

The Good Teacher

From MoodleDocs

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THE GOOD TEACHER

Act 1: The Pretty Good Teacher wants to be a better one

Once upon a time, there was a Pretty Good Teacher. Her students and her peers recognized that she was a Pretty Good Teacher. Humble as she was, though, she also felt that she was a Pretty Good Teacher, and she was proud to be one.

Still, like all good teachers, she wanted to be an even better teacher.

She spoke with colleagues and they gave her many helpful tips (although she suspected that some of them were holding back a little).

She talked to her students, and their insights were often quite interesting and thought-provoking.

She went to her principal and he gave her some good advice. (Really, he did.)

She read journals and books, joined a ListServ, visited web pages, signed up for courses, attended workshops and conferences, and generally sought knowledge wherever she could find it. She was very motivated.

Little by little, she began to try new strategies and techniques in her classroom. For example:

- She began to take multiple intelligences into account in her lesson plans.
- She started using cooperative learning in her classroom.
- She integrated more project-based learning into her instruction.
- She even started using an LCD projector.

Sometimes, it was a bit overwhelming. Exhausting, in fact. Not everything worked out the way she intended. But she persevered, because she wanted her students to learn as much as possible.

Still, she felt that something was missing. She wanted to do things with her students that she had never been able to do before. Things that were fun, things that were exciting, things that students actually enjoyed doing. Mostly, things that made her students WANT to learn.

But she couldn't say what those things were.

Act 2: The Pretty Good Teacher meets Mr. Dougis

One day, she read an article in her local newspaper about Mr. Dougis, a teacher who was doing great things on the Internet with his students. It sounded exciting and she wondered if this were not what she had been looking for.

She knew the school where he taught, and she left him a telephone message. Would he mind her dropping by one day to chat?

The next day, she received an answer. She could drop by any Thursday to see what was up. But it had to be a Thursday.

She went to her principal and explained to him that she needed a substitute teacher for next Thursday. She told him why and he gladly gave her a professional day in order to investigate. Really, he did.

She went to see Mr. Dougis. He greeted her with a friendly smile.

"Welcome," he said, and smiled. "It's good that you came today. Thursdays, we Moodle."

The Pretty Good Teacher looked around. There were about twenty-five students sitting at computers. They looked about thirteen years old. Most did not notice her, because they were engrossed in what they were doing.

"What are they working on?" she asked.

"Well," said Mr. Dougis, "a couple of things. Some of them are working together to create a glossary of terms used in the current events articles we read each week."

"They know how to do that?" she asked. She thought that creating an online glossary must be a bit complicated for this age.

"Sure," said Mr. Dougis. "It's not hard to do that in Moodle."

"Oh yes, Moodle," she said, "I read about Moodle in the newspaper article. What is it?"

"It's the software we use in our virtual classroom", he said, as he guided her to a monitor.

"See how the students are simply filling in a form to create entries in the glossary?" he asked. "That's Moodle."

It did not look like the students were having any trouble.

"And some of the other students," he said, "are having an online debate about the way the current war on terrorism is being conducted. It's turning into a pretty heated discussion," he chuckled.

"How do you have an online debate?" she asked.

"They are using a discussion forum to talk with each other and are even rating each others' posts according to criteria we developed together," he said.

"Can they really handle that at such a young age?" she asked.

"Some are still learning about how to deal with constructive criticism and how not to take everything that is posted personally," he replied. "But we are getting there. With a little guidance and encouragement..."

"No, I mean the technology," she interrupted.

"Of course!" replied Mr. Dougis. "In Moodle, forums are easy to use."

And throughout the day, that is how it went. Moodle this and Moodle that. The Pretty Good Teacher had to admit that

even the younger students seemed to be proficient Moodlers. And almost all the students seemed engaged and interested in their work.

She was impressed, but wondered if all were really as it seemed.

During Mr. Dougis' break, they talked over a cup of coffee and a piece of cake.

"Tell me more about Moodle," she said.

"Well," he began, "I use Moodle to complement and enhance my classroom instruction. I might, for example, just upload a Power Point presentation to the site for my students to review or post links to a good web site. Or we might do something more social, more collaborative, as you have seen today."

"So, Moodle helps you do some things differently?" she asked.

"Not just different," he emphatically corrected, "better."

"How so?" She really wanted to know.

"Let's say," said Mr. Dougis, "that we are discussing the effects of global warming. I can send my students to the library to do traditional research and we can discuss what they find out in class. And I can have the students make posters to display what they have learned. We can break into groups create lists of top ten easy ways to fight global warming. And we can have a debate in class about the effects of global warming, too."

"That sounds fine," said the Pretty Good Teacher. "What is wrong with that?"

"There is nothing wrong with that," replied Mr. Dougis, "but we can, for example, also go to Moodle and create a survey about global warming to administer to students here at our school and to students at our online partner schools in Canada and South Africa in order to see to what extent we all agree on the issue. We can design the survey together, invite our partners to take it, and have a discussion with them about where we see eye to eye and where we don't. And that is potentially a rich, valuable educational experience that we could not have without Moodle, don't you agree?"

The Pretty Good Teacher did agree. She wanted this Moodle thing for her students.

Mr. Dougis showed her how to go to any one of several sites and set up a Moodle classroom. That weekend, the Pretty Good Teacher started learning the basics of Moodle. She even got in touch with the moodle community at moodle.org where she found other teachers like herself and lots of people interested in the moodle thing.

Act 3: The Pretty Good Teacher starts Moodling

By the next Friday, she and her students were in the school computer lab. She showed them how to use a discussion forum and urged the students to discuss the novel they were currently reading.

Some students had a good bit to say about it. Others had very little to say. Some comments were insightful. Others were quite foolish.

The Pretty Good Teacher was disappointed. Was Moodle not really all Mr. Dougis had claimed?

A few days later, she tried again. She set up a chat room and told the students to chat about anything, but to pretend they were characters from the novel. A few students did a really good job, but many students did not seem to take the assignment seriously. And the chat room became very confusing when everyone spoke at the same time. Frankly, the lesson was a flop.

Some of her students must have been talking about Moodle in a less than complimentary way, because the Pretty Good Teacher had to endure some snide comments about it in the staff room. Some of her so-called colleagues actually seemed

happy to see her struggle a little. It was incomprehensible to her, but it was undeniable. And she didn't like looking foolish.

Now the Pretty Good Teacher was quite sure that Moodle was not as wonderful as Mr. Dougis seemed to think it was. Annoyed, she sent him an email, telling him so.

Act 4: Mr. Dougis you've got an email

She received a quick reply. "You sound upset," wrote Mr. Dougis.

The Pretty Good Teacher returned, "I am upset. I am not so sure that Moodle is right for my students."

An exchange of emails ensued.

"Maybe," he responded. "But let me ask you this: Did your students do what you asked them to do?"

"What do you mean?" asked the Pretty Good Teacher.

"Well, when you asked them to discuss the novel in the forum, did they do that?" he asked.

"Yes, I suppose most of them did," she replied.

"And when you asked them to chat about the novel," he continued, "did they do that?"

"The majority of them did," she answered.

"So, why are you unhappy?" asked Mr. Dougis.

It was a good question.

"Well," she wrote, "the students did not seem very excited about the lessons and I am not sure that they learned much, either."

"Does that ever happen in your traditional classroom?" asked Mr. Dougis.

Now she was offended. "Almost never," came her indignant response.

"Why not?" asked Mr. Dougis playing with fire.

First she planned a very icy and angry response. But after 5 minutes or so, she cooled down and started thinking about it seriously. Normally, her lessons had something like a beginning, a middle and an end. They were well thought out and the students understood just what she expected of them. So that is what she wrote in her response to Mr. Dougis' question.

"Can you honestly say the same of your two Moodle lessons?" he wrote back. Mr. Dougis was definitively a daredevil.

She knew he was right. She had expected Moodle to work some sort of magic on her students, but she had not really designed the kind of good, effective lessons she normally planned.

"What would you advise your students to do in a situation like this?" asked Mr. Dougis.

She decided to give Moodle another chance.

Act 5: The Pretty Good Teacher strikes back

This time, she asked herself, "What do I want my students to learn?" And she wrote down her objectives.

Then she asked herself, "What resources will we need to make the lesson work?" and she collected and organized her resources.

Finally, she asked herself, "What is it I want my students to actually do in order to be successful?" And she designed her activities.

The Pretty Good Teacher wanted her students to recognize and identify the importance of conflict in the novel.

She located a couple of good online resources to give students the information they needed to do this and she posted her own notes to help them better understand what they found on the web sites.

In addition, she wanted them to create a web page for each major conflict in the novel, describing the conflict and suggesting several possible ways the conflict could be resolved. Then she set up a wiki where her students could do this.

Before going to the lab, she discussed the lesson with her students and showed them how to work in a wiki. She used her cool, new LCD projector for that.

She posted clear instructions about the lesson to the web site, reinforcing what she had said in class (and unconsciously stating a contract with her students).

The next day, they went to the lab.

The Pretty Good Teacher was gratified to see how much better the lesson went. While a few of the students did have a little trouble the first few minutes getting used to the wiki, most of them actually caught on very quickly, and it was a pleasure to see how they helped each other get up and running.

After about forty-five minutes, almost all students had contributed to the wiki. Some of their web pages were surprisingly good.

As the Pretty Good Teacher circulated around the lab, she encouraged the students and complimented their work. Of course, she also had to remind a couple of students that playing card games on the computer was not part of the lesson.

While she could not say that the lesson was perfect, the Pretty Good Teacher was pleased. The students had not only learned a lot, they seemed to enjoy doing so.

That evening, she went back to the wiki to reread some of the pages. She was surprised to see that some students had continued to work on their pages from home. They had added graphics and links and some shocking, but enthusiastic, text formatting. She had not assigned this as homework, they just wanted to do it.

And the Pretty Good Teacher smiled a little.

Act 6: The next day

When class met the next day, several of the students were quite excited about Moodle. One said, "When my father asked me what we had done in school, I showed him the wiki. He thought it was great!" It was obvious that she was proud of the work she and her classmates had done.

The Pretty Good Teacher was feeling pretty good.

"Can we go back to the lab today?" one student asked.

"No," she replied, "not today, but we can go back next week. Do you all want to do that?"

When they said yes, she was not very surprised.

"In the meantime," she suggested, "maybe we should think of a name for our online classroom."

They thought of several good possibilities and decided to vote to pick the best one. The Pretty Good Teacher said, "We do not have to vote right now. I will post a choice to our new web site and you can take a few days to decide."

Almost everyone agreed that this was a sensible idea. But a couple of students looked unhappy about it.

"What's wrong?" the Pretty Good Teacher asked one of them as the class was leaving.

"We don't have the Internet at my house, so I can't vote," said the student.

The Pretty Good Teacher hadn't thought of that. But she had an Internet connection in her classroom. And there were quite a few online computers in the school's media center.

"Why don't you stop here right after school and use our computer when you want to Moodle?" she suggested. "Or I can write you a pass to the media center during class one day when we have a few extra minutes."

The student smiled. "Thanks! I'll stop by after school", she said and headed to her next class.

When she returned at the end of the day, she had a friend with her. "You're not in my class," teased the Pretty Good Teacher. "I know," said the friend, "but it sounds like fun."

And the Pretty Good Teacher was pretty happy.

Act 7: She kept on moodling

And so it went. Over time, Moodle came to be an important part of the class. Soon, the Pretty Good Teacher was posting lesson plans to Moodle. Not very exciting, but the parents seemed to appreciate it. After a while, she began setting up little practice quizzes to help students prepare for tests. Together with another class, the students collaborated on articles for the school newspaper. They submitted rough drafts of papers for peer review and discussed class matters online. Some students even used the chat room for occasional online study sessions. And once they discovered instant messaging and blogs, things really got crazy.

After a few months, Moodling became second nature to them. It felt natural. It was fun.

And other teachers at the school began to Moodle. Sometimes, they met with their wireless laptops at a local cafe for "Moodle and Coffee" sessions. The teachers began to look forward to spending this time together--even a couple of the teachers who had made negative remarks in the staff room.

Act 8: Unexpected role-reversal

One day, the Pretty Good Teacher ran into Mr. Dougis at the grocery store. She told him how well things were going. And she thanked him for Moodle.

"Glad to share," he said, and smiled.

"Know what I like best?" she said. "It is cool that we can do a weekly podcast for our new partner class in Australia! My students love that podcasting module!"

"So there's a podcasting module? I didn't know that," said her Moodle mentor.

"Really, well, we should set up a forum where we can share on a regular basis," she replied, secretly thrilled at this unexpected role-reversal.

"Yes, that's a great idea. Let's do that," answered Mr. Dougis, who was clearly pleased. "You know, it sounds like you have become a Very Good Teacher."

And he was right. She had, indeed, become a Very Good Teacher.

Epilogue

She had to convince the school faculty council and the school director, but she finally succeeded in getting some free days for her trip to the next MoodleMoot. Her school administrators even covered the expenses of her trip, writing it off as "professional development" and wishing her well as she represented them to other schools attending the Moot. Once there she, the Good Teacher, gave a speech to other Moodlers about her Moodling experiences.

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