

Chapter 10

Moodle: A Platform for a School

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ABSTRACT

The Project “Moodle: A Platform for a School” started in February 2010 in the first year of a cl@sse 2.0 of the middle school I.C.9 of Bologna. Through the integrated use of the Interactive WB, of personal notebooks of the students and of the technological equipment of the school, students and teachers have had the opportunity to use Moodle for socialization, exploration, and learning. The project has encouraged inclusion and has developed the students’ autonomy, making learning experience creative and motivating.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) more widespread than ever before and the use of new technologies has changed learning environments. There is statistical evidence that ICT can enhance attainment in subjects. Teachers have a more positive attitude towards ICT by realising its value for learning; they increasingly use ICT to prepare their work more efficiently and achieve time gains. Sub-

stantial progress in the use of ICT for education and training has been made across Europe¹. Like all the other European Member States², Italy has developed programmes and specific actions for the integration of ICT in education and training. “Moodle: a platform for a school” has been realized within “Cl@ssi 2.0 project”³, promoted by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research, which intends to verify how the introduction of ICT in the daily didactic can transform the learning environment. In this context, the Moodle platform seemed a useful tool

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to share and experience new teaching practices (Dougiamas, 1999). Through the integrated use of the Interactive WB, of the students' personal notebooks and of the technological equipment of the school, students and teachers have had the opportunity to use Moodle software both for socialization and for learning. When using Moodle the students have learnt how to assimilate and process information and also how to cooperate and interact with one another. This project has encouraged inclusion and has developed autonomous learning, supporting critical and creative thinking and problem-solving skills.

The school is located in a suburb about 25 minutes from the city centre of Bologna. It is a three-year middle school with a student population of approximately 550. About 20% of those students come from other countries, especially from Easter Europe. The faculty consists of nearly fifty full- and part-time teachers, plus some additional support staff employees. The school has an ICT area with 50 PCs running Windows XP and IWB in each classroom. Staff rely heavily on ICT when delivering lessons, including the use of IWBs.

Since the beginning of the '90s, ICT has been integrated into the overall strategy of school-life, transforming it into an ICT rich environment. The idea of using a virtual learning environment for educational use was the natural development of innovative teaching with ICT. Virtual learning Environment (VLE) is a set of teaching and learning tools designed to enhance the student's learning experience by including the use of computers and the Internet in the learning process. Virtual learning environments are frequently utilized in distance learning, but they may also be used within a physical learning environment. Among many VLEs to choose from, Moodle is very popular in education, because it is free (open source) and it is quite easy to use both for teachers and for students. It is also grounded within social constructionist pedagogy and it has all aspects of VLE functionality, such

as chat, forums, calendars, homepages, shared workspace (wiki), content and online assessment.

The project started thanks to the support of the project FICUP, co-financed by the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme (Geraci & Capecchi, n.d.) and with the help of a teacher from the Comprehensive School in Ozzano Emilia (Bologna).

The main objectives of the project were:

- To promote peaceful coexistence in the classroom;
- To develop a sense of belonging to the group;
- To encourage the participation of the learners within school activities;
- To develop learning paths based on sharing and discovery;
- To promote inclusion;
- To help students to learn more cooperatively and independently;
- To enhance learners' level of creativity, motivation, enjoyment;
- To provide easy access to wider range of learning materials;
- To save time and photocopies;
- To develop new bonds between teachers and learners;
- To work more directly with the most neglected and/or the most gifted students.

In collaboration with the Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna, Italy, Faculty of Education, specific objectives, strategies and criteria for evaluating the experience have been identified, crossing the axis of socialization (autonomy, participation, sharing) with learning styles (reproduction, production and discovery). (Figure 1)

Communication, Inclusion and Participation (also of families) can be defined as the keywords of the project.

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