Blogging: A Doorway for Communication Between School and Parents

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Preface

As a Kindergarten teacher working for the Vancouver School Board, I see the challenges that parents face when trying to make a connection with the school, so as to provide learning support to their children. These struggles are particularly exacerbated when the parents themselves are working and are new immigrants, who may not speak English fluently. In a study on home-school communication and recent Chinese immigrants done by Dyson (2001), it found that immigrant parents communicated with the school very infrequently due to a variety of factors, with the most common reason being the lack of English speaking skills. This challenge of improving communication between parents and the school is something that many teachers face in our school systems today. Epstein’s study (1983) on the effects of family-school interactions on student achievement shows the importance of parental involvement across all grade levels. However, not all families become involved in school-related activities or show interest in their children’s schoolwork.

Many of the schools in the Vancouver area provide education to students whose parents are new immigrants, refugees or working parents from middle to low income families. At times, it is hard to involve and inform parents about what is happening in the schools of their children, as hard copy forms do not make it home, or parents find them hard to understand. Language barriers, lack of time, and little experience with Canadian schools can result in low parental involvement, and low level of communication between teachers and parents. The research done by Dyson (2001) shows that “in comparison with non-immigrants, immigrant parents communicated with schools less often, had more difficulty understanding the communication, and were less satisfied with the school’s
communication style” (p.470). By providing an alternative means of two-way communication through blogging, I hope to be able to explore the benefits of using this tool to enhance communication between parents and the classroom. In doing so, it may better equip parents within these communities to support their child in their learning, to become more involved in their school lives, and to feel like they are partners in the learning community of their child’s classroom. According to Epstein (1987), “the recent acknowledgements of the importance of parental involvement are built on research findings accumulated over two decades that show that children have an advantage in school when their parents encourage and support their school activities” (p.119-120).
Introduction

As I look through my class list and take note of the students who had not yet returned their consent form, I notice that is always the same handful of students that always seem to lose their forms and notices, and it is always those students that I have to chase after day after day before I get things returned. I ask if their parents have seen the notices that I have sent home and the answer usually is a combination between no, I forgot to show them, or yes, but they did not have time to read it or they did not understand the content of it. This scenario is all too familiar in my Kindergarten classroom. Because many of the parents are working, I have little to no personal contact between me and the parents, save the parent interviews that take place two times a year. According to Rim-Kaufman and Pianta (2005), “findings showed a decrease in family-school communication between preschool and Kindergarten…Class sizes increase and teacher-child ratios decrease making it more difficult for teachers to reach out to families” (p. 309). This, plus other factors including lack of time and language barriers, makes communication between the school and the parents very difficult. As a result, parents miss out on opportunities to be more involved in their child’s school life. And in turn, the students lack a connection between home life and school life. The research findings assert that schools and families would be more effective if they work together to identify and achieve common goals (Litwak & Meyer, 1974). By providing an alternate way of communication between parents and the school, the home-school relationship could become more effective and thus, enhance the learning experience of the students at school and at home.
Significance of this study

We are living in a society that uses technology more and more frequently. There are so many ways to be connected through the mediums of digital technologies. The use of personal computers is almost a given in most households in Canada. Even amongst those families that do not own a computer, there are easy ways to access a computer through the public library or other community resources, with schools being one of them. To remedy the fact that not all families own a computer, the research done by Bessell, Sinagub, Lee and Schumm (2003) on South Florida’s Family Tech Program employed the use of computer training sessions held at the children's schools. Parents and students were allowed access to the schools' computer labs on particular weekends. Families were also informed about local libraries that offered computer terminals and free Internet access. At our school in Vancouver of roughly 500 children, we have about 8 computers that are available for parental use during the school day and outside of school hours. In such a technological society in which we live, it would be a shame to not make the most of this avenue of opportunity to reach out to our parent community. A study on blog use in parent-teacher communication done by Zhang and Hatcher (2011) found that the growth of Internet-based communications such as e-mails and blogs have expanded the ways in which parent-teacher communication can occur.

I see a gap in communication between the school and the parents and I seek to use the technology, through a classroom blog, as an opportunity to remedy the situation.

Herring, Scheidt, Bonus and Wright (2004) states that “since mid-1999, blogging as an online activity has been increasing exponentially” (p.1). Therefore, it would be worthwhile to use this convenient medium in which to reach parents.
Through this research into my classroom blog, I hope to provide feedback on the use of classroom blogs for teachers and administrators and parents, with the intent of improving communication between parents and the school. The use of blogs in classrooms is not groundbreaking, but I hope to add to this area of research by studying whether or not this medium of communication is effective and feasible for other teachers to invest their time into. As outlined by Zhang and Hatcher (2011), Internet-based communication methods offer advantages over more traditional methods because of their ability to increase the frequency and outreach of communication between families and schools. Using a classroom blog could be one way that teachers can improve the relationship between the parents and the school and classroom. Students would benefit from their parents being more involved with and informed about their learning.

An area of specific interest to me in this research is the potential to improve the communication between the school and parents that speak English as a second or third language, and parents who are new immigrants. Often, parents who are new to the school system are hesitant to meet with the teacher or come into the school to learn more about how they could be a partner in their child’s schooling. It is not that the parents are disinterested or unwillingly, but rather that they do not know what protocols to follow and they may have difficulty with communicating in English. According to Epstein (1995), “just about all families care about their children, want them to succeed, and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities so as to remain good partners in their children's education” (p.703). With that being the case, it would be helpful for families to be notified about events happening in the school and classroom, as well as be well informed about school and classroom routines and expectations. A
classroom blog may be a gentle way of easing the stress of communicating with the teacher, without the constraints of time and the need to speak effectively in English. Also, with the use of translation tools available on the Internet, it would be easier to translate information via the classroom blog. For these reasons, I believe that having a classroom blog as a communication tool is worth studying and looking into at this time.

As Epstein (1995) suggests

> collaborative work and thoughtful give-and-take among researchers, policy leaders, educators, and parents are responsible for the progress that has been made over the past decade in understanding and developing school, family, and community partnerships. Similar collaborations will be important for future progress in this and other areas of school reform. (p. 711).

The purpose and objective

As a classroom teacher, I want to investigate how the use of a classroom blog site can serve as an alternate means of communication between the school community and parents. Traditional forms of communication are still necessary and important, such as parent-teacher conferences and hard copies of forms and notices. However, as mentioned earlier, forms and notices may not make it home, and because of work schedules, parents may not always have the time to meet with the teacher to be informed about the progress of their child. Consequently, parental involvement is low in some schools due to factors that include working parents, language barriers, and lack of knowledge of school and classroom events and needs. According to Ho Siu-Chu and Willms (1996), the prevailing perception among educational researchers is that successful schools establish practices
that foster greater communication with parents, encourage parents to assist children at home with their schoolwork and planning, and recruit parents to work as volunteers or participate in school governance. The argument is that these practices, in turn, lead to higher levels of achievement from the students. Thus, there is so much to be gained from better communication between the school and parents. Using a classroom blog could be a step in the right direction towards bridging the communication gap between the school and parents.

Research Questions

Through my reading and thinking on blogging and the classroom, I have designed the following research questions which have guided my work:

- Is a classroom blog an effective tool in relaying information about the classroom and school to parents of diverse linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds?

- How often do parents access the blog site to check on additions or contribute to the blog?

- Does the blog help parents to feel more connected with the school and classroom?

- Does the classroom blog support learning at home? How does it support home learning?
• Can a classroom blog help to alleviate some of the language barriers between school and parents through the use of Google translator on the blog site?

These practice related questions have directed my action research. These questions form the basis of the data collection instrument, the anonymous survey that was distributed to the parents of my students in order to collect the data for this research.

Overview of the study

This study was conducted in March of 2012, in a school in the Southeast region of Vancouver. This school of approximately 500 students has a wide range of cultures, socio-economic status and family backgrounds. The student population is predominantly ESL and many of the parents are new immigrants. Many of the parents are working parents and parental involvement at the school is low. Grandparents, who may or may not speak any English, are frequently the go-between between the teacher and the parents because often, the parents are still at work and cannot pick up their child after school. The parents in my Kindergarten class were used in this study to provide feedback on their use of the classroom blog that I had created.

A survey was sent home for parents to complete regarding the classroom blog. They completed the survey and returned it anonymously by dropping it into a box outside my classroom. I used this data to evaluate the usefulness of the blog and to study the effectiveness of the blog on parents becoming more involved and informed about what goes on in the classroom and at school. The conclusions drawn from this research will be used to help me to grow in my professional career as an educator and to help others that
may have similar challenges as educators. As described in the Action Research Guide for Alberta Teachers (2000), “As an educator, you are faced daily with challenges as you work to provide an effective learning environment for all the students in your classroom or school. These challenges surface in your reflections as questions that you attempt to answer to improve your professional practice” (p. 2).

Overview of the Written Report

This report is divided into five sections. Section one is the introduction to this study. I went over the significance of this research as well as the questions that form the basis of the study. Section two is the literature review on blogging and its use in educational settings. Section three takes a look at the methodology and how I conducted the research and processes that I went through to get the data. Section four is the data analysis, where the survey that I collected from the parents will be gathered and interpreted. The last section is the findings and conclusions where I tie the data gathered in section four back to my original research questions and take a look at the implications of the results on my future professional growth. The appendices attached at the end are the forms, notices and survey that were used in this research and can be used for reference.
Literature Review

Parental involvement is the vital link between home and school. Parents need to be involved in their child’s learning at school so that the child can know that school and learning is important. As stated in Ramirez (2001), “students tend to place greater importance on their education when they see their parents actively involved in it” (p. 30). Studies have shown that there is a link between parental involvement and higher student achievement. A parent that is more involved in their child’s schooling can positively affect their achievement. According to Epstein’s research (1987), “the evidence is clear that parental encouragement, activities, and interest at home and participation in school and classrooms affect children’s achievements, attitudes, and aspirations” (p. 120). It is important for parents to be informed and updated on what their child is learning at school and to be involved with the school. According to Bird (2006), having the parents in the school “utilizes parents as partners in teaching and learning, recognizes parents as legitimate participants in school governance, fosters community cohesion, and supports the development of parenting skills” (p. 41). The study on family-school communication in preschool and Kindergarten done by Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2005) also found that “communication sets the stage for establishing shared goals and mutual decision-making, avoiding misunderstandings, and helping parents understand how to reinforce learning and school instruction in the home” (p. 288). Hence, this link between parents and the school cannot be one that is ignored or broken.

Even though studies have shown that parental involvement in schools can lead to better academic success, better attendance, and increased social skills, participation in schools is alarmingly low (Bessell et al., 2003). For families that speak English as a
second language, new immigrant families, and families from low economic status, participating in schools may not be an urgent matter. These families struggle with coping with a multitude of issues such as heavy workloads and language barriers. Spending the time looking over their child’s schoolwork or being involved in their school would be one more extra thing on their plate that they need to worry about. It may be that the parents have the desire to become more involved, but they lack the tools and the time to act upon it. According to the findings in the study on the barriers to parental involvement by Brock and Edmonds (2010), time and work schedule conflicts were two predominant barriers to the parents’ involvement in schools.

Teachers, on their part, find it difficult to find the time to connect with parents on a regular basis to inform and to comment on what is going on in the classroom and at school. According to Ramirez (2001), “Teachers often indicate that they do not have enough time to effectively communicate with all parents” (p. 30). The school day is already jam packed with lessons and activities and teachers often find it impossible to have personal interaction with each child’s parents at the day’s end. Then there are the forms, notices, notes, and newsletters that go home with child, in hopes that those would make it through the journey home from school and that the student would then remember to give it to their parents. If those forms, notices, notes, and newsletters are the only form of communication between the school and the parents, then parents may not be getting the information that they need because those hard copies go missing and never make it into the hands of the parents.

Here, technology can enter as a medium through which to engage and attract parents to become more involved. Technology, like numbers, can be a more universal
language through which to communicate. Numbers can be understood amongst people who do not speak the same language. In the same way, technology can afford users a way to communicate that can overcome some language barriers. Bessell et al. (2003) argue that

Because technology is associated with its own vocabulary and language, it is an excellent platform from which to make connections and build working relationships with non-mainstream families. In such a scenario, families do not have to give up their native tongue for the language of the teacher or school. Instead, both teachers and families are augmented by the addition of the language of technology. (p. 8)

Therefore, teachers can utilize technology in their classrooms to augment the relationship between the school and families. In doing so, it may allow parents to be involved in a more comfortable and flexible forum than purely face to face interactions with the teacher or school. Blogging can be one technological tool that can be used to reach the parents in their homes. In the study on blogs done by Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, and Wright (2004), they found that blogs “enable faster and easier content modification that does not require knowledge of HTML and blogs can be used by almost anyone, and be responsive to people’s daily needs” (p. 11). Perhaps blogs can be one way to respond to the needs of better home-school communication.

Blogging is not a new phenomenon, as least not in technological time where things come into and out of style very quickly. However, weblogs, or its short form blog, have been around for over 10 years and is essentially a web diary. It is a place for web users to chronicle information on one specific focus or a whole range of topics. There are
entries that are made that appear in reverse chronological order that contain commentaries or links to other websites. According to WordPress.org (n.d.), blogs tend to have a few general characteristics. Blogs usually have a main content area where there are categorized articles that are listed chronologically, with the newest on top. An archive would contain older articles that were posted. A common feature on blogs is a comment area for visitors to the blog to leave comments about the articles. Blogrolls, which are links to related sites, are also usually present in blogs. If kept in the simplest form, blogs can be quite easy to navigate. The appeal of blogs can be attributed to the connections they create when readers and writers interact and explore common interests. The ease with which blogs can facilitate that interaction is equally as important (Richardson, 2003).

In an educational setting, blogs can be used for a variety of purposes, depending on who the intended audience will be. They can be set up as personal journals, for the teacher or for the students. Blogs can be used as a bulletin board to display student work, so that parents can view samples of their child’s work online. They can even be set up to be portfolios of the students’ work. Whatever the purpose, blogs have a quality that makes it an attractive idea. They have the power to be collaborative and communicative beyond the classroom and they allow for many people to share ideas and comments (Weiler, 2003).

For the purposes of this study, the blog’s intended audience is the parents. In using this communication tool, it could allow parents to be a part of the classroom and the school community even though they may not physically be there. The blog here is meant for parents to become more involved through reading the blog and using it to be
updated on the events and activities that are happening in the classroom and school, and
to view their child’s work online. Furthermore, the blog could become more
collaborative as parents comment and share about the posts. Herring, Scheidt, Bonus,
and Wright (2004) suggests that “by enabling readers to post comments, blog software
makes Web pages truly interactive” (p. 11). However, this step into allowing comments
is a daunting one both for the parent and for the teacher. For the parents, extra training
on the use of the technology may be necessary before they can be comfortable in using
the comments option (Ramirez, 2001). For the teacher, it opens up the blog to public
comments which may require some screening before being posted on the blog. However,
the blog can be set up so that comments can be moderated for appropriateness before they
appear on the blog (Rochelle, 2009). Nevertheless, if parents and teachers can learn to
use the blog as a collaborative tool as well, it would make communication between the
school and the parents that much more effective. Parents could ask questions regarding
the classroom work or school events and teachers can respond to their questions quickly
via the blog.

The benefits of using a blog can be a motivating factor in creating one for the
classroom. Technology affords families greater and more varied means of contributing to
their children's academic experience (Bessell et al., 2003). Parents can use the
information posted on the blog to propel conversations with their child about their
learning at school. They can also extend that learning at home by finding ways to
incorporate concepts learned at school. The discussion of school-related activities at
home had the strongest relationship with academic achievement according to the study
done by Ho Siu-Chu and Willms (1996). For ESL parents, the blog can be translated into
different languages so that comprehension and translation challenges can be reduced. Many times, translators are not readily available at the school when teachers want to relay important information about the classroom or the school. But, through Internet tools such as Google translators, information posted on the blog can be translated more readily. Also, non-English proficient parents who may be hesitant to speak with teachers in person, as well as parents who do not have the time to meet during normal school hours, such as parents who work multiple jobs, can still maintain regular communication with the school via the blog (Bessell et al., 2003). The time factor can also be an attractive feature of the classroom blog for the working parent. If parents work during the day, then it might be impossible for them to come into the school regularly to meet with teachers. With the use of the blog, parents can access the same information on their own time. That means that if their available time is at 9:00 p.m., then it is possible for them to check out what is going on in their child’s classroom and school at that hour. This would be impossible if communication between school and parents existed only on a face to face basis. This is particularly pertinent according to the study done by Brock and Edmonds (2010), where they found that “the types of activities that constitute positive and meaningful parental involvement require considerable time commitment. Working parents may not have the luxury of time, or at least the luxury of the involvement time designated by schools” (p. 56).

Teachers can also stand to benefit from the use of blogs. According to Bushweller (2006), blogs can “streamline educators' workloads, allowing them to bypass paperwork by posting class content, notices for parents, and other pertinent information online” (p. 45). There are so many times that teachers hand out forms and notices at the
end of the day, only to find those notices on the floor of the hallway, or stuffed into the cubbyholes in the coatroom. That information will never make it home and teachers are forced to try again the next day and to try and find out which students did not take a notice home. The classroom blog can help ease some of that anxiety by providing another way for parents to access important information. Prior to having a classroom blog, teachers would have limited platforms to show what students are learning in different subject areas or topics. Even on bulletin boards outside the classroom, there is only so much space. With a blog, there is almost unlimited space for which to display the learning taking place in the classroom. Parents can gain insight into what their child is learning across many subject areas. This will keep parents informed about their child’s education and increase the strength of the partnership between the school and parents. According to Epstein (1995), this partnership “recognizes their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students” (p. 701).

In order for a blog to work as a communication tool, the teacher would have to ensure that several factors are in place. The teacher would need to spend the time and energy into updating and monitoring the blog so that information is fresh and current. According to Wilcox (2006), infrequent updates on the teacher’s part could result in the perception that they do not care about the blog, and the information would not be relevant due to delay in the posts. Other challenges include the fact that a computer with Internet access is needed in order for the teacher to upload pictures, work, or text onto the blog. In my case, this is fortunately not a problem because in Vancouver, every teacher is outfitted with a computer in the classroom with Internet access.
importance on the list of things for teachers to consider when using a blog is ensuring that the students’ identities are protected. Consent is required from parents before work and pictures are posted on the blog. And, as Heinrichs (2006) states, “when posting identifying information, such as photographs or captions, teachers should password-protect the blog” (p. 15).

Difficulties that parents might need to overcome when using a classroom blog include the lack of computer access. Ramirez (2001) states that “not all families are equipped with computers, and some that are may not have access to the Internet” (p. 31). Fortunately, there are ways to access a public computer. Most libraries have computers that allow Internet access and some community centers have programs that allow parents to learn and to use computers. At our school in Vancouver, there are computers designated for parental use in our libraries. Hence, parents can still access the blog through those computers. It would be beneficial if teachers can inform parents of ways to access computers so that parents have the opportunity to use the technology. Another hindrance that parents can face when using blogs is unfamiliarity with this type of website. Indeed, according to Ramirez (2001), “some parents may be resistant to, uncomfortable with, or unable to use technology” (p. 31). To remedy this, teachers may need to provide training and information sessions for the parents, prior to the blog’s launch in order to familiarize them with the technology and with the functions of the blog.

According to research done by Liontos (1991) on families of at-risk students, having parents participate in their child’s education improves the learning environment in the classroom and school. It is important for teachers to develop communication with
parents so that both understand the others' expectations. That is, school can become more home-like and home can have a school component. In order to do that, schools need to provide better methods of communication for the parents. Improvement in communication methods would enhance relationships between the school and home (Bird, 2006). With this research, I hope that it will encourage other teachers to utilize this mode of communication with parents. For the parents, I hope that it would give them a chance, a voice, and an outlet in which to share the learning experience with their child.
Methodology

In this section, I examine my research questions and explain how and why I used certain methods and techniques in my investigations. The first part takes a look at the context in which my study takes place and also the set-up of my classroom blog. Then, I will introduce the participants and research process. This is followed by a section on ethical considerations and how the data is collected and analyzed. The last section will explore the verification of the findings.

Context

My action research is directed towards the parents of the children in my Kindergarten class. The parents come from a wide variety of backgrounds. All are working parents and most speak another language other than English at home. Language barriers may prevent some of the parents from using the computer in a more in-depth way. In my class, I have families that speak English, Punjabi, Arabic, Vietnamese, Russian, Chinese and Spanish. The school is located in Southeast Vancouver. This area is known for its ethnically diverse neighbourhood, which is home to mostly working class families. Our school is not considered an inner city school and does not offer a subsidized hot lunch program. Below are two graphs that display the percentage of ESL students in Elementary school and the prevalence of low income families in the Vancouver district. The area in which my school is located is indicated with a dot on each of the graphs.
Figure 1.1

Elementary ESL - % of Total Enrolment

Figure 1.2

Prevalence of Low-Income in Vancouver
As shown on the two graphs, the area where my school is situated consists of a very high percentage of students that are ESL, with a relatively high percentage of low income families as well. Subsequently, the school experiences low parental involvement and low levels of communication between the school and parents.

Many of the families in my class own computers with Internet access in their homes, although in most of the families, the computer is for the children to use to play and to do homework on. Parents use the computer for Internet access and data storage. Accordingly, parents have little to no experience with social networking media, such as Facebook, blogging or even email. At the school library, there are around eight computers that parents can use to access the Internet and to do other work on it. This provides a way for parents to use computers even if they do not own one at home.

Parental involvement at this school is low, due to work schedules and language barriers. However, parents are quite concerned about their child’s schooling and will try to do what they can for their child with what they have. At the school, grandparents are often seen picking up and dropping off the students because parents are at work. The grandparents are very loving, but often speak very little, if any, English. It is against this diverse background that my action research will commence.

The Classroom Blog

My classroom blog is a new addition to my classroom this year. I had created the blog in November 2011 and it went live at the end of January 2012 when it was linked onto our school’s website. Since then, I have been actively updating the blog with what we are learning and doing in the classroom. The posts are kept short and simple, so that
it would not require parents to read copious amounts of material every night. I also try to keep the language simple and easy to understand. Consequently, if the parents do use the Google translator, it would be easier for the language to be translated accurately.

The interface of my blog is kept simple to allow for easy navigation. Posts are set up in chronological order, with the most recent on top. The posts are about different events or subjects that we are studying. They are categorized, but the posts do not appear in categories because it is set up to appear in chronological order (only if the user so wishes to see the posts of various categories that the posts would appear in categories). I include many pictures and various pieces of work that the students have done. These are password protected and I make sure that I have media consent forms from parents before I post the pictures of students in my class. The main objective for my posts is to keep parents updated on what their children are learning and doing in the classroom and to connect parents with programs and events that are happening around the school.

Along the top of the blog are different pages that parents can access by clicking on it. I have the Home page, which is where all the posts appear, About Our Class, which is an informational page on the rules and routines of our class, Kindergarten Newsletters, which is a monthly newsletter that I write and send home every month that details what the class has been and will be learning, ABC Rap, which is a video link to an alphabet chant that we have learned, Numbers, which is another video link to a number rhyme we have learned, and finally Moberly Home, which is a link that brings the user to our school’s website. On the right hand side of the blog is a valuable tool for ESL parents. The Google translator is there for parents to translate the blog and its content into their first language.
After the blog was launched, I sent home a notice that detailed the blog and simple instructions on how to access the website. I also showed the students the blog so that they could be excited about it as well, since the blog features their work and their pictures. The students could tell their parents about the blog and encourage them to check it. After the notice went home, I posted the website outside my classroom door so that parents would always have a reference to go back to, in case they lost the address or needed the instructions again. Moreover, I made it a point to personally talk with many of the parents about the blog and to show them how to get to it on the internet.

This blog was created for the parents of my class so that they can have access to information about our class and school. By doing this study, I hope to determine if the blog is effective for the parents so that they can better communicate with the school.

The Participants

The participants in my study are the parents of the children in my Kindergarten class. There are 18 enrolled children in my class. As mentioned previously, there are many different languages spoken in the families of my class, including English, Punjabi, Arabic, Vietnamese, Russian, Chinese, and Spanish. A little over half of the parents do not speak fluent English and would require interpreters for parent-teacher conferences. Most of the parents work, some during the day when the children are at school, and some work the evening and night shifts. This results in alternate forms of childcare for their child during the week, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or neighbours. There are a handful of parents, about five or six, whom I rarely see or interact with because of their work schedule. For those children, much of the information, notices, newsletters, and
forms that go home from school are handed to older siblings, grandparents, and other
caretakers to relay to the parents. Despite the language barriers and the impossibility of
having face to face interaction with the teacher, the parents like to stay current on what is
happening in the classroom; they are grateful for the newsletters I send home every
month that detail what we are learning in the class.

I chose to use this group of participants because they are the intended users of my
classroom blog. This parent group is what I am interested in studying because I wanted
to see if the use of a classroom blog would make them feel more included and involved in
their child’s schooling.

Research process

A notice went home to the parents explaining my action research and an invitation
to voluntarily participate in this study. I explained that this was part of a study to gather
their thoughts and opinions on the classroom blog. Participation was completely
voluntary and the survey could be completed at home. Next, a letter of implied consent
was sent to the parents. This letter outlines the study, its purpose, its benefits and risks,
as well as the steps to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The letter was for them to
keep. If they chose to complete the survey, then they have given me implied consent.
After they had read the letter of implied consent, I sent home the survey, an envelope,
and an instruction sheet on how to complete the survey and where, when and how to drop
off the completed survey. All the forms that were sent home were translated into the
language that is spoken at the potential participant’s home so that there would be full
understanding of the research purpose and process. The forms were translated using
Google translator and it was checked over for accuracy by multicultural workers at the school. The participants that volunteered completed the survey at home. Then, they folded and enclosed the survey in the provided envelope and they sealed it. I had set up a drop off box outside my classroom for parents to deposit the sealed envelope inside. This box was available for drop offs before school and after school. I put the box out half an hour before school started and I also put the box out for half an hour after school. After that half an hour period, I retrieved the box and kept it in a locked cabinet for safe keeping. In this way, I hoped to ensure the anonymity of the participants. The participants had one week to complete and return the surveys.

**Ethical considerations**

Due to the fact that I am currently the teacher of the children of the participants, there was a need to make certain of the anonymity of the participants. Even though the survey was voluntary and its content only pertained to the classroom blog, and not in any way the progress of the child, there is still the chance that parents may feel compelled to participate despite my assurances that there will be no repercussions upon their child in the classroom. Hence, the survey was returned in a sealed envelope and the drop off box was located outside my classroom so that I cannot see the person who dropped off the survey and I cannot keep track of the parents that did the survey and the parents that did not do the survey.

Because I am in a power-over situation as the children’s teacher, I needed to ensure that parents understood that there would be no negative repercussions on their child’s schooling if they chose not to complete the survey. In the information form, it
stated clearly the survey done will only pertain to the classroom blog, and never anything to do with the progress of their child or that of any other children in the class. Also, participation was completely voluntary and anonymous.

Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time. If they wished to withdraw after they had submitted the survey, they could have informed me of their decision and their data would not have been used in the study.

The data from the surveys collected was kept in the box for the duration of a week, during the drop-off period. In the in-between times of daily drop off, I kept the box in a locked cabinet. After the study, the data will be destroyed through shredding and all electronic notes and data will be destroyed through electronic file deletion.

**Data collection and analysis**

The survey I collected from the participants sought to answer these questions:

- Is the classroom blog an effective tool in relaying information about the classroom and school to parents?

- Does the classroom blog help to alleviate some of the language barriers between school and parents through the use of Google translator on the blog site?

- How often do parents access the blog site to check on additions or contribute to the blog?
• Does the blog help parents to feel more connected with the school and classroom?

• Does the classroom blog support learning at home via the use of video links on the blog?

These questions mirror my research questions and the survey is based on these questions. The survey consists of mainly yes and no questions for the participants to circle and three of the questions require the participant to write a short written response.

After the one week drop-off period for the surveys to be returned, I took out the surveys from the box. I unsealed each envelope and read the answers to the survey. I collected the answers on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet so that I saw the data more clearly.

I analyzed the data by looking at how many yes or no I had for each question. If the majority of the answers for a particular question are a yes, then I would see which area of the blog was effective. Similarly, if a question receives mostly a no answer, I would then see the areas of the blog that needed improvement.

Data Verification

I used mainly yes or no answers in the survey to ensure that participants understood how to complete the survey. By using a small sample size, I can count with accuracy how many participants answered yes or no and hence, I would be able to calculate the percentage quite easily with 100% accuracy. In this way, I can see which questions have a majority of affirmative or negative answers. I can then use that data to refine and improve upon the classroom blog. The results of the survey will be shown in this report.
Data Analysis

This section will discuss the findings from this study. The data is based upon a survey that was given to the parents concerning our classroom blog. The blog had gone live for three months prior to the survey. My action research focused on the usefulness of the classroom blog as a tool for communication between parents and the classroom and school. The data from this research serves as a guide to me in my professional growth as a teacher by shedding light on whether or not a blog is helpful in parent-teacher communication and what I can do to the classroom blog to make it more useful to the parents.

There were sixteen questions on the survey. Each of the survey questions directly links back to my original research questions. The survey was laid out in a very easy to follow format, consisting mainly of questions that required yes or no answers. The parents needed to read the question and either circle yes or no. There were three questions that asked the parents to write short answers in response. The survey needed to be in a simple format because most of the parents of the children in my class are ESL. Easy wording and format of the survey allows for greater understanding of the questions and the convenience of completing the survey. The survey was translated into their home language as well, so the wording needed to be concise and simple to allow for easy and accurate translation.

The classroom blog survey was handed out to each of the 18 families of my Kindergarten class. Each package contained an implied consent form, an instructional sheet for filling in and returning the survey, an unmarked and blank envelope, and the actual survey itself. Each form had English on one side and the family’s home language
on the other side. There were 5 forms that were English only, 3 with Punjabi translation, 3 with Vietnamese translation, 3 with Chinese translation, 2 with Arabic translation, 1 with Russian translation, and 1 with Spanish translation. Of the 18 forms that were sent home, I received 12 surveys that were put into the anonymous drop-off box outside my classroom door. Therefore, 6 parents opted not to complete the survey. Translated into a percentage, 67% of the parents in my class completed a survey while 33% did not complete a survey. While it would not be possible to say that the 33% that did not return a survey do not use the classroom blog, I can deduce from the survey that 11 out 12 parents that did complete the survey used the classroom blog regularly (see Question 1 in Figure 2.1). Therefore, at least 61% of the parents in my class use the classroom blog.

This section presents and investigates the data collected for each of the questions in the survey and its implications on the usefulness of the blog as a communication tool. The figures that follow are a record of the data from the survey. As I discuss the findings, I will use the percentages to indicate the responses to each question.
Figure 2.1 The survey results

Survey
Blogging: A doorway for communication between school and parents

The number of participants in the survey: 12

1. How often do you check our classroom blog site?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>everyday</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 times a week</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 times a week</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions

2. Do you own a computer at home?  
11  92  1 8

3. Is the blog site easy to use?  
9  75  3 25

4. Do you find the information posted on the blog useful?  
11  92  1 8

6. Do you use the video links posted to help your child learn their letters and numbers at home?  
8  67  4 33

7. Are you more aware of what is going on in our classroom now that you can check what we are learning on the blog?  
9  75  3 25

8. Do you use the information that I post regarding what we do in the classroom to reinforce at home what they learn at school?  
10  83  2 17

9. Does using the Google translator help with understanding classroom and school information?  
9  75  3 25

10. Are you more aware of what is going on in our school now that you can find information about events and happenings through the blog?  
10  83  2 17

11. Do you feel like you are more involved in the school and in the school life of your child as a result of using the blog?  
7  58  5 42
12. Do you find that using the blog is more convenient than coming into the classroom or school? 6 50 6 50

13. Have you recommended the blog to other parents? 6 50 6 50

14. Have you discussed the blog and its content with other parents? 3 25 9 75

**Figure 2.2 Responses to Question 5**

Responses to Question 5. What information do you use most often in the blog?

- everything, but the letter and maths may more
- none
- fun links (starfall), what goes on in the classroom
- school news, letter recognition, letter sounds, school events
- missed info, updates
- news what's happening in school, pictures of student on what he learns in school, the blog is very helpful
- well sometimes I check the blog to see what they’re learning in class and how far they are with regular activities, so that I can help him or her with number counting and ABC’s
- actually I didn't really to how to use all information like how to open all sites. I saw some important notes I really like them.

**Figure 2.3 Responses to Question 15**

Responses to Question 15. What improvements or additions could be made to the blog to make it better?

- Sometimes the blog page takes forever to open
- I don't have a computer & I don't check regularly
- If set up some homework at the blog maybe better. Each student can have a password and enter the blog for doing the homework for half hour to one hour recorded it and check it by teacher later.
- More about what the children listen to in class and their reading lessons
**Figure 2.4 Responses to Question 16**

Responses to Question 16. Is there anything that you feel should be removed?

No I think it's great that Div 21 have a blog and that the kids parents are up to date with their child and help to know what they learn in class

The info is useful for parents

Nothing

Survey on Blogging: A doorway for communication between school and parents

1. *How often do you check our classroom blog site?*

The parents selected from four choices depending on the frequency that they checked the classroom blog site. They could have chosen a) every day, b) 3-5 times a week, c) 1-2 times a week, or e) never. From the survey, 17% said that they checked it every day, 25% said that they checked it 3-5 times a week, 50% said that they checked it 1-2 times a week, and 8% said that they never check the blog. These numbers indicate that most parents check the blog at least 1-2 times a week. This is a positive finding in that it shows that most parents check the blog at least once a week to read its contents. Also, it reveals that parents know of the blog’s existence and remember to check it regularly for information. Of those that returned the survey, one parent, which was 8%, indicated that they do not check the blog at all.

2. *Do you own a computer at home?*

The data shows that 8% (which is one family out of twelve) of the participants do not own a computer. The other 92% of the families do own a computer at home. As mentioned earlier in my paper, we cannot always assume that all families possess a computer in their home. As Ramirez (2001) explains, “not all families are equipped with
computers, and some that are may not have access to the Internet” (p. 31). According to this data, most of the families in my class own a computer at home, while one does not. This family that does not own a computer at home did also indicate that they checked the blog site 1-2 times a week. From this, I infer that they may use the computer at the library or other places that may offer the use of a computer with Internet.

3. Is the blog site easy to use?

The parents’ response to this question indicate that 75% of them found the blog site easy to use, while 25% did not find it easy to use. When I created the blog site, I tried to keep in mind that many of the parents in my class do not have the time or the English proficiency to navigate around a complicated blog site. Therefore, I tried to keep it as simple as possible. The most pertinent and important information regarding our class and school appears as posts on the home page of the blog. Therefore, when the user first arrives at the blog, the most recent information is posted on the top. The majority of the parents did find that the blog was easy to use. However, for the 25% that did not find it easy to use, I could address their specific needs in a tutorial on the blog and how to use it. I could offer that tutorial to all the parents and show the uses of each section and page of the blog. According to Ramirez (2001), “plan a time when you or someone else may be willing to train parents to access the information you will put on the Internet” (p. 30).

4. Do you find the information posted on the blog useful?

According to the survey, 92% of the parents said yes to this question, while 8% said no. This data indicates that most parents find the blog helpful in communicating information from the classroom and school. This is positive because most parents are using the information posted on the blog. There is one family that indicated that they do not use
the website information. This family also indicated that they checked the blog 1-2 times a week. Even though they do not find the information from the blog useful, they still check the blog regularly.

5. What information do you use most often in the blog?

This is the first question that required parents to write a written response. Not all parents answered this question. These are responses written by the parents that did answer question 5. I used the exact wording that they had written down. Most of the parents are ESL and they may not have written the response in completed sentences. However, the essence of what they were trying to say is understandable.

- everything, but the letter and maths may more
- none
- fun links (starfall), what goes on in the classroom
- school news, letter recognition, letter sounds, school events
- missed info, updates
- news what's happening in school, pictures of student on what he learns in school, the blog is very helpful
- well sometimes I check the blog to see what they're learning in class and how far they are with regular activities, so that I can help him or her with number counting and ABC's
- actually I didn't really to how to use all information like how to open all sites. I saw some important notes I really like them.

From these responses, the majority of the parents use the blog to get updates on what their child is currently learning. Many of them are using the blog for information about
school or the classroom, such as information that they may have missed on a notice going home, or information about what goes on in the classroom. These responses are a good indication that the school can communicate some information with parents via a blog.

6. *Do you use the video links posted to help your child learn their letters and numbers at home?*

The response to this question indicates that 67% use the video links, but 33% do not use the video links. Access to the video links is located in separate pages in the blog. The pages appear across the top of the blog page. Perhaps these pages are harder to find, which may account for the 33%, which are 4 parents, who do not use the video links. These video links are to complement the learning of the letters and numbers that take place at school. Parents can have access to familiar poems and chants that are used at school to reinforce the same material at home. The majority of the parents do use the video links for this purpose.

7. *Are you more aware of what is going on in our classroom now that you can check what we are learning on the blog?*

For this question, 75% of the parents said yes and 25% of the parents said no. This data allows me to see that most parents are finding the information on the blog useful and that they can use that information to be more connected with what goes on in our classroom. This is an important indication that the blog is working at better communication between the classroom and the families.

8. *Do you use the information that I post regarding what we do in the classroom to reinforce at home what they learn at school?*
According to the data on this question, 83% of the parents said yes, while 17% of the parents said no. The majority of the parents indicated an affirmative response, which means that the blog is effectively providing a useful bridge in connecting the learning that takes place at school with the learning that takes place at home. This is similar to what was said in question 7 in that parents that are involved in their child’s learning can positively impact their child’s achievement at school.

9. *Does using the Google translator help with understanding classroom and school information?*

This question resulted in 75% of the parents indicating yes and 25% of the parents indicating no. The Google translator is located in the top right-hand corner of the blog. It allows for users to translate the whole blog and its content into another language. This tool was intended to aid those parents that did not read English fluently to be able to understand the information presented in the blog. However, as all translations cannot be a hundred percent accurate, there could still be some words or phrases that might cause confusion. Consequently, I try to keep the language on the blog as simple as possible with the intention of easy comprehension and easy translation. The 25% of the parents, which equates to 3 parents, who did not find the Google translator useful may have found that the translations were inaccurate. Of, it could be that those three parents were English speaking, and therefore did not require the use of the translator. The positive aspect of the results is that most parents did find the Google translator useful, which affects the usefulness of the blog as a communication tool.

10. *Are you more aware of what is going on in our school now that you can find information about events and happenings through the blog?*
The results for this question are that 83% of the parents said yes and 17% of the parents said no. I often update the blog with information about school-wide events which parents can take part in, or help their child take part in. For instance, there are performances and assemblies that parents are invited to attend, which I announce on the blog. In this way, I hope that parents would have one more way to know how to be involved in their child’s school. According to the results of this question, most parents are getting that information out of the blog because they indicated that they are more aware of what is going on at the school.

11. Do you feel like you are more involved in the school and in the school life of your child as a result of using the blog?

This question is the follow-up question to question 10. I wanted to see if after the parents were made more aware of the events and happenings at the school, they would then act on the information and participate more frequently, and feel like they are more involved. The results of this question are 58% said yes to feeling more involved in the school and 47% saying no. It is still a majority of parents that did feel a positive impact on being more involved at the school after using the blog, but not as much as I had hoped. Perhaps more information and more explicit invitations need to be made on the blog regarding school activities. The survey thus far indicates that most parents feel more connected with the classroom and the school, but not as many feel more involved with the school.

12. Do you find that using the blog is more convenient than coming into the classroom or school?

This question showed the result of 50% of the parents saying yes and 50% of the parents saying no. The results of this question surprised me because I had previously thought
that having another way of communication that did not require the parent to physically come into the school would be more convenient to the parents as they can check on updates on the classroom and school at times that were more suitable to them. The data from this question indicates that only half the parents feel this way. The other half still prefer to come to the school in person to have face-to-face contact, or they simply did not find that having a blog is convenient because they do not check the blog. This reminded me that although a blog can be useful in serving as one communication tool, it cannot replace personal interaction with parents.

13. Have you recommended the blog to other parents?
There were 50% of the parents that indicated yes, while the other 50% indicated no to this question. I wanted to see if parents who found the blog useful would recommend the blog to other parents. From the results of this data, half of the parents did recommend the blog to other parents. The six parents that did recommend the blog to other parents checked the blog at least 1-2 times a week and they all found that the blog information was useful (they all answered yes in response to question 4). Also, five of those six parents also indicated that felt more involved in the school as a result of using the blog (they answered yes in response to question 11). The positive experience they had with using the blog perhaps motivated those six parents to recommend it to other parents.

14. Have you discussed the blog and its content with other parents?
For this question, 25% of the parents said yes, while 75% of the parents said no. From the results of this question, it is clear that the majority of the parents do not discuss the blog with each other. Only three of the parents, which is 25%, talked about information presented in the blog with other parents. This might be because the parents do not talk
much to one another in general. Parents may have one or two parents that they talk to within the class, but they would probably not have a lot of opportunities to communicate with other parents on a regular basis, particularly those parents that work and cannot come to the school to pick up their child personally. However, it may be beneficial to the parents to develop a parent group to mutually support each other and their children.

15. What improvements or additions could be made to the blog to make it better?

This question required parents to write a short response. Only four parents responded to this question. Here are the responses as they were written.

- Sometimes the blog page takes forever to open
- I don’t have a computer & I don’t check regularly
- If set up some homework at the blog maybe better. Each student can have a password and enter the blog for doing the homework for half hour to one hour recorded it and check it by teacher later.
- More about what the children listen to in class and their reading lessons.

From these responses, it seems that each parent has a different opinion about what would make the blog better. The first two responses relate to the computer and the Internet. The comment on the blog pages loading slowly may be a result of too many pictures or graphics on the page. I could try to limit the number of pictures on a given post. The response about not having a computer is a concern that I had already when I created the blog. I did not want to exclude any parents when I used this blog as communication tool between the school and the parents. One way that I could try to alleviate this problem would be to more overtly advertise the availability of school computers for parental use. There are computers in our school’s library that are allotted for parents to use, but not all
parents are aware of this fact or utilize this service. With this outlet for computer access, perhaps the parents without computers at home could find the blog more convenient.

There is one parent that indicated they want homework to be posted on the blog as well. This might be useful for teachers who teach grades higher than Kindergarten. At the Kindergarten level, there is no formal homework, save reading at home with your child. However, this parent might be thinking of online learning activities that children can complete at home that relate to the learning at school. I do not post homework on my blog, but I do have something called Fun Links that appear on the right-hand side of the blog which lists links to several educational websites that help with the learning of letters and numbers for young children. The last response from this question indicated that the parents wanted more information on what their child is learning in class, particularly reading. On the blog, there is a video link that relates to the letter learning that we do in the class, but there is not a section for reading. Perhaps in my posts on the home page I could provide more information on the subject areas that we are learning at school.

16. Is there anything that you feel should be removed?

This question did not generate a lot of response. None of the parents indicated that anything should be removed.

- No I think it's great that Div 21 have a blog and that the kids parents are up to date with their child and help to know what they learn in class
- The info is useful for parents
- Nothing
Of the parents that responded to this question, there was no indication that they felt anything should be removed. Rather, they felt that the blog was useful and they used the information to keep current on what their child is learning in the class.

The results of this survey have helped me to reflect on the classroom blog and its feasibility as an alternate communication means between the school, the classroom and parents. Its purpose was to find out if parents were using the blog and if they found the information in the blog useful and informative. Then, as the parents become more informed about the happenings in and around the classroom and school, it would make the parents feel like they were a part of the school community and an important partner in their child’s development and achievement at school. The results of the survey let me see that most parents are in favour of the classroom blog and that the blog does answer the questions that I set out to investigate at the beginning of my research. The following section will take an in depth look at the implication of the results of the survey on my quest to create a good communication tool between the school and the parents. It will explore the practical ways that I can improve the blog so that it can reach more parents and provide a good example for other teachers who are looking for similar ways to improve their relationship with the parents of the children in their class.
Conclusions and Implications

The process and results of this action research study allowed me to grow and mature as an educator. It taught me to critically question the techniques and the rationale I use in my teaching, to see if they are truly benefitting the students. For this study, I sought to examine the possibility that a classroom blog would improve communication between parents and the school because I felt that low parental involvement is an issue that my school and other schools in Vancouver struggle with. The reason that I felt this topic was worth investigating is because most of the research into the home-school relationship supports the finding that parental involvement can directly affect student achievement at school. According to Epstein (1995), the degree to which parents are involved in their child’s education is one of the most important factors affecting children’s success in school.

My overall conclusion after having done this action research study on blogging as a communication tool is that a classroom blog is a viable option for teachers to use in order to enhance home-school communication, and thereby improving the level of parental involvement in schools. The results of the survey show that the majority, 61%, of the parents in my class uses the classroom blog and that they find that the information within the blog is useful and helps them connect with what is happening in their child’s class and school. To me, that is a positive step towards my goal of gaining more parental involvement at my school. Parental involvement is important because it improves the school climate, reduces behavior, and supports student academic achievement according to a school improvement plan done by Yale Child Study Center (Comer, 1984).
In this section, I will revisit each of my original research questions to see how the survey addressed and answered these questions. Then, I will explain how these findings affect my future blogging endeavors in the classroom. Lastly, I will look at future possibilities of research in this area.

My research questions

- Is the classroom blog an effective tool in relaying information about the classroom and school to parents?

4. Do you find the information posted on the blog useful?  

7. Are you more aware of what is going on in our classroom?

For this question, I referred to number 4 and number 7 in the survey. After examining the results of the survey, it shows that the blog is effectively relaying information about the classroom to most of the parents because 92% of the parents in the survey found that information posted in the blog was useful and 75% of the parents felt that they were more aware of what was going on in our classroom as a result of checking the blog. I wanted to know if the parents were more aware of classroom events because that makes the information that I post relevant and useful. This is important because parents need to be informed about what goes on in the classroom and school. However, due to various factors, parents may not get the information that they need via notices that are sent home.
or may not have the time for a parent teacher meeting. Mitchell, Foulger and Wetzel (2009) assert that while traditional forms of home-school partnerships (for example, parents participating in class activities and teachers sending home children’s work) are associated with positive results, they are limited in their ability to effectively reach all families. With the use of the classroom blog, the teacher can provide an alternate way for families to access the same information as what was handed out in forms and notices or via face to face interaction with the teacher.

- How often do parents access the blog site to check on additions or contribute to the blog?

According to number one on the survey, the majority of the parents, 92%, or 11 of the 12 parents checked the blog at least 1 to 2 times a week. I got this percentage by adding the everyday, 3-5 times a week, and 1-2 times a week together. To me, this is a positive finding because parents are checking into their child’s progress and activities on a regular basis. I did not expect many parents to check the blog every day for updates because I myself do not update the blog every day. However, I usually publish a new post or new activity one to two times a week. Therefore, the parents would be quite well-informed
about the classroom and the school if they checked the blog once a week. According to Zhang and Hatcher (2011), “effective parental involvement relies on frequent communication between classroom teachers and parents. Good teacher-parent communication is frequent, timely, straightforward, and honest” (p. 264). With the use of the classroom blog, parents and the teacher can communicate what is learned in the classroom and what is going on at the school in a timely fashion.

- Does the blog help parents to feel more connected with the school and classroom?

7. Are you more aware of what is going on in our classroom?

83% No
25% Yes

10. Are you more aware of what is going on in our school?

17% Yes
83% No

11. Do you feel like you are more involved in the school and in the school life of your child?

58% No
42% Yes

For this question, I will look at the two components, school and classroom separately.

First, let us discuss the classroom. According to number 7 of the survey, 75% of the parents felt that the blog did help them in becoming more aware of what was happening in the classroom. Much of the posting that I do in the blog is related to our class specifically. Therefore, the parents may feel that through the blog, they know more about what their child is learning in the classroom and thereby, they would feel more connected to the classroom. This was reflected in the survey because the majority of the parents
that completed the survey felt that they are more aware of what was happening in the classroom. At the school level, I looked at number 10 on the survey. For this question, 83% of the parents indicated that they were more aware of the school activities, which shows that parents are also getting to know the school better. Interestingly, when I looked at number 11 on the survey, only 58% percent of the parents in the survey felt that they were more involved in the school activities. I had hoped that by being more aware of the school activities that the parents would then take action and be more actively involved in events and happenings around the school. Some parents are doing this, which is a positive step. For those parents that do not feel as if they were more involved, they are at least still gaining some knowledge of the school through the classroom because many activities and pictures that I post on the blog are connected to events and issues that relate to the school as well as the classroom. For instance, I would post about special performances that our class took part in during assemblies which involve the whole school. In that way, parents can know what their child is doing in the class, but also they can be informed about events that happen that involve the whole school. It is important that parents feel like they are a significant part of the school community because according to Epstein’s (1995) research into building school/family/community partnerships, “when parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work” (p. 701).
• Does the classroom blog support learning at home? How does it support home learning?

The survey results for number 8 indicated that 83% of the parents did use the information that is posted regarding what we do in the classroom in order to support learning at home. In my blog, I try to post a wide variety of activities that happen in and around the classroom and school. Sometimes, the information is administrative, such as reminders to come to the PAC meetings or to register for the hot lunch program. But other posts contain the work that we do in the class. This could be related to the arts, to the academic subjects, or to athletics. By posting this wide variety, I hope to help parents gain a more well-rounded view of the learning that takes place in their child’s classroom and school. In turn, this information could be taken by the parents to extend the learning at home. I post my monthly Kindergarten newsletters on the blog which explains much of what we are learning in the coming month. By having this information on the blog, parents would have at their fingertips the lessons and the concepts that are being taught at the moment in their child’s classroom. Researchers Greenwood and Hickman (1991) found that the home had just as much influence on students’ learning as did the school. And according to Epstein (1995) “just about all families care about their children, want them to succeed, and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities so as to remain
good partners in their children's education” (p. 703). Having a blog could be one way of giving the parents the tools they need to support their child in their learning at school.

- Can a classroom blog help to alleviate some of the language barriers between school and parents through the use of Google translator on the blog site?

Given that many of the parents of my class are ESL, I had thought that having the Google translator on the blog page would have been a huge asset in the building of better communication between school and home. Therefore, it is nice to see that on number 9 of the survey, 75% of the parents did use the translator to help them navigate the blog and to understand the material posted in the blog. Both parents and teachers in a study done by Constantino, Cui and Faltis (1995) confirmed that language barriers caused Chinese parents’ lack of communication with their children’s school. Therefore, with the technology that a blog has to offer, it becomes a step easier for immigrant parents to understand what is happening in their child’s classroom and school.
Correlations between response sets

In reviewing the survey results, correlations between the responses to some questions can be found. These correlations are important to note because relationships between the questions can affect the responses.

The first correlation that occurs is between question 1, which asks how often do you check the classroom blog site, and question 2, which asks do you own a computer at home. If the family did not own a personal computer at home, then that could directly affect how often the parent could check the classroom blog. From the survey results, the majority (92%) of the families did own a computer and also, 92% of the families checked the blog regularly, at least 1-2 times a week. Interestingly enough, the one parent that indicated that they did not own a computer at home checked the blog 1-2 times a week. It was actually a parent that indicated that they owned a computer who circled never.

Number 3 on the survey, which asked if the blog site was easy to use, could affect the answer to two of the other questions. 75% of the parents indicated that it was easy to use. This could affect the way the parents feel about the usefulness of the information posted on the blog, which was asked in question 4. Indeed, 92% of the parents felt that the information was useful on the blog. If the Google translator was used, it might make the blog easier to use. Question 9 asked if the Google translator helped with understanding classroom and school information. 75% of the parents indicated yes. From those results, a link between the number of parents that found Google translator helpful and the perception that the blog is easy to use can be seen. Most of the parents that indicated that Google translator helped with the understanding of the information also indicated that the blog site was easy to use.
The survey asked if the parents used the video links posted to help their child learn the letters and numbers at home in question 6. This could be related question 8 which asked if the parents used the information that is posted regarding what we do in the classroom to reinforce at home what they learn at school. According to the survey, 67% use the video links and 83% of the parents reinforce the learning at home from information that they have learned through the blog. Many parents that indicated that they used the video links said that they reinforced the learning at home. Hence, parents are using the video links as a way to extend the learning from school into the home.

Limitations of the study

Given the very small sample size of this study, it would be hard to make conclusions that can be applied to all parent groups. Therefore, a larger sample is needed to make statistics that are more representative of the effectiveness of blogs on communication in a larger context.

Because my blog does not keep a log of the number of visitors to the blog, it would be difficult to tell if parents checked the blog as often as they had indicated. In future, I will apply a plug-in to the blog which can specify how many visitors check the blog, so that there is more accountability and accuracy when I review the effectiveness of the blog.

Summing Up

In summing up the research, I believe that the findings from my action research study are in line with the research that outlines the importance of home and school communication. Parental involvement at the school is of great importance in the partnership between the school and the families. In some studies, it leads to increased
motivation for school in students, enhanced achievement, and a better attitude towards school. According to Brock and Edmunds (2010), “much research clearly indicates that student achievement is maximized through parental involvement” (p. 49). Despite this research backing, parental involvement is low in some schools due to a variety of factors. According to the study of South Florida's FamilyTech Program done by Bessell et al. (2003), White middle-class parents still occupy the most visible forms of parental involvement (i.e., school board and PTA membership), but participation rates even by these mainstream families are alarmingly low. The question of how to engage parents is even more pressing today since connections between individuals, groups and institutions are being threatened. (p.7)

Through the use of a classroom blog, teachers can utilize the technology to bridge the gap that sometimes exists in the communication between the school and the parents. One of the recommendations that Brock and Edmunds (2010) suggested in their research on parental involvement barriers and opportunities was a school website because it provided parents an efficient way to access information on their own time at their own computers and it could promote two-way communication between parents and the school. Thus, a blog, being a form of website, could also improve this relationship between families and the school. In closing, I believe that this research has been very valuable to me and to other teachers that are looking to provide an alternate means of communication with parents. It has helped me to see that my classroom blog is effective in reaching out to parents and that the students in my class are benefitting from their parents’ increased knowledge and participation in their learning. A classroom blog is but one tool in the
communication toolbox, but how powerful it could be if it were utilized by teachers and parents to enhance the partnership between the school community and families. In the end, I feel as though I have contributed to building that bridge to better communication between parents and the school.

**Practical implications on my professional growth**

This action research has helped me to take a situation that I saw in the schools and investigate ways to approach it. It taught me to “look critically at specific problems and act as self-critical change agents” (Action research guide for Alberta teachers, 2000, p. 5). Creating the blog for the parents allowed for a way to remedy the lack of communication between the school and the parents. The blog is not the magical solution to the problem that could fix everything, but the blog does effect positive change in that parents are using it to gain more information about their child’s learning and that it helps them be more connected to the classroom and the school. After having done this study, I think the blog has been effective at accomplishing the goal of providing an alternate mode of communication with the parents. Now, there are several practical implications that I will incorporate into the blog process.

First, I think that providing a tutorial session on navigating the blog would be helpful for the parents. Inviting translators to be present could help with better understanding of using the different tools on the blog. From one of the comments, a parent mentioned that they did not know how to use all the pages of the blog. It would be useful to plan a time outside of school hours that is convenient for parents to hold a tutorial session. Having this time to train parents was suggested by Ramirez (2001), “plan a time when you or someone else may be willing to train parents to access the
information you will put on the Internet” (p. 30). Also, it could also provide a time for parents to voice their questions and concerns, as well as to make suggestions as to what they would like to see incorporated into the blog.

I think that the next step in the development of my communication with the parents of my class would be for the parents to utilize the comments option on the blog. At present, the blog is used for me, the teacher, to relate messages from the classroom and school to the parents at home. However, in order for effective communication to occur, the parents need to join in on the conversation about what their child is learning at school. The blog allows for comments to be added on the posts. Parents could use this tool to initiate conversations between themselves and the teacher or other parents. Monitoring the comments might take a little more work on my part, but I think that this new step would be valuable in improving the communication. In the survey, not many parents indicated that they were talking to each other about the blog and its content with other parents. If the comments option was utilized then parents would have a convenient way to hold conversations about their child’s learning.

After having reviewed the parents’ comments on what information they use most often in the blog and what improvements or additions could be made to the blog to make it better, I believe that parents would like to see some practical ways to extend their child’s learning at home posted on the blog. For example, I could post some activities that parents could do with their child at home that would help with their number skills. Suggestions could include using card games to review numbers, or counting out the spoons to set the table. These practical suggestions might help parents who need some tips on extending the learning from school into their home environment.
The creation of this blog has helped me in creating more opportunities to communicate with parents. With the knowledge I have gained through the set-up process and the experience of maintaining and updating the blog, along with engaging in this action research study, I could share this information with colleagues so that they could feel comfortable in using this medium to reach out to the parent community. In doing so, others may have valuable insights or ideas that could improve the blog. It would also be interesting to see the response of the parents to the blog when the blog is used for higher grades and in different schools.

Further Research

In this research, I had used my own class as a basis for the study. It was very useful for my own purposes to know if my classroom blog was effective specifically for the parents of my class. However, in future research, this could be expanded to include a larger survey base to make the research more accurate and more conclusive when it is done on a larger scale. Then we would be able to see if classroom blogs are effective for parents across a district, from different socio-economic status, and for parents of students across different grades.
References


[http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9218/risk.htm](http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9218/risk.htm)


Appendix A

Recruitment Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,
I hope that you have been enjoying Div. 21’s classroom blog over the past little while. I am currently working on my Masters of Education program at the University of Victoria. As a part of my program, I am doing some research about blogging and the classroom. I am hoping to gather thoughts and opinions from parents regarding the use of our classroom blog. I am looking for volunteers to be involved in this research so that I can gather some data for my paper. Participation in this research is completely optional and it will involve you filling out a survey that would take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The questions asked will only pertain to the use of our classroom blog. Your participation is greatly valued. I will use the information to help improve the blog and to improve communication between the school and you. Any information given by you will be kept confidential and your name will not be used in the research paper. If you decide to complete this survey, please return the completed survey by dropping it inside the drop off box located outside my classroom by _____________________. If you have any questions or concerns about this research, I would be happy to meet with you to answer any questions. Thank-you very much for your time and your help!

Sincerely,

______________
Appendix B

Instructions on Completing the Survey

Thank-you very much for taking the time to complete the survey. Please remember that participation in this survey is OPTIONAL and ANONYMOUS. All questions in the survey are about the classroom blog only. At any time, you can withdraw from the study, even after you have handed the survey in. Thank-you for your help in this research!

1. Read over the notices handed out to you.

2. Read the notice about Implied Consent. If you complete the survey, then you will have given me implied consent to use the information that you have given me in the survey for my research paper.

3. Complete the survey by circling the answers that best describe your use of the classroom blog. Some of the questions require a short, written answer. This survey should take approximately 20 minutes. You do NOT need to put your name on the survey to ensure anonymity.

4. Once you have completed the survey, please put the survey into the envelope provided and seal it. Drop the envelope in the drop off box outside my classroom.

5. Please drop off the envelopes by _________________.

6. If at any time you have questions or concerns, please contact me in person at the school.

Once again, thank-you so much for your support in my research.
Appendix C

Survey
Blogging: A doorway for communication between school and parents

Please circle the answer that best describes your use of the classroom blog. Some answers may require you to write a short answer.

1. How often do you check our classroom blog site?
   a) every day  
   b) 3-5 times a week  
   c) 1-2 times a week  
   e) never

2. Do you own a computer at home?
   a) Yes  
   b) No

3. Is the blog site easy to use?
   a) Yes  
   b) No

4. Do you find the information posted on the blog useful?
   a) Yes  
   b) No

5. What information do you use most often in the blog?

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

6. Do you use the video links posted to help your child learn their letters and numbers at home?
   a) Yes  
   b) No

7. Are you more aware of what is going on in our classroom now that you can check what we are learning on the blog?
   a) Yes  
   b) No
8. Do you use the information that I post regarding what we do in the classroom to reinforce at home what they learn at school?
   a) Yes   b) No

9. Does using the Google translator help with understanding classroom and school information?
   a) Yes   b) No

10. Are you more aware of what is going on in our school now that you can find information about events and happenings through the blog?
    a) Yes   b) No

11. Do you feel like you are more involved in the school and in the school life of your child as a result of using the blog?
    a) Yes   b) No

12. Do you find that using the blog is more convenient than coming into the classroom or school?
    a) Yes   b) No

13. Have you recommended the blog to other parents?
    a) Yes   b) No

14. Have you discussed the blog and its content with other parents?
    a) Yes   b) No

15. What improvements or additions could be made to the blog to make it better?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
16. Is there anything that you feel should be removed?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________