Proposal to Implement Moodle as SD33’s LMS of Choice

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Mr. Arul-Pragasam,

 I am writing this letter to you to propose the implementation a new method of content delivery accessible to all teachers of SD33.  If approved, classroom instruction in our district will take on a fresh and exciting look, with student engagement and academic performance showing improvements.  The technology that I am referring to is an online learning management system (LMS) called Moodle.

 My interest in this stems from the focus Sardis Secondary has had on 21st century learning and the discussions of my colleagues on ways to bring technology into the classroom. The measuring stick I used to assess Moodle’s effectiveness for our district was based on Bates and Poole’s (2003) SECTIONS framework and Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) seven principles.

**What is Moodle?**

 Moodle stands for “modular object-oriented dynamic learning environment” (Got Moodle, 2008). It is an LMS that can be run on either Windows or Mac computers. It is comparable to other systems like Blackboard, WebCT/Vista, and Desire2Learn, but one of the main differences is that it is open source software (Got Moodle, 2008). This means that it is free to obtain, which answers the cost question that Bates and Poole (2003) address. Moodle can be downloaded directly from Moodle’s website (www.moodle.org).

 Teachers who use Moodle can create a blended learning environment and make course content accessible to students online.  This accessibility would assist students who need extra assistance or who have missed classes by providing a way to connect with the curriculum outside of the classroom (Shachar & Neumann, 2010). Moodle is a tool educators can use for course structure, delivery, and assessment.  Teachers can effectively model the National Education Technology Standards for Teachers (NETS, 2008) as they personalize instruction for students and accommodate individual learning needs.  It gives educators flexibility to design courses in a way that makes sense for the students and provides choice in education.

 I have been able to experiment with my own Moodle page as I develop course work for my Physics 11 Waves unit and I am pleased to report that Moodle scores high on ease of use (Bates & Poole, 2003).

**Features of Moodle**

 The following are some of Moodle’s many features found on their website:

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| **Lesson** | an activity where questions can be in multiple choice, true or false, numeric, short answer, or essay format |
| **Chat** | a synchronous environment with HTML abilities and a session log |
| **Forum** | an asynchronous environment where posts have attachment abilities |
| **Wiki** | a tool that supports group work and collective authoring as well as giving students a sense of control |
| **Choice** | a single question poll, useful for measuring the opinions of a class and getting a sense of who is understanding |
| **Assignment** | student work can be uploaded, graded, commented on, and resubmitted and this tool can be given late options |
| **Workshop** | a feature that is used for peer assessment with multiple grading scales |
| **Quiz** | a question database with automatic grading, feedback, answer shuffling, limited time and multiple attempt options |

**Affordances of Moodle**

 Asynchronous environments afford thoughtful discussions in the convenience of one’s home at any time (Ally, 2004). This would dramatically open up opportunities for students to not only contact teachers, but to pull in ideas and questions from other class members. A “forum” would be common ground where anyone could join in and offer up thoughts; it would allow peer interaction that might otherwise be awkward and difficult, especially if students do not know each other well.

 Perhaps even more beneficial is the ‘wiki’ feature, where collaboration can occur with multiple people contributing to the same document. In this way, Moodle meets the interaction and cooperation components of the seven principles (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). As well, an online aspect would allow for a more constructivist approach to teaching (Shachar & Neumann, 2010), which would optimize the learning environments in our district (Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004).
 There has been significant research in recent years on the benefits of incorporating a more blended approach to teaching. Studies have shown that group work done online, in a synchronous or asynchronous environment, achieves a slightly higher grade average than a face-to-face class (Somenarain, Akkaraju, & Gharbaran, 2010). In regards to assessment, online submission of assignments and digital testing would limit the amount of class time used to evaluate learning and reduce the amount of paper used in the course (Got Moodle, 2008). This would have a positive effect on the environment, which is becoming an ever-growing concern in our world.

**Technical Requirements**

 From a technical aspect, SD33 would need to have a physical or virtual third-party server to house Moodle. There would also need to be enough storage to maintain the server with enough memory and performance to support hundreds and potentially thousands of users. In addition, connection to the district’s Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) server would be required. Although the district IT personnel would need to familiarize themselves with Moodle in order to field technical questions, Moodle is highly supported through the open source community. The district would be wise to offer workshops for teachers at professional development conferences as a way to educate instructors on the abilities of Moodle.

**Conclusion**

 I think Moodle is an LMS that provides a flexible, private, and easy-to-use solution that offers teachers a robust and capable working environment. It would give teachers the ability to add components to their courses as needed, all the while providing students a straightforward no-nonsense education environment that meets their learning needs. The tools found in Moodle would bring in elements of constructivist and socio-cultural learning theories that would strengthen existing classroom communities and make learning more meaningful. It is my recommendation that our district make steps to incorporate Moodle into our classes.

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