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A Comparative Study of Teachers' Attitudes and Practices Regarding Homework in the Elementary, Middle, and High School Grades

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The University of Southern Mississippi

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES REGARDING HOMEWORK IN THE ELEMENTARY, MIDDDLE, AND HIGH SCHOOL GRADES

by

Courtney Pisarich Peltier

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and practices of elementary, middle, and high school teachers regarding homework. In addition, the study sought to find if there was a relationship between the teachers' attitudes and practices of homework, as well as finding the differences between the grade levels.

The questionnaire used for this study consisted of 18 items focused on teachers' attitudes toward homework using a five-point Likert scale. In addition, six questions on the survey were asked regarding demographics, and there were eight questions pertaining to teacher homework practices. A Pearson Correlation was used to examine the relationship between attitudes and practices of each grade level, and a one way ANOVA was conducted to address the differences among the grade levels.

The findings of the study revealed that there is a relationship between the teachers' attitudes and practices of homework in middle school and special education classes; however, there was no significant relationship between the two in elementary and high school grades.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

According to Cooper (1989), homework can be defined as any task that is assigned to students by the teacher for the intended completion during *non-school hours*. However, many secondary students complete homework during study hall, library time, or even in another class. In today's society, homework plays an important role in most school- aged children's daily routine. It is believed by many educators that homework can have a significant impact on a student's achievement; however, not all teachers assign homework and not all students will complete the homework that they are assigned (Cooper et al., 2006).

Although homework is typically viewed as a positive influence in students' achievement, there is still little known about how teachers feel about it and what teachers view as the benefits from it (Cooper, 2001). Similarly, Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) found that while homework has long been a topic of research, little has been focused on the teacher's role in the process. Most of the research has examined how much time students spend doing homework or the effects on student achievement; however, the homework process begins with the teachers who choose the assignments and topics. Furthermore, the Department of Education in *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform* (National Commission on Excellence, 1983), concluded that time spent on homework is often used ineffectively.

Why do teachers assign homework? According to Cooper et al. (2006), homework usually serves more than one purpose. Some purposes are related to

instruction; however, some meet the purposes of the teacher, the school administration, or the school district. It was also found that in addition to enhancing instruction, homework is assigned for a variety of other purposes, such as establishing parent-child communications, fulfilling directives from school administrators, and punishing students (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001;Van Voorhis, 2003). As stated by Muhlenbruck et al. (2000), teachers also have different purposes for homework depending on the grade level taught. Elementary teachers may feel that young students do not have the study skills or time management habits that are necessary to complete homework assignments. Surveys and interviews conducted by Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) outlined ten purposes for doing homework: (a) practice, (b) preparation, (c) participation, (d) personal development, (e) parent-child relations, (f) parent-teacher communications, (g) peer interactions, (h) policy, (i) public relations, and (j) punishment. Epstein et al. (2001) suggested that assigning homework to meet these purposes should increase student learning and development and improve teaching and administrative practices.

Research has revealed that teachers can benefit from family involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Thus, it was conjectured that it would be beneficial for teachers to assign and design homework that involves the family. One approach was the Teachers Involve Parents In Schoolwork (TIPS) (Epstein, Salinas, & Jackson, 1995). This interactive homework design promoted family involvement by guiding students to have conversations with family members in math, science, language arts, or any other subject (Epstein et al., 1995). Students were given the opportunity to talk with a "family partner" about the lessons that were learned that day in the classroom; however, the family partner was not asked to teach that skill (Van Voorhis, 2004). As with most homework

assignment, the TIPS assignments were the responsibility of the student. The family member was there to play a support role in discussing the homework, not to do any teaching. The students are demonstrating and sharing ideas (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001).

Over the course of the 20th century, experts, teachers, and parents have not had much agreement on the issues of homework. Since parental involvement relates positively to student achievement, educators now generally agree that parents need to be involved in schooling. Although it is generally agreed among parents and educators that parents should be involved, they remain in a heated battle over who should take the "lead" in the education of children (Gill & Schlossman, 2003b).

Even though research has recognized the validity of homework, most research does not provide specific suggestions for implementation. Research generally is slow when it comes to formulating firm conclusions on the basis of reported findings. A synthesis of research over the past sixty years has only produced a handful of recommendations (Marzano, 2003):

1. Homework is purposeful. For example introducing new content, practicing a skill or process that can be done independently although not fluently, elaborating on information that has already been discussed in class, and providing opportunities for students to discover topics of their own interest.
2. Homework assignments are designed in a way that maximizes the chances that students complete it. This means that homework is at the appropriate level of difficulty for each student. While assignments need to be challenging, students

should be able to complete them independently with a reasonably high success rate.

3. Parents should be involved in homework when appropriate. For example, parents need to help students summarize the information that they have learned, but parents should not feel as though they need to act as the teacher or "police" students to make sure that they complete their homework.
4. The amount of homework assigned is carefully monitored and appropriate for the grade level and not take away from too much family time. (Marzano, 2003)

Statement of the Problem

In this study, the problem is that there has been little research in the area of teacher perceptions, attitudes, and practices with regard to homework. Even though much research has been conducted in the area of the relationship between homework and achievement, there is still a need for further research in the role educators play in the area of homework.

Homework has become a battle in many homes and school districts. Cooper (2001) even wrote a book entitled, *The Battle Over Homework*. Parents have asked school boards to reconsider the amount of homework that has been assigned to students while administrators are questioning the quality of homework assignments in the schools (Vail, 2001). Educational reform movements of the 1980s based on the study, *A Nation at Risk* (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1985; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), the 1990s with the mandates of *Educational Goals 2000*, and the 2000s with the creation of the No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB, 2001) created an increased commitment to higher standards in education. These mandates

to increase the performance of students in the United States schools have created a focus on what teachers and school administrators are doing to improve student learning. The debate over the impact of homework on student learning has been an area of concern and questioned with regard to why teachers assign homework and what homework practices are used at different grade levels. This led to more recognition by parents and educators of the important role of homework in education (Polloway et al., 1994).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to identify and compare teachers' perceptions regarding homework and their homework practices at the elementary and high school levels. The researcher explored the relationships of teachers' perceptions and practices regarding homework with the hope of developing a clearer understanding of how teachers are utilizing homework to improve student achievement. This information could have an impact on school policies and procedures regarding homework, the professional development of teachers, and parents' understanding and support for homework practices.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in elementary schools?
2. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in middle schools?
3. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in high school?

4. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in special education?
5. Do elementary, middle, high school, and special education teachers differ on their attitudes about homework?
6. Do elementary, middle, high school, and special education teachers differ on their homework practices?

Significance of the Study

Since the participating school districts have not conducted a study in the area of teacher perceptions and practices in homework, this study could be useful at the district level for implementing homework into the curriculum. There has been much research in the area of homework and achievement; however, there is little research on teacher attitudes toward the assignment of homework. This study will contribute to the body of literature by providing a better understanding of why teachers choose to assign or not to assign homework. Teachers who assign homework will have an opportunity to state reasons why they do so, which may influence other teachers' attitudes and practices in this regard. This study can also be beneficial to parents. Parents may develop a better understanding of why teachers choose to assign or not to assign homework and why homework assignments vary in length and difficulty by grade level. This can lead to building a better teacher-parent relationship. Administrators may also find valuable information pertaining to why some teachers decide to assign homework and others do not. This could lead to more discussion and possibly professional development on the topic of homework. Consequently, student learning can be enhanced through the discovery of better homework practices.

Assumptions

It is assumed that the questionnaires will be completed honestly.

Delimitations

1. Only two school districts will be included in the study.
2. The study will be limited to teachers in grades K through five for elementary, grades six through eight for middle school, and grades nine through twelve for high school.
3. The study will be limited to regular education and special education teachers.

Definition of Terms

Elementary School- For the purpose of this study, "elementary" will be defined as grades K through five.

High School- For the purpose of this study, "high school" will be defined as grades nine through twelve.

Homework- According to Cooper (1989), homework can be defined as any task that is assigned to students by the teacher for the intended completion during *non-school hours* (Cooper et al., 2006)

Interactive homework- Homework designed to encourage students to share what they are learning in class with their family members and peers (Epstein, 2001).

Middle School- For the purpose of this study, "middle school" will be defined as grades six through eight.

Patterning- Patterning refers to the fact that the brain does not learn things that have no logic or have no meaning (Caine & Caine, 1995).

In this chapter, the researcher introduced the study. In Chapter II, the literature will be reviewed. The methodology is explained in Chapter III, and Chapter IV will present the findings of the study. Chapter V will provide a summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose for this study is to compare the perceptions and practices of elementary and high school teachers. There has been much research in the area of homework and achievement; however, there is little research on teacher attitudes toward the assignment of homework. A better understanding of why teachers choose to assign or not to assign homework can be accomplished through a survey that seeks their reasons. This chapter gives a definition of homework, a brief history of homework, purposes of homework, homework designs and teacher practices, research on homework and student achievement, the debate over homework, and parents and homework.

According to Cooper (2006), homework can be defined as any task that has been assigned by a teacher to a student that is intended to be completed outside of school. In-school tutoring, non- academic extra- curricular activities or home study courses are not included in this definition (Muhlenbruck et al., 2000). The most common purpose for homework is for students to practice skills that have been taught during school hours (class time). Sometimes homework is used as a preparation tool to prepare students for an upcoming lesson. In addition to enhancing instruction, homework can have other purposes: establishing communication between parents and students, fulfilling requirements set forth by administrators, or punishing students. Most of the time, homework has more than one purpose (Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006). The area of homework has long been a topic of investigation for many researchers in education (Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). However, few studies have

focused on the role of the teacher in homework (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Similarly, Bryan and Burstein (2004) reported that research has primarily focused on improving students' skills for doing homework as opposed to improving teachers' skills in preparing and assessing homework as well as for providing specific strategies teachers can use in designing homework assignments.

Theoretical Foundation

Although many teachers cannot name a specific learning theory that underlies what they do in their classroom, they are no less informed by theoretical assumptions (Kohn, 1993). For example, giving a first grader a sticker for staying silent on command is a theory that symbolizes distinct assumptions about the possibility of choice and what it means to be a human being (Kohn, 1993). According to Rose (2003), recent research on the human brain has either supported or nullified certain approaches to teaching and learning. Brain-based learning focuses on what we know about the brain and typical educational practices to help school become complete learning organizations (Jensen, 2008).

Ornstein and Thompson (1984) suggested that the brain performs many functions simultaneously without effort. Thoughts, emotions, and imagination occur at the same time (Caine & Caine, 1990). Another article by Rose (2003) also stated that the brain functions as an integrated system. Therefore, good teaching should be orchestrated in the same way and must be based on theories and methodologies that make it possible for all learners to succeed. No one specific method can encompass the variations of the human brain (Caine & Caine, 1990). Similarly, Jensen (2008) stated that we are all natural learners and failing students and schools are not a result of a defective brain, but rather it

is a result of a faulty system. Creating an organization around which the brain learns best is perhaps the best educational reform. Jensen (2008) stated that brain-based education is having the professional knowledge to know which strategies are better than others in certain situations.

According to Caine and Caine (1995), the traditional model of learning is being challenged. However, many approaches are still fragmented and limited to specific approaches, such as cooperative learning and thematic instruction. Similarly, Caine and Caine (1991) stated that many schools deal with subjects separately, and each subject is taught at a separate time. The student's thirst for knowledge is not taken into account when it comes to teaching subject matter. Times for learning and taking breaks are based on schedules according to how long is needed to teach the subject matter. Caine and Caine (1995) also stated that learning environment can not be linked to some artificial time schedule based upon a need for order and convenience. Schedules should be based on the time it actually takes for a student to explore a point of view or master a task. Similarly, Jensen (2008) stated that the brain does learn best on demand by a school's rigid schedule.

Jensen (2008) stated that brain-based education focuses on how the brain learns best. Caine and Caine (1995) stated that brain-based learning emphasizes the importance of *patterning* which refers to the fact that the brain does not learn things that have no logic or have no meaning. Since our natural tendency is to integrate information, we will resist anything that is isolated into bits of information. Teachers need to help students understand the meaning of the new information and how it relates to the real world. Caine and Caine (1991) stated that literature, math, science and history are often seen as

separate disciplines that are unrelated to the life of the learner. However, brain-based learning suggests that the disciplines relate to each other and share common information that the brain can recognize and understand. Additionally, Caine and Caine (1995) reported that teachers need to make use of all available resources, including community resources, in order to create a dynamic leaning environment.

In brain-based learning literature, there is no one exact way for students to solve a problem (Caine & Caine, 1995). According to Caine and Caine (1995), teachers need to recognize that it is more important that students are given a chance to explore and experiment as opposed to "getting it right." Assessments should consist of more than just paper and pencil tests. Jenson (2000) recognized that standardized tests are inevitable, but he shared that by having students complete authentic tasks, achievement scores can increase. In the same vein, Caine and Caine (1995) stated that there are all types of authentic assessments in which students participate in the learning process and progress. According to Caine and Caine (1991), teaching to the human brain requires an understanding of how the brain works. Additionally, Jensen (2008) stated that the brain was designed for survival not for efficiency and order. In the same vein, Caine and Caine (1991) reported that teachers do not need another method to help "save" education; rather, they need a more complex form that makes it possible for them to organize and make sense of what they already know. Weiner (1994) added that a deeper understanding of achievement motivation in children occurred because of advances in social cognition.

According to Seifert (2004), educators for a long time have been trying to construct theories of motivation. Four theories that are currently prominent are self-efficacy theory, attribution theory, self-worth theory and achievement goal theory. Bandura (1993) explained that self-efficacy influences the cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes of humans. Self-efficacy can be described as a student's belief that they can control their own learning and master their academic activities, which, in turn, influences their level of motivation (Bandura, 1993). According to Seifert (2004), self-efficacy is a person's belief that they are capable of completing the task at hand. Students who are not confident or who view themselves as incapable may avoid tasks that they feel are too challenging. In the same vein, research by Hynd et al. (2000) reported that students who learned and did not learn physics information both stated that they were influenced by their perceptions of their own ability to perform well. Teachers' beliefs in their efficacy to motivate and promote learning affect the type of learning environment they create, which directly affects the learning that takes place in their classrooms (Bandura, 1993).

An attribution refers to the perceived cause of an event, a person's explanation as to why an event turned out the way it did (Seifert, 2004). Weiner (2010) states that the development of the attribution theory can be related back to Atkinson's (1957) conception of motivation, which states that motivation, is determined by individual differences or motives. According to Weiner (1985), attributions give way to emotions, which then have consequences for future behavior. For example, an outcome might be passing or failing a test, doing better or worse than expected, or winning or losing a game. Following the outcome would be either a positive or negative emotional reaction.

Therefore, it is after emotional responses that attributions occur (Seifert, 2004). In the same vein, Eccles and Wigfield (2002) reported that attribution theories include beliefs about abilities for success and incentives for participating in activities.

In the self-worth theory by Covington (1984), the motivation for self-worth is the ability to maintain a positive self- image. Another article by Seifert (2004) reported that if a person knows they are loved and respected by others, then he has a positive sense of self-worth. In the same vein, Eccles and Wigfield (2002) reported that children need to believe that they are academically capable in order to maintain their worth as a student in the school context. However, it is often difficult for students to maintain that they are academically competent because of school evaluation, competitions, and social comparisons. According to Covington (1984), given the choice between feeling guilty for not working hard or feeling shamed by working hard and failing, students would rather feel guilty. Additionally, Seifert (2004) stated that students have defense mechanisms to protect their self-worth: withdrawal, procrastination, disorganization, cheating, or asking for help.

The achievement goal theory, according to Seifert (2004), is a student's desire to achieve particular goals. Students are more concerned with how they perform in comparison to others and are concerned with how they are perceived by others. In contrast, Eccles and Wigfield (2002) reported that other students have task-involved goals in which students focus on mastering a task and increasing their competence. Some students are work avoidant as reported by Seifert (2004). One reason may be that they are failure-avoidant or learned-helplessness students (Covington, 1984). Failure-avoidant

students do not do the work because it is a threat to their self-worth, and learned-helplessness students do not feel that they are capable of doing the work.

Purposes for Homework

In an article by Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001), it was stated that teachers will assign homework for a variety of purposes. In the same vein, Cooper et al. (2006) found various purposes for homework, some related to instruction, but some met the purposes of the teacher, the school administration, or the school district. Similarly, Warton (2001) found that homework was sometimes assigned as an extension of what was learned in class. The teacher's purpose was to review and solidify the day's lesson and/or extend knowledge beyond the classroom lesson. Another article by Xu & Yuan found Teachers often assigned homework in multiple subjects as the students matured. Corno and Xu (2004) explained occasionally homework assignments would be for the purpose of future learning, such as the case of summer reading. Another article, (Muhlenbruck et al., 2000) reported there are different purposes for assigning homework depending on the grade level. For example, teachers of elementary school may feel that students do not have the study skills or time management habits that are essential for completing homework. Consequently, these teachers assigned homework less often to help students learn material and more often to teach students *how* to study and set aside time for schoolwork at home.

Similarly, Corno and Xu (2004) found that teachers, in the early years, used homework to aid in the development of work habits and self-control; however, it is during the high-school years that academically able students received and completed more homework than others (Coutts, 2004). A meta-analysis conducted by Cooper et al.

(2006) reported that teachers generally expect students to do more homework as they move from first grade to fifth grade. In the spring of 2000, 21% of public school first-grade teachers expected their students to spend at least 30 minutes on reading homework; similar expectations increased to 31 percent in the third grade and 53 % in the fifth grade (Cooper et al., 2006). Van Voorhis (2004) found that teachers usually hesitated when asked why they assign homework because they are rarely asked to identify those reasons. In order to better understand the teacher's role in homework, it is important to understand the reasons why teachers assign homework to students (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001).

Practice and Preparation

Xu and Yuan (2003) found that teachers viewed homework as one of the major indicators of whether students were doing well in school. Teachers sometimes assign homework to make certain that the students are prepared for the upcoming lessons (Epstein & Van Voorhis 2001). This might include completing any unfinished work. Becker and Epstein (1982) found in their study that teachers in elementary schools reported the main reason they give homework is to practice skills from class lessons. Garner (1978) observed in a study of fifth, eighth, and tenth grade students that 25 to 30 minutes a day of math homework in high school would add 3 and one-half years of time for mastering math. Another article by Muhlenbrook et al. (2000) reported that homework may be designed to aid students in internalizing the day's lesson. In addition, teachers may ask students to outline ideas about a topic in order to stimulate the students' thinking. In the same vein, Van Voorhis (2004) shared that homework may provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate their knowledge of a particular topic. While some students enjoy talking in class, others prefer to process knowledge quietly. Often,

these quiet students understand the concept equally as well as the vocal students; however, some of the quiet students are silent because they do not understand or have a lack of interest. In any case, homework offers a way for all students to enhance their learning (Van Voorhis, 2004).

Participation and Personal Development

Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) reported that homework increased students' participation in projects and applying knowledge and skills. Often times in class, students were cautious about participating in certain activities. Homework can be designed so that all students are engaged in active learning, such as writing reports and conducting experiments (Corno, 2000). Another reported purpose of assigning homework (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001) was to increase student responsibility. In a study conducted by Xu and Juan (2003), a teacher explained that he viewed homework as a way for students to own their learning, set their own pace, and manage their time and energy. Also, homework can be used so that students recognized particular skills and talents that may not haven been taught in class. As found by Muhlenbruck et al. (2000), some teachers would assign homework to help students learn to manage their time and establish schedules. While working at home, students are in control of the amount of time they spend on homework and what resources they take advantage of. In addition, students have to learn how to deal with typical distractions in the home. A study conducted by Corno et al. (2004) found that elementary students learn how to arrange their workspace to be more productive. While completing homework, students tend to move away from noise as they realized that they could not be distracted by other things

going on around them. For example, children would move away from their siblings and avoid watching TV while completing homework.

Parent/Child Relations

Although less often used (Van Voorhis, 2004), homework is sometimes assigned by the teacher in an effort to improve relations between the parent and child (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). By talking with their child about homework assignments, the parent can better understand what the child is learning in the classroom. Conversations with their child can reinforce the importance of schooling and learning and can also help the child better understand how schoolwork can be applied to real life situations (Epstein, Simon & Salinas, 1997). Another article reported that some homework assignments may bring parents and children closer together through learning and exchanging ideas (Acock & Demo, 1994). Van Voorhis (2000) found that when students and their parents were excited about science homework, the students completed more homework and with more accuracy than students whose attitudes were not positive or did match those of their parents.

Parent/Teacher Communications

Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) reported that homework may be purposely designed in order to keep parents informed of students' progress. Similarly, Van Voorhis (2004) found that teachers sometimes assigned homework that required the parent to review a test or project in an effort to keep the parent up-to-date on their child's progress. Homework can also be designed by the teacher to give suggestions to the parents about how to better support their child's learning. In addition, homework assignments may be given because of a child's weakness in a particular area. In this instance, the parent is

playing the role of a tutor (Lehrer & Shumow, 1997; Xu & Corno, 1998). Teachers will often require that students have their parents sign a homework agenda or completed assignments (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001).

Peer Interactions

In an article by Corno (2000), it was stated that homework may be designed in an effort to encourage students to work together. Students may work together in order to complete short-term or long-term projects and also help each other study for tests. The teacher may assign roles for students in the case of formal assignments, or in more informal cases, it may simply involve students talking to each other on the phone about homework (Corno, 2000). Research by Azmitia and Cooper (2001) suggested that when students support each other on homework assignments, they will have better math and English grades. In addition, teachers may increase student interest by assigning homework that allows students to collaborate with peers in order to exchange ideas or discover other perspectives (Corno, 2000). Similarly, Gifford and Gifford (2004) acknowledged that homework needs to fit in the real world and fit the typical needs of students. "Homework assignments that allow for Internet and telephone exchanges between and among students invite the development of natural, collaborative communities" (Corno, 2000, p. 533).

Punishment and Policy

In the past, teachers would often assign homework for the purpose of punishment for inappropriate behavior. However, teachers now report that assigning homework for misconduct is not a valid purpose (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2000). Some researchers (Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Xu & Corno, 1998) have defined homework as punishment

by itself because of assignments that are poorly designed and burdensome that frustrates students. Another reported purpose for homework is for the fulfillment of school or district policy that prescribes specific amounts of homework. It may be determined by principals, district superintendents, or educator- parent teams that students should be assigned certain amounts of homework (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2000).

Homework Designs and Teacher Practices

A major issue facing educators and administrators is how to get teachers to accept strategies that research has proven to be effective (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). According to Johnson and Pugach (1990), teachers are willing to try methods that they feel are feasible, cost-effective, and valuable. However, they tend to discard strategies they deem to be too time-consuming or inconsistent with the structure of the curriculum. Similarly, a study by Polloway et al. (1994) found that teachers are less willing to consider strategies that involve considerable structural change. Paulu (1998) stated that the homework practices of teachers vary widely, and many teachers assign homework, unfortunately, for busywork. This leads the student to believe that the teacher does not understand or care about them. Another article (Polloway et al., 1994) stated that in a study of homework practices of teachers, the completion of unfinished work was the most frequently reported type of homework assigned (50.9%), followed by practice (22.2%), make-up work (8.8%), preparation for future work (5.7%), and test preparation (3.5%). It was also found that homework that was assigned for test preparation most beneficial.

According to Epstein (2001), the process of homework first begins with the teachers who choose the topics and assignments; therefore, teachers not only assign the homework, but they also design the homework. Researchers (Moll, Amanti, Neff, &

Gonzalez, 1992) worked with teachers to develop homework assignments that allow students to bring skills learned at school home to the families. This sparks discussion among students and family members. For example, students may talk to their mothers about how math concepts were used in sewing (Gonzalez et al., 2001). Similarly, Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) stated that investigations could be conducted in how workers in many occupations use reading and math. By helping students make these family-school connections, the students realize that many of the people in their families and community make use of skills that are learned in school.

Corno (2000) also found other innovative ways that teachers designed homework that helped students make use of their talents and sparked creative thinking. For instance, some teachers designed homework that allowed students to work with peers after school and made use of the Internet. According to Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001), when students may otherwise be working at home alone, interactions with peers and friends allow for sharing of ideas. Another example by Corno (2000) discussed how the writing process was used in homework assignments. Students were instructed to keep a notebook of ideas that were generated from family events, photographs, or other activities. The notebooks were then used in class for writing stories, essays or poems. The homework notebooks helped students focus their writing on what they know. Epstein et al. (1997) reported that evaluations in interactive homework showed that writing practice improved students' quality of work.

New approaches outlined by Epstein (2001) involved *homemade homework*. This design required students and parents to work together in order to come up with assignments based on family activities and responsibilities at home. For example, some

parents and students decided to write a letter to other family members. Others wrote about past family vacations or made a budget for an upcoming vacation. This design may also include creating critiques of television shows or movies that the family has seen together. Epstein (2001) talked about *home conferences*, which was originally designed by a middle school teacher. In these assignments, the students would choose a piece of writing to take home and read or discuss with someone in the family and then write a reflection and get suggestions for that piece of writing.

While some parents complain that teachers give too much homework, others complain that teachers do not give enough. Similarly, teachers in the same grade at the same school will often treat homework differently (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Parents have even suggested (Baumgartener, Bran, Donahue, & Nelson, 1993) that teachers need to talk to each other so that students do not experience a "shock" form grade to grade because of teachers' varying homework attitudes, perceptions and policies. However, these issues can only be solved at the district level. Regrettably, there has been little research that assessed teacher compliance with school district policy (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Hartensteiner and Marek-Schroer (1992) reported on one school district's evaluation of the effectiveness of two homework policies; however, the assessment was limited to only two sixth-grade classrooms. The two policies contrasted the consequences for not turning in homework on time. In one school, the students were given two days to complete and turn in an assignment while at the other school the students were not given any extra time; they received a zero if the assignment was not turned in on the due date. The results found that the school with more severe consequences yielded a higher homework completion rate.

Marzano (2003) said that more effective teachers use more effective teaching strategies. So, what then are "effective teaching strategies?" One identified strategy is homework. There are several factors that affect the implementation of homework, such as:

1. Providing meaningful feedback on all homework assigned,
2. Assigning homework for the purpose of students practicing skills that have previously been the focus of instruction,
3. Assigning homework that requires students to compare content, and
4. Providing homework that allows students to make metaphors with the content (Marzano, 2003).

According to Marzano (2003), teachers have had a considerable effect on student achievement. Teachers have a direct effect on what students learn, how they learn, and how much they learn. The quality of instruction by the classroom teacher has a direct effect on student achievement. Marzano (2003) conducted a meta-analysis that reported an increase of about fifty-three percentage points in student achievement over one year for the most effective teachers; conversely, ineffective teachers produced gains of about fourteen percentage points over one year. The definition of an effective teacher can vary depending on the expectation of society (Korkmaz, 2007).

Homework and Student Achievement

The results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMS) in the middle (Beaton et al., 1996) and upper-secondary schools (Mullis et al., 1998) intensified homework-related issues. The TIMS study found that in comparison to the United States' counterparts in Japan and South Korea, the United States was not performing as well. This disappointing performance sparked debate among many in the

political and educational arenas. It was argued that Japanese students spend more time studying and this sparked politicians to demand more and different homework for U.S. students. However, not all studies found a positive relationship between homework and achievement (Trautwein & Koller, 2003).

As parents and educators argued over the strengths and weaknesses of homework, researchers argued over whether or not homework improved student achievement (Muhlenbruck et al., 2000). As reported by (Farrow et al., 1999), not all recent studies have found a positive correlation between homework and student achievement. A number of experimental and quasi- experimental studies have examined the influence of homework versus no homework. In most studies, there were classes who were assigned homework, and others were designated not to receive homework for a specific amount of time, and then the achievement of the two groups was compared. Studies conducted by Cooper between 1962 and 1987 were analyzed and concluded that academic achievement in classes where homework was assigned was higher than that of no-homework classes (Hattie, 2009). It was also found that the effect of homework was stronger in higher grades; however, it was weaker in mathematics. Homework effects in mathematics were stronger for computation and concepts as opposed to problem solving. When teachers acted as experimenters, the positive effect of homework was three times larger; also, only studies without repeated measurements or counterbalancing found positive homework effects (Trautwein & Koller, 2003).

The variables used as indicators of achievement and homework are a major criticism of much of the research conducted in the twentieth century (Trautwein & Koller, 2003). Grades and standardized achievement tests have both been used as

"outcome indicators" in research. However, Trautwein & Koller (2003) argued that standardized tests, not grades, should be used to examine class-level effects. Grades are typically evenly distributed among a class. The best students in a "poor performing" class usually receive an A even when they received a B or C in a high performing class. Grades are most often standardized within a class because the teacher will use the class as the frame of reference. Therefore the view is that teachers who assign more homework are more successful in increasing the test scores. Consequently, when determining the homework-achievement relation at the student level, grades should be used only as an alternative to achievement tests (Trautwein & Koller, 2003).

"Time spent on homework per week" is the most common variable used when measuring achievement (Trautwein & Koller, 2003, p.116). There are four problems that are associated with this variable. First, this may not be an accurate measure of time spent on homework. The questionnaire may not clearly define what this means; therefore, respondents may include other school-related activities. This may make the time spent on homework appear more positive than it actually is. Second, homework *per week* is itself a collective variable. It consists of homework frequency, length, the time spent per day. Breaking up the homework amount into "homework frequency" and "homework length" may yield new discoveries that may have previous been overlooked. Third, individual student reports of time spent on homework may not provide the information that the researcher is seeking. Because of cognitive or motivational deficits, a student may require additional time than other students to complete homework. Finally, it is yet to be confirmed that students' reports of time spent on homework and the actual amount of time spent on homework (Trautwein & Koller, 2003).

Cooper et al.(2006) suggested that educators have a long list of both positive and negative consequences of homework. The positive effects were grouped into four categories: immediate achievement and learning, long term academic, long term non-academic, and parental and family benefits. In addition to the academic pursuits, homework can have positive effects on behavior relating to everyday life. Because homework requires less supervision than given at school, it is argued that homework promotes self-discipline, time organization, and more independent problem solving. Parents have seen the positive effects of homework because it increased their appreciation and involvement in schooling (Cooper et al., 2006).

Opponents argued that homework had negative effects on students' view of school. They claimed that students became overexposed to academic tasks. It is also claimed that homework leads to physical and emotional fatigue and denies children access to leisure time and community activities. Such activities are essential for teaching important life skills (Cooper et al., 2006).

There are two possible explanations as to why the relationship between homework and achievement may be weak in lower grade levels. First, research in cognitive psychology suggests that younger children are less capable of ignoring irrelevant information or stimuli in the environment than that of older children. Thus, distractions in the home will be more likely to have an effect on younger students making homework less effective. Because younger children have less effective study habits, it is more likely that homework will have little effect on achievement (Muhlenbruck et al., 2000).

According to Cooper (1989), much of the research on homework is focused on the time-spent-on-homework variable. While this may be the case, learning theories are still valuable to educators. The theoretical approach underlying most of the research is "time on task" and/or "opportunity to learn" (Trautwein & Koller, 2003, p. 120). Cooper (1989) conducted a series of meta-analysis on homework. In these studies, he argued that homework is twice as effective for high school students as opposed to junior high students and twice as effective, again, for junior high students as opposed to elementary school students. The smallest effects were found in math while the largest effects were in science and social studies; English was in the middle (Hattie, 2009).

Trautwein and Koller (2003) indicated that research is still far from achieving the central goal of showing the strength of the relationship between homework and achievement. After reviewing homework studies from the 20th century, studies reveal only weak empirical support for the theory that increased amounts of homework will enhance achievement at the class-level. It is unclear the relationship between time spent on homework and achievement gains at the student level. Although more studies are still needed, it seems as though a new generation of homework research, which uses multilevel modeling to overcome the methodological problems, is putting homework research on the right track. Research on homework needs to be aimed more at well-founded theories of learning and instruction (Trautwein & Koller, 2003).

Homework vs No Homework

According to Marzano and Pickering (2007b), the issue of homework has long been an issue of debate among educators and parents. Cooper (1989) has written many studies and conducted a series of meta analysis on the influence of homework vs. no

homework (Hattie, 2009). However, it is interesting that we are now seeing an increase in arguments against the homework. This has been evidenced by several recent books, including an editorial in *Time* magazine that presented arguments against homework without much discussion of other alternative perspectives. Likewise, there has been evidence of the usefulness of homework when implemented effectively (Marzano & Pickering, 2007b).

Homework has often been an aspect of schooling that involved an important connection between home and school. School boards across the nation have debated the merits of homework, some wanting to curb it completely. There are many school districts that will set limits on the amount of homework a teacher can assign, and some have even done away with homework completely (Gill & Schlossman, 2003b).

The first high profile "attack" on homework is considered to be *The End of Homework: How Homework Disrupts Families, Overburdens Children, and Limits Learning* by Kralovee and Buell (2000). The authors declared that homework contributes to a competitive U.S. culture that overemphasizes work as opposed to personal and family well-being. They also focus on low socio-economic students who are often reprimanded for not completing homework when they are in an environment that may make it virtually impossible for them to complete assignments at home. Extended school days were suggested by the authors as opposed to the assignment of homework (Marzano & Pickering, 2007b).

The Case Against Homework: How Homework Is Hurting Our Children and What We Can Do About It (Bennett & Kalish 2006) also criticized the quality and quantity of homework. The authors not only claimed that too much homework can be

detrimental to students' health and well-being, but that teachers are not well trained in how to assign homework. They called for parents to demand that teachers reduce the amounts of homework assigned, design more valuable assignments, and abolish homework completely over breaks and holidays. In another book, *The Homework Myth: Why Our Kids Get Too Much of a Bad Thing* (2006) by Kohn, research on homework was criticized. Kohn claims that the research on homework failed to reveal the effectiveness of homework as an instructional tool. Furthermore, teachers should only assign homework when it can be proven to be beneficial. In other words, not just assigning homework as a matter of policy. Teachers should also be able to justify these assignments. Additionally, these assignments should be constructed so that that they can easily be completed in the home, such as cooking experiments in the kitchen, cooking, doing crossword puzzles with the family, watching good TV shows, or reading. Giving students an opportunity for deciding what homework is assigned and how much is also urged (Marzano & Pickering, 2007b).

Marzano and Pickering (2007a) found that inappropriate homework practices can be ineffective and even decrease student achievement. School districts should reinforce policies that will ensure teachers use appropriate homework policies; however, discarding homework altogether could be detrimental. Enhancing learning beyond the typical school day is one important advantage to assigning homework. Since American students spend much less time on homework than students in other countries, this is a very important characteristic. A comparative study in 1994 looked at the amount of time U.S. students spend doing homework as compared with students from countries like Japan, France, and Germany. The study found that students in other countries are expected to

spend about twice the amount of time as U.S. students (National Education Commission on Time and Learning, 1994). If a school district were to eliminate homework then they would need to identify a practice that would produce the same effects and manage to fit that into the existing time limits of the school day. A much better option would be to enact effective homework policies (Marzano & Pickering, 2007b).

Even though most Kindergarten through grade twelve teachers assign some type of homework, there has not been any research that shows an agreement on the benefits of homework in the early elementary years. The Cooper, Robinson, and Patall (2006) meta-analysis noted that homework should have varying purposes depending on grade level. For the *earliest* grades, homework assignments should be designed with the focus on fostering positive habits, attitudes, and character traits. As students progress into *upper* elementary grades, homework should focus on fostering improved academic achievement. Beyond the sixth grade, homework needs to be used for improving standardized test scores (Marzano & Pickering, 2007a).

One of the biggest issues of controversy surrounding homework is the amount of time students should spend on it. Cooper (2007) recommended the "ten minute rule," which suggested that homework assignments combined should take about as long to complete as ten minutes multiplied by the student's grade level (p. 118). However, the point may be missed when focusing on the amount of time students spend. There is much research that suggests that the amount of time is not as important as the amount of homework that is *completed*. Therefore, just assigning homework may not produce the desired effect. It is imperative that teachers plan homework assignments carefully so to maximize the potential for students' learning (Marzano & Pickering, 2007a).

Parent Involvement and Teacher Attitudes

Research shows that teachers can benefit from family involvement (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Home-school communication with parents and family is a key element of homework (Polloway, 1994). Similarly, Gill and Schlossman (2003) felt that the most important function of homework is the connection between home and school. Because parents have little ways to monitor their child's progress in school, homework gives them first-hand knowledge of the school's educational goals and structure. Homework gives parents, to the best of their ability, a means of having some type of authority and control of their child's education. When there is more parental involvement in the school, teachers report more positive attitudes about teaching (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Futhermore, teachers who conduct activities that involve students' parents are more likely to report that all parents can help their children while other teachers are more likely to stereotype parents with less formal education and report that the parents are not interested and, therefore, cannot help their children at home (Epstein, 1990). In the same vein, Bryan and Burstein (2004) found that parent involvement in homework led to higher homework completion, which then led to higher achievement. In addition, teachers who involve parents increase their appreciation of all parents and continue to add assignments that involve family (Epstein, 1990).

Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)

Epstein, Salinas, and Jackson (1995) reported that results of research on homework completion and parental involvement suggested that teachers design homework so that the assignments are purposeful and meaningful. In addition, the assignments need to be engaging and of high quality, so all students, of all ability levels,

are able to complete them. Researchers and teachers worked together to improve the design of homework and studied the effects of interactive assignments on homework completion, family involvement, and student learning. "Interactive homework" is designed to encourage students to share what they are learning in class with their family members and peers (Epstein, 2001,p. 183).

According to Van Voorhis (2004), there are two main differences between TIPS interactive homework and independent assignments. All TIPS assignments, in contrast to independent assignments, are designed to promote conversations with family, peers, and community members. For example, a middle school TIPS math assignment for computing averages may require students to interview people to see how many hours they sleep. The students would then compute the averages and report the findings to their family members. In this instance, students have the opportunity to share the lessons they are learning in class with others. The second difference is that TIPS assignments have more family-friendly assignment schedules. Since the TIPS assignments require talking with family members, the teacher must take this into account. With an independent assignment, teachers may assign homework and require it to be turned in the next day. However, teachers need to allow for more time with the assignment of interactive assignments.

Epstein and Dauber (1991) stated that the TIPS process began from early research that revealed when elementary teachers regularly involved parents in reading at home, more of these students improved their reading test scores from the fall to the spring of the school year. Studies (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Scott-Jones, 1995) also revealed that teachers in the younger grades would ask parents to be involved

in reading homework but not as much in other subjects. Few teachers would even involve parents in homework as students moved to the middle grades. As stated by Epstein (2001), more vigorous research should be conducted to have a better understanding of how specific homework designs can affect outcomes of students' grades. The TIPS studies also reveal even more questions about how teachers play a role in using homework as an instructional tool.

Parents and Homework

Public schools have an enormous amount of discretion when it comes to parental involvement. Some schools allow parents to be involved in the creation of educational policies, and others do not. According to Gill and Schlossman (2003b), educators cannot avoid homework policies and practices that will potentially offend some parents. If the school assigns little or no homework, parents who want to participate in their child's learning get offended. If the school assigns too much homework, parents who have plans for their children after school get offended.

Aside from improving test scores and academic achievement, homework is a key factor in the relationship between home and school. Parents have a way to view, although not necessarily comprehend, the content of their child's educational training. It has often been implied that children discover from their parents how to manage their homework (Xu, 2004). Xu (2004) discovered that there are two effects that homework may possibly have on a home. First, some parents may view homework as an intrusion on their family time. Parents found this threatening to their authority. They did not like it if doing homework was something that they had to manage outside of school. However, there are parents who thought that homework was an effective form of

communication between home and school and value its worth. According to these parents, homework was a part of keeping them involved and gave them a chance to participate. By the teacher not assigning homework, parents felt that they were being excluded from their child's learning. These two views created issues among teachers and administrators.

Corno et al. (2004) research stated that homework could be better supervised than it usually is. Most adults were not very well informed about how to help their children with homework. In most cases, children received too little assistance from parents; however, some parents were too authoritative when giving assistance by often doing the homework for the child. Corno et al.'s (2004) study suggested that students benefited the most when parents' supervision:

1. clarified the teacher's expectations,
2. modeled and encouraged effective work habits, and
3. responded swiftly when the child needed help.

It was also discovered that parents do not need to have higher education in order to adequately assist their child with learning good study habits. Knowing how to provide effective guidance, not a college degree, was what determined success. However, many parents do not receive much guidance from teachers and/or schools on how to do this. A survey of 560 elementary and middle school parents supported this conclusion when it was reported by over half the parents that they were concerned about how to help their children establish effective study habit. This research suggested that parents should be given guidance from schools about how to better supervise during homework. The

combination of support and supervision was not unlike that of employer and employee which both produce rewards (Corno et al., 2004).

Special Education and Homework

According to Bryan and Burstein (2004), the two primary causes of homework problems for students with disabilities are students' characteristics and teachers' deficits creating homework assignments. Student characteristics include: poor motivation, comprehension problems and lack of organizational skills. There has been an increase in interest for homework intervention in the past decade to help students in special education classrooms develop better homework completion skills (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). According to Salend and Schliff (1989), students with learning disabilities can greatly benefit from homework when teachers follow good homework policies.

Improving the homework performance of struggling learners is a serious issue in schools today because the majority of these students are in general education classrooms where they are receiving increasing amounts of homework (Margolis, 2005). Because students with disabilities are now being mainstreamed into the regular education classroom, special education teachers are spending the majority of their time helping students with homework assignments instead of helping them develop skills that will teach them to complete homework assignments independently (Hughes et al., 2002). According to Bryan and Burstein (2004), students with learning disabilities experience more deficits as they increase grade level. This is often because homework assignments increase as students get older. Schumm and Vaughn (1989), conducted a survey and found that 80% of teachers assign homework regularly, but few matched the assignment to the students' skills. According to Ormrod (2003), teachers should create challenging

yet familiar assignments that struggling students are able to successfully complete without too much effort. Similarly, Epstein et al. (1993) stated that teachers create assignments that match struggling students' abilities to work independently. Additionally, Salend and Schliff reported that homework completion rates may increase for struggling students if teachers give explicit directions for homework. This would include the following:

1. give specific directions and due dates for assignments
2. offer students guidance in finding appropriate resources for completing assignments and the extent to which they may get assistance from peers
3. encourage students to ask questions regarding homework assignments
4. allow students to start homework assignments in class.

According to Margolis (2005), if teachers notice that struggling learners are having problems completing homework, then teachers need to address these problems. Teachers can improve homework completion rates of struggling students by appropriately preparing them for the assignments, giving feedback, and linking homework to learners' goals. Bryan and Burstein (2004) suggested that schools create school-wide teams that help develop appropriate homework assignments for struggling learners.

Summary

Although many educators and parents recognize the benefits of homework, it has still been an issue of controversy over the years. Although some research and educational theory report some evidence of increased achievement through homework, there are other factors that need to be considered. There has been much research conducted in the area of homework and student achievement; however, not many studies

have focused on the teachers' role in the homework. The purpose of this study is to conduct a survey to better understand the attitudes and practices of teachers related to homework. Also, this study will make comparisons of elementary, middle, high school and special education teachers to see if the grade level taught has any affect on those attitudes and practices of teachers. In this chapter, the researcher has reviewed the literature. The methodology is presented in Chapter III. In Chapter IV, the findings are presented. A summary of the study, conclusions and implications for practice and recommendations for further study are discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

Although research has been conducted in various areas of homework, little has been researched concerning teacher's attitudes and perceptions of homework, or the possible role these attitudes may play in the implementation of homework. This chapter will give information pertaining to the procedures, instrumentation and data analysis of the study.

Research Design

This study was a between participants approach and a descriptive research design will be employed. Cross-sectional research was used. There were four groups being studied: elementary school teachers (grades K through 5), middle school teachers (grades 6- 8), high school teachers (grades 9 through 12) and special education teachers. The researcher will attempt to describe characteristics between grade level taught, years experience, and teacher homework practices and attitudes.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of elementary (grades K-5), middle school (grades 6-8), secondary (grades 9–12) teachers, and special education teachers in two school districts. The participants were randomly selected based on their willingness to participate. All participants have at least a bachelor's degree or above.

One school district is located in a suburban community of approximately 18,000 people. The district is composed of 80% Caucasian, 12% African American, and 4% Asian and Hispanic. Total enrollment for the district is approximately 5,400. Regular, as

well as SPED teachers, will be invited to participate in the study. The elementary teachers were taken from each of the three elementary schools in the district and consist of grades K through 5. There were approximately one hundred teachers participating in this category. The secondary teachers were from the one high school in the district consisting of grades 9 through 12. There were approximately 125 teachers representing this group.

The second district consists of seven elementary schools representing grades K-5. There are also three high schools in the district that will represent grades 9-12. All teachers in the district have at least a bachelor's degree or higher. The approximate enrollment for the district is 9,173. The district is composed of 85% Caucasian, 2% Hispanic, 9% African American, and 4% Asian. Fifty-one percent of enrollment is male, and forty- nine percent are female. The elementary schools have approximately 189 teachers while the high schools have 135 teachers.

Instrumentation

The researcher has obtained permission to use a survey already designed by another researcher, Clifford D. Conner (Appendix A). The survey that was used has 18 items that are focused on teacher attitudes' toward homework. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* was utilized in order to rate attitudes and behaviors (Appendix B). To obtain information on the participants regarding their gender, years experience, grade level, and education level, six demographic questions were asked (Appendix C). There were also eight questions pertaining to in-class practices following the survey (Appendix D). The following information was obtained from the creator of the instrument, Clifford Conner, on the reliability and validity of the instrument:

A panel of five experts (one fifth grade teacher, two fourth grade teachers, and two third grade teachers) in the field reviewed the instrument to obtain content validity. Each teacher reviewed the instrument and suggested some minor changes. The instrument was resubmitted to the same experts who then approved the final instrument.

To achieve reliability, the survey was then administered to 30 people who fit the population characteristics of the sample to be studied. The survey was then administered the same 30 people after a four-week interval. Each item was then analyzed using the Pearson *r* and Fisher's *r* to z.

There was no statistical difference in the total attitude scores before and after the maturation period. The statistical significance was verified by the two- sample t test (t-value = -0.22, df = 55, p-value = 0.587), which indicated that the teacher's attitudes did not change after the maturation period. (C. Conner, personal communication, August 3, 2010).

Procedures

Before any data collection could be obtained, permission was sought from the superintendent of the school district. The researcher sent an email to the superintendant to discuss the research study and get permission. The researcher also discussed that the survey would be conducted via email to ensure that the district did not block this site for the purpose of the study. The researcher then contacted each building principal via email to inform them of the questionnaire that would be emailed to their teachers. The researcher then requested permission from IRB to conduct the study.

Once permission was granted, the email addresses were added to the Survey Monkey program. The researcher accessed all email addresses through each school district website. The email provided an explanation for the purpose of the study and instructions on how to complete the survey. The participants were asked to complete the survey within a two week time period. Survey Monkey allowed the researcher to track those who had not responded. The researcher sent reminder emails after one week to those who had not responded. If the researcher had not obtained enough responses via Survey Monkey, then the questionnaires would have been sent to the participating school districts in paper form and hand delivered to the building principals to distribute. The researcher would have then requested the surveys be returned to the building secretary, and the researcher would personally pick up completed questionnaires.

At the end of the two-week period, participants were no longer able to complete the survey. The data was transferred into an Excel spreadsheet and then into SPSS for statistical analysis. All data obtained on Survey Monkey would be private and confidential. The data was stored on a password protected personal computer that would only be accessible by the researcher.

Delimitations

This study is limited to only two school districts and only to those whom are currently employed by such school districts for the two week time period. Other school employees and/or staff are not invited to participate. Another limitation is that the participants are selected based on their willingness to participate as opposed to a non-random sample. By obtaining a convenience sample, the researcher is not able to generalize beyond the study.

Data Analysis

The researcher will examine the survey responses of the teachers in order to address the research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in elementary schools?
2. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in middle schools?
3. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in high school?
4. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in special education?
5. Do elementary, middle, high school and special education teachers differ on their attitudes about homework?
6. Do elementary, middle, high school, and special education teachers differ on their homework practices?

The data is collected via Survey Monkey, downloaded to Microsoft Excel, and then transferred to SPSS for formal data analysis. Descriptive statistics are produced from the demographic information items. An alpha level of .01 is set.

For the first four research questions, Pearson Correlation are used to examine the relationship between the groups. The fifth and sixth research questions are addressed by conducting a One way ANOVA.

In this chapter, the researcher has discussed the instrument and procedures that are used in the study, as well as the data analysis. In Chapter IV, the researcher will discuss the findings and Chapter V will detail suggestions for further studies.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in elementary, middle, and high school grades. A surveyed was emailed to 500 teachers in two Mississippi coast school districts to determine if there were differences in their attitudes and practices regarding homework. The researcher received 172 responses giving a 34% return rate. The researcher will present the results of the statistical analysis.

Demographics

The participants in this study included 500 elementary, middle, high school and SPED teachers in two Mississippi coast school districts. Of those surveyed, 62 were elementary teachers representing 36% of the population, 38, or 22% were middle school teachers, 52 or 30% were high school teachers, and 20 or 11% were SPED teachers (see Table 1). The majority of the teachers (33.7%) had between 11 and 20 years teaching experience. In addition, the majority of the teachers (44.2%) hold a Masters degree. The majority of respondents were female.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Variables

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Elementary	62	36.0
Middle	38	22.1
High School	52	30.2
SPED	20	11.6
Experience		
0-4 yrs	34	19.0
5-10 yrs	50	29.1
11-20 yrs	58	33.7
21 or more	29	16.9
Education		
BA/BS	60	34.9
Masters	76	44.2
Masters +	32	18.6
Doctorate	4	2.3
Sex		
Male	24	14.0
Female	147	85.0

Descriptive Statistics Criteria

The following findings address the first eighteen questions that the teachers were asked concerning their attitudes toward homework. A five-point Likert scale was used ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* (Table 2). The researcher found that the question most teachers agreed on was number 18: "Students from low socio-economic backgrounds should receive little or no homework." More than 50% of the teachers disagree with this statement. It was also found that teachers least agreed upon question #17, "Students from low socio-economic backgrounds are at a disadvantage regarding homework completion."

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Survey Questions 1- 18

Questions	Mean	Std. Deviation
Low scoio-economic students should get little homework.	4.24	.654
Students who complete homework are more prepared for class.	4.20	.758
Students who complete homework do better on tests.	4.12	.826
Homework develops a sense of personal responsibility.	4.16	.836
Students who complete homework understand subject matter.	4.09	.813
Homework does not develop independent work habits.	3.86	.871
Students who complete homework are more organized.	3.92	.883
Students who complete homework have a better attitude.	3.85	.874
Homework increases a student's ability to follow directions.	3.77	.822
Homework does not make students more confident.	3.73	.914

Table 2 (continued).

Homework does not increase ability to retain facts.	3.73	.929
Completing homework does not teach a student to budget time.	3.71	.939
Completing homework teaches students to complete it on time.	3.61	.978
Students who complete homework have a more positive attitude.	3.54	.771
Students who complete homework have a positive self-image.	3.55	.855
Students who complete homework create fewer problems.	3.27	.883
Students who complete homework are more respectful.	3.23	.918
Low socio-economic status gives disadvantage.	2.88	1.16

Note. Scale: 1= SD; 5= SA

The following descriptive statistics show the mean scores (Table 3). The following scale was used: 1= *Strongly Disagree*; 2= *Disagree*; 3= *Neutral*; 4= *Agree*; 5= *Strongly Agree*. The average score for "homework practices" was 2.86 and the average for "attitude" was 3.74. Therefore, although the attitudes are positive and high, the reported practices are low.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics

	N	minimum	max	mean	std. deviation
Homework practices	169	1.0	4.33	2.86	.728
Attitude	172	2.0	4.94	3.74	.529
Valid	169				

Is There a Relationship between Teachers' Attitudes and Practices Regarding Homework in Elementary Schools?

A Pearson Correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices in elementary grades (see Table 4). The results indicate there is no significant correlation, r(61) = .170, p= .191, between teacher attitude and practices of homework in the elementary grades. Therefore, elementary teachers' attitudes have no effect on their homework practices.

Table 4

Pearson Correlation of Teacher Attitudes and Practices in Elementary

		Attitude
Homework Practices	Pearson Correlation	.170
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.191
	N	61

Is There a Relationship between Teachers' Attitudes and Practices Regarding Homework in Middle School?

A Pearson Correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between teacher attitude and practices of homework in middle school grades. There was a significant correlation, r(37) = .367, p= .026, at this grade level indicating that the teachers' attitudes about homework have a significant positive affect on their homework practices (see Table 5): The more positive the attitude, the more homework practices.

Table 5

Pearson Correlation of Teacher Attitudes and Practices in Middle School

		Attitude
Homework Practices	Pearson Correlation	.367*
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.026
	N	37

* correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Is There a Relationship between Teachers' Attitudes and Practices Regarding Homework in High School?

A Pearson Correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between teachers' attitudes and their practices regarding homework in high school grades. It was determined that there is not a significant correlation, r (51)= .231, p= .104; therefore, high school teachers' attitudes have no effect on their practices (see Table 6).

Table 6

Pearson Correlation of Teacher Attitudes and Practices in High School

		Attitude
Homework Practices	Pearson Correlation	.231
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.104
	N	51

Is There a Relationship between Teachers' Attitudes and Practices Regarding Homework in Special Education?

A Pearson Correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices for Special Education teachers. It was determined that

there was a significant correlation, r(20) = .456, p=.043. Therefore, SPED teachers' attitudes positively affect their homework practices (see Table 6).

Table 7

Pearson Correlation of Teacher Attitude and Practices in Special Education

		Attitude
Homework Practices	Pearson Correlation	.456
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.043
	N	20

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

Do elementary, middle, high school, and special education teachers differ on their attitudes about homework and homework practices?

The researcher conducted a Oneway ANOVA to answer research questions five and six (see Table 8). It was determined that there was a significant difference in teacher attitude, $F(3, 168) = 6.94$, $p < .001$, and a significant difference in homework practices, $F(3, 165) = 3.57$, $p = .015$. The researcher also determined that elementary, middle, and high school teachers have a more positive attitude toward homework and give more homework than Special Education teachers (see Table 7).

Table 8

Teacher Attitude and Practices in Elementary, Middle, High School and Special Education

		N	Mean	Std Deviation
Attitude	elementary	62	3.68	.49
	middle	38	3.94	.44
	HS	52	3.81	.53
	SPED	20	3.34	.59
	Total	172	3.74	.53
Practices	elementary	61	2.95	.62
	Middle	37	2.79	.76
	HS	51	2.97	.64
	SPED	20	2.41	1.01
	Total	169	2.86	.73

Summary

This chapter focused on the analysis of teachers' attitudes and practices toward homework in elementary, middle, high school and special education. The results of the survey revealed that in elementary and high school grades, teacher attitudes toward homework have no effect on their homework practices. The Pearson Correlation indicated that there is a significant relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices in middle school and special education; however, special education teachers have the lowest attitude toward homework.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the attitudes and practices of elementary, middle, high school, and special education teachers regarding homework. Chapter V presents an overall summary of the research study, discussion of findings, conclusions, limitations, recommendation for practice, and recommendations for further research.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and practices of teachers in different grade levels regarding homework. This study contributes to the existing literature that relates to homework. While there have been many previous studies in the area of homework, there has been little in the area of teacher attitudes and practices regarding homework.

The study began with a review of existing literature and other research studies relating to homework. There were several topics that guided the literature review: (a) purposes for homework, (b) homework designs and teacher practices, (c) homework and student achievement, (d) homework vs no homework, (e) parent involvement and teacher attitudes, and (f) special education and homework. The sample for this study was represented by 172 teachers from two coast school districts in Mississippi. The instrument used was one that had previously been developed by another researcher. The instrument consisted of a section of demographic questions and a section for teachers' attitudes and practices of homework in which they expressed agreement or disagreement.

Research data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Categories including years of experience, grade level taught, gender, and level of education were described

using frequencies and percentages. Moreover, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if there was a relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework.

Findings

In summary, the analyses of the research data found:

Q1. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in elementary schools?

Overall, elementary teachers' attitudes regarding homework have no significant effect on their homework practices.

Q2. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in middle schools?

There was a significant relationship between middle school teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework.

Q3. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in high school grades?

Overall, high school teachers' attitudes toward homework did not significantly effect their homework practices.

Q4. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in special education?

There was a significant relationship between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework in special education.

Q5. Do elementary, middle, high school and special education teachers differ on their attitudes regarding homework?

Overall, elementary, middle, and high school teachers have a more positive attitude towards homework than special education teachers.

Q6. Do elementary, middle, high school, and special education teachers differ on their practices regarding homework?

Overall, elementary, middle, and high school teachers assign more homework than special education teachers.

An area that teachers had the strongest agreement was in the area of low socio-economic students. Teachers strongly agreed that it does not matter if students are from a low socio-economic background; therefore, these students should receive the same amount of homework as every other student. Teachers also strongly disagreed that students from low socio-economic backgrounds are at a disadvantage when it come to homework completion.

Conclusions and Discussion

This study examined whether or not teachers' attitudes about homework affect their homework practices in the classroom. In addition, the researcher examined if the teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework differ based on grade level taught.

Studies (Cooper et al., 2006) have shown that the effects of homework differ by grade level. Others (Kravolec & Buell, 1991) argue that homework does not foster achievement and the practice of homework should be minimized or eliminated completely. According to Cooper and Valentine (2001) this could be because elementary students are less skilled in study habits. This researcher agrees that younger students probably don't benefit as much as older students when it comes to homework. In this study, it was found that elementary teachers' attitudes do not reflect their homework

practices. Research suggests that, overall, homework in lower grades is mainly only beneficial for the motivational skills than for improvement of grades (Bempechat, 2004).

Many reviews of research (Cooper, 1989) on homework have identified various reasons teachers may assign homework. Muhlenbruck et al. (2000) reported that one reason teachers may assign homework is to prepare students for upcoming lessons. In this study, the teachers surveyed seem to agree with this. Fifty-five percent of the teachers agreed that students who complete homework are more prepared for class and 56% of teachers agreed that students who complete homework are more likely to understand the subject matter. The researcher agrees that students, especially in the high school grades, can greatly benefit from homework because it gives practice for upcoming lessons.

Another reason teachers reported giving homework was to build student responsibility (Muhlenbruck et al., 2000). In this study, 55% of the teachers surveyed agree that completing homework makes students more secure and confident in class. This researcher believes that completing homework helps students learn how to manage time and develop study skills.

In this study, the teachers most agreed with the statement that "students from low socio-economic backgrounds are at a disadvantage regarding homework." Kravolec and Buell (1991) suggested that homework punishes students in poverty for being poor. In this study, 53% of the teachers disagree that students from low socio-economic backgrounds should receive little or no homework. This supports the literature (Ogbu, 1995) that low-income parents also care deeply about their child's education. Although these students are from low socio-economic families, that does not mean that their

parents do not care about their child's education. However, this researcher believes that certain students are at a disadvantage in certain circumstances. For example, many students do not go home and have a quiet place to study, or they may not have family members who are available to help them. In addition, Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) stated that homework should not be based on a family's income.

In this study, 47% of the teachers stated that they usually give the same assignment to every student for homework. However, the literature on brain-based research (Caine & Caine, 1990) suggests that every brain is unique. Teachers should strive to give students choices in their assignments in order to appeal to individual interests. In addition, research has shown that purposeful homework is more effective (Marzano & Pickering, 2007). Therefore, if students get individual assignments, based on their needs, the assignment will have more personal meaning to the student than if everyone gets the same. This researcher agrees that students' assignments should be differentiated; however, the researcher also recognizes the extra amount of work this requires on behalf of the teacher.

The literature suggests that homework should frequently be reviewed (Margolis, 2005). Similarly, Marzano (2003) stated in his book, *What Works in Schools*, that effective teachers provide specific feedback on all homework. The researcher agrees that homework should not be assigned if the teacher is not going to review it. If the student takes the time to complete the assignment then the teacher needs to take the time to discuss it; furthermore, the assignment has no value if the student worked every question incorrectly. Students need to know if the work they did is correct. The teachers in this

study seem to agree with the literature findings. Forty-five percent of the teachers indicated that they review every homework assignment in class.

Limitations

The following are limitations that existed in this study:

- The first limitation was that the findings were limited because the respondents consisted of a small population from two school districts. Therefore, this study was not applicable to larger school districts.

Recommendations for Practice

The results of this study will add to the existing body of knowledge for educators and administrators on the topic of homework. Although much research has been done on the relationship between homework and achievement, not much has focused on the teachers' attitudes towards homework. A better understanding of these attitudes and teachers' homework practices can greatly benefit administrators and, in the long run, benefit students as well. This researcher suggests the following potential actions for teachers and administrators:

1. Become aware of the purposes for homework. Teachers need to make sure that assignments have a meaningful purpose and not merely "busywork" for students.
2. Administrators need to become aware of the homework practices of teachers in the district and evaluate these practices. Teachers need to be held accountable for their practices regarding homework to ensure that the assignments are purposeful.
3. Administrators could possibly implement homework policies into the district curriculum.
4. Teachers should follow the "10-minute rule" as proposed by Harris Cooper.

5. Administrators need to give teachers professional development that will help teachers better understand the purpose for homework and ideas for homework design.
6. Teachers need to be conscious of students with learning disabilities and their needs regarding homework.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future possible studies generated by this study might include:

1. Collecting data from administrators on their attitudes about homework. Once the teachers' attitudes are evaluated, it would be helpful to also know what administrators feel. This could lead to collaboration for better understanding and design of homework assignments.
2. Collecting data from parents and students on their attitudes toward homework for further collaboration and understanding of homework policies.
3. In the high school grades, data should be collected based on subject area taught. It might be more insightful to group together subject areas than to analyze high school teachers all together.
4. A qualitative approach, such as interviews and focus groups, should be utilized to gain a better understanding of why teachers have certain beliefs about homework.
5. Collecting data from other districts with greater teacher diversity.

APPENDIX A

PERMISSION TO USE QUESTIONNAIRE

RE: homework questionnaire

Tuesday, January 11, 2011 10:39 AM

From:

"Dean Conner" <dean.conner@cmcss.net>
Add sender to Contacts

To:

"courtney peltier" <river_courtney@yahoo.com>

You are more than welcome to use my questionnaire. My apologies, however, the computer that had all of my dissertation documents got stolen a couple of years ago. Good luck. Hope it goes well for you!
Dean Conner

From: courtney peltier [river_courtney@yahoo.com]
Sent: Monday, January 10, 2011 11:13 AM
To: Dean Conner
Subject: homework questionnaire

I am currently working on a disseration about homework. I wanted to know if I could use your questionnaire and if you could email me a copy.
Thanks, Courtney Peltier

Subject:	Re: homework questionnaire
From:	Dean Conner (dean.conner@cmcss.net)
To:	river_courtney@yahoo.com;
Date:	Monday, September 26, 2011 7:15 PM

You got it. Good luck!

From: courtney peltier <river_courtney@yahoo.com>
Reply-To: courtney peltier <river_courtney@yahoo.com>
Date: Mon, 26 Sep 2011 17:08:00 -0700
To: CMCSS CMCSS <dean.conner@cmcss.net>
Subject: homework questionnaire

I am currently working on my dissertation regarding homework. I would like permission to reproduce your questionnaire used in your dissertation. Thanks for your time,
Courtney Peltier

APPENDIX B

TEACHER ATTITUDES TOWARD THE ASSIGNMENT OF HOMEWORK

Please answer the following questions according to the scale shown below. Circle the number that indicates the degree to which you believe homework affects students, teachers, parents, and school climate.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1. Completing homework teaches a student to complete homework on time.
   1 2 3 4 5
2. Students who complete homework tend to develop a sense of personal responsibility.
   1 2 3 4 5
3. Students who do complete homework tend to be more organized.
   1 2 3 4 5
4. Completing homework does not teach a student how to budget time.
   1 2 3 4 5
5. Completing homework does not develop a student's independent work habits.
   1 2 3 4 5
6. Completing homework increases a student's ability to follow directions.
   1 2 3 4 5
7. Students who complete homework are more likely to understand subject matter.
   1 2 3 4 5
8. Students who complete homework are more likely to do well on tests.
   1 2 3 4 5
9. Students who complete homework are more prepared for class.
   1 2 3 4 5
10. Completing homework does not increase a student's ability to retain factual information.
    1 2 3 4 5

11. Completing homework does not make students more secure and confident in class.

1 2 3 4 5

12. Students who complete homework have a more positive attitude towards school.

1 2 3 4 5

13. Students who complete homework have a better attitude towards participating in class.

1 2 3 4 5

14. Students who complete homework are more respectful of their teachers.

1 2 3 4 5

15. Students who complete homework create fewer discipline problems.

1 2 3 4 5

16. Students who complete homework have a more positive self- image.

1 2 3 4 5

17. Students from low- socio- economic backgrounds are at a disadvantage regarding homework completion.

1 2 3 4 5

18. Students from low socio- economic backgrounds should receive little or no homework.

1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET

1. How long have you been teaching?

   0- 4 yrs 5- 10 yrs 11-20 yrs 21 yrs or more

2. What is your educational level?

   BA/ BS Masters Masters + Doctorate

3. Male Female (Circle One)

4. Please circle one.

   K 1 2 3 4 5 9 10 11 12 Special Ed

APPENDIX D

IN-CLASS PRACTICES

1. I assign homework:
   Daily Weekly Monthly Seldom Not at all

2. On average, how much homework do you give each night?
0 to 15 minutes 15 to 30 minutes 30 to 60 minutes 1 to 2 hours more than 2 hours

3. How often is homework reviewed in your classroom?
Every assignment most assignments about 1/2 assignments a few assignments never

4. How often do you grade homework?
Every assignment most assignments about ½ assignments a few assignments never

5. How often do you assign homework that requires students to involve another person (parent, peer, sibling)?
Every night more than once a week about once a week less than once a week never

6. How often do you provide rewards for completing homework?
Every assignment most assignments about ½ assignments a few assignments never

7. How often do you assign different assignments to different students in your class?
Students always get the same students usually get the same assignments
same and different assignments are given equally students always get different assignments

8. How much homework in your classroom is required and how much is voluntary?
All is required most is required about half is required and half is voluntary most homework is voluntary all homework is voluntary

APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Tel: 601.266.6820
Fax: 601.266.5509
www.usm.edu/irb

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **11050301**
PROJECT TITLE: **A Comparative Study of Teachers' Attitudes and Practices Regarding Homework in Elementary and High School Grades**
PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: **04/21/2011 to 12/10/2011**
PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation**
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Courtney Pisarich Peltier**
COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**
DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership**
FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**
HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Exempt Approval**
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **05/09/2011 to 05/08/2012**

Lawrence A. Hosman
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair

5-10-2011
Date

APPENDIX F

SUPERINTENDENT PERMISSION

Apr 19 2011 12:24PM HP LASERJET FAX 228-826-3393 p.1

AUTHORIZATION TO PARTIPCATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Consent is hereby given for **Jackson County School District** to participate in the research project entitled "A Comparative Study on Teachers' Attitudes and Practices Regarding Homework in Elementary and High School Grades". Information was given about all benefits, risks, or discomforts that might be expected.

Participation in the project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. All personal information is strictly confidential, and no names will be disclosed. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided if that information may affect the willingness to continue participation in the project.

Questions concerning the research, at any time during or after the project, should be directed to Courtney Peltier (researcher) at 228-326-2311. This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that all research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601)266-6820.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The ultimate goal of this study is to increase student achievement. Additionally, the researcher hopes to gain a better understanding of teachers' attitudes and practices regarding homework.

PROCEDURES
The researcher will email elementary teachers (grades k-5) and high school teachers (grades 9-12) via school email. Teachers will be asked to fill out a 10- 15 minute questionnaire via *Survey Monkey* about their attitudes and practices regarding homework.

I hereby give consent to Courtney Peltier to conduct a research study in the **Jackson County School District.**

Barry Smacker

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