

KD Module 4: Organisation and Administration

Unit 3: ICT as a Communication Tool



Objectives:

In-service teachers should be able to use ICT to communicate and collaborate with students, peers, parents and the larger community in order to nurture student learning (UNESCO ICT-CFT, KD.4.e).



Duration:

Total of 4 notional hours – 1 hour lecture, 1 hour tutorial and 2 hours computer practical session.



A] Lecture (1 hour)

Notes to Facilitator

The purpose of this lecture is to provide an overview of some of the communication tools that are available to teachers to help improve communication and interaction with students, fellow teachers and parents. The introductory passage below has been provided as a guide to set the scene and should be adapted as necessary.

Introduction

What are Communication Tools?

Communication tools are the 'C' in ICT. Communication tools offer teachers a means to improve communication and interaction among students, teachers and parents. They can aid the teacher in reinforcing instruction, increasing the level of contemplation/discussion on a topic or simply informing his or her audience.

Technology places a number of communication tools in your hands. Some of these include:

- Cell phones (text messages and voicemail)
- E-mail
- Instant messaging
- Electronic newsletters (e-newsletters)
- Shared online calendars
- Class and school web pages
- Social networks.

But how do these tools help you to facilitate and improve communication with students, peers and parents, both inside and outside your classroom?

Cell phones (text messages and voice mail)

In today's world, nearly every passerby is equipped with a cell phone. Thus, cell phones provide a great means to communicating with both students and parents. A simple text message can serve as a great reminder to parents about upcoming parent-teacher meetings or to remind students about upcoming tests. By creating a standard voice message on your phone at the end of each day, you can provide students and parents with a means to receive updates as to the topics covered during the day and any assignments or homework that has been scheduled.

E-mail

Electronic mail, commonly called **email** or **e-mail**, is a method of exchanging digital messages from an author to one or more recipients.¹

E-mail can replace conventional paper-based communications in a school. It is also an incredible time-saver. It allows you to send information and documents to colleagues and receive the same instantaneously. You can communicate with teachers in other schools – even in other parts of the world – and exchange ideas and learning materials with them. You can also contact parents by e-mail. Some parents may not have e-mail facilities, but an increasing number of them are getting online, particularly since many cell phones are e-mail enabled.

Electronic Newsletters (e-Newsletters)

E-Newsletters are a great means to communicate important school events and notices with the entire school. They also save on time and printing costs. E-Newsletters should supplement conventional printed newsletters for those parents who do not have access to email.

Instant Messaging

Instant messaging (IM) is a form of real-time direct text-based communication between two or more people using personal computers or other devices, along with shared clients. The user's text is conveyed over a network, such as the Internet. More advanced instant messaging software clients also allow enhanced modes of communication, such as live voice or video calling.

Instant messaging opens up a world of communication. No longer do you need to walk to the other side of the school grounds to ask your colleague a 'quick question' – you can simply message them and get your response almost immediately. Popular tools for IM include Skype, Google Talk and Yahoo! Messenger. These are all free to download and use.

Online Calendars

Online calendars (remember the previous unit!) are an easy, useful method of posting information accessible by all and connecting the home, school and larger community. For example, teachers can post homework and important dates. Daily organisers can be tools of the past. When a parent asks "Do you have any homework?" they already have the answer. This tool has the potential to have a really positive impact on a school's culture.

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Email>

Class and School Web Pages

A classroom website can be a very effective communication tool. It can enhance communication among the classroom and students, parents and the community. Classroom websites can be showcases for students' work, newsletters and other classroom information. They can contain homework assignments as well as any ongoing or upcoming projects. Parents and students can log on and see students' work and assignments. The community can access the information to find out what is going on in the classroom, school and community.

A school website is a set of web pages grouped together to meet the information needs of staff, students and/or the community. Good school websites have a clear purpose, organised themes with good information, and appealing graphical elements that hold the site together. Ultimately, a school website is a communication tool that represents the vision, image and culture of a school.

Social Networks and Blogs

A social network service is an online service, platform or site that focuses on building and reflecting social networks or social relations among people, e.g. who share interests and/or activities.²

A **blog** (a blend of the term **web log**) is a type of website or part of a website. Blogs are usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video.³

Through social networking sites and blogs, it is possible for you to consult with subject and education experts around the world. These communication tools help you to build a personal learning network (PLN). Examples of popular social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube and LinkedIn. It is even possible to communicate with your students via a blog.

Summary

Effective communication is essential to create strong school-home partnerships and to increase parental involvement. Just as teachers are skilled in the art of teaching, they also require knowledge and skills to communicate effectively with their parent community. Teachers should strive to use a variety of effective strategies to make communication as informative and interactive as possible, incorporating new communication methods and yet retaining the human touch. Every communication exchange, regardless of format, should reflect a thoughtful, planned approach and should be viewed as an opportunity for teachers to promote parent partnerships and, ultimately, to support student learning.⁴

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_networking_sites

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>

⁴ *Communicating with Parents: Strategies for Teachers.* (Susan Graham-Clay.) Available online at: <http://www.adi.org/journal/ss05/Graham-Clay.pdf> (Copyright).



B] Tutorial (1 hour)

Notes to Facilitator

After the lecture, allow the participants to discuss and consider concrete examples of where communication technologies could enhance school administration and teaching and learning. Use the grid below to guide the discussions.

Activity

In this activity, you will discuss concrete examples of where communication technologies could enhance school administration and teaching and learning.

1. In pairs, discuss how each of the communication tools listed below might be implemented to aid communication with peers, students and parents. Suggest several scenarios for each audience and list some benefits of implementing the communication tool.

Communication Tool	Suggested Scenarios: Peers	Suggested Scenarios: Students	Suggested Scenarios: Parents	Benefits
E-mail				
Instant Messaging and Video Calling (e.g. Google Talk and Skype)				
Online Calendars				
Class Web Pages				

2. Now discuss and list some potential barriers to effective communication that might exist in each of these situations.
3. Share your ideas with the entire class in a tutor-led discussion.



C] Computer Practical (2 hours)

Notes to Facilitator

The purpose of this session is to allow participants the opportunity to explore and get familiar with some of the communication tools that they have at their disposal. Participants will require access to an Internet-connected computer. The facilitator should be on hand to assist participants as required, but wherever possible peer collaboration and assistance should be sought. Prior to the session, the facilitator will need to have established a Facebook page and a Twitter account to allow participants to interact with. In addition to this, the facilitator should have created an e-mail address to which participants can e-mail their newsletters. This e-mail address should be a group list so that all participants in the class will be able to review each other's work.

For this session, you will require access to a computer with internet connectivity. You will be exploring and getting familiar with some of the communication tools that you have available to you.

Activity:

1. Communication with parents should not be a one-way street. You have been tasked by the principal to send out an e-newsletter to the school with regards to strategies parents can employ to facilitate communication with their children's teachers.
 - Using MS Word, compile the contents of the newsletter. You can refer to the following resources online to draw inspiration:
 - i. *Effective Parent Teacher Communication*: <http://www.parenting-ed.org/handout3/Parental%20Involvement/Communicating%20with%20Teacher%20Handout.pdf>
 - ii. *Parent Teacher Communication*: <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/succeed/communication.cfm>
 - Next, using MS Outlook, attach your word document and e-mail to the e-mail address that has been provided to you by your facilitator. If you require assistance in the use of MS Outlook, you can refer to the following online tutorials (note: your version of Outlook might differ from the examples covered in these tutorials, but the fundamentals will remain the same).
 - i. <http://office.tizag.com/outlookTutorial/>
 - ii. <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/outlook-help/CH010062212.aspx>
 - iii. Microsoft Outlook 2010: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cr-yWrmyEY4>
 - iv. Microsoft Outlook 2007 Tutorial – Using the Email function & more (Part 1 of 2): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHsYtnGfO2I>
 - v. Microsoft Outlook 2007 Tutorial – (Part 2 of 2): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qm1CbzIkWLo>
2. Join the Facebook group that has been established by your facilitator for this purpose.
 - Conduct Internet research on the merits of using Facebook in Education.
 - Write a post on the group's wall that summarises your research and your views on the topic.
 - Comment on two posts from fellow students.

Tip: If you require any support in creating your own Facebook account (if you are not already a member) or require any general support, visit YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>) and conduct a search on "using Facebook". You will find a wealth of video resources to assist you.

3. Join the Twitter group that has been established by your facilitator for this purpose.
- Write one tweet which describes your views on how to communicate effectively with students outside of the classroom.
 - Respond to two tweets from your fellow students.
- You will need to create a Twitter account (if you don't already have one). Again, if you need support in this, visit YouTube or conduct a Google search to find further information.



Resources Used in this Lesson Unit

Susan Graham-Clay. (n.d.). *Communicating with Parents: Strategies for Teachers*. Available online at <http://www.adi.org/journal/ss05/Graham-Clay.pdf> (Copyright unknown).

Knowledge Management (Wetpaint). (2011). *ICT Collaboration Tools*. Available online at <http://knowledgemanagement.wetpaint.com/page/ICT+collaboration+tools>. (CC: BY NC SA)

Saskatoon Public Schools (2003). *Technology Tools for Teachers: Communication*. Available online at http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/pd21byersj/comtIs.html. (Unknown)

Wikipedia (2011). *eMail*. available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Email> (CC: BY SA)

Mark C. Edwards. (2000.). *Effective Parent Teacher Communication*. Centre for Effective Parenting. Available online at <http://www.parenting-ed.org/handout3/Parental%20Involvement/Communicating%20with%20Teacher%20Handout.pdf> (© All rights reserved).

University of Illinois. (2011). *Parent Teacher Communication*. Available online at <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/succeed/communication.cfm> (© All rights reserved).