STUDENT PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF HOMEWORK

Keith Michael Popham
B.A., California State University, Sacramento, 1998

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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF HOMEWORK

A Thesis

by

Keith Michael Popham

Approved by:

_______________________________, Committee Chair
Zephaniah T. Davis, Ph.D.

_______________________________, Second Reader
Rita M. Johnson, Ed.D.

_______________________________
Date
Student: Keith Michael Popham

I certify that this student has met the requirements for the format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

______________________________________________
Robert H. Pritchard, Ph.D., Department Chair                   Date

Department of Teacher Education
Abstract

of

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF HOMEWORK

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Statement of the Problem

Homework is, has been, and will be for the foreseeable future a common practice of most schools. Most teachers assign homework on a nightly basis with the expectation that students will perform the tasks independently outside of the classroom setting. Is this practice important to students? Do students within varying achievement levels perceive homework’s importance differently?

In order to understand how students perceive homework, research needs to be conducted to examine student perception. This research categorizes the effects of homework on students and researches how these effects may or may not influence student perceptions.

Sources of Data

Data for this thesis was first collected through a review of the current literature on the issue. Harris Cooper (1989), in a “Synthesis of Research on Homework,” defined the practice and examined the history of research on homework. Theodore D.

A survey was also conducted of fifth-grade student perceptions to explore their perception of whether or not they felt homework was important. Ninety-nine surveys were collected and analyzed.

Conclusions Reached

The survey results validated much of the existing research regarding students’ perceptions of the importance of homework. Most students, regardless of achievement level, had an opinion. Of those students with opinions about homework’s importance, most felt it was important to them, made them a better student, and was a good extension of what was taking place in the classroom.
DEDICATION

For my grandparents, Fredrick and Carolee Popham, without whom, the ball may have never started rolling.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my wife Rebecca for her love and support during the writing of this thesis.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The practice of homework in most American schools is alive and well. The theory behind the practice is to further student knowledge outside the classroom setting by assigning work to be carried out by a student outside the classroom. Ideally, homework should be carried out by students after an independent level of understanding has been achieved with guided classroom discussion and practice. Original concepts should be presented and practiced in class with teacher guidance to achieve sufficient understanding to a point where students can practice and internalize the learning on their own. Unlike in-class guided practice or even in-class independent practice, ideally homework should not introduce new concepts, but rather further student understanding of a concept or application of a skill that has already been presented at length in class.

The purpose of this study was to explore how students in fifth grade (in this researcher’s class, and other fifth grade students from the researcher’s school) regard the relevance and importance of homework. Given that homework is being assigned on a nightly basis by a majority of teachers, how is the practice of assigning homework perceived by students? Do students believe that homework is a necessary part of their school experience? Do they feel that homework is simply busywork? Do they regard homework as an integral part of furthering their understanding of classroom material?
Method

This thesis developed a student survey to collect data from 99 fifth-grade students. Results from the survey were analyzed to find how the students’ responses about the relevance and importance of homework compare to the findings of previous studies.

Limitations

The opinions expressed in the survey are from a sampling of fifth-grade students from this researcher’s classroom and other classrooms on the same campus, and therefore, constitute a convenience sample appropriate for action research; the information should not be generalized as a representation of all fifth-grade students.

Definition of Terms

Operational definitions of important terms used in this thesis follow below.

*Achievement groups* Specific to this study, these levels are based on English Language Arts performance levels. Levels include Far-Below Basic, Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. For the purposes of this study, groups were combined into two different groups - a Proficient/Advanced Group and a Far-Below Basic/Below-Basic/Basic Group.

*CST* California Standards Test, a major component of the STAR program (Standardized Testing and Reporting Program). The CSTs are developed by California educators and test developers specifically for California. They measure students' progress toward achieving California's state-adopted academic content standards,
which describe what students should know and be able to do in each grade and subject tested.

*Homework* Work assigned by teachers for students to carry out during non-school hours.

*STAR Program (Standardized Testing and Reporting Program)* The Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program used to measure academic progress in California Public Schools. Test results are used for student and school accountability purposes.

Organization of the Remainder of the Thesis

The research and the survey discussed in this thesis are organized in the following manner:

1. The Homework Debate, including Constituencies Vying for Control,
2. Research about Homework, including Homework and Achievement, and Students’ Beliefs, Feelings, and Attitudes about Homework, and
3. Assigning Homework.

This sets the stage for Chapter 3, which details the design of the survey method and underscores key points discussed in the review of literature. Chapter 4 presents the results and analysis, followed by discussion and recommendations in Chapter 5. The document finishes with references cited in the thesis.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

How important is homework to students in elementary school? Do students’ opinions about homework differ depending on how successful they are in school? Many people have researched the effects of homework, but few studies have delved into the idea of students’ attitudes towards homework. This is important due to the fact that homework is still being assigned the same way it has been for years. In fact, the current trends have more and more homework being assigned at earlier ages. This study is attempting to better understand students’ attitudes towards homework and if their attitudes can be related to performance.

The literature review in this chapter describes the homework debate, identifies the constituencies vying for control, research about homework, homework and achievement, students’ beliefs, feelings, and attitudes about homework, and the assigning of homework.

The Homework Debate

Cooper (1989) operationally defined homework as work assigned by teachers for students to carry out during non-school hours. According to Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, and Greathouse (1998), the assigning of homework involves complex interaction of more competencies than any other teaching task. Unlike guided practice which takes place at school, where a teacher has a hand in the direction and outcome of an assignment, teachers have to monitor multiple assignments, take into consideration student ability levels, and realize that after-school leisure activities play a role with
individual student performance (Cooper, 2001). Ultimately the student must use his/her own discretion about whether, when, and how to complete certain assignments (Cooper et al. 1998).

Although the primary goal of homework is to provide independent and distributed practice for students to internalize content and processes, it also can strengthen the relationship between home and school through providing parents the opportunity to view the content of their child’s academic training (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). Thus, homework plays a part in establishing and consolidating a child’s beliefs and study patterns regarding academic work. It can also be argued that the elementary years are especially critical when shaping student perceptions (Coutts, 2004).

Constituencies Vying for Control

Debate about whether or not homework should be required has continued for more than a century. The passions behind the opinions for and against the practice of homework have inspired views that lacked nuance and pedagogical sensibility, and that sometimes reflected ideological bias as well. Gill and Schlossman (2004) contend that the opponents of homework exaggerated its harms, and that supporters overstated its benefits. These polarizing views often drown out the more moderate and current reformist position.

Courts have long established legal precedence over homework. In the most dramatic public success in the crusade against homework, the 1901 California Civil Code stated, “No pupil under the age of fifteen years (Grades 1 to 8) in any grammar or primary school shall be required to do any home study”. Individual school districts
around the nation, from Washington, D.C., to Bangs, Texas followed California’s example and abolished homework (Gill & Schlossman, 2004). This regulation reflected the idea that homework was a form of “school imperialism.” From a structural standpoint, homework could have two fundamentally opposite effects on the home. Some people viewed it as an intrusion into the hours reserved for the family and, therefore, a direct threat to parents’ authority to manage their children’s time outside of school. Alternatively, some people viewed homework as the primary means by which schools communicated and collaborated with families. In addition, many objectors expressed disdain over an alleged sense of arrogance amongst educators regarding their view of parent support at home. The idea was that parents did not have the proper training to help their child with assignments. Some educators claimed to scientifically design education programs for the carefully controlled, laboratory-like classroom environment. This type of educator saw parents as, if not the enemy, at least an obstacle to progressive education (Gill & Schlossman, 2003).

There was a concerted reevaluation of the practice of homework with the 1957 launching of Sputnik (Kravolec, 2007). All of a sudden, homework was a way to add school time for increased math and science education, and following that sudden increase came the backlash of the late 1960s. For the first time the National Education Association published statements regarding the idea of limits being put on homework (Kravolec & Buell, 2000).

Talk about limiting homework practices was revitalized again with the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*. The U.S. Department of Education argued that the
nation’s schools were so bad it was as if a warring army had invaded our shores (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). Proponents of that period engendered the largest consensus on the subject of limiting homework yet seen in America.

According to Gill and Schlossman (2004), the more recent movement to create state and national standards, and then raise those standards has made homework a standard component of the educational experience for even primary grade children. The argument for “the academic excellence movement” of the past 20 years has succeeded in raising homework expectations for the youngest children, the age groups for whom research suggests homework has the fewest benefits (Cooper, 1989, 2001).

Gill and Schlossman (2004) concluded that efforts to increase homework in middle and high school, where it is most likely beneficial, have not been substantial or sustained. The authors also pointed out that most teenagers do very little homework, and most 17-year-olds do no more than most 13-year-olds.

Research about Homework

*Homework and Achievement*

Research has show that homework does have an effect on student performance. A 1982 study by Keith researched the topic of time spent on homework and student achievement. The study consisted of 20,364 high school seniors drawn from the first wave (1980) of the National Center for Education Statistics’ High School and Beyond longitudinal study (HSB). The sample, containing information on 58,728 seniors and sophomores in high school, was a two-stage stratified probability sample from 1,016 high schools, with schools drawn in relation to their size. With this in mind, an effort
was made to obtain data on 36 seniors and sophomores within each school. The present sample had only seniors from the HSB sample for whom there was complete information on all the variables used in the analysis.

The students were stratified by race (only black and white students were used in the study), family background (such as parent education level and occupation), ability (based on HSB standardized test scores), field of study (either general education student or college preparatory), time spent on homework (responses were “no homework is ever assigned”, “less than 1 hour”, “between 1 and 3 hours”, “between 3 to 5 hours”, and “between 5 and 10 hours”) coded 0 - 5, and grades so far in high school (one to eight categories ranging from mostly below D, to mostly A’s).

Results from the study confirmed that an increase in time spent on homework had a positive effect on students’ grades in high school. Those students reporting that they spent more time on homework received better grades. The results held true across ability levels (Low, Medium, and High Ability). For example, the High Ability group reported receiving “Mostly B’s” when spending less than an hour on homework weekly, while others, in the same group, who spent greater than or equal to 10 hours a week on homework reported receiving “A’s and B’s.”

The researcher also found that mean grades and homework time had a strikingly linear relationship for all levels of ability, in contrast to the decreasing slope lines that would be expected if increased study time yielded diminishing returns. The author stated that the most striking aspect of the results came in the increase of grades as a function of homework time: even low ability students who spent no time on
homework earned, on the average, above an overall C average. Results also showed
that with one to three hours of homework a week, the average low ability student
could achieve grades similar to an average ability student who does not do homework.
Ultimately, the researchers concluded that increased homework time resulted in higher
achievement, as measured by grades, for all levels of ability. In addition, homework
seemed to have compensatory effects; students of lower ability achieved grades
similar with their higher peers through increased study. Even with general parental
involvement not having a large effect on grades through homework, the results still
indicated that a more focused parental involvement, aimed at encouraging students to
spend more time on homework, very well might lead indirectly to students receiving
higher grades (Keith, 1982).

A 1989 study by Leone and Richards explored the amount of time students
spent completing homework. Participating students, made up of 401 public school
students in Grades 5-9, were classified as “underachievers”, “congruent achievers”,
and “overachievers” based on their GPA’s and standardized test scores. Results of the
study showed that the overachievers reported doing homework significantly more
often than students in the other two groups did. For example, overachievers in fifth
and sixth grades spent over eight hours a week on homework versus a little over six
hours by both underachievers and congruent achievers. Overachieving ninth graders
spent an average of nine and a half hours on homework, while the other two groups
spent about four and a half hours - less than half the time spent by overachievers.
Results of the study also found that homework completion decreased with age for
underachievers and congruent achievers, while overachievers, regardless of grade level, spent increasingly more time completing homework.

The researchers also reported significant findings regarding family involvement with homework. Results showed that congruent and overachievers were more likely to do homework with family members than were underachievers. Overachievers also reported doing homework alone with a parent more often than did students in the two lower groups. Overall, the finding pointed out that homework done with family members was associated with better academic performance.

In a 2001 study, Cooper took the idea a step further by attempting to find a relationship between homework and achievement with elementary-school students. Cooper stated that the relation between homework and achievement seems to be different at different grade levels. Research involving thousands of students shows little correlation between homework and test scores in elementary school, but the relationship grows positive and strong in secondary school.

The researcher hypothesized that homework completion would mediate the relationship between students’ attitudes towards homework and students’ classroom grades. The results of the study found that students who completed their homework normally (as measured by the teacher) had few distractions at home when completing assignments. Positive classmate norms, higher student ability, and positive parent attitudes toward homework were all related to greater parent involvement. A student’s attitude toward homework could be predicted by how much homework they completed, by student ability, and by parent facilitation.
In the end, parent facilitation was an important mediator of the relation between student norms, student ability, and parent’s attitudes toward homework and classroom grades. So much so, that the researchers mentioned that positive parent involvement in homework was the strongest predictor of grades. More specifically, when parent involvement supported autonomous student behavior, there was a positive relationship with achievement. Conversely, when parent involvement came in the form of direct instructional involvement this created a negative relationship, and affected student achievement.

The results regarding an elementary student’s attitude toward homework appeared to not play a large role in determining classroom success. It was more important for developing a positive foundation in elementary school because student attitudes become more strongly linked to grades in secondary school (Cooper, 2001).

More recently, in a longitudinal study using different methods for similar purposes, Keith, Diamond-Hallam, and Fine (2004) studied the effects of homework on achievement. The study was based on the idea that many students complete their “home” work in school. The researchers wanted to see if there was a difference in achievement with students who actually did their homework at home versus at school.

The researchers used a latent variable structural equation modeling (SEM) to determine the magnitude of the influence of in-school homework and out-of-school homework on senior grade point averages (GPA; high school grades in English, mathematics, science, and social studies). What the researchers found in interpreting the paths of the variables from in-school homework and out-of-school homework to
grades was that the path from in-school homework to 12th-grade GPA was tiny and statistically insignificant (.01). On the other hand, the path from out-of-school homework to 12th-grade GPA was statistically significant (.28), suggesting that each standard deviation increase in out-of-school homework will result in corresponding standard deviation increase in students’ GPAs. The results suggested differences in the influence of in-school and out-of-school homework on students’ GPAs. The researchers also compared both types of homework completion with 12th-grade achievement test scores. Consistent with the other findings, out-of-school homework had a moderate and statistically significant effect on subsequent test scores, whereas in-school homework had no such effect (Keith et al., 2004).

Taking the time to teach students how to complete their homework has shown to have a positive effect on student performance. A study by Minotti (2005) examined the effects of learning-style-based homework on the achievement and attitudes of middle school students. A convenience sample of pre-formed classes was used to create two groups. The groups consisted of students who used traditional homework and study strategies (control), and a group of students who used a new approach to homework based on their learning style (experimental). Both sets of students saw different presentations and received booklets from the researchers containing tips on studying based on their group’s homework strategy (traditional vs. learning-style-based homework strategies). Results of study showed that both groups demonstrated higher levels of achievement after treatment. However, the groups improved at considerably dissimilar rates. Results show that both groups were essentially similar at
the onset of the study. The control group demonstrated minor achievement gains in reading (pretest score of 82.46 and a posttest score of 83.03), mathematics (pretest score of 81.45 and a posttest score of 82.45), science (pretest score of 81.81, and a posttest score of 82.56), and social studies (pretest score of 81.11 and a posttest score of 81.96) after treatment. While the experimental group demonstrated significantly larger gains in all four subject areas (reading pretest score of 81.29 and a posttest score of 88.86, math pretest score of 82.00 and a posttest score of 88.87, science pretest score of 81.79 and a posttest score of 88.80, and social studies pretest score of 81.64 and a posttest score of 88.68) after using individual learning-style based homework prescriptions. A MANOVA was then used to reveal there were significant main effects for the mean achievement between pretest and posttest measures for reading (.619), math (.515), science (.504), and social studies (.498).

Research regarding homework and achievement has also shown that students benefit from focused homework intervention. A 2009 study by Reinhardt et al. looked into the effects of homework intervention on student performance with a group of six students. Baseline data was collected for three weeks, the intervention was implemented for six weeks, and follow-up data was obtained for eight weeks. Throughout the intervention period students were provided incentives if they completed homework assignments with a certain level of accuracy. These incentives ranged from 5 minutes of extra recess to 10 minutes of computer game time, and were contingent on meeting a certain level of accuracy on a specific assignment determined by the teacher. Accuracy rates served as the dependent variable for this study, and
students were assigned homework four days a week (Monday through Thursday) in reading comprehension, mathematics, and spelling. Students completed their homework and the classroom teacher evaluated the assignments for accuracy the following day. The teacher calculated the percentage of items answered correctly to determine the accuracy rates. Any item that was not completed was scored as incorrect, and homework that was not turned in was scored a zero.

Results from the study found that students’ performance in reading comprehension showed a high level of improvement between the baseline and intervention phases. The average level of improvement for all six students in the study was 61% accuracy rate during the baseline phase, to a 78% accuracy rate during the intervention phase. This level of improvement in reading comprehension homework performance followed throughout the four follow-up phases as well. Overall, mathematics homework performance revealed an improvement of a 10% higher accuracy rate during the intervention phase and a moderate improvement over baseline during follow-up phases. Spelling homework performance was more stable compared to baseline performance, and ultimately resulted in a trivial effect size.

Students’ Beliefs, Feelings, and Attitudes about Homework

Taking into consideration the way in which a student feels about completing a specific task is important to consider when assigning homework. A portion of the 1989 study by Leone and Richards was devoted to how students felt during the school day and how they felt when completing homework. What the researchers found was that students’ moods while doing homework were strikingly lower than those during any
other activity, including classwork. When studying the same information across achievement groups the results indicated that the aforementioned groups of underachievers, congruent achievers, and overachievers all felt similarly negative during homework relative to their experience during other activities. Students of all ages reported the highest relative levels of affect and arousal when doing homework with friends and the lowest when doing homework alone. However, it was notable that students were most attentive to homework when completing it with a parent and least attentive when doing so with friends. These findings appear to partially explain why children who did homework with their parents were found to receive better grades.

When looking at the results through students’ experiences the researchers found that high achievers appeared to spend more time on homework as they get older despite the accompanying negative effect, while the remaining groups of students do even less in the higher grades, perhaps to avoid the negative experience. To give some perspective, the authors went on to state that the most successful students in the study spent only 21.5% of their time or about 21 hours per week engaged in classwork or homework. In contrast, Japanese and Russian children reported spending over 50 hours per week in school or studying (Japanese Finance Ministry, 1980; Zuzanek, 1980).

A 1998 study by Cooper et al. surveyed 709 students about their attitude towards homework. This random sample of students ranging from a large metropolitan public school district, a suburban school district, and a rural district contained students from 2nd to 12th grade (with a fairly equal distribution amongst the grade levels). Of
the students polled, students in the lower grades, and those who expressed poorer attitudes toward homework had teachers who said they assigned a lot of homework. Teachers of poorer achieving students in lower grades also expressed more positive attitudes toward homework but not significantly so. In the upper grades, more positive teacher attitudes toward homework were associated with more assigned homework. More positive student attitudes were associated with more completed homework and higher class grades (Cooper et al.).

According to the 2005 study by Minotti, students’ attitudes differed when comparing different types of homework practices. Both the control (45.87) and experimental (46.02) groups had similar mean scores prior to the study as far as their general attitude towards studying. After using the differing homework prescriptions, a 10 point difference in attitudes toward homework scores as measured by the SDS was significant at the p<.05 level for experimental group (46.02 to 56.81). The control group only had a three point increase between pretest and posttest, which was not significant. The author went on to say that the link between homework and achievement was a pronounced one - especially when keeping in mind different learning styles.

The parent-student relationship while completing homework does play a part in successful homework completion. A 1988 study by Epstein explored the correlates of homework activities and the effects of homework on elementary school students’ achievements and behaviors in school. The author used data from 82 teachers and 1,021 parents and students in their classrooms using surveys. The aspect most closely
related to this current study focused on how some students liked to talk about school and homework while others did not. The study also examined levels of tension students may have had while completing homework with a parent.

Results showed that children who liked to talk about school and homework with a parent and children who were not tense about working with a parent on homework had higher reading and math skills. In the study, about 20% of students did not like to talk about school with their parents and 35% became tense when working with a parent on homework. The author mentioned that these attitudes about school might be early warning signs of more serious problems. Epstein (1988) went on to state that children who like to speak about school and homework with a parent tend to be better students and well behaved in class. On the other hand, students who are tense when working on their homework with a parent more often have homework problems, yet these are the parents who teachers ask to spend more minutes at home helping their child. The author further stated that parents of children who have problems in school require guidance on how to help their student or else school problems could be compounded by ineffective help at home (Epstein, 1988).

The aforementioned Reinhart et al. (2009) study focusing on intervention-based homework practices, also studied the participating students’ opinions. Results of this section of the study found that students’ opinions were positive when exposed to an intervention-based homework plan versus a more traditional homework plan where less focus was placed on the practice. The intervention plan was based on students receiving instant feedback from their teacher about their homework assignments the
morning they were due. The students yielded a mean score of 4.3 on the 5-point scale falling between the “Somewhat Liked” and the “Liked a Lot” categories. According to the authors, this meant the students generally found the intervention acceptable.

A 2006 study by Yazzie-Mints polled over 81,000 students about their overall perception of their high-school experience. A section of the survey was devoted to out-of-school activities, including students’ perception of homework. Students were asked about how many hours they spent during the week doing written homework. Forty-three percent of students reported spending one hour or less, while 55% reported spending one hour or less each week reading and studying for class. With this in mind, most students still recognized the importance of homework and studying.

The researcher went on to state that students reported spending very little time on activities related to academic work – for example, “Doing written homework” and “Reading and studying for class” – were reported to be among the most important activities to them. Conversely, other activities, ones in which they spent far more time involved with, such as “Watching television and/or playing video games” and “Surfing or chatting online,” were rated by respondents as being relatively low in terms of importance to them. On average only 7% of participants felt homework to be “Not at All” important, while most participants responded that homework was “Somewhat Important” (33.5%) and 34.5% mentioned that it was “Very Important” to them. Interestingly, only 8.5% of participants felt it was their “Top Priority”. According to the study, results were split amongst students’ “Top Priority” with
socializing with friends outside of school being the most popular with 20% of students who felt this way (Yazzie-Mints, 2006).

A 2007 online survey by Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (MetLife) had more than 2,000 students answer questions about how much time they spend on homework, whether it helps them learn more, and its overall importance. Of the 2,000 students polled three-quarters of them (77%) believed that doing homework is important or very important and seven in ten (69%) agreed that doing homework helped them learn more in school.

The MetLife (2007) study also looked at how low-achieving students and high-achieving students perceived homework. According to the results, lower achieving students spent less time on homework and spent less time doing homework at home. The results went on to suggest that students who do not believe homework is important were more likely than other students to get C’s or below (40% vs. 27%), don’t plan on going to college (26% vs. 15%), and rated the quality of education they receive as only fair or poor (29% vs. 13%). More specific to the current study, overall 83% of 3rd to 6th-Grade students polled (922 total students) felt that homework was either “Very important” to “Important.” While only 16% of 3rd to 6th-Grade students felt that homework was either “Somewhat Important” to “Not Important.” The study also showed how students in different achievement levels perceived homework. The study found that 82% of students who receive mostly A’s feel that homework is “Very important” to “Important”, while 79% of students who get A’s and B’s felt this way.
Only 68% students who receive C’s and below felt it was “Very important” to “Important.”

The study also surveyed students about whether homework helped them learn more in school. The study found that of the 922 third to sixth grade students polled 77% either “Strongly agree” or “Somewhat agree” that homework helped them learn in school. When looking across achievement levels, 71% of students who get mostly A’s felt it helped them learn, while 72% of B students and 62% of C and below students felt the same (MetLife, 2007).

Assigning Homework

The assigning of independent work for students to complete outside of the classroom is an important part of a classroom teacher’s daily practices. With this in mind, it is important to realize that reports from the past have scrutinized and shaped public opinion regarding the practice of homework. According to Alber, Nelson, and Brennan (2002) the last two decades have seen a number of national commissions and reports, which have been particularly unkind in their review of the educational system. The Commission on Excellence in Education’s report A Nation at Risk (U.S. Department of Education, 1983), and the Educate America Act (H.R. 1804, 1994) are both examples of reports supporting the need for major changes in education – especially when it came to homework. Initiatives such as these have led the way for reform involving increased academic rigor through high academic standards and heightened expectations. One way to accomplish such changes is through homework.
Thus, expectation by teachers, administrators, and parents is that homework will be assigned on a nightly basis at levels starting in first grade (Alber et al., 2002).

The U. S. Department of Education (2010) suggests the following amounts of nightly homework for students in elementary and middle school: 10 to 20 minutes a day for kindergarten through second grade, 30 to 60 minutes for grades three through six, and seventh through ninth grade students should be spending more time on homework and the amount may vary nightly. The U.S. Department of Education’s website (2010) also mentioned the breakdown of subject areas and nightly assignments students should be assigned.

According to the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans Inc., the amount of time that surveyed teenagers (2008) reported spending on their homework has increased. In the latest report, 21% of students said they spent more than 10 hours a week on homework, up 9 percentage points from 2005. Overall, high-school students spend an average of 8.2 hours each week on homework (2008).

Summary

Homework in the United States dates back to the 19th century. Unlike guided practice, which takes place at school, assigning homework has teachers having to monitor multiple assignments, take into consideration student ability levels, and realize that students have various after-school activities in which they participate. Ultimately the student and parents must use their own discretion about whether, when, and how to complete certain assignments.
The argument as to whether it was necessary is as old as the practice itself. Over the years the arguments for and against the practice of homework have come and gone – with the most noticeable push coming after the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*. The publication sparked a national push towards increasing rigor within American schools. This argument spilled over into the idea that increasing homework for children would increase academic performance. Whether simply assigning more homework on a nightly basis increases academic performance has yet to proven.

A more recent movement to create state and national standards has made homework a standard part of the educational experience of all school-aged children for perhaps the first time in history. The argument against “the academic excellence movement” of the last 20 years is that it has only increased homework for those students of primary school age.

Research regarding the effectiveness of homework on achievement has been mixed regarding specific groups of students and their abilities. Research has shown that low-achieving students in high school may benefit from homework, and has also shown that the more homework a student does the better they perform in school. On the other hand, research has shown that primary-aged students show little to no academic improvement when regular nightly homework is a part of the curriculum.

Research also has shown that specific homework practices; those based on either a student’s learning style, a specific learning strategy, or intervention can have a positive effect on student performance. In addition, research has shown that parent involvement does play a part in the effectiveness of homework and ultimately student
achievement. Struggling students do, on average, need more help with homework and spend more time on it. Research has shown that the most effective practices have open lines of communication between parents, teachers, and students. It is important for facilitation and interaction between parents and students to be positive in order to assure effective outcomes.

According to recent research on student attitudes, students find homework important. Regardless of student ability or success in school, a majority of students felt as though homework helped them become better students. At the same time, students’ feelings about homework were not necessarily always positive. Although there was a fundamental importance placed on homework by students, the activity was not necessarily a student’s favorite task to perform after school. The key points regarding students’ perceptions of homework became the basis for the survey used in this research. The researcher was interested in knowing how students among different achievement levels felt about the importance of homework.
Chapter 3

METHOD

A survey method was used to explore student views about homework. This study focused specifically on three research questions.

1. Do fifth-grade students think that nightly homework is important?
2. Do fifth-grade students feel that nightly homework makes them a better student?
3. Do fifth-grade students feel that their nightly homework is an extension of what is being taught in class?

Participants

The participants of this study were 99 fifth-grade students in the Sacramento area. The students were from my current class and recruited through colleagues (other fifth-grade teachers) at the same school. The total number of potential participants was 156. The number of students surveyed in each class varied, but the mean number of participants per class was 16.5 students out of a possible 26. Six classes were surveyed. The students were given a permission slip the day before, given a brief description of the survey they were going to take the following day, and told if they brought back the parent permission slip and filled out the survey properly they would receive a piece of candy in return. The following morning the researcher collected all permission slips in person.

Participants were only asked to use their roster number as a way for the researcher to identify them. By combining their roster number and their teacher’s
name, the researcher was able to identify a performance level for the participant. Performance levels were based on 2009 CST (California Standards Test) scores in language arts. The performance levels were Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below-Basic, and Far-Below Basic.

**Instrumentation**

The three-question survey asked students to respond to the following:

1. Do you feel that nightly homework is important?
2. Do you feel that homework makes you a better student?
3. Do you feel that nightly homework is a good extension of what is taking place in class?

Each question had a 5-point scaled response for students to record their answers.

**Responses on the questionnaire were:**

1. Not important at all
2. Somewhat Important
3. Do not know
4. Important, and
5. Very Important.

**Data Collection Procedure**

The researcher designed the questionnaire (see Appendix) and it was immediately given to the participants after permission slips were collected. Questions focused on the importance of homework, whether or not nightly homework made the participants better students, and whether or not nightly homework is a good extension
of what was being taught in class. All surveys were collected immediately after students filled them out.

Data Analysis

The researcher tallied the results of all the completed surveys and recorded them in tabular fashion. The researcher then stratified them by student performance levels. Next, the researcher examined the results for patterns of responses; both within and between the survey question responses and within the performance level strata. Finally, a Chi-square analysis was undertaken on the set of interesting probable patterns revealed in the data.
Chapter 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses and examines the results from the survey. The findings for this study are informative in that they identify the extent to which this sample of fifth-grade students regarded homework as relevant and important to them as students. Of additional value, reflections on the findings highlight numerous qualitative variables that could help to better understand why a sizable proportion of students disagree about or are even confused about the importance and relevance of homework. Given that homework is important and relevant to students, then pursuing a better understanding of its variables is integral to solving the problem of measuring students’ relationship with it.

Student responses to question one are presented below in Table 1. Students were stratified by achievement levels and then placed into one of two groups: an Advanced/Proficient group, which made up a significant proportion of the overall participants, and a Basic/Below-Basic/Far-Below Basic group. Responses were then broken up into groups of either Not Important at all to Somewhat Important, to Important to Very Important. Responses of Do Not Know, which made up 10% of overall answers and were later defined as students without an opinion, were not included in this table.
This chapter presents a description of the results from the study and a discussion of the findings. Again, responses for question 1 were

1. Not Important at All,
2. Somewhat Important,
3. Do Not Know
4. Important, and
5. Very Important.

Results of Table 1 show that a majority (66%) of all students felt that homework was Important to Very Important; while only 23% of students surveyed felt that homework was Not Important at All to Somewhat Important. Most students (79%) had an opinion either way as to whether homework was important or not.
While analyzing the data it became apparent to the researcher that it was necessary to place achievement levels into two distinct groups: an Advanced/Proficient group, and a Basic/Below-Basic/Far-Below Basic group. This is noteworthy for two reasons:

1. because of the number of responses (there were far more Advanced/Proficient students who participated in the research – 85 versus 14), and
2. because of the significance of No Child Left Behind legislation signed in 2002, which put in place the ambitious goal that ALL children will be at least proficient in reading by 2014.

Table 2 presents the raw percentage responses to all three questions on the survey by the Advanced/Proficient group of students. Again, responses were then broken up into groups of either Not Important at All to Somewhat Important, to Important to Very Important. Responses of Do Not Know were also left off this table and those responses were defined as students with no opinions. Each row then represents responses of those with an opinion, either negative (Not Important at All to Somewhat Important) or positive (Important to Very Important). For example, 21 out of 76 students with an opinion felt that homework was Not Important at All to Somewhat Important, while 55 out of 76 students with an opinion felt that homework was Important to Very Important.
Table 2

*Advanced & Proficient Performance Level Students’ Raw Scores and Percentages for Survey Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advanced &amp; Proficient Responses</th>
<th>Not Important at All - Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Important - Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question #1</td>
<td>21/76 28%</td>
<td>55/76 72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question #2</td>
<td>17/68 25%</td>
<td>50/68 74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question #3</td>
<td>20/74 27%</td>
<td>54/74 70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>50/218</td>
<td>159/218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fourteen of 99 students were in the Basic/Below-Basic/Far-Below Basic achievement levels according to their English Language Arts scores. Forty-three “Do not know” responses occurred out of the total 254 responses recorded by all three survey questions. Approximately 72% of Advanced/Proficient students who responded other than “Do Not Know” indicated that they regard homework as either Important or Very important overall. Also, among the Basic/Below-Basic/Far-Below Basic students who respond other than “Do Not Know”, data indicated that about 57% regarded homework as either Important or Very Important.

The researcher performed a Chi-Square analysis on the responses by the Advanced/Proficient achievement groups to determine statistical significance of the data. Based on the standard p<.001 with two degrees of freedom the results indicated that the results were not due to chance. The researcher’s expected values were that of equal distribution among responses, which would have had student opinions spread
across all possible responses more evenly. For example, the researcher was expecting the same amount of students to say they found nightly homework “Not Important at all” as to “Somewhat Important” as to “Important” and as to “Very Important” (a value of around 20 student responses for each available answer). Thus, the researcher’s hypothesis was not proven.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Homework has been, is, and will be for the foreseeable future, a part of most school curriculums. With this in mind, it is important to understand that homework is not just a means to spur students’ academic achievements, but is also an important part of the relationship between home and school (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). Homework is also an important way to further a student’s experience and understanding of concepts first brought to light in the classroom setting. If assigned thoughtfully and appropriately it has the potential to further student understanding outside of regular school hours. Coutts (2004), furthers the idea behind the importance of homework by stating that homework not only plays a part in furthering classroom concepts, but also in establishing and consolidating a child’s beliefs and study patterns regarding academic work. Furthermore, a student’s experience with homework at the elementary-school level plays an integral part in laying the foundation for a student’s career in learning.

Results of this study bring to the forefront the idea that most of the fifth grade students surveyed (86%) had an opinion about homework. Of those with an opinion, 78% felt that homework was either “Important” to “Very Important,” 76% of students surveyed felt that homework played an “Important” to “Very Important” role in making them a better student, and seventy-four percent of students surveyed felt that homework was a good extension of what is taking place in class. These results were found across achievement levels. Overall, most Advanced/Proficient students felt that
homework was either “Important” to “Very Important”, while low-achieving students perceived it similarly, with most responding that homework was “Important” to “Very Important”. This perception was similar when comparing all three questions on the survey.

Results of the study are comparable to that of the results of Cooper et al.’s 1998 study where the researchers found that elementary-aged, low-achieving students held positive attitudes toward homework. Similar findings can be found in the results in the 2006 Yazzie-Mints study, which polled over 81,000 students and found that a majority of students found homework to be important. The author went further by stating that “Doing written homework” and “Reading and studying for class” were reported to be among the most important activities to students surveyed when away from school (Yazzie-Mints). The 2007 MetLife survey of over 2,000 students found 77% of students polled thought homework to be important and 69% responded that homework helps them learn more in school.

What has become apparent to the researcher is that, overall, students perceive homework as an important part of their school experience. With this perception in mind, it is essential that all parties involved understand that most students do see the relationship between homework and school. Teachers, parents, and administrators all have a hand in the way in which homework is perceived, assigned, and potentially completed. The important part is that everyone is on the same page regarding homework, its importance, and ultimately its effect on student achievement.
The teacher’s role in assigning homework is obvious, but do most teachers consider the idea that students view the task as important when they assign it? Is homework assigned out of convenience or because it is simply expected by parents? It is the opinion of the researcher that homework should be as well thought out and prepared for as daily lessons. Is this the case in most classrooms? According to Cooper (1989), the effectiveness of homework, with respect to academic achievement, points to the fact that not only are many homework practices not very useful for elementary school students, but assigning homework at such a young age can be detrimental to their attitudes towards school. Most research shows that the lower the grade level, the less effective homework is on the population of students.

What seems interesting to the researcher is that it has been his experience that teachers assign homework differently. Some assign a lot on a nightly basis, and some fail to assign much at all. Assigning too much homework and interfering with a student’s life outside of school is always something a classroom teacher needs to be aware of, but are teachers who assign too little homework doing a disservice to their students? A common practice seen throughout the research on homework is the idea of homework being based on what was not completed in class. Far too often, in this case, students rush through not only their homework, but also their classwork in order to avoid any homework. This develops a practice which is detrimental twofold. Homework should be assigned separately from independent class work, at the end of the day or period, when students have the best opportunity to revisit the material at home.
Classroom teachers also need to keep in mind the population of diverse learners (for example language learners, learning-disabled students, and students with attention issues) when assigning homework. In a recent study by Brock, Lapp. Flood, Fisher, and Tao Han (2007), the authors performed in-depth interviews with teachers regarding their homework practices. What the researchers found was that although teachers did engage in “typical” homework practices on one level, they did make provisions to make sure all students had the support they needed to complete their homework. For example, many of the teachers had language learners as students. In those cases many teachers offered extra assistance in the form of before and after-school homework clubs, and being available in their classrooms before and after school.

According to Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, and Brown (2004), after-school homework programs can also interfere with other, nonacademic activities that promote student bonding to the school and the community, and run the risk of reducing parental involvement in the schooling process. Ultimately, the help provided by these programs is limited by the quality of the homework students receive. In the opinion of the researcher, after-school programs are helpful, but ultimately could be hard to count on for assisting students properly. That is why it is the opinion of the researcher that further studies look into traditional settings versus best-case-scenario, after-school programs.

Successful homework practices should begin to include more use of technology. According to Reuter (2009), when comparing an online option versus the
conventional school norms and practices, online students showed a 42% grade improvement from pre- to post-assessment; while on-campus students had a 21% improvement with the same curriculum. Online students also showed better learning success in lab-related knowledge and skills based on individual assessment questions. Unfortunately, to find successful use of technology and homework a person has to look outside the United States for examples of computer use and its effect on homework success. According to Wong (2001), students receiving computer drill-and-practice homework performed significantly better in achievement and retention than did the students completing paper-based homework. In addition, students in the computer game group and computer-aided discovery group performed as well as those in the paper-based group. What is interesting to note is that at the time of this study, one of the limitations was the idea of limited software availability. It would be interesting to revisit this limitation considering the exponential growth of technology over the last few years.

Open lines of communication between teachers, parents, and students also seem to be a key component to successful learning outside the classroom. A study by Hoisiin (2007) involving communication between all of the three aforementioned parties suggested the importance of parental involvement with homework. The researcher went on to state that parent-teacher communication would result in parents developing better attitudes toward school. When parents develop a positive attitude toward school, then they will be motivated to get more involved in their children's schooling (Epstein, 1995). These positive attitudes with parents will lead to positive
attitudes among children. Research has shown that positive attitudes results in higher academic achievement (Epstein, 2001).

The role of administrators and school districts is also important in implementing successful homework practices. Both act as a communication device with parents and understanding what makes up successful homework practices are necessary when implementing an effective homework plan. According to Baumgartner and Donahue (1998), it is important to develop a plan for homework, a plan that starts with all parties having a say in the look, expectations, and implementation of the plan. Baumgartner went on to say that a good starting point for any type of school homework plan should begin with surveying both students and parents. Creating a statement or homework philosophy from the results could help towards family buy in to the plan (Baumgartner & Donahue). Developing a homework brochure could go a long way into creating a means for parents to better understand how a positive homework environment can help students with homework completion. Simple suggestions such as designating homework time each day, limiting distractions, creating a designated place for doing assignments, and newsletters that will keep parents abreast of upcoming assignments and themes could go assist in fostering a successful school-wide plan (Baumgartner & Donahue; Epstein 1988). Other ways to keep everyone on the same page are clarifying grading policies, estimating the amount of time students should be spending on assignments, and helping students organize and prioritize assignments (Nuzum, 1998).
Homework is important to most students and although the numbers of Far-Below Basic/Below Basic/Basic students versus Advanced/Proficient students differed in this study, the percentages were similar. Both groups of students felt that homework was important. Further research should look at larger numbers of elementary-aged students, specifically larger Far-Below Basic/Below Basic/Basic students. Also, it would be interesting to compare time spent on a nightly basis to those same students’ attitudes. Another approach could compare parents’ attitudes with their children’s attitude regarding homework.
APPENDIX

Questionnaire
Nightly Homework Questionnaire

Name __________________

1) Do you feel that nightly homework is important?

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not important at all  Somewhat Important  Do Not Know  Important  Very Important

2) Do you feel that the nightly homework makes you a better student?

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not important at all  Somewhat Important  Do Not Know  Important  Very Important

3) Do you feel that the nightly homework is a good extension of what is taking place in class?

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not important at all  Somewhat Important  Do Not Know  Important  Very Important
REFERENCES


