

Get Connected:
An Inquiry Into Technology as a Tool for
Communication

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Context

I would consider my classroom a “typical” fifth grade classroom. No one child is the same and they all have different interests, friends, and backgrounds. Our classroom is composed of a fairly even mix of thirteen boys and twelve girls. On the first day, we had twenty-four students and then received one more child five days into the school year. The students ranged in age from nine to eleven years old at the beginning of the school year in September. We also had seven students that were new to the school this year and seem to have made a smooth transition into our classroom. All have created friendships with students in our class as well as with fifth-graders from other classrooms.

Socially, the class has a wide range of personality types. We have four students that have been diagnosed with either ADD or ADHD and have been prescribed medication for use during the school day. We also have one student that has been diagnosed with Oppositional Defiance Disorder and is receiving individual anger management support from the school counselor. My mentor and I have also noticed the emergence of social cliques as the school year progresses, especially amongst the girl students. We have had localized instances of bullying, both verbal and cyber, that have been addressed and discussed with administration and the students’ families.

While our class is not necessarily racially diverse, we have students that come from many different family backgrounds and situations. Our class consists of twenty-three white children, one biracial child, and one child who is Arabic. There are several students that live with a single parent or have parents that are divorced. One student in our class is categorized as “homeless,” but does live with his grandparents. One student moved from Saudi Arabia in August and has received ESL for an hour and a half each day since the beginning of the school year.

During the majority of the school day, six students are out of the classroom. Aside from the student receiving ESL instruction, two receive math and reading learning support while three other students receive learning support services for math, reading, and writing instruction. All five of the children that receive learning support instruction have started to return to the classroom for whole group reading and small group guided reading instruction from my mentor or me. We also have three students that are out of the classroom weekly for learning enrichment in math. Other students leave the classroom on a monthly basis to receive learning enrichment for reading and science. Our classroom has a wide range of learners and personalities that all contribute to our classroom environment. As the year progresses, they continue to change as learners and our style of instruction must adapt to their changes.

Wonderings and Questions

Looking back at my own elementary school career, I often remember bringing home a newsletter to my parents and enjoyed showing them what I had been learning about and doing during the school day. As I got older, it wasn't as "cool" to keep my parents in the loop about school, but they still wanted to know about what I was doing for the seven hours that I wasn't with them every day. As the school year got under way in my classroom, I began to wonder what could be done to keep my students' parents informed about classroom happenings.

I started to think about what students were telling their families about their school day or if they were even telling them anything at all. Were parents actively involved in their child's school life and learning? How could they have access to our classroom without necessarily having to take time to stop by the school? My mentor teacher had sent home a monthly newsletter through e-mail at the beginning of the year, but had received no

feedback of any kind from parents. After a few months of sending updates with no reply, he eventually stopped sending a monthly newsletter all together. We had a bare bones classroom website, but there was very little available for parents to check out regarding our day-to-day school life.

I started to look more into how communication with parents and families is addressed and found a wealth of information. Every researcher, teacher, and parent has his or her own perspective about what effective communication between school and home is and how it should be handled (Epstein, 709). However, one thing remains constant amongst all sources: an open flow of communication is significantly better than no communication at all (Shirvani, 35). Opening these lines of communication has been important to me since day one of my experience in fifth-grade and I hope that, through data collection and observations, I can find the best forum for my students and their families.

Main Wondering

- How can technology support communication between teachers, families, and students?

Sub-Questions

- How can I include children receiving learning support in the blogging/technology process?
- What are the different roles that students can play when contributing to a classroom blog?
- What are things that parents are interested in and want to hear more about?
- Will this change in communication increase parents' willingness to become involved in our classroom?
- How can I make the communication appropriate for unique family situations?

Data Collection

In order to explore the technology use of my students and assess the effectiveness of different communication tools, I collected several pieces of data. Collection of data occurred before, during, and after the implementation of the communication tools.

Before Implementation

Before I began collecting data, I gathered baseline information on the computer usage of my students and their parents. I had the students complete a survey in class using a Google Application. Each of the questions was multiple choice. I began by asking students about the accessibility of a computer in their home. The questions progressed to ask about the students' Internet usage and if they had interest in contributing to a classroom blog (Appendix C). The main purpose of this survey was to gain a better perspective of how often my students used computers outside of the classroom. The results helped me to select tools I thought could be influential in communication between school and home.

Additionally, I wanted to gain the perspective of my students' parents. I sent an e-mail explaining my proposed plan and a link to a survey that I had generated through SurveyMonkey. In this multiple-choice survey, I polled parents to gauge their interest in receiving the Family Message Journal through email and inquired about their thoughts about a classroom blog. At the end of the survey, I included a portion where parents were able to leave additional questions or comments they had regarding the different resources (Appendix D). I compiled the responses to this survey (Appendix E), which led me to several "musts," which I carefully considered as I constructed the format of the different computer-based tools.

Finally, I evaluated the rate of return of students' Family Message Journals, which I had collected since the beginning of the school year. Students had been keeping a handwritten journal, which they would bring home on Fridays. Their families responded to

their entries and students would return the journals each Monday. Each week, I would mark whether students returned a completed journal. Before implementing a new strategy, I counted how many times each student had returned his or her hand-written journal. I recorded each return so that I could evaluate which students returned their journals frequently and who rarely or never returned a journal (Appendix F).

During Implementation

The next phase of data collection occurred as I was in the process of implementing various Internet based resources as a tool of communication between the triad of student, teacher, and parent. I wanted to evaluate whether using these tools would affect the amount or type of communication that was happening between parents and students.

The first strategy I implemented was sending weekly Family Message Journals through email. After I had analyzed the “before” data from the student survey, parent survey, and Family Message Journal return rates, I introduced students to an e-mail based journal. Each student sent a message to their family member(s) and sent me a carbon copy so that I was able to read the content of each journal. I then sent an e-mail to parents explaining that in order to collect data, I would need them to “reply all” to their child’s journal. Through this system of data collection, I was able to keep track of the number of times parents responded to their student’s electronic journal. I created a spreadsheet (See Figure 1 and Appendix G), which allowed me to organize the weekly return rate from parents (R). I was also able to mark whether a student had chosen to hand-write their journal (W) or if a student was absent when the journals were written. Each week, if I did not receive a response (NR) from a student’s parent, I would ask that child to check their e-mail in front of me. If that student’s parents had responded but had not sent me a carbon copy, I would be able to mark that there had been a response.

	2-Mar	19-Mar	23-Mar	29-Mar
Student 1	Absent	R		
Student 2	(W) - NR	R	R	
Student 3	R	R	R	R

Figure 1. E-mail Journal Return Data

The second resource that I explored was a student-contributed classroom blog. I explained that we would be using the blog to tell their families about the happenings of our classroom. After basic instructions, students worked as a whole group to create a classroom web space on tumblr.com. They decided on a name, a background theme, and the format of the blog space. After heated discussions and many votes, the 211 Gazette was born. Once the space was set up, I installed a view counter through StatCounter. Though this counter could not help me determine who was reading the blog, it gave me the capability of recording the number of total blog views. StatCounter also ran weekly reports, detailing how many times people were logging on to the blog.

After Implementation

After establishing the classroom blog and collecting data on the rate of return of Family Message Journals, I wanted to gather further information on their effectiveness. I conducted two additional surveys, one completed by students and the other by their parents. In the Google Applications survey to students (Appendix H), I wanted to learn more about their feelings about electronic journal entries and our classroom blog space. The questions that I asked included, "Do you prefer writing your Family Message Journal by hand or on the computer?" and "Do you like contributing to The 211 Gazette?" I wanted to get a sense of students' thoughts and feelings about the newly implemented tools. I was able to record their multiple-choice and free response answers and gain the perspective of students.

The survey that I sent through SurveyMonkey to parents (Appendix I) explored their thoughts on our classroom's Internet tools. I asked, "How many times have you checked The 211 Gazette (classroom blog)?" and "Do you prefer receiving your child's Family Message Journal through e-mail or in their journal?" to get a better understanding of parent opinions. I also created a portion where parents could voice their comments and concerns about the implemented strategies. I compiled their responses (Appendix J) and evaluated for changes between opinions from the preliminary survey.

Data Analysis

Throughout my inquiry, I carefully collected and interpreted data that I felt would help me to gain insight into my main wondering and sub-questions. I hoped that this data would lead me to some conclusive claims.

Pre-Implementation Student Survey Analysis

The survey that I administered to students in order to gauge their interest (Appendix C) was incredibly informative. Completed forms were automatically compiled into a spreadsheet, which I was then able to evaluate for common answers. The first portion of the survey asked students about their computer usage outside of school. When looking through the results, I found that all of my students had access to a computer at home; something that I had assumed would not be true. I also asked students how often they used the computer outside of school, finding that most fell between thirty minutes and an hour of computer time each day.

The next question was to gauge student feelings about handwriting versus typing. The survey asked students if they would rather type or handwrite if given the choice on an assignment. The vast majority of students responded that they would prefer to type, but those who prefer to write were of interest to me. I noticed many of the children who chose

writing as a preference typed furiously on a computer while their handwriting progressed at a slower rate. However, their responses sparked a new sub-question from my wondering. How can I adapt these resources to incorporate students that might not enjoy or be fluent at typing?

The final portion of the student survey evaluated how students utilize the computer during their free time and their interest in a classroom blog. The responses of student gave me insight into how students use their computer time and what they are already familiar with. Many students said that they would not like to update our classroom blog, which also surprised me. I was sure that students would be excited to contribute to a classroom web space. However, I had not yet explained the concept to students, so I wondered if once they had a better understanding, their opinions would change.

Pre-Implementation Parent Survey Analysis

The survey that I sent to parents (Appendix D) was based much more heavily around the idea of using these tools in our classroom. It was my goal to get a sense of what parents wanted and how my general plan could be adapted to meet their needs. I wanted to make sure that the tools could satisfy the needs of our classroom as well as the requirements of the families, so that they would be successful. Though I did not get a response from every child's family (20 out of 25 families responded), I felt that the sampling was large enough to draw reasonable conclusions.

I first asked parents about their thoughts on an electronic version of the Family Message Journal. Eighty percent of parents said that they would be interested in receiving the journal through e-mail. Eighty-five percent said that they would be just as likely or more likely to respond to the journal if it was sent electronically. This data gave me the confidence that a majority of parents were open to the idea of receiving the journal entry through e-mail. However, I had to account for those parents who were not receptive to this

format. I had never intended to make the e-mail journals a requirement for the students, but rather an option that would be available to them. The parent responses made that choice even more important. If a parent wanted their child to write their journal by hand, I was not going to put the student in an uncomfortable spot. I e-mailed parents explaining that students could hand write or type their journal entry, but it was that child's choice. If a parent wanted their child to write the weekly note, they should address that with their child.

The second portion of the parent survey focused on their interest in a classroom blog space. I wanted to know their level interest, what they would like to see on a blog, and how they would like their child to contribute. These questions were more open-ended than the previous multiple-choice questions and gave a better sense of how parents wanted the blog to be used. Eighteen out of twenty parents were interested in seeing their child work as a writer or blogger and a photographer. The majority of parents wanted to see student work samples, book reviews, and most importantly, coverage of special events happening in our classroom. Though I knew that these three things would not be all that was covered in our blog, parent feedback helped guide my thinking as I started to plan what the blog might look like.

While most of the parents were very positive about the idea of e-mailed journals and a classroom web space, a select few had additional questions and concerns. I had previously addressed one of the most prevalent concerns in an introductory e-mail, but parents reinforced their thinking in the final questions or comments section of the survey. Their main concern dealt with their child's privacy and security. They wanted to be sure that pictures of their child would be password protected and inaccessible from the general public. I had thought seriously about these concerns and enlisted the help of the district's technology director, Helen Quinn, to help with the logistics of privacy. Consulting with

Helen allowed me to address parent questions and assure them that their child would be safe.

Family Message Journal Return Analysis

As I introduced students to the idea of electronic Family Message Journals, I explained that their parent's return to the journal would still count as a homework grade. I went through each step with the students and showed them how the journal e-mail should be sent using "reply all." The final week of hand written journals, our class had eight responses from parents. The first week of electronic journals, there were thirteen journal replies, twelve of those being through e-mail. While it wasn't the huge jump in returns that I had hoped for, I knew that I could not base the possibilities on the first week alone. As the weeks progressed, so did the rate of journal return. The average journal return rate was 16.25, a substantial jump from the average return of 13 for hand written journals. While that only is only three more journals returned, I thought about it as three more parents that were interacting with their child about what was happening at school.

Blog Data Analysis

It was quite difficult to find a way to gather data about the effectiveness of the classroom blog as a tool for communication. After preliminary attempts with several different options, I decided to use a view counter as part of the data collection for the blog. The view counter appeared at the bottom of the blog and showed how many people visited the blog each week. I would also receive a weekly report from StatCounter, the provider I had chosen, which included information about who was viewing the blog. While I couldn't see the names or e-mail addresses of viewers, the report did tell me if it was a user's first time on the blog or if they were a return visitor (See Figure 2). I was especially interested in the first-time visitors portion of the report, as I knew that all of the students had already seen the blog, so it must have been some one else with access.

Weekly Stats Report: 26 Mar - 1 Apr 2012
Project: PFE Reitz
URL: <http://pfereitz.tumblr.com/>

Summary

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total	Avg
Pageloads	3	3	20	0	8	0	0	34	5
Unique Visits	1	1	2	0	4	0	0	8	1
First Time Visits	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	5	1
Returning Visits	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	3	0

Figure 2: Blog View Report

While the report was very helpful in evaluating the blog views, it was frustrating that I was not able to see which parents had logged on. Much of my information came from discussions with students when I overheard them saying that they had shown their parent something on the blog. There was no way to see if the parents who had not been interested might have logged on once the space was established.

Post-Implementation Student Survey

After the electronic Family Message Journals and classroom blog had been in place for several weeks, I administered another survey, which gave me insight into students' thoughts about the new tools. I found that students who had shown a preference toward hand writing in the first survey stated that they now preferred to send their Family Message Journals through e-mail. There were only two students who responded that their preference was to write in their journal, a difference from the five that stated their preference of handwriting before the tools were introduced.

The survey also asked students a series of opinion questions. Did they think that their parents responded more or less to journals that were e-mailed? Do they know if their parents have ever checked the classroom blog? I was interested to see whether their thoughts aligned with the data I had collected. I found that when comparing the student and parent survey as well as evaluating the journal return data, students often underestimated

their parents. Students often thought that their parents responded with the same amount of frequency to their Family Message Journals while in fact, their parents were responding more. Students also thought that their parents had checked the blog less frequently than what I collected from parent surveys (Appendix H).

Post-Implementation Parent Survey

I also wanted to see if parent attitudes towards the different communication tools had changed as a result of the implementation. I wondered if some parents might have shifted their thinking and come to enjoy the Internet tools. On the other hand, I thought that some parents might have realized that they did not like this use of Internet in the classroom. I sent out the survey to parents via SurveyMonkey (Appendix I) and consolidated the feedback into a spreadsheet in order to analyze the responses (Appendix J). I found that the majority of parents now preferred receiving their child's Family Message Journal through e-mail, but some missed the "personality" of a hand written note.

I also looked closely at the number of times each parent said that they had visited our classroom blog. There were not as many as I might have expected and in the area for comments and questions, some parents said that they were confused as to how to access the blog. Though this was discouraging at first, I took their comments and sent an additional e-mail making sure that I explicitly explained how to access the blog. Almost immediately, the number of blog views increased and I received positive feedback from parents. The survey to parents was one of the most valuable tools when it came to analyzing the effectiveness of the resources. If I had never realized that parents were confused about access, they might not have had the chance to see what all of my students had been working so hard on.

Explanation of Findings

After collecting and analyzing the various forms of data from my students, parents, and Internet tools, I made notice of important patterns, which could lend themselves to specific claims.

Claim #1: Parent participation in their child's school life can be affected through the use of technology.

When students would write their weekly Family Message Journal to a member of their family by hand, the audience of that entry was limited. The person that it was addressed to was the only one that responded. With the implementation of electronic Family Message Journals, a child could write to anyone and everyone that they so chose. It was interesting to see the number of replies received from parents who were divorced, siblings, or even grandparents. There was no limit on who could be involved in that child's school life. The decreased limitations allowed the journals to evolve into a source of communication in which everyone could play a role.

The 211 Gazette also provided a space for multiple family members to check-in on what was happening when their student was at school. Different than a newsletter, which may not even make it to the hands of a parent, anyone with the password to the website could stay updated. They were able to read posts, view pictures, and make comments, which would not have been a possibility in the past.

Whether the change that was brought on by the implementation of the two electronic tools is positive or negative is still to be seen. The effect could differ from parent to parent and child to child. However, through casual conversations with many parents, I am confident that there will be many more positive impacts than there are negative.

Claim #2: There is no certainty that every parent will seek involvement in his or her child's academic life.

One of the biggest obstacles that I faced throughout this inquiry process was the lack of response from specific parents. I began to notice a trend as I analyzed who replied to the surveys and sent back a response to the Family Message Journal. There were certain parents who simply weren't involved. These parents never replied to a Family Message Journal. They have never sent an e-mail to the teacher. They did not seek involvement from the beginning and their level of involvement did not change after new strategies were introduced. Though they had been given new opportunities to become involved throughout the school year, they were not present. Does that mean that these parents are not present in their respective child's home life? Not necessarily. There are many factors that keep parents away from their child's school life (Seitsinger, 486). As a teacher, it was my responsibility to keep the children accountable for themselves and hope that their parents would respond.

Reflections and Implications for Future Practice

When I began this inquiry, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. Of course, I wanted the Internet tools I planned on implementing to be a wild success. I went into this experience thinking that my project would go according to plan and that things would be smooth sailing. While I did follow a basic outline of my original path, my inquiry led me to even more questions that can't necessarily be answered immediately.

As soon as I introduced the different tools to my students, they were as receptive as I had hoped. They were all excited about exploring the new resources and I was excited to explore with them. While the students were eager to get started, I did run across some hesitation from their parents. I think that the biggest problem was uncertainty on their part. I tried to be as clear and forthright as possible with all families before, during, and after the class began using the tools so that they would be used as they were intended, as a tool of

communication. Once parents got used to replying to the journals through e-mail and checking the blog, there were far fewer questions and a much larger participation rate.

Through this experience, I have learned that it is certainly not possible to connect with all students' families solely through the use of technology. However, I still wonder what I can do to make those connections from the very beginning of the year. If parents are accustomed to these tools of communication the whole year through, would they be more willing to use them? How can these be adapted to be effective across grade levels and with different parents? As I move into the future and take these wonderings with me, I want to take these experiences and expand upon them. They will guide me in the ways that I communicate with parents and help me to establish connections that can help to shape each child's academic career.

Appendices

Appendix A: Inquiry Brief

Context

As I went to visit my classroom for the first time at the end of my junior year, I was more than excited. I had just been assigned to a first and second multi-age classroom at Park Forest Elementary with a mentor that had been teaching at the primary level for over ten years. I met all of the students and couldn't wait to see them again the next year when they would be "mine." Fast-forward a month and I get a call from my mentor saying that it had been decided that he (and I) would be moving upstairs to teach fifth-grade for the following year. So began the journey of the two of us trying to figure out how to teach a group of ten and eleven year olds.

On the first day of school, we both nervously waited for twenty-five students to come rambling through the doors. Neither of us knew where to start or what the first day, week, or month would hold. The more time I spent with my students, the more I realized that fifth-graders were just first and second graders disguised in taller bodies. They still need the support and guidance that they needed when they were primary students, but they didn't seem to seek our help as younger children might. I wondered what we could do to make sure that they were getting as much as they could from fifth-grade.

I would consider my classroom a "typical" fifth grade classroom. No one child is the same and they all have different interests, friends, and backgrounds. Our classroom is composed of a fairly even mix of thirteen boys and twelve girls. On the first day, we had twenty-four students and then received on more child five days into the school year. The students ranged in age from nine years and ten months to eleven years and one month old at the beginning of the school year in September. We also had five students that were new to the school this year and seem to have made a smooth transition into our classroom. All

have created friendships with students in our class as well as with fifth-graders from other classrooms.

Socially, the class has a wide range of personality types. We have four students that have been diagnosed with either ADD or ADHD and have been prescribed medication for use during the school day. We also have one student that has been diagnosed with Oppositional Defiance Disorder and is receiving individual anger management instruction from the school counselor. My mentor and I have also noticed the emergence of social cliques as the school year progresses, especially amongst the girl students. We have had localized instances of bullying, both verbal and cyber, that have been addressed and discussed with administration and the students' families.

While our class is not necessarily racially diverse, we have students that come from many different family backgrounds and situations. We have twenty-three white children, one who is biracial, and one who is Arabic. There are several students that live with a single parent or have parents that are divorced. There is one student in our class that is categorized as "homeless," but does live with his grandparents. We also have one student that moved from Saudi Arabia in August and has received ESL for an hour and a half each day since the beginning of the school year.

During the majority of the school day, six students are out of the classroom. Aside from the student receiving ESL instruction, two receive math and reading learning support while three other students receive learning support services for math, reading, and writing instruction. All five of the children that receive learning support instruction have started to return to the classroom for whole group reading and small group guided reading instruction from my mentor or me. We also have three students that are out of the classroom weekly for learning enrichment in math. Other students leave the classroom on a monthly basis to receive learning enrichment for reading and science. Our classroom has a

wide range of learners and personalities that all contribute to our classroom environment. As the year progresses, they continue to change as learners and our style of instruction must adapt to their changes.

Rationale

Looking back at my own elementary school career, I often remember bringing home a newsletter to my parents and enjoyed showing them what I had been learning about and doing during the school day. As I got older, it wasn't as "cool" to keep my parents in the loop about school, but they still wanted to know about what I was doing for the seven hours that I wasn't with them every day. As the school year got under way in my classroom, I began to wonder what could be done to keep my students parents in the know.

I started to think about what students were telling their families about their school day or if they were even telling them anything at all. Were parents actively involved in their child's school life and learning? How could they have access to our classroom without necessarily having to take time to stop by the school? There weren't regular emails that were sent home or a newsletter that parents could look over. We had a bare bones classroom website, but there was very little available for parents to check out.

I started to look more into how communication with parents and families is addressed and found a wealth of information. Every researcher, teacher, and parent has his or her own perspective about what effective communication between school and home is and how it should be handled. However, one thing remains constant amongst all sources, an open flow of communication is significantly better than no communication at all. Opening these lines of communication has been important to me since day one of my experience in fifth-grade, and I hope that through data collection and observations, I can find the best forum for my students and their families.

Main Wondering

How can technology support communication between teachers, families, and students?

Sub-Questions

- How can I include children receiving learning support in the blogging/technology process?
- What are the different roles that students can play when contributing to a classroom blog?
- What are things that parents are interested in and want to hear more about?
- Will this change in communication increase parents' willingness to become involved in our classroom?
- How can I make the communication appropriate for unique family situations?

Timeline

Week of February 6 – 10

- Begin collecting baseline data on student computer usage through survey
- Begin collecting baseline data on parent computer usage through survey
- Read sources for annotated bibliography
- Write initial inquiry brief
- Write initial annotated bibliography

Week of February 13 – 17

- Analyze student and parent computer usage survey baseline data
- Introduce idea of classroom blog to students
- Introduce idea of emailing Family Message Journal to students
- Students send Family Message Journals to families through email

Week of February 19 – 24

- Begin collecting data on Family Message Journal return percentage
- Meet with Helen Quinn to discuss options for a safe classroom web space
- Introduce classroom web space to students
- Contact families about set up of classroom web space
- Revise inquiry brief and annotated bibliography

Week of February 27 – March 2

- Continue collecting data on Family Message Journal return percentage
- Final inquiry brief and annotated bibliography due
- Students begin work on classroom web space
- Begin collection of student homework return rates

Week of March 5 – 9

- Spring Break

Week of March 12 – 16

- Continue collecting data on Family Message Journal return percentage

- Continue collecting homework return data

Week of March 19 – 23

- Continue collecting data on Family Message Journal return percentage
- Continue collecting homework return data

Week of March 26 – 30

- Conduct student survey on satisfaction of classroom web space and Family Message Journal format
- Conduct parent survey on satisfaction of classroom web space and Family Message Journal format
- Continue collecting data on Family Message Journal return percentage
- Continue collecting homework return data

Week of April 2 – 6

- Analyze data and finish inquiry paper draft

Data Collection

Surveys

- Students will complete a survey to evaluate their computer usage habits. It will ask them if they have Internet access at home and how often they use the Internet out of school
- A survey will be sent to parents to evaluate their thoughts about communication in our classroom. They will also be asked how often they would check a classroom web space and what they would like to see included on the space.

Interviews

- I plan to interview students as a whole-group and individually about what they would like to see on a classroom web space and if they would be interested on using email to send their Family Message Journals.
- I plan to interview other teachers in the school to see what they do in terms of communication between classroom and home.

Artifacts

- I will analyze Family Message Journal response rates before and after email format for rate of return
- I will analyze homework response rates before and after establishing a classroom web space
- I will evaluate the classroom web space for student submissions and contributions to the space.

Observation

- I will evaluate each child's Family Message Journal for length, quality of writing, and thoroughness of responses for an increase in information.

Appendix B: Annotated Bibliography

Comer, J.P., Haynes, N. M. (1991). Parent involvement in schools: An ecological approach. *The Elementary School Journal*, 91(3), 271-277.

When reading through this article, I noticed a couple of things, the main revelation being that no matter how old research may be, it can still be relevant. The researchers started their study in the late 1960's and it continued until the late 1970's. The article was written in 1991. Yet, there was nothing that had dated itself. I feel that the importance of building a strong connection between families and schools is just as relevant today as it was twenty-plus years ago. One critical part of this relationship that the researchers discuss is that it is not just the connection between the teacher and the parents that matter. Parents need to know that the school community, including administrators and other school staff, accepts them. They also look at the ways that different parents want to be involved in their child's school life. Some parents only are interested in what their child is doing as an individual during the school day. Others are concerned about what is going on with the whole class and seek opportunities to involve themselves inside the classroom. The final type of parent involvement that the researchers identified were those parents that were focused on what has happening at the whole school level. While whole school involvement is not of particular relevance to my inquiry, it does help me to understand that some parents might use their involvement in our classroom to become more involved with school wide events and organization. Of course, I cannot expect that any of my student's families will become involved at all, but this article showed where and how some might be able to become involved.

Fan, X., Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(1).

This article looks at the effects of parent involvement in students and questions whether more involvement necessarily has a positive impact on student learning. They address society's idea that parent involvement is always a good thing in a child's school career and how this isn't necessarily true. I guess that I have always carried that same notion, when parents are involved the effect is of a positive nature. After reading this article, I realize that some types of parent involvement are not needed and in fact can have negative effects. Parents that might be overly concerned with their child's schoolwork can have the same negative impact as parents that are not involved. This article gave me new perspective on the two sides of parent involvement and how both can have either positive or negative effects.

Hornby, Lafaele, G. ., R. (2011). Barriers to parental involvement in education: An explanatory model . *Educational Review*, 63(1), 37-52.

In this explanatory model of parent involvement, the researchers looked at the gaps between literature about parent involvement and how it is practiced in schools. The researchers refer to these gaps as barriers to parental involvement. These barriers include individual parent/family factors, child factors, parent-teacher factors, and societal factors. This article was helpful because it not only talked about the different factors, but also explored subcategories of those factors. For instance, the researchers explain that some parents hesitate to become involved because they feel that it is the school's responsibility to be the sole educator of their child. However, they also explain that another barrier is

parent's perception of a teacher's invitation to become involved. If families do not feel welcomed by the teacher, they are less likely to play a role in their child's school life. This article also explored the fact that a child's craving for parental involvement generally decreases as the student gets older. They address the fact that younger students are more positive about their parents being involved in their school life. As children age, they desire less involvement in the classroom and more support in other ways, such as through homework help. I hope that this article can provide some solid evidence for the things I have been observing and inferring with my own students in regards to their parents' involvement in their school lives.

Jordan, C., Orozco, E., Averett, A. National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools. (2001). *Emerging issues in school, family, and community connections: Annual synthesis*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

This journal takes a look at four different components of the connections between school, home, and community, some of which I had not ever considered. The researchers clarified the concept of connections between families and communities with schools. They then looked at measuring the outcomes of family and community connections with schools. The final two sections evaluated how connections between families, communities, and schools could be further researched. I was most interested in Issue 2, measuring the outcomes of connections, because I felt that it most closely related to my main wonderings. This section looked at the fact that not all of the connections established by families are necessarily direct or very clear. They looked at things that indicate a connection between family and school, which can help me as I start to collect and evaluate more of my data. The outcomes were listed for students, schools, and families & communities. I am most interested in looking at the outcomes for students and I think that the indicators that these researchers have identified will be quite valuable. They include academic achievement, increased achievement in other areas of school life (attendance, educational aspirations, etc.), social behaviors, and creating a network for support. Another important indicator are the resources that are available to families and how they use them to support their child. I look forward to looking for these indicators and identifying other class specific indicators that will help guide my inquiry for my students.

Mo, Y., & Singh, K. (2008). Parents' relationships and involvement: effects on students' school engagement and performance. *Research in Middle Level Education Online*, 31(10), Retrieved from <http://amle.org>

This article focuses on the involvement of parents in their children's school life during the middle school years. The researchers conducted a study which asked students how involve they felt that their parents were when it came to talking about school. They asked questions such as, "Which of the following have you done with your MOTHER: (a) talked about your schoolwork or grades, (b) worked on a project for school, and (c) talked about other things you're doing in school." This set of questions continued to ask about the involvement of the student's father in their school life and the goals and aspirations that they think their parents have for their education. I was interested to see how these researchers posed their questions and found that though they didn't jump right to asking if students thought their parents were involved, the questions were clear enough to elicit informative responses. Even though this article focused on students at the middle school

level, I felt that much of the information and many of the questions could be applied when collecting data within my fifth grade classroom.

Pomerantz, Moorman, Litwack, E. M., E. A., S. D. (2007). The how, whom, and why of parents' involvement in children's academic lives: More is not always better. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(3), 373-410.

This article looks at how and why parents become involved in their child's academic life. First, like many other researchers, these authors look at the different ways that parents are involved with their student's learning. Next, they evaluate how parent involvement affects different students. Some children are more responsive to their parents being involved, while others find it annoying or disruptive. Finally, the researchers look at the possible benefits and/or drawbacks of parent involvement. They explore why some parents feel a great need to stay connected to the child's classroom while others show little or no interest. This article helps me as I research multiple reasons and effects of parent involvement at the upper intermediate level by addressing students at every grade level.

Seitsinger, A.M., Felner, R.D., Brand, S., Burns, A. (2007). A large scale examination of the nature and efficacy of teachers' practices to engage parents: assessment, parental contact, and student-level impact. *Journal of School Psychology*, 46(4), 477-505.

This article piqued my interest because the main focus of the research was not how much parents were involved or how involved students thought that their parents were in their school lives. Rather, it focused on effective teacher and school practices that lead to higher levels of *desirable* parent involvement. They identified strategies that teachers typically use to include parents in the classroom environment, including information on student performance and providing necessary information for health and classroom community purposes. They also looked at the correlation between the rate of teacher initiated parent engagement and the percentage of parents who regularly attend scheduled conferences. Reading through this article made me question what effect opening the line of communication between school and home could have in my own classroom. Will parents be more comfortable and engaged when conferencing does happen if they feel a stronger connection with their child's classroom community?

Shirvani, H. (2007). Effects of teacher communication on parents' attitudes and their children's behaviors at schools. *Education*, 128(1), 34-37.

This article takes an interesting look at how teacher communication affects student and parent's attitudes towards math. While this article is not directly related to my inquiry because of the age range that the researchers focus on (high school freshmen), the results that they evaluate are similar to what I will be looking for with my fifth graders. Changes in student conduct and behavior and also student engagement are evaluated before and after changes in teacher communication. The writers of this article did not look at how teachers communicated with parents, but rather how often they communicated with parents. The researchers found increases in student completion of homework and also a higher rate of accurate responses when compared to that of the control group. I hope to see increases in homework completion (specifically Family Message Journals) and this research reaffirmed that with increased parent communication, it was not only possible but also attainable to reach a goal of completed and correct homework from every student.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Communications and Outreach. (2010). *Parent power: Build the bridge to success*. Washington, D.C.: Education Publications Center.

This document was released by the United States Department of Education and aimed at parents of children from pre-school to twelfth-grade. Each section addresses the needs of students across the grade levels. I focused my attention on the middle school section, as I feel that the suggestions were more applicable to my students. The document lays out what parents should be talking to their child about, especially concerning times of transition. Whether these transitions are educational, social, or physical, the article lists ways that parents should continue their involvement. While this article is helpful to my research, I feel that many of the parents in my classroom are already doing these things. The parents that are not already having these conversations will probably not take the time to seek this kind of information. However, I wonder how it might be used as a resource from the teacher to parents. Would parents be receptive of this parenting “advice”?

Xu, M. (2008). *The relationship between parental involvement, self-regulated learning, and reading achievement of fifth graders: A path analysis using the ecls-k database*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Akron).

This article was of special interest to me because it focused on the different types of parent involvement at the fifth-grade level. The researchers evaluated the self-regulated learning and reading achievement of fifth-graders. They then investigated different types of parent involvement and their effect on students’ self-regulated learning. The types of parental involvement that these researchers studied were interesting to me because I had not thought of some of them as “typical” parental involvement. They included traditional school involvement and parent education expectations, but also looked at parents’ TV rules, help with homework, and homework frequency. Because I am interested in looking at homework return frequency, this article helped me to understand what I might look for as I analyze my data.

Appendix C: Student Computer Survey

Timestamp	Name	Do you have access to a computer at home?	How often do you use the Internet when you are not in school?	If you do use the Internet outside of school, how long do you usually stay on at one time?	If you were given an assignment and you got to choose between writing it by hand or typing it on the computer, which would you choose?	When you go on the Internet (at home and at school), what do you usually do? Check all that apply.	If we were to have a classroom website or blog, do you think you would want to help update it?
2/10/2012 10:34:57	Ryan	Yes	More than once per day	Usually between 1 and 2 hours	Typing on the computer	Check email, Play games, Chat with friends, Use search engines	Yes
2/10/2012 10:35:00	Olivia Zoda	Yes	Once per week	Usually more than 2 hours	Typing on the computer	Check email, Chat with friends, Use social networking sites	Yes
2/10/2012 10:35:05	Ian	Yes	More than once per day	Usually between 1 and 2 hours	Typing on the computer	Use search engines, walkthroughs	Yes
2/10/2012 10:35:08	Bella	Yes	Once per week	Usually between 30 minutes and an hour	Typing on the computer	Check email, Play games, Chat with friends	Yes
2/10/2012 10:35:09	Dylan	Yes	More than once per day	Usually between 1 and 2 hours	Typing on the computer	Check email, Play games, Chat with friends, Use search engines	Yes
2/10/2012 10:35:10	jameson	Yes	Once per day	Usually between 30 minutes and an hour	Typing on the computer	Check email, Play games	No
2/10/2012 10:35:10	Tyler	Yes	Once per day	Usually between 30 minutes and an hour	Writing by hand	Play games, Check email, Play games, Chat with friends, Use search engines, Youtube maybe	No
2/10/2012 10:35:10	Maia Egan	Yes	More than once per day	Usually between 1 and 2 hours	Typing on the computer	and school projects	Yes

2/10/2012 10:35:10	Katie	Yes	More than once per day	Usually between 30 minutes and an hour	Typing on the computer	Check email, Play games, Use search engines	Yes
2/10/2012 10:35:26	Skylar Kutruff	Yes	Once per day	Usually between 30 minutes and an hour	Typing on the computer	Check email, Play games, Chat with friends, Use social networking sites	No
2/10/2012 10:35:53	Stephen Babich	Yes	Once per day	Usually between 1 and 2 hours	Typing on the computer	Check email, Play games, youtube	Yes
2/10/2012 10:36:01	herbert	Yes	Never		Typing on the computer	Check email, Chat with friends	No
2/10/2012 10:36:09	Paige	Yes	Once per month	Usually between 30 minutes and an hour	Writing by hand	Check email, Play games, Use search engines	No
2/10/2012 10:36:09	Kayla	Yes	Once per day	Usually between 30 minutes and an hour	Typing on the computer	Check email, Chat with friends, Use search engines	Yes
2/10/2012 10:36:09	Zachary J. Paulsen	Yes	Once per week	Usually less than 30 minutes	Typing on the computer	Check email, Play games, Use search engines	Yes
2/10/2012 10:36:10	Quinn williams	Yes	Once per day	Usually between 30 minutes and an hour	Typing on the computer	Play games	No
2/10/2012 10:36:18	Megan	Yes	Once per week	Usually between 30 minutes and an hour	Typing on the computer	Check email, Play games, school projects	No
2/10/2012 10:36:21	Julia	Yes	Once per week	Usually between 30 minutes and an hour	Typing on the computer	Check email, Play games, Use search engines	Yes
2/10/2012 10:36:32	Andrew	Yes	Once per day	Usually less than 30 minutes	Typing on the computer	Check email, Play games	Yes
2/10/2012 10:36:40	Ellie	Yes	Once per week	Usually less than 30 minutes	Writing by hand	Check email, Play games, Chat with friends, youtube	Yes
2/10/2012 10:37:12	Laura Theresa Halpin	Yes	More than once per day	Usually between 1 and 2 hours	Writing by hand	Check email, Play games, Chat with friends, Use search engines	Yes
2/10/2012 10:37:23	Abby	Yes	Once per day	Usually less than 30 minutes	Typing on the computer	Play games	Yes

2/10/2012 10:37:29	Jadyn Rex Maske	No	Once per week	Usually less than 30 minutes	Writing by hand	Play games Check email, Play games, Chat with friends, Use social networking sites , Use search engines	No
2/10/2012 10:37:47	wafi bakhshwain	Yes	Once per day	Usually between 30 minutes and an hour Usually between 30 minutes and an hour			Yes
2/10/2012 10:39:14	nicholas	Yes	More than once per day		Typing on the computer	Play games	Yes

Appendix D: Parent Computer Survey

1. Child's name

2. Would you be interested in receiving the Family Message Journal in an email?

- a) Yes
- b) No

3. Would you be more likely, less likely, or just as likely to respond to your child's Family Message Journal if it was sent through email?

- a) More likely
- b) Less likely
- c) Just as likely

4. How often do you refer to our classroom's website for nightly homework assignments?

- a) Often
- b) Sometimes
- c) Never

5. If our students were to contribute to a password protected classroom blog, how often do you think you would read the blog?

-
- a) Often
- b) Sometimes
- c) Never

6. If a classroom blog was established, what type of information would you be most interested in reading about?

-
- a) Homework assignments
- b) Student work samples
- c) Special events
- d) Spelling words
- e) Book reviews

f) Other (please specify)

7. I would be willing for my child to participate in the following roles:

- a) Blogger/writer
- b) Photographer
- c) Contribute student work samples
- d) Other (please specify)

8. Please list any questions or concerns you might have below.

Appendix E: Parent Survey Results

Name	FMJ - Y/N	Response	Homework	Read Blog?
Abby				
Andrew				
Bella	Yes	More likely	Never	Often
Dylan	Yes	Just as likely	Sometimes	Often
Ellie	Yes	More likely	Never	Often
Herbert				
Ian	No	Less likely	Never	Often
Jadyn				
Jameson				
Julia	No	Less likely	Never	Never
Katie	No	Less likely	Sometimes	Often
Kayla	Yes	Just as likely	Never	Often
Laura	Yes	More likely	Never	Often
Maia	Yes	Just as likely	Sometimes	Often
Megan	Yes	Just as likely	Never	Sometimes
Nick				
Olivia	Yes	More likely	Sometimes	Often
Paige	Yes	More likely	Sometimes	Often
Ryan	Yes	Just as likely	Never	Often
Quinn	Yes	Just as likely	Never	Often

Skylar	No	Just as likely	Never	Often
Stephen	Yes	More likely	Never	Often
Tyler	Yes	Just as likely	Never	Often
Wafi				
Zach	Yes	More likely	Never	Often

Appendix F: Hand Written Family Message Journal Return Data

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12
Abby												
Andrew		R	R	R			R			R		
Bella	R			R	R	R	R		R			
Bryan	R	R	R		R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Ellie	R	R		R		R				R		
Herbert												
Jan	R	R	R	R	R	R	R		R			
Jadyn				R								
Jameson				R								
Julia	R		R	R	R	R	R	R		R	R	R
Katie	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R		R	R
Kayla	R			R	R	R	R	R	R		R	R
Kyara		R	R	R					R			
Maia		R		R	R	R	R		R	R		R
Megan	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Nick	R	R										
Olivia	Absent	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R		
Paige	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R		R		R
Ryan	R	R	R	R					R		R	
Kylar	R	R	R		R	R	R		R	R	R	
Stephen	R	R	R	R	R							
Tyler	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Quinn		R	R	R	R		R	R		R		
Vafi												
Wach		R	R	R	R		R					
Total Return	14	17	15	19	15	13	15	9	12	11	8	1

Appendix G: E-mail Family Message Journal Return Data

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Abby	Absent	R		
Andrew	(W) - NR	R	R	
Bella	R	R	R	R
Dylan	R	R	R	R
Ellie	Absent		R	R
Herbert				R
Ian		R		R
Jadyn			(W)	
Jameson		R	R	
Julia	(W) - R	(W) - R	(W) - R	(W) - R
Katie	Absent	R	R	R
Kayla	R	R	R	(W) - R
Laura			R	R
Maia	R	R	R	R
Megan	R	R	R	R
Nick	(W) - NR	(W)	(W)	(W)
Olivia	R	R	R	R
Paige	R	R	R	R
Ryan	R	R	R	R
Skylar	R	R	R	R
Stephen	R	R	R	R
Tyler	Absent	R	R	(W) - R
Quinn	R	R	R	(W) - R
Wafi				
Zach	R	R	(W)	Absent
Total Return	13	18	16	18
Email Return	12	17	15	14

Appendix H: Student Post-Implementation Survey

Timestamp	Name	Do you prefer to write your Family Message Journal in an e-mail or in your journal?	Do you know if your parents have ever checked The 211 Gazette?	How many times have you contributed to The 211 Gazette (as a writer or photographer)?	If you e-mail your Family Message Journal, do you think your parents respond more often than when you wrote it by hand?	If you could make any changes to The 211 Gazette, what would they be?
4/13/2012 7:35:28	Ian	E-mail	No, they have not	1 - 2 times	I think they respond the same amount	
4/13/2012 7:35:39	dylan earnst	E-mail	I don't know if they have ever checked the blog	Never	I think they respond more	nothing i think the 21 gazette is good.
4/13/2012 7:36:03	Stephen Babich	E-mail	No, they have not	1 - 2 times	I think they respond more	We should have a spot were we write things about ourselves.
4/13/2012 7:36:52	Jadyn	E-mail	No, they have not	Never	I think they respond less	NOTHING!!!! !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! !!!!!!!!!!!!
4/13/2012 10:38:08	Zach	E-mail	I don't know if they have ever checked the blog	1 - 2 times	I think they respond more	nothing i really like it
4/13/2012 10:38:08	Tyler	E-mail	No, they have not	Never	I think they respond the same amount	
4/13/2012 10:44:47	nicholas	Journal	No, they have not	1 - 2 times		i think it is good
4/13/2012 10:45:59	Julia	Journal	I don't know if they have ever checked the blog	3 - 4 times		Have more blog entries so it is more interesting.
4/13/2012 10:46:29	Kayla	E-mail	I don't know if they have ever checked the blog	Never	I think they respond the same amount	i dont really think that anything needs to be changed, i like it the way it is.
4/13/2012 10:46:46	Katie	E-mail	No, they have not	1 - 2 times	I think they respond the same amount	Having no password because I never got it.

4/13/2012 10:47:14	Herbert	E-mail	I don't know if they have ever checked the blog	Never	I think they respond more	
4/13/2012 10:47:17	Quinn williams	E-mail	I don't know if they have ever checked the blog	Never	I think they respond the same amount	I dont have any changes.
4/13/2012 10:47:52	Herbert	E-mail	I don't know if they have ever checked the blog	Never	I think they respond more	I will not make any changes.
4/13/2012 10:48:39	Tyler	E-mail	I don't know if they have ever checked the blog	Never	I think they respond the same amount	
4/13/2012 10:50:12	Abby	E-mail	No, they have not	Never	I think they respond the same amount	nothing
4/13/2012 10:50:31	jameson	E-mail	Yes, they have	1 - 2 times	I think they respond more	
4/13/2012 10:52:08	Megan	E-mail	Yes, they have	1 - 2 times	I think they respond the same amount	I don't know!
4/13/2012 10:53:04	Laura Halpin	E-mail	Yes, they have	1 - 2 times	I think they respond more	I would have 1-4 enters every week. Also I would give it the plaid back round it is real fun lookin' that is all.
4/13/2012 10:54:51	Bella	E-mail	I don't know if they have ever checked the blog	3 - 4 times	I think they respond more	we pick a color and stay with it
4/13/2012 10:55:16	andrew	E-mail	No, they have not	Never	I think they respond less	none
4/13/2012 10:59:20	Skylar	E-mail	I don't know if they have ever checked the blog	1 - 2 times	I think they respond the same amount	
4/13/2012 11:04:14	Paige	E-mail	Yes, they have	1 - 2 times	I think they respond more	The theam
4/13/2012 21:35:52	wafi	E-mail	Yes, they have	3 - 4 times	I think they respond more	
4/15/2012 10:25:13	Ryan	E-mail	I don't know if they have ever checked the blog	3 - 4 times	I think they respond more	i dont know

Appendix I: Parent Post-Implementation Survey

1. Child's name

2. Do you prefer receiving your child's Family Message Journal through e-mail or in their journal?

- E-mail
- Journal

3. How many times have you checked The 211 Gazette (classroom blog)?

- Never
- 1 - 2 times
- 3 - 4 times
- 5 - 6 times
- 7 or more times

4. If you have any additional comments, please write them below.

Appendix J: Parent Post-implementation Results

Name	E-mail/Journal	Blog Visits
Abby		
Andrew	E-mail	1 to 2
Bella	E-mail	Never
Dylan	E-mail	3 to 4
Ellie		
Herbert		
Ian	Journal	Never
Jadyn		
Jameson		
Julia		
Katie	Journal	Never
Kayla	Journal	Never
Laura	E-mail	1 to 2
Maia		
Megan	Journal	3 to 4
Nick		
Olivia	E-mail	1 to 2
Paige		
Ryan	E-mail	5 to 6
Quinn	Journal	Never
Skylar	E-mail	1 to 2
Stephen	E-mail	Never
Tyler	E-mail	Never
Wafi	Journal	7 or more
Zach	E-mail	1 to 2

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Shirvani, H. (2007). Effects of teacher communication on parents' attitudes and their children's behaviors at schools. *Education*, 128(1), 34-37.