# Non LMS Toolkit

## Some Caveats

Let me start by saying that I am primarily concerned with teaching elementary school students. This obviously impacts my choices with regard to my Non LMS toolkit. I know a great many students can quickly master new applications, but in my choices I have selected applications that favour simplicity over increased functionality. To give you just one example, with a group of high school students I would likely have selected Weebly as a platform for my students to showcase their learning, but for elementary school students Kidblog fulfills the same purpose in a much more limited way.

## The Main Page

As far as learning platforms go, it’s hard to beat Edmondo. It looks great, is exceptionally easy to navigate and comes with features like quizzes and calendars. It is already popular with teachers at my school for communicating with parents and by posting lesson and assignments online you never need worry about the excuse- I forgot my book at school.

You can share links and post messages to the group on the main wall or send private messages. It’s easy to monitor students’ progress and they will appreciate the little awards and badges that they can acquire. This would be the main site of my course.

## Video

Obviously the content that I will post to Edmondo would come from all over the internet depending on the topic of study. However, for those times when I need to give instruction directly to my students, Youtube is the obvious choice. It allows me to tailor materials to my students and address their needs. It offers rich resources in terms of educational and instructional videos and students can showcase their learning by creating videos of their own. It also promotes communication and community by allowing students to comment on videos and post questions to their creators.

## Meetings

I remain skeptical that community can be built without periodic face to face communication. For that reason I would use Blackboard Collaborate to hold occasional synchronous sessions. This would give students an opportunity to work with one another and pose questions to the teacher. Collaborate also allows for breakout groups and, not surprisingly, collaboration. Students can co-author documents on the whiteboard and present their work to their classmates through file sharing.

## Community

In order to build a more robust classroom community online I would (and do) use Kidblog for elementary school students. Kidblog addresses a number of needs. It provides a place where students can share reflections on their learning and comment on the reflections of others. This is not only an opportunity to assess their learning and make them assess their own learning, it builds community. Students can build eportfolios and teachers can easily provide feedback to them. The best feature of all however is the safety that it provides. The classroom community is closed to everyone outside of the class (although parents can be invited in) so it’s a good place for students to develop their digital literacy skills and make the mistakes that learning requires.

## Collaboration

For group projects I would suggest that my students use Google Documents. First and foremost it is very easy to access. I believe you don’t even need to have a Google account. Beyond that, it is a great way for students to work together on projects. It’s fairly standard as far as word processors go and the format is compatible with pretty much everything. Compositions done in Google Docs can be cut and paste into blog entries or on to a Powerpoint.

I think the entire Google Suite offers exceptional quality and as their products become more and more integrated, they will be increasingly useful for educators.

## Assessment

For tests and quizzes, I like Socrative surveys. It allows both teachers and students to gain instant feedback on their learning. It is extremely easy to create good looking customizable quizzes. Socrative allows you to create many different types of questions and can be accessed easily from anywhere.

## Gradebook

My gradebook of choice is Engrade- mostly because it was the first online gradebook that I came across 4 or 5 years ago that did everything that I wanted it to. It’s simple to use and it allows you to create categories for assignments and vary their weight. Students can login and check their marks whenever they wish. I used it for two years but at the end of 2013, it closed down its Canadian servers and as a result I moved my marking back onto spreadsheets which I don’t like. I believe it remains the best option for an online gradebook however. I just am unable to confirm whether or not it is legal for teachers in BC to use it.