

# Why Do I Need Three Smartphone Apps to Manage My Child's School Activities?

*Shôn Ellerton, February 22, 2023*

*I'm sure managing and coordinating your child's activities was simpler before the so-called paperless age.*



Just how complicated does it need to be to manage your child's schooling and extracurricular activities? It's a serious question and it warrants an answer.

Let's start with the fact that many parents both work which adds additional pressure in coordinating such activities like dropping off and picking up from school. For those with nearby neighbours suffering the same dilemma, some relief may be sought to help each other out from time to time, but for many, particularly those in more secluded or remote neighbourhoods, it isn't easy to find others to help. Many rely on family members, but this has become less common with every passing year because of the fluid nature of finding work in other locations, which results in families being split across the globe. And yet, many countries in the Western world stubbornly refuse to accept this reality. School hours are shorter than the average workday, so parents are often forced to use expensive after-hours care facilities, some of which require extensive organising in advance for fear of being overbooked. Then there's the scheduling nightmare of many schools having odd hours during certain parts of the week and those infamous pupil-free days, which there seem to be too many of. It's no small wonder that some parents opt to send their kids to boarding school for this very reason alone. Although it's often a very expensive option.

However, what I find the most irksome thing about managing school activities for one's child is the push to promote the use of smartphone apps to carry out

every conceivable activity. Gone are the days that your child brings home a slip of paper for you to sign so they can go on a field trip. No. These days, you have to log on to some online portal or, most usually, an app to complete a plethora of forms and then asked to fill in the same information which you completed many times over and over. What's the point of going paperless when you're asked to complete the same details over and over, such as address, Medicare information, allergies, next of kin, emergency details, and so on?

This brings me on to the question of why one needs to have no less than three separate apps on a smartphone to manage my child's affairs at our school. One called *SkoolBag*, which deals with newsletters, emails, and other communications. Another called *Qkr!*, which deals with payments of school meals and other items, and yet another, called *Seesaw* which is used to post photos and activities. The only one of these apps which I can use on the desktop is Seesaw according to my school. Also, I have an ageing iPhone 6 which works well enough for me for what I need it to do, but none of these apps are supported anymore and cannot be loaded. As I refuse to be hostage of being forced to upgrade my phone for the sake of supporting these apps, my wife has, very kindly, taken on the mission to deal with these apps on a day-to-day basis.

In general, I have an aversion to the growing trend of relying on apps on smartphones to carry out day-to-day transactions and not been given the option to use a website portal. It used to be the other way round in which one may be given the option of using a smartphone app instead. I carry a small smartphone which fits in my pocket and have enormous difficulty in reading and typing with fat fingers and thumbs. In any case, I prefer to carry out my daily business on the desktop when I get home, but to force more and more people to use their smartphones is absurd.

Taking a slight tangent to the topic at hand, the biggest concern for many parents is, of course, managing to get to grips with the quality of the education. Like many parents, I want to have the confidence that my child is getting the best possible education. As an older parent, that confidence is, somewhat, diminished insofar that once you hit being fifty, you start to take notice that just about every teacher is significantly younger than you. I'm not suggesting that young people are not as smart, but many have not had the same years of experience and wisdom. Even as a fifty-year-old, it's interesting when I think of a teacher as that older and more learned person armed with a supreme font of wisdom and knowledge. But when I turn up to a parent-teacher session, I'm conversing with a young adult

more than twenty years my junior who, despite working very hard as a teacher and doing what teachers are meant to do, may not have the same wealth of knowledge and wisdom as someone in their older years may possess. It's a common observation as I found out once one hits middle age, where the average age of those leaders within other institutions like the world of politics and the corporate world is less than your own making it easy to assume that many important decisions affecting the lives of others are based on less wisdom and experience. This is why young leaders should always have an older mentor who has this experience and wisdom.

But getting back on to the topic of managing to understand what kids are taught in an Australian school, it's not terribly easy. I ask my son the question and he usually responds with an answer stating that he didn't learn anything new. Not an aspiring source of information I grant you, but this is often normal behaviour for many children when they get home. It happens to adults as well. I get asked a similar question from my wife. 'How was work?' I respond apathetically, 'Yeah, it was okay'. So, it would be nice to have a daily or weekly summary of what is being taught in school rather than an end-of-term one-on-one parent-teacher talk which lasts no more than half an hour. The *Seesaw* app I mentioned earlier is an ideal platform to use, but it's usually used for posting the odd photo of one's child doing some artwork or, basically, looking happy in class. And this also depends on the teacher, some of whom, do very little in the way of posting what happens. I empathise with this to some extent as the teacher has quite enough to do with teaching. There is the national school curriculum which is available for all to see, but every school has its own variation of what is taught.

It's the sign of the times and, I guess, for those dinosaurs like me who abhor having to install new smartphone apps to conduct seemingly simple tasks like paying for a school lunch, will just have to adapt.