

CAN MOODLE INCREASE LEARNER AUTONOMY?

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses concerns about increasing learners' autonomy through the use of learning management systems, and specifically through the use of one of these, Moodle. I will comment on some of the ways using a learning platform may *not* increase learner autonomy but also offer examples from two different subjects that I believe do increase learners' autonomy. Students' opinions of their work with Moodle will also be included.

KEY WORDS: Learner autonomy, Moodle, learning management systems, LMS, pedagogical innovation.

RESUMEN

Este ensayo se centra en sobre si es posible incrementar la autonomía del alumnado a través de algunos sistemas de control de aprendizaje y, más concretamente, Moodle. Me detendré en algunas de las maneras de emplear estos sistemas que creo que no ayudan a incrementar esta autonomía y, a la vez, describiré ejemplos de su empleo en dos asignaturas en las que creo que sí lo hacen. Asimismo, se incluye opiniones de alumnos sobre su propio trabajo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: aprendizaje autónomo, Moodle, sistemas de control de aprendizaje, LMS, innovación pedagógica.

1. INTRODUCTION: DO LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS INCREASE LEARNER AUTONOMY?

In this paper I would like to reflect on the use of Moodle,¹ a learning management system (LMS) as a possible instrument for increasing learner autonomy. I think activities can be developed and designed by teachers to help students achieve greater learner autonomy using this or other LMSs; however the opposite is also possible. Since I started using Moodle, I have been seeking ways to work with it so as to have it help advance my students' autonomy in their learning process. I think that greater learner autonomy can be achieved through LMSs if these are set up to do so but I am also of the opinion that this is not achieved automatically.

LMSs run the risk of being simply transmitters of information, that is, a new source to maintain the traditional teacher-centered class in which the teacher





simply uploads information onto the platform the same way as giving lectures to fill the students' supposedly empty heads. The students may be somewhat less passive in that, instead of listening to the teacher and taking notes, they can choose when and where to download and do the assigned work; however, this possibility does not exactly make the form of learning very pro-active. Uploading links to websites with exercises does not, in itself, help students take much charge of their learning. Forman (20) points this out when she writes that textbook publishers' online courses and/or materials tend to be "pretty dry and very similar to what you'd expect from any standard course book: endless gap fills, multi-options quizzes, etc, not exactly the thing to inspire most internet-savvy students." This author (and I) do not find that learner autonomy is encouraged, much less enhanced, with this kind of work, when the only thing that students can decide is when they will do the work (much the same as traditional homework in any case).

Corder and Waller affirm that computer-assisted language learning "proves effective for language learning, promotes autonomy, caters for various learning needs and provides flexibility by enabling students to work at the own pace in their own time" (9). This may be true, but I think it depends on how the platform is used. Moodle can give a certain amount of autonomy in and of itself in the sense that students can see on the initial page what work is being done each week and can get work there.² It can help me, the teacher, in that, even if I bring photocopies to class, the paper in question also goes onto Moodle where it is available for anyone who missed class that day. However, if the learning platform is used only in this way, the increase in learner autonomy is very small. If teachers use a VCP only to upload website exercises, notes for their students to read and/or copy, lists of bibliography, little autonomy is gained. "...it's not the technology that matters —it's what you do with it that counts" (Keddie 17). In the same line of thought, Attwell states "I am unconvinced that our present educational technology, based essentially on managing learning, rather than encouraging creativity, provides ... motivation for learners." Granted, it does save on photocopies, it does save students' energy of having to take notes in class but students put nothing of their part into this unless their teacher sets up a means for them to do so.

There are many programs in which the entire process of foreign language learning has (theoretically at least) been uploaded onto a virtual classroom platform but of course using a learning platform does not guarantee, by any means, an increase in their learning autonomy. To give just one example, the Spanish Ministry of Education has set up an LMS which includes among other learning programs, English language with, at present, four levels that go from a CEFR pre-A1 to a B1

¹ MOODLE is an acronym for "Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment." Because Moodle is an open source there is a large international community of users providing informal support and feedback for each other. This community can be found at <<http://moodle.org>> (Hockly 60).

² Moodle, in this sense, offers two possible ways of organizing the first page: by weeks or by topics.

level. By the fourth level students are doing work in the skills of reading, listening, writing and reading but can take no initiative of their own. So using a learning platform in itself may not increase learner autonomy at all.

In the following sections of this article I will describe two ways of working with Moodle forums that I think help students to increase their own output, their decision making and greater autonomy.

2. USING THE MOODLE FORUM: STUDENTS PROPOSE TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

I have looked for ways to use the Moodle activity of “forum” in order for students to have a greater decision in what material we work with and how it is used. In this section of the paper I want to look at how students choose the focus of what will be discussed on the forums I set up on the Moodle page. The subject is Methodology for the Teaching of English as a Second Language, an elective open to third and fourth year students. For each article students may read, I open a Moodle forum.

For specific areas of work (e.g. assessment, treatment of mistakes, classroom management, etc.), I propose a series of articles³ for students to choose, read and write open questions on. These open questions I call “discussion points.”⁴ Using the term discussion point (DP) and having four possible focuses for them, my intention is that students see this proposal as *their* choice of the focus of their comments, questions, objections or reflections with respect to what they have read. “Starting from the students’ discussion points rather than from mine means that we start from what they find most interesting, most striking. By using their own questions, I can find out what they think is most interesting in each article and start from there, as opposed to what I think is most important or interesting.” (Bobb Wolff, *Asking* 89) In this sense, students writing DPs on the Moodle forum is not very different to writing them on paper or in an e-mail.⁵ The change I see is what takes place next. When I receive a student’s DP on paper or in an e-mail format, this DP is not yet available for the rest of the class. A DP which has been uploaded onto a Moodle forum is immediately available for everyone in the class to read and respond to. Working this way opens the discussion to multiple voices and opinions, as the rest of the class can respond both to the original DP and to the responses written *to* it. The idea behind this is that it is the students who are, if not structur-

³ The use of the term “article” covers, in fact, both journal articles and book excerpts. Here we will refer to these always as “articles” to simplify.

⁴ By “discussion points” I mean 1) any statement or concept you disagree with, 2) any statement you would like to discuss with other people, 3) anything you don’t understand OR 4) anything that especially attracts your attention.

⁵ The use of discussion points without using Moodle, that is in a traditional classroom situation, has been previously described in Bobb Wolff, “Asking”; and Bobb Wolff, “Learning.”





ing the format of the forum, deciding the content that will be discussed on it. Learner autonomy is, I believe, fomented here to a certain extent, in the sense that students can choose among the given articles which ones to read. In a greater degree, autonomy is increased through the fact that students decide the focus on what is discussed with respect to each article.

How the discussion is carried out also varies, giving students more control of the time and topics. Before using the Moodle forum, within the classroom context, during the small group discussion period, each group (3-5 students) could choose which DPs they wanted to discuss but could obviously only work on one at a time—and classroom time is relatively limited. When the turn came for the whole class discussion, obviously we all must focus on the same article and the same discussion point on that article at the same time and are limited again by the number of hours of in-class time. With the forum, there are no time limits as to when one can access and respond. (See the dates of the original DP and of the responses in Example 1, below).

Using the Moodle forum, the choice of what DPs are read and responded to is entirely in the students' power. In the paper version, when DPs were sent to their professor, I had to act as a "censor" in the sense that I would choose which DPs would be included in the photocopy made for the students, knowing that there wouldn't be time to discuss all of them. Of all the DPs sent to me, I would choose five to seven for each of the articles on the specific area under discussion at the time. This meant that not all the discussion points from each student would be presented to the class. One of the alternative ways of working with these DPs in class was that students brought their written DPs to class rather than sending them to me. For each article, small groups chose and wrote onto a transparency those DPs they found most interesting to work on with the entire class and then presented them on a OHP. Usually, at best, there was time to discuss one or two chosen DPs on each article from each group, meaning that most students' DPs never were discussed at all.

In example 1, there is a DP copied from a Moodle forum uploaded by a student along with responses from two other students. We can see that in her initial comment, YLG is voicing concern about all the aspects of the teaching process described in the excerpt she has read; she finds the possibility of having to take into account so many aspects threatening, thinking she would focus on only two and explaining why she would do this.

EXAMPLE 1:

*Teachers - Learners.*⁶

by YLG - domingo, 28 febrero 2010, 22:50

There is something that has attracted my attention because I think it is very difficult to achieve. This is the reason why I would like to put it into discus-

⁶ The excerpt referred to here is from Edge, 1993.

sion. I think it is very hard for a teacher to attend to so many aspects as organisation, security, motivation, instruction, modelling, guidance, information, feedback, encouragement and evaluation. It is impossible for a teacher to take into account so many things in a class that in most of the cases lasts just 55 minutes and where there are usually more than 20 students. I know that all of these features are important but I think that the teacher must have priorities. I think that the two most important aspects of all I have mentioned before are “Motivation” and “security.” If students feel comfortable in the language they are trying to learn and they are motivated as well they will be able of developing their skills although sometimes the teacher will have to correct them. In this way the teacher can have time to solve problems with the learners that have more difficulties in the language.

Re: Teachers - Learners.

by YHL - domingo, 7 marzo 2010, 19:43

On the one hand, I agree with you because I think that the teacher sometimes does not have enough time to have into account all the things you have mentioned. And I also agree with you in the fact that the most important ones are motivation and security, because if a teacher is motivated, he or she will be able to motivate his or her students, and in this way they will learn much more things; and if the teacher feels self-confident, he or she will transmit that to the students, and the students will feel respect for the teacher. But on the other hand, I think that a good teacher should find time and ways of including other things that are important for the students, such as a good organization, or good systems of evaluation and assessment that had been previously explained or discussed with the students.

Re: Teachers - Learners.

by SDFD - lunes, 17 mayo 2010, 18:39

I agree with YLG in which it is very difficult for a teacher to achieve every aspect which have been mentioned in the article. I consider like her that it depends on the type of class you have in front of a teacher should use some aspects or another taking into account the kind of answers he/she could obtain.

The first response, from YHL, seems to interpret the initial comments as having to do more with the teacher’s motivation than with the students’; she also has objections to leaving out aspects that she thinks are important. The second response refers to both of the previous ones, in that SDFD shows agreement with YLG in contrast with what YHL wrote.

Reading through this written DP and the two reactions to it, another possible advantage of using a Moodle forum can be seen. The students have more time to think through, write, change and rewrite their comments or response in the written format of a forum than when this is done speaking, although there may be a more rapid give and take in a spoken format. This may not lead to greater autonomy on the students’ part but I think the following does. I have found is that it is much easier for me *not* to dominate in the written format. In the classroom speaking format, students tend to look to me, their professor (the “expert”) for my



response to each DP and of course, as Charles Curran always said “the teacher is sick to teach” and I always have “lots of good stuff” I want to say about any given DP so I really need to control myself to not take over the discussion on any DP. In the Moodle forum I can simply wait and write after other contributions have been put in.

I *do* set a minimum requirement for the number of articles to be written about, the number of discussion points to be written and the number of responses to classmates’ DPs and include this clearly in the assessment criteria both at the beginning of the course when the program is discussed and at the end of course assessment. I think this must be clearly stated so that students realize that this aspect of the course is important and to be taken seriously and also so that they know clearly what has to be done.

The text in Example 2 is excerpted from one student’s journal where she describes her opinion of using the Moodle forum this way. Some of her description + opinions of the work could equally apply to writing the DPs in the “traditional,” paper way (“we have to read the article with critical eyes,” ... “students can learn from each other,” “the objectives of the teacher are to make the students read the articles and reflect on them”). Others clearly could only apply to an on-line forum (“writing about them...” ... “they will participate much more...”)

EXAMPLE 2:

We had to select four articles from six, read them carefully, and write discussion points on the forum (Moodle). I consider it a very useful activity because we can learn a lot by doing this. We have to read the articles with critical eyes, and to write things about them. Furthermore, as we have to put our DPs on the forum, we can read other classmates’ DPs, and we can comment on them. This can be very enriching, since students can learn from each other, they can ask and answer questions through the platform, and the teacher is also there to supervise the comments, and to correct if there is something wrong; I think this is her role. I think that the objectives of the teacher are to make the students read the articles, and reflect on them; to make them be critical, and to make them interact with other students about what they have read by thinking about other classmates’ comments and opinions and writing about them, students learn a lot. Moreover, I think that it is a different and innovative activity (doing it in the platform), and this is important, because the students will be more interested, and they will participate much more. Furthermore, I consider that this is a different and innovative way of teaching the theory, making the students read it, reflect on it, and writing down things they find worth commenting for several reasons.

This journal entry does not explicitly mention learner autonomy at all but I think we can see a degree of autonomy in the fact that students are choosing (to a certain extent) what to write about, what to write, what to reflect on as well as how they are learning from one another. “[U]sing the articles as springboards is a way of getting the students to think their own thoughts about the articles rather than simply answering the questions their teacher thinks are important (Kontra 43).”

3. STUDENTS' OPINIONS ABOUT THE USE OF MOODLE

Third and fourth year students doing the subject of methodology were, in many cases, using Moodle in other subjects as well. I used a questionnaire to ask them how they were using Moodle in all these subjects as well as their opinions about how it was used (without identifying the subjects). There are no unanimous or even majority answers, which is to be expected since the students are enrolled in a variety of different subjects. The entire questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1; however, here I will focus on just three of the questions: in what ways have you used Moodle, how does it help you learn and what disadvantages have you found to using it.

To the question “in what ways have you used Moodle?,” we can see different types of usage that professors have made of the Moodle with their students. One of these is using Moodle to give additional input of material. Included here by students are the following: reading articles, looking at additional sources (for example, watching videos) or exercises, downloading papers on a topic and downloading notes for the subject. A different use of Moodle is doing work on it. For this aspect, student answers covered writing discussion points and answering other students' questions on a forum, commenting on articles read, making a glossary or vocabulary for a subject, doing on line questionnaires, doing homework and doing critical reviews. The third aspect of Moodle included is having it as a bulletin board: seeing the homework for the next class, sending homework, and checking their marks for activities and exams.

Asked how using the Moodle helped them learn, again, we can see among the answers the students include that there are different types of benefits for them. Some answers are related to the fact that Moodle facilitates contact with their professor and classmates. Some students wrote that through Moodle they can ask their teacher doubts they have about the subject, others that it is easier to send homework and still others that this is a means for the teacher to leave them extra work to help themselves.

A strictly material benefit that more than one student wrote about is that they do not have to buy notes but just print them and in this way save money and also avoid a lot of papers in their folders. The ease of choice of time and place to work is also mentioned more than once. Students point out that there is not the same time pressure to give an answer as in class because they can take their time before answering. After doing homework at home, it can be uploaded onto Moodle and, as a variation, homework can be done anyplace and any time the student wants to.

In any case, for me the most interesting answers to this question are those in which the students see using Moodle helping them with their learning process. With regard to keeping a glossary or vocabulary, students include as a benefit that this helps them understand the articles better and makes them have a clear idea of the key concepts of the subject.

Several different types of comments can be found concerning the use of a forum on Moodle although the answers are similar. Some students mention



that talking about points on a forum helped them to interact with other students and share opinions about topics they were dealing with in class while others wrote that it helped them to learn because they paid attention to classmates' opinions, and also it helped them to improve their knowledge; others simply stated that the forum was a good way to learn or a good way of learning in group or that it was a more interactive way of learning because they can share their opinions and knowledge.

Other remarks concerning the benefits to their learning process are more dispersed; these include being in contact with the subject's issues all the time for extra sources, the usefulness of having sources for the subject on internet and simply knowing what they have to learn, or that it made it easy to see one's progress throughout the course.

Students also wrote about the disadvantages they could see to using Moodle. One of these is of a strictly technical nature which, in fact, has nothing to do with how the Moodle is used by their professors although it does, of course, affect its use: several students point out that if one doesn't have an internet connection at home or has an unreliable connection, its use is complicated. Other than this concern, we can note differences between those students who have not used this, or any, VCP very much and those who have more experience with it. Among the former, there are students who simply write that the biggest disadvantage for them is that they don't know how to use it, that they get lost or don't understand how it is organized; we can consider this a call for help, professors need to check that their students are familiar with Moodle and explain how it is organized for each class.

Of those students who have experience using Moodle, some dissatisfaction is expressed concerning professors' use it. One complaint is that some professors do not say anything in class about homework but simply upload assignments onto the Moodle front page and assume students will find the reference and do the work. Others point out that they are aware that if a professor is using Moodle, their class hours should be correspondingly reduced (a university norm) but state that their teachers require them to attend all the face to face classes and then also put in many hours on the Moodle. In any case, the disadvantages expressed seem to be fewer than the advantages which students describe.

Analyzing the information from these third and fourth year students, few of the possible ways of interactive work that Moodle offers are being exploited; these include, at least, chat, forum, journal, wiki and glossary. Most of the work described here is using Moodle as a digital bulletin board, for assignments, marks, extra work. Only the forum and the glossary are uses that could not be done in face to face work. Granted, as we have seen, students do find many advantages to these uses of Moodle but we professors need to learn how to get more use out of all the possibilities that Moodle offers. As Miller (2) points out, "Teachers have to be trained in how to use CALL [computer-assisted language learning] in promoting autonomy. With this training comes a change in the teacher's role in the classroom."

Looking at the students' answers with a possible increase in their autonomy in mind, I also think that where we see more of an increase is precisely in those cases where students can input information onto the Moodle, on the glossaries and the forums. The degree of autonomy in being able to study or work when they choose

to do so, downloading material from the Moodle, seeing what their work is, etc., do not create much of an increase in their autonomy. Referring again to the quote in the previous paragraph, teachers need training in how to help their students become more autonomous through the use of a learning platform of this type.

This or an equivalent questionnaire was not used with the first year students, whose work we will discuss in the following section, because the subject with me was the only one in which they were using Moodle.

4. USING THE MOODLE FORUM: STUDENTS' STORIES⁷

A quite different use of the Moodle forum to lead students to have greater control of the work they do is in a first semester, first year subject of English language.⁸ In this case, the students write and upload stories of their own invention onto a Moodle forum. The only requirements they have with respect to the stories themselves are that they need to choose and incorporate some fifteen new vocabulary words in their story and the length of the story should be some four hundred words. (See appendix 2 for the assignment as it is given to the students on Moodle.) The other requirements are that on the forum they write comments about two classmates' stories and that this process is to be carried out three times during the fifteen-week semester. In this sense, the students are not choosing to do the work; it is a requirement and is explicitly included in the assessment criteria. Other than this, they are free to decide the topic of their stories, decide the vocabulary they will include and decide which classmates' stories they will comment on.⁹

The initial objective of asking students to write these stories was that of learning new vocabulary. I have them choose the vocabulary they will include individually because, at their level of linguistic competence, each one has different vocabulary gaps. I also want them to develop their own criteria about what they need to memorize with respect to new vocabulary since one can never memorize all the vocabulary there is in English—or any language. I also think they invest themselves more in their story if they choose the vocabulary to include than if I were to do so; the story belongs more to them if they choose and this is motivating so they are more likely to continue with the out of class activity. I do not set any specific criteria of how they should go about choosing this vocabulary although I do sug-

⁷ In this first year subject at the beginning of the semester I asked the students how many had used Moodle or some other VCP previously (e.g. in their secondary school studies); only some five percent had done so; that is very few had experience with a learning platform. At the same time some 98% were accustomed to using internet, in most of the cases to download music or films, watch videos, YouTube, etc.

⁸ In the English Studies degree, begun in the academic year 2009-2010, the subject is called "Communicative Skills in a Modern Language (English)."

⁹ An earlier version of this study has been described in Bobb Wolff, 2009 "Europe."



gest that they can use any from the texts we are using in class or from texts of any other subjects. To a certain extent students *do* use these sources, which means that there is some repetition of new vocabulary from story to story, making it more likely that these new words will become part of their long-term memory.

As I wrote just above, the initial motivation I had for introducing this out of class activity was that of having students choose and use new vocabulary. With the use of the activity I have come to realize that the work done on written fluency, extensive reading and the positive class dynamics that come about from students reading and writing comments on one another's stories are as important if not more important than the work on practicing with the new vocabulary each has chosen.

Looking first at the positive class dynamics aspect, it has been demonstrated that students learn better if they feel comfortable with their classmates. Stevick expressed this very explicitly when he wrote, [in a language course] "success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom" (4). Writing stories and reading one another's stories, according to students' comments in the questionnaire and the final interviews as well as the comments themselves on one another's stories demonstrate that this assignment does achieve this. "My main concern as a teacher has been first in trying to get my students participating, socializing, adjusting to each other, and identifying with a group that uses the target language for social purposes" (Murphey 70). This computer-mediated communication does build community among learners—in this case, first semester, first year students, in relatively large classes (from 35-55 students), who did not know one another at the beginning of term. It can be seen in their comments (see example 3, below) on one another's stories and their answers on a questionnaire passed at the end of the semester that it has helped to build community feelings and reduce anxiety.

EXAMPLE 3:

Responses copied from Moodle forum on students' first stories:

- I really like your story, I think that You couldnt choose more interesting subject.
- Great title!! When i saw this title i just had to read your story!Well done.
- A great story =). I really enjoyed it ^_^ . It makes me remember a book I read when I was like 15 years old, about a group of adolescents who travels in time when they go to bed xD
- Your story is really good. You have amazing imagination. Congratulations! Fabulous concept I really like it I'm waitin' for part 2

Another benefit of this activity which I had not expected when I began to use it is that of extensive reading. Students are required to read and comment on two of their classmates' stories on each of the three Moodle forums during the semester. What I have seen is that they have taken the responsibility of choosing to read more stories, in some cases, a good many more. The stories are at their level of competence because they have been written by classmates; As Murphy points out, "Extensive reading works best when it is self-regulated (students choose materials

that are at an appropriate level and interesting) and students get hooked on reading a lot of level-appropriate material” (73). Since the students are choosing from among the stories written by their classmates we can be sure that what this extensive reading is at their own level (versus what could happen with stories their teacher could select).

In the final questionnaire asking the students how many stories they had read, over 60% said they read between three and ten stories each of the three times. Between 15 and 20% said they read between eleven and twenty-five stories. (See appendix 3 for the questions and results for the year 2009-2010.)

The stories are concerned with written fluency. I do no correcting and the students do not correct each other's stories either. This, in one sense, bothers me; or at least bothers the part of me that has the professional deformation of not feeling comfortable with leaving mistakes alone, in this case, on the forum for everyone in class to see. At the same time, at least one of the objectives of this activity *is* writing fluency, which precludes correction. I don't want writing fluency to be affected by a concern with accuracy. We're working on *that* elsewhere. Forman points out this contradiction: “Teachers need to think about ... how we can deal with our own inconsistencies and create an environment where both we and our students can act as autonomous agents, conscious of what the learning process constitutes and where it is taking us” (22).

If these were not students of a degree in English studies I would be less concerned about their written accuracy; as it is, this is an aspect of their learning process which does need to be taken into consideration. In any case, it is worked on through other activities in and out of class; it is not one of the objectives of this out of class activity. On the final questionnaire, I asked the students if they were concerned about reading stories that might have mistakes. Over eighty percent answered that they *were* concerned about this. Yet when I asked if they felt uncomfortable with the mistakes they noticed, 85 percent said they were not uncomfortable with the fact that they had noticed mistakes in their classmates stories which could be taken to mean that in theory the idea of having mistakes was a concern but in the reality of reading it was not. Students expressed more concern about classmates finding mistakes in their own stories although only twenty five percent answered that they felt quite or very uncomfortable with this possibility while the other seventy five percent said they didn't feel at all uncomfortable with this.

Writing new vocabulary stories allows learners take control of several aspects of their learning. Within the general time framework I set, students choose when to do this work since it is an out of class activity. However, I think the other aspects of taking control are more important for increasing their autonomy. One is that of choosing new vocabulary. Choosing what they will write about for each story is another. Being able to choose which stories they read and which stories they comment on is one more. I think students do achieve more autonomy in their work in this subject through this activity with the Moodle forum.



5. FINAL COMMENTS

As I wrote in the introduction, I think Moodle, and any learning management system, can be useful for helping learners achieve a greater amount of autonomy in their learning process but that it depends on how it is used. Some authors seem to think that using an LMS alone is sufficient, e.g. Miller “Without motivation learners cannot begin to move towards autonomy. One way in which learner motivation may be enhanced is via technology” (2), or Nakata “Computers also have the potential to make learners more autonomous, in that using devices such as computers enables them to learn what they want to by themselves at their own pace and thus control their own learning” (51). Technology may or may not enhance motivation. As a novelty with a class, any use of technology will most likely increase motivation; but if its use ends up being very similar to a traditional note-taking student-receptive-passive class, motivation to use the technology may quickly disappear. Furthermore, motivation alone will not forward students’ autonomy in their learning process; it certainly helps, although I have also found that realizing that they have more autonomy of decision in their work also increases students’ motivation.

In any case, I am more inclined to agree with Benson when he voices, “Learners who engage in technology-based learning do not necessarily become more autonomous as a result of their efforts. A great deal depends on the nature of the technology and the use that is made of it” (10). Or as Schank is quoted as saying, “the real change is how we teach, not the tools we use” (5).¹⁰ E-literacy is, in itself, an important learning objective nowadays and since Internet is not going to go away, to the degree that we are able, we should also be helping our students to learn how to use it better; at the same time as it helps them become more responsible for their intellectual growth.

As their teachers, we professors need to learn how to use the new technologies, in this case, Moodle, to help our students advance in their learning and in their autonomy. White wrote, “it is evident that there is an urgent need for us to focus on matching both new and existing opportunities for learning with the needs of learners in relation to developing and maintaining control of their learning” (71). Moodle, any LMS, can help learners advance in their autonomy but only if we, as their professors, learn to use this tool for it to help them do so.

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¹⁰ Translated from the Spanish: “El auténtico cambio es cómo se enseña, no los instrumentos.”

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE ON USING MOODLE USED WITH METHODOLOGY STUDENTS SPRING 2010

In what ways have you used MOODLE in your different subjects? Add lines as needed	How interesting was this?	How useful was it?	What did <i>you</i> have to input onto this?	Why or why not did it help you learn?

As a student, what benefits can you see from using MOODLE?

And as a teacher?

What disadvantages or drawbacks can you see as a student?

And as a teacher?

In the different subjects, how often did you look at the MOODLE first page to check if there was new information?



APPENDIX 2

WRITTEN OUT OF CLASS WORK: VOCABULARY TASK

The vocabulary task will be uploaded to the Moodle forum and, if you choose, also to the wiki there.

1. You need to find between 10 and 15 useful new words. You can choose new words from the texts we use OR, if there aren't that many new words, find other interesting or useful new words to reach this number.
2. With these words (and obviously lots of others), write a short story or play. Please underline the new words you have used. Your story should be approximately 400 words in length, this is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an A4 page in Ariel 12 font. It doesn't matter how silly the story is! You will find it easier to remember these words. In fact, if you prefer not to write fiction, you can write about something else—but it should be yours, something that interests *you* and that *you* write.
3. Below your story, please include the new words in alphabetical order and say where you found each one and what criteria you used to choose each. Also please include the new words you found but didn't use.
4. Stories are due weeks 6, 9 & 12, that is Oct 27th, Nov 17th & Dec 9th.
5. Upload your stories to one of the Moodle forums; there is a different forum for each story. In addition to writing your *own* story, you will comment on at least two classmates' stories also. Of course, you will also be able to read your classmates' comments on your story there.
6. Comments on two other people's stories must be written weeks 7-8, 10-11 and 13-14.
7. If you want your story to be corrected, you must also upload it to the Moodle wiki. There, classmates may try to improve the grammar/vocabulary of your story. Putting your story on the wiki is *entirely voluntary*; that is, it's your decision.
8. On the wiki, you can try to correct any mistakes you find on any of the stories there. Identifying and correcting other people's written work can help you improve your own.
9. Near the end of the semester you will write a short report on the usefulness of this task for you. This should be turned in by January 12th.



APPENDIX 3

EXCERPTS FROM THE SURVEY WITH STUDENTS ON NEW VOCABULARY STORIES & COMPS¹¹

- 2) For each of these new vocabulary stories, you were asked to comment on two of your classmates' stories. For the FIRST new vocabulary stories how many classmates' stories did you read? (The question here is NOT how many you commented but how many you READ).

Possible answer	None	2	3-10	11-25	26-40	More than 40
responses	1	3	27	7	1	0
%	2	8	69	18	2	

- 3) For the SECOND new vocabulary stories how many classmates' stories did you read?

Possible answer	None	2	3-10	11-25	26-40	More than 40
Number of responses	2	3	25	8	1	0
%	5	7	64	20	2	

- 4) For the THIRD new vocabulary stories how many classmates' stories did you read?

Possible answer	None	2	3-10	11-25	26-40	More than 40
Number of responses	2	9	20	7	0	1
%	5	23	51	17		2

- 5) When you read classmates' new vocabulary stories, were you concerned about there being mistakes in them?

Possible answer	Not at all	a little	sometime	quite uncomfortable
responses	3	18	17	1
%	7	46	43	02

- 6) Did you notice mistakes in classmates' new vocabulary stories when you read them?

Possible answer	Yes	No
responses	33	6
%	84	15

¹¹ This questionnaire was inspired from Zhou 2007: 42-45.

7) If you noticed mistakes in classmates' new vocabulary stories, did you feel uncomfortable with them?

Possible answer	Not at all	a little	Quite uncomfortable	very uncomfortable
responses	16	17	4	2
%	41	44	10	5

8) Did you feel uncomfortable that classmates might find mistakes in your new vocabulary stories?

Possible answer	Not at all	a little	Quite uncomfortable	very uncomfortable
responses	19	10	6	4
%	49	26	15	10

9) Did you enjoy reading classmates' new vocabulary stories on the moodle forums?

Possible answer	A lot	So-so	Not really
responses	24	14	1
%	62	36	2

