The platform to be discussed in this experience report is Edmodo. In 2008, Jeff O’Hara and Nic Borg founded Edmodo to assist with communication and collaboration between students and teachers. According to O’Hara (2008), many schools did not use the tools they purchased because they were not easy to use, so for that specific reason, Edmodo was designed. Edmodo contains features like those on social media, and in the courses I teach, it can be used for educational purposes. For example, I have students create their own user profiles customized to their preferences, which enables them to comment on other students’ activities. The students can also share their ideas with their classmates through messages, just like on social media platforms. Edmodo is flexible enough for students to submit their assignments, completed on their own or through collaborative learning exercises, and answer quizzes or polls I have assigned at their convenience. One of the advantages of Edmodo is the ability to conduct a course entirely online, giving students the flexibility they need in case they have a demanding schedule. In my courses, students use texts, videos, and other sources of media to complete their homework and assignments; easily using these sources through Edmodo allows for blended learning to occur naturally. By using these online tools, students increase their digital literacy, which can be helpful for them in many different settings.

A tremendous benefit of Edmodo is allowing students to interact with classes around the world and in other parts of the country. Although it is the role of the teacher to find another instructor or appropriate class to do the learning exchange, once the preparations have been made, the interactions by the students with their online learning partners can begin. Students can participate
in a collaborative project where they may complete projects and assignments with their learning partners. In different parts of the country and in different countries around the world, students have their own ideas and life and learning experiences. Through Edmodo, one of the bigger picture results of this collaboration is that students can share these ideas and experiences with the learning partners in their project, allowing for new thought processes and approaches to complex problems to reach the students which would otherwise not be possible. Thus, Edmodo facilitates the development of skills to interact with peers in online/digital environments, similarly enhancing the digital literacy of the students through the utility of the blended learning nature of Edmodo.

Despite the advantages that using an online learning environment site such as Edmodo could present, it took some time before meaningful insights were obtained by teachers and researchers. One of the earliest examples of Edmodo in the literature appeared in 2009, and at that time, the primary focus of Edmodo was on its role as a microblogging site rather than one with large educational value (NEWGARDEN, 2009). Edmodo’s focus was on using it as a closed social network, wherein the teacher said that students “can post and reply to messages from me and their fellow classmates” (MUKERJI; TRIPATHI, 2010, p. 99). Thus, the technological applications to its future role in education were vastly underdeveloped, and Edmodo functioned only as a social messaging service. In fact, one mention of the site described it only as a microblogging site with additional features for student and teacher privacy, but elaborated no further about these features or other capabilities (MATESIC; VUCKOVIC; DOVEDAN, Z, 2010).

In contrast to when it was first developed, nowadays Edmodo is the subject of rich research material on which a number of studies have been conducted. Each of these studies utilizes the materials production of the learners to draw conclusions about learner progress. The level of student learning can be English as a foreign language (EFL) learners or native English-speaking students. It appears that the feedback resources in Edmodo are primarily those from the student posts and activities. Much of the research has focused on what students write and ask one another to evaluate fluency and material understanding. This is positive because the best way to see not only if one student is fluent, but also if the class has general understanding, is to have access to a
system or set of tools that will allow the teacher to look through the material and assess learning. Further, with well-defined goals, outcomes, and assignments, teachers have a predictive model of what they believe the data should look like and can evaluate how well their predictions match the course learning. However, with that in mind, Edmodo is still based predominantly on written production, and much of the studies using the platform do not have an oral or spoken component for evaluation. This limits some of the creativity of the users of the platform and may force some courses to adopt multiple platforms and tools to make up for Edmodo’s deficiencies in areas of analysis.

In one study, Shams-Abadi and coworkers utilized Edmodo to interrogate the effect of Edmodo on the writing performance of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners (SHAMS-ABADI; AHMADI; MEHRDAD, 2015). Researchers in this study hypothesized that Edmodo would have no significant effect on the learners’ writing performance. To test their hypothesis, the researchers divided students into groups: the experimental group which used Edmodo during 12 sessions to present assignments using the platform, and the control group which simply presented assignments in class. The experimental group members shared paragraphs with each other on Edmodo, whereas the control group only provided feedback in class. The results showed that the writing performances of the experimental and control groups were nonidentical: the experimental group outperformed the control group (SHAMS-ABADI; AHMADI; MEHRDAD, 2015). Therefore, Edmodo can be used to assess student learning and the best teaching methodology while providing instant feedback to students and the teacher.

Another study analyzed student collaboration in the classroom by focusing on the effectiveness of Edmodo discussion boards as a tool (HOLLAND; MUILENBURG, 2011). In the 10th grade English class which was chosen, the teacher had observed that students had difficulty responding to other students’ comments and question, so it was necessary to implement a technique to remedy this issue. Students were divided into small groups and given questions by the teacher, and they were asked to reply, allowing other group members to see the responses and giving them the chance to respond. While initially the students were off-topic, due to its similarity to Facebook, the students carried on conversations with one another about the responses, increasing their interaction with one another and their understanding of the material. The authors found that
it was clear to determine which students had a solid grasp of the reading, while others needed to reread the material. Student-posted questions further highlighted the differences in understanding. Thus, with its similarity to another online tool, Edmodo facilitated discussion among students but also allowed the teachers to gain valuable course information from students’ questions and answers.

From a pedagogical standpoint, Edmodo may be well-suited to replacing the traditional classroom, but more expansion is needed for this to occur. As previously stated, the platform is primarily geared toward blended learning by incorporating other activities to supplement the material in class. It can specifically develop competency in learners, seen in the examples of writing performance and classroom discussion. Further, collaboration between classmates is heavily emphasized, as well as collaboration across the country and international collaboration, which is useful for learners. Finally, Edmodo can be used to develop self-directed learning (SDL), encouraging learners to acquire information independent of the teacher and present their own findings (KHOUDARY, 2017).

On the other hand, there are some limitations of Edmodo, with limited kinds of learning experiences possible, limited production of material to be analyzed, small numbers of learning styles, and not a large immersion in the course. The outlier to these limitations is immersion, because when collaboration among multiple classes is considered, it is an immersive environment for students to work with peers in a completely different location. However, in the standard classroom, there are not many creative opportunities specifically with Edmodo. Given that there is such a heavy focus on written materials and that students are typically not tested on making video recordings, audio recordings, etc., other learning experiences besides long-distance learning are limited. Additionally, not many learning styles can be addressed in Edmodo without a large range of material, because not all students can benefit from the same set of materials.

In this review, while I believe Edmodo can be used as a teaching tool to assist students, it may need some changes to be a better tool. Clearly there are positives to the computer-mediated approach using Edmodo, not the least of which is the immediate feedback response to students
upon completion of assignments. I believe Edmodo functions best for courses which heavily focus on reading, because not only are students gaining more comprehension when they write their own questions and respond to other students’ questions, teachers are gauging the entire course progress at once. The option of collaborating with classrooms around the world or across the country would be highly applicable in my own English courses that I have taught. Collaboration gives students a chance to obtain time management skills and teamwork building opportunities, which are highly desirable skills that they will use in the future. Finally, with some material already read by the students before class, more class time may be dedicated to advanced learning, making it possible for students to learn more in the same time period, with an easy-to-use framework.

However, the negatives of Edmodo also deserve scrutiny. Reading texts, answering written questions, and collaborating on written projects does not provide the breadth of learning required for language learning, which focuses much more on other aspects of language production. Learners are limited by what they can produce in Edmodo, and the platform appears set up such that it is not highly customizable.

Overall, Edmodo is an interesting learning tool that can be used for certain development of skills and parts of language, with a number of educational benefits available to students through online learning. Although it started in its initial role as a microblogging site, Edmodo sees use that is more widespread now as a learning platform, and more recently, research is conducted using results generated from student learning. Some limitations are inherently present as a consequence of being an online-only platform. Despite these drawbacks, Edmodo has the potential to become the gold standard for computer-mediated teaching.

REFERENCES

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