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Allee Campbell
California State University, Monterey Bay

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Importance of Including Proper Education on Homework for

Pre-Service Educators

Allee Campbell

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California State University Monterey Bay

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Abstract

Homework is a tool that has the power to reap beneficial or negative effects. The variations of these effects stem from the techniques and homework content that teachers employ. This senior capstone examines the educational knowledge that pre-service educators attain on homework techniques and the effects while preparing to become educators. Through review of syllabi at the undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and credential levels at a university, the senior capstone research finding will reveal the knowledge of proper homework assignment and distribution and their training in preparation to become future teachers. This senior capstone research project discloses what is and what is not taught at the levels where pre-service teachers have been trained leading up to becoming teachers. This shed some light in strengthening the curriculum for future pre-service educators. The finding of this research may bridge the gap between the beneficial and negative effects of homework for students.

Introduction

Homework is defined as any assignment given "to students by schoolteachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours" (Cooper, 1989). Historically, homework has been the consistent factor amidst changing times, regardless of one's level of education. Though homework is present in the classroom, students are greatly affected by how the method teachers utilize to distribute homework, as well as the substance of that homework. Research suggests that there are a myriad of teaching techniques employ in distributing homework assignments, some of which benefit student's and some of which prove detrimental to a student's learning experience. Poorly assigned homework can lead to a student's frustration, exhaustion, lack of time for other activities, and a possible loss of interest in learning (Kohn, 2007).

I became aware of the negative impacts relating to poor homework distribution during my time as a nanny. Spending two years with five-year-old twins, I observed their behavior each afternoon as they returned from school. Backpacks would drop, the homework battle would begin, and I would struggle to carry the girls through the "battle" of countless work sheets and exercises. During the tears and shouting, I always questioned if the worksheets were

actually beneficial to the girls' education. This question led me to others: was their kindergarten teacher aware of these struggles at home? Were there struggles happening in every child's home? As I reflected on my own academic experiences, I began to question if I had ever been exposed to the proper education of homework at a recognized university. If a credible university program did not provide me with this knowledge, I presume that the girl's kindergarten teacher has also failed to receive similar knowledge.

"Many teachers are under greater pressure than ever before to assign more homework... Some of it comes from parents, some from the administration and the desire for high scores on standardized tests... I'm disappointed to admit that colleges of education simply don't offer specific training in homework" (Kalish, 2012). Without proper training in homework, many teachers may be unknowingly giving homework that harms a student's learning experience. Diane Lowrie, an educator as well as mother of a first grader, said her first graders reading logs, repetitive math worksheets, and regular social studies reports were crushing him. She said, "Iain (her son) started to hate school, to hate learning, and he was only 6 years old" (Hancock, 2011). Poor homework distribution has

the potential to affect the rest of a student's academic life, namely if the child turns off their desire to learn at a young age.

In this paper I plan to discuss the importance of proper education of homework for pre-service educators. I will examine the role that homework has played in the lives of students throughout the past century. I will also examine the research that has already been conducted. Upon examining the research that currently exists, I will describe the methods I used in this study. Through my research, I plan to answer an array of various questions that still exist relating to the education of homework for pre-service educators. The primary research question I propose to seek the answer to is: 1. Why is it important to include proper education on homework in pre-service educators? The secondary questions will be: 1. Do school districts have policy on homework according elementary teachers? (If they do, how does the policy address the proper homework distribution?) 2. How knowledgeable are pre-service educators about the policy and effects of homework on students? 3. Have pre-service teachers been educated on how to properly distribute homework for elementary school students? 4. Are there existing courses in the Liberal Studies curriculum that address the proper

and effective homework distribution for pre-service teachers? What is the importance of homework education for pre-service educators in both the undergraduate and post-graduate or credential curriculum?

Literature Review

Homework has been a recurrent topic of debate in education. Attitudes towards homework have been ever changing among parents, educators, and administrators. (Gill & Schlossman, 2000). Throughout the century, different historical events have impacted the popularity of homework in the classroom. Like most issues, homework has been a trend that seems to weave in and out of the United State's education system.

In the early 20th century, educators did not question the use of homework for students. It was a common belief among educators that homework helped create disciplined students. It was not until the 1940s that negative connotations of homework emerged. The change was due to a growing concern that homework interfered with the home lives of students. The 1950s brought another change and a push for homework regained traction when the Soviet's launched *Sputnik* (Hough, 2014). As many perceived the Soviet Union to be technologically superior to the United

States, concerns about the United State's education system were brought to light. Sentiments surfaced that the United States lacked rigor. Most believed that a more stringent homework approach would be partial fix to the problem. Thirty years later, the homework trend took another turn when the pro-homework consensus was once again reversed. Learning theorists discovered homework could be detrimental to students' mental health (Hough, 2014).

In the 1990s Dr. Peter Gray, Professor of Psychology at Boston College, assessed a research study, which examined how 6 to 8-year-olds spent their time in 1981 and again in 1997. He found that compared to 1981, children in 1997 spent less time in play and had less free time. They spent 18 percent more time at school and 145 percent more time doing schoolwork (Entin, 2011). To this day, arguments continue to be raised for homework and against homework (Marazano & Pickering, 2007). There are many advocates for homework as they focus on the benefits that homework produces, but there are others who advocate against homework because they focus on the negative aspects homework can produce.

For those who advocate for homework, an improved academic achievement is most often cited as the principal benefit. Dr. Harris Cooper and his colleagues, interested

in applying the lessons of social and developmental psychology to educational policy issues, conducted rigorous research on homework in the classroom (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). Utilizing research that dates back to the 1930s, Cooper conducted analysis of the data in 1989 and most recently 2006. In his research, Cooper looked at the relationship between homework and student achievement by comparing students who were and were not assigned homework. Cooper and his colleagues (2006) noted that, "with only rare exceptions, the relationship between the amount of homework students do and their achievement outcomes was found to be positive and statistically significant. Therefore, we think it would not be imprudent, based on the evidence in hand, to conclude that doing homework causes improved academic achievement" (2006).

The research of Cooper and his colleagues found the benefits of homework to vary amongst levels of education. At the elementary school level, "homework for young children should help them develop good study habits, foster positive attitudes toward school, and communicate to students the idea that learning takes work at home as well as at school" (2006). Beyond the elementary school level in regards to the secondary school level, student homework is associated with greater academic achievement as

previously suggested.

Harris Cooper's research on homework has had an impact on policies and practices nationwide and his leading meta-analyses is the main study that is used to validate homework in the classroom (Social Psychology Network, 2008). Given the influence of Dr. Cooper's research on policy, one can imagine the criticism that arises in the academic discussion. "A careful reading of Cooper's own studies . . . reveals further examples of his determination to massage the numbers until they yield something... anything on which to construct a defense of homework for younger children" (Kohn, 2006).

Criticisms aside, those who advocate for less homework focus on the negative effects of homework, which include student's frustration and exhaustion, lack of time for other activities, and possible loss of interest in learning (Kohn, 2007). Research also suggests that homework has the potential to impact the relationship between a student and their parents at home. Some parents note feeling resentment for having to play the role of enforcer in getting their child to complete homework. The perception also exists among parents that they will be criticized for either being too involved or not involved enough in the completion of their child's homework (Kohn, 2007).

Drawing on academic research, interviews with educators, parents, and kids, as well as their own experiences, two of the most successful homework reformers find that there is no empirical evidence that homework helps elementary school students long term achieve academic success (Bennet & Kalish, 2006). Their research seeks to expose parents and educators to the discussion in an attempt to build a coalition against homework in hopes that it will eventually disappear.

Bennet and Kalish (2006) also attribute the negative effects of homework to the lack of training educators receive during their process of becoming teachers. Teachers have "homework policies" where they are instructed to assign a certain number of minutes of homework every day, or to make assignments on the same schedule every week. Homework in most schools is not limited to those occasions when it seems appropriate and important. Kohn (2007) also asserts that as a result of the lack of knowledge, the point of departure seems to be, "We've decided ahead of time that children will have to do *something* every night" (2007).

It is the purpose of this Senior Capstone to expose the truths about what teachers and pre-service teachers understand about homework. The current research implies

that homework reaps negative effects when distributed incorrectly. In this senior capstone, I will try to find the answers from the source of what is causing the negative effects.

Methods and Procedures

The purpose of my research is to examine both the historic and current exposure that teachers have received as it relates to the proper homework methods and procedures. In order to determine the degree of homework education and training that has been implemented in the curriculum of pre-service educators, I will be surveying current and retired elementary school teachers, as well as pre-service teachers at the undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and credential levels.

The surveys, to be distributed in March 2014, will be sent to 10 current elementary school teachers (See Appendix A), 10 retired elementary school teachers (See Appendix B), 10 pre-service teachers at the undergraduate level (See Appendix C) and 10 pre-service teachers at the post-baccalaureate or credential level (See Appendix D).

As I seek to determine where the proper education occurs, or fails to occur, the population in my study takes into account every step of an elementary school teacher's

career. Ensuring that no step is omitted from my study, the research should be conclusive in stating whether proper education is or is not implemented. Current teachers will be surveyed to shed light on existing district policies regarding homework and explain the manner in which those policies are enforced (See Appendix A). In targeting retired teachers, I aim to determine the manner in which proper homework education has changed over the past several decades (See Appendix B). Pre-service educators are included to determine what is currently taught about homework at the undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and credential levels (See Appendix C and Appendix D). The line of questioning for each survey lends itself to an understanding of the classes being offered, as well as the student's comprehension of the effects of homework. To that aim, pre-service educators will be surveyed on their current knowledge and perceived ability to effectively distribute homework.

My research will include a review of every Liberal Studies course syllabus at California State University. La Tanya Wilson, the Administrative Support Coordinator for the Liberal Studies Department, has provided the researcher with access to the outcomes of the Liberal Studies curriculum. In reviewing these syllabi, I will search for

courses that cover the education and training of homework. This research will reveal the current California State University curriculum.

Once the data is collected and analyzed, a conclusion will be made as to whether or not pre-service teachers have been educated or are educated on the proper homework methods and procedures. In addition, a recommendation to all universities with pre-service teachers will be made in order to enhance the effectiveness of each program.

Results and Findings

After surveying a wide array of pre-service teachers and current teachers, I will present my results and findings in a format framed around the secondary research questions.

Do school districts have policy on homework according elementary teachers? If they do, how does the policy address the proper homework distribution? (See Appendix A)

Of the ten elementary teachers that were surveyed, each stated that they must abide by their school districts policy regarding homework. Regardless of the state or county that the surveyed teacher was located, in each of their school districts possessed the same policy. When asked about district policies, Teacher 'A', a fifth grade

teacher in California, responded: "It (homework) should be 10 minutes a night in 10 minute increments that increase at each grade level. So, 1st grade should get 10 minutes of homework, 2nd grade should get 20 minutes of homework, 3rd grade should get 30 minutes of homework, etc." When asked the same question Teacher B, a fifth grade teacher from Philadelphia, responded, "Our teachers in this district basically give 10 minutes per grade level, so my 5th graders should have 50 minutes." When presented with the same question, each of the other eight respondents suggested the same approach. Each teacher's responses conveyed that their district policy address the amount of time spent on homework. However, the policies do not address the specific content of the homework distributed.

Do pre-service teachers know about the average school district policy on homework distribution? How knowledgeable are pre-service educators about the effects of homework on students? (See Appendix C and D)

Of the ten pre-service teachers at the undergraduate level, none of the respondents had any previous knowledge about the average school district policy on homework distribution. Of the ten pre-service teachers at the credential or post-baccalaureate level, five knew the

average school district policy. The other five students had no previous knowledge about the average school district policy on homework distribution.

Knowledge on the effects of homework varied greatly among respondents. Each respondent was asked to respond on a scale of one to five on how knowledgeable they were on the effects of homework; one represented no knowledge while 5 represented much knowledge (See Appendix C and D). Among the undergraduate pre-service teachers, three of the ten responded with a one (no knowledge), one of the ten responded with a two, three of the ten responded with a three, two of the ten responded with a four, and one out of the ten responded with a five (very knowledgeable). Among the pre-service teachers at the credential or post-baccalaureate, one of the ten responded with a two, five of the ten responded with a three, and four of the ten responded with a four. Not surprising, the range among the respondents spanned the entire spectrum of the scale.

Have pre-service teachers been educated on how to properly distribute homework for elementary school students? (See Appendix C and D)

Of the ten pre-service teachers at the undergraduate level, none of the respondents have been educated on how to properly distribute homework to elementary school students.

Of the ten pre-service teachers at the credential or post-baccalaureate level, two of the ten had been educated on how to properly distribute homework for elementary school students. The remaining eight had never been educated on how to properly distribute homework to elementary school students. As this suggests, 90 percent have had no formal education on how to properly distribute homework.

This secondary research question was directed towards pre-service teachers; however, a current elementary schoolteacher also felt the desire to provide additional information to the research, as it relates to the question. After discussing the homework policy she abides by, Teacher 'B' also stated, "I was never taught in college about homework or how to distribute homework."

Are there existing courses in the Liberal Studies curriculum that address the proper and effective homework distribution for pre-service teachers?

In reviewing the syllabi in the Liberal Studies Department at CSUMB, there are no courses that cover the education and training of homework.

Discussion

After examining literature on the effects of homework's, as well as the qualitative data derived from the respondent's answers, it is apparent that education on proper homework distribution is important. The literature review provides information that argues homework yields both positive and negative effects. When homework yields negative effects, it has been shown that they can cause extreme harm to the mental state of young students and long-term effects as it relates to a student's education. What the literature review did not produce was the reasons why homework has multiple effects. I believe my research produced suitable reasons for the variation.

Upon further review of my research, it is apparent that pre-service educators, whether at the undergraduate, credential, or post-baccalaureate, have not been and are not educated on homework. The results show a consistency among pre-service educators and their knowledge about homework. Out of twenty pre-service educators, 90 percent of them have never had any formal education on how to properly distribute homework. The data gathered from my subject participants also showed great discrepancies among respondents when asked about their previous knowledge on the effects of homework to elementary students. It may be concluded that if the effects of homework are taught in

undergraduate, credential, or post-baccalaureate, there should be less discrepancies in the responses from my subject participants.

I believe the variation of positive and negative effects between children and homework is due to the lack of homework education and training in a pre-service educators preparation to become a teacher. Teachers create homework plans with no guarantee that their distribution of homework will be effective for their students. Without proper homework training, many teachers unknowingly give homework that is detrimental to a student's learning experience. The research suggests that homework creates adverse effects when distributed incorrectly (Bennett & Kalish, 2006), but how is a teacher supposed to know how to distribute homework correctly if they have never been educated on the subject matter?

I believe the negative effects of homework can be stopped if we introduce proper education and training on homework into CSUs pre-service educators curriculum. If every teacher has knowledge on the potential effects of homework and is trained how to effectively distribute homework, I believe the negative effects of homework will vanish.

My recommendation for the Liberal Studies Department at CSUMB is to implement a course or a section of a course that is dedicated to the education of homework. I believe this subject matter would fit well within LS 300: Major ProSeminar. In this class students explore educational theories, perspectives, and concepts as they develop and demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills, as well as critical thinking and research skills. A section on homework techniques, effects, and policies would fit perfectly within this class

Problems and Limitations

One obstacle presented itself during the conduct of my research. While all current elementary school teachers and every level of pre-service educators responded to my survey, no retired teachers responded to my survey. I believe that technology was the reason for this obstacle. I received many responses from the retired teachers that stated their confusion and lack of knowledge on how to properly fill out the survey.

Due to my small population size, I believe my data would not be statistically significant in the eyes of scholars. This in mind, I do believe that my research is a good place to start. I collected data from multiple

credential programs throughout the United States and a major California State University. I believe that the programs I surveyed offer some void in the curriculum to educate pre-service educators. Therefore, my research is valid enough to come to the conclusion that there is a lack of proper education on homework in pre-service teachers preparation to becoming teachers.

Conclusion

Homework given to elementary students can yield both positive and negative effects. Current research suggests that poorly assigned homework can generate frustration, exhaustion, lack of time for other activities, and a possible loss of interest in learning for students (Kohn, 2007). One would assume that something as important as homework, a tool that has the power to damage a student's life if distributed improperly, would be introduced in pre-service education. The truth is that education on homework and training on homework is not taught in a pre-service teachers curriculum, whether at the undergraduate, credential, or post-baccalaureate level.

Ten current elementary school teachers, 10 pre-service teachers at the undergraduate level, and 10 pre-service teachers at the post-baccalaureate or credential level were

surveyed on the subject matter of homework (See appendix A, C, and D). The survey produced results that showed only two of twenty pre-service teachers had formal education on homework distribution. The survey also produced results that showed current teachers are held to a homework policy that enforces the amount of time students should spend on homework. The homework policy does not discuss the content of the homework but only the time that should be spent on homework.

Homework education is important for pre-service educators because poor knowledge about homework and its effects can lead to poorly assigned homework. When distributed incorrectly, homework can have negative effects on students, but how is a teacher supposed to know how to distribute homework correctly if they have never been educated on the subject matter? The key to ending negative effects of homework is through education of pre-service educators!

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Appendix A

Survey for Elementary School Teachers

1. Does your school district have policies on homework?
If so, what are these policies and how does the policy address the proper homework distribution?

2. Through out your time as an educator or as a future educator, have you been properly taught/trained on how to effectively distribute homework? If so, what were those courses?

Appendix B

Survey for Retired Elementary School Teachers

1. Did your school district have policies on homework?
If so, what were these policies?

2. Through out your time as an educator, had you been properly taught/trained on how to effectively distribute homework? If so, what were those courses?

Appendix C

Survey Questions for Pre-Service Teachers at the Undergraduate Level

1. Have you ever learned about or have been trained on how to effectively distribute homework in the classroom?

- A. Yes
- B. No

2. Do you know how many hours of homework are appropriate to distribute at every grade level?

- A. Yes
- B. No

3. How knowledgeable are you about the effects of homework on students?

Not Knowledgeable- 1 2 3 4 5 -Very Knowledgeable

Appendix D

Survey Questions for Pre-Service Teachers at the
Credential or Post-Baccalaureate Level

1. Have you ever learned about or have been trained on how to effectively distribute homework in the classroom?

- A. Yes
- B. No

2. Do you know how many hours of homework are appropriate to distribute at every grade level?

- A. Yes
- B. No

3. How knowledgeable are you about the effects of homework on students?

Not Knowledgeable- 1 2 3 4 5 -Very Knowledgeable