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Man's own experience prompts him to create app for pupils to get academic help for free

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Mr Anders Tan (left) and Mr Chia Luck Yong launched EduSnap to allow students to pose questions anonymously. (Photo: TODAY/Don Wong)

SINGAPORE: As a rebellious student in his younger days, Mr Anders Tan felt asking questions in class was akin to losing face.

To maintain a know-it-all front among his peers, he chose instead to keep mum about his doubts to the point of flunking his exams repeatedly and ending up in the EM3 stream.

It also did not help that his mother, a factory worker, and father, a mechanic, were too busy making ends meet to watch over him.

"I did not want to look stupid in front of my friends," said Mr Tan, now 29.

Things turned around for him only when a cousin started tutoring him. Mr Tan did well enough at the Institute of Technical Education to go to polytechnic and obtained a degree in Information Systems Management from Singapore Management University in 2012.

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Through his experience and volunteer work with at-risk youth, Mr Tan became inspired to create a mobile application for students to anonymously pose questions about schoolwork, free of charge.

“I wanted to help those who may have a big ego or are too shy to ask questions (with) a tool that can help them study,” he said.

Together with two friends from university – Mr Chia Luck Yong and Mr Shaun Tan – Mr Tan launched mobile app EduSnap in January. A student stuck with a question can upload a photograph of it onto the app.

In as soon as 10 minutes, tutors from any of the 12 partner tuition centres will respond with a photograph explaining concepts behind the solution to the question.

To meet their goal of helping disadvantaged children, the app’s creators have tied up with five voluntary welfare centres offering tuition programmes.

So far, EduSnap has about 600 registered users. A check on the app showed a flurry of activity, with questions and answers filed according to topics and by school levels.

Altruistic resource-sharing platforms such as EduSnap have sprouted in recent years with the Internet. For example, in Singapore, the openlectures.org portal allows students to share free video tutorials for different subjects.

Representatives from voluntary welfare centres welcomed such platforms as they complement their efforts in helping disadvantaged children. However, they also noted the importance of the human touch in instilling motivation in these students.

To avoid over-reliance on this free app, Mr Felix Leo, a counsellor with Care Corner – Teck Ghee Youth Centre, suggested: “The app’s creators could consider having answers provided in the form of hints to get students to try to think on their own first.”

A schoolteacher interviewed agreed that such mobile apps provide students with academic help after school hours, but added: “You still need someone to provide the motivational element and transmission of knowledge, especially in a child’s developmental years.”

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