

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON HOMEWORK

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Teachers are finding that a number of students do not complete homework assignments for various reasons, and have long experienced the frustration of students who do not or will not complete their homework assignments. The purpose of this action research project was to research ninth grade freshmen student attitudes about homework at a single large urban public high school. Data from surveys was compiled and aggregate frequency counts of students' responses for each of the survey items were tabulated. According to the data obtained from the 136 freshmen respondents, only 39% reported completed their homework frequently. Sixty-nine percent of the students surveyed indicated that they think homework is meaningful and that it reinforces concepts learned in class, while 64% of the students disagreed with the statement that homework served little or no purpose. Based on the results from this study, educators may need to help students to see and know that their homework assignments are meaningful and that it is not just "busy work". Students need to realize that homework can help them succeed academically and intellectually.

Introduction and Background Information

Teachers are finding that a number of students do not complete homework assignments for various reasons, and have long experienced the frustration of students who do not or will not complete their homework assignments. This is not a new problem as this phenomenon has been researched for decades (Cooper, 2001). Teachers often complain that they cannot get their students to complete or attempt homework assignments. Darling-Hammond & Olivia (2006) share a number of reasons that students report why they do not complete homework assignments. One

of the most frequently reported reasons is that students do not know how to do the work. Some students reported not knowing how to begin the homework assignment, and in some cases they do not understand the instructions for their assignment as given by the teacher.

Secondly, Darling-Hammond & Olivia (2006) reports that students did not feel that the assignment was meaningful, and they did not understand how the work related to the lesson of the day. An additional reason students feel that homework was not meaningful is that they did not receive immediate or any feedback from the teacher regarding the homework assign-

ment completed. If a teacher does not grade the homework and return it to the students the next day or quickly thereafter, the students report feeling like they have wasted their time on that activity. Students prefer that the teacher show how the homework has an impact on current subject matter and connect homework assignments to current lessons. This way, the students feel a sense of self-satisfaction, knowing that the completion of their homework assignment is applicable to their class activities.

Pasi (2006) reports that students may not complete homework assignments which they feel are boring and routine; for example, repetitious worksheets and hand-outs. Teachers should make the homework relevant, but interesting and appealing to the students' learning style. Pasi also recommended that teachers consider incorporating project-based assignments in an effort to increase homework completion.

Part-time jobs or baby-sitting siblings may interfere with the students' ability to complete their assignments. Extracurricular activities such as soccer, basketball, or football, may end late at night sending students home tired and unmotivated to complete their assigned homework tasks (D-Hammond & Olivia, 2006). Students reported becoming stressed from the volume of homework that was assigned by their collective teachers within a day's time in high school and ultimately not getting all of their homework completed (Lacina-Gifford, L.J., & R. Gifford, 2004). Those same studies report that students need down time to relax after attending

school, and that parents are requesting school boards to reduce the amount of homework that schools are required to give students.

Researchers also report that teachers assign homework because some parents expect their children to come home with one or two tasks (Brock, Lapp, Flood, Fisher, & Han, 2007). These expectations typically come from students whose parents are 'professionals and upper-class' (Skinner, 2004). Professional and upper class parents want their children to be challenged to perform to the best of their ability and be prepared for success in the real world. Additionally, the current general consensus of most Americans' opinion on homework appears to retain the notion that the more the teacher assigns, the better the school. More homework is sometimes correlated with schools that offer 'rigor and challenge' (Brock et al., 2007).

In opposition to the more homework, better school idea, some parents are complaining to school boards that their child receives too much homework from their teachers. Parents say that their child is burdened and overworked. Parents want to make sure that teachers follow the guidelines for assigning homework established by the district and that they are not exceeding those limits (Kohn, 2007). Additionally, parents want teachers to be mindful of the amount of work they assign students and not underestimate the amount of time it will take the student to finish the work. Some families want to decide how they spend the majority of their evening and not the school system (Kohn, 2007).

Furthermore, these same parents would

like for the school districts with mandatory homework to re-evaluate the policy that requires teachers to assign a certain number of minutes of homework each night to students. Such policy may lead parents to suspect that teachers are not matching the assignment to individual ability, but merely giving homework for the purpose of a requirement. Hence, the end result is reduced homework assignments. Conversely, it was determined in another study that the "typical student does not spend more than an hour a day on homework" (Skinner 2004, page 5). This same study also reported that the percentage of college freshmen who spent more than 5 hours a week on homework as seniors in high school dropped from 47% in 1987 to 34% in 2002.

In summary, although teachers continue to assign homework when some students fail to turn it in, there are justifiable reasons why they continue to require the completion of such tasks. Some researchers and entities say that teachers assign too much homework, that the teacher's expectations or directions are unclear, and that the teacher gives the students too many handouts. They also state that homework assignments do not involve family interaction or creativity and that this could be a major reason why a lot of the work does not get done. On the other hand, there are some parents who expect their child to come home with homework. These parents believe that homework prepares their child for college and improves their study and work habits.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to address ninth grade freshmen student attitudes about homework at a single large urban public high school with an enrollment of approximately 2200 students attending grades 9-12. An interview with the school administrator revealed that the number of freshmen failures in classes increased by almost half, from the 6 week grading period to the 12 week grading period. The school administrator at this institution attributed the lack of homework completion as a major contributor to the increase in failing freshmen.

The target population consisted of 577 freshmen class members with 263 males and 314 females. This freshman group comprised 26% of the total school population. All freshmen students were assigned an additional set rules beyond those required of the regular 10-12 student body that were designed to hold the freshman more accountable for their behavior and actions.

Two freshman level English teachers agreed to administer a survey to their classes that addressed students' attitudes towards homework. A total 136 freshmen responded to a 39-item Likert-type survey that addressed student attitudes and why or why not they complete assigned homework, demographics of assigned homework, and student reports of their habits regarding completing their assigned homework. The 4-point response scale allowed four values of Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, or strongly disagree.

Data Results

Data from the research surveys were compiled and aggregate frequency counts of students' responses for each of the survey items reported in the attached Tables, I, II, and III. Responses to questions on the survey provided insights to the attitudes and habits of the students regarding their assigned homework and homework-related topics are summarized in Table I. Questions about the logistics and demographics of homework assignments were included in section two of the survey and responses are summarized in Tables II and III.

Student Reported Facts About Homework

Aggregate demographics of the homework assigned indicate that 41 percent of the freshmen students receive homework assignments every day of the week, 71 percent 4 or 5 days per week, and 95 percent at least 3 of 5 days per week. Students received homework most frequently in English and math (46 to 68 percent for 4 or 5 days per week) and least often in social studies and electives (13 to 24 percent for 4 or 5 days per week). Additionally, the math and English homework were reported to require the greatest time investments to complete assignments (65 percent math, 18 percent English) compared to other subjects.

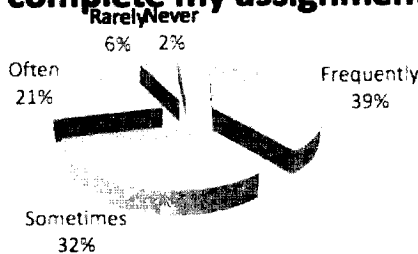
Student Attitudes and Beliefs About Homework

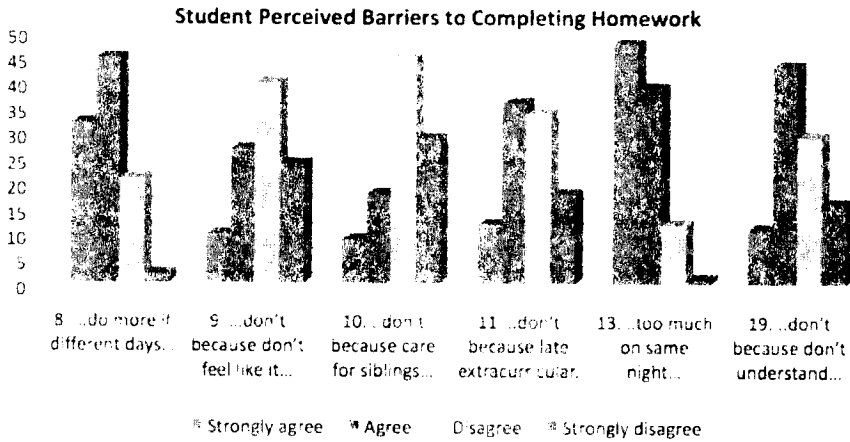
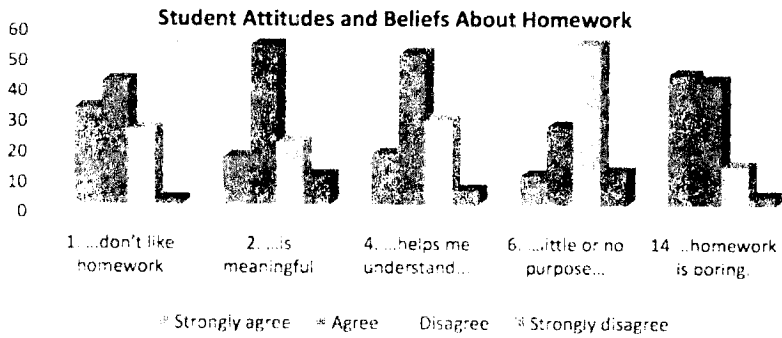
According to the data obtained from the 136 freshmen respondents, only 39% reported completed their homework frequently. Sixty-nine percent of the students surveyed indicated that they think homework is meaningful and that it reinforces concepts learned in class, while 64% of the students disagreed with the statement that homework served little or no purpose. Fifty-seven percent reported that they received a variety of activities for homework. Not surprisingly, 73% of the freshmen agreed that they do not like homework, 84% thought it was boring, and 87% felt that teachers assigned too much each night. An overwhelming majority of the students, 86% (Agree or Strongly Agree), said that they would be more likely to complete their homework if teachers let them start on it during class. This could play an important role in the probability of homework being completed.

Perceived Barriers to Homework Completion

Seventy-seven percent of the students agreed that if teachers in various subject areas assigned homework on days different than other teachers, they would do more of it, and 87% agreed or strongly agreed that teachers assigned too much homework

...I complete my assignments...





on the same night. Seventy-four percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that taking care of their siblings prevented them from doing their homework, while only 27% agreed that they do not do homework because they do not feel like it. On the other hand, 36% of the students surveyed said that extra-curricular activities caused them to get home late, leaving homework on the back burner. Forty-three percent reported that they do not do their homework because they do not understand it.

Student and Teacher Habits in Homework Completion

In a break-down of the number of days homework was assigned in the various subject areas, 47% reported homework in math 5 days a week, 24% had homework in science 3 days a week, 25% had homework in English 5 days a week, and 32% had homework in social studies 0 days a week. Forty percent reported that most elective classes did not have homework any days of the week. Accounting for average clock time spent completing assigned homework given to the students each night,

65% of the students reported that it generally took them about 30 minutes to complete each assignment, but the overall amount of time to complete all of their homework was about 1 ½ hours per night. Math is the subject matter that takes the students the longest time to complete followed by English, with science and social studies trailing.

Forty-four percent of the students indicated that teachers rarely returned graded homework the next day, while 27% of the students said their teachers sometimes return graded homework within 1-2 days. Thirty-four percent of the students reported that it was best that teachers use class time to go over homework as an effort to benefit the entire class.

Discussion and Recommendations

The most common type of homework is a type of instructional homework, also called practice homework (Cooper, 1989b). This type of homework involves the students reviewing material that was learned earlier in the school day and reinforces the content. Eighty-six percent of the students agreed that this type of homework reinforces concepts learned in class and sixty-seven percent of them reported that this homework helps them understand the subject matter better. Also, this is the most common type of homework assigned by math teachers. Forty-seven percent of the students surveyed indicated that they have math five days a week, and sixty-five percent of them said that it takes them longer to complete their math homework than any of the core academic areas.

Based on information gathered from

the data obtained from the surveys conducted by students in the academy, there are several reasons why students do not do or complete their homework assignments. However, educators may need to help students to see and know that their homework assignments are meaningful and that it is not just "busy work". Students need to realize that homework can help them succeed academically and intellectually. Measures and strategies have to get implemented to make this happen. The following recommendations are offered to teachers when assigning homework:

- Make sure that students understand how to do the work and understand the directions.
- Make sure the homework is relevant to the lesson.
- Return homework the next day with feedback.
- Allow students to start on homework assignments in class and monitor their ability to proceed.
- Provide students with options for homework assignments.
- Schedule subject-specific homework on certain days.
- Be mindful of how much clock time assigned homework might require to be completed from the student's perspective.
- Provide a variety of types of assignments for students.

Table I Academy Freshmen Responses to Questions 1-19 in Percentages (%)

Question #	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. ...don't like homework	32	41	25	2
2. ...is meaningful	16	53	21	10
3. ...reinforces concepts...	24	62	10	4
4. ...helps me understand...	17	50	28	5
5. ...starts in class...	6	60	22	12
6. ...little or no purpose...	10	26	53	11
7. ...more likely finish if start in class..	35	51	9	5
8. ...do more if different days...	32	45	21	2
9. ...don't because don't feel like it...	10	27	40	24
10. ...don't because care for siblings...	9	18	45	29
11. ...don't because late extracurricular.	12	36	34	18
12. ...wouldn't on other days either...	4	7	48	41
13. ...too much on same night...	48	39	12	1
14. ...homework is boring.	43	41	13	3
15. ...variety of activities assigned...	11	46	36	7
16. ...should take off points for late...	5	27	34	34
17. ...would do more with family...	7	19	42	32
18. ...parents don't check	15	38	32	15
19. ...don't because don't understand...	11	43.4	29.4	16.2

Table II Student Responses to Questions 20-30 in Percentages (%)

Question #	Frequently	Sometimes	Often	Rarely	Never
20. ...parents monitor...	26	21	20	21	12
21. ...I complete my assignments...	39	32.35	21.32	5.88	1.47
22. ...regular homework in electives	10	22	12	41	15
23. ...regular homework in core...	62	16	18	3	1
24. ...homework projects...	18	44	15	22	1
25. ...choices in assignments...	2	14	14	35	35
26. ...graded next day...	6	21	16	42	15
27. ...graded in 1-2 days...	10.3	27.2	32.4	24.3	5.8
28. ...graded in a week...	9	30	24	30	7
29. ...graded in 2 weeks...	6	23	12	27	32
30. ...checked during class...	4	34	30	22	10

Table III Student Responses to Questions 31-36 in Percentages (%) for # of Days A Week

Question #	0	1	2	3	4	5
31. days per week of any homework	0	1	4	24	30	41
32. days per week math homework	4	1	11	16	21	47
33. days per week science	18	10	23	24	10	15
34. days per week social studies	32.4	16.2	12	15.4	10	14
35. days per week English	17	5	18	14	21	25
36. days per week electives	40	20	15	12	5	8

Table III A Student Responses to Questions 37-39 in Percentages (%)

Question #	≤ 30 minutes	1 Hour	1 & 1 ½ Hrs	2 Hours	≥ 2 Hours
37. ...to complete nightly...	13	26	25	14	21
38. ...to complete each assignment...	65	29	4	1	1
Question #	English	Math	Science	Social Studies	
39. ...which class longest to finish?	18	65	10	7	

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