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ABSTRACT

The aim of this book is to inform teachers about the problems and opportunities raised by homework assignments particularly for black township youth in South Africa. Homework is an important aspect of the learning process and sets the scene for emergent pupil independence in education. It also provides the space for pupils to free themselves from the immediate direction of their mentors and define their personal "culture of learning." A study of homework patterns of 300 high school pupils living in three-generation families in Soweto and Durban townships was conducted to examine the influence of the home environment on the educational performance and achievement of contemporary youth. Formal face-to-face interviews were conducted with high school pupils, their parents and grandparents. The survey was carried out in a 3-week period. All three generations answered questions on the school attended by the designated high school pupil, the child's performance at school and satisfaction with the schooling. All participants completed a diary or time budget for a prescribed weekday. The study found that homework routines were well established in the households that were surveyed. Students often do homework after dinner, and there were as many references to doing homework alone as there were to doing homework with schoolfriends or members of a study group or family. (Contains 41 references.) (MOK)

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Contents

Introduction

Homework is an important aspect of the learning process but one which is less accessible to teachers than learning in class. Homework sets the scene for emergent pupil independence in education (Miller, Kohn & Schooler, 1986). There is plenty of leeway for the pupil to make practical decisions on when, where, and how to tackle the homework task. Homework provides the space for pupils to free themselves from the immediate direction of their mentors and define their personal "culture of learning".

When it comes to homework, the school dictates the scope of work and possibly the format in which work is to be produced. Thereafter the task is left to the individual student. Typically, the teacher will see only the outcome of the homework process. When the results of homework are poor, teachers may be at a loss to establish the causes of the deficit simply because the homework process is removed from their immediate influence and scrutiny.

This descriptive report on homework seeks to fill the gap in our knowledge of the homework situation. It may be instructive to learn how youngsters tackle the homework tasks the teachers set. Insight into the range of circumstances in which homework is attempted may deepen teachers' understanding of the challenges which their charges face when invited to study on their own.

There is a further reason for placing the homework process under the microscope in South Africa. Homework is the area

where parental and teacher concerns about education meet. Homework may represent a collaborative parent-teacher effort or a tug-of-war between school and home influences depending upon current parent-teacher relations. A better grasp of homework issues may provide practical guidelines for better co-operation between teachers and parents to foster a positive attitude to learning among South African youth.

At the beginning of the 1990s, there was widespread concern that the "culture of learning" had been eroded in South Africa's black urban areas (Everatt & Sisulu, 1992; Nxumalo, 1993). The slogan of the 1980s, "liberation before education", however, affirms the ideological value of education in the eyes of township youngsters and the sacrifice of the youth who forfeited opportunities for personal advancement to promote the interests of the wider community (Mogano, 1993).

Recent research suggests that education is a means-to-an-end for young people in that it provides a passport to jobs and facilitates social mobility (Møller, Richards & Mthembu, 1991; Møller, 1991a). Nonetheless, the value of education has been eroded during the recession of the past decade. Young people have learned that practical work experience could count for more than an education certificate in finding jobs during the recession, and higher paper qualifications are needed to find scarce jobs (Hartshorne, 1992; Mare & Winship, 1984; Moulder, 1990; Møller, 1993).

In 1993, the pressing need to restructure the South African education system was generally recognised. The period preceding this era was characterised by frequent disruptions

in education (Mogano, 1993; Nzimande & Thusi, 1991). Whereas disruptions during the 1980s were mainly caused by student boycotts, the 1990s have also witnessed the discontent of teachers. Chalk-downs in protest of working conditions for teachers have compounded the disruptive effects of student stayaways. Until the restructuring of South Africa's education system has been realised, it is unlikely that the learning process will run smoothly for the majority of township children and their teachers. However, even under conditions of disarray, school children and their families have been adopting educational habits which may prove formative for the future life chances of township youth. Therefore a case study of homework will shed light on the prevalent patterns and the conditions in which township children learn at present.

This publication reports on research undertaken in two urban areas to enquire into the influence of the home environment on the educational performance and achievement of contemporary township youth. The study also examined homework practice which is the focus of this report.

Before turning to the focal issue of this publication — homework — an introduction to the general influence of the home environment on educational attainment and performance is relevant.

Family status and education

The literature states that, as a general rule, high educational achievers have above average educational aspirations which are often related to social class (Glass, Bengtson & Dunham, 1986; Schaefer, 1991; Smith, 1981). In some societies, the

educational status of female members of the family are regarded as more telling of social class influences than those of males. For example, among US blacks, historians trace educational advancement through the female lineage (Mullins & Sites, 1984). For historical reasons, social mobility for black women in the US was related to education, whereas men advanced materially through job migration. A similar case may be true for black advancement in South Africa where the teaching and nursing professions have provided the major channels for the social advancement of black women.

It is not quite clear whether parental influence derives from socio-economic status or whether family status factors influence educational aspirations, expectations and achievement indirectly through family lifestyles (Alwin & Thornton, 1984). Some experts have speculated as to whether socio-economic status may be an indirect measure of atmosphere in the home and child-rearing practices (Bradley, Rock, Caldwell, Harris & Hamrick, 1987; Moore, 1987; Murphy, 1986; Prom-Jackson & Johnson, 1987; Shade & Edwards, 1987; Slaughter & Epps, 1987). Factors such as reading in the home and disciplinary methods tend to be related to social class. In the South African context, the rural and urban background of the parents may compete with material advantages in shaping the atmosphere in the home.

Parental influence on education

There are two areas where parents can influence the educational attainment of their children. Firstly, parents can decide where to send their children to school. Secondly, once

their children are enrolled in school, parents can support the educational efforts of their children and encourage them to remain in school and prepare their lessons. The latter parental influence essentially means seeing that children complete their homework and other school assignments and study for examinations.

Choice of schools. Concerning parental decisions on schools, some readers might think it far-fetched to speak of choice of schools under the present educational dispensation. It is certainly true that economic and political considerations may constrain the choices of black parents. Consider, though, that in recent years vocal groups of parents have come together to call for urgently needed reforms to the education system. Township parents who foot the bill for their children's education are concerned about value for money. Even under current circumstances, there may be some leeway when seeking to find suitable places in township schools to meet the individual needs of children. It is argued here that even among the group of concerned parents, the better informed will make more judicious choices than their ill-informed counterparts.

Parental support in education. In modern industrial society the main responsibility for the education of the young has been removed from the family. As in many developing societies, black parents have shifted their responsibility for the education of their children to professionals. Although schooling is neither free nor compulsory for black South Africans, public education is the norm. However, public education does not mean that parents are excluded from the learning process altogether.

In more recent times the important role of the supportive home environment in achieving educational goals has been recognised once again. The realisation has been that education does not occur in a vacuum. The school and the home need to operate in concert if education is to succeed.

In the United States the Headstart Programme, to promote early learning among disadvantaged children, was designed to compensate rather than to invite parental input (Slaughter & Epps, 1987). Current thinking is that parental input is not dispensable but represents an important positive influence on academic achievement. Supervision of homework is a case in point.

Schooling in the home environment

Homework, as the concept suggests, is meant to be done at home. Homework therefore represents one of the few remnants of home education of former times, and presupposes a supportive home environment.

Slaughter and Epps (1987) in their review article on black education in the US cite the role of the family in education as a primary force which affects educational achievement over time. This occurs simply because the family is a consistently present influence during childhood and adolescence. One might extend this argument and speculate whether the family influence is not consistently present even where the household structure is fluid and children experience changes in the composition of the co-resident family during childhood and adolescence. The critical factor may be simply that the family, regardless of its

composition, is a constant factor during childhood and adolescence and acts as a reference group.

The study reported here investigated the roles of the family member or members who fulfil key support functions for the high school child. At the outset of the study it was argued that the extended family, of which the three-generation family is the prototype, had an edge over smaller township families when allocating educational support roles. The three-generation family could draw on a larger pool of human resources to provide educational support. Accordingly, the study was designed to investigate not only parent support roles but also the educational roles of grandparents and siblings (Scott-Jones, 1987; Smith, 1984; Wilson & Allen, 1987).

The researchers were particularly interested in the role of the grandmother in three-generation families. It is well known that black grandmothers play an important role in pre-school childcare and education. However, there is less information on the grandmother's role in education in the later stages of the child's educational development. Anecdotal evidence suggests that grandparents may assist youngsters from disadvantaged social backgrounds to complete their education and attain socially recognised positions in society in spite of the odds against educational achievement. Although such cases may refer mainly to skip-generation homes, where the grandparents stand in for absent parents, there is every reason to believe that where grandparents assume titular headship of large urban families that they also wield considerable influence on the opportunity choices of the youngest generation in the household.

The study also examined literacy events in the home (Caplan, Whitmore & Choy, 1989; Caplan, Choy & Whitmore, 1992). It is thought that literacy events are critical factors for promoting a culture of learning in the home. Literacy events include a positive attitude towards the tradition of knowledge in the form of myths, folk tales or reading aloud. Research among US immigrants indicated that the tone of the event might be more important than the direct literacy effects. Among Southeast Asian immigrants to America it made little difference whether children were read to in the medium of instruction in school or in their home language (Caplan, Whitmore & Choy, 1989). In fact, the values relating to pride in one's cultural heritage, which would most likely be reinforced through non-English readings in the home, was a positive home influence on academic achievement. In this case, the child's achievement was probably mediated through feelings of security about his/her background and self-confidence.

The Study

Most studies of the influence of the home environment concentrate on early learning in the home when parental influence is thought to be the strongest. Research procedures frequently consist of observations in the home and interviews with the mother, and in some cases observations of interactive behaviour of mother and child when carrying out set learning tasks (Bradley *et al.* 1987; Murphy, 1986; Ninio, 1990; Scott-Jones, 1987). Ideally, a series of observations might be undertaken to observe development over time.

This study selected high school rather than primary school pupils as its target group. All the high school students were members of three-generation township households. Although three-generation households may represent special cases of complete extended families, they nevertheless account for a substantial minority of township households[1].

Three-generation families and educational achievement

Three-generation households were selected for the study for the following reasons. Firstly, three-generation households represent the prototypical extended family, although urbanisation has displaced male headship with female dominance in a large number of cases. Mutual support is the backbone of the large extended family which provides practical assistance and social security throughout the life course. Thus, it was assumed

that the three-generation family would provide optimal opportunities for social support of school children.

Secondly, the three-generation household is a special case of the extended family living under one roof. Co-residence assures that all members of the extended family are available on a day-to-day basis for support activities, such as assistance with or supervision of homework. Thus, the co-resident family provided the ideal setting to inquire into which persons, in particular, made themselves available to discuss school issues, to assist with homework, and to examine the probable impact of support behaviours.

While the three-generation family may have plenty of human resources at its disposal to support high school pupils, it may be more likely than other family constellations to suffer from inter-generational tensions which might prevent suitable support from materialising. From this viewpoint, the three-generation family serves as a test case for the study of the effects of family solidarity (Roberts, Richards & Bengtson, 1991) on the educational performance and achievement of its youthful members.

The sample

The 300 three-generation families in the study were selected randomly in six townships in Soweto and in the Durban suburbs of Umlazi and KwaMashu. Formal face-to-face interviews were conducted with high school pupils, their parents and grandparents. Three persons fitting this description were selected in 300 homes in Soweto and Durban townships, yielding a sample size of 900 persons. The sample

was evenly split between male and female high school students in Soweto and Durban. The pupils were evenly distributed over the high school classes of Standard 6 to Standard 10 and the survey was carried out in the first three weeks of October 1992.

Survey instruments

Two instruments of study were applied in the survey. All three generations answered questions on the school attended by the designated high school pupil, the child's performance at school and satisfaction with the schooling. Secondly, each of the 900 survey participants completed a diary or time budget for a prescribed weekday. Members of the same household described their round of activities for the same day.

In contrast to many of the conventional studies of home influence on educational achievement, this study was confined to only one short period of observation and relied only on self reports of family members. On the other hand, larger numbers of families participated in this survey than is usually the case in purely observational studies. Information was solicited not only from the mother but from other members of the family representing the three generations in the household. The child's observations were the focus of attention.

Interested readers are referred to the end notes for more details on sampling procedures and research methods.[2]

Analysis

It was assumed at the outset that homework practice would vary according to age. Standard 10 pupils, in particular, would

be studying for their final examinations at the time of the survey. Their homework and study habits might reflect specially intensive concentration on schoolwork which might differ from those of the younger pupils.

Homework competes with other committed leisure activities such as housework and other freely chosen spare time interests such as relaxation, watching television, visiting with friends, and playing sport. It was reasoned that the different leisure pursuits of young men and women might result in distinctive homework patterns for male and female pupils. The above considerations prompted us to divide the sample into age and gender groups. In order to better study the effects of varying home and school environments, further sample divisions were made between pupils from harmonious versus non-harmonious families and between groups of pupils reportedly attending good versus poor schools[3].

Research hypotheses

A basic assumption made at the outset of the study was that pupils from families which co-resided in peace and harmony, would experience superior educational support which would enhance their school performance and exert a positive effect on study habits.

The second supposition concerned the influence of the school. Although the focus of the study was on the family and the home environment where homework supposedly took place, the influence of school factors on homework practice could not be ignored altogether. It was anticipated that the quality of the school would set the broad parameters in which pupils would seek to undertake their homework. At the outset

it was assumed that the home environment would, in part, account for the quality of the school, in the sense that parents would attempt to choose the best school for their child according to their personal capacity.

As discussed earlier, the choice of school might be considered the critical first step in a child's education. A child's efforts in school might be negligible if there was poor direction in school. Let us stop to consider the possible reactions of school children to different quality school environments. One might make a broad distinction between two reactions. It might be expected that a poor school environment would demotivate and thereby exert a negative influence on homework performance. That is, the atmosphere of the school would spill over into the home. The opposite reaction might also be anticipated. Children might seek to compensate for the poor school environment by investing more time and effort in homework and extra-curricular lessons. It is also theoretically possible that a child, under the direction of diligent parents, might develop good study habits while attending a poor quality school. If the child transferred to a better learning environment, the good study habits established earlier could provide a headstart. Thus, a supportive home environment might counterbalance or compensate for a poor school environment in the short term.

Both the compensatory and spill-over reactions are plausible and can be backed by theoretical considerations.

The proposition of "spill-over" and "compensation" reactions are grounded in *leisure theory*. If one were to apply the work-leisure analogy to a child's daily activities, school could be defined as the child's work situation and homework as a spare time pursuit. The nature of homework is such, that one

would expect schoolchildren to consider it more of a committed or obligatory spare time pursuit than other leisure interests.

Leisure theorists have long speculated whether persons who have a positive attitude to their work environment choose their leisure interests to match their work, and conversely, whether persons in boring jobs seek to compensate for deficiencies in the work situation by choosing contrasting leisure interests (Miller & Weiss, 1982; Staines, 1980). If schoolchildren experience school life as exciting rather than frustrating, which is likely to be the case with high quality teaching, children might be expected to tackle their homework with more energy and enthusiasm than schoolchildren who experience their school lives as boring and frustrating.

Parallels to the "spill-over" and "compensation" ideas are also to be found in *quality-of-life* theories. A schoolchild's quality of life might be defined as the sum of many discrete aspects of life including home life, school life and leisure time. In this case it would be possible for a satisfactory situation in one sphere of life to partly compensate for a less satisfactory one if a fixed level of well-being is achieved. Another view of quality-of-life presupposes that a certain level of overall well-being spills over or permeates into every aspect of life, in which case there would be less possibility of compensation between good and bad parts for the individual concerne (Headey, Veenhoven & Wearing, 1991).

Bearing in mind these possible linkages between the school and home environments suggested by the leisure and quality-of-life theories, let us turn to the reports of hov homework was done in the 300 families surveyed.

Results

Sample characteristics

In order to address the differential effects of the school and home environments on young men and women of different ages, the sample was divided into four groups of young males and females 16 years and younger, and males and females 17 years and older. A description of the sample is based on the profiles of the four groups shown in Table 1.

The four age/gender groups were evenly distributed in Soweto and the Durban townships. The median sizes of the households to which the pupils were attached were 8 or 9 persons. Most of the pupils reported that their families were making ends meet but had no luxuries. The younger boys and girls, the latter in particular, were more likely to report that their families were comfortably off. By survey design the male pupils were more likely to live in households headed by a male. The older girls more often lived in female-dominated households in which the father was not present. Between 70% and three quarters of all households included unemployed persons. Very few households included persons with post-matriculation qualifications. The younger boys were most likely to live in such households.

In the majority of the households Zulu was spoken, with smaller percentages speaking South Sotho and Tswana as their home language. Approximately half the pupils attended Department of Education and Training and KwaZulu high

schools, respectively. Small percentages in each of the four groups were enrolled in private and open multi-racial schools. The older boys were least likely to attend a private or open school. The total sample was evenly distributed over the five classes of Standard 6 to 10. Among the two younger groups most pupils were in the right class for their age, but only 36% of the older boys and 40% of the older girls were still "on track". Most pupils aspired to completing matric and over half wanted further education. More girls than boys aspired to post-matric education.

In the sample as a whole, 55% stated that they were in good schools and one fifth stated they were in poor schools. The older pupils were more critical of the schools they were attending. They more often reported that they were attending an average or poor school and that school life was frustrating rather than rewarding. Although the younger pupils had done better in their mid-year examinations, about equal proportions, between 66% and 71% in each group were satisfied with their performance.

Less than one third in any group reported that they had ever felt disinclined to learn. The vast majority felt that the school boycotts had reduced their educational opportunities.

The older boys and girls expressed less satisfaction with their lives. However, roughly equal proportions in each group reported that their round of activities on the diary day had been to their liking.

Survey results indicated that very few pupils contributed to their educational expenses. The older girls were most likely to do so. Both boys and girls did housework, ran errands and

undertook shopping and gardening. Older pupils were more likely to take on shopping tasks, and boys did more gardening than girls.

The vast majority of pupils were satisfied that there was peace and harmony in the household. Large proportions were not willing to voice any complaints about family life but did express factors which had made them proud of their families during the past year. The older girls were more likely than others to complain about family life.

The majority of pupils stated that they received support from their families. Female support was more forthcoming than male support. Mothers were the persons most concerned about school issues, especially in the case of younger pupils. In the case of older students grandmothers also acted as support persons. Some boys, especially the younger boys, stated that their father was the person to whom they turned regarding educational matters. Younger pupils usually received assistance with homework from mothers and siblings. Friends often assumed the role of homework assistants in the case of the older pupils. The older pupils, in turn, also helped their younger siblings. Younger boys were least likely to help their younger brothers and sisters with their homework.

The grandmother was the person who told stories or read aloud in many of the surveyed homes. In one quarter to one third of homes no one practised the oral literary tradition or read aloud.

The majority of pupils stated that they did their homework at home. The younger girls were most likely to do their homework at home. Boys were more likely than girls to do

their homework at school. Most pupils stated that they usually spent up to two hours a day on their homework. Older girls were most likely to spend over three hours on their homework.

Between 45% and 66% reported that they studied in groups. Study groups were more popular among the older pupils, particularly among older boys. About one fifth attended extra classes and Saturday school, and 16% attended winter school. Other results not shown here suggested that participation in study groups did not have a positive influence on educational achievement. Of all the extra-curricular options reviewed, Saturday school appeared to be most positively associated with good school performance. The older boys appeared to have chosen extra-curricular education strategies that were least likely to produce good academic results. For example, the participation of older boys in study groups was above average and their participation in Saturday school was below average.

Leisure pursuits differed markedly according to age group. The majority of the younger pupils had no steady boy- or girlfriends, whereas the older pupils did. Boys and older girls said that they "hung out" with friends. The older boys were most likely to be members of a youth club or a club which met regularly; the older girls were least likely to be members, with the younger groups falling somewhere in between.

If one takes the liberty of inferring age trends from cross-sectional data, the overall picture is one of pupils becoming increasingly more critical of their school and home life and disillusioned with life in general as they grow older. At the same time the school performance and attainment of the older

high school students declines rapidly. The older boys, in particular, develop interests outside the home which interfere with homework and school performance. The younger girls tend to be home-oriented and therefore receive greater protection than the older girls against outside disturbances through the family network of support for their educational activities. The younger boys appear to be the most satisfied with school and family life which might be a reflection of the carefree existence of male youth combined with a relatively advantaged background.

Attitudes to school life

In the course of the interviews the high school respondents were asked about their ideas for improving their school performance[4]. The results are shown in the top section of Table 2. Pupils recognised that students needed to study hard and teachers needed to teach if their school performance was to improve. Extra tuition, better educational facilities — in particular library facilities — and better qualified teachers were needed. Given the many factors involved it is difficult to see variations in the response patterns of the age and gender groups. There appear to be very few age differences with the possible exception that older pupils emphasised the need for better educational facilities. The younger girls were more likely to support extra tuition; the younger boys underscored the importance of the teacher's role and financial assistance for educational achievement.

Discrepancies between the votes received from the different types of homes and schools were more apparent. When

discussing the factors which would help them to perform better in school, pupils from harmonious families were more likely to emphasise the importance of their own efforts in applying themselves to their studies. Persons from disharmonious families emphasised external factors such as the need for better educational facilities and better qualified teachers. Pupils in good schools set greater store by participation in additional lessons and financial assistance to support extra study efforts on their own part. Pupils in poor schools concentrated on external factors, the need for better facilities and better discipline in schools.

School life was perceived as being rewarding if one was enjoying school and experiencing a sense of achievement (see Table 2 (cont) on page 60). Enthusiastic and dedicated teachers and good discipline contributed to a positive evaluation of school life. The frustrating aspects of school life focused almost exclusively on the lack of discipline in schools and the negative attitudes of teachers.

Younger boys were most likely to base their positive and negative evaluations of school life on the quality of teaching and discipline. Substantial percentages of the younger boys commented that their teachers were doing a good job and discipline was good in their schools. Older pupils were particularly concerned about the poor discipline in their schools. Older girls appeared to lack the positive motivation and sense of achievement which stems from satisfaction with school life. Younger girls were more likely to comment on the social aspects of school life and that they enjoyed meeting with their friends at school.

The views of school life obtained from pupils in good schools and in harmonious families converged. Both groups were more likely to experience a sense of achievement in school and to comment positively on teacher performance and curriculum. Pupils from poor schools and disharmonious homes stressed the poor discipline and poor teaching in their schools. Pupils attending poor schools were less likely to comment on positive social relations at school. These results alert one to the existence of reinforcing interactive effects between perceptions of good home and school environments.

Homework patterns

All three generations in the study were asked to give a descriptive account of how the high school respondent in the household set about doing homework assignments.

Table 3 gives an overview of the three different accounts. Responses have been grouped according to various aspects of doing homework including the "where", "when", "with whom" aspects, which are regular features of most time budgets (Harvey, 1990). Further headings subsume the various approaches to the homework task and an evaluation of the outcome.

Where. The accounts emphasise the fact that homework is usually done at home. It appears that most pupils have a fixed place where they do their homework. Only a small minority varied the place where they studied and sometimes did homework at school or took it home. Few pupils worked in the public library, though a few referred to the library at school. (It will, however, be remembered that pupils in schools with a

poorer rating called for more facilities including libraries. It is possible that libraries might be used for homework purposes if they were available). Some pupils said that they did their homework at school after classes. Some were able to slip in some homework in free periods or between classes. However, only a small minority said that they did the bulk of their homework at school.

A few respondents made a distinction between "homework" and "study", activities which were carried out in different places. In cases where such a semantic distinction was made, "homework" was considered to be assigned work, and "study" referred to additional work undertaken of pupils' own volition. Contrary to the popular meanings assigned to the concepts "homework" and "study", the pupils who made the homework/study distinction stated that they did their homework at school and studied at home.

At home, there appeared to be no particular preference for a room in which to do one's homework. The common areas tended to be used more often than bedrooms, though a small minority of pupils said they worked in the bedroom. Respondents stressed the importance of atmosphere rather than the specific room. Approximately a quarter said they preferred to do their homework in a quiet place, possibly alone or at least undisturbed. A few pupils said they locked themselves in their bedrooms to do their homework. One person retired to a backyard room where she could work undisturbed.

When. Homework is typically an after-dinner occupation. Mainly older pupils reported that they studied late at night

when it was quiet and the family was asleep. Only a few pupils said that they got up early in the morning to study before school. A handful tackled homework before other tasks or recreation. Some indicated that they liked to play a while or have a snack before attending to homework. Mainly female pupils reported that they did their housework before sitting down to do their homework. The pupils were more likely to describe where their homework fitted into their after-school schedule than did their parents or grandparents.

With whom. The social context of homework varied. There were as many references to doing homework alone, as there were to doing homework with schoolfriends or members of a study group and with family. More male than female students reported doing homework with friends which was congruent with the results on higher male participation in study groups. Female students made more mention of doing homework with, or aided by siblings and other family members. Some reports were suggestive that persons in attendance were actively involved in the homework process. Other reports suggested that school children solicited help only if necessary but felt assured of a supportive environment.

Members of study groups and gangs were less likely than others to report the assistance of siblings and were more likely to include studying with friends in their descriptive accounts of doing homework. Gang members also tended to study at night. Age might be the critical factor for this study habit.

The process. A few reports focused on the process of completing the homework task. The most common description under this heading referred to sitting down to the task with the

tools of the trade: paper, pen and textbooks. Parents and grandparents gave this description as the most visible sign of homework in progress, in a few cases with the qualifier that they *presumed* that their children were doing their homework. The pupils were in a better position to give more detailed descriptions of procedures, which cannot be observed from outside. A few pupils stated that they limbered up by starting with the easiest tasks and graduated to the harder ones. Others reported that they left queries to ask their teachers in class. A substantial group organised their tasks with the help of a study timetable. Others worked their way through the study material testing their knowledge at regular intervals. (This revision strategy may have been overstated owing to the date of the survey shortly before the end of the year examinations). Only a few pupils stated that they did their homework while listening to the radio or watching television. Parents and grandparents were more likely to make this observation.

Parents' and grandparents' descriptions of homework. Parents and grandparents gave mainly outsider descriptions of the homework situation. However, the picture remains by and large the same with a slight shift in emphasis. Parents and grandparents noted the visible times and places where homework occurred. The data suggest that the older generation was made more aware of homework if they themselves or other members of the family were drawn into the process. About one-fifth depicted homework as a task done alone, without assistance and when one is undisturbed. Parents, and grandparents in particular, tended to understate the role of friends as homework partners. Elders were more

inclined than the youth to move from description to evaluation. Assessments were usually positive, "she does her homework well". A small percentage, but twice as many grandparents as parents, stated that they did not know how the children did their homework. Some persons in this category indicated that they never saw the child do any homework.

Variations in homework patterns

Our data allowed us to trace the variations in homework patterns according to age and gender of the pupil and in more and less favourable home and school environments. Table 4 shows the breakdowns in homework patterns according to these factors.

Results indicated that more girls than boys said homework followed on housework. Girls were more likely to describe the room in which they did their homework. Only girls retired to their bedrooms to do their homework.

The younger groups of pupils were more likely to mention assistance from siblings and family members. Young girls were least likely to do their homework with friends and study groups, which is consistent with results on family support discussed earlier.

Mainly young pupils got up early to do their homework before school. Older pupils were more likely to do their homework late at night after the family had gone to sleep.

Descriptions of homework strategies suggested that younger pupils relied more heavily on assistance from other persons

when doing their homework, whereas older pupils aimed to work more independently.

The type of school environment did not appear to have a bearing on the manner in which pupils tackled their homework. The influence of family life was more apparent. A striking result was that persons from more harmonious families did their homework at home and felt more free to solicit the assistance of members of the family. In contrast, pupils from disharmonious families were more likely to report that they did the bulk of their homework during school periods. If pupils from disharmonious families studied at home they purposely secluded themselves from the rest of the family where they would not be disturbed. Such homework strategies included waiting until the family had retired at night, rising before the family was awake, or locking oneself in the bedroom.

Homework activities on the diary day

The diaries kept by the pupils provide insights into homework patterns on one particular day in the life of a high school child. All 300 pupils in the study kept a diary for a designated weekday (Monday to Thursday) indicating their activities from the time of waking until going to sleep at night. For the majority of pupils (85%) the diary day was a regular school day. It was a shorter school day for 9%. A further 4% of diarists reported that they were on study leave on the diary day. Table 5 summarizes the diary entries of the 300 pupils according to the four age and gender groups introduced earlier. According to verbal accounts, most pupils spent about one and a half hours on homework on a regular weekday. The

diaries tell a similar story. According to diary entries, between 83 minutes (1 hour, 23 minutes) and 106 minutes (1 hour, 46 minutes) were spent by any of the four age/gender groups on homework, studying for exams, and reading to learn. Owing to the time of year, some groups spent more time on studying for exams than on regular homework. The diaries also confirm the homework patterns outlined above. The majority of homework and related activities were pursued at home. Girls were more likely than boys to do homework and study at home, especially the younger girls. The majority of homework and related activities were solitary ones. Female and younger pupils were more likely to be with family when doing homework. The older boys were most likely to study and do homework away from home in the company of persons outside the family circle.

Motivations to do homework

How are pupils motivated to do their homework? The reason analysis included in the time budgets completed by the school-going respondents tell us more about how pupils felt about doing homework on the diary day. Respondents were asked to give up to two reasons for engaging in each of the activities of the diary day. The given reasons included obligation, sense of duty, social relations, instrumentality (as a means to achieving something else), enjoyment, physical need, and to pass the time (Elcardus & Glorieux, 1993).

Taking all the activities which the 300 high school pupils pursued over the 24 hour period of the diary day, homework accounted for 154 diary entries. That is, on average, about

every second pupil did homework on the diary day. Homework was characterised by an achievement-oriented activity (i.e., a means to an end), with strong overtones of duty and obligation. The comparison of the two motivation profiles for school attendance and homework are instructive. In the first instance, both school and homework were rated as means-to-an-end activities. Thereafter, school was more often associated with obligation, i.e., with an other-directed compulsion, homework was described as a duty, that is, an inner-directed force.

The scheme used to classify the activities of the diary day made a distinction between the activities of homework, reading to learn, and preparing for examinations. The profiles for homework (n154 activities), reading to learn (n26), and preparation for exams (n147) were similar, with emphasis on the achievement orientation as described above, and obligation and duty. As the activity label "read to learn" suggests, the main emphasis here was on deferred gratification, with a less pronounced sense of duty or obligation. In contrast, sense of duty and obligation figured more prominently in the motivation profiles for homework and exam preparations than for reading. It was noteworthy that small percentages also indicated enjoyment, that is, intrinsic satisfaction, when participating in homework, reading and preparation work. The average pupil spent 95 minutes on homework (including study and reading to learn) on the diary day. Further analysis showed that the few pupils who enjoyed their homework and related tasks on the diary day spent 31 minutes more than average doing homework on that day. Similarly, pupils who

perceived school life to be rewarding spent an additional seven minutes on homework on the diary day. However, where school life was viewed as frustrating, pupils spent twelve minutes less than the average on their homework. Pupils who had done well in their mid-term examinations spent 107 minutes, on average, on homework and related tasks on the diary day compared to only 88 minutes spent by the lowest achievers. This finding suggests that doing homework does produce the expected results. It also indicates the possibility that pupils, who are rewarded by good marks, are encouraged to sustain good homework habits.

Case Studies

To illustrate the interactive effect between school and home environments and their joint influence on homework and other learning behaviours, five case studies were developed using the survey distinctions discussed earlier (see headings in Table 4). The cases depict the unique situations in which five pupils found themselves. Four of these pupils represent the four age/gender groups distinguished in the study. The only commonality between the four cases concerns personal experience of reportedly deficient home and school environments. The learning situation of these four high school pupils from poor home and school environments is contrasted with a fifth case of a matric student with a satisfactory home and school life. The criteria of the quality of the home and the school were self reports on satisfaction with peace and harmony in the family and the quality of the school (See endnote 3). The cases were selected from ones identified by computer. The names of pupils have been changed to protect their identity.

Case # 1: Younger male high school pupil

Sipho is a 15-year-old male student who lives with his father, grandmother, uncle and two aunts in a Durban township. His grandmother is a state pensioner. His father, who is in his thirties, only has the use of one eye and is the recipient of a disability grant. Currently the only breadwinner in the family

is an aunt who is employed full-time. Sipho says his family is making ends meet but has no luxuries.

A depressed atmosphere permeates the home. Sipho is indifferent about his personal quality of life and family life. The same applies to his father. His grandmother expresses outright dissatisfaction.

Sipho cannot say whether he is loved, understood or respected by his family. He complains that the home is too small. He disapproves of his father selling liquor to supplement the disability grant. Sipho's grandmother is equally disapproving of her son's occupation. Sipho's father says he feels embarrassed about his financial situation. Nevertheless, selling beer on the diary day was the activity that gave him the greatest sense of satisfaction because it "earned a living".

Sipho is in Standard 7 in a KwaZulu school. According to Sipho, his school is a very poor one. His father and grandmother confirmed the poor quality of Sipho's school. Sipho says that school life is frustrating and boring: "My school usually has the boycotts and our teachers are too lazy to come into the classes to teach." Sipho's grandmother blames the school children as well as the teachers for education problems. "They don't enjoy being school children, because they are too lazy to go to school and study. He (Sipho) passes - I don't know how. Maybe the teachers are afraid to let them fail because they are afraid of harassment by the pupils."

Sipho wants to go as far as matric at school. He has had to repeat a grade in the past. Although he passed five of the six

subjects he is taking at school in the mid-term examinations, he feels he could do better if he attended "a very strict school."

Sipho belongs to a study group. He is not given homework every day. If there is homework, he normally does it during a study period at school. Sipho's father states he does not know exactly how Sipho does his homework. Sipho's grandmother remarked that during the period January to September she could not remember ever seeing her grandson do any homework or studying. However, she'd noticed he was studying in October as it was near to writing exams.

On an average weekday, Sipho reckons that homework accounts for a half an hour of his time. On the diary day Sipho went to school but did not make an entry referring to homework in his diary. After school Sipho washed his school shirt, and read a novel before going out to visit a friend in the late afternoon. He got back home in time to watch television before supper which he ate with his grandmother and the aunts.

Case # 2: Younger female high school pupil

Puleng is a 15-year-old Standard 8 pupil. She lives in Soweto with her mother, grandmother, aunt and uncle, brother and a male cousin. The adult women in the household are employed full-time and the family lives comfortably.

Puleng says she is dissatisfied with her personal life and the peace and harmony in the family. Puleng feels that her family does not understand and trust her. She has a steady boyfriend.

Her grandmother, she complains, is very unfriendly towards her friends and is suspicious of her movements.

Puleng attends a private school which she describes as one of average quality. Her mother rates the school as a poor quality institution. Puleng reports that school life is frustrating. Her teachers often leave classes early and "there's no one to carry on teaching." Puleng says she is not doing well at school and needs extra lessons in all her subjects. She'd like to attend a Saturday school.

Puleng's mother is the person who takes the greatest interest in her progress at school. The problem, Puleng confides, is that during the past year her mother continuously nagged her about her poor school performance, so much so that Puleng thought of running away from home.

Puleng says she does her homework at school. She and her friends work in pairs. "The one who understands better explains to the one who doesn't." She spends an average of one hour on homework on a weekday and her teachers are the persons who assist.

Puleng's mother maintains that Puleng usually does her homework at home and she helps her daughter with it. Puleng's mother complains that her daughter often misses school. "She spends most of the time reading books". In spite of this complaint Puleng's mother says she is proud of her daughter's school performance: "She has never disappointed me." Puleng's mother dreams of getting an apartment "to live with my child in harmony."

Puleng's grandmother indicates that she is more worried about her son, who is presently in jail, than about her daughters and granddaughter. She is happy that her daughters respect her and "don't even drink". She approves of Puleng's school and her reading habits. "She likes reading and this shows that she will not have problems." However, the grandmother wishes Puleng could mix more with whites to improve her knowledge of English.

Puleng took vacation on the diary day. She springcleaned the house, visited friends and watched video tapes and television. She said that she did these things to pass the time. The activity she liked best was reading a novel before falling asleep that night. She said she liked the reading because it helped "to improve her English vocabulary."

Case # 3: Older male high school pupil

Bongani is a 19-year-old youth from a Durban township. He lives with his father and grandfather, an uncle, three aunts and a female cousin. Bongani reports that the family of seven is making ends meet but has no luxuries. According to the older respondents in the household, they are merely scraping an existence.

Bongani is dissatisfied with his personal and family life. He complains that his family live past each other. "There is no family life as far as respecting one another. Everyone does as t' :y please and there is no order at all." In Bongani's opinion, pupils who do better than others at school have no domestic problems and they study hard.

Bongani feels closer to his grandfather than to his father. Bongani and his grandfather share a negative view of their personal lives, unlike Bongani's father who is content and unaware of their unhappiness. Bongani's grandfather maintains that his family does not respect him. He complains that his children are rude to him. They see him as a burden and give him no financial support.

Bongani attends a Department of Education and Training controlled school which is of poor quality. He has repeated a grade in the past and is now in Standard 8. He reports that at present teachers are attending classes and learning is "fine". Bongani passed his exams at mid-term so he feels he is doing well enough at school. In order to do better, he would like to have money for a school uniform and for food at school.

Bongani says that no one in the family is interested in his progress at school or assists him with his homework. He studies with a study group and does his homework at school. He and his classmates work out the solutions to their assignments. He usually spends one and a half hours on homework on a weekday.

Bongani's father and grandfather confirm that they do not discuss school issues or assist with homework. Bongani's grandfather says it is his policy not to influence his grandson to do better at school. Bongani's father gives a different description of his son's homework habits. He maintains that Bongani has arranged a study in his bedroom and does his homework behind closed doors. Bongani's grandfather says he does not know how Bongani does his homework. He assumes

that Bongani does all his studying at school and comes home with his assignments completed. Bongani's grandfather remarks: "This house is not suitable for him to do homework. My children are all drunkards."

Bongani described the diary day as a shortened work day. He studied with his friends at school between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. In the afternoon he played soccer and did housework and shopping. Before supper he spent an hour in the bath and read the newspapers while he was soaking. After the evening meal he watched television with his cousin and went to bed at 9 p.m.

Case study # 4: Older female high school pupil

Zodwa is a young woman of 22 years. She lives in Umlazi with her grandmother, mother and father, and eight brothers and sisters. She is the oldest of the nine children in the family.

Zodwa's parents are employed, her mother on a part-time basis only. Her grandmother is a state old-age pensioner. The family is making ends meet but has no luxuries.

Zodwa has a steady boyfriend. She is dissatisfied with her personal life. She states that life is frustrating and boring but hopes that things will get better. Zodwa's mother and grandmother also feel despondent about their personal quality of life. Zodwa complains that there is little harmony and peace in the family. Lack of money is the greatest problem for the household. Zodwa's grandmother shares her concerns about family problems.

Zodwa attends Standard 10 in a KwaZulu high school outside Umlazi which she describes as poor. She has repeated a grade in the past. She spent a period out of school during the past year because she was short of money. Her family disapproved of her missing school.

Zodwa explains that school life is frustrating these days because "people from outside are always giving us trouble." She says that her teachers are looking for a suitable venue where she and her classmates can write their exams. Zodwa's mother and grandmother are concerned about the level of violence in the area which prevents teachers and pupils from attending school. Zodwa's mother is convinced that unless the government stops the violence in the township, the school children will continue to do poorly at school. Zodwa thinks it would be better if she could study at home. "I find it useless to go to school since the teachers don't attend to us at all."

Zodwa wants to complete her matric. She is not doing as well at school as she would like to. She says she got good marks in four of the six subjects she is studying at school. She failed history and Afrikaans. However, she has not received a report on her performance.

Zodwa states that her mother takes the greatest interest in her progress at school. She attends a Saturday school during term time. Her homework strategy is to consult several textbooks and to synthesize the information contained in them. On an average weekday, Zodwa reckons that she spends four hours on homework. She does her homework with a friend at the friend's house. She also helps her siblings with their

homework. She is the person in the family who reads and tells stories to other members.

On the diary day, a Monday, Zodwa got up at six o'clock in the morning to iron her school uniform. She travelled to school by taxi. She was at school from 8 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. After school Zodwa changed and washed her school uniform, prepared the supper and did the shopping. She studied from 5.15 p.m. to 8 p.m. before supper. She retired to bed at 9 o'clock after family prayers.

Zodwa's favourite activity of the day was studying. "That's the main goal to achieve." The most disappointing event of the day was going to school to find that there were no teachers present.

In contrast to the four cases above, the last example refers to a matric pupil who rates her school and family life as rewarding and satisfying.

Case study # 5: Matric pupil satisfied with family and school life

Gugu is 18 years old. She lives in Umlazi with her mother, grandmother and aunt. The family is living comfortably.

Gugu is satisfied with her personal life and the harmony in the family home. She gets on well with her mother and grandmother. They do lots of things together, share ideas and talk about things that really concern her. Gugu has no complaints about family life. "We are a united family. If a

person has done a good thing, she is praised. When she has done wrong, she is told to improve her behaviour."

Gugu's mother confirms this picture of family life: "We are living peacefully. We respect each other. We have straight talk, always speaking the truth." Gugu's grandmother echoes her daughter and granddaughter: "We are a very united family."

Gugu attends a KwaZulu school which she rates as very good. She is in her last year in high school. She has repeated a grade in the past. At the moment school is exciting and rewarding for her. She has just heard that she passed all her subjects in the trial exams. Gugu is now motivated to apply herself to her studies in order to pass matric. Her school work is much improved since June when she failed two subjects in the mid-year exams. "Failing those subjects in June made me learn and study very hard. I wish teachers would teach us on Saturday." Gugu believes that pupils who do well in school like to learn and have good teachers.

Gugu belongs to a study group which meets at her home. She studies with her group at night. "After they have gone home I study alone and do my homework." Gugu does about three hours of homework on a weekday.

Gugu's mother observes that her daughter has few problems with her school. "She is very interested in her school work." Gugu's mother agrees with her daughte hat Saturday classes are needed to improve the performar..e of matric students. However, she concedes that it is "now late because they are already writing their final examinations."

Gugu's mother is a businesswoman who travels a lot for her work, judging from her diary entries. This may be the reason why Gugu's grandmother is the person who takes responsibility for overseeing Gugu's progress at school and her homework. The grandmother is also the storyteller in the family. Gugu's grandmother approves of her granddaughter's study habits. "She must study with the children who are good in the subjects that she doesn't understand. She is doing this." Gugu's grandmother comments that her granddaughter has "good ambitions" but admits that she herself is somewhat anxious about her granddaughter's forthcoming exams. She worries: "What will be the problem is when she doesn't pass!"

On the diary day, Gugu got up at 6 a.m. and made her own sandwiches for her lunchbox. She took a taxi to school and was in school from 7.30 a.m. to 3 p.m. After school Gugu relaxed and watched television with her aunt. After six o'clock she attended to her school clothes. Her friends came to her house to do their homework together between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. She ate a late supper alone at 10 o'clock and then joined the family for prayers before going to bed at 11 o'clock.

Gugu felt that her round of activities on the diary day had been worthwhile. Her best liked activity of the day was studying with her group. "It was very interesting and I gained a lot." There were no activities that she disliked, "because I did the things that I wanted to do and relaxed when I wanted to."

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this book is to inform teachers about the problems and opportunities raised by homework assignments. A study was done of the homework patterns of 300 high school pupils living in three-generation families in Soweto and Durban townships, and the study shows that homework routines tend to be well established in the households surveyed. The major changes in routine concern the irregular division of the amount of work done at home or at school. Parents and grandparents may not be aware of what is actually done where. This may make supervision of homework or encouragement to study more difficult.

Homework routines appear to differ between households. However, the general rule is that homework is done later in the day. Age factors partly determine whether pupils are early birds or night owls. Superficially seen, the descriptions of how homework is done by the three generations tally with minor shifts of emphasis. Subtle signs in the data suggest that there is awareness of the need for a home environment conducive to study. Set times and places in the home are designated for homework. The need for peace and quiet to study and for assistance is recognised. There is no indication in the data as to which generation initiated the homework routine, so one must assume that the routine was established gradually to match rather than to interfere with the lifestyles of all members of the household, that is, the needs of the younger generation are accommodated and homework does not dominate the

domestic routine. Specific mention is made of recreational activities as well as domestic work preceding homework. The question here is whether this is the child's or the parent's choice. Certainly a few pupils indicated that they sometimes felt disinclined to study because they were overtired as a result of their domestic workload. This question calls for further inquiry.

The most striking finding emerging from the study is that pupils from disharmonious families are less likely to do homework in the sense that they undertake after-class assignments in school rather than at home. If children from disharmonious families do bring their after-class work home, they take elaborate precautions to ensure that they are shielded from disturbances in the home and can work in peace and quiet.

The data from the diary material suggest that pupils take their homework seriously. They are motivated because they believe that doing homework will produce positive results. The time-use results suggest that good homework habits have a positive influence on achievement in school. Some school children are more motivated by inner direction, others by external pressure. The time-budget results also indicate that self-motivation may be a more important factor for homework and independent study than for attending school. The descriptive accounts of homework confirm that many pupils exhibit self-motivation in that they prefer to carry out their homework activities on their own. An intriguing question for future research is whether a sense of duty rather than

obligation exerts a more positive influence on school performance and achievement.

Intervention

> *There are no guarantees in education; it is a high risk business. But not to do anything and to be paralysed by the size of the problem carries much higher risks* (Hartshorne, 1992:62-63).

The in-depth study of the homework situation was undertaken with a view to providing pointers for intervention. If the township school child is required to regularly complete specific set work at home rather than in after-class study periods at school, we need to know more about how the home environment promotes or detracts from good study habits.

Results from our study of homework indicated that a wide range of homework routines exist. The fine-tuning of routines is mainly determined by the age and gender of the pupil. The most striking finding to emerge from the study is that the poor quality home environment provides little support for homework activities. Therefore, teachers will need to consider how to better assist the pupils at risk of under-achievement in school owing to lack of family support. This will not be an easy task, especially as the teachers themselves are demoralised with the situation in black schools (Nxumalo, 1993). The pupils' accounts of their school lives touched on the problems experienced by teachers. Furthermore, poor school and home environments tend to go hand in hand. Whereas pupils from good home environments tend to be satisfied with school life, pupils from disharmonious families more often attend schools

which are not to their liking. The case studies of multiple-risk pupils — pupils exposed to both poor home and school environments — alert us to the difficulties encountered when students seek to compensate for lack of family support. The accounts illustrate the complexity of individual situations.

Survey results indicate that many high risk students seek to compensate for the poor quality home environment by studying at school with friends. Their efforts appear to go unrewarded. Other results from the study not shown here (Møller, 1994) indicate that participation in study groups has little positive influence on academic achievement. This suggests that the compensation strategies of most pupils from poor quality home environments are not working well and additional measures need to be devised to assist pupils to make academic progress.

In conclusion, this in-depth study of homework suggests that family support is vital for effective education. Results alert us to the difficulties encountered by the high risk pupils who are unable to adequately compensate for lack of family support. Judging from the pupils' own accounts of how they do their homework and their time use on regular weekdays, township youth take their education and after-class assignments very seriously. They believe that homework is a worthwhile occupation that leads to success in education. Given the hope attached to homework by township youth, and the time and effort expended on it, surely they deserve as much assistance as society can provide to help them achieve their educational goals.

Endnotes

1. The three-generation household is currently a common living arrangement for black residents of South African cities. Three-generation households accounted for 28.8% of urban black households (n1199) in a 1988 sample survey of metropolitan areas; and 50,8% of urban blacks in the total sample lived in a multi-generation household (Steyn, 1993). A representative sample survey of youth 16 to 20 years of age living in the Durban metropolitan area in Natal province in 1992 showed that 22% of youth lived in three-generation households. (Unpublished results of a representative sample survey conducted in the Durban Functional Region. Private communication, Dr. Jane Kvalsvig, Human Sciences Research Council, Durban.)

2. A mixture of quota-controlled and random sampling procedures were applied to select 300 three generation households in six areas of Soweto (Pimville, Dube, Moroka, Orlando East, Diepkloof and Dobsonville) and in Durban's Umlazi and KwaMashu townships. Four randomly selected starting points were used in each area of Soweto, and eight in each of the two Durban townships. Interviewers moved from these points in search of households which met the quota requirements of male and female high school children with co-resident parents and grandparents. Personal interviews were conducted with a representative of the high school child, the parent, and the grandparent generation, resulting in a sample size of 3 x 300 = 900 individuals. Where available, the same-sex parent and grandparent in the household were interviewed.

   Interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes. Fieldworkers interviewed respondents on their own as far as was feasible.

   The survey instrument consisted of three questionnaires:

   The screening interview was conducted with a contact person for the household. The schedule used for the screening covered demographic information on the household and all its members.

   The main interview was conducted with three individuals representing the three generations in the household. Items covered in the main

interview included educational achievement and motivation, study habits and aspects of family solidarity. Various probes tapped the possible direct and indirect influences of the home and school environment on educational achievement.

A unique feature of the survey is that essentially the same items were put to the representatives of three generations. Items were suitably re-phrased for each generation level.

At the end of the main interview session the interviewer left a diary with the respondents for them to complete on a specified weekday (Monday to Thursday). The members of the same household recorded the events of the same day, thus the diaries placed with each household captured the events of one day from the perspective of three generations. Respondents were asked to make a written or mental note of the activities of the day, times of starting and finishing activities, as well as details of where and with whom the events took place.

Time-use research experts regard the free-flow 'tomorrow' diary, which allows respondents to describe the daily round of events in their own words, as the most accurate means of collecting time-use data (Altergott, 1990; Harvey, 1990). The technique was also considered the most appropriate one for the South African setting. The method caters for the age-graded sample. Earlier research in the local context had proved the method to be workable among both literate youth (Møller, 1991b; Møller, 1992) and semi-literate older adults (McCallum, 1991).

The interviewer collected the diaries the following day or as soon as technically feasible. In the follow-up interview the interviewer reviewed the events of the diary day with the respondent to make sure all details had been recorded and asked for additional information on motivations underlying the events and an evaluation of the day.

The standard questionnaire schedule consisted of open- and closed-ended items. The questionnaire schedule, which was piloted prior to commencement of the survey, was available in English, Zulu and Sotho. Respondents were interviewed in the language of their choice.

Responses were recorded in separate questionnaires for each respondent. The households in the survey were presented with a token gift in appreciation of their participation in the study. A joint gift to the entire household can be seen to be in keeping with the notion of family solidarity.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Decision Surveys International (DSI), a professional social research organisation in Johannesburg. Interviews were conducted by trained investigators in the employ of DSI. Prior to the commencement of the study, field workers were thoroughly briefed by the senior professional in charge of the project who worked closely with the author in finalising the survey instruments. Fieldwork commenced on October 3, 1992 and was completed by 17 October, 1992. The field work was monitored throughout the survey to ensure uniformity of approach in the two survey sites. Questionnaires were checked daily and a ten percent quality control was applied.

The data was coded and processed by DSI and then transferred to the University of Natal for further statistical analysis.

3 The survey items for high school pupils read:

"How satisfied are you that there is peace and harmony in this household? Are you very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?"

"In comparison to other schools in your area, would you say your school is very good, good, average, poor, or very poor?"

4 Simon (1986) conducted a similar inquiry looking into the perceived factors underlying black failure rates in rural schools in the Bergville circuit. Factors identified by rural black South African pupils included lack of facilities, poor teachers and a home environment not conducive to studying.

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Table 1

Profile of high school pupils by age and gender

	Total n300 %	m -16y n53 %	f -16y n69 %	m 17y + n97 %	f 17y + n81 %
Area					
Soweto		47	49	52	51
Durban townships		53	51	48	49
		100	**100**	**100**	**100**
Household size					
Up to 8 persons		58	48	46	58
9 persons or more		42	52	54	42
		100	**100**	**100**	**100**
Self-reported socio-economic status					
Poor		8	6	9	9
Making ends meet		64	56	71	71
Comfortable		26	38	20	20
Wealthy		2	0	0	0
		100	**100**	**100**	**100**
Family background					
* Male household head		23	9	25	5
* Lives with both parents		43	32	34	15

Table 1 Continued

* Unemployed person in household		74	71	70	75
* Post-matric qualification in household		13	4	5	5
Home Language					
Zulu		71	66	68	63
South Sotho		9	18	14	8
Tswana		11	4	11	18
Type of school					
Department of Education and Training		51	49	53	46
KwaZulu		42	42	45	46
Private/open school		6	6	2	8
Other, don't know		1	3	-	-
		100	**100**	**100**	**100**
Educational attainment					
In Standard 6	19	43	38	4	6
In Standard 7	19	23	39	14	6
In Standard 8	20	28	20	17	20
In Standard 9	22	4	3	35	35
In Standard 10	19	2	-	30	33
	99	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
"On track" pupil (i e , in right class for age)	61	93	97	36	40

Table 1 Continued

Educational aspirations					
Aspires to post-matric education		49	62	55	64
Evaluation of school					
Good	55	68	62	50	46
Average	25	15	21	26	34
Poor	20	17	17	24	20
	100	100	100	100	100
Evaluation of educational situation and performance					
* School life rewarding		73	69	49	40
* Doing as well in school as would like to		71	68	66	67
* Passed 84% of subjects in mid-year exam		53	52	37	46
* Passed maths and science as percentage of total pupils		37	38	13	16
Motivation					
* Sometimes don't feel like learning		28	30	26	32
* School boycotts have made it more difficult for young people to get the education they need		85	92	82	87
* Family expresses anger if I miss school		13	7	14	22
Life satisfaction					
* Life-as-a-whole (very satisfied or satisfied)		79	79	53	54
* Life rewarding (versus frustrating)		77	81	51	51
* No disliked activities on diary day		68	57	66	59

Table 1 Continued

Family life				
* Pays for school fees, books, uniforms				
A little	8	7	5	12
A great deal	2	-	3	5
*** Does housework**				
A little	32	16	18	12
A great deal	62	84	70	85
*** Does shopping and runs errands**				
A little	32	32	21	24
A great deal	59	55	67	61
*** Does gardening and home repair work**				
A little	28	26	23	27
A great deal	60	13	74	28
Evaluation of family life				
* Satisfied with peace and harmony in family life	85	84	83	78
* No complaints about family life	79	64	61	49
* Expresses pride in family	85	84	81	67

Table 1 Continued

Family support person who is most concerned about school issues:				
Grandmother	17	12	26	25
Grandfather	6	-	1	1
Mother	42	58	42	47
Father	21	7	11	4
Sibling	6	7	5	5
Nobody	0	3	5	6
*** Person who assists with homework**				
Mother	25	28	16	12
Grandmother, grandfather	-	1	1	3
Friend	13	7	31	26
Father	4	6	4	-
Sibling	17	28	16	20
Teacher	2	1	1	4
*** Person who tells stories, reads aloud**				
Grandmother (grandfather)	42	41	44	44
Mother (father)	8	7	12	11
Respondent or sibling	6	16	16	14
Nobody	32	22	22	25
*** Respondent assists sibling with homework**	68	70	75	73

Table 1 Continued

Homework practice — Usually does homework					
At home		72	83	69	76
At school		24	17	28	20
At friend's house		4	-	2	3
Other (library, church)		-	-	1	1
		100	**100**	**100**	**100**
Time spent on homework per weekday (self-report)					
Up to 1 hour	29	28	32	27	31
Over 1 up to 2 hours	40	43	42	45	28
Over 2 up to 3 hours	21	23	16	22	25
Over 3 hours	10	6	10	6	16
	100	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Extra-curricular education					
Participation in					
• Study group		45	46	66	51
• Extra lessons		18	18	18	23
• Saturday school		20	30	13	27
• Winter school		13	20	14	17
Marital status					
Single - no steady boy/girlfriend		60	75	41	40
Single - steady boy/girlfriend		32	25	59	60
		100	**100**	**100**	**100**

Table 1 Continued

Club membership				
a) Hangs out with friends	58	43	75	65
b) Hangs out with a gang	9	11	32	18
c) Belongs to a club that meets regularly	20	18	42	14
d) Belongs to a youth club	22	30	32	23
Belongs to a club and/or youth club (c,d)	34	39	53	30

Table 2

Attitudes toward school life	m -16y %	f -16y %	m 17y + %	f 17y + %	Family harmony Yes %	Family harmony No %	Good school Yes %	Good school No %
Recommendations for improving school performance								
Extra schooling, study groups	28	48	19	26	30	24	38	18
Students must study hard	23	19	18	23	23	9	18	22
Teachers must teach	25	13	15	18	16	20	15	19
Better educational facilities	11	12	23	18	15	24	12	23
Better qualified teacher, better education	15	12	13	18	12	24	12	17
Library facilities	11	9	13	16	12	17	9	16
Access to textbooks	8	12	13	6	10	9	9	10
More time to study	9	9	12	9	11	6	10	10
Help with studies, encouragement	4	10	12	10	9	11	10	9
Financial assistance	11	6	5	6	6	11	10	3
Change to a better school	4	12	4	3	5	7	4	7
Discipline, regular school attendance	-	4	5	4	5	-	-	8
Curriculum changes	-	1	2	1	1	4	2	1
Parent involvement, co-operation	6	3	6	4	5	4	6	3
Nothing	4	4	-	3	3	2	2	2
Don't know	2	1	2	-	2	-	2	1
Number respondents/pupils (n)	53	69	97	81	246	54	165	135

Table 2 Continued

Reasons for school life being rewarding or frustrating								
Rewarding aspects								
Positive motivations	27	25	28	18	23	28	26	23
Sense of achievement, doing well	37	31	28	15	31	8	33	19
Teachers enthusiastic, dedicated	25	27	15	13	20	14	22	15
Good discipline	22	13	13	10	15	12	16	12
Curriculum	12	13	11	10	13	6	15	8
Social support	4	15	8	6	9	6	12	5
Facilities		1	0	0	2	-	2	1
Frustrating aspects								
Poor discipline	18	27	47	55	38	47	33	47
Teachers disinterested, poor teaching	25	15	22	22	18	33	10	33
Demotivated	2	-	3	9	3	6	3	5
Poor facilities	4	4	3	3	3	6	2	5
Lack of finance	-	-	2	-	1	-	1	-
Poor performance	-	2	1	1	1	2	-	2
Number respondents/pupils (n)	49	68	91	78	235	51	157	129

Table 3

Homework patterns

High school pupil. "How do you go about doing your homework?"
Older generations. "How does your son/daughter/grandson/granddaughter go about doing his/her homework?"

	Child	Parent	Grand-parent
	n 300	300	300
	%	%	%
Where			
Do homework at home*	19	20	18
At school, after school/during the study, free period, free period in between/ do bulk at school/school library	15	8	5
Local library	-	0	0
Sometimes at home and sometimes at school	5	1	2
Do homework at school, study at home	3	0	1
Bedroom/locked in bedroom/relaxing on bed	3	7	5
Other room (dining, kitchen, lounge, back room)	4	9	13
In a quiet place/where not disturbed	10	8	6

* The phrasing used in the descriptions refers to the high school pupils except where responses came mainly from parents and grandparents

Table 3 Continued

When			
Early in the morning/before school	3	2	1
After school	6	0	2
Immediately after school before anything else	4	2	3
Go out/relax first (play, go to gym, eat, watch television first)	3	2	2
Do homework after house work	8	6	6
At night/in the evening/after supper	17	20	23
After the family has gone to sleep/stay up late	7	7	9
With whom			
With friends/with study group	17	13	10
Do homework with sister/brother	1	2	3
Helped by sister, brother, family member	14	16	9
Ask if have problems, don't understand, need assistance	4	7	3
Do homework by myself/without assistance	3	3	1
Alone/undisturbed	14	17	20
Method			
Start with easy parts/do what I can on my own	1	-	-
Take/sit down with books/use textbooks/ sit at table	8	9	7
Read and test myself/revision	8	0	1
Read/write/reads and writes/see him (her) writing presume it's homework	6	10	7
Have a study timetable	1	0	1
Leave problems, queries for teacher	2	0	-

Table 3 Continued

While listening to radio/watching television	1	4	2
Evaluation			
Do/es homework very well	1	6	4
Only studies when forced to/reminded	-	1	3
Do not know/never see him doing homework/ no idea	0	6	11

Table 4

Homework patterns by age and gender of pupils, harmony in the family and quality of school

	m -16y %	f -16y %	m 17y + %	f 17y + %	Family harmony Yes %	Family harmony No %	Good school Yes %	Good school No %
Where								
Do homework at home	26	11	23	16	21	9	18	20
At school: after school/ during the study, free period, free period in between/do bulk at school/school library	21	10	18	12	13	24	15	15
Sometimes at home and sometimes at school	6	9	4	4	5	6	8	2
Do homework at school, study at home	4	3	5	-	3	4	3	3
Bedroom/locked in bedroom/ relaxing on bed	-	4	1	6	[illegible]	6	2	4
Other room (dining, kitchen, lounge, back room)	2	10	2	4	[illegible]	4	5	4
In a quiet place/where not disturbed	9	12	10	9	9	15	9	12
When								
Early in the morning/before school	6	6	2	1	2	7	4	2
After school/at home	6	1	7	7	5	11	4	7
Immediately after school before anything else	2	6	5	4	3	9	5	4
Go out/relax first (play, go to gym, eat/watch television first)	6	1	1	4	3	2	3	2

Table 4 Continued

Do homework after housework	2	13	5	11	9	4	9	7
At night/in the evening after supper	17	16	19	17	19	9	20	14
After the family has gone to sleep/stay up late	4	6	8	9	6	13	7	7
With whom								
With friends/with study group	21	9	20	20	17	17	17	17
Do homework with sister/brother	-	1	2	1	2	-	2	1
Helped by sister, brother, family member	21	28	4	9	15	9	13	14
Ask if have problems, don't understand, need assistance	4	4	3	4	5	-	4	3
Do homework by myself/without assistance	4	3	2	3	3	-	3	2
Alone/undisturbed	13	12	17	15	15	13	14	15
Method								
Start with easy parts/do what I can on my own	-	-	2	3	2	-	1	2
Take/sit down with books/use textbooks/ sit at table	6	6	8	9	8	6	6	10
Read and test myself/revision	6	9	6	10	7	11	8	7
Read/write/read and write	6	10	4	6	7	4	7	6
Have a study timetable	2	-	2	1	1	2	1	2
Leave problems, queries for teacher	4	4	-	1	2	2	1	3
While listening to radio/ watching television		1	2	1	2	-	2	1

Table 4 Continued

Evaluation								
Do homework well	-	1	-	1	1	-	1	1
Don't know	-	-	1	-	0	-	-	1
Number respondents/pupils (n)	53	69	97	81	246	54	165	135

Table 5

Time use on the diary day: Homework, studying for exams, and reading to learn

	m -16y n53	f -16y n69	m 17y+ n97	f 17y+ n81
Participation rates				
Did homework, studied and/or read	79 %	83 %	78 %	73 %
Time spent in minutes on:				
Homework	29	47	42	43
Studying for exams	61	28	55	44
Reading to learn	7	8	9	5
Homework, study, reading	97	83	106	92
Locational setting ("where?")	%	%	%	%
Home	82	95	79	90
School	13	1	12	10
Library	-	1	7	-
Other person's home	2	.	2	-
In the street/travelling	-	2	-	-
Elsewhere	3		-	-
	100	**99**	**100**	**100**
(n activities = 100%)	60	75	108	84

Table 5 Continued

Social setting ("with whom?")*	%	%	%	%
Family	38	29	9	17
Non-family	17	9	27	16
Alone	63	67	65	68
(n activities = 100%)	60	75	108	84

* Columns add to over 100% because some activities were done in the company of more than one person.

South Africa is currently experiencing a "crisis in education." While South Africa awaits major educational reforms, pupils and their teachers are discouraged by the lack of progress.

This book focuses on a particular aspect of education about which little is known, namely homework. Educational opportunities are not exclusively the result of the quality and quantity of contact hours in school. Schoolwork *outside* of the school setting makes an equally important contribution to education achievement. A study conducted in three hundred households in Soweto and Durban asked African pupils to describe in their own words *how* they do (or don't do) their homework. To complete the picture, the pupils' own accounts of homework were compared with those supplied by parents and grandparents. Findings indicated that a supportive home environment represents an important additional educational resource which needs to be tapped to promote positive education outcomes. Pupils who feel happier about family and school life are more motivated to study harder. Establishing good homework habits among township school children may be a joint task for teachers and parents to tackle together. The combined effort may have positive and far-reaching outcomes for South African education.

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