

## Moodle in Grade 2? You've Got To Be Kidding, Right? No!

Romeo Marquis and Cynthia Damian

Although Cynthia Damian is co-author of this article, I've never met her – *really!* However, I can say with complete confidence that she is an innovative educator who transforms vision into reality for her second grade students and their parents. I can say this as a result of her participation in a couple of my graduate courses and in subsequent partnering with me in an extremely important project. Our most recent collaboration is this article. We hope the content might be at least somewhat surprising to you.

I recently taught an asynchronous online course in multimedia to fifty-three (yes, 53!) teachers from several countries across several time zones – Thailand, South Korea, Trinidad and Tobago, India. Cynthia was one of my “guest presenters” all the way from Morocco. Through a discussion forum, she was able to conduct a wonderful discussion while allowing these teachers to enter her Moodle “course” site as guests. All in all, this was quite an experience in global teaching and learning combining two course management systems. My graduate course was in Blackboard while Cynthia's course is in Moodle.

Cynthia teaches at the Casablanca American School, making this project even more global. This is what 21<sup>st</sup> Century professional development is all about. Her “course” title is, “Grade 2 at the Casablanca American School.” Her site includes an information center for parents, photos of her class, a section for reading, spelling, math, audio files, work sheets, PowerPoint presentations, links to Web sites, and even math problems to solve. Wouldn't you just love to have your own children or grandchildren in Cynthia's class?

Following is some material taken from the discussion board forum which Cynthia facilitated. To participate in this forum, the teachers in my course first had to enter Cynthia's Moodle site as guests. Following these visits, discussion flowed . . . 147 posts over a few days. It is not possible to include the entire forum here. However, here are some of Cynthia's responses to teachers' questions:

Cynthia: I can use Moodle in class as a listening center because I have recorded books. This gives me the ability to work one-one with the students as well as train a student to help me when I can't come to the rescue. So, weekly updates would include spelling

words and math word problems. However, you could always get ahead in creating your information in each module but hide it and so when you are ready to display it you have that option.

Romeo: What a nice example of differentiating instruction.

Cynthia: Keeping my site current is important overall but that depends on how long and what content you are going to display. Older students can be held more accountable to it. With the little ones, their capabilities are still developing and so you need a lot of parental supervision for this. So, I plan on showcasing this site in September at "Back to School Night."

Romeo: Nice example if educating parents and involving them in their children's education.

Cynthia: I agree with you that it is work keeping it updated. However, I would have to say that when I first started my moodle site through Romeo's Moodle course. I had a lot of trouble getting started as an elementary teacher. I will be honest, I was ready to throw in the towel because every teacher that was online represented middle and high school teachers but I decided to stick with it and I am glad I did because my Moodle journey with all of those teachers made a difference in how I wanted to design my site at the lower end. My advice to you is to take each module one step at a time. Do not overload until you get comfortable with your skills. Organize and prioritize what you want to make meaning for your students. Yes, presentation is important and it should be eye catching especially for these little ones but content is what is delivered.

Romeo: Ahhh, such sound advice.

Cynthia: Updating Moodle depends on the section I need to keep current. For example, parent newsletter and spelling words for the week are updated every week. If I am doing a unit in Science and Social Studies I will go about next year in updating it every 4 weeks. I will post the essential questions under each module and then update it after 3 weeks. Organize, prioritize what you want to deliver in content areas and take it piece by piece.

Romeo: Teachers using Moodle do find that they have to be very organized.

Cynthia: Moodle has been a new experience and I would recommend it for the tools that are made available and you can certainly differentiate instruction using it, especially if you add audio for your struggling readers. Imagine the control and comfort you would be giving the students.

Romeo: I've often said that this is really *not* about Moodle. It's about redesigning what we do in order to strengthen ways in which we help students learn.

Cynthia: First, I am glad to be participating with you in this module. I am a new user to Moodle. I took the course, *Integrating Moodle into Your Teaching* this spring. It was well worth the time I invested with Romeo and the other online students. Not to mention that I was in tears as I had no idea what was expected of me because I did this on my own while the rest of the teachers online had each other to support one another at their local schools.

Romeo: Cynthia is truly a pioneer, isn't she? What persistence!

Cynthia: Our school uses Edline. I am glad that I have experimented using Moodle. I absolutely like Moodle and I strongly believe that it is all about redesigning the way a teacher can deliver his/her instruction. Honestly, Edline does not hold as much as Moodle.

Romeo: Edline and other tools including blogs and wikis are good tools, but they are not as comprehensive as Moodle. Moodle is truly a Learning Management System (LMS) rather than simply a portal that provides *some* tools for student and teacher use.

Finally, here is a quote from a teacher who visited Cynthia's site: "Your site is overwhelming!!!! Every page I go into creates an ambivalent feeling of excitement and envy!!! The parent page, all aspects of the curriculum, the skills and strategies used, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities - Unbelievable!! I am sure your kids are so motivated that student achievement is high!! Most of the public schools in my country- Trinidad and Tobago do not have access to this type of technology. To keep up with these 21st century skills, the system will have to undergo a major overhaul beginning with human and financial resources - training of teachers, etc. Maybe, I can get ambitious and propose this innovation to my principal!! Excellent work!! Keep it up!!!!!"

Cynthia continues: Moodle has been something new to me. I think that Moodle is a

great tool to use when providing students with different tasks to do. What I have liked most about this tool is that it leaves students accountable for checking it almost daily to know what is going on or what is going to happen in class. Moodle is especially good to use when students are not able to make it to class that day. Parents should also be encouraged to participate in checking the site as well. What is important to stress with parents is that Moodle is another way for them to access their child's performance in my class. Moodle allows them to contact me with any concerns, questions, and/or comments.

Moodle has become to me the detailed planner that I never had to lift a finger to make. With just a simple click of a button, accessed by a username and password, my planner has opened before my very eyes. This to me became the very essence of distance learning. Even if the student is not in the classroom, Moodle will have the exact information that he/she missed. This leads to less of the unnecessary repetition of directions and more efficient learning. It is much like taking your classroom into the student's home. I personally feel that Moodle gives the students access to all the information they need to know regarding what they have been learning in class.

Gone is the time where one will be worrying about things that they have missed in class due to one reason or another because Moodle allows one to check on his/her course activity updates via the internet. By utilizing Moodle, the parent, student and teacher will always have access regarding the course.

The utilization of technology in the classroom through Moodle is not about doing one more thing; it is about replacing something the teacher is already doing and then seeing if it works for both the teacher and the student and of course seeing if there is added value in the learning process. Moodle is about getting your students excited about learning and engaging them with the tools they want to be engaged with. Classrooms are now extended into the Web, giving students a common place to interact and share classroom resources. Thus, Moodle allows non-technical teachers to set up with convenience and ease a website where students will learn together and independently. Hopefully Moodle will help more teachers connect to their students and organize the vast knowledge we all possess individually.

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