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Parent and Teacher Perceptions of Elementary School Homework

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Jimmy Marcum

May 2018

Dr. Pamela Scott, Chair

Dr. William Flora

Dr. Virginia Foley

Dr. Stephanie Tweed

Keywords: Homework, Parental Involvement, Stress

ABSTRACT

Parent and Teacher Perceptions of Elementary School Homework

by

Jimmy Marcum

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of parents and teachers of elementary school students regarding homework. Specifically, the researcher examined parent and teacher perceptions, perceptions of teachers in kindergarten through fifth grades, and parents of elementary students in kindergarten through fifth grades. In this qualitative study, the researcher analyzed feedback obtained from two focus groups: a group of three parents and a group of three teachers. One-on-one in-depth interviews of seven parents or guardians and seven elementary school teachers were utilized. These interviews were conducted in settings chosen by the participants. All participants worked in, or had children enrolled in, one school division in Southwest, Virginia. All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and examined by the participants to validate accuracy before coding began.

Coded analysis of interview data revealed emergent themes based on frequency of occurrence. Additionally, noteworthy data discussed by participants were documented. The findings of the study indicate that homework for elementary school students can be both beneficial and detrimental for elementary school students. The following themes emerged from analysis of participant interviews: homework can lead to stress; homework should be differentiated; homework should be brief; failing to complete homework results in school consequences; homework reveals student successes and areas of concern; homework amounts do not increase with grade level progression; nightly reading homework is acceptable; teachers have

a misconception between what they believe they are assigning and what is actually occurring; and homework must have a purpose. Moreover, noteworthy ideas were: teachers will make changes to homework based on parent feedback; homework impacts sleep; homework reduction can be beneficial; parents enjoy having homework options; parents appreciate information about homework; and teachers do not like assigning homework.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my Lord, Jesus Christ, who has always been so wonderful to me and has lovingly guided me through this entire process. He has constantly made a way for me to be successful. I am forever grateful for His love and mercy.

I also dedicate this study to my amazing wife, Jessica. I would have never been able to make it through this process without you. Your love, encouragement, and wisdom have always helped me to be successful. Even when I was tired and doubted if I would survive this process, your confidence in me never wavered. Thank you for your understanding all of those nights I sat typing away on my laptop only hearing you when I made a concerted effort to pull myself out of the world of schoolwork. We have accomplished so much together and we are just getting started. My love for you grows with each passing day. Thank you for loving me.

Finally, I dedicate this study to my children: Slade, Shandi, and Kinley. We have had so many wonderful times together, but I know that some great memories were lost due to the late nights and weekends I spent working. My sacrifices were made to provide more for each of you. Without a doubt, your mother and I know that the three of you can accomplish anything you set your minds to. Work hard, do not settle for anything less than your best, and know that we love you with all of our hearts. I look forward to spending more quality time with you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When author Bunmi Laditan and her behavior therapist husband told their 10 year old daughter's school that she would no longer be completing any homework, her daughter instantly felt a great deal of stress leave her body and the family started enjoying more quality time together (Dowd, 2017). When Laditan posted the response to her Facebook page, she received many positive responses, more than 64,000 likes, and garnered attention from the media (Dowd, 2017). The homework topic brings about strong viewpoints both in support for and against. Stress is a term that is often associated with nightly student homework. The single greatest predictor of stress in elementary to middle school aged children from ages 9-13 was the amount of time spent on homework (Brown, Nobiling, Teufel, & Birch, 2011).

Homework is the term generally used to describe schoolwork given to students with the intent that completion will occur after the conclusion of the school day (Cooper, 2007). Homework has been a staple in the lives of American students for at least thirty years. Students at the elementary school level have not received immunity from increased loads of homework. In fact, they may have been the primary target of the homework agenda. "It's with younger children, where the benefits are most questionable (if not absent), that there has been the greatest increase in the quantity of homework" (Kohn, 2006, p. 38). This increase has been confirmed in recent publications (Loveless, 2014; Moyer, 2017; Wilde, 2016).

Learners need not only teacher support but also ongoing parental support to ensure homework completion is obtained and such support assists with increasing understanding (Knapp, Jefferson, & Landers, 2013; Margolis, 2005). Increasing parental involvement in

schools is necessary for educators because parental support is positively correlated with increasing student achievement (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). Likewise, involving parents in their child's education ensures that a child will perform at optimal levels (Hoerr, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

School divisions understand the importance of strengthening bonds with parents and incorporating them in the decision-making process. Requiring students to complete homework may have a negative impact on the relationship between teachers and parents of elementary school students. First, homework at home creates multiple problems between parents and their children that may even lead parents to complete their child's homework (Shumaker, 2016). Additionally, assigning homework is often felt by parents to be an attack on their parenting skills and greatly decreases quality family time that children need (Kohn, 2007; Kralovec & Buell, 2000; Vatterott, 2009).

A disconnect often exists between the homework philosophies and viewpoints of teachers and parents. Understandably, parents desire to understand the purpose behind their child's homework. Many teachers believe assigning homework teaches responsibility, but homework has never been proven to increase self-discipline or responsibility (Kohn, 2006). Both parents and teachers understand the importance of exercise and sleep, but nightly homework can infringe on these opportunities which may have health and emotional consequences. Behavior problems in students can be minimized by providing children opportunities to be physically active (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Finally, the intended purpose, increasing academic performance, of homework is questionable. Cooper (2007) determined homework less effective for elementary

school students because they are distracted at home, have not developed adequate study habits, are not likely to use self-testing strategies, and elementary students take longer to complete homework.

Research Question

This qualitative research study revolves around one overarching question: “What are the perceptions of elementary school parents and teachers in regard to the purpose of homework?”

Significance of the Study

The results of this study may add to existing research on homework’s influence on parent-teacher relationships. Administrators, superintendents, parents, and teachers may use the findings in a collaborative effort to improve or make changes to their existing homework policies and procedures. Assigning nightly homework to elementary school students must be examined to determine if assigning nightly homework to elementary students will influence parent-teacher relationships. Determining homework’s influence is important because positive parent-teacher relationships equate to high-levels of academic achievement.

The significance of this study focuses on the perceptions of parents and teachers of elementary school students to determine homework’s influence on parent-teacher relationships. Data provided by participants through interviews allowed for an analysis to determine if either group credits nightly homework as an attributing factor in strengthening or weakening parent-teacher relationships. Parents or guardians of ten elementary school students in kindergarten through fifth grades and teachers of students in kindergarten through fifth grades participated in the study.

Definition of Terms

Busywork – “Both students and parents tend to view tasks that don't appear to require thinking as busywork. Projects that require nonacademic skills (such as cutting, gluing, or drawing) are often inefficient” (Vatterott, p. 11, 2010).

Parental Involvement – “Parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children” (Jeynes, p. 245, 2005).

Stress – “The physiological response to the perception of loss of control resulting from an adverse situation or person” (Jensen, 2009, p. 22).

Student Engagement – “Students’ involvement with activities and conditions likely to generate high-quality learning” (Coates, 2008, p. vi).

Practice Assignments – “Meant to reinforce the learning of material already presented in class and to help the student master specific skills” (Cooper, 2007, p. 6).

Student Voice – “The right-now expression of feelings, opinions, and narratives” (Jensen, 2016, p. 117).

Limitations

A qualitative study emphasizing participant interviews was chosen for this study. The utilization of qualitative methods provides the researcher with highly-detailed information (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling was utilized to collect data from the parent(s) or guardian(s) of seven elementary students and seven elementary school educators. Seven teachers from the elementary school setting participated in the study. Both groups of participants represent grades

kindergarten through fifth grades. Subsequently, both participant groups represent three elementary schools.

Due to the limited number of participants, the results are not representative of the perceptions of all parents or teachers from elementary school settings across the United States. Also, it is not clear if the results would be different if the researcher was not a current administrator and former teacher in the county from which participants belong. Finally, the researcher cannot declare that homework alone contributed to the relationship statuses declared by participants.

Summary

This qualitative study examined the perceptions of 10 elementary school teachers and the perceptions of the parent(s) or guardian(s) of 10 elementary-aged students in regard to homework's influence on parent-teacher relationships. Chapter 1 contains an introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, definition of terms, and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 contains a detailed review of the existing literature. Chapter 3 contains details of the methodology used in the study. Chapter 4 reports the collected data. The conclusion, recommendations, summary, implications for future practice, and suggestions for future research are included in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This qualitative study was designed to examine to the perceptions of parents and teachers on the influence of homework assigned to elementary students with respect to its influence on parent-teacher relationships. Specifically, this relationship was examined by obtaining the perceptions of both groups through a small, focus study and then one-on-one interviews with 10 participants from both groups. Homework is a term that is generally understood by all past and present students.

Homework's ability to help students has been greatly questioned. Gill and Schlossman (2004) wrote, "While the opponents of homework exaggerate its harms, the supporters overstate its benefits" (p. 180). There are clearly two definitive sides to this argument. Cooper (2007) determined homework less effective for elementary school students because they are distracted at home, have not developed adequate study habits, are not likely to use self-testing strategies, and elementary students take longer to complete homework (p. 31). Yet, many researchers, including Cooper, believe that elementary school students can benefit from nightly homework both academically and by learning strategies that will make them more proficient learners. Other researchers believe that homework can be beneficial but are careful to make mention of the fact that, like most instructional methods, homework must be created in a way to ensure students learn from completion (Marzano & Pickering, 2007).

Individuals representing the other side of the argument claim that homework does not work, divides families, and may impact students emotionally (Kohn, 2007; Kralovec & Buell,

2000; Vatterott, 2010). What educational researchers, including members of both groups, can agree on is that parental involvement is necessary for student success (Cunha et al., 2015; Kohn, 2007; Kralovec & Buell, 2000; LaRocque et al., 2011; Marzano & Pickering; 2007; Vatterott, 2010).

Current Views of Homework

Homework is not a new concept and has been a debated topic for well over 100 years (Kralovec & Buell, 2000; Loveless, 2014; Vatterott, 2009). In the early 1900s, homework was viewed negatively by parents because homework limited fresh air and sun exposure and both were considered essential for the optimum health of children at that time (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 41). However, a few years earlier, homework was greatly valued as a tool that would sharpen the minds of America's youth (Cooper, 2007).

Cycles of periodical challenges to homework's significance would occur in America from the 1950s until 1983. In the 1950s, the Space Race caused homework to spike for American students in an effort to exceed their Russian counterparts (Spencer, 2017). It was in 1983 that president Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education released a report that would change how homework was viewed by politicians, parents, and educators. This publication was entitled "*A Nation at Risk*." The premise behind "*A Nation at Risk*" was that total school reform was necessary to close the achievement gap between America and those nations considered to have the highest performing students. An essential component to such largescale reform was the requirement that American students complete more homework on a nightly basis to ensure student success (Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

With the public calling for an improved education for all students, parents and students alike felt the impact through an increase in homework. Homework can assist with bridging the gap between school and home (Vatterott, 2009). Parents of elementary school students aid in homework completion by providing their children a quiet place to work, by reminding their children to keep a positive attitude about their homework, through a constant monitoring of emotions, and by offering assistance (Fan, 2012). Parents possess both the capabilities to assist their students with improving engagement levels of homework completion and with improving their levels of achievement on homework and other academic tasks (Doctoroff & Arnold, 2017).

With parents seeing their students complete more work during their time quality time at home and parents becoming invested and involved in the homework process, one would think that most parents would be against homework. However, some parents believe that homework is a key component necessary to ensure student success, especially in affluent communities that possess successful schools (Galloway, Conner, & Pope, 2013). Other nations have taken opposite approaches to homework only to find great success. Finland is renown in educational circles for possessing some of the world's greatest schools and routinely finishes in the top three in world rankings (OECD, 2015). Finnish students, some of the most academically prepared and successful students in the world, spend very little time on homework and a great deal of time on creative play (Partanen, 2011).

Conflicting Opinions

One may find it difficult or even confusing to determine if homework is an important tool for students. Dr. Harris Cooper an authority on homework analyzed over 60 research studies in both 2006 and 2012 and in both analyses he was unable to prove that homework helps improve

student performance on unit tests or grades (Cooper, 2007; Spencer, 2017). Yet, Maltese Fan, & Xiato (2012) found a positive correlation between the amount of time students work on homework and standardized test scores. These results were found when examining high school students. Such achievement increases may be exclusive to older students. “After decades of research on the topic, there is no overall positive correlation between homework and achievement (by any measure) for students before middle school or, in many cases, before high school (Kohn, 2006, p. 38). Other researchers understand that there is very little evidence to support that homework is effective in increasing academic performance especially at the elementary level (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Additionally, students who homework is intended to help the most, struggling students, are also the students least likely to complete their homework (Mangione, 2008).

Homework supporters believe that homework’s ability to positively impact students goes beyond academics. Homework assists with student responsibility, limits behavior problems, and helps students learn how to meet deadlines (Ekici, 2014). Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011) found that homework had only a small to medium effect on improving the self-regulatory skills of elementary school students.

A belief exists among educators that homework’s greatest flaw is that is in the design of the homework (Frey & Fisher, 2011; Marzano & Pickering, 2007). When teachers do not assign high-quality homework, the benefits are minimal or can even be detrimental to student learning (Marzano & Pickering, 2007). Likewise, homework’s inability to assist students may be specifically attributed to the fact that most schools lack a precise plan that involves all stakeholders (Protheroe, 2009; Watkins & Stevens, 2013).

Younger students do not understand the value of homework like junior high and high school students (Nunez, 2014). Cooper (2007) declared that the impact of supervised study is greater for older students than elementary students. Furthermore, evidence supports the idea that elementary students and high school students benefit more from parental assistance with homework than middle school students (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). However, the more parents assist students with their homework the more likely their child is to view their assistance as intrusive (Moroni et al., 2015).

American students are not the only students completing homework on a nightly basis. Homework is a weekly occurrence for almost every math and language arts student in Latin America (Murillo & Martinez-Garrido, 2014). These same elementary school students are not improving academically after receiving feedback on their homework. While both Latin American and the United States embrace the notion of assigning students nightly homework, both American and Latin American students are not considered to have the highest performing students in the world- a distinction going to Singapore (OECD, 2015). In the early 2000s, the approach to homework taken by nations considered to have the highest performing students may have made nations question their approaches to homework. Students of Japan, Denmark, and the Czech Republic routinely outperform their counterparts, despite the fact that they rarely are assigned nightly homework (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). However, more recent data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2015) has revealed that the top performing schools around the world have vastly different approaches to assigning homework nightly, with the top nation embracing the idea that assigning nightly homework equates to greater achievement and other nations in the top five delineating from nightly homework.

Teachers often report they stray from assigning homework out of concern that parents may inaccurately teach children the concept featured in the homework and the teacher will have to devote extra time reteaching the concept (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). A problematic situation often arises at home due to the fact that children routinely struggle to convey to their parents the mathematical procedures utilized in their classrooms (Lange & Meaney, 2011). Yet, assigning math homework to elementary school students is one of the few instances in which assigning homework correlates to higher test scores (Eren & Henderson, 2011).

Conversely, for students who recognize they have trouble with math, math homework has the potential to cause emotional trauma (Lange & Meaney, 2011). A conflict exists between the perceived roles in teaching math to their children. Parents are willing to share the responsibility, whereas teachers tend to believe the success of their math students falls on their shoulders (Wilder, 2017). To conclude, even homework supporters recognize the need for ongoing discussions about homework because change is necessary to ensure all students are meeting high academic standards (Gill & Schlossman, 2004).

Homework Policies

When the Merrimack, New Hampshire school division decided to eliminate grading of homework, school board members called for more research to prove that the decision was done in the best interest of students (Houghton, 2017). Despite the fact that a great deal of research literature has been recently released about homework, Glenn, Jones, Merritt, and Sartain (2015) found that many school divisions have homework policies that have not been modified in the past five years and it is not uncommon to see homework policies that are over 15 years old. Most school divisions post homework policies online for the general public to view, but most parents are not familiar with how to access these policies. Paying special attention to homework policies

could benefit teachers, parents, and students. Homework can be more beneficial to students and less problematic if educational leaders would create an easy to follow homework policy and provide teachers with substantial homework examples (Protheroe, 2009, p. 44).

Amounts of Homework

A concern that parents have about homework for their child is the length of time it takes their child to complete homework. Most educators and school divisions tend to generally adhere to the NEA's 10-minute rule which equates to 10 minute increments of nightly homework for students depending on their grade level (Cooper, 2015). "My sense is that pushing beyond a 15-minute rule, generally speaking, creates a situation in which the costs of homework will begin to outweigh the benefits" (Cooper, 2007, p. 92). Homework that exceeds the 20 minute threshold needs to be accompanied by measures that provide students the opportunity to determine if the completing the assigned homework would be beneficial (Mendler, 2000). Teachers often believe they assign their students a reasonable amount of homework that should only take require between 15 and 30 minutes to complete (Murillo & Martinez-Garrido, 2014). The amount of time a student spends on homework is not as important as actually taking the time to complete assigned homework (Maltese et al., 2012).

Palacios (2017) researched 228 high school graduates to determine final grade point average, gender, or amount of nightly homework completed significantly impacted anxiety scores. Participants completed an anxiety assessment an online surveys about gender, grade point averages, and homework amounts. The data revealed a significant relationship between anxiety scores and final grade point averages and the amount of nightly homework completed. The data also indicated that a significant amount of anxiety did not exist for students completing less than an hour of homework each night or students that reported completing one to three hours per

night. However, students completing over three hours of homework per night experienced high stress levels.

Despite the fact that these researchers and organizations call for limits to homework, the amount of homework assigned to younger students has only increased in the past twenty years (Kohn, 2006). Overall, most students are not reporting a significant increase in the amount of homework they complete each night (Loveless, 2014). Increasing homework workloads does not necessarily equate to academic success nor the amount of time that students spend on homework each night (Valle et al., 2016). Spending more time on homework only increases student achievement for junior high and high school students (Nunez, 2014). Despite belonging to the group of students benefiting most from homework, high school students who exceed more than three hours of homework per night are more likely to experience academic stress and physical health problems (Galloway et al., 2013).

Parental Perceptions

Fan (2012) found that the majority of parents with elementary-age students believe they are fully capable of assisting their children with homework completion. Elementary school teachers assign homework that requires family involvement and understand that such assistance is necessary for completion (Phares, 2017). Parents report that assisting their children with homework actually improves their relationships with their children (Bennett & Kalish, 2006).

Some parents frequently stray from helping their students complete their homework (Kiewra et al., 2010). This avoidance could be a result of confusion. Most parents indicate that rarely receive any details about school homework policies, guidance on proper homework completion, or intended purposes for homework assignments (Kiewra et al., 2010). When parents notice their children struggling with math and reading in the primary grades, they devote more

time monitoring and assisting with homework completion as their child progresses through school (Silinskas, Niemi, Lerkkanen, & Nurmi, 2013).

Yet, educators do not want parents to be excluded from what happens in their child's educational walk. "Given that increased level of parental involvement in schools and in the education of their children is positively correlated with increasing educational achievement, it is important to devise ways to increase parental involvement" (LaRocque et al., 2011, p. 115). Positive family and teacher relationships are essential for improving academic performance (Cankar, Deutsch, & Sentocnik, 2012; Loughran, 2008; Sahagun, 2015; Simon, 2004).

Orkin, May, and Wolf (2017) studied 36 students in first through six grades to examine parents' influence on learned helplessness during reading and writing homework. The researchers found that parents who repeatedly intruded during their child's attempt at homework completion saw an increase in helpless behaviors from their children. Helpless behaviors were identified as behaviors like frustration or avoidance of homework. The researchers stated that parental attempts to intervene were not intentionally done to disrupt, rather, attempts were made to assist.

Aichler (2017) conducted open-ended interviews with four middle-class families to explore the emotions experienced by parents when assisting their elementary-aged children with homework. Despite using homework routines, students did not complete homework independently. Likewise, these routines did not eliminate or significantly reduce stress on the parents. In fact, the participants expressed their dismay that neither using homework routines nor assisting their child with homework completion reduced the stress they felt or the frequency of excessive emotional expressions their children experienced during homework.

Moroni, Dumont, Trautwein, Niggli, and Baeriswyl (2015) studied longitudinal data from 1,685 sixth grade students from Switzerland to determine if quantity and the quality of parental homework involvement affected student achievement. When students identified their parents as intrusively involved in the completion process of their homework, their reading test scores were lower. However, students that found their parents' help as supportive had higher reading test scores. The frequency of parental involvement in homework resulted in lower reading test scores (Moroni et al., 2015).

Another way that school divisions and teachers can increase parental involvement is by giving parents control over their child's homework. Parents who have the ability to end their child's homework after the child reaches a point of frustration are highly appreciative for such proactive measures (Margolis, 2005). Minimizing a power struggle means increasing communication. Parents believe that teachers would greatly benefit from training on how to communicate effectively with the parents of their students (Wanat, 2010). Moreover, teachers must communicate the purposes of the homework they assign because homework quality is a concern that parents have (Viadero, 2009).

Educators' Views of Homework

Teachers assign homework to keep parents informed and try to adhere to the 10-minute rule (Gallo, 2015). On the other hand, more experienced teachers are more likely to assign less homework than new teachers (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Administrators rarely force their beliefs about homework on their teachers and allow them to assign homework as they choose. In fact, principals rarely talk to teachers about homework until they receive a parent complaint (Bedford, 2014). Often, this means simply adopting brief, often vague district-wide homework policies that favor students and parents, but very few parents are aware that the homework policies of most

school divisions allow for homework flexibility (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Surprisingly, parents of elementary school students believe that homework has value in improving academic performance and is given for a specific purpose, despite the fact that teachers disagree (Hoeke, 2017).

Elementary school teachers value reading and homework activities that require a practice of memorized facts and identify these tasks as being the most meaningful homework assignments (Hoeke, 2017). Rarely do teachers create homework assignments that require students to active higher-level thinking because most homework assignments are created to allow students to prove understanding with little more than a one word answer (Bedford, 2014). Yet, using homework that requires students to use lower-level skills does not constitute high-quality homework. Teachers who want to assign useful, high-quality homework, homework that improves student learning for long periods of time, often espouse asking students to create original projects (Ekici, 2014). Experienced teachers are better prepared at creating meaningful homework and monitoring how homework is used than teachers with less than five years of teaching experience (Viadero, 2009).

Differentiating homework is equally as important and can ensure learners of all ability levels successfully complete their homework (Margolis, 2005, p. 11). Providing high-quality, timely feedback is another way students can learn from their homework (Ekici, 2014; Mendler, 2000). Many students struggle with understanding the importance of completing homework due to the fact that they rarely receive feedback on their learning from their teacher (Ekici, 2014). Teachers rarely receive training in how to work effectively work with parents which could improve the likelihood that students successfully complete their homework (LaRocque et al., 2011).

Also, teachers can improve homework completion rates if they directly tie current issues into the assignments themselves (Ekici, 2014). The key to effective homework is to develop homework for elementary school students that resembles those items in their lives that bring them joy like video games, can lead to a reward or public recognition, are routinely practiced, and feature high-quality projects that leave lasting impressions (Jackson, 2007). Transcendent homework is homework that is carefully crafted and assigned by the teacher based on student need (Neason, 2017). Students would benefit from their homework assignments if their teachers ensure that all homework: is purposeful, requires high-level thinking, is selected by the student, differentiated, and the amount of material on each page is minimized (Vatterott, 2010).

Stoeger and Ziegler (2008) studied the impact that five weeks of weekly training in self-regulation and self-efficacy would have on fourth grade students during homework activities. These students displayed improved: self-efficacy, time management skills, and a greater proficiency at reflecting accurately on their own learning. Student-participants also experienced increased homework completion rates during the study that remained constant while their counterparts saw a decrease in homework completion rates throughout the entirety of the study.

In studies designed to investigate the relationship between parental support, student motivation, and emotions during homework, Knollman and Wild (2007) surveyed German sixty graders at home. The self-report questionnaires measured extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, as well as the self-concept of the student's perceived mathematic ability. The participants were asked to read math vignettes and report which emotion they would experience if they were in the situation described and the intensity of such an emotion. The findings indicated that intrinsically motivated students experience more positive or negative emotional affects than their extrinsically motivated counterparts. Additionally, extrinsically motivated students have a more profound,

positive emotional response to their parents providing an organized learning environment conducive to learning than their intrinsically motivated counterparts.

Williams, Swift, Williams, and Van Daal (2017) studied two classes of nine and ten-year old students in a primary school in England to investigate whether math homework designed to include parents could enhance parent-child interactions and performance. The homework featured open-ended questions and was designed specifically to connect topics that interested the students with math concepts. The researchers asked students to participate in daily student-teacher collaborative sessions that required students to discuss the findings of their homework and the experiences of working with their parents. Additionally, occasional parental information sessions, drop-ins, and focus group discussions were utilized to motivate and inform parents how to best assist their students without providing direct instruction. The researchers found: high levels of parental involvement and student engagement, student enjoyment while completing their homework, and students enjoyed discussing and celebrating their efforts.

Impacting Students and Families

Some families believe that time spent on homework takes away from quality family time whereas other parents acknowledge that homework brings them together (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). In fact, homework is a widely supported practice (Gill & Schlossman, 2004).

Pressman et al. (2015) studied 1173 students in kindergarten through 12th grades to determine if they actually receive the NEA's recommended 10 minutes of nightly homework dependent on their grade level. What the researchers found were that students typically receive more than this amount nightly. The researchers also found that as parents perceive themselves to

be less effective in their abilities to assist their students with their homework, the likelihood that they felt that homework negatively impacted their families increased (Pressman et al., 2015).

Homework, if it is to be used, must be differentiated to meet the unique needs of each student. Students cannot flourish when educators believe that all students have the same needs (LaRocque et al., 2011). Failing to differentiate homework will be problematic for students. Homework struggles are oftentimes a result of homework assignments that require students who struggle academically to work beyond their independent levels (Margolis, 2005). High performing students are more likely to set high achievement goals for themselves which results in higher levels of homework achievement than students who set low goals for themselves (Valle et al., 2015). Elementary students of all ages procrastinate on homework, but lack of homework completion can be minimized if students learn how to embrace autonomous motivation and teachers and parents learn how to foster such motivation (Katz, Eilat, & Nevo, 2014). Students of all ability levels declare that possessing a lack of understanding about what their teachers want them to do and the difficulty of the homework as reasons for not completing their homework (Landing-Corretjer, 2009).

Not only do students struggle when homework is difficult to complete, but the entire family of the child may be impacted. Stress on the student, student-family interactions, along with total time required to complete homework assignments are elevated with students who struggle academically (Kohn, 2006). Homework frustration is common for parents. Normally understanding parents who identify the importance of being sensitive to the needs of their children find it difficult to respond with the appropriate level of sensitivity when it comes to

homework problems (Cunha et al., 2015). While completing homework, all students and parents would benefit from a commitment to exhibiting positive emotions (Katz et al., 2012).

Special education teachers believe that homework teaches special education students important self-regulatory skills and reinforces previously learned academic concepts, but they admit that homework frustrates special education students (Bennis, 2011). Struggling students report spending more time on their homework than high performing students (Flunger et al., 2015). Special education students with learning disabilities and possessing an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) can be successful with homework completion if they have the support of their parents, teachers and parents that are continually collaborating, and academic supports that are clearly defined and understood by all (Walker, Collins & Moody, 2014). In contrast, creating effective homework for special education students who work in an inclusive setting is often difficult for educators (Carr, 2013).

Stocakall (2015) warned that disabled students with executive function (working memory, flexible thinking, or self-control) deficiencies should not be given the same homework as other students. Their homework should include: visual prompts, clear and simple directions, reduced work, and a focus on material that students already understand. These students should also be rewarded for homework completion.

Socio-economic status negatively impacts a student's ability to successfully complete their homework (Murillo & Martinez-Garrido, 2014). Poor students have difficulty completing homework due to responsibilities and difficulties that their more affluent peers do not experience (Anderson, 2013). The same parents who lack age-appropriate print resources at home are also unable to provide their child with meaningful homework feedback (Spencer, 2014). Not to mention, affluent parents are available to provide their students with tutors that poorer parents

cannot afford which only creates a larger academic divide between socioeconomic classes (Phares, 2017).

Fox (2016) studied six North Carolina families that resided in low-income housing to determine how homework was perceived by these families. Mothers provided data for the study. These parents found that homework was necessary to track their child's progress, help them to understand school curriculum, provided learning routines for their children, and was a valuable opportunity for siblings to work together. All of the participants expressed a fear of reaching a point where they would be unable to adequately assist their students with homework completion. One final important aspect to the research was the desire from parents to see feedback on their child's work. Failing to provide feedback was viewed in a negative light (Fox, 2016).

Student Health

Homework is not simply a mundane experience for all students. For some students, homework can be a traumatic experience (Lange & Meaney, 2011). High school students believe that homework robs them of enjoying their time at school, and a desire to have psychiatric counseling to help alleviate the mental distresses that homework creates (Bates, 2013). Students who reported anxiety in a particular subject were found to have anxiety completing any assignment, including homework, in that particular subject area (Lichtenfeld, Pekrun, Stupnisky, Reiss, & Murayama, 2012). Such stresses impact the families as well. Katz, Buzukashvili, and Feingold (2012) found that the stress levels of parents directly correlates to the stress levels of their elementary aged students.

Homework stress has caused many students to adopt unhealthy habits like overeating (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Michaud, Chaput, O'Loughlin, Tremblay, and Mathieu (2015) studied 511 eight to ten years old students and found that boys who do an increased amount homework

and are stressed by this schoolwork are less physically active than their counterparts and this inactivity could lead to obesity. Interestingly, one study revealed that time spent completing homework was found to be directly associated with lower blood pressure rates in 12 year old students (Gopinath, Baur, Hardy, Kifley, Rose, Wong, & Mitchell, 2012). Stresses for students are concerning and must be addressed to protect the mental and physical health of students (Bennett & Kalish, 2006).

Brown, Nobiling, Teufel & Birch (2011) sampled 882 students ranging from the ages of 9 to 13 to determine student perceptions of activities, possible overscheduling, and stress levels. The researchers discovered that the greatest predictor of stress levels in students was attributed to the amount of homework they were assigned. In fact, students who stated they completed an average of two or more hours of homework per night were twice as likely to report stress than students who completed an average of one hour of homework per night. Additionally, student participants that reported an average of 3 hours of homework completion time per night experienced a five time increase in stress levels as compared to their counterparts that completed an average of one hour of homework per night.

Homework that impedes on the student's ability to sleep has health consequences. In a study of 2,200 students ranging in ages from 9 to 16, researchers found that students who went to bed later than their peers had higher BMI (Body Mass Index) percentages and were also more likely to be overweight (Olds, Maher, & Matricciani, 2011). A more recent study revealed that students in 4th through 7th grades who sleep less than 10 hours per night have a poorer quality of diet when compared to their counterparts that average 10 hours of sleep per night (Franckle, Falbe, Gortmaker, Ganter, Taveras, Land, & Davison, 2015).

Parent-Teacher Relationships

Bempechat and Shernoff (2012) wrote, “Parents are their children’s first and primary guides through their schooling experiences, and therefore can serve to greatly buffer or compound risk factors for disengagement and low achievement” (p. 316). Parents believe that teachers are trained to make appropriate educational decisions for their child and that the relationship between parents and teachers should be reciprocal in regard to what works for best for each child (Wanat, 2010, p. 175). Lower levels of parental involvement, low family incomes, and gender (males) are all factors that negatively influence relationships between elementary age students and their teachers (Wyrick & Rudasill, 2009). When parents are informed and involved with their child’s educational experiences, they are more likely to exhibit a positive attitude toward their child’s teacher (LaRocque et al., 2011). More involved parents also have a positive impact on the relationship between their children and the teacher (Wyrick & Rudasill, 2009).

Building positive relationships with parents is not always easy for today’s educators, especially for teachers who work with a vast number of students (Kim, Sheridan, Kwon, & Koziol, 2013). Interventions that provide parents with daily information and feedback about their child’s homework has proven to be effective in increasing completion rates and reducing the number of student-parent conflicts attributed to homework (Beck, 2012).

Parents and teachers sometimes find themselves at odds due to poor grades or disciplinary actions taken against the student that are attributed to poor homework scores or a failure to complete the assignments. Punishing students by giving taking points off of their homework, assigning after school detention, or taking their recess does not improve homework completion rates or accuracy and stigmatizes students (Neason, 2017). This conflict is strengthened when students convey to their parents that their homework is not meaningful. Most

students describe their homework as little more than busywork (2010). Teachers are cautioned that grades should not be taken and homework should be designed with the idea in mind that the student should be able to complete the assignment without the assistance from an adult (Mangione, 2008). In contrast, students hesitate to complete their homework without the possibility of receiving a letter grade (Vatterott, 2011).

Parent participation in the schools and positive relationships with teachers are essential to student success. This means that homework transparency is crucial. Confident, well-spoken, and highly informed parents are more likely to participate in their child's school (LaRocque et al., 2011). Parents believe that their children are more successful in mathematics at the elementary school level when the relationship between parents and the school is effective (Wilder, 2017).

Student Achievement

Homework has not been found to improve the academic achievement of students at the elementary level (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). In fact, in-class supervised study has proven to be much more effective to improving the academic performance of elementary school students than homework completion (Cooper et.al., 2006). Likewise, no positive relationship exists between homework assistance and academic achievement (Wilder, 2014).

The socioeconomic status of the student effects how homework assists with student learning. For elementary students in an urban setting, parental checking of completed homework is not proven to impact student achievement (Jeynes, 2005). Homework has a positive impact on the test performance of elementary students if the students are part of a higher socioeconomic class (Rønning, 2011).

Summary of the Literature

The review of the literature in this chapter encompassed a discussion of today's homework, conflicting opinions about homework, homework policies, amounts of homework, parental perceptions, educators' views on homework, impacting students and families, student health, and parent-teacher relations. The literature is unclear on homework's ability to improve parent-teacher relationships or increase parental involvement at the school. What the literature reveals is that both parents and teachers need to work together to assist students with homework completion and accuracy. Since homework continues to be assigned to elementary school students, research is necessary to determine the perceptions of educators and parents about how homework influences the dynamic of the parent-teacher relationship.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the chosen methods used to examine the perceptions of parents and guardians of elementary school students and elementary school teachers regarding the effect homework has on relationships between teachers and parents. A qualitative research method was selected to thoroughly examine how parents and teachers perceive nightly homework and the power, or lack thereof, it has on the relationship aspect between the two groups.

A phenomenological study focuses on the experiences of a person or group in response to a phenomena. (Patton, 2002). In this study, the phenomena of assigning homework was examined. Qualitative research methods were selected because this type of research utilizes open-ended questions and will provide a variety of feedback and minimize the researchers' ability to dictate the results. Qualitative data is copious and offers a variety of research to analyze (Patton, 2002). Small group and individual interviews were used to obtain more profound results. Only conducting one interview with participants does not provide robust, reliable interview data (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the perceptions of parents and teachers of elementary school students regarding homework. Homework is defined as assignments provided to students for completion outside of normal school hours in an effort to increase

academic understanding. Seven elementary school teachers and seven families were interviewed to determine the homework perceptions of both participant groups.

Research Questions

This qualitative research study was focused on the perceptions of parents and elementary school teachers regarding homework. Parents and teachers encompassing three elementary schools participated in this study. The overarching question of this study was: “What are the perceptions of elementary school parents and teachers in regard to the purpose of homework?”

Sequential questions included the following:

1. “What is the relationship between homework and student learning?”
2. “What is the relationship between homework and parent-teacher relationships?”
3. “What is the relationship between homework and student health?”

Research Design

A qualitative research design featuring a focus group interview, open-ended questions, and one-on-one interviews were utilized. The study was phenomenological in nature focusing on the phenomena of homework. Qualitative data was coded. Coding allowed for adequate, reliable data (Auer-Srnka & Koeszegi, 2007).

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative researchers must objectively interpret data while minimizing bias without glamorizing the results (Holloway & Biley, 2011). Qualitative studies require the researcher to sample on a personal-level and immerse themselves in the data (Polit & Beck, 2010). As a result,

bias could easily become an issue. To prevent this from occurring, the qualitative researcher must provide the intended audience with all data and be certain to find participants who will provide data relevant to both sides of the homework debate. Another way to prevent bias is by refusing to interview only parents that clearly have established bonds with teachers and school personnel or only parents that have problems with teachers or school personnel. Balance and transparency are key.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Researchers have yet to universally accept a method to judge qualitative research (Rolfe, 2006). According to Patton (2002), "The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (p. 245). In qualitative research, the researcher is solely responsible for obtaining data from the participants (Chenail, 2011). To produce substantial qualitative research, the qualitative researcher must be careful manipulate participants to sway responses in a particular direction (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). To protect participants and organizations, qualitative researchers should not conduct research with their organization (Creswell, 2007). To avoid abusing trust or influencing the responses of those that I work with, all teacher participants interviewed were teachers that are not currently working under my supervision. Likewise, all parent participants did not have children enrolled in the elementary school in which I work.

Researchers should clarify their intended research methods with all participants and be transparent about their own research experiences and the auditing process (Cope, 2014). Participants were made aware of the purpose of the research before signing informed consent

forms. These individuals were also given detailed information about the researcher's work and research experience. Each participant was informed that their exact words would be coded and used in the study. Research participants were informed that the entire process would be overseen by the chair of the researcher's dissertation committee and the dissertation committee. Review by a doctoral committee was necessary to add credibility (Patton, 2002).

A qualitative design is valid when the resulting data can be interpreted coequally by both the participants and the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Qualitative researchers can enhance research quality and credibility by asking participants to react to the researcher's findings before finalization (Patton, 2002). For this reason, research participants will be asked to review their quotes and the researcher's findings before the conclusion of the study.

Trustworthy qualitative research is explicit and contains precise quotes from participants that enable those reading the research to confirm the researcher's conclusions (Cope, 2014). Validating the trustworthiness of qualitative research is essential if the findings are to be used (Noble & Smith, 2015). Transparency, neutrality, being able to apply findings to other groups, and disclosing potential biases are ways to produce reliable qualitative research (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Data Collection

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher cannot rely on the research instruments of others and cannot rely on others to collect their data (Creswell, 2007). One-on-one, interviews enabled the researcher to collect the data necessary for this study. The majority of sampling in qualitative studies are done through personal interviewing. Interview questions must focus decisively on what the qualitative researcher hopes to understand (Anfara, Brown, &

Mangione, 2002). These sessions revealed the researcher's commitment to using open-ended questions. Open-ended questioning techniques were employed because these questions can evolve throughout the process and assist with providing a deeper understanding (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. By precisely identifying my participants, I am focusing on a strength of qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Informed consent forms were signed by all participants before beginning interviews and collecting data. Participants were also informed that they could leave the study at any time and could refuse to answer questions.

Interviews of parents and teachers were used for this study. Two focus groups consisting of three parents and three teachers were asked to answer three, open-ended questions that provided feedback used to create questions for both individual interviews of seven parents or guardians and seven teachers. It was important to collect this initial feedback to create very precise questions. Unambiguous questions focused on what the researcher is seeking to understand are essential for researchers (Anfara et al., 2002).

Open-ended questioning assisted with preventing researcher bias and lead to new, undiscovered avenues of thought. Interviews enable researchers to obtain new, alternative perspectives that adds to the existing body of research about a particular topic or phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 2005). Additionally, the utilization of open-ended questioning of the focus groups allowed for the creation of precise homework questions asked of each participant during individual interviews.

The researcher contacted parents to determine dates, times, and locations for interview completion. The researcher worked diligently to accommodate the requests of all participants. The majority of the interviews were held at the school in which the teachers work and at the schools in which the parent participants' children were enrolled. Interviews were recorded electronically by the researcher to capture audio necessary for coding. All interview participants were aware that the sessions were recorded. All sessions were recorded and stored on the researchers' password-protected computer. Responses were reviewed with participants to validate their intended responses and intended meanings in the event that ambiguity existed.

Selection Process

For this study, purposeful sampling techniques were used. Purposeful sampling is a common method chosen by qualitative researchers to ensure that selection of participants will provide a vast amount of information about a phenomenon (Palinkas, 2015). The seven teachers selected for the one-on-one interview portion of the study were from three different elementary schools in Southwest Virginia. The researcher asked principals of three elementary schools to identify teachers in kindergarten through fifth grade that would be willing to participate in the study. Special emphasis was noted that a blend of both veteran teachers with five or more years or more of experience and non-tenured teachers with less than five years of experience were needed for the study. The three teachers who participated in the focus group were not interviewed during the individual interview portion of this study.

The seven families selected to participate in the one-on-one portion of this study had children who belonged to the same three aforementioned elementary schools. In an effort to interview a wide-variety of parents, I asked administrators from all three of the elementary

schools to recommend parent-participants in kindergarten through fifth grades. Each principal was asked not to exclusively select parents who may possess a positive view of their child's teacher or nightly homework. What is more, principals were asked not to exclusively recommend parent participants that had previously expressed a negative perception of their child's teacher or nightly homework. For both participant groups, the researcher kept a checklist to ensure that all grades kindergarten through fifth grades were represented in both the parent and teacher groups. The three parents or guardians who participated in the focus group were not interviewed during the individual interview portion of this study.

Data Analysis

Interview data were collected, coded, and then examined to determine if categories emerge. Qualitative analyses occurred after data collection. Coding data enables researchers to create categories and to find patterns that may have been previously undiscovered (AERA, 2006). Open coding aides researchers by enabling the researcher to develop categories after examining the data provided by initial participant responses (Creswell, 2007). Axial coding helps the researcher explain why these categories emerged and selective coding is necessary to explain how all discovered categories are linked (Creswell, 2007).

Interview data were collected, coded, and then examined to discover emergent categories. The coding process was multi-faceted. Multiple rounds of coding was applied and memos were created and examined. Memo writing increases researcher involvement and analysis (Charmaz, 2006). These memos assisted with the creation of categories used to develop themes from the results of participants. The data were analyzed and used in the formulation of findings. Data-driven conclusions validate the study results. Researchers must be devoted to taking the

necessary steps to minimize their own voice and potential biases (Joyner, Rouse, & Glatthorn, 2013).

I understand that because my study is qualitative in nature the results will require more work to detail the findings than if I were completing a quantitative study. Qualitative studies include a vast amount of details and thorough explanations of the data that require a lot of time to carefully analyze (Patton, 2002). The data were detailed with specific, verbatim comments from participants. Verbatim comments used in this study were checked for accuracy by the participant.

Ethical Considerations

Past researchers were notorious for taking advantage of the most vulnerable members of society and the IRB is now in place to protect these and all individuals (Patton, 2002). Principles of research that must be followed are: researchers must avoid discrimination by showing equity, reflect a commitment to honesty, and treat all participants humanely (Joyner et al., 2013). Ethical qualitative research requires obtaining consent from all participants and ensuring that all participants are protected and their identities are completely confidential (Ponterotto, 2010). The researcher took all of these principles into consideration. IRB was sought and obtained before conducting any interviews to ensure that all participants were protected. Special attention was taken to protect the identity of all participants by using pseudonyms and findings were protected by the researcher.

Qualitative research can be uncertain from one moment to the next (Ponterotto, 2010). With this in mind, the researcher was consistent with asking all individuals the same questions, avoiding asking leading questions, and by voice recording all interview sessions.

Summary

Chapter 3 details the research methods used in this study. The participants were selected for the purpose of examining the perceptions of parents and teachers of elementary school students regarding homework. Participants were purposefully selected in an attempt to obtain participants that represented all elementary grade levels (kindergarten through fifth grades). Perceptions were limited due to the fact that all participants were exclusively located in one school division.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of 10 parents of elementary school students and 10 elementary school teachers toward homework assigned to elementary school students. All research was conducted within one school division including three elementary schools in Southwest Virginia. The multi-site study was completed by utilizing open-ended questions asked during interviews. The data provided an opportunity to add the body of research that exists on elementary school homework. The findings from data provided a more thorough understanding of the homework perceptions amongst study participants.

Superintendents, directors, administrators, teachers, parents, or researchers may find the information revealed as part of this study useful for policy creation, homework practices, instructional techniques, homework discussions, or future research.

Study data were collected from the 10 participants during interview sessions. In all sessions, parents and teachers were asked open-ended questions focusing on the topic of homework for elementary school students. Initially, two focus group interviews consisting of three parents and three teachers were conducted. These individuals were excluded from one-on-one interview sessions. Subsequently, 14 one-on-one interviews took place after focus group interviews.

The 10 parent participants had children currently enrolled in elementary school with all grades kindergarten through fifth grades represented. Three of the parents participated in a focus group interview. Seven parents participated in one-on-one interviews. The 10 elementary school

teachers who participated in the study were active teachers who represented all grades kindergarten through fifth.

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and then coded. Emergent themes, including similarities and differences between groups, were documented. The nine themes that emerged from data analyses were: homework can lead to stress; homework should be differentiated; homework should be brief; failing to complete homework results in school consequences; homework reveals student successes and areas of concern; homework amounts do not increase with grade level progression; nightly reading homework is acceptable; teachers have a misconception between what they believe they are assigning and what is actually occurring; and homework must have a purpose. Furthermore, six noteworthy concepts were revealed. These concepts were: teachers will make changes to homework based on parent feedback; homework impacts sleep; homework reduction can be beneficial; parents enjoy having homework options; parents appreciate information about homework; and teachers do not like assigning homework.

Selection of Participants

Participants selected for this study were parents and teachers of elementary school students within one school division in Southwest Virginia. The individuals selected for this study were selected based upon purposeful sampling. Three current elementary school administrators within the same Southwest Virginia school division were asked to provide names of potential parents and teachers that may be interested in study participation. Parent participants were selected by each administrator based on the fact that they had a child currently enrolled in the school of the administrator. Teacher participants were selected based on the fact the teacher currently taught in kindergarten through fifth grades for the administrator. All individuals who participated in the study are referred to using pseudonyms.

Interview Process

Interviews were scheduled after contacting each participant. Each interview was held on a day and at a time that accommodated the schedule of the participant. The majority of the interviews were held at the school-site where the participant worked or that his or her child attended. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Informed consent forms were provided to and signed by participants before any of the interviews were conducted. Each interview began with a brief discussion of the interview process. Participants were informed that they could stop the interview at any time and that they may refuse to answer any question. All participants were informed that the interview was being audio recorded. In order to eliminate researcher bias, participants were made aware that they may be asked to validate or approve verbatim comments or implied concepts or ideas.

Interview Data

After transcribing interviews, data were sorted according to each participant group. Reoccurring comments were color coded for both parent and teacher participant groups. Similarities and differences between parent and teacher comments were examined and themes and noteworthy comments emerged based on the frequency of occurrence. The results provided insightful information about how parents and teachers perceive homework for elementary school students. The Interview Data section includes the verbatim comments of participants and was gathered by the researcher from either focus group interviews or one-on-one interviews that consisted of open-ended questions.

Homework Can Lead to Stress

Seven parents and three teachers indicated that homework can cause stress either in the lives of students, parents, or both. Fourth grade parent Andy Smith stated, “I think that it can also put a strain on relationships at home. Um, a kid can be frustrated. Parents are frustrated, you know? It can create a lot of tension if there is too much homework, um, and not enough downtime.” In addition, third grade parent Joanne Clayton, indicated she experienced stress, “And I am about to lose it. When my kid comes home and he is fried from the day, I was about in tears talking to the teacher the other day about it because he’s done.” Fourth grade parent Maurice Garland stated:

Having a lot of homework, or having a lot of concepts pushed at you multiple times, for example, 20 math problems when five would have been beneficial is difficult as a parent sitting there fussing and arguing with a child trying to get them to finish what homework they’ve got and you know that they know how to do it, but it’s the teacher that sent the homework home.

Fifth grade parent Joey Allen discussed displeasure with extensive amounts of homework. Allen stated, “I know some kids need that extra. Um, but it’s just very stressful-hours consuming homework sometimes.” Likewise, second grade parent Abraham Rogers described how 50 minutes of homework caused stress and lead to a disliking of school when they expressed:

I felt like that was way too much time to spend on homework for a six or seven year old. Um, and I didn’t feel like that was beneficial for him and he started having feelings of not liking school anymore because it was too much homework.

Kristine Rhode, parent of a fourth grader, described her child’s stress “He was afraid that he could not finish the assignment that he was spent by the end of the day, and he was in tears.

That is when homework has gone too far.” Fourth grade teacher Sabrina Kalt reported on the pressure failing to complete homework can have, “But it hurts their self-esteem if they come back to school and all the other kids have it and they don’t have it.” First grade teacher Connie Gildea understood homework’s ability to cause stress both within her own family and the families of her students, “I see that homework can be quite a battle at home and I don’t want them to go home after being in school all day and battle with them about homework.”

Homework Should be Differentiated

Five parents and two teachers agreed that homework should not be the same for all students. Kindergarten parent Janet Price understood that homework amounts must match the attention span of the student, “You know they need to be given a workload that’s appropriate for their, um, for their attention spans.” Parent Maurice Garland addressed a need for some students to be given homework targeted at areas of weakness when he noted, “If you do those five problems and you are struggling, then you might need five more problems. Sometimes, homework needs to be, can be, individualized to the student.” A sentiment shared by parent Joey Allen, “Mom and Dad reading with them more. Mom and Dad going over spelling words, you know, a little more. Um, with uh, it would just make an amazing difference for them I feel.” Parent Abraham Rogers concurred that elementary students cannot receive the same nightly work, “I don’t think there should be, necessarily, a blanket homework assignment for everybody. In a perfect world, homework should be assigned based on the child.” Parent Kristine Rhode went on to say, “There are some kids where that may be beneficial and I think that is my hardest thing with homework. It truly has to be catered to the child.” Teacher Jordan Snodgrass agreed that homework should be differentiated, “Homework has to be differentiated just like our

classroom assignments have to be differentiated.” Teacher Casey Body explained how they differentiated homework for their fourth grade students. He commented:

At times, that I have different homework for different individuals. Um, if somebody is struggling with like division and they need more work on division, then they are assigned some division homework. Whereas, other individuals that are grasping the idea, who know what long division, uh, is about, and can function with it, then we go on with something else. They have, uh, another homework sheet. Probably could be problems involving, uh, the division objective they learned to do the division, but, then, they have to do some thinking- problem solving. So, the potential is you can adjust your, uh, ability groupings with assigning different homework to different individuals.

Homework Should be Brief

Six parents and five teachers commented on the necessity to make homework assignments short in length or in regard to the total number of questions. Parent Andy Smith hoped that most of the learning should take place at school, “I think that homework can be a good thing if it’s in moderation. Well, I think, uh, hopefully, the majority of the learning is happening in class.” Additionally, Andy felt that homework brevity was important for all students. He stated:

I don’t think it necessarily needs to be every single night and not just homework for the sake of sending homework home. I think it really needs to be accomplishing something. Um, so, I think as they get older, uh, I still don’t think that they should have hours of homework every night. I think for elementary school age, they need just enough to help reinforce the things they are learning and to help them grasp the concepts better.

Parent Maurice Garland explained, “The whole point for me of homework is to know that he mastered a concept, and if he mastered that concept, more of that is not going to help him master it any more.” Parent Joey Allen addressed how long homework should take. Joey explained:

Honestly, I feel like no more than 30 minutes' worth. I know that would differ with every child, you know? What may take one child five minutes to get finished and it may take another child more. Um, but, I don't know, I just feel like no more than 30 minutes.

Fourth grade parent Yvon Cronkowski felt that an hour was the maximum amount of time any elementary school student should devote to homework, "Younger grades like K through 2nd grade, well I'd say K through 1st no more than 15 to 30 minutes and 2nd through 5th 30 minutes to an hour." Parent Abraham Rogers stated that homework should require even less time to complete, "I think homework for elementary school students should be quality-based meaning they need some homework at home. Um, but it doesn't need to be 40 or 50 minutes." Fifth grade teacher Andrew Wyatt expressed his concern that homework could diminish student interest in school, relationship with the teacher, and academic performance. He stated:

For kids to succeed in school they have to like school, and want school to be fun. It shouldn't be boring. It shouldn't be drudgework. So, my idea is that if you make, put too much on the kids, give them too much work to do, especially at home, that they are going to start to resent you, start to dislike school, and I think their, their, progress or the way they do in school suffers.

Kindergarten teacher Kendall Matthews minimized homework for kindergarten students, "My personal philosophy on homework, if I do send homework, I don't want it to take more than 20 minutes- tops." Further, Matthews thought all elementary students should do little more than his kindergarten class. He stated:

I would hope that my students don't spend any more than 15 or 20 minutes on their homework Any more than that is just entirely too much for a five year old or six year old. Um, and I would hope that any student wouldn't spend more than 30 minutes on homework. But, I am sure that's going to vary from class-to-class and teacher-to-teacher. That's just my personal feeling. I would never want them to spend more than that on homework.

Fourth grade teacher Barry Lynch addressed brevity in the number of problems he assigns, “I don’t think you should overload a child with homework. For example, in math, if we, if we give them multiplication problems to do, if they can do five, if they can do five, they don’t need to do 50.” Second grade teacher Claudia Marzul stated her rationale for assigning minimal amounts of homework, “We do a lot in our classroom during the day. And so, the students are always busy working on strategies or skills that we need to know. So, I don’t like to give a lot of homework.” Teacher Casey Body expressed that because elementary homework is primarily a review of previously learned material homework should not take long periods of time to complete. He shared:

Again, it’s not a very long assignment. It’s just an assignment to, um, have them go over what we’ve done that day and know that they have to finish it and get it done. Most of the time it shouldn’t take them more than 15 minutes to do their homework.

Failing to Complete Homework Results in School Consequences

Five parents described their frustration that students would be punished for failing to complete homework assignments. Parent Kristine Rhode recommended her son take a punishment instead of stressing over an assignment, “Take your silent lunch tomorrow rather than deal with this particular assignment.” Parent Maurice Garland explained that despite understanding the skill addressed in the homework, a student would be punished at school for failing to complete homework. He reported:

It’s the teacher that sent the homework home. So, if he doesn’t do it the next day, he’s going to be the one to get in trouble. And, as a student, he doesn’t quite understand that he’s going to get in trouble the next day. I understand that as a parent. He will not be, he will either get silent lunch, no recess, or whatever. There’s going to be some kind of consequence to him not having the homework when I still know he mastered that concept already.

Parent Kristine Rhode reported that part of the homework assigned to elementary school students is obtaining a parent signature. She is concerned that students are punished for parents who fail to sign for their child. She stated:

If my child is doing their homework, if there has never been an issue, then why is he getting in trouble? I forget to sign. I understand it is also his job for me to sign it. However, if there is no issue with the homework getting done and no issue with classwork, I think having a parent's signature on there is kind of a moot point.

Fifth grade parent Veronika Carpenter was concerned that homework punishments can demoralize students. She stated:

She got put in silent lunch. You know, she has always met (goals). You know and to me that is defeating the purpose that we are trying to build up in these kids, confidence that they can do it you know? They have been pushed to the limits in (name of math program omitted) and go further on their own through the progress in (name of reading program omitted). When you start punishing them for things like that.

Parent Abraham Rogers discussed his displeasure that his child, "would have received the punishment of silent lunch for failing to complete their homework." Abraham felt this his child was being asked to complete an excessive amount of 1st grade homework. Parent Joanne Clayton is concerned about students repeatedly being punished. She commented:

And I think there are benefits to homework, but there are limits on it that can be helpful. Um, when you have these kids who have circumstances that are not beneficial- those are circumstances. When those kids are punished, they are already punished at home. Then, they come to school and they are punished. They must feel like they can never catch their breath.

Further, parent Kristine Rhode was concerned about students who are punished on a daily basis. She said:

I have gotten close to some of the kids in my son's grade and there are parents that are not involved, at all. There are kids that are making their own dinner. They aren't copying

that thing five times and every day they are in silent lunch because they didn't finish their homework from the night before. They were more worried about what they were going to eat. Then why would they copy this thing five times?

Homework Reveals Student Successes and Areas of Concern

Four parents and three teachers shared that homework enables parents or teachers to see particular skills in which students are excelling or struggling. Parent Andy Smith said that homework can be informative for parents and teachers alike. He stated:

Um, and also to have some parent feedback- I think that could be a good benefit, so that the parent knows what's going on at school, um what they're learning and help out if there's any problem with what they're learning. Um, so I think those are some good benefits. Um, and it also helps the teacher know if they're really grasping the content, too.

Completing homework with their child helped parent Janet Price and her husband understand what their child was learning. She explained the process:

Well, I think if it's done right with, you know, I know in our house we sit down, either my husband or I, will sit down with our daughter and go through each step of her homework with her- which I think is the ideal situation. Interaction with the child and their parents. Um, I think that its important, it's an important process to help parents understand what's going on with their child at school and in the classroom, but I also think it's important for, you know, the child has learned all day and they get home it's sort of a reminder of what they have learned through the day. Um, I do see in our child that it just reinforces what she learned at school.

Parent Maurice Garland used homework to assess understanding. He stated:

As a parent, if he has homework, I can see that he understands the concept. Um, to me that's a huge benefit for me. If I see that he understands it, I don't worry when it comes test time, or quiz time, or the dreaded SOL time (laughs). Um, if I don't have homework to guide me as a parent, I don't know if he's mastered the content.

Parent Riley Cooper commented that homework helps with student parent connections and by teaching students that learning never stops. He discussed:

I feel like it connects the student and the parent with their education. Um, it lets the student know that learning doesn't just stop at school. That when they're home and they're doing it on their own or with their parent, their education continues. Um, I feel like if they did not have homework, it would make them feel like their education strictly at school and once they're out, they don't have to learn anymore.

Teacher Andrew Wyatt shared that elementary homework can prove mastery, "Some parents like to see homework come home- like to see their child practicing at home. That shows that they are getting better." Teacher Kendall Matthews stated homework provides insight to parents, "I think that gives them some kind of idea what's going on in the classroom." First grade teacher Charlie Ernst went on to say that first grade students work on homework with their children enabling them to see what they are learning. "Parents are helping the students with it, they are not doing it, um, just by themselves, independently, parents are helping them with their homework." Homework allows parents to see where their child is struggling and can foster discussions between teacher and parent. Teacher Claudia Marzul stated:

Sometimes parents, when they are working on homework with their child can see that maybe they aren't getting it the way that we are doing in the classroom, and I appreciate that and respect a parent that asks if there's another way we can do this. Absolutely! Because it is my job to make sure that my child is learning.

Homework Amounts do not Increase With Grade Level Progression

The comments of five parents and two teachers explained that elementary school students are not assigned more homework with each passing grade level. Participants expressed that the amounts of homework assigned to students varies across grade levels and from teacher-to-teacher. Parent Janet Price stated, "I can only speak from the perspective of a kindergarten

parent. We spend anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes per night on homework.” However, fourth grade parent Vyron Cronkowski had a different experience with kindergarten homework. She indicated:

I think the elementary homework from my experience with my child’s children’s experience has been fair. It has been more of a review of things they are covering in the class. I’ve, I’ve not felt like it’s been too much. Um, kindergarten was a little bit more, but I think that was really the beginning of some basic, um, skills that they really need to know.

Parent Joey Allen indicated homework amounts can change as students progress through elementary school. Joey shared, “As my children have personally gotten older, homework has become [sic] a lot more and very stressful for my kids. Not so much maybe this year, but years in the past.” In fact, parent Maurice Garland’s stated that homework amounts depended on the teacher, “It just depends on the grade and the teacher. Um, in general, we had more homework in 3rd grade than we did in 4th grade. I really believe it’s the philosophy of the teacher. Some teachers don’t send as much homework home, some do.”

Analysis of data from teachers in same grade levels indicated that teachers teaching the same grade level do not always give the same amounts of homework and teachers in fourth and fifth grades can assign less homework than teachers who teach in grades kindergarten through third. Fifth grade teacher Andrew Wyatt stated, “I rarely give homework.” Whereas, fifth grade teacher Barry Lynch stated, “In the 5th grade, we assign 30 minutes for reading. We assign 20 minutes for math.” Likewise, fourth grade teacher Casey Boyd indicated, “We do not go over our limit of 40 minutes.” Whereas, fourth grade teacher Sabrina Kalt rarely gives homework, “I mean it might be like giving them a sheet one time in a whole month- maybe even six weeks.”

Nightly Reading Homework is Acceptable

Five parents indicated that reading homework is desirable and seven teachers indicated reading homework is assigned nightly. Parent Andy Smith stated, “You want kids to love to read. You want them to enjoy the process and to be relaxed when they are reading a book, not be stressed out.” Parent Maurice Garland commented that reading helps across curriculums. He stated:

I think everybody needs to read. I think that reading 20 minutes a night is not unacceptable. That’s necessary to grow as a child because you learn more words. You learn more vocabulary. You learn about different subjects cause you can pick up books about social studies, or you can pick up books about history, um, or geography. There’s lots of different aspects of reading that are necessary for kids.

Abraham Rogers, parent, indicated that homework helps him bond with his child. He shared:

I think that he needs some reading homework because that’s very important and there’s only so much time he has at school to practice reading. Um, and that’s also something we can do at home to having a bonding time together for reading. Um, that’s something we can work on together.

Reading homework is the preferred homework of parent Riley Cooper, “If there had to be homework each night, if it was required or recommended, I would think books, books, books.” Parent Kristine Rhode informed that reading is a staple at her house, “They enjoy reading. We would read every night whether it was required or not. I mean that is just part of it.” Teacher Charlie Marzul said, “Reading is obviously something that we do and should do every night.”

Teachers Have a Misconception Between What They Believe They are Assigning and What is Actually Occurring

The interview data of two parents and four teachers shed light on the fact that teachers are not properly estimating the amount of homework they assign nightly. Parent Andy Smith expressed a concern that teachers underestimate how long homework actually takes. He expressed:

And I know 20 minutes is supposed to be a sufficient amount of time to read and I think that's a good goal. Um, sometimes though, you know, if the teacher has an expectation the book has to be completed, sometimes that takes more than 20 minutes. And, sometimes, there's a disconnect between, it's like read every night. At the same time, there's an expectation to have the book finished, and I don't think that's always possible to do in 20 minutes.

Parent Joanne Clayton expressed concern that the amount of homework she was told was not accurate. She stated, "We were told 20. Twenty of (name of reading program omitted). Twenty of (name of math program omitted). Then, the multiplication. Then, the dump sheet for math. Then, the (indistinguishable). And then, spelling homework." Teachers provided comments that were contradictory to the total amount of homework they gave students. Teacher Barry Lynch stated:

Okay, at my school, we, in the 5th grade, we assign 30 minutes for reading. We assign 20 minutes for math. We have a program called accelerated reader which tracks their levels in reading. We ask that they read 30 minutes. We also have a program, I'm sorry it's called (name of reading program omitted). Then we also have, uh, a program for (name of math program omitted) which is a spiral review and we ask them to do 20 minutes of homework for that. And then, of course, if we assign a test they need to study for the test and we usually try to announce test a week in advance, so that gives them plenty of time to study for the test.

Lynch then added that unfinished classwork goes home as homework which would be more than 50 minutes. Lynch said:

It's not necessarily extra work. It's work they didn't finish. My whole goal for homework, classwork, whatever, is for the student to be successful as possible. That may take more than one classroom sitting. That may take more than two classroom sittings. But, if I can get them started on something they don't finish, I can feel a little bit more confident that they can do it on their own once they get home. So, I don't necessarily have a classwork and a homework assignment.

Teacher Jordan Snodgrass did not include required nightly reading homework into the amount parents are told students would complete each night. Snodgrass reported:

Research has shown that if students will start in 1st grade with about 10 minutes per grade is a good way to judge and add to homework so by the time they get to 3rd grade, uh, we're saying 30 minutes or less, and, then, we still have them do the 20 minutes of reading, so, so, it's 50 total minutes, but I always tell my students they can break it up.

Teachers indicated that there are times when homework can be more than anticipated.

Teacher Charlie Ernst said:

Well, for 1st grade, for our grade, if they will just do that one question and read their story, I would think 15 to 20 minutes. If they spend the extra time and also read with their parent their A.R. book, probably a little more than that, maybe 30. 15 to 20 minutes should easily do. Reading their basal story, um, and even their small group, their small, only has like six pages. So, I would think no more than 30, tops. And, I know, I've heard that it's supposed to be so many minutes per grade- like first grade 10 minutes, but I just don't think that happens. I, I think they're going to have to spend 15 to 20 to read their story and work on their A.R and read their little tiny small group reading book. I think 15 to 20.

Teacher Claudia Marzul detailed the amount of time her homework should take. She indicated:

For my second graders, I would hope they wouldn't spend any more than 30 minutes on homework. Uh, for anyone else, I can't speak of. And, like I said, I think homework should be a review and a repeat. Um, if they have a non-fiction book, usually the smaller

non-fiction books they can read them in 10 minutes. Um, if they have a short fiction book, they can do the same. Um, and if they have spelling, or whatever, vocabulary, math, it shouldn't be any longer than 10 minutes. So, I, I would say 30 minutes, 30 to 35 minutes.

Studying for homework can add to the length of time it takes students to complete their nightly homework. Marzul said, "There are nights that, uh, I feel like I've given more homework than normal. If it has to deal with, uh, maybe studying for tests, or something like that."

Homework Must Have a Purpose

Five parents and four teachers expressed that homework for elementary students must have a purpose. The term busywork was associated with work that didn't have a purpose and participants did not view this type of work favorably. Parent Maurice Garland said:

If I have a teacher that sends tons of homework home, it's a little frustrating for me. Um, I would feel like either they're, not, I would feel like they're wanting to send busywork home, or they're not preparing my child.

Parent Riley Cooper said about busywork:

I think when it's just routine passing out worksheets. I'm not really a worksheet fan. Um, if it's given daily and just busywork- just to say that your doing homework to check it off the list. Um, I definitely don't think that's appropriate or beneficial for the parent or the student. I think it causes additional stress for everybody including the teacher. Um, so that's the first thing that comes to mind- any type of busywork.

Teacher Claudi Marzul addressed busywork:

I don't think homework should be sent just to say I'm sending homework as a form of busywork. Um, from my perspective as a teacher, I feel that it should just be review and practice. And, I would say if a student, if a student can't complete a skill, homework isn't going to be beneficial for them. If they can't do it in the classroom, then homework is of no use to them. If, as a teacher, I see that they are having trouble in the classroom completing their homework, then I can help them, and, therefore, they can use homework as a practice- maybe to get better at a skill they're weak in.

Parent Abraham Rogers discussed that homework must have value. Rogers stated:

So, you know, when they're doing sometimes they might send home like 15 math problems and sometimes they send home a worksheet just to send home a worksheet on math and it has no value. So, I believe if you send something home it's because they need help with it and not just because your sending something home to have homework. So, if they understand how to do the homework, then they may not need to do the worksheet.

Parent Veronika Carpenter discussed the necessity for students to have homework goals.

She expressed, "Some of them have no objectives for a whole month. It is kind of crazy. No accountability." Copying homework material is not a valuable homework practice. Parent

Kristine Rhode stated, "But in the circumstance it is not beneficial to read it three times if one time was enough. What's the benefit of copying something five times if I got it after three?"

Likewise, teacher Connie Gildea revealed looking up definitions was not meaningful for her own child. She said, "It was 2 hours and it was writing down definitions for words from the spelling list. It was not beneficial to him in any way whatsoever." Teacher Kendall Matthews commented on his desire not to assign redundant homework. He explained:

Um, you know, redundant tasks, you know. For example, my students who, um, like I said, some of my students don't need that extra practice. For them, I'm sure that is something, they, they already know it, so it doesn't feel like it's beneficial to them. And so, in that situation I would say that it may not be helpful.

Teacher Jordan Snodgrass explained how homework that is not created purposefully can lead to stress at home. Snodgrass reported:

The students by doing the homework that I do it's very similar to, uh, what we do in class, and, so, they have seen the format (bus announcement) that's what I was looking for. They've seen the format before, and I try to make it tear-free homework. That's my goal- is to not have to, I don't want to hear from parents that their child cried and did not understand how to do the homework because in that case it doesn't have any value. But, um, I believe that the homework I assign does provide, uh, value and gives the, not only

the parents then they know what we are working on in class. It gives them the opportunity to see what we're doing, and it gives the students an opportunity to practice.

Noteworthy Findings

Analysis of the interview data revealed the following findings that have research value.

Teachers Will Make Changes to Homework Based on Parent Feedback

Four teachers discussed a willingness to change homework based on discussions they had with parents. Teacher Kendall Matthews explained that he recently made a change to homework based on parent feedback, "Um, so I actually kind of adjusted my homework this week based on that parents' comments that I spoke with them last week. Um, and you know, I told her, you know, I will, we read more challenging for my higher groups." Teacher Jordan Snodgrass expressed that feedback can lead to homework adjustments. Snodgrass conveyed:

Throughout the year, um, we talk to parents. If you have a student and they are taking an hour, or even two hours, to sit and do a homework assignment that the other students are managing to get done in 10 or 15 minutes, I think sometimes you have to adjust that homework for that student. And, then, you can build them back up to where they are- differentiation. Students, that, uh, homework has to be differentiated just like our classroom assignments have to be differentiated.

When discussing conversations with parents about reading homework, teacher Charlie Ernst stated:

We've told the parents that you don't have to do it on a certain night. If you know that Wednesday is a really busy night for you and your family, and you know that you're going to church, do a couple of questions on Tuesday or Thursday, if that helps your family out. So, try to make it so there's no pressure that it all has to be done in one evening. As long as it's done by Friday, they can do it anytime during the week. So, we think that helps, too.

Teacher Claudia Marzul discussed how a willingness to make homework adjustments led to academic improvements. Marzul went on to say:

I had a parent once tell me, actually, his child, even though he was doing these word sorts, his child was not making a good grade on his weekly spelling test. And, so, it was a father, and, he, um, he sent me a note and said (name omitted) he works very hard on this and I know that he's not, he's not making a passing grade on spelling tests. What can we do, you know, to change this?

And, so, we were doing sorts phonetically in the classroom as a way to learn spelling. Dad, his dad said he had him work on writing out the words. Um, as a way to learn them. And, he wanted to know, he said, "When I give him a practice test, he does fine." And he said, "Can you see if maybe you can do that in the classroom instead of asking him to do it phonetically?" I told him, "Sure, we'll do that." This student was a whole-language learner. Phonics wasn't working for him. And his father is the one that said to me, "Can we work on this together? Can we just see if he can learn by writing these words?" And by writing them in a sentence, by writing them three times or whatever we can do rather than focusing on phonics. And, the student ended up mostly making, I'm not going to say 100s all the time, but, you know, 80s, 90s, 100s on spelling quizzes."

Homework Impacts Sleep

Two parents reported that homework impacts the amount of time an elementary student sleeps. Parent Andy Smith indicated that reading homework could cause students to stay up later than preferred. Smith said:

My kids would want to stay up too late to try to finish a book, um, because they don't want to not have that test taken the next day. So, um, I think that's definitely a negative thing because you want kids to be able to go to bed at a reasonable time and not feel like they have to stay up all night studying or reading a book.

Parent Kristine Rhode described her willingness to wake up her child early to complete homework because he didn't want to stop at bedtime. Rhode commented:

And I said, "Buddy, here's the deal: I'll wake you up a half hour early and you can try to finish your homework." Because he didn't want to have to take the punishment. I said,

“Buddy, you cannot do it now.” (Parent imitated son hyperventilating.) I was like, “No, no you don’t. Put it away and leave it alone.”

Homework Reduction can be Beneficial

One parent and one teacher stated that there were benefits when homework is reduced.

Parent Joey Allen was pleasantly surprised when experiencing a homework reduction and noted an increase in academic performance. Allen reported:

Homework is pretty minimal this year. I was honestly shocked because I was ready for, (laughs), you know, major homework time, two to three hours, which has been in the past. Uh, uh, so I was just kind of shocked. I was like okay great, you know? Um, there’s some of course. I feel it is needed, some. So, and I feel that they are doing better even academically.

Teacher Andrew Wyatt discussed with him how a reduction in homework was life changing. Wyatt described:

After the child had been here for two weeks, the mother came in and said I just wanted to thank you. You’ve changed, changed, not only my son’s life, you changed our families’ life because he was going home with two and three hours of homework per night. She said as soon as he came home, it was a battle. It ended up in tears every night. Um, the kid didn’t know how to do the work. The parent struggled with the directions and she said it was an every night thing. And it just affected the whole family.

Parents Enjoy Having Homework Options

Four parents explained that they enjoy having options for homework. Parent Maurice Garland said:

So, as a parent I feel like it would be easier if I knew that say, say his teacher would give us the option. If we know he is good at five, say okay we don’t have to do all 10. You can just do the five instead of doing all 10 knowing that the last five are just torture (laughs).

Parents enjoyed having the option to have nights off from homework. Parent Janet Price stated:

And I know for us we usually don't have homework on Friday nights, so she kind of looks forward to that and knows that she is getting a break and, so, you know, as long as it's spread out, and, and mirrors what they're doing at school, um, you know, sometimes it's nice to give them a break. Um, you know, especially the younger ones, so, you know I, I think it's appropriate to, um, have homework, and I also think it's appropriate to take a break every now and then.

Additionally, getting the homework on Monday and then determining what nights students completed the homework was well received. Parent Riley Cooper expressed:

The one thing that I have loved on the kindergarten level is that it is initially given at the beginning of the week and its due at the end of the week. So, you're given a whole week to either sit down and do it all at one time with your child, or if things aren't just flowing well that day, you can skip a day and do it at another time when the child's more engaged. Um, so with it not being due every single day and just due at the end of the week. Uh, I think that has been wonderful.

Teacher Connie Gildea explained this process, "I give it to them on Mondays and then they work on it at their leisure all week long."

Parents Appreciate Information About Homework

Two parents expressed appreciation for receiving homework information. Teacher Kendall Matthews explained one way he provides parents with homework information, "You know we send newsletters home and all that kind of stuff, so they have an idea. It gives them a better idea of what we're doing during the day." Parent Yvon Cronkowski discussed her pleasure for similar newsletters. She said:

We've been very fortunate. All of our teachers every year has had whether they've sent home weekly, um, in 1st grade the teacher had a website that we were, um, a part of the

whole year and she shared pictures. Um, so, I mean consistently through 4th and 5th we've had a newsletter that gave us important information as a whole.

Moreover, parents are pleased with teachers who are using apps to provide information regarding homework. Parent Riley Cooper indicated:

There's a weekly bulletin sent home, uh, with my son for his homework. She's also started using an app. It's called the (name of app omitted). You may be familiar with that in your school as well. But, that opens the line of communication more especially with technology evolving in our world and in our school. So, I'm able to communicate with her a little easier. Now that we have this app, with his homework listed on it, so instead of just sending a paper copy of his weekly homework, she's sending that on the app and we can communicate a lot easier instead of handwritten notes that you would get and have to send back the next day.

We can communicate a lot quicker. So, since we can communicate a lot quicker, it benefits my son so we can address any specific topic for homework that he needs to work on a little bit more. And, with my son, I've had to use the app to talk to her specifically about sight words. He just needs a little extra help with that. She was able to send, um, website links on that, that I could access directly. And, um, I think when I can access it directly like that I can get it done in a more efficient way. Then, it makes everyone happier.

Teachers do not Like Assigning Homework

Four teachers expressed that they did not approve of homework. Teacher Kendall Matthews stated, "I personally don't like to send home homework." Teacher Sabrina Kalt said, "I am not a big supporter of homework." Teacher Antoinette Bobro stated, "I am not a huge fan of homework either." Finally, teacher Andrew Wyatt expressed that he was not fond of homework and thought that there are more valuable academic activities teachers could employ. He stated:

I've always heard the statement that.. I've always heard the loose rule that 10 minutes per grade. 10 minutes for 1st grade. 20 minutes for 2nd grade. Which would end up being 50 minutes for 5th grade. I think that is a good rule. Uh, but still, I think, I think I've got

more than class time to cover what the state of Virginia wants me to cover. I think my scores show that. I've just got to wonder. I don't think people are using their time wisely if they are having to give a lot of homework. The amount of class time that it takes to assign, grade, record, do all the class, homework things, I think that time could be better spent-teaching practicing.

Summary

The findings detailed in Chapter 4 include verbatim comments provided by the 20 participants during focus group or one-on-one interviews and in response to the open-ended questions asked by the researcher. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the homework perceptions of parents and teachers of elementary school students. Purposeful sampling techniques were utilized to find potential participants for this study. Potential participants were contacted according to the methods approved by the IRB. All participants signed informed consent forms before participating in the audio recorded interview sessions.

The themes that emerged from the interview data were: homework can lead to stress; homework should be differentiated; homework should be brief; failing to complete homework results in school consequences; homework reveals student successes and areas of concern; homework amounts do not increase with grade level progression; nightly reading homework is acceptable; teachers have a misconception between what they believe they are assigning and what is actually occurring; and homework must have a purpose. In addition, six noteworthy concepts were revealed. These concepts were: teachers will make changes to homework based on parent feedback; homework impacts sleep; homework reduction can be beneficial; parents enjoy having homework options; parents appreciate information about homework; and teachers do not like assigning homework.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the elementary school homework perceptions of 20 participants that consisted of 10 parents of currently enrolled elementary school students and 10 teachers currently working in the elementary school setting. All participants partook in interviews in which open-ended questions were employed. Interview questions focused on obtaining each participants perceptions about homework assigned to elementary school students. The viewpoints of participants highlighted their knowledge, experience, opinions, and concerns.

The themes and noteworthy concepts that emerged from data analysis may provide important insight into elementary school homework practices within one school division in Southwest Virginia. Information revealed as part of this study may assist this school division, other divisions, and educators in the way they approach and implement homework at the elementary school level. In addition, the findings may assist in making the elementary school homework experience more meaningful and enjoyable for students and parents.

The interview data were collected, coded, and then examined to discover emergent categories. The coding process was multi-faceted and increased researcher understanding of the categories that emerged and how they were linked (Creswell, 2007). Multiple rounds of coding were applied and memos were created. Memos were examined to determine emergent themes and noteworthy ideas. The emergent themes were: homework can lead to stress; homework should be differentiated; homework should be brief; failing to complete homework results in

school consequences; homework reveals student successes and areas of concern; homework amounts do not increase with grade level progression; nightly reading homework is acceptable; teachers have a misconception between what they believe they are assigning and what is actually occurring; and homework must have a purpose. Correspondingly, six noteworthy concepts were revealed. These concepts were: teachers will make changes to homework based on parent feedback, homework impacts sleep, homework reduction can be beneficial, parents enjoy having homework options, parents appreciate information about homework, and teachers do not like assigning homework.

Discussions and Conclusions

The findings from Chapter 4 provided the researcher with important information about the perceptions of both parents and teachers relative to the topic of elementary school homework. Conclusions were provided after a review of the data. Similarly, recommendations for implications and future research were made. One research question encompassed the focus of the study: What are the perceptions of elementary school parents and teachers in regard to the purpose of homework? Furthermore, the following subquestions were addressed as part of the study:

1. What is the relationship between homework and student learning?
2. What is the relationship between homework and parent-teacher relationships?
3. What is the relationship between homework and student health?

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of elementary school parents and teachers in regard to the purpose of homework?

Research has shown that teachers assign their students homework to inform parents of what is happening in the classroom (Gallo, 2015). Several parents responded that a purpose of homework was to help parents stay informed about what their child was learning in the elementary classroom. Likewise, teachers accredited homework with keeping parents informed about their child's academic progress. Both groups mentioned that homework was purposeful in giving the child extra practice with what was learned earlier in the classroom.

While the majority of participants from both groups mentioned that homework was beneficial, the majority agreed that homework for elementary school students should be kept to a minimum. Repeatedly, parents and teachers cautioned that homework must have a purpose in regard to providing homework that is focused on helping students increase their content knowledge. Busywork was negatively viewed by both groups. These are activities that require little thought on the students' part or simply require the student to do activities that are repetitious and tedious (Vatterott, 2010).

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between homework and student learning?

Cooper (2006) cautioned that only a few studies have been conducted that focus on elementary school homework's ability to impact student achievement, but such research has determined that a significant negative relationship does exist between homework and achievement for elementary school students (Cooper et al., 2006). Research has shown that

parents believe that homework is a key component necessary to ensure student success (Galloway et al., 2013). Discussed by both groups was homework's ability to help students who are struggling with a concept. Sending home homework focused on helping students with concepts they are struggling with enabled parents to help their child with areas of concern. Parents and teachers cautioned that homework could not help students who struggled with the concept in the classroom setting if they did not have parental help with such homework. Alternatively, teachers discussed that sending homework home with a child when they knew that the child did not firmly grasp the concept would be an ineffective practice that would confuse the child.

A parent interviewed actually attributed improved academic performance for her child when a significant reduction occurred in terms of the amount of homework the child was assigned each night. Similarly, a teacher saw an improvement in the classroom performance of a student when a parent shared that they discovered, while completing homework, a better way to help their child learn.

Research Question 3

What is the relationship between homework and parent-teacher relationships?

Interview data revealed a blend of parents had at some point in their child's time in elementary school been upset about nightly homework and parents who described an overall positive homework experience. This year, most parents indicated a positive experience with homework and their child's teacher. This may be attributed to the homework transparency of teacher each child's teacher. Research has shown that when parents are informed and involved

with their child's educational experiences, they are more likely to exhibit a positive attitude toward their child's teacher (LaRocque et al., 2011).

Despite parental opinions both positive and negative about homework, only a few parents actually indicated that they had an interaction with their child's teacher about their homework concerns. Two parents actually said that only if the homework got out of hand would a homework discussion with the teacher be necessary. Likewise, only a few teachers indicated they had ever experienced a discussion with parents that focused on the negative aspects of homework they had assigned. Some parents who had a close connection to the school felt that they had to be very cautious about talking to their child's teacher about the amount of homework their child was being assigned. Rather than express their concerns that the homework was excessive, they simply kept their viewpoints to themselves. Thus, homework did not have a profound impact on parent-teacher relationships.

Research Question 4

What is the relationship between homework and student health?

When students are stressed by a subject during the regular school day, they are also stressed by homework in that subject area (Lichtenfeld et al., 2012). The participants did not report that elementary students were stressed by one particular subject. Rather, parents expressed that the length of homework would cause students to become stressed which would cause them to stress as well. Research has revealed that when students become stressed, their families are stressed as well (Katz et al., 2012). Most teachers reported that they did not want students to have excessive amounts of homework, to be stressed by their homework, and that family time was important. Two parent participants mentioned that homework in excess impacted their

sanity. One parent even suggested their child accept a punishment rather than deal with the stress their homework was causing. Two parent participants expressed that their child would sometimes miss out on sleep to complete homework assignments. Sacrificing amounts of sleep is detrimental to student health (Olds, Maher, & Matricciani, 2011; Franckle et al., 2015).

Some parents attributed elementary school homework with the opportunity to spend beneficial time with their child. Parents report that assisting their children with homework actually improves their relationships with their children (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Most notably, reading homework was mentioned by parents as being the type of homework that they were fondest of completing with their child.

Eliminating homework has actually been accredited with improving the amount of nightly homework for elementary school students in one school division and lowering student stress levels (Zalaznick, 2018). Whereas, other research revealed that homework extending beyond an hour of homework per night significantly increases the likelihood of student stress (Brown, Nobiling, Teufel & Birch, 2011). The participants in this study did not attribute stress on their child or their family until homework exceeded the threshold of one hour.

Conclusions

Conducted in a school division in Southwest Virginia, this study focused on determining the elementary homework perceptions of parents and teachers. The results of this study provide an opportunity to further discuss how homework is assigned to elementary school students. Data analysis led me to the conclusions that parents and teachers have similar ideas about the amount of homework that should be assigned and both groups agreed that elementary school homework can be utilized in a way to improve the academic performance of students. Such an improvement for elementary school students cannot occur without constant, honest parental feedback.

Recommendations for Practice

The research revealed the potential to assist with improving homework practices. The following recommendations for practice will benefit students and educators:

1. The findings of this study may be shared with central office staff, administrators, and educators to foster discussions about how homework is approached by everyone. Administrators would benefit by asking each teacher to openly discuss the amounts of homework they assign each night, how homework is differentiated to meet the individual needs of students, and the purposes of the homework being assigned. Additionally, discussions should include details on how homework quality will be continually evaluated.
2. Most educators have ever participated in homework training. For this reason, participating in professional development opportunities and training sessions focused on the creation and implementation of proven homework practices, including ways to differentiated homework, would be helpful to educators. Training in effective differentiation methods would be especially meaningful for teachers since it has been identified by both parent and teacher participants alike as being difficult to accomplish.
3. Teachers should schedule time to discuss homework with parents of their students. These conversations need to be candid. The teacher can discuss their expectations with parents and ask for their feedback. Teachers would benefit from giving parents options with completion and schedule days in which no homework would be assigned. Teachers would also benefit from either eliminating the practice of punishing students for failing to complete their homework, or keep a record of when and to whom it is happening to prevent excessive punishments. This log

can help teachers find tendencies and provide these students with extra help during class instead of sending home homework they are unable or refuse to complete.

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional qualitative or quantitative studies that focused on obtaining parent and teacher perception data would be helpful to gain a greater understanding of the homework perceptions of elementary school parents and teachers. These studies could be used in conjunction with this study to determine if the results presented are typical in other regions. Moreover, obtaining perception data from administrators and students may fill in potential gaps in the data.

Future research would be beneficial along the following lines:

1. Conducting an additional quantitative study to determine specific quantitative data that may help clarify findings. Documentation that reveals the exact amount of time parents and teachers feel that students do homework, how much time each grade level should spend on homework, stress level data, and obtaining other numerical data on important homework information like frequency of punishments would be beneficial.
2. Expanding the study to include administrators and past or present elementary students would be helpful. Students who recently attended elementary school can provide valuable information that can lead to implications for the future of homework assigned to elementary students. Their results may dispute the data provided by both participant groups.
3. A research study that used mixed methods to look for academic performance correlations between students who were given little or no homework in elementary school and those students who completed an hour or more nightly. A study could be conducted to look for correlations between these groups when the students are both enrolled in either middle or high school.

Furthermore, college student academic performance can be compared between groups who self-identify as students who typically did little to no homework and those that did over an hour per night on average.

Summary

The findings from this study provide information about the participants' perceptions of elementary school homework. The research questions focused on how each group of participants perceive elementary school homework, understand its purpose, and aspects of homework that are beneficial or detrimental to students. In conclusion, the participants reported that homework for elementary school students had the potential to be beneficial if: done in moderation, has a purpose, students were not assigned a punishment for failing to complete, teachers accurately estimate the amount of time their homework takes students to complete, differentiation is present, and the primary focus of the homework is on reading.

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. What are your thoughts about homework for elementary school students? Explain how you assign homework and determine its potential value. (Explanation for teachers only.)
2. What are the potential benefits of homework for elementary students?
3. Are there circumstances when homework might not be beneficial for elementary school students? Explain.

One-on-One Questions

1. What are your thoughts about homework for elementary school students? Explain how you assign homework and determine its potential value. (Explanation for teachers only.)
2. What are the potential benefits of homework for elementary students?
3. Are there circumstances when homework might not be beneficial for elementary school students? Explain.
4. In your experiences with your students, how does the assignment of homework influence your relationship with parents? (Question for teachers only.)

In your experiences with your child, how does homework influence your relationship with your child's teacher? (Question for parents only.)

5. How much homework should elementary students be assigned each night? (Question for parents only.)

How do you determine when and how much homework to assign students? (Question for teachers only.)

6. How many minutes per night do elementary school students spend completing homework?

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