**<http://breanneqlearnsonline.weebly.com/504-learning-journal.html>**

*Non-LMS toolkit post:*

**Communication and Discourse**

The first community and discourse tool that I always go to is **Blackboard Collaborate**. The way that this is set up is just a great area for students to connect in real time without having to be face to face. I really like how it encourages students to converse and make connections with each other. The blackboard function is also very handy in allowing students to show their work or bring others to websites that inspire or intrigue them and explain everything as they go through it. There can be issues with this program and having a lag time but it is the best tool that I have found so far in helping students to build a sense of community without living in the same physical community and attending the same physical classroom.

Another thing that I find would be helpful for students to communicate and collaborate if they did not necessarily have to do it in real time would be **WordPress**. I have not used this resource with my own students yet as I do not have enough students to do collaborative work with but this seems like a tool that can be used synchronously as well as asynchronously to allow students the chance to blog and write about their learning and then share it with myself as their teacher as well as other students to get feedback on certain items. This seems like a great tool to use as well as blackboard because although blackboard is in real time, it is the teacher who has to set up the “room” so students do not have as much freedom in when they can use it as they would with WordPress.

**VoiceThread** is something else that I am very interested in looking into for the future. I am not as much of a fan that it is a paid for service so I would be using some of my classroom funds instead of being able to freely use it with no fees as I am with other programs. I have not come across many teachers who have used it but I am sure that they are out there and I have just not thought to ask them. According to their website, VoiceThread allows someone to “upload, share and discuss documents, presentations, images, audio files and video. Over 50 different types of media can be used in a VoiceThread.” This seems like a very worthwhile program to have but I am still left to wonder if there is something else out there that is free to use so that it would be more accessible to my students.

**Edmodo** is another program that I have just discovered, although it is more like the LMS Moodle but looks more simplified, I am curious to test it out and see if it elevates some of my hesitations with using Moodle and how it is hosted seems to be very user friendly. Teachers are able to create an alert for interesting links for their students that seems to work almost like a twitter type function within the tool. There is an app that students can download to an iPhone to use it on the go. This is set up to be like a social network and have that feel so that the students are engaged as well as being connected at the same time. Badges are something that is new to me but with this tool teachers are able to award them to their students and this is something that I will be looking into once I have more time to play around in it.

**Content and Organization**

Anyone who knows me well knows that I am big on organization, my files on my computer are all set up in a certain way and it is just how my brain works the best to process everything. Organization, I think, is a big factor in helping students with their success in learning. If everything is given to them in a chaotic mess then they will constantly be searching everywhere to find what they are looking for. When I get my list of students at the beginning of the year, we first figure out how they would like to split their work for the terms (all at once or half and half through the year) and from there I send my students a CD with a timetable set out for them as well as all of their assignments for the year in clearly labeled folders and files. I think my students like to have everything in a nice little package like this but I would also like to try to move past just the CD and have all of my assignments and expectations on a website so they are easily accessible on the go if my students are not home or do not know where they placed the CD (and do not have it loaded on their computer).

As I learn more and more about **Weebly** and create more in depth sites using it, this is something that I have been thinking about using for my course content. The downside that I see with this though is the privacy issue. As far as I know you cannot password protect a Weebly site and in that case anyone at anytime could have access to all of my assignments for my students and could reproduce them as their own without my knowledge. This is where I think that something such as Moodle (although it is a big of a process to set up) would be nicer to use and password protect.

I also think that **GoogleSites** might be something else that I would be interested at looking into as it claims that you can “control who can view and edit” which would take away my big worry from the Weebly site. I have never used Google Sites but because it is something that links to other things such as GoogleDocs and GoogleCalendar, it might be something that I am very interested in learning about. The downside that I could see with using this is the student needs an email to have access and with some of my students, the parents do not allow their children to have their own email (because of their age) so that would pose a problem.

**Google Calendar** seems like something that, because it is cloud based, would be easy to set up and share with my students. For the most part my students are self-directed and self-motivated learners that can choose when they would like to accomplish certain assignments. I think that in the coming years as I have more students and want to incorporate more collaborative work I will have to start using something such as google calendar so that my students are all on the same time frame and getting work done at the same time so when they come to collaborative work, they can all contribute equally. The drawback is that this does not link to any LMS but for where I am right now, that is okay because I am not sure that it would be the best path for me.

With these tools it will just have to be more investigation on my part to see which one works the best for what I am trying to accomplish.

**Assessment**

I would like to use GoogleSites and some of the other tools available through Google, I think that **GoogleDocs** would be something else that would be beneficial to my students if I were to set it up in my courses. I would still have the issue of some students without an email that I would have to figure out but from my own experience using GoogleDocs in the OLTD program, it is something that is as close as you can get to peer collaboration and editing as possible in an online asynchronous setting. The only thing that worries me a little bit is the fact that this is hosted in the USA and their privacy and security protocols may not be the same for BC.

In following with my being in awe with what I have learned about the capabilities of Google, I am interested in Avi’s posting of **GoogleForms**. I am very keen on allowing my students to complete self and peer evaluations and in finding out that I can do this all with GoogleForms, I am starting to think that Google, in all its capabilities, is starting to sound like its own mini LMS. I am also very interested in the capabilities of GoogleForms to provide students the opportunity to use it as a quiz platform as right now all my students are doing their quizzes via pen and paper and then either faxing or snail mailing them to me. If I were able to set up quizzes online and have the students accomplish them through that, it would not only help with cutting down the amount of paper needed to complete assignments but it would also help me to mark things faster.

**Soometa**, as described by Jane C seems like something that would be interesting to have my students use for presentations. I have had experiences as someone viewing a presentation that did not work out so well that this is something that I am very hesitant about. I am aware that all electronic tools will have the possibility of hiccups and issues but with presenting, as it is usually in real time, it usually presents the most issues. Prezi, for example, has caused many headaches to colleagues and because of just hearing about their frustrations, I would be hesitant to use it myself. Soometa seems to be different and I am interested in looking into it further to see if the ‘hiccups’ would be alleviated using it opposed to Prezi.