Non-LMS Toolbox
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At this point in the Online Learning and Teaching Diploma program, I have learned that it is not possible to utilize, incorporate, understand, or even know about, all the web-based tools that are applicable to educational purposes. While it is fun to browse and dabble in all these applications, I think it is important to take the time to learn some of them really well so as to have a well organized and professionally utilized set of tools. Certainly, it is prudent to continue to add to that set of tools with new things, but be specific in what you want when searching for that next new web tool.

To be able to exist without an LMS such as Moodle, or to be able to supplement it, I would choose the following tools and resources for myself and my students:

Content

Weebly for Education makes for a great dashboard. Teachers are able to easily create class and individual student websites. Here, all your class assignments, content, video links, etc. are organized and easy to navigate. Students can access class information and assignments from their computer, tablet or mobile device – anywhere. No more excuses for not knowing what was covered in class while absent. Great communication tool for notifications and on-going conversations with the Blogging options.

Google Calendar is great for time management and use as a day-timer or agenda for students and teachers. Notifications remind you of upcoming events such as due-dates, quizzes and exams, field trips, etc. With Goggle Calendar, you can send and accept invitations to meetings. When creating an event, Calendar will generate a Hangout link or allow files to be attached if desired. Calendar is easily shared with other Goggle Apps and also compatible with other online calendars. Calendar is accessible with a computer, tablet, or mobile device.

PBS Learning Media is a free site for teachers and students. The site gives teachers access to productivity tools such as a Lesson Builder, a Quiz Maker, and Storyboard. The Lesson Builder and Quiz Maker allow teachers to make lessons that are media rich and contain selected PBS video content. The Storyboard provides opportunity to create presentations using PBS videos, graphics, and text. This site requires the user to create an account. The account stores all your content.

Community

Blackboard Collaborate is the best tool to date for delivering synchronous, real-time instruction. Teachers can create separate classrooms for each course or cohort they teach. The ability to use audio only is a huge bonus where bandwidth is an issue. The interactive whiteboard is a great way for the teacher to present lessons as well as have students participate with their own contributions. The chat function allows you to have ongoing monitored conversations and encourages questions from even normally silent students with the private conversation option. Break-out rooms allow for group work activities. Application sharing and web browsing are also available. Collaborate is great for building community even when the participants are in different locations. All meetings can be recorded for later review or viewing by those unable to make the original get-together

Google+ Communities are a great place to start and carry on conversations. As a teacher, you can set up a community just for your class or for a subject specific group in your school. Learning how to use notifications within a community provides the option of instantly knowing when your students are contributing to a conversation. As an asynchronous tool, Communities allows students to reflect on a conversation before providing their own input allowing for deeper more meaningful conversations.

Google Hangouts is the synchronous version of Communities. Hangouts allows for a group to meet in a real-time video format. It is best to keep the number of participants small so as to manage conversations better. There is a pallet of tools to customize the experience for each participant. Hangouts is a great way for groups to meet outside of class to work on projects and group activities while working with other Google Apps such as Docs and Drive.

Assessment

Student created websites are an excellent way to show learning. Students can use a website to showcase assignments in a variety of formats including text, video and photo. As well, reflective blogging is a useful component of self assessment and ongoing teacher feedback. Using a website for an ePortfollio is a wonderful way for students to combine all forms of assessment in a way that is meaningful to them and allows for a sense of ownership that a binder full of paper hand-ins cannot.

Google Drive is a cloud-based file storage and sharing app that is great for students to submit assignments, get feedback, and edit without having to do countless revisions on paper. Files are open to any that are available through Google's educational apps. Teachers can set privacy limits on files and also different levels of privileges for editing.

This tool kit is something that cannot be left sitting in a corner of your computer unused. As with anything else, constant use will only improve the effectiveness of any of the tools listed here. I am quite certain, based on recent exposure to so many different tools, that this toolbox had best be quite large as many new tools will be added over time.