NSU NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY Abraham S. Fischler School of Education

Innovate: Journal of Online Education

Volume 2
Issue 2 *December 2005/January 2006*

Article 6

1-1-2006

Places to Go: Moodle

Stephen Downes

Follow this and additional works at: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/innovate

 Part of the Education Commons

Recommended APA Citation

Downes, Stephen (2006) "Places to Go: Moodle ," *Innovate: Journal of Online Education*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 2 , Article 6.
Available at: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/innovate/vol2/iss2/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Innovate: Journal of Online Education by an authorized editor of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.

Places to Go: Moodle

All exhibits, tables and figures that have remained available have been included as additional content with their respective articles to be downloaded separately. Click here to return to the article page on NSUWorks and view the supplemental files.

Unfortunately, not all the supplemental files have survived until 2015 and some will be missing from the article pages. If you are an author in Innovate and would like to have your supplemental content included, please email the NSUWorks repository administrator at nsuworks@nova.edu.

Places to Go: Moodle

by Stephen Downes

With the recent merger between Blackboard and WebCT creating a giant in the academic course management system (CMS) market, academic computing staffs have been casting about for alternative products. As their responses have indicated, educational technologists are concerned that the merger will lead to an increased cost for the software, a decreased likelihood that the new company—now in a near-monopoly position—will expand and improve that software, and an increased possibility of becoming locked into a proprietary solution that will not allow academic administrators to customize the software to meet their own needs. Systems such as Sakai, Bodington, and .LRN have emerged as potential alternatives, but Moodle, an open source CMS written in a computer scripting language called PHP, has received especially enthusiastic responses from educational technologists. The Open University, for example, recently announced its support for Moodle, and Canada's Athabasca University adopted Moodle last summer.

A great deal has been written online about the Moodle software, much in the form of advocacy and more in the form of case studies. Readers wanting an overview may want to view Mira Vogel's slide presentation Using VLEs effectively: Goldsmiths' Experience or the Imperial County Office of Education's Moodle Overview. In a nutshell, what attracts educators to Moodle is not merely that it is free, but that Moodle's design is explicitly informed by a social constructionist pedagogy, an approach that emphasizes interaction over content.

An instructional technologist's first experience with Moodle is often the Moodle Web site. Moodle can be used for much more than course management; both the Moodle Web site and the EdNA Groups Web site, for example, run on the Moodle software. The Moodle site features the three-column layout that has become a standard for course management systems (see also, for example, Plone or PHP-Nuke). The main menu is to the left, login is to the right, and important and current content tops the center column.

New readers will want to follow the links in the central "Welcome to Moodle" section, possibly skipping over the definition of Open Source (unless the subject is new) to follow the pedagogical principles link. This page briefly outlines the four major concepts behind Moodle: constructivism, constructionism, social constructivism, and the concepts of connected and separate behavior. According to the site, thinking about these issues not only explains Moodle's design philosophy but also "helps you to focus on the experiences that would be best for learning from the learner's point of view, rather than just publishing and assessing the information you think they need to know. It can also help you realise how each participant in a course can be a teacher as well as a learner."

To see these principles in action, readers should next follow the links to one of the Demonstration Courses and skip the Moodle Features Demo Course, as it will be quite daunting without further experience. The News Forum is disappointing because it has not been updated since 2003, but more current content is available in the Suggestion Area. Following these links, readers will begin to see Moodle flex a bit through offerings like reader feedback, chat and discussion forums, quizzes about attitudes to learning and preferences in course style, and background reading in a glossary and variously formatted documents. To play with some of the content generation tools, readers may also want to enter the Teacher's Hands-on Playground where, after logging in with the demonstration username and password, educators can access the full range of Moodle tools.

After exploring these links, readers may think that Moodle is similar to most other course management systems, albeit with a less professional presentation. Where Moodle shines, however, is not in its marketing

and advertising, but in its online community; as the site notes, "Moodle has a large and diverse user community with over 75,000 registered users on this site alone, speaking 70 languages in 138 countries." Probably the best place to start exploring this community is the Using Moodle forum although even this venue will likely overwhelm readers looking for a neat, linear presentation. For tips on how to negotiate the forum, readers should begin at the top and follow the link to the forum's Guide to Participating. Skipping to the Open Social Forum will then give readers a taste of the Moodle community. Readers should not attempt to read everything but should instead choose topics of interest, such as the Top 10 Moodle Myths or the discussions on using Moodle for Communities of Practice or Skype Conference Calls. To keep up with future discussions without returning to the forum, registered users can subscribe to the forum's RSS feed by following the link in the upper right corner of the Open Social Forum page.

Scrolling down beyond the "Getting Started with Moodle" discussions, readers will find detailed forums on each of Moodle's many features, such as the assignment module and the flash module. Most of these modules will not be of interest to casual visitors; they are intended to support Moodle administrators though readers may be interested in discussions on using Moodle to import and export SCORM packages. More information on handling SCORM packages may be found under item 11 in the Features Demo. Other discussions of interest include teaching strategies and building learning communities. System administrators will be interested in the Moodle source code, downloads, development news, and bug tracking reports. Finally, the discussions page includes news feeds from Google and OLDaily in the left hand column and a list of new users in the right hand column.

A little less noticeable, but equally valuable, is the course categories page. Once a teacher or technologist has decided to look more deeply into the software, this will be the place to go. Courses within the Moodle for Business Uses—which look very much like the discussions and forums just visited; readers will get used to the interface design very quickly—look more deeply at different uses for the software. The Moodle Exchange section provides readers and developers with complete Moodle courses that can be downloaded and modified for local use; developers can also exchange glossaries, SCORM packages, and quizzes.

In exploring these more substantive sections, readers will approach the heart of the software and will finally want to explore the Download Area. As advertised, Moodle source code is freely available; new users should download the latest stable release (or "branch"); newer releases may have undiscovered bugs. Moodle will run on just about any recent computer with an installed Web server, database (such as MySQL, an open source database), and PHP. Once the files are extracted into their own directory on the Web server, an install script manages the Moodle installation, which typically takes only a few minutes. More detailed instructions are also available online for those who want to install the software manually.

Moodle is based in Perth, Western Australia and was started by developer Martin Dougiamas as a hobby. It now boasts about 140 core developers and has attracted worldwide attention. Enthusiasts will find that the Moodle Web site is just the beginning of a process of discovery that will take them to hundreds of installations, reports, and news items from around the world. Moodle may not be Blackboard or WebCT, but many educational technologists are beginning to think that the Moodle course management system is all they need.

COPYRIGHT AND CITATION INFORMATION FOR THIS ARTICLE

This article may be reproduced and distributed for educational purposes if the following attribution is included in the document:

Note: This article was originally published in *Innovate* (http://www.innovateonline.info/) as: Downes, S. 2005. Places to go: Moodle. *Innovate* 2 (2). http://www.innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=245 (accessed April 24, 2008). The article is reprinted here with permission of the publisher, The Fischler School of Education and Human Services at Nova Southeastern University.

To find related articles, view the webcast, or comment publically on this article in the discussion forums, please go to http://www.innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=245 and select the appropriate function from the sidebar.