

CLASSROOM WEB PAGES
MAKING THEM WORK FOR YOU

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

I am a fifth grade teacher in the State College Area School District. I believe that keeping parents and students informed is vital to the success of the classroom. Therefore, on a weekly basis I send home a home folder containing student work and include an informational letter of the week's activities and upcoming noteworthy information. This precipitates communication between home and school and often an informed family becomes an involved family.

This year I wanted to design a classroom web page, which would further enhance this weekly communication between home and school as its primary goal. Also, I had a secondary goal to build on the technology skills of my students through learning to use and navigate around the web page. Therefore, I would design a web page that would post the weekly newsletters and I would include something for the students to build on in their technology skills.

In researching what a classroom web page should have I found that our school district recently completed a technology survey, which I found helpful to designing my web page. In the results the parents reported things they find most helpful from school web pages. Most important was a homework page listing class assignments with due dates and upcoming activities and or assignments. The second most important and useful information that parents reported was being informed through a daily bulletin or weekly newsletter of some sort. Next, I scheduled technology training to learn about designing a web page and listened intently as

the instructor emphasized what is important in a classroom web page and what is vital to its success.

The instructor compared designing a web page to adopting a puppy. She said don't commit to more than you can keep up with. Do you want to adopt a poodle, a low maintenance dog or a high need St. Bernard? What can you commit to taking care of? There is nothing more disappointing than accessing a web page to find most of the information outdated and not useful to the reader. Therefore, commit to only what you can keep up with and maintain it. My wondering questions became:

How do I design a classroom web page that works for me?

What do parents and students really want from a classroom web page?

INQUIRY PLAN

I attended technology sessions, two in fact, and decided I only wanted to adopt a poodle, a web page with just the basics in mind. My decision brought together what I learned from the technology survey report and what the technology instructor emphasized to be able to maintain. Therefore, my web page would include: a weekly newsletter, daily homework assignments and something for the students to build on to develop their technology skills. In posting my weekly newsletter I followed the same format of the paper version that the parents received since the beginning of the year in the students weekly home folder. This included information about our subject areas like social studies, language arts, and science along with announcements and special dates.

To transition to this electronic version of the weekly newsletter, I printed out directions of how to access the web page and included those in the weekly home folder. I also took the students to our computer lab to show them how to access the web

page. To entice the students to access the page, read it, bring it to their parents attention and build on their technology skills, I started a Mummmmm is the Word section. I named this Mummmmm is the Word as I requested students to keep mum about the information shared in it as I always asked them to do something which I would reward them for. I wanted other students to pick up on this in the classroom in hopes it would entice them to look up the web page and follow suit themselves.

Some examples of Mummmms that I copied from past newsletters are:

Mummmmmmmmmmm is the word: Spring is in the air, although, I haven't even seen a robin yet. What is the official start date of the spring season? AND when Dr. Voight mentioned it was warm in Antarctica we were thinking spring/summer like temperatures, but he actually meant temperatures like? Write your responses on a sheet of paper, hand them in to Mrs. Khayat Monday morning and you'll have to figure out what your reward has to do with the questions!

*MMMMMMMMMMMMMum is the word: **How many amendments have been added to our Constitution?** Write it down on a piece of paper and hand it in to your teacher Monday morning. **She will provide you with the means to continuously see your information in print.***

*Mummmmmmmmmmmmm is the word: Our new science unit is called Animal Kingdom. We will study about two large groups that scientist have named vertebrates and invertebrates. **Invertebrates make up what percent of all animals?** If you bring in the answer, **Mrs. Khayat will put you into a sticky situation.** Also, add to your response what would make learning about animals really exciting?*

*MMMMMMMMMMMMMum is the word: **Read the article below and write on a piece of paper some signs to watch for a tsunami. Hand this in to Mrs. Khayat on Monday and she will be sure to keep you hooked.***

Ms. Stoicovy shared the following with me: A 10-year-old British girl saved 100 people in Phuket, Thailand, when she recognized signs of the approaching tsunami that occurred last week. According to Reuters, an international news

agency, the girl had just learned about the science of tsunamis in school. She and her mother quickly warned hotel staff, who evacuated the beach minutes before the devastating tsunami hit. The beach was one of the few on the island where no one was killed. To read a Reuters article about this incredible story, go to
<http://news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/nm/20050103/od_uk_nm/oukoe_quake_briton_girl>

My original goal with Mummm is the Word was to entice the students to read the web page, which would have them building on their technology skills as they learned how to navigate through the different sections. The Mummm had far more implications than I expected. I met my original goal with reaching about half the class accessing and reading the web page. However, a following of Mummm students rose to the challenge of the questions asked, became enriched by the content they researched, and found a cure for boredom at home, after all, "curiosity is the cure for boredom." These students, about seven of them, consistently kept after me for mum hints, or reminded me to post the mum on the web page. In fact, it's notable to mention that two of my students have completed every single mum, which is about 20 of them. Commendable of these students, to say the least, as they are truly inspired not by what they earn from doing the mum, but for what they learn.

As I was designing my web page I found some things much easier than I expected. Therefore, I did include more sections to my web page than I originally planned, ones that were low maintenance like a specials schedule listing time and day. A schedule like this takes just one posting as it was set for the school year. I also included a Tools for Citizenship page to share student accomplishments on a weekly basis. Occasionally, I posted pictures from classroom activities, which the students loved!

DATA COLLECTION

To evaluate the effectiveness of my web page I conducted a survey for students and one for parents. I found that only one student doesn't have access to the web page at all. One only has access every other week. The other 18 students have daily access to the web page. I asked them the same questions and following are the results.

Student Results - 17 out of 20 returned their surveys

1. How often do you look at our classroom web page?

Daily- 2

3X week- 1

Weekly- 10

Other (every other week)- 4

2. What do you look at?

Weekly Penguin Page- 15

Homework Page- 12

Other (pictures)- 6

3. What do you find most helpful on the web page?

Homework page for 12 students, especially when they are absent

Announcements and reminders for 6 students

Mummmm is the word for 2 students

4. What is missing from the web page?

New Pictures of everyone

Section for student articles listing their favorites

New postings on Stirrin' Up the Science page

Student information page

5. Do you have suggestions for improvement?

New pictures

Student articles with their pictures

Schedule for the week like the daily schedule posted on the blackboard
 Google search box
 Field trip pictures

Parent results - 12 returns

1. How often do you look at our classroom web page?

Daily- 1

3X week- 2

Weekly- 3

Other (every other week)- 6

2. What do you look at?

Weekly Penguin Page- 10

Homework Page- 8

Other (pictures)- 1

3. What do you find most helpful on the web page?

Homework page for 6 parents

School happenings for 5 parents, it provides a springboard for conversations

Photos for 1 parent

4. What is missing from the web page?

Links to homework related topics/sites (ex.. civil war sites)

Link to email

6. Do you have suggestions for improvement?

List serve to remind parents to look at the weekly newsletter which is especially important in the beginning of the year.

ANALYZING THE DATA

The results of the data bring together both my wonderings: Designing a web page that works for me, and what parents and students really want from a classroom web page. I needed to keep in

mind the "adopting a poodle" mentality, to be sensible to the demands I placed upon myself with designing and maintaining a classroom web page. However, this web page had to also meet the needs of the students and parents for it to be an effective tool of communication and useful to them. Based on my results I believe the web page accomplished this and was successful. Some students and parents would like me to add more to my web page as they are pushing for the adoption of the St. Bernard with adding student informational pages and links to homework related sites. However, for now I will continue to focus on meeting their needs within the guidelines of what I can maintain which is the newsletter, homework page and something for the students to build on their technology skills.

CLAIMS AND EVIDENCE

1. Teachers can design a classroom web page that works for them in an already time intensive school day.
 - I "adopted a poodle," in designing a web page with the basics of a weekly newsletter, daily homework page and an extra to entice the students to access it.
2. Teachers can meet the basic needs of what students and parents want in a classroom web page.
 - As reported in the survey results students and parents both found the weekly newsletter and homework page to be most helpful.
3. Students want more information and pictures of themselves on the web page.
 - Six students regularly look for new pictures of themselves and others reported that is what they like the most.
4. Parents want reminders to access the web page.

-At least half the parents asked for a list serve to be reminded to access the weekly newsletter especially in the beginning of the year.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Designing my classroom web page became a real highlight of my advancement in technology this year. I found many benefits of the web page that went beyond my basic goals and wonderings.

For one, since parents had access to our daily homework assignments it improved student responsibility in completion of homework. For the few students who frequently forgot their assignment books, the homework page assisted parents in the daily assignments and curtailed an otherwise stressful situation at home.

Next, the Mumm is the Word had far reaching implications that I did not anticipate. The regular participators became an enriched group with the many things they learned as they went above and beyond to answer the Mummys. I was impressed with the two students who never missed a week. They challenged me to keep them inspired and motivated to complete the Mummys.

Then, the postings of pictures on the web page highlights the phrase a picture is worth a thousand words. Posting pictures from many of our activities brought the parents into our classroom to see the many happenings throughout our school year.

Finally, in the future I plan to continue to develop my classroom web page. I will keep focused on the basics and continue to add some alluring sections like the Mumm to motivate the students to be involved in it. I also would like the students to post their own student articles and write the newsletters on a consistent basis. At this time I don't have any new wonderings. At the elementary level I believe the basics are important and they are what most students and parents want.

Web Site Links

Classroom Web Page:

<http://www.scasd.org/2497125129103338/site/default.asp>

Web Page Inquiry Project:

<http://www.scasd.org/2497125129103338/cwp/browse.asp?A=3&BMDRN=2000&BCOB=0&C=53081>

2004 State College Area School District Technology Survey:

<http://www.scasd.org/24971201030133828/FileLib/browse.asp?A=374&BMDRN=2000&BCOB=0&C=51998>