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Using edmodo in middle school Language Arts

The transcript below came from an informal interview I did with a teaching colleague, Tom Scheeler, on his integration of edmodo in his Language Arts classes. (Tom is on Twitter, and has a school webpage.)



Q: Why did you decide edmodo was worth looking at for use in your classroom?

A: I liked the interaction with the students. It seemed more rapid – they would post something and it would be there. It wasn't going through a check-and-balance thing, I like the ease of uploading files. I like the fact that I can put an assignment there, grade it there, and the kids can get their results there.

Q: What process did you go through to get the students enrolled in edmodo?

A: Rather painless actually. Once I established the groups, they just had to click student and enter the access code. No email address was needed at all. In fact, during the setup, students could choose to use their cell phone number to receive updates.

Q: Tell me more about the cell phone interaction.

A: The students can choose to have their edmodo notifications sent via SMS text message.

Q: What kind of notifications do they receive? I heard you saying to the students that unless they had unlimited texting on their cell phones, they shouldn't choose to do that part. What does it look like when they receive a message?

A: They actually get to pick the notifications they want to receive. So, if they want to receive replies, notes, alerts. Earlier today, I sent out an alert that their online grades had been updated.

Q: For the students who do not have unlimited texting or cell phones, could they use their email addresses to receive the same notifications?

A: Yes. I encourage them to use their EduTech (Sendit) email addresses, so they can read the alerts and notifications on school computers (because those email accounts are not blocked by the state filter).

Q: After the setup, then you loaded each class as a “group” into edmodo, and each group ended up with its unique access code. Then what?

A: I didn’t do anything to add students to the groups. They added themselves using the class access code. I didn’t make those codes public knowledge across all classes, just shared it during the individual class hour setup.

Q: Now, you’ve got your classes set up, and you’ve begun putting in assignments. Tell me more about that.

A: We’ve put in one assignment (as of the date of this interview), and it was a brief one to see that the students would know how to enter an assignment into edmodo, and to see that I could effectively grade what they had submitted.

Q: What kinds of assignments are you putting into edmodo?

A: Quick, reflective, one paragraph or less in size. Another option you have is that students can upload a file. So one of my next assignments will be to have the students type something in a word processing program (we use AppleWorks), and upload it to me via the site. This way they can take the time to compose and use spell check and such. One of the other things I like about posting assignments in edmodo is the ability to post active web links. It’s so easy to copy and paste the link into the post, and students can use it right away. We can do the same thing on our SchoolCenter page, but the process is more length for us as teachers – whereas this is immediate.

[Tom is an avid user of Google Docs in all of his Language Arts classes, and we had a brief discussion of how students could compose their reflection answers in a Google Doc, make him a collaborator to the doc, or “publish” the doc and send the URL to that published doc to him within the edmodo group.]

Q: What has been your students' response, over all, to the use of edmodo?

A: Warm. They're still waiting for the "fun". I need to put up content that they want to see and view, and say to themselves, "hey, if I go to Mr. Scheeler's edmodo page today I'm going to find something worthwhile." The thing they do recognize, and like, is that it's just THEIR class, it's just THEIR learning community, where they know each other and feel comfortable. The kids have already figured out ways of using the common posting area to send individualized messages to one another. (The postings in the edmodo group are seen by the group, and the students cannot send private messages to one another.) They start their messages with "To:", and who they're trying to write to. It's similar to what we do on Twitter with the "@" symbol - they've figured out to do it by starting with "To:". Do their classmates get back to them on edmodo, not usually, but it serves as another "conversation starter". I would like to see a feature built-in to edmodo, like the Twitter "@" so that students could direct their messages to one another. It would still be public to the group, but slightly more directed. Lastly, I'm so early in using edmodo - I'm going to continue to use it across this year.

Update: This blog post is mentioned in: <http://educationpurpose.net/2009/01/08/edmodo-more-than-just-a-twitter-for-education/>