iPad, the Essential Teacher Tool
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English physicist Freeman Dyson once said, "the technologies which have had the most profound effects on human life are usually simple." Whether you are an Apple fan or not, most would agree that the most appealing feature of the iPad is its simplicity. Now, I am not here to advertise for Apple, nor to claim that the iPad is the Holy Grail of teaching tools. Instead, I'm here to share with you how it is helping me tremendously to survive my first year of teaching.

The iPad is a compact tablet measuring 7.3 inches x 9.5 inches with a battery life of approximately 8 to 10 hours (it depends on how bright you set your screen). Besides simplicity, the next useful feature that the iPad offers me is its portability. There is no extra weight to carry around such as a power adaptor that you would need for a laptop. Rather than lugging around three to four textbooks back and forth daily, (believe me science textbooks are especially heavy), now I simply upload their digital counterpart and other e-books onto the 1.3 pound tablet and I can access them anywhere, anytime. As a result, I prepare my Keynote lectures, lesson plans and worksheets on a simple interface on the go.

Here at West Coast Adventist School (WCAS), our primarily form of communication is email, and I get a lot of emails from parents and assignments submitted online from students every day. To save time, my iPad through WiFi Internet allows me to answer a majority of those emails throughout the day, between classes and lunch, without running back to my desk where the classroom computer sits. Furthermore, my emails are automatically synced with iCloud so that my classroom computer and my home computer will be updated with the same archive keeping my records simple.

There are two essential online programs that CAA (Cariboo Adventist Academy) and WCAS rely heavily on, and they are Jupitersgrades and Moodle. Jupitergrades (formerly known as Snapgrades), is a web-based database tool which allows teachers, students, and parents to keep track of grades and attendance. Moodle is a web-based tool through which our courses are delivered to our students. Through my iPad, I am able to access these sites via the built in Safari app easily. Early on, from my practicum days, I learned that various individuals will jump out of nowhere and ambush you anytime for: 1) grades and 2) what assignments are due/missing. Armed with my tablet and Jupitergrades, I can answer those questions with ease. Gone are the days when I'd have to drop what I'm doing and run back to my classroom for my gradebook to answer questions.

In addition to portability and accessibility, here are some apps that I cannot teach without:

Calender - A free app that comes standard on every iPad. It syncs with iCloud, which in turn sync all of my data to all of my computers. It helps me keep track of school events and appointments. I set reminders on the app so that I do not forget meetings and calling parents.

Skype - A free app but requires subscription fees, (I pay $3.00/month with unlimited US/CAN minutes). I can call parents/students and talk as long as I want without worrying about long distances charges with a WiFi connection.

iBook - A free app that comes standard on every iPad. It is a basic PDF reader with media capabilities. The greatest asset to this app is that Apples offer cheap online interactive textbooks you can buy! (only with a US iTunes account for now).

GoodReader – It's a $4.99 app that is totally worth its cost. This app can read and edit most document files you throw at it! I primarily use this app to read, highlight key-points, and doodle on my digital textbooks, (if the publisher did not supply a copy, I just scan sections of a text in PDF). When assignments are submitted via email, I also use this app to grade (edit the file) and return without ever going to the printer, saving trees!

You-Version Bible - A free all-in-one app that provides various translations of the bible, multiple devotions, and even an online database where you can compare various parts of the scripture with other people. The best part is that it can be accessed offline.

VNC Lite - A free app that enables me to remotely control my classroom computer or home computer via my iPad. This app came in handy during my first practicum when the Smartboard broke down for 4 weeks before it was repaired. With this app on my iPad, I was still able to use the touch interface by remotely controlling my classroom computer. Even now that I have my own classroom, I still use this app to retrieve programs and files from home or the classroom computer whenever I am connected to the Internet.

I can definitely go on for a quite some about how amazing this multipurpose tool is for me. Overall, this piece of technology has made being a teacher for me a lot simpler by combining my various essential tasks into one neat package. I highly recommend the iPad for teachers who want to minimize clutter and seek more simplicity in their life.