

Parents and Homework: A Phenomenological Investigation

by

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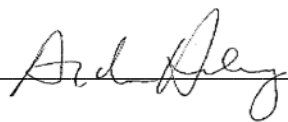
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Abstract

Throughout history, perspectives on homework have constantly been changing, ranging between positive and negative attitudes towards homework. This is largely the result of current events and research. If one desired, research could be found to support both favourable and unfavourable perspectives on homework. Research has also demonstrated that parent involvement in homework has a substantial impact on its outcomes. Therefore, this research aimed to gain a better understanding of parents' perceptions on homework. The hope was that this research would provide greater insight into the homework debate, providing educators with guidance for homework practice and creating questions for further research. The research design used was a qualitative phenomenological investigation. To investigate parents' views of homework, six parents were randomly chosen from a Christian independent school in an urban area of British Columbia. The six parents were interviewed using open ended questions. The interviews underwent thematic analysis and common themes were established. The most common themes regarding parents' perspectives on homework were that (1) *there are benefits to homework*, (2) *homework should not be new material*, (3) *homework should not require parental support*, (4) *homework prevents children from playing*, and (5) *homework places burdens on families*. Minor themes evident were that (6) *parents' past experiences in their own education influence their view of homework* and (7) *there is a need for clear expectations regarding homework*. An area that displayed much inconsistency is the amount of homework, as (8) *parents opinions on a desired amount of homework varied greatly*. The research provided great insight into parents' perceptions on homework for educators, while also creating questions to be explored in further research.

Keywords: Parents' Perceptions, Homework, Phenomenological, Thematic Analysis

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Parents and Homework: A Phenomenological Investigation

Chapter 1

The Problem

“But that is the way we have always done it.” “If it isn’t broke, don’t fix it.” These are two common phrases in our world today, especially in the world of education. I have heard both of these phrases used in discussions about homework. In a world that is changing daily with new technologies, responsibilities, and family structures, it is important to constantly evaluate how ‘things are done’ and how ‘things can be fixed.’ For example, with new technologies, students have unlimited access to information at their fingertips. Consequently, students do not need to know all the facts; rather, they need to know how to find the facts and how to think critically and collaboratively once they have received the facts. In a changing world, the topic of homework must be placed under the microscope, as well.

In placing a topic like homework under the microscope, research needs to be completed and critically evaluated so that a well-rounded philosophy regarding homework can be developed. Currently, there is a huge range between countries with regards to the amount of time students spend working on their school work. Two countries that are considered to be in the top tier of education systems, Finland and South Korea, are on opposite ends of the spectrum. In 2012, Finland’s education system was ranked number one, and South Korea’s education system was ranked number two (DeNisco, 2013). Finnish children have a short school day with few homework assignments (DeNisco, 2013), while South Korean students experience long school days, followed by tutoring and rote learning assignments (DeNisco, 2013). It is important to consider what homework approaches might be effective and beneficial for our contexts here in southwestern British Columbia.

Currently, research has done little to shape homework policies and practices (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). A review of research by Cooper, Robinson, and Patall (2006) states that since research can be found to support both sides of the argument for and against homework, the development of consistent policies and practices has been challenging. Consequently, some teachers decide that they are not going to give any homework, while other teachers decide to give a few hours of homework each night. As research is completed on the topic of homework, educators will be able to utilize homework in a way that maximizes the benefits and minimizes the negatives of homework.

As an educator myself, I desire to know how to best utilize homework. I am passionate about seeing students experience success and I am not content to just continue what I am doing without identifying the best practices. I often ask myself the following questions. Do I need to place more structure into the homework that I give my students? Is homework even necessary? What are parents' perceptions on homework? How does homework impact family life? In reading articles and talking to educators it is difficult to gain a clear understanding on how I should proceed in my own practice, as evidenced by the wide range of perspectives. Due to my own uncertainties, I desired to pursue more research in the area of homework. I decided to pursue parents' perceptions because parents have an important viewpoint on homework, understanding the effect homework has on their child and their family. My hope is that my research on parents' perspectives on homework will not just aid me in my homework practices, but will be of benefit to other educators as well.

Background to the Problem

Homework is defined as tasks that are carried about by students during non-instructional time (Cooper, 1989). Homework does not include in school guided study (study hall or library

time), home study courses, or extracurricular activities (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008).

Homework is extra work intended to enhance instruction, providing students with the opportunity to practice and review the material presented in class (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). In some situations homework is used to establish communication between parents and children, fulfill directions from school administrators, or punish students (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). For this paper, homework will be defined as any school work that is completed outside of school hours, whether it is completed at home or another location. The research undertaken in this study does not outline a specific purpose of homework, but seeks to recognize what parents see the purpose of homework to be.

Understanding parents' perspectives is important because parents have a major impact in their child's homework. Parents can be involved in homework in a variety of ways. For example, parents provide space and materials for homework, interact with the teachers, monitor homework completion, make rules about when and where homework is to be completed, respond to questions about homework and provide feedback (Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Parents also are called upon at times to provide direct homework instruction (Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). As parents are involved in their child's homework, they can't help but display their beliefs about schoolwork, homework, and learning (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). If parents have a positive attitude about homework, their optimism may transfer to the way their children view homework and schoolwork (Harris Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998). Therefore, parents' attitudes toward homework could have a significant impact not only on how their children view homework, but also on their children's view of school. Parents are sometimes very involved in their children's homework, thus highlighting the importance of understanding parents' perspectives surrounding homework.

Research Problem

The problem being addressed is the need for a greater understanding of parents' perceptions regarding homework. Homework could be either a positive or negative experience for families, depending upon the needs of the individual academic child, the structure of the family, and parental attitudes towards academics versus other activities after school. Surprisingly, the number of research studies on parents' attitudes towards homework is limited. Historically, examinations of parents perceptions towards homework in the early- to mid-20th century concluded that parents wanted homework because it connected them to what their children were doing at school (Gill & Schlossman, 1960).

More recent, primarily qualitative research studies offer a mix of findings. Corno and Xu (2004) found that parents perceived their children as doing well when they completed all their homework and doing poorly when they did not complete their homework. Corno and Xu (2004) also found that parents felt that a teacher cared about their child when they assigned their child homework and that homework taught their child how to be organized and kept them out of trouble.

There is no previous research on whether parental beliefs surrounding homework are influenced by deeper core values, whether these be secular or religious, and sociocultural variables, such as degree of religiosity, religious affiliation or ethnicity. As the proposed opportunity sample will be drawn from a Christian school, the literature review will include findings with regard to attitudes towards school achievement from many religious and secular perspectives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to gain a phenomenological understanding of parents' attitudes towards homework. The aim is to enable educators to better understand homework within the context of family and belief systems. As parents share their perceptions regarding homework, educators will gain significant insight into how homework is viewed by the people who have major impact on the completion of homework.

Aim and Prediction

Phenomenological research does not strive to test a hypothesis, but aims to understand a phenomenon by allowing the data which is collected to speak for itself (Osborne, 1990). The aim of the research is to investigate whether parents believe homework to be positive or negative. Parental involvement in homework is not simple, as it is influenced by involvement strategies, the child's age, the child's ability, resources at home, and the parents' own mentoring skills (Patall et al., 2008). Other factors could include the amount of time parents have to help their children, the number of parents present in the home, and parents' attitudes towards homework. Every family has different schedules and their children have different needs. For example, some parents work standard weekday times and others work nonstandard weekday times. The families of parents who work nonstandard schedules sometimes experience inferior family function, more depressive symptoms, and less effective parenting capabilities according to one study (Strazdins, Clements, Korda, Broom, & D'Souza, 2006). Therefore, it is predicted that parents' perceptions of homework will vary depending on the realities present within their child and family lives.

Importance of the Study

The research will give educators a greater understanding of the thoughts parents have towards homework. As educators have greater understanding of what parents believe to be

negative and positive aspects of homework, they will be guided in their practice with regards to homework. For example, educators may gain understanding as to the type of homework they should assign as well as the amount of homework they should prescribe. It is also important for educators not only to focus on the connection between homework and achievement, but also, on its impact on the home. Parents play a major role in the development of their children, therefore, their opinions on homework must be considered.

The study will further the research regarding homework by providing another perspective on the topic of homework. Similar to any type of research, this study will not answer all the questions, but will likely create more questions for further research. Exploring the human experience is an important part of research and will likely lead to later hypothesis testing (Osborne, 1990). As parents' perceptions regarding homework are investigated, it will become clear as to what direction other qualitative or quantitative studies regarding parents' perceptions on homework should take.

Definition of Terms

Parents' perceptions on homework is defined as how parents view, think, and understand the topic of homework.

Middle School is defined as a mixture of grades 6 through 8.

Homework is defined as tasks that are carried about by students during non-instructional time (Cooper, 1989).

Non-instructional time is defined as any time outside the regular school day (For example, 8:45 AM to 2:55 PM is instructional time).

Achievement is the level at which someone accomplishes something successfully.

Summary

Homework is an area in which much research has been completed, but there is little consistency regarding its practices. Due to inconsistencies, more research needs to be completed in order to establish clarity on how to establish consistent homework standards. Parents play a major role in their child's education, but little research has been completed focusing on parents' perceptions. Investigating parents' perceptions will provide educators with valuable insight on the topic of homework. This insight will provide clarification on proper homework practices and areas of further research on the topic of homework, both of which will contribute to establishing more consistency on homework practices in our education systems.

Outline for the Remainder of the Paper

The literature review which follows outlines how people have viewed homework since the 1890s. The literature review also outlines the positive and negative arguments towards homework, along with identifying the connection that parents have had with homework. Overall, the literature review provides a framework for the research being completed in this study by highlighting the importance of gaining a greater understanding on all areas relating to homework.

The methodology chapter outlines the nature of phenomenological research and provides an explanation regarding why phenomenological research was used in this study. The methodology chapter then describes the process of choosing participants, interviewing, and analyzing data.

The results chapter outlines the major themes which have been identified and the implications that these themes have. In the final chapter, I discuss the implications and how they then shape the recommendations, the discussion surrounding areas of further research, and the conclusions that I draw.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction to the Chapter

As the world has changed over the past 150 years, so have perceptions on homework. The pendulum has swung between viewing homework as an integral aspect of a country's success, to viewing homework as detrimental to the growth and development of children (Cooper, 1989). Through research, both positive and negative aspects of homework have been identified. Positive aspects of homework focus on achievement and personal benefits such as self-direction and organization. Negative aspects of homework focus on a loss of enjoyment in learning, as well as child and family stress. Research has also focused on the complexities of parent involvement in homework, recognizing that parental involvement often has negative side effects, especially when parents do not know how to get involved. Throughout history, much research has been done on the topic of homework. Because there is still no definitive picture as to what homework should look like, and because our world and family structures continue to change, this study will contribute to the consistent policies regarding homework that should be established.

Homework

As stated previously, homework is defined as tasks that are carried about by students during non-instructional time (Cooper, 1989). Homework does not include in school guided study (study hall or library time), home study courses, or extracurricular activities (Patall et al., 2008). Homework is often intended to enhance instruction, providing students with the opportunity to practice and review the material presented in class (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). In some situations homework is used to establish communication between parents and

children, fulfill directions from school administrators, or punish students (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001).

Historical Conceptions of Homework

1890s to 1950s

Between the 1890s and 1950s, much of the documentation on homework focused on its place in the school system (Gill & Schlossman, 1960). During this time period, the attitude toward homework experienced cycles. Some schools and school districts placed large restrictions on homework, while others eliminated homework all together (Gill & Schlossman, 1960). For example, in 1901 the state of California abolished homework in Grades 1 to 8 (Gill & Schlossman, 1960). In contrast, in the 1930s, 78% of parents were in favour of homework and 22% of parents were not in favour of homework (Gill & Schlossman, 1960). After World War II, the majority of people continued to be in favour of homework, demonstrated by a 1955 Gallup poll in America which found that 4 out of every 5 people favored more homework for high school students (Bard, 1958). By the end of the 1950s it was generally accepted that children do better with homework, as long as they have parental support (Gill & Schlossman, 1960).

1960s to 1980s

Some people during the 1960s and 70s argued that children needed more time to play and explore (Hough, 2014a). The thought was that homework got in the way of social experience, outdoor recreation, creative activities, and the amount of sleep required for children and adolescence (Wildman, 1968). Despite some anti-homework sentiment, the 1960s to the 1980s represented a time in which the majority of people had positive feelings towards homework. A cause of this feeling was due to the launch of Sputnik in 1957. The launch of Sputnik pressured leaders in North America into pushing academic rigor so that children would be able to work

with more complex technologies (Cooper, 1989). Out of a total of 20 studies conducted between 1962 and 1986, 14 studies produced results that favored homework while 6 produced results that favored no homework (Patall et al., 2008). According to standardized test studies, it was demonstrated that high school students doing homework outperformed 69% of students who were in a class that did not assign homework (Patall et al., 2008). In the 1980s, homework was offered as a solution to problems at home, school, and within society. It was thought that homework could improve academic achievement which would then result in an improved labour force, enabling America to be more competitive with Europe and Asia (Patall et al., 2008). The efforts to improve the labour force were evident in the amount of homework assigned to children. From 1981 to 1997, the average amount of homework for age 6 to 8 children increased from 52 to 128 minutes weekly (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2000). In the last half of the 20th century, much of the research demonstrates a positive attitude trend concerning homework.

1990s to Present

Recently, the importance of getting parents involved in their children's education has received considerable attention from policy makers, educators, parents, and the mass media (Cooper et al., 2006). For example, research has been done surrounding a "Teachers Involve Parents in Homework" (TIPS) program, revealing that when parents receive more guidance in how to support their children in the homework process, homework becomes a more positive experience and students experienced improved results (Voorhis, 2011). The TIPS program does seek to guide parents through the homework process, but it does not address parents' perceptions surrounding homework. Similar to the TIPS article, there are many studies that have focused on the topic of homework, but there is a limited understanding of how parents view homework.

Currently, there are many discussions surrounding the topic of homework, especially focusing on whether homework should be eliminated altogether. In January, 2014, The Harvard Graduate School of Education website posted an article on whether people were for or against homework (Hough, 2012). Opinions against homework state that young people need less homework because children are stressed out and missing out on family time (Hough, 2012). Some schools have changed their structure of homework and experienced huge success. For example, Gaithersburg Elementary School has exchanged nightly homework for nightly reading and longer projects (Hough, 2014). The result has been a dramatic improvement in reading levels for the students (Hough, 2014). Opinions in favour of homework state that students need to keep up with the students of other countries and remain competitive (Hough, 2012). On education.com, an article written on the homework debate outlines the fact that the main reason in favor of homework is to help kids do well on standardized tests, which isn't teaching kids how to learn, but just how to do well on the test (Sorrentino, 2013). The article by Sorrentino highlights the importance of parents speaking up about homework so that policy changes do occur. It is interesting to note that despite the current attitudes towards homework, little has been done to establish consistent policies across North America, which could largely be due to changes occurring throughout history and inconsistent results within research.

Positives and Negatives of Homework

Evidence also suggests that there is a positive correlation between the amount of homework completed and achievement (Cooper et al., 1998). A review of research recognized the academic positive impacts of homework as including better retention of factual knowledge, increased understanding, better critical thinking, curriculum enrichment, improved attitude

towards school, and better study habits (Cooper et al., 2006). Therefore, if students complete their homework, they will likely experience a higher level of achievement in school.

Studies have recognized numerous personal benefits for young people. Through a review of research, findings demonstrate a possible positive relationship between homework activities and self-efficacy, self-reflection, responsibility for learning, maintaining focus, managing the environment, inhibiting distractions, delaying gratification, and managing time (Cooper et al., 2006). A review of research also recognized non-academic positive impacts as being greater self-directions, greater self-discipline, better time organization, more inquisitiveness, and more independent problem-solving (Cooper et al., 2006). All of the skills and characteristics listed above are great, but one must ask the question of whether homework is the best way to develop these personal characteristics.

In contrast to the studies which demonstrate benefits of homework, research also demonstrates that the benefits of homework are not as clear as one may think. For example, research shows that students in the United States have a greater chance of academic achievement in the future if they spend more time playing sports and less time doing homework (Won & Han, 2010). A review of literature surrounding homework displays that the connection between homework and achievement is positive for secondary students and negative or null for elementary students (Patall et al., 2008). Due to conflicting evidence regarding the positives and negatives of homework, creating policies regarding homework is challenging.

Homework has also been identified as having negative side effects on young people. A review of research highlighted negative impacts of homework as including a loss of interest in academic material, physical and emotional fatigue, denial of leisure time, pressure from parents to perform well, confusion of instructional techniques, copying from other students, and

increased difference between high and low achievers (Cooper et al., 2006). In line with these negative impacts, Wendy Mogel, a clinical psychologist and parent educator states, “But there is one particularly insidious force that confounds and frustrates nearly every family I meet. It’s homework. Beginning in twelfth grade, homework consumes the evening hours, cranks up household tensions, and turns freewheeling kids into nervous grinds” (2001, p. 221). As the conversation surrounding homework continues, it is important to consider more than just achievement, and recognize the ways in which homework could potentially have a negative impact on young people.

When discussing homework, it is important to consider the differences between the various grade levels. Younger children have less effective study habits, diminishing their ability to gain positive results through homework (Cooper et al., 2006). Junior high students who completed less than 1 hour of homework per night experienced positive results, but students who completed 1-2 hours experienced no positive results (Patall et al., 2008). Students in their middle school years are experiencing adolescence. During the adolescent years, involving the transition to middle school, there is often an increase in parent-child conflict (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998). The way in which homework is approached for different grades must speak to the diversity of developmental stages that young people go through.

Parents and Homework

Research has explored the connection between parents and homework. The benefit of parental involvement in homework, which is referred to most often, is the way parental support can accelerate learning by increasing the amount of time spent studying and making the study time more efficient, effective, and focused (Patall et al., 2008). For years, parents have seen homework as a way to stay involved in their child’s education, enabling parents to be aware of

what their children are learning on a day to day basis (Gill & Schlossman, 1960). Parental and family benefits were also highlighted as including greater parental appreciation of and involvement in schooling and student awareness of connection between home and school (H. Cooper et al., 2006). Parental involvement with homework can be beneficial if parents desire to be involved in their child's homework.

The relationship between parent involvement in homework and achievement is very complex (Patall et al., 2008). A review of research reveals that the positive effect of parental involvement in homework is small for high school students and elementary school students and negative for middle school students (Patall et al., 2008). A study done by Cooper, Lindsay, and Nye (2000) identified that more than half the parents helped their children with homework in order to improve their child's understanding. However, over 40% of parents highlighted the fact that their support made homework harder some of the time (Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000). Therefore, the benefits of parent involvement in homework are not as clear cut as some research suggests.

Not only are the benefits not as clear as one may think, but negative results of parent involvement in homework must be considered. Negative forms of parental involvement in homework occur minimally in most families (Cooper et al., 2000). It can be effective under certain conditions. In contrast, parents who are more controlling often have a negative impact on motivation and achievement (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). Two thirds of parents report that they have engaged in inappropriate homework support, including giving correct answers or completing assignments for their children (Cooper et al., 2000). Poorer families reported more interference than support for autonomy (Cooper et al., 2000). When parents control their child's

homework, provide dishonest support, and limit a child's autonomy, homework can have a negative impact on children and families.

If parents are going to be involved in homework, they need to know how to be involved. Parents see it as important that they are involved in their child's education, believing that by being involved in their child's education they can have a positive influence; parents feel as though the child and the school want them to be involved in their education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Motivational theorists state that parental involvement which establishes clear and consistent guidelines for homework and supports a child's autonomy will be the most effective (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). A collection of research demonstrated a common theme, a theme highlighting that students find homework more enjoyable when their parents are involved (Patall et al., 2008). Parents report that they spend more direct involvement time with students in lower grades and allow for more autonomy for students in higher grades (H Cooper et al., 2000). Parental support for autonomy proved to have a positive impact on achievement while direct involvement by parents proved to have a negative impact on achievement (H Cooper et al., 2000). Not enough studies have been done on homework completion and homework problems in connection to parental involvement, to shape the specifics for training programs for parents (Patall et al., 2008). Training programs need to consider contributing factors which impact homework, such as family economics. It is suggested by many researchers that parental involvement increases differences between high and low students because of economic differences (Patall et al., 2008). If parental involvement in homework is going to be beneficial for students, more research needs to be done to implement training programs so that parents can be empowered in being involved with their child's homework.

It is important to note that not all parents view homework as beneficial. In a study completed by Turanli (2009) a survey was completed by 147 grades two through five students and parents. The study revealed that both students and parents do not find homework very beneficial, highlighting that the efforts do not pay off (Turanli, 2009). It was also identified that teachers are not able to monitor homework properly and provide necessary correctives and feedback (Turanli, 2009). Many parents do not believe that homework assignments are interesting enough to motivate students and do not support the learning of subject matter effectively (Turanli, 2009).

Summary of Findings

Perceptions of homework have ranged from positive to negative over the past 150 years. Factors contributing to the variety of perceptions include economic pressures, a focus on achievement and the health of a child, and the results of research. Positive attitudes towards homework have focused around achievement and the development of personal characteristics like responsibility. Negative attitudes towards homework do not see homework as improving achievement, but as having emotional impacts like stress and frustration. The relationship between parents, children, and homework is also problematic, as parental involvement has potential to heighten the negative impacts of homework. Research that has been completed on the topic of homework outlines the importance of gaining an even greater understanding of homework and how it can be best utilized, if at all, to enable more children to experience success in their schooling.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

Undergoing the proper steps in preparation for, throughout, and after the interview process is important. The research design is a qualitative phenomenological study which uses interviews to explore the experiences that parents have with homework. Parents were randomly selected and made aware of the ethical considerations involved. The interviews underwent thematic analysis to establish consistent themes. This methodologies chapter displays the well thought out process for the collection of information that provided concrete data on the topic of parents' perceptions of homework.

Research Design

The research design for this study is a qualitative phenomenological study. In qualitative studies, the focus is on using mostly verbal descriptions in natural settings (McMillan & Wergin, 2010). In quantitative studies, the focus is on numerical calculations to describe and explore relationships among traits (McMillan & Wergin, 2010). As a result, stories and case studies are used as data for qualitative studies as opposed to statistical reports which would be present in a quantitative study (McMillan & Wergin, 2010). This study will seek to gain a greater insight on parents' perceptions regarding homework through verbal descriptions.

Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness or experience, intentionally focused towards a certain object in the world (Smith, 2013). In other words, a phenomenological study explores what it is like to have a certain experience (Law et al., 1998). Phenomenology focuses on the phenomena, also known as the appearance of things, focusing on the meanings things have in our experience (Smith, 2013). The phenomena in my research is identified through

the perception of the people having the experience (Lester, 1999). Understanding experiences in phenomenological research is primarily done through narrative and story (McMillan & Wergin, 2010). Narrative and story may be collected through interviews, conversations, participant observation, action research, focus meetings, and analysis of personal texts (Lester, 1999). Therefore, the data collected through phenomenological studies is from a first person point of view (Smith, 2013).

Phenomenological research has its strengths. First, the aim of phenomenological research is not to test a hypothesis, but to let the data speak for themselves (Osborne, 1990). Consequently, the researcher is not attempting to guide the data towards a certain result, although the research must still be aware of personal biases. Second, phenomenological research provides practical consequences for human living (van Manen, 2011). Once phenomena are experienced in the same way by different participants, commonalities can be identified (Lester, 1999). These commonalities provide valuable insights. Third, phenomenological research is very effective at surfacing deep issues and allowing voices to be heard (Lester, 1999). Fourth, phenomenological research allows for a full understanding of experience, recognizing perception through memory, imagination, emotion, desire, embodied action, and linguistic activity (Smith, 2013). The strengths of phenomenological research make it a great tool to use in the exploration of parents' perceptions regarding homework.

There are also weaknesses which must be identified as being a part of phenomenological research. Although phenomenological research is thorough in identifying factors and their effects in individual cases, one must be cautious in applying the factors and their effects to the larger population from which the participant was drawn (Lester, 1999). In most phenomenological studies the number of participants is limited, preventing the generalization of the results. Another

major weakness of phenomenological research is personal biases. Phenomenological researchers must recognize personal biases through the process of self-reflection in order to best understand data (Osborne, 1990), thus it is important for researchers to be aware of the weaknesses of phenomenological research.

The experiences, on which this research is focused, encompass those that middle school parents have with homework and with their children's experience of homework. Much research has been done on the topic of homework, but most of the research focuses on achievement and how homework impacts a child. A phenomenological study provides greater insight into how homework impacts the parents and the home. Likely, the study will provide guidance for future studies focused on the topic of parents and homework. The strengths of the study focus on actual experiences of parents as they are recalled through conversation, providing a deeper understanding of parents' thoughts surrounding experiences with their children's homework.

Selection of Subjects

As a researcher and as an educator I saw a great opportunity to gain valuable insight into parents' perceptions of homework through my investigations. Through the selection of participants at the Christian independent school in which I was working, my hope was that I would be able to gain a greater understanding of how parents viewed homework, which would then shape my practice and could possibly shape the practice of other educators.

When selecting subjects it was important that participants had previously experienced homework with their child/children and were willing to be interviewed (McMillan & Wergin, 2010). An information email (see Appendix A) was sent out to every parent who had a child in a Christian independent school in an urban area of British Columbia. This was to ensure that parents could speak to the experiences they had had with their middle school child/children and

homework (Osborne, 1990). This email outlined the purpose of the study, the method of study and the commitment the study would entail. The email also highlighted that parents could decline to answer any questions, could withdraw from the study at any time, that the study would have no negative impact on their children. Their names would remain confidential throughout the entire process and no information that might possibly identify them would appear in this final report. Out of respect for the participants, it is important that they are fully informed (see next section for additional information) (Osborne, 1990). The email did not specify which parent should volunteer, leaving the decision up to each individual family. The parents were asked to respond by a certain date, of their willingness to participate in the study.

From the list of parents who responded with a willingness to participate in the study, six parents were randomly chosen from a hat to participate in the study. Through the experiential realities of the six participants, a deeper understanding of parents' perceptions on homework, the phenomena, was established (McMillan & Wergin, 2010). The six parents who were randomly chosen each signed a consent form. Throughout the interview, no demographic information of the participants was collected.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at City University of Seattle. The Institutional Review Board of City University of Seattle bases its ethical principles on the Nuremberg Code, the Declaration of Helsinki, and the Belmont Report. In 1947, the Nuremberg Code was developed to address the brutalities committed by Nazi Germany's medical experiments. In 1964, the Declaration of Helsinki became the first code of research ethics focused on social and behavioural research. The Belmont Report was published in 1978, establishing guidelines for human subject research and is the standard for Institutional Review

Board reviews. The current ethical requirements established by the Institutional Review Board include informed consent, protection of confidentiality, and risks of participation are not greater than the benefits of the study.

Informed consent for participation in the study was given by parents, when they affirmed their willingness to participate in the study, after being fully informed of the nature of the study and their ability to ask any questions at any time. The consent form clearly stated where the interview was to be carried out and what would happen with the data that was collected. Participants were made aware through the consent form and at the beginning of the interview that they could decline to answer any question, discontinue the interview at any time without consequence, and that the interview would not have any negative impact on their child. For this study, parents received much guidance as far as their freedoms, even after giving signed consent.

The second ethical consideration as outlined by the Institutional Review Board is protection of confidentiality. To protect the participants the interviews were done after school hours. Parents were given the option of meeting at an off campus location or meeting in a classroom. The names of the parents remained anonymous as each individual was represented by a letter on the typed transcripts. In order to prevent identification of the participants, no demographic information was collected. The raw data for each interview will be kept in a locked cabinet for five years and then destroyed.

Finally, the risks of participation in this study are not greater than the benefits of the study. There is minimal potential for negative impacts as a result of participating in the study. If anything, participation in the interviews could stir up frustrating feelings. However, more than likely, allowing parents to voice their frustrations and be listened to would be of benefit. The benefits of this study are far greater as they allow for a greater understanding of parents'

perceptions regarding homework and offer a springboard to better shaping the practice of educators, while guiding further research on the topic of homework.

Instrumentation

In order to understand the experiences that parents have with homework, interviews were conducted to explore the experiences of parents. “Interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings” (Fontana & Frey, 1994). An interview was used as opposed to a focus group because in a focus group parents would likely influence each other’s ideas, resulting in an untrue representation of parent perceptions on homework. Each interview question that was asked was open ended so as not to lead the participants toward any particular conclusions (Osborne, 1990). Although open ended questions are used, the interviewer still needs to be aware of how personal biases of the interviewer may taint the response of participants (Osborne, 1990). Frey (2004) notes that, “The open-ended question is effective particularly when phenomenological purposes guide the research” (p. 769). Through the interview process, with open ended questions, parents were able to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings on the topic of homework.

Data Collection and Recording

As the data was collected through interviews, it was important for the interviews to be conducted in the proper manner. In order to enable participants to share their true experiences, the interviewer strived to do the following. First, the interviewer focused on listening to the participant, while seeking to follow the direction taken by the participant (Law et al., 1998). Second, the interviewer attempted to develop a rapport with the participant (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Third, the interviewer recognized how questions and responses can impact the

participants (Law et al., 1998). Through proper interviewing techniques, what I believe to be an accurate account of parents' perceptions surrounding homework was discovered.

The six participants were interviewed in a closed room. Each interview lasted approximately eight minutes. The interview consisted of the three phases. First, the interviewer strived to develop rapport by welcoming participant, describing the purpose of the visit, and outlining ethical considerations. Second, the interviewer used the same base of scripted questions to collect data for each interview (see Appendix B). After the scripted questions were completed, the interviewer asked if there were any other thoughts, opinions, or experiences that the participants would like to share. Once the interview was complete, the participants were thanked for their willingness to be involved. The interviews were digitally recorded on two devices to ensure that the information would not be lost.

Data Analyses

After the interview, the interviewer listened to the recording to make sure that the interviewer did not influence the answers of the participant overtly. The recorded interviews were then typed out as transcripts, with the participant's name being replaced by a letter. The lines in each transcript were numbered to allow for thematic coding.

The transcripts from each interview underwent thematic analysis, which is the method of analysing, and reporting themes or patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Clear explanation of the process is important to the credibility of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In completing a thematic analysis for the research, a number of steps were taken. First, while listening and typing up the interview the interviews were coded. Second, the interviews were reviewed again to continue the coding process, allowing for the themes from each interview to be established. Third, the themes from each interview were then compared against each other,

looking for commonalities. Generalizability is only established when experiences from one person can be found in the experience of other persons (Osborne, 1990). Fourth, the themes were divided into major themes and subthemes. Finally, the themes were expanded upon and supported with references from the 6 interviews.

After the themes have been established by one researcher, an inter rater reliability test was done by another person. Through this process, the themes collected by the first researcher were either affirmed or rejected.

Methodological Assumptions

There were a few assumptions that were made about the study's subjects and the data collection methods. First, it was assumed that the parents who volunteered would be able to accurately share their opinions regarding homework. However, it is also important to recognize that parents may not share their real opinions. For example, the parents may be cautious when talking with an educator, parents may be caught off guard by a question, or parents may be trying to tell the interviewer what they believe the interviewer wants to hear. Second, it was assumed that the themes collected from the parents who were interviewed represent the experiences of homework and perceptions regarding homework that other parents may have within a similar urban/rural Christian independent school in southwestern British Columbia. When making assumptions, it is important to recognize the limitations of a study.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study. First, the study represents an opportunity sample, which prevents the generalization of the study. Second, the study will focus on middle school parents (grades six through eight), which prevents the generalization of the study to elementary and secondary schools. Third, only six people will be interviewed, and there is a

good chance that 6 people could have very different opinions surrounding homework, making thematic coding difficult. Although there are limitations, the qualitative process will outline some important aspects of parents' perceptions that educators need to recognize and it may also provide insight into areas for further research.

Summary

Through this qualitative phenomenological study, parents' current perspectives and experiences regarding homework were discovered. A collection of participants was prudently chosen, ensuring that ethical implications were considered. This was followed by an astute interview process, in which collected data underwent thematic coding. The hope was that the thematic coding would provide a valuable insight into parents' perceptions on homework by the sharing of their experiences.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

I feel the interviews were a positive experience for both the parents and me. The perceptions the parents shared were meaningful, as it was evident that this was a topic the parents desired to talk about. The parents seemed to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences. I felt as though a relaxed atmosphere contributed to their willingness to share. As an interviewer, I enjoyed the process of collecting information from parents through the interview process, while listening to, transcribing, and coding the interviews. During the interviews, I had to be alert for a number of different reasons. First, it was difficult not to jump in and share my opinions on what the parents were saying. Second, I had to be focused throughout the entire interview so I would be ready to respond appropriately and alert to when another open ended question should be asked. Overall, I felt as though the interview experience was a positive experience for both the parents and I.

This study strived to understand the shared experiences and perceptions of six parents regarding the topic of homework. Through the results and ensuing discussion, the participants will be referred to as Participants 1-6. All study participants were willing to share their experiences on the topic of homework and the results of the interviews established various themes involving homework as positive, what homework should not entail, homework as negative, parental impacts on homework, the importance of clear expectations, and inconsistent opinions regarding the amount of homework. The themes are displayed and broken down into more detail in **Table 1** and expanded upon in the remainder of the results section.

Table 1 – Overview of Themes

Themes	Subthemes	Subthemes (2)
Homework as Positive	Homework is beneficial – evident in 6 of 6 interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive character traits • Good for review and practice • Study skills like time management • Allows parents to be a part of school
What Homework Should not Entail	<p>Homework should not be new material – evident in 4 of 6 interviews</p> <p>Parents should not have to help – evident in 4 of 6 interviews</p> <p>Homework should not be due the next day – evident in 2 of 6 interviews</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be for kids who did not use class time wisely • Should be work that is not completed in class time • Kids should learn it at school • Children are taught different, so how can they help • Stress of kids transferred to parents • Students didn't get it done at school because they didn't know what they were doing • Big projects require too much parent help • Short notice • Busy lives
Homework as Negative	<p>The importance of play – evident in 4 of 6 interviews</p> <p>Homework is a burden on families – evident in 4 of 6 interviews</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most work should be completed at school, then at home they can play • Kids already spend a full day at school, should not have more than 30 minutes of homework • Already spend 6 hours at school • Kids in North America have a chance to play • Value family time, homework can get in the way • Pressure to get a tutor • A burden, a big thing • Causes stress

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loosing balance
Minor Themes	<p>Parents impact homework – evident in 4 of 6 interviews</p> <p>Clear expectations – evident in 2 of 6 interviews</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through their experiences as a child • Parents work ethic • Influence of past • Through examples and instructions • Appreciate a policy on homework
Amount of Homework	A wide range of what people view as being an acceptable amount – evident in 6 of 6 interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 hours a week • 5 hours a week • 4.5 hours a week • No more than 2.5 hours a week • Next to no homework

Homework as Positive

The most common theme gleaned from my research is that homework is beneficial for students. At least one benefit of homework was evident in each interview. Benefits are outlined as any possible positive outcome of homework. Although 100% of the interviews identified benefits of homework, it did not entail that that all participants had completely positive views towards homework.

The benefits identified by the participants can be broken into four categories. First, homework develops positive character traits like independence, work ethic, and responsibility. Second, homework is great for review and practice of work that has already been taught in schools. Third, homework establishes good study skills like time management. Fourth, homework allows for parents to be a part of their child’s education. It is important to note that different parents identified different benefits.

Homework develops personal character traits.

A common theme within 4 interviews was how homework helps to develop character traits like independence, work ethic, and responsibility. For example, Participant 2 stated that homework was good for “Learning how to do research and learning how to work independently” (Lines 45-46). Another parent stated,

I think they should all have homework, whether or not they are smart, middle of the road, or struggling. Just because I think it is the work ethic of learning how to accomplish homework at home is very important as they get into older grades and university (Participant 2, Lines 22-25).

In talking about how they do not hover over their children when doing homework one parent commented, “Yeah, it is part of that independence in our opinion” (Participant 5, Line 31).

Participant 6 said about homework, “I think it is good to add structure to their lives and to give them responsibility away from their peers” (Lines 18-19). The most commonly occurring theme regarding the benefits of homework was connected to character traits.

Homework is great for review and practice.

Half of the parents who were interviewed highlighted that they feel homework is beneficial for review and practice of material that has already been learned. For example, one parent said,

I think it is good for them to review the material, and I have two girls who are very disciplined. They come home and they do their homework, so it is not that I have to push them for it. So I don't mind homework, as long as it is not a new topic (Participant 1, Lines 94-97).

Another parent highlighted that homework is only okay for study and review saying,

I think next to no homework is acceptable unless they have to study and review because that is something they do have to do, is review work that they have done in each unit so that they don't have to cram (Participant 5, Lines 65-67).

A third parent stated, "I could see the benefit in especially something like Math where you are taking home math facts or math concepts and you are practicing them all the time" (Participant 6, Lines 49-51). Therefore, as long as it is not new material, some parents see benefits of homework being the review and practice of material that has been learned at school.

Homework helps in study skills like time management.

In talking about opinions regarding homework, a parent stated, "I think it really develops study habits for later on when you are older and there are expectations" (Participant 3, Lines 110-111). A study skill which was highlighted by a parent was time management. "Occasionally, I think it is good for kids to work on bigger projects so they learn how to manage time" (Participant 2, Lines 30-31). Study skills was evident in the interviews, but was not as prevalent as the other benefits of homework.

Allows parents to be a part of their child's schooling.

The final benefit of homework, which was evident in only one interview, was that homework allows parents to be a part of school. Participant 6 said that homework "Allows us to be a part of it (school)" (Line 74). It was interesting that one parent highlighted this as being one of the benefits because as you will see later on in the summary, many parents do not want to be involved in their child's homework.

What Homework Should Not Entail

Although benefits of homework were highlighted by all parents, they were also quick to state what homework should not entail. Parents outlined that homework should not be new

material, parents should not have to help, and homework should not be due the next day. Stress is commonly triggered for either the child or parent, when homework does not abide by these three guidelines.

Homework should not be new material.

The most strongly talked about theme amongst four out of the six parents was that homework should not be new material. Not only was it a frequently talked about theme, but parents talked about this topic with resentment and frustration. One parent stated, “If they bring homework home that they don’t understand it’s frustrating at our house” (Participant 5, Lines 37-38). A second parent outlined why it is important for children to learn the material at school by saying,

What I think homework should be, would be, is work that has not been completed in class time. So, I understand that there will be times when you have to have extra homework because you haven’t had enough time in class to finish something and I think that is what homework should be, partly because I don’t have the training to help teach what might be coming home (Participant 3, Lines 34-38).

Participant 1 commented about homework,

They shouldn’t come home with new ideas, right, the teaching should have been done in class and the homework is reviewing what they have been taught, or, preparing for a test, but it is content that has been presented in class that the kids need to practice and rehearse and fine tune (Lines 42-45).

Parents believe the homework is okay when it is an overflow of what their children have already learned in the classroom.

Parents should not have to help with homework.

In line with parents stating that the homework should not be something new, parents highlighted that they should not have to help with homework to the extent that they are often expected. Participant 1 highlighted why parents should not be expected to help with homework in saying,

Last year my daughter struggled very much in school because she often came home with new material and since I went to school, I mean, hey, Pluto is not a planet any more, right, so the information I know, right, is different than how they are being taught or how math is taught, completely different way than when I went through school, and so yes, she often came home with brand new stuff and was frustrated when we taught her different than what was presented at school, the answer was the same, but the way we got there was different (Lines 49-55).

Another parent reflected these same feelings and expressed,

So, I understand that there will be times when you have to have extra homework because you haven't had enough time in class to finish something and I think that is what homework should be, partly because I don't have the training to help teach what might be coming home. Some of the homework that has come home, how I have learned it is being taught in a completely different way now and I keep getting told, "That's not how we learned it in school" (Participant 3, Lines 35-40).

This same parent also said,

The only part of the homework I don't like are the big projects and I think because the expectation of how much work they need to put in really requires parental help and I feel

like I have already gone to school and I really don't want to do it again (Participant 3, Lines 104-106).

Another parents outlined that students "Should be able to get their work done at school and often we as parents feel unequipped to help them with the homework they do bring home" (Participant 5, Lines 17-18). Overall, parents feel that they should not be expected to help with homework because they are not equipped to do so, emphasizing that it is important for their children to understand the material at school if they are going to bring it home to work on.

Homework should not be due the next day.

The final "should not" of homework outlined by the parents is that homework should not be due the next day. This theme was not as strong as it was only evident in two of six interviews. Participant 4 commented about homework, "I don't like it when it is due the next day" (Line 37). The parent stated that extracurricular activities, including working late nights to meet next day's deadline for homework assignments, contribute to stress. Adding to this theme, another parent reflects on how she responds when her child comes to her, "'Mom I need to have this or that or whatever and it has to come in the next day.' That frustrates me" (Participant 6, Lines 58-59). Due to the busy lives that some families have, there was evidence through two of the interviews that when homework is due the next day it causes stress and frustration.

Homework as Negative

Although the general feelings towards homework were not negative as a whole, a few adverse applications became evident through a thematic analysis of the interviews. The negatives focused around the importance of play and the burden that homework places on families.

The importance of play.

The importance of play was a strong theme as it was evident in four of six interviews. In talking about school work at home one parent expressed, “I feel like they are already at school for six hours a day working and they need some down time to play and recharge and be kids” (Participant 2, Lines 77-78). A second parent declared, “I think most of the classwork for an average student should be accomplished in the time they are at school. Then at home they can play” (Participant 4, Lines 21-22). A third parent commented that there should not be too much homework so that it would “Give some time to blow off steam and run outside, or play this, or do whatever” (Participant 6, Lines 74-75). Participant 3 talked about her strategies at home saying,

By the time they have had a full day at school and we have come home they are so exhausted that to do another amount of homework at home they are just, they are trying to unwind, um, I find that if I can give them a snack of course and a break, so usually I will give them an hour of just free time (Lines 91-95).

Limiting the amount of homework because children already spend a full day at school and need some time to unwind, run around, and play was a common theme expressed amongst the parents who were interviewed.

Homework is a burden on families.

Through a thematic analysis of the interviews it was also evident that homework is often a burden on families. With frustration one parent expressed, “We try to do a lot of family activities together, spend a lot of family time, so if somebody has a lot of homework, it gets in the way of that, especially on weekends (Participant 5, Lines 39-40). Another parent explained the challenges with homework in her family by saying,

So when she had a project due and the weekend was coming up she was right away, "Oh, well, I can't do that because I need to focus on this," and I was like, "You are 13 years old, this should be our argument for Sunday night before school, go have fun on the weekend." So, for our children, it definitely impacts life. I always make sure that I am preparing them, "Hey, this weekend we have a lot up, so if you have got anything due get 'er done during the week" (Participant 1, Lines 149-154).

In talking about balance a parent stated that her child is "allowed to have some after school activity without having to stay up late" (Participant 4, Lines 39-40) due to homework. A common theme amongst the parents who were interviewed was that homework is a burden on families, especially in that it prevents families from having valuable family time.

Minor Themes

There were a few other themes from the interviews that did not fit under the larger themes, but they are still important to note because of the impact they could have on further research. One of the themes is parental impact on homework and the second theme is the importance of clear expectations.

Parents impact on homework.

Parental impact on homework was evident in four of six interviews. In each of these interviews parents acknowledged that who they were, as parents, impacted their child in some way. Participant 1 acknowledged that her parents were not involved in helping her with homework so she does not desire to help her children with homework. She also acknowledged that her husband's dad was a teacher and as a result, her husband is honoured when their children ask him questions (Lines 105-113). Participant 2 acknowledged that "My own work ethic" (Line 76) impacts how she views homework. Participant 3 highlighted that "Partly our own

experiences when we were in school” (Line 44), highlighting that she did a lot of homework as a child and her husband did not. It is evident that everyone has very different views on homework, based on their personal opinions, their own experiences in school, and their experiences with homework in their home as they were growing up.

Clear expectations.

Two parents emphasized the importance of clear expectations with regard to homework. One parent focused on the expectations and guidance that can be given to parents by saying,

I think that the expectations are there, instructions for the folks if we are supposed to be helping, examples, I think always primarily of math, because that is what is coming to our house quite a bit, so on how we can teach that the same way that it is being taught at school (Participant 1, Lines 141-144).

In talking about homework policies and establishing clear expectations one parent expressed, “Yeah, if this is the rule we are going to enforce it, if it is not the rule let’s get rid of it” (Participant 6, Line 99). This parent wondered whether a policy was in place stating that homework actually takes precedent over school sports. These two interviews suggest that clear expectations for parents are needed as they support their children in their homework, thereby empowering families in understanding the school’s expectations regarding homework.

Amount of Homework

The interviews demonstrate that the expectations parents have for the amount of homework given to their children cover a wide range of attitudes. The amount of homework parents view as acceptable ranges from no homework assignments to 5 hours a week for middle school students. For example, one parent declared, “I think next to no homework is acceptable unless they have to study and review” (Participant 5, Lines 65-66). In contrast, another parent

proclaimed, “I would say an hour a night” (Participant 2, Line 30). How can a teacher meet the needs of all families regarding expected amounts of homework? The contrasts evident in what parents believe to be an acceptable amount of homework, definitely highlights the importance of involving parents in the conversation of homework as research is presented and as policies are developed.

Summary

The results section presents interesting ideas surrounding parents’ perceptions of homework. Overall, parents have a neutral view of homework, recognizing that there are benefits, but also that there are negative aspects of homework. The benefits were highlighted as an opportunity to develop character traits, practice and review material learned in class, refine study habits, and allow parents an opportunity to be involved in their child’s schooling. Aspects of homework that could be improved upon were identified by parents, as they suggested that educators should only assign work that has already been learned in class, thus, work that does not require parental assistance. Avoiding to assigning of work that is due the following day was also important to parents. Negative aspects of homework identified by parents that are challenging to avoid, while still implementing homework, are the ways that homework gets in the way of opportunities children may have to play and how homework places an extra burden on families. Other themes expressed how parents view homework based on their experiences and the importance of clear expectations and policies surrounding homework. A theme that displayed a diversity of opinions was the amount of homework middle school students should have. Overall, the thematic analysis of the interviews provides good insight into parents’ perceptions on homework.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

The problem being addressed in this paper is the limited recent research on parents' perceptions of homework. Parents play a major role in their children's lives, specifically in the area of education. Understanding parents' perceptions of homework provides an important piece of information into establishing more consistent policies and standards surrounding homework. These policies and standards could deal with both the amount of homework and the type of homework, providing educators with consistent guidelines regarding homework.

Throughout history, in North America, the pendulum has swung back and forth between whether homework should be implemented or not. The inconsistency has been a result of current events in our world and the balance between negative and positive aspects of homework. If a favourable application of homework was sought, research could be found to support that perspective and visa versa, unfavourable research of homework could also be found to support the perspective that homework is not a positive educational practice. Parents also play a huge role in the area of homework, having the ability to either add to the negative aspects of homework or amplify the positive aspects of homework. As our world changes it is important for research to continue on the topic of homework. More research, specifically in the area of parents' perceptions on homework, will contribute to the creation of more consistent policies and standards regarding the topic of homework.

To gain more insight into parents' perceptions on homework a qualitative phenomenological research design was used. Six parents of middle-school aged children were

selected randomly, each undergoing an interview process. The six interviews then were subject to thematic analysis, establishing common themes amongst the interviews.

The themes that were discovered provided great insight into parents' perceptions on homework. The most common theme was that homework does have benefits, but this did not mean that parents saw homework as a positive experience overall. The most strongly stated themes revolved around what homework should not entail, such as being new material and requiring parent support. Parents also highlighted negative aspects of homework, focused around preventing play and placing a burden on families. Minor themes that were present included how parents' pasts impacted their view on homework, as well as their need for clear guidelines and policies in order to best help their child. The thematic analysis also displayed inconsistencies in parents' ideas surrounding the amount of homework that should be given. Overall, the thematic analysis provides educators with a greater understanding of parents' perceptions on homework.

Conclusion

Before conducting the research, it was predicted that parents' perceptions of homework would vary depending on the realities present in their child and family's daily realities. The results demonstrate data both for and against this projected statement. The prediction was supported with the premise that family situations impacted how much homework time parents believed was acceptable. Based on the range of family realities, parents differed in their views of how much homework is acceptable; interviewees' responses registered from no homework requirement to five hours of homework being acceptable. The prediction was not supported in that despite differing realities, parents highlighted commonalities in what homework should not entail. Four out of six parents emphasized that homework should not be new material and should not require parents support. In addition, despite differing realities, all parents acknowledged that

homework did have benefits. Therefore, the results both supported and did not support the prediction that parents' perceptions of homework would vary depending on the realities present in their families' lives.

The hope is that through research on parents' perceptions regarding homework, the experiences shared by the parents would demonstrate meaning and help to determine implications for further practice and research. It is important to note that due to a sample size of six parents, it is difficult to make broad statements across the entire population based on the results. However, qualitative phenomenological research on the topic of homework does provide guidance for important aspects of homework that must be considered for proper practice by educators and for further areas of research by researchers. The implications for educator practice and further research will be discussed in the recommendations section to follow.

Implementation of policies and standards regarding homework across all levels, including provincial, district, and school levels is challenging. The research does not support the changing of national, provincial, or district policies regarding homework, but it does support the need for consistency within schools. It is important for educators, parents, and students to understand the expectations regarding homework. I do not think it is okay for a grade eight teacher to establish a no homework policy while a grade five teacher in that same school assigns 90 minutes of homework every day. This can become especially challenging when families have children in both grades. Therefore, it is important for educational leaders at the school and local level to discuss the implications of homework, establishing guidelines with built in flexibility. Flexibility is necessary, even at the local level, because we live in a diverse world, and guidelines need to recognize the complexities of this diversity. It is important for the homework conversation to happen, but it is also important for the differing needs of people to be considered.

When looking at any aspect of the education system it is important to dream, to think further than what is currently being done, therefore considering how education could meet the needs of all learners. Research can contribute significant value to the homework debate, encouraging educators to return to the basics of what homework is trying to accomplish, by recognizing how homework can contribute to the success of each individual learner. The recommendations section of this chapter will discuss some of these significant ideas, while addressing areas of further research.

Recommendations

Parents' perceptions regarding homework were discovered through this qualitative phenomenological research study. Through thematic analysis of six interviews, the results section outlined common themes regarding parents' perceptions on homework, offering more of a discussion on the common themes as opposed to black and white statements on proper homework practices. The themes established do not always validate definitive changes in education practice, but instead prompt more questions needing to be investigated on the topic of homework.

Homework as positive.

The results demonstrate the parents' affirmation of the benefits of homework as perceived in the shaping of positive character traits, being good for review and practice, encouraging the development of study skills, and allowing parents to be involved in their child's schooling. From the benefits listed it is important to ask a few questions. How can the benefits of homework be amplified? How can the type of homework which is given be geared towards achieving these benefits? Does homework need to look different in different subject areas? An

area of further research could focus on these questions, seeking to address how the benefits of homework could best be maximized for individual students in each subject area.

Another question to ask about homework is whether homework is the best way to develop positive character traits. Can the development of these character traits be best met in other ways? For example, in developing responsibility, would it be better for a child to have a paper route rather than being immersed in homework assignments? An area of further research would investigate how the development of positive character traits is addressed through homework, while comparing these methods to other methods of developing positive character traits.

What homework should not entail.

The theme focusing on what homework should not entail brings up valuable insight for educators. Four out of six parents expressed that homework should not be new material. As an educator, it is important to be aware of whether assignments are indeed new material to your students. Difficulty is realized in discerning whether an assignment is considered to be new material. Does this mean that children have to understand everything before it is sent home? Does this mean that students should never have to struggle through the work that is sent home? If children are expected to understand all work before it goes home, should homework be sent home at all? It is important for educators to be aware of the type of homework they are sending home, but more research needs to be done investigating what is considered to be new material.

Four out of six interviewees highlighted that parents should not be expected to help with homework, as parental availability was limited and also parents were aware of their inability to help. It was apparent some parents desire to be involved, but most parents do not wish to be students again. They do not want their children to be so overwhelmed that the parents have to do

the work for or with their children. The theme of parents not wanting to help brings up some interesting points. If parents do not want to help or are not able to help, then sending homework that the child does not understand will likely create stress and anxiety. Therefore, it is important for schools be clear on the expectation for parental involvement, while allowing for flexibility. For example, a school can make it clear that if a child does not understand the homework, then a written note can be provided by the parent, excusing the child from any consequences. These guidelines could be provided through emails to parents, may be posted on the school website, or may be present in the school handbook. An area of further research would be to develop a better understanding of why parents do not want to help and how homework can be structured in a way so that parental assistance is not required..

It would be valuable to pursue more research on the topic of what homework should not entail. The results would likely differ based on the cultural base to whom the question was posed, but the results would still provide valuable insight for individual districts and schools. Educators could then become more knowledgeable on the type of homework that parents do not value, recognizing that flexibility is necessary in the creation of guidelines, standards, or policies.

Homework as negative.

Four out of six parents highlighted that homework inhibits the amount of play in which children should be engaged. Parents stated that their children already spend a full day at school and should either have from none to very little homework. The importance of play is a popular topic of conversation today. Play is a very important part of the development of children and must not only be considered when talking about homework, but also when engaging in conversation about the school day. School should offer play during the curriculum, not only at recess and lunch. Learning can be organized in such a way that play is seamlessly incorporated.

Four out of six parents also emphasized the burden that homework places on families. Parents mentioned that homework prevents family time, causes stress, and inhibits families from enjoying a healthy balance. The frustrations, on which this study only scarcely touched, that parents had regarding the burden that homework places on the family must not be ignored. More research should explore the aspect of homework as a burden for families. Research will provide educators with solid groundwork for implementing homework practices that are not only less burdensome, but positive and uplifting for families. It is exciting to think of homework as a way of bringing families together rather than pushing them apart.

Parental impact.

In four of the six interviews parents acknowledged the impact that they have on their child's homework. Parents recognized that their experiences as a child and their work ethic influence their child's homework. A valuable practice that all parents might undertake would be to reflect on their own experiences and who they are, realizing these realities impact how they partner with their child in school work. In doing this, parents can evaluate whether their view of school work is beneficial for their child. For example, a mother who experienced a lot of homework as a child may expect her child to have the same amount of homework. The mother may not consider that unlike her experiences, her child also is involved in piano, gymnastics, and cadets. Similarly, if a parent made it through school without doing any homework and therefore places little value on homework, their interactions with their child may limit their child's success. It would be valuable to pursue further research in how parents influence their child in attitudes about school in general. Research could provide greater understanding, inspiring the triangle of educator, parent, and child toward working together, thus encouraging successful outcomes for the child.

Clear Expectations

In just two of the six interviews, parents highlighted the importance of clear expectations, both in the homework that is given by individual classes and in the homework expectations as a school. It would be valuable to look at what other schools, districts, provinces, and countries are establishing regarding standardized policies. Are these policies successful? Are these policies flexible? Developing more consistent standards could allow for teachers to get on the same page with each other as well as provide parents with improved guidance regarding homework expectations.

Amount of homework.

The inconsistencies surrounding parents' perceptions on the amount of homework their children should have stimulates a number of different questions. First, what is impacting the differing perspectives amongst parents? Studies should be done examining what is shaping this perspective for the parents, looking at past experiences, information they are receiving, and any other contributing factors to parents' perspective on homework. Second, how does a teacher deal with these differing perspectives in the amount of homework they assign? If the six parents interviewed in this study all had children in the same class it would be impossible to please all of them. Some of the parents desire for their children to have no homework while others think their children should have one hour a day. It is important for studies to continue to investigate the optimal amount and type of homework so that parents and educators are on the same page. However, parents are still going to have differing opinions so educators will either need to allow for differing amounts of homework or be firm in their decision as to what they feel is the optimal amount.

Final Statement

Educators must continue to work with parents and students so that homework, if given at all, can provide students with the best possible opportunity for success. This phenomenological research study demonstrates that there are a whole lot more questions than answers in the homework debate. The questions must be asked. How can the benefits of homework be amplified? How can the development of character traits be met in homework? Do children have to understand everything before it is sent home as homework? How do you incorporate play into the school day? How do parents' experiences impact their child's school work? What is influencing parents' perceptions on the amount of homework their child should have? In light of the many perpetual questions that remain, it is yet important for educators to reinterpret the way things are being done, allowing for the opportunity to think of homework in a new way.

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Appendix A

Hello Parents,

I am currently completing the thesis for my Master of Education (Leadership) program at City University. I am investigating parents' subjective view of homework through one-on-one interviews. I hope to interview 6 parents regarding this theme. The interviews will take approximately 20 minutes. Your privacy will be protected as no names will be included in the report I write or any information that could possibly identify participants or their children, such as the name of the school or any teachers. I assure you that your involvement or decision not to be involved will have no bearing on your child's performance or evaluation in school. Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you do agree to participate, at any time you may withdraw from the interview process without any negative consequence. You will also be free to ask questions at any time or to choose to avoid replying to any of my questions. The interview will be recorded on two password protected iPads, but the only people who will ever have access to this recorded data (or any of the data) will be me, my research supervisor, and the director of Canadian programs at City University. Your identity will not be recorded--your name will be replaced by a code. The interview will then be typed into transcripts by me, on which your identity will be coded. All data, whether digital or written, will be kept securely on a flash drive in a locked cabinet in my home; digital data will be encrypted. All raw data, the recordings and transcripts, will be destroyed after 5 years.

This process has been approved by the administration. If you would like to be included in this study please email me before January 17. Please note that 6 parents will be chosen randomly to participate in the study from the emails that I receive. Thank you for your time.

Appendix B

Tell Parents to Develop Rapport:

- **Thank you for your willingness to be involved**
- **Goal is to discover parents views towards homework – middle school**
- **Homework is** work children complete outside of instructional time
- Hope it will be **interesting** for both of us
- Questions are **open ended for a reason, I don't want to lead you**
- There are **no wrong or right** answers, I just want to know **your story/opinions**
- Will have **no impact on your child's** schooling – I understand that people have differing opinions
- You may **withdraw** from the study at any time or **decline to answer a question**
- I will **type out interview** and look for **common themes** - thematic coding
- **Only** myself and my **research supervisor** will see the original copies
- **Names** will be kept confidential – changed to a code
- **About 20 minutes long**

Open Ended Interview Questions

- What is your view on homework in general?
- Tell me about your experiences with your middle school child/children's homework?
- How do you feel when your child/children in middle school come home with homework?
- What do you feel influences your view of homework?
- How much homework in your view is acceptable? Why?

Prompts

- Can't you **tell me more** about that
- That is **interesting**
- What was that **about/like**
- What did that **mean** for you
- Do you have an **example**

To Finish

- Is there **anything else** you would like to add (thoughts, opinions, experiences)
- Thank you