INCREASING HOMEWORK COMPLETION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

BY USING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES

AND ESTABLISHING ROUTINES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research project was to increase the homework completion rate of middle school students through the use of interventions. The participants in this study came from one public middle school. The participants were thirty-four 6th grade students in language arts, respectively. The intervention took place from September 10, 2007 through November 20, 2007.

The targeted students at one public middle school in northwestern Illinois exhibited low levels of homework completion. The teacher researchers surveyed teachers, parents, and students, in addition to completing teacher observation checklists for each of the targeted students. The teacher survey asked questions pertaining to students turning in homework, and receiving consequences for not doing so. The parent survey revealed that students do not bring homework assignments home but do ask for assistance when needed. The student survey indicated that parents helped their child with their homework assignments less than half the time (zero to three days a week). Also, students indicated that they fill out their planners most of the time (four to five days a week). The teacher observation checklists showed that incomplete homework assignments were a significant problem for the targeted students.

One of the interventions that was chosen to implement was positive reinforcement through the Gotcha system. This intervention has been referred to as a way for students to receive positive feedback, as well as a way to motivate students to increase their rate of homework completion. Another intervention chosen to use included increasing parental involvement in the completion of student homework through the use of daily homework planners. This intervention has been used as a strategy that has led to increased parental involvement, and an increase in the homework completion rate (Bryan & Burstein, 2004, Teacher). This intervention involved students writing assignments in their homework planners daily and taking the planners home to have them signed by their parents. By doing this students and parents were establishing a homework completion routine.

The teacher researchers found that the use of Gotcha's and student planners seemed to positively effect the parent involvement rate. However, the percentage of incomplete assignments increased by seven percent. The teacher researchers also found that fewer students asked their parents for help with their homework. The teacher researchers believe that the use of planners helped students to organize their homework, and made parents more aware of homework assignments.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The targeted students of the sixth grade language arts class and the sixth grade resource class of Site A at a public middle school in northwestern Illinois, displayed low levels of homework completion. Low homework completion was defined as students failing to turn in completed assignments. This problem of low homework completion appeared to negatively impact student achievement. This problem was documented through a teacher observation log, a teacher survey, a parent survey, and a student survey.

Immediate Context of the Problem

This action research project was conducted by two teacher researchers in the same community in rural northwest Illinois. The school was a middle school and all site information was retrieved from the 2005 Illinois School Report Card.

The middle school had a student population of 775, representing five ethnic backgrounds. Table 1 below reflects that the majority (90%) of the student body is Caucasian and Hispanic.

Table 1

Ethnic Backgrounds of Students by Percentage

Site	n	Caucasian	Hispanic	African American	Asian Pacific	Multiracial/ Ethnic	Native American
School	775	71.2	19.4	1.9	0.5	7.0	0
District	3600	67.9	21.5	2.7	0.6	7.0	0.3

Of the 775 students, 40.8% are considered to be low-income, which is about the same as the district percentage of 40.6. Low income is defined in the Illinois School Report Card (2005) as "…students come from families receiving public aid; live in institutions for neglected or

delinquent children; are supported in foster homes with public funds; or are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches" (p. 1). The population of students with Limited-English-Proficiency at the middle school was 0.5%, which was a third of the district percentage of 1.7. "Limited-English-proficient students are those students eligible for transitional bilingual programs" (p. 1). The schools attendance rate was 95.1%.

The school district, which includes four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school, employs a total of 189 full-time equivalent teachers, 26.5% (n=50) are male and 73.5% (n=139) are female. Of the 189 full-time equivalent teachers in the district, 65.5% (n=124) have bachelors degrees and 34.5% (n=65) have masters degrees or above. The average years of experience a teacher has in the district is 16.6 years while the average salary for a teacher is $53,133. Table 2 illustrates the limited diversity among faculty in this district.

Table 2

Ethnic Backgrounds of Teachers by Percentage

Site	n	Caucasian	Hispanic	African American	Asian/ Pacific	Native American
District	189	92.0	5.8	2.1	0.0	0.0
State	128,079	84.3	4.5	9.9	1.2	0.2

The average class size in the middle school was 23 students, with a student to teacher ratio in the district of 22:3. The pupil-certified staff ratio in the district was 16:2. In the 2003-2004 academic years, $4,739 was spent on instructional expenditures, and $7,416 on operating expenditures, per pupil. Instructional expenditures as defined in the Illinois School Report Card 2005, "…includes the direct costs of teaching pupils of the interaction between teachers and pupils. Operating expenditures per pupil includes the gross operating cost of a school district excluding summer school, adult education, bond principal retired, and capital expenditures" (p.

3). These expenditures per pupil were much lower than the state averages of $5,216 and $8,716, respectively.

According to the schools website (Site Website, 2006), approximately 225 instructional minutes per week are dedicated to each of the required subjects: English, mathematics, science, social studies, and physical welfare. In order to be considered for promotion to the next grade, students must have successfully completed all required courses as determined by classroom teachers. Parents were to be notified before the end of the 3rd quarter if their child is being considered for retention or in need of our 90-hour summer remediation program. Successful completion of this program, evidenced by growth in required skills, allowed for promotion to the next grade.

The administrative structure and staff consists of the principal, assistant principal, dean of students, two counselors, one school psychologist, one social worker, one speech pathologist, one ESL instructor, one library specialist, one technology specialist, five music staff, four PE/Health teachers, one literacy coach, six encore teachers, six classroom aides, one nurse, three secretaries, one police liaison, and four custodians. Administration and staff are divided into teams. The eighth grade team consists of two cores that include two language arts teachers, one science, one math, and one social studies teacher (n=5). The seventh grade team consists of two cores that include two language arts teachers, one science, one math, and one social studies teacher (n=5). The sixth grade teams consist of three cores that include three language arts teachers, one science, one math, and one social studies teacher (n=5). The special education resource teachers consist of 4 sixth-grade, 2 seventh-grade, and 2 eighth-grade teachers.

Based on the teacher researchers' experience, the school has a friendly atmosphere with high standards for students and faculty. The administration allows faculty to collaborate on

projects and facilitate interdisciplinary units, which tie an entire academic team into a theme. Also, the administration encourages teams to collaborate three times a week to discuss student matters. Before and after school homework clubs are open with aides present to assist students. After school tutoring is offered on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. Also, after school reading and math remediation programs are available. Athletic and musical programs involve a great number of students. A "Big Brother Big Sister" program is available for all students.

The school is located near two side streets of the city and one crossing guard is stationed at the dangerous intersection to keep students safe while crossing the streets. The school shares its geographical location with one of its four elementary schools and the high school. The school grounds encompass more than half of the available space; it is a large, brown, brick two-story structure. The school is a split-level building with a total of two floors. The main level of the building includes the main office, gymnasium, lunchroom, band room, seventh grade hall, and an eighth grade hall. The upper level is reserved for mainly sixth grade with the library and technology centers in the middle.

The information we believe is the most pertinent to our problem is the socioeconomic status of our students. With 40.8% of our students being low-income we are curious if homework completion is not valued as much in low-income homes. Cooper and Nye state that students from poorer homes can have more difficulty completing assignments than their middle class counterparts (1994). Poorer students are more likely to work after school, or may not have a quiet, well lit place to do their assignments. It can be argued that, like school, homework is not the great equalizer (1994).

Local Context of the Problem

This action research project was conducted in a rural northwest Illinois community that is situated on the banks of the Rock River in one of the largest counties in the state. The total population in 2000 for the community was 22,844, with males accounting for 48.5% and females accounting for 51.5% of the population. The growth rate for 2000 was -3.8%. The median age for residents in the community was 37.8 years (U.S. Census Bureau, Fact Sheet, American Fact Finder, 2000). The median household income in the community was $40,816.00, and the median family income was $48,588.00. The percentage of families below the poverty level was 6.4%. The community is predominantly Caucasian 87.5%, Hispanic or Latino 7.7%, and 4.8% of residents are of other ethnicities (U.S. Census Bureau, Fact Sheet, American Fact Finder, 2000). The community has a substantial percentage of the population who have earned high school degrees (81.1%) and a small percentage (14.3%) of the population have attained bachelor degrees or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, Fact Sheet, American Fact Finder, 2000).

The average household size was 2.51 and the average family size was 3.02 (U.S. Census Bureau, Fact Sheet, American Fact Finder, 2000). The community has 63.5% of the residents in the labor force. The labor force had a 4.9% unemployment rate (2000).

The community is a strong blend of industry, commercial, and retail business and residential areas. In fact, the community has become a regional retail hub. The community industrial base has expanded as the city has filled two industrial parks and begins development of a third and fourth. Retail sales for the region have expanded as the community has emerged as a regional retail hub. The total crime index rate for 2004 is 2, 807.

In 1834, Hezekiah Brink built the first cabin in what was to become Harrisburg. Two years later, William Kirkpatrick settled downstream in an area that became Chatham. In 1838,

the small towns of Harrisburg and Chatham combined to become the community in an effort to

attract the county seat. The name was bestowed to the new town in honor of Major James Site,

who distinguished himself in the area during the Blackhawk War in 1832. On February 16th,

1857 the community was incorporated as a city by state law (City of Site, website).

The community is within one of the best park districts in the state. The Park District

offers a variety of recreational opportunities in addition to the city parks. At Park A, which is

situated on an island in the Rock River, the park district operates a public pool and concessions

area. Users can also launch watercraft, use the pavilion, or fish on the island. At the Westwood

complex, residents can purchase memberships or day-passes for the indoor tennis courts, indoor

track, racquetball courts, gymnastics club, fitness gymnasium and more. At the District's Center,

users can play basketball on two full-length gym courts, or go swimming in the indoor pool. The

park district also runs a golf course on the east end of the City and a marina on the Rock River.

The marina offers concessions, fuel, and some watercraft rentals. This, in addition to a number of

parks spread around the area that offer ball diamonds, soccer and football fields, tennis courts,

playgrounds and picnic benches.

The community also operates a number of parks throughout the city. At the Civic Center,

one can find weekly concerts from the Municipal Band performing in the band shell. Lincoln and

Wallace parks are neighborhood parks offering several basketball courts, play areas and open

space for people to enjoy. Platt Park offers open space and a ball diamond in the middle of town,

while Dale Park offers a break and a place to sit in the shade downtown. The community is also

home to both a YMCA and a YWCA.

The site in which the research is being conducted is a middle school that the district's

four elementary schools feed into. The district mission statement as found in the School

Improvement Plan is, "This district, in partnership with parents and community, will create a caring environment in which all students learn. This partnership shall empower all students to become responsible learners and decision makers as they prepare for the 21st century" (Site Website, 2006). The district has one pre-elementary building, four elementary buildings, one middle school, and one high school. The current tax base is $4.55 per $100.00, and the district is currently planning a tax referendum in the near future. The technology allows each classroom at least one computer. The site has three computer labs, each with 25 or more computers that are available to classes and students throughout the day. The district averages one computer for every four students (Site website, 2006).

With 40.8% of our students being low income, we are wondering if this demographic relates to the lack of homework completion in our classrooms. This wondering conveys to mind that today's world brings the fact that most homes are two-parent-working homes (Cordry & Wilson, 2004). Thus, homework is a source of stress for many families (Bryan & Burstein, 2004, Teacher). Therefore, we are questioning if our perceptions of low income and two-parent-working homes contribute to lack of homework completion.

<center>National Context of the Problem</center>

Several researchers have documented that students experience difficulties in completing their homework (Salend & Gajria, 1995). It is stated that students lose interest in homework in 30 minutes. Students with disabilities say that homework is dull, boring, and a waste of time (Bryan & Burstein, 2004, Teacher). Some student barriers that interfere with homework include understanding assignments, accurately recording them, remembering to take materials home, setting aside time to work, organizing necessary materials, following through and completing work, putting the work in a safe place, and then remembering to take it back to school (Bryan,

Brustein, & Bryan, 2001). However, in later grades, when a child has multiple teachers,

homework can really add up (Galvin, 2004).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Evidence of the Problem

The purpose of this research was to increase the homework completion rate of middle school students by having them fill out homework planners correctly, having planners signed by a parent, and completing daily homework logs. The participants in this study come from one public middle school. The participants were thirty-four 6th grade students. Student, parent, and teacher surveys were distributed to document the current levels of homework completion. In addition, the teacher researchers completed daily homework logs for a period of two weeks prior to the implementation of the interventions. The pre-documentation period had a duration of two weeks from August 27, 2007 through September 7, 2007, and included tasks such as photocopying and collecting consent and assent forms from participants; making photocopies of parent, student, and teacher surveys; distributing and collecting each of the previously mentioned surveys; completing daily homework logs; and analyzing the collected surveys.
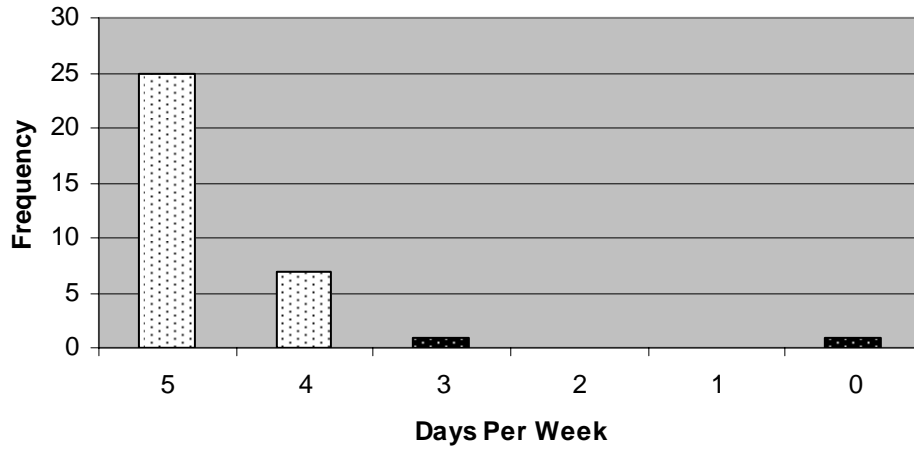
Student Survey

The student survey contains a series of questions designed to generate student feedback on the current rate of homework completion, and how easily students were able to get assistance with their homework at home. The survey was administered to 34 students in sixth grade the week of August, 27, 2007 in the teacher researchers' respective classrooms. This survey included five questions all consisting of likert scales. The students completed this survey by August 31, 2007 100% (n=34). This survey was administered only once by the teacher researchers at the given school (Appendix A).

In Figure 1 of the student survey, the bar graph represents that 100% (n=34) of students reported that they turn in their homework four to five times a week.
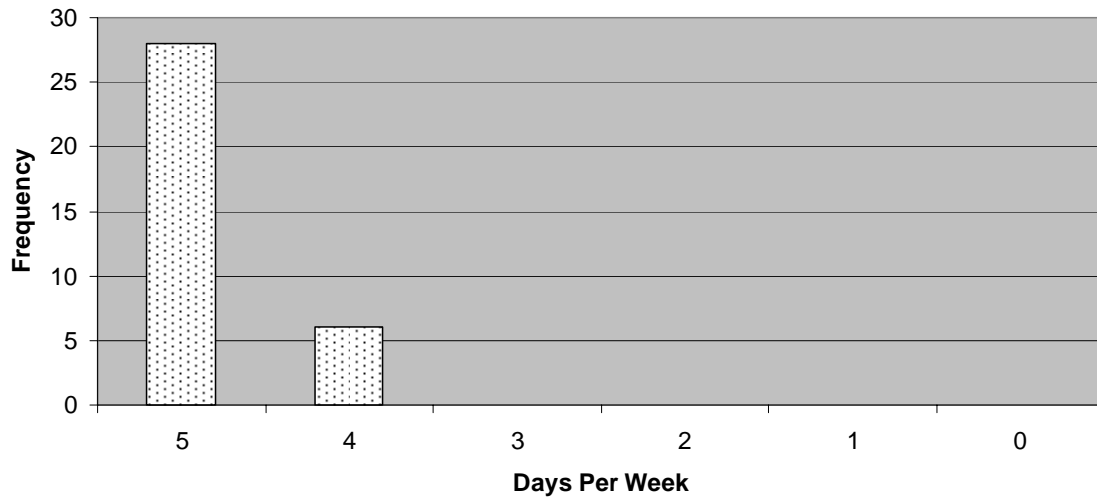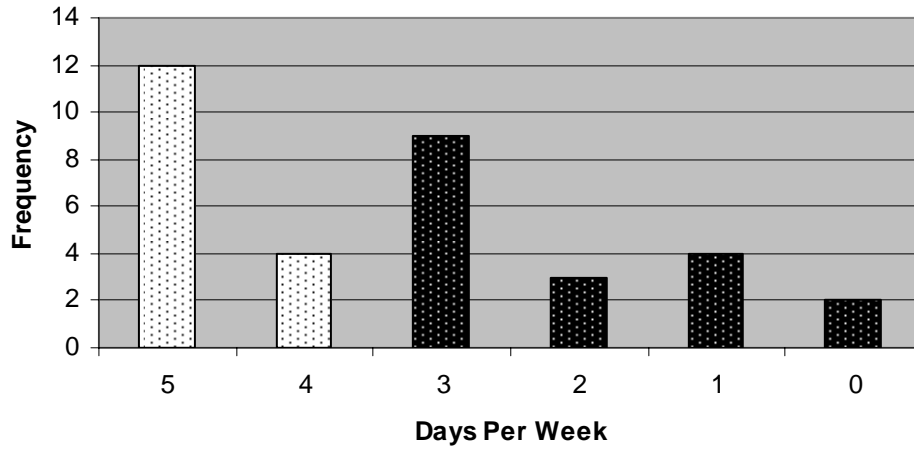

Figure 1: *Students turn in their homework* (n=34)

In Figure 2 of the student survey, the bar graph represents that 6% (n=2) of the students reported that they do not fill out their homework planner zero to three times a week.

*Figure 2: Students fill out their homework planner* (n=34)

In Figure 3 of the student survey, the bar graph represents that 53% (n=18) of the students reported that they receive homework help from their parents zero to three times a week.

*Figure 3: Parents help students with their homework* (n=34)

In Figure 4 of the student survey, the bar graph represents that 24% (n=8) of the students reported that they do not understand the purpose of the assignment zero to three days on an average week.
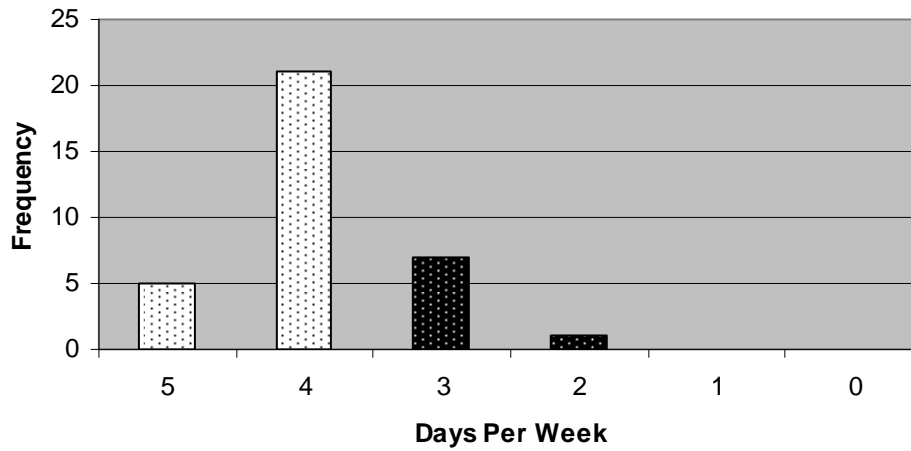
Figure 4: *Do students understand the purpose of the assignment* (n=34)

In Figure 5 of the student survey, the bar graph represents that 26% (n=9) of the students reported that they do not have a quiet place for homework completion zero to three times a week.
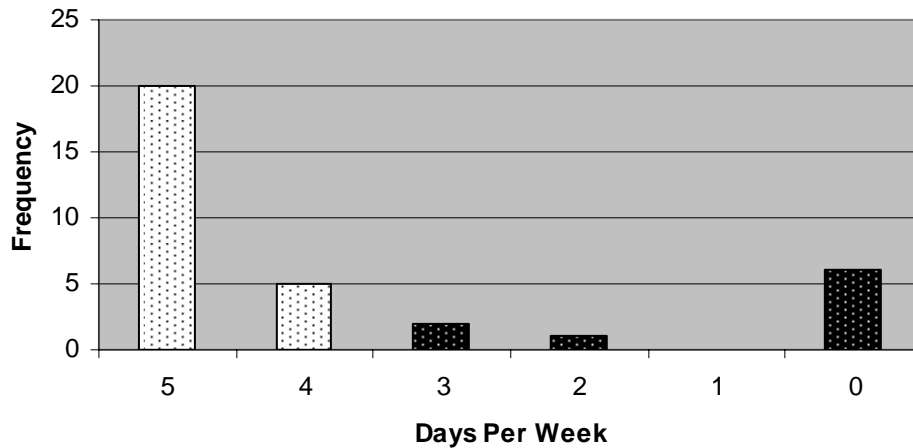
Figure 5: *Days students use a quiet place for homework completion* (n=34)

Summary

The student surveys indicate that 100% (n=34) of students turn in their homework four to five days during an average week (Figure 1). Students did not have a quiet place for homework completion 26% (n=9) zero to three times a week (Figure 5), but parents/guardians were not available to help with homework 53% (n=18) zero to three days a week (Figure 3).
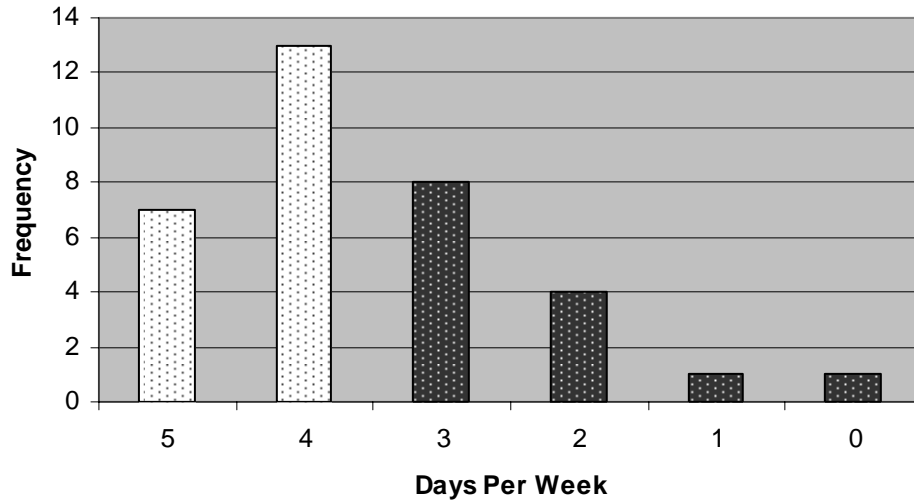
<u>Parent Survey</u>

The parent survey was designed to generate parent feedback on their current homework practices within the home such as, parental availability and requests made by their child for homework help. Parents who completed and returned the consent/assent forms were asked to complete the parent survey (Appendix B). Surveys were distributed to parents of thirty-four 6th graders in the teacher researchers' reading/language arts classes the week of August 27, 2007. The percent rate of return was 100%. The parent survey included five questions all consisting of likert scales. The parents responded to the first two questions by circling 0 days, 1 day, 2 days, 3 days, 4 days or 5 days. Parents responded to questions 3, 4 and 5 by circling never, sometimes, often or always.

In Figure 6 of the parent survey, the bar graph represents that 97% (n=33) of parents reported that they ask their child if they have homework four to five times a week.
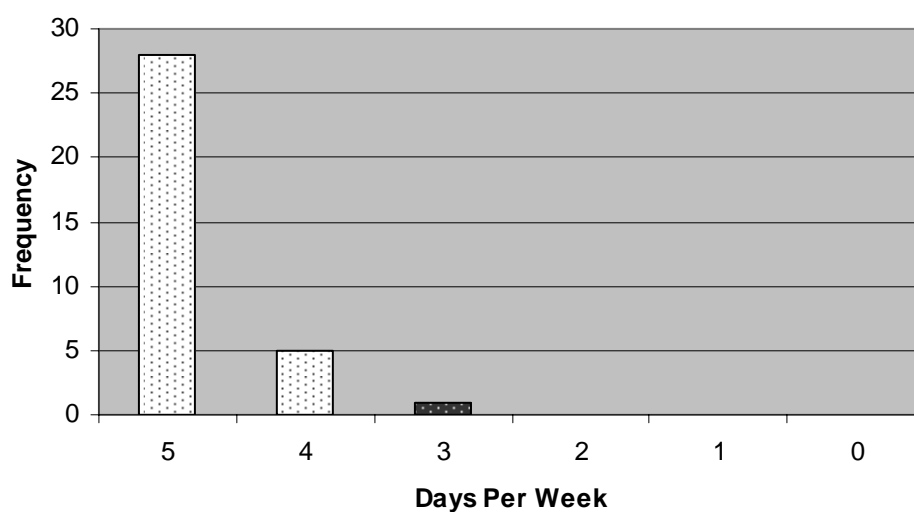
Figure 6: Parents ask their child if they have homework (n=34)

In Figure 7 of the parent survey, the bar graph represents that 41% (n=14) of parents reported that their child brings homework home zero to three times a week.

Figure 7: Child brings homework home (n=34)

In Figure 8 of the parent survey, the pie chart represents that 59% (n=20) of parents reported that their child sometimes or never asks them for help with their homework.

Figure 8: *Child asks for help with homework* (n=34)

In Figure 9 of the parent survey, the pie chart represents that 6% (n=2) of parents reported the homework is always or often too difficult for them to help their child.
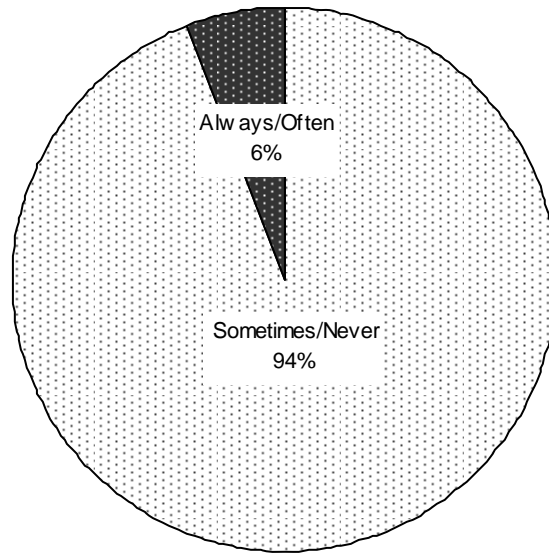
Figure 9: *Homework too difficult for parents* (n=34)

In Figure 10 of the parent survey, the pie chart represents that 6% (n=2) of parents reported that they sometimes or never provide a quiet place for their child to do their homework.
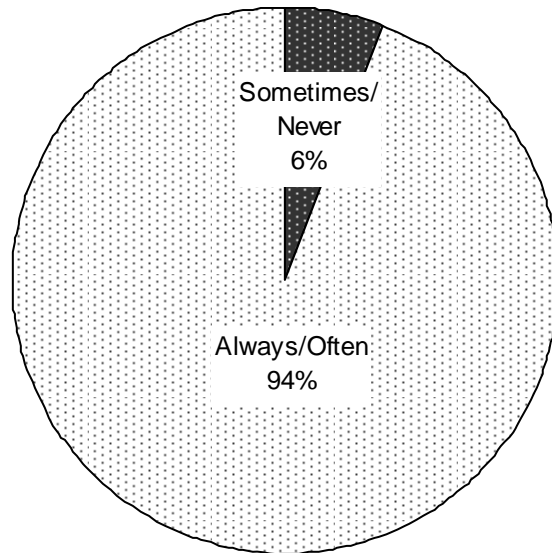
Figure 10: Provide a quiet place for homework completion (n=32)

Summary

The parent surveys indicate that 97% (n=33) of parents reported that they ask their child if they have homework four to five times a week (Figure 6). How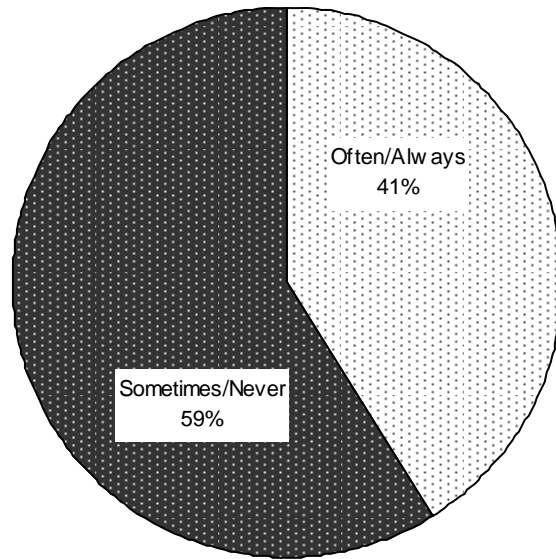ever, 41% (n=14) of parents reported that their child brings homework home zero to three times a week (Figure 7). Also, only 59% (n=20) of parents reported that their child sometimes or never asks them for help with their homework (Figure 8). On a positive note, only 6% (n=2) of parents reported the homework is always or often too difficult for them to help their child (Figure 9), and 6% (n=2) of parents reported that they sometimes or never provide a quiet place for their child to do their homework (Figure 10).

Teacher Survey

       The teacher survey is a tool that the teacher researchers used to determine how teachers feel about homework completion. This survey was administered to fifteen 6th grade teachers at the site. These teachers received this survey and had one week to complete it. Of the teachers surveyed, 38% (n=6) returned their completed surveys. The teacher surveys were given and completed on August 31, 2007. The survey included five likert scale questions, along with a place for additional comments. Each of the five questions included four choices: frequently, often, rarely, and never. The teacher researchers collapsed the results of this survey into an affirmative (frequently and often) and a negative (rarely and never) reaction. The teachers were asked to circle the response that most described their classroom homework practices over the last academic year (Appendix C).

       Of the teachers surveyed, 100% (n=6) of the teachers reported that students frequently or often turn in their homework.

In Figure 11 of the teacher survey, the pie chart represents that 100% (n=6) of the

teachers reported that students frequently or often turn in their homework on time.

Frequently/Often
100%
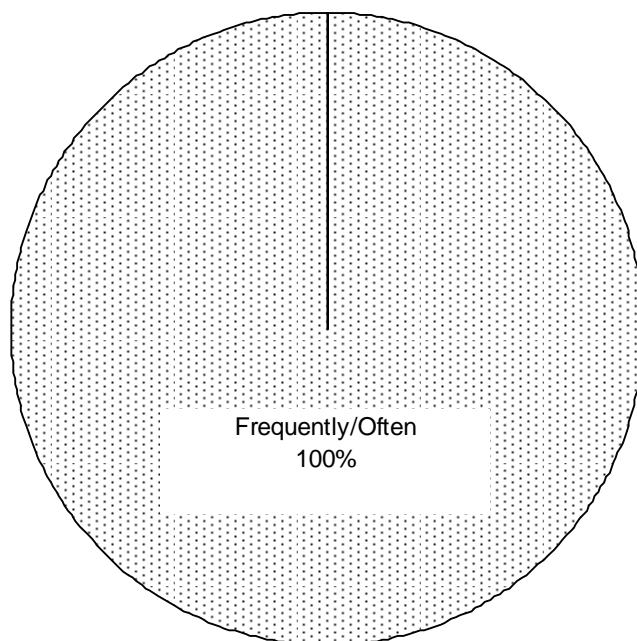
Figure 11: *Students turn in their homework on time* (n=6)

In Figure 12 of the teacher survey, the pie chart represents that 83% (n=5) of the teachers reported that students frequently or often have consequences for not turning in complete assignments.

Rarely/Never
17%

Frequently/Often
83%

Figure 12: Students have consequences for not turning in complete assignments (n=6)

In Figure 13 of the teacher survey, the pie chart represents that 50% (n=3) of the teachers reported that students had time allocated to do their homework in class.
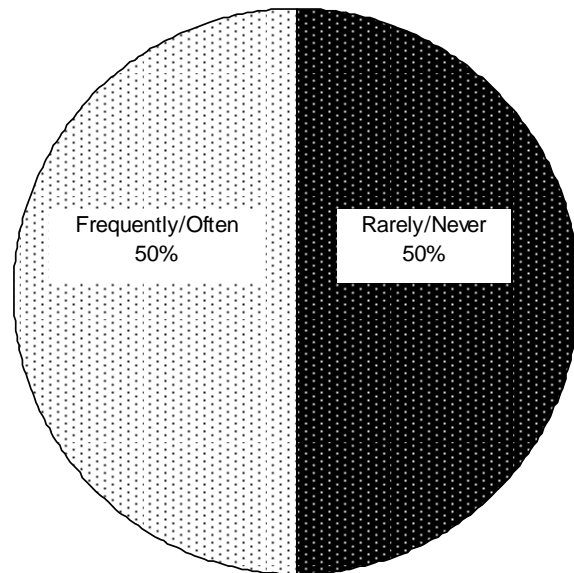
Figure 13: Students had time allocated to do their homework in class (n=6)

In Figure 14 of the teacher survey, the pie chart represents that 50% (n=3) of the teachers reported that students are offered incentives for completing their work on time.

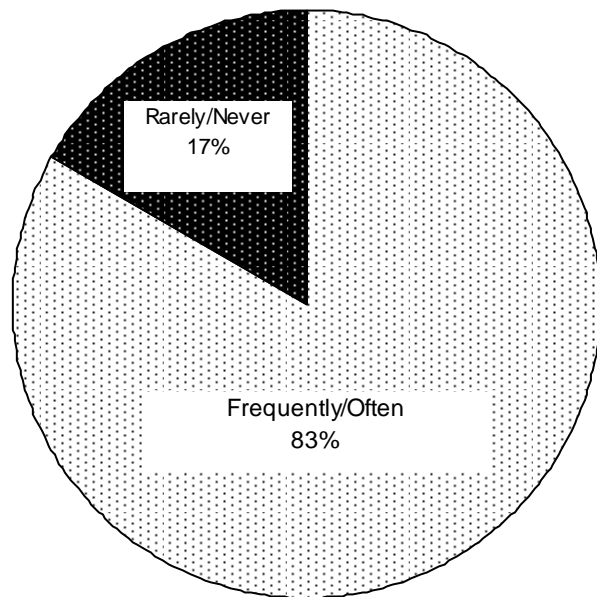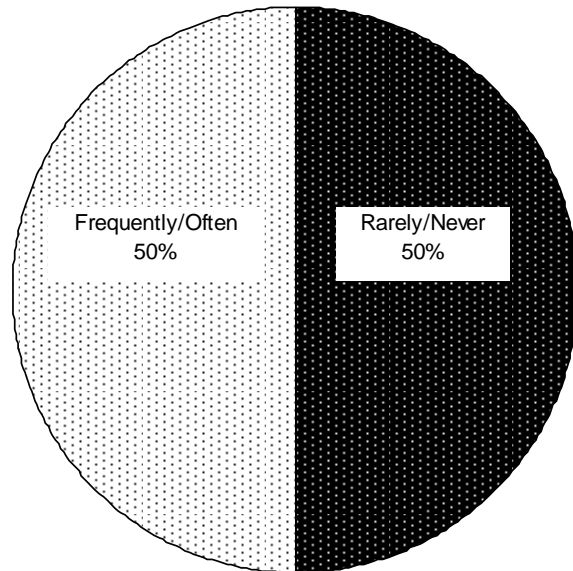*Figure 14*: *Students are offered incentives for completing work on time* (n=6)

In Figure 15 of the teacher survey, the pie chart represents that 100% (n=6) of the teachers reported that students are given expectations for homework assignments.

Frequently/Often
100%
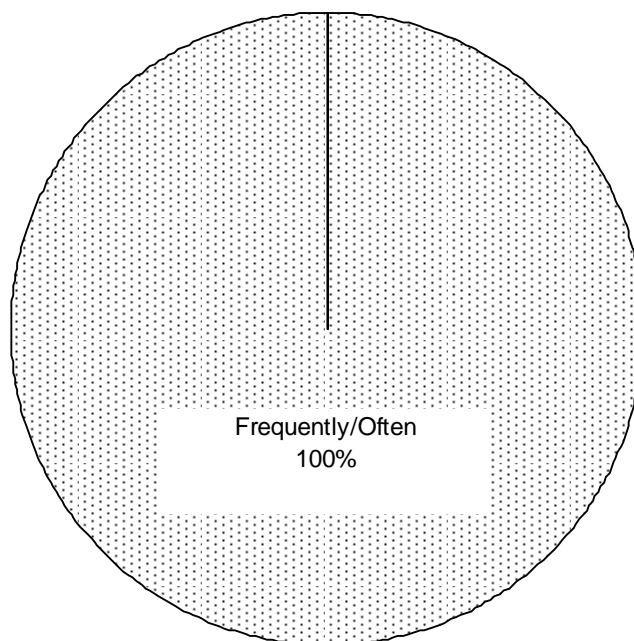
Figure 15: *Students are given expectations for homework assignments* (n=6)

Summary

According to Figure 11 of the teacher survey, 100% (n=6) of teachers reported that students turn in their homework assignments on time. However, according to Figure 14 of the teacher survey, only 50% of teachers (n=3) offer incentives for completing work on time. Additionally, according to Figure 13 of the teacher survey, only 50% (n=3) have time allocated for students to do homework in class.

<u>Teacher Observation Checklist</u>

        Teacher Observation Checklists were completed each day from August 27, 2007 through September 7, 2007 to record the number of students who completed homework, had their planners filled out correctly and had their planners signed by a parent/guardian (Appendix D). The teacher researchers collected data each day from 34 students. The teacher researchers compiled their data from the teacher observation checklists at the end of the two week period.

        Figure 16 shows the data collected from August 27, 2007 through September 7, 2007 regarding completed and incomplete homework. The pie chart represents that 99% (n=33) of the students completed their homework everyday.
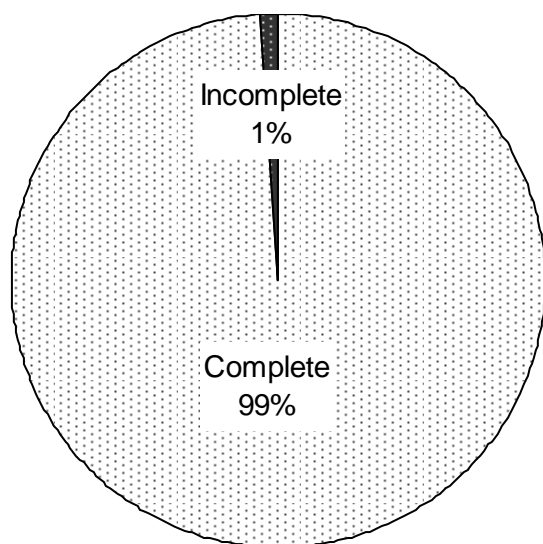
Figure 16: *Homework Completed* (n=34)

In Figure 17 of the teacher observation checklist, the pie chart represents that 88% (n=30) of the students had their planner filled out correctly everyday.
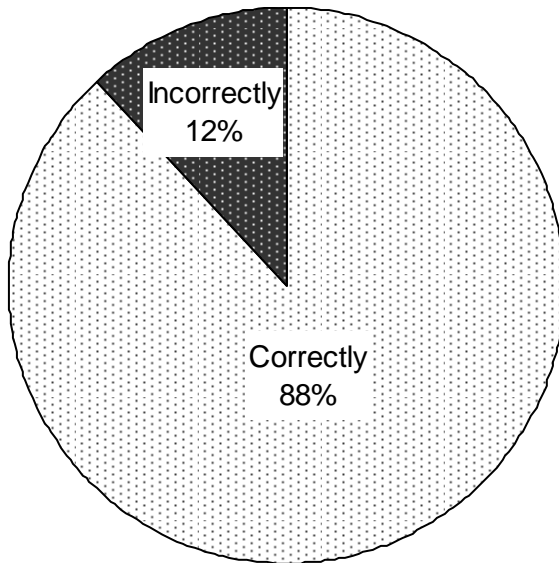
Figure 17: *Planner Filled Out Correctly* (n=34)

In Figure 18 of the teacher observation checklist, the pie chart represents that 79% (n=27) of the students had a parent signature in their planner everyday.
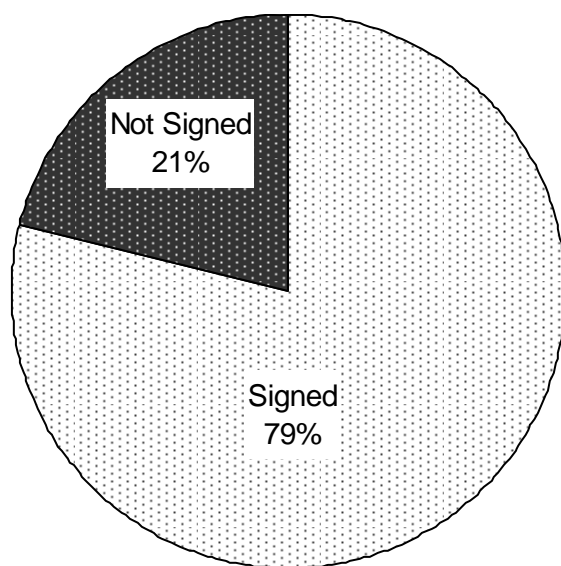
Figure 18: Planner Signed (n=34)

Summary

According to Figure 16 of the teacher observation checklist, 99% (n=33) of the students completed their homework everyday. Additionally, 88% (n=30) of the students had their planner filled out correctly everyday (Figure 17) and only 79% (n=27) of the students had a parent signature in their planner everyday (Figure 18).

<u>Reflection</u>

We, as teacher researchers, found the data collected to be interesting and helpful in establishing our routines and procedures in the classroom. Regarding the student responses we feel the students were not completely honest. All of the students reported that they turn in their homework four to five times a week (Figure 1). The results were more positive than what we seen in the classroom and in their planners. Obviously, several students view themselves in a more positive way when it comes to these problem areas. We were a bit disheartened to see that 53% of the students surveyed said they receive homework help from parents three days or less a week (Figure 3).

Regarding the parent surveys, we were really pleased with the 100% return rate. We also feel that the parents were honest and forthcoming with their answers and comments. We were very pleased that almost all of the parents ask their child if they have homework every night (Figure 6). We found it to be rather interesting that 59% of the parents reported that their child sometimes or never asks for help with homework (Figure 8). We hope we do not see a decline in homework completion considering over half of the parents are not helping with homework.

Of the 15 teacher surveys that were handed out, only 6 were returned. Therefore we were not very happy with the return rate. However, we were pleased to see that 100% of the teachers report that students frequently or often turn in homework on time (Figure 11). Also, we were shocked that 50% of the teachers allocate time in class for homework (Figure 13). Overall, we found the teachers responses to be in line with our experiences and practices as sixth grade teachers.

During data collection, it came to our attention that several students did not know how to fill out their planner correctly. Therefore the 12% of students not filling out their planner correctly came to no surprise (Figure 17).

It will be interesting for us, as teacher researchers to see how our interventions/strategies impact the outcome of our post documentation data. We hope our interventions will motivate our students to fill out their planners correctly, involve their parents, and complete their homework.

<div align="center">Probable Causes</div>

Teachers and adults comment that homework facilitates learning to work independently, teaches responsibility and preparation for the future (Coutts, 2004). Beliefs about the value of homework and concerns over the quantity assigned have fluctuated (Bempechat, 2004). The meaning of homework and the purpose it fulfills is seen differently by students, parents and teachers (Coutts, 2004). There is a growing concern among parents, students and teachers about the usefulness of homework, especially large amounts of it in the elementary grades (Truscott, 1998). Lack of homework completion may be due in part to parental problems (Bryan & Burstein, 2004, Teacher). Improving parent involvement is one of the most challenging tasks facing educators today (Vandegrift & Greene, 1992). More often than not, parents lack the training to offer sustained involvement with their child's homework (Cooper & Nye, 1994). Another factor influencing parental involvement in homework is parents' personal beliefs about the causes of school achievement and their ability to help their child (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997, as cited in Bryan T., Burstein, & Bryan J., 2001). Most parents spend more time watching television than talking about school with their children (Clevenson, 1999), therefore parents need to establish a routine for their child and monitor progress to aid in homework completion (Xu & Corno, 2003).

Other problems with homework completion include children not having a designated spot to do homework, lack of supervision, homework is too difficult or too long, and they procrastinate (Bryan & Burstein, 2004, Teacher). Today's world brings to the table the fact that most homes are two-parent-working homes (Cordry & Wilson, 2004). Children are overscheduled with too many extracurricular activities, causing stress and exhaustion (Dolin, 2005). Thus, parents are having stressful evenings and homework battles more and more (2005). Parents are using trial and error, bribery, threats, reasoning and anything they hope will work to get homework done (How, 2007).

The lack of homework completion can be due to work getting harder and harder and some students may have a more difficult time than others completing assignments, doing them correctly, or simply staying interested (Galvin, 2004). Increasing homework assignments and raising standards are likely to make it more difficult for these students to succeed in general education classrooms (Bryan T., Burstein, & Bryan J., 2001). Most students leave school with a poor understanding of mathematics that they cannot adequately perform the vast majority of jobs; much less consider doing their homework (O'Melia & Rosenberg, 1994). For many students, mistakes, confusion, and academic struggle become a common aspect of learning (Bempechat, 2004). The mere mention of homework can be enough to prompt a child not to comply; with an anxious child the mention of homework may elicit anxiety (Hudson & Kendall, 2002). In a survey conducted by Sawyer, Nelson, Jayanthi, Bursuck and Epstein, (1999), students consider teachers to be a part of the problem by making homework more difficult by: (a) using inconsistent language, (b) explaining homework too quickly or not at all, (c) do not answer questions, (d) do not specify when homework is due, and (e) give several assignments at once (as cited in Bryan, et al., 2001).

Other causes of homework completion difficulties for all students are lack of motivation, poor attitudes (Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998), and/or cultural differences in homework style (Hong, Milgram, & Perkins, 1995 as cited in Bryan and Burstein, 2004, Improving). Several students believe that homework is not important and reported they often forgot what was assigned, forgot to bring home materials, misunderstood assignments, procrastinated, and failed to follow a schedule and offered many excuses (Gajira & Salend, 1995). Many students do not take homework seriously and tend to forget about it (Heitzmann, 1998).

Several researchers have documented that students with mild disabilities experience more difficulties in completing their homework than their nondisabled peers (Epstein et el., 1993; Heller et al., 1988; Polloway, Foley, & Epstein, 1992; Salend & Schliff, 1989 as cited in Salend & Gajria, 1995). Characteristics of students with LD interfere with every step of homework including understanding assignments, accurately recording them, remembering to take materials home, setting aside time to work, organizing necessary materials, following through and completing the work, putting it in a safe place, and then remembering to take it back to school (Bryan et al., 1995; Epstein et al., 1993 as cited in Bryan, et al., 2001). Although characterized and identified most commonly by their apparent social and emotional problems, students with behavior disorders (BD) may also be described as evidencing academic performance deficits as well (Epstein, 1995). Many students with emotional behavior disorders (EBD) have difficulty staying academically engaged and completing tasks (Cancio, West, & Young, 2004). For those students who are integrated into the general education environment, this concern is magnified (2004). Also, most adolescents with attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) have

difficulties with homework completion because of their short attention spans, restlessness, and impulsivity (Robin, 2000).

Homework completion, time on homework, and parental involvement inform and affect the teacher's role in the homework process (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Few studies have focused on the teacher's role in the homework process (2001). Teachers need to justify homework assignments and skills taught (Heitzmann, 1998). Garner states that schools tend to lack schoolwide homework expectations, teachers tend to give busy work, teachers assume that kids have the skills to do the work themselves, and teachers need to coordinate assignments with each other (1991). Some argue that teachers lack training in the proper use of homework and the construction of good assignments (Cooper & Nye, 1994).

Homework completion can also be due to the problem in home-school communication. Many families commented that they receive little information about school and what's going on at school (Clevenson, 1999). These problems can be summarized into concerns surrounding initiation, timeliness, consistency, follow through, lack of clarity and usefulness of communication, and a lack of teacher knowledge of students' needs (Munk, Bursuck, Epstein, Jayanthi, Nelson, and Polloway, 2001). Munk also states that causes of communication problems include the lack of convenient opportunities to communicate, differing attitudes of parents and teachers toward homework, and teachers' scant knowledge regarding student strengths and needs (2001).

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

There are many solutions that can assist middle school students to improve homework completion. Under the guidance of adults who challenge their intellectual growth, homework provides students with the training they need to develop achievement beliefs and behaviors (Bempechat, 2004). Additionally, establishing a routine for homework can increase the probability of total compliance (Heitzmann, 1998) and improve the home-school connection (Truscott, 1998).

In middle school, greater commitment to school homework has a positive effect on changes in self-esteem (Hoge, Smit & Hanson, 1990). Academic self-concept has been significantly correlated with achievement with overall grade performance and with school withdrawal regarding homework (House, 2000). To increase self esteem, secondary teachers should design homework that more effectively encourages and enables low-ability students take the time they need to complete their work (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Children need to know that their teachers and parents believe in their ability to acquire knowledge and master new skills (Bempechat, 2004). Overall, a student's self-esteem tends to dominate with the largest impact on changes in academic self-esteem – which leads to homework completion or incompletion (Hoge, et al., 1990).

Positive teacher reinforcement, parent participation, parent training, and self-management play a major role on homework completion (Callahan, Rademacher & Hildreth, 1998). Providing adult positive role models who challenge intellectual growth, homework provides students with the training they need to develop adaptive achievement beliefs and behaviors (Bempechat, 2004).

When parents and teachers participate and help with homework, the depth and quality of learning increases (Hatch, 1998). By adults providing greater motivation, accountability, sense of purpose, and confidence, these factors alone could contribute to increase student achievement with homework completion (Hatch, 1998). In general, the appropriate monitoring of homework assignments by teachers and parents is very critical (Cooper & Nye, 1994).

Teachers have been given recommendations to help increase homework completion. Small class sizes could be used to increase homework completion. Studies show that small classes are more productive due to learning environment and one-on-one teacher time (Murdoch & Guy, 2002). Additionally, effective group performance with smaller class sizes is effective in all aspects of education, not just homework completion (Murdoch & Guy, 2002).

Teachers should provide a wide variety of assignments and provide positive feedback to students about their homework assignments (Trammel & Schloss, 1994). Teachers must target assignments to students' needs, learning styles, and abilities (Heitzmann, 1998). Homework should be given on varying abilities and skill achievement levels (O'Melia & Rosenberg, 1994). Also, it is recommended that teachers use a wide variety of assignments of various lengths (Heitzmann, 1998). Teachers need to remember to provide clear and quick feedback for all homework assignments (Heitzmann, 1998).

It is noted that students take homework seriously if quiz problems are taken directly from the homework (Miller, 1996). By quizzing on randomly selected homework problems, it motivates students to do a thorough job on 100% of their homework (Miller, 1996). If teachers created a homework quiz policy, students would control their own learning and are held accountable for their ability to work each problem (Miller, 1996). Also, providing random quizzes from homework can facilitate retention, the first step toward transferring knowledge

from knows to situations (Miller, 1996). By and large, indirectly quizzing over homework improved study habits, removes incentives to cheat, and simplifies the grading of student work (Miller, 1996).

Next, teachers need to be trained and have good policies set in place. Flexible scheduling time should be allowed for teachers to discuss homework strategies, accommodations, and modifications (Munk, et al., 2001). When teachers follow good policies, homework can be an effective and a valuable teaching tool (Salend & Schliff, 1989). Helping teachers construct good policies can be provided in training in the use of homework, assignment construction, and strategies (Cooper & Nye, 1994). One good policy to follow for teachers is to never assign work that would overwhelm and last hours into the night. Homework that would take all night to complete might cause increased feelings of inadequacy in students (How, 2007). Also, teachers could allow sufficient time in class for completing assignments (Heitzmann, 1998).

Parental involvement appears to be part of the solution in improving students' homework completion. Schools need to foster parental involvement and create classroom and school environments that improve and promote children's adjustment and engagement (Simmons-Morton & Crump, 2003). Parents must remain involved in the lives of their early adolescent children, given the complexity of modern life (Simmons-Morton & Crump, 2003). When parents are proactive with school work, the student's behavior and social adjustment improve drastically (Cordry & Wilson, 2004). Overall, parent involvement is critical in homework completion to provide a conducive environment and periodic rewards for assignment completion (Cooper & Nye, 1994).

Clear communication between student, parent, and teacher is essential to show the benefits of homework completion (Coutts, 2004). Teachers need to keep the communication

open-ended though phone calls, e-mail, or a homework hotline (Munk, et al., 2001). Educators should start out by sharing their homework policy with parents at the beginning of the school year (Heitzmann, 1998). Then, daily communication and feedback that inherently takes place between home and school is most widely used or requested service by parents (Callahan, Rademacher & Hildreth, 1998). Therefore, it is important to ensure clear home/school communication with parents via e-mail, phone, or letters (Warger, 2001).

Parent training and school programs can provide parents with the knowledge to help their children with homework completion. Teachers can give parents clear delineate responsibilities at the beginning of the year in a meeting and set shared goals and share expectations (Munk, et al., 2001). Parents need to be trained to be supportive homework coaches in what to do and what to look for (Olympia & Sheridan, 2004). By offering parent training programs for parents, it teaches techniques and strategies to use at home to help with success (Cooper & Nye, 1994). School programs can teach parents the essentials for setting up and following through with a simple reward system at home (Miller & Kelley, 1994). These school programs have been highly successful in getting parents involved (Finn, 1998). Workshops can offer tips for parents on how to be a homework coach. These workshops can show parents how to create a homework reward system, negotiate a homework contract, go through a daily homework planner, check for homework completion, deliver earned rewards, and eventually fade the reward system (Miller & Kelley, 1994).

Parents can improve homework completion thought parental encouragement. Parents can be instrumental in encouraging and motivating their children to complete homework (Olympia & Sheridan, 2004). Active parental encouragement improves student morale, attitudes, and academic achievements, thus, by taking on an active role, parents reduce their child's risk of

failure academically and reduce the chances of dropping out before graduation (Cordry & Wilson, 2004). Parents must consider a time to discuss school matters with their child every night (Finn, 1998). Parents need to collaborate with their teenagers to develop an effective homework structure, which needs to remain in place through middle school and all of high school (Robin, 2000). Parents must be instrumental in monitoring, assisting, and reinforcing the homework process (Salend & Schliff, 1989).

There are many strategies that can help improve homework completion. Simple modifications to the classroom can help improve homework completion. Teachers should always begin with simple tasks, using positive reinforcement for each completed homework task (Hudson & Kendall, 2002). Teachers need to explain so that students have a clear understanding of their homework assignment (Salend & Schliff, 1989). Students with behavior disorders need to be reminded because they tend to procrastinate (Bryan & Burstein, 2004, Teacher). Homework accommodations can be made by providing one-on-one assistance, adjusting evaluation standards, providing learning tools like notes, and providing a specialist to monitor students' work at the beginning of the day (Warger, 2001). Teachers can modify by individualizing homework assignments for students (Salend & Schliff, 1989). Also, allow frequent breaks, especially when students seem to be overwhelmed with the homework assignment (Dolin, 2005). Moreover, teachers can help by modifying how much homework is given each day in class (Salend & Schliff, 1989).

Peer assistance and tutoring can also aide in homework completion. After school sessions and peer tutoring have proven to be successful in homework completion (Bursuck, Harniss, Epstein, Polloway, Jayanthi, & Wissinger, 1999). The study centers open after school provides the social context, as well as the physical environment that is so important for learning (Coutts,

2004). Also, using peer-assisted strategies such as peer tutoring, peer checking, and cooperative homework groups helped with homework completion (Gajria & Salend, 1995).

A strategy that helped increase homework completion consisted of giving students real life assignments (Bryan & Burstein, 2004, Improving). Real life assignments that connected to students' world and communities were proven helpful in homework completion (Bryan & Burstein, 2004, Improving). All teachers should strive to design high quality homework that has real life application to that students who complete their assignments will, in fact, benefit from their efforts (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). There needs to be consistency between the planned purpose of homework, its real life application, and the type of task assigned (Coutts, 2004). Teachers can help out by providing a specific objective for all homework assignments (Salend & Schliff, 1989).

Teaching self-monitoring, independence, and organization skills can improve homework completion. Homework contract intervention uses goal setting, a written contract, and rewards to boost student homework completion and provide independence (Miller & Kelley, 1994). To help with organizational skills, students must be taught to prioritize assignments, beginning with the most difficult and save the easiest for last (Dolin, 2005). Also, teaching students the ability to plan and manage activities within a time frame will help with their organization (Stormont-Spurgin, 1997).

Students can also improve homework completion through the use of lists, routines, and reminders. Using a constant routine, student pacing, and lists will help plan ahead for future projects and assignments (Stormont-Spurgin, 1997). Also, positive reinforcement contracts, routines and lists, assignment folders and daily planners, and collaboration could help students' combat organizational problems and lead to a better rate of homework completion (Stormont-

Spurgin, 1997). Teachers must set up a homework routine at the beginning of the year and make parents aware of the homework policies (Warger, 2001). Writing down the routines and lists on the boards will help remind students of their work (Stormont-Spurgin, 1997). Additionally, establishing a routine for written homework can increase the probability of total compliance (Heitzmann, 1998).

All students can benefit from homework planners, which will improve organizational skills (Bryan & Sullivan-Burstein, 1998). It is recommended that a student use their homework calendar/planner everyday and every hour (Warger, 2001). Teachers should not just hand out a planner, but give instruction on how to use it will boost homework completion (Bryan & Burstein, 2004, Teacher). Additionally, teachers should review assignment notebooks and make sure assignments are prioritized (Robin, 2000). Next, the homework planner should be checked daily for a signature to verify that the parent is aware of the homework assigned (Galvin, 2004). Furthermore, planners are a wonderful communication tool between school and home (Bryan & Burstein, 2004, Teacher). It is not a surprise the daily assignment book is the most highly rated strategy (Bursuck, et al., 1999).

The above strategies work for some students and teachers, while others it does not help. The strategies used can vary from year to year and student to student. According to the many studies, parental involvement seems to be important in helping students increase their homework completion rate. Even though some parents may not be able to assist their child with homework, they can still be involved in establishing routines and organization (Xu & Corno, 2003). With parents more vigorously involved and other strategies implemented, teachers should notice an improvement in their students' homework completion rate.

Project Objective and Processing Statements

As a result of using the daily homework planner and awarding daily homework completion points to the students, during the period of September 9, 2007 through November 20, 2007, the students of the teacher researchers were to increase homework completion. The teacher researchers developed a daily routine for the completion of daily homework by the use of planners, which designs a system for communication with parents. Additionally, teacher researchers recorded daily in the teacher observation log whether or not assignments were completed by the students. To implement these interventions, teachers passed out and modeled how to use the homework planner. Also, teachers modeled how daily homework points added to students' grades will increase the overall grade by 10%.

Project Action Plan

The entire action research project was implemented for 15 weeks; however the two teacher researchers needed an extra week in the beginning to copy surveys. The plan shows what tasks were completed one week at a time.

Pre-Week 1   August 20-August 24, 2007

- Run copies of parental, teacher, and student surveys
- Run copies of parent consent and student consent
- Pass out student planners

Pre-documentation
Week 1   August 27-August 31, 2007

- Distribute teacher survey
- Distribute student survey
- Distribute parent survey

Week 2   September 4-September 7, 2007

- Collect & analyze teacher survey
- Collect & analyze student survey
- Collect & analyze parental survey
- Explain homework participation points
- Model homework expectations for student planners

Intervention
Week 3   September 10-September 14, 2007

- Students complete homework planners daily
- Parents verify and sign homework planners daily
- Teachers check homework planners daily
- Teachers record in observation logs for completion points

Week 4   September 17-September 21, 2007

- Students complete homework planners daily
- Parents verify and sign homework planners daily
- Teachers check homework planners daily
- Teachers record in observation logs for completion points

Week 5   September 24-September 28, 2007

- Students complete homework planners daily
- Parents verify and sign homework planners daily
- Teachers check homework planners daily
- Teachers record in observation logs for completion points

Week 6   October 1-October 5, 2007

- Students complete homework planners daily
- Parents verify and sign homework planners daily
- Teachers check homework planners daily
- Teachers record in observation logs for completion points

Week 7   October 8-October 12, 2007

- Students complete homework planners daily
- Parents verify and sign homework planners daily
- Teachers check homework planners daily
- Teachers record in observation logs for completion points

Week 8   October 15-October 19, 2007

- Students complete homework planners daily
- Parents verify and sign homework planners daily
- Teachers check homework planners daily
- Teachers record in observation logs for completion points

Week 9   October 22-October 26, 2007

- Students complete homework planners daily
- Parents verify and sign homework planners daily
- Teachers check homework planners daily
- Teachers record in observation logs for completion points

Week 10   October 29-November 2, 2007

- Students complete homework planners daily
- Parents verify and sign homework planners daily
- Teachers check homework planners daily
- Teachers record in observation logs for completion points

Week 11   November 5-November 9, 2007

- Students complete homework planners daily
- Parents verify and sign homework planners daily
- Teachers check homework planners daily
- Teachers record in observation logs for completion points

Week 12   November 12-November 16, 2007

- Students complete homework planners daily
- Parents verify and sign homework planners daily
- Teachers check homework planners daily
- Teachers record in observation logs for completion points

Week 13   November 19-November 20, 2007

- Students complete homework planners daily
- Parents verify and sign homework planners daily
- Teachers check homework planners daily
- Teachers record in observation logs for completion points

Post-documentation
<u>Week 15</u>   November 26-November 29, 2007

- Teachers complete observation log
- Distribute student survey

<u>Week 15</u>   November 28-December 2, 2007

- Collect and analyze student survey
- Analyze teacher observation log

<div align="center">Methods of Assessment</div>

During the post-documentation period, the student survey was given to generate student responses regarding changes in homework tendencies. Their responses were compared to the pre-data to determine any changes that may be attributed to the last 11 weeks of intervention strategies. The survey was given to, and completed by, the 34 students after Thanksgiving break the week of November 26, 2007. The surveys were completed anonymously.

The homework observation log was used during the post-documentation period to assess changes in the rate of homework completion. The post-documentation period took place from November 26, 2007 through December 7, 2007. The homework observation log was used during the post-documentation to see if an improvement has taken place after the intervention has been implemented. The log was used to observe student homework completion rate and see if improvement has taken place from before the intervention to the post-documentation period. The pre-documentation took place from August 27, 2007 through September 7, 2007.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to increase the homework completion rate of middle school students through the use of interventions. The participants in this study came from one public middle school. The participants (n=34) were 6th grade students in language arts class, respectively. The intervention took place from September 10, 2007 through November 20, 2007. Student, parent, and teacher surveys documented the current levels of homework completion. In addition, the teacher researchers completed daily observation checklists for a period of two weeks prior to the implementation of the interventions. The pre-documentation period had a duration of two weeks, August 27, 2007 through September 7, 2007, and included tasks such as photocopying and collecting consent and assent forms from participants; making photocopies of parent, student, and teacher surveys; distributing and collecting each of the previously mentioned surveys; completing daily homework logs; and analyzing the collected surveys.

Historical Description of the Intervention

Prior to Week 1, we photocopied the parent consent form and student consent form, and made copies of the parent, student and teacher surveys. We also handed out the student planners to our students.

During Week 1, we sent home the parental consent letter and the student assent letter. We had all but two students agree to participate in our study. Upon return of these items we sent home the parent survey and distributed the student survey in our classrooms. We had all but one returned the following day. We also distributed the teacher survey to all sixth grade teachers. This was also the first week that we completed our teacher observation checklists. Positives we found were that collecting data easily became a part of our morning routines. We both found

that most of our parents were interested in our research and were willing and excited to participate. Also, we noticed that most of our students were establishing a routine with their parents by getting their planners signed. We felt that research went really well this week. However, a minus was that we had one angry parent who sent back a letter refusing to participate or to allow their child to participate. Also, a couple of students weren't very consistent and didn't seem to care too much. Teacher researcher A was interested to see what the intervention does for the students that are slacking or inconsistent. Teacher researcher B thought it was interesting that all of her students filled out their planners correctly every day and that all of the parents signed their child's planner. We thought this was very impressive.

During Week 2, we collected and analyzed the teacher, parent and student surveys. We also took data every morning, reminded students to fill out their planners then completed and analyzed the daily teacher observation checklists. As part of our intervention we explained and modeled how to use the student homework planners and expectations. Positives we found were that most students were filling out their planners and doing all of their homework. Negatives were we had very few teacher surveys returned. Also, we asked around to find out what other teachers do for planners and organization in their classrooms. We found it interesting that some teachers don't emphasize using the planners. Also, some students in other sixth grade classrooms didn't even know how to fill out their planners or how to use them. We were really bothered by the fact that some teachers are not taking the time to teach students how to use their planners. As first year students in a middle school they need to be taught routines and how to establish them so they become habits. By doing this we feel the rest of their education experience should be a little easier for them if they are organized.

During Week 3, we introduced our intervention and students filled out planners and completed their homework daily and parents verified this with a signature. In addition, we checked homework planners daily and awarded those students with a Gotcha and candy. We also explained the parent handout and sent that home to parents. Positives we had were that the first week went really well for both of us. Students were coming into class and opening their planners before asked to. Another positive is that Teacher researcher B had all of her students and parents participating this week. A negative is that Teacher researcher A had a difficult time getting all of her students and parents to consistently participate. We both thought it was interesting to see how excited our students were about the intervention.

During Weeks 4-13, students filled out their planners and completed their homework daily. Parents verified this daily with a signature at the bottom. We checked homework planners daily and awarded those students with a Gotcha and candy. We found these intervention weeks were almost exactly the same as the third week. A positive was that Teacher researcher B had all of her students participating. A negative was that Teacher researcher A had several students that were inconsistent with this and didn't care.

During Week 14 and 15, which was our post-documentation, we again completed our teacher observation checklists. We also distributed the student survey for students to complete again. Students were a little upset that they no longer were getting a reward for filling out their planners, completing homework and getting a signature. Positives were that most students were filling out their planners and completing homework. However, a negative we found was that some students were not getting a parent signature.

Patterns we noticed were that the students who had their planner filled out correctly every night and had a parent signature were doing better with homework completion than others. We

really liked the communication this opened up with the parents. Also, when we received quarter grades we could see that students who were participating on a daily basis had better grades than those students who did not. We didn't see any shifts or changes during our intervention. However, during post-documentation teacher researcher A had several students who failed to get a parent signature. Students were still filling out their planners and getting their homework done, but they were not getting a signature anymore since there was no reward. We found this to be rather interesting and could see that this was an extrinsic reward for most and that our sixth graders are not mature enough to realize the intrinsic reward for themselves.

Looking back, this was a lot easier to implement and manage than we originally thought. We both really enjoyed this project and easily made it a part of our daily routines. What was difficult was that Teacher researcher A only saw her students for first period. This made it very difficult to keep in touch with them throughout the day and at the end of the day. What went very well was that Teacher researcher B saw her students for three periods in the morning and one period at the end of the day. Therefore, she touched base with her class more often and could remind them of assignments and to fill out their planners at the end of the day.

One of the interventions that we chose to implement was positive reinforcement through the Gotcha system. This intervention has been referred to as a way for students to receive positive feedback, as well as a way to motivate students to increase their rate of homework completion. Teachers should provide a wide variety of assignments and provide lots of positive feedback to students about their homework assignments (Trammel & Schloss, 1994). We found that as our intervention progressed, we naturally provided more incentives for our students so that they would be more motivated to complete their homework. Because of this, we found that

we used more planning time aimed toward the intervention. Please see Appendix E to view samples of the Gotcha system.

Another intervention we chose to use included increasing parental involvement in the completion of student homework through the use of daily homework planners. This intervention has been used as a strategy that has led to increased parental involvement, and an increase in the homework completion rate. All students can benefit from homework planners, which will improve organizational skills (Bryan & Sullivan-Burstein, 1998). It is recommended that a student use their homework calendar/planner everyday and every hour (Warger, 2001). During the implementation of this strategy, students took on more responsibility for their own homework completion, with added supervision from parents. We informed parents of the possible consequences, such as detentions, for the students who had difficulties getting their planners signed each night. Please see Appendix F to view samples of the homework planner.

During the implementation of the project, I found that homework completion improved in my language arts class. As the implementation progressed, I started using this system across all subject areas naturally. I found it easier than expected, as did my students, to correctly fill out, use, and check their homework planner each night. Students loved receiving a Gotcha slip each day for having their homework planner signed. Additionally, the planners and Gotchas created much more dialogue between the students and myself and the parents and myself about homework completion practices. I appreciated the increased attention that was placed on homework assignments by students and parents because of the interventions used. Overall, homework planners and Gotchas were effective in my classroom. Students, as well as parents, were diligent in signing and filling out the planner each day.

As a result of implementing this project and interventions in my classroom, I have learned a lot about myself and my students. First of all, this project helped me realize that a lot of students do not automatically know what to do with their student planners and that they need to be taught how to use them. My organizational skills improved along with the students. Teaching them how to be organized and establish a routine forced me to be organized and follow the same routine everyday. I felt by modeling this, the students were able to relate to or understand the process a little better. I believe I have changed for the better as a result of this project. I am more consistent in my daily routines and expectations. Also, I have had better communication with parents as a result of establishing routines and staying consistent with them. I truly care about my students and their success and I feel this project helped me see and implement one more thing that would help my students be as successful as they can.

<div align="center">Presentation and Analysis of Results</div>

The overall reason the teacher researchers did this project was to increase the homework completion rate of middle school students by using selected interventions. The participants in this study came from one public middle school. The participants (n=34) were 6th grade students in language arts class, respectively. Student, parent, and teacher surveys were given to document the current levels of homework completion. In addition, the teacher researchers completed daily observation checklists for a period of two weeks prior to the implementation of the interventions.

The duration period of the post-documentation was two weeks, November 26, 2007 through December 2, 2007, and included tasks such as photocopying student surveys; distributing and collecting the previously mentioned survey; completing daily teacher observation checklists; and analyzing the collected surveys. In the documentation phase, the interventions were practiced for a period of 11 weeks. The interventions included the use of daily

homework planners and Gotchas. The teacher researchers completed daily checklists for each student, and distributed, collected, and analyzed student surveys during the post-documentation period.

<u>Student Survey</u>

The student survey was a series of questions designed to generate student feedback on the current homework practices; such as understanding the purpose of the assignment and requests made by the child to his or her parent for homework help. This survey was given twice and administered by the teacher researchers. Students who completed and returned the consent/assent forms were asked to complete the student survey. Student surveys were distributed on August 27, 2007 and November 26, 2007.

During the post-documentation observations, researchers noted that students turned in

their homework assignments on time (n=34; 100%) regularly. In Figure 19 below, the bar graph

shows that during the post-documentation period 97% (n=33) of the students reported that they

filled out their planner daily, 74% (n=25) of the students had parent help/participation in

homework, 91% (n=31) of the students understood the purpose of their assignment, and 88%

(n=30) of the students had a quiet place to complete their homework each night. The summary

of these findings can be found in Figure 19 below.
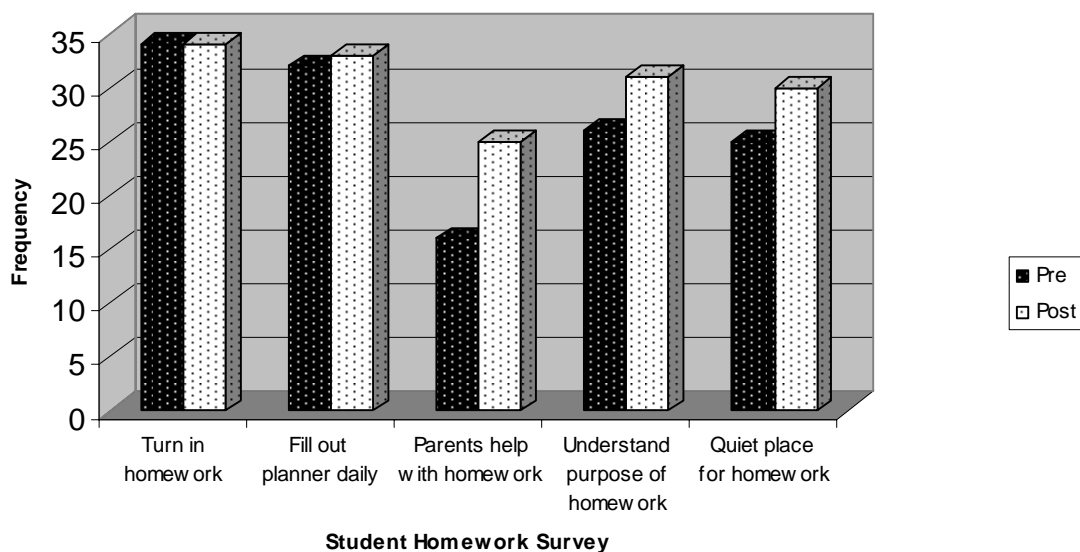

Figure 19: Student Survey (n=340)

As summarized in Figure 19 above, researchers observed pre- to post documentation

those students increased turning their assignments in by a 0% (n=34) increase. The data revealed

a 15% increase (n= 33) in filling out the homework planner, a 27% increase (n=25) in parent

help/participation, a 15% increase (n=31) in students understanding the purpose of an

assignment, and a 15% (n=30) increase in students using a quiet place for homework completion.

<u>Teacher Observation Checklist</u>

       Teacher observation checklists were completed each day during the pre-documentation period from August 27, 2007 through September 7, 2007, as well as during the post-documentation period from November 26, 2007 through December 2, 2007. Teacher observation checklists were used to record complete assignments, if the student planner was filled out correctly and if the planner was signed by a parent (Appendix B). The teacher researchers collected data each day from 34 sixth grade students. The teacher researchers compiled their data from the checklists at the end of the two week periods.

       Figure 20 shows the data collected from pre-documentation and post-documentation periods regarding completed and incomplete homework.
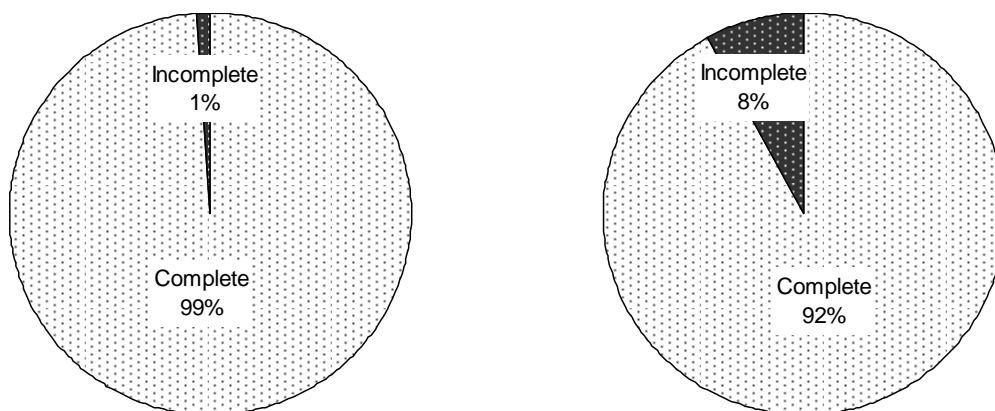
Figure 20: Homework Completed (n=34)

       According to figure 20 above, the pie chart to the right represents that 92% (n=31) of the students completed their homework everyday. The pie chart to the right shows that the teacher researchers observed the number of students completing their homework everyday decreased by 7% in the post-documentation period.

Figure 21 shows the data collected from pre-documentation and post-documentation periods regarding students filling out their planners correctly.

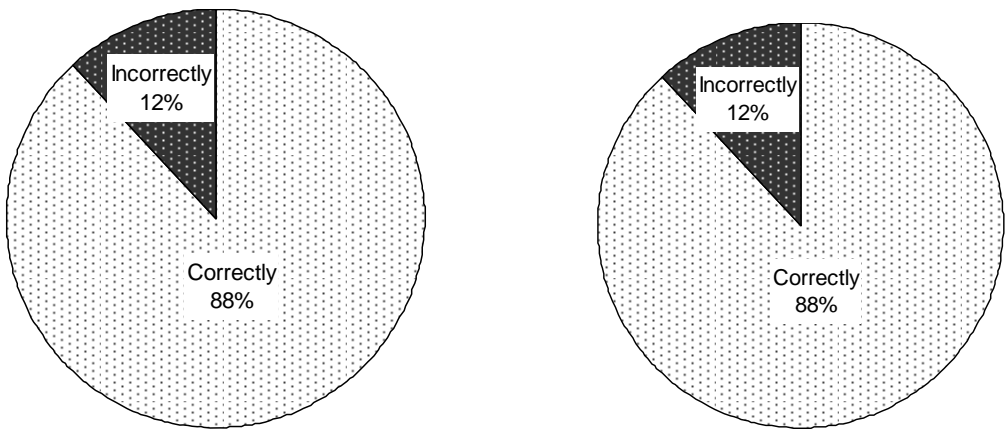*Figure 21: Planner Filled Out Correctly* (n=34)

As shown in figure 21 above, the pie chart to the right represents that 88% (n=30) of the students had their planners filled out correctly everyday, as does the chart to the right. The pie chart to the right shows the researchers observed that the number of students filling out their planners correctly everyday remained the same in the post-documentation period.

Figure 22 shows the data collected from pre-documentation and post-documentation periods regarding students having a parent signature.
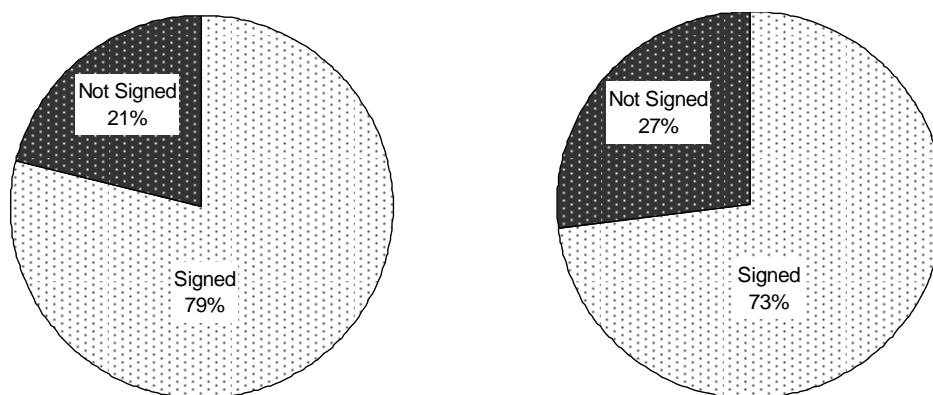

Figure 22: Planner Signed (n=34)

As summarized in Figure 22 above, the pie chart to the right represents that 73% (n=26) of the students had a parent signature in their planners. The pie chart to the right shows that the researchers observed the number of students having a parent signature decreased by 6% in the post-documentation period.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, we found that the use of student planners, Gotchas and establishing routines seemed to positively affect the homework completion rate and was very successful with our students. We believe that the use of planners helped students to organize their homework. We believe that parents were more aware of homework assignments because the planners were being signed daily. This created more involvement by the parents/guardians and a greater focus for homework completion on the students' part.

Students reported that they began to fill out their homework planners before the end of each class instead of waiting till the end of the day. We think that this can be attributed to an improvement in organizational skills caused by the consistency of a 9th hour planner check, Gotcha reward system, and required parent signature of the planner. Because of these

interventions, students were more aware of homework assignments and used both class time and time at home more wisely.

We also found that more students asked their parents for help with their homework. Increased parent participation, better organization, and seeking nightly signatures may be reasons for the increase of students asking their parents for help or to check over their homework. Students also appeared to be more on-task during the star strategies period at the end of the school day by constantly referring to their planner as a guide to complete work.

We will continue to use homework planners in our classrooms for all students. We feel that Gotchas do not have as much value as the homework planners. The homework planners directly involve parents, and this keeps the parents involved and monitoring their child's homework completion. Gotchas did not give the parents any information like the planners, but did serve as a positive reinforcement to students for following classroom rules and expectations.

If we were to do this project again, we would consider using this intervention with all of our classes. We found it difficult to just require one class to have the planners filled out correctly and signed by a parent. Towards the end of the research, we were implementing this strategy with all our classes. Also, we would think about giving students' participation points for just completing a homework assignment, on top of the actual work grade. This would be an extra incentive, besides receiving a Gotcha, to complete one's homework on time. We felt these interventions were very successful and highly recommend using these interventions in other classrooms to increase homework completion.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Student Survey

Directions: Circle one of the numbers that best describes how you have felt about homework within the last year.

	Never	**Sometimes**	**Often**	**Always**
1. How often do you complete and turn in your homework?	1	2	3	4
2. How often do you keep track of homework?	1	2	3	4
3. How often do your parents or guardians help you with your homework?	1	2	3	4
4. How often do you understand the purpose of the assignment?	1	2	3	4
5. How often do you use a set time and place for homework completion?	1	2	3	4

Appendix B

Parent Survey

Directions: For numbers 1 through 5, circle the number that best describes how you have felt within the past year regarding your child's homework.

	<u>Never</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Often</u>	<u>Always</u>
1. How often do you ask your child if they have homework?	1	2	3	4
2. How often does your child bring homework home?	1	2	3	4
3. How often does your child ask for your help with their homework?	1	2	3	4
4. How often is the homework too difficult for you to help your child?	1	2	3	4
5. How often do you provide a set time and place for your child to do homework?	1	2	3	4

Appendix C

Teacher Survey

The following survey is being given to determine homework completion amongst 6[th]grade students. Please circle only one of the choices as they have occurred in your classroom within the 2006/2007 school year. After you complete the survey please return to either Becky Haas or Kim Reiley's mailboxes. Thank you in advance for your time.

1. Students turn in their homework on time

      Frequently   Often   Rarely   Never

2. Students have consequences for not completing or turning in incomplete assignments

      Frequently   Often   Rarely   Never

3. Students have time to do their homework in class

      Frequently   Often   Rarely   Never

4. Students are offered incentives for completing work on time

      Frequently   Often   Rarely   Never

5. Students are allowed to re-do work for a higher grade

      Frequently   Often   Rarely   Never

Additional comments:

Appendix D

Teacher Observation Log
Homework Completion/Assignment Notebook Log

Day:

Student	Homework Completed	Planner Filled Out Correctly	Planner Signed
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No

Appendix E

Sample of Gotcha

Appendix F

Homework Planner