is Moodle?

Moodle is a learning management system. Essentially, it's an online classroom. Many universities use programs like Blackboard or WebCT. Moodle shares many characteristics with such programs. However, there's one major difference: Moodle is Open Source.

Why might you want to use Moodle? Besides the great activities Moodle provides, its main advantage is that it allows teachers to create a central repository of all the web – particularly Web 2.0 - has to offer.

The purpose of this presentation is to walk through the features of Moodle, give some demonstrations on how teachers might use it with students, and point you in a particular direction if you would like to use Moodle in the classroom.

If you'd like to see more examples, handouts, and presentations, please view:

<http://misterv.net/what-is-moodle/>.

Moodle Features

To begin, an administrator creates a class. Both teachers and students are given a user ID and password. Students point their web browser to a particular web address (say www.delhims.org) and login.

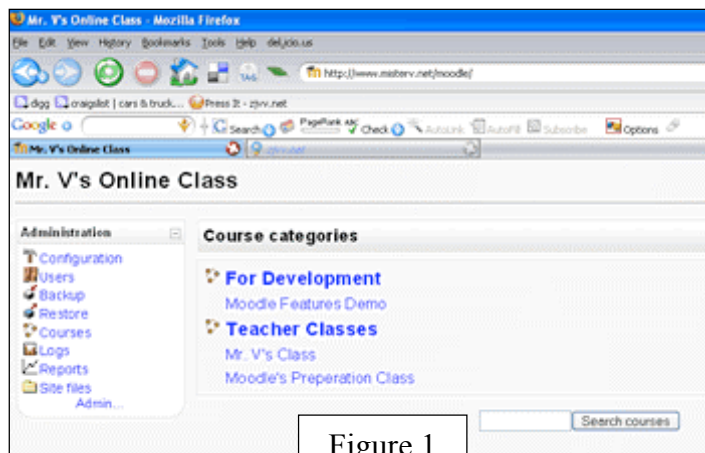


Figure 1

The Structure

When creating a class, a teacher always has two options: Looking at a **Resource** and doing an **Activity**.

Resources are prepared files uploaded to the course server; pages edited directly in Moodle; or external web pages made to appear part of this course. Activities are something a student *does*.

Think of resources as the **material teachers present** to their students (examples: a PowerPoints, Video, Word, Websites, etc).

A Lesson (example)

You can go in a number of directions when creating a lesson. Say, for example, I wanted students to compare modern day propaganda with that of the past. Using Moodle's features, I

- λ Upload Paul Revere's drawing of the Boston Massacre
- λ Embed Video within Moodle for students to watch
- λ Have students partake in a forum discussing similarities and differences
- λ Have them visit sketchcast.com, create their own propaganda, and post back in Moodle as an assignment.

Notice that the lesson and Moodle takes advantage of Web 2.0's idea of "content creation" in nearly every step.

So how might we try this at our school?

If you'd like to try moodle out, I recommend visiting: <http://moodle.org/login/index.php>.

For installation, you can either place Moodle on your school server or pay a hosting company (an inexpensive way to run moodle).

For more information, please view my FAQs.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me:

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Resources

You create or upload the following resources on Moodle:

- λ A Webpage
- λ A link to an external web page (e.g. www.cnn.com)
- λ Microsoft files (PowerPoint, Word Documents, Excel Sheets, etc.)
- λ Adobe files (.PDF & Flash)
- λ Sound files and video (mp3, avi, QuickTime, etc)

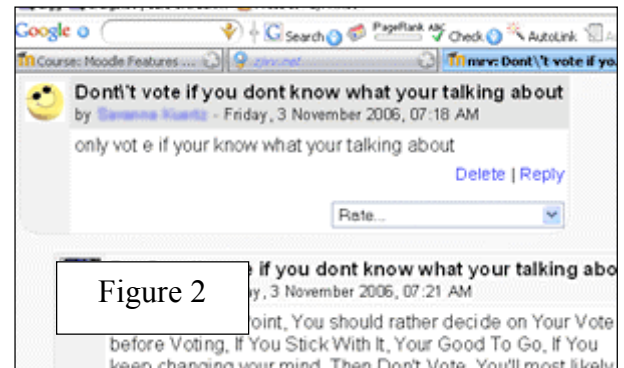
It's extremely simple to post resources in a class.

Activities

Activities are where students do something that show that they're actually learning. Here's a short summary of Moodle's activities.

Forums

Forums are discussion boards. Forums can be structured in different ways, and can include peer rating of each posting. The postings can be viewed in a variety of formats, and can include attachments (Figure 2).



Chats

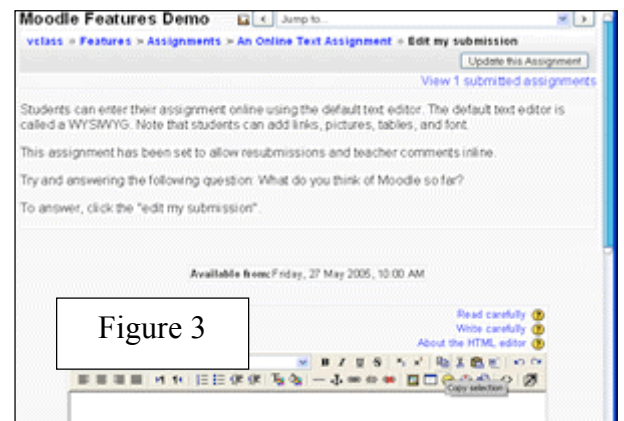
The Chat module allows participants to have a real-time synchronous discussion via the web. This is a useful way to get a different understanding of each other and the topic being discussed.

Assignments

Assignments allow teachers to grade electronically submitted material or 'offline' submissions such as paper-based assignments or class presentations (Figure 3).

There are 3 types of assignments (technically, 3 different ways to turn in an assignment).

- An upload assignment
- An online text assignment
- An offline assignment



Glossaries

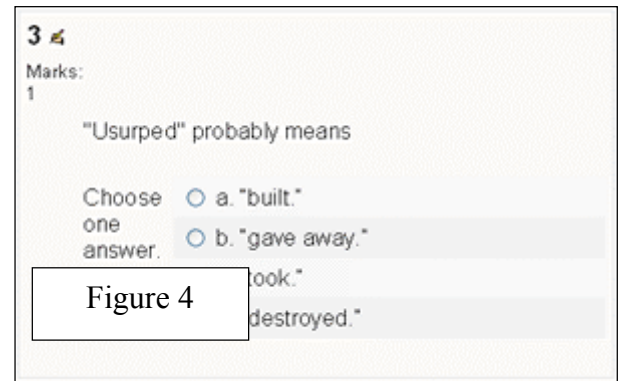
This activity allows participants to create and maintain a list of definitions, like a dictionary. The entries can be searched or browsed in many different formats.

Quizzes

This module allows the teacher to design and set quiz tests, consisting of multiple choice, true-false and short answer questions and more. Each attempt is automatically marked, and the teacher can choose whether to give feedback or to show correct answers (Figure 4).

Choices

Here a teacher asks a question and specifies a choice of multiple responses. This can be useful as a quick poll to stimulate thinking about a topic; to allow the class to vote on a direction for the course; or to gather research consent.



Lessons

A lesson delivers content in an interesting and flexible way. It consists of a number of pages. Each page normally ends with a multiple choice question. Navigation through the lesson can be straight forward or complex.

SCORM Packages

SCORM is a collection of specifications that enable interoperability, accessibility and reusability of web-based learning content. Somewhat complicated, they're like a prepackaged lesson

Surveys


The Survey module provides a number of verified survey instruments that have been found useful in assessing and stimulating learning in online environments.

Wiki

A wiki is a web page that anyone can add to or edit. It enables documents to be authored collectively and supports collaborative learning. Old versions are not deleted and may be restored if required.

Frequently Asked Questions

How complicated is Moodle?

Fortunately, everything in Moodle has a  next to it. You click the question and it gives a straight forward answer to how you need to accomplish things. Moodle is a robust program. It's not very complicated; it just has many features (which can lead to confusion).

Teachers who have normal technology skills (i.e. PowerPoint, email, basic computer knowledge) should not have problems with Moodle. As with most things, there will be a learning curve.

In my experience, students (all students) get comfortable with Moodle within one lesson.

Is Moodle difficult to run?

Not really. In the beginning, you will want someone who has a deeper understanding of technology set up Moodle. This doesn't have to be you school's tech person, just someone who understands how the web works (I'm a history teacher who managed to figure Moodle out within one hour).

Is Moodle safe and secure?

Moodle is as secure as you make it. As with most things on the web, passwords need to be protected and classes need to be monitored. But these are user issues (which can't necessarily be controlled by the software). Moodle is developed using PHP scripting language with a MySQL database. Both are open source products used to power much of the internet. In my opinion, they are as secure as proprietary software.

How does Moodle relate to gifted and talented instruction?

Moodle is best at differentiated instruction. You can set up various courses for your GT students that utilize their different talents and creativities. Of course, this doesn't apply to GT students, but all.

Does Moodle improve test scores?

Speaking personally, Moodle helped improve my student test scores (however, I don't know of any empirical studies that back this up). Here's how Moodle helped:

- λ Moodle grabs student interests like nothing I've seen in my teaching career. They literally love using this program. I'd have students show up early in the morning just so they could spend time in my online class.
- λ Moodle's quiz feature helped immensely. I uploaded a number of state standardized questions and had students – essentially – drill on the questions for months before the test.
- λ Beyond the quiz feature, my students would use Moodle to explore topics in depth. I'm convinced that these features not only helped them past the State test, but also assisted them in achieving Accelerated status.

Where can I try Moodle out?

<http://moodle.org/login/index.php>

Where can I host Moodle?

You can host Moodle on any server that's configured to run PHP & MySQL. Your district/school may be able to help you with this. If not, you can always purchase a web host package and run Moodle from an external site. Many web hosting companies come with a script called "Fantastico" which installs Moodle in 2 clicks. I've generally had success with a company called Lunarpages (but there are many that work).

I really want to emphasize that if you have the time and desire, Moodle is not a difficult program to get running (particularly with a hosting company).

Can I contact you with questions?

You bet! I've helped set up Moodle and school websites for a number of schools. If you'd like to contact me, feel free:

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