Chapter 12

Reforming Classroom Education Through a QQ Group: A Pilot Experiment at a Primary School in Shanghai

Yang Yang
East China Normal University, China

Xiaohui Zhu
Wujing Primary School, China

Cailian Jin
Wujing Primary School, China

Jiacheng Jia Li
East China Normal University, China

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to discover a way to support school-family communication and classroom education by using QQ, which is a very popular instant messenger in China. This study focused on a banzhuren and his class from a primary school in Shanghai. A QQ group was developed to communicate with his students’ parents and improve the classroom education. By observation, interviews, and questionnaires, the authors found out the function of the QQ group and the opinions and experiences of the QQ group from the banzhuren, some subject teachers, parents, and students. The platform was used to show the records of school activities, share information bulletins, support learning outside of school, and address problems between school and family. All teachers, parents, and students considered the platform to be helpful, although some problems arose. Possible solutions for these problems and further research directions are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Parents and teachers serve vital roles in children’s education. Research has shown that parent involvement has a positive influence on student learning (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2012). Students tend to achieve higher marks, have better school attendance, behavior and social skills, be more adaptable and continue their education longer than their peers if their parents are involved in their learning (Goodall, 2016). Parents are expected to be involved in the education of students in many different ways, including assisting students in their learning, ensuring school attendance, supporting good behavior, and giving suggestions for administration (Selwyn, Banaji, Hadjithoma-Garstka, & Clark, 2011). Promoting parental involvement requires communication between teachers and parents (Bouffard, 2008; Goodall, 2016). An effective process of school-family communication is not a one-way transmission, but a two-way exchange of information and creative collaboration. To achieve cohesive two-way communication, teachers should inform parents about their children’s learning situation and school activities (Epstein, 2008). Parents should be invited to participate in their children’s education and school activities (Barge and Loges, 2003; Ho, Hung, & Chen, 2013). Meanwhile, communication about students’ learning and school activities must be processed using diversified, clear, and effective methods (Epstein & Natalie, 2004). With the development of information technology, efficient and convenient means of supporting school-family communication have emerged (Merkley, Schmidt, Dirksen, & Fuhler, 2006; Thompson, Mazer, & Flood Grady, 2015). Besides face-to-face conversation, phone calls, short messages, e-mail, websites, blogs, online instant messenger and other platforms are available ways for schools and families to communicate. Schools and parents have flexibility in the ways that they communicate with each other.

Chinese schools used to rely on contacting parents through home visits, parent meetings, and phone calls. It took teachers too much time to visit all of their students’ homes and gathering all the parents to have a meeting was time-consuming. So usually, teachers would only visit each student’s home and have a parent meeting once a semester, which was not enough to solve all students or parents’ problems efficiently. Although phone calls allowed teachers to communicate with parents about their own children in a timely manner, this format does not allow parents and teachers to discuss common issues in a collaborative group setting (Zeng, 2008; Zhang, Wang, & Xie, 2015). With the widespread use of the internet, many schools in China have developed their own websites. The school puts the records of school activities and learning materials on the website, which gives parents an opportunity to understand more about the school. Some schools’ websites even allow each class to have its own sub-pages where teachers, students, and parents can share information of the class. Parents can learn some information on these websites but it’s hard to share their own ideas with the school using this format. Besides, teachers, students, and parents need a lot of technology support to edit the pages. So they found it inconvenient to communicate with each other through school websites (Liu, 2009). Some teachers realized the popularity of social software, which allows for two-way interaction between teachers and parents, such as blogs, microblogs, QQ, WeChat, and so on (Lin, 2009; Yan, 2011).

In Chinese schools, the class is an important organization, where all teaching, learning, and other activities happen (Zhang, Wang, & Xie, 2015; Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2009) As soon as a student gets admitted by a school, he/she will be assigned to a class. There are about 30 students in a class. And a teacher will be assigned to the class as the students’ mentor, a role called the banzhuren. The banzhuren is a key person responsible for the whole class of students and is the leader of all of the teachers who teach those students (Gu et al., 2015) The banzhuren will spend school days

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