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The Dog Ate My Homework: A Qualitative Study of Students' Views of Their Homework Experiences

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THE DOG ATE MY HOMEWORK:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF STUDENTS’ VIEWS OF THEIR HOMEWORK EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by
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B.S., Louisiana State University, 1993
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December 2014
In loving memory of

Donel Ray Stogner

10/19/37 – 3/16/11

“How much more you gonna do ‘til you’re a Dr.?”

Now, I’m finished.
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Throughout this long journey, Dr. Jackie Bach has consistently offered her time, efforts, knowledge, advice, humor, and patience. Her words of encouragement have, on many occasions, helped me find enough confidence in myself to keep working and not give up. She gave me enough space to allow me to work through my struggles, yet stayed close enough to keep me on track. She introduced me to Maykut and Morehouse, and I am forever grateful. I appreciate her investment in my study and all the support she provided.

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Roger, thank you for enduring years without my 100%. Thank you for taking over responsibilities at home and doing what you could to reduce my stressful moments. Thank you, also, for challenging my thinking: I share this accomplishment with you. Now that I am finished, I promise to focus on our family.
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Students’ voices are underrepresented in the professional literature and public conversations regarding homework; therefore, this study was designed to include students’ voices in future conversations. This study examined the responses of ten high school students enrolled in an eleventh grade English Language and Composition Advanced Placement (AP) class at a rural public school. The findings of this study answer the research questions: 1. What are students’ experiences with homework? 2. In what ways have these experiences shaped students’ views of homework?

Over a period of 16 weeks, the researcher gathered qualitative data via students’ responses to essay writing, a questionnaire, open-ended questions, journal, focus groups sessions, and social media (Twitter) postings. At the end of the study, the findings revealed that 1. Students worry and stress over trying to divide their time between homework completion and other obligations. 2. Students struggle to complete their homework assignments because they claim they are not academically prepared. 3. Students resist homework assignments they consider unnecessary. 4. Students realize completing homework can be meaningful.

The findings of this study indicate that, for different reasons and at different times, the students in this study view homework as: assignment that affect arbitrarily affects their class grades; a way to prepare for tests; assignments not worth doing; something they do not need to know or want to know; assignments they will complete it if they have to; requirements they need to fulfill; opportunities to teach them to be responsible; a way to increase their retention of subject matter; confidence building opportunities. The students in this study also offer the following adjectives to describe homework: cumbersome, stressful, tiring, confusing, difficult, unimportant, pointless, useless, boring, common sense and counterproductive. This study points
to the need for education stakeholders (i.e. policy makers and elected officials, school administrators, parents, post-secondary educators, and future employers) to consider students’ perspectives of their homework experiences and include these concerns in future conversations about homework.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Okay, I admit it. Even with over 20 years of teaching experience, I still question the importance of homework in my classroom. Throughout my career, I have cycled through phases of assigning a certain amount of homework, only to find myself eventually lightening the loads and asking myself the same questions. Should I even assign homework? If so, what should it be? What do I do when students do not complete their homework? Finally, the most troublesome question of all: Why do some students not complete their homework assignments?

Again, after all these years, I still have no answers. I have never participated in a meeting to discuss how homework benefits or harms students, how much time students should spend on homework, how homework should be designed, how often homework should be assigned, or if it should be assessed. Although there have been homework policies established in other school districts across the country and even at other schools in my district, my school has never established homework expectations. While I have worked with five principals, three assistant principals of curriculum, and one curriculum coach, none has ever suggested a school-wide homework policy nor even voiced an opinion about homework in general. At first, one might consider me fortunate to have the freedom to decide how to teach my students; however, after a few moments of reflection, one might also begin to question whether my ignorance actually is something to be viewed positively. What do I know about designing effective homework?

When I began teaching, I assigned homework because I hoped it would establish my reputation as a dedicated teacher. I was frustrated when students came to class without their homework assignments. How could I review and discuss anything if the students did not bring completed assignments to class for discussion? How could they come to class without their work? I asked them what happened, and I always received the predictable answers: “I forgot,”
“I didn’t do it,” “I didn’t want to,” “I didn’t know how,” “I did not have time,” and, of course, the most irritating response of all, “What, we had homework?” I felt insulted when students did not place my homework assignments on the top of their “to do” list. I was baffled. Why aren’t they embarrassed or ashamed to come to class without their homework? Why aren’t they sorry? What are they thinking? Why don’t they care? Clearly, my students and I have a difference of opinion when thinking about homework. In this study, I did not seek to prove that I am right and my students are wrong. Instead, I tried to understand how students view homework.

**Homework Definition**

Throughout the past 100 years, psychologists and educators have become more involved in understanding how the human mind works and how learning occurs (Mayer, 1999). The evolution of learning theories has guided the direction of instruction in the classroom and has led teachers to devise innovative homework activities (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001). In fact, the evolution of educational research has even challenged the very definition of homework.

In his 1989 study, *Homework*, Harris Cooper, one of America’s leading authorities on homework, defines homework as “tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours” (p. 7). Twenty years later, the way we view homework has changed, forcing Cooper to restructure his original definition. In an interview with Bembenutty (2011), Cooper points to his substitution of the phrase “during noninstructional time” for “nonschool hours” (p. 340). By making this distinction, Cooper excludes guided study activities or tutoring, courses taught through home study or correspondence, and team sports and club activities (p. 34). Cooper is not the only homework researcher who recognizes the need to adjust the definition of homework.
In a different interview, Bembenutty (2009) asks Lyn Corno, another leading homework researcher, about her changed definition of homework. Corno explains that her definition is not limited to the assignments teachers send home with students to complete by a certain due date, and that homework can also include any work students choose to do, such as getting a head start on future assignments and projects or activities completed with other students at after school programs. As Corno suggests, “These examples imply a very different ‘definition’ of homework. Today, homework is a process by which the completion of academic tasks infiltrates family and peer dynamics and impacts the nature of teaching in community organizations as well as schools” (Bembenutty, 2009, p. 142). Cooper and Corno’s changing definitions of homework are examples of the evolution that has occurred in the field of education. For the purpose of this study, the term homework is defined as any academic work, study, project, activity, etc. with which students engage during non-school time.

Homework History

When I began to search for answers to my questions about homework, I was surprised to read the numerous articles contributing to the ongoing discussion of the effectiveness of homework. In September of 2013, Google Scholar returned over 245,000 articles when conducting a search using the keywords “homework education.” In August of 2014, that number increased to over 304,000 articles, indicating an ongoing interest in the homework debate. In fact, the conversation is not limited to scholarly journal publications. National newspapers, such as The New York Times, have published articles detailing the proposed changes in homework policy at local school districts.

In Hu’s 2011 article, “New recruit in homework revolt: The principal,” she presents people’s responses to a proposal from New Jersey’s Galloway School District to limit weeknight
homework and ban homework on weekends, holidays, and vacations. Ms. Cushlanis, a mother of children who attend a school in the district, supported the proposal, saying, “They shouldn’t be bombarded with homework….Kids need to be able to play; they need outlets” (para. 19).

Conversely, William Parker, the uncle of a student who also attends school in the district responds, “Part of growing up is having a lot of homework every day. You’re supposed to say, ‘I can’t come out and play because I have to stay in and do homework’” (para. 21).

Throughout my life, I have viewed homework, like Mr. Parker and countless others, as an expected part of “going to school.” I had heard of other schools banning homework, such as New Jersey’s Ridgewood High School which introduced a “homework-free” winter break and schools in Bleckley County, Georgia which instituted “no homework nights” throughout the school year (Hu, 2011), but I thought these occurrences were part of a new trend in education. I soon discovered I was wrong. Even in 1926, American education researchers were studying the effects of homework. In fact, a study published in 1927 compares the “effects of homework versus in-school supervised study on the achievement of eleven and twelve year-olds” (Cooper & Valentine, 2001, p. 143).

Conversations about homework continue today, with supporters of homework promoting it as an essential part of student learning, and critics of homework proclaiming that it is detrimental to students’ well-being. Supporters and critics are intensely passionate about their stance, sometimes going so far as to accuse each other as having un-American political or ideological agendas (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). While the next chapter details the arguments presented for and against homework, this chapter will now provide a brief history of the paradigm shifts in American education, in order to help the reader understand how these principles and values continue to shape the way people view homework.
1900s – Late 1950s.

In the United States, from its colonial beginnings into the start of the 20th century, homework was an accepted practice among educators. They believed homework was a way to discipline students’ minds, to practice skills learned at school, and to prepare for future class lessons (Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Laconte, 1981; Marzano & Pickering, 2007). Although most educators agreed about the need for some homework, they often debated how much homework should be assigned and at what age students should have homework (Laconte, 1981).

During the late 1890s, students were learning more advanced concepts than their parents could understand, and many parents were unable to assist their students in completing their homework assignments (Nelms, 2008). Eventually, American parents became frustrated by the homework assignments their children brought home. Ladies Home Journal editor Edward Bok exposed their collective sentiment in 1900 when he published “A National Crime at the Feet of American Parents.” In his article, Bok argues that homework should be abolished for students under the age of 15 and limited to no more than one hour a night for students aged 15 and older (Kralovec, 2007; Mehta, 2009; Nelms, 2008). He suggests that homework is detrimental to students because it poses health risks and nervous disorders (Nelms, 2008), forces students to carry heavy book bags, and deprives them of sunshine and fresh air (Kralovec, 2007). His article caused parents to rally against homework, condemning it as a form of imperialism, invading family life (Kralovec, 2007; Nelms, 2008). Bok’s article created a stir across the nation. For example, in 1901, California policy makers responded by enacting laws that banned homework for students under the age of 15 and limited homework for students aged 15 and older. The revolution was short-lived, and the homework laws were reversed in 1917 (Mehta, 2009).
Bok was not the only voice to speak in opposition to homework. The founders of the Progressive Education Movement advocated a “learn by doing” approach (Kralovec, 2007; Laconte, 1981) and encouraged problem solving and thinking skills. They openly criticized the drill of skill and memorization homework assignments for their failure to promote experiential learning. While the “progressive” movement gained respect among many educators, academics, and even parents (Gill & Schlossman, 2003), the movement was not fully accepted across the nation. Most schools continued their drill of skill, and homework assignments continued to be accepted as a regular and expected practice in education.

During the 1940s, the supporters of the Life Adjustment Movement placed less emphasis on intellectual knowledge and focused more on social, personal, and hygienic skills. The goal of this education movement was to improve students’ physical and emotional well-being, in order to prepare them for success in the work force. Life Adjustment advocates claimed homework invaded students’ private time at home (Laconte, 1981; Marzano & Pickering, 2007). Although this movement was not able to eradicate homework, during the mid-1900s, many American educators sought to make a difference by replacing the established homework practices with an assortment of assignments appealing to individual student’s preferences (Laconte, 1981). In fact, scholars and practitioners worked to transform homework assignments into meaningful, educational experiences for students and to establish practical guidelines for the teaching profession (Laconte, 1981). This movement seemed to promise a homework-free future for students, but no one could predict what would occur by the end of the 1950s.

**Late 1950s – 2000.**

On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union’s space program successfully launched Sputnik, the world’s first artificial satellite. This one moment in history sparked an era of competition
between America and the Soviet Union, commonly known as the “space race,” and was a wake-up call to Americans, forcing them to push harder and achieve more. Americans became concerned about the lack of rigor in the classroom. They saw assigning more homework as a way to accelerate math and science acquisition and prepare students for competition on a global scale (Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Kralovec, 2007; Mehta, 2009; Marzano & Pickering, 2007). Never before in American education history had the pressure to increase academic rigor been so strong. Americans felt “driven as much by cultural insecurities and an obsession to affirm traditional values as by any documented military challenge” (Nelms, 2008, p. 51). Teachers felt pressured to accelerate their teaching, and students were overwhelmed with assignments (Nelms, 2008).

Once the post-Sputnik crisis subsided, there was a lull in the push for homework. Homework was seen as a symptom of too much pressure on students and was challenged by contemporary learning theories (Cooper & Valentine, 2001). One of the main goals of education reform in the late 1970s was to address homework and its effect on students (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). Before any changes to homework could be implemented, President Ronald Regan appointed the National Commission on Excellence in Education to study the state of education in America. In 1983, that commission published the groundbreaking study *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*. The findings report a lack of rigor in the classroom and call not only for an increase in the amount of homework teachers assign their students but also an increase in the expectations of homework assignments and completion (Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Kralovec, 2007). After the publication of this document, policy makers mandated nationwide modifications to education programs. School schedules were increased to seven class periods per day and the homework loads became heavier.
2001 - Present.

In 2001, President George W. Bush proposed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Following the policies that preceded it, NCLB also calls for increased rigor in the classrooms and a stronger focus on homework (Kralovec, 2007). To receive federal funding, NCLB required states to develop standards for students’ basic skills per grade level, and schools administered assessment tests at the end of select grade levels. The data from the test results (and other factors such as student attendance, graduation rate, etc.) were used to determine a school’s score, or school report card. Each school had to show evidence of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), as determined by each state. If schools failed to meet their AYP, they were required to follow the state designed improvement plan.

During its implementation, teachers and students were subjected to enormous pressure to improve teaching practices and improve students’ standardized test scores. According to education historian and analyst Diane Ravitch, “Schools focused more time on testing than on the arts, creativity, and physical activity” (Gregory, 2014, para. 7). Although policy makers promoted NCLB as a surefire way to increase American students’ standardized test scores, Ravitch argues that it never had the potential to meet any of the proposed goals. In fact, she claims that only a small percentage of the politicians who voted in favor of NCLB ever believed it had the potential to succeed (Gregory, 2014).

In 2012, the national Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) endorsed a newly written curriculum, Common Core State Standards (CCSS), designed to establish consistent nationwide standards for all grade levels. These standards defined what students at each grade level should know in English language arts and math. Again, the focus was to increase rigor in the classrooms, and to prepare students to be globally
competitive. Because of increased pressure on teachers to produce students who perform better on standardized tests, many teachers felt forced to maximize opportunities for student learning.

**Statement of the Problem**

This brief historical review reveals patterns and shifts in public opinion of homework, decades of modification of education practices, and a constant determination to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning. While there may be division among the various parties involved, they all seem to share a common goal: They want students to be successful learners, healthy and well-rounded individuals, and productive participants in a competitive world.

Throughout the history of education in America, the effectiveness of homework assignments has continued to be a topic of debate. A thorough literature review on homework purposes and effectiveness reveals articles describing the viewpoints held by many stakeholders in education, including parents, administrators, teachers, researchers, policy makers, and others.

Even though students are the ones who actually “do” the homework assignments, they have had little representation in the literature related to homework. Warton (2001) points out, “Despite the variety of methodologies employed in the studies that do exist…little evidence emerges of a full understanding of the student viewpoint” (p. 158). As educators and stakeholders continue to debate, future conversations would benefit from including students’ voices.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe my English III AP students’ views of their homework assignments. Student viewpoint, according to Warton (2001), includes perceptions, ideas, and understandings. In order to understand what happens when students approach homework, researchers, parents, teachers, and all other education stakeholders need to understand students’ viewpoint.
Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the theory of constructivism, which argues that truth and knowledge are based solely upon people’s personal perspective (Crotty, 1998). An individual’s perspective and personal experiences shape his or her awareness and definition of truth. This theory empowers individuals by granting them conscious or unconscious authority to assign their own values and constructions of truth and objectivity.

Since the 1970s-1980s, an awakening has occurred in regards to learning theory, as psychologists and educators reconsider the constructivist theories of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Jerome Bruner (Mayer, 1999). According to Mayer (1999), constructivists believe learning occurs when “people select relevant information, organize it into coherent structures, and interpret it through what they already know” (p. 15). Students actively create their own meanings as they attempt to make sense of their experiences (Mayer, 1999) by relying on their existing schema (Parsons, Hinson, & Sardo-Brown, 2001). According to Henson and Eller (1999), in order for effective teachers to motivate their students, they must “formulate… complex situations into understandable principles of learning” (p. 199). When students are unsure of the requirements of their homework assignment, they often view the assignments as irrelevant, and feel little motivation for assuming responsibility and completing the tasks (Fisher & Frey, 2008b).

Drawing on these ideas, I relied on the theory of constructivism to conduct a study examining the ways in which students interpret and explain their homework experiences and the ways these experiences shape their viewpoints of homework more broadly.
Significance of the Study

Much of the research studies gathered in preparation for this study consistently provided data collected from adult perspectives. Very few studies sought to understand what students experience as they negotiate homework assignments on a daily basis. Even in conversation with other educators, student perspective seemed to be devalued. For example, a colleague told me, “You don’t need to waste your time asking the kids why they don’t do their homework. I can tell you why. It’s simple, they’re teenagers; they don’t want to do homework” (C. Cody, personal communication, August 2012). I never believed the answer was simple. I knew I had to design my own study, and I knew it had to be a qualitative study, allowing me to look beyond the generalizations adults make about teen-agers. I wanted to learn about their homework experiences and understand their point of view.

Although, I was able to uncover a few studies during my literature review that reported students’ opinions of homework, most were analyses of quantitative surveys, which provided limited responses from students. Like Warton, Bempechat, Li, Neier, Gillis and Holloway (2011) conclude in their literature review, “There is a paucity of qualitative research on homework and motivation,” and “a deeper awareness of the ways in which students describe their homework experience can shed light on differential meaning-making” (p. 255). Because the literature does not represent an evenhanded balance between adult and student perspectives, this study sought to reveal students’ opinions as they responded to questions about their viewpoints of and experiences with homework.

Even though students are the ones who feel the effects of homework, they have had little representation in the literature related to homework. The use of a qualitative study allows the researcher to utilize a constructivist lens to understand what influences one group of students’
decision-making (Creswell, 2003). This study gave students an opportunity to enter into conversations concerning homework, which allows the adult stakeholders to understand their concerns and needs.

**Context**

The sample for this study included one tenth grade and nine 11th grade students enrolled in an English III Advanced Placement (AP) class at a rural high school, serving students ranging from seventh through 12th grades. While the questionnaire, open-ended questions, and focus group data were collected in the English III AP classroom. During their own time, students provided responses to the writing prompt, homework planner, and Twitter self-reporting—“an online social networking and microblogging service that enables users to send and read short 140-character text messages, called ‘tweets’” (Twitter). Although the study was originally designed to gather data over a period of nine weeks, unpredictable interruptions (i.e., weather events, guest speakers) required data collection to span a period of 16 weeks. Additionally, students’ continued willingness to contribute via Twitter allowed the researcher to witness homework experiences even after the study ended.

**Research Questions**

I examined data collected from essays, questionnaires, open-ended questions, homework journals, focus group interviews, and Twitter self-reporting. This study sought to uncover student viewpoints of homework and answer the following research questions:

1. What are students’ experiences with homework?
2. In what ways have these experiences shaped students’ views of homework?
Conclusion

Chapter 1 opens with my ongoing reflections and experiences with homework as a classroom teacher and shifts to a brief history of paradigm shifts in American education since the early 1900s. The chapter then provides the statement of the problem, the purpose statement, the theoretical framework, the significance of the study, and concludes with the research questions. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature, focusing on education stakeholder’s views of homework, teachers’ purposes for assigning homework, and the problems with homework. Chapter 3 discusses the rationale for a qualitative study, setting and context of the study, participants, research phases, difficulties encountered, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the study. Chapter 5 provides the implications of the study’s findings and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The picture of homework is a complex one with no definitive answers. A review of the literature regarding homework produces a list of topics including, but not limited to: time spent on homework, effects of homework on student achievement, how parents can help their children with homework, how teachers can design effective homework, reconsidering homework, purposes of homework, self-regulation of homework, and online homework versus paper homework. Many of the articles challenge each other on topics such as “give more homework” versus “give less homework,” and “homework increases test scores” versus “homework only increases stress,” yet each author writes with the same objective: to help students. In spite of this shared objective, these authors all seem to ignore the opinions of those they are trying to help by not including students’ voices in their work.

This literature review is divided into three sections and begins by introducing the reader to education stakeholders and their views of homework. These stakeholders have the potential to influence classroom teachers, who ultimately give the homework assignments that create the students’ experiences described in this study. Although the aim of this study is to present the unheard voices of students, this literature review begins by presenting the voices of those who are heard in the literature related to views on homework. A discussion of how these groups of stakeholders fit into the conversations on homework provides important background for readers.

Upon introducing the conversations happening around the topic of homework, this chapter then discusses teachers’ views of and purposes for homework assignments, and offers possible homework options. By discussing the reasons teachers assign homework, this chapter provides readers another layer of background information, which will allow them to understand the potential effects homework can have on academic and personal growth.
As the reader will soon discover, the first four sections of this review provide plenty of support for homework. In order to provide a fair representation of the differing perspectives, the final section offers a discussion of some problems that are often associated with homework.

**Education Stakeholders**

The purpose of organizing this literature review by education stakeholder group is to provide background information for the reader, explaining who each of these stakeholders are and what their stake in homework is. According to *The Glossary of Education Reform*, education stakeholders are defined as anyone who is “invested in the welfare and success of schools and students” (*Glossary of Education Reform*, 2014). The education stakeholders described in this study include 1. policy makers and elected officials, 2. school administrators, 4. parents, 5. future employers, and 6. teachers.

**Policy Makers and Elected Officials.**

Policy makers and elected officials who support education reform often believe that increasing the rigor of lessons and assignments, including homework, plays an important role in promoting America as a competitor on the international scene (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). They believe in improving standardized test scores (Bennett & Kalish, 2006) and using these scores to determine student achievement (Kohn, 2006). Policy makers accept as true the notion that standardized test scores are a direct indication of student learning. It follows, in this view, that if students do not score high on their tests, they cannot be internationally competitive (Kralovec & Buell, 2001).

In fact, many policy makers believe that an increased amount of challenging homework assignments helps students practice skills and increase knowledge, and thus test well, which is important to the superiority of the United States (Nelms, 2008). Therefore, policy makers often
urge educators to strive for ways to promote more rigorous standards in the classroom.

According to Gill and Schlossman (2003), homework is considered a “key symbol, method, yardstick of serious commitment to education reform” (p. 319).

While giving a speech to the Washington Research Symposium on November 11, 1994, then House Republican Whip, Newt Gingrich, previewed the topics of a course titled “Renewing American Civilization” he would soon teach at Reinhardt College in Waleska, Georgia. He described the five changes he believed would be “central to everything that will be organizing our [Washington politicians’] activities over the next two years” (para. 2). While discussing the second of these changes, he asserted that Americans must:

Rethink the assumptions that grew up in a self-indulgent national economy… [reorganizing] litigation, taxation, regulation, welfare, education,… government,… health…[in order to] make us the most competitive society,…most desirable place to invest to create jobs and the place with the best-trained and most entrepreneurial work force, most committed to [William] Deming’s concepts of quality. (para. 3)

In his next statement, he acknowledged the challenge inherent to this goal and argued:

One step, frankly, has to be that every child in America should be required to do at least two hours of homework a night, or they're being cheated for the rest of their lives in their ability to compete with the Germans and the Japanese and the Chinese…. [I do not believe we need] a federal department of homework checkers. I believe that we should say to every parent in the country, “Your child ought to be doing two hours of homework. If they're not, go see the teacher. If you can't convince the teacher, get a better teacher, and in the interim assign it yourself.” …I mean the objective fact is, historically, this was a country that got the job done, not a country that found scapegoats for the failure. And so we've simply got to reassert…a level of civic responsibility we're not used to. (para. 4)

This comment promotes the assumption that homework is the starting point for building and sustaining a successful, global economy in America. During his speech, Gingrich attempted to encourage parents to be more involved in their children’s education. He also scorned those who make excuses and avoid getting the job done. Gingrich addressed the notion of “civic responsibility,” implying that students “doing” at least two hours of homework each night is a
sign of a dedicated American. Gingrich sought to motivate his audience to believe that educational reform is part of sustaining a successful American presence throughout the world.

Since one effect of reform is improved practices, one might assume reformers would support changes that had been studied and found effective. With this in mind, in 2001, Cooper and Valentine published a paper demonstrating how research can inform policy and practice. They chose two documents—What Works, a 1980’s booklet published by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE), and “Helping Your Child Get the Most out of Homework,” a 1996 parent guide published collectively by The National Parent-Teachers Association (NPTA) and the National Education Association (NEA)—and compared them to Cooper’s 1989 homework meta-analysis, a study which revealed a positive correlation between homework and achievement only in high school-age students. Their aim was to examine how closely the recommendations of each document were designed “to assist school administrators, educators, and parents” (p. 151) represented the evidence found in research.

Policy makers promote their education agendas as a means to improve student performance, yet often they are not fully aware of the issues related to homework. Cooper and Valentine (2001) found that the document offered by the NPTA and NEA was consistent with research findings. They concluded that the document presented by the USDOE contained omissions and was misleading in its assertion that homework increases academic achievement in elementary through high school students equally. Cooper and Valentine (2001) suggest that policy makers look to current research to inform homework policy decisions, while asking themselves, “Are the recommendations we make and the practices we espouse consistent with the best research evidence available?” (p. 152). Because of the constant pressure to improve
education, policy makers often advise administrators to promote education reform strategies, which frequently encourage homework (Gill & Schlossman, 2003).

**School Administrators.**

Many administrators assume that assigning challenging homework loads to students is a sign of increased the academic achievement of successful schools (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, 2001). In fact, homework is considered a main component of fostering school achievement (Bennett & Kalish, 2007). Assigning more homework seems to create the impression of increased student learning (Kohn, 2006), and many administrators believe that the best teachers are those who regularly assign homework (Corno, 1996). Administrators hope that keeping students connected to academics will boost academic achievement, as measured by standardized test scores (Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

According to Watkins and Stevens’ (2013) review of the No Child Left Behind website, “Homework is not directly addressed… [but] is an expectation and the [sic] there is a belief that homework makes a difference” (p. 81). With this in mind, Watkins and Stevens conducted a case study of one Midwestern, rural high school. Data for the study was collected through focus group sessions with faculty and students, interviews with administrators, and quantitative data. With his school on the verge of losing its accreditation, the principal sent a representative group of teachers to a conference in hopes of finding new ideas that might improve the overall success of their students. Upon the teachers’ return, the faculty and administration designed and implemented a “No Excuses Homework program.”

Students’ homework noncompliance seemed responsible for the snowball effect of low scores, leading to course failure, and, eventually, school dropout. According to an interview with the school principal, “We [were] letting students off the hook by accepting incomplete or
missing work…many students were leaving our high school completing few, if any, challenging assignments.’ The school leadership and faculty realized something had to change” (p. 82).

The program began not only with the mandate that “you don’t get to choose not to do homework,” but also the understanding that homework would be “completed with quality” (p. 81). A six-tier intervention strategy, beginning with a teacher/student conference and moving up to crisis intervention—calling in parent/guardian, student, teacher, administrator, and guidance counselor—was designed to motivate students to complete their homework.

The principal adjusted campus procedures in order to accommodate the teachers’ efforts to successfully implement the “No Excuses Homework program.” He acknowledged, “I can’t pay them [teachers] enough for their extra efforts with our students, so I have shifted duties so they no additional responsibility other than their classroom” (p. 83). For example, he designed the school’s master schedule to include a common planning time for departments to regularly meet. He scheduled athletic practices to begin an hour after school ended, so that teachers and students had a block of time to plan extra interventions (i.e. study hall, tutoring) as needed. The principal understood the limited home support of his students, and he felt compelled to offer them extra support to keep them engaged and to help them experience success.

At the end of the study, the researchers, faculty, students, and administrators recognized a newly formed culture of accountability, a marked improvement in the quality of student work, and an overall sense of empowerment in all stakeholders involved. Watkins and Stevens (2013) conclude by asserting, “Homework, with all its critics, can serve as a means to achievement ends. Homework must become embedded and sustained within the school’s culture. It will not succeed if only randomly applied and intermittently supported by leadership” (p. 84).
While this case represents a single school with a particular population, the study is still important to the topic of homework because it illustrates the ways that homework grades can impact the failures and successes of students, teachers, and administrators. Due to the principal’s interest and encouragement, the teachers and students were able to work in an environment that motivated them to reach success.

**Parents.**

Homework helps fulfill schools’ public relations objectives by satisfying parents’ curiosity about what their children are learning (Cooper, 1989; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Additionally, many parents rely on homework as an opportunity to establish communication with their children (Cooper, 1989) for the sake of improving parent-child relationships (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). When parents assist their children with their homework, they can discover their children’s strengths and show their children how proud they are of them.

Parents can also discover where their children’s weaknesses are and offer assistance and encouragement (Cooper, 1989, 1994; Corno, 2000). The connections homework can create between parents and children are valuable to children’s development (Corno, 2000). When parents show interest in their children’s learning and model the characteristics of committed learners, parents are making their children aware of the connections that can exist between home and school (Cooper, 1989, 1994; Corno, 2000). By showing their children that education is not limited to the classroom, parents can help their children feel less resentful about homework (Corno, 2000) and increase their children’s learning by expressing positive attitudes and by valuing success in school (USDOE, 2003). Homework can also help increase parents’ appreciation of education, their involvement in school, and their communication with their children’s teachers (Cooper, 1989, 1994; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; USDOE, 2003).
While many parents encourage homework as a way to enhance their children’s education, others see homework as a babysitter. In fact, some parents admit they want their children to have homework so they will have something to keep them busy (Corno, 1996; Kohn, 2006, Cooper, 1989). A study by Kohn (2006) revealed some parents’ confessions that if their children had no homework to complete, their children would drive them crazy.

According to a study conducted by Cooper, Lindsay, and Nye (2000), parental involvement in students’ homework can result in both positive and negative effects. This study focused on the survey results of 709 parents about their involvement in their children’s homework. Over a period of three months, the researchers collected data from questionnaires divided into two categories, one from parents of elementary and middle school students and the other from parents of high school students. The parent questionnaire gathered information about student characteristics, family characteristics, and parenting style. Although the student and family characteristics sections requested demographic information, such as student grade level and gender, number of adults and siblings in the home, and free lunch status, the parenting style sections were divided into the following categorized subsections: (a) autonomy support, (b) structure, (c) direct involvement, (d) interference, and (e) student outcomes. Within each subsection, the questionnaire asked a number of “How often…” questions. These questions included, but were not limited to, the following: “How often do you or someone else help with homework that your child should really be doing at home?” “How often do you think that helping your child actually makes it harder to do homework?” Most of the respondents were given answer choices which included responses of: (a) all the time, (b) most of the time, (c) about half the time, (d) some of the time, and (e) never.
The findings indicate that parental support for autonomy was positively related to student achievement, while direct parental interference was negatively related to student achievement. The researchers were unable to explicate the possible causes for these results, and admit, “We find it implausible to suggest that high levels of direct parent involvement…are very often the cause for poorer student achievement. It is more plausible that greater support for autonomous homework behaviors causes higher achievement” (p. 483). The researchers suggest further studies using multiple-case interviews, observation methods, or ethnographic methods to better explain the correlation between parental involvement in students’ homework assignments and student achievement.

The study advises teachers to be cautious of assigning homework assignments that require parents’ assistance and consider the parents’ background and skill levels. The researchers assert that it is important to train students to become autonomous learners, as it may improve future academic achievement. They also warn that parents should not interfere with their children’s self-study habits.

**Post-Secondary Educators.**

Regardless of the type of education young adults choose to seek after high school, whether it be attending a trade school, university, community college, or other educational opportunities, the expectation is that students are prepared for the academic challenges they will face (Corno & Xu, 2004). Many post-secondary educators rely on students’ past homework experiences to prepare them for concentration on further learning. In fact, they believe homework is meant to develop within students an aptitude for academic rigor and learning ability (Corno, 2000) by improving study habits and skills that will be valuable once they leave school (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Cooper, 1989, 1994; Corno & Xu, 2004; USDOE, 2003).
In addition, homework assists students by promoting responsibility for their education (Bempechat et al., 2011), which is an important part of the independent phase of learning (Fisher & Frey, 2008a, 2008b). All of these qualities have been attributed to the extra practice and reinforcement that homework demands of students (Corno, 2000).

**Future Employers.**

Many employers believe that homework helps students develop positive work habits, character traits, and life skills that will extend into adulthood (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Cooper, 1989, 1994; Corno & Xu, 2004; Fisher & Frey, 2008a, 2008b). When conducting job interviews, they seek employees who have not only specific trade skills but also exhibit personal traits such as responsibility and self-discipline. They believe that homework trains students to act responsibly and competently and helps students to become disciplined enough to exhibit valuable adult qualities and 21st century work skills (Corno & Xu, 2004). Others believe that homework improves students’ relationships with job-related activities (Corno & Xu, 2004). While this relationship is not explicitly defined in the literature, one can reasonably assume employers are seeking individuals who will unquestioningly obey their supervisors and work diligently.

According to Nelms (2008):

> Business leaders are asked to chair elite task forces on education, and they advocate more rigorous standards and more demanding homework. Of course, such an educational philosophy fits in with an expectation that schools will condition students to work hard, accept orders, not question authority, and avail themselves only of passive resistance in confronting an environment to which they do not relate personally. (p. 52)

Nelms’s implication suggests that employers expect the educational system to shape children into employees who will enter the workforce with knowledge and skills, good work habits, and a willingness to comply. In addition to seeking industrious workers, employers want employees who are conscientious.
It is commonly believed that homework establishes effective work habits such as self-discipline, independence, personal responsibility, and self-direction (Cooper, 1989, 1994; Corno, 1996; Corno & Xu, 2004; Fisher & Frey, 2008a, 2008b; USDOE, 2003). In the hope of producing well-trained adults, education stakeholders support, and often encourage, policies that increase the amount of assigned homework which trains students to work conscientiously.

Although education stakeholders continue to promote homework as an important tool for educating children, their voices and concerns translate into pressure on teachers. Teachers are also education stakeholders worthy of mention. Because teachers are the ones who assign homework, they have a direct impact on students’ homework experiences. The following section discusses the various purposes homework assignments are designed to fulfill.

**Curricular Purposes of Homework**

According to *Homework Tips for Parents* (USDOE, 2003), prepared by Cooper and Gersten, the most common purposes for homework can be organized into four categories: (a) practice, (b) preparation, (c) extension, and (d) integration. The document offers the following definitions for each category:

*Practice homework* is meant to reinforce learning and help the student master specific skills. *Preparation homework* introduces material that will be presented in future lessons. These assignments aim to help students learn new material better when it is covered in class. *Extension homework* asks students to apply skills they already have to new situations. *Integration homework* requires the student to apply many different skills to a single task, such as book reports, science projects or creative writing. (p. 2)

Both *extension homework* and *integration homework* require students to apply knowledge; therefore, for the purpose of this review, they are discussed together. This section reveals a brief overview of the ways these categories are discussed in the literature.
Practice.

Teachers assign homework to provide opportunities for students to become more familiar with material already presented in class. Students need more than one chance to be exposed to new material, (Cooper, 1989; Corno, 1996; Corno & Xu, 2004; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; USDOE, 2003) and effective teachers create opportunities for students to become more immersed in new concepts (Marzano & Pickering, 2007). The opportunities for reinforcement and review of skills and new material introduced in class through at-home lessons builds fluency and retention of information (Cooper, 1989, 1994; Fisher & Frey, 2008a, 2008b; USDOE, 2003).

The purpose of practice homework is to strengthen student knowledge and to assist them in the mastery of particular proficiencies (USDOE, 2003). Often, though, homework assignments allow students to simply practice skills or processes independently, regardless of whether they attain fluency or not (Marzano & Pickering, 2007). Teachers can employ homework assignments to both strengthen students’ knowledge and challenge students enough to ask questions for better clarification.

Preparation.

When students feel knowledgeable and confident about their abilities, they often feel encouraged to participate in class. Completing homework assignments not only offers an occasion for extra practice in studying and learning new information in subject areas (Corno, 2000) but also helps students build upon the knowledge they have already gained. Students can further develop their skills by applying their newly acquired knowledge to new content or larger units of work presented in class (Cooper, 1989; Corno, 1996; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Marzano & Pickering, 2007; Sallee & Rigler, 2008; USDOE, 2003). Active class participation improves students’ questioning and listening skills (Sallee & Rigler, 2008). Through class
discussions, students who complete their homework and follow up with their own questions not only improve their own learning but can also improve learning for the class (Corno & Xu, 2004).

In response to the problem of secondary students showing a “disengaged attitude in class” (p. 767), Buijs & Admiraal (2013) designed, implemented, and evaluated four high school level homework assignments designed to motivate students to fully prepare for their history lessons and become more engaged in the class.

The sample for this study consisted of fifty 11th grade students, divided into one group of 22 and another group of 29, all of whom participated in the pre-post-test design over a period of seven weeks. The researchers also collected data by observing students’ class performance, noting the amount of time spent on tasks, their level of activity, and the amount and variety of questions students asked. The four assignments included; (a) preparing analytical skills, (b) a fragmented assessment, (c) a jigsaw assignment, and (d) a student chosen assignment. Although the researchers admit the students knew they were participating in a research study and possibly adjusted their normal behaviors, the findings indicate that the homework assignments they tested were successful in increasing students’ time on task and class participation.

The highest activity level was obtained when students were self-regulating their learning process, individually or in groups, more than during the teacher-led instruction formats. Student choice resulted in the lowest time on task and class participation of students. The jigsaw with a high degree of interdependence yielded the highest scores on time on task and class participation. (p. 777)

Buijs and Admiraal conclude their study by suggesting that a lack of class participation is “detrimental to students’ learning process” (p. 777), and teachers should consider assigning homework that provides practice and preparation for class participation.

In the facilitation of class discussion, students and teachers can discover the varying levels of student understanding and also help each other answer students’ questions, adding
clarification as needed. Students can benefit from socializing with each other and sharing the benefits of homework (Corno, 2000; Fisher & Frey, 2008a, 2008b). Homework assignments can help students prepare for class discussion and upcoming lessons, resulting in a more comfortable learning environment.

**Extension and Integration.**

Homework encourages students to apply skills they have learned in class, which allows them to make meaning of their new concepts and to connect and apply them to other situations. Many teachers recognize that one strategy to increasing student learning is designing assignments that allow students to relate their prior knowledge and experiences to new ideas (Corno, 1996; USDOE, 2003). Application requires students to apply information they already own to critical thinking, concept-formation, and information processing skills (Cooper, 1989, 1994; Cooper, Horn, & Strahan, 2005; Fisher & Frey, 2008a, 2008b; USDOE, 2003).

Well-designed homework should prompt students to question their new knowledge and seek extension activities. By requiring students to use skills such as summarizing readings and finding main ideas, homework can help students develop more independent problem solving skills (Cooper, 1989, 1994; Cooper, Horn, & Strahan, 2005).

Clever homework assignments encourage students not to use integration and creativity and to apply individually learned skills to construct results (Cooper, 1989). Other challenging homework assignments might require students to make meaning out of material by explaining why, solving problems, and transferring thoughts and ideas to new contexts (Corno, 2000). Homework offers opportunities for students to move beyond the point of practice and reinforcement and into a space where they can exercise their new abilities.
Nontraditional Homework Options

This section offers an introduction to nontraditional homework options designed to facilitate the goals mentioned in the previous section: (a) practice, (b) preparation, (c) extension, and (d) integration. Traditional homework assignments, that many former students will recognize, include worksheets, questions at the end of the textbook chapter, memorization, workbook pages, etc. For the purpose of this study, the phrase nontraditional homework options represents homework assignments that are designed to be more creative or engaging than traditional homework assignments.

Many teachers choose to design nontraditional homework assignments that prompt students to elaborate on ideas discussed in class (Corno, 1996; Fisher & Frey, 2008a, 2008b). Once students leave the classroom environment, they often feel less pressure and are able to think more freely. With this in mind, teachers should offer extension opportunities for students to explore infinite options.

Homework can motivate students to explore topics of their own interest (Marzano & Pickering, 2007), and effective homework assignments can provide occasions for students to apply abstract principles to their learning (Cooper, 1989). Although the next section offers a look at some nontraditional options for English Language Arts homework assignments, many of them can be adjusted and incorporated into other subject areas.

Interactive Homework.

Although homework assignments traditionally have been regarded as independent work, interactive homework is a different type of homework assignment, which encourages interaction between students and family members (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Van Voorhis, 2004). One form of interactive homework—Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)—requires that
students be responsible for their homework, and provides innovative activities that encourage families to become involved in their children’s learning.

Despite the fact that parents play a supportive role in their children’s TIPS homework activities, they are not expected to teach subject matter to their children. Instead, they act as consultants and offer inspiration to their children as they work through their homework assignments. TIPS homework assignments may ask students to conduct surveys or interviews, gather parents’ memories and experiences, apply school skills to real life, or work with parents in other ways (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Van Voorhis, 2004). This information can then be used as resources for students to use while making real-life connections in their writing.

**Cognitive Strategy in Writing.**

The Cognitive Strategy in Writing (CSIW) method directs students to understand and work through the basic steps in the writing process, such as planning, organizing, writing, editing, and revising (Mayer, 1999, p. 150-151). Teachers who have employed this method of writing have seen students not only become more comfortable with the different components of the writing process but also become more thoughtful writers.

Teachers who employ the CSIW method utilize “think sheets,” which are templates that guide students through the steps in the writing process. As part of the scaffolding process, students work through these “think sheets” to figure out what decisions they need to make as they write (Mayer, 1999, p. 152). For example, a “planning think sheet” asks students to set criteria and generate ideas, an “organizing think sheet” helps students organize or outline their ideas, an “editing think sheet” guides students through the self-editing process, etc. (Mayer, 1999, p. 152).
Because the CSIW method promotes self-monitoring through the use of various “think sheets,” provides scaffolding instruction, and creates a writing community, it is a comprehensive method of instruction that involves all aspects of thinking about writing and writing processes. CSIW homework assignments can be effective because they are individualized assignments, providing necessary guidance to students based on their personal needs (Mayer, 1999, p. 151).

**Homemade Homework.**

Homemade homework assignments are designed by students and families based on what they collectively deem important (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). For example, families can choose movies, TV shows, restaurants, or other experiences that they share with each other to discuss, and students can write a critical review based on the family conversation (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Other homemade homework activities might require students and parents to write a letter to another family member, or ask students to draw a picture of something important to the whole family and write an explanation of the reasons why this illustrated object has meaning for the family.

**Inference Training.**

Inference training homework assignments teach students how to read beyond the lines of any given text (Mayer, 1999). Through inference training, students begin to think critically about the information provided within the text. Making inferences requires students to draw upon their schema, or existing knowledge, in order to make the connections necessary to make predictions and assumptions or draw conclusions. For example, one inference training exercise might ask students to read a passage and then generate questions that can be answered by reading the text. Another inference training exercise might ask students to read a passage and then answer higher level thinking questions aimed at drawing conclusions (Mayer, 1999).
**Project-Based Learning.**

Project-based learning (PBL) provides opportunities for students to make decisions and to solve problems (Nelms, 2008). In PBL, teachers provide students with a challenging question or situation, and students pose their own solution to the problem. For example, students might utilize reference resources to gather data or word-processing computer programs to produce a newsletter that offers advice to other students preparing to take the SAT test (Corno, 2000). Because PBL requires students to complete assignments by using and finding resources on their own, it also helps students recognize that knowledge can be gained beyond the classroom (Corno & Xu, 2004; USDOE, 2003) and that learning requires work at home and at school (Corno, 2000; Marzano & Pickering, 2007; USDOE, 2003).

PBL assignments allow students to participate in learning experiences that are much more authentic and meaningful to them than traditional homework assignments. According to Parsons, Hinson, and Sardo-Brown (2001), “the real world life is not divided up into history, English, science, and math classes. Rather, to understand phenomenon in the real world, one has to understand how the disciplines integrate together” (p. 411). As Corno (2000) suggests, many of these projects result in products that are “highly creative, reflecting a level of performance beyond students’ years” (p. 543).

**Story Grammar.**

Identifying a story’s grammar is a method of thoroughly examining literary structures such as characters, setting, conflict, and plot structure (Mayer, 1999). Assigning story grammars as homework for reading class is an effective cognitive strategy for reading comprehension. As students read independently, using their story grammar charts to guide them, they rely on their previous awareness of typical story formations to better understand the reading selections
(Mayer, 1999). Because younger students may not have accumulated schema to understand the structures of certain stories (Mayer, 1999), a basic story grammar chart may require students to identify elements of plot sequencing such as exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement, setting, characters, atmosphere, and conflict.

As students become more experienced readers, they can complete more complex story grammar worksheets. For instance, more detailed story grammars require students to identify stories as combinations of settings and episodes. Mayer (1999) referenced the following divisions for understanding plot structure: (a) episodes can be divided into beginning and development, (b) development can be divided into response and ending, (c) a response can be divided into simple reaction and action, etc. The more sophisticated readers become, the more detailed their story grammars become (p. 74).

**Home Conferences.**

In many English Language Arts classrooms, students compile portfolios of their writing. Home conferences can be used to extend the writing portfolio experience by involving family members when making portfolio decisions. In home conferences, students share their writings with their family members, discuss the work, and then use their family members’ input to decide which compositions to choose to rewrite and what adjustments should be made. Additionally, students can write an explanation of the process and results of the home conference experience (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001).

Although nontraditional homework assignments such as homemade homework and self-selected reading often encourage students to think critically, these assignments are not necessarily better than traditional assignments. Teachers must carefully design these assignments to ensure they accurately reflect what is being assessed (Osburg, 2003).
Nontraditional assignments must have clear objectives to avoid students’ misunderstanding or distortion of the meanings of the topics being studied. When students are unsure of the requirements of their homework assignments, they often view the assignments as irrelevant and feel little motivation for completing the tasks (Fisher & Frey, 2008a).

**Other Purposes for Homework**

In addition to the curricular purposes of practice, preparation, extension, and integration, teachers often assign homework because they are unable to finish lessons within the time allotted per class period. Some teachers use their students’ homework assignments as a way to provide feedback, since limited instructional time often does not allow the opportunity for individual conferencing. Other teachers see homework assignments as strategies for building students’ character or promoting their personal development (Corno, 2000) through practicing self-reflection, achieving autonomy, and developing positive attitudes toward academic experiences.

Vatterott’s 2014 article “Student-Owned Homework” addresses some of the key changes in all curricula since the incorporation of the Common Core State Standards, which asks stakeholders to reconsider “who’s in charge of learning” (p. 40). She explains that students are now asked not only to think deeply but also apply complex thinking skills. In order to help students meet the new standards, teachers must “change [their] mindset and overhaul the practice of homework” (p.40).

Vatterott introduces the steps required for a few example homework assignments, and then explains that students must feel comfortable with the notion of making mistakes while working through their problems. When students learn to accept their mistakes, they learn to feel safe enough to self-assess. According to Vatterott, “the more they self-assess, the more they develop ownership of their learning” (p.41). She suggests that teaching students to answer the
question, “How do I learn best?” is the first step in the self-assessment process. If teachers carefully plan effective homework assignments, and if students seriously apply themselves to thoroughly completing the tasks, homework assignments have the power to enhance students’ personal attributes (Corno & Xu, 2004).

**Class Period Extension.**

Often, classroom teachers feel they must rely on homework to extend their teaching time (Sallee & Rigler, 2008). According to Marzano and Pickering (2007), some English teachers acknowledge that they would have difficulty reading and discussing novels in class if students did not read at home. For example, some schools have added extra class periods to the school day by shortening instructional time in all other classes. By subtracting even seven minutes from each class period, teachers can find themselves struggling to provide adequate instruction to satisfy students’ needs. For unpredictable reasons, teachers sometimes need to find more time for instruction.

**Feedback.**

Students’ homework assignments not only help teachers to see the knowledge and skills their students are learning, but also provide opportunities for teachers to offer feedback to their students. Teachers can use homework to gauge individual student progress, discover areas students find difficult, and recognize how well students comprehend the subject matter (Corno, 2000). In other words, if most students understand the material, teachers are confident about moving to the next level of teaching. If many students are struggling, teachers realize that they need to reteach and possibly employ different strategies to aid students’ learning.
When teachers evaluate homework assignments, they have a private space to provide feedback regarding individual errors, to supply extra practice, and to clarify confusion (Cooper, 1989, 1994; Corno, 2000).

**Reflection.**

Homework fosters students’ inquisitiveness (Cooper, 1989, 1994), allowing them opportunities to self-question, and to develop an understanding of their assignments and new knowledge (Cooper, Horn, & Strahan, 2005; Corno, 2000; Sallee & Rigler, 2008). Homework can also encourage students to ask themselves valuable questions (Corno, 2000). Self-reflecting on the techniques involved throughout their learning process allows students to recognize strategies that help them learn more effectively, to discover their true feelings about the topics they are studying in school, and to learn more about themselves as learners.

Vatterott (2014) encourages teachers to provide opportunities for students to “think about their learning and to create strategies that work for them” (p. 41), and to gain experience in “charting their progress standards, conducting student-led conferences to demonstrate their learning, and setting their own goals for improvement” (p. 42). In the end, Vatterott believes that once students take ownership of their learning, they will become engaged learners who are competent in self-diagnosis and self-reflection.

On the deepest level, homework assignments that encourage self-reflection can uncover emotions and opinions students never realized existed (Corno, 2000). When students question themselves, they embark on a journey during which they make discoveries on their own, and the possibilities are limitless and totally unpredictable.
**Positive Attitude and Autonomy.**

As students are given more opportunities to work on their own, they also have more chances to develop a sense of autonomy (Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000; Corno, 2000; Sallee & Rigler, 2008). When students are promoted to higher grade levels, their homework becomes more challenging. Completing these difficult homework tasks independently is a sign of maturity. As learners become more mature, they usually begin to exhibit more initiative and self-sufficiency (Corno & Xu, 2004). The goal of education is not to teach students to repeat what they are taught, but rather to teach students how to learn. Once they understand that learning is a process, they will be able to think for themselves and trust their judgments.

When students successfully complete their homework assignments, they often develop a positive attitude toward school and feel more encouraged to become more involved in learning (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Homework helps students to become motivated and to feel self-efficient (Bempechat, et al., 2011; Schwartz, 1907). Students need to feel accomplished and to be encouraged by their own abilities to perform assigned tasks. Once students competently complete their homework assignments, they feel optimistic about their ability to face additional challenges (Bempechat, et al., 2011), and begin to believe in their ability to succeed.

Although homework is often only seen as a means to aid students’ curricular progress, it can also be an effective way to offer students additional opportunities to work on school lessons, to prepare students for class discussion, and to allow teachers to informally measure student growth (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). In addition to the goal of curriculum enhancement, teachers also assign homework to foster students’ character building. The confidence that students often feel in achieving success can improve their attitudes toward learning (Corno & Xu, 2004; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001), develop self-confidence, and work independently.
Although these outcomes might sound fantastic and grand, they are not always achieved. The following section discusses some of the obstacles students encounter as a result of their homework assignments. These issues include, but are not limited to, additional stress, resources required, assistance needed, time consumed, and the appearance of counter productivity.

**Problems with Homework**

Because many educators have recognized the necessity of students having time to relax and to acquire life skills by socializing with friends and family, they consider these needs before assigning homework. Unfortunately, many other educators continue to design and assign homework without taking these needs into consideration, often causing damaging effects such as stressful home lives, interference with extra-curricular activities, and an unintended encouragement of cheating.

**Stress.**

Homework often creates anxiety and stress not only for students but also for their families. Buell (2000) boldly declares that “One of America's biggest educational fallacy is that more homework makes better students. In fact, if homework were a prescription drug, the FDA would long ago have demanded its recall” (para. 4). Buell, a long time homework dissident, joins a lengthy list of contemporaries who work diligently to expose homework’s negative effects, claiming that students are overworked and overstressed (Sallee & Rigler, 2008). In fact, Gill and Schlossman (2003) report, “Children and parents are losing sleep, burning out, and entering therapy as a result of heavy doses of homework” (p. 319).

Even as early as 1907, educators such as Professor Schwartz published articles opposing homework, arguing, “it is hard to see just why more work at home by fatigued scholars should accomplish that miracle of training the will, which a mental discipline of six hours did not
achieve” (p. 641). He suggests that students can only endure sitting and listening in a classroom for a certain amount of time before they reach their physical and mental limitations. When they reach the point of exhaustion, students become less interested in working competently.

Lange and Meaney (2011) present the narratives of two 10-year-old girls and their experiences with math homework. These girls’ traumatic situations stemmed from the frustration they experienced when doing math homework with family members. The researchers observed the girls in their math class on a weekly basis for one year, and conducted three focus group sessions. The narratives discussed in this study expose the differences in the expectations of parents and children. For example, one girl’s father scolded her for counting on her fingers and wanted her to try another approach. As Lange and Meaney report:

The daughter rejected [her father’s] approach because she felt that she would not be able to explain how she worked out the answer to her teacher. For [the daughter], the learning required more than memorisation, and her father did not have the skills to explain the method he wanted her to use (p. 45).

The other girl recalled the terrible experiences doing math homework. Often, she and her parents argued because they thought she should be able to solve the math problems, but she continued to insist that she could not. On one occasion when she was unable to do the math calculations, her father angered her, and she began to scream and cry. Her mother interfered, her father became angry, the girl ran into another room, and everyone continued yelling and screaming. As Lange and Meaney (2011) report, “Although [the girl] did not directly blame her parents for her emotional distress, there were numerous references to the experience of doing homework with her parents as being unpleasant” (p. 46). The study continues to discuss the implications of such encounters and their impact on students’ learning experiences.

Lange and Meaney (2011) discuss these situations in terms of children’s sense of agency. They assert that children’s meaning-making and physical agencies are affected by homework,
because the homework experience shapes the way students make meaning of their homework—
is it stressful or simple?—and physically restricts them from other activities. Lange and Meaney conclude the study by suggesting that parents acting in the role of teacher often negatively affect the relationship they have with their children. Lange and Meaney also leave the reader to ponder the question, “Is it appropriate to send children off into the potential conflict zone of procedural mathematics homework knowing that it could lead to or reinforce emotional and mathematical trauma that could have a long term impact?” (p. 49).

**Resources.**

Homework can often further complicate the family dynamics of economically challenged households. Some families struggle to cope with the added pressure of homework demands because they cannot afford extra supplies for projects or even paper and pencil for everyday tasks. Many households do not have computers, Internet access, dictionaries, or other reference sources for their children to use. A number of homes are overcrowded, and students are unable to work in a quiet, undisturbed space. In many households, every member of the family must help by doing household chores, cooking meals, and caring for younger siblings. While many students are at home filling the duties of absent or working parents, many other students are expected to find after-school employment to supplement the family’s income (Sallee & Rigler, 2008) so as to provide the basic necessities to live.

**Assistance.**

Even if parents are able to provide supplies and a quiet workspace for their children, students still often become unnecessarily frustrated because homework assignments are challenging and complex (Corno, 2000). These frustrations often cause the students to experience feelings of anger, guilt, and ineptitude (Corno, 2000). Additionally, some parents, due to their own limited
education, are unable to assist their children. Their frustration and embarrassment often translates into anger, which only increases the tension within the home (Corno, 2000). Critics argue that parents are already challenged enough in raising their children, and homework is often an unnecessary aggravation, adding anxiety to the home (Corno, 2000; Sallee & Rigler, 2008).

In his August 2000 AlterNet article, Buell alludes to his own ethnographic research showing that “extensive homework assignments have played a major role in school dropouts” (para. 5). His study, sponsored by the Maine Department of Education, collected interview data that reveals that at the time, the common area of complaint among high school-aged students was homework. Many students offered detailed accounts of incomplete homework, parents and children in conflict with each other over homework demands, and the quick disappearance of available time for parents and students.

Buell concludes his article by suggesting, “the place for our children to be doing independent work is the setting designed for such work, the schools themselves, [with] teachers or other adults with appropriate skills and experience…” (para. 6). In other words, parents should parent, and teachers should teach. Not only can homework negatively affect the family dynamics in a home, but it can also interfere with a family’s social activities.

**Time Consumption.**

Homework often interferes with students’ involvement in extra-curricular activities. These activities are considered to be equally important as schoolwork, because they can potentially encourage the increase of knowledge and the development of valuable life skills in such as: cooperation, endurance, success, defeat, and persistence (Buell, 2004).

In 1968, Wildman published an article in the Peabody Journal of Education proclaiming, “Whenever homework crowds out social experience, outdoor recreation, and creative activities,
and whenever it usurps time that should be devoted to sleep, it is not meeting the basic needs of children and adolescents” (p. 204). Teachers should remember the importance of other life experiences and plan their lessons with family time in mind.

In fact, Cooper (1994) and Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) reveal that teachers rarely discuss with each other how much homework they assign to their students. For example, if six teachers assign 30 minutes of homework, those students will have at least three hours of homework to complete in one evening. If students have athletic or music practice, chores, or family obligations, it will be difficult for them to meet all of their goals in one evening.

In 2003, Aloia conducted a study on teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of homework. The study gathered data from 247 teachers who responded to a questionnaire and eight open-ended questions about the efficacy of their own homework assignments. His findings indicate that the teachers surveyed held the same beliefs about homework as found in most of the literature; that is, homework helped their students via reinforcement and review. He also found that those teachers were concerned that homework limits students’ family time and playtime.

In 2008, Sallee and Rigler published a study seeking answers to questions such as, “Are we being sensitive and supportive to outside interests in our current practice of assigning and using homework?” “How do the teachers’ goals match (or contrast) what students gain from it [our homework] and why?” (p. 47). They collected data by interviewing individual teachers, discerning what their philosophies on homework were, as well as what happened once it was assigned and collected, how it was assessed, and what percentage of students’ grades it represented (p.47). The researchers also collected data via random sample surveys of more than 180 students. Students responded to questions about how they spent their time outside of the classroom, providing researchers information regarding students’ impressions of homework.
After analyzing the data collected from students, the researchers found that students were “more overcommitted than ever” (p. 48), citing that 49% committed two or three hours daily to extra-curricular activities, and 62% committed at least four hours weekly to extra-curricular activities. While many students had jobs to help their families with financial burdens, many other students were involved in extra activities that made them more attractive on their college applications. The researchers close their study by asking:

Therefore, if homework is assigned to students without consideration for these factors, can it be said to be equitable? Is it favoring students with preexisting understanding and creating a widening gap between those students and the ones struggling to catch up? Is it biased toward students with fewer time commitments, or who are better at organizing their time? (p. 49)

In an attempt to answer these questions, the researchers turn to Kohn’s 2007 article, “Rethinking Homework” which suggests:

We should change the fundamental expectation in our schools so that students are asked to take schoolwork home only when there’s a reasonable likelihood that a particular assignment will be beneficial to most of them. When that’s not true, they should be free to spend their after-school hours as they choose. (para. 13)

Students often suffer unnecessary pressure when trying to meet the various demands put upon them in a short amount of time (Bennett & Kalish 2006). As a result, students are unable to determine where to focus their energies and how to satisfy all the adults who have created unattainable expectations for them. This burdens students with emotions such as guilt, shame, anger, and resentment (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Because of the pressure put upon them to perform, students often resort to desperate measures to complete their homework.

**Counterproductive Tasks.**

Instead of seeing it as a useful supplement to learning, many students and parents view homework as useless and counterproductive. Few parents confront teachers and argue the usefulness of their children’s homework assignments. Instead, they accept homework as a part of
schooling (Kohn, 2006) and suffer through the drudgeries with their children. Homework has become an expected part of students’ educational experiences, and nothing seems to be able to change it. Almost every adult remembers having difficult homework assignments, and many of the same adults believe in maintaining this traditional method of education.

When parents see their children frustrated with their homework, they often try to remedy the problem by assisting. Sometimes parents are unable to explain the concepts to their children, and they lose their patience, causing arguments between parents and children and even more deeply felt resentment of homework for both parties (Kohn, 2006). In order to end the turmoil quickly, some parents choose to complete their children’s homework (Corno, 2000).

Many students see homework as busywork (Bennett & Kalish, 2006), a term used to describe assignments that have no other obvious reason than taking up students’ time by keeping them busy. Activities such as worksheets, rote copying, and memorization usually fall into this category. Because these assignments are often submitted to the teacher for completion credit, students often finish them hurriedly, messily, or not at all. In fact, there is no way to ensure the students are doing their own work (Corno, 1996). Students often “borrow” their classmates’ worksheets and copy the answers (Sallee & Rigler, 2008).

Conclusion

Homework advocates continue to say that more homework is better, but opponents say that there is no conclusive, empirical evidence to support this claim (Kohn, 2006). Corno (1996) also supports this stance, asserting that there is no evidence that proves that “homework fosters any discipline or responsibility in children” or “completing homework contributes to success in school” (p. 28).
Several studies show that homework is problematic because it disturbs family time and extra-curricular activities (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Buell, 2004; Kralovec and Buell, 2000, 2001) and causes unnecessary stress (Gill & Schlossman, 2003; Sallee & Rigler, 2008) for children and families. In fact, homework does not necessarily help students gain knowledge (Corno, 1996, 2000; Kohn 2006). Even so, many educators continue to assign homework because they feel pressure from administrators and parents (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Kralovec and Buell, 2001), they believe it is their responsibility to provide opportunities for students to practice skills independently or prepare for future lessons (Corno, 1996; Kohn, 2006), and they want students to feel competent and motivated (Marzano & Pickering, 2007).

Even researchers disagree on how to best measure the effects of homework. The measures range from time spent on homework, amount of homework, frequency of homework, types of homework, student views of homework, parental influence on homework, etc. Although studies on homework will remain inconclusive until scholars reach some consensus, evidence does seem to suggest the following: 1. Policy makers should refer to research findings when considering whether or not to enact changes. 2. Homework assignments should consider students’ abilities and require the application of higher level thinking, inference making, and creativity, instead of filling in blanks and answering questions on the most basic level of mental recall. 3. Homework assignments should be designed to avoid creating stress, producing frustration, and occupying time for other activities in students’ lives.

This chapter discusses education stakeholders’ views of homework, providing a basic understanding of the debates over homework, including its potential purposes and problems. The next chapter explains the rationale for the research method chosen, details the
setting/context, provides portraits of the participants, and describes the research phases, difficulties encountered, limitations, and ethical considerations of this study.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The following chapter begins with a discussion of the rational for using qualitative methodology for this research study. The next section explains the setting and context within which this study was conducted and leads into descriptions of the ten participants. Each participant description is designed to present the reader with an exposition of each student’s personality, family situation, educational experiences, and future ambitions. These descriptions are included so the reader can see the participants as more than just participants in a study or high school students who may or may not complain about homework. By having some knowledge of these participants’ background, readers better understand the ways these students construct meanings of homework through their homework experiences. The next section of this chapter presents the various research phases of this study, which include essays, a questionnaire, open-ended questions, journals, focus group sessions, and social media posts. The chapter concludes by discussing the difficulties encountered, limitations, and ethical considerations.

Rationale for Research Methodology

In order to research students’ attitudes toward homework and the influences that shape those attitudes, this study employed a qualitative approach. Qualitative researchers seek to understand the ways participants construct meaning out of their situations by capturing and interpreting what people say and do (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Qualitative studies allow researchers to design in-depth studies of their participants, while supporting the basic constructivist theory that personal perspective directly influences what people see as truth and knowledge (Crotty, 1998). Constructivism argues that an individual’s perspective and personal experiences shape his awareness and definition of truth. Researchers are able to carefully examine these “truths” by actively interacting with their participants, and the participants are
allowed to maintain authority insofar as they assign their own values and constructions of truth and objectivity. This study sought to provide students a space to describe freely their experiences with homework, how they see the function of homework in education, and how they reach these conclusions.

A qualitative study allows researchers to listen to participants’ voices, to ask follow-up questions, and to uncover a deeper understanding others’ perspectives. Words are a powerful tool for humans; they understand and create their world with words and they guard themselves with their words (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The challenging task of the qualitative researcher is to seek out and analyze logical patterns and connections in the words and actions of participants, and to present the findings for others to examine, while maintaining integrity in the ways the participants originally detailed their lived experiences (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Aware of the fact that qualitative researchers do not seek to find predictability or prove a hypothesis, I similarly did not know beforehand what the data would reveal. With this in mind, I felt compelled to examine students’ perspectives in hopes of unveiling the overlooked or ignored information often taken for granted in adult assumptions. In this study, I wanted students to explain their thought process when they decide either to attempt to complete or to totally ignore their homework assignments.

**Setting and Context**

This study took place at a public high school (PHS) situated in a rural town with a population slightly below 10,200, with 99.1% of the population identifying themselves as white. Although 74% of the population has attained an education level of a high school diploma or higher and the median household income is $53,546, another 10.7% of the population lives
below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Considering the fluctuation of students who enroll, transfer, or withdraw, the school population typically ranges from 600-625.

For many of the 21 years I have taught at PHS, I have often compared its environment to that of the fictional town of Mayberry, as depicted on the television series, *The Andy Griffith Show*. Informal parent conferences take place in the aisle of the local grocery store, and many parents discipline their children for disrespecting authority or disturbing class. I can leave my purse in my unlocked classroom without fear of being robbed. In fact, many of the teachers leave their vehicles unlocked in the parking lot. Although, once a student stole a few quarters, and on another occasion a few candy bars were missing during class candy sale, I have never felt unsafe on this campus.

The town houses two public schools, the elementary school and the high school. The gym at the elementary school is called “the playing gym,” and all the basketball games and tournaments are held there. The gym doors are open two or three nights a week for junior high boys’, junior high girls’, high school boys’, and high school girls’ basketball games from October to February. Many parents find themselves bringing their entire family to the gym to support their children who play basketball. The children who run around the gym all night (two or three times a week) and consistently eat supper and snacks from the concession stand are nicknamed “gym rats.” Everyone keeps an eye on the gym rats, making sure they stay indoors after dark, no matter how much they beg to play outside. People seem to take care of each other.

The community is home to at least five churches representing Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal faiths. While much of the town sets its weekly schedule according to the basketball games, the coaches set the basketball game schedule around Wednesday night church programs.
PHS operates on a modified block schedule. To explain, students are enrolled in eight classes. They attend the odd numbered classes on Monday and Thursday, and the even numbered classes on Tuesday and Friday; each block lasts 90 minutes. The first block of these four days, however, has ten extra minutes built into it for the sake of “homeroom.” During homeroom, teachers can pass out and collect documents, write receipts for monies turned in for various reasons, and conduct other house-keeping chores. On Wednesdays, students attend all eight classes for 45 minutes each; there is no homeroom on Wednesdays.

For participants in this study, I chose to enlist the students in my eleventh grade Advanced Placement (AP) English III class. AP courses are courses designed to prepare students to take an optional standardized test at the end of the year, with the aim of scoring high enough to “place out of” (receive credit for) entry level college courses. When the class was first offered, 35 students signed up to take the course, and they articulated their excitement over joining my class. Once they were informed of the summer assignment that was included as part of the class, the amount of work required during the year, and the college level expectations of this course, the class enrollment shrunk to a total of six.

Once the school year began, and students’ class schedules were being assigned, it became clear that the non-AP English III classes were above the legal limit of 33 students for a class size. In order to comply with the law, four other students transferred into the AP class, despite the fact that they had not completed the summer assignment. Due to these circumstances, I amended the summer assignment to account for the late entries, and we met for class on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday during the first block of the day. The AP class had a total enrollment of ten students, allowing a personal, familial atmosphere. Within the first few weeks, students indicated they much preferred to “circle up,” as they call it, (move their desks into a circle) in order to create a
closer space for sharing conversation, rather than feeling isolated by being spread out farther across the room from each other.

Because qualitative data is collected in naturalistic settings, allowing participants to remain in their customary environment (Cox, Geisen, & Green, 2008; Creswell, 2003; Firestone, 1987; Mertler, 2009; Marks, 2009; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005), much of the study took place in my own classroom. This classroom is an average sized classroom situated in the corner of the cafeteria building. The classroom doors open outside to the sidewalk and a grassy area, facing the student parking lot. This classroom has been a part of these students’ customary environment for at least two years, for some, and as many as four years for others.

In order to create a feeling of uniqueness for the AP students, I allowed them to eat breakfast in the classroom. They ate anything and everything from toaster pastries and biscuits to last night’s sushi; usually they drank coffee, carbonated beverages, or water. This classroom, which often smelled of freshly brewed caramel coffee, prompted the same response from students each day: “Ahhh, it always smells so good in here!” At no point was eating or drinking a problem; students respected their space and never left their trash. This classroom is also used on Tuesday for an after-school discipline clinic. Students who attend clinic sweep, mop, dust, wipe desks, and other cleaning tasks as necessary every week, keeping this classroom tidier than most other classrooms on the campus.

Participants

After 21 years of teaching, I have witnessed few changes in the community, and I am now teaching a new generation: the children of my former students. While most of the town’s characteristics have stayed the same, more people have moved into the community, bringing with them their own customs and ideas. In fact, within the last ten years, the school has nearly
doubled its enrollment. The demographic description of the community where PHS is situated seems to indicate that the student population of this particular AP English III (APE3) class would include ten white students from stereotypical middle-class families comprised of married parents, two and a half biological children and a dog. Interestingly, the class reveals a more diverse population.

These students brought with them different academic, emotional, economic, ethnic, religious, political, physical, and social life experiences. These students’ standardized test scores ranged from the 17th to the 90th percentiles. Some seemed confident, while others seemed insecure. Some of these students’ families live below the poverty level and qualified for the free lunch program, while other families are classified as middle to upper-middle class. Most students identified themselves as Caucasian; one as Mexican, another as Polynesian.

Some students were active members of a local church and others did not attend religious services anywhere. Some students came from households where a Republican or Democratic philosophy was taught, while others never heard political discussions. While one student was a starting athlete on the varsity team, another was a dancer, and another excelled at choir, the others displayed no interest in physical exertions. From living in the same town since birth, to moving to escape the ravages of Hurricane Katrina; from living with both biological parents all their lives, to living with divorced parents, or never knowing a parent; from living in an upscale two-story home, to sleeping on couches of parents’ friends; from dining in fancy restaurants, to hoping to find a meal, this class represented a variety of life experiences.

At the end of the school year, I gave the students a personal inventory writing assignment (see Appendix G) asking them to write an essay addressing ten questions. The quotes in the following participant profiles were taken from their written responses. To protect participants’
identities, their names have been substituted with pseudonyms. These rich descriptions are important to this study because they represent the differing educational goals, family backgrounds, and personality types of each participant.

“Aaron.”

I literally forced Aaron to take my APE3 class. I specifically picked him from the 11th grade roster and told the guidance counselor that if any student in the 11th grade could pass the AP English Composition exam, I knew it would be Aaron. I had already taught him eighth grade English and English II, so I was familiar with his abilities. In the beginning, he complained about his GPA falling or losing his “A” in English because of all the work for my class that he did not have time to do. Once he immersed himself in the readings and began writing, he stopped complaining and even began bragging about being in the AP class.

Aaron is not the athletic type; he is thin and lanky. Aaron can take a joke, and has a quick, sharp wit. He will strike back with a comment of his own, often causing embarrassment. Aaron does not seek to intentionally insult or belittle others; he simply calls out what he sees. He also has a strong sense of what believes is right and wrong. For example, in eighth grade, he was given a three-day suspension for fist fighting with another boy during lunch. Upon his return to class, Aaron explained that he did not care about the suspension, and he would not tolerate the boy disrespecting his sister by putting his hands on her.

Aaron comes from a turbulent home, but he seeks pity from no one. He has an older sister, and three younger brothers. The three oldest children experienced their parents’ divorce, reconciliation, and ultimate separation. When writing about moving in with his father, Aaron asserted, “No, this is not some sob story about how my mommy kicked me out I’m just stating facts” (personal communication, May 22, 2014). Additionally, he never publicly mentioned his
financial obligations while living with his mother, such as paying for his gas, vehicle insurance, and nearly half the cost of the braces on his teeth. After moving in with his father, his financial situation worsened, proven by his addition that he pays his dad “two hundred a month for bills, then I pay my insurance, gas, and I buy my own groceries… because like I said I live by myself. My dad ‘lives’ there, but ninety percent of the time he’s at his girlfriend’s house” (personal communication, May 22, 2014).

Regardless of his struggles at home, he is very proud of his abilities. Aaron wrote, “I would describe myself as a good student. I make good grades, I stay out of trouble, and I’m responsible and that’s a lot more than most kids here” (personal communication, May 22, 2014). Aaron knows he has had a rough life and that his parents are not perfect, but he says that he is “proud of the good work ethic my parents instilled in me because that is what has brought me to where I am today” (personal communication, May 22, 2014).

“Jon.”

Jon definitely thinks differently than most others. Having taught him eighth grade English, I was already aware of his unique personality and was able to appreciate his oddities. For example, when we each agreed to bring breakfast foods for a Christmas party, he brought a box of Cheerios cereal. When we all agreed to bring gifts for a gift exchange, he brought the pair of water shoes (men’s size 12) that had been stored for two years under the seat of his dad’s truck, saying, “Hey, they’re new…the tag’s still on ‘em!” (“Jon,” personal communication, December 17, 2013).

Jon comes from a traditional home and has three older siblings. Jon offers his opinions as matters of fact and has no problem acknowledging and owning his arrogance with pride. After gaining permission to write freely, he opened his autobiography with, “Through the course
of human existence, there have been a multitude of self-absorbed pricks with an undeserved sense of accomplishment that rambles on about their lives. I am one such prick” (personal communication, May 22, 2014). Jon is more mature and more well-read than his classmates, studying history, science, and culture on his own. He looks for the stories the textbooks do not reveal. He feels superior to others and describes the rural community around him as a “fetid feeding pool to the Klan” (personal communication, May 22, 2014). He knows he excels on standardized tests and believes that course work is not nearly as important as top scores on college entry examinations such as the ACT and SAT. He uses his wit to explain his faults, saying, “I do not, however, have a propensity for hard work. This laziness may stem from a deep seeded psychological disorder” (personal communication, May 22, 2014). He believes he is an “average” student and that people “overestimate” him. He admitted, “I can work hard, I only choose not to” (personal communication, May 22, 2014).

Jon often discussed his dissatisfaction with school—not about learning, but about school as an institution. He asserted that throughout his school experiences, teachers have told him he could excel if he wanted to. He replied, “Screw that. Hard work is not worth my time, especially when educators can’t take the time to actually engage their students” (personal communication, May 22, 2014). For example, Jon complained that he was unprepared for another AP test, and he blamed his teacher for not better preparing the students. Even though Jon learned how to write synthesis essays in APE3, he did not feel compelled to use those strategies on his other AP test. Instead of writing an essay at all, he wrote a haiku. He could not remember the topic of his haiku but was proud of it anyway. His choice to fail the test, highlighting the fact that he will sacrifice excellence in order to prevent a teacher from appearing successful, is an example of Jon’s passive-aggressive nature. If he senses teachers have no classroom management skills or are
ignorant of the subject matter they teach, he will lose all respect for them. He will not take notes or participate in class, doing only the bare minimum to get by. Even though he does not feel compelled to work hard or take orders from authority at this point in his life, Jon still plans to go to college and later join the Air Force as an aerospace engineer. He also joked, “[I will] probably marry someone and have 2.5 perfect children, after which I will be thrown into prison for the rest of my life because I chopped a child in half” (personal communication, May 22, 2014).

“Hannah.”

By the time Hannah enrolled at PHS during her ninth grade year, she had transferred schools eight times. Having spent three years at the same school marks the longest stretch in time she has attended one school and lived in the same home. She noted, “finally settling down” somewhere is very different from her “migratory childhood” (personal communication, May 27, 2014). Transferring to so many schools and following so many different curricula can easily result in students “missing” valuable instruction. For example, leaving a school when instruction begins on addition and transferring to a school when addition was taught months earlier would result in “gaps” in her learning. Fortunately, Hannah expressed, “I’ve never necessarily felt disadvantaged in my education due to transferring. If anything, it has trained me to adapt quicker than most people my age would, and that alone can be of benefit in the future” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

While she has survived an unstable childhood, she also acknowledged, “Although I've grown to appreciate the dynamics of my family now, I despised the journey” (personal communication, May 27, 2014). Hannah lives in a trailer with her father, stepmother, and two sisters. Neither of her parents earns much money, so the family struggles, and Hannah is accustomed to making sacrifices. At the beginning of the school year, Hannah informed the
guidance counselor and me that she was transferring out of my class because she was unable to afford the required books. Having taught her English II, I knew she had the ability to excel in the course and pass the AP English Composition exam. To make a long story short, we provided books for her. Because Hannah knows she will have to work hard to “beat out others for scholarships,” she actively takes notes, asks thoughtful questions, carefully follows directions, and always turns in thorough work. Although she works hard and consistently makes A’s, she is not boastful. She said, “I’m smart and I learn quickly, but I wouldn't say that the average person couldn't keep up with me” (personal communication, May 27, 2014). Hannah has a drive that many students lack; teachers dream of having students who are half as determined as she is. She explained her motivation by confessing, “I, personally, just feel like I have something to fight for…I told myself that I would not struggle to support my family the way my parents do now and always have” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

At home, Hannah has a long list of responsibilities that occupy much of her time. While her parents are away working long hours, they expect her to clean the house, launder the clothes, tend the animals, and cook dinner. She also assumes the role of “mother,” taking her younger sister to her extracurricular activities. While this also occupies her time, Hannah is selfless in sacrificing for her sister. She explained, “…for her sake, I try to keep up with what she needs to stay in those activities because I don't want her to have to quit like I did just because of my parents’ lack of interest in what she enjoys doing” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

Additionally, Hannah has a job tutoring a neighbor down the street three days a week. Hannah wants to feel accomplished by meeting all the demands she faces, but often she cannot. She often wishes the world would slow down and that her parents would lighten her load. Unfortunately, “…neither one of [her parents] made it through high school, so they don't always
understand the time and effort that's needed for certain classes” (personal communication, May 27, 2014). In the future, she says she wants to find a career in the medical field but is not quite sure doing what. She is considering becoming a pharmacist, but is researching all her options before she makes any decisions, explaining, “I'm not working this hard now to just settle for something I don't want to do” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

“Stephanie.”

It would be easy to teach a class all year long and not notice Stephanie. She always carries a stack of books that she is currently reading. She described herself as the “girl hiding a book behind a textbook, reading while the teacher was teaching” (personal communication, May 23, 2014). She rarely asks questions or contributes to class discussion. When invited to speak, she often looks nervous and on the verge of tears. When I taught Stephanie English II, I learned she prefers to speak in smaller group settings, avoiding the students (usually privileged “preppy” girls) who seem to intimidate her. She has lived a “hard life” remembering the New Year’s Eve of 2001 when, at the age of three, she helped her mother pack up and leave her father, leaving him only “the food which she took out the fridge and placed on the floor.” She remembers her mother being “fed up with [my father], coming home drunk or high” (personal communication, May 23, 2014).

After that, she and her sister moved around with her mother from boyfriend to boyfriend, living in different trailers and sleeping on different couches. She transferred from school to school and missed establishing a firm foundation in English class. She knows she lacks important skills and shared, “That’s why during the summer I take my workbooks and any textbook that I got and played school with my sisters so I could improve all subjects” (personal communication, May 23, 2014).
Stephanie’s parents (her mother and stepfather) dropped out of school before they completed tenth grade, so “right now being a junior in high school makes them proud enough” (personal communication, May 23, 2014). Stephanie wrote that she does not feel any pressure from her parents, except “that I don’t make the same mistakes as them and that I get a good education so I can support myself” (personal communication, May 23, 2014). She plans to go to college “to get to [sic] degrees one in enterprise software development and advancing computer science” (personal communication, May 23, 2014). She says she is determined to land a job in computer technology anywhere outside of the state, saying, “I will do this because this is my dream and I have the potential to achieve this dream” (personal communication, May 23, 2014).

“Nicole.”

Nicole comes from a traditional home, living with her mother, father, and younger brother. Her father is in the army, and during the first ten years of her life, her family moved five times. Adjusting to so many schools was a challenge for Nicole, who wrote, “I remained friendless until sixth grade” (personal communication, May 27, 2014). During her sixth grade year, she watched in fear as her only friend was “bullied so severely” that her parents removed her from the public school system and homeschooled her. As a result, Nicole developed a fear of being bullied and worked to make herself invisible. For many years, she refused to read aloud and participate in class discussions. On a few occasions, she has chosen to take a grade of zero instead of make a public presentation, standing in front of her classmates like “a target.” She refuses to admit in front of her classmates that she does not understand a lesson, fearing that her questions will elicit ridicule. Because she remains confused and struggles with her assignments, she often hears her parents, “yelling [at her] for not taking initiative and getting help….”
then added, “The constant lectures, and disbelief when they realize that I am almost nothing like either of my parents is included in that as well” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

Nicole feels like she does not meet her parents’ expectations, especially when she struggles in math. She wrote, “Math is by far the one class I have never been well equipped for, which is ironic because my mom is amazing with numbers” (personal communication, May 27, 2014). While she may not grasp working with numbers, her talent in writing is evident as she used metaphor to describe her relationship with math, writing, “For me, mathematics is that one low-hanging vine, just out of reach, while I sink into a pit of failure quicksand. The more I struggle to grasp it, the faster I drown” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

Nicole likes reading, visiting the library, shopping at bookstores, doodling, watching/reading anime, and playing video games. Interestingly, what she considers “doodles” are in fact very impressive drawings, but she is too nervous to let anyone “critique” her doodles.

I have taught Nicole longer than any other student in this class; she was my student in seventh grade English, seventh grade reading, eighth grade English, eighth grade reading, and English II. Over the years, I have constantly reminded her to turn in her assignments. In fact, I am on a first name basis with her mother, Monica, because I emailed her about Nicole’s work.

She described herself as, “unorganized, forgetful, melodramatic, and a bit of a pessimist” (personal communication, May 27, 2014). While Nicole is usually quiet in class, she seemed at ease in the small APE3 class. She read aloud when prompted and added to discussion when invited. I loved when she interjected her comments under her breath; her sarcasm and dark humor offered a unique twist on whatever topic we were discussing. When I jokingly scolded her about her handwriting she agreed, “My handwriting is atrocious. My parents often tell me I write like a serial killer” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).
When describing herself as a student, she explained, “I would say that I’m smart, but I’m not exactly a genius” (personal communication, May 27, 2014). Nicole has a voracious appetite for reading, which has provided her a vocabulary and insight unlike her peers. Nicole plans to attend college, but has no idea what she wants to do, saying, “It just feels like a maze to me, I have no idea which way is the correct path” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

“Amy.”

Amy is the product of a “traditional” home; she lives with both biological parents and three siblings. Amy considers herself “blessed” to have both parents and described her siblings as “one highly annoying, and so much like her mother, older sister…a little sister who could (and has before) talked for days…then a little brother [with his] putrid smell and impossible stubbornness” (personal communication, May 22, 2014). The residents whose families have been in the community for generations classify Amy’s family as “transplants,” since their family moved into the town within the last ten years. Upon moving to the community, Amy’s parents wasted no time in becoming involved in the church, the school, and the parks and recreation board (the entity which monitors and controls the community athletic teams). Readers should note that these three arenas are the heart and soul of rural, southern communities. By becoming active in these areas, the family has been well-received in the community. Although they may technically still be “transplants,” they are in no way “outcasts.”

Amy’s parents are very involved in their children’s lives. She described her father’s “obligations list” since it is “the only option for MY obligations to fall under” (personal communication, May 22, 2014). Amy’s obligations (as ordered by her father) are as follows: God, family, school, basketball, and finally, social life; “not that I have a [darn] social life anyway,” she complained (personal communication, May 22, 2014). Her parents seem to run a
strict household, as she said that “rudeness, disobedience, failure to succeed in school and numerous other faults are rewarded with light to severe punishments” (personal communication, May 22, 2014), yet Amy is the rebellious middle daughter. She even admitted, “Actually I have such huge issues with staying out of trouble because I'm quite the rebellious teenager and I hate rules” (personal communication, May 22, 2014).

I have taught Amy seventh grade reading, seventh grade English, eighth grade reading, and eighth grade English. I agree with Amy’s description of herself, which read: “straight up, I am an average student” (personal communication, May 22, 2014). She loves learning about grammar and expressing herself through writing. On the other hand, she is not a fan of math. She jokingly suggested, “The person who invented the Quadratic Formula and decided that it was ‘OK’ to mix the alphabet with numbers was a real douche bag and I really hate him” (personal communication, May 22, 2014).

She plans to go to college by means of an athletic scholarship and eventually “coach high school boys' basketball and work as a physical education instructor” (personal communication, May 22, 2014). She says her motto is “to do the things people say I cannot,” and admitted, “This has gotten me into a lot of trouble to say the least” (personal communication, May 22, 2014).

“Caroline.”

Caroline described herself by saying, “I am a middle child” (personal communication, May 23, 2014) who lives with her natural parents, younger brother, and older sister. Caroline has lived in and attended school in the same town her entire life. Although her parents are wealthy—they own a large home, drive expensive cars, and dress their family in the nicest clothes, take vacations to Brazil, etc.—she describes her life as “simple and boring” (personal communication, May 23, 2014). Caroline has been pushed to excel for many years.
Caroline admitted, “If I ask for help, I’m told that my parents don’t feel like doing my homework and that my brother needs more help than I do” (personal communication, May 23, 2014). Caroline says that there is silence in the household when her brother is studying—his parents eagerly by his side—but similar concessions or assistance are not available when she needs to study. She claimed, “I will be up until 12 midnight working on homework and still not complete assignments due to lack of understanding” (personal communication, May 23, 2014).

She often complained about the pressure her parents put on her to excel in all subjects saying, “If I struggle in school, I’m lectured…I’m forced into the most difficult classes…The lectures I receive…usually last 30 minutes per parent” (personal communication, May 23, 2014). She also revealed that she often listens to her parents yelling throughout the house and “sometimes I solve my families [sic] problems” (personal communication, May 23, 2014).

Caroline described herself as “a hardworking student with a terrible memory. I am quick because I focus. I focus because my parents punish” (personal communication, May 23, 2014). Her parents push her and hound her about her grades every day, reminding her of her “gifted” title, but Caroline retorts, “I donnot [sic] feel like I am gifted just odd and hardworking” (personal communication, May 23, 2014).

Caroline wants to leave home as soon as possible and wants her future home to have many rooms where she can be free and creative. She wants to be a mother and to one day be happy. She is not sure if she will reach her goals, but “just being free to be myself would be fine” (personal communication, May 23, 2014).

“Catherine.”

Catherine has lived in the same home as her natural family and has attended the public schools in this town for her entire life. She is a pretty girl, who seems to have a perfect life. She
attends school, takes dance class, helps her mother in her office, and does a few chores around the house. She admitted she likes to be “lazy and just eat and watch TV” (personal communication, May 23, 2014).

Catherine is privileged, being able to travel the world, drive a nice car, live in an expensive home, have nice clothes, etc. Catherine is very “ladylike” insofar as she is graceful and reserved. She is social with her crowd of select girlfriends and her boyfriend. She is very quiet and rarely has an opinion on anything that she likes to share with the class. She takes notes, but doesn’t ask questions.

Catherine said that she works on her homework upstairs in the library at home. Her only complaint about her homework time is that she has to travel upstairs and downstairs to get help from her parents if she needs it. She feels that math is easy for her and credited this natural ability of easily learning math to her parents, saying, “My parents…use math for their jobs, so it’s a very common subject in our household” (personal communication, May 23, 2014). She admitted that she struggles in English and history, claiming, “they don’t interest me” (personal communication, May 23, 2014). She described herself as a student by saying, “I push myself to do the best I can, but I wouldn’t consider myself the smartest. I would consider myself smart but nothing more or less” (personal communication, May 23, 2014).

In the future, she plans to attend a university and would like to “study fashion and fashion merchandizing to hopefully become a fashion designer” (personal communication, May 23, 2014). In any case, she wants to have a career in fashion.

“Rachel.”

Rachel described her family dynamic as “complex” (personal communication, May 27, 2014). She and her siblings—a younger brother and sister—lived with their natural parents until
their divorce in 2002. The children lived with their mother until she started dating and neglecting her children. At that point, the children bounced between maternal and paternal grandparents’ homes. In 2007, Rachel’s mother remarried and the children moved in with her. Rachel remembers moving in and out of five different homes and attending three different schools the first year she was living with her mother again. In 2013, Rachel “moved back in with [her] father but stay[s] with [her] aunt and uncle to go to school” (personal communication, May 27, 2014). Rachel’s father works out of town, which is why he was unable to have custody of his children after his divorce. His brother and wife—the latter of whom is a former student of mine—take care of Rachel when he is out of town. Recently, Rachel ran away from home. By the time I heard the news, it was followed by, “but they found her and she said she would come home” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

Rachel looks back and never remembers a time when she was able to study peacefully in a quiet place. While living with her mother, Rachel was expected to babysit her younger siblings, and help them with their homework, even if it meant, “doing” their homework for them. She feels comfortable in math class and struggles in science. Her parents have never offered to hire a tutor, telling her it is her “responsibility to finish her own work” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

She is an average student, and said, “I do not feel I have any intellectual gifts” (personal communication, May 27, 2014). She is polite, quiet, and kind. She does not always participate in class discussions, but when she does, she is thoughtful. She is easily embarrassed but owns her mistakes and is able to laugh about them. She is always willing to listen if anyone needs someone to care. Rachel plans to attend a local university and enter the nursing program. She would like to become a registered nurse and work at a hospital.
“Maria.”

Maria admitted, “The earliest years of my short existence are slightly difficult for me to write about” (personal communication, May 27, 2014). She is ashamed of her father who is a drug user and alcoholic. After having an affair with another woman, her father divorced her mother. Due to their constant moving between Texas and Mexico, her baby brother’s Mexican citizenship, and the corruption of Mexican authorities they have encountered, Maria and her mother had to flee Mexico, leaving her baby brother behind. She has seen neither her father nor brother since leaving the country when she was three years old. Maria sadly wrote, “Although my mother tried for years, she was not able to keep her promise [to go back and get her son] because of the corruption of her own country” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

Soon after leaving Mexico, her mother settled down with another man and has been with him for 14 years. “I can very proudly call this man my dad!” Maria said (personal communication, May 27, 2014). During the first nine years of her life, Maria recalls moving eight times. The final move occurred when she entered fourth grade, and she has been in the same school system since. She anticipated another move, but was glad to have stayed and is “expecting to graduate from [PHS] in a little less than a year!” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

In describing herself, Maria said, “I believe I have intelligence… [but] I cannot concentrate in algebra… [and] I procrastinate as much as I am able to” (personal communication, May 27, 2014). Since she is bilingual, she easily carries a strong A (103%) in Spanish class, but struggles in math, saying, “It is stressful and angers me that I can’t be like other people who understand everything the math teacher is saying” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

She hopes to go to a local university and become a registered nurse. She would later like to become a “nurse practitioner and move to one of the twenty-six states that allows nurse
practitioners to perform the same tasks as a physician, and open my very own clinic” (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

Research Phases

Yin (2014) defines triangulation as the “convergence of data collected from different sources, to determine consistency in a finding” (p. 241). Using multiple methods to check and recheck data helps to ensure the transferability and dependability of the findings. For this study, I chose to collect data by means of writing prompts, a questionnaire, open-ended questions, a two-week self-reporting period via a paper and pencil homework journal, interviews, and another two-week self-reporting period via social media by way of posts on the popular online social networking service, Twitter. I hoped that the incorporation of various data collection instruments would yield elaborate information, suggested and defined by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) as “rich, thick data via prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and other strategies” (p. 11).

AP Style Writing Prompt.

Once students and parents signed and returned the consent forms, I was ready to begin data collection. The next unit I had scheduled to teach was a discussion of writing argument papers. An argument paper is one of the required three essays on the AP English and Composition exam. I decided to present the students with an AP style argument-writing prompt (see Appendix A) that would function in two ways: (a) a practice writing assignment for the exam and (b) a way to begin the conversation about homework for my study. After teaching the students what a basic format for writing arguments looked like, I presented them with a prompt that provided two quotes, one supporting and the other opposing homework. Students were
given the following instructions: “In a well-organized essay, take a position on homework. Support your argument with appropriate evidence and examples.”

Before returning the graded writing assignments to the students, I made hard copies to save for my data collection files. Unfortunately, I found that the students had not followed the argument strategies I offered to them as examples, which resulted in less-than-stellar writing. I returned to the discussion of writing arguments and reassigned the writing prompt. Some students made complete changes to their writings and others made minimal changes. After grading them and making hard copies of the second round of papers, I returned the writings to the students and entered into a third discussion of writing arguments. At this point, the students were made to rewrite for a third and final time. I graded and made hard copies of round three and used them as a data source.

**Questionnaire.**

Now that I was collecting data that was unrelated to actual school lessons, I was careful not to allow my research to interfere with instructional time. As mentioned earlier, I met with my APE3 class during the first block period of the day on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. During the Tuesday and Friday block periods, an additional ten minutes are included for “homeroom.” We have never used this ten-minute block of time for any “homeroom” purposes, so I felt that I could designate this time to my research. If we worked past the ten minutes, I made note and was sure to adjust my lessons to begin instruction sooner the next day. By doing so, I was sure to separate my research from the students’ instruction, thereby insuring I did not confuse my roles as teacher and researcher, nor did I allow my research to take away from instructional time.
I created a questionnaire (see Appendix B) based on the perspectives on homework revealed by my literature review. Part one of the questionnaire consisted of 18 alternating statements that either supported or opposed homework. Participants responded to Likert-style questions by indicating if they “fully disagree,” “somewhat disagree,” “agree,” “somewhat agree,” or “fully agree” with each statement. In part two, participants indicated how often they have homework assignments that have been designed to fulfill the teacher-supported designs also discussed in the literature review. Participants responded to ten descriptors by indicating “never or IDK,” “a few times each semester,” “a few times every 9 weeks,” “a few times monthly,” or “daily.” Once these questionnaires were collected, I tallied the students’ responses and looked for patterns. On some questions, students responded unanimously, yet on other questions, students responded with split decisions. I made notes about these responses and used them to generate future focus group questions.

**Open-Ended Questions.**

The next step involved asking students a group of short response, open-ended questions (see Appendix C). The purpose of these questions was to allow the students to respond freely and in their own words. These questions asked students to consider a range of notions such as “If you were the teacher, what would your homework policy be?” and “What is a reasonable homework assignment?” I again looked for, and took notes on, any emerging themes and interesting ideas in the students’ responses. These notes were added to the notes from the questionnaire and led to the composition of additional focus group questions.

**Homework Journal.**

Students were asked next to participate in a two-week self-reporting period. I typed a journal (see Appendix D), including instructions, daily recording sheets—which included spaces
for each class and weekends—and extra lined pages for additional notes as necessary. I punched holes in the pages and placed them inside pronged folders. I called it a homework journal and gave each of the ten students his/her own copy. I reminded students that while I encouraged them to speak freely, they should be careful about losing their journals and others finding and reading them. I told them I would protect their thoughts when they were shared with me, but I could not protect them if their thoughts were found offensive to others who might report them to the office. Of the ten students involved, only four wrote in their journals. I read through them and took note of their personal reactions to the homework assignments they had over the two-week period, such as, “Read the next chapter for homework—I haven’t read any all year long, why would I start now?” (“Rachel,” personal communication, February 25, 2014). These responses again added to my list of questions to ask during focus groups.

**Focus Group Sessions.**

In order to have more time for interviews, the students and I decided we would meet before school at 6:45 A.M. To show them I appreciated their time, I promised to have a pot of coffee ready and some powdered donuts for breakfast. Since I was their teacher, I had spent enough time working with this combination of students to recognize that some students speak over other students, and that some students stay quiet to avoid embarrassment. In order to create an environment where each student felt free to speak, I asked them to write on a piece of paper the names of the classmates they felt comfortable speaking around. I used this information to schedule small group meetings of two or three students per interview. I made sure not to schedule a pair of siblings at the same time, a student who felt socially inferior with certain students, and another student who felt academically inferior with a pair of other students. I showed the students the assigned groups, making sure everyone felt comfortable. *Every* student
made special arrangements and met with me at school, in my classroom, before sunrise (between 6:45-6:55 A.M.) on his/her scheduled day. The focus group sessions lasted approximately forty-five minutes each, and were conducted over four days.

Most students enjoyed donuts and coffee during the interview, explaining some of the movement noise heard on the digital audio recorder. While I asked general questions to the groups (see Appendix E), I also asked detailed follow-up questions to individuals. For example, in his response to the open-ended questions, Jon suggested that due dates for homework assignments be extended until a week after the assignment was given. I asked a few follow-up questions: “How does that work reinforce skills? How quickly are new concepts introduced? Wouldn’t you be on another topic after a week?” During the focus group sessions, I asked an average of 15 questions. Everyone seemed at ease and willing to speak freely.

Throughout every stage of data collection, I continued to remind the students that I would never reveal their answers to my questions. I was looking for patterns and for phenomena to occur by working with participants who have the ability to help others understand the homework experience, which was the phenomenon being studied (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). During the interviews, I asked probing questions and observed participants’ actions and reactions during the interview, adding more layers of information and strengthened the results of the study. Body language and tone of voice add meaning to any conversation, and the subtle ways in which information is exchanged between people can add meaning to language. I recognized these behaviors, took note of them during sessions, and determined if further probing was necessary.

**Twitter.**

The last phase of my data collection was experimental. At the beginning of this project I thought about a way to involve students on their own terms; this train of thought led me to social
networking. Because this study focused on students’ experiences with homework and how they made decisions about completing homework, I was cautious about asking participants to record their experiences with homework for an additional two weeks. In qualitative studies, participants have more opportunities for reciprocation; therefore, the participants in this study were encouraged to collaborate with me in order to ensure that the study was being conducted effectively. I proposed the idea of using Twitter to the students, and they were all supportive. Twitter is accessible through any smart phone or computer with Internet capabilities. Twitter accounts are free, and nine members of the study group created a separate account for the two-week tracking period.

Before we began, I printed a copy of the school district’s Internet usage and social networking policy. I read over it and highlighted the section that discussed the teacher’s responsibility to inform the principal of any interactions with students outside of the classroom setting and seek approval before doing so. I explained to my principal that I was working on my dissertation and wanted to set up Twitter accounts. I informed him that I already had parental approval, and before I could explain any more he gave me the “go ahead.” I discussed with students the protocol we would follow (see Appendix F), and provided each with a copy of our rules. The participants exchanged Twitter account names with each other and chose to “follow” each other. By following each other, they were linked to each other’s accounts, which allowed them to read and respond to each other’s posted comments.

I created a new Twitter account name and followed the participants. Initially, I intended to stay out of the conversations and not view participants’ conversations until the two-week self-reporting period concluded. I assumed that by not entering into the conversation, I could encourage a “natural” setting for the students to engage freely with one another without feeling
“cyber-stalked” by their teacher. On the first day, they invited me into their conversations and complained that they were waiting for my comments. Because these teenagers are members of a generation who enjoy social networking, and because communicating amongst themselves about their experiences in real time provides them feedback and instant gratification, I was encouraged that this experiment might yield interesting results.

Since the participants were students enrolled in my class at the time, I continued to reassure them that their comments would not be used to harm them in any way. They were encouraged to speak freely and voice their thoughts and opinions in any way, with any choice of language, about their homework experiences (including any homework assignments I assigned during the self-reporting period) without fear of reprimand. It was during this time I learned about memes, pictures posted and reposted via social media as messages, and how a picture can be worth a thousand words. While these Twitter postings were scheduled to last only two weeks, some students continued posting months later.

**Difficulties Encountered**

Data collection was scheduled to begin in early January 2014 and was expected to finish by the end of February. Unfortunately, the state suffered from unusually icy weather conditions, which caused PHS to be closed for a number of days. As a result, data collection started later than anticipated. Additionally, events scheduled by the school guidance counselor and district school board—two class periods for the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) document coding and testing, a guest speaker from a local technology center, two class periods for National Merit Scholars document coding and testing, and a junior class assembly—interrupted my ability to collect data. Throughout the semester, nine classes were either
cancelled or interrupted. Data collection began in mid-January and continued until early April, officially lasting 16 weeks.

Unofficially, students continued to post tweets pertaining to homework intermittently until the end of the school year, during the summer (for those who were enrolled in the AP English IV class and had a summer assignment), and even into the first few weeks of the next school year; in total, students continued to tweet even 17 weeks after data collection ended.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following considerations: convenience sample, and teacher as researcher. The use of a convenience sample can be considered a limitation because the sample was chosen from one class of students from one high school, which indicates that the results may be limitedly applicable to students in similar school settings. My role as both teacher and researcher could have had an effect on the student self-reporting of the study. Even though students were guaranteed that their comments would be protected, some still may have been intimidated by my role as their teacher, and were careful with what they chose to report.

Confirm Biases

Before I even begin to discuss my data analysis, I must present to readers my personal opinions, or biases, regarding homework. By discussing my own thoughts and feelings about homework, I hope to prove to readers that this study has certainly been an exploration for me and not an attempt to justify any preconceived notions to prove or disprove what the literature has already revealed.

As a teacher, I have the grand expectation that my students will, without question or hesitation, faithfully apply great effort and complete the homework I assign. I assign homework because I want my students to have additional exposure to the concepts discussed in class.
Furthermore, I want them to return to class with their completed work so we can build on those concepts and continue broadening our learning experiences. I want my students to think about what we did in class and bring back stories about how what we discussed in class related to something that happened in their reality. Unfortunately, in their reality, my class is not as important to them as it is to me.

If I step away from my role as teacher, I can admit that not everything in the world needs to revolve around homework assignments. As a wife, I hate nagging at and arguing with my husband about why he can or cannot take the boys for a golf-cart ride on our land past a certain time of evening because they have homework to complete. As a mother, I hate the stressful and tiring nights, pushing my sons to finish their homework until bedtime. As a graduate student, I hate having to spend time away from my family to instead work on my own homework assignments and writings. I also hate the stress of having to meet deadlines for school, work, family, and home. In fact, this study itself has been an extremely long homework assignment, and has made it even more possible for me to empathize with my students and their own homework experiences.

Over the course of my lifetime, I have spent over twenty-six years as a student and over twenty-one years as a teacher. By this point in my life, one would assume I had come to some conclusion about my own perspective on homework, yet I have not. This is why this study is important to me.

Ethics

As with all research studies involving human participants, certain ethical considerations must be addressed. Since this study focused on minors, parents granted permission for their children to participate. At the school level, the principle administrator granted me permission to
conduct a study on campus. Before I collected any data from the participants, I made sure the participants understood their rights. These students knew ahead of time that their identities would remain anonymous, and that they should respond openly and honestly about their experiences. They were also informed that any information they provided revealing that they had experienced any neglect or abuse must be reported to the proper authorities. In order to eliminate the threat of power differentials between students and me, their teacher (Hammack, 1992), students understood that they had the choice to engage in the study, and that they had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without coercion or repercussion. As a researcher, I guaranteed participants that they would have the ability to ask questions and receive answers concerning their participation in the study.

Qualitative researchers become directly involved with the participants in their studies to better understand them and report the participants’ truth (Eisner, 1981; Firestone, 1987; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). In fact, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) believe that “researcher and object of study are dependent; researcher should position themselves as closely as possible to what is being studied” (p. 5). In order to maintain an impartial and ethical relationship with the participants, I continually reminded myself of my role as an “objective researcher” for the duration of the study and avoided conversations or behaviors that may have influenced or interfered with students’ willingness to respond honestly or openly. I never repeated to other teachers what the students’ complaints were. Even though one might assume that informing teachers of students’ needs might lead to a better working relationship and lowered stress in the classroom, I felt compelled to remain quiet. I felt a bit of an ethical dilemma about remaining quiet, but protecting the participants was my most important consideration throughout the study.
Additionally, I have an ethical responsibility to remind readers that this study presents my colleagues as the students’ describe them. The teachers mentioned in this study are unable to respond to the students’ descriptions their homework assignments, their instruction, or their practices. Because this study reports some unfavorable accounts of classroom occurrences and teacher-student interactions, readers must recognize that this study is an exploration of the ways students understand and make sense of and describe their experiences, and not necessarily the ways the teachers or others outside of this study would describe those same experiences. This study was designed to examine the ways students describe their experiences with homework as a result of the combination of all the factors they experience, not to criticize or defame teachers or their practices.

When analyzing data, qualitative researchers must take extra care to “check for the accuracy and creditability of their findings” (Creswell, 2003, p. 195), suggesting researchers infer the findings. If researchers are studying an area familiar to them, they may be too close to the situation as not to recognize their biases. In his article, Smith (1983) reminded readers of the beliefs held by many scholars, noting that “an investigation of this world is considered objective if the process and results are unbiased; that is, undistorted by the particular dispositions of and the particular situation surrounding the investigator” (p. 10). In order to meet this goal, I considered my personal biases, emotions, and beliefs. By journaling my thoughts and by sharing and talking about my views with my colleagues, I worked to follow Smith’s (1983) advice and (1) “eliminate all bias and preconceptions,” (2) “not be emotionally involved with or have a particular attitude toward the subject,” and (3) “move beyond common-sense beliefs” (p. 7).

I took into consideration Hammack’s (1992) discussion of the “dual-role” conflict (p. 261), which described how a researcher might have difficulty maintaining a separation of the
role as teacher and the role as researcher, causing an interference with “normal educational practice” (p.260). As a researcher, I was conscious not to interrupt or encroach upon students’ instructional time for the sake of the study. I maintained the course of the designed lessons and did not deviate from them for the sake of the study.

Conclusion

One of the most powerful aspects of qualitative research is its ability to capture personal experiences, provide a voice for participants (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Prakash, 2007), and present findings in a number of different formats. By utilizing a variety of data collection instruments, this study sought to capture the personal experiences of and provide a voice for the ten students enrolled in my APE3 class.

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), the qualitative researcher is responsible for collecting and culling the data, while acknowledging that as the study progresses, the data may change, and continuing to protect the meaning constructed by the participants. By using qualitative measures, I was able to explore phenomena and give voice to what quantitative studies have forgotten, ignored, or overlooked (Cox, Geisen, & Green, 2008; Firestone, 1987).

In Chapter 4, I will report the findings from this study. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the implications for future research with qualitative homework studies in the future.
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Qualitative studies are often criticized for their lack of validity, or rigor. According to Vocabulary.com, rigor can be defined as “the quality of being valid” (2014). The term has become increasingly common lately, as many education stakeholders have begun to use it, within the framework of educational reform, as a way to promote educational practices that require “thoroughness and exhaustiveness” (Vocabulary.com, 2014). Rigor is also a criteria to be considered when evaluating the strength of research studies, as the term implies “academic, intellectual, and personal challenges” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014), and requires thinking deeply and questioning one’s assumptions.

In order to be “thorough and exhaustive,” I share how I experienced my own “academic, intellectual, and personal challenges,” while “thinking deeply and questioning my own assumptions” throughout this chapter. To this end, I provide rich descriptions of the ways I analyzed and interpreted my students’ meanings of homework, thereby providing evidence of the rigor, or validity, in my study.

In the first section of this chapter, I use a combination of suggestions from Creswell (2003) and Maykut and Morehouse (1994) to describe my process of data organization and data analysis. In the second section of this chapter, I discuss the strategies I employed to ensure validity. In the third section, I discuss the findings of my study by describing my APE3 students’ views of their homework assignments and answering the following questions:

1. What are students’ experiences with homework?

2. In what ways have these experiences shaped students’ views of homework?
Data Analysis and Interpretation

Organizing, analyzing, and interpreting data sources can be a huge undertaking for qualitative researchers. They must choose or design a strategy for making sense of the data they collected. For the sake of this study, I incorporated a combination of steps outlined by Creswell (2003) and Maykut and Morehouse (1994) in order to fulfill my needs for a clear plan. While I mostly follow Creswell’s (2003) six steps for data analysis and interpretation (pp. 190-197), I also incorporate Maykut and Morehouse’s (1994) detailed suggestions for organizing data chunks, using the constant comparative method, and inductive category coding.

Organize and Prepare Data.

Throughout the data collection process, I made sure to keep hard copies of all written documents. These documents were divided by type of source and stored in an accordion style file folder. Since, Maykut and Morehouse (1994) warn qualitative researchers to “maintain an easy way of identifying these various sources in the growing mound of data you will amass” (p. 127), I started organizing data from the beginning of the data collection phase. When students turned in each of the three drafts of their AP Writing Style responses, I scored each, made notes in the margins about their writing and possible questions for future discussion, made a copy for my file and returned the originals to the students.

Once I received the responses to the questionnaire and open-ended questions, I made notes in the margins for follow-up questions and filed them away, also. Upon collecting students’ homework journals, I read through them, removed the pages with responses from the folder, and stapled them together according to student. Four of the ten students recorded their homework experiences, and these four packets of data were placed in the file folder. As each of the focus group sessions ended, I saved a digital audio copy of the session on my flash drive and
computer. Once all four focus group sessions concluded, I spent close to sixteen hours transcribing each forty minute session. I saved a digital copy to my computer and flash drive and printed a hard copy to place in the file.

Near the middle of May, I used my computer to log in to my Twitter account, hoping to find an efficient way to transfer the Twitter posts onto a document. After a few hours, I finally formatted everything, spacing posts well enough to print the discussion without dividing photos between two pages. I printed them and placed them in the file with all the other data sources.

Once the semester ended and everyone was dismissed for summer vacation, I gathered all the data from my files and went to PHS to begin working. My plan was to take my data piles to my classroom, spread them out on my desk, and access the free copy machine at work instead of paying a copy service. After I loaded my papers, binders, and two young sons into my truck and we were on our way, I called the assistant principal and asked if there was any reason I could not use the copy machine. She told me it was totally fine, that they recently signed a contract for a new machine, and that the passwords were the same. She even told me to call her back if I needed another access code to make additional copies in case I used up my 1500 copies per month allotment. Upon arriving at my classroom, I showed my sons how to access their favorite Minecraft inspired YouTube videos on a spare computer, gave them each a comfortable rolling chair, and was then free to work on my data.

I used a binder and dividers to organize the sources I had collected throughout the study. As I punched holes in papers and inserted them into the binder, I made sure to write each students’ name on every page of their responses and place page numbers on multi-page assignments. For example, when handling the AP Style Writing Prompts, I labeled each one AP WP (Advanced Placement Writing Prompt), with the student’s name, number of draft, and page
number of total pages (e.g., AP WP Hannah I-1 of 2, AP WP Aaron II-1 of 3). I used the ink jet copier in my classroom to make copies of assignments when students wrote on the back of their papers so all my copies would be front only copies, allowing me to trim passages from a copy and paste them to index cards as needed.

Once all the papers were properly labeled, I went to the new copy machine to make an extra hard copy for safe keeping. While there, I noticed the new copier not only had the ability to scan documents into PDF files, but also to email the documents. I placed all 241 data pages on the copier and made a hard copy for chopping data into chunks of information. Next, I scanned the papers into a PDF file and sent it to my email for safekeeping. I checked my email from my phone to make sure the documents were safely in the inbox and returned to my classroom.

I labeled a second set of dividers, punched holes into another set of 241 pages of data, and inserted them into a second binder. At this point, I was tired and the children were hungry for lunch. We packed our things, shut down the classroom, and returned home.

**Read Through Data.**

Later, I visited a local office supply store and bought some items I needed for the next step in my data analysis. When I returned home, I brought a table and chair into my bedroom and lined up some of the supplies suggested by Maykut and Morehouse (1994): packs of note cards, note card labels, pencils, scissors, a glue stick, and a box. According to Maykut and Morehouse, the next step required “culling for meaning from the words and actions of the participants in the study, framed by the researcher’s focus of inquiry” (p. 128). I reread through each of the 241 pages of data, looking for every comment that answered the question, “What is your viewpoint of homework?” and in doing so, I found myself cutting and pasting nonstop.
While cutting and pasting, I found it difficult to extract pieces from the Twitter data. The student responses needed to remain intact in order to show how the students respond (and don’t respond) to each other. The flow of these real-time events could not be fragmented. I decided to wait and see how I would utilize the Twitter data. I put the Twitter printouts in a folder and continued to chop the other pages.

Over a 24-hour period of time (with minimal rest in between), I was able to condense 222 pages of information—less than the original 241, because I saved the 19 pages of Twitter conversations for later—to 321 note cards. I knew I had too many cards, but I wanted to examine them more closely before I narrowed them down.

Each note card was carefully labeled so that each data chunk could be identified easily. This labeling included an abbreviation for the data collection instrument, student’s initials, and a page number for the print document. For example, a card that says “I2-A-5” tells me that I need to look at the transcript for Interview Two and look on page five for Aaron’s quote. A card that says “J-S-2/18” tells me to look at Stephanie’s homework journal on February 18 for her quote. All my data chunks can easily be traced back to their original text.

**Detailed Analysis.**

The next step in my data analysis required a critical reading of the data chunks I had recently placed on note cards. As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest, “[the] constant comparative method…provides the beginning researcher with a clear path for engaging in analysis of substantial amounts of data in a way that is both challenging and illuminating” (p. 127) With this in mind, I began reading the cards, looking carefully at what the student was saying about homework. I began to see words and phrases appear over and over. The cards were placed in initial categories as follows: Need to/want to, learning and understanding, time at
school, amount, time at home/after school, grades, responsibility/time management, reasonable homework, worry/stress, useless/busywork/easy, purpose, can’t do it/forgetful, and didn’t want to/don’t care. While I felt accomplished with this first approach to organizing data chunks into categories, I still had too many cards and too many categories. I needed to combine overlapping categories and eliminate redundant data cards.

Next, I sat and reread through the data cards and decided to trim them down and create new categories. I read through the 321 data cards and eliminated redundancies, narrowing my collection to 176 data cards. My category titles changed to the following list: standardized, interest, memorization, fragmented, time at end of class, too much, need time, home outranks school, deadlines, lower grade, teachers give grades, responsibility, study, beneficial, stress, useless, reinforcement, practice, understand, finish, busywork, teacher info., increase retention, need more instruction, forget, and distraction. From this new list, I began to see how many of these categories involved teaching, purposes, grades, life, students, and stress. I needed to step away and regroup.

I continued to rearrange my cards and categories, yet I never felt comfortable with them. I decided that I needed to mix the cards up and start over. I called my two sons to action and had them working in an assembly line; one applied tape to cards, the other stuck cards to my bedroom doorframe. I stood in the hallway of my home and taped data chunks to the walls until I had exhausted the stack (and my sons). Studying the data columns spread down the hallway, I moved chunks from column to column, eliminating short columns and beginning new ones. Eventually new categories emerged.
**Code to Generate Descriptions.**

Once I was satisfied with the categories, I removed the cards from the walls and sat at my computer transcribing students’ handwritten responses into typed data. While working, I found myself referring back to my binder containing a copy of the original documents. I needed to clarify the context of some data chunks. Recalling Maykut and Morehouse (1994), I was glad I had carefully labeled my data because it allowed me “to return to the original data set when necessary to study the units of data in their fuller context” (p. 128). I also decided upon the pseudonyms I would use for each student and began referring them by these new names in my mind so I could work with their responses more fluidly.

As I worked through my stack of cards, I began combining the data chunks into category lists on my computer. With the pseudonyms in place, and the chunks written out and sitting next to each other, I began to further examine what my students were trying to describe. I moved the categories around, trying to see which ones spoke to each other. I moved single chunks and entire categories many times, feeling overwhelmed and discouraged.

According to Creswell (2003), this process requires “continual reflection about the data… [and] it is not sharply divided from other activities in the process” (p. 190). Because I am not an experienced qualitative researcher, I understood that I would need to carefully focus on the data in order to make sense of the students’ responses. My goal of presenting an accurate account of my students’ homework experiences was more important than hurrying to finish a study. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), “What becomes important to analyze emerges from the data itself, out of a process of inductive reasoning” (p. 127); therefore, I decided to step away from the data for a few weeks and allow myself time to think. Upon my return to the data, categories began to fall into place, and I was finally able to craft propositional statements, which
allowed me to design an outline for the discussion of my findings. Table 4.1 presents the propositional statements, keywords, and categories that guide my descriptions of my students’ views of their homework experiences.

**Present Findings.**

I present the findings of this study as a discussion of the emergent themes, which are supported by subcategories and anecdotal evidence. One of the most powerful aspects of qualitative research is its ability to capture personal experiences and provide a voice for participants (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). For the purposes of this study, I see narrative writing as the only way to describe the complex phenomenon that the data revealed students’ relationships to their homework to be and to provide a space for my students’ voices to be heard.

**Validation**

Establishing validity strengthens a qualitative study (Creswell, 2003). The goal of any study is to accurately represent the findings as perceived by the researcher, participant, or readers. Other terms associated with this concept include *trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility* (Creswell, 2003). Creswell discusses eight primary strategies for checking the accuracy of researchers’ findings (p.196). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest four strategies (pp.146-147). The discussion that follows illustrates how I employed many of these strategies to ensure the validity of my study.

**Triangulation.**

Creswell (2003) advises qualitative researchers to triangulate their data (p. 196). This means researchers implement a variety of collection instruments, conduct focus groups, and record field notes. By looking across the many data sources, qualitative researchers are able to build a rational explanation for the ways they interpret their data. In this study, I gathered data
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions</th>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students worry and stress over trying to divide their time between homework completion and other obligations.</td>
<td>lower grade, good grade, keep the grade, easy “a,”</td>
<td>Students worry about their homework grades affecting their overall class grade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>distraction, yelled, chores, wash dishes, damper, fight, mom telling</td>
<td>Students have difficulty working on homework due to distractions and interruptions occurring at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cumbersome, busy, too much, huge lesson, killing me slowly, sit for hours, stress, eight classes</td>
<td>Long homework assignments are exhausting for students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>activities, other things, play time, something else, relax, free time, job, family, social life</td>
<td>Homework infringes on students’ recreational time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students struggle to complete their homework assignments because they claim they are not academically prepared.</td>
<td>fail, barely teach us, know it for the test, teaching the test, learn differently, teach one way, barely explaining, haven’t done enough</td>
<td>Students feel they do not receive adequate instruction to work independently on homework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>next day, go back, moved on, something different</td>
<td>Students complain they do not have time to retain information because of the pacing of their lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>falling asleep, don’t take interest, boring, didn’t pay attention</td>
<td>Uninterested students do not pay attention in class, missing information they will use to complete their homework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ticked off, rude, doesn’t want to help, difficult, same person, bother someone</td>
<td>Confused students resist asking questions to help them understand the information they will need to complete their homework.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Table 4.1 continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions</th>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students resist homework assignments they consider unnecessary.</td>
<td>answers in the back, copy, get the answers, use a website</td>
<td>Students frequently copy homework answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>memory, want to forget, chance I remember, mind a clean slate</td>
<td>Students forget about their homework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pointless, useless, waste so much time, never helped, nothing to do with, over and over, boring</td>
<td>Students say homework does not help them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>common sense, already know, don’t have to, exact questions, don’t need, not something you really need</td>
<td>Students believe they do not need to do homework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students realize completing homework can be meaningful.</td>
<td>will do it, responsible, suffer consequences, have it done</td>
<td>Students know homework is their responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>manage, planner, self-discipline, plan out, time management, immediately started, figuring out what</td>
<td>Balancing homework with other obligations challenges students to make responsible decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>find the solution, increased retention, re-teaching, helped, not overwhelming, apply, build confidence</td>
<td>Students consider some homework beneficial.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

from three drafts of an AP Style Writing Prompt that asked students to write about homework, a questionnaire, a set of open-ended questions, a two-week homework journal, focus group sessions, and at least two weeks of Twitter posts (tweets). Using these various sources, I examined the data to find recurrent themes.

Additionally, by collecting data from these varying sources, I was able to provide opportunities for students to respond in ways that were more comfortable for them. According to Mayer (1999), constructivist theory suggests that “people select relevant information, organize it into coherent structures, and interpret it through what they already know” (p. 15). This means
that students actively create their own meanings as they attempt to make sense of their experiences (Mayer, 1999). With this in mind, my purpose in providing various opportunities for data collection was twofold. Not only did I seek to establish validity in this study by using triangulation, but also to provide multiple opportunities for students to construct meanings from the ways they examined their homework experiences. For example, some students did not record anything in their homework journals, yet they wrote extensively in their essays. Some students did not use Twitter, yet they spoke openly during focus group sessions. Considering the differences among my students’ time, interests, personalities, motivations, etc., I was able to offer various opportunities for them to become engaged in their examinations of their homework experiences, which allowed them to recursively construct and reflect on their own meanings of homework. As a result, all students were able to actively participate, and all students are represented in the findings of this study.

**Prolonged Engagement in the Field.**

The idea of prolonged experience in the field allows researchers the opportunity to establish rapport with study participants (Creswell, 2003; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Fortunately, I had already established a rapport with my students, having taught each one of them for at least an entire school year. I did not have to devote hours trying to earn trust and learning how to read the subtle nuances of their gestures and diction; I was already familiar with their senses of humor, body language, insecurities, etc. Also, I was able to engage with them for both the semester before and the semester during which the study officially took place, making data collection convenient.

This prolonged exposure to students and their free exchange of ideas aided me in establishing indwelling (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Indwelling allows researchers to
understand the ways their participants construct meanings of their experiences. Using indwelling, a way of “understanding the person’s point of view from an empathic rather than a sympathetic position” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 21), I situated myself in the position of student. Since I have been enrolled in school for more than half of my lifetime, I can certainly empathize with students’ homework experiences. I understand the temptations, distractions, aversions, frustrations, and responsibilities associated with managing time and balancing obligations with homework.

**Member-Checking.**

While I am able to empathize with students’ experiences with homework, I am also able to step back and examine the situation, reflecting on the students’ meaning, not my own (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). I recognize that although I may be able to empathize with my students through indwelling, I cannot assume that the students’ meanings and my meanings are the same. Following Maykut and Morehouse’s (1994) suggestions, I suspended as much as was possible my own ways of viewing the world, and sought to answer the questions: “What is happening here? What is important in the lives of people here? How would they describe their lives? What is the language they would use to do it?” (p. 69).

Before the focus group sessions, I revisited the data collected from the writing assignment, questionnaire, open-ended questions, and homework journal. I presented my findings thus far, seeking responses regarding the accuracy of my interpretations of their responses. I also asked for clarification of and elaboration on responses that were still unclear to me.

Once I had formatted the Twitter posts from their two nights of cramming for an exam, and a draft of my propositional statements chart, I met again with the participants. As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest, I invited them for an informal review of my findings to allow
them to “determine whether [I] had captured the reality of their experiences” (p. 71).

Fortunately, seven of the ten were in a class taught by “Dr. Physics,” which was next door to my classroom. “Dr. Physics” had not planned to teach any new lessons during the beginning of this class period, devoting the time for students to work on a review packet he put together. With an appreciation for dissertation writing, having written a 700+ page dissertation himself, “Dr. Physics” excused the students from his class for a short meeting. Ironically, they were excused after agreeing to complete their review assignment independently, for homework!

The students and I walked around the corner to the cafeteria and sat around a table to discuss my findings. I showed them the way I had formatted their Twitter posts and added explanations of their comments. I invited them to critique my interpretations and comments. Aside from “Hannah” informing me that “ion curr” was not a comment on her own homework, but a comment on her classmates’ hesitancy to begin Tweeting about their homework experiences, the students agreed that I had represented them accurately. Interestingly, their main complaint was their dissatisfaction with my choices of pseudonyms, arguing that they would prefer “any name but that one!” I told them to calm down and focus on my propositional statements.

I showed them the propositional statements chart and began reading through the statements, key words, and categories. Immediately, “Aaron” spoke up and informed me that the majority of his homework concerns were related, in his opinion, to the lack of instruction he receives before being asked to work independently, not the reason I was beginning to discuss. I asked him to wait until I read another statement, assuring him that I had already heard his concerns and definitely included them.

Once I had finished reading over the chart with the students, they sat, nodding their heads, agreeing that I had accurately summed up their views of homework. I asked if anyone
had any questions or anything to add. I waited for responses, and received nothing but slowly shaking heads and faces expressing, “Nope. That’s it.” I thanked them for their time and walked them back to class. (I also thanked “Dr. Physics” and told him, “I owe ya one!”)

**Rich Description.**

Creswell (2003) urges qualitative researchers to provide “rich, thick description” (p. 196) in their reporting. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) also use the term *rich* when they suggest qualitative researchers report with “richness of data” (p. 95), “rich and believable descriptive narrative” (p. 122), “rich in reporting the actual data” (p. 150), and “rich description of the people and settings” (p. 154). Throughout this report, I have provided rich descriptions of my study. For example, in Chapter 1, I begin narrating the story of my personal struggle with assigning homework to my students. In Chapter 3, I provide rich descriptions of the setting, context, and participants. Even in this chapter, I have provided narrative descriptions in order to, as Creswell (2003) describes, “transport the readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experience” (p. 196).

Reflecting on Maykut and Morehouse (1994), who suggest that “we create our world with words; we defend and hide ourselves with words” (p. 18), I will stay close to my students’ constructions and present their reactions to, struggles with, and comments on their homework experiences through a narrative mode. By using a narrative mode, I hope to provide readers a glimpse into my world as a teacher and a researcher, in order to show how my findings helped me put together my notions of how my students construct meanings of their homework experiences. A narrative mode will also provide readers a glimpse into my participants’ worlds as teenagers in 2014, illustrating how they view their experiences of balancing the demands of home, family, work, friends, self, etc. with the demands of homework.
**Discrepant Information.**

Qualitative researchers must acknowledge the discrepant information found in their studies. Discussing opposing perspectives adds credibility to their report (Creswell, 2003). Differing viewpoints exist in the real world, and they do not always work together towards the same goal. For example, if researchers present an analysis of a phenomenological study, and all of their data supports a single theme, readers might become doubtful of the findings. They might suspect the researchers manipulated the findings to support their preconceived biases. Readers might also question the researchers’ ability to analyze the data, missing important details that they considered useless.

The findings of this study are compressed into four propositional statements. Three of these statements represent my students’ negative views of and struggles with homework. The fourth statement presents my students’ recognition of and support for useful and helpful homework. If I had eliminated this statement and the discussion of its categories, I would have manipulated the study, showing only negative viewpoints of homework. The study would be a misrepresentation of the data collected, since I would have ignored my students’ comments on homework that helps them or the types of homework they do not mind completing. The study would also be a misrepresentation of my students as thinkers, presenting them as narrow minded and unwilling to acknowledge any benefits of homework.

**Audit Trail.**

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), qualitative researchers improve the validity of their studies when they “establish a permanent audit trail of [their] research efforts” (p. 146). The documented evidence of data collection, organization, and analysis allows readers to trace the path and note every step the researchers took when they began the process of examining the
data. As readers understand the process, they are able to determine the validity of the study. In this chapter, I have presented the procedures I followed for organizing, analyzing, and interpreting the data I collected for this study, establishing an audit trail for readers to consider.

In this chapter, I have discussed the processes of organizing, preparing, analyzing, and interpreting my data. I have also discussed the strategies I employed to ensure validity, such as comparing data through triangulation, experiencing prolonged time in the field, applying member-checking, providing rich descriptions, including discrepant information, and establishing an audit trail. In the next section of this chapter, I present the findings of my study, organizing them thematically and supporting them with data.

**Findings**

The purpose of this study was to reveal my students’ views of their homework experiences. In this first finding, I examine the overall responses to the Twitter feed because reading through the social media postings, or tweets, from students’ Twitter accounts, provided valuable insight into my students’ experiences. Students’ tweets often reflected the recurring themes mentioned throughout the study, such as feeling overwhelmed, doubtful, obligated, conflicted, angry, frustrated, and exhausted.

From definitions provided by Lynn Corno (Bembenutty, 2009) and Harris Cooper (Bembenutty, 2011), and for the purpose of this study, the term *homework* is defined as any academic work, study, project, activity, etc. with which students engage during non-school time. The first excerpt from the Twitter feed illustrates students experiencing the shared experience of cramming for a test.
Cramming for a Test.

While some tweets can stand independently from the others, others took the form of discussions, chronicling shared experiences that must be represented as a whole, as it was recorded in “real time,” or the actual time it occurred. While reading Twitter from the Internet, the responses to posts appear as threads, which are not always arranged in chronological order. For the sake of creating a reader-friendly presentation, I copied and reformatted the tweets, arranged them chronologically, enlarged them, included the time of each posting, inserted text boxes containing pseudonyms over usernames, and provided captions. Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 represent my students’ shared experience of studying for the same math test. A close reading of Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 allows readers to begin to understand how students prepare for, react to, tolerate, manage, etc. their homework experiences. These figures show five students’ tweets and one student’s written comments about their test preparations. These students are multi-tasking—balancing their social, home, and academic lives—as well as they can.

The tweets allow readers to see these students’ struggles, complaints, and frustrations, which reflect what these students actually feel. For example, Hannah, Maria, Rachel, and Stephanie were normally quiet throughout an entire class period; they never complained. Examining their tweets allowed me to access their thoughts, feelings, struggles, and general perceptions in a way that was never apparent before. I was able to learn about the students as individuals and also to see how they interact with each other. The tweets allowed students to interact in a natural environment (at home via social media) and to use their choice of language, memes, selfies, and emoji to genuinely express themselves.
Figure 4.1 Cramming Two Nights Before the Test

Hannah feels she has too much homework.

Maria needs a nap so she can do homework. She quit her job to keep up in school.

Hannah’s message to her classmates, “Dis is @ erry 1 else,” means “This [meme] is at/for everyone else.”

This is a meme, a picture representing some aspect of popular culture, posted to a social media site.

The caption “ion curr” is a slang for, “I don’t care.” Hannah is suggesting her classmates are as apathetic as the guy in the meme.

Hannah feels overwhelmed and wishes she had a head start last week.

Aaron expresses sarcasm and opens the floor for others to criticize the review.

Rachel is overwhelmed by her homework and escapes by sleeping.

Hannah struggles to balance household obligations with homework.
For Algebra II we received a review for our test three days before said test. Today we will receive the second part of that review... the day before the test we are receiving the second part you know because... is a quality teacher who definitely cares about the educational well-being of her students.

Catherine says she has too much homework.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, this is a complete essay explaining how Catherine feels about her homework load tonight.

Emojis are images indicating the speaker’s thoughts and/or feelings.

Jon set up a Twitter account, but chose not to tweet. He shares his frustration and blames the teacher for not being prepared for the test.
(Figure 4.2 continued)

Rachel has to take a nap to gain energy to keep working on her homework.

Hannah feels comfortable to openly express her strong, feelings about Algebra II.

This is a selfie, a photo of self and surroundings posted on social media. At 5:22 P.M. Hannah and Maria are working on their study guides and cramming for their test tomorrow.

Hannah is frustrated, feeling unprepared, looking for excuses, and blaming her teacher.

Rachel sarcastically announces how much work she still has.

Maria and Hannah show they agree with Rachel’s post by clicking “FAVORITES.” They are identified by profile pictures.

Although Rachel took a nap, she is too tired to continue.

Aaron attended school all day, worked through the evening, and arrived home at 10:37 P.M. He has not studied for the math test, and does not look forward to tomorrow.
After reading through the data collected from the various sources, I present my students’ views of their homework experiences by describing the following four themes:

1. Many students struggled to divide their time between homework and other obligations.

2. Students struggle to complete their homework assignments because they claim they are not academically prepared.

3. Students resisted homework assignments they considered unnecessary.

4. Students realized completing homework is meaningful.

**Struggling to Divide.**

According to my students, they worried about how to divide their time between what they considered important and unimportant. They were concerned about their homework grades affecting their class grades, and so they endured interruptions and distractions at home, spent
long hours working on their assignments, and sacrificed recreational time in order to fulfill their various obligations. For example, Hannah’s tweet in Figure 4.3 illustrates her struggle to meet her obligations to school and home. Her profile picture is an open book with her head lying on top of it, illustrating the state of exhaustion in which she seems to live. Her tweet shares her personal experience of trying to spend enough time working on math homework and being scolded for not completing her household chores.

![Hannah’s Profile Picture](image)

Figure 4.3 Hannah Almost Got Punished

1. Homework grades and class grade. The students in this study worried about graded homework affecting their overall class grade. They recognized that colleges look at students’ transcripts when determining admission, and they worried that their homework grades would lower their class grade. They were often aggravated that they were required to go through the motions of completing homework in order to maintain their GPA (grade point average).

These students who were interested in attending college after they graduate recognized the importance of maintaining a respectable GPA, and they worried about how their homework grades affected their academic success. For example, Hannah complained in her essay, “Homework in high school doesn’t always benefit the student in learning the skill or remembering the facts so much as it does cause them to worry and stress over the need to do it to keep the grade” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Students who viewed homework as
a way to reinforce skills taught in class and increase their learning were often frustrated by the effect their homework grades have on their overall class grades.

Knowing that colleges and universities determine students’ admission based on their GPA, Hannah continued to vent in her essay, “Homework and grades have become such a big deal in our society. That’s what everyone looks at to determine the quality of a student for college or to see how hard working they are” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Her concerns were echoed by her classmate, as Caroline explained in her essay, “Grades are important when applying to colleges. Homework, which is supposed to be ‘beneficial,’ should not keep a student from getting into a school they deserve” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Students were frustrated that their homework grades were indirectly related to their possible acceptance into the school of their choice.

Students also expressed their dissatisfaction with being graded on material that they were in the process of mastering. Caroline explained in her essay why she opposed graded homework, “A good student may pass a class with a lower grade because of homework” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). In other words, students who struggle to understand and complete their homework do not feel that homework grades should carry enough weight to lower their grades. Moreover, students who understand the material covered in class often feel they do not need homework practice. As Caroline argued in her essay, “If a student already did well with a topic, homework is just extra and useless, but must be done unless you want a lower grade” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). This comment indicates that students feel forced to complete homework tasks, not for the sake of learning but for the sake of obedience.

In fact, students who see homework as tests in obedience resent the way teachers flippantly argue the value of their homework assignments. In her essay, Caroline wrote, “It’s an
easy A,’ I recollect many different teachers explaining. ‘Just do it and you will get an A’” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). When a teacher tells students to “just do it [homework],” especially when students have other responsibilities, students are unconvinced that the homework assignments carry any value. In fact, when responding to an open-ended question, Caroline condemned graded homework for being, “a grade on how fast you learned in class and how many resources you have at home” (personal communication, January 17, 2014) Students feel penalized if they need more time to learn or do not have assistance at home.

Students identified completing homework with compliance, as Stephanie recorded in her homework journal, “The stuff she is having us do is ridiculous. I have to study so I can get a good grade to keep up with my A.” (personal communication, February 18, 2014) Students become resentful and tired from unnecessary homework assignments but feel pressure to obey and comply for the sake of saving their grades.

2. Distractions and interruptions. The students in this study reported that their time at home was not always conducive to completing homework. Students often have to endure distractions from friends and family. While some of these interruptions are within students’ control, others are not.

Social media websites and apps, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc., have become an increasingly popular way for people to communicate with each another. Students with social media accounts often feel compelled to interact with their friends by reading and posting comments.

Although socializing with others is not necessarily an undesirable activity, it can become problematic when students should be engaged in other activities, namely their homework. During her focus group session, Amy explained how social media becomes a distraction:
You’re sitting there, like, “Yeah, I’m really gonna get this homework done,” and you get a notice that you have another “like” on Instagram…and you’re like, “Oh well, let me go check that.” And then by the time that happens, you’ve been on Instagram for three hours and nothing got done. (personal communication, March 14, 2014)

Taking a minute to check a message has the potential to turn into hours of browsing. Students who have to fight this distraction often find themselves running short on time to finish their homework. Although this distraction is within the students’ control, other disturbances within a family home often interrupt students’ time for homework.

Upon arriving home from school, students take on other roles and responsibilities such as tending to siblings and completing chores. Students do not only hold the role of student. Some function as the sole babysitter for siblings until parents come home from work, monitoring their behavior and assisting with homework. Others are responsible for chores around the house.

Students with younger siblings often find themselves in charge of helping with their siblings’ homework. Parents who work long hours or have limited education themselves depend on the older siblings to assist the younger siblings. Students complained that they tried to finish their own homework, but were unable to do so because they had to take care of their siblings. For example, Rachel admitted in her essay, “I was yelled at for actually doing my homework when [my parents] thought I should have been doing my siblings’ homework” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Not only are older siblings sometimes held accountable for helping their younger siblings complete homework, they are sometimes expected to complete it for them.

In some households, older students are responsible for monitoring their younger siblings while parents are away at work. When this occurs, students find themselves constantly distracted from the concentrated study necessary to complete challenging homework assignments. As Stephanie explained during her focus group session:
My sisters, they fight a lot, and most of the time my mom’s not home anymore ‘cause she
has to work. So, I have to make sure they stop fighting. So, I have to get up and go settle
them down and then go back to [homework] again and I forget where I left off. (personal
communication, March 14, 2014)

Because the interruptions become so difficult to overcome, students are forced to wait until their
parents come home before they can be as fully attentive as they need to be to finish their
homework. In some instances, students simply give up struggling to complete their homework,
thinking they will never have any uninterrupted study time.

In other households, students are responsible for helping with chores. Within minutes of
walking in the door, some students are barraged with demands. Amy described her busy
afternoons in her essay, “With Mom telling me to do this and that, later the dishes. And then
Dad telling me this, I never have a chance to breathe” (personal communication, March 14,
2014). Students might leave school with intentions of getting started on their homework, but
once they arrive home, their parents often have other plans for their evening.

Although students reported that their parents expected them to perform well in school,
students complained that their parents failed to realize how often they prioritize other tasks above
homework. Students are often challenged to divide their time between their parents’ demands at
home and their obligations to school. For instance, during her focus group session, Stephanie
revealed her struggle with her mother, “Last night, I [said], ‘Mom, I really have to finish reading
this book.’ She [said], ‘Well, you should’ve did that before. Now you have to wash dishes!’ So,
I wash dishes and have to stay up and read” (personal communication, March 14, 2014).

Students feel pressure to complete their homework, but they cannot escape their parents’
demands. Hannah vented in her homework journal:

I feel a bit overwhelmed and angry due to not having any time to do homework. I had to
help wire the trailer for an electrician to come then dinner and chores. I had to tutor
today as well. There’s no getting out of doing something just because of homework at my house. (personal communication, February 25, 2014)

Even when students think they are able to overcome the interruptions at home and finish their homework, new obligations can arise.

Not only are parents often unaware of how their requests occupy their children’s time that could otherwise be dedicated to homework, but also they are unaware of the effects of their punishments. Students often rely on technology to assist them in completing their homework assignments. In her essay, Hannah discussed her experience being punished from her electronics, “Not having any electronics whatsoever can have a damper on my studies, since I do my own research or seek help on my own when I struggle...I'm left to stay confused” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Students have difficulty completing their homework when temptations, siblings, chores, other obligations, and punishments continually interrupt them.

3. Long homework assignments. The students in this study complained that they received “too much” homework. According to their descriptions, “too much” homework can be measured by the amount of time between assigning and collecting a task. “Too much” homework also describes the amount of time required to complete an assignment for a single class, or the amount of time to complete homework for all classes, collectively, in one night.

Students will eagerly identify the types of homework assignments that they deem “too much.” When asked an open-ended question about homework, Jon explained, “Reinforcements of the lesson are fine. Worksheet packets due the next day are no bueno [no good]. Packets as a whole are just a bad idea, they are intimidating and cumbersome” (personal communication, January 17, 2014). What Jon described as packets are usually a stapled stack of worksheets that provide practice and application of skills learned in class. A homework assignment that is designed as a review allows student opportunities to revisit and reapply multiple skills taught in
class. Students question the purpose of homework when the assignments are more cumbersome than intellectually stimulating. When asked the same open-ended question about homework, Maria wrote, “Assignments that are not too lengthy but review the lesson effectively and give adequate practice because often students don’t want to sit for 3 or more hours to do homework after leaving school” (personal communication, January 17, 2014). Students accept challenging homework; they are just limited by the amount of time available to complete it.

In fact, some students find themselves spending hours trying to complete a homework assignment, even working until they can no longer stay awake. In her essay, Catherine explained her late night struggles with homework:

> Some people are very busy during weekdays, and staying up until two AM working on homework just means the students will be too tired to focus and learn to do the next assignment. If a student could not finish an assignment in one night, they should not be punished or spoken to like they are lazy. They could have copied and not even tried. (personal communication, March 5, 2014)

When students devote extended amounts of time working on their homework and are still unable to finish, they seem to fall into the same category as students who never attempted the work. They feel that their efforts are not appreciated, and they feel defeated. They worry that they will fall behind, and they experience feelings of exhaustion.

Students argue that a single homework assignment can take a few hours to complete. As Stephanie discussed during her focus group session, “It takes me about two hours to do math homework every day ‘cause she gives it to us constantly. Sometimes it [helps], but most of the time it’s too much” (personal communication, March 14, 2014). Teachers expose class material to the students during the day and continue to expose them to the material in the evenings via homework assignments. Although students acknowledge the benefits of homework practice, they feel that many of their homework assignments are overkill. On one evening, Amy
complained in her homework journal, “HUGE LESSON! Only 8 questions for homework but each question has 4 or 5 subquestions! HATE ALGEBRA HOMEWORK!” (personal communication, February 20, 2014). On another evening her entry read, “Coach is the most laid back dude on campus…But all these dual enrollment packets are KILLING ME SLOWLY. Packet homework that lasts for 3 weeks…Not Cool…” (personal communication, February 19, 2014). Students not only complained about trying to divide their time among their various responsibilities and homework for one class, but feel even more overwhelmed trying to satisfy the demands for multiple classes.

Students suggested that teachers allow more time between assigning and collecting homework. They claimed that the extended due dates will give them more time to complete their work. When asked an open-ended question about how much time in advance teachers should allow for students to complete their assignments, Rachel answered, “At the very least, three days. Students do not have just one class. There are eight classes, and each instructor has assignments to be done. If more time was given, more students would complete their homework” (personal communication, January 17, 2014). In response to the same open-ended question, Hannah explained, “Some teachers don’t care that there are students that have seven other classes to do homework for and work after school and it doesn’t help the student, it just adds more stress” (personal communication, January 17, 2014). In trying to satisfy the demands put upon them, students experience stress and frustration. They often find themselves sacrificing their recreational time in order to find time for homework.

4. Recreational time. The students in this study did not look forward to homework. Most of them had had homework assignments since they were in kindergarten, so it was not a new activity to them. They’ve gone to school, learned new concepts, practiced them at home, and
moved on. I wanted to know when students began developing a dislike for homework. During her focus group session, I asked Maria if she could tell me at what point she began to resent homework. Maria admitted, “I have never liked [homework]. It took away from my playtime” (personal communication, March 13, 2014). Her resentment traces back to elementary school.

Interestingly, students seemed to have been carrying bitterness towards homework since the beginning of their educational careers. During a focus group session, I asked Aaron to explain why students react so terribly to homework and he explained, “It’s, like, kids hear “homework” and they’re like, ‘Why would you wanna do homework?’ You wanna have a life. You wanna do other things. So why go home and do it?” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). Throughout the study, other students made the similar complaints.

During her focus group session, Catherine explained, “It [homework]…causes bitterness because [students are] like, ‘I could not [emphasis added] be doing this and be doing something else’” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). Students want a break from schoolwork. They are around it all day long, and once they leave school, they look forward to other activities. For example, in her essay, Maria argued that homework “cuts time out of [students’] days that can be spent doing extracurricular activities or volunteering which is what many colleges look for.” (personal communication, March 5, 2014) Some students expressed a genuine interest in dedicating their time to worthwhile causes; they were not always looking for excuses to get out of work. Their frustration came from not being able to find time for all of their obligations. Hannah admitted in her essay, “We have jobs, chores, college applications, family, and a social life to try to keep up with as well… [trying] not to disappoint can lead…to a constant state of worry and stress” (personal communication, March 5, 2014).
Students often experience stress and frustration as a result of their homework demands. Taken together, this group of students had to divide their time wisely as they struggled to ensure that their homework didn’t lower their class grade and affect their GPA. Students also learn to tolerate distractions and interruptions at home that interfere with their ability to complete their homework. Not only did these students push themselves to endure hours of exhausting homework assignments, but also they often sacrificed recreational activities in order to find time to complete their homework. As a result of these homework experiences, students struggle to divide their time between homework and other obligations.

**Not Academically Prepared.**

Ringing school bells may indicate the end of a class period, but they do not indicate students’ readiness for independent homework. Students often feel challenged to keep the pace and pay attention. Those students in this study who struggled often refused to admit their weaknesses and ask for help.

Students argued they do not receive enough instruction to prepare them for their homework, expressing that they wished information was presented more thoroughly and concepts were introduced less often. For example, Aaron’s tweet in Figure 4.4 illustrates his dissatisfaction with the way the teacher presented the lesson to the class. On another level, his tweet is really an attempt to file an unofficial complaint about being forced to complete homework he was unprepared to do. His comment is also a critique of the teacher, whom he believes is incapable of effectively teaching her subject.
Figure 4.4 Love Trying to Do Algebra Homework

These same sentiments appeared again, nearly two weeks later (see Figure 4.5), when Aaron again tweeted his dissatisfaction with the preparation he received in math class. Anticipating the possibility of scoring a low grade on his math test, he prepared himself by assigning the blame for his failure on the teacher’s poorly designed study guide. Hannah’s tweet, which begins with “@Aaron,” indicating that she is responding to his post, simply states “same.” She inserts an emoji of applauding hands that indicate her approval of his statement. Her one-word tweet confirms Aaron’s assumptions and shows anticipation of her possible failure as well.

Figure 4.5 Time to Fail My Final

1. Inadequate instruction. The students in this study often attributed their problems with understanding homework to inadequate instruction. During his focus group session, Aaron criticized the way he feels teachers disseminate information in too many of his classes:
Yeah, it’s like, “We’re [teachers] gonna give you the material just as long as you know it for the test—to make a good grade on the test.” [emphasis added] That’s all that matters. It’s not about whether you understand [emphasis added] it or not…’cause there’s not really a focus on that at all [emphasis added]. (personal communication, March 12, 2014)

Students recognize the ways their classroom instruction has changed over their careers as students. They see teachers speeding through lessons and overloading students with homework assignments designed to prepare them for standardized tests.

Jon argued in his essay, “Homework in its current state is preparation for the tests to come, but we as a nation need to shift our focus from teaching the test. We need to turn from cookie cutter facts and knowledge to actual education” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Using the term “cookie cutter facts,” Jon identified the information his teachers present to him in class as “one size fits all.” Students want a more personalized learning experience.

In fact, during his focus group session, Aaron admitted, “Teachers… just don’t have enough time to look at every student individually and try to help them with their needs….Every kid’s different, so they’re gonna learn differently, but that’s not how it works” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). Oftentimes, teachers present information to their students in one context and expect them to develop a working knowledge from that one demonstration or discussion. Students argued that their teachers are unwilling or unable to teach them using various strategies.

During his focus group session, Jon used math class as an example to explain how this situation occurs:

Math is such a taxing subject, and it’s not always easy to teach everybody the right way. So, what most teachers do is, they’ll teach one way, most students don’t get it. Student or two, here or there, they’ll get it—because math is crazy. So, if you aren’t taught well in class, and you have homework, that’s the stuff that you learned in class—you should’ve learned in class—and you have no idea what you’re doing. (personal communication, March 11, 2014)
In other words, after teachers present a lesson, some students still have difficulty understanding the material. Instead of teachers finding alternative ways to explain the lesson, they often simply repeat the same lesson that left students confused in the first place. When this occurs, students view their homework as an impossible task.

Students also want their teachers to provide more examples. While students are developing their understanding of new concepts, having more examples of the new information offers them additional opportunities to fully grasp the material. During his focus group session, Aaron complained:

I can figure [my homework] out but, I just want…to do the problems as a class…. ’Cause it seems like we don’t do that many problems. She shows how to do the problems, and we do them on our own, but how can we know how to do the problems on the homework, if we haven’t… had enough problems shown out? (personal communication, March 12, 2014)

Without independently practicing in class, students are unable to make mistakes and ask for assistance. If they reach these moments of confusion while working at home, with no one around to help them, they are more likely to quit working on their homework.

2. Move too fast. The students in this study also blamed the quick shifts from lesson to lesson for their inability to retain information necessary for completing homework. They argued that if their assignments were presented to them at a slower pace, they would have more time to understand it. Instead, they are rushed through lessons they say are difficult to process.

During his focus group session, Aaron vented, “I don’t understand it as much because we go over it that day, you get the homework, and the next day you get a new assignment” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). The more times students are exposed to the new information, and given the opportunity to practice and apply the new concepts, the more they are allowed to develop a deeper understanding of what they are learning.
Once teachers move to new lessons, students have difficulty determining which solutions or procedures should be applied to which situations. During his focus group session, Jon provided an example:

If I go back five or six days later….I don’t remember, like, how [emphasis added] it was taught because we have moved on to more advanced things. So I’ll try to use a more advanced thing [emphasis added] that we learned later on and that’s doing it wrong, [emphasis added] and I get it wrong [emphasis added], and I end up getting a worse grade than if I had done it when it was assigned. (personal communication, March 11, 2014)

Students know that they have to prepare for standardized tests, unit tests, chapter test, etc. They know that teachers must present a certain amount of material during each school year. They did not argue about feeling challenged to learn. However, students argued that the pacing of lessons is so quick that they cannot keep up.

In her essay, Nicole discussed her issue with the instruction she receives, “It’s more like memorization. We learn something one week, and we go into something different. After about two months of studying stuff, we get a review sheet with everything…you have no idea…. ‘Cause previous stuff wasn’t learned” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). In other words, students are unable to remember what was taught because they never really learned it in the first place. When they go home, they are unable to complete their homework, because they have no idea what to do. After a few weeks of perplexing class lessons and homework assignments, students are faced with a chapter review of material they never learned. This is the reason these students give as to why they have such difficulty studying before their tests.

Tired of feeling confused and overwhelmed, Hannah offered a suggestion during her focus group session, “I think it would help, actually teaching us how to do the certain lesson, instead of us memorizing how to do it. If we go back, if just for a few problems every assignment, I think that would help” (personal communication, March 13, 2014). Students want
someone to explain the new information to them in a way they can understand, so that they are able to independently work on their homework. They also want to see examples that will help them understand how to complete their homework. Students want a chance to work on some of their homework with assistance nearby in case they have questions. They also want homework assignments that help them keep information from previous lessons fresh in their minds.

3. Not paying attention. The students in this study admitted that they were disinterested in some of their classes. When they did not pay attention, they often failed to learn information necessary for completing their homework. By lacking both of information for and interest in a subject contributes to students’ hesitancy and inability to complete their homework.

When asked why students do not pay attention in class, Hannah confessed in her essay, “History bores me. Sometimes I’ll begin falling asleep sitting up because I don’t really care about what’s being taught. History is mostly just memorization of times and events” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Hannah was not interested in memorizing and recalling information for a class, and her disinterest led to her falling asleep in class. Because she resisted her history homework, she did not excel in her history course. Hannah further revealed in her essay, “Not being able to remember a lot of events in history can make me feel undereducated and stupid” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Some students said they were not interested in the subject matter presented in class, and others complained about the delivery of the material in their classes.

During her focus group session, Catherine explained why she did not pay attention in her history class, “’Cause he’s [the teacher] just sittin’ there talkin’… and it’s, like, I don’t take interest in that…in history at all” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). Catherine’s history teacher delivered his entire lesson via lectures. According to Catherine, he spent much of
the class period speaking, while students sat, listened, and took notes. Because she was not interested, she did not pay attention. Because she did not pay attention, she did not take notes. Because she did not take notes, she was unable to complete her homework assignments.

Other students also complained about their disinterest in their classes. During his focus group session, Jon confessed, “There’s nothing in her [the teacher] instruction, or in what I learned in math class, that makes me want to learn it…or, heck, do the homework. It’s just, well, that class is dreadfully boring” (personal communication, March 11, 2014) Jon’s apathy towards paying attention and taking notes in his math class explains why he often was unable to complete his homework assignments.

Some students recognize that they have difficulty paying attention in class. In order to compensate for any material they missed in class, they often go home and fill in the gaps by themselves. Caroline admitted that she spent many nights working on math homework by relying on a combination of what she remembered from class and what she figured out from the textbook. During her focus group session, she explained:

We had the big textbooks and they had all the information inside, so I could just…say, “Okay, this is how you do this.” The [new textbook]…doesn’t really show that. So that’s part of my problem, because I don’t pay attention in class, and the textbook’s not helping me anymore. (personal communication, March 11, 2014)

Due to recent changes in the curriculum, the school district has purchased a different style of textbook for students to use. Apparently, the math textbook does not provide the type of support students need to aid them in completing their homework. Because students ignore valuable information discussed in class and are unable to use their textbooks for help, they feel discouraged when they attempt to work on their homework assignments.

4. Ask no questions. These students revealed that they were reluctant to ask questions before, during, and after homework assignments. They were often eager to hurry and begin their
homework as soon as teachers finished their lessons. Generally speaking, once teachers conclude their lesson, they usually allow a few minutes for students’ questions before they issue the homework assignment. During this wait time, students said that they seriously contemplated whether they should or should not take a chance and ask a question. During her focus group session, Maria described what happens when students ask questions in class, “Everybody wants to get, like, the work finished, and whenever people keep asking questions, it gets on everybody else’s nerves, and then they get ticked off at the person who’s asking questions” (personal communication, March 13, 2014). Students fear their classmates’ reactions and often prefer to stay clueless rather than friendless. Because of this choice to avoid asking for clarification, they are often unable to complete their homework; they do not know what to do.

Students do not feel comfortable asking for individual help; they sense frustration and bitterness from their teachers. During her focus group session, Maria explained why she does not ask questions, “Cause…if you go and ask the teacher a question, she’s kinda rude about it, so you don’t want to go and ask her anything ‘cause you don’t want to get yelled at” (personal communication, March 13, 2014). Students would rather stay confused and risk not finishing their homework than tolerate their teachers’ offensive reactions to their questions. During her focus group session, Rachel discussed how she feels when she asks for help, “She makes you feel like she doesn’t want to help you. It makes you not want to even try to do the homework” (personal communication, March 11, 2014). Other students reported similar reactions from their teachers. During his focus group session, Jon complained:

I mean, there’s a woman who knows how to do all of this, but she’s sitting in her secluded little damp cave in the corner of the room [at her desk]. It’s a very unpleasant thing, to go and talk to her and ask her for assistance because, um, if you do it more than once in a class, she will be very upset with you, wondering why I don’t understand, why I don’t get it. It’s difficult in that class when you want to ask questions. (personal communication, March 11, 2014)
Students feel conflicted about what to do. If they ask questions when teachers are still conducting class, they risk ridicule from their peers. If they ask questions when teachers retire to their desks, they risk criticism from their teachers.

Some students remain quiet in class and wait until later to seek help. Later they use the Internet, see a tutor, consult other teachers, or ask their peers. During her focus group session, Hannah suggested, “I think people just don’t feel like asking questions from the same person…that sometimes they want to get other sources” (personal communication, March 13, 2014). By approaching other sources, students are able to avoid embarrassment. Unfortunately, students are not always able to find solutions to their problems from other sources. In the end, they remain confused, and their homework assignment remains incomplete.

When all else fails, students accept defeat. Students who have been through the motions before convince themselves that there is no help for them and that they will continue to struggle through their classes. In her essay, Nicole explained what happens when she has questions about her homework, “I probably won’t do it because I have no idea what I’m doing, and I don’t want to bother someone for help when they have other things to do that are more important” (personal communication, March 13, 2014). Students who identify with Nicole not only have given up asking questions during class but also feel their questions are not worthy of answers. Students feel that their questions are a bother to others and that their needs are unimportant.

Students complained that they did not receive enough instruction during class to understand how to complete their homework assignments. They blamed their lack of proper instruction on too much preparation for standardized tests, cookie cutter lessons, and too few examples. Students also complained that they are unable to retain the information presented to them in class. They argued that their teachers move too quickly from concept to concept and do
not provide enough opportunities to revisit previous information learned. Students are bored and often lose focus in class, creating gaps in their knowledge since they do not pay attention. Students are uncomfortable asking questions because they are afraid of ridicule from peers or teachers, and they feel their questions are a waste of someone else’s time. As a result of these homework experiences, students feel that they are not academically prepared to complete their homework assignments.

Resist the Unnecessary.

Even though some of these students completed their homework, they confessed to taking shortcuts. Instead of completing their homework assignments, students often copy someone else’s. Sometimes students do not turn in homework; they say they forgot their homework. On other occasions, they say the homework would not have helped them anyway. Some students even believe they do not need to do homework.

For example, Hannah’s tweet in Figure 4.6 shows her indifference toward a homework assignment that requires reading sections in her history textbook. The tone of her tweet does not indicate sincere concern. Although she begins with “Oops,” she is not surprised; she never intended to read the textbook. Her journal entries are evidence to many other nights when she indicated that she had no desire to read in her history textbook. She believed her notes from the lectures contained enough information to prepare her the test and saw no point in reading.

Figure 4.6 Oops. Didn’t Read
In Stephanie’s tweet in Figure 4.7, readers read her request for “anyone” to give her answers to the study guide. She claims she is too busy to complete her homework. By reminding her classmates that the assignment is due tomorrow, she creates a sense of urgency. She circumvents her homework responsibilities by asking to copy answers. She shows no shame in making her request, since she publicly announced it on a social media site that she knows her teacher (the researcher—not her algebra teacher) even reads.

![Figure 4.7 Study Guide I Need It](image)

1. Copy homework answers. These students admitted to copying homework as a method of completing assignments. In fact, at no point during the many responses collected throughout this study did a student ever equate copying with cheating; they use the word *copy* but never the word *cheat*. Copying has become so commonplace that students see it as standard practice toward negotiating their way through their homework assignments.

For example, during her focus group session, Stephanie shared, “Like, most of my friends play video games and I usually do my math and they’re like, ‘Oh, can I copy the math?’ and I was like, ‘Yeah, I guess,’ and I give it to ‘em” (personal communication, March 14, 2014). Stephanie was well aware that some of her friends never attempted their homework and spent their entire evening playing video games. Even though she spent her time struggling to complete her homework, she gave her work to them. Students who complete their homework willingly share their answers with their classmates, seemingly without question or hesitation.
Another way students circumvent their homework obligations, especially when they are assigned novels to read, is by seeking out answers via the Internet. The internet offers many resources for students. Websites such as www.sparknotes.com, www.pinkmonkey.com, and www.shmoop.com provide plot summaries and analyses of books, short stories, dramas, etc. Instead of spending hours reading and analyzing challenging texts, students take the shortcut. They quickly read the summaries and analyses, and come away feeling knowledgeable and prepared for class. Not only does the Internet provide quick information, but it also provides entertaining video presentations.

Whereas the aforementioned websites offer a shortcut alternative to reading novels, video presentations are an even quicker shortcut. The videos require no printing, no annotation, no reading. Students can just sit back, listen, and watch. For example, Jon shared a channel on www.youtube.com, an Internet site that provides a place for anyone with Internet access to upload videos, called Wisecrack. The Wisecrack channel, which carries the claim that you will “learn your ass off,” is home to shows such as Thug Notes, which provides educational videos. (Due to the use of profanity, the videos are not appropriate for K-12 classrooms.) The host, Sparky Sweets, Ph.D., offers viewers brief but entertaining and insightful summaries and analyses of various works of literature and philosophical theories. For example, he begins his discussion of Arthur Miller’s The Crucible with:

Things ain’t right up in 1692 Massachusetts where Reverend Paris baby girl Betty in bed straight clocked out. See, last night Paris peeped Betty freakin all pagan-like…and now word on the street is witchcraft be involved. And the uptight peeps of Salem ain’t havin none o’dat. (Bauer & Salamon, 2013)

Although the Internet provides useful information that students can incorporate into their learning, students often forget that these sources should be used as supplements to and not replacements for the original texts.
During her focus group session, Amy admitted visiting a website on the Internet that provided her a summary of *The Great Gatsby*, instead of reading the novel itself. During the conversation, Stephanie admitted, “That’s what I did” (personal communication, March 14, 2014). For many students, using the Internet is a tempting option.

Other students do not waste time pursuing their classmates’ work or searching Internet websites. Students have learned to investigate the contents of their textbooks. They realize that some texts provide the answers to questions and problems in the back matter. In fact, during her focus group session, Catherine dismissively shared, “Um, like, in biology. We had bookwork the other day, but they had the answers in the back of the book, so...” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). Students skip the step of working out the problems or answering the questions by themselves. They immediately turn to the back of the book and copy the answers.

Students know they should not copy the answers. They identify that one of the purposes of homework is to provide practice, and they know that practice helps increase retention of new information. During her focus group session, Hannah explained that “homework is not effective or it doesn’t work ‘cause students just copy it...every single day” (personal communication, March 13, 2014). In other words, she witnessed her classmates copying homework answers daily instead of practicing or applying the skills they learned in class on their own. Hannah discussed the problem of students copying homework in her essay, arguing that students are “under so much pressure, many are compelled to just copy their homework from another student, neutralizing what homework is supposed to do for the individual” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Hannah’s phrase “neutralizing what homework is supposed to do” indicates her awareness that homework is “supposed to do” something.
During her focus group session, Amy also discussed students copying homework:

Probably half the kids in the junior class just copy, which is good for them cause you get the 20 out of 20 or the 15 out of 15, but when the test comes, that’s 100, 120 point test…you don’t know what you’re doing. So it’s not beneficial in the end. (personal communication, March 14, 2014)

In other words, students admitted that when they consistently copy answers from other sources and submit the homework as their own work, they may score “A’s” on their homework grades, but they risk struggling through their tests. They recognized that since they did not apply themselves or familiarize themselves with the material, they may have put themselves at a higher risk of unsuccessfully performing the tasks required on their tests.

Students know that teachers use homework to assess whether or not students are struggling with skills taught in class. They also know that if the majority of students provide evidence of their struggles, their teachers would address their problems. Unfortunately, they continue to copy answers and turn in homework that presents the façade of student mastery. As Aaron revealed during his focus group session, “Well, some [students] get the answers from people who actually do the work, stuff like that. So you wouldn’t know if they know [how to complete the assignment]. A lot of them just don’t care” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). In other words, in their minds, homework is not a true reflection of student learning.

2. Forget homework. Teachers frequently ask their students, “Why didn’t you do your homework?” As previously discussed, students often complain that their lives are hectic, and they often respond, “I forgot.” Students use this excuse all the time. While some may honestly forget, many others conveniently choose to forget.

Caroline often appeared preoccupied with her obligations to school, home, and extracurricular activities. She tried to keep up with her school work, but often failed to turn in her homework assignments. During her focus group session, Caroline explained, “I forget about
even if I have one [emphasis added] day to complete it. I have the worst [emphasis added] memory” (personal communication, March 111, 2014). She continued to explain her problem. She said that if she heard her teachers announce a homework assignment, she did not pay much attention to it. If her teachers mentioned it again, she began to recognize there is something she needs to do. If her teachers mentioned the assignment again, she realized, “Hey, I should write that down.” She continued to explain that only after her teachers made multiple announcements and reminders about an assignment, did she feel compelled to actually write down a reminder. She then explained her organizational strategy of writing several notes and placing them in different places, hoping one of them would spark her memory. She concluded by admitting the notes did not always work, and she continued to forget about her homework (personal communication, March 11, 2014).

Although their focus group sessions were held on separate days, Nicole, who rarely ever had her homework completed, shared a similar story. Like Caroline, she also tended to ignore her teachers homework announcements unless they were repeated multiple times. During her focus group session, Nicole explained, “I do have time to do [homework]. It’s just by the time I get home, my mind is a clean slate, and I do not remember any kind of assignment” (personal communication, March 13, 2014). She also admitted that writing reminder notes was useless because she forgot to revisit them. Caroline and Nicole expressed frustration over their inability to remember their assignments. They cited their poor memories as the cause of their incomplete homework assignments. Other students, however, have a different problem.

When students claim they “forgot” to do their homework, they are usually stretching the truth. When faced with their homework assignments, they conveniently employ their selective memory, or choose to forget. During her focus group session, I asked Rachel why she forgot her
homework. As Rachel explained during her focus group session, “many teenagers simply forget about their homework” (personal communication, March 11, 2014). Not satisfied with her response, I probed more. I asked her why teenagers forgot about homework but remembered to check social media. She replied, “Because, I think, for a lot of people, it is something that we want [emphasis added] to forget…because it’s not something we enjoy” (personal communication, March 11, 2014). When faced with a choice between homework and enjoyment, students choose fun now and make excuses later. Although students are reluctant to complete homework assignments because they are not fun, they are even more inclined to ignore homework assignments that they feel do not help them.

3. Homework does not help. Students expect their teachers to make informed decisions when assigning homework. They do not want to spend their time on pointless busywork. They have no patience for assignments that seem unrelated to the lesson, and they resent boring assignments.

As a result of their previous experiences with poorly designed assignments, students have developed negative opinions of homework. As Caroline wrote in her essay, “Though homework could be beneficial, I believe it is mostly pointless” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Her opinions of pointless homework stems from assignments that she feels have never improved her ability to solidify the information she learned in class.

Students prefer homework assignments that are more “give” than “take.” In other words, they want homework to “give” them practice applying their new skills, not “take” away time they could have spent on other activities. For example, Rachel recorded in her homework journal, “Chemistry. Finish a worksheet. I did it because I understand how to do it and it was easy. However, I feel like it was useless because it didn’t help. It felt like busywork” (personal communication, March 11, 2014).
communication, February 25, 2014). Along the same lines, Amy complained in her homework journal about Spanish II class, “I [wish] I didn’t have to waste so much time writing pointless crap….” (personal communication, February 18, 2014). Both entries record nights when these students were resentful of having to complete homework assignments that were so easy, they viewed them as pointless and a waste of their time.

Students are also annoyed by homework assignments that they find confusing and unrelated to their lessons. They grudgingly walk through the motions of completing their homework assignments, while constantly complaining and questioning the purpose of the assignment. For example, when discussing her Spanish homework during her focus group session, Stephanie vented:

Most of the time we have to translate paragraphs that are ridiculously long. Most of the time it has nothing to do with what we are learning. We have a vocabulary list that we usually do and then she gives us a paragraph and most of the time it has nothing to do with the words. (personal communication, March 14, 2014)

Her bitterness toward Spanish class is a direct result of dedicating too much of her time to homework assignments that have no meaning for her. She saw no connection between her class lessons and the homework assignment. She felt she had been given an assignment designed to waste her time, and she was angry about it.

Rachel voiced strong opinions about her homework experiences in her essay. She declared, “There has never been a time for me when homework has helped me learn what was taught in class. We are not only expected to understand and complete a lesson in class, but also have a completely different assignment to be done at home.”(personal communication, March 5, 2014). Her animosity toward homework stems from her perception that neither her homework assignments nor her school lessons complement each other. Her tone indicates she felt overwhelmed having to concentrate on multiple concepts that seemingly do not relate to each other.
When students do not view their homework assignments as supplements to their class lessons, they see no point in attempting to complete them. As Rachel revealed in her homework journal, “I have homework but I will not do it. I will copy the work and answers. I do not understand how to do the work at all. This homework assignment is pointless because it only confuses me more” (personal communication, February 24, 2014). Rachel’s journal entry expresses her resistance to attempt her assignment, her stratagem to copy answers, her inability to complete the required tasks, and her negative opinion of the assignment. Students often complained of having homework experiences that elicited responses similar to Stephanie’s. In addition to being pointless, students also view their homework as boring.

Students are unenthusiastic about homework assignments they deem boring. Even if they believe the homework assignment is important, they still resist it. According to my students, any assignment that includes repeating a task over and over again eventually becomes boring.

For example, during her focus group session, Rachel discussed why she hates Chemistry homework, saying, “Because it’s tedious and monotonous. It’s the same thing over and over and people get sick of doing the same thing over and over so they just stop” (personal communication, March 11, 2014). Students do not understand why so much replication is necessary. As evidenced in Rachel’s response, once students tire of repetitive tasks, they desist.

Continuing her description of boring assignments, Rachel also discussed reading assignments. During her focus group session, Rachel complained, “When I have to read a chapter out of the textbook, I feel like I am having to reread the same paragraph over and over until I actually understand what I read and remember what I’ve read” (personal communication, March 11, 2014). Because she found herself having to reread, she found textbook readings frustrating and tiresome.
Equally disenchanted with the idea of reading from her history textbook, Catherine shared her reaction to “read the chapter” style homework assignments. During her focus group session, she admitted, “Uh…sometimes, like, my history…I won’t read because it’s so [emphasis added] boring. I just fall asleep while I’m reading” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). Catherine already knew she would have to fight to stay focused while reading textbook chapters. She decided from the moment the assignment was announced that she would not comply.

4. I do not need homework. Students often view homework as something they do not need to do. Some students believe they already know enough of the material to score well enough on a test. Other students believe they do not need to know the material taught in a class, thinking they will never need it in the future.

When students feel confident in their knowledge of a subject, they often choose to skip the homework for that subject and move on to other tasks. As Hannah explained in her essay, “[students] may not feel like they have enough time to sit in a quiet place and do three hours of homework on material they already know” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Students rarely spend their time studying because they think it is fun. Rather, once they feel they are prepared, they are ready to move on to something else. In her homework journal, Hannah wrote, “I’m not studying for this because we read it in class. It was a simple read, and our study guide was relatively easy. It’s common sense to me. I have more important work to do for other classes” (personal communication, February 18, 2014). Because she had more pressing work, she placed studying for something she already knew at the bottom of her list of priorities.

Rachel’s homework journal revealed similar sentiments. In one entry she wrote, “AP European History. Read chapter. I will not do this. I have not done it all year. I do not do it because I don’t have to. I listen to lecture and pass the test” (personal communication, February
Rachel did not study because her history assignments were not rigorous; they did not force her to think, but instead, just recall or repeat information.

When students recognize the exact same questions on a test and its study guide, they tend to place less value on the class and exert less effort on homework assignments. In another journal entry, Rachel wrote, “Anatomy. Study for test. I did the study guide in class which has the exact questions from the test so there is no point in studying” (personal communication, February 25, 2014). These entries illustrate occasions when students did not feel that their homework assignments were necessary. These entries also indicate that the class assignments were not challenging enough for the students to feel the need to study.

When students ask the question, “When am I ever gonna use this?” they are seeking a rationale for focusing their attention and learning. If they cannot recognize how new information will benefit them, they tend to consider it useless.

During her focus group session, Stephanie explained, “I don’t do my assignments because I don’t think I need to be in that class. I didn’t want to take Biology II. I mean, I just make a high enough grade so I can keep my GPA up” (personal communication, March 14, 2014). In other words, since she could not justify why she needed to know the information taught in Biology II, she seldom devoted time to homework assignments and studying.

Jon and Aaron echoed Stephanie’s sentiments when they spoke of their math class during their focus group sessions. Jon shared, “It’s [algebra] not something that you really need to know [emphasis added]” (personal communication, March 11, 2014). Later, Aaron complained, “…and, like, algebra, I could care less. I just wanna get through it and pass the class. Cause I’m not gonna use that” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). Jon and Aaron were scheduled for focus group sessions of different days, yet they both expressed the same opinions. Because
they could not relate the concepts they learn in math to any real-life situations, they determined that algebra was useless and decided to exert minimal time and effort toward their class assignments and homework assignments.

Given the students’ responses in this section, it appears they frequently return to school without having completed homework assignments. Instead of spending time on their homework, they often copy the answers from someone else. Students legitimately and conveniently forget to complete their homework, and others avoid homework because they say it never helps them. At times, students feel that they are already prepared for class, and they do not need to spend time on homework. Some students believe that the information their teachers force them to learn and the homework their teachers assign them will never be useful to them in the future. Because of these homework experiences, students resist homework assignments they consider unnecessary.

**Homework Can Be Meaningful.**

Although students complain about homework assignments, they know homework can be significant to their learning experiences. Students realize they, alone, are accountable for their homework. They realize the importance of balancing their obligations in order to complete their homework. Students also admit that some homework assignments can be helpful.

1. Students are responsible for homework. Maria’s tweet in Figure 4.8 illustrates her dedication to completing her homework assignments. Pulling an all-nighter means she is going to stay awake and work until she finished her assignments. Her picture shows her on the floor, with her school books and supplies around her. She shapes her hand in the thumbs-up position, all indicating she is ready to begin. Although she ends her tweet with a sarcastic tone, “Fun fun!” she is working hard to fulfill her obligations to her classes and maintain her grades.
Figure 4.8 Pulling an All-nighter

In her tweet, featured in Figure 4.9, Maria writes with sarcasm. She is quite irritated to know that she has a long night before her, re-working history assignments. Somehow, there was a mix-up, and her work disappeared. The history teacher told Maria she must complete the assignments and submit them the next day, so he could grade them before the grade period deadline. If she did not submit the work on time, all eight assignments would count for zero credit and her class grade would drop significantly. Maria reported that this emergency homework assignment kept her awake until 2:00 A.M.
Figure 4.9 Thanks History Teacher

Students acknowledge that they are accountable for their homework assignments. They know what happens if they do not complete their homework assignments by the deadline. They know what happens when they do not practice the material recently attained or when they do not prepare for tests, or the next day’s lesson.

For example, Nicole wrote in her essay, “The student is solely responsible for completing homework. If they choose not to, they suffer the consequences” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). In other words, if you turn in zero work, you receive zero points. If you do not practice, you do not learn. Aaron made an interesting point when discussing homework and applying the word responsible to his understanding of it. During his focus group session, he explained:

Well, I’m not saying that you’re doing [homework] to be responsible. I don’t do homework so it will help me be responsible. I’m saying the homework itself is what will make you be responsible. It’s not really your choice. You have to be responsible for it because nobody else is going to be. (personal communication, March 12, 2014)
He was adamant about properly attributing the notion of responsibility to homework. He argued that the obligation to complete homework falls directly on the shoulders of students. The students must accept the task and complete the job.

At no point during his focus group session did Aaron describe homework as something he enjoys doing. In fact, he argued, “As far as worksheets to go over the material, I don’t wanna do that. I will [emphasis added] do it because it’s practice, but I wouldn’t have fun doing it” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). Although he may be reluctant, he will meet his teachers’ expectations and complete his assignments. Similarly, during his focus group session, Jon admitted, “If I need to do something, I’ll have it done” (personal communication, March 11, 2014). He succinctly acknowledges that if he sees a need, he will complete the task.

2. Make responsible decisions. The students in this study also recognized that the act of completing homework while also balancing other obligations helped them make responsible decisions. Unlike the previous section that described the situations that force students to struggle with dividing their time between their homework and other obligations that exist as part of students’ fast-paced lives, this section describes the ways that students’ homework obligations push them to make responsible decisions within the context of controlling their own lives.

For example, Hannah wrote in her essay, “If he/she does what their [sic] supposed to, homework teaches them responsibility and self-discipline as well as giving them a sense of independence” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). In other words, homework challenges students to avoid giving in to temptations. Students argued that these responsible decisions often lead to the development of positive character traits and work ethic, and once they prove to themselves that they can stay focused, they can enjoy a sense of freedom.
Most of the students in this study agreed that homework assignments forced them to learn how to manage their time effectively. In her essay, Catherine explained, “Managing all of their tasks can help to develop time management skills. Overall, students will grow to show initiative and to be more independent through managing homework” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). She sees homework as a way to inspire students to show “initiative” and begin effectively managing their time.

Later in her essay, Catherine continued, “If used correctly, homework allows students to take on the responsibility of completing something by a certain time and the responsibility of figuring out what they need to work on to better themselves at something” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). In other words, homework not only forces students to meet deadlines but also to discover their weaknesses and work on improving themselves.

Hannah also agreed that homework aids students in developing necessary life skills. In her essay, she explained:

Students may feel they don’t have time, but that is when homework helps to teach responsibility and a good work ethic that will be needed later on in their life. They need to learn how to manage their time and responsibilities. That’s half the purpose of homework. (personal communication, March 5, 2014)

Hannah had experience feeling overwhelmed while trying to fulfill multiple responsibilities at the same time. She knew what happened when students survived the hectic pushes in life; they experienced success. She argued that homework is necessary because it challenges students to manage their time effectively.

In her homework journal, Stephanie records an occasion that shows what happens when students begin to feel overwhelmed by their homework:

I dont [sic] have time for all of this. I have to get a job to pay bills cause my parents barly [sic] work and I need to pay for a car. How can I manage all of this. But I must
write the outline by tomorrow. I have to start reading my book. And voc. [define vocabulary words]. (personal communication, February 25, 2014)

She begins her entry by complaining that her homework is unmanageable and that it prevents her from obtaining a job. As she complains about her parents in her next sentence, it is unclear whether they barely work because they have no prospect of employment or because they have a poor work ethic. Her next comment illustrates her worry that she cannot cope, sounding like she is on the brink of giving up. In her next sentences, however, she lists the tasks she needs to finish. It seems as though she is creating a “to do” list, mentally preparing herself to take action.

During his focus group session, Aaron admitted that fulfilling his obligations to both his homework and his job force him to schedule his time. He explained, “Like, I have to like plan out, when I’m gonna do homework, on what days, and…if I have to do it before work or after work, or if I don’t have work. So [homework] definitely helps me with that” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). Aaron realized that because he has to work, he must think ahead to make sure his work schedule and homework time do not conflict with one another.

Also realizing the importance of scheduling her time for homework and other obligations, Rachel wrote in her essay, “The teacher handed us our worksheets and we immediately started working to finish our assignments before we went home…we both had chores and work, and other homework for other classes” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Rachel explained that she and her classmate usually have limited time after school to work on homework, finish their household chores, and tend to their siblings. They showed initiative by acting responsibly and beginning their assignments as soon as they could, saving time for other tasks.

3. Helpful homework. The students in this study admitted that some homework assignments could be helpful. They valued the extra practice that homework provides them. In her essay, Catherine explained, “The saying ‘practice makes perfect’ applies to [homework],
because the more you work on a subject and apply yourself, the better you become at it, and the less of a chance you have to forget” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). In her essay, Maria expressed the same opinion. She explained, “Students are unable to perfectly retain information in its entirety just from hearing a lecture. Further activity such as homework is required for increased retention of the subject matter” (personal communication, March 5, 2014). Students recognize the need for homework that provides reinforcement of material learned in class.

Although students recognize the need for homework assignments that provide opportunities for them to practice and apply their new skills, they also argue that teachers should use good judgment when creating and assigning these homework activities. In his essay, Aaron explained his opinion of homework. He wrote:

If a teacher is preparing her students for a test and assigns work to do in class and study at home, I find this type of homework acceptable. This is benefitting the students by letting them build their confidence in the subject rather than sending them home blindly with [20] questions to do. (personal communication, March 5, 2014)

Aaron complained about struggling for hours to complete his math homework. His negative experiences with his homework made him doubt his abilities. He wanted teachers to allocate class time for students to work on their homework. He asserted that allowing students to work on homework while they are still at school would help them build enough self-confidence through their practice that they could go home and finish working independently.

When asked an open-ended question about homework assignments that are reasonable, Nicole wrote that “assignments pertaining to the most recent lesson with one or two questions more difficult than the rest, but not so much that intervention is needed so the student can find the solution themselves with what they have learned” (personal communication, January 17, 2014). Nicole sees the value in challenging students on their homework assignments.
disapproved of homework assignments that were so difficult that students must seek help outside of their classrooms and ask others for assistance.

Students rarely recalled occasions when homework helped them. During his focus group session, Jon shared:

Every once in a while, we’ll have a really good homework assignment, where I feel like, “I actually learned something from this.” I understood a lot of the things [the teacher] was saying in class, and the assignment helped me to have a firmer grasp on the material taught. Um, it’d be a lot better if that happened every time, but I’m just happy it happened once. (personal communication, March 11, 2014)

Jon’s recollection reveals a history of being assigned poorly designed homework. Interestingly, among the many homework assignments he had ever done, the faint memory of one positive learning experience stuck out in his mind. He was glad to have it and wished for more.

Similarly, Hannah recorded an occasion when she had a positive homework experience. She wrote, “Chemistry. 5 problems on Boyle’s law worksheet-simple and short, not overwhelming at all but a good review on the new skill from today. If I wouldn’t have done this, I probably would’ve forgotten how to do it.” (personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Even though she had a worksheet for homework, she said it was not too difficult and a “good review.” Like Jon, Hannah was not opposed to all homework assignments. Students look forward to homework assignments that offer some challenge and review of the lesson learned, while also providing them opportunities to feel successful.

The students in this study knew that homework was their responsibility. They also knew that balancing homework with other obligations challenges them to make responsible decisions. Although they complained about homework, they considered some homework assignments helpful and realized that completing homework can be meaningful.
Conclusion

This chapter began with a rich description of my data analysis procedures, which included organizing and preparing the data, reading through the data, analyzing the data, coding the data, and generating descriptions. Next, I described how I interpreted meaning from the data and presented the findings in a table. In the next section, I discussed the strategies I employed to ensure the validity of my findings, which included confirming biases, triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, member checking, rich description, including discrepant information, and establishing an audit trail.

In the next section, I introduced the findings of this study by providing readers two figures that contained the conversations and comments students presented on two occasions as they worked on homework and prepared for a test. Within the figures, I provided captions that explained what the students’ tweets meant. The purpose of these figures was to illustrate the shared experiences of these high school students struggling with their homework. Next, I presented the findings of this study by organizing them into four themes. Excerpts of students’ tweets introduced each theme, inviting readers to share individual student’s homework experiences. I subdivided the themes into categories, and within each category, I provided explanations and evidence to support my findings. In the next chapter, I present a summary and discussion of my findings. I also present my recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter begins with a quick review of the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, and study design. The discussion continues with a summary of the findings as they either respond to the research questions, or imply further interesting conclusions. These findings are also accompanied by an explanation of what this study offers the body of literature on homework, and recommendations for addressing the findings of this study. Finally, this chapter concludes with suggestions for further research.

My own teaching experience has been the impetus for this study. Regardless of the current topic of conversation among those seeking to respond adequately to students’ educational needs, homework is nearly always part of the discussion. In my introduction and literature review on the topic of homework, I examined the various viewpoints of homework as described from adult perspectives, i.e. parents, administrators, teachers, researchers, policy makers, etc. Even though students are the ones actually required to “do” the homework, their perspectives are underrepresented in the literature.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to address the disproportionate representation—or lack thereof—of students’ voices regarding homework in scholarly and public conversations about homework. This study was designed to provide rich description of my APE3 students’ homework experiences and the ways these experiences have shaped their views of homework. Through the theoretical framework of constructivist theory, this study represents the ways students’ personal perspectives shape their ideas of truth and objective knowledge, allowing them conscious or unconscious authority to assign their own values and constructions of meaning (Crotty, 1998).
Data were collected from a sample of ten students enrolled in an 11th grade APE3 class—nine of them were categorized as 11th grade students, and one was categorized as a tenth grade student—enrolled at a rural public high school. The students provided input via essays, a questionnaire, open-ended questions, homework journal entries, focus group sessions, and Twitter tweets. These data collection sources were designed to allow this study to address the following research questions:

1. What are students’ experiences with homework?
2. In what ways have these experiences shaped students’ views of homework?

The data were analyzed using a combination of suggestions from Creswell (2003) and Maykut and Morehouse (1994) for organizing data chunks, using constant comparative method, and inductive category coding.

**Summary of the Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore students’ homework experiences and discover the ways their experiences have shaped their views of homework. Table 5.1 illustrates the findings of this study, and the section below provides a summary of these findings.

**Discussion of Struggling to Divide.**

Sallee and Rigler (2008) claimed that students are overworked and overstressed. The students in this study confirmed this claim by describing their struggles to devote the time necessary for both successfully completing their homework and fulfilling other obligations. Students argued that they experienced stress and anxiety from trying to handle various interruptions, avoid distractions, and endure long assignments, while still finding time—even going so far as to sacrifice their recreational time—to complete homework assignments and maintain
Table 5.1 Responses to Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are students’ experiences with homework?</th>
<th>In what ways have these experiences shaped students’ views of homework?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students worry and stress over trying to divide their time between homework completion and other obligations.</td>
<td>Students view homework as something that unnecessarily lowers or inflates their grades. Students view homework as cumbersome, stressful, and tiring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students struggle to complete their homework assignments because they claim they are not academically prepared.</td>
<td>Students view homework as a struggle because sometimes they barely know what to do. Students view homework as only preparation for tests. Students view homework as confusing and difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students resist homework assignments they consider unnecessary.</td>
<td>Students view homework as not worth doing, so they will often just copy the answers. Students view homework as unimportant, pointless, useless, and boring. Students who know the information view homework as common sense and a waste of time. Students view homework as something they don’t need to know or don’t want to know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students realize completing homework is meaningful.</td>
<td>Students view homework as something they will do if they have to. Students view homework as a way to teach students how to manage their time and be responsible. Students view homework as a way to increase retention of a subject or to re-teach themselves lessons. Students view some homework assignments as confidence builders because they are not overwhelming.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
their GPA. Although some students admitted they were able to control how they spent their non-school time, others complained that they had little to no control of their after school hours.

Those students interested in attending college after they graduate from high school worried about meeting the GPA requirements of their chosen school. They realized that graded homework assignments factored into their overall class grade, and they worried about what would happen if their grades slipped. According to Marzano and Pickering (2007), homework assignments provide independent practice, whether students attain fluency or not, and many of the students in this study were resentful that their teachers assigned grades to their practice work. Other students took exception to being assigned homework when they were confident in their knowledge and ability to apply skills taught in class. They claimed these assignments were a test of obedience and a waste of their limited time. Students admitted that they reluctantly submitted to their teachers’ homework demands because they feared low class grades.

Most students reported that after-school time was filled with distractions and interruptions. Some students confessed that they were their own problem. Once they began reading through their social media sites—browsing, posting, and “creeping” (learning about friends’ lives by reading their postings and status updates; acceptable because the person posting gave the “creepers” access to this information)—they admitted to wasting hours of valuable time they could have spent completing homework. The literature review conducted for this study did not reveal any studies examining the role social media plays in students’ homework experiences.

Other students complained that after school, they must shift from their role as student into their role(s) as caretaker, cook, housekeeper, etc. Although Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) and Van Voorhis (2004) advocated a nontraditional homework strategy called “interactive homework,” designed to benefit students and families, the dynamics of some of these students’
households do not lend themselves to Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS), which encourages families to become involved in their student’s learning. If a home has more than one student, how much time is available for each? What happens in households where the parents work during the evening hours? The responsibilities that accompany these roles, not to mention the demands of extra-curricular activities, occupy the majority of students’ after-school time.

Even though Newt Gingrich (1994) professed that all American students should have at least two hours of homework each night, the students in this study disagreed. These students complained that some of their teachers consistently assigned homework that consumed an excessive amount of time. They also complained that their teachers never seemed to coordinate or plan their homework assignments together. Completing homework for multiple teachers has become an overwhelming task, and most students became exhausted due to trying to complete long homework assignments by their due dates.

In order to meet their deadlines, students often had to sacrifice their personal or recreational time. Kohn (2007) suggests that teachers should assign homework only when there is a strong possibility that the assignment will be beneficial; otherwise, students’ after-school hours should be their own. Most of the students in this study validated Kohn’s assertion when they expressed bitterness at the thought of not experiencing any enjoyment. Because they were exposed to schoolwork during the day, they felt overworked by enduring further exposure to schoolwork during non-school time.

According to Gill and Schlossman (2003), students experience physical and emotional effects from overwhelming homework loads. Although the students in this study did not reveal any extreme cases of entering therapy because of their homework struggles, they did report that they experienced stress as a result of their struggles to find time to complete their homework.
Some students admit they caused their own problems when they lost track of time while playing on social media sites. Other students argued that because they are subject to other obligations, they are unable to decide how to divide their after-school time.

**Discussion of Not Academically Prepared.**

Most of the students in this study complained that on many occasions they felt unprepared to tackle the academic tasks assigned for homework. Vatterott (2014) asserted that changes in the curriculum, specifically the increased rigor, point to a need for teachers to rethink the practice of homework. Buell (2000) argued that the place for students to do independent schoolwork practice is at school, with teachers present to assist them when they struggle. The students in this study agreed, claiming that because they often did not receive enough instruction during the school day (examples and explanations), they were unprepared to work independently on their homework. These students also complained that the pacing of lessons in some of their classes was too fast, which often was a source of their confusion. Other students admitted that they had difficulty staying engaged during class lectures and instruction, nodding off to sleep and missing valuable information that they would later need. Ironically, these students admitted to being confused and needing extra help, yet they also admitted that they resisted asking questions for fear of embarrassment in front of teachers and peers.

Students who complained about not receiving adequate instruction argued that some of their teachers only provided one approach to understanding new skills or information. They claimed that their teachers modeled only one example, or explained one process, for applying the new skills or information. Much of the literature asserted that students need more than one opportunity to be exposed to new material (Cooper, 1989; Corno, 1996; Corno & Xu, 2004; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; USDOE, 2003), and students spoke to these claims when they
criticized their teachers for not meeting students’ needs by providing more instruction. They felt abandoned, struggling for hours on impossible homework.

These students also condemned the nationwide push to prepare students for standardized tests. Kohn (2007) explained that standardized tests scores have become the accepted means of determining student achievement, and the students in this study discussed feeling pressure to perform well on these tests. They asserted that they constantly worry about the one-size-fits-all standardized tests they must take, complaining that the educational system has placed too much emphasis on standardized tests. They also complained that suffering through subpar instruction and lessons are not effective ways to fulfill their individual needs.

Some students admitted to falling behind in their classes because they were unable to learn at the fast-paced rate at which some of their teachers moved through lessons, and unable to complete the homework assignments their teachers assigned. Gill and Schlossman (2003) discussed the ever-growing push to improve students’ test scores, and the students in this study argued that some of their teachers were pushing them to move too quickly. They reported that their teachers explained the pressing need to cover as much material as necessary within a limited amount of time. The students added that their teachers seemed to believe that increased exposure to material resulted in increased test scores. Conversely, these students argue that they did not have enough time between lessons to firmly grasp any true understanding of the information presented before being introduced to new concepts and ideas. The students worried that without truly learning, hardly anyone would see increased test scores.

When students were not engaged in their teachers’ class lectures, they did not pay attention or take notes, which would have helped them complete their homework. Not paying attention in class caused them to miss information presented. Just as some of the 11th grade
students in this study discussed their disinterest in their history class. Buijs and Admiraal (2013) observed disengaged 11th grade history students in their study. Buijs and Admiraal sought to design assignments that would encourage student engagement, suggesting that lack of class participation was “detrimental” to student’s learning (p. 777). Marzano and Pickering (2007) asserted that effective teachers create opportunities for students to become immersed in new concepts, and the students in this study supported this assertion when they blamed their teachers for not presenting more engaging lessons.

Sallee and Rigler’s (2008) study asked if homework assignments were biased, favoring students with preexisting understandings, and divisive, widening the gap between students who do and do not struggle in class. Some students in this study experienced frustration since certain textbooks (namely math) have ceased to provide the examples and explanations they need to help them do their homework. Because the students ignored valuable information discussed in class and were unable to use their textbooks for help, students often felt discouraged when they attempted to work on their homework assignments.

Salle and Rigler (2008) and Corno and Xu (2004) asserted that active class participation, where discussions encourage students’ questions, improves students’ questioning and listening skills; unfortunately, the students in this study reported only two classes where they were encouraged to ask questions. They claimed that their other classes were either lecture or teacher driven formats, rarely eliciting students’ input. Students confessed that they were very hesitant to ask questions in class because they feared their classmates’ reactions. Students were also afraid to ask questions because they feared some of their teachers’ reactions. Although some teachers did not mind answering questions, students were well aware of the teachers who routinely responded rudely to students who showed a need for extra assistance. Some students
chose to seek assistance later, from someone else. Others decided to dismiss the issue and never ask their questions, making homework more challenging than the teacher originally designed.

Students who were underprepared were unable to complete their homework. Like many of the students in this study, the participants in Lange and Meaney’s (2011) study struggled with their math homework. The researchers questioned the appropriateness of sending students into the “potential conflict zone of procedural mathematics homework” (p. 49), arguing that terribly negative homework experiences could result in long term emotional damage. While the students in this study never described their conflict zone in the same terms as Lange and Meaney, their description of their math homework experiences reveal a legitimate struggle. Whether they did not receive proper instruction, they were too disengaged with the lesson during instruction, or the pacing of the lessons was too fast, students consistently complained that they were not able to actually learn: They described their learning as memorizing. Even though many of these students admitted to occasions of feeling confused, they often refused to concede to any urge to ask questions, for fear of humiliation.

Discussion of Resist the Unnecessary.

Bennett and Kalish (2006) describe busywork as assignments that have no other obvious reason than taking up students’ time. As students in this study discussed their resistance to homework assignments, they similarly defined homework as “pointless,” “useless,” and “a waste of time.” One way students circumvented their homework responsibilities was by seeking answers from other places instead of “doing” their own assignments. Other students were less proactive, admitting that they simply did not “do” the homework because it did not help them or that it was not significantly important to them.
According to the literature review, teachers can use homework as a way to gauge students’ progress, offer feedback, and provide clarification (Cooper, 1989, 1994; Corno, 2000), yet Sallee and Rigler (2008) claim that students copy answers from their classmates. The students in this study unanimously admitted that they, or someone they knew, had copied homework answers before. In fact, students copy answers to their homework so often that teachers can never be sure which students independently completed their own homework. Students openly copied answers from their classmates, admitted to reading/viewing book summaries and analyses online, and confessed to looking at the answers in the back of some of their textbooks.

Some students expressed a concern regarding their inability to remember their homework assignments. Other students confessed that they purposely forgot their homework assignments. In each case, whether due to memory failure or a more conscious disregard, students often claimed that they forgot their homework. The literature did not reveal any studies regarding the relationship between students’ memories and homework experiences.

Some students resisted completing their homework because they said that it would not help them. They claimed that their homework assignments have never offered any opportunities for them to increase their learning nor provided them adequate practice or help. In response to similar concerns, Mayer (1999) suggested that English teachers consider a nontraditional homework strategy called Cognitive Strategy in Writing (CSIW) which calls for students to respond to “think sheets” that guide their thinking and help them organize their ideas for their writing activities. This strategy is effective for many students because teachers design the “think sheets” according to students’ needs.

Fisher and Frey (2008a) claim that students who are unsure of the requirements of their homework feel little motivation to attempt the task, often calling it “irrelevant.” Similarly, some
of the students in this study agreed, attributing their incomplete homework assignments to their opinion of whether the information will ever be pertinent to their future. If they determined that a certain lesson contained information that they deemed totally unrelated to their lives, they labeled it “useless” or “pointless” and refused to comply.

Many of the students in this study admitted to resisting homework assignments for various reasons and in different ways. Some students sought shortcuts and copied answers from outside sources instead of taking on the responsibility of producing answers on their own. Others chose to forget about or avoid their homework.

**Discussion of Homework Can Be Meaningful.**

Throughout the literature, researchers promoted homework as a means of promoting students’ self-discipline, independence, personal responsibility, and self-direction (Cooper, 1989, 1994; Corno, 1996; Corno & Xu, 2004; Fisher & Frey, 2008a, 2008b; USDOE, 2003), and many of the students in this study agreed, admitting that some homework assignments have the potential to create meaningful learning experiences. They acknowledged that they are responsible for turning in completed homework, and in order to do so, they knew they had to make prudent decisions about prioritizing their responsibilities. Students also admitted that, if material were clearly presented and assignments were thoughtfully designed, homework could actually be beneficial to their learning.

Bempechat et al. (2011) claimed that homework promotes students’ sense of responsibility for their learning, and the students in this study agreed. They knew that they were ultimately responsible for making responsible choices and thoughtfully completing their homework assignments. Although they might have chosen to copy answers, to take shortcuts, or to resist completing any homework, students understood the risk they took when they chose to
avoid engaging with their homework assignments, such as earning zero points on graded assignments and struggling on comprehensive tests. While these students admitted that they did not always make responsible choices with their time, they also confessed that if they had a task to do, they often put forth the effort to complete it.

Fisher and Frey (2008a, 2008b) claimed that when students take responsibility for their learning, they enter into the independent phase of learning. The students in this study confirmed this claim when they spoke of their sense of independence that accompanied their successful homework experiences. Once they thoughtfully completed their homework assignments, they spoke of experiencing a sense of independence and feelings of accomplishment. Students admitted that having to balance their homework responsibilities helped them develop time-management skills and a stronger work ethic.

Although these students seemed to complain about most of the homework their teachers assigned, they actually did not mind completing the few homework assignments that they considered helpful. According to the literature review, students who successfully complete their homework develop positive attitudes become motivated, and feel optimistic about their abilities (Bempechat et al., 2011; Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Schwartz, 1907). The students in this study proved these assumptions to be correct when they reacted positively to homework assignments. They admitted that their homework helped them better understand what was taught in class, and they appreciated homework assignments that offered them what they considered reasonable challenges. Although they confessed that they had little objection to homework which requires them to synthesize and apply the knowledge they garnered from class, they adamantly stated that they took issue with homework assignments that required hours of concentrated focus and study.
Cornó and Xu (2004) advocated the notion that homework can help students develop valuable independent qualities, and the students in this study agreed. They knew that homework helped them to develop a sense of responsibility for the tasks they were assigned. They also knew that the pressure of having to meet homework deadlines taught them to be self-disciplined, to make prudent choices with their time, and to prioritize their required tasks. Students recognized that certain homework assignments have the potential to be helpful, and they regretted that they have not had more positive and successful homework experiences.

Many of the findings of this study support arguments in the literature review, such as the potential for stress, frustration, and exhaustion brought on by long homework assignments. These students demonstrated valuable adult qualities such as responsibility and strong work ethic when they took ownership of their learning and stayed up late working on their assignments. They agreed that homework should provide opportunities for students to practice and reinforce newly taught material and concepts, and, as the literature revealed, they resisted homework assignments they deemed busywork, pointless, a waste of time, etc. The students in this study also provided support for the implication that students regularly copy homework answers. Together, these various experiences with homework cause many reactions among students.

Implications

Even though this study echoes many of the common claims about homework, it does so in a much more powerful way. A declarative sentence stating that students struggle with homework only places a fact in readers’ minds. This study was interested in discovering more than just facts; it was designed to describe experiences. This study offers an examination of these students’ social aspects of homework in multiple settings, including digital ones. It offers readers the chance to observe the exact words the students in this study used when they
expressed themselves and to see the images they shared with others, such as sitting on the floor with their books and notes spread out around them. Readers can examine the memes, emoticons, and emoji the students in this study chose to represent their thoughts and can observe these students’ interactions with each other through their replies or “favorites.” Readers are able to calculate the amount of time these students devoted to their studies and witness them sneaking to study with a book light under the covers of their beds. These descriptions do not simply provide facts to the reader; they invite readers to share in the students’ experiences.

The responses garnered in this study allow readers to see layers of support regarding the struggles students regularly experience. For example, while another study may make the claim, “Students are unable to complete their homework,” I am only provided evidence through the language of the claim itself. After reading the responses from my students, though, and regarding their inabilities to complete their assignments, I was able to realize that their struggles were real. They truly were unable to complete their homework, and their reasons include not understanding the lesson the teacher presented, not being engaged in the lesson and missing necessary information or feeling too embarrassed to ask questions for clarification or understanding.

In fact, near the end of the data analysis phase of this study, I shared my data chunks with a colleague. I wanted to see if the ways I grouped the data made sense to someone outside of my study. After he read the data, I noticed a distressed expression on my colleague’s face. He placed the data on his desk, leaned forward in his chair, furrowed his brow, and said sadly, “I feel awful for these kids.” He shook his head and then continued, “Ya know, it really makes you stop and think. What are we doing to these kids?” (M. Stilley, personal communication, September 4, 2014). I felt the exact same way. Reflecting on all the articles, studies, and books that I have read regarding homework, I realized that they provided readers information, or factual
data. However, this study offers readers something different: knowledge, or acquaintance with factual data. This notion of acquaintance is what awakens a sense of consciousness within readers and opens them to self-reflection.

**Recommendations**

While much of this study has encouraged me to reflect and reconsider the ways I design and assign homework in my classroom, it has also guided the ways I, as a parent, approach homework with my sons. On many occasions I remind myself not to interfere with their independent practice, letting them make their own mistakes. I also remind myself to be patient with them—that just because they were born from an English teacher, they were not born with an aptitude for reading, writing, and spelling. This study has given me the courage to question the homework assignments my children’s teachers send home, sometimes even sending a note back saying, “He did what he could. We will finish the rest over the weekend.”

With the notions of consciousness and self-reflection in mind, the next section offers education stakeholders some recommendations for addressing areas of concern as voiced by the students in this study. Although not all of these changes will work for every situation, they are meant as suggestions for working toward improvement. As the students in this study illustrate, many of their experiences with homework have been negative, resulting in many negative views of homework. If policy makers, school administrators, teachers, and parents resist ratifying any policies, enacting any changes, learning any new strategies, or making any adjustments, students’ homework experiences will likely continue.

1. Students complained they do not have time to retain information due to the pacing of their lessons. According to the students in this study, the pacing of their teachers’ lessons is often too accelerated. Because policy makers (namely those at the district level) usually
establish the pacing guideline for teachers to follow, these policy makers should investigate students’ concerns about their inabilities to keep up in their classes and also review the pacing guidelines they have established. If they discover a need for adjustments, they might consider consulting veteran classroom teachers who, due to their years of experience providing instruction and gauging students’ rates of learning, are more aware of the average time necessary for effective instruction and student learning to occur.

Additionally, policy makers should develop district-wide homework guidelines that describe effective homework strategies and suggest limitations for amount and frequency of homework assignments.

2. Students worry about their homework grades affecting their overall class grades. With this in mind, school administrators should consider establishing a school-wide policy for graded homework assignments. This policy should limit the effect graded homework has on students’ final class grades. For example, some school administrators have instructed their teachers that homework assignments, class participation, and other informal assessments should count no more than 10% of students’ final class grades. By setting this standard, class grades will not be inflated or lowered to questionable extremes.

3. Long homework assignments are exhausting for students. School administrators should provide exemplars of effective homework assignments suitable for each of the various subjects and grade levels taught at their schools. They should set homework policies addressing suggested times allowed between assigning and collecting homework, frequency of assigning homework, and projected amount of time necessary for students to complete homework.

School administrators should also design a system for teachers to coordinate their homework assignments, allocating both time and space for teachers to meet and providing a
place for them to record and share the dates they assign homework. This would allow teachers to actually realize the total amount of work their students are required to do and to determine if students are unfairly overloaded. Teachers could understand their students’ struggles and better coordinate assigning homework with the other teachers on the faculty.

School administrators should be aware of the homework that their teachers assign, and should sometimes even “do” some of the homework assignments. By immersing themselves in their students’ work, they can measure assignments’ levels of difficulty, and evaluate if they are appropriate for independent practice. School administrators could also determine if completing the assignment before the deadline is realistic.

Teachers should assign homework that occupies a reasonable amount of students’ time. For example, Cooper (1989) suggests ten minutes per grade level for high school students. If teachers are unable to reduce the size of certain assignments, they should at least consider reducing the frequency of the long assignments they assign.

4. Homework infringes on students’ recreational time. In their study, Watkins and Stevens (2013) described a high school setting in which the principal recognized his students’ need for more time to work on homework assignments. Similarly, school administrators should consider including a study hall/homework period during the school day. This would not only provide time for students to work on homework but also allow access to teachers for assistance.

Teachers should only assign homework when they determine with reasonable certainty that the assignment is essential to promoting students’ learning. If they determine an assignment is not immediately crucial, they should not assign it and should instead allow the students to spend their non-school time fulfilling other responsibilities or however else they choose.
5. Students feel that they do not receive adequate instruction to work independently on homework. School administrators are ultimately responsible for the level of instruction their teachers provide to their students. School administrators should make frequent classroom visits to monitor, observe, and evaluate the ways their teachers are providing instruction. When necessary, they should offer their teachers advice and suggest strategies to improve their classroom instruction by offering professional development opportunities for their teachers, and providing them with fresh, innovative, and effective teaching strategies.

Teachers should independently examine the effectiveness of their teaching. Instead of becoming complacent, they should constantly rethink their instructional strategies. They could ask an administrator, or other teacher, to observe and offer advice regarding their instruction. They could also track their teaching via self-reflection journals, or ask students for input. Teachers should determine if their teaching strategies need improvement, and seek out better teaching practices through their professional organizations, subject-specific professional journals, workshops, conferences, or other professional development opportunities.

6. Confused students resist asking questions to help them understand the information they will need to complete their homework. Teachers should work to create a classroom environment that fosters and encourages students’ questions. Teachers should establish classroom protocol for students’ questions, explaining to students that impatience and intolerance are not acceptable qualities for their classrooms. Teachers should also reconsider the ways that they interact with their students, and determine if they are providing their students with positive learning experiences, and allocating time for students to approach them, privately and before submitting their homework, with questions regarding their homework struggles or needs for clarification.
7. Students say homework does not help them. With this in mind, teachers should only design and assign homework assignments that are helpful, not busywork. The assignments should relate to the class lesson and make sense to the students. In addition, teachers should consider providing summaries or notes from their lesson to accompany their students’ homework. In providing notes, teachers ensure that students have a reference, or reminder, to assist them as they attempt their homework.

8. Students believe they do not need to do homework. Teachers should provide justifications for the homework they assign so that students understand how the assignments are applicable to them now and possibly in their future. By explaining the relevancy of their homework assignments, teachers can increase the likelihood that their students will consider their homework assignments necessary. Also, teachers should assign homework according to students’ needs. For example, if students are struggling, teachers should provide extra opportunities for those students to reach success. Conversely, if students exhibit mastery, they should not be required to complete the same remedial tasks of struggling students.

9. Students consider some homework beneficial. Teachers should consult their students and determine which types of homework assignments they find most beneficial to them. Teachers could then design other assignments, offering similar challenges or eliciting similar results. They should also offer choices when assigning homework. For example, teachers could allow students to choose seven out of ten questions to answer. Offering choices invites students to become involved in making decisions about their homework, gives them a shortened assignment, and allows them to skip questions that they consider too challenging without fear of a lowered grade for incompletion.
10. Students have difficulty working on homework due to distractions and interruptions occurring at home. Parents should consider the intellectual struggles that their children experience while working on their homework assignments and try to provide an environment conducive to homework completion. Parents should limit the distractions at home and allocate time for homework. They should also determine their children’s needs for easier homework completion, such as a quiet workspace, paper, writing utensils, a computer, computer programs (such as word processing and slide show presentation programs), Internet access, reference resources, etc. and try to make those items accessible to their children. Parents should also reassess their priorities, asking themselves questions like, “Which is more important for my children right now, washing dishes or studying for a test?” In doing so, they should reevaluate what they consider immediately necessary and what they consider can wait until later. (Hopefully they will determine that their children’s educational needs outweigh the need for washing dishes.)

11. Students forget about their homework. Parents should take time to talk with their children about what they are learning in school. They could also check to see if their children’s teachers record their class lessons and homework assignments on a web page. In helping their children remember their assignments, parents could teach their children to use a planner or notebook to record and count down due dates for projects or tests.

    Only in a perfect world would every homework experience be pleasant for every student. In fact, only in that perfect world would every homework assignment be designed, assigned, completed, and assessed effectively, all in a harmonious effort that enhances students’ learning. The world we (researcher, study participants, and readers) live in is not perfect. The reality is
that we are humans, with shared and independent life experiences, resulting in our differing views about many situations in life, including homework.

Even the students in this study represented their differences when describing their homework experiences, including those who take short cuts and read supplemental material; copy answers from texts, Internet, or classmates; need assistance with their assignments, study all night long independently or with classmates; begin working at the last minute; forget how to do the assignment; or avoid completing homework assignments. These students’ various ways of approaching their homework is based on their previous experiences. While seeking to understand their homework experiences and the ways these experiences shape their views of homework, I became aware of issues that education stakeholders should consider for the purpose of meeting students’ needs.

Suggestions for Future Research

As studies approach their conclusion, many researchers begin to contemplate the ways their study would look if conducted differently. Likewise, if this study were replicated and conducted at other public schools, particularly an inner-city or urban setting, at private schools, with students from different grade levels, and/or conducted using a longer data collection period, what would the findings reveal? Understanding the homework experiences of larger samples of students from various settings has the potential to better inform policy makers, administrators, teachers, and parents as they make decisions about students’ non-school time.

As the study neared its conclusion, some of the students in this study expressed sadness, saying they would miss the sense of community that we established by using Twitter. They reported that they enjoyed talking to each other and felt that they were not alone in their homework struggles. Researchers should examine the ways social media affect students’
homework experiences, thinking about both its usefulness and hindrance, and the ways in which it might possibly offer opportunities for different types of homework assignments.

Additionally, some students mentioned memory. Whether they legitimately suffered from memory lapses or just poor organizational skills, some students reported they were unable to remember they had homework tasks to complete. Some students complained that they were unable to remember how to complete their homework tasks. Others mentioned that they wanted to forget about their homework. The lapse in memory could be better explained by a study seeking the ways students’ memory affect their homework experiences. Educators could use this information to develop ways to promote more continuance in students’ memory and improve their homework experiences.

All of the students in this study described copying homework answers as an everyday occurrence. Educators could benefit from understanding the ways students use copying as a stratagem for circumventing their homework assignments. For example, they could develop ways to detect copying, design assignments too difficult to copy, or learn to use students’ copying to their advantage.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study represent a bleak view of these students’ homework experiences. As a follow-up to their stressful evenings “cramming for their test,” the tweets in Figure 5.1 provide a look at what happened when the test was over.

In Hannah’s first tweet, the phrase “brain feels fried” is a way of expressing her mental exhaustion. The school day at PHS concludes when a bell sounds at 2:30 P.M., and within minutes, Hannah sent out a tweet marking the end of a tiresome day. Rachel sent out a tweet shortly after 9:00 P.M. expressing her excitement at having no homework. If you click on her
hashtag of “#thankyou,” you will linked to other Twitter users’ tweets also expressing “thankyou.” A few minutes after Rachel’s tweet, Hannah tweeted that she was glad she only had to study for one class, as indicated by her smile emoticon at the end of her sentence. She also predicted that she would have a “good” weekend since she did not have math homework. She included two emoji at the end of her tweet.

After her test, Hannah is tired of thinking.

A “hashtag” (pound sign) is used on social media sites, to turn a phrase into a metadata tag, similar to a hyperlink, connecting to other posts with the same phrase.

After her test, Rachel is excited to have a homework-free night.

Emoticons, similar to emoji—representing the writer’s thoughts or feelings, are formed by using a keyboard to create an image. By typing a colon and a closing parenthesis, Hannah creates a smile, indicating she is happy.

Figure 5.1 After the Test

The first emoji shows a happy face with hearts, indicating that she is happy and loving the idea of no math homework, and the prospect of a good weekend.

What if students were able to have more positive experiences during their non-school time? What would happen if their teachers shortened or limited homework assignments?

Throughout this study, these students complained about the amount of homework their math teacher assigned. They claimed that the homework was too much, too difficult, and too frequent.

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What would it look like if the students in this study actually had a week free from math homework? Believe it or not, they did. Figure 5.2 presents their reactions to their math free nights.

Because these students did not have math homework, they were elated. Rachel used multiple question marks and exclamation points, showing both her disbelief and excitement. She also posted an image of a shocked face, with eyes wide open, mouth open in the shape of the letter “O,” with hands pressed against both cheeks. She then questioned if her experience was really happening, and again used multiple question marks and exclamation points to indicate her disbelief and excitement. She ended her tweet with a happy face emoji.

Hannah stretched her spelling of “algebra” by adding extra a’s and emphasized it with an exclamation point, both of which indicate that she is yelling. She added an emoticon smile, indicating her yell was a happy expression. She complimented her math lesson and ended her tweet with a universal hand gesture for “Okay.”

Hmm…Why did homework suddenly stop? Was it because the teacher knew the kids were tracking their homework via Twitter?

Figure 5.2 What If: Teachers Didn’t Assign Tons of Homework
(Figure 5.2 continued)

Aaron is glad to have what he considers a homework-free weekend, yet he reminds his classmates to read the novel for APE3. Is reading not homework?

Hannah enjoyed a stress-free weekend.

Rachel was able to enjoy her weekend because she had no homework to worry about.

Stephanie was happy because she was not overloaded with homework.

Aaron makes a joke about not having any math homework for a whole week.

Hannah is surprised she has not had any math homework all week.

Aaron’s APE3 teacher “favorite,” or approves of his comment.
Aaron blatantly stated that his math teacher told the class to tweet that they did not have any math homework and wrote the celebratory expression, “yay.” He then wrote the word “ONCE” in all capital letters, which indicates yelling in the Internet world, to specify that this is the only time he has not had math homework all year.

On Sunday, April 6, Aaron, Hannah, and Rachel expressed their gratitude for a weekend free of stressful homework. Rachel had no homework and was really excited. Hannah and Aaron had a few homework assignments, but did not complain. Interestingly, Aaron reminded his classmates to read the novel assigned for their APE3 class. Since they were not overloaded, stressed, or frustrated by their homework assignments, they felt comfortable working on them. When homework overloaded them, their tones were not so contented.

Throughout the week, the students still experienced the shock of not having any math homework. They continued posting happy comments about not homework, even joking that they should become suspicious of a conspiracy.

All along, students reported being told that their homework assignments were essential to their learning. Suddenly, their homework loads were adjusted—not just lightened but totally lifted. What happened to their homework? How would these students view their homework, even their school experiences, if they could feel this relieved each day?

Furthermore, what if teachers were able to adjust deadlines once they realized their students needed more time? Some of the students in this study complained that they were often pressed for time and that they wished for extended deadlines. The tweets in Figure 5.3 illustrate the conversation I held with some of my students during their vacation from school regarding any homework assignments they had over the break from school.
I was curious to know about their homework assignments over the one-week long spring break.

Reflecting on Aaron’s April 6 tweet about not having homework but remembering to read, I posed this question.

Aaron considers the APE3 homework because he has to journal about his readings. He also has homework for his Spanish class.

His APE3 teacher “favorited” his effort to complete homework over spring break.

Aaron is reporting that he is working on his homework, counting it down.

Hannah has not started any homework.

Rachel realizes she hasn’t started her homework, and time is running out. “Ughh!” means she is frustrated.

Hannah realizes time is running out and she needs to begin.

Figure 5.3 What If: Teachers Could Extend Deadlines?
Aaron described his homework assignments for APE3 and Spanish. A few days later, Hannah admitted that she had not worked on any homework over the break. A couple days later, Rachel admitted the same, and expressed frustration over having not started her homework yet. Hannah then resigned herself to having to start her homework, since she realized that her time would soon be occupied by other obligations. At this point, I realized that I really had no intentions of grading their journals immediately after they submitted them on Tuesday. I decided that I should allow the students a couple days extra to work on their journals instead of the journals sitting on my desk for those same couple days, waiting for me to grade them.
Not all of my homework assignments are so urgent that their deadlines cannot be extended. After I extended their deadline, the common tweeters, Rachel, Maria, Aaron, and Hannah, responded by clicking “favorite” after my tweet and/or tweeting their relief. They spread the news to their classmates, and on Friday, the students all turned in their homework.

The purpose of this study was to examine students’ homework experiences and discover the ways these experiences shape the ways students view their homework. Because students are underrepresented in the professional literature and public conversations, this study provided a space for students’ to share their stories. By listening to the concerns expressed by the students in this study, the adults who make the decisions for all students might feel compelled to seek out and employ more effective strategies that could improve students’ homework experiences.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living human subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

---

**Applicant**: Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-C, listed below. When submitting to the IRB, once the application is completed, please submit the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at [https://sites.1siue.edu/wp/oirll/human-subjects-screening-committee-members/](https://sites.1siue.edu/wp/oirll/human-subjects-screening-committee-members/)

---

**A. Complete Application Includes All of the Following:**
(A) A copy of this completed form and a copy of parts B thru F.
(B) A brief project description adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1 & 2.
(C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
   *If* this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment materials.
(D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 1 for more information.)
(E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: [http://hrp.nhtraining.com/users/login.php](http://hrp.nhtraining.com/users/login.php)
(F) IRB Security of Data Agreement. [https://sites.1siue.edu/wp/oirll/files/2013/07/Security-of-Data-Agreement.pdf](https://sites.1siue.edu/wp/oirll/files/2013/07/Security-of-Data-Agreement.pdf)

---

**1) Principal Investigator:** Elizabeth Yvette Stogner

**Dept:** College of Education

**Ph:** 225-964-9961

**E-mail:** estogner@lsu.edu

**Rank:** Graduate Student

**2) Co-Investigator(s):** Please include department, rank, phone and email for each.

*If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space*

**3) Project Title:** The Dog Ate My Homework: A Case Study Analysis of Students’ Perspectives of Their Homework Experiences

**4) Proposal? (Yes or No)**

   □ Yes, LSU Proposal Number

Also, if Yes, either

   ○ This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant

   OR

   □ More IRB applications will be filed later

**5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students):** 11th grade students

*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used (children <18, the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, etc.). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

**6) PI Signature:** Elizabeth Yvette Stogner

**Date:** 10/23/13

(no per signatures)

**I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changed, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

---

**Screening Committee Action:** Exempted [ ] Not Exempted [ ]

**Category/Paragraph:**

**Signed Consent Waived?** Yes [ ]

**Reviewer:** [Mathews ]

**Signature:** [Signature]

**Date:** 12/3/2013

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Student Assent Form

I, ____________________________, agree to be in a study to discuss my homework experiences and viewpoints on homework. I will have to answer a questionnaire, participate in focus group meetings, and record my homework experiences for a few weeks. I can decide to discontinue participating in the study at any time without consequence.

Student's signature: ________________________________ Age: ____ Date: __________________________

Witness*: ________________________________ Date: __________________________

(N.B. Witness must be present for the assent process, not just the signature of the minor.)

STUDY EXEMPTED BY:
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
133 David Boyd Hall
225-578-8692 / www.lsu.edu/irb
Exemption Expires: 12/19/2016
Parental Permission Form

Project Title: “The Dog Ate My Homework”: A Case Study Analysis of Student’s Perspectives of Their Homework Experiences

Performance Site: Doyle High School
20480 Circle Drive
Livingston, Louisiana 70754

Investigators: The following investigator is available for questions.
M-F, 8:00 A.M. – 2:30 P.M.
E. Yvette Stogner
Doyle High School
(225) 686-2318
Elizabeth.stogner@lpsb.org

Purpose of the Study: Document students’ experiences with homework and their viewpoints of homework.

Inclusion Criteria: Students who are willing to discuss and document their homework experiences and viewpoints of homework.

Exclusion Criteria: Students who are not willing to discuss and document their homework experiences and viewpoints of homework.

Description of the Study: During a six week period, the teacher researcher will gather information from participants regarding their homework experiences and how these experiences affect their perceptions of the purposes of homework. The researcher will collect information from questionnaires, essays, focus group discussions, assignment planners, and Twitter posts.

The questionnaire elicits responses regarding homework purposes; the essay presents two quotes on homework, and asks students to choose a quote and craft an argument; and the focus group discussions allow participants to collectively respond and share notions about homework experiences and purposes. Participants will record and comment on their homework assignments via daily planner and Twitter accounts.

Benefits: Students will benefit from a greater understanding of homework assignments and purposes. The study may reveal information regarding homework assignments that may assist teachers in creating more effective lesson plans and assignments.

Risks: There are no known risks.

Right to Refuse: Participation is voluntary, and a student will become part of the study only if both student and parent agree to the student's participation. At any time, either the subject may withdraw from the study or the subject’s parent may withdraw the subject from the study without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might
otherwise be entitled.

Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included for publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Financial Information: There is no cost for participation in the study, nor is there any compensation to the subjects for participation.

Signatures: The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding the study specifics to the investigator. This study has been approved by the LSU IRB. If I have questions about subjects' rights, or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu. I will allow my child to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Parent/ Guardian’s printed name: __________________________________________

Parent/ Guardian’s signature: __________________________________________ Date: __________________________

The parent/guardian has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I have read this consent form to the parent/guardian and explained that by completing the signature line above, he/she has given permission for the child to participate in the study.

Signature of Reader: __________________________________________ Date: __________________________

STUDY EXEMPTED BY:
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
130 David Boyd Hall
225-578-8692 / www.lsu.edu/irb
Exemption Expires: 12/19/2016
APPENDIX B: AP STYLE WRITING PROMPT

(Suggested time—40 minutes.)

Consider the distinct views expressed in the following statements.

“If we distrust the result obtained during the six school hours, it is hard to see just why more work at home by fatigued scholars should accomplish that miracle of training the will, which a mental discipline of six hours did not achieve.”

Hermann Schwartz

“When do students have time to read a book other than when it is assigned as homework? There is no time in school to read a book. …When else do students have time to write an essay or write a research report? In school, students may be able to write a few paragraphs, but it takes time to write an essay that is longer than a page. If it is not done after school, it won't be done at all.”

Diane Ravitch

In a well-organized essay, take a position on homework. Support your argument with appropriate evidence and examples.
### APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is part of a research study being conducted by a Ph.D. candidate from LSU. Any information you provide will be confidential & anonymous.

**Part I.** Please indicate with a check (√) to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>fully disagree</th>
<th>somewhat disagree</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>somewhat agree</th>
<th>fully agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Educators should effectively teach students within the class time.</td>
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<td>2. Homework develops positive work habits, character traits, and life skills that will extend into adulthood.</td>
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<td>3. Students become unnecessarily frustrated because homework assignments are so challenging and complex.</td>
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<td>4. Homework will establish effective work habits such as self-discipline, independence, personal responsibility, and self-direction.</td>
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<td>5. Households should have computers, Internet access, dictionaries or other reference sources for students to complete their homework.</td>
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<td>6. Homework plays an important role promoting America as a competitor on the international scene.</td>
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<td>7. Some parents, due to their own limited education, are unable to assist their children.</td>
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<td>8. Every student should be required to do homework each night.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Homework often interferes with students’ involvement in extra-curricular activities.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Challenging homework loads are a sign of increased academic achievement and successful schools.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Students are unable to satisfy all the adults who have created unattainable expectations.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Homework satisfies parents’ curiosities of the knowledge and skills their children are learning.</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Many students see homework as useless busywork.</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Homework provides an opportunity for parents to establish communication with their children.</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Students sometimes “borrow” their classmates’ worksheets and copy the answers.</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Homework does not necessarily help students gain knowledge.</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Many post-secondary educators rely on students’ past homework experiences to prepare them for further learning.</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Parents will complete their children’s homework.</td>
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</table>
Part II: Answer the following questions.

What do you believe are the purpose of homework?

How do you determine if you will complete a homework assignment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part III. Please indicate with a check (✓) how often you have homework that fits the description.</th>
<th>Never or IDK</th>
<th>A few times each semester</th>
<th>A few times every 9 weeks</th>
<th>A few times monthly</th>
<th>A few times weekly</th>
<th>Daily</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Homework that provides opportunities for you to solidify material presented in class.</td>
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<td>2. Homework that encourages you to apply skills you have learned.</td>
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<td>3. Homework that allows you to make connections and meanings for yourself.</td>
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<td>4. Homework that prompts you to elaborate on ideas discussed in class.</td>
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<td>5. Homework that offers extension opportunities for you to explore infinite options.</td>
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<td>6. Homework that encourages self-reflection.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Homework that teachers use to provide feedback to you.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Homework that teachers assign because they are unable to provide time in class for you to work.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Homework that builds your character and promotes your personal development.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Homework that helps you develop a positive attitude toward school and learning.</td>
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APPENDIX D: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

1. How should instructional time be spent?
   a. Teaching?
   b. Practicing?
   c. Discussing?
   d. Other?

2. What types of assignments are reasonable to complete at home? Why?

3. How much time in advance should be given to complete assignments outside of class?
   Explain.

4. Can all learning happen within the instructional time given for each class period?

5. If so, is it? If not, why not?

6. If you were a teacher, what would your homework policy be?
APPENDIX E: HOMEWORK JOURNAL

- Keep a record of your homework assignments for two weeks. (2/18/14 – 3/4/14)
- Most importantly, answer these questions each day you have homework.

***Are you going to do the assignment? WHY?***

(Your explanation of WHY is the most important part of my research. Treat this like a personal diary/journal and feel free to openly discuss the why.)

Additional responses are highly encouraged. To help you get started, consider the following:

1. What did the assignment asking you to do?
2. Do you see any purpose for this assignment? Why?
3. If you were the teacher, would you have given this assignment? Why? Why not?
4. What would you change about the assignment?
5. How did you feel while working on the assignment?
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Week 1-Friday Date: ________________
Week 1-Saturday Date: ________________

Week 1-Sunday Date: ________________
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Week 2-Saturday Date: ________________

Week 2-Sunday Date: ________________

Week 2-Monday Date: ________________
## APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Questions</th>
<th>Sample Probing Questions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you think of homework?</td>
<td>• Why is it a waste?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Why doesn’t it help you learn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you determine if you will complete a homework assignment?</td>
<td>• What types of assignments are “busy work”?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• How does a graded homework assignment compare to a non-graded assignment?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• How do deadlines affect your decision to do homework?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What types of homework assignments do you get?</td>
<td>• Describe the types of homework assignments that you get that help you learn.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Describe the types of assignments you think do not help you learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the purpose of homework?</td>
<td>• Does homework help you with time management?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does it make you responsible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you ever just decide you are not going to do any homework?</td>
<td>• Why do you avoid certain assignments?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Why are you unable to complete the assignments?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- If you are given 15-20 minutes at the end of class to begin working, why is your homework still not completed by the next class period?
- What happens when students ask questions in class?
- If you were given more instruction, how would that affect your ability to complete your homework?
- If you were given more instruction, how would that affect your desire to complete your homework?

Describe what happens when you sit at home to work on your homework?

- If you are able to remember to check your social media accounts, why are you unable to remember the homework assignments you have to do?
- How does that prevent you from doing your work?
- What do you need at home in order to do your homework?
- What types of responsibilities do you have around the house?
- What happens when homework interferes with your ability to fulfill your responsibilities?
APPENDIX G: TWITTER PROTOCOL

1. Each participant will create a new Twitter account. Only the people involved in the study should post. Do not tell anyone about your new account or name. We want to limit the followers list to ourselves.

2. After everyone has set up his/her account, we will compose a list of everyone’s Twitter account name. Once we all become followers of each other, we are ready to post.

3. For two weeks, tweet about your homework. Keep in mind that this is a time to speak freely about the homework assignment and your experience with it. You are not allowed to speak inappropriately about the school, administration, teachers, or staff associated with it. The focus of the study should be the homework experience.

4. Tweet whatever you want. If you can’t think of anything to say, keep the following prompts in mind when tweeting:

   a. How much time did you spend on homework tonight?
   b. How difficult was your homework tonight?
   c. Did you have any homework tonight? If yes, what was it?
   d. Did you choose to avoid homework tonight?
   e. If yes, what was it? Why did you avoid it?
   f. Did you have time for your homework tonight?
   g. Do you need help? Ask your followers for help.
   h. Did anyone tweet back and help you?
   i. Will you complete the homework yourself? Why?
   j. Will you simply copy someone else’s homework? Why?
APPENDIX H: PERSONAL INVENTORY

Write an essay that thoroughly discusses and/or explains the following 10 bullet points.

Introduction includes:

- Explain the dynamics of your family. For example, have you lived with both biological parents all your life? If not, with whom (when) and why?
- What schools have you attended? If you have moved, identify the locations of these schools and explain the reasons for moving.

Body includes:

- Explain how involved your parents are in your school work. Consider the following:
  - How often do they question you about school? What prompts them to ask?
  - Do they offer help personally or offer to obtain a tutor when you struggle?
  - What happens when you struggle in school?
  - Do they provide quiet time and adequate space to work on your assignments? Why?
- In what subjects do you generally excel? Why? How does this make you feel? (Does the teacher play any role in your ability to excel?)
- In what subjects do you generally struggle? Why? How does this make you feel? (Does the teacher play any role in your struggle?)
  - What are your obligations outside of school? Explain your involvement in these activities and if you are involved by choice?
  - Do you have hobbies?
  - Do you participate in sports?
  - Do you have a job?
Do you belong to other organizations which meet and require some of your time?

- Have your parents expressed certain expectations they have for you? If yes, what are they? If no, what do you think they might be?
- Are there punishments at your home? What types of punishments are utilized at your home? For what types of violations are punishments given? Do these events affect your abilities or efforts toward your education or studies?
- How would you describe yourself as a student? (Are you smart? Are you quick? Do you have intellectual gifts? What can you say about yourself?)

Conclusion includes:

- Is there a difference between what you want to do in life and what you will probably do in life? If so, why? If not, why?
VITA

Elizabeth Yvette Stogner has lived her entire life in Louisiana. After graduating from high school in 1989, she entered Louisiana State University and received her Bachelor of Science with a major in Secondary English Education in May 1993. She later enrolled in the Graduate School at Louisiana State University and received her Master of Library and Information Science in August 2002. She also became a National Writing Project teacher consultant and a certified student teacher supervisor in 2002. In 2004, she became a National Board Certified Teacher with a focus in English Language Arts/Adolescence and Young Adulthood. In 2008, she again enrolled in the Graduate School at Louisiana State University and began working toward her Ph.D. Later, in 2008, she earned a certificate of Education Specialist. In 2013, she renewed her National Board certification.

She has been employed as an English teacher since September 1993. Over the years, she has taught sixth grade English, seventh grade reading, seventh grade English, eighth grade reading, eighth grade English, high school English I, high school English II, high school English III, high school English III Advanced Placement, high school English IV, and high school fine arts. She still teaches in the public school setting and currently works with a local university as a student teacher supervisor. She anticipates receiving her Ph. D. in Curriculum and Instruction from Louisiana State University in December 2014.