

Collaborate Inquiry / Research Project
Building Boys Engagement Using Moodle: An Online Environment
HPCDSB Coordination Team
Report Completed by: Sean McDade

Board Name: Huron Perth Catholic District School Board

Names of People Involved:

Loretta Ayotte – Coordinator of Technology
Dawne Boersen – Coordinator of Literacy
Sean McDade – Junior/Intermediate teacher
Peggy Sloan – Junior Teacher
Danielle Peters – Junior Teacher
Ken Schoonderwoerd – Junior teacher
Janis Antonio – Intermediate teacher
Caroline Thuss – Intermediate Teacher
Kerrilyn Grainger – Occasional Teacher / Intermediate Teacher
Teresa Finlayson – Sr. Teacher
Chad Verberne – Sr. Teacher

Title of the Project: Building Boys Engagement Using Moodle: an Online Learning Environment

Inquiry Question: *Does incorporating an online learning environment into classroom practice improve boy's engagement in literacy?*

What did we do and how?

The Huron Perth Catholic District School Board first brought a group of teachers together to learn about an online learning environment called the MOODLE. This web-based software program creates an electronic extension of the classroom, which is accessible to students and parents twenty-four hours a day. Students can post assignments, create a blog or wiki, review project/assignments, expectations and access various classroom materials like PowerPoint's and study guides at their leisure. More importantly, students can connect with their peers and teacher in a password-protected environment that allows them to stretch the classroom into their living room. For parents, it creates an engaging portal into the day to day happenings of the classroom, where they can not only see what their child is doing almost up to the minute, but can be active participants too, by contributing ideas to the parent wiki or by responding to student/teacher postings.

Implementation of the Moodle was left to the discretion of each individual teacher and their perspective principal. An example of an implementation strategy was how one teacher organized a meeting for parents that included the coordinator of technology from central office, to show them the features of the MOODLE, how to access it from home,

and to answer questions they had about the security and safety of using this web tool in the classroom. Parents were encouraged to think of the Moodle as “an open-ended” invitation to the classroom.

The features of the MOODLE allow for the possibility that students can participate in new ways to construct and share learning that goes on in the classroom, like never before. The great benefit of the Moodle is that it served as the perfect way to strengthen the home/school link while helping students use the technology that they love. Moreover, the Moodle would engage students in their own learning by enabling them to become producers of information rather than just passive consumers of it. For example, in one classroom the teacher exposed the students to many different web based tools such as Animoto, Glogster, Wordle, Google Docs and presentation software such as Notebook by SMART Technology©, and how the Moodle would serve as a way to “connect” all learning activities together.

Over the course of the school year students gained experience with the tools by completing a variety of projects connected with the learning goals and curriculum expectations for their grade. Evidence of this was when students had the opportunity to create a healthy eating commercial while considering a target audience. With this activity, students were tackling objectives both within the media/language strands and the health curriculum. However, since the students were using web 2.0 software and posting their finished projects on the MOODLE, the learning experience seemed to deepen for the students. Engagement, work ethic, and peer interaction took on another shape as students created projects that were closer to a Madison Avenue marketing commercial than the traditional hallway posters. As one student put it, “I felt like my commercial was good enough to be on TV.” By using the web and the MOODLE, the classroom was transformed into an exchange of ideas that stretched far beyond “work that is just turned in to be graded”.

What evidence supports your assertions?

Mid-way through the year, it was time to find out about how the use of technology in the classroom was contributing to and encouraging the home, school and peer connections in the classroom, and whether or not it was *improving boy’s engagement in literacy?* To accomplish this task, it was determined that one classroom would be selected and the students would be observed, interviewed, and surveyed. In addition, surveys were sent to their parents as well.

Students were given a short online survey to find out what they thought about using the MOODLE and the web based tools. Most of them reported they "strongly agreed" that completing projects with another person or in a group is easier using web based tools. The students also overwhelmingly supported the statement that "it is good that my parents can see what I am doing at school on the MOODLE." Many students use the web based software to create things besides projects for school. They use them for their own personal creations which some may post on social networking sites such as Facebook.

Parents reported that the MOODLE is a huge asset in helping feel connected to the classroom. "It has kept me informed as my child never tells me much about what he does at school...He has been more enthusiastic about school and challenged to do more creative work," noted one parent. "Yes, Deadlines are now "emailed" or submitted through the Moodle and I get to review her work on the computer. It is pretty impressive so far. " Most of the parents who responded to the questionnaire were familiar with the names of the web tools that their children were using and many reported that they saw an increase in their son or daughter's engagement with school and school projects. My child, "enjoys learning new software, uses it at home, and is excited to show us her work. It makes learning fun!" Parents also saw the value of the MOODLE as a catalyst for and a means of communication. The engagement provided by the web tools and the resulting projects posted online became points of conversation at home that one parent described as "more interactive". Another parent saw the MOODLE as a possible way to communicate with other parents.

The teacher reported a "significant" increase in student motivation towards writing activities that were Moodle-based. This led to improved lessons and markedly better writing assignments. In addition, the teacher found that students shared their work and resources via the Moodle which generated a lot of excitement in class.

What did you learn about the problem you investigated?

After only a short time using this technology it seems that there are considerable benefits for students and their parents. Increased engagement in learning, reduced stress about completing projects while working in a group or with others, greater parental engagement with the student learning their children are doing, and improved communication between home and school in a meaningful, regular way have all contributed to improved student learning for this class. When students are actively engaged in their learning with the help of new technologies, the classroom takes on a vitality that is palpable.

What are your next steps?

- 1) Every teacher that was involved in the project has asked to continue using Moodle in their classrooms
- 2) An invitation to all teachers went out in the summer of 2010 to encourage the use of Moodle in the classroom
- 3) Training Sessions have been organized at local schools
- 4) Moodle support has been incorporated into PLC's and job-embedded training opportunities

Overall Reflection:

Students easily embrace technologies such as the Moodle and it is our task as educators to see the possibilities that the new technologies provide so that students can reach their full potential.