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WHAT ARE ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR
HOMEWORK? AN INVESTIGATION ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND THEIR
HOMEWORK COMPLETION

By
Charles Kenneth Morgenweck

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 11, 2006

Approved by _____

Professor

Date Approved 5/11/06

ABSTRACT

Charles K. Morgenweck

WHAT ARE ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR HOMEWORK? AN INVESTIGATION ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND THEIR HOMEWORK COMPLETION

2005/06

Dr. Joy Xin

Master of Arts in Special Education

The purpose of the present study was to determine if there was a relationship between the amount of time special education and general education elementary students spent on homework and their corresponding academic achievement. The participants of the study included 83 fifth through eighth graders from a rural elementary school. Of those 67 were general education students and 16 were special education students. A self-reported survey was provided to participating students, as well as an interview to eight randomly selected students and their parents. The results showed that there was a very slight correlation between the amount of time students spent on homework and their academic scores. The parent/student interviews presented similar responses between parent and student groups in the area of homework awareness, but indicated perceptual differences in areas of homework support. The findings are consistent with previous research in homework practices.

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April 2006

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Statement of Problems

When a student's grades or performance is discussed, his/her teacher and parent would assume that if the homework is done, the student's rewards will be good grades. Homework is an aspect of curricula that has been widely recognized as an important factor to academic success (Warger, 2001). There have been many studies regarding homework and its place in the American educational experience; however, the findings of those studies are mixed. For example, some studies support homework assignments (e. g. Black, 1996; Huntsinger, 1999; Keith, 1982, 1986). In those studies, the importance of homework has been noted to improve students' attitudes toward school, to promote study habits, to facilitate understanding and retention of the material, and to involve parents in the educational process. Other studies question the usefulness of homework for students, especially for young children (e.g. Gajria & Salend, 1995). One concern indicated that homework had only a minimal effect on elementary students (Cooper, 1989). Another concern was that the type of homework assignment determined if homework was viewed as a positive or negative experience. Homework that focused strictly on repetition was not consistent with the goals of homework. That is, homework had the greatest effect on the academic achievement of high school students but had only a minimal effect on elementary students (Cooper, 1989).

According to Black (1996), the main purpose of homework was to allow children to practice new skills, to prepare for learning new information in class, and to apply new skills by doing projects and practice for extensions. If homework was more reasonable, interesting, and clear, students would like to complete it (Black, 1996). Morse (1999) believes that students should be “paid” to do their homework as if it were a job. In this perspective, earned money (in the form of stickers, prize boxes, or a Pizza Hut lunch) would motivate students to complete homework just as adults are motivated to work each day (Morse, 1999).

How much homework is done by today’s students? It is found that the majority of students at all grade levels were studying less than an hour on a typical night for their homework. Even among 17-year-olds, only 12 % spent more than 2 hours on a typical night (Gill & Schossman, 2003). Does a student’s completion of homework translate into good grades? According to Kember and Ng (1996), grade point average did improve somewhat with hours of work, but students could work long hours and still obtain poor grades because they used inappropriate learning approaches. It was confirmed that a pattern of complex interrelationships occur rather than simple, direct correlations exist between learning approaches, learning outcomes, study motivation, hours of study, perceived workload and grade point average (Kember & Ng, 1996). Wildavsky (2000) reports that high school students seem to be getting better grades than ever while studying less. While researching the degree of students’ preparation for college work, Weiss (2005) found that about two-thirds (65%) of high school students were doing three hours or less of homework and still received mostly A’s and B’s.

Researching the time of doing homework, Caudill (1999) noted that students are rational in time allocation. They establish the concept of utility-maximization, where students face time constraints. They allocate time among their studies and other activities. In this framework, a grade of “A” provides more utility than a “B”. Goodstein (2004) addressed the importance of time management as a key indicator to success in the classroom, workplace, and home. Accordingly, teachers who incorporate specific calendar and daily planner routines into the classroom also build important life skills that will serve the students well in the years ahead. A recent study showed that balancing homework with other activities can contribute to school success and promote positive developmental outcomes in a child’s home life as well (Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, & Brown, 2004). While, Dickinson and O’Connell (2001) found that the amount of study time has, at best, a weak effect on grades. How a student used study time was more indicative of how that student did in his or her classes.

Jianzhou (2005) identified eight student-perceived reasons for doing homework. These included: to develop a sense of responsibility, to learn to work independently, to learn study skills, to develop discipline, to reinforce school learning, and to obtain family, teacher, and peer approval. These reasons also were related to student perceptions of homework behavior and their academic achievement. Students agreed that homework could help them better understand their lessons. However, the student’s primary reason for completing homework assignments was to win approval from their parents and teachers (Jianzhou, 2005).

When students with learning disabilities are included in general education settings, they are expected to complete their homework as what their general education

peers are required. Do they have any problems to complete the same homework as their peers do? Do they also have successful strategies to complete their homework as their peers? To answer those questions, Bryan and Burstein (2004) identified the primary homework problems of these students. For example, homework assigned by teachers lacked accommodations and modifications. Usually, teachers assigned the same homework to their students with disabilities without adaptations. It was found that 80% of teachers regularly assign homework, but few matched the tasks to student skills and provided feedback or positive consequences for homework performance (Salend & Schiff, 1989). These assignments were considered as developmentally inappropriate in terms of their difficulty and length of time to complete.

For students with learning disabilities, problems in completing homework have been attributed to their short attention spans, memory deficits, poor receptive language, and/or lack of organizational skills. Their listening and memory deficits may interfere with their understanding or remembering what homework has been assigned by the teacher in class (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Students with learning disabilities felt it was too hard to complete homework assignments (Warger, 2001). They perceived homework as busy work, and took too much time to complete. When a student with learning disabilities had such perceptions of homework, the chance of completing homework was reduced significantly (Warger, 2001). It seems that disabled learners must be assigned homework they were capable of completing, reflecting what had been taught in class.

In investigating parents' perceptions of their children's homework assignments, Dudley-Marling (2003) found that homework frequently reduced time available for family leisure, activities and domestic chores. Overall, the demands of homework

disrupted the lives of families, upsetting family relationships and denying parents and children many of the pleasures of their life. In another way, completing homework assignments seems to serve as a collaborative effort between the parents and child. It seems that homework completion needs a collaborative effort, so that parents can better monitor their child's progress in completing the assignments (Dudley-Marling, 2003).

Significance of the Study

Teachers have long used homework to provide additional learning time for students to practice what they learned in class. Despite the popular belief that homework has positive effects on students, the empirical research addressing the effectiveness of homework has been described as being vague, uncertain, sometimes contradictory, and perhaps even insufficient (Eagland & Flatley, 1985). Homework has been identified as a major factor affecting disabled learners. However, there still is a lack of empirical evidence to support this belief. The minimal amount of research on homework practices of disabled learners has found that homework has positive effects on school achievement. However, there is a disagreement about the effect of homework on academic achievement and school performance (Epstein, Polloway, Foley, & Patton, 1993; Gajria & Salend, 1995). Lack of homework completion was reported to be a major factor that contributed to poor academic performance and school failure of students with learning disabilities (Gajria, et al., 1995). It is found that students with learning disabilities can achieve grades much like their typical peers through opportunities to allow them to increase time to practice and study, such as homework. Truesdell and Abramson (1992) also found academic performance of disabled learners improved when the rate of homework completion increased. Homework was most effective if disabled learners

accurately completed their assignments and demonstrated at least moderate acquisition of the instructional material. Although there has been a recent increase in literature addressing homework and students with disabilities, there is still relatively little research focusing on the effectiveness of homework for students with learning disabilities, especially the amount of time for homework, and support they get in school and at home (Callahan, Rademacher, & Hildreth, 1998). The present study has compared students with and without learning disabilities by identifying time spent on homework in each academic subject and their grades. It attempts to provide information to teachers when considering appropriate homework assignments to different learners.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine if there are any relationships between the amount of time elementary students with and without learning disabilities spent on homework and their academic achievement. The goal of this study is to determine if there is a relationship between the amount of homework a student completed and his/her performance in school. This study attempts to provide additional information to the homework research, and to identify students' needs in subject learning in order to improve the teacher's instruction.

Research Questions

1. Is there a relationship between student grades and times of their homework completion?
2. How much time do elementary school students spend to complete their homework in each subject?
3. Are there any differences of study time to complete homework between grade levels?

4. Are there any differences of study time to complete homework between students with and without learning disabilities?

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Homework has been a topic to debate for years. The discussion ranges from its necessity to the time requirements that satisfy all subject areas. What must be done for a student to succeed in the classroom? What must the student with learning disabilities do to succeed in the classroom? What must be done to maintain a passing grade? In this section, research articles are reviewed focusing on relationships between homework and academic achievement, students' perceptions of homework, challenges of students with disabilities to complete homework assignments, and parental support.

Homework and Academic Achievement

According to Cooper (1989), homework increases academic achievement directly by increasing "time on task" and indirectly by promoting personal qualities essential for future academic success (e.g., persistence, diligence, the ability to delay gratification). Cooper (1989) indicated that the effect of homework on academic achievement is largely a function of grade level. That is, homework has the greatest effect on the academic achievement of high school students, but has only a minimal effect on elementary students. Homework is seen as a way to improve academic achievement; however, its limited benefits must be balanced against potential social costs of increased children's homework burden (Cooper, 1989). Homework policies and procedures for students with learning disabilities must consider that the homework assignments have a reasonable chance of being completed correctly, in order to foster proficiency or maintenance of

skills, and have careful monitoring to use a variety of reinforcement strategies (Cooper & Nye, 1994).

To enhance test scores and academic achievement, students were required to keep a daily self-monitoring log of their study activities (Dickinson & O'Connell, 2001). It was determined that time spent on organizing study materials had a stronger relationship with course test scores than did total study time, and time spent for reading and reviewing (Dickinson & O'Connell, 2001). It was found that high-scoring students averaged almost 32 minutes more per week organizing homework material than did low-scoring students, though their difference in total study time was only 53 minutes per week (Dickinson & O'Connell, 2001).

Homework provides young adolescents with learning disabilities an opportunity to learn, apply, and maintain a comprehensive strategy for recording and completing assignments independently. This way, their rate of assignment completion in general education classes increased and the number of homework requirements also increased (Hughes & Ruhl, 2002; Schumaker & Deshler, 1996). Associated with their improvement in completing homework were better grades, higher teacher ratings, the ability to complete homework assignments without prompting from parents or teachers and to maintain his/her use of these skills and strategies over time (Hughes et al., 2002).

In summary, if a relationship existed between time spent on homework and academic achievement, the more time spent on homework assignments the more progress students would make in their educational pursuits. However, how study time was utilized and what strategies were employed to complete homework assignments seemed to have had a greater impact on academic achievement. Once a student with

learning disabilities employed an individualized, independent strategy with reinforcement to correctly complete homework assignments, better academic performance would be presented.

Student Perceptions

Eccles (1983) theorized that an expectancy-value model of motivation existed in all students. A student belief about a task and his/her expectations for success on that task are directly related to the achievement behaviors: performance, task persistence, and task choice. This model indicated that achievement-related behavior, such as choice of activity and task persistence, were most directly influenced by students' expectations of success and by their perceived value given to the task (Warton, 2001).

In an effort to draw conclusions about rational of student work effort, Caudill (1999) found that students who were in danger of failing a class spent more time studying and doing homework to avoid the consequence of failure. In the study, the concept of utility-maximization, where students combined study time to produce satisfaction in the form of a course grade, was examined. Findings indicated that students spent self-prescribed sufficient study time to receive an acceptable grade.

Aaroe and Nelson (1998), investigated disabled learners' views regarding curriculum matters and found that the extent of student acceptance was influenced by their academic and social success (Aaroe & Nelson, 1998). Service-delivery settings, activity preferences, and instructional modifications were areas impacting their success. Students' attitudes and responses were generally positive with regard to their instructional setting and preferred activities that provided enjoyment and high success rates. Students with learning disabilities, regardless of grade level, were found to prefer

modifications in homework, work in groups, and desire adaptations in instruction and materials where they had learning difficulties (Vaughn, Schumm, & Kouzekanani, 1993). These findings indicated there was a relationship between a student's category of disability and the student's preference of instructional adaptations (Vaughn et al., 1993). In contrast to these findings, Klingner (1999) found that students with high-incidence disabilities want the same activities, books, homework, grading criteria, and grouping practices as their classmates, because they want to be treated equally as their non-disabled peers. Students without disabilities also agree that not all students learn in the same manner or at the same speed. Both groups of students value instruction that was reasonably paced, given clear and concise assignments that were thoroughly explained, taught, and presented with differentiated instructional methods to reach all possible learners (Klingner, 1999).

In a survey given to elementary and junior high students regarding homework, student experiences varied considerably at different grade levels and in different class settings (Bryan & Nelson, 1994). Specifically, students preferred activities that made them feel smart, helped them learn more, gave them immediate feedback, and allowed them to produce their best schoolwork (Gardner & Bates, 1991). According to Balli (1997), student perceptions focused on the extent to which parents either facilitated or confused the student's understanding of homework concepts, and the positive or negative effect associated with parent-child interactions. A significant number of students believed they did better in school when their parents helped them with their homework. Parental involvement had long-term benefits (Balli, 1997). Children appeared more motivated to learn when conditions were authentic, meaningful, jointly constructed with

peers/teachers, and were within their reach (Rueda & Moll, 1994). When this occurred, homework was student-centered rather than teacher- directed. Student-centered homework was initiated by students and/or jointly constructed with peers and/or the teacher. It was reflective of the student's home/community world in a realistic and meaningful way (Rueda & Moll, 1994). It also provided opportunities for students with disabilities to increase their motivation with school related activities while distractibility problems decreased (Kogan, 2001). Thus, student's enjoyment level, understanding, empowerment, helpfulness and value orientation increased when they played a more active role in their academic challenges (Kogan, 2001). When asking the purpose of homework assignments, students gave a variety of responses (Warton, 2001). As students matured, the concept of importance, usefulness, and utility of homework related to achievement and goal accomplishment were given as responses. However, short-term outcomes such as completing homework "to please parents and teachers", "avoiding getting into trouble", "to learn", and "to revise", were also mentioned by younger students (Warton, 2001).

In conclusion, student perceptions were related to utility-maximization models in which students rated each task in terms of success, performance, and effort exerted while learning a given task. When disabled learners were asked about adaptations of homework assignments, the research indicated that a student's view of instructional modifications was dependent upon a particular student's learning disability. These students wanted equal treatment when homework assignments were given. They also wanted student-centered homework that was meaningful and related to newly learned skills. Parental involvement was mentioned to support student homework completion and

to enhance grades. The reasons for better performance included both a desire to do better and the desire to avoid the consequence of failure.

Challenges of Homework Completion

According to Cooper (1989), the reasons of students' incomplete homework assignments included the following: they were involved in non-school related commitments, wanted a social life, forgot to bring it home, the assignment was too hard, they did not understand it once they got home, took too much time doing it, and lacked organizational skills. In addition, some students participated in sports and clubs after school because their mothers were still working. This might be another reason why homework was not completed (Cooper, 1989). Homework posed significant challenges for students with disabilities. According to Bryan and Burstein (1997), there were several areas of difficulty concerning homework completion. Short attention span, memory deficits, poor receptive language, and lack of organizational skills were often the reasons given for incomplete homework assignments. Listening and memory deficits interfered with understanding or remembering what homework had been assigned and organizational deficiencies affected getting the assignment home, gathering the materials for working on the assignment, and bringing it back to school (Bryan, Nelson, & Mathur, 1995; Lenz, 1992; Polloway, Epstein, & Foley, 1992). Both general education and special education teachers consistently reported that homework problems seemed to be exacerbated by deficient basic study skills (Bryan & Burstein, 1997). It was found that students with learning disabilities lacked organizational skills that were basic to homework completion (Bryan & Sullivan-Burstein, 1997). These students had difficulty identifying a location that was free of distractions; organizing materials available for their

homework; allocating enough time to complete activities and keep on schedule; take notes in class for their homework; develop a sequential plan for completing multi-task assignments; check the homework assignment for accuracy and completion; and get support from parents, teachers and classmates to complete homework on time. The same problems were noted in Montague's research (2001). Therefore, it was important to help these students start with their homework, monitor them until homework was completed, and remind them of their homework assignment to avoid missing and forgetting to return when it was complete. In addition, student learning styles may impact on their homework completion. Teachers needed to distinguish between individual preferences of time, place, and conditions on the process of learning outside school (Hong, Milgram, & Perkins, 1995). It was also reported that personal dispositions should be matched to conditions for completing homework. Customizing the environment to capitalize on personal learning styles enhanced chances of completing homework.

When investigating their perceptions of homework assignments, thirty-seven percent of students mentioned that homework was, "dull and boring" (Bryan, Nelson, & Mathur, 1995). Students also indicated that they did not understand the purpose and benefits of doing homework. There were limited connections between homework and its role in the development of generic skills such as time management and learning autonomy. Homework was seen as an unpleasant, disliked, solitary activity unrelated to learning across home and school contexts (Warton, 2001). Students also complained that time devoted to homework limited opportunities for other family activities. The time parents spent on their children's schoolwork frequently disrupted domestic routines and undermined relationships between parents and children (Dudley-Marling, 2003).

Stressful interactions over homework threatened long-term relationships between parents and children, calling homework the carrier for school troubles and the means for transforming school troubles into family troubles (Dudley-Marling, 2003).

The challenges of homework participation and correct completion of homework assignments facing all students and parents are numerous. Again, a value-utility model of success, performance and effort was present. Time management strategies, study/homework completion strategies, and setting requirements were identified as positive components employed by all successful students, regardless of age, maturity and category of disability.

Parent's Support Role

The role of a parent in nurturing a child is a key indicator for his/her growth and maturation. Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts (1989) found that adolescents who describe their parents as treating them warmly, democratically, and firmly were more likely to develop positive attitudes toward, and beliefs about their achievement, and as a consequence, they were more likely to do better in school. Specifically, the study indicated that authoritative parenting likely facilitated adolescents' academic success (Steinberg, et al., 1989). These are three components of authoritativeness—parental acceptance, psychological autonomy, and behavioral control—made independent contributions to school achievement, and provided positive impact of authoritative parenting on school success, and developed a healthy psychological orientation toward work. It was found that trying to change adolescents' motivation to work hard and strive for success held the most promise for psychological interventions that enhanced school performance among those adolescents (Steinberg, et al. 1989).

According to Bigelow, Zhou, and Min (2001), a relational scaffolding exists among school, student, and parent's motivation and goals. First, the term relational scaffolding originated from Vygotsky's (1978) concept of zone of proximal development, which basically states that children and parents collaborate to assist the children to say or do things that ordinarily lie outside their grasp. Knowledge was acquired socially and culturally through interpersonal interactions with adults or peers. Parents who were involved in school-related activities such as homework enhanced their child's education in three ways: (1) modeling, (2) reinforcement, and (3) direct instruction (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). For example, when parents help children with homework they model their belief that educational pursuits are worthy of their time and effort. Further, when parents praise children for correctly completing homework they reinforce the goals of education. Finally, when parents provided direct instruction by drilling their children on homework problems and asked open-ended questions they promoted factual learning and cognitive ability (Balli, 1998). It was found that homework performance and academic achievement improved when parents received training and consistently implemented home-based self-management and reinforcement strategies (Callahan, Rademacher, & Hildreth, 1998). Homework completion and accuracy also increased when parents were trained and implemented a student self-management program. For example, students with learning disabilities were better able to manage their academic and social behavior after their parents participated in a homework program designed to facilitate completing homework and minimize homework problems (Cancio, West, & Young, 2004).

In conclusion, parents played a major role in their children's physical, psychological and social development. Fostering a warm environment at home enhanced a child's maturation and academic growth. Most children have benefited from parental interactions, not only immediately in the form of modeling, reinforcement, and instruction of homework help, but also in the future as they become adolescents.

Summary of Literature Review

The research offered a variety of reasons as to how time spent doing homework assignments and grades students received were related. It was found that a relationship existed between time spent on homework tasks and academic achievement. Other findings indicated particular homework strategies used were responsible for academic success. Perceptions of students when determining effort, performance, and outcome were also reported to influence academic achievement. Disabled learners seemed to prefer modifications that were particular and effective to meet their specific needs. Students wanted student-centered learning approaches and styles that their input was used to determine homework assignments. The ability to identify and use effective homework strategies incorporating time management skills and offering reasonable expectations of homework completion were essential to disabled learners as well as their non-disabled peers. The role parents play in the development of children's maturation socially and academically determined the probability that young learners experienced success later in their academic life. Parenting was a key indicator that enabled children to have reasonable expectations of success in academic pursuits.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

Participants

Students

A total of 83 students participated in the survey. All were enrolled in fifth through eighth grades and attended an elementary public school located in the southern area of New Jersey. Of these, 7 students were classified as learning disabled by school district personnel using the state eligibility standards. All had IEP objectives in reading or math, and received remedial instruction in special education resource rooms. These students received one period of instruction in mathematics (43 minutes) and two periods of instruction in language arts (86 minutes). There were 9 students who received accommodations and modifications through the implementation of a 504 plan. There were 41 students who received basic skills instruction in math, and there were 28 students who received basic skills instruction in language arts. The criteria for selection in the basic skills program were dictated by a student's performance in the standardized test in the previous school year. Any students who scored in the 5th stanine (percentile) or below were placed in this program. Participation in the basic skills program was voluntary.

Of the 101 students enrolled, 83 students participated in the student survey. Eight students, two from each grade level, volunteered to participate in a follow-up interview. Four were classified as learning disabled and the other four were students without disabilities. Each student was permitted to participate by their parents.

Table 1 presents the general information of all participating students.

Table 1

General Information of Participating Students

Grade	Male	Female	# of Students with IEP	# of Students with 504 plans	General Education Students	# of Students in Basic Skills-Math	# of Students in Basic Skills-LA
5	12	11	0	3	20	1	3
6	14	12	3	1	22	14	14
7	12	9	1	0	20	5	10
8	17	14	3	5	23	21	18
Total	55	46	7	9	85	41	44

Parents

Eight parents volunteered to participate in a structured interview. Of those, four parents had a child classified with a learning disability, and the other four had children without disabilities. Table 2 presents participating parents' information.

Table 2

General Information of Participating Parents

Parent	Gender	Age Range	Employment	Number of Children	Education				
					College Grad	Some College	HS Grad	GED	Some HS
1	F	30-35	School Aide	4	X				
2	F	35-40	Nurse	5	X				
3	F	30-35	House wife	2		X			
4	M	40-45	Casino Host	3		X			
5	M	45-50	Electrician	2		X			
6	F	35-40	Teacher	2	X				
7	F	40-45	House wife	2					X
8	M	40-45	Carpenter	1			X		

Setting

The study was conducted in a public elementary school located in a rural section of Southern New Jersey. A total of 219 students were enrolled in the school including K-8 grades. The average class size was 19.6 students. The attendance rate was 95.9%, while the student/faculty ratio was 9.6: 1. The student/administrator ratio was 118:1. The student mobility rate was 6 % and the student/computer ratio was 2.4:1. All locations throughout the school have been wired for access to the World Wide Web. Seventy-one percent of administrators and faculty possessed a BA/BS degree, 25 % had a MA/MS, and 4% held a PhD/EdD. In 1995, the school was recognized by the State Department of Education as a STAR School of Excellence, one of only ten in the state.

Eighty-three students in grades 5 through 8 participated in the study to take the survey. The survey was conducted in the Social Studies class, as all students in each of these grades were instructed together during this class period.

Materials

Student Survey

The Student Homework Survey consisted of 8 questions. Question 1 and 2 asked for gender and grade levels of participating students. An operational definition of homework was followed by question 3 which asked students the time they spent doing homework in 5 subject areas. Students were asked to give the amount of time in 5-minute increments for each subject. Question 4 asked for the grades students received in those 5 subject areas during the previous marking period. Question 5 asked students if they received help with their homework. Question 6 asked students to list anyone who helped him or her with their homework. Question 7 asked students to identify the

subject(s) they received help in homework. Question 8 asked students to give reasons they did not do their homework (See Figure 1 in Appendix A).

Student Interview

The student interview consisted of 12 items. Students are asked to rate the frequency of each question using a Likert-type scale (0 = never, 1 = at times, 2 = often, and 3 = very often). Question 1 and 2 asked if the student told parents about homework assignments and if any help was required to do the homework. Question 3 asked if the student found it difficult to begin homework. Questions 4 and 5 asked if assignment books were used and if tests and quizzes were discussed. Question 6 and 7 asked if the materials to do homework were forgotten in school and if there were consequences for missing work. Questions 8 and 9 asked if there was a special time and place to do homework assignments. Question 10 asked if parents were aware of the students' present grades in school. Question 11 asked if a student would use a homework hotline. Question 12 asked if the student read for pleasure at home (See Figure 2 in Appendix A).

Parent Interview

The parent interview questions consisted of 12 items. Parents were asked to rate the frequency of each question using a Likert-type scale (0 = never, 1 = at times, 2 = often, and 3 = very often). Interviews gathered information that detailed their children's homework practices and strategies. Question 1, 2 and 3 asked if parents inquired about their children's homework, if they helped with homework and helped their child get started with homework. Questions 4 and 5 asked if they were aware of an assignment book and upcoming tests. Questions 6 and 7 asked if their child forgot homework materials and if consequences existed if assignments were missing or not completed.

Questions 8 and 9 asked if a special time and place were used to complete homework. Question 10 asked if parents were aware of their child's grades. Question 11 asked if parents would use a homework hotline. Question 12 asked if their child read for pleasure at home (See Figure 3 in Appendix A).

Procedures

Student Survey

I initiated discussions with the elementary school principal to conduct research in September, 2005. A copy of the introduction letter and survey were delivered to the principal in late September. After his examination, I was given preliminary approval to survey and interview students in October, 2005. Prior to the survey delivery, a permission letter was sent to parents for their signatures to allow their child's participation

All students were informed of the voluntary and anonymous nature of the survey. When I delivered the survey to each student in class, I asked them if anyone had questions and if they understood the directions. I also told the class that I was available to assist any student in completing the survey. If a student did not understand a question or had difficulty to read a question, the question was read to the student individually. All fifth through eighth graders participated in this survey before their Social Studies class began in each period when all 5th – 8th grade students were mainstreamed. The survey took about 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Then, students were asked to turn in the completed survey.

Student Interview

Interviews gathered information that detailed students' homework practices and strategies. I interviewed 8 students, two from each grade from 5th through 8th. Three students were interviewed before classes started, four were during their lunch time, and one during the tutorial period. All interviews occurred individually. Each student was asked to respond to the questions listed in the interview protocol (see Figure 1 in Appendix A). If there was any question that needed to be clarified, I repeated or explained it. Each interview lasted about 15-20 minutes.

Parent Interview

Correspondence to parents was initiated through a participation letter followed by a phone call that requested parental input with the study. All parental participation was on a voluntary basis. Each interview took place at the parent's convenience. I interviewed 8 parents including six mothers and two fathers individually. These parents represented each grade level of students (See Table 2). Three interviews took place at individual homes, four at school and one interview was conducted over the phone. All interviews took about 15-20 minutes following the interview questions (See Figure 3 in Appendix A).

CHAPTER 4

Results

There were 101 students enrolled in the fifth through eighth grades. All students were asked to participate in the homework survey. A total of 83 students responded to indicate their participation with their parents' consent. Of these, 47 (56.6%) were female, and 36 (43.4%) were male. This represented a respondent rate of 82 %, which included 25.3 % of eighth graders (21 students), 22.9 % of seventh graders (19 students), 26.5 % of sixth graders (22 students), and 25.3 % of fifth graders (21 students).

Student Survey

Time for Completing Homework

According to the survey responses, the average amount of time to complete all homework assignments for elementary students, fifth through eighth grades, was 63.9 minutes (see Table 3). The respective averages for all students in each grade level were: 56.9 minutes for fifth graders, 72.4 minutes for sixth graders, 63.8 minutes for seventh graders, and 62.4 minutes for eighth graders.

The average time it took for students to complete homework assignments in specific subject areas was the following: language arts, 18.6 minutes; science, 5.5 minutes; math, 23.6 minutes; social studies, 8.7 minutes; and students took an average of 7.5 minutes to complete health assignments.

Table 3

Average Time for All Students to Complete Homework

Grade Level	Number of Students (Total of 83)	Subject Areas (in minutes)					Average by Grade Level (in minutes)
		Language Arts	Science	Math	Social Studies	Health	
5 th	21	12.4	3.8	22.6	10	8.1	56.9
6 th	22	13.4	8.6	31.1	9.5	9.8	72.4
7 th	19	28.2	5.3	15.3	9.2	5.8	63.8
8 th	21	20.2	4.3	25.5	6.2	6.2	62.4
	Subject Average(in minutes)	18.6	5.5	23.6	8.7	7.5	63.9

According to survey responses, the average amount of time it took students with disabilities to complete all homework assignments, fifth through eighth grades, was 40.4 minutes (see Table 4). The respective averages for disabled learners in each grade level were: 39.9 minutes for fifth graders, 32.5 minutes for sixth graders, 25 minutes for seventh graders, and 64.1 minutes for eighth graders. The average time it took for students with disabilities to complete homework assignments in specific subject areas was the following: 13.3 minutes for language arts 4.0 minutes for science, 11.5 minutes for math, 6.8 minutes for social studies, and 4.9 minutes to complete their health assignments.

Table 4

Average Time for Special Education Students to Complete Homework

		Subject Areas (in minutes)					
Grade Level	Number of Students (Total of 16)	LA	Science	Math	Social Studies	Health	Average by Grade Level(in minutes)
5	3	10	5.0	8.3	11.6	5.0	39.9
6	4	8.8	6.3	8.8	5.0	3.8	32.5
7	1	10	0	5.0	5.0	5.0	25.0
8	8	24.4	4.8	23.8	5.6	5.6	64.1
	Subject Average (in minutes)	13.3	4.0	11.5	6.8	4.9	40.4

According to survey responses, the average amount of time it took regular education students to complete all homework assignments, fifth through eighth grades, was 69.6 minutes (see Table 5). The averages for regular education students in each grade level were; 59.7 minutes for fifth graders, 81.4 minutes for sixth graders, 65.8 minutes for seventh graders, and eighth graders spent an average of 71.3 minutes to complete their homework assignments. The average time it took regular education students to complete homework assignments in specific subject areas was the following: 19.9 minutes for language arts, 5.9 for science, 26.6 for math, 9.2 for social studies, and regular education students spent an average of 8.1 minutes to complete their health assignments.

Table 5

Average Time for General Education Students to Complete Homework

Grade Level	Number of Students (Total of 67)	Subject Areas (in minutes)					Average by Grade Level (in minutes)
		Language Arts	Science	Math	Social Studies	Health	
5	18	12.8	3.6	25.0	9.7	8.6	59.7
6	18	14.4	9.2	36.1	10.6	11.1	81.4
7	18	29.2	5.6	15.8	9.4	5.8	65.8
8	13	23.1	5.0	29.4	6.9	6.9	71.3
	Subject Average (in minutes)	19.9	5.9	26.6	9.2	8.1	69.6

The respective completion time for all students was 64.1 minutes (see Table 6).

Special education students took 49.1 minutes and regular education students spent an average of 69.7 minutes on their homework.

Table 6

Average Time for Each Group of Students to Complete Homework

Subject Area	All Students	Special Education Students	General Education Students
Language Arts	18.6	16.9	19.9
Science	5.5	4.7	5.9
Math	23.8	15.9	26.6
Social Studies	8.7	6.6	9.2
Health	7.5	5.0	8.1
Average Homework Completion Times	64.1	49.1	69.7

According to survey responses, the total score average for fifth graders was 95.1 and 90.9 for sixth graders, 91.7 for seventh graders and 90.3 for eighth graders. The

cumulative score average for all fifth through eighth grade students was 92.0 (see Table 7).

Table 7

Average Scores of All Students

Grade Level	Number of Students(Total of 83)	Scores in Subject Area					Score Averages by Grades
		Language Arts	Science	Math	Social Studies	Health	
5	21	93.6	96.4	93.0	97.0	95.6	95.1
6	22	87.5	94.6	88.9	92.7	91.0	90.9
7	19	85.1	93.9	90.8	93.5	95.4	91.7
8	21	84.6	90.6	89.7	93.5	93.1	90.3
	Average Scores	87.7	93.9	90.6	94.2	93.8	92.0

Table 8 indicates reported scores by special education students. According to Table 8, the average score of students with disabilities was 90.5, the reported score of 93.3 for the 5th graders, 91.0 for the 6th, 89.6 for the 7th, and 88.1 for the 8th.

Table 8

Average Scores of Special Education Students

Grade Level	Number of Students (Total, 16)	Scores in Subject Area					Score Averages by Grades
		LA	Science	Math	Social Studies	Health	
5	3	93	94	91.3	93.7	94.7	93.3
6	4	87	95.8	89	93	90	91
7	1	80	96	88	88	96	89.6
8	8	79.6	86.9	87.5	93	93.3	88.1
Average		84.9	93.2	89	91.9	93.5	90.5

Table 9 presents the reported average scores by general education students.

According to Table 9, the average score of general education students was 92.5, 95.4 for 5th graders, and 90.9 for 6th, 91.8 for 7th and 91.7 for 8th graders.

Table 9

Average Scores of General Education Students

Grade Level	Number of Students (Total 67)	Scores in Subject Areas					Score Average by Grades
		LA	Science	Math	Social Studies	Health	
5	18	93.6	96.8	93.3	97.6	95.8	95.4
6	18	87.6	94.4	93.3	92.6	86.3	90.9
7	18	85.4	93.8	90.9	93.8	95.3	91.8
8	13	87.7	92.8	91.0	93.8	93.0	91.7
Average		88.6	94.5	92.1	94.5	92.6	92.5

Table 10 presents the average scores of all participating students. The special education student's average was 90.5, the general education student's average was 92.5, and 92.0 was the average score for both groups combined.

Table 10

Average Scores of Each Group of Students

Subject Area	All Students	Special Education Students	General Education Students
Language Arts	87.7	84.0	88.6
Science	93.9	91.0	94.5
Math	90.6	88.6	92.1
Social Studies	94.2	92.9	94.5
Health	93.8	92.9	92.6
Cumulative Score Point Average	92.0	90.5	92.5

Correlation between Time and Score

To assess correlations, Pearson Product Moment correlations were calculated. Correlation coefficient of time students spent on homework and their achievement scores was .075, indicating very slight correlations between these two variables.

Homework Assistance

All students responded to the questions in the survey. In response to the question, “Do you get help with your homework”, 81 % of special education students while 89 % of general education students responded that they received help with their homework (see Table 11).

In response to the question, “Who helps you with your homework assignments”, 40% of students stated that their mother was the source of assistance. Twenty-nine percent responded that their father helped with homework assignments. Additional responses identified friends (9.1%), others such as grandparents, teachers, uncle, (8.4%), brother (7.1%), and sister (6.4%) were responsible to provide assistance to their homework.

Forty-four percent of students indicated that math was the subject they needed the most support, 30.3% of respondents needed assistance in language arts, 11.4% in Social Studies, 8.3% in health , and 5.3% in science.

In terms of reasons why homework was not completed, forgetting assignments or homework material (texts, worksheets, and notebooks) was the most frequently indicated in the survey responses (32.44 %). Also, 19.6 % indicated being too busy, or without time to complete their homework. Without understanding homework assignments

(19.6%), unwillingness (8.8%), extracurricular activities (6.9 %) and others (12.7%) were additional reasons. Twenty percent of respondents reported that they always did their homework.

Table 11

Student Responses to Homework Assistance

Students	HW Help (By percentage)		Who helps	Subjects requiring assistance	Reasons for the incomplete assignments
	Yes	No			
			Mom (40%)	Math (44.7%)	Forgot (32.4%)
All students	72	10	Dad (29%)	LA (30.3%)	No Time/ Too Busy (19.6%)
Special Ed	13	3	Friend (9.1%)	Social Studies (11.4%)	Don't Understand (19.6%)
General Ed	59	8	Other (8.4%)	Health (8.3%)	Other (12.7%)
			Brother (7.1%)	Science (5.3%)	Don't Want to (8.8%)
			Sister (6.4%)		Extra Curricular (6.9%)

Student Interview

Eight students, two from each grade level, volunteered to participate in a follow-up interview. Of those, four students were special education students and the other four were general education students. Table 12 reports the mean and standard deviation of participating students' responses to each question in the interview. The range of answers was between 0.0 (never) and 3.0 (always). Scores of 0 (never), 1 (sometimes), 2 (often) and 3 (always) were used to indicate frequency of responses. In the student interview, scores between 0 and 1 were presented in Question 4 (parent review of assignment book), (mean = 0.0); Question 6 (forgot materials), (mean = 0.5); Question 11 (use of a homework hotline), (mean = 0.75); and Question 7 (consequences); (mean = 1.0). In the

student interview, scores between 1 and 2 were presented in Question 2 (getting homework started), (mean = 1.0); Question 3 (getting help), (mean = 1.5); Question 5 (inform parents of tests), (mean = 1.25); Question 8 (a special place for homework), (mean = 1.5); and Question 9 (a special time for homework), (mean = 1.25). Also, in the student interview, Question 1 (telling parents about homework), (mean = 2.0); was the only score between 2.0 and 3.0. Question 11 (aware of grades), (mean = 3.0); was the only score of 3.0.

Table 12
Mean and Standard Deviation of Student Responses

Interview Question	Responses	
	Average Mean	Standard Deviation
1. inform parents	2	1
2. get help with homework problems	1.5	1.11
3. get homework started	1	.7
4. parent review of assignment book	0	0
5. inform parents on upcoming tests	1.25	1.08
6. forget materials	.5	.5
7. face consequences for incomplete homework	1	1.22
8. special place for homework	1.5	1.5
9. special time for homework	1.25	1.29
10. parents aware of grades	3	0
11. use hotline	.75	.43
12. read for pleasure	.50	.50

Parent Interview

Eight parents, who had children in each grade level, volunteered to participate in a follow-up interview. Of these, four parents have children in special education and the other four parents have children in general education. Table 13 reports the mean and standard deviation of all participating parents' responses to each question in the interview. The range of answers was between 2.0 (often) and 3.0 (always). In the parent interview, there were no scores under 1.0, however, the mean of 1.0 was presented to three questions: Question 3 (getting homework started), Question 6 (forgetting material), and Question 7 (consequences). In the parent interview, scores between 1 and 2 were presented in Question 2 (help with homework), (mean = 1.5); Question 4 (assignment book), (mean = 1.37); Question 5 (upcoming tests), (mean = 1.62); Question 9 (special time for homework), (mean = 1.62); Question 10 (knowing grades), (mean = 1.75); and Question 12 (pleasure reading), (mean = 1.37). In the parent interview, the mean of three questions was above 2.0. Question 1 (asking about homework), (mean = 2.5); Question 8 (special place), (mean = 2.25); and Question 11 (using a homework hotline), (mean = 2.37); presented scores above 2.0. There were no mean scores of 3.0 in the parent interview.

Table 13

Mean and Standard Deviation of Parent Responses

Interview Questions	<u>Responses</u>	
	Average Mean	Standard Deviation
1. ask child about homework	2.5	.7
2. help child with homework	1.5	.86
3 problems getting homework started	1.0	.5
4. ask child to see assignment book	1.37	.99
5. ask about upcoming tests	1.62	.85
6. forget materials	1.0	.7
7.establish consequences for incomplete homework	1.0	.69
8. special place for homework	2.25	1.08
9. special time for homework	1.62	1.31
10. know child's grade	1.75	1.08
11.use Hotline	2.37	.85
12. see child read for pleasure	1.37	1.11

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to determine if there was a relationship between the amount of time elementary students spent on homework and their academic achievement. The results show that there was a very slight correlation between these two variables (time vs. academic scores).

To examine the time elementary school students spent on homework in five subject areas, it was found that the average time to complete homework assignments in specific subject areas was the following: language arts, 18.6 minutes, science, 5.5 minutes, math, 23.6 minutes, social studies, 8.7 minutes, and health assignments 7.5 minutes. Overall, students spent an average of 63.9 minutes on homework assignments each night.

To further identify the time difference between students with and without disabilities, it was found that special education students spent 40.4 minutes per night on homework, compared to an average of 69.6 minutes general education students spent, which represented a 30 minute difference between the two groups. For example, in math, special education students spent an average of 11.5 minutes on homework assignments, while general education students spent an average of 26.6 minutes on their math homework. This represented more than 2 times the amount of study time general education students spent than special education students. In language arts, 13.3 minutes was the average study time for special education students. Compared to 19.9 minutes for general education students, it represented approximately 50 % more study time for the

general education students in language arts. It seemed special education students spent less time on their homework than general education students, not only in reported subject areas, but also in different grades. In addition, when comparing student and parent responses to the interview, both similarities and differences existed between the two groups in their perception of homework practices. There were several perceptual similarities among the two groups (awareness of and/or assistance with homework, knowledge of upcoming tests, and knowing their children's grades) which supported earlier findings by Balli (1997) who ascertained that parent-child interaction produced positive outcomes in homework completion rates and student academic success. Some differences in perceptions of homework practices between the two groups included: reviewing the assignment book, having a special place for homework, using a homework hotline and seeing the student's reading for pleasure. The parent survey presented the following means: Question 4 (ask child to see assignment book), (mean = 1.37); Question 8 (special place for homework), (mean = 2.25); Question 11 (use homework hotline), (mean = 2.37); and Question 12 (see child read for pleasure), (mean = 1.37). It appears that parents sometime (mean > 1) ask their child to see the assignment book, and at times see their child reading at home, and they often (mean >2) find a special place for their child to do homework, and refer their child to using the homework hotline to get support. The student survey presented these following means: Question 4 (parent review of assignment book), (mean = 0.0); Question 8 (special place for homework), (mean = 1.5); Question 11 (uses homework hotline), (mean = .75); and Question 12 (reads for pleasure), (mean = .50). It appears that students never ask their parents to review their homework (mean = 0), and they sometimes have a special place for doing their

homework (mean >1), seldom use homework hotline for help, and read at home (mean <1). The difference between parent and student responses may indicate that parents want to offer support, but students may not want to be assisted by their parents, especially the upper level graders. They may want to show their ability and independence. This may impact their perceptions on parental support differently from their parents.

The findings of the present study support the previous research by Dickinson and O'Connell (2001). In their study the amount of study time had a weak effect on student academic scores, and the study time was more indicative of a student's performance in class. The present study found a very slight correlation between the time and student scores. This finding is consistent with the previous research (e.g. Cooper, 1989, Dickinson & O'Connell, 2001). Homework had a minimal effect on an elementary student's performance in school.

The present study also found reasons why homework assignments were not completed. It is consistent with the previous studies by Cooper (1989), Bryan and Burstein (1997), Bryan, Nelson, & Mathur, (1995), Polloway, Epstein, & Foley, (1992), and Dudley-Marling, (2003). Lacking of organizational skills, forgetting materials, having limited time, being too busy and involvement in extracurricular activities were the most frequent reasons given for incomplete homework assignments.

The study is limited by several factors. First, the participants were from a rural elementary school in only one state. The overall student population of the school covers 96 % of Caucasians. In addition, a limited number of special education students and their parents were included in the sample. This limited sample size may have impacted the findings of the study. Second, the results were based on a self-reported investigation.

Data collected from the survey and interview rely solely on self-reported information. There might be a discrepancy between reported information and actuality. Given these limitations, the study still provides additional information about student homework. Homework provides students additional practice on their learning in class. The results indicated a slight relationship between homework study time and student achievement scores. That may mean that homework assignments may not be directly related to student learning in class, but seen as an extra assignment to keep them busy at home. The present investigation is in agreement with Warger (2001) who concluded that students perceived their homework as busy work and took too much time to complete. The slight correlation between study time and academic scores may also indicate that homework assignments are not effective to improve student achievement. This supports Bryan, Nelson & Mathur's (1995) study in which they found that students did not understand the purpose and benefits of doing homework.

In conclusion, this investigation presents the differences of time students spent to complete homework, but fails to offer reasons as to why these differences existed. Were special education students assigned less homework than their general education peers? Longitudinal investigations may be needed to offer explanations to the reasons behind the reported differences in study time between these two groups of students.

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Appendix A: Student Homework Survey

Elementary School Homework Survey

This survey is being administered as part of a graduate course research project at Rowan University. While your participation is voluntary and you are not required to answer any of the questions herein, your cooperation and participation are important to the success of the project and are greatly appreciated. If you choose not to participate please understand that all responses are strictly confidential and no personally identifiable information is being requested. Moreover, whether you agree to participate or not, your decision will have no affect on your grades, your standing in class, or any other status.

Please circle the correct answer.

1. Gender: Male Female 2. Grade: 5th 6th 7th 8th

The next few questions are about homework. Homework is defined as any work you do outside class, such as in your tutorial period, during after-school activities, waiting for the bus, or at home.

3. Give the best guess for the amount of homework you do in the following subjects each night.

Give the amount of time in 5-minute increments for each subject (ex...5, 10, 15, 20).

LA SCIENCE MATH SOCIAL STUDIES HEALTH

4. Give the grades you received last marking period for each subject

LA SCIENCE MATH SOCIAL STUDIES HEALTH

5. Do you get help with any homework? YES NO

6. If you do get help, who helps you?

(List anyone who helps you)

7. In what subjects do you receive help?

(List any subject you receive help)

8. What are some reasons you have not done your homework?

Appendix B: Student Homework Interview

Student Homework Interview

1. Do you tell your parents about your daily homework?

Never _____ At times _____ Often _____ Always _____

2. Do you get help with your daily homework?

Never _____ At times _____ Often _____ Always _____

3. Do you have problems getting started with your homework?

Never _____ At times _____ Often _____ Always _____

4. Do your parents ask to see your assignment book?

Never _____ At times _____ Often _____ Always _____

5. Do you tell your parents about upcoming tests, quizzes, reports, or projects?

Never _____ At times _____ Often _____ Always _____

6. Do you forget to bring homework, books, or handouts home with you?

Never _____ At times _____ Often _____ Always _____

7. Is there a consequence for incomplete or missing homework assignments?

Never _____ At times _____ Often _____ Always _____

8. Is there a special place for homework to be completed at home?

Never _____ At times _____ Often _____ Always _____

9. Is there a special time set aside for homework at home?

Never _____ At times _____ Often _____ Always _____

10. Do your parents know your grades this marking period?

No idea _____ Somewhat _____ Fairly sure _____ Certain _____

11. Would you use a Homework Hotline, via the school's web site?

Never _____ At times _____ Often _____ Always _____

12. Do you read for pleasure at home?

Never _____ At times _____ Often _____ Always _____

Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix C: Parent Homework Interview

Parent Homework Interview

1. Do you ask your child about their daily homework?

Never_____ At times_____ Often_____ Always_____

2. Do you help your child with their daily homework?

Never_____ At times_____ Often_____ Always_____

3. Does your child have problems getting started with their homework?

Never_____ At times_____ Often_____ Always_____

4. Do you ask to see your child's assignment book?

Never_____ At times_____ Often_____ Always_____

5. Are you aware of your child's upcoming tests, quizzes, reports, or projects?

Never_____ At times_____ Often_____ Always_____

6. Does your child forget to bring homework, books, or handouts home?

Never_____ At times_____ Often_____ Always_____

7. Is there a consequence for incomplete or missing homework assignments?

Never_____ At times_____ Often_____ Always_____

8. Is there a special place for homework to be completed at home?

Never_____ At times_____ Often_____ Always_____

9. Is there a special time set aside for homework at home?

Never_____ At times_____ Often_____ Always_____

10. Would you use a Homework Hotline, via the school's web site?

Never_____ At times_____ Often_____ Always_____

11. Do you know your child's grades this marking period?

No idea_____ Somewhat_____ Fairly sure_____ Certain_____

12. Does your child read for pleasure at home?

Never_____ At times_____ Often_____ Always_____

Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix D: Parent Consent Letter

Elementary School
South Jersey
United States

October 17, 2005

Dear Parents,

Your child will be asked to complete a questionnaire that involves study habits of 5th through 8th grade students. Please be assured that the information provided will remain strictly confidential. The answers will be consolidated with those of other students. These results will be shown in statistical form only.

If you have any questions, please contact me school or home.

Thank you,

Ken Morgenweck