

Chapter 4

Managing Information, Communication and Technologies in Schools: Overload as Mismanagement and Miscommunication

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ABSTRACT

One of the most crucial areas in which information and technologies need to be managed in our information-rich society is in schools. Whilst information overload is often associated with organisations or social communication, schools represent the intersection of several stakeholders for whom information and communication must be managed effectively. Using a case study of a school in a Gulf State, this chapter analyses how mismanagement and miscommunication relating to the use of ICT is hindering the educational progress of children by examining school/teacher-pupil interaction; home-school communication, and; the application of ICT in the curriculum. It presents a professional and parental perspective on how the use and management of information technologies and effective communication are critical in maintaining acceptable levels of educational achievement. It draws on the experiences of both pupils and parents and uses a framework of participant observation to illustrate the problems of information overload as mismanagement and miscommunication.

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INTRODUCTION

Information enjoys a special status in our contemporary society and whilst writers continue to debate the details of this ‘information society’, most are convinced that the availability of information, and the concomitant development of information and communication technologies (ICT), is the defining feature of our times (Webster, 2006).

The information society and ICT revolution are heralded in public discourses as unprecedented societal changes and have thus been used to promote a vast number of initiatives and reforms, including ICT in education (Nivala, 2009, p. 435).

Nivala (2009) continues that education has been the focal point of information society strategies because they have touted the use of ICT in enhancing education and because education is seen as a means for progressing into the information age. Following the ushering in of the information society, deterministic discourses have been “saturated by the view that technology is the only way to keep education up to date and relevant, thus leading to better results in teaching and learning” (Selwyn et al., 2001, cited in Nivala, 2009, p. 436).

As information becomes more widely available in all spheres of life, the proper use and management of this information in schools poses challenges to all those involved in the educational process. Apart from the obvious concerns about unsuitable material available to children online, schools are responsible for educating children about how to use and manage ICT to enhance knowledge and develop life skills. Misuse of technology in the classroom is an issue of growing concern for educational institutions, practitioners and parents alike and unless there is open and effective communication between schools, students and parents it will be difficult to understand the role of ICT in teaching and learning. Access to an increasing variety of information channels does not mean that parents are better informed of the decisions being made by schools or that they are familiar with the policies and procedures that schools are supposedly practicing. Similarly, creating a number of media through which to disseminate information does not necessarily guarantee a more knowledgeable school community if these channels are not used efficiently.

The immediate implication of information ‘overload’ is that there is too much information available but the concept is extended here to include not just the potential of having an overwhelming amount of information in schools but also a number of other factors such as information mismanagement; miscommunication; ‘underload’ and even deliberately withholding information. Overload also refers to the smoke-screen created by a school to convince parents that lots of information is available because several channels for disseminating information exist, but in reality very little is actually being communicated. Whilst it is plausible that mismanagement

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