

**EVOLUTION AND RELATION OF STUDENTS' HOMEWORK MANAGEMENT
STRATEGIES AND THEIR PARENTS' HELP IN HOMEWORK DURING THE
TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the evolution and the relation between students' homework management strategies, their parents' help in homework and school and homework achievement across the transition to high school. Data were drawn on 101 student-parent dyads who participated in a two-year longitudinal study. Findings indicate parent involvement fosters three homework management strategies in middle school (i.e., *managing time*, *monitoring motivation* and *monitoring and controlling emotion*) and two (*arranging environment* and *monitoring and controlling emotion*) at the high school level. In summary, our study provides evidence that family-school collaboration remains essential at the high school level.

INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies, mostly conducted at the elementary level, have examined the benefits of homework, the links between attitudes and beliefs, homework completion and achievement, as well as parent involvement and motivation to become involved in homework (e.g., Cooper, 2001; Cooper et al., 1998, 2000; Corno & Xu, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Patall et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2004). Other works, at the middle and high school levels, studied students' homework management strategies (i.e., arranging environment, managing time, focusing attention, monitoring motivation, and monitoring and controlling emotion) and family help in homework (e.g., Corno, 2004; Xu & Corno, 2003). Results revealed no differences across middle grades regarding students' strategies, but significant drops in certain strategies across high school grades. Gender differences in the homework management strategies at the high school level were observed, in favour of the girls (Xu, 2006). Family help of all socioeconomic backgrounds in middle years was positively related to some of the homework management strategies (Xu, 2004, 2006). On their part, Cooper et al. (2000) reported a positive relation between parental support for autonomy and homework completion in higher class grades. Surprisingly, Patall et al. (2007)'s research synthesis revealed positive associations between parent involvement in homework at the high school level and achievement-related outcomes. Given that the inconsistencies the research findings, obviously, more information is needed with respect to developmental changes in students' homework management strategies and family help during the transition to high school.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two lines of relevant research guided our study, the first one being related to management strategies that students use while doing homework and the second one having to do with parental help in homework.

Students' Homework Management Strategies and Performance

Based on their previous works and other related studies, Xu and Corno (2003) have identified five categories of management strategies that students may use to help homework completion and performance. These include: (1) Efforts to arrange the work environment (*arranging environment*); (2) Efforts to budget time to meet deadlines (*managing time*); (3) Efforts to discriminate task-relevant information from distractions (*focusing attention*); (4) Efforts to maintain or enhance homework intentions (*monitoring motivation*); (5) Efforts to prevent or control negative affect or emotional control (*monitoring and controlling emotion*). In their study conducted with a sample of 121 students including 6th, 7th and 8th graders and regarding the five categories of homework management strategies, the authors found no difference across grade levels (Xu & Corno, 2003). Moreover, their results showed no relation between homework management strategies and student achievement measured in terms of standardized tests. In another study with 426 US students from grades 9, 10, 11 and 12, they again found no grade level differences in the five categories of homework management strategies (Xu, 2006). However, in a follow-up study, Xu (2004) indicated that high school students, as compared to middle school students, made fewer efforts to avoid internal distractions (*focusing attention*), and to engage in self-motivation and self-reward (*monitoring motivation*). What about Quebec students? How do their homework management strategies evolve from middle school to high school? To what extent are their strategies related to their homework performance?

Parental Help in Homework

According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2001)'s review of literature, parents get involved in their child's homework mainly in (1) establishing physical and psychological structures for the child's homework performance; (2) monitoring the homework process; (3) responding to the student's homework performance; (4) doing homework with the child; (5) using strategies to shape homework demands to child capabilities in order to help the child understand; (6) engaging in interactive strategies such as modeling, discussion, etc., and (7) engaging in activities that will help the child to develop appropriate managing learning skills and strategies. The first and the last categories of parents' homework involvement strategies are of particular interest in this study (see also Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, Whetsel & Green, 2004). Viewed in terms of Epstein's typology of parental involvement, these parent behaviors fall into two of the six types of involvement: type 1 or parents' basic obligations in children's education and type 4, involvement in learning activities at home (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2001). These parents' homework behaviors have been associated with a number of student outcomes such as achievement, student attitudes toward homework and homework behaviors (e.g, enjoyment in doing the task, attention to homework; investment of time and effort, sense of responsibility for doing the work, persistence in task completion) (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001).

On their part, Grolnick and Ryan (1989) proposed a theoretical approach to parent involvement in three dimensions of parenting style: *autonomy support*, *direct parent involvement* and *provision of structure*. *Autonomy support* refers to the degree to which parents encourage independent work and participation in decision making. *Direct parent involvement* relates to the extent to which the parent is interested and active in the child's life while *provision of structure* concerns elimination of distractions. In view of Kay et al' study (1994) in which the authors reported the need for parents to be better equipped, Cooper and his colleagues (Cooper, Lindsay & Nye, 2000) suggested the addition of another parental dimension that corresponds to the parent

mentoring skills. The results of Cooper et al.'s (2000) study indicate that parent autonomy support is associated with higher test scores, homework completion and that direct involvement is linked to lower test scores and class grades. Low SES parents reported less autonomy support and more interference than other parents.

Relationship between Students Homework Management Strategies and Parental Help

Cooper et al.'s (2000) study showed that parental support for autonomy had a positive association with student achievement and homework completion. Direct parent involvement was negatively related to student achievement. In Xu and Corno's (2003) first study with middle school year students, parental help showed positive links with efforts arranging the environment and monitoring and controlling emotion, two strategies for managing homework while in their follow-up study, parents help was related to all five of homework management strategies. Even though there were differences between their research results, the authors concluded that family homework help is related to at least some student strategies for managing homework. In light of the research reviewed here, the major purpose of this study was to examine the relations between student homework management, parental help and school and homework performance. In the present study, we have chosen to extend the parental homework theoretical framework to include both Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s (2001) and Cooper et al.'s (2000) works.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were investigated: (1) How do students' homework management strategies and their parents' help in homework evolve from middle to high school? (2) What is the relation between students' homework management strategies and their parents' help in middle and in high school years? (3) To what extent are students' homework management strategies and their parents' help related to school and homework achievement?

METHOD

Participants

These data were collected as part of a larger longitudinal study on homework at the elementary and secondary levels. For this sample, data was collected twice, in the semesters of Secondary 1 (7th grade, Time 1, in 2005) and Secondary III (9th grade, Time 2, in 2007). The sample consisted of 101 student-parent dyads for which data was available at both times of the study. Exactly, 84% of the parent respondents were mothers and 16%, fathers. The respondents' children (girls = 57%; boys = 43%) were attending six public secondary schools in urban, suburban and rural areas in Quebec. Over 71% of participants lived in traditional families (i.e., two biological parents). Almost 45% of the respondents had a high school education or less, 30% attended college (one or two years after high school) and 25%, university. Nearly 25% of respondents said their child experiences "minor" or "major" problems in school whereas 75 % reported their child is doing "well" (56%) or "very well" (19%).

Instruments

Demographic Characteristics. Parents were asked information regarding their own gender and their child gender, their level of education, and their family structure.

Perception of School and Homework Achievement (Adaptation of *Thinking About Helping My Child with Homework* and *Thinking About My Homework*, Bareno, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995, 1999; *Parent*: 6 items; alpha = .83¹; *Student*: 5 items; alpha = .81) The measure assesses the parent's and the student's perception of school and homework performance.

Parenting Style (Adaptation of the *Parenting Style*, Cooper et al., 2000). Constructs validity was examined using a Principal component analysis with Varimax rotation, that identified 2 factors (as opposed to 3 in its original form) with an eigenvalue > 1. The first factor, *Parental Direct Involvement and Autonomy Support* (5 items; alpha = .82) explains 43% of the

¹ All of the alpha values are the ones obtained in the present study.

variance. The second factor, *Provision of Structure (Elimination of Distractions)*; 2 items) explains 17% of variance. The *Interference* item was eliminated.

Parental Involvement in Homework (Adaptation of the Parent Perceptions of *Parent's Structuring and Activities Related to Homework* from *Thinking About Helping My Child with Homework*, Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995, 1999; 15 items; alpha = .85) The measure relies on parent's report of his/her structuring and other activities related to the adolescent's homework. It is important to note that no multicollinearity problem was observed between the two parental measures, that is, *Parenting Style* and *Parental Involvement in Homework*.

Students' Homework Management Strategies (Adaptation of the *Features of Homework Strategies*, Xu & Corno, 2003). Construct validity was investigated using a Principal components analysis, followed by Varimax rotation. Results revealed 5 factors organized in the following way: (1) *Arranging Environment* (5 items, alpha = .73); *Managing Time* (4 items, alpha = .75); *Focusing attention* (6 items; alpha = .82); *Monitoring Motivation* (5 items; alpha = .89) and *Monitoring and Controlling Emotion* (3 items; alpha = .52).

All of the above measures employed a four-point Likert scale: 1 = never, 4 = always.

Procedures

The design of this study was reviewed and approved by our University's ethical review committee. The data were collected in May 2005, for Time 1, and in May 2007, for Time 2. Distribution of the questionnaires was left to the discretion of the six secondary school principals. About 40% of the middle school students and their parents who returned the questionnaires at Time 1 participated again at the high school level, that is, at Time 2 of the study.

RESULTS

(1) *How do students' homework strategies and their parents' help in homework evolve between middle school and high school?*

To address the first question, repeated measures ANOVAs were computed to verify the evolution of students' homework strategies and their parents' help in homework from middle school (Time 1) to high school (Time 2) and to examine if the evolution is different when taking into account family structure, level of schooling, student gender and perceived school and homework achievement. The means and standard deviation for each measure of student homework management strategies and parental help in homework are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1, insert here

Concerning students, results show that *focusing attention* increases ($p < .001$), and that *monitoring motivation* ($p < .054$) improved a little but *managing time* ($p < .251$) did not change at all whatever the variable considered (i.e., family structure, level of schooling, student achievement). However, *monitoring and controlling emotion* significantly decreased ($p < .004$) as well as *arranging environment* ($p < .000$), the latter one more importantly for boys than for girls ($p < .01$) (interaction effects). As for parents, results indicate that the three measures of family help, *parent direct involvement* and *autonomy support* ($p < .000$), *provision of structure* ($p < .005$) and *parental involvement in homework* ($p < .000$), diminished during the transition from middle to high school, and that, whatever the variable considered.

Table 2, insert here

(2) *What is the relation between students' strategies in homework and their parents' help in middle and high school years?*

Results of the correlational analyses at the middle school level (T1) indicate low but positively significant associations between *parental involvement in homework* and preadolescents' *monitoring motivation* ($p < .05$), *managing time* ($p < .05$) and *monitoring and controlling emotions* ($p < .05$). There were also positive relations between *parental autonomy support and direct help* and students' *monitoring motivation* ($p < .05$) and between *parental provision of structure* and students' *arranging environment* ($p < .01$). At the high school level (T2), results revealed positive relations between *parent direct involvement and autonomy support* and adolescents' *monitoring and controlling emotion* ($p < .05$) during homework and between *parental provision of structure* and *arranging environment* ($p < .05$).

Table 3, insert here

(3) *To what extent are students' homework strategies and their parents' help related to school and homework achievement?*

Concerning students' strategies, analyses indicate positive correlations between students' *managing time* in Time 1 and school achievement in both Time 1 ($p < .01$) and Time 2 ($p < .05$). More work habits were related to homework performance based on the students' perceptions. Thus, *managing time* ($p < .01$) and *monitoring and controlling emotions* ($p < .01$) homework management strategies had a positive relationship with homework performance at both times of the study while *arranging time* was correlated with homework performance only in Time 1 (p

<.01). Interestingly, students' *attention focus* ($p <.01$) was negatively linked to homework performance in both times of the study.

Table 3, insert here

With regard to parent involvement in homework, results indicate negative associations with school achievement in Time 1 ($p <.05$) and in Time 2 ($p <.01$). Likewise, negative correlations were obtained in the relation between *parental autonomy support and direct help* and school achievement in both times ($p <.01$), as well as homework performance in Time 2 ($p <.05$). There appeared no relation between *parental provision of structure* and school achievement and homework performance. Interestingly, paired *T*-tests revealed a significant drop from middle to high school on homework performance according to parents' perceptions ($t = 3.14$, $df = 102$, $p <.002$) and students' perceptions ($t = 5.03$, $df = 101$, $p <.001$).

Table 4, insert here

DISCUSSION

Evolution of Homework Strategies and Parental Help in Homework

Our results suggest that in high school, as compared to middle school, students make more efforts in avoiding daydreaming, starting conversations unrelated to their homework, watching a TV show while doing homework or stopping work on homework to play or do something else (*focus attention*). Similarly, high school students make more efforts in encouraging and praising themselves for good effort and work (*monitoring motivation*).

However, at the high school level, adolescents seem to be less likely to ask help from their parents and their friends (*monitoring and controlling emotion*) and to find a quiet area and turn off the TV (*arranging environment*). Boys, more than girls, tend to diminish their efforts in *arranging environment* for homework. Noteworthy of consideration is the fact that the above observations were constant regardless of the parent's educational level, family structure, and the adolescent school achievement. These results are in contrast to one of Xu's studies (2004) that demonstrated lower levels of high school students' concentration and monitoring motivation strategies during homework session, when compared to the middle school students. In opposition to our findings, Xu (2004) reported no grade level difference in terms of *monitoring and controlling emotion* and *arranging environment*. Nevertheless, the fact that girls reported more efforts to arranging environment is in accordance with Xu's (2006) findings. Contrary to Xu's (2006) results that showed higher scores among girls on *managing time* and *monitoring and controlling emotion*, we did not observe any other gender differences in those homework management strategies. In summary, in accordance to Xu's findings, our results showed grade level differences but they were not related to the same homework management strategies.

Consistent with other works (e.g., Cooper et al., 2000; Epstein, 2001; Lee, 1994), general parent involvement in homework or involvement in terms of direct help and providing structure decreased from grade 7 to grade 9. Otherwise said, parents of high school students less often tell their adolescents when to do homework, that it's important to do homework, to check their homework, to ask them if they have finished their homework or simply ask them about homework (*parental involvement in homework*). Parents of high school students also tend to be less involved directly in helping the adolescent understand the homework or in doing it more quickly. The decline may indicate that parents try to develop the adolescent's autonomy and sense of responsibility and that they expect their youngsters to take over by themselves, which is

quite logical. On the other hand, it may signify that their help is not wanted or welcomed by the adolescent. At the same time, it may reflect the belief that their involvement in homework is not seen as being part of their responsibilities (role construction) at the high school level or that they don't have the competencies nor the skills to intervene adequately (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001).

Relationship between Students' Homework Strategies and Parental Help in Homework

In middle schools, when parents are involved in homework in a general manner, students tend to set priorities and plan ahead, to remind themselves of the remaining time available and to keep track of what remains to be done (*managing time*). Likewise, more parents are involved in homework in the middle years, more students are likely to praise themselves for good effort and good work, and to encourage and reassure themselves (*monitoring motivation*) and to ask their parents or their friends for help (*monitoring and controlling emotion*). In both at the middle and high school levels, when parents turn off TV or ask them to find a quiet area to do homework (*provision of structure*), their youngsters usually look for a quiet area to work on homework (*arranging environment*). Also, at the high school level, when parents offer direct assistance (*direct help and autonomy support*) because the adolescent is needing help or does not understand homework, he/she is then better able *to monitor and control emotions*. These findings extend those of previous studies (e.g., Cooper et al., 2000; Xu, 2004, 2006) by putting in evidence the benefits from parental assistance at both the middle school and the high school levels. More importantly is the role of parents in helping the youngsters at the middle and high school levels to arrange their workplace. Parents' role in fostering the organizing work area strategy appears particularly important with boys since they reported less frequently than girls to working to manage their work place. In sum, even though the level of parental involvement in homework diminishes at the high school level, adolescents can still benefit from their parents'

help because there is still a need to get over distractions and to cope with difficult tasks. Needless to remind that *arranging environment and monitoring and controlling emotion* are the two homework management strategies that dropped during the transition to high school.

Relationship between Students' Homework Strategies, Parental Help in Homework and School Achievement and Homework Performance

Students' Homework Strategies and Achievement and Homework Performance. Positive correlations were observed between students *managing time* skills in school achievement in middle school and high school and homework performance at the high school level. Put in other words, the more youngsters are able to set priorities, plan ahead, remind themselves of the time available to do homework and telling themselves not to waste time, the more they complete homework and do it correctly and perform well in school. Two important links are worthy of consideration: the ones between students' *focusing attention* (negative link), *monitoring motivation* (positive link) and homework performance in both grade 7 and grade 9. Our results suggest that if adolescents in middle school and in high school make fewer efforts to avoid daydreaming during the homework session, stopping homework to watch TV or playing or starting a conversation, then their homework performance is lower. On the other hand, if they praise themselves for their efforts and their good work and reassure themselves that they are able to do the homework when they feel it is too hard, they're usually more likely to complete their homework, to do well on it and in school. In sum, the above three homework management strategies, *managing time*, *focusing attention* and *monitoring motivation* are linked to homework completion and good work at school. These results are somewhat in contradiction with Xu and Corno's (2003) which failed to show significant correlations with student achievement measured in terms of standardized tests.

Parental Help in Homework. Furthermore, at the high school level, parents offer *direct involvement and autonomy support* more often when the adolescent is having difficulties with homework. Our results show a negative link between general parental involvement in homework and direct help and school achievement at both middle school and high school levels. In high school, *parental autonomy support and direct help* seems to also respond to poor performance in homework. These findings echo Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s (2001) arguments regarding parental help in homework as a response to student's homework and school difficulties. It is not surprising that parents of grades 7 and 9 choose to become involved only when the youngster asks for help or is experimenting poor school and homework performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study draws its originality in that it focuses on students' homework management strategies and family help on a longitudinal basis, that is, from middle to high school. A first caveat to generalization of the results includes the small size of the parent-child dyads sample. Another one is related to differences in some measuring instruments factorial structures as compared to the anglophone original versions. This divergence can be caused by cultural differences, or by modification of the factorial structure following the translation of the scales or by weaknesses inherent in the original scale. Despite some limitations, our findings demonstrated that middle school students who received parental help (e.g., asking about homework, checking homework, helping when needed, making follow family rules about doing homework) reported more frequently efforts to budget time (*managing time*), to maintain homework intentions (*monitoring motivation*) and to prevent or control negative emotional response (*monitoring and controlling emotion*). At the high school level, when parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds were involved, adolescents reported more efforts in *monitoring and controlling emotion*, suggesting that some adolescents still benefit from parental assistance to control unwanted

emotions. At both middle and high school levels, parent direct involvement and autonomy support appears to be a response to low school and homework achievement, consistent with other studies indicating bidirectional relationships (Patall et al., 2007). As expected, the three forms of parent help decrease from middle school to high school. Further research is needed on whether parent gender makes a difference with respect to homework involvement across the transition to high school. The finding that students do not really improve their managing time and monitoring motivation skills during the transition from middle to high school challenges us in particular. Yet, the results of our study show positive links between those two sets of skills and adolescents' school and homework achievement. This finding is of paramount importance from a practical standpoint. Our results provide hints as to how parents and teachers can intervene in order to improve the targeted homework management skills if student achievement outcomes are to improve at the high school level. It could then be worthwhile to investigate the benefits associated with the introduction of personal motivators and parental motivation support as well as more interesting and relevant assignments on school and homework achievement. In summary, our study does provide evidence that family-school collaboration remains essential at the high school level.

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Table 1

Students' Homework Strategies and Their Parents' Help in Homework

| Students' Strategies | Time 1 | | Time 2 | |
|------------------------------------|--------|-----|--------|-----|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| Arranging Environment | 1.61 | .91 | 1.22 | .59 |
| Managing Time | 1.42 | .81 | 1.27 | .82 |
| Focusing attention | 1.01 | .63 | 1.22 | .59 |
| Monitoring Motivation | 1.36 | .87 | 1.16 | .82 |
| Monitoring and Controlling Emotion | 1.15 | .66 | .82 | .63 |
| Parental Help in Homework | | | | |
| Autonomy Support and Direct Help | .81 | .39 | .52 | .43 |
| Provision of structure | 1.84 | .82 | 1.58 | .75 |
| Parental Involvement in Homework | 1.36 | .55 | 1.01 | .48 |

Table 2

Correlations between Parental Involvement in Homework and Student Homework Management

| Students Homework Strategies | Parental Help in Homework | | Autonomy Support and Direct Help | | Provision of Structure | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|------|----------------------------------|------|------------------------|------|
| | T1 | T2 | T1 | T2 | T1 | T2 |
| Arranging Environment | .22 | .05 | .04 | -.07 | .35** | .23* |
| Managing Time | .23* | .04 | -.10 | .14 | .15 | .07 |
| Focusing Attention | .02 | -.06 | -.04 | -.07 | -.04 | -.07 |
| Monitoring Motivation | .23* | .07 | .23* | .07 | .12 | .21 |
| Monitoring and Controlling Emotion | .21* | .12 | .19 | .22* | .02 | -.03 |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 3

Correlations between Students Homework Management in Time 1 and School Achievement and Homework Performance in Time 1 and 2

| Students Homework Strategies at Time 1 | School Achievement | | Homework Performance | |
|--|--------------------|------|----------------------|--------|
| | T1 | T2 | T1 | T2 |
| Arranging Environment | -.00 | .03 | .27** | .13 |
| Managing Time | .26** | .25* | .43** | .23* |
| Focusing Attention | -.09 | -.15 | -.50** | -.30** |
| Monitoring Motivation | .10 | .14 | .49** | .32** |
| Monitoring and Controlling Emotion | -.09 | -.07 | .11 | .07 |

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Table 4

Correlations between Parental Involvement in Homework and School Achievement and Homework Performance in Time 1 and 2

| Parental Help in School Achievement Homework | School Achievement | | Homework Performance | |
|--|--------------------|--------|----------------------|-------|
| | T1 | T2 | T1 | T2 |
| Parental Involvement in Homework | -.24* | -.29** | -.06 | -.18 |
| Autonomy Support and Direct Help | -.42** | -.42** | -.17 | -.24* |
| Provision of Structure | .01 | -.03 | -.02 | -.08 |

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$