

Summer 2005

Create a Successful Homework Partnership Program: A Professional Development Workshop for Teachers to Maximize Benefits of Homework Assignments

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ABSTRACT

CREATE A SUCCESSFUL HOMEWORK PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM: A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP FOR TEACHERS TO MAXIMIZE BENEFITS OF HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

by

Terri M. Anderson

July 2005

Decades of research have indicated the importance of family participation as a contributing factor toward the academic success of children. Most significantly, a child's family can play a role in his or her scholastic achievement by helping with homework assignments. The teacher's task in this endeavor is to explain assignments clearly and thoroughly both to students and to their families. This task is twofold. First, the teacher must construct assignments that are purposeful, clear and appropriate to meet individual student needs; second, the teacher must offer assignments in a variety of presentation modes to accommodate needs of diverse populations that exist within our learning communities. The purpose of this project was to create a staff development workshop for teachers. The workshop was designed specifically to meet those challenges associated with creating a successful homework partnership program within an elementary school.

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CHAPTER ONE
BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT
INTRODUCTION

Throughout every district and state of the United States, students have felt an ever-growing pressure to achieve academically. The ability to read, write, calculate and to have the necessary problem-solving skills to survive in our complex and demanding society have been more and more essential for graduating students. Because of this, educators at all levels are challenged and sometimes feel threatened by increasing educational demands mandated by federal and state laws designed to encourage academic achievement. As educators have been pressed to become more effective and productive, family and community influences on academic learning have escalated in importance (Lewis & Henderson, 1998).

The United States federal government has mandated through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) that every school receiving Title I money be required by law to develop an appropriate parental involvement policy and program. This law has required that parents be involved in both the development and implementation of these programs. The NCLB specifies in detail what needs to be included in the parent involvement programs and policies in order for school districts to be in compliance with the federal law (United States Department of Education, 2001).

The Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

(OSPI) has indicated through their research, that all people within a school community have a responsibility to educate students, not just the teachers and staff within schools. Families, businesses, social service agencies, community colleges and universities are all to play a vital role in this effort. The article, "Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools," written by research staff at OSPI, acknowledges the research that has taken place over the years and reinforces the "importance of the relationship of family and school to student achievement." Parent and family involvement has been identified in the state of Washington as one of the nine characteristics, and this document rightfully acknowledges the important contribution parents and families can make toward students' success (OSPI, 2003, p. 41-43).

Because state and federal laws have pressured local school districts to make parent involvement an integral part of public education, district and building administrators have needed to be prepared to implement policies and practices immediately and effectively (United States Department of Education, 2001). The educators' motivation to facilitate these school-family partnership practices within their school should be not only to avoid negative repercussions, but also to appropriately serve the children. As Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn and Voorhis (2002) point out, that families can contribute to academic achievement in children in a multitude of ways. For example, family members can serve as volunteers; they can continue to learn and improve their existing

parenting skills that promote learning; they can participate in positive communication with school staff; they can continue to provide opportunities for their children that will foster a positive learning environment in the home. These are just a few of the ways a family can nurture the intellectual growth of a child.

Among the many tasks of the teacher, one is to assist families in the promotion of a positive and successful home learning environment. A teacher's encouragement of families to actively assist the child with homework assignments, especially in the elementary school years, is greatly conducive to a child's academic success. Parents, regardless of their own background, can benefit from guidance from schools on ways to help their children learn better. For families to help children with the work they do out of school, the teacher must explain assignments thoroughly and clearly to students and family members. In this regard, the teacher's task is twofold. The first task is to create assignments that are complete, developmentally appropriate, and unambiguous. The criteria by which assignments will be evaluated must also be manifest. Once assignments are constructed and explained, there remains the second challenge for the teacher, that of offering assignments in a variety of presentation modes in order to accommodate the diversity that exists among students and families within the schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Statement of the Problem

Educators have been continually trying to discover ways to increase student achievement. Since it has been determined that family involvement is a key factor in raising student achievement, it is the responsibility of the school to provide opportunities for family participation. Implementing an effective school-wide homework program that will meet the needs of the diverse population is just one of the ways that will contribute to the success of educating all learners. If families cannot understand the details of a student's homework assignment and/or that assignment is not communicated effectively, it is less likely that the family members will be active participants in the homework program. In addition, if the quality, level and frequency of assignments are not appropriate for the specific needs of a student, the homework then loses its meaningful purpose. If teachers are provided some training and helpful tools that will aid in the implementation of a successful homework program, the families will be more apt to participate and therefore the probability of student success increases.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to design a staff development workshop for teachers. The workshop was specifically designed to meet the challenges of presenting a clear, developmentally appropriate and thorough homework assignment in a variety of formats to accommodate the diversity of students and

family members that teachers are likely to encounter. The overarching project is a workshop. The product associated with the project is a booklet that can be used as a handout that will be provided in the workshop, but that may stand alone as a guide for teachers as well. A multi-media presentation will accompany this booklet to be used as a visual tool during the workshop. The goal of this specific workshop was to provide teachers an opportunity to develop successful strategies promoting just one of the many methods by which families can become involved with the achievement of students: helping with homework.

Limitations of the Project

This project was designed to address the needs of students attending both Rochester Primary School and Grand Mound Elementary School in Rochester, Washington. These two schools serve children grades K-5. This particular workshop may not be suitable for other schools or grade levels.

Definition of Terms

Significant terms used in this project are as follows:

Educator: Any of the following: teacher, building administrator, program administrator, central administrator and state officials working within the realm of education.

Family: A child's nurturing, caretakers with whom he or she lives, usually, but not necessarily related by blood.

Homework: Cooper (1989, p. 7 as cited in Cooper 1994, p.2) defines homework as "tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours." Omitted in this definition are the following: in-school guided study, home study courses and extracurricular activities, such as sports or student newspapers.

Parent: Another term used to describe an adult person supporting and/or living with a student.

Parent involvement: Can consist of parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, parent leadership.

Partnership: Collaboration between family and school.

CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM SELECTED SOURCES

The research examined indicates the importance of implementing family involvement practices within a school and outlines the educational benefits for students. This literature review is divided into the following sections:

- Defining Parent Involvement
- Family Involvement and Student Achievement
- Benefits of Family Participation
- Types of Family Involvement
- Understanding Barriers to Parent Involvement
- State and Federal Recommendations
- Learning at Home
- Homework: Advantages and Disadvantages
- Suggestions for Implementing Homework Within the Curriculum
- Homework for Students With Learning Disabilities
- Summary

Defining Parent Involvement

A review of literature on parent involvement has revealed that there is not consistent agreement on what is meant by the term “parent involvement”

(Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2001). There are a variety of terms that are used interchangeably (e.g. home-school relationships, home-school collaboration, family-school involvement, home-school partnerships, parent involvement, family involvement (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992). Furthermore, there is not a consistent terms that is used in professional literature that describes this act of parent involvement (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Dunst & Paget, 1991).

Family Involvement And Student Achievement

Research has indicated the significant role that the family has in a child's education, because family members are the most influential people in a child's life, especially parental figures. Family participation improves student learning whether the child is in preschool or in the upper grades and regardless of socio-economic status (Davis, 2000). Rioux and Berla (1993) also attest that parent and family involvement should not be confined to early childhood or elementary grades, but should last through high school. Others have demonstrated that a student's home environment has a greater impact on test scores than any other factor, including school curriculum or student body characteristics (Coleman, 1996). In addition, though statistics suggest that poverty may predict lower school performance, families that provide a stimulating, language-rich, supportive environment defy the odds of less than ideal socio-economic circumstances (Redding, 2001). Because they are the child's first teacher, the parents (or parent) have the most influence and the ability to

motivate and shape a child's attitude about school learning (Warner, as cited in Stromberg 1991). Parents are the first true role models for a child. In raising a child, the parent naturally takes on the role as the teacher at home. He or she plays a crucial role in both the home and school environments in developing the child's intelligence, achievement, and competence (Beecher, 1984). The child's first learning expectations occur at home under the tutelage of his or her parents, and these expectations are the foundation for the child's intellectual development in the classroom and in other learning environments (Warner, as cited in Stromberg 1991). When a parent talks and plays with infants, reads bedtime stories to toddlers, plays math and reading games with elementary school children, helps middle school students with homework, and establishes appropriate boundaries for teens, he or she lays the foundations for the children's academic success. Thus, teachers do well to encourage parents to be active participants in their child's learning both at home and at school (Davis, 2000).

Benefits of Family Participation

Decades of research have indicated the importance of family participation as a contributing factor toward the academic success of children. Studies have shown that children benefit greatly when their families are actively involved in their education. For example, they receive higher grades, have better attendance, complete more homework, exhibit better behavior and demonstrate a more positive attitude toward higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Similarly, Epstein et al. (2002), describe the benefits for students when families

are actively involved in the process of educating their children. When parents do participate in education, students increase both in achievement and attitude (Henderson & Berla, 1994). These benefits include: higher test scores, improved attendance, more homework completed, fewer placements in special education, more positive attitudes and behaviors, higher graduation rates and greater enrollment in post-secondary education. Studies conducted in Maryland also concur to show that there are significant benefits for middle and high school students as a result of continued school implementation of several types of family involvement practices (Seyong, 1994). Results suggest that the benefits of family involvement are not confined to early childhood or elementary grades, but last through high school (Rioux, Berla, Education Week 1994).

Types of Family Involvement

This project uses a framework developed by Joyce Epstein, a leading researcher on school-family partnerships, to characterize parent involvement practices. According to Epstein (1994), there are six essential practices for developing effective school-family partnerships:

1. Basic obligations of families, such as providing for the health, safety, and nutrition of children,
2. Basic obligations of schools to communicate well with families about school programs and children's progress,
3. School responsibilities to reach out to parents in order to enlist their

voluntary participation in the operations of the school,

4. Parent involvement at home, such as helping children with homework and other learning activities,

5. Parent participation in school decision-making,

6. Collaborations and exchanges with the community to increase family and student access to community resources.

These six essential components offer a foundation upon which educators and parents can build their own outreach strategies (Epstein, et al. 2002).

Understanding Barriers to Parent Involvement

“Parent involvement is a complex activity, especially among low-income families. These parents often see a limited role for themselves in their child’s education and their involvement in the school” (Boeck, 2002, p. 46).

The schools’ committed collaboration with and encouragement of families endeavoring to help children scholastically cannot be underestimated. Ideally, the principal, teachers, school board, superintendent, and public officials are partners with families who, in turn, can make important and unique contributions to this partnership. The communal effort of school and parent in the challenge to educate children is the road to success, though it be fraught with roadblocks and detours (Washington State PTA, 2004).

Often, though desirous of building a parent-teacher partnership, school staff does not know how to create positive and successful parent involvement

programs. Some teachers have mixed feelings about involving parents because they feel inadequate in their own skills of working with families. They may be fearful even to attempt this endeavor (Epstein & Connors, 1995). In addition, in their own preparatory coursework, most teachers have not been taught the skills and knowledge necessary to implement an effective parent involvement program.

Until the past several years, the majority of state teacher certification programs did not require that teacher education programs include standards on family involvement issues. The Harvard Family Study Report written by Shartrand, et al. (1997) concluded that only 22 states had parent involvement in their credentialing standards. Teacher education courses that deal with parent involvement issues and practices do make a difference in subsequent classroom practice. An assessment study by Katz and Bauch (1999) on graduates from teacher education programs at Peabody College, Vanderbilt University indicated that these new teachers felt prepared and engaged in a diverse number of parent involvement practices because they had received parent involvement training in their teacher preparation courses.

Frequently, parents' involvement is limited by their own attitudes and beliefs about their capacity to help in their children's education. Although wishing to help, some parents hesitate or are altogether stymied because of real or imagined barriers, such as those listed by the National Parent Teacher Association:

- Parents are shy
- Family need

- Lack of teacher/student continuity
 - General lack of respect of parents by staff
 - Family need for confidentiality
 - Previous lack of school responsiveness
-
- Systemic culture
 - Prejudices with appearances
 - Grandparents as parents
 - Interruption of school schedules
 - Single-Parent family issues
 - Meeting location and schedules
 - Lack of shared vision among staff
 - Lack of teacher/staff preparation
 - Parking issues
 - Transportation issues
 - Language barriers
 - Parent's feeling of exclusion
 - Parents with special needs
 - Parents in financial need
 - Misinterpretation of school system

(Washington State PTA, 2004).

A key to involving all parents and reducing some barriers, is by creating opportunities for parents in which teachers, administrators and families all are seen as valuing the concept of parent involvement (Dauber & Epstein, 1991).

Parent involvement is a complex activity, especially among low-income families. These parents often see a limited role for themselves in their child's education and their involvement within the school. However, as Boeck (2002, p. 46) explains, "the voices of disenfranchised parents and community members must be heard and they must be empowered as advocates for their children. Engaging families in culturally appropriate ways is critical in the establishment of these partnerships." Schools that are serious about developing partnerships with parents can provide information to parents about how to be partners as well as to understand and attempt to reduce those barriers that keep parents from being more active (Chavkin & Williams, 1989). The real work needs to be done at the school level to develop policies and practices that encourage involvement at the school and guide those parents in how to help (Caplan, Hall, Lubin, Fleming, 1997).

State and Federal Policies and Recommendations

Raising student achievement is undoubtedly the goal of educators at every level. In addition to this reason for implementing parent involvement practices within a school, there are practical and legal aspects of this topic. Federal and state guidelines are significant factors that influence site-based decision-making regarding the implementation of parent involvement programs (OSPI, 2003).

A new era of education began when the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) became a national law on January 8, 2002 (U. S. Dept. of Education, 2002). This law is built on four common pillars: accountability for results, an emphasis on doing what works, based on scientific research, expanded parental options and expanded local control and flexibility. More exactly, schools that receive funds under Title I, may only receive those funds by following very intricate guidelines, specifically regarding parent involvement as explained in SEC. 1118 in Title I document. The law describes explicit requirements concerning parent involvement, specifying that each state education agency support the collection and dissemination of information on effective parent involvement practices to local districts and schools. The law also spells out specific measures that local districts and schools must take to ensure that parent involvement exists in significant areas including: overall planning and written policies at the local levels, annual meetings, trainings and coordinating parent involvement strategies among federal education programs. Included in these federal programs are the following: Title I, Head Start and Reading First. Schools that have these federal programs must involve parents in developing parent involvement practices for their schools. The law also provides for involvement of parents of private schools who have students served by various federal education programs such as Title I (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Becoming a high performing school takes years of continuing commitment. The state of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public

Instruction (OSPI) is continually researching effective methods of creating successful schools. “Nine Characteristics of High-Performing Schools,” written in 2003, is one publication researched and written by researchers from OSPI. In addition, Washington State School Director’s Association (WSSDA) has researched methods of improving student achievement in an article entitled “Closing The Achievement Gap: A Policy Action Guide” (Boeck, 2002). Both articles identify parent involvement as a necessary factor that when emphasized, would aid in the improvement of student learning. In “Closing the Achievement Gap,” other factors in addition to parent involvement, are named as being significant in closing the achievement gap among students, including the following:

- Allocation and Alignment of Fiscal Resources
- Quality Teachers Assigned to all students
- Teaching and Learning
- Cultural Competence
- Time and Opportunity to Learn
- Learning Environment
- Readiness Gap and Early Intervention
- Parent Involvement and Community Collaboration
- Assessment and Accountability

(Boeck, 2004, p. 4)

The report also defends the idea that family stability is clearly associated with student achievement and that parents must be heard as well as empowered as advocates for their children. Engaging families in culturally appropriate ways is critical to establishing these partnerships (Boeck, 2004).

“Nine Characteristics of High Achieving Schools” affirms the idea that parent involvement be included as one of the nine characteristics. This publication outlines the following characteristics of high performing schools:

- Clear and Shared Focus
- High Standards and Expectations for all students
- Effective School Leadership
- High Levels of Collaboration and Communication
- Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Aligned with Standards
- Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching
- Focused Professional Development
- Supportive Learning Environment
- High Levels of Family and Community Involvement

(OSPI, 2003 p. 41)

Both articles are similar in their view of school-family partnerships as they both promote the idea that it is the school’s responsibility to initiate this process and relationship.

Learning At Home

As mentioned earlier in the discussion of the types of parent involvement learning at home is one of the six types listed (Epstein et al. 2002, p. 14-15). In order to promote parent involvement, schools can support a family's efforts to help their children learn when they come home from school. Epstein et al. (2002) include learning at home among the following educational goals:

1. Parenting: Helping all families to establish home environments to support children as students.
2. Communicating: Design effective forms of home-to-school, school-to-home communication.
3. Volunteering: Recruit and organize parent help and support.
4. Decision Making: Include families in school decisions and develop parent leaders.
5. Collaborating with Community: Identify and integrate resources from the community, which will strengthen school programs, family practices, and therefore improve student learning.
6. Learning at Home: Provide information to families about how to help with homework.

(Epstein et al., 2002, p. 14-15)

The United States Department of Education considers homework to be an extension or elaboration of class work (ACCESS ERIC, 2000). Homework plays a significant role in education in the United States. According to the National

Assessment of Educational Progress, two-thirds of nine, thirteen, and sixteen year-olds reported doing homework, and the percentage was increasing (Cooper, 1994). Thirteen-year-olds reported spending an average of about one hour daily on homework (Walberg, 1991). This data indicates that homework accounts for approximately 20% of the total time the typical American student spends on academic tasks.

Homework: The Advantages and Disadvantages.

Homework has been defined as “a task assigned to students by teachers, that is meant to be completed during non-school hours” (Cooper, 1989, p. 7 as cited in Cooper 1994). To paraphrase, another definition of homework offered by Jocelyn A. Butler (2005) is a time when students practice or learn outside of the classroom. In addition, she makes the point that homework is valuable because it teaches them to study independently.

The list of possible advantages and disadvantages of homework can be long. Among the suggested benefits of homework, the most obvious is that it will increase students' retention and understanding of the material it covers. Less directly, homework can improve students' study skills and attitudes toward school and teach students that learning takes place outside the classroom as well (Cooper, 1994). JoLynn Plato (2000, p. 10) indicates in her article “Homework and Its Role in Constructivist Pedagogy,” that homework in general is extremely beneficial for students. She describes that the supporting research is somewhat

dichotomous indicating: objective benefits ascertained from standardized test scores and subjective benefits ascertained from parents, teachers, and the students. "Homework's effect on achievement can be described most accurately as above average," claims Harris Cooper in "Homework Research and Policy: A Review of Literature" (1994, p.6). Cooper indicates that, of 20 studies completed since 1962, 14 are pro-homework. Of 50 studies correlating the time spent on homework with student achievement, Cooper reports that 43 of the studies indicated that students who did homework had better achievement. Debbie Reese reinforces in her article "Homework: What Does Research Say?" the data presented by Cooper. She also adds concurrent data that suggests that students in junior high who complete their homework, outperform those who do not complete their homework by 35% on standardized tests, although oddly, there seems to be no difference in scores in the elementary grades (Reese, 1997, p. 15). By simply evaluating the effectiveness of homework using behaviorist evaluation techniques such as standardized testing, one can ascertain that the short-term stimulus of assigning homework reaps the long-term response of improved student achievement. Other benefits that homework has for students and learning have been described by Butler (2001, p. 1), in saying that homework can:

- provide additional practice and increase the amount of time students are actively engaged in learning.
- be useful to teachers for monitoring student progress and diagnosing student learning problems.

- increase student responsibility and individual accountability.
 - facilitate more rapid movement through curriculum.
 - lead to increase communication between parents, schools and students.
 - promotes parent awareness of student learning.
-
- contribute to students' and parents' understanding that schools have high expectations of students.

Butler (2005, p. 2) also explains that:

- Schools in which homework is routinely assigned and graded, tend to have higher achieving students.
- Giving homework on a regular basis may increase achievement and improve attitudes toward learning.

The article "How Important Is Homework," a summary of the United States Department of Education's perspective on the issue provided by Kid Source Online, summarizes the subjective benefits of homework:

It serves as an intellectual discipline, establishes study habits, eases time constraints on the amount of curricular material that can be covered in class, and supplements and reinforces work done in school. In addition, it fosters student initiative, independence, and responsibility, and brings home and school closer together (ACCESS ERIC, 2000, p.1).

Cooper presents immediate and long-term effects of homework:

Immediate: Students retain information and understand material better. Critical thinking and concept formation are increased. Information processing is improved, and the curriculum is enriched.

Long-term academic: Learning is encouraged during leisure time. Attitude toward school is improved. Study habits and skills are improved.

Long-term non-academic: Students have greater self-direction and self-discipline. Time management is easier for students. Students are more inquisitive and participate in more independent problem solving activities (Cooper, 1994, p. 16).

Diana Brown (as cited in Plato, 2000) has suggested that even though objective statistics claim that homework in the elementary level has little effect on testing, a reasonable amount of homework for younger students has benefits. Self-responsibility is cultivated when a student hands in an assignment, regardless of the complexity of the assignment. In addition, the simple assignment of reading at home has shown to have a positive effect on student achievement. Nancy Paulu (2000) indicates that parents can also reap the benefits from homework as well. The homework assignment will help the family to learn about and become involved in their child's education. The homework will provide opportunity to communicate more with their children and the school. Most important, parents who promote homework assist teachers in creating a lifelong love of learning.

The possible negative effects of homework are perhaps more interesting. Harris Cooper (1994) points out that first, some educators note that any activity can remain rewarding only for a limited time. If students are required to spend too

much time on an activity, they will eventually become bored with it. Second, homework limits the time students can spend on leisure-time and community activities that can impart important lessons, both academic and nonacademic.

Third, parental involvement, however well intended, often becomes parental interference. Parents can confuse children if the teaching methods they employ differ from those of teachers. Fourth, homework can lead to undesirable behaviors such as cheating, either through copying of assignments or receiving assistance with homework that involves more than tutoring. Finally, homework can exacerbate existing social inequalities. Students from lower-socioeconomic families are likely to have more difficulty completing homework than those from well-to-do families. Students living in poverty are also more apt to work after school or may not have an adequate environment for study (Plato, 2005).

In the article "Homework and Its Role in Constructivist Pedagogy" Plato (2005) also described various controversies regarding the benefits of homework. She includes various perspectives beginning with the idea that Bempechat (1998, p. A31) and Butler (as cited in Plato, 2005) summarize, to the effect that homework assignments in the early years of elementary school have very little value. The social and emotional development can be negatively influenced by the stress that homework can bring to young children and their parents.

Brown (as cited in Plato, 2005) warned against giving homework assignments as a means to just finish what was left undone during the school day (Plato, 2005).

Cooper (1994) has warned against some of the possible down sides of assigning homework. Too much time is needed for homework activities and therefore limits time to spend on leisure and community activities. There also may be the temptation to cheat to get the assignment done.

On the positive side, according to Russian psychologist Vygotsky, as cited in Plato (2000), the social aspect of dialectical constructivism was crucial, especially in the first stage of his proposed zone of proximal development. In *Cognitive Psychology and Instruction* by Roger H. Bruning, Gregory J. Schraw, and Royce R. Ronning, the general term of *constructivism* is defined as a psychological leaning that "generally emphasizes the learner's contribution to meaning and learning through both individual and social activity . . . In the constructivist view, learners arrive at meaning by selecting information and constructing what they know" (1999, p. 215). The authors indicate three types of constructivism: exogenous (reconstruction of pre-existing ideas), endogenous (new abstract knowledge developing through cognitive activity based on predictable sequences), and dialectical (source of knowledge is based on social interactions between learners and environments) (Bruning et al., 1999, pp. 216-217). Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky , according to Bruning et al., viewed "all higher human cognitive functions [as having] their origin in each individual's social interactions in a social cultural context." (1999, p. 217). In Vygotsky's theory, he ascertains that a zone of proximal development can be defined as "the difference between the difficulty level of a problem a child can cope with

independently and the level that can be accomplished without help." (Bruning et al., 1999, p. 218). Therefore, if a teacher wished to support this theory as part of her educational philosophy, the homework assigned must encourage the support of those in the student's school and home atmosphere. During the school day, peers, teachers, and administrators should serve as the student's support group as he builds his knowledge through activities that allow for problem solving and higher level thinking in a group setting. At home, the parent, guardian, or siblings should serve as assistants and partners for the student, especially in the elementary grades. Assignments at all grade levels should be given that truly extend the cognitively rich work the student experiences within the classroom (Plato, 2005).

Current research has suggested that students make greater progress when homework is a part of their kindergarten through twelfth grade school experience, and further, that homework is well worth a teacher's efforts to assign and to grade (Plato, 2005). When planned carefully, the advantages of assigning homework far outweigh the disadvantages of excluding it from a student's educational experience.

Suggestions for Implementing Homework Within the Curriculum

Several researchers indicate the key to success for teachers assigning homework is threefold: what one assigns, what one does with the assignment, and what guidance one gives parents in assisting their children (Paulu, 2000; Berkowitz, 1996; Butler, 2000; Brown, 2000; all as cited in Plato 2000).

First, elementary school students should be assigned homework, though it should not be expected to improve their achievement. Rather, homework should help young children develop good study habits, promote positive attitudes toward school, and communicate to students that learning takes place outside as well as inside school. Thus, assignments to elementary students should be brief, should involve materials commonly found in the home, and should not be too demanding. The academic function of homework should emerge in junior high school. However, its function as a motivational tool should not be ignored. The use of both required and voluntary assignments is recommended. The latter should involve tasks that are intrinsically interesting to students of this age. Cooper offers the following recommendations concerning the frequency and duration of mandatory homework assignments per week for different ages.

Table 1.

Recommended Time Spent on Homework, (Cooper, 1994, p. 7).

Duration of Mandatory Homework Assignments per Week		
Grade	Number of Assignments	Minutes Spent on Assignments
1-3	1-3	15 or less
4-6	2-4	15-45 per assignment
7-9	3-5	45-75 per assignment

The following list includes several suggestions for having success with homework programs:

- Assign a reasonable amount of homework. Studies suggest that elementary students should have brief and undemanding work. Middle school students should have no more than 1-2 hours a night. High school students' amount of homework will depend on the level of difficulty of coursework that is chosen by the student (Cooper, H, 1994).
- If students are given a choice, they tend to respond better. Cooper (1994, p. 10) recommends the inclusion of both required and voluntary homework, and the majority of assignments graded in terms of whether the assignment was completed or not.
- School/wide policies should exist for the assignment of homework (Butler, 2000).
- Homework should be clear in order for the students to complete it independently (Butler, 2000).
- Homework should be linked to what the students are already doing in class and should be returned with constructive comments or corrected together in class (Butler, 2000; Tavares, 1998).
- Teachers should make their homework expectations clear for students and parents, including what will be accepted and when it will be accepted (acceptance of late homework is encouraged) (Butler, 2000; Brown, 2000, as cited in Plato; Tavares, 1998).

- Teachers should avoid using homework as a punishment (doing homework because a student behaved badly) and/or as a reward (no homework passes). This tends to devalue its purpose (Tavares, 1998).

Homework for Students with Learning Disabilities

Much attention has been given recently to the use of homework with learning-disabled students. Prior to 1986, not many studies of homework practices included students with learning disabilities. More research in this area exists today. Researchers sought to determine how homework practices and policies that produced positive outcomes for students without disabilities, might differ for students with disabilities.

First, researchers examined studies of the overall effectiveness of homework for students with learning disabilities. This research indicated that the positive effects resulting from assigning homework for students without disabilities, also appears for students with learning disabilities. Studies have indicated that the characteristics of beneficial homework assignments for the two types of students are different). For example, homework assignments for students with learning disabilities should be brief, emphasizing reinforcement of skills and class lessons rather than integration and extension of class work. In addition, students who do not possess certain minimum skills in an area may not benefit from homework at all. Thus, it is vital that teachers monitor homework assignments for students with learning disabilities. Monitoring might involve

reviewing completed assignments promptly in class, rewarding students for completeness and/or accuracy, and allowing students to begin assignments in class so that teachers can make certain that students understand assignments (Cooper, 1994).

Studies also indicated that parental involvement with regards to homework was essential for students with disabilities. These students tend to have less developed self-management and study skills than their peers, and their ability to study relies more on the provision of a proper environment, both physical and emotional. Students with learning disabilities may need periodic rewards while they work or immediately after completing assignments as well as more help in finishing tasks. Research suggested that parents' involvement should be prolonged rather than intermittent (Cooper, 1994).

Summary

The importance of parent involvement in a child's education has been established. Research over the last two decades has demonstrated that children whose parents are involved in their education, are more likely than other students to have positive educational experiences and outcomes, such as improved academic performance, better school attendance, higher aspirations, reduced dropout rates, and increased graduation rates (U. S. Dept. of Ed., 2001). Given the clear evidence of positive returns to parent involvement, schools nationwide are being called upon to develop practices that encourage parents to become more

involved in their children's education both at school and at home (U. S. Dept. of Ed., 2001). Many factors influence parents' involvement in their children's education and schools' efforts to encourage various kinds of involvement are among the most important factors. School practices such as communicating with parents about school activities and programs, and assisting parents to help their children learn at home, increase the level of parent involvement in the home and at school (Crosnoe, 2001).

Further research has suggested that whether parents become involved, depends more on school and teachers' practices than on family characteristics such as ethnicity, parent education, family size or marital status (Epstein and Dauber , 1993). Therefore, it is recommended that schools engage parents in their child's education.

It has also been indicated that the relationship between homework and student academic performance has been influenced heavily by age of the student. The effects of homework on elementary students appear to be small, almost trivial; expectations for homework's effects, especially short-term and in the early grades, should be modest. Homework should be viewed as one of several methods teachers can use to show children that learning takes place everywhere. For high school students, however, homework can have significant effects on achievement. Indeed, relative to other instructional techniques, and considering the minimal costs involved in implementation, homework can yield a considerable increase in academic performance at this level. Additionally, as explained, improved

academic performance is not limited to students without disabilities. Homework can have significant benefits for students with learning disabilities as well.

Having these positive outcomes resulting from homework programs has been contingent on: teacher preparation and planning; assignments appropriate to the skill, individual need, attention, and motivation levels of students; and appropriate involvement of parents.

CHAPTER THREE

PROCEDURES/METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this project was to design a staff development workshop for teachers. The workshop was specifically designed to meet the challenges of presenting a clear, developmentally appropriate and thorough homework assignment in a variety of formats to accommodate the diversity of students and family members that teachers are likely to encounter. The overarching project is a workshop. The product associated with the project is a booklet that can be used as a handout that will be provided in the workshop, but that may stand alone as a guide for teachers as well. A multi-media presentation will accompany this booklet to be used as a visual tool during the workshop. The goal of this specific workshop was to provide teachers an opportunity to develop successful strategies promoting just one of the many methods by which families can become involved with the achievement of students: helping with homework.

Towards this goal, the current studies and pertinent literature were examined.

Need for the Project

Throughout every district and state of the United States, students have felt an ever-growing pressure to achieve academically. The ability to read, write, calculate and to have the necessary problem-solving skills to survive in our complex and demanding society have been more and more essential for graduating students. Because of this, educators at all levels are challenged by

increasing educational demands mandated by federal and state laws designed to encourage academic achievement. As educators have been pressed to become more effective and productive, family and community influences on academic learning have escalated in importance (Lewis & Henderson, 1998). Often, though desirous of building a parent-teacher partnership, school educators do not know how to create positive and successful parent involvement programs. Some teachers have mixed feelings about involving parents because they feel inadequate in their own skills of working with families. They may be fearful even to attempt this endeavor (Epstein & Connors, 1995).

Since it has been determined that family involvement is a key factor in raising student achievement, it is the responsibility of the school to provide opportunities for family participation. Implementing an effective school-wide homework program that will meet the needs of the diverse population is just one of the ways that will contribute to the success of educating all learners. If families cannot understand the details of a student's homework assignment and/or that assignment is not communicated effectively, it is less likely that the family members will be active participants in the homework program. In addition, if the quality, level and frequency of assignments are not appropriate for the specific needs of a student, the homework then loses its meaningful purpose. If teachers are provided some training and helpful tools that will aid in the implementation of a successful homework program, the families will be more apt to participate and therefore the probability of student success increases.

Support for the Project

Support and encouragement for the project was received from the author's principal at Rochester Primary, Kim Fry, the writer's professor, Dr. Steven Nourse, from Central Washington University, and Robert Dixon, a private Curriculum Design Specialist.

Planned Implementation of the Project

This particular workshop will be presented to teachers at both Rochester Primary School and Grand Mound Elementary School at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year. The workshop will be just one in a series of many parent involvement workshops that will be written and presented for Rochester School District personnel.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROJECT

The purpose of the project was to design a staff development workshop for teachers. This workshop was designed specifically to meet the challenges of presenting a clear, developmentally appropriate and thorough homework assignment in a variety of formats to accommodate the diversity of family members that so many teachers are likely to encounter. The overarching project is a workshop itself. The product associated with the project is a booklet that can be used as a handout that will be provided in the workshop, but that may stand alone as a guide for teachers as well. A multi-media presentation will accompany this booklet to be used as a guide during the workshop and overview of the material within the booklet. The goal of this specific workshop is to provide teachers an opportunity to learn more about and to develop successful strategies to promote just *one* of the many methods by which families can become involved with the achievement of students, namely, helping with homework.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of the project was to design a staff development workshop for teachers. This workshop was designed specifically to meet the challenges of presenting a clear, developmentally appropriate and thorough homework assignment in a variety of formats to accommodate the diversity of family members that so many teachers are likely to encounter. The overarching project is a workshop itself. The product associated with the project is a booklet that can be used as a handout that will be provided in the workshop, but that may stand alone as a guide for teachers as well. A multi-media presentation has been created to accompany the booklet and be used as a guide during the workshop. The goal of the workshop was to provide teachers an opportunity to learn more about and to develop successful strategies to promote just one of the many methods by which families can become involved with the achievement of students, namely, helping with homework.

The workshop focuses primarily on learning at home and is the fruit of an extensive review of literature about this topic and especially about parent involvement. The first presentation of this workshop will be given to teachers who are currently employees in both Rochester Primary and Grand Mound Elementary School. Also, this will be the first in a series of parent involvement

workshops designed for educators to promote parent involvement practices within their schools. This professional development series will serve as a building block towards creating and sustaining positive school-family relationships within the learning community in both schools.

Conclusions

As a result of this study, the following conclusions were reached:

1. Schools in the United States are under tremendous pressure to improve student learning.
2. It has been determined that family involvement is a key factor in raising student achievement.
3. Federal law (NCLB) is requiring schools that receive Title I funding to implement comprehensive parent involvement programs.
4. There are numerous barriers that prevent parent involvement.
5. Learning at home with the assistance of parents, especially on assigned homework tasks, greatly nurtures a child's academic growth.
6. There are advantages and disadvantages to having homework for students, but advantages outweigh disadvantages.
7. There seems to be strong correlation between student achievement and homework, especially significant for older children.

8. There is consistent data indicating that students in grades 7 through 12 who actively participate in homework do better on standardized tests than students who do not participate.
9. Evidence does not suggest a similar relationship between younger students completing homework and improved standardized test scores.
10. The positive benefits of homework for younger children includes: promotion of self-responsibility and encouragement of more parent involvement.
11. Teachers need professional development training to assist them in creating effective homework programs for the diverse populations that they are teaching.

Recommendations

As a result of this study, the following recommendations have been made:

The Homework Workshop training should be available and presented to all current and new teachers teaching grades K-6. Additional professional development opportunities should be provided for school personnel that promotes and sustains comprehensive school-family partnerships within the school.

Some of the topics for future workshops may include: creating successful volunteer programs, promoting effective communication between school and home, educating parents about curriculum, how to include all parents in your classroom activities, promoting parent leadership within the schools, how to

effectively involve and communicate with adults with literacy problems, how to communicate and involve families of English Language Learner (ELL) students, how to effectively communicate and involve parents of students with disabilities, and so forth.

Future workshops and handbooks should be designed to reach all levels of educators including certificated, classified and administrative employees in schools.

For this particular workshop, attendees will be provided an opportunity to give feedback in order to continually improve the homework partnership.

Continuous methods of research (surveys, focus groups, interviews, literature) will be collected in order to improve the homework training and future professional development trainings.

Helping Students and Their Families Be Successful

Completing Homework

Strategies that teachers can use for assigning homework that will maximize its effectiveness

**Helping Students and Their
Families Be Successful**

**Completing
Homework**

**Strategies that teachers can use for assigning
homework that will maximize its effectiveness**

Foreword

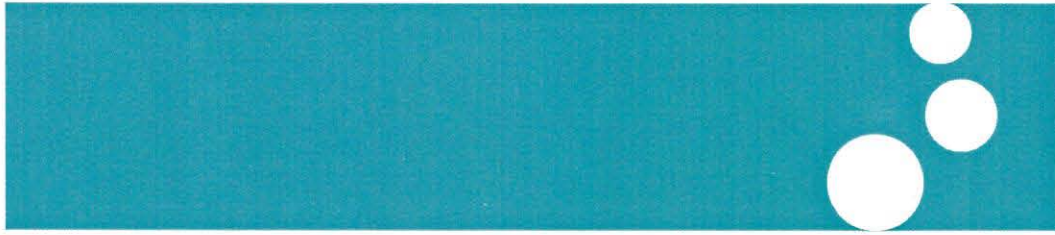
Research has indicated how significant a family's role has in a child's education. The more a family is involved with their child's education, the higher the achievement for the child. The family plays a crucial role in the home and school environments, with regard to facilitating the development of the cognitive, psychological, physical and moral development of the child. Research indicates that when families are involved in their child's education, that child is likely to benefit from:

- ◆ Increase in positive attitudes
- ◆ Higher test scores
- ◆ Improved attendance
- ◆ Fewer placements in special education
- ◆ Higher graduation rates

As educators, we have promised to raise standards for all children, to help all children meet state and federal standards and mostly promote well educated, lifelong learners.

Because of this commitment, it is essential for educators to partner with families and share the responsibility of educating students. Although there are numerous limitations to overcome, as there are with any elements of school reform, it is essential that educators initiate and sustain a partnership between educators and parents, in order to better serve children.

Homework has been a significant part of students' lives since the beginning of formal education in the United States. It is a necessary element that needs to be part of education because it can improve student learning. In addition,



homework can help students to develop positive study skills and habits that will continue to serve them throughout their lives. Not only does homework help students learn to manage their time, work independently and take responsibility for their work, but it also promotes opportunity for families to become involved with their child's education.

Finally, if educators facilitate this partnership through homework practices, they will not only make their professional lives easier as teachers, but also keep their promise to the children that they serve: a promise to help every student succeed.

Rarely do teachers have enough time to accomplish all that is expected of them. Now, with the multiple pressures created by school reform initiatives, asking teachers to implement additional strategies, can seem preposterous to most. Nonetheless, the benefits of facilitating partnerships with families can be numerous.

Most teachers, whether they are primary or intermediate, assign schoolwork that is to be completed outside of class. By definition, this is typically called "homework". There are many purposes and value associated with homework, but only a fraction of students return these assignments completed successfully.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide teachers with strategies that will maximize the effectiveness of the homework work assigned. These tools have been created for teachers who have limited time as well as those who serve a diverse population of students and families.

Table of Contents

Foreword

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Section 1	Purpose of this booklet
Section 2	Homework: A plan for the whole school family
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Section 5	Obstacles to completing homework successfully
Section 6	Overcoming the obstacles
Section 7	Characteristics of an appropriate homework assignment
Section 8	Time Allotment Guide
Section 9	Types of Homework that enhance student learning
Section 10	Communicating assignments with students & families
Section 11	Elements that should be communicated for every assignment
Section 12	Teacher's Role
Section 13	Teachers writing down assignments
Section 14	Conclusion

Section 1: Purpose of This Booklet

The purpose for creating these homework guidelines is:

- ◆ To provide specific, research based homework guidelines for teachers
- ◆ To ensure that the time students spend doing homework is beneficial to their learning and development
- ◆ To promote consistency in homework practices and time expectations
- ◆ To help promote positive, educationally relevant experiences for all students
- ◆ To help increase the level of communication and understanding between home and school as it relates to student learning
- ◆ Help all students and families familiarize themselves with sound homework practices

Section 2: Homework: A plan for the whole school family

Research indicates that when specific kinds of homework are assigned, students' achievement can be raised. In addition, when families are involved with their child's learning, in or outside of class, student achievement will increase. Because of this, teachers can provide a homework program effectively involving families that can promote achievement utilizing these elements. In terms of homework, both the family members and educators each have a distinctive yet interrelated role to play and, each has a voice that needs to be heard. Homework requires teachers, students and parents to play very specific roles; teachers assign, students perform, and parents support. This booklet provides suggestions for teachers to include in their homework program; a vital component of the educational process.

Section 3: What Research Indicates Regarding Homework

- ◇ A reasonable amount of study and preparation outside of class time is necessary for the academic growth of students
- ◇ The amount of homework should increase as the child progresses through the grades
- ◇ Homework enhances the following: self-directed and independent learning, good work habits, development of good time management skills, ability to follow directions, judgments and comparisons, self discipline, and positive communication with families about what is happening in school.
- ◇ Student achievement rises significantly when teachers regularly assign homework and students conscientiously complete it.

Section 4: The Purpose of Homework

Homework is a necessary extension of the classroom experience. Additionally, it is an opportunity for children to learn and for families to be involved in their child's education. Research has indicated that student achievement can be raised when certain kinds of homework is assigned. Homework has different purposes for different ages of children. Homework for younger children should be designed primarily to develop positive attitudes and study habits, and to reinforce basic academic skills, while homework for older students should develop or expand content knowledge in addition to promoting positive study habits. In general, quality homework is designed to promote the following benefits for students:

- ◆ Exploration and discovery
- ◆ Stimulation of interest
- ◆ Development of higher-order thinking
- ◆ Development of self-discipline and independence
- ◆ Satisfaction that comes with mastery
- ◆ Improved literacy skills
- ◆ Improvement of basic skills
- ◆ Independent extension of work begun in the classroom
- ◆ Opportunity for parents to be involved in their child's learning
- ◆ Opportunity to communicate with parents about the curriculum
- ◆ Raising student achievement

Section 5: Obstacles to Completing Homework Successfully

The homework problems that we face are due in large part to the ever-evolving diversity of American society. There are pros and cons to this theory. Fortunately, we live in a diverse nation with a variety of family structures and cultures. These diverse situations, however, are often accompanied with problems for children and obstacles that make achievement in schools a true challenge. Not every child has an opportunity to have two parents available to them, with adequate financial resources and time allowed for the optimum school preparation activities. In addition, many families today are faced with limited English language abilities or may even be limited in terms of literacy. As educators, we need to be aware of these circumstances and prepare our students and their families with strategies to overcome these hurdles, in order to succeed in and outside of school. Not all students come from situations involving socioeconomic challenges, linguistic challenges, or family structural problems. Other students still have obstacles that are not as extraordinary but still may interfere with completing their homework:

- ◆ Sports
- ◆ Church
- ◆ Choir, music lessons
- ◆ Television and video games
- ◆ Chores
- ◆ Other siblings with needs

In any case, if appropriate assignments are assigned and clearly communicated, this will provide an optimum learning opportunity for students.

Section 6: Overcoming the Obstacles

In order for families to help children complete and succeed with the work they are assigned outside of school, there are multiple challenges that teachers must face. The first is to provide clear explanations of the assigned work. The teacher needs to create assignments that are complete and unambiguous, including components that help clarify their expectations. Once these clear and appropriate assignments are created, there remains the second challenge: communicating the assignments to both students and families using a variety of methods in order to accommodate the wide range of needs that exist among our learners and their families.

Section 7: Characteristics of a clear homework assignment

Homework practices can widely vary. Some teachers will create brilliant assignments that combine learning and pleasure while others use homework as a tool to provide students with additional practice on important skills or concepts. Unfortunately, “busywork” can only harm the educational process by turning students off thus making them feel that learning is not enjoyable or worthwhile. Homework has a long history in the American education system for good reason. It extends time available for learning and children who spend more time on homework, on average are predicted to perform better in school. There is substantial evidence that the quality of homework assigned affects student success with that homework. It is therefore important to use strategies when assigning and evaluating homework that will maximize the effectiveness of the work assigned. The question is, how can teachers ease the homework headaches? This section will list and describe elements that should be inclusive with every homework assignment. The homework should:

- ◇ Be an extension of what the student is learning in the classroom
- ◇ Be designed so that the assignment can be accomplished independently by the student
- ◇ Details of assignment explicit (purpose, directions, timelines, expectations) written down by the teacher
- ◇ Be developed appropriately using time allotment guidelines
- ◇ Include help options. Students or families should be informed how to get help if the assignment is not understood. Phone numbers, email, website, before school or after school individual help, peer support, homework club etc...Should be available.
- ◇ Be communicated in the student's and family's native language
- ◇ Be developed into small manageable units
- ◇ Provide information to parents and students regarding teacher's policy on missed and late assignments, extra credit, and available adaptations. Establish a set routine at the beginning of the year.

Section 8: Time Allotment Guide

The amount of time spent doing homework is determined by a number of factors. Meaningful homework is given to extend/or reinforce what is taught in the classroom. Some assignments are short-term, while others are of long-term nature. The ability, effort, and work habits of each student determine the amount of time needed to complete assignments.

When developing homework assignments, teachers should refer to the suggested time span and coordinate assignments with other teachers at their grade level, when appropriate. In any grade level, the teacher should take into consideration the individual differences, needs, and interests of the students.

Homework will increase gradually in amount, variety, and frequency as students progress from grade to grade. The following table indicates recommended times per grade level per day. It is important to note that these are only suggested times.

Kindergarten	15 minutes
First Grade	15 minutes
Second Grade	20 minutes
Third Grade	30 minutes
Fourth Grade	40 minutes
Fifth Grade	50 minutes
Sixth Grade	60 minutes
7&8th Grade	90 minutes
9th-12th Grade	120-150 minutes

Section 9: Types of Homework That Enhance Student Learning

Research has indicated that students' achievement can be raised when specific kinds of homework are assigned:

1. **Study Skills and Habits:** Homework assignments are designed to improve skills such as concentration, discipline, note taking, reading, writing, time management and organizational skills.
2. **Practice and Review:** Homework assignments designed to reinforce material presented in class and/or the mastery of already introduced material.
3. **Preparation:** Some homework assignments are designed to introduce materials that will be helpful in understanding future instruction.
4. **Skill Integration:** Assigning projects or reports that integrate a variety of skills.
5. **Extension:** Assignments designed to allow students to transfer material already learned into new or more complex situations, including real world applications.

Section 10: Communicating Assignments with Students & Families

Communication with families is a vital and necessary component while involving families in a child's education. Student learning will improve when both parents and teachers are collaborating on the goal to improve student learning. In addition, student learning will improve if teachers communicate effectively with families about a broad range of educational issues, including homework specifically. It is therefore a challenge for teachers to find effective ways to communicate homework assignment details with all family members. In the previous section discussing obstacles, it became clear that there are a number of reasons why some students may be unable to succeed in completing their homework assignment. Sometimes, even under very optimum family living conditions, connecting with families can be a challenge for teachers. Often, teachers may have high expectations for families and homework, but for numerous reasons, homework is not always completed. As educators, we can offer a variety of communication tools to families:

- ◆ Curriculum or "Back to School" nights (including appropriate language translations)
- ◆ Parent-Teacher conferences
- ◆ Individual Phone calls
- ◆ Individual conference other than parent-teacher conferences as requested
- ◆ Provide contact information to families (phone numbers, email, website)
- ◆ Telephone homework hotline
- ◆ Websites
- ◆ Newsletters (translated if necessary)
- ◆ Group or individual e-mails
- ◆ Audio-tapes for the visually impaired or those who cannot read
- ◆ Video-tapes for those who can see but cannot read
- ◆ Homework parent helper who communicates if there are questions
- ◆ Contact information for help

Section 11: Elements that should be communicated for every assignment

Just as it is important to find ways to communicate every assignment, it is essential that teachers communicate all necessary elements for every homework assignment including:

- ◇ Purpose
- ◇ Subject
- ◇ Due date
- ◇ Materials needed
- ◇ Detailed description of what is expected from student
- ◇ Evaluation criteria
- ◇ How much this assignment contributes to classroom grade or report card
- ◇ Suggestions for families about how to help with homework
- ◇ If the assignment is a project or another long term assignment, outline the various timeline due-dates
- ◇ Contact information for where to obtain help

Section 12: Teacher's Role

Teachers assigning homework should consider the following for every assignment:

- ◇ Present the assignment clearly and thoroughly
- ◇ Clearly communicate the purpose, directions, and expectations to parents and students for all assignments
- ◇ Provide for individual differences
- ◇ Vary assignments in length and depth based on student's ability level,
- ◇ Provide students and parents with homework mastery strategies (i.e. what to do first, plan for effective use of time, optimum work environments, parents role)
- ◇ Provide timely and appropriate feedback to students and parents by grade or comment as a reinforcement of the learning process.
- ◇ Communicate the assignment to both students and families using a variety of presentation modes (i.e. homework hotline, take home folders, newsletters, calendars, phone calls, planners, home visits, curriculum nights, videos, audio tapes)
- ◇ Provide parents with ideas of how to support their child doing homework
- ◇ When appropriate, provide some student choice in assignments to meet the individual interests, abilities and needs of students

Section 13: Teachers writing down assignments

As described above, there are a variety of tools for teachers to use for communicating assignments to students and families. For the families who have literacy issues or language barriers such as ell families, it is helpful to have these assignments not only clearly written down by the teacher, but also to have included a visual representation of the assignment. The following are examples of using both a clearly written assignment coupled with a visual tool. An example of a primary project as well as an intermediate math assignment were included below:

Intermediate Example

Teacher: Mrs. Reynolds

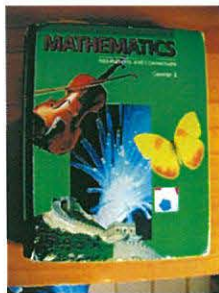
Date Assigned: May 16, 2005

Date Due: May 17, 2005

Purpose: Practice material introduced in class

Assignment: Math Book, p. 340

Even problems through 34 (2,4,6,8 ... 34)

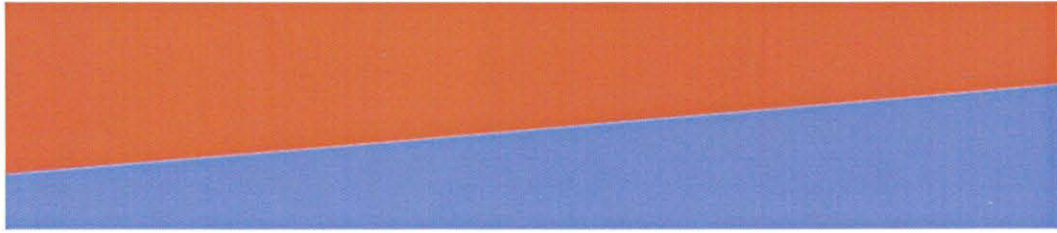


Help:

- c. explanation on pp. 338-339
- d. mrsreynolds.com
- e. parent volunteer helper, Mr. Stone, 555-5998

Grading: Daily assignment graded based on problems attempted. Average of daily assignments equals $\frac{1}{2}$ total grade.

Extra Credit: problem #36



Primary Example

Teacher: Mr. Jones

Date Assigned: March 1, 2005

Date Due: March 17, 2005

Purpose: To provide opportunity for parents and students to plan and construct a project together using imagination, cooperation and artistic skills.

Parent's role: To support the child during the child's activity. Child should use their own ideas to create this project. Parents will assist child.

Assignment: Leprechaun Trap. We've been talking a lot about leprechauns in class. These are imaginary little Irish people that the children would like to catch when our leprechaun visits our classroom. The kids came up with ideas that the leprechaun will be attracted to: gold, the color green, candy, rainbows, sparkly things, treats and other things that are interesting. Let them use their imagination. Remember to find a way that your trap can capture the leprechaun just so the kids can see them.

Materials: Any materials are fine to use. Children can use their imagination.

Help:

- c. school phone number: 456-3311
- d. mrjones.com
- e. parent volunteer helper, Mr. Drake,

Grading: This assignment can be displayed in class for kids who would like to share with each other. The display and show and tell will be optional.

Section 14: Conclusion

Homework can unite children, parents and teachers in a common effort to improve student learning. Whether you are a primary or intermediate teacher, you will face a multitude of challenges with regards to assigning and communicating homework to students and families who have diverse needs and backgrounds.

For some children and their families, completing homework assignments and learning will be a difficult endeavor. For others, completing homework will be remarkably easy. As educators, we have the ability and an obligation to pull together resources and provide opportunities for both. I hope that the strategies provided will be useful while implementing your homework program.

Create A Successful Homework Partnership Program:

*A professional Development Workshop
For Teachers to maximize benefits
Of Homework Assignments*

By Terri Anderson

Sections of this Workshop

- Purpose of this workshop
- Homework: A plan for the whole school family
- Purpose of Homework
- Research
- Obstacles for completing homework
- Overcoming the obstacles
- Quality of appropriate homework assignment

Sections continued.....

- Time Allotment
- Types of Homework that enhance learning
- Communicating assignments
- Elements that should completed for assignments
- Teacher's role
- Clearly written assignments
- Examples of intermediate and primary
- Conclusion and comments

Purpose of Workshop

- To provide research based homework guidelines
 - Provide teachers with research to support their program
 - Time allotment guidelines
 - Tips for providing consistency with program
 - Elements that should be included in assignments
 - Tips to guide teachers to create clear assignments
 - Variety of communication methods



Homework: A plan for the whole school family



Homework: A Plan for the whole school family

- When specific kinds of home are assigned
- Student's achievement increases
- Teacher-Parent partnerships
- Teacher's role
- Parent's role
- This workshop provides suggestions for fostering this partnership



Facts and Findings

1. Schools in the U.S. are under pressure
2. Family involvement is a key factor in raising student achievement
3. NCLB requires Title I schools to implement parent involvement programs
4. Numerous barriers to prevent parent involvement
5. Six types of involvement have been identified as one model
6. Schools can promote these six types

Six Types of Parent Involvement Joyce Epstein

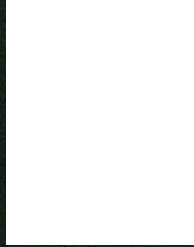
1. Parenting
2. Communication
3. Volunteering
4. Learning at Home
5. Decision-Making
6. Collaborating With Community

Parenting



Basic obligation of families, such as
Providing for the health, safety, and nutrition of
children

Communication

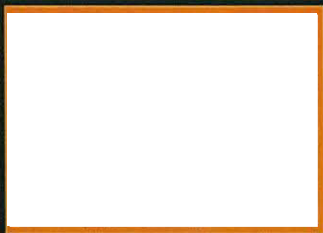


Basic obligation of schools to communicate well with families about school programs
And children's progress.

Volunteering

School responsibilities to reach out to parents in order to enlist their voluntary participation in the operations of the school. Volunteering does not have to occur on the school campus.

Learning at Home

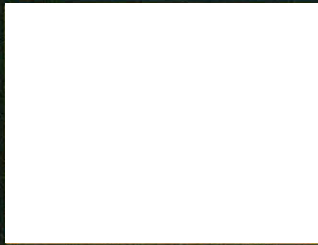


Parent involvement at home or outside of class, such as helping children with Homework and other learning activities.

Decision Making

- Decision making to mean a process of partnership, of shared views and actions.
- Including parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school.

Collaboration with Community



Collaborations and exchanges with the community to increase family and student access to community resources.

Research and Homework?

- A reasonable amount of homework is necessary
- Increase academic growth of students
- Amount should increase as students get older
- Student achievement rises when homework is regularly assigned and it is completed

Research continued...

- Homework enhances the following:
 - *Self-directed and independent learning*
 - *improved work habits*
 - *time management skill*
 - *ability to follow directions*
 - *self discipline*
 - *school-family communication*

What is homework?



Homework is an extension of the classroom experience.

Opportunity for children to learn and families be involved in their child's education.





Benefits of homework

- Exploration and discovery
- Stimulation of interest
- Development of higher-order thinking
- Development of self-discipline independence
- Satisfaction that comes with mastery
- Improved literacy and other basic skills
- Opportunity for parents to become involved
- Opportunity for teachers to communicate with parents
- Raising student achievement

Obstacles

- Diversity among students and families
- Language
- Family structure
- Limited literacy
- Extra-curricular (music lessons, sports, church, etc.)
- Activities at home (television, video games, chores, etc.)

Overcoming Obstacles

- Provide clear and appropriate homework assignments that will meet needs of all individuals
- Communicating the assignments to both students and families using variety of methods

Clear and Appropriate Homework Assignment

This section will describe and list elements that should be inclusive with every homework assignment.

Clear and Appropriate?

- Assignment is extension of what is being taught in class
- Student should be able to complete it independently
- Details of assignment should be explicit
- Appropriate time allotment guidelines (see table)
- Help options
- Small manageable units
- Information regarding teacher's policies on missed and late assignments, extra-credit, available adaptations etc.

Types of homework...

1. Study Skills and Habits
2. Practice and Review
3. Preparation
4. Skills Integration
5. Extension

Duration and Frequency of Homework Assignments

Grade	# of Assignments	Minutes/Day
1-3	1-3	15 or less
4-6	2-4	15-45
7-9	3-5	45-75

Communicating Assignments How?

- Curriculum nights
- Provide contact information to parents (phone, email, web)
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Phone calls
- Additional conferences
- Homework hotline
- Websites
- Newsletters
- Others.....



Communicating...How?

- Group or individual emails
- Audio-tapes for the visually impaired
- Video-tapes for those with literacy issues
- Homework volunteer to organize and answer questions
- Assignment written down by teacher including
 - Purpose
 - Due date
 - Details
 - Contact information
 - Photographs if helpful



What should be communicated?

- Specific subject
- Due date
- Materials
- Expectations
- Evaluation criteria
- Suggestions for parents
- Time-line due dates for projects
- Contact information for help
- Contribution to grade





Teacher's Role

- Present assignment clearly and thoroughly (elements)
- Provide for individual differences
- Vary assignments in length and depth (individual)
- Provide both students and parents with homework tips
- Provide timely feedback
- Communicate assignments using variety of ways
- Provide information to parents on how to help
- When appropriate, provide choices for students to meet individual needs, interests and abilities of individual students


Teachers providing Written Instructions

The following examples are ways that teachers could
Create clearly written assignments that
Include the elements as discussed in the previous
Sections.

These examples are fairly straightforward, but could
be developed more creatively and with a system in
place to make the process very convenient for both
parents and teachers alike.

Intermediate Example

Teacher: Mrs. Reynolds
 Date Assigned: May 16, 2005
 Due Date: May 17, 2005
 Purpose: Prerequisite material introduced in class
 Assignment: Math Book, p. 340
 Even problems through 74 (1,5,6,8 ... 34)




Help:
 1. encyclopedia on pg. 338-339
 2. myresources.com
 3. parent volunteer helps, Mr. Stone, 555-5555

Grading:
 This assignment graded based on problems attempted.
 A range of daily assignments equals 75 total grade

Extra Credit: problem #10

Primary Example

Teacher: Mr. Jones
 Date Assigned: March 3, 2005
 Due Date: March 17, 2005
 Purpose: To provide opportunity for parents and children to plan and construct a project together using imagination, cooperation and artistic skills.
 Parent's role: To support the child during the child's activity. Child should use their own ideas to create the project. Parents will assist child.
 Assignment: Leprechaun Trap. We've been talking a lot about leprechauns in class. There are imaginary Irish folk people that the children would like to catch when our leprechaun visits our classroom. The kids come up with ideas that the leprechaun will be attracted to: gold, the color green, candy, rainbows, sparkly things, treats and other things that are interesting. Let them use their imagination. Remember to find a way that your trap can capture the leprechaun just in the kids can see them.
 Materials: Any materials are fine to use. Children use not their imagination.



Help:
 1. school phone number: 456-2321
 2. myresources.com
 3. parent's volunteer helps, Mr. Stone, 555-5511

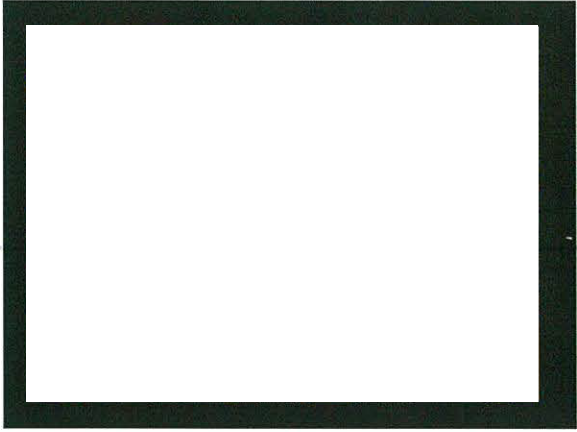
Grading: If this assignment can be displayed in class for kids who would like to share with each other. The display and share will be optional.

Homework can unite children, parents and teachers
 in a common effort to improve students learning.

Whether you are a primary or intermediate teacher, you'll confront
 numerous challenges with regards to homework.

As educators, we have the ability and an obligation to pull together
 resources and provide opportunities for all children to succeed.

I hope these strategies will help you with your homework program.





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