Moodle pros and cons….

What are we looking for?

I like the ease of drag and drop. To add a file in Moodle there are a few steps to follow and it would simplify things if you could simply drag from your Windows Explorer and drop it into an LMS. It would save a number of steps and encourage teachers to add more content (and relieve us of the need to recreate some things within the LMS).

Support of a variety of file types is becoming more and more necessary. With the variety of platforms and programs available and with the desire to be able to hold class content under one umbrella – it is important that LMSs provide the ability to incorporate a variety of formats and file types.

Ease of use is the first thing I'm looking for in a LMS. I still remember DOS based programming and am thankful that we now live in a windows age. Copying and pasting, adding files, deleting files, moving things around, grabbing resources from the net and importing them, exporting marks and activities….all of these things should happen smoothly and easily in an LMS of choice. I want to focus my time on the teaching aspect, not fighting to set up a simple and straightforward lesson.

What should you be wary of?

When using Moodle to create my unit build I found it to be onerous in the fact that when I was working in a number of programs compiling information to create a detailed lesson, there were times when it timed out on me and I lost work that I was trying to input. Moodle will often save work as you go, but there were a few times when I lost what I had been working on inputting and had to start again.

Also frustrating is the fact that every time you add a new resource or activity and click save, Moodle drops you back at the top of your page. Not so bad if you are just adding a few items or working on a small unit. I was working on a novel study and only completed activities for Chapters 1-4. I was already finding it frustrating having to continually scroll down to reach Chapter 4 where I was working – I can't imagine the scrolling I would have had to complete it if I was working up to chapter 20 or more!

New and noteworthy (total of 50 marks)

Tellagami ([https://tellagami.com/](https://tellagami.com/)). For those of us who enjoyed making voki's to introduce yourselves or share information in our last OLTD course, Tellagami is the same type thing, but in app form. I use mobile devices in my classroom and this is the perfect tool to allow students to introduce themselves, tell a short story or make a presentation on something they have researched. Much like voki, you can choose from a variety of characters and modify their appearance, take pictures for a background and then type in what you want you 'gami' to say or record your own voice and send it to a friend or share it. This app by Tellagami Inc. Entertainment is free to download in the app store and can be used to 'create

and share a short story'. You can use it as an 'exciting tweet or status update' so it is compatible with other social media already in use by most of our students. You can also add emotions or change the scenery and it seems to provide more options (in the form of available characters without purchase) than the voki site allowed. Lots of fun to use in class for creative writing and storytelling, intro's on a class webpage or tutorials on how to use a new program or complete a class activity. I'm excited to explore this app with my class and will initially use it to create summaries of our personal projects for our school presentations.

Glossary definitions (total of 60 marks)

Elearning standards: ICC – (added by Kris Sward Mar 30/13)

ICC refers to the AICC (Aviation Industry CBT Committee) which was one of the first associations to implement standards around online training. In particular these standards outline 'specification[s] for interoperability between CBT courses and computer-managed instruction (CMI) record keeping systems.' These guidelines have been seen as a basis for the future development of online learning standards for many industries.  Information from
http://www.webbasedtraining.com/primer_standards.aspx

Elearning standards IMS - (added by Kris Sward Mar 30/13)

IMS refers to the IMS Global Learning Consortium whose mission 'is to advance technology that can affordably scale and improve educational participation and attainment.' To ensure global access to technological innovations being used in education, the IMS 'develops open interoperability standards, supports adoption with technical services, and encourages adoption through programs that highlight effective practices.' They have outlined and defined the way lessons and content are described and tagged so that educators can easily search for reusable content relevant to their needs on the internet. Information from http://www.webbasedtraining.com/primer_standards.aspx and
http://www.imsproject.org/aboutims.html

Module - (added by Kris Sward Mar 30/13)

A module is simply defined as a standard unit of measurement. In the case of an e-learning, a module would be a single self-contained unit of study. This unit could encompass the entire content of a course or be comprised of a specific topic of study within a course made up of a number of modules. A relevant example could be how our D2L has been separated into 'modules' for 501, 502, 503 and 504 thus far.

RSS - (added by Kris Sward Mar 30/13)

RSS stands for Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication. An RSS feed allows users to update content into many different programs in one simple step, as well as be advised of updates from various

platforms or programs in one place. Rather than checking in with numerous websites, users can employ an RSS feed to gather information from their favourite websites in one place and quickly and easily access information such as news headlines, blog updates, twitter feeds and status updates. Information from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS

Simulations - (added by Kris Sward Mar 30/13)

A simulation is 'the imitation of the operation of a real-world process or system'. In terms of eLearning, simulations are virtual realities created to allow users to experience and react to potential situations they might encounter in the real world and understand the repercussions of their actions in such situations. Many companies will set up simulation training exercises to allow employees to train in safe, structured environments with little or no risk to the employee or customers. Games such as flight simulators or Sim city, farm, etc. also allow users to gain experiences they might not have the chance to have in real life in a fun and entertaining way. Information from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simulation

Web 2.0 - (added by Kris Sward Mar 30/13)

Web 2.0 refers to interactive websites that allow users to do more than just read information. This type of website is engaging for users and incorporates tools that allow them to communicate with each other, create content and share information as well as view the content that others have created. (think social networking, blogs, wikis, youtube, etc.) Information from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0

Research Gradebook

**LearnBoost by Google docs (posted by Kris Sward) 4 stars  https://www.learnboost.com/home**

Prior to OLTD I hadn't used Google for much other than as my go-to search tool. My eyes have been opened to all that Google has to offer and a gradebook option is just one of the wonderful things you can do on the Google platform. LearnBoost is a free gradebook that allows users to create and share lessons, track attendance and input grades which are updated instantly. Parent and student access means no surprises come report card time and stats can be put into various graphs to chart progress, identify strengths and weaknesses and generally wow parents with technology in IEP meetings. Like many other platforms, LearnBoost allows you to customize grade scales, allow for weighting of assignments, set up classes and assignments quickly and easily and create seating charts based on student strengths and weaknesses. Unlike most grading platform options, LearnBoost is Free for all users (parents, students and teachers) and is available in over 70 languages (other options tout two – Spanish and English). A full demo is available here and sign up is quick and easy (I know because I already converted!). A further review of LearnBoost is available here. Critics have offered that

LearnBoost has a few glitches in tracking grades and that many updates or add ons are not yet available, but Google has a strong support team to help you work through these difficulties.

In researching various gradebooks for this project, I have found that many offer very similar platforms and tools. Providing easy set up, exporting of data to local systems for reporting, access for parents and students (either through a log in or email alert) and attendance and behaviour logs are all common features (to name just a few). Drawbacks typically come in the form of price range and in the fact that data is stored in the cloud – meaning not necessarily on Canadian soil. Though that may be a concern in terms of privacy issues for our students, it seems that this may not be an option unless you want to stick with a program implemented by your district (with data stored on local servers) or an offline option. In this regard, the key benefit of LearnBoost is that it's free.

**TeacherEase (posted by Kris Sward) 3 out of 5 stars [http://www.teacherease.com/](http://www.teacherease.com/)**

TeacherEase is a full on SIS system that will allow teachers track grades, but also input attendance and track behaviour issues, print full reports on school letterhead and provide email alerts to parents to keep them up to date of their child's progress. Data is stored on the cloud. The key distinguishing difference between TeacherEase and other gradebook options is that although it costs $89.95 per year, it has a 'member benefits' program that allows teachers to try it free for a year and extend their free trial for extra months by signing up other teachers or posting a link to the TeacherEase site on their classroom websites and further offers a $100 Amazon gift card if a school signs up five or more teachers to use their gradebook program. I would prefer a free version with no strings attached but this program offers a way to get your first year and then some free, by which time you would be able to tell if it provided all of the services you were looking for.

In researching various gradebooks for this project, I have found that many offer very similar platforms and tools. Providing easy set up, exporting of data to local systems for reporting, access for parents and students (either through a log in or email alert) and attendance and behaviour logs are all common features (to name just a few). Drawbacks typically come in the form of price range and in the fact that data is stored in the cloud – meaning not necessarily on Canadian soil. Though that may be a concern in terms of privacy issues for our students, it seems that this may not be an option unless you want to stick with a program implemented by your district (with data stored on local servers) or an offline option.

**Jupiter Grades (posted by Kris Sward) 4 out of 5 stars [http://jupitergrades.com/](http://jupitergrades.com/)**

Jupiter Grades is one that has been mentioned in class so I've added it here. As with other programs it offers a variety of gradebook options, parent and student access and is accessible on any device or computer platform (a bonus as we move into more tablet based options). Jupiter grades also allows you to set up online quizzes and tests and upload worksheets. It provides the option of an extra login with some privileges to provide to teachers who will be working in your class (TAs or TOCs). A really neat

option this service provides is the ability for students to track 'what if' grades which will allow them to see what score they need to get on an upcoming quiz or assignment in order to achieve a specific grade overall. The downside to this program is that data is stored on the cloud (privacy issues) and there is a cost associated with it. The gradebook option is free but limited in what you can do. For the full version, including a comprehensive SIS, the cost is $49.95 per year per teacher. There are many worthy options to look at here and I would likely use this program in my classroom if the cost per year was covered.

In researching various gradebooks for this project, I have found that many offer very similar platforms and tools. Providing easy set up, exporting of data to local systems for reporting, access for parents and students (either through a log in or email alert) and attendance and behaviour logs are all common features (to name just a few). Drawbacks typically come in the form of price range and in the fact that data is stored in the cloud – meaning not necessarily on Canadian soil. Though that may be a concern in terms of privacy issues for our students, it seems that this may not be an option unless you want to stick with a program implemented by your district (with data stored on local servers) or an offline option.

**Gradebook Wizard (posted by Kris Sward) 2 stars http://www.gradebookwizard.com/**

Similar to other programs in that you can add entries easily, update classes and allow student and parent access to track progress. This is also a part of a full service SIS program. The gradebook has a free 30 day trial and then costs $49 per year per teacher. With the other available options that provide as good or better services for less cost (often free), there isn't a huge reason to go with this program, though they do have a great demo on their website.

In researching various gradebooks for this project, I have found that many offer very similar platforms and tools. Providing easy set up, exporting of data to local systems for reporting, access for parents and students (either through a log in or email alert) and attendance and behaviour logs are all common features (to name just a few). Drawbacks typically come in the form of price range and in the fact that data is stored in the cloud – meaning not necessarily on Canadian soil. Though that may be a concern in terms of privacy issues for our students, it seems that this may not be an option unless you want to stick with a program implemented by your district (with data stored on local servers) or an offline option.

**Thinkwave (posted by Kris Sward)          3 stars  http://www.thinkwave.com/**

Thinkwave is a US based gradebook option that includes SIS options as well. As with other gradebook programs it offers the ability to easily input and track student marks, set up student and parent accounts so they can track their own progress, keep attendance records and enter comments (of up to 5000 characters) and marks for report cards. Some unique aspects of this program are that it allows for rollover of students year by year so that classes are automatically populated (less input each year plus you can see where students were at in their previous class) and that it can be accessed on all forms of

devices. Some drawbacks come in the form of the US based data storage and the price - $49.95 per year per teacher.

In researching various gradebooks for this project, I have found that many offer very similar platforms and tools. Providing easy set up, exporting of data to local systems for reporting, access for parents and students (either through a log in or email alert) and attendance and behaviour logs are all common features (to name just a few). Drawbacks typically come in the form of price range and in the fact that data is stored in the cloud – meaning not necessarily on Canadian soil. Though that may be a concern in terms of privacy issues for our students, it seems that this may not be an option unless you want to stick with a program implemented by your district (with data stored on local servers) or an offline option.