“The Culture of Homework: Stories Teachers Tell”

by

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Abstract

One facet of education is homework. The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers use homework as an instructional strategy. This study examined the views of five educators and how they use homework as a part of their instructional cycle. Teacher interviews, parent communication, and homework assignments were all gathered as data points. As a result of collecting and analyzing this data, ideas for how homework can best be used evolved. These findings contributed to the conclusion that homework has merit. However, parameters and common expectations between stakeholder groups need to be set in order for homework to be an effective instructional strategy.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

"I wrote a 20 minute bit about how homework stinks" (Koren, 1996). After working hard throughout the day and completing assignments at school, students are often rewarded with additional work to be completed at home (Kohn, 2006). The United States Department of Education (2003) "suggests that children in kindergarten through second grade can benefit from 10 to 20 minutes of homework each school day" (p. 1). By this recommendation, primary age students, students in grades K–2, will spend 30 to 60 hours during a typical school year completing at home assignments. At-home assignments are completed beyond the instructional day and without the guidance of the licensed professional that assigned the task (Vatterott, 2009).

Homework can be defined as assigned activities to be completed beyond the instructional day. These activities are intended to be completed at home (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). A teacher at the school assigns homework assignments, which can be considered an instructional strategy to improve student achievement (Van Voorhis, 2011). The majority of previous research related to homework looks at how much time is spent on assignments and how the completion of those activities impacts school success (Cooper, 1989; Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Paschal, Weinstein, & Walberg, 1984). More current studies look at the type of assignment and how it fits individual needs (Danielson, Strom, & Kramer, 2011; Watkins & Stevens, 2013).

Homework has evolved from the times of early education when the primary focus of learning was rote memorization. At-home assignments are no longer simply memorizing math facts or spelling words (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Vatterott (2009) and Kohn (2006) detailed that

as family dynamics and the diverse needs of learners changed, families were frustrated with the increased workload to be completed at home and teachers were frustrated when assignments were not completed. Attitudes regarding homework changed as the philosophies of education changed over time.

The shift in societal attitudes about homework often coincided with a historical event that caused the shift. For example, "After the Soviet Union launched the *Sputnik 1* satellite in 1957, the trend toward less homework was quickly reversed as the United States became obsessed with competing with the Russians" (Vatterott, 2009, para. 14). The aforementioned trend towards less homework was so pronounced during the 1930s and 1940s that movements were launched to eliminate at home assignments. The 1960s and 1970s saw a shift again as parents believed that their child should have relaxed carefree evenings. The 1980s and 1990s saw a pro homework alliance begin as deficiencies in the United States educational system were brought to light. As a result, additional homework was assigned to fix these inadequacies. The 2000s have seen a shift back to limiting the time spent on assignments away from school as the cyclical nature of education continues (Vatterott, 2009).

Research completed by Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) found that in order for homework that is assigned by teachers to be effective, it requires in depth knowledge on the part of the teacher making that assignment for students to complete. The teacher must have an understanding of the curriculum. In addition to understanding the curriculum, the teacher needs to have an understanding of the dynamics involved in each child's personal setting. In other words, not only does the teacher need to know the material being assigned, but they need to be aware of the home environment that each student returns to nightly. Each student is unique. Each home environment is unique. Understanding the dynamics of each child's unique

characteristics and setting will allow educators to thoughtfully assign work that can be completed based on each unique situation.

Studies related to homework and the individual needs of learners were limited. As a result, it is important to examine the culture of homework and how it is used in school districts. Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) point out in a call for future research that, "The topic of homework should be covered more pointedly in preservice, advanced, and inservice education for teachers and administrators" (p. 191). By examining the culture of homework and how it is used in a local school, practitioners can determine if additional professional development is required to train teachers on the effective use of homework as an instructional strategy.

Various reasons may be given by teachers as to why they assign homework. One reason teachers may assign homework is to keep parents in touch with what is happening at school (Epstein, 2011). It is important to determine if teachers have the training needed to assign meaningful work to be completed at home and that they are not just assigning work without giving it proper time and attention when planning. Furthermore, the building administrators and district leaders need to be aware of what assignments are assigned to be completed outside of school. It is important to discuss the instructional strategy of homework with school and district leaders because they set the policies and procedures for the school and district that the students attend.

Statement of the Problem

Homework is an instructional strategy that has been around as long as students have been attending school (Kohn, 2006; Vatterott, 2009), yet rarely is it an instructional practice that is closely examined for effectiveness. Asking teachers for their views on homework provides important insight into this understudied practice. How do teachers really feel about homework?

Do their behaviors match their words? Research indicates that when homework is targeted to meet specific needs that it is most effective (Heitzmann, 2007). As a result, it is important to talk with teachers about how they use homework and to determine if their actions match their words.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the culture of homework as an instructional strategy in one elementary school. In addition, the artifacts gathered from examining the homework assignments made by teachers were explored. A classroom observation was made to determine if practices matched beliefs and relevant research strands were investigated. These include reasons for assigning homework, parental involvement in homework, and instructional strategies.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do teachers describe the culture of homework they work to create in their classroom?
2. How do teachers use homework within their instructional cycle?
3. How do teachers' practices align with their beliefs?

Significance of the Study

This research examined the culture of homework as an instructional strategy in an urban elementary school in the southeastern United States. In addition to how homework was used as an instructional strategy, the research examined the use of homework and how teachers' beliefs and practices aligned. Factors in education are cyclical in nature. Educators can take on different philosophical approaches to instructing students. Various instructional strategies can be used to instruct students. The information that is collected can provide information to school and

district instructional leaders. It is important to understand if teachers have the necessary pedagogical knowledge as it relates to homework to be able to carefully design assignments to be completed beyond their scope of influence. Essentially, school and district leaders can develop or refine policies that coincide with their views related to homework as an instructional strategy.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations to the study were considered before research started. The following limitations were noted:

1. The use of a single site for the study limited the number of participants in the study.
2. Lack of access to classrooms during instructional time.
3. Only artifacts and teacher perspectives were represented.

Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions were made:

1. Participants in the study had some degree of influence over the homework that was assigned.
2. All teacher participants in the study assigned homework.
3. Participant responses about beliefs in the interviews were honest.

Definition of Terms

The definition for terms used in the study is provided below:

Homework – Homework is an instructional strategy used by teachers. Homework is defined as activities that are intended to be completed beyond the instructional day (Cooper, 1989). For the purposes of brevity, homework and at home assignments will be used interchangeably.

Instructional Strategy – The techniques and practices teachers use to guide student learning.

Interactive Homework Assignment (IHA) – An Interactive Homework Assignment (IHA) is a homework assignment designed to involve parents in the completion of the assignment with their child (Bailey, Silvern, Brabham, & Ross, 2004).

Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) – The Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) strategy is an interactive homework assignment specially designed to involve parents in the homework experience (Van Voorhis, 2011).

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this review of literature is to provide an overview of the current research on homework as an instructional strategy. First, the history of homework is detailed. Second, instructional strategies were explored. Then, findings on the purposes of homework are described followed by the types of homework assigned. Homework has been used to involve parents in the education of their children. Research on the effectiveness of homework is shared. The last section provides a summary of the research and why it is important to study this topic. Examining the use of homework and instructional strategies can offer insight in to how effective homework can be and what empirical studies tell us about its use as an instructional strategy.

The History of Homework

The history of homework is well documented in empirical studies and educational literature (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Cooper & Valentine, 2011; Eren & Henderson 2011; Kohn, 2006; Van Voorhis, 2010; Vatterott, 2009). The reasons for assigning homework vary and these reasons have changed as the centuries have turned. A look at homework during the 19th and 20th centuries and present day was examined.

Eren and Henderson (2011) pointed out that the state of California actually banned homework from being assigned to students in 1901. Despite this movement in California, other states viewed homework as a positive strategy to grow the minds of learners. In the early 20th century homework was used to develop the automaticity of students. Homework was assigned to

discipline the minds with assignments and practice problems (Cooper & Valentine, 2001). Vatterott (2009) detailed that during this time period the major impetus in schools was on rote memorization. As a result, homework activities involved memorizing math facts and spelling words. One of the seminal researchers and historians in the field of homework, Cooper (1989), echoed this sentiment. During the early 1900s, homework was viewed in a positive light due to the fact that memorization could be completed at home. However, not all stakeholders shared this sentiment. Families were forced to determine if it was more important for students to learn their lessons, or assist with family chores; for example, working on the farm (Gill & Schlossman, 2004). In fact, education did not go much beyond the foundational years of elementary school during this time period. Homework could take two to three hours to complete depending on the aptitude of the learner involved. During this time period an increase in pediatric medicine was growing. Pediatric doctors began to blame ailments that they diagnosed with children on homework. The pediatricians believed that children needed to be out playing and exercising and not indoors completing assignments. As a result, an anti-homework sentiment grew and the instructional strategy was not used as often (Vatterott, 2009). This anti-homework movement allowed students the opportunity to socialize with peers and develop individual interests outside of the school day.

When the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik 1* in 1957, homework was brought back in to popularity as the need to compete globally became a priority for United States citizens (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Eren & Henderson, 2011; Van Voorhis, 2010; Vatterott, 2009). Russian students were perceived as being academically advanced relative to American students. Also, the reality of the Russian government putting a satellite in space scared the American people (Gill & Schlossman, 2004). The viewpoint of homework as a

positive held until the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Vietnam War and the fight for civil rights weakened the emphasis on homework for elementary students in the United States. The pendulum once again moved back to a call for less homework. Bennett and Kalish (2006) pointed out that parents wanted children to have an opportunity to enjoy their evenings without having to complete schoolwork at home.

This swing did not last for long. A report on the status of the United States educational system, *A Nation at Risk*, published in 1983, caused homework to be called on again to improve the inadequacies in the education of students. It was not just a call for homework but a call for increased educational opportunities for students to learn (Vatterott, 2009). However, Kohn (2006) contended that more homework would be called for whenever it was noted that educational results are sub-par. The back and forth between homework advocates and opponents continues today as they work to identify if homework is an effective instructional strategy or a harmful one.

Instructional Strategies

Instructional strategies are utilized to improve student performance when mastering content. As a result, it is important to look at instructional strategies and how the implementation of these strategies can impact student learning. Homework is an instructional strategy that is rarely explored or considered by research. Many spurious variables can unintentionally influence the results of studies intended to isolate a treatment for a group of students. This is particularly true when it comes to empirical work on the subject of homework (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Due to the fact that teachers use homework as part of their instructional practices, it has been found to be an effective instructional strategy by some researchers (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). In

addition to homework as an instructional strategy, other instructional strategies will be reviewed to show how their effectiveness compares to the instructional strategy of homework.

Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) examined homework as an instructional strategy in their research on how various instructional strategies impacted student achievement. To be considered a strategy with significant impact, the effect size of the research sample had to be high. The researchers completed a meta-analysis of previous research. Using data from numerous previous studies, syntheses, and meta-analyses of research on instructional strategies they were able to identify nine instructional strategies that impacted student achievement the most. The highest effect size for their categories of instructional strategies is 1.61 and the lowest is 0.59. The nine strategies are: "identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinquistic representations, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, and questions, cues, and advanced organizers" (Marzano et al., 2001, p. 7). Several of the instructional strategies identified and defined in this study were broadly defined. Marzano et al. (2001) used the reported effect sizes from the previous studies and came up with an average effect size for each instructional strategy. "Researchers at Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) analyzed selected research studies on instructional strategies that could be used by teachers in K–12 classrooms" (Marzano et al., 2001, p. 4). They decided to draft their work in this format because they believed that the best way to determine what is known about a topic is to study as much about that subject as possible and that the composite results of that analysis gives you the best data as to what is effective. The following paragraphs will give the effect size for each instructional strategy, give the number of studies that were used in the analysis for that particular strategy, and provide a definition of each strategy. The details

on the selected studies will be discussed as each distinct instructional strategy is presented in detail.

The average effect size for "homework and practice" was 0.77. Homework affords students the opportunity to work on skills outside of the school setting. These tasks are assigned by the classroom teacher. One hundred thirty-four total effect sizes were averaged to obtain this effect size. Four research studies were used to determine this effect size. The four research studies (Graue, Weinstein, & Walberg, 1983; Hattie, 1992; Paschal, Weinstein, & Walberg, 1984; Ross, 1988), seminal to the work of Marzano et al. (2001), studied the general effects of homework. Graue, Weinstein, and Walberg (1983) used the keywords of "home intervention and parent participation" (p. 353) to calculate effect sizes from previously completed studies from 1970–1980. They were studying how the effect of a treatment designed to enrich a child's at-home environment compared to a control group that did not receive the treatment. This synthesis of past research indicated that the treatment, providing an at-home instructional program, had a significant impact on improving student's achievement. It should be noted that, as stated by the researchers, variables such as time spent implementing the treatment, specialized training for parents, and what types of students would benefit most from the in-home instructional program should be explored further (Graue, Weinstein, & Walberg, 1983). Ross (1988) completed a meta-analysis of studies that examined controlling variables. In this work, homework was never specifically mentioned. However, the researcher referred to "out of school tasks" (Ross, 1988, p. 426). The activities designed to look at controlling variables that included "out of school tasks" had a higher effect size, 1.06, than activities that did not include "out of school tasks". Paschal, Weinstein, and Walberg (1984) completed empirical work on studies that examined homework and how homework activities impacted student achievement. Once again

this was a synthesis of previous research that was completed from 1966–1981. The researchers studied the results and looked at how homework rigor, time spent completing assignments, and importance of assignments compared to the control groups in each study. They showed as much as a 2.56 change in standard deviation from the experimental and control groups. As a result, they concluded that it is important to score and provide feedback on homework assignments. However, they do state that a lot of the research on homework completed contains opinion and should be evaluated to determine the scientific relevance of the study (Paschal, Weinstein, & Walberg, 1984). The included studies from Marzano et al. (2001) show that much of the research on homework is an analysis of previously completed research related to the topic of homework. In fact, some of the studies do not even specifically list homework in the article. As a result, caution should be used when discussing the findings.

In order to fully understand the effect size for homework that was found in this study, it is important to examine the effect size of other instructional strategies. The average effect size for "identifying similarities and differences" was 1.61. When students work to simplify material by breaking it down into smaller chunks and comparing and contrasting these elements they are using this strategy. Thirty-one total effect sizes were averaged to obtain this effect size. Three studies from the 1980s and one undated study, for a total of four studies, were analyzed to determine the effect size associated with this strategy. The analysis of these studies found that this strategy had the greatest impact on student achievement. "Identifying similarities and differences" are the brain exercises that are said to be the center of human thought. It is interesting to note that as part of the instructional strategy for "identifying similarities and differences" that multiple tasks are included as a part of the strategy. For example, identifying

similarities and differences involves comparing, classifying, creating metaphors, and creating analogies.

The average effect size for "summarizing and note taking" was 1.0. Students can group material and express it in a manner that makes sense to them when using this strategy. There were 179 total effect sizes averaged to obtain this effect size. Six studies from the 1980s and 1990s were analyzed to compile the average effect size for this strategy. Summarizing involves deleting material from passages that students read, substituting selected material, and adding details by making inferences and predictions (Marzano et al., 2001). When you are deleting information from a passage the reader separates items that are repeated. Substituting means creating categories for items that may be listed in the selection. For example, if the selection lists butter, milk, and eggs, then you would substitute the list with the category of dairy products. Note taking involves the skills of summarizing and according to the researchers, verbatim notes is the least effective form of note taking.

The average effect size for "reinforcing effort and providing recognition" was 0.80. When teachers recognize that students are working hard to understand material and complete a task they are able to provide encouragement and support that leads to greater effort being exerted by the student that is working to master content. Twenty-one (21) total effect sizes were averaged to obtain this effect size. Effect sizes from seven studies completed in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s were used to determine the effect size for this instructional strategy. "Reinforcing effort and providing recognition" is different than the other instructional strategies because it does not involve a task or activities. However, it is an important act the teacher does to support student learning. It does not engage the memory centers of the brain but involves the attitudes and beliefs of the students. This instructional strategy requires the teacher to

communicate with students and help them develop a positive attitude towards schoolwork and believing that they can complete a difficult task at the mastery level. This involves teachers providing examples of individuals that were successful during difficult situations and tracking effort and recognition with rubrics and notes.

The average effect size for "nonlinguistic representations" was 0.75. When teachers utilize strategies other than solely linguistic modes, students make stronger connections to the materials. Two hundred forty-six (246) total effect sizes were averaged to obtain this effect size. Six studies from the 1980s and 1990s were used to determine the effect size for this instructional strategy. "Nonlinguistic representations" involve teaching students to map information presented to them. Paired with linguistic stimuli nonlinguistic stimuli helps to activate long-term associations with material and provides increased opportunities for activating the brain. This instructional strategy is important because Marzano et al. (2001) point out that most material provided by teachers is in a verbal, linguistic, format. By teaching students to map material with graphic organizers, make models, and use other activities that involve nonlinguistic skills, teachers can provide students with opportunities to organize information in new ways.

The average effect size for "cooperative learning" was 0.73, which is lower than the effect size of homework. Teachers can group students and design activities that allow them to work collectively on an assignment. One hundred twenty-two total effect sizes were averaged to obtain this effect size. Nine different studies from the 1980s and 1990s were analyzed to determine the effect size for this strategy. Marzano et al. (2001) determined that the combined effect size increase was positive and that cooperative learning positively impacted students. This instructional strategy combines interpersonal skills and requires students to interact with each

other as they learn and study material. They suggest that this strategy should be used sparingly when grouping by ability and that groups should be minimal in size.

The average effect size for "setting objectives and providing feedback" was also lower than that of homework. It was 0.61. By making sure that students understand what they will be working on teachers can provide a clear understanding of the material being covered. Four hundred eight total effect sizes were averaged to obtain this effect size. Nine studies from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s were used to determine the effect size for this instructional strategy. "Setting objectives and providing feedback" is used to focus learning activities and allows students to narrow in on what they are actually trying to accomplish as learners. This strategy is effective because it provides clear parameters for what is expected in the assigned activity. Learners are encouraged to restate what the expectations are for activities and provide independent goals for the assignments. The teacher in turn provides specific information relative to the performance of students on the assigned task. Feedback is essential to letting the students understand where they are in mastering concepts and successfully completing the assigned activities.

The average effect size for "generating and testing hypotheses" was 0.61, which is also lower than that of homework. Teachers can provide opportunities for students to predict what will happen with their learning when using a hypothesis. Sixty-three total effect sizes were averaged to obtain this effect size. Three studies from the 1980s and 1990s were analyzed for this instructional strategy. The instructional strategy of "generating and testing hypotheses" provides students an opportunity to actively engage with real-life material. For example, students can watch a bean grow and by observing this over the course of a few weeks, they have multiple opportunities to make predictions on what is happening and what will be happening.

The teacher can then fill in content that provides specific information about what is occurring. Due to the fact that students are "generating and testing hypotheses", they have an enhanced context for learning and this provides greater opportunity for the students to retain the information for a longer period of time. It also provides opportunities to engage previously learned material because the students have to use prior knowledge to engage in hypothesis testing.

The average effect size for "cues, questions, and advanced organizers" was 0.59. When providing material that allows students to organize thoughts and key ideas students can benefit from this organization and stage setting for the learning experience. One thousand two hundred fifty-one total effect sizes were averaged to obtain this effect size. Thirteen total studies from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s were used to determine the effect size for this study. "Cues, questions, and advanced organizers" involves activating previously learned material to set the stage for learning activities. By providing appropriate cues teachers can direct students to the important facets of a lesson or material. This works to assist students in developing a deeper knowledge of the material. By questioning appropriately and allowing students time to think before accepting responses, teachers are able to strengthen the level of understanding students experience with material. This in turn provides much richer answers from students and not simply a recalling of facts. Advanced organizers can be in the form of verbal stories like narratives. Encouraging students to skim material to get an idea of what may be presented in the lesson is also an example of an advanced organizer. These strategies involve activating knowledge centers from learned material or encourage thought provoking ideas for material that will be learned. As a result, students are able to interact with material prior to the lesson and in turn have a better chance at mastering the content.

The nine instructional strategies listed and detailed provide an overview of what research has shown to be effective in improving student achievement. Homework had the fourth largest effect size in this analysis. Although nine specific strategies are shown to have the greatest impact on student achievement, one could argue that they all have components of effective instruction intertwined. In fact, the components of each strategy could be considered instructional strategies themselves. Teachers can use these and other instructional strategies to plan and implement lessons that fully engage and involve students to be successful learners (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

Purposes of Homework

Instructional Strategy

As stated previously, homework may be viewed as an instructional strategy. An instructional strategy can be defined as the techniques and practices teachers use to guide student learning. Many proponents refer to the 10-minute rule for assigning homework (Van Voorhis, 2011). This 10-minute rule is a guide for teachers to use when assigning an appropriate amount of homework to students. For example, a student in kindergarten or first grade would complete 10 minutes of homework a night. For each grade that the student is in you can multiply that grade by 10 to determine the amount of time it should take a student to complete homework assignments that night. A sixth grade student would not have more than 60 minutes of homework and a second grade student would have 20 minutes of assignments. Assigning an extra 30 minutes of math homework each night for secondary aged students can increase their academic performance (Eren & Henderson, 2011). However, there is debate about the effectiveness of homework at the elementary level. There is a negative relationship between additional homework time and increased grades among elementary-aged students (Van Voorhis,

2010). Yet, homework is still viewed as an instructional strategy that can be used to improve student academic performance by many educators and researchers (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Homework affords students an opportunity to practice a previously learned skill. Homework can provide an opportunity to preview material that will be taught in a future lesson. Homework is viewed as an instructional strategy that engages students outside of the school setting and provides a lesson that learning can happen anywhere.

When homework is used as an instructional strategy, defined features of the assignment must be adhered to in order for it to be effective (Carr, 2013). Five distinct features of homework should be used when determining if it is a quality assignment. They include making sure that the students understand what they have to do and why it is important, that the assignment does not take too long to complete and provides a slight challenge to students. It should not be busy work or include work that the students are incapable of mastering. Also, students should be afforded some flexibility when deciding what assignments need to be completed. Successful completion of the assignment is paramount and the assigned work should not be overly detailed when using worksheets or handouts. In addition to these requirements, Carr (2013) writes that homework should not cover new material or be assigned as a punitive measure.

Watkins and Stevens (2013) contend that teachers view homework as part of the learning process and that homework allows teachers to extend learning beyond the school day. The researchers completed a qualitative study that focused on getting homework right in a high school in the Midwest. The study examined the cultural transformation that the high school took to get homework right for students. They used Goldilocks as an analogy to the homework process. Is it too hot, too cold, or just right? The transformation focused on defining homework

and ensuring that it was completed by students and checked by teachers. Also, the work consisted of quality assignments that benefitted students and enhanced the lessons that were being taught. Two other key components were that students could not score below 70 percent or they had to make up the assignment. No student was allowed to make a zero. As a result of these contingencies, six levels of interventions were implemented. The interventions ranged from conversations between the teacher and the student to a full team meeting to decide how to assist the student in completing assigned work. Due to the fact that these interventions were implemented, assignments to be completed at home had value and students had to show enough muster to meet the academic requirement associated with the assigned work. Essentially, they were held accountable for the work and had to stick with the task until at least 70% mastery was attained.

Watkins and Stevens (2013) were interested in how students and faculty perceived the risks and benefits associated with the new homework plan. They also wanted to understand how it changed the culture of the school and what role the building administrator played in supervising the implementation of the homework policy. After completing interviews with teachers, students, and administrators, the researchers developed three themes from the data that was collected. The first was that homework was valued now that the policy had been implemented. Before the policy, there was a lack of concern for assignments and student were fine with accepting zeroes on work that they did not complete. In addition, the work that was turned in improved and all parties had a sense of control and willingness to sustain the homework initiative. Essentially, by structuring policies and procedures to ensure the successful completion of homework assignments, stakeholders were able to improve the academic rigor of assignments. In turn, students demonstrated increased proficiency and accountability.

Parental Involvement in Homework

In addition to supporting student learning, homework can also be a useful tool to engage parents. Patall, Cooper and Robinson (2008) completed a meta-analysis of previous research related to parental involvement and homework. Their research synthesized the quantitative results from studies they found by conducting a keyword search for homework. They searched the following databases to uncover empirical studies related to parental involvement and homework: ERIC, *PsychINFO, Sociological Abstracts* and *Dissertations Abstracts,* and *Science Citation Index Expanded*. They also searched for studies that cited the 1989 work of researcher Harris Cooper, because this is a seminal piece that is often cited in literature. Over 4,400 documents were discovered and deemed relevant. In addition to this expansive search, they consulted professionals in the field of parental involvement and homework. Researchers then set the criteria to determine which articles they would use in their analysis. First, the included study "had to have estimated in some way the relationship between a measure of parental involvement in homework and a measure of achievement or an achievement-related outcome" (Patall et al., 2008, p. 1047). Two sampling restrictions were used. Students in each accepted study had to be in grades K–12 and be in Canada or the United States. Design types included in the synthesis were (1) parents in the experimental group had to have received some instruction on how to involve themselves in the completion of their child's homework assignment; (2) the studies looked at cross-sectional, naturalistic measures of the involvement of parents in their child's homework; and (3) they ran a bivariate correlation coefficient between the achievement measures and parental involvement in homework. In all, 34 studies were used for analysis in the synthesis of research. The results showed "studies correlating time on homework and academic achievement suggested that the positive effect of involvement was small, if it was different from

zero at all" (Patall et al., 2008, p. 1087). Essentially, parental involvement in homework activities did not have a significant impact on student achievement. So while homework may help engage parents in their child's education, it doesn't appear to significantly impact student achievement, according to the analysis of these 34 studies (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008).

Wilder (2014) pointed out that many schools across the United States have been working to implement parental involvement programs with the hope of improving academic performance. It is important to base policies that deal with parental involvement around strong empirical research. Wilder studied the relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement. He conducted a keyword search of databases for the topic and settled on nine studies for his analysis. Parental involvement activities as defined by Wilder for his studies' analysis include how children and their parents communicated about school, homework assistance, the school expectations parents have for their children, and truancy and participation related concerns. Wilder's synthesis found that there is no positive relationship between homework assistance and improved student academic performance. In addition, in some cases parental involvement in homework and the child's academic performance showed a negative correlation. He points out that this is surprising because parents report that homework assistance is the most commonly associated form of parental involvement.

Galindo and Sheldon (2012) found that students who attended schools that make an effort to involve families in their child's education — for example, holding curriculum nights, encouraging participation in field trips, and allowing families to volunteer in schools — demonstrated attributes that lead to school success. The positive attributes of these schools include better rates of attendance and lower issues with discipline. They found that outreach from the school can help to improve the achievement levels of students. However, they stop

short of calling all parental involvement activities homework. In other words, they classify parental involvement as parents involving themselves in activities with their children outside of school. Some of these activities that can be considered to have an academic benefit to children include storytelling, playing games, and working on arts and crafts to name a few. Also, many types of homework can be completed without parental involvement. Essentially, the school can supplement what families are already working on by assigning activities that coincide with what parents are doing with their children after school hours. The researchers acknowledge that many outside variables, such as principal attitudes and other school factors, could contribute to the increase in academic achievement. Their data was collected using surveys and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, so it was not a randomized sample. Survey items asked parents how they spent time with their children outside of school hours. This is how researchers were able to determine the ways that parents were involved with their children.

Bailey, Silvern, Brabham, and Ross (2004) completed a study on interactive reading homework. The researchers sought to discover if involvement from parents through specially designed homework would increase the students' abilities to draw inferences from reading assignments. They hypothesized that specially designed homework would benefit the student with the parent participating in the assignment completion. The researchers provided teachers with training that taught the teachers how to teach the parents to interact with their child when completing homework assignments. They had two experimental groups and one control group. The participants for the study were from schools in southeastern Alabama. Using pre and post testing to determine the effectiveness of their study, the researchers determined that the experimental groups outperformed the control groups. The first experimental group provided parents with training on interactive homework and the interactive homework was specially

designed for the objective. The second experimental group received only an interactive homework assignment and the parents were not trained on how to complete the assignment with their child. The control group did not receive a specially designed homework assignment or parental training. It is interesting to note that the posttest scores for the control group actually dropped from the pretest scores. The posttest scores for the two experimental groups both showed improvement. However, the parent group that received training showed an increase over the parent group that did not receive training on how to complete the homework assignments. The results provide positive results that interactive homework assignments were effective for the participants of this study.

Bailey (2006) completed further research related to Interactive Homework Assignments (IHA). This study examined how an Interactive Homework Assignment (IHA) contributed to student's ability to draw inferences. In this study, the IHA is out of class work that is intended to increase involvement of parents during task completion. Three classes of students were selected for the study. Two experimental groups and one control group were designated. Group one was assigned an IHA and parents were instructed on how to interact with students during assignment completion. Group two was assigned an IHA but parents did not receive training on completing the work. The third group was the control group because they were not assigned an IHA and parents did not receive any training on how to interact with their child while they completed homework assignments. The researcher collected data using surveys, rubrics, checklists, testing, and diaries. Statistical analysis was used to determine if the homework treatment had an effect on the student's ability to draw inferences. There was found to be a statistically significant difference between the groups relative to the type of homework assigned. The researcher confirmed the IHA made a difference in the student's ability to draw inferences. The researcher

recommends that universities take a more calculated approach to instructing educators to design work that requires IHA.

Parental involvement activities can go beyond interactive homework assignments. Parental involvement activities can include an investment of time in the child's assignments. One research study that examined how parents invested time into their child's homework activities was completed by Domina (2005). This study looked at how a child's behavior was impacted by the parent investing time in their child's homework assignments. Follow-up surveys on the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97) gathered the level of education of families, work experience, and information on family background. Participants from the initial survey were followed and participated in intelligence and behavioral assessments in later years. Specifically the results from the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT) and the Behavior Problems Index (BPI) were analyzed from 1996 and 2000. The PIAT measures student cognitive gains and the BPI measures discipline issues as reported by their mother's on survey items. The study found that checking homework as a form of parental involvement, when it was included with other forms of parental involvement, showed a positive association with student achievement scores. This was after controlling for variables that have previously been shown to negatively impact a student's academic success such as: socioeconomic strata, gender, and parents attained level of education. The full list of parental involvement activities included: "attending parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings, volunteering both in and out of the classroom, and checking homework" (Domina, 2005, p. 240). With measures studied relative to the BPI, the researcher found that assisting and checking homework showed that behavioral challenges declined. In essence, the parental involvement activity of investing in homework showed a decrease in the child's behavioral problems in this study.

Schnee and Bose (2010) studied how the math learning of students was related to the level of support they received at home. Essentially they studied how parents interacted with their children during at-home activities. The at-home activity came from the *Everyday Mathematics* curriculum. Qualitative methods were used to conduct the study. Researchers interviewed parents from three schools in the Northeastern portions of the United States. Interviews and classroom observations of teachers, parents, and principals were used to assemble the data. After the data was collected, the researchers coded the transcripts from the interviews looking for emergent themes to present themselves. The researchers discussed their results and believe that it is important to look at what and why parents do what they do when they involve themselves in the homework process. Even when parents aren't involved it may be an intentional response to the situation and not just a lack of concern or inability to involve themselves in the work of their student. As a result of their conclusions, they state that educators need to ensure that policy and practice actually supports what parents are doing. Schnee and Bose (2010) believe that instead of using homework to strengthen a connection between home and school that educators should treat homework as an agreement between the teacher and the student. Assigning homework to involve parents in the education of their children may be counterintuitive. Parents in turn may purposefully disengage from the activities in order to develop autonomy in their child.

Van Voorhis (2010) designed an interactive homework tool with her colleagues in 1992, known as Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS). TIPS provides directions for homework completion, tells students how to involve their family in homework, and the criteria for completing the homework is stated. The TIPS strategy has been used to complete studies (Van Voorhis, 2010, 2011) on how it is used in homework and the relationship between TIPS and achievement has been analyzed. For two years, one teacher from each of four different

schools was randomly chosen to assign TIPS as a treatment, and four teachers were chosen to serve as the control group. Teachers utilizing TIPS were trained on using TIPS and submitted various types of quarterly data. Data include homework completion, survey measures, time on homework, family involvement, math homework attitudes, feelings about math homework interactions, and mathematics achievement. The purpose of the study was to determine if and how families were involved in homework, if the control and experimental groups exhibit a difference in time and involvement on homework activities, if different emotions were elicited from the two groups, and how the TIPS treatment impacted achievement scores. Findings suggest that more family involvement was shown by the TIPS group than the control group. A survey found the respondents believed that TIPS was a good tool and described it as better than traditional homework assignments. The majority believed it should be used in future years. There was no statistically significant difference between groups and the amount of time they spent on homework assignments. General feelings that the groups reported after completing homework included being happy, unhappy, and okay. The TIPS group elicited happy more often than the control group, which favored unhappy and okay more often. A standardized achievement test was used to measure the math achievement levels of the students in both groups. After controlling for variables such as race and socio-economic status, the TIPS group had higher achievement scores than the control group. It is interesting to note that the study did not include students with a specialized plan of study or those that receive special education services. Even though these students were not included, the research showed that TIPS had a positive effect on achievement and that student and families had a better experience when completing homework assignments. Van Voorhis (2010) also discussed implications of the research. She believes that the results show that well designed homework does not take students

longer to complete. However, it does involve more effort on the part of the teacher. In addition, she states that families will involve themselves in homework by using TIPS.

Van Voorhis (2011) examined the effectiveness of the TIPS intervention in a second study. This study was a two-year longitudinal study of three groups of students. The first group involved homework activities in elementary math classes, the second and third involved middle school language arts and science homework activities. Instructional and non-instructional purposes for assigning homework were identified. Instructional purposes include allowing students to repeat what was taught during the day at home, gather information for future learning, to become involved in learning activities, and personal development. Non-instructional factors are policy related; the school says that you must assign activities to be completed at home, and to encourage communication between the child and their parent and the parent and the teacher. With these assignments 70% were made to allow students an opportunity to complete classwork or further develop a concept or skill that was previously taught. Van Voorhis (2011) points out that in the elementary grades homework should develop good associations with character traits and attitudes. In addition, homework should develop parental involvement and stabilize material learned in class. Van Voorhis (2011) focused on how the achievement level of students using TIPS compared to the control groups, how many activities were completed and how much time was invested in those assignments, and if there was an emotional investment in the completion of the TIPS activities.

The sample included over 500 students in close to ten schools. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data gathered. Elementary aged students reported spending less time on homework than did the middle age students in the other two groups and were more likely to complete homework assignments. Participants that used the TIPS procedure

reported being happier than those participants that did not use it. Spurious variables contributed to the results of achievement. For example, ethnicity and socio-economic factors and initial academic achievement influenced the results. However, the TIPS participants had significantly higher achievement scores than the control groups. Interesting to note is that the TIPS homework strategy did not correlate to report card grades.

Parental Involvement

Epstein (1994, 2011) is considered to be a leading researcher when it comes to parental involvement and is often used as a starting point for research on parental involvement (McNeal, 2012). Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn and Voorhis (2002) offer six suggestions for including families in the education of children. These areas are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Parenting support calls for educating families on developmental milestones and teaching parents how to set goals for students. Communicating entails open a method of talk between home and school that benefits both parties. By enlisting the help of members in the community that want to improve the education system, volunteering and collaborating with community members allows mutual interests to both benefit. Students and teachers grow from the assistance of volunteers and volunteers know of opportunities to serve when these opportunities are effectively communicated. By allowing parents to provide input on school related issues, decision-making can empower parents to take an active role in supporting the school and the school's initiatives. Learning at home involves families in the curriculum related activities that take place at the school. This at home learning allows families to be active in the education of the child. As a result, teachers should design assignments that allow children to talk about relevant events that

are important to the child. This will allow the student to naturally involve their family in the at-home learning activities (Epstein et al., 2002).

Although Epstein is seen as a well known scholar in the field of parental involvement, McNeal (2012) believes her opinions are flawed and that she expresses beliefs in a positive stance without backing them up with empirical proof. For example, in 1988 Epstein stated that a negative relationship was shown in parental involvement in homework activities. Epstein concluded that parents invest time in students that are struggling academically. McNeal contends that this negative association is actually portrayed as a positive result even though empirical proof is lacking. It is interesting to note that the work of Epstein is mentioned in almost all of the studies that were reviewed related to parental involvement.

To contrast the work of McNeal (2012), LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) cite the work of Epstein (1994) as credible and use the assertions of Epstein that parental involvement is critical to academic success of students. One parental involvement activity that LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) point out as positive is homework. The researchers contend that parental involvement activities, such as homework help, can also benefit the family and not just the school or child. They contend that this form of involvement keeps parents in tune with what is happening at the school and with what their child needs academically.

Homework Effectiveness

Homework is an important part of schooling. Not all teachers use homework as an instructional strategy and not all students complete the work assigned from teachers that do use homework as an instructional strategy (Cooper & Valentine, 2001). Bailey, Silvern, Brabham, and Ross (2004) state that it is not appropriate for educators to assign homework without considering the child's background and that if homework is assigned without factoring in these

variables that it would be ineffective. Margolis (2005) supports this statement and argues that in order for students to be successful with at home assignments, the teacher must design work that matches the level of autonomy that each student demonstrates. In addition, the teachers must create a can-do attitude that convinces struggling students that they can be successful.

Cooper and Valentine (2001) examined the results from an undetermined number of previous studies that focused on the many views of researchers that have studied homework. For example, how much time should be spent on assignments, how effective is homework, and should parents be involved in completing assignments to name a few. They discovered that as students aged up in school that homework was more effective. By examining previous work in the field of homework they were able to conclude that the effect size of their research showed that younger students did not benefit from completing homework as an instructional strategy. Older elementary to secondary age students did show an increase on achievement tests when homework was used as an instructional strategy. They compared the achievement levels of students that received homework as an instructional strategy and those that did not. The comparison was made by examining the scores that students received after taking an achievement test. The researchers hypothesize why these results vary by ages of students. One theory is that teachers do not differentiate instruction, as students get older. As a result, homework becomes necessary for mastering content. In other words, assignments are not broken down to meet the individual needs of each learner and students must practice assignments outside of the regular school day to be successful. Increased autonomy of students is also offered as a suggestion to why homework effectiveness is increased, as students get older. As children mature they are typically capable of attending to and completing tasks independently. They also are less likely to be distracted by outside stimuli and have learned how to mitigate the

poor study skills they might have demonstrated as younger students. The researchers go on to suggest that there is no empirical basis for homework being assigned for primary aged students (Cooper & Valentine, 2001).

Homework has also been shown to have positive effects on academic schooling. These positive effects include the idea that homework involves parents in the education of their child, that learning can take place outside of school, homework develops an ability to retain information longer, and that homework improves student's attitudes about school (Cooper & Valentine, 2001). Bailey, Silvern, Brabham, and Ross (2004) believe that it is difficult to involve parents in at-home assignments. However, they showed that by training parents on how to assist with homework and by designing assignments that involved families in the completion of work, students increased proficiency in targeted objectives. Sadlier (2011) lists positive outcomes of homework as intended consequences of completing assignments. These intended consequences include providing an opportunity to review previously taught material and to preview materials that will be covered by the teacher. In addition, the researcher pointed out that homework provides an opportunity to involve parents in the education of their child and that students have an opportunity to develop independence while practicing previously taught skills away from the instructor's guidance.

Negative effects of homework include students growing bored with assignments, students not being able to participate in extracurricular or social experiences outside of the school day, cheating was encouraged, parents becoming involved in homework activities can be interference, and differences in socio economic status can influence effectiveness (Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Sadlier, 2011). An over-assigned objective intended to be completed at home can cause students to become bored with the content that has been assigned to strengthen a skill. In other words, if

they can complete math work independently on five trials, it becomes unnecessary for the student to complete 30 problems. Although the teacher's intention may be to develop automaticity, the students actually become bored and disengage from the assignment. The fact that assignments are typically generic in nature and do not consider individual needs leads to students becoming bored with assignments. A student that has already mastered a skill does not require extra practice to improve proficiency. Some parents of students with academic difficulties elect to enroll their students in academically-based activities after school. These include tutoring or foreign language programs (Kohn, 2006; Sadlier, 2011). As a result, these students miss out on opportunities to engage in social experiences that allow for interaction among peer groups outside of the school environment.

Homework assignments may also encourage cheating among students. Instead of students completing assignments independently, they can easily copy assignments from each other (Cooper & Valentine, 2001). This defeats the purpose of providing independent practice away from the teacher. Some students will want to complete the assignment and yet, they have not mastered the assigned skill. Therefore, they will copy answers from a fellow classmate or in some cases parents may actually complete assignments for their child. This intentional interference by parents sets a bad example for children and minimizes any positive impact that the assignment might have created (Cooper & Valentine, 2001). Differences in resources available to students outside of the school environment contribute to an unfair advantage that economically disadvantaged families face. Families of affluence likely have the ability to acquire materials or resources necessary to assist with at-home assignments.

Cooper and Valentine (2001) contend that all research related to homework is flawed because researchers are unable to conduct research that includes a truly random sample of

participants. In addition to this notion are the ethical concerns that the researchers have related to research on homework. Withholding a treatment such as homework may impact the educational path of students. They also state that enough research on homework has been conducted that educators or parents can find studies to support its use or refute its effectiveness. This is in direct contrast to the research of Alfie Kohn (2006) who contends that homework only has a negative association and strongly discourages the use of homework as an instructional strategy. One reason Kohn is so strong in his beliefs is because of the time it takes students to complete assignments. Van Voorhis (2011) states that the time it takes to complete homework assignments is a source of disdain for those critical of homework. He also pointed out that only a small portion of primary aged students spend large amounts of time on homework assignments. He shows that only 5% of nine-year-old children spend more than two hours of their nightly activities completing assignments. Margolis (2005) contends that empirical studies that demonstrate how to improve homework performance are limited. Sadlier (2011) echoed these findings. The researcher discovered that homework can be a time that is stressful and created a confusing situation for students. Students were confused by family members that try to assist with homework but these family members may have used an instructional strategy that was not familiar to the learner. In fact, the strategy may not even be a strategy that the teacher used to cover the material.

Summary

Van Voorhis (2010) points out that teachers, parents, and students believe that homework has value. However, there is a need for additional professional development to improve the design and content of homework. Some research related to the effectiveness of homework as an instructional strategy shows that primary-aged students do not benefit from the use of homework

as an instructional strategy. However, homework that includes a component that involves parents in the homework completion has been shown to be effective. From this review of literature, it is clear that there is a need to better understand how homework is implemented in the schools and how this impacts instruction in the classroom.

CHAPTER III. METHODS

Research addressing how teachers use the instructional strategy of homework is lacking. Yet, homework is often used as an instructional strategy to involve parents in the educational process of their children, to reinforce previously learned skills, and to introduce new material (Kohn, 2006; Marzano & Pickering, 2007; Sadlier, 2011; Vatterott, 2009). Therefore it is important that we study how teachers use homework as an instructional strategy. In addition to studying how teachers use homework, it is important to examine the policies and restrictions that may be placed on homework.

The purpose of this study was to examine how homework was used as an instructional strategy. In addition, the artifacts gathered from examining the homework assignments made by teachers were explored. Factors associated with homework design, instructional strategies, the history of homework in the United States, purposes of homework, parental involvement in homework, and homework effectiveness were researched.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do teachers describe the culture of homework they work to create in their classroom?
2. How do teachers use homework within their instructional cycle?
3. How do teachers' practices align with their beliefs?

Research Design

Qualitative methods through a grounded theory approach were used to complete this study. Qualitative research allows the researcher to develop meaning from an observed setting that typically involves multiple data sources (Creswell, 2013). Berg (2009) states that qualitative methods allow for a deep examination of an explored concept and that the data gathered cannot be expressed in numbers. In particular, grounded theory allows for going beyond simply describing a situation to being able to develop a theory for why something is occurring.

Due to the fact that the researcher was trying to understand how homework was being used in a local school, a grounded theory approach allowed the researcher to build broad views and interpretations of how the group members used this instructional strategy in their natural surroundings. In particular, grounded theory allowed the researcher to answer the research questions. The intent of grounded theory is to develop theories from the data that is gathered. That being the case, it is appropriate to use grounded theory to discover how teachers use homework as an instructional strategy.

Qualitative methods were used because the issue of homework needed to be explored in a manner that was open ended and holistic. This method of inquiry allowed the participants to write their collective stories as the research unfolded. The data from the research was analyzed to see if a theory that defined the use of homework by teachers could be developed. By allowing the participants to tell of their experiences with homework, the participants were able to assist in the potential development of the theory that could evolve. In addition, by studying the participants in their natural setting, the researcher was able to verify statements and trends that developed in data analysis. Assigning a number or using quantitative methods would not have

allowed the researcher an opportunity to fully examine how homework was used. As a result, qualitative methods allowed for the deep exploration of how teachers used homework.

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss developed grounded theory in sociological research in 1967. They believed that the ideas developed through research should be rooted in the everyday experiences of the studies' participants. The theories should develop out of the data that is gathered from the informants (Creswell, 2013). Studying and asking the participants to articulate their beliefs and practices on the topic of homework allowed ideas to flow freely. Participants were able to express their views and discuss how this instructional strategy was woven into their teaching methods. In addition, their lived experiences were discussed and used in the data analysis.

Role of the Researcher

It is important to detail the lived experiences of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). My experiences as an educator contribute to the active collection of data. This section covers my past experiences and how these experiences shaped the study and influenced the collection and interpretation of data.

As a child I always completed my homework assignments. I either walked or rode my bike to school. My mother was a nurse and worked early in the morning. As a result, I typically had to wait in the cafeteria or in the hallway before being allowed to go to class. This extra time at school allowed me to complete any homework that was previously assigned. If I did complete assignments at home, they were completed in front of the television and usually involved a snack. I remember completing activities from the thin spelling textbook and wondering why I had to alphabetize words I already knew how to spell. I was, however, thankful that the spelling

book was small because books and school materials inhibited my ability to run or ride my bike home quickly.

In high school I continued my routine of completing assignments before the day began. I no longer walked or rode a bike, but not being at school early seemed foreign and this punctual arrival provided an opportunity to complete work. After school and into the evening I worked or participated in some type of athletics. I do not remember completing any work outside of school other than a research paper my senior year. My grades reflected this inability to attend to assignments beyond the school day.

As a college student I easily found other activities to fill my time outside of class. However, I did work to complete assignments and study. Usually this was a feverish rush to complete papers the night before they were due or cramming for an exam. Once I arrived to my methods courses I finally found a desire to complete work and typically finished assignments well ahead of schedule. I recall a methods course on teaching social studies in the elementary school. We had to complete a workbook full of geography activities. I took the entire workbook and completed the whole thing within the first week of classes beginning.

As a teacher I rarely assigned homework. I made a deal with my students. If they maintained at least a B average, I would not assign homework. I often had students and parents ask for activities to complete at home. I would kindly oblige and easily find assignments for them to complete. If I did assign homework, it would involve asking students to gather leaves or look at the moon or play kickball and keep score using fractions or numbers greater than one.

When I moved into the role of an administrator, parent conferences were difficult for me. I would cringe when parents explained that their child was unable to participate in outside activities because they could not complete their schoolwork. Initially, not having direct control

over how teachers assigned homework was very hard, and I often felt depressed or sad when I would leave parent conferences. I had a difficult time suppressing my personal feelings related to homework and allowing my teachers autonomy to decide what instructional strategies they used.

Now that my children are in school and often have homework assignments, I have to be careful to not minimize the importance of the assignments that my children are completing. Although I do not think many of the assignments directly benefit my children, they are expected to complete all assignments and work that is sent home in the form of a project. My youngest child, a fourth grader, will often take his assignments, which have been assigned a week before they are due, and complete them in one sitting over the weekend. This allows him the freedom to come home and play during the weekday without having to complete assignments. It allows me to ask the question: If he can complete the assignments before the teacher has taught the material, why does he need to complete the homework at all? At any rate, he is expected to complete the work. My older son, a seventh grader, has seen some direct benefit from homework, particularly in math. His assignments are made through a digital platform that allows him to work on items until mastery is achieved. I do believe that there are times when he has mastered the content but still has to complete the assigned work. However, when he is having trouble with a concept, it is nice to have the ability to ask for additional problems and a tutorial that can show him how to complete the problems. All in all, I believe the homework they complete is unnecessary. However, I do believe that as they get older, assignments that meet there individual needs can serve a direct benefit to them as students.

My experiences as a student, teacher, and parent have led me to this point of study. I contend that assignments should be individualized and adapted to meet the needs of each learner.

However, I only have my personal experience to draw from when making this claim. By studying how teachers use homework as a part of their instructional cycle, I will be able to examine data that is collected and look at this often used instructional strategy. Hopefully this work will allow a sound theory to develop through data analysis and provide meaningful insight for educators.

Data Collection Procedures

Setting

This study was conducted on the campus of a K–5 school in the southeastern United States. The school used for this study housed around 450 students and serves a large geographical area that includes urban and rural spaces. This was a public elementary school but a large portion of the students do not feed to the zoned middle school. The students typically apply for magnet school programs or enroll in a private setting to complete their middle and secondary education.

Participants

The informants in this study included the K–2 teachers that elected to participate. Teachers were used as participants in the study. Each was interviewed and the classroom was observed. The classroom observation focused on the physical features of the classroom. For example, did the teacher dedicate an area for collection of homework assignments? In addition to the interviews and observations, assignments created by the teachers were analyzed and the school district's policy manual and school handbook were reviewed to look for items related to homework.

Teacher P101 has been teaching for 17 years, with the last 14 years being at the research location. She decided to pursue teaching as a career after volunteering in her child's classroom.

All of her experience is in kindergarten. She has a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education.

Teacher P102 has 24 combined years of teaching experience. She has taught a variety of grades ranging from second to fourth. Her teaching experience includes teaching in a self-contained setting where she teaches all subjects to one group of students, and being in a departmentalized setting where she taught specific subjects to as many as four groups of students during the school day. She has taught at the current research location for the past 13 years and takes an active role in the production of a grade level play each year. She has a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Elementary Education. Teacher P102 stated, "I was in a different field and my mom pretty much pushed me into teaching, but once I got into it and actually started teaching and interacting with the kids, it's just interacting with the kids. That is what I love."

Teacher P103 has taught first grade for 16 years. All her teaching experience is in first grade. The last 13 years have been at the current research location. When asked why she wanted to become a teacher, she said, "I knew I wanted to make a difference." In addition, she believes that students need multiple ways to approach a task or objective and that she can provide that direction to her students. She has a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Early Childhood Education.

Teacher P104 initially wanted to be a pediatrician but thought that the schooling would be a bit much. She holds Bachelor's, Master's, and Specialist degrees. Quite a bit of schooling for someone that though being a pediatrician would require a lot of time in school. She became a teacher because, "I've always liked kids and I've always wanted to have kids and I felt like this would be the best way for me to do what I really felt like I was put here to do." She has taught for 14 years and all of her teaching experience has been at the current research location. She

taught fourth grade in her first year of teaching and has been teaching kindergarten for the past 13 years.

Teacher P105 has taught first grade for 13 years, and all have been at the current research location. She holds a Bachelor's and Master's degree. She has served as a grade level chairperson and has worked on various committees. She stated that, "I have always known that I wanted to teach." Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' experience.

Table 1

Summary of Teaching Experience

Name	Degrees	Years of Experience	Years at Research Location	Certification
P101	Bachelor's	17 years	14 years	Early Childhood & Elementary Education
P102	Bachelor's & Master's	24 years	12 years	Elementary Education
P103	Bachelor's & Master's	16 years	13 years	Early Childhood Education
P104	Bachelor's, Master's, & Educational Specialist	14 years	14 years	Early Childhood, Elementary Education, & Reading Specialist
P105	Bachelor's & Master's	13 years	13 years	Elementary Education

Ethical Considerations

The informants in this study are working to prepare students for future learning. As a result, they could begin to question the instructional strategies that they employ. The researcher

developed the following procedures to minimize any risks to ethical concerns: 1) the intent of the study was provided in writing and the objectives were discussed with all participants, 2) the research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and 3) the names of the participants and the location of the research were changed.

Data was collected from January 31, 2017 to March 10, 2017. The participants completed an initial 60-minute interview. The questions for the interview were provided to the teacher participants ahead of time. However, the interview was semi-structured in nature (see Appendix A). The researcher allowed the conversation to take off in directions that veered from the script. All of the teacher participants were asked the scripted questions, but additional questions were asked based on responses to those scripted questions. Follow-up interviews were conducted to discuss themes that emerged and to complete member checking (Berg, 2009). In addition to interviews, homework assignments were gathered and analyzed. The weekly assignments made by the teachers were gathered by the researcher during the defined time period, which ran from January 31, 2017 to February 28, 2017. The assignments were gathered after the initial interview and used for analysis. The teachers were asked to provide the researcher with all assignments that were intended to be completed at home during this time frame.

The participant's classrooms were also observed during the month of February. This observation focused on the physical use of space in the classroom and focused on any evidence of homework. For example, the researcher looked for a designated space to list homework or to collect homework assignments. It was conducted to determine if any evidence of homework could be found in the arrangement of the classroom (see Appendix A). A pre-observation conference was not held with the participants. The naturally occurring elements and structure of

the classroom were important. Therefore, the observation instrument was not shared with participants until after the observation occurred. The classroom observation was completed without students being present. The observer was trying to determine if any evidence of homework was shown in the physical layout of the classroom. For example, was there a dedicated space in the classroom for homework assignments to be posted or a collection area for homework assignments? A post-observation conference was held to debrief on the data collected during the observation. Teacher web pages were examined each week during the selected period to look for details related to homework. The web pages were analyzed once a week during this period.

All K–2 teachers at the elementary school being studied were given an opportunity to participate. Primary teachers were selected, instead of including all K–5 teachers because research on the effectiveness of homework at the primary level is shown to have a minimal impact on student achievement (Vatterott, 2009). As a result, a focused look on this grade span allowed the researcher to isolate the activities and assignments being used at the primary level. The school had four kindergarten teachers, three first grade teachers, and four second grade teachers. There were 11 participants that were eligible for participation in the study, but because participation was voluntary, only five actually participated.

Data Analysis Procedures

Grounded theory allowed for the explanation of theories that developed through the empirical data that was collected (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). I studied the existing research on homework before gathering independent data. This initial inspection into the topic of homework allowed for the construction of interview questions. In addition to interview questions being developed, the researcher was able to determine what artifacts would be important to gather and

what needed to be observed during field visits. Grounded theory allows for the exploration into how homework is being used. It is appropriate to use grounded theory because, "grounded theory results in the generation of new knowledge in the form of theory" (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 20). As a result, a theory on how teachers used homework was developed.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. After the interviews were transcribed the recordings were deleted to eliminate any identifiable information from the participants. Field notes were taken during the observations. Specifically, the observations focused on evidence in the classroom related to homework. For example, did the teacher have a designated space that listed homework or a homework collection procedure? These notes were reviewed and compared with the transcripts. The homework artifacts were analyzed and compared to the transcripts to determine if the assignments matched the intent of the assignments. The intent of the assignments was gathered in the interviews.

Bernard and Ryan (2010) discuss database management systems for transcripts. The interview transcripts were organized for analysis initially by date and the grade that the teacher taught. Then the larger sections of text were broken down into smaller sections. The data was broken down and segmented as codes evolved from the empirical collection and coding of data. Codes were identified from the participants' responses. As the themes and coding evolved, the transcripts were organized according to concepts that were evident in the data. The interview transcripts, observation notes, analyzed documents, and web site review data were all coded. A codebook was developed to assist with the development of theory. The transcripts were reviewed multiple times before sorting and coding began. Initially coding occurred manually and as themes developed the data was sorted to help organize information. The data was coded and classified using specific colors for a visual depiction of what was occurring with the data.

The transcripts were also analyzed to determine if the results could be linked to previous research.

Three types of codes were used to develop the codebook: structural, theme, and memos. The structural codes were descriptive and allowed for the organization of features of the participants. These included the demographics of the informants. In addition, the structural codes allowed for organization of the answers to interview questions. The thematic codes were initially organized by the interview questions and grouped as common ideas and common responses as they emerged from the analyzed data. Memoing allowed me to begin organizing the data into recognizable patterns that were used in the development of theory.

The scripted interview questions served as a starting point for seeing which concepts and themes emerged from the data. Initially, each participant's data was analyzed as a unique case. After looking at each individual case, the answers to the scripted questions were merged to study how the responses related to each question. From this analysis categories of codes began to develop. Codes, categories, and themes evolved as the data was grouped and organized by commonalities that became evident as the data was coded.

The recorded interviews were listened to before transcription began. This allowed the natural conversation to be played back and provided an opportunity to freely engage with the data. The second step of the coding process involved transcribing the data. The data was organized into a transcript that allowed me to look at and manipulate the data that was gathered. The data gathered during the interview was poured over numerous times and each time different notes, highlights for sections of texts, and ideas were used. The initial coding involved highlighting key words or phrases that caught my attention. I also jotted down quick thoughts and ideas that emerged from this pass at the data. The second coding pass at the data was to

complete a line-by-line coding of the respondent's answers to the questions. Line-by-line coding allows for the coder to remain clear and see the subtleties that emerge from the data (Charmaz, 2006). At this stage of the coding process ideas about what the data was saying began to emerge. The initial codes provided an opportunity to begin developing a codebook. At this juncture, the codes were applied to the transcribed data. Essentially, the data was looked at from a new perspective and analyzed using the codes to sort and organize the information. The data was organized by these codes and reviewed again to look for themes that began to develop. After data analysis of the interview transcripts, the information gathered during the classroom observation, and the teacher assignments were analyzed. The three pieces of data were matched to determine if the respondent's actions matched their stated responses in the interviews. Throughout this process, memos and reflective journals were used to keep up with ideas and patterns that developed through the data. This reflective practice provided an opportunity to continually refine and organize information.

Strategies for Validating Findings

Triangulation of data involves using multiple data sources to confirm the events of a study (Berg, 2009; Creswell, 2013). The data collected involved multiple measures and was interwoven to develop the themes that emerged from the research study. A peer reviewer was used to assist with analysis. The peer reviewer was consulted and asked to read transcripts from the interviews and to associate those transcripts with themes that the researcher developed. In addition to the previously mentioned forms of validation, member checking was employed to make sure the researcher was correctly interpreting the meaning of the respondent's data (Creswell, 2014). A summary of the collected data was sent to participants. The participants were provided an opportunity to review and respond to the responses they provided through the

interview process. The role of the researcher also detailed an account of past experiences and influences of the researcher.

A detailed audit trail provided credence to the threats to grounded theory methods. In particular, a detailed audit trail helped eliminate threats to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The audit trail validated the time spent with informants and the time spent member checking. It allowed for transferability because another researcher could complete the same process in future research. Dependability was achieved by having the peer reviewer looked at and analyze codes and themes as they emerged and changed. Also, the audit trail confirmed that other researchers would achieve similar results if they coded the data.

Proposed Narrative Structure of the Study

Warrants and assertions were written to confirm the development of theory. Thick rich descriptions provided an opportunity for the readers to immerse themselves in the described settings. Quotes and data were used to describe the lived experiences of the participants. Essentially, the data that was previously coded was grouped and organized to confirm the theory that developed from the data. The data — in this case field notes, interview transcripts, and artifact analysis — was used to support the emerging theories. This was written with contextual support to add meaning to the data.

Expected Impact and Significance of Study

The results of this study were presented to the building administrator and district leaders. By examining how homework is used, teachers and families benefit from the careful selection and targeted practice the instructional strategy of homework can provide. It is important to not only know how homework is used but how it can best benefit learners.

CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the culture of homework as an instructional strategy in a local school. Teacher's perspectives and practices were the focus of the study. Teacher interviews, lesson plans, and homework assignments were part of the data examined. A classroom observation was made to determine if practices matched beliefs and relevant research strands were investigated. These include reasons for assigning homework, parental involvement in homework, and instructional strategies. There is empirical work related to the effectiveness of homework (Bailey, 2006; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Wilder, 2014), but this study focused on homework as a part of teacher's instructional practices at a southeastern elementary school. I utilized a grounded theory approach to examine the following questions:

1. How do teachers describe the culture of homework they work to create in their classroom?
2. How do teachers use homework within their instructional cycle?
3. How do teachers' practices align with their beliefs?

Although previous research was consulted before coding data, several emergent themes developed through data analysis. Quotes from participant interviews, information from the classroom observation, and assignment analysis were used to cover the findings.

Qualitative methods through a grounded theory approach were used to complete this study. Qualitative research allows the researcher to develop meaning from an observed setting that typically involves multiple data sources (Creswell, 2013). Berg (2009) states that qualitative

methods allow for a deep examination of an explored concept and that the data gathered cannot be expressed in numbers. In particular, grounded theory allows for going beyond simply describing a situation to being able to develop a theory for why something is occurring.

This study was conducted on the campus of a K–5 school in a southeastern school district. There are 28 K–5 schools in the district. The school used for this study housed around 450 students and serves a large geographical area that includes urban and rural spaces. This was a public elementary school but a large portion of the students typically apply for magnet school programs or enroll in a private setting to complete their middle and secondary education. The range of teaching experience of the participants was 13 years to 24 years. Two participants taught kindergarten, two first grade, and one second grade.

Being that homework is viewed as an instructional strategy and that teachers are trained professionals, they were asked to discuss their background and training on homework. These questions were asked to see if they viewed homework as an instructional strategy. In addition, it was important to see if any training in teacher education programs or professional development sessions ever covered the topic of homework.

Professional Development

As a part of the scripted interview questions I asked participants if they had ever completed any profession development activities related to homework as a teacher. In addition, they were asked to reflect on their teacher preparation programs and if homework was covered. All of the participants shared that they have never attended a professional development session related to homework and that they did not recall discussing the topic of homework in teacher preparation programs.

P101: “Never, I don’t remember talking about homework one time in class.”

P102: “I don’t want to say that I feel like it’s a waste of time but I feel like each teacher knows how they want to operate homework. I just don’t know if we necessarily need a whole workshop on homework.”

P103: “I don’t (remember attending professional development on homework). Unless you can enlighten me, I don’t know that there would be a need for that.”

P104: “I don't really recall having any professional development related to homework but if I were to participate in professional development on homework, I would want it before the school year starts and I would expect somebody to kind of break it down by grade level.”

P105: “I think it would be a waste of time. I don’t remember talking about it in college.”

Other facets and details from the data gathered during the study were uncovered. These include information on instructional strategies and the details on the homework assignments that teachers give to their students. Ideas and participant responses follow in the subsequent sections.

Instructional Strategies

Being that homework has been described as an instructional strategy that can improve student academic performance, teachers were asked to define and list their favorite instructional strategies. They defined what they believed were strategies that allowed their students to learn. Each participant described what the term instructional strategy meant to them in their own words.

P101: “Strategies to produce a certain outcome for students.”

These actions by the teacher are included as part of the instructional cycle to provide structure and depth to lessons. The specific strategies that the teacher mentioned are chunking, word play, and sound manipulation. The teacher went on to list a behavioral strategy that she believes impacts teaching and learning. This strategy was proximity seating.

P101: “I put them in the front of the room if they are not paying attention.”

Teachers P102 and P103 stated that instructional strategies are different ways of doing what is best for their children. They did not list any specific strategies that inform instruction.

> P102: "(I) look at what works best for my class and change it and see what will work next time."

> P103: "When I think of instructional strategy, I think of having reading groups and small groups and pulling students back for leveled instruction and making sure they each are individually getting what they need."

Teacher P104 and P105 summarized what instructional strategy meant to them.

> P104: "An instructional strategy is different ways of teaching different skills to different kids in different ways."

> P105: "The different things you do in your classroom to meet the needs of all students."

The focus on instructional strategies for all participants was on small group instruction and meeting the individual needs of learners. Marzano et al. (2001) discuss that instructional strategies improve the likelihood that academic achievement will improve. Although the participants did not list the specific strategies highlighted by researchers, they do focus on student mastery of outcomes through small group and individualized instruction. In addition, the participants did not list homework as an instructional strategy.

Homework Assignments

The types of homework assigned by teachers (see Table 2) were a common 20 minutes of nightly reading and a math assignment that coincided with daily instruction. The assigned work by the participants in this study allowed for some flexibility in deciding what they wanted to read when completing their nightly reading assignment of 20 minutes. However, the math work was always from a supplemental workbook that came with the math series. The math assignment was a follow-up from the daily lesson. In addition to these assignments, certain participants required a grammar skill, writing activities, and spelling or sight word review.

Table 2

Types of Homework Assignments

Participant	Grade Level	Reading	Math	Other Assignments
Participant 101	Kindergarten	20 minutes of nightly reading	Math – a workbook page review of daily instruction	No additional assignments
Participant 102	Second Grade	20 minutes of nightly reading	Math – a workbook page review of daily instruction	Grammar skills, science and social studies
Participant 103	First Grade	20 minutes of nightly reading	Math – an optional workbook page review of daily instruction	Sight words and spelling
Participant 104	Kindergarten	20 minutes of nightly reading	Math – did not mention a specific assignment	Sentence writing and sight words
Participant 105	First Grade	20 minutes of nightly reading	Math – one sheet of 3–4 problems	Reading folders, sight words, and spelling

> P101: "I have them read 20 minutes a night with their parents. The homework is easy and it usually is whatever the skills are that we've gone over for the day."
>
> P102: "I assign homework daily. I always give math practice. I give a reading skill and a math skill. They need to strengthen and hone in on those skills daily."

The average nightly assignments for the participants in this study ranged from 30–45 minutes. This included the 20 minutes of reading that they frequently referred to when describing their homework assignments.

Participants in this study were not aware of the district policy related to homework (see Appendix B). This policy was discovered when I reviewed the district's policy manual. It was completed while looking for a homework policy. There were also inconsistencies in their responses when asked about a school policy related to homework. Aside from the 20 minutes of nightly reading, the participants assigned varying types of work. P102 stated that homework cannot be given on the weekend or graded, but was unsure if it was a district or school policy. Participants 101 and 104 didn't know about other grades, but believed kindergarten did not have a policy. Participants 103 and 105 believed that the policy was to have 20 minutes of reading homework every night. The 20 minutes of reading was intended to be focused on reading activities. For example, participant 105 did not care if the students were reading a menu or other types of materials. She just wanted them engaging with text. The other participants acknowledged that the 20 minutes could be spent reading to someone or having someone read to the child.

The district policy clearly defines that teachers are expected to assign homework and check the assignments that are made. The policy reads, "Teachers are expected to assign and check meaningful homework regularly." It was not mentioned that homework assignments could not be made for the weekend. Also, no specifics related to grading homework were covered in the policy. A review of the school handbook did not reveal any references to a policy on homework at the school level. Participants were asked to detail what they do with homework the day after assignments are made.

> P101: "I don't make a big deal out of it (homework). If they do it, they do it, if they don't, they don't."
>
> P102: "I usually just kind of check over it and see if there are any notes on it."
>
> P103: "That is strictly up to the parents. With homework we don't take it up."

P104: “I don’t take it up. We will go over it (as a) whole group.”

P105: “We don’t ask for homework to come back. We don’t check it so I don’t really ever address math.”

Not all students completed homework assignments. Teachers were asked about students completing the assigned work. Participant 101 was not sure if students completed all of the assigned work. She did not require the assignments to be turned in. Assignment completion could vary by the season. Participants stated that students were busy with extra-curricular activities in the fall and spring. As a result, they saw a decrease in assignment completion. Participant 105 said that her students would tell her that the child’s parents did not make them complete assignments.

The teachers relied on electronic forms of communication to inform students about the assignments. E-mail messages to parents and teacher created websites or blogs were used to make assignments. Teachers did hold an initial meeting with families in the first of the year. During this meeting they communicated how assignments were made and what the nightly assignments would consist of for each week. Only one participant dedicated a space to homework assignments in the classroom and made sure that students were reminded each night of the homework assignment. I asked specific questions related to parental beliefs about homework and the procedures used for assigning homework. In addition, participants were asked to describe when assignments were made.

Participant 101 did not believe that all students needed homework and that the parent’s opinion related to homework varied. Participant 104 also shared the views of participant 101 about what parents expected and thought that students needed to be playing. Participant 103 and 105 believed that some parents wanted additional assignments to be completed at home. P103

stated that, “You might have a few parents every year who say, do you have something more you can send home?” P105 echoed this claim by stating, “You have parents that will come in from the beginning and say I want homework every night and I want my child to be challenged.” However, they thought that parents were happy that not much attention was needed for homework.

The parental expectations for homework seem to contradict what the participants stated that they believe parents think about homework. They stated that parents don’t want assignments and that parents are appreciative of the fact that they don’t assign a lot of work to be completed at home. However, they still assign work that takes on average 30–45 minutes to complete.

Specific information related to how homework assignments were communicated to students and parents is summarized in Table 3. In addition, how the assignment was communicated and when the assignment was made is included.

Table 3

Homework Details

Participant	Homework Communication		Homework Planning
	Students	Parents	
Participant 101	Models for students for the first few days of school	Posted on web page and e-mailed weekly	When planning for the week
Participant 102	Posted on board in classroom Communicated at the end of the day	Posted on web page	On the weekend when planning
Participant 103	Complete a page in their notebook	e-mailed to parents	When planning for the week
Participant 104	Walks through assignment	Posted on web page	When planning for the week
Participant 105	Tells them to write it down	e-mailed to parents	When planning

The participants also discussed when assignments were made. In other words, when did they decide that students would need to complete work at home (see Table 3)? All of the teachers predetermine the work before the skill was taught. The assignment is included as part of a weekly lesson plan and covers the content for the week.

All assignments related to homework are predetermined. Although a few participants mentioned that they will adjust the assignments accordingly after the lessons were taught, they never mentioned canceling assignments if students mastered the content. If students are not mastering the material, participant 102 will adjust the assignment and notify the parents of the change in the nightly work. Teachers indicated that students may work ahead to complete the work before the lesson has been taught.

While analyzing the data it was discovered that the teachers believed strongly in the nightly reading assignment that was given to students. Each participant mentioned the reading assignment. It was present at various points throughout the interview and evident on the teacher's communications with parents through e-mail correspondence or the blogs that the teacher's used to communicate with parents.

Table 2 detailed the homework that participants assigned. In addition to the table, teachers did not assign homework on the weekend, and two participants stated that they do not assign homework on Wednesday night because they believe families need to be participating in church activities.

Codes

The code book (see Appendix C) shows the categories and codes that emerged from data analysis. The subsequent sections provide examples of quotes, data collected during the classroom observation, and analysis from the teacher's homework assignments. These data points provide detailed accounts of the thematic elements that evolved and occurred. Table 4 details the codes that emerged from data analysis.

Table 4

Coding Categories

Codes	Description	Key Word(s)
Responsiveness	The process teachers use to provide feedback to student assignments	Feedback, grading, checking
Supplementing	Providing additional opportunities to practice skills	Reinforcement, practice
Involving	Keeping parents up to date with what skills are being covered in class	Informed, up to date
Communicating	Having the ability to notify parents about what students are learning	e-mail, notes, blogs, web site
Background	The events and past occurrence that lead to gained knowledge	experience

Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to the methods teachers use to provide effective feedback to students on the assignments that they completed at home. None of the participants in this study reviewed the assignments to see if the assignment was completed correctly after students completed the work. In fact, a few even stated that they do not expect the assignment to return to school after it is completed. Although the teachers said that they can tell which children read each night, there is not a procedure in place for ensuring the completion of the nightly reading assignment in any of the teacher's classrooms used in this study. However, three teachers mention that in years past they used a reading log that parents were asked to sign each night verifying completion of the nightly 20 minutes of reading. This practice is no longer in use.

The practice of being responsive seemed to indicate that the teachers only responded to assignments when a student had trouble grasping a concept or completing the work. Participant 102 stated that, "I look to see if there's a note. If there's a note that lets me know that there's something wrong with what they are working on. I'm kind of glancing over trying to see. I'm checking. Did you understand your homework? I don't necessarily go back unless there is a problem." Participant 103 expressed, "If it comes to a point that I see someone is not consistently getting the work done in class, then I will make sure they are doing their homework." Although all participants did not state that they consistently check for the completion of assignments, they do respond to the homework when students are struggling and look to those assignments to help with content mastery.

Supplementing

Teachers mentioned that they give homework to provide additional opportunities to practice skills taught during the day. This is supplementing their instruction with additional opportunities to practice skills in order to achieve mastery of those skills. This includes working on math problems at home, reading appropriate texts, and practicing other assigned skills.

> P101: If we do a lesson on subtraction, say its lesson 5-2, and then they'll go home that night and do a repeat of 5-2 at night. They should be able to do that on their own."
>
> P102: "It's (homework) never like busywork or nonsense stuff. It has got to be relevant in order for it to work. Grammar skills are very important and math skills are very important."
>
> P103: "If I'm teaching a lesson on telling time, what's going home is going to be a reinforcement of that day."
>
> P104: "The skill I teach in class directly relates to what I give for homework."
>
> P105: "It builds on the skills that we taught that week."

Additional opportunities to practice a skill were mentioned by all participants as a reason for assigning homework. A review of assignments showed that the teachers were assigning work that coincided with the material being taught that day in math. For example, the assignment that the teacher communicated with parents was reviewed in the lesson for the day, the material provided on the supplemental workbook that was sent home in the beginning of the year matched the information on the teacher's blog, e-mail, or web page. This indicated that the teachers were matching assignments with classwork and providing an opportunity to practice the skill at home.

By providing additional opportunities to practice skills, the teachers believed that they were allowing the students to strengthen their automaticity in math and develop good study habits away from the school. Participants commented that they could see a noticeable change in the students that completed the assigned work. Although teachers did not grade the assignments, they could determine the students that worked on the skills the night before. Participant 104 stated that, "I can tell this one practiced at home and this one did not. I say, did you do your homework last night? I get that big smile and we do have fives." She was referring to when she would complete a whole group activity in the morning that reviewed the skills that were taught on the previous day. Teachers did not have a designated procedure for checking assignments that were expected to be completed at home. However, teachers believed that the students that completed work were somehow obvious.

> P101: "I know if they are struggling and they don't do their homework and the ones who aren't struggling if they do."
>
> P105: "You can tell and the kids will tell you that I didn't do my homework last night. It's pretty obvious. The students that are struggling do not get any help at home."

By providing additional opportunities to practice the teachers believed that they were meeting the parental expectation to have homework and allowing the students that took

advantage of completing the assignment the opportunity to grow as learners. This growth is evident by teachers and they made reference to knowing the students that completed the assignments.

Involving

Homework tasks were also used as a way to keep parents involved in the education of their children. This allowed parents an opportunity to see what the students are working on during the school day. Teachers indicated that they wanted parents to be aware of the child's school activities. They believed that the homework assignment serves as a conduit between the school and home. It allows parents to become involved with the child if they are struggling on an objective. In addition, parents can see if the child is successfully completing the assignment.

> P102: "I get kind of preachy to my parents. I tell them that they need to supervise the homework and see if they understand it. If nothing else, it will give the parents a good indication of if it's something we need to work on. It is too late when the graded papers go home. I want my parents to be well informed."

> P103: "I would go back to the parent and talk to them about the need for reinforcement if it was a child that was struggling."

Teachers wanted parental involvement in homework activities to help the parent understand what their child is working on at school. Participant 103 shared that she will e-mail parents of children and tell the children directly to do homework. This was specifically for the students that do not grasp the concept taught at school. "They were not getting time to the half hour so I told a few of them do this tonight and bring it back to me." These assigned activities allowed parents to measure the progress their child is making and see if the child is struggling with the work. The participants in this study used homework to share information with parents and involve the parents in the daily activities of the student.

Communicating

Closely related to the theme of involving, communicating with parents emerged as a strand in coding. The teachers would often use the homework assignment as an opportunity to communicate with parents. This was completed in a variety of ways but the dominate form of communication involved technology such as web sites and e-mails. Participant 101 will communicate with parents if she notices that a student is having trouble in class. She will encourage the parents to complete the homework assignment because the student needs the extra practice.

P102 uses a website to communicate homework assignments to parents and was the only participant that had a space in the classroom dedicated to homework. Her classroom was organized with student desks facing a whiteboard that listed the daily assignments and objectives for the day. In addition, she had a panel of the board dedicated to homework assignments. The classroom observation verified the statement provided by the teacher. A section of the dry erase board was sectioned off for homework. It included a spot for the subjects. The observation was completed on a Friday morning before school. The other classroom observations did not reveal any space dedicated for homework, which calls into question how clearly homework is communicated to students. Participants discussed how assignments were communicated to stakeholders.

> P103: "I send an e-mail. We used to have a blog but a lot of parents complained because they forgot to check it. We had all this information for them and nobody was checking it. So I started sending e-mails. At least I know that I am doing my part to get it directly to them and what they decide to do with it is their choice."
>
> P104: "I tell my kids and we walk through the assignment before I put it on my website."
>
> P105: "Well we don't do a blog anymore. That got to be a pain. We started doing Sunday night e-mails. I list basic things. I'll put reading homework. Remember to read for 20 minutes every night and then I will go into whatever we are doing that week."

Homework was primarily communicated to the parents. The teachers sent messages to parents or posted the information on a blog. This was along with communicating the assignments to students and having the students take the assignment home. Only one teacher, P102, dedicated a space for homework in their classroom. An additional teacher, P104, mentioned going over the assigned work with the students.

The assignments were made for the week. Teachers sent e-mails or updated blogs on Sunday night. One participant mentioned that she would update by Tuesday at the latest. The parents also communicated back to the teacher by e-mail when they did not understand assignments. Participant 104 recalled a situation in which parents informed her that the child could not complete the assigned reading work. The teacher asked the parent and child to come in for a conference. During the conference, the mother informed the teacher that the child was struggling to read the books that the teacher was sending home for the 20 minutes of nightly reading. This surprised the teacher. The teacher pulled out a book and asked the child to read. The student read with great prosody. By having a two-way communication system for homework, teachers were able to assist parents and students. This is an example of how teachers found two-way communication about homework to be important.

Background

The lived experiences of the participants influenced their views on homework. This was evident as they responded to their memories of homework and to their experiences with homework as a parent. These experiences lined up with their practices related to homework. Four participants did not place much emphasis on the homework that was assigned. They did not have a space dedicated to homework in their classroom and they did not even expect assignments to be turned in the next day. They all had memories of homework that were not

favorable. They assigned homework because they thought that it should be assigned. Essentially, they operated on the premise that homework is a part of school. As a result they assigned homework because it was expected to be assigned.

> P101: "I was a struggling student. I really felt overwhelmed. I remember seeing 50 math problems and I was totally overwhelmed. I remember 50 times? When I just got it right on the first 15 but the last 15 I got wrong. I was so tired of doing the steps. I got the concept and the skill but because it was so overwhelming I missed half of the problems. I didn't do good on my homework. I just remember it being overwhelming."

Participant 101 also stated that in her current practice that she does not want homework to be taxing for students. Her response to the question about assigning homework was almost gleeful. "The homework is easy. I really don't even make a big deal out of it."

> P103: "We had a lot of homework every night, sometimes two to three hours and it was busy work."

Participant 103 was almost hesitant to even discuss the topic of homework. She let me know before the interview officially began that she did not believe in assigning homework. She stated that, "I believe home time should be for home. I don't think a child who can fly through something needs to do it again."

The demeanor of participant 104 demonstrated an obvious disdain for homework. Her shoulders slumped, her jaw clinched, and she released a sigh of air when asked about her childhood memories of homework.

> P104: "Yes, horrible. I can't remember every class. It was like something we started in class and if we didn't finish it in class we finished it at home."

As a result, participant 104 commented, "I don't think they need hours of homework every night."

> P105: "I remember my mom sitting down with me and doing it all. I mean just to be done with it. It was one of those things. You just expected it. I remembered having tutors and dreading having tutors. It wasn't anything that I looked forward to or was excited about."

The fifth participant, participant 102, did have a space dedicated to homework on her dry erase board in her classroom. She checked each day to make sure that the students completed the work and adjusted assignments based on what was covered in class that day. She had a different memory of her homework experience. Her memory was more neutral and did not display as a positive or negative memory of homework.

> P102: "I remember very little about homework. My parents weren't educated people so they weren't able to help us with homework. I remember doing very little homework. I don't remember actually studying or doing homework until I got into high school."

The teachers also mentioned their experiences as parents during the interview process. This was not a question that was asked, and it came naturally from the conversation that took place during the interview. It is interesting to note that some of the reasons they gave for assigning homework matched their responses. They were trying to make homework for their students what they wanted it to be as a parent. Essentially, they did not want to be bothered with homework during their family time. However, they do want to be informed of the assignments their children are completing.

> P102: "I want the parents to see what we are doing. Whenever my child had something, I would ask him, "What are you doing in school?" He would answer, "I don't know. I don't remember." When I see his homework, it lets me know 'okay you are working on integers.' It just kind of lets the parents know what we are working on."

> P103: "My child still has a lot of homework at night."

> P104: "As a parent I like to know what they are working on. I don't want to know she's having trouble when a grade comes home. I think the older they get that homework is more important."

> P105: "As a mom I don't want to spend every night doing homework."

Each participant shared their lived experiences and those experiences seemed to shape the application of homework as an instructional strategy. In addition to their experiences as a

student, the experience of homework as a parent influenced what they provide as assignments to their students. Four of the participants remembered completing laborious tasks and homework being a chore to complete. Three participants mentioned their own children when discussing the topic of homework and how they use the homework assignment as a parent to stay informed of the topics that their child is completing in school.

Summary

The findings of this study show that teachers use homework in a variety of ways. The examples include providing homework for extra practice, using assignments to keep parents informed, and giving homework because schools traditionally assign homework. All of these examples were found in the review of literature that was conducted before the data was gathered. The opinions and practices of the teachers demonstrate that homework is used as a practice in their instructional cycle.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the culture of homework as an instructional strategy in a local school. Teachers' perspectives and practices were the focus of the study. Teacher interviews, lesson plans, and homework assignments were part of the data examined. A classroom observation was made to determine if practices matched beliefs and relevant research strands were investigated. The research strands include the reasons teachers list for assigning homework, parental involvement in homework, and instructional strategies. There is empirical work related to the effectiveness of homework (Bailey, 2006; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Wilder, 2014), but this study focused on homework as a part of teacher's instructional practices at a southeastern elementary school. The following questions were examined utilizing a grounded theory approach:

1. How do teachers describe the culture of homework they work to create in their classroom?
2. How do teachers use homework within their instructional cycle?
3. How do teachers' practices align with their beliefs?

This research study used grounded theory to work towards theory development on how homework was used by teachers. The primary goal of the study was to allow teachers to have a voice in describing how they use homework as an instructional strategy. Participants were interviewed. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed. In addition, the assignments that the

teachers created were reviewed and a classroom observation was conducted. After analyzing the data it was determined that educators have varying opinions about the relevance of homework. They used homework as an instructional practice but they do not all agree if homework correlated to academic growth. Participant 105 stated that, "Reading is something that they really should be doing [at home], especially if they are struggling." Participant 101 does not believe homework is important enough to assign regularly and does not make an issue out of assignment completion. Although some participants stated that they do not believe homework is valuable, they all assigned work to be completed at home. In addition, several participants stated that they could tell a difference in students that completed the at home activities and those that did not complete homework. Researchers often found that the extra practice homework provides allows an opportunity for students to improve academically (Dean et al., 2012; Marzano et al., 2001; Patall et al., 2008).

Purposes of Homework

Instructional Strategy

Marzano et al. (2001) and Dean et al. (2012) found that homework is an instructional strategy that can be used to improve student academic achievement. The participants in this study used homework but did not define homework as an instructional strategy. The assignments that the teachers made for students were blanket assignments that all students were expected to complete. The participants mentioned that they will provide small group and individualized instruction for learners throughout the day. If individualized instruction is appropriate when students are under the watchful eye of a certified professional, should we consider at home assignments that take into account individual differences?

Assignments were created when planning for the week, they were communicated to parents and in some instances to the children, but there was no follow-up on the part of some the teachers in the study to even see if the student completed the assignment correctly. Watkins and Stevens (2013) found in their work that in order for homework assignments to be successful, students and teachers need to ensure that the work is meaningful. Furthermore, they found that by holding students accountable for the quality of the work that was submitted, that the effort and attention to detail on the part of the students increased. In turn, this led to an impactful academic performance as displayed by the students.

The school district that was used as a research site has a policy (see Appendix B) that states that teachers are expected to not only assign meaningful work but that the work is to be checked. The teachers interviewed did not indicate any knowledge of this district policy. They did believe that 20 minutes of nightly reading was a requirement. The majority of participants stated that it would be okay if a student did not complete homework assignments. Through member checking, P102 stated that, "I don't think it is okay if a student doesn't decide to do homework (lol). Otherwise, what's the point of assigning it?"

Parental Involvement in Homework

Research on the effectiveness of parental involvement activities in homework has been completed in several studies (Bailey, 2006; Bailey et al., 2004; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Patall et al., 2008; Schnee & Bose, 2010; Van Voorhis, 2010, 2011; Wider, 2014). The mixed bag of results shows that when certain criteria are met — for example, training parents to assist with homework assignments (Bailey, 2006; Bailey et al., 2004) — academic gains can be positive. This is important to point out because the participants in this study detailed that they have parent meetings that they use to explain what the homework assignments will be for the year. The

participants in this study also discussed how they communicate with parents on improving student performance. They will take the time to inform parents if the child needs to complete the assignments. It did not appear that this was an attempt to educate parents on how they can help the child be successful with his at home assignment but a way to make sure that the parent knows that the child is struggling. However, if parents are willing to come to the school and attend parent meetings and field concerns over the child's academic aptitude, these meetings could be built around developing parents' ability to assist with homework assignments. The assignments that allow for positive parental interaction with their students could be valuable. As Van Voorhis (2010, 2011) found, involving parents in their child's homework has been shown to have a positive impact on the child's academic maturation. Perhaps professional development on the topic of homework is needed to educate the teachers on how it can be an effective instructional practice (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001).

Homework Effectiveness

The participants in the study pointed out on several occasions at multiple times during the interviews that they could see academic growth in the students that completed homework assignments. In several instances the teachers did not even check the assignments that they created for the students. Carr (2013) found that homework can be a good way to reinforce classroom teaching. A key part of homework being effective is that is has significance. When the assignment is not even checked, it most likely does not have a worthwhile purpose.

The effectiveness of homework will always have spurious variables that are difficult to control for when conducting research on the topic (Sadlier, 2011). However, by carefully and thoughtfully assigning work that can be completed by each student, the assigned work could increase the likelihood that students receive positive gains from completing the assignments.

The amount of growth is dependent upon the independent learning level of the student (Margolis, 2005). Participants acknowledged that they pull and adjust instruction for students that are struggling when they are at school. Yet, only one participant mentioned providing an alternate assignment for students. Even then it was at the request of the child's parent. Participants did state that they would allow for the assignments to be shortened or not completed at all if students were having a difficult time completing the work. If they take the time during the school day to work individually with learners, they could assign content appropriate assignments to the learners in each group. In turn, this would allow students to complete homework that was appropriate for their pace and should increase the effectiveness of the assignment.

The participants in this study assign homework for a variety of reasons. First, homework was assigned because it has always been assigned. Kohn (2006) found that this was a reason teachers used for assigning work. Coupled with this notion is the fact that teachers believe there is a parental expectation that their child should have homework. Due to the fact that parents expect the assignments, teachers assign work even though they truly do not believe it is necessary. Just because we have always done something does not mean that it is best for children. By having informed discussions on the topic of homework, teachers can educate themselves on how this instructional strategy can best be used. Also, teachers can have dialogue with other professionals in different buildings and evaluate how effective homework is as an instructional strategy. If they believe it is an ineffective practice, they can conduct informed meetings with parents and explain this stance. Secondly, teachers believe that additional practice on a learned skill will develop automaticity and improve the child's ability to recall information. Research supporting this claim has been found to be true (Dean et al., 2012; Marzano et al., 2001). Although additional practice on a skill is important for developing learners, it has to be

the right kind of practice. Students learn in different ways and develop on different time lines. Assignments need to be crafted that take these differences into account (Bailey, 2004; Margolis, 2005).

Teachers need help. Just saying that they should craft individualized assignments does not solve the problem. They need time to develop lessons and time to develop learners. As educators we are in such a hurry to cover standards and objectives that we often forget we are instructing and shaping young minds. Creativity in making assignments and activities can be a part of that process. Also, policies and practices that limit teacher autonomy need to be removed. Teachers are educated individuals and need to have the ability to practice the craft of teaching. By providing time to plan for instruction and allowing teachers to become better informed on the topic of homework, we can increase its effectiveness.

How did the teachers in this study use homework as part of their instructional cycle and how did their practices relate to previous research? Participants in this study stated that homework provided students an opportunity to practice standards and skills that were learned during the school day. Researchers also found that practice was listed as a reason homework was assigned (Cooper & Valentine, 2011; Vatterott, 2009). Competing with the time needed to complete homework are extra-curricular activities (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Kohn, 2006; Sadlier, 2011). Participant statements supported this finding. Also, the participants noticed that homework completion percentages dipped in the fall and spring as students participated in an array of after school activities. Kohn (2006) and Sadlier (2011) found that extra-curricular activities could have an academic focus. These included foreign language and other programs that could have academic benefit for the student that enrolled in the activities. Participants viewed the dip in homework completion as a negative effect of participating in extra-curricular

activities. However, participating in extra-curricular activities could provide an increase in student academic achievement (Kohn, 2006; Sadlier, 2011).

Carr (2103) found that for homework to be effective that it needed to have set parameters. Some of these include that the length of the assignment needs to be appropriate. It can be too long. Also, students need to be capable of completing the assigned work. One critical component was that students needed to have a choice in completing what they were assigned. In this study, students did have flexibility in choosing what they wanted to read each night for the assigned 20-minutes of nightly reading. However, the 20-minutes of nightly reading added to the time it would take students to complete assignments each evening. On average participants assigned 30-45 minutes of nightly work. According to researchers, the appropriate length of time for students in second grade would have been 20 minutes and for kindergarten and first grade students it would be 10 minutes (USDoE, 2003).

Researchers also view homework as an extension of the school day (Watkins, 2013). This extension can also provide an opportunity to develop the home-school connection. In other words, homework assignments provide an opportunity to involve parents in the education of their children (Patall et al., 2008). Participants viewed homework as an opportunity to keep parents in the loop. They stated that by assigning work that coincided with in school objectives that parents would know what the child was working on. In turn, if they assisted the child in the completion of these activities, they would know if a child was struggling with an assignment and not be surprised if a bad grade came home with signed papers. Schnee and Bose (2010) found that homework should be an agreement with the teacher and the student and not a connector to home.

Galindo and Sheldon (2012) found that family nights, such as, curriculum events, math, and literacy nights serve as a good way to involve parents in the education of their children.

Participants mentioned that they have back to school events. At these events they inform parents of the expectations for homework. These events could take on a uniform focus throughout the building. In addition, they could provide an opportunity to train parents on how to successfully assist with homework activities. In turn, this would make homework an interactive process for parent and child. Researchers have discovered that by training parents on a specific objective that allows the parent to engage with students when they complete assignments, that the students can experience a positive academic gain (Bailey, 2006; Bailey et al., 2004; Van Voorhis, 2010, 2011).

Participants in this study stated that not all students completed homework assignments. They listed a variety of reasons as to why this was true. This ranged from a lack of concern for the assignment to the fact that students said that no one at home made them complete the assignment. Cooper and Valentine (2001) found that not all students complete homework assignments. Bailey (2004) and Margolis (2005) found that the child's background should be considered when making homework assignments. Although participants mentioned that all of their students did not complete homework, they did not differentiate the assignments or consider the child's home environment.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was 'How do teachers describe the culture of homework they work to create in their classroom?' The participants in this study provided insight into how they incorporate the instructional strategy of homework in their classroom. The teachers used this strategy as an opportunity to facilitate additional practice of skills by students at home. It does not seem like they spent time developing a specific culture of homework value and expectations. In other words, there were not defined rituals and practices that were consistent from class to

class or grade to grade. However, the two kindergarten teachers and the two first grade teachers did have similarities in how homework assignments were communicated to parents and how the assignments were treated after the students came back to school. Each grade span had a different procedure and seemed to have autonomy when deciding how homework was used.

It was clear that homework was used as a way to keep parents informed of the skills being taught at school. This provided teachers the opportunity to show parents when a child struggled or when they mastered the skill. Teachers wanted the parents to know how the student was doing while working on a topic. The homework assignment provided this knowledge. Although the teacher sent graded work home, it was too late to inform the parent of the child's ability level. In other words, the proficiency level had been assessed and marked. The parent could not help the child master the skill after the assessment. Homework provided the opportunity for the parent to engage with the child ahead of the assessment and gauge their mastery level. It was interesting to note that the assignment was not necessarily meant to engage parents in their child's learning but to inform them of their progress.

Research has shown that when parents engage in the learning of their child, through at home assignments, that it can have a positive impact on academics (Bailey, 2006; Bailey et al., 2014; Van Voorhis, 2010, 2011). Bailey (2006) and Van Voorhis (2010) developed lessons and training sessions for parents to actively assist in the completion of the assignments. Similar sessions might be useful to the parents in classes of participants in this study. By training the parents on how to assist in the completion of homework activities, they discovered that students mastered the content at a higher rate of proficiency than the students whose parents were not trained on how to assist during homework time.

Researchers also found that teachers use homework as an opportunity to inform parents of their child's learning (Epstein et al., 2002; Kohn, 2006; Vatterott, 2009). They believe that this is an opportunity to provide parents with information about what is happening at school that day. Participants in the study that I completed commented that as parents they like to see what their own children are completing for homework. Seeing homework allows parents the opportunity to know what is happening at school and keeps them informed of what the child is learning. Van Voorhis (2011) notes that teachers use homework as a way to involve parents in the child's learning. This research took on more than just simply informing parents but developed and trained parents on activities that involved the parents and empowered them to assist the child with assignments. As a result, the academic benefits were positive.

The culture of homework has taken on the culture of society (Kohn, 2006; Vatterott, 2009). As times evolve and as societal challenges pop up, educators link homework to what needs to happen in schools. The culture of homework can be viewed as a fix all for educational leaders when achievement scores of American students drop below those of international students (Kohn, 2006; Vatterott, 2009). The challenge of homework is that numerous variables can impact the stability of it being successful (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Research shows that as cultures change the culture of homework also goes in cycles when it comes to the expectations of families on homework. This is important to point out because change sometimes moves slow and educators need to be at the forefront of change and not lagging behind as students will likely have diminished academic gains if we do not effectively change with the times.

The culture of homework for the participants in this study was varying. Inconsistencies among grade levels and teachers make it difficult to clearly define the culture of homework. I would contend that they are in a state of change. The participants acknowledged that they could

see that homework had a positive impact on students. They could tell the students that did not complete assignments. By developing a shared culture across the school, they could likely increase the effectiveness of the at home assignments. A shared culture horizontally and vertically among teachers should benefit families as they have a consistent expectation for homework and what it means as an instructional practice (Wilder, 2014).

Research Question 2

Research Question asked, 'How do teachers use homework within their instructional cycle?' The participants in this study used homework to provide additional opportunities for students to practice skills taught in class and to keep parents informed of what students were learning. Practice and reinforcement were listed as the primary reason that the teachers assigned homework. The practice was needed for students that were struggling according to participants. However, unless the parent requested additional assignments, the work was a blanket assignment intended to be completed by all students. Teachers did make allowances for students that struggled to complete assignments. In some instances, they would tell the student not to complete the work at all. Some participants stated that they liked for parents to be aware of what they are working on in school. They did not want the parents surprised when a child brought home a bad grade.

Procedurally homework was posted to blogs, web pages, or e-mailed directly to parents. Only one participant dedicated classroom space to homework. Assignments were not checked for accuracy. Some participants mentioned checking to see if the work was completed. Others mentioned doing informal checks on the skills from the previous day. In some instances the work was not even expected to be returned to school. Teachers did not want homework to interfere with extracurricular activities or family time. Although teachers see homework as an

extension of their instructional cycle, the actual assignment is not used to guide further instruction. In fact, with homework assignments being decided when the teacher plans for the week, the assignment itself may not even be necessary. Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, and Stone (2012) found that providing feedback is an important part of the instructional cycle. Students need effective feedback that either corrects or affirms the work they are completing. This allows them to move forward as learners. As a result, they are more likely to continually engage with a topic and work towards content mastery (Dean et al., 2012).

Practice and reinforcement was listed in the literature review as a reason why teachers assigned homework (Cooper & Valentine, 2011; Vatterott, 2009). The opportunity to practice a skill afforded students additional work time and increased proficiency on standards (Dean et al., 2012; Marzano et al., 2001). Practice and reinforcement is needed for most students to become better learners. They need the opportunity to work on skills and tasks that are new. Participants described how homework is often practice of what is learned in class. By continually working at content mastery they can develop as learners. Homework can provide a positive correlation to student achievement scores (Patall et al., 2008; Sadlier, 2011). The strength of this correlation is contingent upon the age of the learner (Cooper & Valentine, 2001).

Homework has also been shown to have a negative effect on student academic outcomes in some studies (Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Sadlier, 2011). Some students do not need additional practice on a skill and can become bored with assignments. By requiring additional work to be completed on an already learned skill teachers may unintentionally cause the learner to disengage. This can lead to student burnout and a lack of immediacy or want to complete the assignments (Kohn, 2006; Sadlier, 2011). Participants mentioned that the homework assignments they made were generic and often posted on web sites or e-mailed to the parents of

all students before the lesson were taught. It is likely that some students mastered the content after teacher instruction and in school practice. If students have already mastered the material, additional reinforcement is not always needed. Also, by eliminating the redundancy students would experience by completing a previously learned skill teachers could hopefully eliminate boredom that their students may experience while completing homework. As Kohn (2006) and Sadlier (2011) found, students can become bored and experience burnout while completing assignments. One participant echoed this while telling of her homework experience as a child. She recalled having to complete 50 math problems and becoming disengaged with the assignment after working through the problems. She questioned why 50 problems were needed if she could master the objective in 15 problems.

Previous research concluded that in order for homework to be effective, teachers need to take into account individual differences of learners and the home environment that children return to each night (Bailey et al., 2004; Margolis, 2005). The participants in this study did not express any impact these factors have on the homework they assign each night. One participant mentioned that they had a student that told her he did not complete at home assignments because no one at home made them complete the work. They told the teacher that all his parents did was sleep. However, this did not impact the nightly assignments. Bailey, Silvern, Brabham, and Ross (2004) state that parents not only need to be informed of what students are completing at school but that parents need to be trained to assist with homework completion. Teachers in this study communicated with parents about homework in a variety of ways, such as websites and newsletters, but they never discussed any training parents were provided on ways to help their children with homework. The TIPS studies completed by Van Voorhis (2010, 2011) support this claim. Homework activities should involve parents as an active participant in the completion of

assignments. However, parents need training on how to best assist students in the completion of assignments (Bailey, 2006; Bailey et al., 2004; Van Voorhis, 2010, 2011).

Kohn (2006) points out that homework can interfere with social experiences outside of the school. Homework activities can unintentionally replace an activity that students could participate in after school. These activities can provide an opportunity for students to have a positive social experience. In turn the positive effect of the extracurricular activity could also positively impact student achievement (Vatterott, 2009).

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was, 'How do teachers' practices align with their beliefs?' It was interesting to just listen to the teachers talk about the experience of homework. They were asked to reflect on their memories as a child. Through natural conversation it was noted that their experience as a parent also contributed to their homework practices. For example, participants mentioned that they like to know what their child is working on in school. Homework provides this connection to what their child is working on in school and what they can do at home to assist their learner. Their individual memories of homework for the most part did not portray a positive experience.

The practice of homework by participants seemed to contradict their beliefs in the majority of instances. It seems that a negative or less than favorable memory of homework would cause you to eliminate the practice or refine its use so that it would be a positive experience for students. Four of the participants recalled a homework experience that was laborious and time consuming. The fifth participant did not recall having much homework. Participants were unsure of how effective homework was as an instructional strategy but continued to use it because it was expected and homework kept parents involved with the child's

learning. The participants listed reasons that they believe students do or do not complete assignments. This contributed to their beliefs about homework but did not seem to influence their practices. They continued to use homework as an instructional strategy for all students even though not all students completed the work.

Previous work on parental involvement in homework activities showed that parents can be important in the homework experience (Epstein et al., 2002; Patall et al., 2008; Wilder, 2013). Homework is just one way that parents can be involved in the child's school. Other activities include volunteering and allowing parents to provide input on school activities. Researchers believe that parental involvement in school activities is important for students to be successful. Homework can be one of the positive experiences parents have with school (LaRocque et al., 2011). Schnee and Bose (2010) found that homework should be between the teacher and the student. This mediates the impact homework can have on students that do not have an active support system at home. They believe that homework does not need to be a connector to home. Cooper and Valentine (2001) found that not all students complete homework assignments. Participants in this study never mentioned homework as a tool that they used to inform instruction or planning for future assignments. This is an example of how their beliefs and practices aligned. There was no evidence collected that showed homework was used to guide instructional sequence.

Implications

The participants in this study have not received any formal training on the use of homework as an instructional strategy. The opportunity to have informed discussions around the topic of homework can be provided to allow teachers to talk about best practices related to the instructional strategy of homework. By asking questions to the participants in this study, I truly

believe it caused them to reflect on their professional practice and question if homework is effective. However, more opportunities are needed to reflect on professional practice. In fact, more research is needed on how individual teachers use homework as a part of their instructional cycle. From my study it was evident that the teachers that participated used homework. Further exploration is required to determine if this practice is effective. The key component to this research needs to be the teachers. They need the opportunity to study this instructional strategy and determine if it is an instructional strategy that should remain in their instructional cycle.

Teachers need to be informed of the district policy related to homework. The policy is open-ended and would allow for flexibility in crafting assignments. For example, the policy states that meaningful homework should be regularly assigned. This statement provides enough ambiguity that the school personnel could craft a local procedure that would be in alignment with district policy. As a result, participants could move away from doing something, assigning homework, because it has always been done to having confidence in the instructional strategies that they use. Informed use of this instructional strategy could lead to better completion percentages and meaningful assigned work.

Also, parents need to be a part of the homework discussion (Bailey, 2006; Van Voorhis, 2011; Watkins & Stevens, 2013). A parent being a part of the discussion needs to happen on an annual basis because students change and mature as they age up in school. Participants mentioned having conferences with some parents on homework and inviting all parents to back to school nights. By involving parents in the discussion teachers can learn what the expectations of parents are on homework. If homework makes a meaningful impact on student development, then teachers can explain that to the parents and help families see the relevance of at-home assignments. If homework is deemed to be ineffective, they can use their time more effectively.

At a minimum the standard for what will be expected from the student, teacher, and parent should be set forth and adhered to. There is no reason to make any assignment that you do not expect to collect and grade (Carr, 2013). If it is worth the child's time to complete, teachers should at least discuss the assignment and provide feedback. By carefully selecting worthwhile work to be completed at home, educators will increase the likelihood that the assignment will be completed (Watkins & Stevens, 2013).

Authentic assignments can provide opportunities for authentic learning (Brophy, 2010). Educators are talented enough to develop homework assignments that students want to complete. They need the opportunity and time to carefully plan those assignments based on student needs. The world is an amazing place and we need to teach children how to explore and learn from what is around us (Bruner, 1996). Participants in this study stated that they did not see value in students returning the homework assignments to school. This means that assignments were not checked. It is hard to imagine the students being motivated to complete assignments when the teachers do not value the assigned task. Authentic assignments should naturally invoke a child's curiosity and could provide intrinsic motivation to complete assignments. If we are studying multiplication facts, teachers can connect the extracurricular activities that students participate in to the lesson. For homework, students can bring in the score to a baseball or soccer game. The teacher can provide a morning activity that asks students to imagine that the scorekeeper made a mistake when posting scores. Instead of counting one run each time a person scored they counted seven. What would the score to the game you brought in have been if this happened at your game? The great part about this assignment is that the score, which was the homework assignment, does not matter, any score will work. It provides a connection between a desired activity and a math objective that students are studying (Brophy, 2010). If we want students to

understand that learning can happen anywhere, this type of assignment provides that opportunity. Imagine if every time a child participated in an extracurricular activity that they practiced multiplication facts. Automaticity would likely increase and efficiency and number sense would evolve as that child saw real-world connections between the assignment in school and their personal experiences.

If parents want to be informed of what their students are working on in school, there are better ways to communicate this information than through a nightly assignment that does not hold much value. Teachers are already using technology to communicate with families. It would be very easy to post or provide a modified copy of lesson plans to parents. It would also be easy to print and send home a copy of those plans to families that may be limited when it comes to access to technology. The teachers can use their parental meetings to go over what the plans mean and how to use this information to understand what the children are working on in school.

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional studies related to homework could be completed to determine if it is effective in impacting student achievement, increasing parental involvement, and informing teachers about student thinking. Being that variables are hard to control for when completing homework studies, it would be interesting to look at how the teacher's practices after an assignment have been completed would impact student achievement scores. For example, all things could be equal after controlling for sampling restrictions and initial academic achievement scores. The independent variable of homework feedback could be used to determine if checking the assignments to see if they are completed correctly would make a difference in the student's achievement scores. Another area of research would be to include students and families into the

discussion of homework. It would be insightful to see what students and parents think about the purpose of homework. This would allow educators to develop policies and procedures that benefit all stakeholders. This research should be completed because the expectations of all stakeholders may align and a solid discussion on the topic of homework could lead to better utilizing homework as an effective instructional strategy.

Other topics could be explored. Researchers could examine the type of support teachers need to implement homework strategies that positively impact student achievement. It would be a boost for school leaders to determine if and what type of adult learning was needed to make these changes. In addition to the aforementioned areas of further research, this study could be replicated and expanded to include teachers from different geographical regions and grade configurations. The culture of one school does not indicate the culture of all schools. By expanding the research area and involving additional participants a more well rounded and comprehensive theory could be provided. By developing a more cohesive theory on homework beliefs and practices, students and teachers can benefit and work together to improve academic achievement. It would be really interesting to include the beliefs of students, parents, and teachers when completing this research. Looking at how the beliefs of these stakeholder groups align would allow educators to develop assignments that are worthwhile for all groups involved.

Conclusions

The intent of this study was to determine the culture of homework in a southeastern elementary school, how teachers used homework as part of their instructional cycle, and to see if their practices matched their beliefs. When starting the research, I had some very strong opinions about the use of homework. I did not believe that it was an instructional practice that needed to be used in a K–2 setting. I believed that the practice of assigning work to children

ages 5–9 and expecting it to be completed with any type of impactful gain was insidious. Although my views heading into this research were pretty set towards homework being an ineffective instructional practice, I have been swayed. After talking to the teachers that participated in this study, I believe that homework can be effective. Each participant mentioned seeing growth in the students that completed homework. I acknowledge that other variables are likely in play, but the fact that they each saw merit in the homework assignment has allowed my views to evolve. The most interesting thing to me was that there was not a consistent plan in place for homework practices from classroom to classroom. By unifying the schools practices related to homework, I believe that the instructional strategy of homework could have a much more meaningful impact on student academic growth.

In order for homework assignments to have any impact on student academic growth, which should be the purpose of assigning homework, teachers need a procedure in place to ensure the successful completion of the assignment (Watkins & Stevens, 2013). In addition to the procedures, parents, teachers, and school leaders should agree on the importance of assigning and completing the work. If the teacher is not willing to invest class time in going over the assignment, the assignment loses its relevance. If parents do not believe the work is impactful, it does not have a purpose.

Students may need an opportunity to grow and develop good study skills and habits beyond the instructional day. This additional practice needs to take into account the individual needs of learners and the home environment that they return to each night. Homework should not be a stressor added to families. Homework should provide meaningful activities that can be completed independently and provide appropriate practice for the students that are expected to complete the assignment.

At the end of a long work day or school day, families do not need to be burdened by additional responsibilities that do not favorably impact the student. By having conversations with all stakeholders, educators and the families that they serve can work together to find common ground on how time after school best benefits each student. At the end of it all, we get out what we put in. If families don't want homework, don't assign it. If families do want homework, make it meaningful and have the decency to at least see if it is completed correctly.

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APPENDIX A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me what grade you teach and how long you have been teaching?
2. How long have you taught at this school?
3. Why did you choose teaching as a career path?
4. What do you think of when you use the term instructional strategy?
5. What does the term instructional strategy mean to you?
6. What are some of your favorite instructional strategies?
7. What type of homework do you assign?
8. Why do you assign homework?
9. How does homework relate to what you do in class the day before it is assigned?
10. How does homework relate to what you do in class the day after students complete assignments?
11. How long do you think it takes students to complete assignments?
12. What do you do if a parent reports that it takes their child much longer to complete an assignment?
13. Does your district have a homework policy? School?
14. What do you think parents believe about homework? What do they expect? What do you think they consider to be the purpose of homework?

15. Did you have homework when you were in school? What do you remember about your assignments as a student?
16. How are assignments communicated to students? Parents?
17. Is homework graded? How do you grade assignments?
18. Do all of your students complete homework assignments?
19. Do you have any thoughts about why they do or don't complete the homework?
20. What are your thoughts about professional development related to homework?
21. What happens if a student does not complete homework assignments?
22. When are homework assignments made? When do you decide what homework to assign?
23. Do you think students enjoy completing homework? Why or why not?
24. What do you do with homework the next day? Do you take it up, discuss it, how do you address problems students missed on their homework?
25. Do you ever use homework as an informal assessment to impact further instruction? For example, if students missed a specific type of problem, do you plan a small group to work with them on this type of problem? Why or why not?

Do you have any questions for me?

Observation Protocol

Pre-Observation Conference

A formal pre-observation conference will not be held. However, the participant will be made aware of the fact that a classroom observation will be taking place. Due to the fact that the observer is trying to gain information in the natural setting, a pre-observation conference may cause the participant to alter the natural environment or change their natural behavior.

Observation

The observation will focus on artifacts and dialogue related to homework.

Post-Observation Conference

The post-observation conference provides the observer an opportunity to clarify any statements and asks questions about the observation. The post-observation conference is intended to be a short recap of what was observed in the classroom.

Observation Instrument

Sketch the physical features of the classroom:

T = technology
Y = teacher desk
Z = cooperative learning area
X = student desk
A= white board
D= door
W= window

Observation Instrument

Provide specific examples of teacher and student evidence related to homework:
Teacher:
Student:

APPENDIX B

District Policy Related to Homework

SECTION:	CODE:	ISSUE DATE:
INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM	IHB	11/21/89
DESCRIPTOR TERM:	RESCINDS:	ISSUED:
HOMEWORK	IHB	3/22/84

Teachers are expected to assign and check meaningful homework regularly. Guidelines for homework should be established and distributed to assure reinforcement for skills taught and give opportunity for developing effective study skills.

Study skills shall be taught annually during the first weeks of instruction in each course.

APPENDIX C

Code Book

Codes	**Description**	**Key Word(s)**
Responsiveness	The process teachers use to provide feedback to student assignments	feedback
Supplementing	Providing additional opportunities to practice skills	Reinforcement, practice
Involving	Keeping parents up to date with what skills are being covered in class	Informed, up to date
Communicating	Having the ability to notify parents about what students are learning	e-mail, notes, blogs, web site
Background	The events and past occurrence that lead to gained knowledge	experience

Coding Categories

Codes	Description	Key Word(s)	Data Point
Responsiveness	The process teachers use to provide feedback to student assignments	feedback	2Q3, 3Q3, 1Q4, 2Q4, 3Q4, 4Q4-6, 5Q4-6, 2Q7, 3Q7, 4Q7, 5Q7, 1Q8, 5Q8, 2Q9-10, 3Q9-10, 5Q9-10, 2Q11, 4Q11, 1Q12, 2Q12, 3Q12, 4Q12, 5Q12, 1Q14, 2Q14, 3Q14, 4Q14, 5Q14, 1Q15, 2Q15, 4Q16, 1Q17, 2Q17, 1Q18, 2Q18, 1Q21, 3Q21, 4Q21, 5Q21, 1Q22, 2Q22, 3Q22, 4Q22, 5Q22, 1Q23, 1Q24, 2Q24, 3Q24, 4Q24, 5Q24, 1Q25, 2Q25, 3Q25, 4Q25
Supplementing	Providing additional opportunities to practice skills	Reinforcement, practice	1Q4-6, 4Q4-6, 5Q4-6, 1Q7, 2Q7, 3Q7, 4Q7, 5Q7, 1Q8, 2Q8, 3Q8, 4Q8, 5Q8, 1Q9-10, 2Q9-10, 3Q9-10, 4Q9-10, 5Q9-10, 1Q11, 2Q11, 3Q11, 4Q11, 5Q11, 2Q12, 3Q12, 4Q12, 1Q13, 3Q13, 5Q13, 1Q14, 2Q14, 3Q14, 5Q14, 1Q15, 2Q15, 5Q15, 1Q18, 2Q21, 3Q21, 2Q22, 5Q22, 1Q23, 2Q23, 3Q24, 5Q24, 1Q25, 2Q25, 3Q25, 5Q25
Involving	Keeping parents up to date with what skills are being covered in class	Informed, up to date	1Q4, 2Q4-6, 2Q7, 3Q7, 4Q7, 5Q7, 1Q8, 2Q8, 5Q8, 1Q9-10, 2Q9-10, 4Q9-10, 5Q9-10, 2Q11, 4Q11, 2Q12, 3Q12, 1Q14, 2Q14, 3Q14, 4Q14, 5Q14, 2Q15, 3Q15, 4Q15, 2Q17, 1Q18, 2Q21, 4Q22, 3Q24
Communicating	Having the ability to notify parents about what students are learning	e-mail, notes, blogs, web site	2Q7, 3Q7, 4Q7, 5Q8, 1Q9-10, 2Q9-10, 4Q9-10, 5Q9-10, 2Q11, 4Q11, 1Q12, 4Q12, 5Q12, 1Q15, 2Q15, 3Q15, 4Q15, 5Q15, 1Q16, 2Q16, 3Q16, 4Q16, 5Q16, 2Q17, 1Q18, 2Q21, 3Q21, 2Q22, 4Q22
Background	The events and past occurrence that lead to gained knowledge	experience	1Q1, 2Q1, 3Q1, 4Q1, 5Q1, 1Q2, 2Q2, 3Q2, 4Q2, 5Q2, 2Q3, 3Q3, 4Q3, 2Q7, 2Q8, 5Q8, 2Q9-10, 1Q13, 2Q13, 4Q13, 5Q13, 3Q14, 1Q15, 2Q15, 3Q15, 4Q15, 5Q15, 2Q18, 1Q20, 2Q20, 3Q20, 4Q20, 5Q20

Legend: 1Q4= Participant 101 Question 4

APPENDIX D

Permission to Conduct Study

Montgomery County Board of Education
307 South Decatur Street • P.O. Box 1991 • Montgomery, AL 36102-1991
Phone (334) 223-6700 • Fax (334) 269-3076
www.preparingstudentsforlife.com

MONTGOMERY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

November 3, 2016
Institutional Review Board
c/o Office of Research Compliance
115 Ramsay Hall
Auburn University, AL 36849

Dear IRB Members,

After reviewing the proposed study, "The Culture of Homework: Stories Teachers Tell", presented by Jason H. Lowe, a graduate student at Auburn University, I have granted permission for the study to be conducted at Blount Elementary.

The purpose of the study is to determine how teachers use homework in their instructional practices. The primary activity will be interviews and observation. Only teachers in grades K-2 are eligible to participate.

I understand that interviews and observations will occur at a time mutually agreed upon by participants and will not interview with normal classroom instruction. I expect that this project will end not later than August 30, 2017. Mr. Lowe will contact and recruit our teachers and collect data at Blount Elementary.

I understand that Mr. Lowe will receive consent from all participants, and have confirmed that he has the cooperation of the classroom teachers. Mr. Lowe has agreed to provide my office a copy of all Auburn University IRB-approved, stamped consent documents before he recruits participants on campus. Any data collected by Mr. Lowe will be kept confidential and stored in a locked filing cabinet in his AU advisor's office. Mr. Lowe has also agreed to provide a copy of the results from his study.

If the IRB has any concerns about the permission being granted by this letter, please contact me at the phone number listed below.

Sincerely,
Mona L. Green
Mona Green, Principal
Blount Elementary School
334-244-0078

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Letter

AUBURN
UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
CURRICULUM AND TEACHING

5040 HALEY CENTER
AUBURN, AL 36849-5212

TELEPHONE:
334-844-4434

FAX:
334-844-6789

www.auburn.edu

"NOTE: DO NOT SIGN THIS DOCUMENT UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT."

INFORMED CONSENT
for a research study entitled
"The Culture of Homework: Stories Teachers Tell"

You are invited to participate in a research study to determine how homework is used in a local school district. The purpose of this study is to develop a theory of how homework is used as a part of daily practices by teachers. This study is being conducted by Jason H. Lowe, Principal Researcher, under the direction of Dr. Megan Burton, Associate Professor in the Auburn University Department of Curriculum and Teaching in the College of Education at Auburn University. You were selected as a possible participant because you teach in a school that serves students in grades K-2 and are age 19 and older.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to participate in interviews and allow me to observe your classroom at least one time. The interviews will be conducted at mutually agreed upon times convenient to you and will last no longer than 60 minutes. The initial interview will be audio recorded and transcribed so that I may confirm my notes from the interview. After the initial interview, we will set up a time for me to observe your classroom. The classroom observation will take place during the teacher's planning period or at a time when no students are present. The observation document will be shared with you after the observation is complete. However, I will be happy to share this document ahead of the observation if you so desire. A clarifying interview will take place after the observation and initial interview have been completed. This interview will be scheduled with your consent and should not last more than 60 minutes. This interview will allow an opportunity for me to confirm the responses to the initial interview and ask about information from the classroom observation. All audio files will be destroyed once my researcher notes are confirmed.

Are there any risks or discomforts? There is the risk of a breach of confidentiality for participants. However, the researcher will implement appropriate protocols to minimize this risk.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? There are no benefits to yourself or others.

Will you receive compensation for participating? There will be no compensation for participating in the study.

Participant's initials _____ Page 1 of 2

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Are there any costs? If you decide to participate, you will not incur any costs.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data will be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, The Department of Curriculum and Teaching or your school system.

Your privacy will be protected. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information obtained through your participation may be used to develop a dissertation.

If you have questions about this study, *please ask them now or* contact Jason H. Lowe by phone (334) 887-2100 or email at jhlowe@auburnschools.org or Dr. Megan Burton by phone (334) 844-4000 or email at meb0042@auburn.edu. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

_____	_____
Participant's signature Date	Investigator obtaining consent Date
_____	_____
Printed Name	Printed Name
	_____
	Co-Investigator Date
	_____
	Printed Name

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Click here to enter text.

APPENDIX F

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT (verbal, in person, and follow-up e-mail)

My name is Jason H. Lowe, a graduate student from the Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Auburn University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to determine how homework is used as part of the daily practices of teachers. You may participate if you are Kindergarten, first, or second grade teacher. Please do not participate if you are not willing to be interviewed and open your classroom to an observation when students are not present.

As a participant, you will be asked to complete an initial and follow-up interview and open your classroom to an observation when students are not present. Your total time commitment should not exceed two hours.

There are not any risks associated with participation in this study. You will not receive any compensation or compensatory benefits from participation in the study. However, you may benefit from the guided reflective practice in the reasons and beliefs about one of your instructional strategies. Your responses and information will be kept confidential and no identifiable data will be shared. Also, you will not incur any costs for participation in the study. In addition, you may change your mind about participating in the study at any time during the study.

If you would like to participate in this research study, please e-mail me at jhlowe@auburnschools.org or you may call me at 334-782-8040.

Do you have any questions now? If you have questions later, please contact me at jhlowe@auburnschools.org or you may call me at 334-782-8040 or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Megan Burton at meb0042@auburn.edu .