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# Homework: A Nightly Ritual Beginning in the Elementary Grades

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Homework: A Nightly Ritual Beginning in the Elementary Grades

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

School of Education

Dominican University of California

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## Signature Sheet

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the chair of the master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Science. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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Abstract

Homework has become an accepted staple within education in the United States. However, little is acknowledged regarding the influences homework has on students. The purpose of this extended literature review is to look at the influences of homework on students in the elementary grades. The following research on homework was found through books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, magazine articles, and interviews. Within the research, educational, socioeconomic, and parental factors shown the largest influence, both positive and negative toward homework. The author discusses future implications to better improve homework's influence on students in the elementary grades. These implications include a need for homework policies to be set up within school districts, individual schools, and classrooms. These policies must address students' individual needs.

## Introduction

In the majority of schools in the United States homework is assigned to students as work to be completed at home, outside of the classroom, and returned to the teacher for credit. However, only about 35% of school districts have an actual homework policy set in place (Roderique, Polloway, Cumblad, Epstein, & Bursuck, 1994, p. 483). This causes teachers to assign homework based on their personal beliefs rather than basing it on research or policies. When sending homework home, seldom does the teacher take into account each student's physical, mental, and social influences that contribute to properly completing homework.

In looking at one school district located in the San Francisco Bay Area, there is no official board policy on homework. Through the principal's want and need to adopt a homework policy, she has presented staff members with many articles on the topic of homework, specifically looking at the influences it has on children and whether it is necessary in the elementary grades. The principal hopes that the staff will come together as a team and form a consistent approach to assigning homework throughout the grade levels. With the rise in popularity of books on the difficulties of getting children to complete their homework, this is an approach many schools may be moving towards.

### *Statement of Problem*

In the realm of education there is much controversy surrounding the area of homework in regards to whether it is beneficial or not to students. Cooper (2007) defines homework as:

Tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are intended to be carried out during nonschool hours. The word *intended* is used because students may complete homework assignments during study hall, during library time (sanctioned by teachers), or even during subsequent classes (not sanctioned) (p. 4).

The focus of this paper is on looking at the influences of homework on students in the elementary grades. These grades are defined as kindergarten through fifth grade.

*Purpose Statement*

The purpose of this extended literature review is to provide in-depth information on the influences of homework to aid in determining whether homework is beneficial, impartial, or detrimental to students of all backgrounds in the elementary grades. A secondary purpose is to identify what approaches to homework need to be made to meet the student's individual needs in order to create a positive experience for the student. In addition, suggestions are given based on the research. It is suggested that school boards review their homework policy and make changes to benefit their students.

*Research Question*

What are the influences of homework on students in the elementary grades? The research addresses a wide range of influences including educational, emotional, cultural, economic, parental, physical, and environmental.

Theoretical Rationale

Two learning theories are closely associated with homework: Constructivism and the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Constructivism, one of the major learning theories, is the belief "that learners, having some prior knowledge and experience as a basis from which to test out their hypotheses, build their own set of content to solve a particular set of problems posed by the instructor" (Leonard, 2002, p. 37). Constructivism is about knowledge and how one learns (Fosnot, 1996, p. ix). Constructivism is based on a collaborative learning environment, meaning that it is not teacher based. Instead the teacher is more of a coach as the students make discoveries throughout the learning process. A constructivist view of learning implies a method to teaching in which the students come up with their own questions, strategies and tactics in the learning process while creating a meaningful experience (Fosnot, 1996, p. ix).



A popular theorist in constructivism is Jean Piaget. In Piaget's *development learning* theory he explains that a student's existing *cognitive structures* will change in order to understand what new events are occurring in the environment, and through *assimilation* the student then interprets the events through their existing cognitive structures (Leonard, 2002, p. 38). Therefore, in regard to homework students will use their existing knowledge of a subject to build further hypotheses and understandings at home in a learner-centered environment, in contrast to the teacher-centered environment at school.

As homework is an individual activity that is designed to be completed outside of school and away from the teacher, the students are encouraged to think, question, construct, and stratify on their own to further their thinking and knowledge of a subject. In relating this theory to homework, a project-based assignment would best fall in the category with constructivism as opposed to a more repetitious type of homework, such as studying math facts.

Repetition in homework would relate closer to the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Also known as Bloom's Taxonomy, the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives is the organization of educational goals in regards to the development of intelligences within three categories: the cognitive domain, the affective domain, and the psychomotor domain (Leonard, 2002, p. 190). The cognitive domain calls attention to mental processing, the affective domain relates to feelings and emotions, and the psychomotor domain relates to motor skills.

Bloom's Taxonomy, created by Benjamin Bloom and colleagues in the mid-1950s, is a "hierarchical system of order thinking skills" from lower cognitive skills to higher cognitive skills (as cited in Levels & Types, 2006). The lowest cognitive skill is labeled knowledge, which is information previously learned. Next is comprehension, followed by application. Comprehension is defined as student demonstration of understanding through the use of own

words, and application is applying new information through a variety of ways. Analysis begins a higher order of thinking followed by synthesis, when pieces are combined to form a new meaning. Evaluation is the highest level in Bloom's Taxonomy in which a set of criteria is used to help arrive at a conclusion (Levels and Types, 2006).

In regards to the different types of homework that students bring home to complete, the levels of the taxonomy can be divided into lower level questioning and higher level questioning. Lower level questioning is found in the knowledge, comprehension, and simple application levels of the taxonomy (Levels and Types, 2006). Questions that fall into the level of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation would be considered to be more of a higher level questioning (Levels and Types, 2006). If necessary, Bloom's Taxonomy could be used to assess the type of homework students are given.

### *Assumptions*

Homework is given in many American elementary grade classrooms on a daily, weekly, and/or monthly basis. The reasons why teachers assign homework may vary. It may be given as an assessment of lessons learned in class, it could be an extension activity, it might be a way to teach new information that was not taught in class, it may be a review of information as a way to solidify the lesson taught, or it just might be a requirement set up by the school board.

Regardless of the reasons why a teacher assigns homework there are many benefits to having students complete it. Homework teaches students responsibility for themselves by requiring the students to complete the work at home and return it to school on the date assigned. In addition homework also provides students with the skill of time management. The students are given a certain amount of time to complete an assignment and expected to hand it in on time. Not only do they need to be aware of due dates but they also need to be aware of the amount of time it will

take for them to complete the assignment on a nightly or weekly basis. This means the students must take into account any after school activities or obligations and plan accordingly so they have enough time to complete their homework.

In an ideal situation, homework serves as a review of important concepts and skills that are taught in class. The school day is limited and teachers these days are bombarded with state standards they must teach in accordance with standardized tests. Because the amount of information is so great, teachers can benefit from sending home assignments that review what is taught in class. Students not only gain extra practice at implementing the concept outside of school, but teachers can also be sure that the lesson is given another chance to be learned.

In these busy days of students being “over scheduled” and complaints that there is not enough time to spend with the family, homework provides a chance for parents/guardians and children to interact. It provides a school-to-home connection in which the caregivers are able to interact with the child in regards to what the child is learning in the classroom. Through this interaction caregivers show an interest in what the child is learning and can relate personal experiences to the lessons at hand making the concept more concrete for the child.

Homework has the potential to benefit all parties involved including the student, teacher, and caregivers. The key word here is potential. If one of the components is missing such as a lack of caring about responsibility, difficulty or no help with time management, special education needs that are not being met by the teacher, or the absence of parental or caregiver support, homework can in turn lead towards a negative experience for the child.

### *Background and Need*

Parents, teachers, administrators, policy makers, and students all have their own ideas of why homework exists. Through these individual beliefs many false impressions are believed to

be true. Corno, a Professor of Education and Psychology at Teachers College at Columbia University, specializes in classroom learning and motivation. In the article *Homework Is a Complicated Thing* (1996), Corno lists five widespread misconceptions about homework. The notions that follow have proven to be mistaken due to their lack of evidence and support:

1. The best teachers give homework regularly
2. More homework is better than less
3. Parents want their children to have homework
4. Homework supports what students learn in school
5. Homework fosters discipline and personal responsibility.

Corno (1996) continues to list five realities about homework in hopes that policy makers who make recommendations to educators will follow more psychological perspectives on homework rather than these widespread misconceptions. The five realities about homework follow:

1. Homework is easily misused or abused by teachers and schools
2. Homework can be the bane of parents' existence in the early grades
3. Homework can make some students avoid rather than enjoy schoolwork
4. The best homework may be work done at home and brought into school
5. Policymakers, educators, and parents can all benefit from knowing the results of research on homework.

As Corno looks at more of the psychological aspects people base homework's effectiveness on, Kralovec and Buell (2001) propose that the public is basing their belief on homework's effectiveness in regards to achievement. They sum up these beliefs into three myths:

1. Homework increases academic achievement

2. Students' test scores will not be internationally competitive without undue amount of homework
3. Those who question homework want to weaken curriculum and encourage students' laziness.

Kralovec and Buell, both educators, were the first to openly challenge the idea of “the more homework the better.” Kralovec and Buell believe that educators should stop wasting their time on the questionable benefits of homework and start calling for adequate school funding, more professional development, and staffing professionals in after-school programs, and that it is these issues that are more important than the media and parents' concerns over homework (2001).

Kohn, an author, lecturer, and critic of homework, states in an interview in *neatoday* (2007) that he believes the myth surrounding homework is that it will further our students' understandings academically as well as teach them better study habits (p. 17). However, Kohn states that the research of homework given in elementary schools does not show an academic advantage in order to prove this myth correct. He also feels that the idea of students learning “good work habits is an urban myth” (Kohn, 2007, p. 17).

Finally, Cooper, a professor of psychology and director of the Program in Education at Duke University, as well as an extensive researcher on the topic of homework, takes more of a middle approach to the influences homework has on students. Cooper (2001) suggests that homework is beneficial only if teachers use their knowledge of the differentiating abilities of their students in order to guide what they expect from their students. He also feels that homework shares both positive and negative influences on a student's life.

With varying research results, misconceptions, and beliefs surrounding how homework has an influence on students, educators need to gather further information. This need reaches out

to policy makers, researchers, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students alike in that the ultimate goal is to educate the students and keep their motivations high.

## Review of the Literature

### *Review of the Previous Research*

#### *Early history.*

The debate over homework has been going on for over one hundred years. This topic has caused many individuals and groups to speak both for and against the issue. The passions, debates, and reasons for these arguments have grown over the years and it is such that homework holds its own particular influence and importance in America's educational history (Gill & Schlossman, 1996, 2004; Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

Homework practices in the early nineteenth century are unclear however it is known that because children had to work to help provide for the family attendance at school was erratic and the school year was shorter (Gill & Schlossman, 1996; Kralovec & Buell, 2000). At this time many schools consisted of one room classrooms generally filled with students in grades 1-4 which made it difficult for teachers to assign leveled homework (Gill & Schlossman, 1996, 2004). Few students continued on with school past the fifth grade and if they did, the process of learning turned into more drilling, recitation, and memorization and sometimes the memorization became hours of nightly homework (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Even more rare was when children continued on to high school. High school students would need to prepare at home for sometimes three hours prior to class (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 40). This raised concerns that homework was causing illness and creating health concerns in children, which led to an occasional campaign to limit the amount of homework (Gill & Schlossman, 1996, p. 31). However these campaigns did not last long as administrators expressed that schooling was

optional and those who wished to study needed to accept the amount of work that was expected of them (Gill & Schlossman, 1996; Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

However, towards the end of the nineteenth century thoughts began to change. Through the voice of Francis A. Walker, a Civil War hero and President of the Boston school board, the idea to put an end to homework was now a part of the national agenda (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 42). The people became concerned with whether homework was a threat to the health of the child and whether it actually provided any academic value (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 42). It was when a physician, Dr. Joseph Mayer Rice, became interested in looking at learning and the effects it can cause on the health of the child that the nation became aware. He looked specifically at spelling homework, which involves the drilling and memorization that was earlier deemed important, and concluded that it had no influence on their spelling ability (Gill & Schlossman, 1996, p. 33). With this came the movement toward progressive education in which the structure of teaching in schools would be brought to question (Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

During this time educators became the primary advocates toward the anti-homework movement. In addition, one key supporter was primarily concerned with the physical and mental harm he believed homework was causing students (Gill & Schlossman, 1996, p. 33). In the early 1900s Edward Bok, an editor for *Ladies' Home Journal* wrote a series of articles on the anti-homework sentiment. He claimed that homework caused an interference with family life and that it disrupted the lives of the students and their parents (as cited in Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 43). Bok also suggested eliminating homework until the end of grammar school, which was usually by the age of 15, and limit homework to one hour a night in high school (Gill & Schlossman, 1996). Anti-homework responses continued throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s with the

focus being that homework caused health risks towards children (Gill & Schlossman, 1996, 2004; Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

It was in the 1930s when a particular focus on what type of health issue homework caused came into play. It was thought that children needed a certain amount of time to play outdoors and be in the sun and homework was depriving these children from doing this, which in turn was a threat to the development of the child (Gill & Schlossman, 1996, 2004). Through the growth of progressive education came the notion of the development of the “whole child” in that schools were responsible for the child’s physical and mental well being (Gill & Schlossman, 1996). Homework was being seen as something that limited the child from developing these skills that could only be learned through free play (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Labor leaders also wanted their voice to be heard in that they felt homework was work, and work for the child needed to be regulated (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 44). Soon another attack emerged, other than damaging the family and the child, the critics argued that homework did not provide any academic benefits (Gill & Schlossman, 2004, p. 176).

Homework experiments became very popular during this time, which gave fuel to anti-homework sentiments. The general consensus amongst researchers was that homework in the elementary grades showed no positive influence on achievement in academics (Gill & Schlossman, 2004, p. 176). Otto, at the time a notable educational psychologist, included this finding in 1941 in the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* under homework (Gill & Schlossman, 1996, p. 55).

However in the 1950s the negative attitudes towards homework began to diminish. The progressive movement was replaced with an academic excellence movement in which the standards and academic disciplines were raised in American education (Gill & Schlossman,



2004, p. 177). This was largely caused by the Soviet launch of *Sputnik* in 1957. The thought that the Russians “beat” us into space changed the American public’s feelings toward education (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 46). People began worry that the current state of education “lacked rigor” and that students were not given proper preparation in regards to future technologies (Cooper, 2001). The unfavorable state of schooling in America was directed towards its lack of homework (Gill & Schlossman, 2004, p. 177). It was thought that through increasing the homework load the importance in education would return and the perceived problem would begin to correct itself. By 1961 the majority of educators and parents were once again in support of increasing the amount of homework (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 47).

During the late 1960s a new debate on homework came to the scenes. Parents were now complaining that both the school day and their workday was too long, leaving little time during the day for recreational activities, with homework causing tension between parents and their children (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 48). Mental health advocates became worried because of the increase in the suicide rate among school children, wondering if the pressures of school were too great (Wildman, 1968, p. 204). In response to this the American Educational Research Association made the following statement:

For mental health, children and young people need to engage in worthwhile out-of-school tasks suited to their individual capacities. Homework should supply such tasks and reasonable freedom in carrying them out. Whenever homework crowds out social experience, outdoor recreation, and creative activities, and whenever it usurps time that should be devoted to sleep, it is not meeting the basic needs of children and adolescents (as cited in Wildman, 1968, p. 204).

A division within the National Education Association also made its own recommendations in 1966 suggesting that (a) students in the early elementary grades should not be assigned homework and, (b) time limits need to be established for those students that would receive homework. If students have a period of free time during the week the organization suggested that

the student develop more of a social life both mentally and physically. Finally, they hoped to shift homework to being more inventive and fun (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 49).

The academic excellence movement fell between 1968 and 1972 with the politics surrounding the Vietnam War and the late civil rights movement. Attitudes towards homework began to change again in hopes of finding what would best help improve academic achievement (Gill & Schlossman, 2004, p. 179). Economic competitors around the world prompted the new academic excellence movement in the 1980s beginning with *A Nation at Risk*, a plea to the nation by The National Commission on Excellence in Education. According to the authors:

..the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people...Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them (1983).

Homework was again being discussed, and the demand was for more of it (Gill & Schlossman, 2004, p. 179). In 1986, the U.S. Department of Education published the article *What Works: Research on Teaching and Learning*, of which clearly supported homework and gave specific suggestions to teachers (Gill & Schlossman, 2004, p. 179). Schools soon began to require more homework and at earlier ages (Gill & Schlossman, 2000, p. 27).

With the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, homework has once again been brought to the spotlight of educational reform. Gill and Schlossman (2004) propose that the most recent movement in homework is one in which influences students in the elementary grades. With the focus on state standards, students in these grade levels are automatically expected to complete homework as part of their educational experience (p. 180).

*Are there different types of homework given?*

Homework can be categorized by its (a) amount; the length of the assignment and frequency with which it is assigned, (b) difficulty; easy, hard, or a blend of both, (c) purpose;

whether it is for instructional or noninstructional use, (d) skill area; in regards to what type of skill is necessary to complete the assignment, (e) choice for the student; whether the homework is required or voluntary, (f) completion deadline; long or short-term assignments, (g) degree of individualization; refers to whether the assignment has been individualized for the student or whether the entire class has been given the same assignment, and (h) social context; meaning how the assignment is completed, independently or with another person or group of people (Cooper, 2007, p. 5). Because there are different types and variations of homework teachers have many options when it comes to the assignment. This allows teachers the opportunity to look specifically at the influence each type can provide toward their students to help in determining if one type would be more influential over another.

Within the many different types of homework, Van Voorhis (2004) describes the three main functions for which homework exists, (a) instructional purposes, (b) communicative purposes, and (c) political purposes (p. 207). Within each function lie many purposes.

According to Van Voorhis (2004) *instructional purposes* include practice, preparation, participation, and personal development (p. 207). The most popular reason for giving homework is to practice a skill learned in class (Cooper, 2007, p. 6). In addition, assignments that present new material are used to prepare students for lessons in the future (Cooper, 2007, p. 6).

Homework also provides students with the opportunity to show their comprehension of the material in their own way as well as helps promote personal development through learning the responsibility of completing and handing in their assignment (Van Voorhis, 2004, p. 207).

Cooper (2007) includes a couple more instructional goals homework provides including “extension homework”, in which students take previously learned material and apply it to new

situations, and “integrative homework”, in which a student must combine a set of learned skills to create one product (p. 7).

Van Voorhis’ (2004) *communicative purposes* of which homework provides include parent-teacher communication, parent-child relations, and peer interactions. The author suggests that teachers can create assignments to promote these interactions (p. 208). Continuous assignments inform parents of what the child is learning in class and how they stand academically. Homework assignments may also require students to interact with a parent or peer thereby extending communication between school and home further (Van Voorhis, 2004, p. 208).

Homework provides *political purposes* when it is required based on school policy and/or to appease the school community (Van Voorhis, 2004, p. 208). Van Voorhis (2004) feels that when a school’s administration requires homework, it sends a message out to the community and to the parents that they hold high standards and assume high expectations on their students’ work (p. 208). Often, school districts will have a board policy in place on the homework requirements for their school. The degree to which the board defines their homework policy also sends a message out to the community in regards to what they expect of their students.

The Newark Unified School District has two sections available to the public on instruction of homework, one in their board policy and one in their administrative regulations (Board of Education, 2004). This four-page document clearly states their definition of homework, the purpose of homework, the recommended nightly minutes per grade level, from kindergarten through grades 12. In a section titled “Communication” they define the importance of the home-to-school link homework provides. Within the administrative regulations, they

define the types of homework, as well as the specific responsibilities and procedures of the students, teachers, and parents (Board of Education, 2004).

Perkins has a different outlook on homework. He believes that the goal of teaching students is to make them *understand*. However, his definition of understanding does not only include having knowledge and being able to demonstrate a skill, it carries a deeper meaning in which students engage in activities that cause them to generalize, apply themselves, question, and model (Perkins, 1993). This type of teaching challenges the traditional forms of homework that involve drill, recitation, and practice. Although Perkins (1993) agrees that this sort of knowledge is important, it will however have no use for the student if they do not fully *understand* the knowledge or skill. Homework however can reach the sort of understanding Perkins (1993) speaks of when it requires students to transfer their knowledge into real and everyday situations. The connections these activities create will help provide the students with a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Finally, Kohn (2006) reminds us that “one size doesn’t fit all” meaning that teachers cannot expect that every student in their class will be able to complete the same assignment in the same way as the next student (p. 184). Students in the same class have different academic levels of ability. Being given the same task may cause boredom in one student and frustration in another. In addition, one student may receive adequate or inadequate parental help and another student may receive none. Kohn (2006) feels that if homework is to be given, students should receive individual assignments that meet the student’s needs and interests, however if the same assignment is going to be given out to all the students, then homework should not be given (p. 185).

*Are there academic benefits to homework?*

The most common reasons given for the purpose of completing homework stems from the thinking that it provides an immediate influence on academic achievement (Cooper, 2007, p. 8). Cooper (2007) groups the academic benefits of homework into immediate academic effects and long-term academic benefits. One of the suggested immediate positive academic effects Cooper (2007) has found is that homework provides an additional feature to enhance the curriculum. He has also found that it assists students in gaining a better understanding of the material being taught, as well as helps students better retain the information at hand (p. 10). The long-term academic benefits Cooper (2007) has found pertain to academics but not necessarily achievement. One of these benefits includes developing better behaviors and routines of study as well as promoting students to learn during their own personal time. Cooper (2007) has also gathered that homework can provide better critical-thinking skills, which is high on Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, as well as supports students' positive outlook on school.

Cooper, a highly regarded researcher in the field of homework, gathered the results of a multitude of studies on homework and states in the most recent edition of his book on homework that when looking at elementary students and homework, the positive influences towards achievement are incomplete. He continues that although they found that homework can help to increase unit test scores, similar studies have found the increased level of achievement "to be weak; in fact, it borders on trivial" (2007, p. 37).

Cooper's response to this weakness in the elementary grades refers to cognitive psychology (2001). Studies show that younger students have shorter attention spans, and have a more difficult time tuning out interruptions and stimulations in their environment. In addition, younger students have not yet learned or mastered the skills of time management or beneficial

study habits (2001, p. 36). It is within these cognitive domains that Cooper (2001) suggests that within the elementary grade levels, homework should not be looked upon as a way to improve upon achievement but rather guide students towards a different objective (p. 36).

*Are there nonacademic benefits to homework?*

Upon initial reaction, homework may be seen as a means to provide students with a type of academic support. However, is it possible that it provides any type of nonacademic benefits to students as well? Cooper (2007) has found that because homework is designed to be completed at home without the help of a teacher and in a smaller amount of time than would be expected in the classroom, homework is a channel for students to learn self-discipline, how to better manage themselves and their time, as well as learn how to be more independent in the learning process (p. 9).

Kralovec and Buell (2001) have a different take on these nonacademic benefits. They first recognize that advocates argue that learning these traits at an early age help students in the long run when completing work in high school and beyond. However, Kralovec and Buell (2001) also remind us of Piaget's theory in that asking students to complete a task before they are developmentally ready can be destructive to their growth and progress as a student. They continue to argue that there is no concrete evidence to prove whether homework actually does encourage these positive behaviors (p. 41).

Corno and Xu (2004) relate homework to the job of childhood. They suggest that the goal of homework in the elementary grades be one of building upon positive "work habits and self-control" (p. 228). In a previous study by Corno and Xu (1998) they found that repeated homework experiences, which involved parent interaction, presented obvious occasions for the students to expand on their management skills and work habits (as is cited in Corno & Xu, 2004,

p. 229). Along with these nonacademic benefits, pacing was another skill that was learned when provided with weekly homework packets or projects (Corno & Xu, 2004, p. 229). Finally, Corno and Xu (2004) observed that when students in the elementary grades were given different types and levels of difficulty in homework assignments, the students began to learn how to focus their attention depending on the demand of the assignment (p. 230).

Kohn (2006) on the other hand has difficulty in comprehending the beliefs that homework provides nonacademic benefits. In regards to time management and responsibility he asserts that it is the parents who typically tell the students that homework must be completed before moving onto something else (p. 54). Kohn (2006) also wonders if it is even necessary to try and have homework teach young children these skills in that by nature, older children will have a better grasp at budgeting their time regardless of how much homework they received in the past. He also argues that the personality of the student needs to be factored in, in that different personality traits yield different habits regardless of the amount of experience one has in completing homework (p. 56). Kohn feels that these nonacademic benefits can actually be achieved through completing chores and other family activities (2006, p. 56).

*Does parental involvement have an influence on homework?*

When teachers send homework home they are opening the experiences of their students to parents through inclusion in their student's schoolwork, thereby calling for parents to take part in their student's academic lives (Cooper, 2007, p. 10). Cooper (2007) informs us that educators feel that the same type of parental involvement can cause both positive and negative influences on their students (p. 59). The types of homework involvement Cooper indicates are (a) direct participation in instruction, (b) providing guidelines over homework, and (c) supervising homework (2007, p. 64).



When parents directly participate in the instruction of their child, educators have found that it can both increase the rate at which the child learns as well as hinder the child's development, if parents teach their children a different method from the way they are being taught in class (Cooper, 2007, p. 59). The same effect can happen when parents supervise their children's homework, in that a proper amount of assistance may help them, but too much may hurt them; such as when answers are given rather than hints (Cooper, 2007, p. 59).

Cooper, Lindsay, and Nye (2000) looked at the behaviors of parents and how they related to student achievement, with an emphasis on "parenting-style differences" (as cited in Cooper, 2007, p. 64). In this study Cooper, et al. (2000) used four types of parenting styles to help them determine the parent's function in regards to homework and whether or not it yields beneficial to the student. Three of these "parenting styles" were taken from Grolnick and Ryan's (1989) study. These roles include: (a) *autonomy support*, the value with which parents hold in regards to solving problems independently, giving their children choices, and having a role in decision making; (b) *structure*, the degree of guidelines held over the child; (c) *involvement*, the level at which the parent is involved in the child's life (Grolnick and Ryan, 1989, p. 144); and the last style Cooper, et al. included was (d) *interference*, the degree to which the help given from parents makes the homework more difficult (as cited in Cooper, 2007, p. 65).

Through their study, Cooper, et al. (2000) found that some types of parental involvement are better than others (Cooper, 2007, p. 65). Their survey found that as the parents' *autonomy support* went up so did the child's achievement, however direct parent *involvement* did not result in higher academic achievement (Cooper, 2007, p. 66). Cooper proposes the reason for this is based on how the parents are choosing their involvement, basing it on how well their student is already doing in school. For example, if a student is doing well in school the parent

may focus on autonomy support, however if the child is not doing well in school, the parent might become directly involved in the student's homework (Cooper, 2007, p. 66).

It has been suggested through multiple studies of both random assignment and causal models that training parents to be properly involved in their child's homework can have a positive influence on completing homework, reducing problems with homework, as well as possibly improve the level of academic achievement in elementary school children (Cooper, 2007). However, Cooper is not surprised by the positive influence on parent training with students in elementary grades as it is easier for parents to become more involved with their child at this age (2007, p. 64).

Cooper (2007) believes that parental involvement can yield both positive and negative influences on students; while most are positive, parents can also interfere with their child's learning resulting in negative involvement. Included in these positive influences are creating a connection between school and home when students bring work home to either share or ask for assistance with, in which the parent becomes involved in the child's learning (Cooper, 2007, p. 10). However, outside involvement can also result in assistance in that answers are given rather than support in ways to problem solve (Cooper, 2007, p. 11).

*Does socioeconomic status have an influence on homework?*

Although teachers play a significant role in assigning homework, preparing the students to complete the assignments as well as follow up on completed work; it is really the student's individual differences that have more of an influence on homework (Cooper, Jackson, Nye, & Lindsay, 2001). Parents and siblings of the student may take part in assisting the child with their homework, but only if socioeconomic factors make it possible for them to be around. The home environment set in place also has an influence in either promoting or restraining the student from

proper completion of their work (Cooper, et al., 2001). Finally, the community plays a part in helping students complete their homework as to whether or not they are providing entertainment, which has the possibility of luring them away from their homework (Cooper, et al., 2001) or if the community is providing academic resources for students and at what cost.

Americans live in a society where family income level is a part of the classification process. Through this reality our students are in turn influenced, both positively and negatively. There is a belief that the United States provides an equal opportunity for all in regards to education through the facilitation of public schools. It is because of this that many Americans share the belief that if the poor regulated their social activities, worked harder, and completed more homework; they would also be able to share in what is known as the “American Dream” (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p.71). High-powered business leaders feel that poverty and the loss of jobs could be rid of, if students only worked harder, and that studying and working hard is the “American way” (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 7). However this is not always equally possible for every student.

The typical American family has changed over the past few decades. With the divorce rate rising, single-parent homes have become more of the norm. This generally causes a change in the economic pressures of the family as well as the academic responsibilities (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 6). Depending on the single parent’s abilities, this may have a major influence on children in whether or not they will continue to go to school, or whether they will need to drop out of school and get a job to help provide for the family, or in some cases juggle both. Very rarely does this leave time for the student to complete homework and study harder for that “American Dream”.

In order for students to complete homework, parents need to be involved at a practical level. In relation to income this can influence the environment in which the parents provide for students to complete their homework. It is necessary, in the least, for students to have a quiet, well-lit place to complete their homework (Cooper, 1994, Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Students who come from homes where income is not an issue generally have better or more resources available to them in order to complete their homework. These resources may include computers, appropriate lighting, books, a desk, and possibly even a tutor (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Students who already have these resources may also have educated parents that can assist them with their homework. On the other hand, low-income students may come from families with uneducated parents who are unable to help with academic work. Kralovec and Buell (2000) feel that it is possible for these parents to imply a negative attitude toward school based on their position in society and that the parents may even go as far as to discourage their children from completing their homework for various reasons including interference with the family, a job, or promises of future intangible opportunities (pp. 68-69).

Homework influences students in each economic class differently. Kralovec and Buell (2000) feel that homework is in a sense “abusive” when looking at the life of a student from a low socioeconomic class. Cooper feels that students in homes that are better off may increase their ability to stay on task, but for children who are already disadvantaged, homework can create difficult situations that are harmful to their learning thereby causing a reverse effect (as cited in Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 67). Kralovec and Buell (2000) feel that “...the practice of homework appears to further disadvantage the already disadvantaged” (p. 70). The authors continue to express that “Homework may just be one of those schooling practices, like tracking, that in fact serve to sort students according to class and to magnify the class differences inherent

in our society” (2000, p. 66). Therefore, if these “disadvantaged” students do not have the resources they need at home in order to complete homework, such as simply a “quiet, well-lit place” then as Kralovec and Buell (2000) suggest, why not provide it for them at school (p. 80).

The research points out the economic divide that exists for students around the practice of homework. Kralovec and Buell (2000) feel that the divide between students exist because it is the parents with money who are on the necessary school committees and see homework as a way for their students to increase their academic level and prepare themselves for college (p. 79). They continue that parents from low socioeconomic families are looked down upon and therefore their voices are not heard (2000, p. 79). However, there does seem to be a relationship between social class and test scores in the United States, in that the more money within the community, the higher the test scores (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 65).

Kralovec and Buell (2000) remind us that we must keep in mind that the environment of each student’s home is diverse and that there are different parameters in which students complete their homework (p. 80). They continue to point out the fact that because there are many books on the subject of, how to get your child to do their homework, proves that this is a difficult task for all, regardless of income level (p. 80).

*Does the environment in which homework is completed influence students?*

Homework is an academic component that is generally done outside of school therefore; teachers are unavailable during the time it is being completed (Corno, 2000, p. 529). The environment in which students complete their homework vary from home to home. It is also possible that homework can be completed outside of the home whether it be at an after school activity, on the bus, at work, or in a library. Wherever homework is completed, the homework environment is different from the student’s environment in the classroom (Corno, 2000, p. 529).

If students are completing homework within the home, there are many factors that influence its completion. The children's socioeconomic status is one of the factors that can have an impact on their home environment. Students that come from a high or stable socioeconomic status may have a multitude of resources available to them to successfully complete their work. Some of these resources might include computers, materials, adequate room and/or desk space, and proper lighting (Cooper, 1994). Students from a low socioeconomic status may have few/no materials, desk space, or lighting provided, making it difficult and possibly stressful for them to complete their homework.

Regardless of high or low socioeconomic status Cooper (2007) has also found that time resources can also be a factor, which influence the home environment in which homework takes place (p. 58). For instance, a family that can provide their child with a quiet place to work with all the necessary materials may not physically be available to help the student due to reasons such as commitments with work, tending to another child, and/or having to make dinner. Whereas, a student with a low socioeconomic status may not have as many "environmental supports" but may, in turn receive more individual time and support from their family (Cooper, 2007, p. 59).

The number of siblings in a household can also be a factor in students successfully completing their homework. Depending on how many resources or materials are available within the household, siblings may compete for them as they complete their work. More children in a household can also eliminate the opportunity to provide a quiet space for the children to work, as well as take time away from the amount of parental involvement each child could receive. As the number of siblings decrease within a household, the amount of homework support for a child increases (Cooper, 2007, p. 58).

Corno and Xu (2004) suggest that it is important for teachers and parents to teach children good work habits as well as create a supportive environment in order for elementary school students to complete their homework (p. 228). In their study in which they compare homework to a child's job, Corno and Xu (2004) found that students who were successful learned how to arrange a workspace that was conducive to completing their work. This included removing themselves from noise and other distractions (pp. 229-230). Finally, helping a child set up a homework routine will comfort the child within their environment (Corno, 2000, pp. 531-532).

*Does a student's culture have an influence on homework?*

In an article published in *Time Magazine*, titled "The Myth About Homework", Wallis (2006) states in her research she found that in Japan, Denmark, and the Czech Republic, all nations that tend to surpass the United States on student achievement tests, have less homework assigned to them than countries such as Greece, Thailand, and Iran who score lower on the tests and have an abundance of homework. This raises the question as to whether culture has an influence on what, where, and how students complete homework.

Chen and Stevenson of the University of Michigan studied a group of 3,500 elementary students within three countries, the United States, Japan, and China. They were interested in taking a closer look across the cultures as to how much time is spent completing homework and their beliefs and attitudes towards homework. The researchers collected their information through interviews with the students and their parents as well as the teachers of first and fifth graders and specifically designed achievement tests (Chen & Stevenson, 1989). Chen and Stevenson thought it would be appropriate to look at homework within these cultures in

particular due to the level of high achievement within Japanese and Chinese school children and the average scores of American students in cross-national studies (p. 551).

Through interviewing the mothers of the students who were being studied, Chen and Stevenson (1989) wanted to find out about how much time their children spent doing homework. The researchers also asked the teachers to estimate the amount of time their homework assignments required (p. 554). They found that the mothers' estimates were aligned with the teachers' estimates in that Chinese students were assigned and spent the most amount of time on homework, followed by Japanese students, followed by American students. Keeping in mind that Chinese students were found to spend the most amount of time on homework, the Japanese students were often found spending twice as much time or more than the American students (p. 556). Chen and Stevenson (1989) were surprised to find that Japanese students spent less time on homework than Chinese students due to stereotypes of Japanese students being closely watched at home by "the well-known *kyoiku mama* (educated mom)" (p.558). They explained this difference in that Japanese students, more so than Chinese and American students, spend a great deal of time in after-school programs where they can possibly be given further work to be completed (p. 560).

Chen and Stevenson (1989) then looked at the children's attitudes towards homework. They found that in general American children do not enjoy completing homework however, Chinese students do enjoy completing homework, as well as find it valuable and practical. In the Chinese culture, homework is the main activity after school therefore much time is devoted to it. Japanese students were indifferent in their attitude toward homework in that they realize it is important however gave no indication of enjoying it (Chen & Stevenson, 1989).



Chen and Stevenson (1989) did not find any relationship within the cultures between the time spent on homework and the students' academic achievement. The researchers claim that the time spent on homework is due to the length of the assignments given by the teacher and the child's ability (p. 560). Chen and Stevenson (1989) also found that if the homework is appealing to the students as well as see the practicality of it, then homework can contribute towards academic achievement. However, if the assignments are poorly created in that they are repetitive, and/or uninteresting, then increasing the amount of homework will not necessarily provide a positive influence (p. 560). Finally, when comparing the attitudes of the Chinese and Japanese societies Chen and Stevenson (1989) found that both parents and teachers feel that homework plays an important role in the success of their students and that American teachers do not place the value on homework as high in relation to the success of their students (p.560).

Kralovec and Buell (2000) have a different take on Americans' attitudes toward homework. They believe that from the very beginning, Americans have had a strong work ethic. With that teachers were in charge of preparing their students for a world in which they must work in order to survive, therefore the teachers have had to become firm and consistent and out of this came homework. However, they also believe that this cultural norm has become a label for the students in regards to how they perform which will in effect relate to their self-esteem. Kralovec and Buell even go so far as to suggest that homework may be one of the devices that are purposefully used to hinder students that have a low socioeconomic status (p. 69).

Kralovec and Buell (2000) strongly feel that in the American culture the emphasis on homework is used to prepare students for the business world in which they will need to be ready for an abundance of work and long hours. They also argue that homework is providing "a form

of psychological preparation” for the society in which we live in. They feel that this sort of stress and reasoning for which homework is given is problematic (p. 87).

Kohn (2006) argues that when people look across and compare student cultures, it is the test scores that are used in order to rank the countries’ education systems (p. 42). It is often seen that other countries’ higher test scores compared with American students’ lower test scores is caused from Americans receiving less homework. Therefore, the conclusion is often made that less homework causes lower scores, and/or if more homework were assigned, scores would go up (pp. 42-43). Although Kohn finds this conclusion not to be true he backs it up with a study of empirical evidence in which two researchers, Baker and Letendre (as cited in Kohn, 2006) compared data from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) from 1994 to 1999 within 50 countries:

Not only did we fail to find any positive relationships, (but) the overall correlations between national average student achievement and national averages in the frequency, total amount, and percentage of teachers who used homework in grading are all *negative!* If these data can be extrapolated to other subjects – a research topic that warrants immediate study, in our opinion – then countries that try to improve their standing in the world rankings of student achievement by raising the amount of homework might actually be undermining their own success... (Baker and Letendre, p. 127-128, as cited in Kohn, 2006, p. 43).

Kralovec and Buell (2000) wonder why, if there is no solid evidence that proves homework provides academic achievement and yet it continues to hold such a powerful influence on our culture, there must be something more in homework than just making our students more competent. They continue that because homework has become such a staple in our culture there is much resistance to change (p. 81).

*Does homework cause positive or negative psychological influences on students?*

Quite often when a student complains about school they might hear their parent, teacher, or peer tell them that school is their job. This statement carries a heavy meaning in that it is

essentially telling the student that in order to survive one needs to work, even at their age. Corno and Xu (2004) exemplify this understanding through a series of empirical studies. Through their research in looking at how students tackle homework they found a commonality between homework and having a job (Corno & Xu, 2004, p. 227). The researchers list many benefits that elementary students receive through homework such as learning how to confront a difficult piece of homework by completing it first while they are “fresh” or by breaking up the load with easier tasks (p. 228). Through this, students will learn the benefits of multitasking as well as how to react when confronted with a challenging task.

Corno and Xu (2004) understand that students are rarely filled with excitement when having to complete homework (p. 228) however, they have also experienced students informing them that they realize there are many things in life one may not want to do, but will have to learn how to work through it anyway. Corno and Xu feel that through completing homework students will be better prepared for learning how to deal with situations such as these in the future (2004, p. 229).

In their study Corno and Xu (2004) also found that the elementary students in which they researched began to help themselves get through their homework by self-checking their motivation level (p. 230). When a feeling of frustration arose they found that some students used “positive self-talk” to help them work through the assignment (2004, p. 230). In contrast, when homework is completed and good grades are obtained of which essentially leads to academic advancement, students learn that completing homework can lead to a positive compensation (Corno & Xu, 2004).

Bempechat (2004) looks at homework as a critical component in assisting a child develop achievement motivation (p. 189). In particular, participating in homework, even in elementary

school, provides students with a greater amount of time and experience to build on routines for studying, to learn how to become successful in learning as well as to learn how to manage when the homework is difficult (Bempechat, 2004, p. 189).

Finally, Corno (1996) reminds us that “Students do seek pleasure and avoid pain – this is a universal principal of motivation” (p. 29). Corno suggests that teachers provide positive experiences with homework early on and only gradually increase its difficulty. Parents as well need to support a positive environment that encourages and supports their student. Together parents and teachers should keep the lines of communication open at all times and tackle problems as they arise (Corno, 1996, p. 29). In order for homework not to become something students fear, it needs to be based on the motivations and interests of the students (Corno, 1996, p. 29).

*Does the amount of time spent on homework have an influence on students?*

Students spend different amounts of time on homework for a number of different reasons. Some of these reasons might be determined by academic ability, environmental factors, economic factors, parental involvement and/or the actual amount of homework assigned by the teacher. Whatever the reason many researchers have found that the amount of time spent on homework differs, positively or negatively, in regards to their grade level. However, according to Cooper (as cited in Research/Practice Newsletter, 1994) “Data show that homework accounts for about 20% of the total time the typical American student spends on academic tasks...” This indicates that homework is an important focus of a student’s school day.

In looking specifically at students in the elementary grades, national research found in 1999 that about 53% of nine year-olds, which are typically third graders, spent less than one hour on homework per night. About 12% of nine year-olds reported spending between one and two

hours on homework per night, and about 5% spent more than two hours per night on homework (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Keeping these statistics in mind, the National Education Association state,

Most educators agree that for children in grades K-2, homework is more effective when it does not exceed 10-20 minutes each school day; older children, in grades 3-6, can handle 30-60 minutes a day (2006).

Many educators know this idea as the Ten Minute Rule. In other words, ten minutes of homework is multiplied by the student's grade level indicating how much time they should spend on homework per night (Cooper, 2001, p. 37).

Cooper (2001) also looked at a group of 50 studies, which compared the amount of time students spend on homework with their level of achievement. He found that 43 of the studies found that students who spent more time on homework had a higher level of achievement, and that the other seven studies shown students who spent more time on homework had a lower level of achievement. Cooper also found through this research that grade level was a strong indicator of whether the amount of homework helped increase the student's achievement level. For grades 3-5 he found the correlation to be nearly zero (Cooper, 2001, p. 36). Leone and Richards (as cited in The Center for Public Education, 2007) found in their correlation study that students in grades two through four shown a negative correlation between the amount of time students spend on homework and their reported grades.

Another form of empirical evidence can be found through the Nation's Report Card, which provides information to the public about the academic achievements of elementary and secondary students in the United States. The measure of achievement is found through a variety of subjects provided by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). When taking the test, students are often asked questions that pertain to them. Recently, one of the questions

asked was how much time they spend on homework. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a division of the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), is the primary federal unit that is used to collect and analyze data that is related to education. The results from the reading exam from 1992-2000 show that students in the fourth grade who spend more than one hour on homework and students who do not have homework averaged the same score (IES, 2001). Within the 2000 fourth grade mathematics exam, students who reported spending a half hour on homework scored about the same average as students who completed no homework, falling only slightly behind the highest average which were students who reported doing fifteen minutes of homework per night. Students who averaged forty-five minutes or more of homework scored lower than students who did no homework (IES, 2003).

Cooper (2007) however, sheds light on one of the reasons why teachers assign homework at the elementary grades and that is to help develop the skill of time management (p. 31). This skill is seldom measured on standardized tests thereby making it difficult to separate the student's level of achievement with the amount of time it takes to complete their homework.

*Do after school programs and the community have an influence on homework?*

As was mentioned by the principal of a San Francisco Bay Area elementary school, students these days are overscheduled which leaves no time for play (M. Clark, personal communication, January 30, 2007). Therefore coming home after soccer practice, gymnastics class, Lego class, etc. to eat dinner and then complete homework has left little time for families to spend quality time together. However, not every child has the same after school experiences, some are overextended in activities, others are unsupervised. However different their experiences may be, Cooper (2007) uses three principles to help determine whether their time spent after school will have a positive or negative effect toward their schoolwork (p. 56).

The first principle looks at whether the activity supports academic skills. These academic skills can be strengthened through a variety of ways including a job, game, television program, etc. The second principle looks at whether the activity helps promote the value of school as well as helps them feel part of the school community, either through team sports, clubs, or even academic related work throughout the working community. The third principle has to do with time and whether or not the activity takes time away from school (Cooper, 2007, p. 57). In general Cooper (2007) feels that whatever the after school activity may be, as long as it promotes academic skills or a positive outlook on school “can lead to improved achievement, either directly or indirectly” (p. 58). In contrast, activities that supersede learning or promote a negative outlook toward school may reduce achievement (Cooper, 2007, p. 58).

In conjunction with Cooper’s principles, Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, and Brown (2004) agree that students can benefit from after school activities, especially those that are at-risk students. The thought process being that the extracurricular activities can help the students feel more connected with their school (p. 223). However, Cosden et al. (2004) have also found that if students spend too much time on an outside activity it can have a negative effect on the focus of their schoolwork (p. 223). This particularly relates to the overscheduled child. Some students that participate in these types of extracurricular activities may be losing out on the benefits of what an after school homework program can provide for them.

Cosden et al. (2004) looked at many studies on after school academic assistance programs and found that many of these programs not only assisted the students with their academic needs by providing structure and support, they also helped them with the students’ self-confidence and self-esteem. In addition, these programs helped the students become more motivated in school and assisted in creating a bond between the student and their school. Finally,

Cosden et al. (2004) also found that when the students attended these after school academic, or homework programs, the teachers' perceptions positively changed in regards to the effort the student was putting forth.

Cooper (2007) found it difficult to determine whether after school homework programs were necessarily beneficial toward homework itself because many of the programs provide other academic activities on top of homework assistance (p. 71). However, Cooper does agree that participating in an after school program provides a positive influence on achievement in children (2007, p. 71). However the objective of an after school homework program should be one that does not take away from family and/or community involvement (Cosden et al., 2004).

Another type of after school support, which is community-based are homework hotlines. These hotlines have been put in place for many reasons including students who have no parental or adult support, parents who do not understand the assignment, as well as students who have limited access to materials (Reach & Cooper, 2004). These conditions have caused some school districts to provide after school assistance through a homework hotline.

According to Cooper (2007), homework hotlines are "telephone services in which teachers or other knowledgeable people are available to answer questions related to homework problems" (p. 67). These hotlines can provide live assistance as well as a recording of information regarding an assignment. Although the purpose of the hotline is to provide students with academic assistance with their homework, Reach and Cooper (2004) found that some students use the hotline to communicate with an adult in order to meet their emotional needs (p. 238). Reach and Cooper (2004) continue to suggest that the hotline organizers need to determine in advance what they can and cannot provide assistance with. In general, homework hotlines can



be an effective method for providing homework assistance to students in need (Reach & Cooper, 2004, p. 240).

After school homework programs and homework hotlines have shown to be beneficial for students who need academic support, as have extracurricular activities that provide a connection between the school and the student. In a survey conducted by Cooper, Valentine, Nye & Lindsay (1999), looking at the relationship between homework and achievement, they found that students who spent more time participating in after school programs and spent less time working or watching television had higher test scores and grades (as is cited in Cooper, 2007, p. 56).

*How is teacher training related to homework?*

In the United States, many teachers report that within their education credential courses, if homework was discussed it was in relation to subjects. It was rarely discussed, if at all, what type of homework should be assigned, how much to give, and how to communicate homework with those at home (Cooper, 1992). Much is left up to the teacher when it comes to the homework assignment. A teacher decides if the material should include a review, introduce new information, expand on an idea, or integrate a number of methods. Teachers decide how much time they want their students to spend on homework and who will complete some, all, or none of the assignment. Teachers can give all of their students the same assignment or tailor an assignment specifically for a student. Teachers can also choose how much time and effort they want to put into planning their homework assignment/s (Cooper, 1992). This leaves a lot up to a teacher, who as Cooper mentions above, has not received adequate training on devising the homework assignment.

Corno (1996) warns teachers who believe homework assignments will, by design support what has been learned in school, in that a variety of students will react differently to the same homework assignment. The ability to complete an assignment has to do with the student's academic ability, home environment, study skills, and genuine interests (p. 28). Being able to communicate effectively between the teacher and parents is also a factor to consider (Corno & Xu, 2004, p. 233). Furthermore, when schools obtain policies on homework, the curriculum has been taken out of the hands of teachers and placed in those who may have little experience or knowledge regarding their students' abilities (Corno, 1996, p. 29).

Another factor that varies from teacher to teacher is what they do with the homework assignment once it is turned into them. Some teachers may collect homework, grade them, and/or give feedback. Other teachers may go over it in class, or just check it in for completeness. In addition will the content be covered in a test, or will it be used in a class discussion? Whatever teachers do with homework has an influence on its effectiveness (Cooper, 1992).

Completing a homework assignment can often be a stressful time for some students. Corno and Xu (2004) hope that teachers will help their students learn how to deal with this sort of stress when it is encountered during a difficult assignment (p. 233). However, like designing the homework assignment, this too would need to be taught.

Finally, Van Voorhis (2004) suggests that more time needs to be given to teachers in order to become more knowledgeable about homework through professional development opportunities. He continues that teachers need to learn about the reasons for giving homework, how much time should be spent on homework, how to communicate between home and school regarding homework requirements, as well as be given alternative or additional homework activities (p. 211). Van Voorhis (2004) believes that through this professional development,

teachers will have more of an opportunity to open the lines of communication with families and create a better motivational experience for students completing homework (p. 211).

*Summary of Major Themes*

There are different aspects in a student's life that can form a positive and/or negative influence on homework. The major themes found within the research involved educational, economic, and parental influences. Throughout the research, many additional influences toward homework were found such as time spent on homework, the environment in which it is completed, after school activities, types of homework, teacher training, and emotional well being; however it was the educational, economic, and parental influences of which were the root cause of these added influences toward homework.

One of the most common reasons given for the purpose of assigning homework are the educational influences, both academic and nonacademic, it provides for the student. Cooper (2001) recognized these supposed influences when beginning his research such as homework provides an immediate gateway toward retaining new material, it teaches study skills, as well as informs students that learning can take place outside of the classroom (p. 34). Homework also teaches students how to be more responsible and independent learners (Cooper, 2001, p. 34). Another common reason for assigning homework is to provide a link for parents to become more involved in their children's schooling (Cooper, 2001, p. 34). If economic opportunities provide, parents are then given the opportunity to show their appreciation in their children's work as well as offer educational support both through providing materials and structure.

However, these positive influences can often turn negative. While homework has the potential to provide educational benefits to students, educators and parents worry that it can also cause students to become uninterested in the information (Cooper, 2001, p. 35), which can then

change their motivation in the classroom. It is also argued that homework takes free time away from students to play, relax, or participate in activities within the community (Cooper, 2001, p. 35). Alternatively, researchers have found that after school activities alone can also provide academic and nonacademic influences on a student, aside from assigning homework (Cooper, 2007, p. 57). There is also the possibility of negative or even a lack of parental involvement with homework. If a parent teaches a concept to their child in a way that is different from their teacher, or if the parent has poor mentoring skills, this can make homework harder for the student (Cooper, 2007, p. 65). Parents can also unknowingly promote cheating if their guidance turns into giving their child the answer (Cooper, 2001, p. 35).

Finally, homework can highlight economic differences among students (Cooper, 2001, p. 35). Students from middle and upper class backgrounds may be provided with an environment that is conducive to completing a homework assignment, whereas a student from a low socioeconomic family may have a difficult time completing the assignment. These difficulties can arise from a lack of materials, improper environmental conditions, or a need to work after school, which takes time away from their assignment (Cooper, 2001, p. 35).

Educational, parental, and economic influences, both positive and negative, were found interwoven within themselves as well as each of the subcategories found in the literature on homework. These three pieces, together or separate, are what cause an unequal opportunity for students when homework is assigned (Cooper, 2001, p. 35).

## Discussion

### *Summary of Major Findings*

Throughout time our nation's feelings towards homework have been that of a cyclical nature. It seems as though every thirty years either an anti-homework or pro-homework

movement is in place. Currently many books and journal articles have been published informing the nation of homework's disadvantages. Locally schools in the San Francisco Bay Area have been rethinking their homework policies in that they are severely modifying them asking students to instead only read and complete math facts (M. Clark, personal communication, January 30, 2007; Melendez, 2007).

In looking at homework and the impact it has on students in the elementary grades, three influences came up time and time again, educational, socioeconomic, and parental. Regardless of the influence, both positive and negative stimuli were found. These major influences were also found to be interwoven. For example, a high socioeconomic family may have little, to no parental involvement if both parents are busy working, and a low socioeconomic family may not be able to give proper academic advice due to their own lack of education. As well, parents may be actively involved in their children's schooling providing them with important nonacademic skills such as time management, and responsibility, and a high socioeconomic family may have the means to provide their children with the necessary materials to aide in their studies.

#### *Limitations/Gaps in the Literature*

Throughout the research on the influences of homework, culture was one aspect that seemed to be lacking in richness. Chen and Stevenson (1989) were two researchers that conducted a cross-cultural examination on homework however; there were not many other studies to cross-reference their findings. Information on national student scores can be found through the Department of Education although the reasons and implications for why these scores are different across nations is lacking.

In examining a local school district's board policy on homework I ran into a problem in that there was no official board policy. As mentioned earlier, this is not an uncommon finding in

that 35% of school districts seem to lack a board policy on homework (Roderique et al, 1994). Upon interviewing the principal I learned that creating a homework policy was a goal she had set this year, in hopes that the staff would agree upon an official policy to have in place for the start of the following school year. In looking further I found an older school pamphlet, which included a short paragraph on the school's previous homework policy, basically listing the amount of time each grade level was expected to complete per night. In looking at other schools and their homework policies I was able to obtain an in depth school board policy on homework from another San Francisco Bay Area school. In looking at the two school policies on homework I was able to compare and contrast the seriousness and depth that some schools take when setting up a homework policy. It would be difficult to believe that the values of the policies, in depth or not, wouldn't be implied through the administration, onto the teachers and eventually onto their students.

In addition there is a lack of teacher training on the subject of homework. Teacher credential programs may mention homework occasionally within a course, however there is no specific class on homework. In turn, this means that teachers are not being taught how, when, what, and who to assign homework. Each of these factors must be taken into account for a student to be successful with the assignment. As well, teachers also need to be trained on what to do with homework after it is returned to the classroom.

Finally, teachers personal feelings, perceptions, and the ways in which they assign homework in relation to their students academic achievement is lacking in the literature. Teachers hold a strong influence over many of their students. Conducting a study on how a teacher's feelings on homework have an effect on their students' academic achievement could

provide useful information toward the advancement of professional development for teachers on homework.

*Implications for Future Research*

If homework continues as a nightly ritual within a student's academic career it is necessary to research further (a) which types of homework are most beneficial for which types of students, and (b) how to incorporate proper training methods of giving homework to current and future teachers.

Kohn mentioned that homework is not something that suits a 'one size fits all' approach (2006, p. 184) and because of this, further research needs to be completed on how to make homework more individual to the student, without overburdening the teacher. If homework is to continue in elementary schools, educators need to realize that not all students have the same parental and/or socioeconomic influences at home. As well, students within the same classroom reach a range of academic levels. This information needs to be considered when devising a plan on when, how, and what homework will look like for each of the students differentiating needs.

Further research also needs to be conducted on homework practices outside the United States. It is obvious that the United States is academically competitive with nations around the globe however the little research that has been completed tells us that American students spend more time on homework yet, test scores are not as high as other countries where students spend less time on homework. Researching homework's cultural influence might help school districts better understand and devise their homework policies.

While this particular discussion pertained to homework in the elementary grades in which research shows that homework shows no academic benefit, homework in the middle school grades show some academic benefit and homework in the high school grades show a

definite academic benefit (Cooper, 2001). Further research needs to be obtained into whether the increase in academic benefit in regards to grade level has to do with an early introduction to homework in the elementary grades. If homework was introduced in middle school would it still show the same amount of academic benefit or does the academic benefit gradually increase as the student becomes more familiar with the idea and routine of homework?

*Overall Significance of the Literature*

Often times within the same school one finds a variety of opinions on homework and how it is implemented in a school. Some parents may feel that the teachers assign too much, others may feel that there is not enough, while still others may be fine with the amount but not happy with the content. Teachers may also vary in their opinion on homework, when to assign it, how much to give, what to include, and how they will manage it once it is received. This can cause a great deal of confusion among the school community. Problems such as these need to be handled beginning at the district level, where a district policy on homework will be created, followed by a school policy and finally a classroom policy. Many of the following suggestions have been referenced through Cooper, 2007, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

School districts can be made up of one school or a large number of schools therefore, when selecting a board policy on homework a district may need to lessen the amount of detail due to the variety of student populations their district makes up. A district policy on homework needs to include explicit reasoning for why homework is assigned in order to show its value. Another important element to include is a policy on how much time each grade level is expected to spend on homework. Finally, the district needs to address that each student is unique in his or her own way, and in doing so indicate that schools will determine how to accommodate students with special needs. At the time of this writing the Newark Memorial Unified School District has



an example of a board policy on homework (available at <http://www.nmhs.nusd.k12.ca.us/Nmhs/HWpolicy/Homeworkpolicy.htm>).

Schools need to decide on a homework policy that best suits their student population. Specifically the general population's socioeconomic status and parental involvement, and what potential influence this will have on their students. Schools have more flexibility to recognize their students' diverse backgrounds, aside from the general population, in determining how they will accommodate those students with special needs. This recognition needs to be included in the school's policy. A school's homework policy needs to include the administrators' role in homework, including but not limited to making sure the policy is followed correctly. The policy needs to include the teacher's role in homework, as well as the student's role. Each school needs to determine what they expect the parents' role to be and include this in their homework policy as well as restate the board's policy on time requirements per grade level, and the purpose of assigning homework.

A classroom homework policy may reiterate the time requirements, purpose of, and parental requirements as stated by the district and/or school however, it too should include information that is relevant to the classroom. A classroom policy needs to clearly state the importance of communicating with the teacher in a timely manner if homework problems arise. The policy should include the types of homework assignments that will be sent home along with the teacher's grading policy.

Research shows that parental influence is a large factor in student's social and mental cognitive beliefs toward homework. Every homework policy should contain a separate section on parental involvement. Research shows that there is both positive and negative parental involvement. The policy needs to include the parents specific responsibilities in regards to

homework, as well as what to do if these cannot be met. (An example of a homework policy specifically stating parents' responsibilities can be found in Cooper, 2007, p. 88). Some of these responsibilities may include, but are not limited to; be encouraging of your child and their work, help your child set up a homework routine, guide your child toward the answer rather than answering it for them, and contact their teacher immediately if there is a problem. As well, teachers should be prepared to train their parents on their homework responsibilities at the start of the school year.

Overall, homework has the potential to be both positive and negative within a student's academic career. One of the many deciding factors are the student's educational, socioeconomic, and parental influences outside of the classroom. To make homework more of a positive experience and to better meet the needs of every student who attends a school where homework is assigned, the district, school, and teacher need to work together and agree upon an adopted homework policy that explicitly meets the needs of their student body. This may include professional development for current teachers and required curriculum for future teachers. Teachers and administrators need to be willing to adopt and/or modify their homework policy for homework to have an overall positive influence on students.

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