NON-LMS TOOLKIT

We live in a non-LMS world, we're constantly mixing and matching software & hardware in order to best accomplish all of our daily tasks. The ability to quickly discern the best piece of software for each job is paramount in our contemporary, web based reality.

There are so many amazing online tools out there for educators, it's big business these days. That being said, I've always kept in mind the cost of these tools, as much of the time, teachers are not reimbursed for online tools/subscriptions that they choose to enroll themselves in. Educators, being the passionate individuals that they are, choose to look at these "subscriptions" as investments. Constantly thinking about how to best prepare their 21st century learners for the future. It is entirely possible to run a successful class or course using a variety of non-LMS tools.

When considering a new application, I keep the following in mind:

- **Is it engaging, fun, and interactive?**
- **Is it affordable? (If it's free..Is it advertisement free?)**
- **Is it age appropriate for my young students? (Are there options for questions or content to be read aloud? Is it inclusive?)**
- **Is navigation around the tool manageable?**
- **Can students comfortably learn the in's and out's without too many challenges?**

I've broken my Tool Kit down into the three suggested areas that I'd like to focus on:

- **Community**
- **Content, organization and interactivity**
- **Assessment as, for, and of learning**

COMMUNITY

Discussions, mentoring, collaboration, and building relationships.

Google Docs

It was only in the past few years that I was introduced to Google Docs, and under personal circumstances rather than professional. My partner Tom told me that I was wasting time and paper making a list for our annual camping trip with a group of friends. He told me it would be better for us to create a Google Doc to which I asked, "how is making a list online better than having one right in my hand?" I went on to find out that we could both look at the same list, cross things out as we went, and add things that we could both see. The ability to share documents add, edit, and remove items was a light bulb moment for me. I think it's not only a great way to collaborate, but it's a great way to keep your team mates (should you have any) on the same page, literally.

Google Currents

Google Currents is like having a private community channel. Currents is a great way to keep people informed of what's going on, you can have conversations, ask questions, share ideas, post pictures, & it's a safe place to build upon your community. It should be called Google Communities, not Currents - but what do I know!?

Microsoft Teams, Channels & Chat

In the past 2 years, I've been getting acquainted with Microsoft Teams and I love it! Within each team that you create, there is a general channel which works much like a general channel stream, where you can ask questions, post updates, share ideas and comment on your colleagues posts. The chat function also allows for you to have private conversations should you need to have confidential conversations... or if you want to share a good knock knock joke, because who doesn't love those?

Zoom

Remember 2019 when Zoom wasn't on everyone's radar? Zoom was a gift in a time of need when we just wanted to see and meet with friends safely and synchronously. We almost felt like we couldn't live without it, and that's because there's a need to feel connected with the people we love, the people we work closely with, and of course our students. Zoom is a platform that I use on a weekly basis. I love that you're able to share your screen, have private chats, record lessons should you have to and meet in real time, even if it's just to share a laugh. You are able to create an account that allows you to use 40 minutes of 'free' time, however, if you want to go beyond that, you do need to sign up to increase those minutes.

WeChat

When I lived and taught in China, WeChat was something that was an absolute necessity. It's a Chinese social media & messaging application. I don't know how we would have coped without it. There's voice messaging, GIFs, video sharing and my favorite part, it allows you to translate many languages into English with your camera hovering over written text. It's not down to a science, but I survived in China for a year thanks to WeChat, and I boarded the plane knowing how to say "hello" and "thank you." It was a great application for us expats to keep up with what was going on, share a laugh, and communicate. There's so much more to WeChat outside of it being a useful communication tool - and time will tell just how far it's capabilities will reach.

Google Drive

One of the best things about Google Drive is that it saves your files online, oh! – and it's free! If you've ever had a computer crash or have misplaced an external hard drive you will understand why Google Drive is an absolute essential. It's been a great way for me to receive and share files, locate them in a moments notice, and access them without technological burps and hiccups.

CONTENT, ORGANIZATIONS & INTERACTIVITY

Dashboard, content, lessons, presentations and file sharing.

Google Sites

Google Sites is free, it's easy to organize, and you can make it fun, inviting, and easy to navigate around. During the lockdown I used Google Sites to make my own website for my classroom. I did not know how to create a website, and I had no idea how I was going to make it work for grade ¾ students and their families. Within an hour of my playing around I felt optimistic because it wasn't as challenging as I thought it would be. It was surprisingly simple to develop an easy-to-use website for my students. Through the addition of fun imagery, hyperlinks, downloadable documents & interactive buttons I was able to tailor the site to my students.

Google Classroom

Google Classroom can be accessed from any device. Files can be uploaded by teachers and students and those documents are stored in a classroom folder on Google Drive. It's been a great way to go paperless but what's even more ideal, is the fact that teachers and students don't have to worry about misplacing or losing any of their work. The excuses will be harder to come up with!

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Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams was challenging for me to familiarize myself with, but an amazing tool for me to utilize. Our school district is encouraging teachers to get more comfortable with Microsoft Teams as the district began to inquire about which platforms we were using to store, share, and display student information. There are privacy and data collection concerns, and rightfully so. While there are some limitations to Microsoft Teams, those limitations don't outweigh the benefits. It's been a great way to share files with colleagues, have video conferencing calls with parents, and an excellent way to make important announcements and outline weekly assignments. It doesn't matter if you're a part of 1 team or 100 teams, the calendar function works seamlessly so that you are able to see your meetings, classes, start times for conference calls, and important due dates in one location. My favorite part about Teams is the ability to have Channels which you can utilize as you see fit (I use them for weekly lessons, assignments, and announcements). The files and materials tabs where you can upload all content that is easily accessible to all students is also a highlight!

ASSESSMENT

Dashboard, content, lessons, presentations and file sharing.

Mentimeter

I discovered Mentimeter this year. I love the idea of using Mentimeter as a formative assessment tool, as it allows for students to have a voice and give honest feedback, and chime in with their input. It also allows for teachers to observe how concepts are being understood, and from there, plan for what's next. You can even use any device to log in from. Mentimeter engages students; There are live polls, quiz questions, class surveys and icebreakers. I'm glad I stumbled upon this resource, I will get a lot of use out of it.

Kahoot

The game based quiz platform that most teachers are familiar with. I love Kahoot because it's affordable and I can find so many quizzes at a moment's notice. Teachers are able to create quizzes and then share them with all teachers who have a subscription. It has everything from phonemic awareness to advanced calculus questions. It's interactive, exciting and engaging - which are the feelings you want to have when completing a quiz!
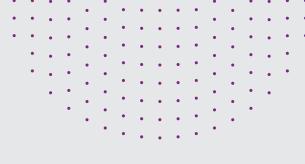
Microsoft Forms & One Note

Underneath the Microsoft Teams umbrella lies a whole tool box of online gadgets to meet teachers' every need. Microsoft Forms allows teachers to easily create quizzes, surveys and questionnaires with options to have multiple choice answers, fill in the blanks, and poll questions. When quizzes are finished and marks are in, teachers can export marks to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, making it convenient for everything grading. With OneNote, students can essentially have an online binder with multiple tabs that I refer to as the 'dividers' of the binder. These notebooks are amazing for students to write their notes, submit journal entries, and collaborate with other students. In my grade ½ classroom I use OneNote for online ePortfolios. I use it to take pictures, upload them as pieces of evidence, and then give descriptive feedback to parents. I've had the opportunity to use OneNote for 3 years and I've had great feedback from parents. It's been convenient for parents to check in throughout their work day to see how their child is doing, and to celebrate their achievements by commenting on their child's work.

Glogster

Glogster is an online interactive presentation tool. I came upon the tool during my OLTD 512 course: Instructional Design. I first used it to create a 'summary of learning' poster, where I was able to include images, text, and then incorporate an audio file over top of the poster. Students are able to express their ideas by combining images, graphics, audio, video, and text on one digital canvas. It does cost about $5.00 a month which can be costly as it's per account but it does allow you to export your projects, and when it's a worthwhile project, it's a worthwhile cost.

Toolkit to be continued...

I know there are many more to mention, but those tools have been my "go-to's". My tool kit will only continue to grow. It's a good thing I don't have to carry this kit around in my backpack - I have a drive for that now. I'm grateful to be able to curate a list of my favorite online tools in a space where I can share them.

Thank you!
~ Marlee Dunlop

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