An Action Research Project Exploring The Most Effective Methods Of Home-School Communication

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Abstract

This project examined how a Kindergarten teacher responded to a growing concern that several traditional methods of home-school communication were not adequately meeting the needs of teachers and parents. Using the cycle of action research, this paper explored the question: What do parents perceive to be the most effective method(s) of communication by the teacher with regard to weekly updates of classroom and program information? Data collected for this project included Parent and Teacher Questionnaires followed by a Parent Satisfaction Survey. Gathered over a six week study the data were analyzed, interpreted and represented in both qualitative and quantitative forms. By consulting scholarly literature, analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data and reflecting on the written feedback from the participants, this study provided a means for exploring both parents’ and teachers’ recommendations for providing more effective and efficient ways to communicate between the home and school.
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Chapter One: Problem to be Investigated

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this teacher action research study was to explore the most effective method(s) of communication between the teacher and parents of the Kindergarten children attending Winchelsea Elementary School. The researcher maintained a dual role as both teacher and researcher during the course of the action research study.

In recent years the researcher used several methods of communication to inform parents about classroom and program information; these included a weekly Friday home-school communication folder that contained a written newsletter (Appendix A) describing current instruction and upcoming classroom events. The researcher also circulated the same weekly newsletter to the parents who provided e-mail addresses and requested information to be sent to them electronically. In addition, the researcher was available for daily informal conversations, phone calls, text messages, and received many written notes. Additionally, three written report cards were sent home and formally scheduled parent-teacher conferences were completed by the researcher at the end of each reporting period during the school year. Parents also received a weekly school newsletter that highlighted significant information and upcoming school events. Even though the researcher strived to keep parents informed, the researcher had been increasingly concerned that such efforts were futile.
Justification of the Study

Even though the researcher strived to keep parents informed, it was increasingly apparent that current home-school communication methods have been ineffective. The researcher made a variety of communication methods available to Kindergarten parents, yet many were seemingly still uninformed about the classroom and school information. Why had the researcher spent so much time writing newsletters and responding to individual e-mails from these parents who had already received the information in other forms? The researcher was interested in discovering the most effective and efficient method(s) to communicate with the home in an effort to improve and include all custodial and non-custodial parents. Since several of the researcher’s students live in dual households, the researcher believed that the home-school communication was inadequate for many non-custodial fathers.

Secondly, the researcher was concerned with the ethical practice of using technology for communicating with parents. Often, confidential information is shared within an e-mail or text message. Since communicating with parents using technology is a relatively new practice for many teachers, the researcher was interested in determining if there are policies and procedures that may guide how teachers reply to, store, and destroy confidential messages.

Throughout the cycle of action research the researcher hoped to determine a feasible method to communicate with parents that could also be replicated by the researcher’s colleagues. Since the researcher is also a Kindergarten teacher, and the first of many teachers with whom parents will establish a relationship at school, the researcher could possibly be causing a conflict for her colleagues by establishing an unrealistic precedent of availability by using several methods (including electronically) for communicating between the home and school. Many young
parents who have children in Kindergarten expect almost instant responses to their questions and concerns because so many of them communicate with the researcher by their handheld devices. The researcher often used her Blackberry® and responded to parents very quickly. By using technology to communicate with parents, the researcher may be setting an unrealistic expectation for home-school communication as perceived by students’ parents as well as the researcher’s colleagues. If the researcher is going to be using such technology, she wanted to develop some guidelines and parameters which will suit the needs of the school community. Communication is an extremely important component of the researcher’s daily routine and she wanted to ensure that it is both effective and efficient.

Finally, the researcher was concerned about the ethical implications of communication with parents using technology. Most of the information exchanged with parents using e-mail is information based and not student specific; however, the researcher has received e-mails that she would regard as confidential information regarding students and families. The researcher wanted to respond and store these messages in an ethical manner. As a researcher and educational leader, it would be very timely to make significant recommendations towards developing school district policies and procedures with regard to using technology to communicate with parents.

*Research Question and Hypotheses*

The present study considered the research question: “What do parents perceive to be the most effective method(s) of communication by the teacher with regard to weekly updates of classroom and program information?” In other words, how might the action research process provide a means for exploring more efficient method(s) of communication *between* the home and school? As described in Creswell (2003), this type of study draws upon the theories of the pragmatic
paradigm to inform a discussion and investigation through the lens of self-reflective teacher practice. While conducting the action research study, the researcher attempted to trace the ways in which her colleagues historically have communicated with parents in their teaching careers. There are several questions that the researcher explored with her colleagues:

- Do they currently use technology?
- How useful is technology compared to other traditional methods that are long-established in their practices?
- How might this project improve the researcher’s practice?
- How could this research benefit the researcher’s colleagues?

The directional hypotheses for this research study are guided by the examination of possible relationships that could be affected within this study. First, the researcher predicted that by using technology within predetermined guidelines, communication will improve as perceived by the teacher and parents. Secondly, the researcher predicted that by using technology, communication with non-custodial parents will improve. Finally, the researcher predicted that by sharing the results and recommendations of the research study with her colleagues, many will feel more confident incorporating new and effective methods for communicating between the home and school. The research findings could potentially be used to assist a staff and/or a school district administration team with designing recommendations to assist teachers in the ethical use of technology to communicate with parents. This change is not something that the researcher will impose, but rather, hopes will happen discreetly by naturally sharing the findings with interested colleagues and serving as a mentor. It is the researcher’s hope that this project will
serve as a sustainable model that will guide future communication practices. The researcher wants to improve teacher learning, and by working collaboratively within a professional community, the researcher will lead by example. “Sustainable leadership lasts. It preserves and advances the most valuable aspects of learning and life over time, year upon year, from one leader to the next” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, pg. 55).

Definition of Terms

The research question is clear, definable and answers exactly what is being investigated in the action research study; there are no ambiguous terms in the question. “All of the defining terms can be clarified by using a constitutive definition and or an operational definition” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, pg. 592). A constitutive definition as defined in Microsoft Office (2007) Encarta is: effective, as causing a desired or intended result, actual or in practice and communication, make known or share (information, thoughts or feelings). An operational definition, as defined by the researcher for this study, would be the method(s) of communication, meaning the weekly teacher-written newsletters (Appendix A) sent home with students in a home-school communication folder. As well as providing a print copy, the researcher also circulated the Kindergarten newsletter to the parents who provided their e-mail addresses and requested information to be sent to them electronically. In addition, the researcher was available for daily informal conversations, phone calls, text messages and received many written notes. The researcher also sent home three written report cards and formally scheduled parent-teacher conferences at the end of each reporting period during the school year. Throughout the school year parents received a weekly school newsletter that highlighted significant information and
upcoming school events. The research question is current considering how rapidly technology is influencing all aspects of professional and personal communication methods.

*Overview of the Study*

The researcher submitted a study proposal and ethics application to Vancouver Island University in the Spring of 2009 (see Table 1). Upon approval from her School District, School Principal, and Vancouver Island University (Appendix C) the researcher obtained consent from the participants. After the consent approval was received (Appendix C) the researcher distributed the Questionnaires (Appendix B) during the week of September 14-18, 2009 (Table 1). The results were used to inform the researcher of the parents’ preferred communication practices. Several choices were made available to the parents which included a paper copy of weekly newsletters, (Appendix A) an e-mailed copy of the weekly newsletter (received by hand held device or home/office computer) for those parents who requested it, and weekly phone calls. Written notes from home or emergency phone calls *were never excluded* and always accepted during the course of the study. Anonymous teacher surveys (Appendix B) were distributed to all professional teaching staff at Winchelsea Elementary during the week of September 14-18, 2009.

Over the course of six weeks the communication methods varied among parents, depending on the preferences stated in the questionnaires. At the end of the six weeks the researcher conducted informal interviews with the parent participants and asked them to complete a Satisfaction Survey (Appendix B) requesting their feedback on the effectiveness of the home-school communication. This feedback was critical to the findings and results of the action research. The information provided by the parents will be used to inform and enhance the communication practices and improve the service to all families. Informed and reflective
feedback is common practice in the researcher’s Kindergarten class, and parents readily accept requests for their feedback. Recommendations were reported based on teacher reflections and parent feedback. The results of the action research were shared with the parent participants in the form of an information newsletter and with the school staff at a meeting in the spring of 2010. A full written summary was made available to participants upon request.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Background

The literature review explored what parents value in effective home-school communication and how teachers are providing communication between the home and school in a variety of ways. A review of how current research related to home-school communication supports student achievement by increasing parent involvement was included. In addition, the researcher further explored the difficulty of providing adequate communication to all parents including the generally underserved fathers of Kindergarten children. Lastly, the review investigated how teachers’ traditional communication practices can incorporate technology as an effective tool to enhance their interactions with parents as well as other professionals.

Studies Directly Related

What Parent’s Value in Effective Home-School Communication

Good communication between home and school helps both the teachers and the school do their jobs better. And maintaining strong communication helps parents better understand teachers’ expectations for academic work and behavior. Developing effective home-school communication has always been a particular interest to the researcher. It has been the researcher’s experience that building trusting relationships with the families of her students is important to ensuring that parents becomes partners in learning from the start. The key to developing successful relationships is effective communication.

Juleen Cattermole and Norman Robinson (1985) suggest that there are three good reasons for school administrators and teachers to develop strong communication with the communities they
serve: “First, educators must understand the needs and expectations of the students and parents if they are to develop appropriate school programs to meet those needs. Second, parents need accurate up-to-date information about the schools if they are going to judge how well the school’s programs are meeting the needs of the students. Finally, close communication between schools and families establishes shared goals and thus build public support for the schools and their educational goals” (Cattermole & Robinson, 1985, pg. 48).

Cattermole and Robinson (1985) surveyed 215 parents of students in 36 elementary and secondary schools in Abbotsford, British Columbia. Their questionnaire asked respondents to choose, from a prepared list, “the ways which they actually learned about their children’s school, and the ways which they preferred to learn about their children’s school” (pg. 48).

The results revealed how parents received information about the schools, how they preferred to receive such information, what dissemination methods they felt were most effective, and the extent to which they wished to be informed.

The findings of the study revealed that “children are both the most frequent source of information about the schools and the source from which most parents prefer to receive such information” (Cattermole and Robinson, 1985, pg. 48). Cattermole and Robinson (1985) also identified that “[p]arents also place great importance on messages that the school directs specifically to them, i.e. report cards and teachers’ notes or phone calls. In addition, they value face-to-face interactions, parent/teacher conferences, personal visits to the school, friendships with educators and school open house” (pg. 49).
Overall, the recommendations that Cattermole and Robinson (1985) provide are very informative and still applicable to current 2010 home-school communication practices. The findings of the study suggest that face-to-face contact is extremely important to parents and helps to develop relationships with parents and community partners. The obvious limitation of this study is that it did not include the use of technology as a method of home-school communication. In the 25 years since the study was completed the way in which society communicates has evolved considerably. It is difficult for teachers to have face-to-face conversations with parents now because many children live in dual households and many children are in before and after school daycare. It is no longer possible not to consider excluding the use of technology as a factor in how parents and teachers communicate. The dilemma that many teachers struggle with is finding the balance between incorporating technology in their communication practices while still developing the valued personal relationships with parents and community partners.

How Teachers Provide Home-School Communication

Teachers provide home-school communication in a variety of ways. Many will organize Meet the Teacher Nights early in the school year which helps to open the lines of communication. As the year progresses, teachers connect with parents in several ways such as, parent-teacher conferences, open houses, report cards, newsletters, home-school folders, phone calls and informal chats during home-school transition times. Good teachers know that cooperative support from parents will give their students more chances to succeed. They need to learn the best ways to share information with parents and create strong relationships with families.
Many educators are looking to improve their home-school communication practices. Martin Hughes and Pamela Greenhough (2006) describe an extensive study in Bristol, UK., called *Boxes, bags and videotape: enhancing home-school communication through knowledge exchange activities*, done with the purpose of describing two activities which were designed to specifically enhance home-school communication. The study involved two home-school knowledge exchange activities; the videotape activity was done at school and sent home and the shoebox activity was done at home and sent to school. The researchers worked with project teachers in four schools to implement the activities. Hughes and Greenhough (2006) used a mixed methods approach to collect their data. A combination of a questionnaire and interview questions resulted in a qualitative sampling of information given by the teachers and parents involved in the two knowledge exchange activities.

The research examined the results of the knowledge exchanged or as Hughes and Greenhough (2006) refer to “funds of knowledge”. Hughes and Greenhough (2006) argue that, “Home-school knowledge exchange activities cannot be seen as the simple transmission of depersonalized knowledge from one party to another. Instead they need to be seen as complex communicative activities in which the participants actively represent their practices and infer, and interpret these representations in terms of their own particular purposes and agendas. Two processes of ‘personalization’ and ‘curricularisation’ appear to be involved here, as are the underlying issues of power and control, risk and threat” (pg. 471). Hughes and Greenhough (2006) stress the importance of, “looking at home-school communication in terms of exchanging funds of knowledge between teachers, parents and children and allowing aspects of children’s lives to be linked to the curriculum” (pg. 485). Hughes and Greenhough (2006) also suggest
that the overall value of the home-school activities may be limited unless they are accompanied by a more fundamental change in the power relationships between home and school. The limitations of this study were that the results were predictable and overall this study simply reinforces that the relationship between the home and the school is critical in developing effective communication.

*How Home-School Communication Supports Student Achievement*

Good communication between parents and teachers create a partnership that benefits the child. The research paper prepared by Karen Lindner (2004) titled *Parental Needs And Expectations Of School-Home Communication In A Child’s Preparatory Year Of School*, explores the action research question, “How frequently do parents access the different methods of communication employed by the school?” (pg. 1). Lindner (2004) used a mixed methods approach and employed both questionnaires and interviews to gather information. Lindner used ‘methodological triangulation’ which validates interview and conversational data by the use of more than one collection method. The subjects were all 21 parents whose children were completing their preparatory year of school. In Australia, preparatory year means children 5-6 years old or known as Kindergarten age in Canada. Lindner’s parents were asked to complete a questionnaire and then they were invited to participate in a focus group interview. The focus group consisted of six volunteers that were “given individual interviews used to enrich the data provided by the questionnaires” (Lindner, 2004, pg. 2).

The results of Lindner’s study (2004) presented parents’ responses to interview questions. Lindner (2004) gave specific information regarding the various types of home-school
communication used by the sample groups. Verbal, written and electronic communication were
described and percentages of parents’ opinions about their effectiveness were included. Lindner
(2004) recommended that “mixed modes of communication be employed in schools and schools
should continually monitor and review the effectiveness of their methods of communication”
(Lindner, 2004, pg. 10). The recommendations were valid and applicable because Lindner
(2004) affirmed that, “[it] will be interesting to monitor any change in parent perception of these
methods as society becomes increasingly dependent upon electronic forms of data use. Certainly,
for schools, electronic communication may act as a way of recording communication in a format
that is easily stored and retrieved for purposes of review” (Lindner, 2004, pg. 10). Overall,
Lindner’s (2004) research was informative and particularly useful for planning research design.
Lindner (2004) concluding that, “Electronic communication is a relatively recent innovation and
one that schools are embracing with different levels of haste and enthusiasm.” was rather
predictable. This study was informative and stressed the importance of educators adhering to
ethical standards when using technology. One major limitation of the study was that Lindner
(2004) did not provide a list of recommendations for using technology which would have
enhanced importance of the study.

Another relevant action research paper exploring home-school communication was,
*Connecting Teachers and Parents through the Internet* (2006), by Darby Tobolka, a Middle
School Teacher. This paper described Tobolka’s (2006) frustration with her home-school
communication practices. “I got tired of writing notes that never made it home, and of students
losing school work and homework. I spent hours calling their homes, copying notes and looking
for more copies. I needed a new strategy to address communicating from school to home”
(Tabolka, 2006, pg. 24).
Tabolka (2006) recognized that her communication practices needed improvement and she structured her study to facilitate those changes. The research question that Tobolka (2006) explored was, “What influence does technology have on parent involvement and communication with their child’s school?” (Tabolka, 2006, pg. 24). Tabolka (2006) used a collection of both quantitative and qualitative data for her six week research study. She initiated the study by hosting a tutorial session for parents who needed assistance with accessing their e-mail messages. This was a good idea and the current researcher followed this suggestion in September 2009. During her study Tabolka (2006) collected data from her students and their parents through surveys, student interviews, e-mails and checklists and observations. The current researcher was particularly interested in Tabolka’s (2006) findings regarding e-mail communication, “In response to my weekly e-mail messages parents said they found them helpful and informative” (Tabolka, 2006, pg. 25). The overall findings of Tabolka’s (2006) action research project help to support the significance and relevance of being very organized and having a time line for collecting data from the parent participants. A limitation of Tabolka’s (2006) study was the relatively short timeline in which she completed her action research. It would have been interesting to see if her results and recommendations changed if she conducted her research for longer than six weeks.

The current researcher was interested in informing her research in the area of e-mail communication. Tabolka cited Blackerby (2004), who conducted an e-mail communication study in his school. Blackerby (2004) agreed with Tabolka (2006) in that “communication between the home and school was not only correlated to positive parental involvement but also took precedence over household income as a determiner of student success” (Blackerby, 2006, pg.6). Tabolka (2006) mentions the results from Herbert Walberg’s (1984) study which
concluded that, “parental involvement has a greater impact on student achievement than socioeconomic status. Improving communication to the home is a challenging yet rewarding task. With support from home and school, the possibilities of student achievement greatly improves” (Tabolka, 2006, pg. 6).

Studies Tangentially Related

The Difficulty of Providing Adequate Communication to All Parents

The research paper prepared by Sean Brotherson of North Dakota State University and Christopher Bouwhuis, a Certified Family Life Educator in Layton, Utah (2007) was informative regarding the specific concerns the researcher has with the lack of home-school communication with Kindergarten fathers. Brotherson and Bouwhuis’ (2007) research question was, “How would fathers and father figures perceive the value of a parenting newsletter as a resource for parenting information?” (Brotherson and Bouwhuis, 2007, pg. 3). Brotherson and Bouwhuis (2007) hypothesized that, “Parent education does not pay enough attention to fathers and their perceptions of educational resources” (Brotherson and Bouwhuis, 2007, pg. 1).

For six weeks the study involved distributing issues of Father Times, a weekly newsletter to kindergarten fathers and father figures. This was followed by giving each father a cover letter outlining the project, a questionnaire, and a return envelope. Each participant was given a gift certificate for a free donut as an incentive for returning the questionnaire. Of the 434 questionnaires distributed, a total of 177 were returned (41 % response rate). The responses to the questionnaire were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree.” The data also included an open ended question allowing for personalized
participant feedback unique to each family. The results of the study included an informative list of five recommendations:

- Fathers and father figures are likely to respond positively to a newsletter resource that targets them specifically.

- Fathers and father figures typically turn first to informal sources, particularly a spouse or mother of their child, for information on parenting and family life. Making educational information part of a father’s “social network” is thus important to reaching them in parent education.

- Fathers and father figures are most likely to value an educational newsletter more highly than other formal sources of information on parenting.

- Fathers and father figures most value educational features that focus on key development needs of children, activities for engaging with children, and research facts they can use in parenting their children.

- Fathers and father figures value a variety of parenting topics in an educational newsletter, particularly those related to communication, feelings, reading, and guidance of children. (Brotherson and Bouwhuis, 2007, pg. 9).

These recommendations provided effective communication to all parents, including the generally underserved fathers of Kindergarten children. The limitations of the study were interesting because the participants were given a gift certificate for a free donut as an incentive for returning their questionnaire. This could be considered an enticement to participate which does question the validity of the participant’s responses.

How Traditional Home-School Communication Practices Can Incorporate Technology

A further area of exploration included the impact of how using the Internet broadens teachers’ professional capabilities and work activities. Teacher’s traditional communication practices can incorporate technology as an effective method of communication and enhance their
communication with parents as well as other educators. The research paper, *Internet Use and Teacher Change* by Scholfield and Locke (2000) is an extensive study which looks at the results of the program, “Common Knowledge Pittsburgh” (CK:P). The CK:P project is one of four large scale Internet projects funded in the United States by the National Science Foundation (NSF). These projects were designed to explore, in very different ways, the potential of using wide-area networking in elementary, middle and high schools. The CK:P project was designed in collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Scholfield and Locke (2000) examined the impact of Internet use on the professional lives of teachers. The major data-gathering methods used in this research were qualitative observations, semi-structured interviews, account holder surveys and the collection of archived material. Data collection took 5 years, beginning in 1993, and included information gathered from a wide variety of individuals of over 100 teachers, 30 school district personnel, 14 CK:P staff and 130 students. The length and rigor of this study was impressive and the findings were interesting particularly in relation to e-mail as a method of home-school communication.

The findings of the Scholfield and Locke (2000) study resulted in important recommendations and outcomes for teachers flowing from Internet access within the context of the CK:P project. Specifically, such access appeared to increase work related communication with other professionals. A strong sense of pride in and enthusiasm for their work was evident in many teachers as a result of their involvement with Internet use.

Although Scholfield and Locke’s (2000) research paper was interesting and informative, in the nine years since this paper was published technology has advanced at such a rapid pace that such cutting-edge information becomes dated and irrelevant very quickly. This idea validates the
current research hypothesis that is no longer sufficient to rely on out-dated, traditional methods of communication if teachers are to be perceived as effective educators.

It is apparent that using technology to communicate with parents is the direction that many teachers are heading. Educators need to examine the importance of establishing professional parameters and adhere to ethical standards when using technology to communicate with parents. If teachers are going to embrace technology, they need to be informed of the benefits and challenges of changing well established practices. “We keep asking teachers to get on luxury liners and go to places they have never been and don’t believe are any better than staying home, and we wonder why they resist” (Earl, 1999, pg. 36). It is the intent of the current researcher to inform teachers about current research, including the benefits and challenges they may encounter when balancing face-to-face conversations and incorporating electronic communication with a rapidly growing technologically savvy parent population.
Chapter Three: Procedures and Methods

Research Design

Teacher action research was the specific methodological framework for this study. Action research “focuses on getting information that will enable them (often teachers or other education professionals, rather than professional researchers) to change conditions in a particular situation in which they are personally involved. The subjects are actively involved and are likely affected by the study’s outcomes” (Fraenkel et. al., 2009, pg.13). The researcher has been concerned about the efficiency and perceived effectiveness of the home-school communication with the parents of the Kindergarten students at Winchelsea Elementary.

The research participants were invited to participate with a covering letter that explained the background for the action research project in September 2009 (Appendix D). The covering letter provided a brief description of the study, including the researcher’s role, purpose, justification, research question and timeline. The parent participants were also informed of the ethical review process that occurred prior to the start of the research project. The parents were made aware that participation in the study was voluntary. There were 16 out of 19 parents who agreed to participate in the research study. The information gathered from the completed questionnaires was used to inform the researcher as to which method of communication the parent participant preferred for the purposes of the six week action research study.

At a staff meeting in late September 2009, the researcher explained the purpose of the study (Appendix D) and invited teachers to participate by completing a Teacher Questionnaire (Appendix B). All information collected was stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure room.
at Winchelesea Elementary. The data will be destroyed after one year. A copy of the final report was made available to all participants at Winchelsea Elementary School and for those who wish to view the findings of the action research project.

School and Community Context

The Qualicum School District #69 serves the mid-island communities of Nanoose Bay, Parksville, Qualicum Beach, Errington, Coombs, Bowser, Fanny Bay, and Lasqueti Island. Winchelsea Elementary School is located in the city of Parksville and had a 2009-2010 student population of 293 students in Kindergarten through Grade Five. There were 8 international students, 29 students had special education designations, and 9 ESL students. In addition, there were 15 Aboriginal students, 9 of whom were receiving ESD (English as a Second Dialect) support. The professional staff was characterized by experienced teachers who worked both in the school and in the district for many years. In addition to classroom teachers, the special education staff was comprised of learning resource teachers, a speech and language therapist and two itinerant district program managers that worked with students with special needs. Also on the staff were five Special Education Assistants who provided support in classroom and resource room settings for a variety of students with special needs, including physical and chronic health impairments, intensive behavior, and learning disabilities. Winchelsea had a relatively high level of student transience with approximately the same number of students entering and leaving during the school year. The school was experiencing a general trend of a five percent decline in annual enrollment. Winchelsea Elementary has established well developed structures which enabled the staff to work closely with district special education personnel and other community and government based agencies and provided support to a relatively significant number of
families. The researcher’s Kindergarten class had 19 students, 9 boys and 10 girls. It was a lovely Kindergarten class that was eager to please. The children’s families were the participants in the action research study. Several children lived with both parents in dual households, and as a result home-school communication was challenging. Winchelsea’s professional staff worked extensively on home-school communication. Of the 14 classroom teachers, 12 provided their students’ parents with weekly newsletters that included program and classroom information. An increasing number of teachers were using computers to send information via the internet to maintain contact with parents. Winchelsea Elementary also had a school web page that included online weekly school newsletters, classroom information, code of conduct, learning links, and the school growth plan. This site was maintained regularly and was an effective resource for parents to access information about the school.

_Instruments and Procedures_

This study emphasized qualitative and quantitative data collection methods which included the participants completing questionnaires and a satisfaction survey (Appendix B). The questionnaire (Appendix B) asked questions about home-school communication in which the participants responded by circling answers using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree.” The researcher asked the parents to choose one method of communication (phone, fax, hand-held device, home-school folder or e-mail) for the six week action research study. Each parent’s preferred method of communication was represented in a pie graph (Figure 2 – Parents Preferred Method of Communication).

Following six weeks of communicating only by their preferred method the participants completed a parent satisfaction survey (Appendix B). The researcher graphed the results of
question #8. *How effective was your method preferred method of communication?* The results were represented in Figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3.

The validity of the data collected to inform the research was dependant on the truthfulness of the responses given by the parents completing the questionnaire. The researcher did not anticipate that the parents would have difficulty answering the questionnaires honestly because the purpose of the questionnaire was to determine each parent’s preferred mode of communication, therefore, giving validity to the questionnaire as a reliable data collection instrument. The researcher consulted with several colleagues regarding the clarity of the language and content of the survey.

The follow-up parent satisfaction surveys (Appendix B) were valid because participation was voluntary and anonymous. The data gathered was used to inform the researcher’s findings. The surveys included open-ended questions that relied on logical analysis of the honest responses.

*Data Collection Timeline*

Since the parents of the Kindergarten students were participants of the study, the initial meeting occurred during the first week of September, 2009. During the Kindergarten “Meet the Teacher” information session, the researcher discussed the research study, including the purpose and justification for the project. The researcher informed the participants of the timeline for the action research and discussed how their participation would be helpful to complete the research. After the initial meeting the researcher gave the parents a letter that described the research project and their role within the study. The researcher was available for any questions or further
inquiries about the project. Letters of consent (Appendix D) were distributed at the conclusion of the meeting. The researcher informed the parents that Ms. Spendlove, the vice-principal, was available as a third party to discuss any concerns and to collect the consent forms which were sent with directions to return the sealed envelope to her as the recruiter.

The following week, September 15, 2009, the researcher distributed both the parent questionnaire titled, “What do parents perceive to be the most effective method(s) of communication used by the teacher” (Appendix B) and the teacher’s survey titled “Home-School Communication Method(s)” (Appendix B). The researcher used the data to inform her of each parent’s communication preferences. The researcher then created a reference chart that clearly identified the preferred communication methods. For example, if a parent preferred to receive classroom newsletters only by e-mail, that was how the researcher sent them. The researcher did not send a weekly home-school communication folder home. If parents preferred a mixed method of communication by requesting electronic communication and hard copies of notices, that is how the researcher communicated with them. In other words, for the purpose of the six week period of the action research, the researcher only communicated with the participants according to their preference, as indicated in the completed questionnaires.

At the end of the six week period, the researcher gave the participating parents a satisfaction survey (Appendix B) asking for their feedback about how effective the communication was between the school and home. The results were represented in Figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3. Individuals were also given the opportunity to comment in written anecdotal note form and responses were recorded by 11 of the parent participants.
The data collected from the teacher surveys (Appendix B) was strictly an informational gathering exercise designed to inform the researcher’s knowledge about current and historical home-school communication practices, as designed by the researcher’s colleagues. Meanwhile, the researcher used the data to develop some guidelines and parameters that reflected both her professional needs as well as those of the broader school community. Being mindful of emerging district policies, the researcher summarized her findings on effective and efficient home-school communication. The researcher shared the results of the action research study with the parent participants and her colleagues upon completion of the written thesis document in April 2010. The following Table 1 outlines the Action Research Timeline.

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March, 2009</td>
<td>Research Methods course, project proposal, project proposal presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare letters of consent for the district superintendent and the school principal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare letters to parents and colleagues requesting voluntary participation in the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2009</td>
<td>Ethics Application Submitted to VIU.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2009</td>
<td>Upon ethics approval, send letters requesting consent to the district superintendent and the school principal (Appendix C).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continue literature review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Investigate district policies in relation to home-school communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Frame</td>
<td>Activity Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| June 2009 to August 2009 | Continue literature review, start coding common themes, as they relate to the study.  
Prepare and copy questionnaires and surveys (Appendix B).  
Organize recording methods for qualitative data. |
| September 2009        | Discuss study at staff meeting and inform colleagues of request of optional teacher survey (Appendix B).  
Meet with parent participants of study. Inform participants and distribute letters of consent, parent questionnaire, teacher surveys. (Appendix B, D).  
Begin 6 week action research study. |
| October 2009          | Continue implementation of preferred home-school communication method(s) as described by the parent participants.  
Continue to communicate with parents as requested. |
| November 2009         | Analyze data and review time and efficiency of new communication practices.  
Parent Participants complete Satisfaction Survey (Appendix B).  
Adjust home-school communication to reflect research findings. |
| December 2009 to March 2010 | Collate and summarize research findings.  
Continue working on final report. |
| April 2010            | Complete final report and submit to VIU April 2010.  
Share results with parent participants, Winchelsea Elementary School staff, and interested senior district staff. |
| April 2011            | Destroy all stored documents. |
Data Analysis

This action research project used a mixed method approach for data collection. The qualitative and quantitative data was paired with a review of scholarly literature related to home-school communication in order to document effective and efficient modes of communication that will improve the researcher’s practice as an educator. The information obtained from the parent participants was collected upon completion of the questionnaires (Appendix B) followed up by a parent satisfaction survey (Appendix B) at the end of the six week action research study. The researcher organized the data by sorting the common themes in order to make it comprehensible and informative. The data gathered was then converted to quantitative bar graphs and a pie graph for the sole purpose of managing and organizing the data for quick reference. The parent and teacher surveys were analyzed and the information was recorded anecdotally to inform the action research study.

Validity and Challenges

One of the primary challenges the researcher faced at the beginning of the action research project was that of her dual relationship as a researcher and a teacher and having the students’ parents as subject participants. The researcher anticipated questions from parents with regard to the initial ‘consent to participate’ form. The standard letter that was given to every parent may have been confusing or intimidating for some. That was not the intent and the researcher’s vice-principal acted as a third party recruiter for the parent participants. The teacher survey was completed by teachers who were willing to share their input on home-school communication. Not all teachers completed the anonymous survey and as a result, the information was limited based on the actual number of surveys completed.
Ethical Concerns

This study was of minimal risk, study involving parents as non-vulnerable participants. Even though the researcher maintained a dual-role relationship as a teacher and researcher, parents were informed of the purpose of the study and consent was voluntary. Parent participants were recruited by a third party to alleviate any possibility of coercion. The teacher participants did so voluntarily and information was gathered to complement the research. Since the researcher was not in a position of authority, there were no issues of “power-over” with the teacher participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained as names were not used during data analysis or in the final report. The names of the participants were not disclosed during or after the study at any time.

Nobody, other than the researcher, had access to any information that was included in the study, including completed questionnaires and surveys. All information collected was stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure room at Winchelesea Elementary School. All data will be destroyed after one year. A copy of the final report was made available to all participants at Winchelsea Elementary School and for those who wished to view the findings of the action research project.

Description and Justification of the Statistical Techniques

The data provided from the questionnaires (Appendix B), informal interviews and satisfaction surveys (Appendix B) given to the parents and teachers, provided significant information in order to make relevant changes in home-school communication methods of the researcher. The instruments and procedures chosen in this action research study were logical choices, given the
data which the researcher needed to inform the research process. The data gathered was sorted, analyzed and converted to figures 1 to 4. By organizing the data in this way, the researcher could easily see the results and respond to the participants’ needs in a timely manner. For example, if 19% of the parent participants selected home-school folder as their preferred method of home-school communication, then the researcher was able to make the folders and distribute them to the parents within a day.
Chapter Four: Research Findings and Results

Quantitative Data Analysis-Parent Participants

The researcher identified home-school communication as an area of her practice that needed improvement. In an attempt to facilitate that improvement the researcher structured this six week action research study to answer the question; What do parents perceive to be the most effective method(s) of communication with regard to weekly updates of classroom and program information?

The researcher gathered information from parent participants in questionnaires (Appendix B). There were 16 out of 19 parents who agreed to participate in the research study. The information gathered from the completed questionnaires was used to inform the researcher as to which method of communication the parent participant preferred for the purposes of the six week action research study. The five methods of home-school communication included e-mail, home-school folder, telephone, fax and hand-held device. The data was collected by collating the results from the Parent Questionnaire (Appendix B) and representing the results in quantitative form represented in Figure 1.
As displayed in Parent Questionnaire Results Graph (Figure 1) the majority of the parents found the Home-School Folder and E-mail extremely useful for home-school communication. The parent participants identified using a fax was the least effective method of home-school communication.

The final question of the Parent Questionnaire (Appendix B) asked the parent participants to choose a preferred method of home-school communication for the 6 week action research study. Of the 16 parents who participated in the study, 11 (or 68%) chose to communicate with the researcher via e-mail for the six week study. While 3 (or 19%) chose to communicate with the researcher via home-school folder and 2 parents (or 13%) chose hand-held devices such as cell phone or Blackberry® as a method of home-school communication (see Figure 2.). No parents or 0% chose phone or fax as their preferred method for the 6 week action research study. Figure 2 shows the percentage of parent participants who preferred specific home-school communication methods for the six week action research study.
Following the six week action research study, during which the researcher communicated with 11 parents by e-mail, 3 parents by home-school folder, and 2 by sending messages to their hand-held devices, the researcher asked the participants to complete a Parent Satisfaction Survey (Appendix B). The following Figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 indicate the results of the 5-point rating scale, as reflected by Question #8 of the Parent Satisfaction Survey (Appendix B) which states: “My preferred method of home-school communication was effective.”
Of the 11 participants who chose e-mail as their preferred method of communication, 8 or (73%) strongly agreed and just 3 or (27%) agreed that it was effective.

Of the three participants who chose home-school folder as their preferred method of communication, 1 or (33%) strongly agreed and 3 or (67%) just agreed that it was effective.
The two participants who chose hand-held device as their preferred communication method both agreed that it was effective but neither indicated that it was strongly effective.

**Quantitative Data Analysis—Teacher Participants**

The teacher participants were asked to complete a questionnaire (Appendix B) asking them how useful the five methods of home-school communication have been, according to a 5-point Likert rating scale. The five methods of home-school communication include e-mail, home-school folder, telephone, fax and hand-held device. The data was collected by collating the results from the teacher questionnaire (Appendix B) and representing the results in quantitative form as represented in Figure 4.

The data provided by the teacher participants indicates that 7 out of 8 or (88%) of teachers believe that home-school communication folders are extremely useful in their communication practices. This graph in Figure 4 clearly indicates that 6 or (75%) of the teacher participants were not sure how useful hand-held devices were as a method of communication between the
home and school. The researcher interprets this information as an indication that most teachers are not using hand-held devices as a regular tool in their home-school communication practices.

**Qualitative Data**

The qualitative data was collected from the last question on the Teacher and Parent Questionnaires (Appendix B). The researcher emphasized the importance of offering the research participants an opportunity to comment on a more personal level by including a comments section on the questionnaires (Appendix B). Often the personal, anecdotal information is not obtainable by simply completing questions on a five-point rating scale. The researcher viewed the comments from the participants as a means to validate the personal conversations that she had with teachers and parents prior to even choosing improving home-school communication as a topic for a research study. “Educators, whether leaders or teachers, make hundreds of decisions in a day. Not every decision requires a major research study. However, decisions that have far reaching consequences or are high stakes deserve to be investigated thoroughly through the lens of pertinent data, either as a way of validating hunches or rethinking ideas” (Earl and Timperley, 2008, pg. 5).

The following four excerpts from the Teacher Questionnaires (Appendix B) describe the participants’ opinions regarding the effective use of technology as a tool for communicating with parents:

“I don’t really use it but would like to try providing my school e-mail address to parents. In the past, the only parents who have e-mailed me have been parents who were also teachers!” (September 25, 2009).

"I wonder about misinterpreting e-mails, for example inferring an emotion or motive that may not exist.” (September 27, 2009).
“As an older teacher, I find that I rely on the ways I’ve always done it.” (September 24, 2009).

“I feel that the hard-copy weekly newsletters are often not read or not read carefully. I think that more parents would prefer e-mail communication and I am going to ask if this is their preference at the upcoming parent-teacher conferences.” (September 27, 2009).

Similarly, the parent participants had the opportunity to comment on their preferences for home-school communication, as retrieved from the Parent Questionnaire (Appendix B) in the following excerpts:

“It is actually a very difficult topic. As a parent, it’s true that an e-mail is a very efficient and practical way. It’s the most efficient way for communication with a teacher. However, as a teacher too, I find it extremely draining and tiring to have to answer all the e-mail I get from numerous parents sometimes 3 times/week. I guess it depends on the information you need to communicate. Is it something general like a newsletter or is it a progress report?” (September 21, 2009).

“Face to face I find very useful. Like when child is being picked up, a discussion or check-in about an immediate issue could then be addressed on the spot. Arranging a time that both parent and teacher can speak face to face or over the phone for subjects less general than a newsletter. Like a child’s progress or behavior.” (September 23, 2009).

The parent participants completed the Home-School Satisfaction Survey (Appendix B) at the end of the six week research study (see Figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3). The parents were given the opportunity to comment about how satisfied they were with the home-school communication for the six week study period. The following are excerpts from the parents’ insights regarding their preferred method of home-school communication:

“If e-mails were used rather than weekly paper newsletters, then it would reduce on paper use at the school. So, save money in the budget and save the environment—Bonus for everyone.” (October 25, 2009).

“E-mail and home-school folder are the best ways to keep in contact with the teacher. I am using e-mail with the Secondary School and that is effective as well, but the folder is
right there! Very convenient for someone that does not work with computers daily!” (October 25, 2009).

Of the 16 parents who participated in the study, 8 included personal comments for the researcher in the satisfaction survey (Appendix B). This data was informative and several personal conversations with the parent participants occurred as a result of the comments.
Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusion

Summary and Reflections

The purpose of this teacher action research study was to explore the most effective method(s) of communication between the teacher and parents of the Kindergarten children attending Winchelsea Elementary School. Focusing on the following question: **What do parents perceive to be the most effective method(s) of communication by the teacher with regard to weekly updates of classroom and program information?**, the researcher invited the Kindergarten parents and teaching staff to participate in the study by completing a Home-School Communication Questionnaire (Appendix B). Using the information obtained from the questionnaires, the researcher communicated with the 16 parent participants according to their preferred method. Of the 16 parents who agreed to participate in this study, 11 chose to communicate via e-mail, 3 by home-school folder (including paper copies of newsletters) and 2 chose to have information sent to their personal hand-held devices (Figure 2). It was made very clear to the parents participating in this study that the teacher/researcher was available for personal conversations at all times during the course of the six week study period.

The researcher found that the parents participating in the study were supportive of the research and occasionally they would ask how the project was progressing. There were no voiced complaints and all participants seemed content with the level of communication they received during the study period. At the end of the six weeks, the parent participants were given a Home-School Satisfaction Survey (Appendix B). The satisfaction survey included two parts. The first was a series of ten statements regarding the home-school communication they experienced during the six week action research study. They rated their opinions on a 5-point
scale. The second part of the satisfaction survey gave the parent participants an opportunity to add personal comments. The information gathered from the participants’ comments was valuable qualitative data and was examined in relation to answering the research question.

Finally all of the data was analyzed and represented in figures 1 through 4. The researcher found that the data collected from question #8 on the Parent Satisfaction Survey (Figures 3.1,3.2,3.3) was decisive in summarizing the results of the action research study. The question read: “My preferred communication method was effective.” Of the 11 participants who selected e-mail as their method of communication, 8 or 73% strongly agreed and just 3 or 27% agreed that it was effective. Of the three participants who selected home-school folder as their method of communication, 1 or 33% strongly agreed and 2 or 67% just agreed that it was effective. The 2 participants who selected hand-held device as their communication method both agreed that it was effective but neither indicated that it was strongly effective. Based on the information provided by the research participants the researcher will adjust her home-school communication practices to include both home-school folders and e-mail as a method to communicate with the parents of her students.

The data retrieved from the Teacher Questionnaires was analyzed and converted to graph form (See Figure 4). Most of the teachers agreed that the home-school folder was an effective communication method and several teachers were interested in using e-mail to communicate with parents, but were reluctant to embrace technology because of their uncertainty regarding the potential ethical implications. The quantitative data retrieved from the teachers’ comments, and the informal conversations that the researcher had with the staff also indicated that there was a
need for some professional in-service addressing teachers’ reluctance to embrace technology as an effective communication tool between the home and school.

**Recommendations**

Improving home-school communication sparked interesting discussions with parents and teachers. Together with the information gathered from this research project and various academic journal articles, the researcher recommended that teachers use both home-school folders and e-mail for effective home-school communication. The researchers have drafted a list of several recommendations that would benefit teachers when using technology as a method of communication between the school and home. The researcher would be interested in developing an in-service on “Using Technology to Improve Home-School Communication” for interested teachers. This in-service could be an after school or Professional Development session for teachers who are interested in using technology in an ethical way to improve their communication practices. The researcher would share the following list during the in-service.

- Use your school e-mail address for home-school communication, not your private home e-mail address.
- Respond with an out of office reply 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.
- Maintain professional standards when sending e-mail messages to students, parents and colleagues.
- Always write messages including correct spelling and grammar, and avoid abbreviations.
- Include your name, title and school contact information at the footer of your e-mail messages.
- Always print messages and keep a paper copy for your records.
- Have and use a locked password function on your computer, phone or BlackBerry® messaging device.
• Use the BCC function on group e-mail messages.
• Use an out of office reply for the weekend to avoid Monday morning meeting conflicts.
• Never send images of your students or yourself on social networking sites.
• Do not engage with a person who is sending questionable messages or images.
• Advise the administration of your school if you receive inappropriate communication.

In 2006, Linda Teel wrote, *Confidentiality and Electronic Mail: Issues of Privacy*, which provided a list of guidelines similar to the researcher’s but she also included the insightful reminder, “Do not write anything in electronic mail that you would not want to read in tomorrow’s newspaper” (pg. 7).

*Limitations of the Study*

One of the primary challenges that the researcher faced at the beginning of this action research project was the dual relationship as a researcher and teacher using the students’ parents and her colleagues as participants. The researcher was pleased that 16 out of 19 parents were willing to participate in the study. That is 85% percent of the class, but the concern was with the remaining 15%. How satisfied was this silent group of parents with the communication between the home and school? The researcher believes that the parents who participated in the study answered the Parent Questionnaire (Appendix B) thoughtfully, but she did have concerns that the results given for the Parent Satisfaction Survey (Appendix B) were overwhelmingly positive. This outcome could have been due to the fact that the researcher also had a dual role as the Kindergarten teacher. Parents of Kindergarten students are traditionally very positive and satisfied with most school-related issues. It has been the researcher’s experience that the
relationship between the Kindergarten teacher and parents has traditionally been extremely positive and unified. For this reason the results of the Parent Satisfaction Survey (Appendix B) could have indicated an overly positive response.

A further interest is the information that could have been provided by the parents that chose not to participate in the study. The researcher was concerned that there was a silent group of parents who were receiving adequate information about their child’s classroom and school activities. Bronfenbrenner (1986) suggests that communication which is guided and purposeful can be an educational force in parent and teacher growth as they attempt to be positive and hopeful role models in children’s lives. Another limitation of the study was the relatively low sample size (16 parent participants) and the relatively short timeline (6 weeks) to gather data, analyze the information and make recommendations. The parent participant satisfaction survey was a valid instrument to provide evidence of the parent’s feedback regarding the effectiveness of the home-school communication practices during the course of the action research study.

The researcher was disappointed with the limited number of teachers who completed the Teacher Questionnaire (Appendix B). Only 58% (or 8 out of a possible 14) teachers participated in the study. The information gathered from the teachers was a secondary source of information to inform the researcher about the traditional home-school communication practices of her colleagues. The researcher wondered that if the Teacher Questionnaire (Appendix B) was administered at a less busy time of year, more teachers would be willing to participate. A broader participation group of teachers could have been expanded by including several schools.
Suggestions For Further Research

A further interest of the researcher is exploring the voice of the silent 15% of the parents who did not participate in this study. The researcher is interested in improving communication with the non-custodial parents of her students, in particular, the non-custodial fathers of the Kindergarten students who may not be informed adequately by the school. A further question that the researcher might consider would be: Does using technology as a method of exchanging information improve the home-school communication exchanged between teachers and non-custodial fathers of children in elementary school? This question would lead to an interesting and relevant study that would progress over a longer period of time, but the results could have a greater positive effect on a wider population of parent participants in the school community.

Another area for further investigation is the ethical implications of using technology as a method for home-school communication. The researcher is conscious of her responsibility to maintain the privacy of families but is concerned about the ethical practices of using technology to respond and store such messages. Using technology to communicate is a practice that teachers will have to embrace but the issue is how to do it ethically? There are several legal documents that bind the process of exchanging confidential student information between the home and school. Educators and parents can refer to several documents as reference for the process, protocol and implementation of communicating student information. These include: The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, 1982. Privacy Act (R.S., 1985, c. P-21)., British Columbia School Act, 1996., BCTF Code of Ethics, 2006., Canadian Teachers’ Federation, Cybertips For Teachers, 2009 and all School Districts Policy Manuals.
The researcher’s ethical concerns are highlighted by the awareness of the potential breach of privacy when using e-mail to send confidential information. A definition of ‘privacy’ as defined in Microsoft Office (2007) as, the state of being apart from other people and not seen, heard or disturbed by them: freedom from the observation, intrusion, or attention of others. The “Privacy Act” within our Canadian Charter of Right and Freedoms (1982) states, “the purpose of ‘The Privacy Act’ is, to extend the present laws of Canada that protect the privacy of individuals with respect to personal information about themselves held by a government institution and thereby provide individuals with a right of access to that information” (pg. 21).

Privacy issues can get very complicated and have legal, ethical and professionalism issues for teachers. The BC Civil Liberties Association and BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association recently submitted a lengthy document titled, The Government’s Response on the Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics on the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, (January 2008). It states that, “the challenges of emerging privacy-threatening technologies must be confronted as soon as possible” (pg. 5). The Government’s response was, “Not addressed” (pg. 5). In the Journal of Academic Librarianship, (1995) Stacey Veeder (1995) wrote an informative research article about electronic mail and privacy which summarized that, “Legislation necessarily always lags behind the introduction of new technologies and often evolves piece-meal into an incomplete and inconsistent patchwork of confusing laws. Not surprisingly, the ambiguity surrounding privacy status of e-mail has led to a spate of civil lawsuits even to a couple of cases involving criminal charges” (pg. 123).

E-mail communication has several implications for teachers because the British Columbia School Act does not provide changes that reflect this new method of communication nor do most
School District Policy Handbooks. Veeder (1995) concludes that, “the resulting public debates undoubtedly will inform the eventual policy decisions concerning the extent to which electronic privacy is protected” (pg. 126). What does apply for teachers is a careful reflection of privacy related values, with regard to ethical practices of accessing, retrieving, responding and storing confidential information. It is clear that our policies and protocols are not able to keep current with the rapid expansion of technology use. A close examination is needed regarding our core values and careful application of our ethical decision making skills when facing dilemmas that will inevitably occur when we use technology to communicate in our teaching practice.

Conclusion

This action research project was a very interesting experience for the researcher. The researcher was pleased with the action research process as a means of examining an area of professional practice that needs improvement. By taking action, conducting research, analyzing the data, and forming conclusions based on the research, communication practices with parents have been improved but the researcher feels this might have come at the expense of developing closer more personal relationships with her student’s parents. It is clear that teachers need to include a variety of methods to communicate with parents. We need to reboot and refresh the way that we think about technology and embrace the possibilities it presents towards improving our communication practices.

Upon completion of this action research project the researcher is looking forward to sharing her results with the interested participants. The researcher is planning on using her new research inquiry skills to embrace future educational change with confidence, knowledge, and enthusiasm.
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Appendix A

Teacher-Researcher’s Sample of Home-School Communication
Kindergarten Newsletter #14

Friday, January 8, 2010

Dear Parents,

Happy New Year! I hope that you enjoyed all of the snow and had a wonderful holiday. The kids seem excited to see their friends and are ready to be back in school.

On Monday, I sent home a bag of ten mini-readers. The children can keep them for the week and need to return them the following Monday. When they return them they will get a new set of 10. This is a great system but will only work if you remember to return the books the following Monday as all of the children will need a new set for the week. This daily reading practice should be a fun, stress-free time for you and your child and is meant to encourage their reading confidence. It should be no more than 10 minutes daily and the intent is to re-read the mini-readers over the course of the week.

This month we will be starting our more formal introduction of the alphabet. We will be working on printing each letter correctly and learning each letter name and sound (yes, phonics!). We have also started to identify some high frequency sight words in our daily morning message and Weekly News. So far, we can read on, we, to, is, it, at and the. I have asked the kids to look for these words in their mini-readers. I am so impressed with their beginning reading skills. At this rate, we should be able to identify more than 20 high frequency sight words by the end of Kindergarten.

Today I have sent home a white Alphabet Mystery Bag marked with a specific letter for each child. They are to find at least three things from home that begin with that letter and put them in the bag. For example, if Taylyn gets the bag marked with a Tt on it she might put a toothbrush, teddy bear and a T-Rex in the bag. Please take some time to find these items with your child and remember that they must start with that letter and be small enough to fit in the bag so we can guess what they might be. Please don’t send any food items and something that you don’t mind leaving at school for a few months.

Our Parent-Helper schedule for January is now posted on our outside door.

Thanks for your support! We continue to be having such a fun year. Your children are truly delightful!

Have a great weekend and Happy New Year!

Maria Austin
Appendix B

Qualitative/Quantitative Data:

Parent Questionnaire – September 2009

Parent Satisfaction Survey - November 2009

Teacher Questionnaire - September 2009
Parent Questionnaire

What is the perceived to be the most effective method(s) of communication for a teacher to provide you with weekly updates and classroom/program information?

This questionnaire is designed to ask questions about effective method(s) of home-school communication.

Please read each statement and select the responses that best describes your preferred method of home-school communication.

There are 5 statements in this questionnaire, each question followed by a prompt inquiring about the frequency each communication method is used by the participant.

On a scale from 1 to 5 indicate how useful you find each method for communicating with your child’s teacher.

1 = not sure  2 = never useful  3 = occasionally useful  4 = sometimes useful  5 = extremely useful

1. Receiving information by e-mail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Not sure</th>
<th>2 Never useful</th>
<th>3 Occasionally useful</th>
<th>4 Sometimes useful</th>
<th>5 Extremely useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I check my e-mail every ____________________________________________

2. Receiving information by weekly home-school communication folder.
I check and read the information in the weekly home-school folder every _________________.

3. Receiving information by phone calls home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>Never useful</td>
<td>Occasionally useful</td>
<td>Sometimes useful</td>
<td>Extremely useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I check my phone messages __________________________________________________________.

4. Receiving information by fax.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>Never useful</td>
<td>Occasionally useful</td>
<td>Sometimes useful</td>
<td>Extremely useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I check my fax machine every ________________________________________________________.

5. Receiving information by Blackberry® or personal handheld electronic device.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>Never useful</td>
<td>Occasionally useful</td>
<td>Sometimes useful</td>
<td>Extremely useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I check my Blackberry® or handheld electronic device for messages ____________________________.

Describe below which method of communication that you would prefer the teacher to use when communicating with you.
**Parent Home-School Satisfaction Survey**

This survey addresses the previous six week home-school communication practices that occurred with your child’s Kindergarten Teacher. Your responses will help your school to determine the most effective and efficient home-school communication methods with regard to weekly updates of classroom and program information.

My preferred method of home-school communications was ____________________________

**Part A**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Disagree +</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree +</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I was informed about weekly classroom updates.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I was contacted every week by the classroom teacher.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. There was not enough information about classroom activities and I felt uninformed.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The teacher was easy to contact.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The method of communication that I choose was manageable for me.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I will continue to ask the teacher to contact me using my</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Effective Home-School Communication

Home-School Communication

Part B

Any additional comments would be appreciated on the topics addressed in this survey.

Thank You!
Teacher Questionnaire

What is the most effective method(s) of communication by the teacher to parents for providing weekly updates and classroom/program information?

This questionnaire is designed to ask questions about effective method(s) of home-school communication.

Please read each statement and select the response that best describes your preferred method of home-school communication.

There are 5 statements in this questionnaire, each followed by a sub-statement inquiring about the frequency each communication method is used by the participant.

On a scale from 1 to 5 indicate how useful you find the following methods for communicating with your student’s parents.

1 = not sure  2 = never useful  3 = occasionally useful  4 = sometimes useful  5 = extremely useful

1. Communicating information by e-mail.

I check my e-mail every ________________________________.

2. Communicating information by weekly home-school communication folder.

I check and read the information in the weekly home-school folder every ________________________________.
3. Communication information by phone calls home.

<table>
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<td>Never useful</td>
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<td>Sometimes useful</td>
<td>Extremely useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I check my phone messages ____________________________________________________________.

4. Communicating information by fax.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td>Sometimes useful</td>
<td>Extremely useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I check my fax machine every__________________________________________________________.

5. Communicating information by using my blackberry or personal hand held device.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td>Occasionally useful</td>
<td>Sometimes useful</td>
<td>Extremely useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I check my or Blackberry® or handheld electronic device.  ________________________________________________.

Describe below any additional method(s) that you have traditionally used in your teaching practice for communicating with parents about your students’ progress or classroom program information.

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

6. How effective do you find using technology as a tool for communicating with parents?

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________
Appendix C

Letter of Approval from School District #69

Letter of Approval From School Principal

Vancouver Island University Ethics Approval
June 1, 2009

Maria Austin
920 View Road
Qualicum Beach, BC
V9K 1N3

Dear Maria:

Thank you for meeting with me to go over the research proposal for your Master’s at VIU. I also appreciated the opportunity to view your final CSML project.

Your preparation and organization is thorough and comprehensive. The question you have chosen to pursue is timely, and your research approach inclusive.

From the timeline that you presented, it is clear that 2009-10 will be a demanding year for you. However, the energy and enthusiasm you are bringing to your project will certainly assist you to meet your goal and complete your paper.

I look forward to hearing the results.

I approve the research proposal as presented.

Sincerely,

Candice Morgan
Superintendent of Schools
School District 69

Copy: Personnel File
Ian MacDonald, Principal Winchelsea Elementary School
Dear Ms. Austin

Re: Consent for Conducting Research

I have read the attached documents connected with your research proposal including surveys, questionnaires, and information letters, and hereby give my consent for you to work within the jurisdiction of Winchelsea Elementary and SD69.

I look forward to the outcomes of your work with its intended purpose of improving communication between home and school, parents and teachers. Please keep me informed and let me know how I can be of assistance in this important project.

Yours Sincerely

Ian MacDonald
Principal
May 4, 2009

Maria Austin

c/o Faculty of Education

Vancouver Island University

900 Fifth Street

Nanaimo, British Columbia

V9R 5S5

Dear Maria:

The Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (CRHIS) is pleased to grant approval for the project titled "What do parents perceive to be the most effective method(s) of communication by the teacher with regard to weekly updates of classroom and program information," submitted April 3, 2009.

Please be aware of your obligation to carry out the research as stated in the proposal. Guidelines as posted on the website at http://www.mala.ca/research/committees/crhis/index.html must be followed for all submissions.

Sincerely,

Ruth Kreson, Chair

Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (CRHIS)

CRHIS Reference No. 2009-020-VIUS-AUSTIN

Date of Approval April 29, 2009

Date of Expiry June 30, 2010

As researcher(s) I (we) hereby agree to carry out the research in an ethical manner as outlined in the approved proposal submission. If I (we) need to make changes to the methods and/or recruitment and consent procedures, I (we) will request an amendment from the CRHIS. If the project runs longer than one (1) year, I (we) will submit a request for continuing review (renewal) to the Ethics Officer one (1) month prior to the expiry date indicated above. At the end of the project, I (we) will notify the Ethics Officer to close the study.

Maria Austin, Student – Masters in Educational Leadership

Date: April 8, 2009

Research & Scholarly Activity Office

900 Fifth Avenue, Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada V9R 5S5 | Ph 250.740.6106 | Fax 250.740.6256 | via.uvic.ca/research
Appendix D

Letters of Consent:

School District No. 69 Superintendent

Winchelsea Elementary School Principal

Winchelsea Elementary School Parent Participants

Winchelsea Elementary School Teacher Participants
April 15, 2009

Dear Ms. Morgan,

I am requesting your permission on the behalf of School District #69 to conduct a research project with the parents of Kindergarten students at Winchelsea Elementary. I will also be asking the teaching staff to voluntarily complete a short questionnaire to provide additional information to support my project. This research is part of the requirements for a Master of Education Degree in Leadership through the Department of Education at the University of Vancouver Island. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Harry Janzen. You may contact my supervisor at (250) 740-6463 respecting this study.

The purpose of this research study is to consider the research question: “What do parents perceive to be the most effective method(s) of communication by the teacher with regard to weekly updates of classroom and program information?” In other words, how might the action research process provide a means for exploring more efficient method(s) of communication between the home and school?

It has been my experience that to build positive home-school relationships with parents it is essential to develop strong communication practices. As part of my regular classroom communication, I have used several traditional methods of communication to inform parents about classroom and program information. Recently I have found that many parents prefer to correspond by e-mail. The school's communication practices need to meet the changing needs of technologically competent parents. As a teacher leader, I will share the results of this study with interested colleagues who may benefit from the finding of the research project.

I am also interested in exploring the ethical practice of using technology for communicating with parents. Often times, confidential information is shared within an e-mail. Since communicating with parents using modern technology is a relatively new practice, I feel it is necessary to determine what policies and procedures may guide how I reply, store, and destroy such messages.

I will also attempt to trace the ways in which my colleagues historically have communicated with parents in their teaching careers. Throughout the cycle of action research, I hope to determine a feasible method to communicate with parents that can also be replicated by my colleagues.

This was a minimal risk study involving parents as non-vulnerable participants. In accordance with the University’s standards for ethical research, the information collected will be held in a locked cabinet and destroyed after one year. A copy of the final written research report will be left in the school with the Principal and you and the Parent Advisory Council will be informed when it is available to be viewed by interested parties.

I am available, at your convenience, to answer any questions. I may be reached at the school or at home (752-6913), or by e-mail at maustin@sd69.bc.ca. I am also requesting consent from Mr. MacDonald on my intended research. In addition to contacting myself or my supervisor, you may verify the ethical approval of this research or raise any concerns you might have by contacting Heather L. Ward, the Ethics Officer at the University of Vancouver Island at Heather.Ward@viu.ca

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions. Please return one copy of the signed consent form in the attached envelope directly to me and keep the other for your records. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Maria Austin
April 15, 2009

Dear Mr. MacDonald,

I am requesting your permission to conduct a research project with the parents of Kindergarten students at Winchelsea Elementary. I will also be asking the teaching staff to voluntarily complete a short questionnaire to provide additional information to support my project. This research is part of the requirements for a Master of Education Degree in Leadership through the Department of Education at the University of Vancouver Island. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Harry Janzen. You may contact my supervisor at (250) 740-6463 respecting this study.

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It has been my experience that to build positive home-school relationships with parents it is essential to develop strong communication practices. As part of my regular classroom communication, I have used several traditional methods of communication to inform parents about classroom and program information. Recently I have found that many parents prefer to correspond by e-mail. The school’s communication practices need to meet the changing needs of technologically competent parents. As a teacher leader, I will share the results of this study with interested colleagues who may benefit from the finding of the research project.

I am also interested in exploring the ethical practice of using technology for communicating with parents. Often times, confidential information is shared within an e-mail. Since communicating with parents using modern technology is a relatively new practice, I feel it is necessary to determine what policies and procedures may guide how I reply, store, and destroy such messages.

The anonymous teacher questionnaires will be distributed to all professional teaching staff during the week of September 14-18, 2009. In accordance with the University’s standards for ethical research, the information collected will be held in a locked cabinet and destroyed after one year.

A copy of the final written research report will be left in the school and you as well as the Parent Advisory Council will be informed when it is available to be viewed by interested parties. I am available, at your convenience, to answer any questions you may have. I am also requesting consent from Ms. Candice Morgan, on behalf of School District 69, on my intended research. In addition to contacting myself or my supervisor, you may verify the ethical approval of this research or raise any concerns you might have by contacting Heather L. Ward, the Ethics Officer at the University of Vancouver Island at Heather.Ward@viu.ca

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions. Please return one copy of the signed consent form in the attached envelope directly to me and keep the other for your records. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Maria Austin
In addition to my role as your child’s teacher, I am also a graduate student in the Masters of Educational Leadership at Vancouver Island University (VIU). As part of my degree requirements, I am conducting a research study designed to improve communication between the home (parent/guardian) and the school (teacher). This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Harry Janzen, Dean of the Faculty of Education. I would like to invite you to participate in this research.

The purpose of this research study is to consider the research question: “What do parents perceive to be the most effective method(s) of communication by the teacher with regard to weekly updates of classroom and program information?” In other words, how might the action research process provide a means for exploring more efficient method(s) of communication between the home and school?

I will be inviting both parents and my fellow teachers to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete two questionnaires. The first questionnaire is included with this letter and can be returned directly to me anytime during the week of September 14-18, 2009. The results of the first questionnaire will be used to inform me of your preferred communication practices, which I will then implement for a period of six weeks. At the end of the six weeks, you will be asked to complete an anonymous satisfaction survey in order to provide me with feedback about how effective our communication was during the six week trial. I will ask you to return the second survey to the school Principal. Both questionnaires will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.
If you choose to participate in this research, there are no risks foreseen. This study may benefit both parents and teachers, as the information you provide may inform and enhance communication practices.

All data collected, including your name and preferred contact information, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office at Winchelsea Elementary School until all copies are destroyed by shredding in November 2010. Only I will have access to the data and no identifying or identifiable information will be included in the final report, ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality. Final results will be presented in June 2010 by written thesis and oral presentation. A copy of the written thesis will also be given to the Winchelsea Elementary School administration and Parent Advisory Council.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are encouraged to ask questions at any point during the research. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without question or penalty. I am available, at your convenience, to answer any questions.

I have read and understand the above study information, and I consent to participate in this research.

_______________________________________  _______________________________________
Participant Signature                    Date                                    Researcher Signature              Date
September 9, 2009

Dear Colleagues,

I am requesting your voluntary participation in an action research study that is designed to improve communication between the home and school. This research is part of the requirements for a Master of Education Degree in Leadership through the Department of Education at the University of Vancouver Island. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dean of Education, Dr. Harry Janzen. You may contact my supervisor at, Harry.Janzen@viu.ca (250) 740-6463 respecting this study.

The purpose of this research study is to consider the research question: “What do parents perceive to be the most effective method(s) of communication by the teacher with regard to weekly updates of classroom and program information?” In other words, how might the action research process provide a means for exploring more efficient method(s) of communication between the home and school?

It has been my experience that to build positive home-school relationships with parents it is essential to develop strong communication practices. As part of my regular classroom communication, I have used several traditional methods of communication to inform parents about classroom and program information. Recently I have found that many parents prefer to correspond by e-mail. The school's communication practices need to meet the changing needs of technologically competent parents. As a teacher leader, I will share the results of this study with interested colleagues who may benefit from the finding of the research project.

I am also interested in exploring the ethical practice of using technology for communicating with parents. Often times, confidential information is shared within an e-mail. Since communicating with parents using modern technology is a relatively new practice, I feel it is necessary to determine what policies and procedures may guide how I reply, store, and destroy such messages.

The study will involve collecting information in the form of a non-identifiable Teacher Questionnaire. In order to respect confidentiality and ensure that participation is completely voluntary, I have requested that a neutral “third party” (Sheila Spendlove) collect the completed teacher questionnaires. The questionnaires are included with this letter and can be returned to Ms. Spendlove in the blank envelope anytime during the week of September 14-18, 2009. The results of the questionnaire will be used to inform me of your preferred home-school communication practices.

A copy of the final written research report will be left in the school and you as well as the Parent Advisory Council will be informed when it is available to be viewed by interested parties. I am available, at your convenience, to answer any questions you may have. I am also requesting consent from Ms. Candice Morgan, on behalf of School District 69, on my intended research. In addition to contacting myself or my supervisor, you may verify the ethical approval of this research or raise any concerns you might have by contacting Heather L. Ward, the Ethics Officer at the University of Vancouver Island at Heather.Ward@viu.ca.

Sincerely,

Maria Austin