

TECHNOLOGY IN PEDAGOGY

Series



Apps for Educators: By Mr Andreas Dewanto

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From keeping track of files, folders and email messages to sharing lesson plans on numerous gadgets – the PC, the MAC, the iPad and/or Smartphone, educators now have a host of web-based applications to stay organized and be productive. In this session, Mr Dewanto, an Instructor with the Department of Physics, Faculty of Science and an Assistant Director for the Special Programme in Science shared his experience with using Apps. He offered solutions on why and how he used applications like Dropbox, Sugarsync, Evernote, Wunderlist, Skitch, Team Viewer and Splashtop Remote and elaborated on the pros and cons of these apps. These apps are cloud-based, compatible across major platforms, relatively easy to use, and, most important of all, they are free. He also discussed on how these apps helped him in teaching and for effectively managing his administrative tasks.

Mr Dewanto started the session by highlighting how he realised that his travelling time could be well-spent and be made productive by using some of the free utility and productivity apps. His top priority in selecting the apps was to allow for planning and preparing lessons, managing classroom and research materials, and communicating with students anytime, anywhere and more importantly the apps would have to be versatile and compatible with the various gadgets – Office PC, home PC, MAC, iPad and Smartphone — that he uses.



He considered the following four aspects when selecting an app to identify if it meets his requirements:

1. **Convenience:** Is the app easy and intuitive enough to operate? It is also important to choose apps that do not involve a steep learning curve.
2. **Versatility:** Is the app compatible across operating systems, platforms and versions? It would be even more advantageous if one app could be easily integrated with another.
3. **Support:** Is the app constantly being developed and updated? It would be good to check if necessary technical support is available.
4. **Price/Cost:** Is the cost of the app low? It would be good to start with free apps which delivers a lot at no cost. Hence when planning to purchase an app, it might be worthwhile to consider if it is value for money.

He then showcased some apps that had helped him:

- to be better organized;
- to be prepared for his lessons; and
- to manage his resources effectively.

File Storage/Sharing Apps:

Dropbox and SugarSync allow for file hosting and/or file sharing. Both these apps are free and allow for storage of files in the cloud and enable easy access from multiple locations and across multiple computers and devices. These apps are useful to back up, to sync and to share all documents, photos, music and movies and enables users to access stored files from a PC, Mac, iPhone, iPad, Android, BlackBerry, or any other device.



Dropbox offers a free storage space of 2GB for a start, and a 250MB referral bonus up to 18GB. One major advantage is its stability.



SugarSync, on the other hand, offers a free storage space of 5GB for a start and 500MB referral bonus up to 111GB. It allows for multiple accounts to be created which can be interconnected giving a larger storage capacity. Even when a folder is shared with others, it does not affect the storage capacity of the other party.

Mr Dewanto uses Dropbox and SugarSync to organise and store all materials related to teaching, research and administration. His personal trick is to use Dropbox to store materials which are currently being used (e.g. current semester's lecture notes, ongoing research project). However, because of the larger capacity that Sugarsync provides, once the files are no longer needed or seldom referred, he will then store the files in Sugarsync.

Productivity App:



Evernote is a cloud-based “notepad” with basic MS-Word like capabilities. It is an easy-to-use, free app that allows users to take notes, capture photos, create to-do lists, clip webpages and record voice reminders. All data is synchronized and made available to clients on Windows, Mac, Web, and mobile devices. In addition, the Evernote Web Clipper option allows for capture of websites in real-time.

Mr Dewanto uses Evernote to:

- draft notes (for lectures, online consultations, and feedback to students)
- draft email messages, minutes of meetings, and blog postings
- capture interesting photos which can be used for his teaching/research
- prepare eLearning exercises

Screenshot editing App:



Evernote to Notepad is Skitch to “Paint”. That is, **Skitch** is a cloud-based screenshot editing and sharing utility, and helps users to get their messages and ideas across with fewer words using annotation, shapes and sketches. With the help of Skitch, users can easily annotate to draw attention to anything. Skitch is integrated with Evernote, and is ideal for quick photo editing, great for writing down equations, and hence becomes useful for consultations with students via email.

Mr Dewanto described and demonstrated how he uses Skitch to:

- reply to student's queries, in particular to show calculation steps (which otherwise is very hard to do using email e.g, NUS Microsoft Exchange). It enables teachers to explain ideas and concepts with fewer words.
- draft a proper explanation to accompany the steps when replying to students, in conjunction with Evernote.
- provide feedback to students on their work.
- highlight or annotate changes and important aspects in pictures, diagrams or poster designs.
- screen grab online chats / discussions.

Organisational App:



Wunderlist is a cloud-based “sticky note” tool and can be used to jot down quick reminders/notifications and “what-to-do” lists. Mr Dewanto uses this app to check on his “to-do” list every morning, and usually uses it for tasks with no specific deadline in conjunction with Google Calendar, which manages his deadlines and appointments.

Remote Access Apps:

Splashtop Remote and Teamviewer are remote access apps which allows for remotely controlling the desktop and/or Macs during lectures, seminars, or tutorials. Both these apps can be used to view files, presentations, or applications while away from your main computer.



Splashtop Remote works better with systems located within the same LAN network. This app is not free for Android users. Splashtop Remote can be used in class to connect to the desktop using an iPad, making it act as the wireless presenter. Not only the iPad controls the desktop, it also mirrors whatever projected on the screen from the desktop. Hence, whatever on the iPad is projected to the screen and this gives teacher greater mobility within a the LT and easy reference to his/her slides without keep on turning back, and makes the lessons more interactive.



TeamViewer works with systems outside of the same LAN network. That is, it can be used to remotely access computer even across the globe, but the connection tends to be slower and can be used to remotely access your computer via an iPad. Mr. Dewanto normally uses TeamViewer to remotely access his office desktop for quick work.

Finally, two potential issues/challenges related to the usage of the Apps were discussed:

- Connectivity: Will this lead to over-dependency on the Internet? (For example, a slow connection or loss in connection). Perhaps, but in the Singapore context, connectivity is rarely a problem.

- Security: Is it safe to upload classified data uploaded in the cloud? Mr Dewanto personally feels uploading his lecture notes, research materials, and presentations are ok. However, he would not feel comfortable having his students' data and/or grades uploaded.

He then concluded the session with a summary snapshot of the compatibility of the apps across the various platforms:

	PC (Win)	Internet Browser (Chrome/Firefox)	MAC	iOS (iPad/iPhone)	Android
Dropbox	√	√	√	√	√
SugarSync	√	√	√	√	√
Evernote	√	√	√	√	√
Skitch			√	√	√
Wunderlist	√	√	√	√	√
Splashtop Remote	√		√	√	√ (paid)
TeamViewer	√		√	√	√

Summary from the Discussion

A lively discussion followed Mr Dewanto's presentation. Participants gave their experiences and details on how and why they used certain apps. Listed below are some Apps discussed on task management, scheduling, storing files and reading files:

Apps for storing, reading, and annotating files

- **GoodReader** is used for reading all kinds of files, especially PDFs
- **FileApp**, a free App is useful as a file manager and reader. FileApp supports a variety of formats – MS Office files (Word, Excel and PowerPoint), image files, and audio files. It enables users to sort the files by file type, date, or folder and also allows for bookmarking specific scrolling positions on longer documents.
- **iAnnotate** allows users to integrates the annotations made directly into the PDF making it easy to be sent to students.

Scheduling App:

- **Doodle** is a free tool for scheduling group meetings with the input from all members of a group or project. It can act essentially as a polling platform for teachers to schedule consultations.

Note Taking App:

- **Penultimate**, a note taking app allows users to create handwritten (using finger or stylus) notes, import photos and images to be use with notes and to sketch things.

Q & A Session

Listed below are some questions:

Q: Can you use the same email to create multiple accounts on SugarSync?

AD: Different emails are required to create multiple SugarSync accounts. But the good thing is that all of these accounts can then be shared, thereby allowing a user to access all of his/her accounts from a single account.

Q: I have used Dropbox, but I am concerned with security issues? How do you deal with it?

AD: I feel that it is okay for me to upload and store my lecture notes, and other research materials on the cloud. However, when it comes to sensitive files with students' data and grade, I store them using in a secure thumbdrive provided by NUS.

Q: Does Wunderlist work on a PC?

AD: Yes, Wunderlist is compatible across all platforms – PC, MAC, internet browsers, iPAD, iPhones, Smartphones with Android OS.

Q: Why do use Wunderlist and not Google tasks for creating “to-do” lists?

AD: Though Google Tasks would perform the same task of creating “to-do” lists as the number of steps required to access the tasks is longer requiring users to open a browser, login to their Google accounts, and then access the tasks. Besides, Mr. Dewanto is also personally prefers Wunderlist's more aesthetic and user-friendly interface.

Q: Have you used the apps for distributing materials to your students?

AD: The closest I have got to using it for classroom distribution is to use and Skitch to draft emails, instructions and project ideas, and send them to students.

Q: By using all these apps, don't you have the urge to always be connected to work and students? How about the “me”-time?

AD: Personally, I have no issue with this. Perhaps I love my job so much, or I am simply being a workaholic, but my real intention with using these apps is that I can stay connected and do my work during those “idle” moments for something more productive. But this of course might not be true for everyone.