A PURPOSEFUL UNDERSTANDING OF HOMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: A Purposeful Understanding of Homework

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There has been a long standing debate over the purpose of homework; it has been a topic for educational reform, discussed in educational debates, and looked at as a means to improve student achievement (Foyle & Bailey, 1986; Gill & Schlossman, 2003; Xu, 2005; Fisher & Frey, 2008). Homework can cause frustration for students and parents, which can lead to tension within the home (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). The tension and frustration can be magnified when homework is not assigned at the independent level, when teachers do not consider differences in social classes, and when time is not taken into consideration.

The purpose of this study was to analyze homework within one school district in two different elementary schools. Second and fourth grade classrooms in a Title I and a Non-Title I school were selected. I used an embedded multiple-case study design (Yin, 2014) drawing upon the following data sources: classroom observations, collections of completed homework samples, and interviews with students, teachers, and parents. This study unpacks multiple stakeholders’ perceptions and purposes of homework. In addition, effective homework characteristics were researched to help all stakeholders have a common understanding.

Findings that emerged from this study are grouped into several key thematic areas: family support and expectations are viewed differently amongst teachers within and across grade levels
and title/non-title school; the perception of the purpose of homework is varied by role (student, teacher, and family); homework is not differentiated by teachers; and teachers do not provide support to families on how they can assist with homework. Based upon the research conducted from the literature review, several of these findings did not meet effective characteristics of homework. Homework should be differentiated for students (Tomlinson, 2010), designed for independent practice (Vatterott, 2010), an opportunity for student growth (Sallee & Rigler, 2008; Wiggins, 2013), an opportunity for feedback from the teacher (Brookhart, 2012; Hattie, 2012), and time sensitive (Sallee & Rigler, 2008).
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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

The practice of homework has long been embedded in American schools; educators have been assigning homework to students as far back as the 19th century (Gill & Schlossman, 2004). Over many decades, homework has been discussed as a means to increase student achievement and prepare our students for later success with rigorous activities (Cooper, 2001). When American schools were perceived to fall short of other countries’ academic achievement, history has shown homework was under review for the role it plays in the educational system.

Homework continues to be a highly debated issue for school boards, parents, and students (Jackson, 2007). Recently schools have been implementing policies providing guidance as to if homework is necessary, when to assign homework, the level of feedback provided by the teacher, and grading practices for homework (Suskind, 2012). Are educators living in the past by assigning homework, or are they failing our current students by not assigning homework? Is it the quality, purpose, and feedback of homework that needs to be reviewed to improve learning? Teachers have shared concerns why students do not complete their homework; many claim students are not supported at home by parents (Wilson & Rhodes, 2010). Homework can cause tension within homes, leading to frustration for students and parents (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). This tension is magnified when students do not want to take the time to complete homework, the homework assigned is too difficult, and when parents/guardians are unable or even unwilling to help with homework. With concerns from the involved parties, the time used for homework is in question.

Homework has been placed on a high pedestal in hopes of improving education in the United States (Pendergrass, 1985), and researchers have agreed that much of the focus has been on the amount of time students spend outside of the classroom studying and its effects on student
achievement (Bembenutty, 2011; Gill & Schlossman, 2000; Gill & Schlossman, 2003; Gill & Schlossman, 2004; Van Voorhis, 2011). Homework has long been thought of as an after school activity for students to improve their academic achievement by practicing and mastering new skills (Corno, 1996). The hours of work completed outside the normal school day have been viewed as a possible answer to students competing against other students from different countries. According to Zuzanek (2009), United States students have not been overburdened with homework when compared to other countries, but parents and educators continue to worry about the social well-being of American students. Students, 15-19 years old, from numerous countries were found to have a strong desire to do something else when asked to complete homework, but interestingly were found to rather spend more time on homework than in class (Zuzanek, 2009). This could lead educators to question if current students are completing their homework when assigned or getting anything out of the homework to improve their learning.

Homework has served many different roles and purposes over many decades and has been used as a mechanism for educational reform, discussed as a key platform for educational debates, and implemented in an attempt to improve student achievement (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Foyle & Bailey, 1986; Gill & Schlossman, 2003; Xu, 2005). Over time, a variety of different uses have been cited for homework; how can a common understanding of the purpose of homework exist for teachers, students, and families?

**Statement of the Problem**

The following problems with homework are addressed in this dissertation; homework assigned beyond a student’s independent level leads to stress and frustration, time involved for all stakeholders, to craft, assign complete, and grade homework; differences in social class may provide varied resources; and there is lack of agreement upon the purpose of homework.
Stress and Frustration

Homework can be a frustrating and stressful phenomenon for students (Gill & Schlossman, 2003; Heitzmann, 2007; Salle & Rigler, 2008; Van Voorhis, 2011). It is frustrating because students are often given assignments that are not at their level (Kohn, 2007; Vorhees, 2011). Also, it can be stressful in the home when parents do not have the knowledge or time to help support their child with homework (Corno & Xu, 2004). Considering the time spent by students completing homework, parents and guardians attempting to support students, and teachers having to assign and assess homework, is the time used for homework worth it when so many different people are impacted? By researching students’, families’, and teachers’ perceptions about homework, some meaning could be made around the ongoing debate and its purpose. If homework is going to be assigned, how can it be done in an efficient manner and with a positive outcome for students, families, and teachers?

Time

Families raise a variety of concerns about homework including the amount of time spent on homework and communication from the teacher (Howard, 2005; Van Voorhis, 2011). Some parents want more homework to push their child academically, while others share the thought that students do enough work during the school day and homework is not necessary. Some families believe more homework will provide more rigorous learning opportunities. Other parents say the amount of homework assigned is ridiculous and students do not have enough time to interact socially and be involved in extra-curricular activities. Because homework requirements can be time consuming, school activities and opportunities for social times are lost for students (Zuzanek, 2009). For teachers, time is needed for planning, creating, and providing
some sort of feedback on the assigned work. In addition, teachers spend time communicating with families regarding homework assignments.

**Social Class**

Additional concerns from families could be grounded in social class. The social class of a family is a factor in the number of resources within the home and the ability or knowledge of the parent (Lareau, 1987). Some parents do not have means, ability, or time to help their child with homework. Whether parents or guardians are supporting their child with completion of homework by providing a routine each night at home or acting as a tutor to teach a specific skill or standard, families are directly impacted by homework (Van Voorhis, 2011). The perceptions from families can be varying, and a better understanding of these viewpoints from different social classes could help make meaning around the decisions for or against homework.

**Common Understanding**

By developing a common understanding of the purpose of homework, parents and teachers could better serve in their roles to help students. Given a variety of viewpoints from different stakeholders, I study teachers’, families’, and students’ perceptions on the overall purpose for homework, including the amount of time needed for the planning, supporting and completing of homework.

**Purpose of the Study**

The intention of this study was to identify the perceptions and purposes of homework to develop a common understanding through the lens of teachers, parents, and students in both Title I and Non-Title I schools.
Significance of the Study

The knowledge this study will provide to educators and parents will be useful for their role with homework. In addition, students should benefit directly when teachers plan homework at the students’ level and parents better understand their role. Teachers will have a better understanding of what characteristics define effective homework and how to best support students when considering different social classes. For homework to be effective, teachers should understand the importance of three characteristics of homework. First, homework must be differentiated to meet the needs of individual students, being assigned at the students’ independent level (Tomlinson, 2005). This means that a teacher is not going to develop and require every student to complete the same assignment. The teacher will assign the homework based upon what the student is ready to do independently, practicing the skills that have been taught by the teacher. By planning a homework assignment at the independent level, a teacher is taking into consideration the amount of support and resources within the home. Second, teachers need to provide effective feedback that is timely and specific for the student based upon the homework that was assigned and completed (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008). This feedback allows the student to know what the next steps will be or that more practice or instruction from the teacher is needed. Third, a mindset must be developed by the teacher that homework is formative. This allows the teacher to not focus on a letter grade for homework, but to tailor additional instruction to help the student be successful in the classroom (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

This research matters because of the amount of time consumed by teachers, students, and parents when homework is assigned. A study found that many elementary students were getting more than three times the amount of homework than the recommended 10 minutes per grade.
(Pressman, Sugarman, Nemon, Desjarlais, Owen, & Schettini-Evans, 2015). Students are involved in many extra-curricular activities, from church activities to school clubs to athletics; homework needs to be created and designed in a way to be efficient, worthy, and supportive of a student’s education. Students view homework as cutting into their social time and opportunities for outside activities (Corno & Xu, 2004).

Without an individual having a clear understanding of the qualities of effective homework, homework becomes time consuming, worthless, and counterproductive to students’ learning. Each individual who plays an important role in the much-debated conversation of homework will be addressed within the triad of homework success in the next chapter (Figure 1). Much existing research shows that homework does not impact student achievement, yet homework is still assigned in today’s classrooms. My study unpacks the perceptions and purposes along with effective characteristics of homework to help all stakeholders have a common understanding.

**Research Questions**

The research question that guided this study was:

1. What is the understanding that exists among students, teachers, and families in elementary schools regarding homework and its purpose in our schools?

Questions that surfaced from the primary research question were:

2. What similarities or differences are there between the viewpoints of families, students, and teachers regarding the purpose of homework within the elementary setting?

3. How do the perspectives regarding the purpose of homework differ from stakeholders at a Title 1 school compared to those from a Non-Title 1 school?
**Definition of Terms**

I have listed below the important terms that are prevalent throughout the literature review to help the reader clarify and understand the text.

*Differentiation* – The instructional decisions made by the teacher to maximize the learning potential of each student by providing learning opportunities through a variety of strategies that allow all students to access the same curriculum based upon the individual needs of the learners (Tomlinson, 2005; Watts-Taffe, Laster, Broach, Marinak, Connor, & Walker-Dalhouse, 2013).

*Effective Feedback* – Written or verbal comments that are provided from the educator to the student based upon his or her performance that is timely and intended to improve the student’s learning and/or performance within the classroom (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008).

*Formative Assessment* – Opportunities created by the teacher to allow students to perform or work on a specific skill or content that has been taught within the classroom for teacher evaluation (Dirksen, 2011). These student learning opportunities also allow the teacher to provide feedback and tailor instruction to fill in the learning gaps or move learning forward based upon performance of individual students (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

*Homework* – Any work that is assigned to the student to be completed outside of the classroom (Corno, 1996).

*Homework Triad* – The homework triad consists of the roles and relationships that exist between parents, teachers, and students focused around homework.

*Independent Practice* – The opportunity for students to practice and solidify skills that have been previously taught in the classroom without the need of adult support (Hunter, 1994).

*Student Learning Theory* – The way students learn by taking their ideas, thoughts and opinions with the teacher as their guide (Hunter, 1994).
Summative Assessment – Opportunities created by the teacher to measure student mastery at the end of a unit, chapter, or semester after instruction has been provided within the classroom (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2006)

Delimitations

The delimitations of the study are:

1. The study is limited to one school district in the state of Indiana.
2. The study is limited to two different elementary schools; one that is a Title I school and one that is not.
3. Only two grade levels were chosen as part of this study.

Summary

As indicated in chapter one, homework has been part of the American educational system for decades and has been debated in regards to its impact on student achievement. By having a better understanding of the different purposes for homework through the eyes of teachers, students, and parents from this study, individuals might be able to use homework in an effective way to the satisfaction of all stakeholders. If educators, families, and students know the purpose of homework, the question of why homework is assigned need not be asked, and a common understanding may emerge. If a common purpose and understanding of homework can be derived, its value could be maximized by placing an emphasis on student growth.

Chapter two will provide a detailed literature review about what research has been conducted regarding homework from the viewpoints of families, teachers and students.
CHAPTER TWO - REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Any time the United States has felt threatened by its counterparts, education comes to the forefront of discussions. One of the topics for debate has focused around the need to increase the amount of homework assignments and the amount of time students spend on homework. “Homework has been viewed as a key symbol, method, and yardstick of serious commitment to educational reform” (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). Yet, merely focusing on the number of hours spent on homework ignores issues of quality. Instead, in this dissertation I focus on the purpose of homework. As illustrated in this chapter, limited research has been conducted at the elementary level with regards to homework and understanding its purpose from teachers, parents, and students.

The history of homework has been well documented over the course of many decades. Dating back to the 19th century, the only students completing homework were high school students; because of compulsory attendance laws, the majority of students did not attend schooling beyond the age of 14 (Gill & Schlossman, 2004). At the beginning of the 20th century, the brain was viewed as a muscle and completing homework was an opportunity to exercise and strengthen the mind (Cooper, 2001). Homework was the accepted way to practice academic skills until the 1940’s when the educational world moved to more of a problem solving mindset. Although homework has been part of American school culture since the 19th century, history has shown the debates regarding homework surfaced due to the threat of other countries outperforming the United States in regards to accomplishments, or the periodic views of educational mediocrity from our society (Suskind, 2012). For example, in 1957 when the Russians launched Sputnik, concern became reality for Americans because the Russians had just won the space race. Americans pointed to the schools and the lack of rigor as the main reason to
blame for this loss (Cooper, 2001). The continual perception was American children were not working hard enough, and more homework would help students work harder and become smarter. As a result, American schools needed to provide more opportunities to challenge students so they would rise to be leaders in the competitive global world. Many believed the Russians had to be working harder in schools and were surpassing the achievements of Americans evidenced by Sputnik.

Several decades later in the report A Nation at Risk (1983), it was stated “the ideal of academic excellence as the primary goal of schooling seems to be fading across the board in American education” (p.15). The United States felt threatened again by their competitors because other countries were taking over and leading the way in science and technological innovation, and many individuals pointed to the educational system as the culprit. The belief was the United States educational system was not preparing our youth to compete globally and the education requirements needed to be strengthened by offering rigorous coursework for all. A Nation at Risk found the following:

Evidence presented to the Commission demonstrates three disturbing facts about the use that American schools and students make of time: (1) compared to other nations, American students spend much less time on school work; (2) time spent in the classroom and on homework is often used ineffectively; and (3) schools are not doing enough to help students develop either the study skills required to use time well or the willingness to spend more time on school work. (p. 23)

This idea led individuals to believe America was at risk to lose jobs to other countries by not preparing students with a rigorous educational system. One of the initiatives intended to help bring the United States back to prominence in the world educational arena was a call for
increased homework, including more time to be spent on homework for high school students and an increase in homework being assigned as early as first grade (Corno, 1996).

When the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was introduced, the United States’ educational leaders reacted towards global threats of our students not being prepared for the 21st century by focusing on school accountability, testing, and improvement for schools (Suskind, 2012). Section 1118 of No Child Left Behind called for schools to “implement effective parent involvement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance.” As part of NCLB, a document was produced for parents entitled Homework Tips For Parents (Coooper & Gersten, 2003), aimed to create a knowledge base on how parents can support their child at home with schoolwork. This was another attempt by federal leaders to use homework as an avenue to improve student achievement and fend off our competitors around the globe. Each of these examples calling for more homework to increase student achievement in the US came during significant events in history over the many decades in an attempt to remedy global threats.

**Background on Homework**

Homework has played many different roles and thus has had different purposes (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Foyle & Bailey, 1986; Xu, 2005). Teachers create and manipulate the role of homework based upon their own beliefs and understanding (Van Voorhis, 2004). Traditionally, homework was additional practice from the day’s lessons (Xu, 2005). Another role homework has played over the years is preparation for the next day’s classroom instruction or discussion. Many times, students are required to read chapters of a book or a passage from an article and must be “prepared” to come to class. In addition, homework has also played the roles of fostering enrichment for students or encouraging student creativity by having students develop their own homework (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Van Voorhis, 2004; Xu, 2005).
Homework has been debated from a variety of stakeholders over many decades. From educators and politicians to students and parents, all of these individuals have played a role in the debate of homework. Researchers have analyzed the amount of minutes students spend on homework from different perspectives. Some believe that the number of minutes is enough and others believe students need to spend more time on their studies (Gill & Schlossman, 2004; Strother, 1984). According to a document created in conjunction with NCLB, Homework Tips For Parents (Cooper & Gersten, 2003), the National Parent Teacher Association believes homework should not be more than 10-20 minutes a day for kindergarten through second grade and 30-60 minutes for elementary students in grades three through six. Homework opponents like Alfie Kohn (2007), suggested homework should only be assigned when it is truly necessary and when one can ensure the assignment will be beneficial to the student. Kohn concluded elementary and middle school students do not achieve at higher levels because of homework and actually dread completing it. The call for more homework from individuals is based on the belief that if students are going to be successful, homework opportunities must be provided to students to continue their learning at home or through well-designed homework programs (Cosden, Morrison, Guiterrez, & Brown, 2004). Whether someone supports or is against homework, educators generally agree that homework should not be assigned just to be assigned. Homework should be assigned with a clear and specific reason to benefit the student and their learning (Vatterott, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that underpins my research is student learning theory. The model developed by Madeline Hunter (1994) is particularly pertinent and serves as a framework as to how students learn in the classroom through the different stages of instruction decided upon
by the teacher. This theory indicates that students can learn and be successful when teachers
assign any educational task to be completed at the independent level. This builds upon what the
student has learned during the instructional part of the day, and then the learner can apply their
new knowledge through independent practice, solidifying a new skill or concept (Hunter, 1994).
Madeline Hunter designed independent practice to solidify the child’s learning without the
assistance of a teacher or other adult. For example, after a teacher has taught a concept, a child
will be ready for the independent level not just because they have been taught, but also because
they have a foundational understanding of what was taught. Then the child is ready to
independently practice the skill. Independent practice, along with the teacher providing feedback
on the completed assignment, allows the student to move to the mastery level (Murphy, Weil, &
McGreal, 1986).

As applied to my study, this theory helps one better understand the purpose of homework
from the different perspectives, such as the support from parent to child, the relationship between
home and school, student achievement, and the attitude of the student towards homework. If the
assignment is not designed at the independent level, students can become frustrated because of
the difficulty of the assignment and their need for further instructional support. Teachers can
plan assignments without thinking about the amount of time needed for completion based upon
differences of students. When assignments are not at the independent level, or teachers are not
sensitive of the amount of time and support needed from knowledgeable parents at home
necessary for completion, individuals will be impacted causing fragmented relationships,
possible remediation, and frustration for parents, teachers, and students.
The Need for Successful Triads of Homework: Teachers, Students, and Parents

Homework creates different challenges for parents, students, and teachers. Parents feel helpless at times because of not understanding the content or the assignment, students refuse to complete homework or forget assignments at school, and teachers become frustrated with lack of support from parents and students who do not complete homework assignments (Van Voorhis, 2004; Voorhees, 2011). Kohn (2006) argued that even when adults see how students are impacted negatively by homework, they do not address it. Too many times, homework is viewed as only a student issue; but in many instances, students are asked to complete homework above their ability level because teachers create impossible tasks for students to complete independently (Voorhees, 2011). According to researchers Fisher and Frey (2008), Theodore, Dioguardi, Hughes, Alosio, Carlo, and Eccles (2009), and Vorhees (2011), teachers have the opportunity and responsibility for appropriately designing and planning successful homework opportunities to support classroom instruction. The collaborative relationships built between parents and teachers (Margolis, 2005) will help play a valuable role in student success from school work that is completed outside of the classroom. This can be accomplished within the proposed homework triad (Figure 1).
Within the homework triad, parents should receive ongoing communication from teachers regarding homework. Yet, a study of over 1000 middle schools found that over 75% of principals said that less than half of their teachers consistently report to parents on how they can support the homework process (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). It is the schools’ responsibility to find ways to communicate with parents, but parents should not wait for schools to communicate with them regarding educational issues or questions regarding their child’s progress. Parents can feel confused on how they can help their child with homework (Xu & Corno, 2003). When questions arise from the parent, a positive relationship would assist the parent so he or she could easily ask a question and not feel the teacher is unapproachable.

Teachers have the largest responsibility within the homework triad. This is emphasized
in Figure 1 with all capital letters in the heading. Teachers must provide continual feedback to students on how they are progressing during direct instruction or from homework assignments that are completed (Brookhart, 2012; Hattie, 2012). The opportunity for teachers to make the greatest impact on student achievement sits well within their grasp each day in the classroom (Schmoker, 2006). By planning instruction, facilitating the content, and making decisions to design and assign homework, teachers have the opportunity to produce successful learners.

Teachers must be able to set students on an independent plan of action for homework as if students do not need any support at home. This is done by the teacher gradually releasing the responsibility of learning to the students. Ultimately, the student will become independent in the application of the new skill or content that has been taught (Fisher & Frey, 2008). Another responsibility for teachers is to construct a bridge between the classroom and home. Teachers must find ways to communicate to provide parents the support and understanding about what is expected at home. When a positive relationship is established between the teacher and parent, and the parent becomes involved in the learning process, students will have the support system they need to have a greater opportunity for success within the classroom and for future goals to become attainable (Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007).

Students may perceive homework as boring and a waste of time because they have already mastered the content or skill during the school day (Corno, 2000; Couts, 2004). Extracurricular activities can play a significant role in the life of a student and impact the completion of homework. For example, nearly half of a random sample of 180 high school students surveyed indicated they were committed to two to three hours of activities each day after school (Sallee & Rigler, 2008). Ultimately, students have to make the decision to complete the homework assigned and participate in extra-curricular activities by managing their time. This is
a reason parents have indicated homework as a positive, along with the idea that homework is part of higher education, leading to future learning and eventual job possibilities (Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Coutts, 2004; Van Voorhis, 2004). Students have the responsibility to complete homework and find the time to complete it each day. When the appropriate instruction is provided and students are on the verge of independence, they will be able to complete homework successfully, supporting their learning within the classroom.

Social Class and Homework

Important consideration must be given when discussing the triad and homework. Although each individual plays an important role, social class is a preexisting circumstance that gives some students an advantage and puts others at a disadvantage. Social class can indicate the level of parental involvement and the resources parents have to make a difference in their child’s schooling (Lareau, 1987). Lareau found the parent’s ability or knowledge level and the amount of resources increases based upon the social class. For some students, competent parents are willing and readily available to help at home and support their child’s school work. Also, in these types of homes, a plethora of resources is readily available to help support the student. For example, tutors may be hired and transportation may be provided, with parents maintaining communication with staff members to help their child be successful.

Other students may have limited resources for a variety of reasons. For example, many students who come from low-income families have fewer opportunities to read at home because of the lack of reading materials (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008). Resources are not just limited to actual materials to read or devices to use, but also to parents’ knowledge base, willingness, and ability to help as well. All parents are not equipped with the same knowledge base as others to help their children with homework. Corno and Xu (2004) agreed that parents
do not all have the same knowledge base, but some parents have the ability to support students during homework and develop study habits when schools provide proper guidance and training. This supports Figure 1 and the double arrow between the parent and the teacher. The collaborative nature has to be formed no matter the social class of parents to ensure the opportunity of student success with homework. Students from lower social classes benefit greatly from having a positive relationship with a staff member at school who truly understands any struggles within their home (San Antonio, 2008). This is why teachers must understand and believe in the planning and design of independence for homework. If teachers understand the struggles at home, they will not set students up to fail on homework based upon their social class or the level of support and resources available each night.

The complexities of social class and homework signify the importance of Figure 1. The word teacher in the figure is in all capital letters because I believe they play the most crucial role. Teachers must take the time to get to know their students and families to understand the individual differences and circumstances within their classrooms. Students who have a positive relationship with teachers in the elementary setting have been shown to have higher student achievement (O’Connor & McCartney, 2007). The supports teachers offer students are critical to the success in the classroom. Without the support of a teacher, a student’s support may vary due to family circumstances. Once teachers understand the significance of social class and the challenges students may face at home, the first barrier for successful homework opportunities will be removed.

**Positive Aspects of Homework**

Although some of the viewpoints and thoughts around homework are negative and some cast a silver lining, benefits of homework are acknowledged by parents, students, and teachers
A PURPOSEFUL UNDERSTANDING OF HOMEWORK

Alike. First, students and teachers have agreed that homework can help students be better prepared for class and gives them a better opportunity to recall the content that was taught within the classroom (Cooper, 2001; Corno, 2000). Also, parents and teachers have seen positive character traits such as responsibility and work habits developed and established in younger children (Cooper, 2001; Sullivan & Sequeira, 1996). Coutts (2004) found that some younger children want to complete homework by having the desire to be like older siblings in their house. With many of the comments or debates around homework being negative or focused on how to fix the issue, it is important to understand that the negativity is not cast by all involved.

Parents’ Responsibility with Homework

Parental support in the academic success of their child regarding homework is valuable. The one constant opportunity for parental involvement in education is homework (Kay, Fitzgerald, Paradee, & Mellencamp, 1994). The mere notion that parents are involved and supportive helps their child progress in his or her own learning (Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007). When a child observes and feels this support, the opportunity for student success will be far greater than for a child without parental support (Balli, Demo, & Wedman, 1998; Lee & Bowen, 2006). The support from parents is not solely directed at the child. The parent must have the understanding and notion to support the classroom teacher as well. Kay, Fitzgerald, Paradee, and Mellencamp (1994) found parents rely on a variety of means of communication to help support their child’s progress in the classroom pertaining to the daily demands of homework. By creating open lines of communication with the teacher and keeping a pulse on their child’s progress, a parent will be completing one role in the successful triad of homework.

The environment a parent creates at home is critical to the success of child. Some students are self-disciplined and avoid distractors like the television (Corno & Xu, 2004), but
other parents allow their child to be distracted by items like the television and telephone (Xu & Corno, 2003). When routines are established and an environment is created that supports homework, a child will have a better opportunity to apply what has been taught during the instructional day.

**Time is difficult.** When a teacher assigns homework, one might suggest that the only person responsible for the completion of the work is the student, but VanDeWeghe (2004) believes that for struggling students it becomes part of the parents’ homework. According to Van Voorhis (2011), parents have reported that when teachers do not fully explain homework directions to students or when the assignment does not relate to the day’s instruction, their time and energy at home is wasted in attempting to help their child. Many parents work a full workday and expect nonworking hours to be spent with family, participating in activities, hobbies, and their own interests (Suskind, 2012). Even though time constraints may make it difficult for parents to be involved, the effort to be involved in a child’s education is just as important as other time commitments, due to the message it sends and because students will do better (Balli, Demo, & Wedman, 1998; Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007).

**Parents do not receive training.** As previously noted, parents have indicated that they are not knowledgeable enough to complete the homework because they were not present when the instruction was presented in class and communication about homework expectations did not occur (Corno & Xu, 2004). Whether the parent is not educated in general or the parent is educated and is not familiar with the curriculum, an issue is created by the responsibility placed on a parent to help their child with homework. Improving the communication and creating a collaborative relationship, Margolus (2005) suggested contacting parents at the beginning of the year to explain homework concepts and procedures. It is almost as if educators believe there is a
shared obviousness between parents, students, and teachers that homework will just get completed throughout the year. Corno and Xu (2004) found educators need to provide effective homework training to parents because having a parent with a college degree does not necessarily equate to effective homework support for a child at home.

In summary, parents play an extremely important role throughout the education process of their child. Parents must be able to support their child to demonstrate their value and appreciation for education and to celebrate their child’s academic accomplishments (Cooper, 2001). However, parents need training and time to allow their child to be successful with homework. School administrators must be able to support parents and provide information on how parents can support their child with homework. Teachers need to provide homework that can be designed for independence at home so parents can support and not have to teach new skills. Not all students are ready for independent practice at the same time, yet many teachers assign the same homework to the entire class. Therefore, schools must provide this type of understanding to teachers so parents will not have to take on the role of teacher and can instead occupy the role of supporter and parent to ensure success with homework. When schools do not provide adequate support to parents and when teachers assign homework before students have reached the independent stage, frustration can surface for the student, leading to parent-child confrontations and the possible sense of failure for all.

**Students’ Responsibility with Homework**

Students play a vital role when it comes to completing homework within the educational system. Sometimes, students believe the homework is meaningless or boring and use those beliefs as a reason why homework can go uncompleted (Coutts, 2004; Wilson & Rhodes, 2010). Whether the homework that is assigned is meaningless or worthy and engaging, the student has a
decision to make. Do I complete the homework or not? When the decision is made to complete the homework, the student takes the responsibility for his or her success and the value of his or her own learning (Vatterott, 2011). Just the opposite, if the student chooses not to complete the homework, the student is making the decision to impact his or her own progress. The realization for the student must be that homework is part of and will continue to be part of the educational process. Students must realize that homework is work, much like an adult job, and additional preparation makes a difference in their achievement (Corno & Xu, 2004). With the responsibility of homework, students can often share a variety of concerns regarding the time, difficulty, and environment.

**Too much time.** Students offer a variety of perspectives regarding homework, but the majority of them focus on the negativity of homework. Because of large volumes of homework, Gill and Schlossman (2003) shared news reports were claiming students and parents are losing sleep and having to enter therapy for reasons of burning out and not wanting to come to school. Sallee and Rigler (2008) agreed, “Students are more overworked and overstressed than ever, with weighty backpacks filled with unprecedented hours of homework each night” (p. 46). Yet in 1999, the National Assessment of Educational Progress questioned 9, 13, and 17 year-olds about how many hours of homework they completed the night before. None of the age groups reported extensive amounts of homework for the overall percentages. Five percent of the 9 year-olds reported spending more than two hours on homework compared to 8% of 13 year-olds and 12% of 17 year-olds. Students see homework as cutting into their extracurricular time and understand the difference between what they like or want to do and what they have to do (Corno & Xu, 2004). Whether a student is working a job, is part of a church group, or is participating on a school team or club, homework can take away from social development and leadership
opportunities in different environments other than school. Students benefit from opportunities to socialize and develop leadership skills to be a well-rounded person. Students want and need time to learn and socialize with friends, co-workers, and teammates in more than just a school setting.

**Homework is too difficult.** Many students believe homework is either too difficult, or they feel they did not receive the proper instruction to complete the work independently, which leads to frustration and possible burnout (Corno & Xu, 2004). Because homework is typically assigned in a one-size-fits-all sort of way, some students’ needs are not being met, whereupon learning can stall and frustration build (Kohn, 2007; Vorhees, 2011). Cooper (2001), Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001), Corno and Xu (2004), Heitzmann (2007), and Van Voorhis (2011) agreed this type of planning, designing, and assigning of homework by the teacher leads to frustration for the student, conflict between parents and child, and possible refusal to complete. For example, Voorhees (2011) shared an example of a fifth grade student having to read a piece of literature on Catholicism. The problem was that the student became frustrated because the piece of literature to read was at a high school level and she was reading at a fourth grade level. These issues could be addressed by having administrators provide professional development focused on homework so teachers can create and assign homework to ensure success of all types of learners.

**The homework environment.** The home environment can be a challenge for students because of the numerous distractions or lack of supervision. Jordan and Nettles (2000) found that students who are unsupervised and spend more time in unstructured settings were at a greater potential risk for negative academic results than those students who were supervised in structured settings. Within the concept of homework, educators forget there are implied and embedded characteristics we assume students will exhibit to complete assignments. Ramdass
and Zimmerman (2011) argued self-regulation skills like time management, setting goals, and monitoring distractions in a location that is suitable for learning are important for homework success. In a study of sixth grade students, Benson (1988) discovered that students needed self-awareness, self-discipline, and parent support to deal with the different distractions that occur during homework. No matter the environment at home, students will always find distractions, but success can still occur when either an adult or the child using the self-regulation skills eliminates those distractions.

In summary, students look at homework as something they are told to do by teachers and realize it takes away from their personal decisions and free time (Corno & Xu, 2004). Most children would much rather choose to play outside than sit and do homework, which is a directive from the teacher at school. Some might say homework is the responsibility of the student. Or is it? Students have the responsibility to complete homework once it is assigned from the teacher; therefore, the greater responsibility lies in the design and plan from the teacher to the individual needs of the student. Homework would not be as difficult for most students if the plan was at each student’s individual level and assigned once the student is at an independent stage of the skill or strategy that had been previously taught in the classroom. As Madeline Hunter (1994) designed in her seven elements of lesson planning, independent practice, homework, should be assigned once the students have demonstrated an understanding of the skill or concept in the classroom. When this occurs, students will be able to show the responsibility to complete homework in an efficient amount of time, leaving opportunities for participation in activities that are by choice and not as a directive from an adult.
**Teachers’ Responsibility with Homework**

Teachers are the decision makers who start the homework process by determining whether or not to assign homework. One might believe that students who are assigned homework will achieve at higher rates than those not completing homework (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). When teachers do assign homework, they have the responsibility to meet the needs of the students and not to just attach a letter grade to the assignment (Vatterott, 2011). Teacher feedback has been found to be a factor in the significance of achievement in relation to homework (Cooper & Valentine, 2001).

When feedback is given to students in a timely manner and is descriptive in nature, by having the teacher explicitly explain the successes and corrections needed, students have the opportunity to grow in their learning and master skills (Hattie, 2012). Teachers need to create homework around the content and skills that have been taught during the instructional day. When this occurs, the opportunity for effective feedback will be present because the homework is directly related to the content that was taught.

Many times, teachers assign the same homework task to all students yet claim they differentiate instruction during the day. This is a major flaw and leads one to wonder why a teacher would differentiate during the instructional time if he or she would not apply the concept of differentiation to homework. Researchers Van Voorhis (2004) and Vorhees (2011) believed differentiated instruction includes meeting the needs of individual students by not planning the same assignment for every child. Fisher and Frey (2008) took it a step further to apply the gradual release of responsibility to the student to independently complete the assignment once the student has had the opportunity to master the skills necessary to complete the assignment. Students will become frustrated and helpless when they are expected to complete homework that
is above their ability and performance in the classroom.

One of the greatest needs in the homework process is the need for instructional planning that allows students to be prepared to complete homework independently. Yet, professional development does not occur for teachers to learn about homework planning and different designs that could be used (Van Voorhis, 2004). Too many times, administrators do not provide any professional development on homework assignments (Kohn, 2007). If administrators could offer professional development on homework planning and designs, the possibility exists for more homework to be turned in and more meaningful assignments assigned. Teachers, students, and parents could have a much better experience with homework, thus enhancing student success.

Within the homework process, teachers must realize the importance of relationship building with students and parents. Relationships will be developed over time through genuine care for students, desire to see all students succeed, and ongoing communication with parents. When teachers are able to successfully build relationships and support parents and students, students will be better prepared to complete the assigned homework that will further their knowledge base and better prepare them for future instruction (O’Connor & McCartney, 2007).

**Teachers’ Perspective on Homework**

Although teachers hold a great deal of responsibility when it comes to homework, they share a variety of topics that have been concerns. Issues can focus on students not completing homework because of the environment within the home, lack of communication from families, or professional development.

**Homework completion.** Teachers are the key holder to homework process by supporting students and parents. Research shows that many students are more likely to not complete homework as they grow older (Corno, 2000). Teachers cannot pick up the pencil and
do the work or create the environment at home for students to be successful, but Xu (2005) found that teachers and parents agree that the purpose of homework is to support or reinforce the learning that occurs in the classroom. Although this may be true from the perspectives of teachers and parents, Vatterott (2011) believed teachers must keep the focus on the learning of students by providing feedback so students can be responsible and value their own learning throughout the process to increase homework completion.

**Environment at home.** Teachers find the type of environment that is created at home can impact support from a parent to a student. Cosden, Morrison, Guiterrez, and Brown (2004) and Kohn (2007) argued that students that come from economically challenging backgrounds are at a disadvantage because teachers do not plan and design homework to meet the needs of lower socioeconomic students. Lareau (1987) added to this notion that the social class of parents plays a role in the materials and resources that parents have to offer based upon their educational status. Lareau discovered that working class parents perceive the school experience as a separate entity from that of the home environment. Whether it is distractors at home like siblings, computers, or the general home environment based upon social class, students need to be able to function in the home by focusing on the work they need to get accomplished and need access to parental support when necessary. Students have to be able to develop some self-regulation skills to complete homework by finding a place to work that is appropriate and suitable so they can focus and concentrate (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011).

**Communication with parents.** Because of how home settings differ and present environmentally challenging situations (Corno, 2000), communication between a teacher and a parent or a guardian can be difficult. Challenges are presented when attempting to communicate with families because many times parents are not accessible to talk, do not attend conferences,
and do not have email or Internet access. When family members are available for communication, to attend conferences, and to participate in school activities, minimally, it is the hidden message that students receive from them that school is important and valued in the home (Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007).

Teachers can be confused with the different messages that are sent from families. One family member believes that the teacher is assigning too much homework and then another person believes there is not enough (Wilson & Rhodes, 2010). Teachers have felt pressured by parents to assign more homework because of the belief the teacher may not be as committed as another colleague that assigns “lots” of homework (Kohn, 2007). Teachers will continue to find communication with families challenging and feel varied demands coming from different parents, but perseverance must prevail so relationships can be established ensuring communication will occur for the variety of families they will come in contact with each year.

**Professional development for homework.** Teachers receive professional development on an ongoing basis regarding different educational topics. Teachers need to be able to apply the professional development they receive to their actions within the classroom. Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) found when teachers design homework in a way to meet specific goals, more students will complete the assigned work and benefits will be obtained. Mangione (2008) argued that teachers have enough professional development on different areas pertaining to education, but the current practice of homework does not match what might seem to be a revelation for many teachers. Professional development is needed to ensure the revelation and practice of homework is dovetailed so all can benefit.

In summary, teachers are the driving force behind homework success. In other words, teachers shape the experience as the creator of any given assignment. Before teachers can be
expected to deliver the plan for successful homework, school leaders must provide the opportunities for teachers to learn more about homework design and planning. By designing a plan for homework that is well thought out, communicated to parents, and differentiated for all learners, teachers can put a plan in place that could be successful. Teachers are successful when students can master skills and content at the independent stage. Homework should be just that: the independent stage that cements the learning from the daily instruction provided by the teacher to the student. Challenges are inevitable and new situations are presented to teachers each year that are out of their control. When teachers can take control and make effective decisions within the classroom, students will have a better experience with homework, optimally resulting in increased responsibility, independence, and most importantly, successful learning.

**What Makes Homework Effective?**

Research indicates that homework can be effective for students when certain characteristics are considered by teachers (Sallee & Rigler, 2008; Van Voorhis, 2004; Vatterott, 2010). Homework should be differentiated for students to meet their individual needs within a classroom. Teachers should view assigned homework as independent practice to help move student learning forward. By having teachers provide effective feedback to students from completed homework, an opportunity is afforded to teachers to change instruction and help students master required skills and content. Finally, time must be considered when assigning homework to students. Each of these characteristics will be discussed, and Table 1 at the end of the section has been created to summarize what makes homework successful.

**Differentiated for Student**

The criteria for successful homework will start as a teacher is planning the instruction and assessment for students. Many times, teachers do not consider homework as part of the planning
process and spend little time focusing on developing homework assignments (Van Voorhis, 2004). If homework is not part of a well-thought-out designed plan, it can become a daily and habitual practice of the same assignment for every student. When this occurs, teachers may not consider the different student abilities within their classroom and the time necessary to complete the work by each student. This can result in homework that is not efficient and can be viewed as busywork that does not result in moving student learning forward (Kitsis, 2008 & Vatterott, 2010).

Teachers need to have a clear purpose when planning, designing, and assigning homework. When students are assigned homework, sometimes they feel as if it is busywork without any true purpose (Kitsis, 2008). Students must know the purpose as to why the homework is assigned (Haas, 2008). Students need to know if the assignment is for practice, to receive feedback to improve, or for a letter grade. According to Haas (2008), it is important to continually communicate the purpose of homework to students. By sharing the purpose with students, a better understanding of the assigned homework can be seen and ultimately students’ learning will progress. For example, if the purpose of a homework assignment is to learn the meanings of new vocabulary words like sink, float, and density, the teacher could assign the words as homework after the students have completed experiments that allow students to see which objects sink or float in the water. Through this type of activity first, students use their own words to write the meanings of the vocabulary words, which supports new learning for the student. Traditionally, teachers have chosen to have students write down the definitions through the use of a dictionary or reading a passage that explains the words. This activity is ineffective because it is in isolation and students are not constructing their own meanings of the new vocabulary word. The experiences exemplified in this example allow students to apply what they
learned. This type of planning for not only the instruction, but also for the specifically designed homework, will help move students’ learning forward for the original purpose that was shared with students in the classroom.

As a teacher is planning and creating the homework assignment, the teacher must be able to meet the needs of all of the students in the classroom. Tomlinson (2010) shared that learning has to be about individual students and not a prescribed set of steps or directions for all students. Many times, teachers will assign the same homework assignment to every student, yet they say they differentiate within the classroom. Teachers need to see that assigning homework is part of the differentiation process within the educational setting. If a text is assigned as part of the homework, reading abilities must be considered. A teacher may need to provide different texts for the students at their varying abilities to read and apply the same comprehension strategy taught during the instructional day to ensure frustration will not set in for the student. This would allow students the opportunity to be successful on homework assignments.

**Student Growth**

Part of students’ ability to demonstrate new knowledge and growth in their learning is successfully completing formative and summative assessments. Homework can be opportunity for students to practice and prepare for these assessments. When teachers plan homework assignments with the goal of students mastering standards, homework becomes the students’ opportunity for independent practice. This allows students to practice and prepare for specific content or skills on the summative assessment.

The homework assignment should be focused on the practice of applying the skills and content of the whole picture, not the practice of rote memorization of facts or vocabulary words for mastery (Wiggins, 2013). This approach allows students the opportunity to improve and
sustain learning instead of memorizing skills without application to complete the homework as busywork.

For students to grow in their learning, teachers should provide effective feedback for homework assignments so the students can understand what successes and challenges they have regarding their progression towards the goal of mastery. Along with the provided feedback, the teacher may need to plan specific instruction needed for reteaching. A student should not be expected to grow in their learning from only the feedback being provided. The need for a grade on homework is not necessary when teachers are providing feedback and planning to reteach skills that are deficient. Eliminating the philosophy that homework has to be graded allows students to focus on their own learning while progressing towards mastery. This could result in students viewing homework as an opportunity to practice and apply the skills taught in the classroom rather than as a pointless activity (Sallee & Rigler, 2008).

**Effective Feedback**

Many times, teachers assess homework for completion by quickly checking the assignment over to make sure students completed the assigned task (Sallee & Rigler, 2008). If this practice is implemented by teachers, the purpose of homework is not met. It is doubtful that student learning will move forward by a simple check for completion. Students have shared that if a teacher only checks homework for completion or does not even check the homework for any type of feedback, they tend to view the homework as not important (Kitsis, 2008).

Homework can be viewed as an opportunity to provide meaningful and timely feedback to students so new learning can occur. For example, if students were assigned mathematics problems to complete using a specific algorithm, a teacher will need to offer more feedback than just a checkmark or a smiley face to signify completion. The teacher could provide feedback
based upon errors that were made using the algorithm, feedback stating what was done correctly, or suggestions on how to organize the problem. According to Hattie (2012), the feedback must clearly state to the student what he or she must do to correct the error or better understand the problem that exists. Feedback from the teacher like this would improve student learning.

The teacher could make the decision to reteach part of the lesson based upon how students performed on the assigned homework. If the teacher just marked homework as complete, the opportunity for reteaching students based upon their completed work would not occur. Teachers should be able to see when the need for reteaching exists based upon student performance. Sometimes the opportunity to reteach the content or skill will be the best instructional decision to help students understand the concept (Hattie, 2012). Brookhart (2012) supported this idea to reteach because effective feedback does not stop once it has been given to the student. The student must have the opportunity to apply the feedback to his or her work within the classroom setting. With effective feedback being provided by the teacher, the homework will allow the student to grow academically and be successful within the classroom.

**Homework as Independent Practice**

When homework is designed, planned, and assigned by the teacher, independent practice should be at the focus of his or her decision making process for several different reasons. It is important for students to have the opportunity to independently practice before an assessment occurs (Kitsis, 2008). After students have been taught during the day and can independently practice the skills needed, they have the opportunity to be successful with homework. It does not make sense for a student to practice problems or strategies incorrectly before they are ready. According to Vatterott (2010), it can lead to frustration or confusion for the student if the teacher assigns the homework before the student is ready for independent practice.
Teachers have to keep in mind students have different types of support at home and some parents even lack confidence and knowledge to support their child when completing homework (Reach & Cooper, 2004). Teachers have continuously asked for parents to be involved in their child’s education, but not all parents provide or come equipped with the same background. Many teachers’ expectations assume parents will help at home (Lareau, 1987). Some parents do not feel confident to help their child. The issue can also be that many students live in a house with working parents and time is of the essence. This creates a challenge for parents and students to ensure homework is completed when assigned. Some parents have even suggested that when they help and support their child with homework it can be viewed as negative through the child’s eyes (Cooper, Lindsey, & Nye, 1999). With these given variables, homework should be completed as independent practice from the day’s lesson.

Time Sensitive

Homework should be planned with the amount of time needed to complete the assigned task because students can struggle with balancing extracurricular activities and homework demands that are placed on them by teachers (Salle & Rigler, 2008). This will allow students to appropriately participate in extracurricular activities and have a social life outside of school while still meeting academic expectations. If time is not considered when planning and creating homework assignments, the amount of time could possibly dominate afterschool hours and negative effects could occur for students, parents, and teachers. Many researchers have suggested that the debate should move away from whether homework is positive or negative for students and their achievement towards analyzing the actual homework itself. Within the planning and designing phase of homework assignments, teachers have the opportunity to make decisions that will help students master skills and content to move student learning forward. If this can occur,
the quality of homework assignments will improve and success will be found by all participants within the homework triad. School administrators may need to make a conscious effort to provide professional development for teachers focused on homework planning and design to help make homework assignments more time sensitive while also being effective in moving student learning forward.

**Summary**

The homework debate rages on and has been presented on both sides of the issues by opponents and advocates. Dating back to the late 1950’s, a call for more rigorous homework for students was shared because of the launching of Sputnik by the Russians. Then came A Nation at Risk in the 80’s and the concern that Americans were allowing education to slip to levels of mediocrity; and most recently, a call for more rigorous standards and school accountability has come from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. All of these initiatives were calling for more homework for children because students were not achieving at the rates as our global counterparts. Each time, it was almost as if panic set in that our global competition was going to take over our jobs and communities and the United States would lose its place in the world.

Currently, educators and federal leaders are still discussing and debating on how we can better prepare our students for a more competitive global world while discussing jobs that do not exist. But, in education, we are still practicing old habits like homework.

Homework is part of the culture that exists within our schools and is unlikely to be eliminated. According to Van Voorhis (2004), not enough attention is given by teachers when designing and planning homework assignments. Therefore, I must create and design a plan for homework to be successful. Before someone might think of banning homework, I believe criteria should be established to plan and to create homework assignments that are more meaningful for
student learning, resulting in success for teachers, students, and parents. Marzano and Pickering (2008) have called for more research to clearly articulate what characteristics are considered for homework to be effective.

Figure 2 represents a synthesis of the literature analyzed in this chapter regarding what makes homework successful. When a teacher takes the time to design and plan homework using the recommended criteria in Figure 2, students, parents, and teachers will find a better opportunity for success. Teachers would need to make sure the homework assignment has met the criteria by asking the reflective questions during the planning process. If teachers can use the figure as a planning guide when creating homework, students would have the opportunity to complete homework and receive effective feedback that would help move the student’s learning forward in an individual and purposeful way.
Table 1

*What makes a homework assignment successful?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The homework should be:</th>
<th>Results:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Differentiated for Students (Tomlinson, 2010) | • Homework assignments that meet the individual needs of each student  
• Focused on content/skills from direct instruction  
• Every student should not receive the same assignment |
| • An Opportunity for Student Growth (Sallee & Rigler, 2008; Wiggins, 2013) | • Ongoing learning until mastery  
• Viewed as practice – formative assessment that aligns with summative assessments  
• Teacher would understand if reteaching needs to occur |
| • An Opportunity for Effective Feedback (Brookhart, 2012; Hattie, 2012) | • Students understand what they did well and what still needs to be improved  
• Students should understand their next steps  
• Not a check for completion  
• Not for a letter grade |
| • Independent Practice (Vatterott, 2010) | • Content has previously been taught  
• Minimal parental support needed  
• Students can complete the assignment without frustration |
| • Time Sensitive (Salle & Rigler, 2008) | • Focused on skills and content, not on cutting, color, etc.  
• Minimal amount of questions or problems assigned for student to show knowledge learned  
• Opportunities for extra-curricular activities |

The need to better understand the purpose of homework is warranted by families, students, and educators. With an understanding of the purpose of homework, all individuals can
make homework a more meaningful experience for the student. In the following chapter, I describe the methods to respond to the research questions.
CHAPTER THREE - RESEARCH METHODS

To gain a better understanding of the purpose of homework in elementary classrooms, I chose to spend time with the individuals who are directly involved with homework at the elementary level. By spending time with teachers, families, and students, I collected data through classroom observations, analyzed homework samples that had been assigned, completed, and graded, and conducted interviews. There has been limited research on the purpose of homework in the elementary classroom and this research helps extract some meaning to better understand the functions of homework at the elementary level. In this chapter, I describe the methods for this study by sharing the design, sample, data collected, analysis, and limitations of the study.

Purpose of the Study

The intention of this study was to identify the perceptions and purposes for a common understanding of homework through the lens of teachers, parents, and students in both Title I and Non-Title I schools.

Research Questions

The research question that guided this study was:

1. What is the understanding that exists among students, teachers, and families in elementary schools regarding homework and its purpose in our schools?

Questions that surfaced from the primary research question were:

2. What similarities or differences are there between the viewpoints of families, students, and teachers regarding the purpose of homework within the elementary setting?
3. How do the perspectives regarding the purpose of homework differ from stakeholders at a Title 1 school compared to those from a Non-Title 1 school?

**Research Design**

I chose qualitative research over quantitative to focus on the different individual’s experiences with homework versus controlling or manipulating the type of homework that was assigned. I wanted to research homework in a naturalistic setting with stakeholders who hold different viewpoints and who are involved on a daily basis. According to Patton (2014), qualitative research should be conducted through interviews, observations, and documents when wanting to explore concepts in the real world. My research explored the purpose of homework within the elementary classroom from the perspectives of teachers, parents, and students through interviews, observations, and documents.

For this research, I used an embedded multiple-case study design (Yin, 2014) because homework was analyzed in multiple classrooms and in two different schools through observations, collections of completed samples, and interviews. The multiple units of analysis were analyzed individually and then compared between the different classrooms and different schools. The primary data source was open-ended interviews with the students, teachers, and parents. Also, I conducted observations in each teacher’s classroom to see what homework the teacher assigned and how the homework was used for instruction within the classroom. Finally, after each observation, to further my knowledge of homework within the classroom, I worked with the teacher to collect samples of homework that had been completed and turned in by students and graded by the teacher so I could analyze the assignments using a rubric. Clarifying questions were asked during the interview process of the study.
Sample

In this section I describe the schools and all selected participants within the study. Demographics are shared regarding the two different schools and information regarding the community where the study takes place.

Schools

Raceway School District is a suburban school district with a population close to 90,000 residents. Over 60% of the district’s population is 25 years and older and holds a bachelor’s, graduate, or professional degree. The school district serves students with special needs along with those students taking advanced classes. The special needs population is approximately nine percent of the student body, while 17% of students are considered gifted. Less than 10 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, in comparison to the state average of approximately 50%. The students within the school system routinely score in the top twenty districts within the state on standardized testing; thus, Raceway School District is a high achieving school district.

I selected two elementary schools within the Raceway School District. One school was a Title I school, Apple Elementary; and the other was a non-Title school, Orange Elementary. Both schools serve around 700 students in grades K-5. Approximately 21% of students at Apple Elementary qualify for free or reduced lunch. Apple Elementary’s population is made up of over 78% White population while the remaining population consists of Hispanic, Asian, Black, Multiracial, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; while Orange Elementary has a White population over 70% (see Table 2 for school demographics). Orange Elementary is a school where less than two percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch.

I chose these two types of schools to gain greater understanding regarding whether there is a difference of support at home provided to students when completing homework and to
compare and contrast beliefs about homework. A Title I school is defined as a school that receives federal dollars to offset the needs of the students based upon the free and reduced lunch rate. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), a Title I school receives federal funding to provide supplemental instruction to help those students who are economically challenged or academically at risk of meeting state standards. The primary purpose of Title I funds is to help provide equity to students who are in low socioeconomic households and allow them to have the opportunity to receive high quality instruction.
Table 2

School Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Apple Elementary Title I School 2015-16</th>
<th>Orange Elementary Non-Title I School 2015-16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>K-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free and Reduced Rates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid</td>
<td>78.7%</td>
<td>97.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>77.7%</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>.001%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>.004%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing Both ISTEP+ ELA and Math</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
<td>87.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Selection

I worked with the administrator in each elementary to find one second grade teacher and one fourth grade teacher for my study. I did not want the administrator to put a great deal of thought into the selection because this would help minimize any bias based upon current teacher practices. The administrators spoke with each team in their building to see if there were any
volunteers to participate. All grade levels had a volunteer. By having two teachers in each building participate, I was able to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of homework from teachers in second and fourth grade. Also, I was able to consider perspectives from teachers teaching the same grade levels in different buildings.

**Student & Family Selection**

After obtaining the teachers’ consent to be part of the study, I purposefully selected students by having the teacher provide me with names of students who routinely turned in their homework as well as names of students who did not or struggled to turn in their homework. The teacher interview helped me better understand how teachers define students who are successful and those who routinely turn in their homework and those who do not. Each teacher selected provided names of students from each category to participate in the study based upon parent consent to participate. I wanted different students represented in an attempt to provide a deeper understanding and clearer picture of homework and its purpose from the teacher, student, and parent perspectives, where homework is turned in and where it is not. By purposefully selecting each teacher and then working with the teacher who provided names of students who turn in homework and those who do not, both perceptions could be analyzed regarding homework. Perceptions were revealed through the interview process with teachers, students and parents.

**Data Collected**

The data I collected were gathered through classroom observations, homework samples, and recorded interviews with teachers, students and parents. The observations were conducted and homework samples were collected before the interviews. The order of events was constructed so the information gathered from the observations and review of homework samples was completed before the interview process. This allowed me to clarify any questions from my
observations and review of homework assignments, thus providing a deeper understanding about the perceptions of homework. The order of events occurred as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2

*Steps for Collecting Data*

Conducting the observations and collecting the homework samples before the interviews allowed me to prepare and reflect on any questions that need to be added to better understand the purpose of the homework assigned. The timeline provided the understanding that the observation and interviews would be conducted with all participants in each case before moving to another teacher, student, and parent to ensure all data on one case was collected before repeating the process for a new case. I wanted to use the collected homework to receive timely feedback from the teacher rather than wait several weeks and possibly have trouble receiving necessary information because of a lapse of time. I believe this was beneficial to my organization before I began to draw conclusions across the entire data set to gain a better understanding of all of the observations and interviews on the purpose of homework. I spent time writing up each case and debriefing the case with a peer. Once all the data were collected, memos of each case were completed, and debriefing with a peer was conducted, the data were
analyzed from all of the cases to see if a better understanding could be gained regarding the perceptions of homework from teachers, students, and families.

**Observations**

Observations were conducted once in each teacher’s classroom for a minimum of 120 instructional minutes. I worked with the teachers to make sure the observations took place during instructional time. Also, I worked with the building administrator to review the building schedule to ensure I could accomplish an observation for a 120-minute block of instructional time. I anticipated these observations would take place in the morning because of disruption to the instructional day for lunch, recess, and special area classes. I transcribed the teacher and student interactions during the observation and used those transcriptions to derive themes.

Through the observation of each teacher’s classroom, I was able to better understand how homework was assigned in each classroom and the type of homework that students were expected to complete. During the observations, I recorded any questions I had that were prompted by teacher decisions or student comments that could be pertinent in developing a better understanding of the purpose of homework. Another opportunity included in the observation was to see how homework was returned to students and what feedback was provided to the entire class or individual students. Teachers could opt to just return homework with a comment like “Good Job!” or feedback could be descriptive such as, “I like how you opened your paragraphs with a transition word. This is what we have been working on during writer’s workshop.” Some teachers elected to reteach certain skills to students that were not demonstrated on assigned homework. For example, if several students struggled with reducing fractions on homework, the teacher could call a group of students to the back table for a reteaching session on how to reduce fractions using a different method. Other teachers simply handed back homework without any
comments and gave a sticker or smiley face. I observed the methods the teachers used to hand back homework during my time in the classroom and I followed up with any questions during my interview with the teacher. The observations were a key opportunity for me to better understand the functions of homework through the teacher’s eyes and the eyes of the students.

**Homework Sampling**

Because I was not able to predict what information would be derived from the interview process, I collected three to five different homework samples that had been assigned to all students in the class and had been graded and returned by the teachers. I made copies of the homework without student names so the teacher could keep the originals for their intended purpose. From my experiences as an educator, I anticipated that many of the homework samples would be in the subject areas of mathematics and reading, so my plan was to observe in these subject areas. As a follow up to the instruction the teacher provided during the observation, the homework samples were collected to see how they might coincide with the instruction that took place within the classroom.

The collection of homework samples as a single set allowed me to analyze different types of assignments that are considered to be homework by creating a rubric based upon my research. I analyzed the homework to determine if the work was completed with support or without support, the subject area, the level of difficulty, the format of the work, the success of the child based upon the completion, and what type of feedback the teacher provided based upon the created rubric. After the observation and collection of homework assignments, the interview with the teacher was conducted where I asked questions using the interview protocol as well as any additional, clarifying questions I had based upon classroom observations and the homework samples I had collected. I had all graded homework copies present with me during the
interviews with teachers, students, and parents in the event I needed to reference a homework assignment if questions arose. Through the collection and analysis of homework samples, a better understanding of the perceptions and purpose of homework in elementary classrooms was developed.

**Interviews**

After an observation and three to five homework samples were collected and analyzed, participants were interviewed. The interviews took place in public settings for the convenience of the participants and were recorded using an audio recording device. I held the interviews in schools, libraries, coffee shops, and even homes if it was convenient for the interviewees. The school setting could be less than ideal for some families because of the atmosphere it could create depending on their experiences within the school or from previous experiences at other schools (Griffith, 1998). I wanted students and families to be in a setting where they felt most comfortable in order to have an open and honest conversation focused around homework. I followed the order of interviews set forth in Figure 2.

All interviews were guided by the semi-scripted interview protocols in Appendix A. Questions were created for each of the interviewees based upon their assumed role with homework. The majority of the questions were open ended to allow interviewees to talk freely about their experiences with homework and for me to gain as much insight as possible from their answers. By using open-ended questions, I was able to gain a better understanding and could describe hallmark differences regarding homework among the different interviewees by comparing and contrasting their responses (Weiss, 1994). Data were gathered from the participants from the two different elementary schools to see if themes emerged between the perceptions of homework provided from those students who turn in homework regularly and
those who turn in homework sporadically or not at all. Also, interviewing teachers and parents who are directly connected to the students illuminated the expectations for homework from the perspective of the teachers in comparison to what the parents and students believed is actually needed to complete homework once the homework commences in the setting of the home.

Each interview began with an introduction of myself and the study. Specifically, for the students, I created a consent form (See Appendix F) to seek parents’ consent before I interviewed their child. Also, I spent more time before the start of the interview with students to make sure each of them felt comfortable in the interview setting. To do this, I asked them questions about their favorite things in school and what they liked doing outside of school to help make them feel at ease. By interviewing students, a potential risk existed for students to be uncomfortable and provide information that could be inaccurate for this study. By having a plan to make them feel comfortable before the interview, the risk was minimized.

After I had interviewed all individuals who were part of the case study, I moved on to the next group of individuals and repeated the process set out in Figure 2. The interviews were a critical component of this qualitative research study because of the opportunity to speak with individuals who were vetted in the homework process. I was able to use the interviews to pull all of the information together that was collected during observations and homework samples to derive meaning about the perceptions and functions of homework in today’s elementary classrooms.

Analysis

In this section, I explain the process used to analyze observations, interviews, and homework samples from each school and grade levels.
Observation and Interview Analysis

Observations were analyzed by having essential questions in mind during the actual classroom visit. I analyzed whether the homework was differentiated and assigned as an extension of direct instruction, whether any reteaching of skills or feedback was provided based upon homework that was turned in, and how the homework was collected and passed back. The homework assigned was identified as an extension during the observation with a simple yes or no based upon the teacher connecting it to the lesson taught that day. If I was unable to decide this through the observation, I asked follow-up questions during the interview with the teacher to help identify if the homework was connected to the lesson observed.

The feedback provided based upon completion of the assigned task was analyzed by looking at the comments or the strategies observed to reteach skills to help the student learn content from the homework. Finally, I analyzed how teachers used the homework with students. Was it used just to get a grade or a check for completion? Was it reviewed with students when it was passed back? What type of communication was used when students received their homework back? These questions helped me better understand how homework functions within the classroom to help students learn and master new standards and skills.

The observation was clarified through the interview process. From the observations, interview questions were asked to deepen my understanding of decisions made around instruction and homework within the classroom. I paid an individual to transcribe the interviewees’ responses by sharing the recordings of interviews. I created a coding scheme by reviewing the transcripts and pulling out themes. These themes and concepts continued to evolve as more data analysis was completed. Codes were issued based upon the concepts pulled from the raw data collected from the interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Once I had coded all
transcripts, I analyzed the codes by looking for themes or categories that existed throughout the responses to make meaning and develop some theory around homework and its purpose within elementary schools. The observations allowed the picture of homework within the classroom to become much more in focus after the interviews. Without one of these types of data, the understanding would not be as complete.

**Homework Analysis**

After collection of three to five homework assignments that have been completed by the students and the teacher has had the opportunity to grade, check, or provide feedback, I analyzed the assignments by using the rubric in Appendix E. The rubric was created from the research reviewed in Chapter 2 and effective characteristics in Table 1 (Van Voorhis, 2004; Sallee & Rigler, 2008; Vatterott, 2010). The rubric was piloted using a set of graded math assignments from a second grade classroom and was tweaked based upon the pilot. The assignments used for analysis were those homework assignments provided by the teachers who were part of this study.

The process involved analyzing the homework assignment based upon the five different areas assessed on the rubric. Each assignment was assessed in the different areas by giving a one, a two, or a three. Half points were assigned if a clear distinction could not be made into one specific category. Once each piece had been collected from each teacher and had been assessed in the five areas, a total score was given as a proxy of effectiveness for the homework. Some of the areas could not be scored before the interviews occurred. Specific questions were asked during the interview with the teacher, parents, and students to gain a better understanding regarding the homework assignments and to provide a more accurate assessment of each assignment.
By reviewing the different assignments collected, I was able to tell if all students received the same assignment. Also, I asked the teacher follow up questions during the interview process to truly understand if the assignment was or was not differentiated so any bias or judgment was removed and to see if differentiated homework assignments were used as part of the teacher’s decision-making process. The observation provided insight into how the teacher differentiated for individual students. I did not believe a need existed for a question to be asked to the parents or students about the assignment differentiation. Students and parents may not have had the knowledge of what others students were completing for homework. To get a clear picture of differentiated homework assignment opportunities, the observation, interviews, and analysis of the completed and graded assignments were dovetailed together in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the purpose of homework within the classroom.

**Check for Validity**

Once all observations, interviews, and homework had been collected from each classroom, I wrote up a case study to debrief with my Committee Chair before starting the process again, as seen in Figure 2. This peer debriefing process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) strengthened validity by reviewing the data from each case study with a peer, who was not involved with the study, and discussing themes that were found.

**Limitations of the Study**

With any type of research, limitations present themselves in a variety of ways depending on the choices that are made by the researcher. According to Patton (2002), qualitative studies with small samples do not always allow for the results to be generalized to other populations and focus more on the depth of the study and not the width. For the practical reason of time, I did not focus on all schools in Indiana, but only on two schools within one school district. This
created limitations because two schools cannot appropriately represent all demographics within the public school system.

As an elementary administrator, bias could be demonstrated by teachers who did not want to participate in a study conducted by a colleague of their current principal; however, I did not include anyone in this study that I currently evaluate or supervise. Some teachers may not want to participate based upon their current practices within their classrooms. Bias could be created through the interview process because of a school administrator asking questions. It was important for me to help all individuals feel comfortable throughout the entire process so genuine and accurate data could be collected through the planned study.

**Conclusion**

Through this study a clearer understanding was developed regarding the phenomena of homework and its purpose. This accomplishment provided rationale for the need for further study. Very little time is spent on professional development for teachers to better understand homework designs that could benefit students, educators, and parents (Van Voorhis, 2004). Homework is not going away in our educational world. As an early primary student, a secondary student, a higher education student, or a parent, the majority of individuals realize homework exists and will continue to exist. Through the interviews and observations, a better understanding of the perceptions of homework was derived to ensure homework was an effective tool for all. Teachers can use homework to provide feedback to students and support their mastery of learning, plan future instruction, and reflect on previous lessons. Students can access homework to independently practice instruction that has been provided and can self-assess their own learning. Parents can use homework to support their child in the learning process and support teachers by valuing the educational process.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I share the findings from research conducted at two public elementary schools: Apple Elementary, a Title I school, and a non-Title I school, Orange Elementary. Interviews were conducted with students, families, and teachers focused around homework within the elementary school and home settings. Classroom observations were completed and homework samples were analyzed. The research was conducted to better understand the different viewpoints and similarities within individuals in regards to the purpose of homework and the different roles they each play at the elementary level. A description is shared to provide a brief background of the district, each school, and participants. The chapter is organized by analyzing the findings from each school first. The remaining portion of the chapter compares the participants in the study by providing an understanding of similarities and differences by grade levels and roles.

Research Questions

The research question that guided this study was:

1. What is the understanding that exists among students, teachers, and families in elementary schools regarding homework and its purpose in our schools?

Questions that surfaced from the primary research question were:

2. What similarities or differences are there between the viewpoints of families, students, and teachers regarding the purpose of homework within the elementary setting?

3. How do the perspectives regarding the purpose of homework differ from stakeholders at a Title 1 school compared to those from a Non-Title 1 school?
School District

Raceway School District is a suburban school that has a population close to 90,000 residents. Over 60% of the district’s population is 25 years and older, holds a bachelor’s, graduate, or professional degree. The school district serves students with special needs along with those students taking advanced classes. The special needs population is approximately nine percent of the student body, while 17% of students are considered gifted. Less than 10% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch in comparison to the state average of approximately 50%. The students within the school system routinely score in the top 20 districts within the state on standardized testing; thus, Raceway School District is a high achieving school district.

Key Themes

Findings that emerged from this study are grouped into several key thematic areas: family support and expectations are viewed differently amongst teachers within and across grade levels and title/non-title school; the perception of the purpose of homework is varied by role (student, teacher, and family); homework is not differentiated by teachers; and teachers do not provide support to families on how they can assist with homework. Each of these themes will be explained in this chapter.

Apple Elementary

Apple Elementary is a Title I school that was built in 1980, surrounded by homes that were developed during the 1970s. Many students walk or ride their bikes to school from the surrounding neighborhoods. In addition, several apartment complexes are within the school’s attendance boundaries. The school serves students in grade K-5 with an enrollment around 650. Approximately 21% of students at Apple Elementary qualify for free or reduced lunch. Apple Elementary’s population is made up of over 78% White students while the remaining students
are Hispanic, Asian, Black, and Multiracial (see Table 1 for further details). The school provides services for students across a wide range of categories including special needs, early childhood education, and high ability education.

Apple Elementary is an aesthetically pleasing school from the outside. Upon entering the building, bulletin boards are neatly displayed, student artwork is visible, and cleanliness creates an appealing learning environment. Interactions amongst students, families, staff members, secretaries, and visitors within the building symbolize the warm and nurturing experience offered to all students daily at Apple Elementary.

**Orange Elementary**

In contrast to Apple, Orange Elementary is a school where less than two percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Orange Elementary’s population is made up of over 70% White students. In contrast to the enrollment at Apple Elementary, 16% of the student population at Orange Elementary is Asian. The remaining student population includes Hispanic, Black, Multiracial, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (see Table 1). The school was built in 1992. Neighborhoods surrounding the school contain very large homes including several gated communities. Orange Elementary provides services to students with special needs including early childhood and students with high ability needs. In 2012, Orange Elementary was recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School by the US Department of Education.

Orange Elementary is beautifully landscaped on the outside. Inside, the school is configured with two central corridors with classrooms located off of each along with additional spaces for small group learning. Interactions throughout the building were pleasant amongst students, families, staff members, secretaries, and visitors. These interactions symbolize a warm and nurturing environment for all students and staff.
Interview Participants

In this section, I provide a brief overview of the participants, and their roles within the study to help the reader have a better understanding of each person. For the purpose of this study all names that are used are pseudonyms.

Table 3

*Apple Elementary Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Homework Completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apple Elementary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parent of Liv</td>
<td>Allie</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Liv</td>
<td>Always turns in homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parent of Annie</td>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>Struggles to turn in homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Parent of Kate</td>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Always turns in homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Parent of Ty</td>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Ty</td>
<td>Struggles to turn in homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Apple Elementary Second Grade Students

Liv. Liv was a very bubbly and energetic child who loved school. She shared that her favorite part about school was learning. Liv shared, “Homework makes me feel happy cause [sic] you learn stuff.” She looked forward to “playing with her friends and eating candy after school.” Liv’s teacher shared she always turned in her homework.

Annie. Annie was shy in nature and loved mathematics because she viewed it as being able to play games. Annie said, “Math is my favorite subject. It’s cause [sic] sometimes we do [sic] really fun games.” Her favorite part about school was hanging out with her friends. She shared she preferred to play outside with friends after school instead of doing homework. Her teacher shared she was a student that did not consistently turn in her homework.

Apple Elementary Second Grade Parents

Allie. Allie is the mother of Liv. Allie seemed to be a very structured and supportive parent because she created a routine for her children to complete homework each day after school. She believed the requirements of homework have changed since she was a student. She recalled completing homework in middle school and did not recall any additional work outside of the school in elementary.

Jill. Jill is the mother of Annie and viewed homework purely as busywork. She created a routine for her children to get off the bus and have a snack before starting their homework. Jill did not believe homework requirements are the same today. She shared, “We never had homework. I remember a few reports, but I don’t remember everyday homework.”

Apple Elementary Second Grade Teacher

Sherry. Sherry chose teaching as a profession to help children and has spent her teaching career in the primary grade levels. She stated, “I enjoying watching children. The growth
children have.” Sherry was a parent herself and shared she also made the decision to teach so she could spend time with her children during school breaks. Sherry believed homework requirements have changed since she was in school because she did not recall completing homework in elementary school.

**Apple Elementary Fourth Grade Students**

*Kate.* Kate was a very honest and forthcoming student who loved school and learning. Her favorite subject was writing because she liked choosing her topics. Kate shared, “I like writing because you get to choose what your story’s about.” Kate’s favorite thing about school was that she learned something new each day, but enjoyed playing on a device after school or watching TV. She shared, “I usually like to play electronics or watch TV”. Kate’s teacher shared she always turned in her homework.

*Ty.* Ty was a student that focused on the social aspect of school and enjoyed coming to school to spend time with friends. Ty was a very confident math student. He shared, “My favorite subject is math because I am certainly good at it.” He also explained he liked to play video games and watched TV after school once he had a snack. He had difficulty turning in his homework on time and missed many assignments.

**Apple Elementary Fourth Grade Parents**

*Claire.* Claire is the mother of Kate and explained homework created some anxiety because she wanted to make sure she was helping by using the correct strategies the teacher was using in the classroom. She did not have a specific routine for her children to complete homework. Claire was willing to help her daughter at home with school work, but it came with struggles. The requirements of homework have changed dramatically for Claire. She did not
recall any homework assigned in elementary school and she shared, “I feel like kids are learning things earlier and earlier.”

_Carl._ Carl is the father of Ty and was a single parent. Carl did not have an established routine for his son for completing homework. Homework created difficult moments within the house. He shared, “It definitely causes problems. Cause [sic] he’s always trying to figure out ways to get out of it and it ends up getting him into more trouble.” Carl did not remember having homework as a student in elementary school.

**Apple Elementary Fourth Grade Teacher**

_Renee._ Renee chose teaching as a profession as a way to make a difference and watch students grow in their knowledge. Also, she shared she liked to spend time with her family. She spent her teaching career in intermediate grade levels. Renee shared, “I am not a huge fan of homework.” She did not like to come home and have to grade homework. Renee believed homework requirements have changed on two different levels from her experiences. She shared she assigns less homework as a teacher than what she experienced in the upper elementary grades as a student, but teachers give more homework in the primary grades than she received as a student.
Table 4

*Orange Elementary Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Homework Completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange Elementary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parent of Campbell</td>
<td>Lindsay</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Campbell</td>
<td>Always turns in homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parent of Ravi</td>
<td>Shiel</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Ravi</td>
<td>Struggles to turn in homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Parent of Maya</td>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Always turns in homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Parent of Aidan</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Aidan</td>
<td>Struggles to turn in homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Orange Elementary Second Grade Students*

_Campbell._ Campbell was a student who was a vivacious learner, but also, appreciated coming home to watch TV. Her favorite subject was math and she loved that she gets to learn in school. She was extremely comfortable, open and honest with her answers. Campbell was known to always turn in her homework.
Ravi. Ravi was an inquisitive student who seemed to really enjoy school and would not complete homework on occasion. He shared his favorite subject was math and that he enjoyed literacy rotations because he gets to do different things in a short amount of time. Ravi’s teacher shared he has difficulty turning in his homework on a routine basis.

Orange Elementary Second Grade Parents

Lindsay. Lindsay is the mother of Campbell and shared concerns regarding homework for her children. “My daughter needs time to decompress and play when she gets home and to spend an hour or more each night on homework is not healthy.” Lindsay did not mention a particular homework routine for her daughter other than the expected assignments she received on a daily basis. Lindsay believed homework requirements have changed because she did not remember any elementary homework and when she came home she ran and played until her mother called her home.

Shiel. Shiel is the mother of Ravi and viewed homework as a way for her to know what was going on in the classroom. She expected homework for her son, but did not mention any sort of routine for her son to complete homework after school. Shiel shared, “If you attend school, you will have homework.” She felt homework has changed since she was in school because her son did not have near the amount she had as an elementary student in her native country, India.

Orange Elementary Second Grade Teacher

Alicia. Alicia chose teaching as a profession because she loved children. She shared she used to do a lot of babysitting and she felt it would be a natural transition to be a teacher. Alicia spent the majority of her teaching career teaching in the primary grade levels. Alicia had a very good relationship with her families. She communicated openly and honestly with them. Alicia
believed homework requirements have changed from when she was school. She did not recall any homework at the elementary level, but now homework has become a routine activity for students at the elementary level.

**Orange Elementary Fourth Grade Students**

*Maya.* Maya was a very mature, studious individual. Her favorite subject was writing because it let her share openly and freely using different types of writing. Her favorite part of school was just being able to learn. She shared, “My favorite thing about school is probably actually learning, because I like to learn and it’ll help you in the future for your job and for things you are going to do.” Maya was a student that consistently turns in her homework.

*Aidan.* Aidan was a very reserved individual who loved school because of the different fun activity nights the school hosted like movie nights. His favorite subject was science because he planned to be an inventor. Aidan looked forward to the weekends. He shared, “Me and my friends really look forward to the weekends because we do not have homework.” His teacher shared that he struggled at times to turn in his homework.

**Orange Elementary Fourth Grade Parents**

*Carmen.* Carmen is the mother of Maya and believed homework was just part of the educational process and a necessary component to learning. She shared, “I think it’s just one of those things that I feel is a necessary component to learning.” Carmen explained they had a routine established for homework. She shared, “They get off the bus, grab a snack and start their homework immediately at the kitchen table without the television on.” The requirements of homework have changed from what Carmen can remember. She shared, “I don’t remember having homework until around fourth grade on a daily basis.”
Lisa. Lisa was the mother of Aidan. Homework created a sense of dread in Lisa because she had to participate a lot in it with her son. She stated, “I have to participate a lot in homework, so I look forward to Fridays when we don’t have homework.” Lisa did not mention any set homework routine in her family other than sitting at a table with her children. The requirements of homework have changed from what Carmen can remember. She did not recall any homework after the primary level and maybe remembered homework starting in 4th grade. “I don’t remember having homework until around fourth grade on a daily basis.”

Orange Elementary Fourth Grade Teacher

Kathy. Kathy had several teachers that had a positive impact on her life as a student. This impact influenced her desire to become a teacher in hopes to have the same result for other students. She had taught several different grade levels and had been a Title I instructor as well. Kathy believed homework requirements had changed from when she was in school and even since she started teaching. She did not recall any homework at the elementary level as a child, but when she first started teaching she assigned worksheets for homework. Kathy stated, “It was just a bunch of busy work.” The homework she now assigns she believed is more purposeful and meaningful for students.

Key Findings within Schools

In this section, I explain the themes that emerged from each school and compare what was found at each building at different grade levels.

Family Support and Expectations are Viewed Differently

At Apple Elementary approximately 21% of students were on free and reduced for the 2015-16 school year, compared to the district percentage of less than 10% and less than three percent at Orange Elementary. A difference around family support was found at second grade
compared to fourth grade. Sherry, a second grade teacher, did not have trouble reaching families or having support for the students in her classroom. She explained, “We always have the couple parents that might not reply to emails or might be hard to get ahold of. But for the most parents, most parents are involved and easy to get ahold of, I would say.” Renee, as a fourth grade teacher at Apple Elementary, contradicted this belief.

On average, there’s not a lot of parent support. You have your few. I mean, there’s several that are, you know, overly involved or want to be kind of involved as much as they possibly can. But, a majority of them are very hands-off, and they don’t contact you a whole lot or they don’t keep in touch or respond as often (Renee, 4th grade teacher, Apple Elementary).

Although this was a different view on family support within Apple Elementary, one might conclude that this was more about the age of the children. Parents are more involved with the classroom and teacher in the primary grades when compared to the support at the intermediate levels (Domina, 2005).

Interestingly, each teacher had different expectations for family support when it came to homework. Sherry expected families to help with homework while Renee was just the opposite. Renee shared, “I don’t expect it, because, again, it’s typically something the kids should have mastered or they should be familiar with from what we did during the day.” Sherry explained, “I expect parents to be there to answer questions when they arise.” These comments were focused more around the age of the child. As children get older, the expectations might change from teachers to families putting more of the responsibility on children to be responsible to complete their homework without family involvement. In turn, families are not as involved in the classroom as well.
Both teachers from Orange Elementary described their families as upper middle class that are active in their roles as parents or guardians. Alicia shared all she has to do is ask and she will have plenty of support from families to help. In her words, “If I need them, they’re here, but they’re not overbearing by any means.” Kathy described her families with the following,

Well, we have definitely a lot of professional, very involved parents that are very active in their student’s life. Have high expectations for them, very well educated. And just very, very in the know about what’s going on. Just very, very active parents, and parents that will email you, you know, just to double-check, make sure you’re, make sure they’re on the same page. They’re not missing something. So, just, they definitely know what’s going on in their child’s education. So they’re very, just very involved (Kathy, 4th grade teacher, Orange Elementary).

The perception of the family involvement from the two participating teachers at Orange Elementary was clearly different than that at Apple Elementary. Teachers at Orange Elementary believed the families are there at all times to help and support their child throughout the educational process and it was just a matter of communication of when help was needed. The amount of support at Orange Elementary was never in question from the teachers. From the two teachers at Apple Elementary in the study, believed it was not as easy to reach families and find volunteers for the classroom. Renee felt it was difficult for her to have family support for her students whether in the classroom or the home. Sherry contradicted Renee a little at Apple Elementary saying she had a few parents that were always willing to help.

As much as parental involvement can be viewed positively, Kathy found a challenge. When it came to homework, sometimes families are too involved and difficult for teachers to understand if concepts are grasped by students. Kathy alluded to this by saying, “I want students
to become independent. But, yeah, I think that they [parents] should be available to if [sic] their student needs help.” This approach was ultimately stating the family support should be available when help was needed, but the parental help should not complete the homework for the child giving a false sense of mastery to the teacher. Alicia expected families to be there and help when asked by their child. She stated, “I talk to parents the very first night about that at Meet-the-Teacher night, and I tell them like at second grade, I expect them to help if they’re needed.”

This expectation could put children at a disadvantage when it comes to assigned homework. If parents or guardians are not home due to a job, students would not have the support that was expected by some teachers. Also, time is not the only disadvantage for students when teachers had such expectations. The knowledge base within different households could put students at an even greater disadvantage for support at home when completing homework. Family members may be home and willing to help, but knowledge is not a given when it comes to homework support. Families come with varying backgrounds, jobs, and degrees, when teachers place expectations of family support for homework, equity does not exist across a classroom, a grade level, or within a school let alone across a school district.

The Perception of the Purpose of Homework is Varied by Role

A common purpose of homework did not exist between the different roles of families, students, and teachers at Apple Elementary. However, the teachers did have a common purpose of homework. Sherry, second grade, and Renee, fourth grade, both believed the purpose of homework was to practice and apply knowledge learned from the classroom each day. The idea of practice from both teachers was supported by their instructional decision making within the classroom. Each teacher described how they used homework in a way to make decisions on small groups and how they retaught students on certain skills in mathematics. Sherry stated, “I
use my math homework as an exit slip for me. I might make a group and have them go with my instructional assistant during math.” Renee added to Sherry’s thought, “Sometimes I just kind of use it to pull groups, maybe with math to see, you know, maybe there’s a group of kids that struggled on the homework, so we’ll pull them aside and work with them on it.” Teachers at Apple Elementary used homework in a formative way to ensure students were grasping new concepts in math.

Three of the four students at Apple Elementary viewed the purpose of homework as practice and review for tests. One fourth grader, Ty, viewed the purpose of homework was for teachers to check and make sure students were paying attention in class. Ty struggled to turn in homework but found success in the classroom on tests. His teacher (Renee) acknowledged this by stating, “I will say, you know, the one, one student you can tell doesn’t do as much homework, but like I said, he’s apparently a student that doesn’t need the homework, cause [sic] he still performs very, very well on the tests.” With three of the four students focused on the purpose of homework as practice and as teachers used it in constructive ways, one could conclude a message had been sent that homework was intended to be used in formative ways within the classroom.

The second grade parents, Allie and Jill, at Apple Elementary both shared a similar belief that the purpose of homework was about preparation. Allie shared, “I feel like it’s a review of what they’ve learned in class that day. And then again, I feel like it’s helping them get prepared when they do have more homework. It’s setting a precedent, setting the stage, setting a foundation.” Jill focused more the practice of homework versus the content that is within the homework assignment. The practice in her eyes was more about the future. “It’s just making them do something instead of actual learning.” The fourth grade parents, Claire and Carl, shared
differing opinions from Allie and Jill. Claire simply said, “I don’t know the purpose of homework to be honest.” In Carl’s words, “You can’t get everything in in the school day that you really need to, so. Then you do allow for extra time outside of school to study.” He thinks time was needed for the homework.

It may be unrealistic to have each stakeholder share the same purpose of homework within a school. However, the teacher provides the direction for what the purpose of homework should be. The directions are then internalized by children so the purpose depends on its use. At Apple Elementary, two teachers in different grade levels shared a common purpose for homework and that might just indicate many more do as well.

The purpose of homework was viewed by the students in second (Campbell and Ravi) and fourth (Maya and Aidan) grade at Orange Elementary as an opportunity to practice. Each student talked about how homework allowed them to practice. Ravi explained, “I think they assign homework to practice, because homework is just like reviewing what they’ve taught you.” Campbell discussed how teachers knew how well students are doing because of homework. She said, “So they know how could you can do it and how well you understand it.” Both of these students shared their teacher did not grade homework. This might indicate where the idea of practice came from and to see how well students are doing. Maya was not as confident in her thought, but she shared, “Maybe to review what we’ve learned in the, during the day, so we can just have one quick, like, review, I guess, of what we’ve learned.” Aidan agreed that the purpose of homework was to practice to create a better understanding. Maya and Aidan both shared their teacher did not grade homework in fourth grade. The idea of homework for practice from these four students at Orange Elementary might be a result of both teachers at Orange Elementary not grading homework.
The teachers had a similar view on the purpose of homework focused around practice, but some underlying purposes surfaced that are vastly different. Alicia, as a second grade teacher, believed the sole purpose of homework was to teach responsibility. Alicia shared, “I think that one of the main purposes is to have the responsibility of taking something home and bringing it back.” Alicia’s instructional decision making in the classroom showed another purpose, but her strong belief was responsibility. Alicia explained she will look over the students’ homework to see how they performed. In her words, “Anybody that has difficulty, I pull those out and then that’s my small group for the next day or I’ll have my assistant work with them on any skills that are lagging a little bit.” She used her homework as a way for students to practice the skills she had taught throughout the day and then check to see how they were doing on the skills.

Kathy shared, “I think the purpose is just to kind of keep the parents abreast of what’s going on.” Also, Kathy believed homework was an opportunity to practice different skills that are taught throughout the day. She stated, “It’s to solidify those skills and apply what has been taught throughout the day.” Kathy used her assigned homework to make decisions on how groups are created to help students master skills within her classroom, but this could be a risk for her by not knowing how much support was provided to students to complete the homework.

While the students at Orange Elementary were similar in their thought of practice as the purpose for homework, the parents had varying beliefs. Similar to Kathy, Shiel believed the purpose of homework was centered more around the family. She shared, “I feel like it gives me an idea of what he’s doing at, you know, school.” Lindsay, as a second grade parent like Shiel, shared the intended purpose of homework was to reinforce the daily instruction from the classroom. Although she shared this was the intended purpose, she believes this was not
happening. “Homework can be very frustrating for kids, and I think you get to a point where they have been in school all day, and they’ve been forced to sit down and focus all day. It is time to run around and play at home.” Her thought process was showing the strain on the child and by coming home from school and doing more work. She added, “When are kids allowed to let school be school and let home be home?”

In Carmen’s words, “The overall purpose of homework in schools, I think, is that they can demonstrate the learning independently of being in school.” She believed that homework should be completed independent of family help. This was not possible according to Lisa because she was always sitting at the table with her son. Lisa’s belief could be impacted by her own child’s academic standing. If a student was challenged by new content and had difficulty completing in-class work, a parent could view time and practice as a reason for homework and not independent practice. Lisa explained the purpose of homework as, “I would guess just for extra practice, and probably also somewhat time restraint. They can’t get everything done in a school day.” The reason could be derived because of extra practice is needed for the mastery of skills and not enough time is provided for students to work during the day. Another belief around time could be all of the demands that are placed on teachers today with standards and accountability there is simply not enough time for students to complete in-class work because time is needed to provide instruction.

Each of these parents at Orange Elementary had different beliefs about the purpose of homework. One might conclude families’ beliefs about the purpose of homework are based upon actions or success of their children within the classroom. If a child was successful in the classroom according to their family, questions might arise about the necessity of homework. With varying perspectives and thoughts on homework from families at the same school, one
could suggest the school needs to articulate the purpose of homework for an understanding for all involved.

**Key Findings from Teachers**

For this section, I compare the findings between the teachers at Apple Elementary (T1) and Orange Elementary (NT1) in like grade levels.

**Second Grade**

Apple Elementary (Sherry) vs. Orange Elementary (Alicia)

One of the major differences between the two schools was the amount of family volunteers and support within the classroom. Alicia shared that she always has parents willing to help, but Sherry explained she just has a common group of parents that are able. In other words, it is the same parents that help in Sherry’s room while Alicia has a larger group that is accessible. Sherry shared she always has several parents that are very, very difficult to reach. Sherry believed that family support should be present during homework, but she knew this was not always the case with her families. To help with this, Sherry allowed students to finish their homework in the mornings because she knew families are not able to help. Also, she believed homework was assigned less in Title I schools because the lack of family support and when homework was not turned in, it was a reflection on the support from home.

Alicia did not see family support as an issue at her school. She was in constant communication with parents and often sent home enrichment activities because they were requesting more work for their children. Alicia described her school community as upper-middle class that valued education and supported teachers. This difference may support the perception that more affluent families support or care more about school than their counterparts.
Teachers’ Perception of the Purpose of Homework is Varied

Sherry’s belief of the overall purpose of homework was an opportunity for students to apply knowledge that they had learned in the classroom while creating the skill of responsibility for students. This differs from Alicia, who believed homework’s sole purpose was to create a sense of responsibility within students. Sherry focused on homework as an extension of the day for students to practice and apply their new learning while Alicia assigned homework to more or less teach second grade students responsibility.

Sherry and Alicia typically did not grade homework, but checked it for completion and accuracy because they made formative instructional decisions within the classroom. Both teachers shared that they created groups for instruction based upon accuracy of homework.

Homework is not Differentiated by Teachers

Sherry and Alicia did not differentiate homework assignments based upon abilities, but sometimes modifications did occur. For example, Alicia and Sherry provided different instruction based upon student needs for math, but all students received the same homework based upon what was provided from the curriculum. Modifications did occur by having a student only complete a certain number of problems or only spell a certain number of words on the spelling assignment while others completed all problems.

Teachers do not Provide Support to Families Regarding Homework

Sherry and Alicia have never provided any tips or strategies to families on how they could support their children at home when completing homework. Both teachers acknowledged they typically just shared their homework expectations at the beginning of the year with families during Meet the Teacher night.
Fourth Grade

Apple Elementary (Renee) vs. Orange Elementary (Kathy)

As much as Renee and Kathy are alike when it came to beliefs about homework, they had some differing insights. Renee perceived that family involvement at her school did not really exist. She did not expect families to help with homework because it should be completed independently if they received the instruction in class. Renee observed her students as successful in her classroom without completing homework on a routine basis. She shared, “There are plenty of students in my room that don’t necessarily do their homework, but they still get high test scores.” Kathy explained the most important thing for her was that students are successful in the classroom during the day. Neither teacher had specific consequences for students who did not turn in homework.

Kathy described her families as very professional and very involved in their child’s life. She stated, “They have high expectations for their children and are very, very involved.” Kathy did not share how parents volunteer within the classroom, but gave the impression that parents are always willing to come in if help was deemed necessary. Kathy communicated daily reminders about homework via text messages, posted homework on her website, and students were required to write down homework assignments in their notebooks that go home each night.

Both teachers assigned about 30 minutes of homework a night, although Renee believed Title I schools do not always assign as much homework as non-Title schools because of parental support. Kathy never graded homework while Renee graded homework assignments when a skill should have been mastered based on work done in class.

Although these teachers had different socio-economic levels between their schools, the underlying beliefs of homework for practice and student success in the classroom emerged. Both
teachers recognized in their own way that students could be successful in the classroom without completing their homework. Renee and Ty’s father (Carl) both referenced his success with grades on a report card, but both acknowledged completing homework was a struggle for him. The decisions of not grading homework by one teacher and occasionally grading by another allowed the teachers to use homework in way to help students master skills and not be punitive in nature for students like Ty and Aidan. Because both teachers did not establish consequences for students who did not turn in homework, demonstrated homework was about practice of skills learned within instructional day.

**Teachers’ Perception of the Purpose of Homework is Varied**

Renee and Kathy shared similar beliefs that homework was more about practice with the idea that the practice allowed the students to master the skills that were taught during the instructional day. Renee added that the more students practice, the better. Both Renee and Kathy believed that homework was a way for families to stay connected to the classroom to better understand what their children were learning.

Renee used the assigned homework in a variety of ways. She sometimes just used it as a check, it was graded if it is a concept should have been mastered, and sometimes it was used to pull groups for reteaching. She shared the main purpose for her with homework was to make sure students were understanding what they were doing in class. In her words,

> It still goes back to making sure that they’re continuing to think about what we’re doing in school, practicing. You know, we did it in class. We did it together. We did it in groups or you did it on your own and then you just practicing more at home (Renee, 4th grade teacher, Apple Elementary).
Kathy never grades homework, but it was gone over to see how students felt about the skill. She placed a star on it once it was completed for students to take home. If a student struggled, she created reteaching groups for students that were not mastering concepts. She either worked with the group or she had an instructional assistant work with students that needed additional instruction on a particular skill.

**Homework is not Differentiated by Teachers**

When analyzing Renee’s homework samples, one of the assignments for mathematics was marked for completion and was not differentiated. Renee had never differentiated her homework for students, but believed that was something she should do based upon how she provided instruction in the classroom. She made the connection that she differentiated her instruction on a daily basis, but all students received the same homework assignment. Renee shared,

> Like homework, it’s just kind of black or white in a sense, where they get it or the don’t, and it allows me to see that, but as the same time, you know, some of them have the parent support and some of them don’t, so you don’t know whether a lot of that is what they know or what their parents know (Renee, 4th grade teacher, Apple Elementary).

Renee explained that she used mathematics homework in a formative way to create small groups for instruction or reteaching based upon how students were performing on skills. This leads one to see the connection that when instruction was differentiated the assigned homework should match the instruction given yet, Renee shared an interesting point that when homework goes home how does one know who would actually complete it. Renee’s purpose of homework maybe influencing her decision to not differentiate homework if it was just to practice and the idea you don’t know how much support was being provided at home. The most important
implication from this study might be how homework is being used once it is completed by students. If students are being penalized by poor grades because they do not understand the content, a sense of false grades could be given. Taking into account that the teacher could have differentiated the assignment, perhaps the student’s understanding of the content would have improved. When a teacher makes the decision to not differentiate homework with the expectation of family support, the greater chance for inequities could be established for students. The assignment is not tailored to the student’s level and family support cannot be assumed creating an inequity for some.

Kathy modified the number of problems her students were given for homework based upon students’ ability levels and sometimes stress levels based upon feedback from the parents. She acknowledged she sometimes sent homework that all students were not ready for and that she should differentiate it based upon their skills. She explained,

Now, ideally, I would love to do that because I know sometimes I do send an assignment home that maybe not everybody is probably quite ready to finish. So, I know that I shouldn’t, but I don’t always, I mean, in the reality of life, it’s not always differentiated like it should be (Kathy, 4th grade teacher, Orange Elementary).

Kathy’s statements showed that the time needed for teachers to create differentiated homework for students is an obstacle to implementation of this practice. The individual’s belief about the purpose of homework might influence the decision to differentiate homework or not. If homework was just for practice and not graded like in Kathy’s room, why take the time to differentiate. One might contradict that thought and even ask then why assign homework.
Teachers do not Provide Support to Families Regarding Homework

Renee never provided any formal support to families regarding instructional strategies or specific methods on how they can help their child with homework. Kathy talked with families about tips like finding a quiet space, creating a routine, and reminding parents or guardians about resources available to go along with curriculum. She emphasized to families she did not want children stressed out over homework and that it was her responsibility to teach the material.

Key Findings from Students

For this section, I compare the findings between the students at Apple Elementary (T1) and Orange Elementary (NT1) in their like grade levels.

Second Grade

Apple Elementary (Liv and Annie) vs. Orange Elementary (Campbell and Ravi)

Liv and Campbell were students that did not have any trouble completing homework, while Annie and Ravi were students that did not complete their homework as frequently according to their teachers. Interestingly, both Annie and Ravi discussed a routine each day after school to complete their homework. Annie and Ravi both stated they always came home and had a snack right away while completing their homework before playing outside. Liv and Campbell did not mention any routine for completing homework. Liv enjoyed coming home to eat candy and play with friends right after school while Campbell wanted to watch TV.

The feelings about homework that were shared amongst this group of students varied. Liv shared, “Homework makes me feel happy because I get to learn.” Campbell explained her emotions were different based upon what the homework entailed. She shared, “Homework makes me sometimes happy, sometimes, excited, and sometimes ugh.” The word worried was used to described Annie’s feeling based upon if the homework was difficult or easy. Annie
described wanting to see the homework when it was passed out in class so she would know if it was going to be hard or easy for her to complete. Ravi seemed to be more of a reflective student and it was demonstrated in his feeling about homework. He did not describe an exact feeling, but shared that homework made him think about how homework connected to what his teacher taught him during the day.

Another difference was the perceived consequences of those students who did not complete their homework. Liv and Annie did not believe there were any real consequences for not completing their homework. Students might finish it in class the next day or complete it the following night. At Orange Elementary, Campbell and Ravi shared they have a consequence as part of their classroom reward system. The different consequences at the schools in second grade for not completing homework were decisions made by the individual teacher and not a school wide decision. This suggests that the SES status of a school does not have relationship with students receiving consequences for not completing homework because consequences were only discussed in one classroom throughout the entire study.

**Students’ Perception of the Purpose of Homework is Varied**

Through analyzing the different responses of second grade students on the purpose of homework, it was evident a difference was perceived by students who were in a Title I school versus those in a Non-Title I school. Second grade Title I students, Liv and Annie, believed the purpose of homework was focused around the preparation of tests. Liv shared, “So you can review stuff and know it for a test.” Annie stated, “Homework is for us to understand it and prepare for tests.” Annie added another thought that it was for teachers to know whether students understood the concepts taught in the classroom which better aligned with students at Orange Elementary. Campbell and Ravi believed the purpose of homework was practice and for
teachers to use in a formative way. Campbell shared her teacher used homework to see how students were doing. Ravi said, “I think they assign homework to practice, because homework is just like reviewing what they’ve taught you.” Throughout the interview for Campbell and Ravi, both made the connection that instruction was tied to homework. Campbell shared it was practice from what had been taught and Ravi used the word review on several occasions to describe homework.

Fourth Grade

Apple Elementary (Kate and Ty) vs. Orange Elementary (Maya and Aidan)

Kate and Ty both attended Apple Elementary while Maya and Aidan attended Orange Elementary School. Kate and Maya did not have any difficulty turning in their homework to their teachers and shared a love of learning in school. Maya shared, “My favorite thing about school is probably actually learning, because I like to learn and it’ll help you in the future for your job and for things you are going to do.” Ty and Aidan were individuals that struggled at times to turn in their homework. As a priority, both boys looked forward to playing with friends or playing video games after school over wanting to complete homework. Kate and Maya both shared the importance of completing their homework first thing because they had outside activities they participate in each week. Gender differences were seen in the fourth grade when it came to turning in homework. Both students that had difficulty turning in homework were males while the students that turned in their homework on an everyday basis were females. The gender differences were only found with turning in homework.

The feelings around homework varied among these four students, but it was evident the important aspect of outside activities and social times were emerging for these students. Kate was heavily involved in different activities each night and she stated, “You don’t really get to do
the things you like because you’re always stuck doing homework.” Now, Kate followed that up with saying she only had 15-45 minutes of homework each night, but her perception was it interfered with her activities. Kate felt bored when she had to complete homework and she explained, “Boring because it takes up your time and you get to learn stuff in school, so why can’t you just practice at school.”

Maya felt happy when thinking about homework and shared she liked to complete her homework first thing so she could hang out with her friends or do other activities. Even though Maya was happy to complete homework, her reason to complete aligned with Kate’s in respect to making sure they completed their homework first so they could participate in other activities. Maya shared she spent somewhere between 35-45 minutes a night on homework.

The two fourth grade boys, Ty and Aidan, who struggled to complete homework on a routine basis offered different feelings about homework. Ty was a student who loved math and was very confident when discussing math homework. He shared on several occasions he was really, really good at math. When other homework subjects were discussed, he wanted to quickly turn the conversation back to math homework. Ty shared he spent 45-60 minutes a night on homework. Aidan had a different take on his feeling towards homework. “It kind of makes me worrisome of the homework that I’m going to get that it’s going to take too long and I’m not going to have enough time to have fun with my friends.” Aidan shared he typically spent about 45 minutes a night on homework and all students shared they typically only had homework on Mondays-Thursdays.

**Students’ Perception of the Purpose of Homework is Varied**

Three of four 4th grade students believed the purpose of homework focused around practice and helping the teacher understand if concepts were understood. Ty was the only 4th
grade student that shared a different purpose regarding homework. He believed homework was assigned from teachers to see if students were paying attention in class and so students could learn more after school hours.

The theme of practice was shared by Kate, Maya, and Aidan. Kate believed homework was an extension of the day so students could continue practicing what they learned from the day. She used the word practice throughout the interview and she even added, “Practice makes perfect, you know!” Maya emphasized the purpose of homework was about practicing and learning. She believed homework allows students to be prepared for the next day in class and not forget what was learned. Maya simply believed her teacher assigned homework for students to understand things better by practicing the skill or concept that was taught during the day. The purpose of homework for Aidan was the review and practice of what was learned during the day.

The majority of these students seem to believe the purpose of homework was practice. Also, many of the comments recognize that homework was a way for teachers to assess if students were understanding concepts that were taught within the instructional day. With the idea of practice being the purpose of homework, one might conclude that was why three of the four students said their homework was never graded, but it was used to see if they were understanding the concepts taught by the teacher. The word practice was heard during interviews, not only from students, but a few parents as well. Combine that with teachers’ decision making focused around reteaching in small groups based upon homework could lead one to believe this is a school belief.

**Key Findings from Parents**

For this section, I compared the findings between the parents at Apple Elementary (T1) and Orange Elementary (NT1) in like grade levels.
Second Grade

Apple Elementary (Allie and Jill) vs. Orange Elementary (Lindsay and Shiel)

Allie and Jill were parents at Apple Elementary and Lindsay and Shiel were parents at Orange Elementary. Different feelings emerged from these families regarding homework. Allie felt “okay” about homework, but Jill felt as if it was more work for her. Jill shared, “It feels like work for me.” Lindsay feels “worried and concerned” about depending on how much is coming home with her child. The amount of homework influenced Lindsay’s feelings and made her question what was going on during the day if there was too much homework. Shiel’s feelings were indifferent because she believed homework was just part of the educational process.

A connection cannot be made between students who turn in their homework and those who do not based upon their parents’ feelings. Jill and Shiel’s children (Annie and Ravi) were individuals who had difficulty at times turning in their homework while Allie and Lindsay’s children (Liv and Campbell) always turned in their homework, yet Jill (Annie) and Lindsay (Campbell) had negative feelings towards homework. It was difficult to know where these different feelings came from if they were not linked to the parents as in this case. One might speculate that a previous teacher’s action could influence the negative feelings, it could be based upon a student’s feelings about school in general, or possibly the school environment could have had an impact.

Family Members’ Perception of the Purpose of Homework is Varied

Allie and Jill had similar beliefs for the purpose of homework that focused around responsibility and preparation. Allie believed the purpose of homework focused around the sense of responsibility, preparation, and review of material. In her words,
I feel like it’s a review of what they’ve learned in class that day. And then again, I feel like it’s helping them get prepared when they do have more homework. It’s setting a precedent, setting the stage, setting a foundation (Allie, Mother of Liv, Apple Elementary).

Lindsay believed the purpose of homework was to reinforce the daily instruction, but she questioned whether it was really doing that. She shared,

Homework can be very frustrating for kids, and I think you get to a point where they have been in school all day, and they’ve been forced to sit down and focus all day. It is time to run around and play at home (Lindsay, Mother of Campbell, Orange Elementary).

Shiel believed the purpose of homework was for families to know what was going on in the classroom and to know what their children should be learning. Lindsay and Shiel did not share any similarities in their beliefs. Additionally, they did not have any common beliefs with Allie and Jill from Apple Elementary.

One might question why the purpose of homework amongst second grade families was different at Orange Elementary when the same grade level parents seemed better aligned at Apple Elementary. Ironically, Allie and Jill’s purpose of homework aligned better with the second grade teacher at Orange Elementary. In other words, the second grade families from a Title I school, Apple Elementary, better aligned with the second grade teacher, Alicia, from Orange Elementary. The different beliefs amongst parents and teachers were not directly tied to the school which could lead one to believe SES may have little connection to one’s belief on the purpose of homework. The purpose of homework may be derived from one’s personal experiences in schools whether it be from when a parent attended school or from an experience as a parent or guardian within their child’s school.
Teachers do not Provide Support to Families Regarding Homework

All four of these parents shared that they never had a teacher provide any support to them to help their child/ren with homework. They each said teachers were good at sharing the expectations during the beginning of the year, but teachers did not help by providing any tips, suggestions, or ideas on how they could help ensure homework was completed at home.

Fourth Grade

Apple Elementary (Claire and Carl) vs. Orange Elementary (Carmen and Lisa)

Claire and Carl were parents from Apple Elementary and Lindsay and Shiel were parents at Orange Elementary. Three of the four 4th grade families had feelings about homework that focused around a negative aspect. The only parent that had a feeling that was neither positive or negative was Carmen. In Carmen’s words, “I don’t know if it makes me feel anything in particular other than it’s part of the educational learning process, so I think it’s just one of those things that I feel is a necessary component to learning.” For Lisa, whose child attended Orange Elementary like Carmen, homework created a sense of dread. Lisa explained her feelings about homework, “A little bit of a sense of dread about doing it. I have to, I have to participate a lot in homework, so I look forward to Fridays when we don’t have homework.” The two different feelings from the parents, Carmen and Lisa, at same school and classroom might lead one to believe that their feelings had to do with the demeanor of their child, their child’s cognitive ability, or the routine established within their homes. Their child’s teacher, Kathy, shared during the interview she does not want homework to be stressful for students or families giving the impression to parents they need to communicate if feelings are negative.

For Claire and Carl, as parents at Apple Elementary, their feelings better aligned with Lisa. Although their feelings align, different reasons emerge. Carl explained homework causes
stress on the relationship between him and his son. “Oh, yeah, it definitely causes problems there, cause [sic] he’s always trying to figure out ways to get out of it and it ends up getting him into more trouble.” Carl’s son, Ty, had difficult turning in his homework on a routine basis and that had an impact on the relationship at home. Claire’s daughter, Kate, always turned in her homework, but the content of the homework was what created a negative feeling in her mother. Claire explained, “You know things are taught differently and, obviously, every teacher teaches, has a different style, and not being there to see how it’s presented. So, it gives me a little anxiety, hoping she is picking it all up.” Looking at the feelings from Claire and Carl, the difference could be in the child’s ability or approach within the classroom. If Claire’s daughter understood concepts within the classroom and completed the homework independently, the anxiety level of her mother may decrease around homework. For Carl, if his son were to complete his homework, troubles may not occur within the home after school.

**Family Members’ Perception of the Purpose of Homework is Varied**

Claire clearly stated, “I don’t know the purpose of homework to be honest.” Other parents at least shared an idea of the purpose of homework. Carmen explained she believes the purpose of homework focused around three different areas: to reinforce the learning within the classroom, to demonstrate independently learning, and to retain information and apply it. She explained, “The overall purpose of homework in schools, I think, is that they can demonstrate the learning independently of being in school.” Carmen added,

I do think that homework should be independent of parent help, and I think that’s a major shift that I’ve seen as a parent, that lot of the assignments that my daughter is receiving at the elementary level no longer require a lot of parent input or support in completing (Carmen, Mother of Maya, Orange Elementary).
If teachers and schools are trending towards homework as independent practice, then teachers must be willing to differentiate the homework so students can have the opportunity to complete the work independently.

One interesting idea emerged for the purpose of homework between families at Apple and Orange Elementary. These parents, Carl and Lisa, both had sons who had difficulty turning in homework and both had negative feelings about homework in general as explained earlier. Carl and Lisa both acknowledged homework was for practice, but time was the main reason for homework. Carl stated, “You can’t get everything in in the school day that you really need to, so. Then you do allow for extra time outside of school to study.” In Lisa’s words, “I would guess just for extra practice, and probably also somewhat time restraint. They can’t get everything done in a school day.”

These experiences explained some of the negative feelings families had about homework. Burdens are placed on families when it comes to homework and have manifested in different ways. Time can be a burden for families when different schedules permit. These schedules might not be adult driven, but student driven. For example, students can be involved in a variety of activities after school and this creates challenges to ensure homework is being completed. Another burden can be in parent/guardian relationship with the child. Parents shared tense moments can be created by homework when their son or daughter does not want to work on it because they would do a more preferable activity like play outside with friends or play video games.

With all of the different beliefs amongst these families, one might conclude a need to create a common understanding of the purpose of homework for all individuals. It is important
to understand the why of homework so all parties can be supportive and understand their role for the success of the student and reducing burdens placed on families.

**Teachers do not Provide Support to Families Regarding Homework**

Just as the second grade families stated they had not received any advice or help from teachers in how they support their children with homework, fourth grade families agreed.

**Findings from Homework Analysis**

For this section, I compared and contrasted different homework samples provided by the teachers at Apple Elementary (T1) and Orange Elementary (NT1).

**Homework Samples**

Teachers provided a total of 12 homework samples they had assigned within their classroom. Each teacher provided three assignments. Out of the 12 homework assignments, eight were from mathematics. Besides those assignments, one was science, one was spelling, and two were reading contracts. The reading contracts that were assigned asked students to read 20 minutes a night and required students to log the book title and author. When analyzing these homework assignments, they focused on the lower three levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy; remembering, understanding, and applying.

When analyzing the different assignments from teachers, there was not any distinction between schools or grade levels based upon the homework assigned, but possible benefits and consequences for teachers and students could be derived. I believe the lack of differences in assigned homework is due to Raceway School District spending time over the years making sure elementary schools are systematic and systemic in their curriculum offerings. Each elementary school requires the same curriculum to be taught. The benefit is that if teachers or students were to transfer buildings at the end of a year, the curriculum would be the same. Teachers might
have to learn new standards in a grade level, but the familiarity of the curriculum and its language would be the same. For students, the benefit could be viewed in the beginning, middle, or end of the year. For example, if a student moves in the middle of the year he or she would be able to continue in the same curriculum. Teachers might not make decisions on curriculum offerings, but they do make the decision on what homework is assigned, if it is differentiated, and how it is used once it is returned results in possible consequences for students.

**Homework is not Differentiated by Teachers**

Consistent with what was revealed in the interviews and observations, homework assignments provided by the four different teachers were not differentiated for students although some modifications were made. All students received the same assignment each time the teacher made the decision to assign homework. This was the same for all assignments in different subject areas.

For mathematics, Everyday Math is used within Raceway School District. From this curriculum, the study link was the one common assignment all teachers provided and one second grade teacher only provided mathematics assignments as her samples. The mathematics homework came directly from the publisher for both schools. One might see this as a benefit to teachers because the homework assignment it is conveniently tied to the lesson and readily available by having master prints prepared for students from the publisher. Also, a benefit could be viewed as consistency in schools, classrooms, and across grade levels. In contrast, it could suggest teachers do not spend any time planning or creating assignments tailored to where students are ready for homework. It looks more like a one size fits all assignment and program. From the parents’ perspective, the curriculum expectation of providing a homework worksheet after each lesson could be the underlying reason why some parents see homework as busywork.
For all math assignments, teachers either provided a check at the top of the paper or in some cases students graded their own papers for accuracy, without actual receiving a grade from the teacher. Also, feedback was not provided to students on what they did well or where improvement was needed. During the teacher interviews, all teachers claimed they used the mathematics homework in a formative way by analyzing how students did and then creating reteaching groups based upon performance on homework. This could be viewed as a benefit for students. If homework is not graded and some students may not turn it in, the final grade is not impacted. When used in a formative way, students are able to receive more instruction before having to perform on a summative assessment. The formative approach to homework may be viewed by teachers as more work, but this was observed in Kathy’s classroom during mathematics instruction and other teachers described this practice during interviews. In addition, both students from Alicia’s classroom noted she helps students to reteach skills based upon homework. Campbell stated, “If we’re unclear, she will help us after it is graded.” Ravi shared, “She might pull you to tell you what to help you figure out if you did something wrong.”

In second grade (Orange Elementary) and fourth grade (Apple Elementary), a teacher provided a reading contract as an example of homework. This assignment was a requirement for all students to read 20 minutes each night. This type of assignment was intended for students to practice reading. One might suggest the benefit of this assignment is practice, but the concern focuses on the requirement of reading and not creating a reading for pleasure. Not just a reading for pleasure, but some students could merely reinforce poor reading skills without the proper instruction or guidance alongside them a teacher could provide. In addition, one might question the accountability for elementary students to read at home. If parents have to support their child
to read, this could create an inequity for some students if family members are not available.

Much has to be considered when teachers assign homework to their students.

**Summary**

It was evident teachers from both schools assign homework to students without providing differentiated assignments and offering very little feedback on the assignments. The decision to assign homework is placed on the teachers and the students will either receive the benefits or consequences depending on the actions of the teachers. Implications, policies, practices, and future research need to be considered if teachers are going to assign homework based upon the four themes shared in Chapter Four: Family support and expectations are viewed differently amongst teachers within and across grade levels and title/non-title school; The perception of the purpose of homework is varied by role (student, teacher, and family); Homework is not differentiated by teachers; and Teachers do not provide support to families on how they can assist with homework. The implications, policies, practices, and future research will be discussed in chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter is intended to provide a summary of the conclusions found from this study that were discussed in Chapter Four. From the themes derived from the data collected, the implications for policy, practice, theory, and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Overview of the Problem

The amount of time spent creating, planning, and completing homework is compelling. Time is needed for students to complete homework, time is needed for parents to support students, and time is needed for teachers to assign and assess homework. Students and parents have exhibited stress and frustration because assignments are not at the independent level and sometimes parents do not have the knowledge base to support their children (Corno & Xu, 2004; Kohn, 2007; Vorhees, 2011). With a family’s social class being an indicator of the knowledge base within the home and available resources (Lareau, 1987), what are the perceptions about homework that exist among different families? With challenges surrounding homework and the continued conversation amongst teachers, students, and parents, is the amount of time given to homework worth it?

Purpose Statement

The intention of this study was to identify the perceptions and purposes to develop a common understanding of homework through the lens of teachers, parents, and students in both Title I and Non-Title I schools.

Research Questions

The research question that guided this study was:

1. What is the understanding that exists among students, teachers, and families in elementary schools regarding homework and its purpose in our schools?
Questions that surfaced from the primary research question were:

2. What similarities or differences are there between the viewpoints of families, students, and teachers regarding the purpose of homework within the elementary setting?

3. How do the perspectives regarding the purpose of homework differ from stakeholders at a Title 1 school compared to those from a Non-Title 1 school?

**Review of Methods**

This qualitative study was created with a multiple-case study design (Yin, 2014) because classrooms were observed, interviews were conducted, and homework samples were collected from multiple grade levels and two different schools. The primary source of data source was transcribed interviews from parents or guardians, teachers, and students. To find common themes, all of the participants were analyzed individually and then compared by grade levels, schools, and roles.

**Major Findings**

The major findings that emerged from this study are grouped into several key thematic areas: Family support and expectations are viewed differently amongst teachers within and across grade levels and title/non-title schools; The perception of the purpose of homework is varied by role (student, teacher, and family); Homework is not differentiated by teachers; and Teachers do not provide support to families on how they can assist with homework.

**Family Support and Expectations are Viewed Differently amongst Teachers**

The impact of social class is a preexisting condition that must play a role as teachers think about the support that is provided to students with homework. The level of support and resources parents provide to their children can sometimes be indicated by social class (Lareau,
The perception is clear that teachers believe family members at Title I schools are not as available to be involved at school or in the home as compared to families from schools like Orange Elementary. The actions of the teachers at Apple Elementary show they assign homework that requires family involvement, just like the teachers at Orange Elementary. Because a higher social class often indicates more available resources and an increased level of ability or knowledge for parents within the home (Lareau, 1987; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008), assigned homework that is not created with social class in mind is creating an unfair disadvantage for some students. Cosden, Morrison, Guiterrez, and Brown (2004) and Kohn (2007) suggested this type of decision making by teachers is putting students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds at a great disadvantage.

Even though the teachers’ perception of family involvement is lower at Apple Elementary than at Orange Elementary, the two teachers still expect and anticipate family support when it comes to helping their child with their studies. This is the disconnect that puts children at a disadvantage. The reality of a family’s social class needs to be understood by teachers so the assigning of homework does not create a disadvantage to those who do not have the same opportunities as others. By understanding different social classes within schools, teachers can contribute by differentiating homework assignments and creating assignments for independent practice. When teachers assign homework at the independent level for students, equity amongst students with and without support from home becomes apparent. The practice of assigning homework at the independent level will play a vital role for students and families to minimize the assumed resources within a household.
The Perception of the Purpose of Homework is Varied by Role

In this study, the perceptions of the purpose of homework were wide ranging from students, parents, and teachers within and outside of their roles. Homework has had many different roles and had different purposes over several decades (Foyle & Bailey, 1986; Xu, 2005; Fisher & Frey, 2008). Communication of a defined purpose of homework could be developed locally within individual schools or within a school district to establish a common understanding. Until then, a variety of perceptions of the purpose of homework will linger because of personal beliefs and experiences.

Students

Large volumes of homework have been linked to stressed-out and anxiety-filled students causing stress within the home (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). Along with the stress that homework has caused, students see homework as a hindrance to their free time (Corno & Xu, 2004). Perhaps due to the age of the participants, within this study, students did not make comments regarding too much homework or being stressed out, but they indicated their preference was to play outside versus completing homework after school. The perception from over 50% of the students indicated the purpose of homework was for practice. In addition to practice, students believed homework revealed to teachers their students’ mastery of skills taught during the instructional day. These beliefs illustrated the traditional use of homework is practice from lessons taught in the classroom (Xu, 2005). Additionally, homework has been used as enrichment over the years (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Van Voorhis, 2004; Xu, 2005), but this was not indicated by any of the students.
Parents

Parents within my study used the words like preparation, responsibility, communication, practice, and independent learning outside of the school day to describe the purpose of homework. With such a variety of perceptions for the purpose of homework, homework is the constant opportunity for family involvement within the home (Kay, Fitzgerald, Paradee, & Mellencamp, 1994). The challenge exists if it is an equal opportunity for all students because of the time for work and outside commitments for some parents (Suskind, 2012). For many parents, jobs require much of their time and do not allow them to be available for their children when it comes to homework. When parents are not available, some turn to tutors to provide support. This creates an equality divide because some families whether working or not, do have the resources for access to tutors. Other parents might be available for their children, but they do not possess the knowledge to be able to make a difference. Although the home provides the opportunity for involvement within a child’s educational journey, it also provides a possible divide for students.

Teachers

Teachers must understand their role when assigning homework and the importance of communication with students and families. Through my study, individual perceptions from parents and students of the purpose of homework did not necessarily match the teachers’. Teachers need to understand their own beliefs impact them as the decision makers for the assigned homework (Van Voorhis, 2004). They must be able to effectively communicate so families can understand the purpose of homework within that classroom. The second grade teachers who participated in my study used the word “responsibility” as a purpose of homework. Alicia, a second grade teacher at Orange Elementary, solely believes homework is for
responsibility, but the students and parents within her room did not communicate the same purpose. The responsibility aspect is one that is often mentioned as a way for students to prepare for future learning and jobs someday (Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Coutts, 2004; Van Voorhis, 2004). The fourth grade teachers and the majority of the students’ thinking for the purpose of homework was practice. The teachers shared they rarely grade homework and that shows their idea of homework as simply practice for students.

Communication is the key to having a shared understanding of the purpose of homework among families, students, and teachers. In this study, families, teachers, and students all had their own experiences to shape their beliefs around homework within the school setting. A shared understanding of the purpose of homework needs to be developed within schools. This would allow everyone to better understand their role and support students throughout their educational journey. The benefit for a shared understanding for homework will create more time for all, healthier relationships could develop between parents and students regarding school work within the home, and students could see the value of their learning from both the home and school.

**Homework is not Differentiated by Teachers**

The teachers who participated in the study from Apple Elementary and Orange Elementary schools do not differentiate their homework assignments for students. Teachers acknowledged their instruction is differentiated on a daily basis, but homework assignments are the same when given. This decision by teachers can lead to frustration by students, and learning to could possibly stall (Kohn, 2007; Vorhees, 2011). Teachers’ instructional strategies are differentiated for students within the classroom, but the practice of differentiating homework does not typically occur (Marigone, 2008). The practice of assigning the same homework
assignment to all students by the teachers at Apple and Orange Elementary is not surprising. Both schools had the same adopted curriculums and resources available to them. For example, Everyday Math was the textbook used in both schools, and the reproduced blackline masters were used as the homework.

Van Voorhis (2004) and Kohn (2007) shared a lack of professional development exists in the area of homework planning and design. My observations of classrooms at both schools support the previous finding. Differentiated instruction was observed at both Apple and Orange Elementary; however, when homework samples were analyzed, all students received the same assignments. This indicates a couple of possibilities as to why differentiation does not occur. One, time is of the essence. Teachers use curriculum materials that are already prepared for them from publishing companies. It is convenient for teachers to make a set of copies and pass them out to all students while not having to differentiate any assignments for a few students. Two, teachers do not have the knowledge to provide differentiated homework assignments to students. Research has indicated that schools do not provide homework professional development regarding planning and creating (Kohn, 2007; Van Voorhis, 2004). It is not fair to assume teachers understand this without having the information provided.

**Teachers do not Provide Support to Families Regarding Homework**

The most important aspect of homework teachers might consider is how parents can support their child. If the expectations are placed on families to assist their children with homework, inequities could be created when teachers assume all families are the same. Inequities could be created by resources made available or not accessible to students; the amount of time parents or guardians are able to help, and even if time is possible; and whether parental knowledge is needed to assist. When teachers create expectations for support with homework
and do not provide any guidance to families, a complex situation can arise and inequities can be created among students.

The teachers who participated in the study from Apple Elementary and Orange Elementary shared they have not provided any support to families on how they can support their child at home with the completion of homework. This supports the belief that parents have often felt confused on how to guide their child with homework (Xu & Corno, 2003). The parents supported this idea and explained that they have never had a teacher share with them how they can assist their child at home other than just going over the expectations with homework policies at the beginning of the year. These findings supported what was found in a study by Epstein & Van Voorhis (2001) involving over 1000 middle schools. Over 75% of principals shared that less than half of their teachers communicate with parents how they can help with the homework process (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Teachers cannot expect or assume the same support and resources lie within every family for students to complete homework. Time needs to be invested by teachers to get to know their students and families so they can provide support within the home. The communication starts with the willingness by teachers to get to know their families. Because students do not all come from the same social class, it is imperative for teachers to take the time to build relationships with families to better understand the needs within the home. Lareau (1987) found that as social class increases, so do the amount of resources and parental knowledge, which then can become available to the students. Corno and Xu (2004) believed parents have the ability to support their children when schools are able to provide guidance and training to families. Teachers must be willing to communicate and offer guidance if different results are wanted regarding the completion of homework.
The building of relationships with families and understanding the complexities of social class are foundational for the success of children within the classroom. One reason teachers may not provide family members with ideas on how they can help is because time is not designated to build relationships. Teachers’ actions show there is an embedded assumption that homework is an expectation and parents know how to offer advice to their children. When staff members understand the struggles for students in lower social classes and get to know different family situations, positive relationships can be established (San Antonio, 2008). Another need may exist with a student in an upper social class where the parents are not around because of involved jobs. The understanding of the different needs within a classroom or school would allow teachers to make better decisions regarding homework and how to best provide support to families. The homework triad (Figure 1) indicates the need for teachers to openly communicate and support families. Before decisions are made to assign homework, teachers must understand the needs within the home, establish positive relationships with students and family members, and then support families by sharing and modeling different instructional methods.

When teachers do not consider different home situations and expectations are established for families to support students with homework, inequities can be created for students. Teachers need to be willing to consider factors that are out of students’ control, like the availability of family members, resources within the home, and the knowledge base family members have to offer. In addition to those factors, these expectations could strain family relationships between the child and parent and between the family and teacher. If a child is not able to complete homework and family members are not able to assist because of an extenuating factor, a struggle could commence and relationships become fractured. It is imperative for teachers to understand
the possible consequences that could occur when expectations are created without the support provided to families.

Conclusions

In this final section, I discuss implications for policy, practice for students, parents and teachers, and theory.

Implications for Policy

This is an opportunity for Raceway School District, building administration, or other schools across the United States to provide professional development to their staff on how assigned homework needs to derive from differentiated instruction – the same that occurs within the classroom on a daily basis. Just as professional development is provided for curriculum materials, instructional strategies, and classroom management techniques, it should be policy for teachers to receive information on effective homework planning and design. The current practices of homework do not always match what teachers display in the classroom (Mangione, 2008). Planned professional development using the information in Table 1 would allow school district personnel to train staff using research-based evidence for homework assignments. This practice would align homework to current classroom strategies. Teachers have to act on the opportunity and take the responsibility to plan and create homework assignments that align to classroom instruction (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Theodore, Dioguardi, Hughes, Alosio, Carlo, & Eccles, 2009; Vorhees, 2011).

Ultimately, communication is the key for many different practices within education; homework does not differ. Continual communication needs to occur for homework to be a success. Figure 1 illustrates the continual process of communication between teachers, parents,
and students. This figure can be used as a guide or reference for policy with employees to understand the expectations of communication.

**Implications for Practice**

The implications for practice can be suggested for all three participants in this study: students, parents/guardians, and most importantly teachers.

**Students.** At the elementary level one might question why homework should be assigned. Smaller amounts of homework have been viewed as useful for students at the elementary level (Cooper, Civey Robinson, & Patall, 2006; Vatterott, 2011). Within this study, one second grade teacher specifically stated homework at her level was about teaching responsibility to students, while others discussed it being about practice. Students need to be able to communicate with teachers and parents about the homework process. Students can become frustrated with homework because of the amount of time it takes to complete or the level of difficulty can lead to conflict with parents or guardians (Cooper, 2001; Corno & Xu, 2004; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Heitzmann, 2007; Van Voorhis, 2011). Before frustration sets in for students, communication needs to occur with teachers and parents. This practice may seem easier said than done for young children, but they need to learn the skill of effective communication. Teachers and parents can model this for students as referenced in Figure 1.

**Parents.** Parents and guardians have a great responsibility to support their children throughout their educational journey. At the elementary level, there is no greater opportunity for parents to instill the value of an education by providing support to their child. Homework is one constant through which parents can support their child (Kay, Fitzgerald, Paradee, & Mellencamp, 1994). When students spend time in unstructured settings and are found to be unsupervised, a greater risk for poor academic results arises than among those students in structured settings.
(Jordan & Nettles, 2000). To support their child, parents must put into practice a homework routine that is created to prevent distractors and be available for questions when they arise for homework to be completed. Students could work in the same location each day, with all electronic devices turned off and put away unless needed for completion of the homework. Also, the same time of day and amount of time each day would aid the student to have a structured setting. The amount of time could be consulted with the teacher. If a child is afforded this time of structure and support, the child will have a greater opportunity for success than a child without support (Balli, Demo, & Wedman, 1998; Lee & Bowen, 2006).

In addition to providing a structured setting for homework completion, parents must be willing to communicate with teachers about how they can provide the necessary academic support. Margolis (2005) emphasized the importance of building relationships between parents and teachers so students can be supported. Within the homework triad (Figure 1), parents can understand the expectation of communication with the teacher. The act of communication with a child’s teacher can send a message to children that school is important and valued by the adults in the home (Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007). Without communication between the adults, a child can suffer and negative feelings towards school could commence.

**Teachers.** Teachers are the ultimate decision maker when it comes to homework. When teachers assign homework, they must understand homework impacts not only students, but parents as well. Teachers are fully aware of the time it takes for them to create and grade homework that is assigned. Time is invested by all parties. For example, teachers grade assignments or plan future instruction based upon homework, students take time to complete it, and parents need to support their child with the completion of homework. Homework is a reality in schools, and the time used could be effectively minimized by implementing homework that
meets the criteria set forth in Table 1, as explained below. When homework is planned and created by meeting certain characteristics, it can be effective for students in terms of applying their learning (Sallee & Rigler, 2008; Van Voorhis, 2004; Vatterott, 2010).

**Differentiated for students.** Teachers must take the time to plan and create homework assignments that meet the needs of individual students. A component of differentiated instruction is not planning the same assignment for every student (Van Voorhis, 2004; Vorhees, 2011). Teachers often focus on differentiated lessons within the classroom and should apply that same decision making to homework assignments. By planning differentiated homework assignments, students will be able to have an assignment that is at their level, which will remedy possible frustration within the home and allow students to work on skills that are meaningful to them.

**Student growth.** As teachers begin to plan homework assignments for different students in their classroom, the content needs to focus on the practice of applying skills taught during the day and not rote memorization (Wiggins, 2013). Students will have the opportunity to grow in their learning when they are not worried about memorizing a list of vocabulary definitions or a specific set of facts.

**Effective feedback.** If teachers are taking the time to assign homework, time must be given to provide effective feedback. If teachers do not take the time to provide feedback to students regarding homework, students have often viewed the homework as pointless (Kitsis, 2008). The feedback must be more than a check for completion or a letter grade. Students must understand what is needed to do to correct any errors and teachers must understand if reteaching is needed for students to understand where the problem exists (Hattie, 2012). Teachers must use
feedback as part of the homework process. If this does not occur, a large amount of time will be wasted by all.

**Homework as independent practice.** Planning homework at an independent level has great implications. When teachers do not plan homework for independent practice, students can become frustrated or confused (Vatterott, 2010). If homework is not planned at the independent level for students, it impacts more than the student. Parents are impacted because they have to be present and available to offer guidance. If they do not have the knowledge regarding the content, conflict could ensue. Teachers are impacted because their time spent planning and creating the homework is nullified when students are unable to complete the work. If homework is created by teachers, it must come with the intention of independent practice for students.

**Time sensitive.** It is understandable that elementary students struggle with balancing extracurricular activities and homework assignments (Salle & Rigler, 2008). Teachers must consider the amount of time it will take students to complete the assigned homework. When the teachers plan differentiated assignments for students, this decision will assist with the amount of time needed to complete homework. Guidelines provided by the National Parent Teacher Association state that time spent on homework should not be more than 10-20 minutes a day for kindergarten through second grade and 30-60 minutes for elementary students in grades three through six (Cooper & Gersten, 2003).

**Implications of Theory to Practice**

The significance of Madeline Hunter’s student learning theory is connected to this study. The importance of independent practice is a guiding factor in the planning and creating of homework for teachers. If students are not ready to independently practice a newly taught skill, frustration can build leading to negative implications. These frustrations could result in
emotional arguments within the home between parent and child, students not wanting to come to school, and hours of wasted time trying to complete the homework. This study finds benefit for homework to be assigned at the independent level, consistent with student learning theory. Students can be successful when teachers plan activities at the independent level, once the student has received instruction and can apply the newly learned knowledge (Hunter, 1994).

Although independent practice is a guiding principle in homework for teachers, schools must think beyond to ensure equity for students. School districts could use technology as an equalizer for students (Edwards, 2017). Districts could first start by ensuring teachers had the knowledge to create lessons that are accessible online. Through such a resource, students would be able to access the lessons based upon homework assignments minimizing the assistance needed from home. These lessons could be posted on a password protected system for students and families only. An incidental benefit for students would be when absences occur. When students are absent and homework assignments are due, this would be a great resource for students to ensure they received the instruction. Second, school districts could create a homework hotline. This hotline could operate using high school students with different areas of expertise. Elementary students would be able to call a phone number or possibly even interact via video conferencing to receive support from a high school student. The benefit for this hotline could be twofold. First, students from the high school could earn volunteer hours by providing these services to build experiences for college applications. Second, school districts would be creating equity by giving all students access to support for homework.

One might question if homework created at the independent is rigorous enough for students. History has shown that lack of rigor in our educational system has been viewed as a reason for student achievement gaps (Cooper, 2001; Suskind, 2012). By creating homework at
the independent level, are teachers creating a divide for elementary students in comparison to other countries? Educators have to ensure our schools are maintaining high expectations for our students and not sending a message that homework is “easy” at the independent level. This reality will not be done easily. Schools districts must provide the proper training for teachers. Teachers must be willing to implement what training is provided. Communities must hold schools accountable to the standards set forth within the community. Students must use the resources that are made available to them to complete the homework that is assigned. All individuals must play a role so that the message is not sent that homework is easy, but a rigorous opportunity to further grow students in their learning.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

When reflecting on my study, I see several opportunities for future research. A deeper look into different classrooms from Title I and non-Title I schools would provide more research and clarity to the perceptions of homework within these two types of buildings. A deeper look could include the quantity or n in terms of the study participants. An increased number of teachers, students, and parents could provide a better understanding of varied perceptions of homework. Also, a research study at schools that are drastically different in demographics and student achievement may provide additional meaning. For example, a school that has over 75% free and reduced lunch rates compared to a school like Orange Elementary could provide some interesting information. Specifically selecting different families within schools could be beneficial to better understand homework challenges among different social classes. These changes to my study could offer an opportunity to analyze different school districts and communities around the state versus analyzing data from two schools within one school district.
An additional idea for future research would be to focus on one’s background and how personal experiences possibly shape their perception of homework. Do certain professions impact the perception or attitude towards homework? Based upon what they do for a living; some parents might believe homework is not necessary at young age. What impact does personal experiences from family members have on a child? Different feelings were shared during my study, but specific questioning was not created to derive a deeper understanding. Speculation could be assumed that possibly the actions of others impact one’s perceptions of homework. Does one’s school experiences or background impact their perceptions of homework? For example, if a family member has had a previous negative school experience, does that impact the perception of homework for their child? More time spent getting to understand each participant’s background and experiences could make greater meaning around the perceptions of homework and whether students are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated.

A study focused on technology and homework could provide some understanding and guidance on how school districts give students the support necessary for success with homework. The opportunity for access is critical and the more ways the access is created the better. Schools districts can use technology in many different ways. Do schools provide a device for all students? Do districts have one learning management system for teachers, students and family to use for assignments, videos, and communication? Through better understanding what technology is used and how it is used in school districts, more robust practices could be implemented to insure equity for students. This understanding could then be applied to how homework is created, assigned, and completed within the current educational setting.

A final recommendation for future research would focus on comparing student grades and homework completion with parents’ perceptions about homework. Do student grades
correlate with a parent’s perception regarding homework? For example, if all students had high
grades, what would perceptions be about homework? Is homework viewed negatively or
positively when connected to a student’s report card? An additional component of this study
could be to analyze the results of standardized test scores and look to see if any meaning could
be constructed when all of the data is analyzed.

**Concluding Remarks**

Homework continues to be a debated topic by teachers, parents, and students because of the
time commitment for all. Time is required for teachers to plan, create, and assess homework;
parents need to give of their time to support their children; and students have to manage their
time to complete the assigned work over preferred activities. Also, time is needed for
communication among all of the stakeholders. If one of the individuals does not participate as
part of the homework process, it can become a fragmented process with the possibility of
frustration and stress.

The homework conversation will continue. When homework is assigned, the impact is
felt by many individuals as evidenced in this study. Assigned homework should be at the
independent level for students, and teachers need to provide guidance to parents on how they can
assist. Teachers need to know effective characteristics of homework assignments and what
supports need to be shared with families so students can have the best opportunity for success. I
have been inspired by gaining new knowledge regarding the complexity of homework and now
have the ability to share the research with educators, parents, and students. The Homework
Triad (Figure 1) and What Makes Homework Successful (Table 1) are two key documents that
will allow me to share this knowledge.
References


Publications.


A PURPOSEFUL UNDERSTANDING OF HOMEWORK


APPENDIX A

A Purposeful Understanding of Homework

Interview Guide

What is the understanding that exists among students, educators, and parents in elementary schools regarding homework and its purpose in our schools?

- What are students, educators, and parents attitudes towards homework?
- Is homework more prevalent in certain subject areas, certain grades or level of schooling?
- What belief exists from students, educators, and parents regarding the number of minutes or hours of homework per night?
- How do teachers at elementary schools approach assigning homework?
- How do teachers at elementary schools use the homework assignments once they are returned?

Interview Protocol

- Schedule interviews for the convenience of the interviewee...public places such as schools, libraries, Starbucks, etc. or the in the convenience of their own home.
- I will dedicate a specific time for each group to help organize interviews. I will plan to complete all interviews of linked participants before moving to another case study. For example, I may allow for two to four weeks to complete the interviews that are directly related to the completed observations of the teacher.
- Students will be selected purposefully by working with the teacher to provide names of student who turn in their homework on a routine basis and those who are more sporadic or do not turn in their homework. For students, a permission slip will be created and a signature will be obtained from the parent before an interview would be conducted.
- Each set of individuals will include a teacher, a student, and a parent.
- Arrange times to schedule interviews.
Teacher interview protocol form

Date: _______________________

Time: _______________________

Location: _____________________

Teacher Interviewee: _______________________

Consent form signed: Yes or No

Thank you for taking time to sit down with me and answer some questions regarding homework in school. My name is Tim Phares; I am conducting this interview and research as part of a study for my doctoral work at Ball State University. Would it be okay if I record our interview? I will only be recording this interview for note-taking purposes. I have developed these questions as part of my research study focused around the understanding of the purpose of homework.

I want to let you know your name will not be attached to any of the information that you provide to me. As I stated previously, I am trying to better understand the use of homework in schools and the perceptions teachers, students and parents have about homework. Do you have any questions for me before we get started? Before we start, I just want to say thank you for helping me with my study. Let’s get started.

Teacher Interview Questions

General Questions about Homework

I am going to start off and ask you general questions about homework and your philosophy of education.

1. Tell me briefly why your chose the teaching profession and what grade you teach?
2. What is your philosophy regarding classroom instruction and homework? Do you believe daily instruction is connected to homework?
3. Do you think homework requirements have changed since you were in school?
4. What do you believe is the overall purpose for homework in school?
5. When you think about homework, how does it make you feel?
6. Do you believe homework allows students to be more successful? Explain your thinking.
7. How do you believe homework is assigned or given differently at this school compared to others in the district?
Questions about Homework Practices

The next set of questions will focus on your practice of assigning homework within your classroom.

1. Can you describe to me a typical homework assignment?
2. Why do you assign homework to students?
3. On average, how much homework do you assign each night? How much time do you think students take to complete your homework?
4. In general, do you think you assign more homework than your colleagues? How do you know?
5. Do you differentiate your homework based upon student abilities? If yes, please share an example.
6. What is the impact on those students that don’t complete their homework?
7. How do you use homework once it is turned in?

Parental Involvement

This set of questions focuses around parent involvement.

1. Can you describe the parent population in your school?
2. How do you communicate with families regarding assigned homework?
3. Do you expect parents to help with homework? Do they help? How do you know?

Questions about Homework Assignments for Appendix E

1. Please talk me through this assignment that was assigned during the observation I conducted in your classroom.
2. When you assigned this homework, did you anticipate parental support being needed? If yes, how much support?
3. Approximately how long do you think this assignment should take a student to complete?
4. Was this homework assigned from the lesson I observed? Was it the first time the students were exposed to this concept or skill?

Final Question

1. Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding homework and the families/students that you provided me?
Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to spend time with me. I appreciate the information you provided and want to remind you this information will remain completely anonymous. If you have any questions or have something more to share, please don’t hesitate to contact me. I will provide a business card to leave with each participant.

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Email: tphares@ccs.k12.in.us or t.phares@sbcglobal.net
APPENDIX C

A Purposeful Understanding of Homework

Student interview protocol form

Date: _______________________

Time: _______________________

Location: _____________________

Student Interviewee: _______________________

Consent form signed from student: Yes or No

Consent form signed from parent for student: Yes or No

Thank you for taking time to sit down with me and answer some questions regarding homework in school. My name is Tim Phares. I am a principal at an elementary school. I love spending time with kids at my school. I eat lunch with them, play games, and visit their classrooms to see what they are learning. Who is your principal? I am going to ask you several questions about homework so I can learn from you. I think that is pretty cool that a principal will be learning from a student. I will repeat the questions if you need me to do so. Would it be okay if I record our interview? I will only be recording this interview so I can make sure I get your answers right. Thank you so much for spending time with me. Let’s get started. Do you have any questions for me before we start?

Student Interview Questions

1. What grade you are in and what is your favorite subject? Why is that your favorite subject?
2. What is your favorite thing about school?
3. What do you like to do at home after school?
4. When you think about homework, how does it make you feel?
5. Why do you think teachers assign homework to you and your friends?
6. How much time do you spend on homework each night? Do you have homework every night including weekends?
7. How does homework allow you to become a better student?
8. Do you tend to have more homework in a specific subject area? Why do you think you have more homework in _____?
9. If you don’t complete your homework, what happens? Are there consequences?
10. Once your homework is complete, what happens? Does your teacher grade it? Does your teacher tell you what you did well and maybe an area for improvement on your homework?

11. Why do you think your teacher assigns homework?

12. If you were the teacher, what would assign as homework to your students?

Questions about Homework Assignments for Appendix E

I would like for you to talk me through this assignment that was assigned during the observation I conducted in your classroom.

1. When you completed this homework, did you need help from an adult or older sibling? If yes, how much help did they give you?

2. Approximately how long did you take to complete this assignment?

3. Was this homework assigned from the lesson your teacher taught? Was the lesson brand new?

Final Question

1. Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding homework from your experiences?

Thank you for spending time with me and talk about homework. I appreciate the information you provided and it will help me better understand how kids feel about homework. You did a great job!

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APPENDIX D

A Purposeful Understanding of Homework

Parent interview protocol form

Date: _______________________

Time: _______________________

Location: _____________________

Parent Interviewee: _______________________

Consent form signed: Yes or No

Thank you for taking time to sit down with me and answer some questions regarding homework in school. My name is Tim Phares. I am conducting this interview and research as part of a study for my doctoral work at Ball State University. Would it be okay if I record our interview? I will only be recording this interview for note-taking purposes. I have developed these questions as part of my research study focused around the understanding of the purpose of homework.

I want to let you know your name will not be attached to any of the information that you provide to me. As I stated previously, I am trying to better understand the use of homework in schools and the perceptions teachers, students and parents have about homework. Do you have any questions for me before we get started? Before we start, I just want to say thank you for helping me with my study. Let’s get started.

Parent Interview Questions

General Questions about Homework

I am going to start off and ask you general questions about your child’s homework and your beliefs about homework.

1. What grade is your child in and who is his/her teacher? Does your child like school? How do you know?
2. How does your child relate to his/her current homeroom teacher?
3. When you think about homework, how does it make you feel?
4. Are there benefits or drawbacks to the homework that is assigned to your child?
5. Why do you think teachers assign homework to students?
6. Do you think homework requirements have changed since you were in school?
7. What do you believe is the overall purpose for homework in schools?
Questions about Homework Practices

The next set of questions will focus on the practice of your child completing assigned homework within your home.

1. Can you describe to me an atypical homework assignment you see your child bring home?
2. How much time does your child spend on homework each night? How often does your child have homework?
3. What happens at school if your child does not complete his/her homework?
4. What is your role as a parent with regards to homework?

Questions about Homework Assignments for Appendix E

1. When your child completed this homework, do you remember them needing help? Does this assignment seem typical?
2. Approximately how long did your child take to complete this assignment?

Final Question

1. Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding homework?

Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to spend time with me. I appreciate the information you provided and want to remind you this information will remain completely anonymous. If you have any questions or have something more to share, please don’t hesitate to contact me. I will provide a business card to leave with each participant.

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APPENDIX E

Rubric to Assess Effective Homework Assignments

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Differentiated for Students</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - The opportunity for students to have assignments at their level. | • Every student receives the same assignment | • Some students receive a differentiated homework assignment | • Homework assignments meet the individual needs of each student  
• Focused on content/skills from instruction  
• Every student did not receive the same assignment |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Growth</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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</table>
| - The chance for students to grow in their learning. | • Assignment is summative in nature  
• Assignment is in isolation of instruction during the day  
• Assignment is based upon rote memorization or basic recall of lesson taught | • Assignment is focused on application phase from new knowledge learned | • Assignment is focused on creating phase from new knowledge learned  
• Viewed as practice: formative assessment |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective Feedback</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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</table>
| - The decision on how teacher provides feedback to student. | • A check for completion or a letter grade is given by the teacher without any feedback | • Some assignments are given grades or checks for completion while and/or some students receive feedback for their next steps towards mastery from the teacher | • Students understand what they did well  
• Students understand their next steps for success  
• A check for completion or a letter grade is not given in isolation, but includes detailed feedback for the student |

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<tr>
<th>Independent Practice</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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</table>
| - The student can complete the work without adult support. | • Not enough content has been delivered by the teacher for student success  
• Adult support is needed throughout the assignment | • Some adult support is needed for students to complete homework  
• Some students can complete the assignment without frustration | • Content has previously been taught  
• Minimal parental support needed  
• Students can complete the assignment without frustration |

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<tr>
<th>Assignment Scope</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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| - The volume of work is considered by the teacher. | • Too many problems or questions  
• Repetitive problems of same skill or concept | • Demonstration of knowledge learned could be seen in fewer problems | • Focused on skills and content taught from the lesson observed  
• Minimal amount of questions or problems assigned for student to show knowledge learned |
A Purposeful Understanding of Homework

Parent Consent Form

Date

Dear Parent/s,

I am writing to ask for your consent to interview your child as part of my study regarding the purpose the homework in elementary schools. Your child’s name will not be attached to any of the information that he or she provides to me. The information is purely to help me gain a better understanding for this project.

Please sign below to give consent for your child to participate in this study and be interviewed in a location of your choice.

__________________________________
Parent Signature

Thanks,

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