OLTD 504 - Reflection on Non-LMS BUilds

Our previous assignment, building a course in Canvas, was a really good exercise; it allowed me to explore this powerful learning management system, and realize that building a course can be not only fun, but fulfilling. I also was able to try my hand on doing a screencast to teach others from my group about a portion of Canvas, and it turns out I really enjoy screencasting.

The most exciting thing was, everything needed to run a proper course -- grades, quizzes, content and community building course -- were integrated seamlessly under the Canvas umbrella. So, when it was time for us to think of what tools we would pick if we decided not to use a LMS, I thought, how would it be if I tried to accomplish the same things using individual tools online? And off I went, building the course all over again.

As it turns out, it was a clunkier process, but also one that gave me the freedom to choose the exact look I wanted, as well as the tools that would accomplish each task best. I decided to build my system in Weebly, which is a tool I am comfortable with, but adding tools from other places on the internet to achieve the coherent, robust options provided by Canvas.

My conclusion, after trying both options, was that despite Canvas providing me with less freedom than what I would have liked, I was willing to compromise, as everything integrated so nicely in one spot. But that was before I found out about Wordpress' new educational plugins and tools.

A long time ago, I was a Wordpress fanatic. I made several sites, and had fun integrating plugins, trying to get the website exactly how I wanted. But the bugs, the time it took me to solve them and the fact that I felt constrained by templates that looked outdated, really put me off Wordpress and pushed me towards Weebly. After last week, when I finally did a little digging and read about the new plugins for education (which basically can transform Wordpress into a Canvas), and after having the chance of looking at the improved templates and

control panel of a Wordpress site belonging to one of my colleagues, I am now excitedly leaning towards building a website on Wordpress for my final project on OLTD. I will start building it this Summer, and I think it will be a fantastic experiment.

Besides using the Wordpress site, however, I still want to use some external tools; I love Zoom for community building and interacting with students, and find that a Zoom section here and there really help bring everyone into the same space. Kahoot is a fun tool that provides game-like quizzes for our synchronous sections. I also love Google Docs and Drive to share files and collaborate, particularly because you are able to collaborate on the same page with your group, even altering the same paragraph at the same time, with no issues.   Finally, I love Seesaw... even though it was originally geared for younger students, I find it is bright, simple to use and I would love to use it to build portfolios of student's work in a visual way. Of course, I may turn out finding that Wordpress has plugins that enable me to do these things on the same website, and in that case, I may have to reassess my thinking.

The outcomes for this course dictate that by the end, the student will:

- Be familiar with common terms, definitions and elements related to Learning Management Systems (LMS) and non-LMS environments.
- Demonstrate basic competency with design and implementation within a variety of LMS and non-LMS environments and tools.
- Plan learning opportunities most suitable to the strengths and challenges of a variety of LMS and non-LMS environments.
- Create assessment and evaluation methods/tools most suitable to the strengths and challenges of LMS and non-LMS environments.
- Integration of current cognitive learning and brain-based learning theory.
- Examine current research around best practices and emerging practices for both LMS and non-LMS environments.
- Develop skills to optimize learning experiences through personalization based on characteristics, needs, stages of development, current personalized learning mandates, misconceptions etc.

I find that we were able to accomplish all of these outcomes in a very organic way. We were not only given information regarding each option and possibility, but given freedom to explore, make mistakes and learn from them. I also found myself naturally thinking of the student, and constantly putting myself on their shoes, wondering what tool would make me happiest as a student, what visuals would appeal to me more. I think that having this experience and also keeping in mind recent cognitive studies, as well as studies in aesthetics and current design trends, really helped our entire group feel more prepared to tackle a course from scratch on our own.