



TLT RESOURCES

TLT WIRED

What's new for instructors in Moodle 2.0?

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Moodle is a widely used Open Source Learning Management System (LMS) built on social constructionist learning principles. Moodle competes with proprietary systems such as Blackboard and Desire2Learn and offers similar functions supporting interactive, online education. Moodle can be used as a pure distance learning platform or as part of a Blended Learning strategy. Register at Moodle.org to find an active user community, documentation, links to commercial support partners, and a list of the many registered Moodle installations in Japan supporting thousands of users.

The Moodle 1.9 release was announced in March 2008—more than two years ago. There have been several delays during this longer than usual development cycle. However, the Moodle 2.0 Release Candidate 1 (20 July 2010) was a usable major upgrade with significant improvements for teachers. Administrators wishing a detailed description of all changes should consult the release notes (Moodle Docs, 2010).

Beauty is skin deep: Better interface

Moodle has never tried to compete with glossier commercial products on esthetics. Although the platform has always been open to customization and can be made more attractive, this takes time and design skills. With Moodle 2.0 a concerted push to improve themes began even before the official release date (NewSchool, 2010). Average users without HTML, css, or php skills now have more options for Moodle installations with clean, professional designs to make their courses more appealing to students and staff.

In addition, the WYSIWYG editor for creating or editing content within Moodle is greatly improved. The old editor was not compatible with some common browsers. The new editor, based on TinyMCE, is cleaner and works well with browsers such as Safari or Chrome.

Even more openness

With Moodle 2.0 the range of options available for connection is greatly expanded. Connect easily with powerful repository systems such as Mahara or Amazon S3. Educators already using Merlot (www.merlot.org) will be happy to see integration here as well. Finally, this release introduces *Community Hubs* which function as full-course repositories, making sharing between institutions easy.

File structure and file management tools have been redesigned from the ground up. When adding a file to an activity or resource, instructors

...with Ted O'Neill

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In this column, we explore the issue of teachers and technology—not just as it relates to CALL solutions, but also to Internet, software, and hardware concerns that all teachers face.

As well as our feature columns, we would also like to answer reader queries. If you have a question, problem, or idea you would like discussed in this column, please contact us. We also invite readers to submit articles on their areas of interest. Please contact the editors before submitting.



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have great new options including: selecting files from the central server or local desktop; using commercial repositories such as Flickr and Picasa for images; Google Docs for office productivity files; or syncing from Dropbox. Intellectual property information such as Creative Commons licenses can be attached at upload.

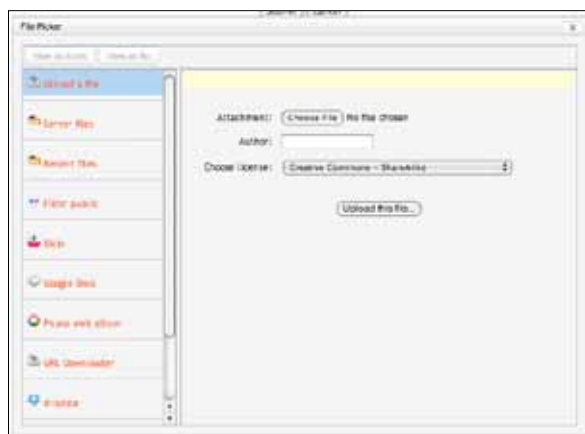


Figure 1. New file upload interface with increased options

Improved course structure and assessment management

It has always been easy to add a wide range of Moodle *Activities* or *Resources* to assemble a course. However, providing tasks and input is not the same thing as structuring a coherent course. Topics, resources, and activities could be organized graphically in Moodle, but this did not actively guide students. Users could click, jump ahead, and bypass the instructor's intended organization with ease. Attempting to manage student progress through a planned sequence of tasks was laborious or inflexible. Moodle 2.0 changed much of this for the better with two new features: Completion and Conditional Activities.

Activity Completion

It is now possible to set completion criteria for a single activity or even for an entire course. For example, the simplest criteria is simply to *View* an *Activity* or *Resource*. Although this cannot assure that a student has actually read a text or listened to an audio file, you can set accessing

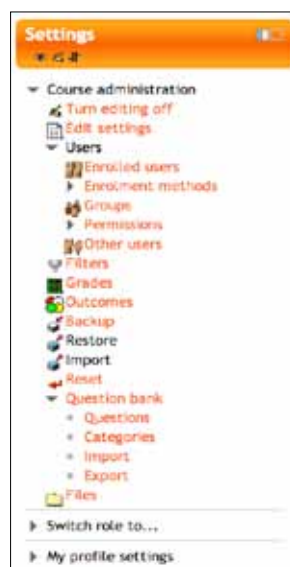


Figure 2. Moodle course administration settings

them as a requirement and generate a simple report of who has done so. Much more powerful applications include requiring: reaching a designated passing grade on a quiz; adding a certain number of posts to a discussion forum; or adding a number of entries to a Database.

Conditional Activities make Completion useful

The next step is to open Resources or Activities only after earlier ones are completed. Under Moodle 1.9, Resources or Activities could only be hidden or visible to all students in a course or group. Now, teachers can create courses that guide students.

For example, a section of a course might include all of the following: a short video of the instructor introducing the topic, a reading passage, a vocabulary and comprehension quiz, and a discussion forum. Under Moodle 1.9, students could do any or all of these in any order, perhaps jumping to the discussion before fully mastering the background material. Activities can now be connected using Activity Completion. With Moodle 2.0, a teacher could set the following sequence. Students cannot read the passage until after they have played the video. If they fail to make a passing grade on the vocabulary and comprehension quiz, they are directed back to

the reading passage until they pass. Only once they have shown some mastery of the material by passing the quiz, they can begin collaborating on a discussion. Intervention from the instructor is not required at each step in the process, reducing assessment time and freeing students to move ahead as quickly (or slowly) as they are able.

One caveat: Watch out for Backup and Restore

Once you've carefully backed up your Moodle 1.9 courses you can always recreate them by restoring them to an installation of Moodle 1.9. However, Moodle 2.0 is such a top-to-bottom redesign that courses backed up from 1.9 cannot be restored directly to an installation of Moodle 2.0. Although this is a significant weakness, there are work-arounds. Upgrading a 1.9 installation to 2.0 will upgrade all of the installed courses. Scripts to fix Moodle 1.9 archives for restoration to 2.0

are underway. Finally, restore from 1.9 backups is expected as part of the Moodle 2.1 release.

Recommendation

Whether you are an experienced Moodler or new to LMSs, Moodle 2.0 is worth trying now. The roadmap sets February 2011 as the goal for a 2.1 release. At that point, Moodle 2 will be ready for any kind of use, so set up a practice course soon to get ready. The more you look, the more good stuff you will find inside.

References

- Moodle Docs. (16 July 2010). Moodle 2.0 release notes. Retrieved from <docs.moodle.org/en/Moodle_2.0_release_notes>.
- NewSchool Learning. (n. d.). Moodle 2.0 theme contest submissions. Retrieved from <newschoollearning.com/theme/submissions>.



JALT FOCUS

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JALT Calendar

Listings of major upcoming events in the organisation. For more information, visit JALT's website <jalt.org>, the JALT events website <jalt.org/events>, or see the SIG and chapter event columns later in this issue.

- ▶ 19 - 22 Nov – JALT2010 "Creativity: Think Outside the Box" will be held in Nagoya, Japan. See <jalt.org/conference> for more information.
- ▶ Oct 15 – Deadline for voting in this year's NPO JALT's national elections (please use the ballot postcard included with this issue of TLT).

JALT News

June EBM

The second JALT Executive Board Meeting was held on 26 June 2010 at the National Olympic Memorial Youth Center in Tokyo. Following is a brief summary of some important issues discussed, which may be of interest to members.



...with Marcos Benevides

To contact the editor: <jalt-focus@jalt-publications.org>

JALT Focus contributors are requested by the column editor to submit articles of up to 750 words written in paragraph format and not in abbreviated or outline form. Announcements for JALT Notices should not exceed 150 words. All submissions should be made by the 15th of the month, one and a half months prior to publication.

JALT FOCUS ONLINE: A listing of notices and news can be found at:
<jalt.org/main/news>