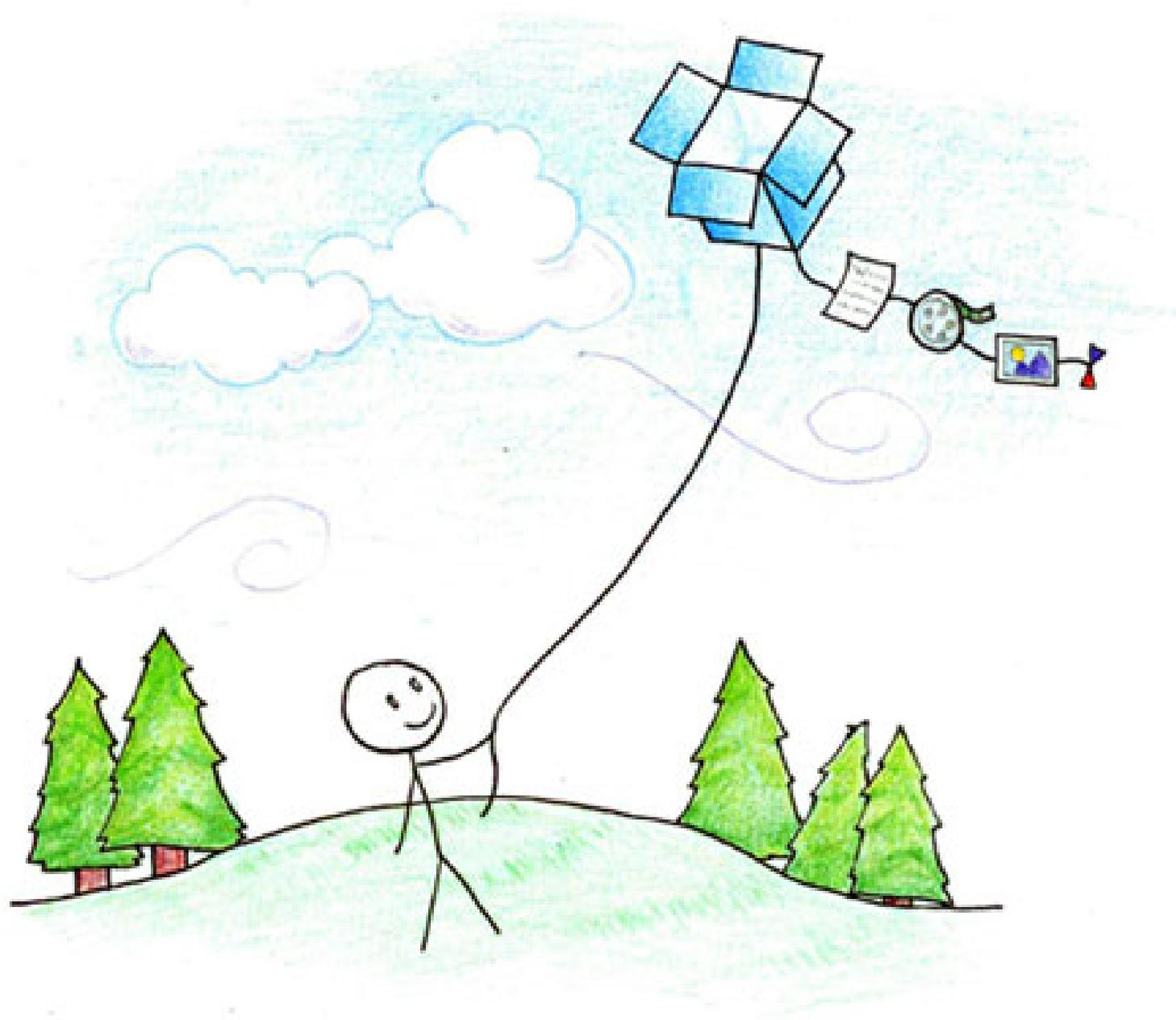

Using Dropbox in Teaching and Research

by Bryan | May 15, 2013 | 1-1-1, Innovative Instruction, Research, Share



For this guest post to the TLT Blog, *Dr. Ana Oprisan*, who received this year's *CofC Distinguished Teaching Award*, reflects on her use of *Dropbox.com* both inside and outside of the classroom:

During the summer of 2012, I attended a weeklong session of the summer *Faculty Technology Institute (FTI)* that presented new potential technologies for the classroom. Besides other interesting topics, Dropbox impressed me with features that, by design, can be used in a wide range of applications from research to classroom teaching.

What is the history behind this multifaceted tool?

According to his founder, Drew Houston, the project started after repeatedly forgetting his USB flash drive while he was a student at MIT. He says that existing services at the time “suffered problems with Internet latency, large files, bugs, or just made me think too much.” He began making something for his personal use, but then realized that it could benefit others with the same problems. Houston founded Dropbox Inc. in June 2007 and launched it in 2008, at an annual technology conference. Over the years, the number of users increased and, as of November 2012, Dropbox announced it had reached 100 million users. — 1

Dropbox stores files in the “cloud”, i.e., on remote servers, and creates a link on your desktop through which you can access your files as if they were in a folder on your (local) computer. Dropbox can store large files in all kind of formats: pdf, videos, pictures, word documents, PowerPoint, etc. The data is stored in the “cloud” and allows access to your documents from anywhere you have access to the Internet. It is easy to understand and use, free 2 GB (up to 18 GB), and it can be accessed simultaneously by a number of different devices and services across platforms and the web. You can create subfolders on Dropbox and share access with other users.

So how did I use Dropbox in my classroom?

After I attended the FTI, I started using the Dropbox in my Sciences and Mathematics For Teachers (SMFT) courses. One of the class requirements for SMFT graduate students is to select a topic covered during the lectures and to make an end-of-semester presentation related to the grade level they teach. In addition, by inviting students to share folders, they can work collaboratively on the final report. At the same time, other colleagues can read their report ahead of time and come prepared to ask questions during the final presentation.

By using the Dropbox features, my students were able to upload and share information such as lesson plans, experimental details, curriculum development, PowerPoint presentation, pdf files, pictures and videos. Since Dropbox works across platforms and devices, one can have access to these documents on all of them (PCs, Macs, iPads, iPhones) and this feature eliminated the need of transferring these files on a flash drive. Another advantage is that using Dropbox eliminates the need of printing copies of all these documents. Furthermore, the graduate students taking my classes have access to all files, and use my Dropbox as a repository containing lesson plans, science standards, experiments, and videos.

So how did I use Dropbox in my research?

I also used Dropbox in my research. For example, I carry out the experiments in a different building and recorded video files with images that were saved on a local computer. Using Dropbox, I was able to share some data files with my research student and we run the image processing tools on different computers in a different building across the campus. Besides the Dropbox campus usage, I was able to transfer files and give my collaborators in France access to our research results and paper drafts.

In summary, I find Dropbox features useful not only in teaching, where it can be used to perform collaborative work on the same project or lab report, share useful information with a wider audience (science standards for teachers, lesson plans, etc.), but also as a tool for collaborative research that helps communicating and sharing data, images and drafts of journal article. It saves both time and effort in research and teaching.

References:

1. [Dropbox \(service\) – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.](#)
2. [Dropbox: A Superb Classroom Tool, Jennifer Carey, August 2012.](#)
3. [No More Printing! Teachers Using Dropbox, Michael Fisher, 2012](#)

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