

Perceptions of the Value of Homework: How Students, Teachers, Parents and Guardians Perceive, the Value of Homework as it relates to Academic Achievement

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Abstract

In this age of high-stakes standardized testing, it is important that students develop a deep understanding of relevant subject matter. In general, this level of understanding is not being achieved, according to recent test scores (Beaton et al., 1996). One plausible explanation for this underachievement is that too many students assign little value to the regular and consistent completion of assigned homework. As a first step in understanding why too many students underachieve academically, it is important that we understand how students, teachers, parents and guardians perceive the value of homework as it relates to students' academic achievement.

Keywords: *Value of Homework, Academic Achievement, Perceptions*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study will be undertaken to investigate how teachers, their students, and the students' parent(s) or guardian(s) perceive the value of homework, as it relates to deepening and broadening students' understanding of material presented in the classroom. The results of this investigation shall improve the lives and the academic experiences of students, teachers, and parents and guardians.

During the past one-hundred years, the attitudes of educators and the general public toward homework have changed several times (Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998). Early in the 20th century, in the late 1950s, and presently, homework is and has been regarded as a positive influence on a student's academic achievement. During this time period, homework has been considered important for several reasons: 1) homework is a means of disciplining students' minds, 2) homework is a viable method of increasing the rigor of a student's academic experience, 3) homework can lead to the improvement of students' scores on achievement tests, 4) because homework can lead to academic achievement, and 5) homework is a means elevating America's competitive position in an increasingly global economy. Conversely, in the 1940s and mid-1960s, homework was seen as inhibiting the development of students' problem-solving abilities and as adding excessive pressure on students to succeed.

Assuming that it is true that one's attitude affects one's behavior (Kraus, 1995), and that in upper grades (6-12) there is a positive relation between students' completion of homework and their academic achievement (Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998), it is important to understand the academic value that upper grade level students, their parents or guardians, and their teachers assign to the regular completion of homework.

2.0 Literature Review

For many reasons, the vast majority of secondary school teachers have traditionally assigned homework to their students (Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998). It is generally held that homework presents students with the opportunity to focus on, practice, and refine specific skill sets, which have been introduced, performed, and discussed in the classroom. Further, a teaching strategy that incorporates homework, well-designed lessons, and formative activities should develop within students a more complete and deeper understanding of a concept, principle, event, or topic encountered in a lesson than would a strategy that solely relies on in-class instruction and activities. Also, the act of working individually on homework can instill within students a strong work ethic, the ability to work independently and think individually, and enhance a student's sense of accomplishment and confidence. Group homework or projects afford students the opportunity to work collaboratively in a setting outside the classroom and without teacher supervision.

By assessing and analyzing students' assigned homework, teachers can discern individual and overall student progress in the following areas: mastery of skill sets, understanding of concepts, and achievement of the particular learning objectives within the current unit of instruction. Having insight into students' progress allows teachers to make informed decisions with regard to the pace of instruction, the effectiveness of activities, and the relevance of assignments. Given that homework is generally believed to be a positive factor in student achievement (Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998), many teachers and parents or guardians complain that far too many of their students do not complete their homework, do not complete enough homework to reap the benefit of the assignments, or produce work that is indicative of an unacceptably poor level of effort. This review focuses on research related to

how students, parents, guardians, and teachers perceive the value of homework as it relates to students' academic achievement.

2.1 Students' Perceptions

Traditionally, researchers have designed quantitative studies on the relationship between homework and student achievement in order to determine a cause and effect relationship. Conclusions from several studies dating from the 1960s through 1989 have varied greatly (1998). One of the leading names in, not just educational research, but specifically homework and academic achievement is Cooper. Known for his extensive studies in this field, Cooper presented his meta-analysis entitled *Homework* (1989) concluding that "the average high school student in a class doing homework would outperform 75% of the students in a no-homework class. "In junior high school, the average homework affect was half this magnitude" (p. 70). This conclusion is meaningful, yet still does not address question of attitudes toward homework in the minds of students. The research question pertinent to this section of the literature review deals with motivation to complete homework. What is the correlation between student attitude toward homework and academic achievement? Cooper in 1989 had not found a study linking academic achievement with student attitudes.

Cooper, Lindsay, Nye and Greathouse (1998) claim their study *Relationships among Attitudes about Homework* is the "first to incorporate attitudes into an analysis of the homework achievement link" (p. 72). Other studies examining the relationship between attitude and academic achievement would come later, but not in great numbers. One thing that has been clear not only given anecdotal evidence in the classroom, but in empirical terms in the work of Kraus is that "attitudes play an important role in determining behavior" (as cited in Cooper, Lindsay, Nye & Greathouse, 1998, p. 71). In order to determine the beliefs students have about homework, the Cooper, Lindsay, Nye & Greathouse (1998) study created an HPI (Homework Process Inventory). A version of the HPI was specifically designed for upper grade level students (grades 6-12). One of the questions asked in the survey were "In general how do you feel about homework?" and had the possible following responses: don't like it at all (scored 0); dislike it somewhat (scored 1); neither like nor dislike it (scored 2); like it some (scored 3); like it very much (scored 4)" (p. 74). Another question asked about whether the student thought that homework increases or decreases students' interest in school, and three questions asked whether the student believed that homework helps students "learn," "develop study skills," and "learn how to manage their time" (p. 74).

Interrelations to the responses to these questions ranged from .31 to .58. Other questions were asked concerning how much homework was assigned and how much was actually completed. The results from the HPI were used to compile a homework attitude scale ranging from 0-14 (0 being very negative to 14 being very positive). Student responses to the questions asked to develop the homework attitude scale resulted slightly below midpoint, 7 (1998). In order to correlate achievement to attitude, data from the standardized achievement tests for the State of Tennessee (Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program or TCAP) was used. The study examined relationships between homework behaviors and attitude and relationships between homework attitudes and achievement. The relationship between student behavior i.e. completed homework and attitude for upper grades was .31 (Cooper, Lindsay, Nye & Greathouse, 1998, p. 78). The relationship between student attitude toward homework and student achievement for upper grades was -.06 (p. 78).

To summarize, the study found weak relationships between the amounts of homework assigned and student achievement whereas the relationship between the amount of homework completed and student academic achievement was strong, especially at the upper grades. This supports previous findings of Cooper and others. The relationship between student behaviors i.e. completed homework and attitude for upper grades was quite strong (1998). "More positive student attitudes were associated with more completed homework and higher class grades." (p. 80). In order to make a more direct connection between student attitude and achievement, i.e. student standardized test scores, multiple regressions were necessary. And though mathematically, the correlation is weak, researchers stated, "Most notably, the regressions serve to underscore the importance of completion of homework by students as a positive factor in achievement even when other influences are controlled" (p. 81). The many relationships represented herein are not simple.

Another factor studied by not only Cooper, Lindsay, Nye and Greathouse (1998) but also Balli (1997) is parental attitudes toward homework and how they affect student attitudes. In contrast to Cooper, Lindsay, Nye and Greathouse (1998), the primary focus of Balli (1997) is to "examine parental involvement with children's homework from the children's perspective" (p. 3). This study of middle school students seeks to capture the perspective of the student. Balli cites a 1995 study to highlight three advantages of parental involvement in activities like homework "(1) modeling, (2) reinforcement, and (3) direct instruction" (as cited in Balli 1997, p. 4). In general, Balli (1998) concludes that parental involvement is a positive influence provided that two criteria are met: (1) appropriate parental strategies and similarities and (2) similarities in teacher/parent expectations (1997). Student perceptions of parental

involvement lend support to the empirical evidence found in the study: “Most students in this study perceived that parental involvement helps them do better in school...” (p. 11).

Student attitudes toward parental involvement are varied however. Lacina-Gifford and Gifford (2004), citing a Public Agenda article state that “almost half of parents reported having a serious argument with their children over homework, and a third of the parents reported that homework was a source of stress and struggle” (as cited in Lacina-Gifford & Gifford, 2004, p. 1). One fact remains consistent in empirical studies done by both Balli (1997) and Cooper, Lindsay, Nye & Greathouse, (1998); homework attitudes of parents influence homework attitudes of students. Relationships between attitude and behavior, and behavior and achievement are not simply isolated from other influences such as parental involvement, teacher attitudes as well as a myriad of other factors. Other important factors influencing student attitude toward homework not found in recent studies are students’ feelings about family time and the amount of work load they are responsible for. Lacina-Gifford & Gifford (2004) remind us that students perceive homework loads as an important factor in their personal lives.

Presently, current research strongly supports the general notion of students who complete homework experience higher academic achievement than students who do not complete homework. What is not presently firmly established by current research is a strong correlation, positive or negative, of student attitude toward homework and academic achievement. Present research in this area does not provide compelling evidence that has practical application for the classroom. Researchers in the field cite numerous variables that complicate the relationship between attitude and achievement thus compelling educators to turn to Teacher Action Research methods.

2.2 Parents’ and Guardians’ Perceptions

During the past one hundred years, the attitudes of educators and the general public toward homework have changed several times (Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998). Early in the 20th century, in the late 1950s, and presently, homework is and has been regarded as a positive influence on a student’s academic achievement. During these periods, homework had been considered important for several reasons: 1) homework is a means of disciplining a student’s mind, 2) homework is a viable method of increasing the rigor of a student’s academic experience, 3) homework can lead to the improvement of a student’s scores on achievement tests, 4) because homework can lead to academic achievement, and 5) homework is a means of elevating America’s competitive position in an increasingly global economy. Conversely, in the 1940s and mid-1960s, homework was seen as inhibiting the development of students’ problem-solving abilities and as adding excessive pressure on students to succeed. Based on reviews of surveys, questionnaires, and polls, dating back as far as 1916, of the opinions of students, parents and teachers regarding homework, Friesen (1978) concluded: Parents strongly favored homework for a variety of reasons. They felt that homework (1) improved grades, (2) stimulated interest, (3) helped develop initiative, responsibility, and self-discipline, (4) provided opportunity for independent study, (5) drew the home and school closer, and (6) provided preparation for further study (p. 11).

With the support of cited research, Peng and Wright (1994) state that, as a group, Asian American students have “higher achievement scores, lower dropout rates, and higher college entrance rates than other students” (p. 346). Further, Peng and Wright hypothesize that these outcomes may be a result of this minority group’s greater exposure to home environments and out-of-school educational activities that are supportive of learning. Central to this hypothesis is the notion that Asian American parents, in general, provide their children with “greater learning opportunities, assistance, and pressure for learning” (p. 346).

The assigned, investigated, measured, and analyzed variables in this cross cultural study were as follows: Demographics of The Family, Discipline and Effort, Parental Assistance, Educational Pressure/Expectations, Additional Lessons and Activities, Student Achievement. When related to student achievement, educational expectations for children had the highest correlation coefficient (.42). When compared to all other ethnic groups, Asian American parents had the highest educational expectations, as measured by expected years of education and level of educational attainment. On average, Asian American parents expected their children to complete between sixteen and seventeen years of education, and 80 % of these parents expected their children to eventually hold a bachelor’s degree (Peng & Wright, 1994). Given the educational expectations of Asian American parents and the fact that Asian American students participated in more educational activities than other groups, it does not seem unreasonable to infer that Asian American parents view homework as a positive influence on student academic achievement. This study concludes making several recommendations for parents concerned about their student’s academic achievement. Specifically, it is suggested that parents may wish to emphasize such academic activities as “doing homework, taking additional lessons outside of school, and going on educational trips” (Peng & Wright, 1994, p.351).

Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, and Greathouse (1998) incorporated measurements of students’, teachers’, and parents’ attitudes about homework into a relational study of attitude, amounts of homework assigned and completed,

and student achievement. The upper grade (6-12) level students' class grades were predicted by standardized test scores and the percentage of homework completed, as well as parents', teachers', and students' attitudes towards homework.

In this study, parents, students, and teachers responded to five questions designed to measure their beliefs about homework and three questions posed to measure their beliefs about specific effects of homework. For example, possible responses to the question, "Do you think homework increases or decreases students' interest in school?" were the following: decreases it a lot (scored 0); decreases it some (scored 1); does not make a difference (scored 2); increases it some (scored 3); increases it a lot (scored 4) (Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998). In general, parents expressed positive attitudes toward homework. Further, because this study was designed such that a specific student's response could be compared to the responses of both his/her teacher and parent or guardian, the study revealed a positive correlation between upper-grade students' attitudes towards homework and those of their parents'. Surprisingly, Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, and Greathouse (1998) claim, "This study is the first to incorporate attitudes into an analysis of the homework-achievement link" (p. 72). In their article they draw the following conclusion: A second practical implication of this study derives from its demonstration of the significant and stable role that parental attitudes play in shaping students' attitudes toward homework and on the grades of older students. School teachers and educational policymakers should interpret these results to mean that efforts to improve parent attitudes toward homework are likely to pay off. The lack of positive effect of homework for some students may be due, in part, to attitudes toward homework held by parents that impede, or at least do not support, their children's full participation, persistence, or commitment to completing assignments. If teachers are not aware that parent beliefs are linked to student homework performance, they may draw unwarranted inferences about the lack of value of particular assignments or homework in general (Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998, p. 82).

2.3 Teachers' Perceptions

The driving force behind the assigning of homework is, of course, teachers. Each teacher embodies unique reasons to incorporate homework into his/her curriculum. Whatever these reasons, there is a solid belief among middle school and high school educators that this aspect of a student's education holds benefits for everyone involved: the student, the parents/guardians, and the classroom teacher. This section of the Literature Review will examine the documentation of the existing perception of educators regarding the following variables: (1) the purposes and implied benefits of homework, (2) the designing of homework assignments, (3) the assessment of homework, and (4) the affective factor that teachers believe may considerably impact student completion of homework.

Consider first the many purposes of homework, which add value according to classroom teachers. Most of these out-of-class tasks are assigned with one of three purposes in mind: (1) practice, (2) preparation, or (3) extension. "Practice assignments reinforce newly acquired skills or knowledge; preparation tasks provide background information prior to delving into new curriculum; and extension assignments encourage higher level thinking by applying previous learning" (Eddy, 1984, n.p.). These purposes offer unique opportunities for a student to increase his/her knowledge base. Teachers may perceive practice assignments as those which allow a student the time to cement his/her understanding of new information that was gained during the current day's classroom instruction. It is possible that this previously learned skill will be used when scaffolding to the next level of course work; thereby, the teacher will deem it crucial that the student practice a skill prior to advancing to the next skill level which may build upon the previous. Teachers' understanding of preparation assignments may include those assignments which allow a student the opportunity to establish a framework in which to place information (or skill) that will be learned next in the curriculum. This may include readings, library research, or the collection of materials (Eddy, 1984). These assignments add value to the classroom by tapping into any prior knowledge that may exist relevant to the upcoming instruction.

Extension assignments may be perceived by a teacher as those which allow a student the opportunity to engage in individualized and creative learning. These homework assignments would be for students who have previously demonstrated mastery of the required skills and can, thereby, tap into their higher order thought processes. An extension homework assignment would be valuable when used as the culminating portion of an academic unit thereby allowing the teacher to assess a student's ability to use and build upon several previously acquired skills from said unit. An on-line search revealed a final purpose of educators and the assigning of homework, the attempt to satisfy and stay within the confines of a particular school's established homework policy. The importance of this purpose should not be overlooked as each classroom teacher is assessed by his/her administrator. These policies vary from school to school, but many of these policies are specific in stating the time that students should expect to spend on homework each week whether attending a private school or a public school. It is stated in the Henry Hudson Senior Public School policy that students should expect to spend at least 5 hours each week completing homework (Homework, 2005, Henry Hudson Senior Public). While at Ipswich School, middle schoolers are expected to spend

5 to 7-1/2 hours each week on homework, and high schoolers should expect to spend 7-1/2 to 20 hours each week on homework (Homework, 2005, Ipswich Middle School). Teachers are generally made aware of these policies and attempt to adhere to same by ensuring that the time required to complete his/her homework assignments in combination with other coursework assignments will not exceed the specified time allotment for homework. These policies reveal the time constraints that are in place to moderate the length of homework assignments, and, hopefully, urge classroom teachers to assign only value added assignments which will have the most efficient impact upon a student's learning.

Consider next the perceptions of teachers when it comes to the designing of homework. It is a commonly held perception of teachers that homework assignments be relevant, value-adding, and potentially inviting to the student. This may not be easily achieved for all educators. VanVoorhis (2001), a researcher who conducted an Office of Educational Research and Improvement sponsored study, found there were definite benefits when homework consisted of well-designed interactive assignments. These benefits were multifold and included the potential for improving family relations, attitudes toward the curriculum, and achievement. This shows us that it is not merely the quantity of homework assignments, but the design of the assignment that may truly add value to learning, which is our goal with this study. Paulu (1995) considers teachers' perceptions of the assessment of homework. "Students are more apt to complete assignments and advance their learning when they get consistent and constructive feedback" (p.18). This may not be a guideline that some teachers follow, but other teachers may not be taking the time to provide students with detailed evaluations.

A final consideration of this teacher-oriented section of our Literature Review was revealed in Paulu's guide *Helping Your Students with Homework*. Within this guide the perception of a current classroom teacher was revealed as, "Half the reason they (students) do the homework is because they like me. It's not always because they realize it's in their best interest" (p. 23). This is a perception that many teachers may not have realized and; therefore, some educators may not deem it important or necessary to have students like them. According to results of a recent study, "Teachers say that many students do not complete homework and that they need more instruction and encouragement in developing high quality homework assignments" (VanVoorhis, 2001, p. 4). This shows the dire situation of educators, students, and parents. And as stated earlier, we teachers are the driving force behind the assignment of homework; therefore, the burden of change lies with us. A further exploration of these issues will discover what changes need to be made and may also indicate how students and parents/guardians can share in the decision making process. How can educators, parents/guardians, and students come together to resolve this dilemma? A review of the literature related to students, teachers, parents and guardians' perceptions of the academic value of homework revealed that the assignment of homework is a pervasive teaching strategy in the United States. Moreover, the general public's attitude toward homework has cycled between positive and negative several times over the past one hundred years. Today, homework is generally held to have a positive value with regard to a student's learning, achievement, development of a strong work ethic, and time management skills. Further, students' attitudes toward homework may be affected by the views of their teachers and parents/guardians.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The method used in this investigation is teacher-originated action research, in which the teachers are the researchers as well as the research instruments. As the researchers will participate in the collection of data, conduct interviews, and review the responses of the participants, this study is phenomenological in nature (Mills, 2003).

Rationale for the Methodology. Democratic, equitable, liberating, and enhancing, action research is a viable method for discovering ways to improve the lives of children, understanding the effects that teachers, parents, and guardians have on children, and improving the design, development and implementation of excellent curriculum (Mills, 2003).

Procedure Used for Data Gathering and Analysis. During the first week of the current school year, all three groups—students, teachers, parents and guardians—participating in this study will respond to a questionnaire designed to ascertain and quantify the participants' beliefs and affective reactions to homework. This questionnaire will be similar to the one used by Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, and Greathouse (1998). This questionnaire will contain 8 questions and employ a Likert scale for scoring purposes. See Appendix A for a sample questionnaire containing the 8 questions posed to participants during the first week of the school year.

The teachers participating in this study shall record, on an assignment-by-assignment basis, the particulars of individual homework given to their students in their grade books. Moreover, the teachers will collect all individual student assignments and quantify the approximate percentage of the assignment which the teachers deem complete; the results of which shall be entered into the teachers' grade books. See Appendix B for the rubric used by the participating teachers to score each participating student's approximate percentage of homework completed on an assignment-by-assignment basis.

At the end of the first, second, and third terms, students shall respond to modified versions of 3 questions posed in the questionnaire completed during the first week of the current school year. These questions shall be modified to reflect only the specific term for which the students' attitudes are being measured. See Appendix C for a sample questionnaire containing the 3 questions posed to students at the conclusion of the first 3 terms of the school year.

In this study, each student's perception of the academic value of homework will be measured in three ways: Responses to 8 questions posed in a questionnaire presented at the beginning of the current school year. End-of-term averages—the mean—of the assignment-by-assignment scoring of the approximate percentage of homework completed during the first, second, and third terms of the current school year. End-of-term responses concerning students' beliefs about the academic value of homework. In addition to their responses to the questions posed in the questionnaire presented at the beginning of the current school year, the two teachers participating in this study will be interviewed by the researchers and will keep journals. The videotaped interviews will be conducted to allow each teacher to fully convey their valuation of homework. The teachers' journal entries will focus on the value of each homework assignment as it relates to the learning objectives of the corresponding lesson.

4.0 DATA MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE

Our team plans to manage our incoming data in the following ways: As we review the questionnaires, we will be identifying and labeling the common themes that are present. After these themes have been identified, we will cut and paste the common themes onto index cards. This will allow us to refine the responses even further by grouping the cards by theme. Prior to conducting each videotaped interview, the machine's counter will be reset to zero. While viewing these interviews, we will be making notes of the similar themes that become evident, noting specific locations of each on the tape, itself, as indicated by the counter. After the machine has been stopped and data has been recorded, play will be resumed as the counter picks up at this point.

At the end of the tape, the end count will be noted. This will allow for less time-consuming retrieval of data at a later time and will support the validity of our data. The quantitative data that will be retrieved from the teachers' grade books will be assembled into histograms which will provide a means to correlate the data (e.g., "Homework Completion Rate" as measured by the number of students in the corresponding percentages). See Appendix D for a sample histogram. After we receive the journals from the parents and/or guardians, we will, again, be looking to identify and label common themes that emerge. We will take the time to number the lines and pages of these journals to assist us in the accurate recording of data. The themes will then be highlighted, clipped, and pasted to index cards. These cards will be grouped by theme.

4.1 Data Analysis

Given the qualitative nature of our study, the data will be analyzed using inductive analysis and constant comparative analysis. Employing both of these techniques will allow the embedded themes within the data to emerge. Moreover, utilization of these analytical strategies will limit the team's tendency to prejudge the evidence allowing the conclusions reached to be a true reflection of the collected data.

4.2 Data Management and Validity

We believe our analysis will prove to be valid due to the following methods we will be practicing: Prolonged participation at the study site: We will be analyzing three grading periods of homework grades which will prove to be more indicative than simply analyzing student results from just one assignment. Persistent observation: Because we will be attempting to ascertain attitudes and perceptions regarding homework assignments, we will be interested in all gathered data and not simply the overall majority's statements. Our answer to the problem may lay within the mind of one very perceptive student/parent who is able to verbalize his/her ideas.

Peer debriefing: We will be working hand-in-hand with several other teaching professionals (8th grade and 11th grade mathematics teachers) who, we hope, will help guide us and assist us in our search. These educators will prove valuable in providing further insight into their curriculum requirements and will ensure we have not misrepresented the data they have provided.

Practicing triangulation: We will be utilizing three types of data gathering methods for each of the following groups of participations: 1.) teachers, 2.) parents/guardians, and 3.) students. Collecting "slice-of-life" data items: We will be collecting actual homework grades and test scores which have been generated prior to the students realizing they are participants in a study. Establishing structural corroboration: Since we will be working as a 3-member team, we plan to crosscheck data in efforts to reduce individual oversight.

4.3 Role of the Researcher

In this investigation, the researchers are the research instrument and are limited by their knowledge, experience, and personal biases. During this study, the researchers will execute the following: Recruit consensually-informed participants. Pilot the questions used in interviews and on questionnaires to assure their appropriateness and effectiveness in answering the questions guiding this study. Conduct interviews with teachers, parents, and guardians. For the purposes of gathering data and discerning affective attitudes toward homework, the researchers will read the participants journals, take appropriate field notes during observations and interviews, review the videotaped interviews and journals, and analyze the collected data. For the purpose of holding each participant harmless and to maintain confidentiality during this investigation, the researchers will control the data generated during this study.

Based on the conclusion(s) reached at the end of this investigation, the researchers shall develop an action plan that when implemented will improve the lives and academic experiences of students, teachers, parents, and guardians.

4.4 Reliability

We will attempt to ensure reliability while conducting our study in the following ways: Member checks: Videotaping interviews will allow us, the observers, the ability to review interviews multiple times to ensure we agree on the interviewee's true meaning with regard his/her responses to our line of questioning. Heterogeneous grouping: We are planning to randomly select participants from the 8th and 11th grades so as not to skew our responses by using only select students. This will ensure a more heterogeneous grouping of participants. Triangulation: By collecting data from multiple sources, we are hoping to gather the needed information in a multitude of ways to allow us to get a distinct look into our problem. Peer checks: Appropriate professionals within the setting of the Carthage School District will be called upon to review our procedures and analyze our collected data and interpretation of same. Allowing them full access to our documentation will enable them to critically comment on the conclusion(s) we have drawn, thereby, potentially reducing the innate teacher-researchers' bias (es).

4.5 Audit Trail

Establishing an audit trail will ensure the dependability of our acquired data, its analysis, and interpretation. This audit trail will include, but not be limited to, a narrative journal containing a description of the processes containing original field notes, the videotape records of included interviews, and archival data in the form of each teacher's assessment of his/her students' homework completion rates (Mills, 2003). See Appendix G for the researchers' narrative journals.

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