ABSTRACT

A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

OF EXTRACURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT AND

HOMEWORK PERFORMANCE OF THIRD GRADE STUDENTS

An Action Research Project

Presented to

The Department of Teacher Education

Of Johnson Bible College

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirement for the Degree

Masters of Arts in Holistic Education

By

Rachel Johnson and Ryan Moulden

May 2011

ABSTRACT

There are many opportunities for students to participate in nonacademic activities. These activities can include: sports, clubs, private lessons, and religious activities. Participation in these activities enriches students' lives by encouraging social skills. Yet, if students are involved in activities requiring many hours of participation, does it affect their academic performance? Knowing the answer to this question, parents and teachers can help their students develop better time management skills.

Research has produced conflicting results on this issue. Many studies emphasize the benefits of extracurricular activities and homework, while others focus on the negative consequences of each. There is research suggesting a positive relationship exists between the two. Yet, according to the critics, too much involvement in extracurricular activities takes away from time that could be spent studying or completing homework. Overscheduled children may not have as much time to complete homework assignments, leading to a decline in academic achievement.

The researchers acknowledged the positive benefits of extracurricular involvement and were interested in the relationship between students' extracurricular activities and homework performance.

To determine the relationship between extracurricular involvement and homework performance, the researchers conducted a four-week study in two elementary schools. Data was collected in two third grade classes. At the beginning of the study, the researchers sent home a survey with students for a parent or guardian to complete. The

data received from the survey provided the researchers with each student's weekly time commitment to extracurricular activities. Additionally, the researchers examined students' homework performance over a four-week period. Each week, two to three homework assignments assessed students' knowledge of content being taught in the classroom. For the first two weeks, math homework scores were recorded, and the second two weeks, language arts homework scores were recorded.

The researchers analyzed their data using a Pearson correlation test. No significant correlation was found between the number of hours spent in extracurricular activities and math homework performance. Yet, results revealed a significant negative relationship between the number of hours spent in extracurricular activities and language arts homework performance. However, this correlation went a different direction than the researchers hypothesized. A positive correlation between extracurricular involvement and homework performance was not found. These findings led to the rejection of the researchers' proposed hypothesis.

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APPROVAL PAGE

This research by Rachel Johnson and Ryan Moulden is accepted in its present form by the Department of Teacher Education at Johnson Bible College as satisfying the research project requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Holistic Education.

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Introduction

Concern and Justification of Study

Today American elementary students have numerous opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. Research continues to suggest the benefits of participation in such activities as sports, clubs, community groups, and private lessons. One report found youth who participate in extracurricular activities demonstrate healthier functioning on such indicators ranging from academic achievement, school completion, psychological adjustment, and lowered rates of smoking and drug use, to the quantity and quality of interactions with their parents (Mahoney, Harris, & Eccles, 2006, p. 1). Additionally, students build positive relationships with other adults and peers, develop self-management skills, and participate in activities that encourage physical growth (Harrison & Narayan, 2003, p. 118). The researchers acknowledged these positive benefits and were interested in the relationship between students' extracurricular activities and homework performance. The data collected will help parents and teachers determine the amount of time needed for success in both.

Problem of the Study

Students today are increasingly more active outside structured school time. While activities provide countless benefits for students emotionally, socially, and academically, there exists concern that participating in organized activities has become excessive for

youth. This “overscheduling” hypothesis is thought to result from pressure by adults to achieve and attain long-term educational and career goals as suggested by several writers (e.g., Elkind, 2001; Gilbert, 1999; Rosenfeld & Wise, 2000). The external pressures, along with the activity-related time commitment, are believed to contribute to poor psychosocial adjustment for youth and to undermine their relationships with parents (Elkind, 2001; Gilbert, 1999; Rosenfeld & Wise, 2000). As a result, family life is disrupted and academic studies outside of school are neglected due to involvement in extracurricular activities, according to the overscheduling hypothesis.

Several studies point out deficiencies in the overscheduling hypothesis. For example, one study found the primary motivations for participation in organized activities are intrinsic, and pressures from adults are seldom given as reasons for participation (Mahoney et al., 2006, p. 1). In the same study, researchers reported American youth only spend about five hours per week on average in organized activities (Mahoney et el., 2006, p. 1). Studies such as the one described examined the amount of organized activity participation in relation to youth adjustment and provide no direct support that youth are overscheduled in organized activities (“The overscheduled child?”, 2007, p. 1). In fact, these same studies provide substantial evidence in support of the positive youth development perspective, stating children benefit from participation in extracurricular activities.

Given the limited support for the overscheduling hypothesis and the consistent support for the positive youth development perspective, the researchers sought to explore the positive benefits of student involvement in extracurricular activities. The theory the

researchers used is the positive youth development perspective. It was developed by the National Conference of State Legislatures, and it was used to study youth outcome indicators to better gauge the effects of programs on the positive development of youth. The goal of positive youth development is to develop multi-faceted programs to help children grow into mature and successful adults. This theory indicates that participation in high-quality programs makes a significant difference in the lives of youth. Positive development settings found within high-quality programs provide: physical and psychological safety, structure, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong and for skill-building, positive social norms, and support for efficacy (Ferber, Gaines, & Goodman, 2005, p. 2). As applied to the researchers' study, this theory holds that the researchers' would expect extracurricular activities to positively influence homework performance because children who feel safe, valued, and connected to caring adults are more likely to be positive about life, engaged in school, and emotionally healthy (Ferber, Gaines, & Goodman, 2005, p.1).

By examining the relationships between homework performance and time spent in extracurricular activities, the researchers expected to find a statistically significant correlation between the two variables.

Definition of Terms

Extracurricular activity. Any structured activity supervised by one or more adults outside regular school hours or the home. The activity can be sponsored by the school or community and include team sports, prosocial activities such as religious activities or volunteer work, performing arts, school involvement, and academic clubs.

Extracurricular involvement. The number of hours he/she spends in each extracurricular activity.

Homework performance. The average score of students' completed homework assignments.

Limitations

The researchers could not conduct a random sampling due to several factors. First, student placement within each classroom was not random. The subjects were assigned as a class by the principal of the school. The second limitation of this study resulted from the time of year the research took place. The data was collected during the winter months when some extracurricular activities were not offered. Last, the small sample size itself may have limited the results of the study.

Assumptions

The researchers assumed a number of conditions. First, it was assumed a large number of the sample would participate in extracurricular activities during the time of the study. Second, the researchers assumed the honesty and accuracy of the students' reported involvement in extracurricular activities. The researchers also assumed students would receive weekly homework assignments during the time of the study and would continue their normal homework habits despite their awareness of the ongoing study.

Hypothesis

For this study, the researchers hypothesized: there is a positive correlation between extracurricular involvement and homework performance (H_1: $r > 0$). The researchers expected the data to show as extracurricular involvement increases, homework performance also increases.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

There are many opportunities for students to participate in nonacademic activities. These activities can include: sports, clubs, private lessons, and religious activities. Participation in these activities enriches students' lives by encouraging social skills. Yet, if students are involved in activities requiring many hours of participation, does it affect their academic performance? Knowing the answer to this question, parents and teachers can help their students develop better time management skills.

Research has produced conflicting results on this issue. Some studies emphasize the benefits of extracurricular activities and homework, while others focus on the negative consequences of each. Yet, there is research suggesting a positive relationship exists between the two. According to the critics, too much involvement in extracurricular activities takes away from time that could be spent studying or completing homework. Overscheduled children may not have as much time to complete homework assignments, leading to a decline in academic achievement. The relationship between extracurricular involvement and homework performance remains an area for further investigation.

The following literature review focuses on both of these issues. First, the theoretical perspective supporting a positive relationship between extracurricular involvement and homework performance will be explored. Then, a review of research on extracurricular activities will precede that of homework. After examining each variable in isolation, the focus will turn to research involving both variables.

Theoretical Perspective

The positive youth development position provides a useful theoretical perspective for studying the benefits associated with extracurricular activities. This theory was developed by the National Conference of State Legislatures in order to provide quality programming for youth. In essence, the positive youth development perspective rests on the idea that children need a well-coordinated array of people, places, and possibilities to help them as they grow and develop (Ferber, Gaines, & Goodman, 2005, p.1-3). The goal of positive youth development is to develop multi-faceted programs to help children grow into mature and successful adults. Promoting positive relationships with peers, providing opportunities to learn healthy behaviors, connecting youth with caring adults, and challenging youth in ways that build their competence are regarded as key components of high-quality programs. According to Ferber, Gaines, and Goodman (2005), "kids who feel safe, valued and connected to caring adults are more likely to be positive about life, engaged in school and emotionally healthy; they are also less likely to participate in destructive or delinquent behavior" (Ferber et al., 2005, p.1). A high-quality program can make a significant difference in the lives of young people. While no single model will work for every child, a high-quality program will provide: physical and psychological safety, structure, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong and for skill-building, positive social norms, and support for efficacy (Ferber et al., 2005, p. 2). These features contribute to the success of youth in various ways, "from preventing teen pregnancy, drug abuse, unemployment and youth violence to promoting academic, civic and vocational success" (Ferber et al., 2005, p. 2). In summary, as applied to the relationship between homework performance and time spent in extracurricular activities, this theory

supports the expectation that time spent in extracurricular activities positively influences homework performance since high-quality programming can provide the necessary environments young people need for healthy development, leading to more success at home, at school, and throughout life.

Extracurricular Activities

The effects of extracurricular activities have been a topic of debate for over a century. The debate stems from a growing interest in how youth are spending their time, especially for maximum academic, psychological, and social benefits (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002, p. 465). Prior to 1900, nonacademic activities were seen as harmful to scholastic achievement, and participation was discouraged. Now, an affirmative perspective on extracurricular activities has been taken since researchers have discovered the positive effects on life skills and academic accomplishments which extracurricular activities can have for students (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002, p. 465). Research suggests the way students spend their time outside of school has as much influence on their success as what they do during the school day (National Institute on Out-of-School Time [NIOST], 2006, p. 1). Still, there exists concern over excessive involvement in extracurricular activities. Despite the benefits of organized activities, some fear too much involvement takes away from time spent on academics such as homework and studying. Therefore, adults are left to consider, how much is too much for youth?

Benefits of participation. Participation in extracurricular activities provides countless benefits for youth (Harrison & Narayan, 2003, p. 117). First, organized activities allow children to build healthy relationships with adults and acquire positive

role models. The presence of adult relationships outside the family is recognized as a developmental benefit, facilitating academic and life success for students. For example, the "Connections Through Clubs" program gives students an opportunity to participate in small-group extracurricular activities and mentoring experiences led by school faculty, staff, and community members throughout the academic year. The purpose of this program is to promote academic, career, and personal and social development for all students. Once this program was implemented at North Windy Ridge School in Weaverville, North Carolina, the school's faculty saw positive results in the program's first year. Of the 548 student responses, 86.7% indicated they had learned something new, 90.6% enjoyed clubs, and students overwhelmingly indicated positive relationships with club leaders and peers (Logan & Scarborough, 2008, para. 14). Adult leaders can empower children and set high expectations for participants. They do this by responding to the needs of the children in their program and by taking the time to establish healthy relationships. Not only do healthy relationships provide support for children, but youth who have a relationship with an adult or mentor outside the family are less likely to participate in high-risk behaviors such as using drugs and alcohol than those who do not have a supportive relationship with an adult (Shumow, 2003, para. 6). Truly, the support, encouragement, and guidance children receive from adult leaders are beneficial to their success as individuals.

Involvement in extracurricular activities also provides health benefits. According to the *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*, "Unless students engage in sufficient daily physical activity, they will not be able to lead a healthy lifestyle that will allow them to use the skills and knowledge they learned in other important school

subjects" (Hill, 2009, p. 30). The documented amount of time children spend watching television, playing video games, and surfing the Internet reveals the great amount of leisure time children have to enjoy. Yet, incidences of chronic illnesses such as obesity and Type 2 diabetes have increased during children's elementary school years due to inactive lifestyles and poor nutrition (Hill, 2009, para. 1). In fact, activity levels of boys and girls decrease between fourth and tenth grade. Sports leagues and health clubs can help motivate students to live healthy and active lifestyles:

> Sport participation during the elementary school years is critical because the development of physical skills in those activities tends to increase participants' perceived competence, which is a major reason why students continue to participate in specific physical activities and are motivated to be physically active. (Hill, 2009, p. 26)

A study of urban middle and high school students found involvement in extracurricular activities was positively connected to a healthy diet and regular exercise (Harrison & Narayan, 2003, p. 113). A similar study of adolescents found sport participants more likely to consume fruits and vegetables than those not involved. Sport participation has also been associated with fewer mental and general health problems (Harrison & Narayan, 2003, p. 113). While participation in any activity appears to be better than nonparticipation, youth who participate in sports have a unique association with "adequate exercise, milk consumption, healthy self-image, and with a lower likelihood of emotional distress, suicidal behavior, familial substance abuse, and physical and sexual abuse histories" (Harrison & Narayan, 2003, pp. 117-118). In their study, Harrison and

Narayan (2003) also discovered students who participate in extracurricular activities are more likely to do their homework and avoid alcohol and drug use and vandalism. Clearly, participation in extracurricular activities allows youth to develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

There are additional benefits to participating in extracurricular activities. Greater engagement in learning and higher academic performance are two positive effects extracurricular activities can have on youth. One study found low-income third, fourth, and fifth grade students who attended an afterschool program had better work habits, emotional adjustment, and relationships with peers than those who did not attend programs (Miller, 2003, para. 4). Additionally, children involved in afterschool programs missed fewer days of school, completed more homework assignments, and performed better on proficiency tests according to another study (Miller, 2003, para. 5). Extracurricular activities also provide opportunities to build skills, especially those necessary to succeed in the 21st century. Clubs or afterschool programs can expose students to new forms of technology. One study noted afterschool computer clubs have become a popular afterschool activity. The skills students learn while using the computer can enhance other academic learning experiences (NIOST, 2006, pp. 3-4). Another benefit extracurricular activities provide is the chance to get involved in a larger community: "Community provides opportunities for youth to learn how to act in the world around them – to explore, express, earn, belong, and influence" (Morrissey & Werner-Wilson, 2005, p. 69). Indeed, it is important to recognize that children and youth do not grow up in programs, but in families and communities. A sense of connectedness and productivity can develop through service projects, and youth can learn to be less

egocentric while caring for the needs of others (Morrissey & Werner-Wilson, 2005, p. 69). Truly, the range of academic, social, and other types of knowledge and skills youth gain through participating in extracurricular activities is immense.

The overscheduling hypothesis. While there are many positive benefits resulting from participation in extracurricular activities, there may be a point when excessive participation does not have greater value for a child: "A few studies have found a curvilinear relationship between activity participation and development. This work suggests there is a threshold in which the number of activities no longer exerts positive influence on developmental outcome" (Fredricks, 2008, p. 390). The leading researchers in the debate on youth development and the overscheduling hypothesis reveal participation in organized activities accounts for only five hours per week of the average American youth's time. Yet, a very small subgroup of youth, between three and six percent, are found to spend twenty or more hours per week participating in extracurricular activities (Mahoney, Harris, & Eccles, 2006, p. 1). The three to six percent of youth who spend a greater amount of time participating in extracurricular activities may be at risk to experience the negative outcomes associated with the overscheduling hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, overscheduling develops from the external pressures adults place on children to achieve long-term goals. External pressure from adults and activity-related time commitments are believed to contribute to poor psychosocial adjustment in children and to weaken their relationships with parents (Elkind, 2001; Gilbert, 1999; Rosenfeld & Wise, 2000). Despite this concern, the majority of published studies support the idea that, except for the small percentage of youth who participate in extracurricular activities excessively, the well-being of youth

who participate in extracurricular activities is more positive compared to youth who do not participate.

The existing studies have considered the amount of organized activity participation in relation to youth development. These studies provide substantial support for organized activities as positive promoters of youth development and do not provide direct support for children being overscheduled in extracurricular activities ("The overscheduled child?", 2007, p. 1). However, David Elkind of Tufts University reports the loss of twelve hours of free time a week for children, including eight hours of unstructured play and outdoor activities while the amount of time children participate in organized sport activities has doubled. Even television depicts children differently: "More often they are portrayed as high-achieving mini-adults or as preoccupied with school issues or family problems such as divorce, substance abuse, AIDS, and job loss" ("The overscheduled child?", 2007, p. 2). Written and televised media reports and popular parenting books suggest the lives of many young people are hurried and stressful ("The overscheduled child?", 2007, p. 1). Perceived pressure from parents and other adults may lead to poor adjustment for youth who are involved in too many organized activities. A qualitative study completed in 2003 suggests participation in many organized activities can limit the time a child has for leisure activity and can constrain the relationship the child has with his or her parents (Lareau, 2003). These concerns about the development of today's youth continue to stimulate the overscheduling hypothesis and those who support it.

Authors Mahoney, Harris, and Eccles (2006), explored evidence in contrast to the overscheduling hypothesis. First, the authors looked at the main reasons youth participate in organized activities and found the primary motivations for participation are intrinsic:

> The most common reasons both adolescents and preadolescents give for participation include: a) enjoyment and excitement, b) encouragement and support received from friends or parents, c) opportunities to challenge oneself, build skills, and increase self worth, d) desire to interact with activity leaders and age mates. (Mahoney, Harris, & Eccles, 2006, p. 5)

Youth seldom describe pressure from adults or long-term educational or career goals as the main reason for participating in extracurricular activities. Secondly, the authors discovered very few American youth devote enough time to extracurricular activities to be described as overscheduled. In fact, most youth are capable of balancing their time between academics, family time, socializing, and relaxing. The authors acknowledge too much time and too many activities can be stressful or problematic for proper youth development. Yet, the few youth with very high levels of activity did not show negative adjustment in most indicators assessed during studies, and they continued to demonstrate healthier functioning than many nonparticipants on most indicators of well-being (Mahoney et al., 2006, pp. 18-19, 21-22). Of greater concern than the overscheduling hypothesis to the authors is the fact many youth are not participating in extracurricular activities at all. The youth who are inactive are the ones whose development should be of concern.

Homework

Dr. Harris Cooper, a professor at Duke University and leading authority on homework, defines homework as "tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are intended to be carried out during nonschool hours" (Lacina-Gifford & Gifford, 2004, p. 279). Homework serves as a link between parents and teachers and as an avenue for informing parents, satisfying school requirements, and, perhaps the least popular of all, punishing the student (Cooper, 2003, pp. 1063). It can be used as a tool to prepare students prior to new lessons, help them review past lessons, and help those students lagging behind (American Federation of Teachers [AFT], 2009, p. 7).

Dr. Cooper acknowledges that homework does not drastically improve achievement for elementary age students. Despite the fact countries whose students are currently outperforming American students on achievement tests do not assign large amounts of homework, American students between the ages of six and eight have gone from studying fifty-two minutes a week to one hundred and twenty-eight minutes since 1981 (Wallis, 2006). Proponents and opponents have argued back and forth for some time on the validity and need for homework in the elementary student's life.

The homework debate. Critics can be found both in students' parents and their teachers. Those opposed to handing out homework say it 'squeezes family life.' Parents have a hard time arguing both for and against homework for their children. While it is true they want their children to be successful academically, many parents want to pass on to their children qualities to make them a good citizen in their community. It is important for families to share time together, building their relationship as a family and learning

about their heritage and religious beliefs. According to a 1998 survey, close to fifty percent of parents say they have had major arguments with their children over homework, and thirty-four percent say homework is a source of stress and struggle (Kralovec & Buell, 2001, p. 40). These arguments about homework and the hardship homework places on family dynamics prevent these parents from attempting to teach any of the extra lessons they hold important.

Curt Dudley-Marling, a professor in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College, found similar results in studies he has done on the implication of homework for students and their families. In his interviews with families of struggling students he found the cost of homework can be quite high. Homework was found to be a disruption to family routine and impaired the relationships between mothers, fathers, and their children. Instead of being a "connection for parents and schools" it became a "carrier for school troubles," a means for transforming "school troubles" into "families troubles" (Dudley-Marling, 2003).

Homework critics hold their strongest arguments at the elementary level: "For students in primary grades, the correlation between time spent on homework and achievement is near zero" (Cooper, 2003, p. 1065). If there is such little effect, why then, critics ask, would we place such big demands on the students and their families at the elementary level?

Benefits of homework. Proponents might agree homework does not directly benefit academic achievement; however it does benefit the student in other areas. They believe "homework assignments provide children with the time and experience they need

to develop beliefs about achievement and study habits that are helpful for learning" (Bempechat, 2004, p. 189). Through homework students learn better study habits and other skills needed to become better learners (Coutts, 2004, p.183). If students do not learn these skills early, proponents fear they will suffer in their later years. Not allowing elementary age students to participate in some sort of homework assignment will put them at a disadvantage as they progress through middle school and high school.

"Homework assignments that allow for Internet and telephone exchanges between and among students invite the development of natural, collaborative communities" (Corno, 2000, p. 533). This quote comes from Lyn Corno, a proponent of not just homework, but changing homework to fit our technological world. Using homework in this way allows students to not only learn classroom material but introduces them to whole other cultures as well, giving them opportunities to practice good social skills while interacting with their international classmates. In the article "Homework as the Job of Childhood," Corno and Xu suggest homework as a precursor to jobs the student might face in the future. Preparation and planning needed when tackling jobs at work can be equated to different parts of homework assignments given by teachers. Students learn to micromanage at a young age. Similar to a job, when resources are used and not simply ignored, homework can be exciting for the student. "Homework can be viewed as a kind of home office for the child with features like those needed in the workplace" (Corno & Xu, 2004, p. 228). Homework to the proponent is viewed as an indirect way of learning life skills. They are not as worried about the content of the homework as what the idea of homework can teach the child to prepare them for the future.

The idea of homework has been around for quite some time and, though debated back and forth on its effectiveness, will not disappear anytime soon. Teachers, parents, and students need to understand that homework can be helpful in different ways: "At the elementary level, it certainly should not be used to introduce new material or just to give kids some work to take home to show their parents' something is happening at school" (Lacina-Gifford & Gifford 2004, p. 280).

The Effects of Extracurricular Involvement on Homework Performance

Whether or not one can agree homework is a viable supplement to raise academic success among students, the fact still remains teachers are assigning it, and students are not completing it. These days "students are simply not doing their assignments" (Glazer & Williams, 2001, p. 43). Homework teaches students, depending on their age level, a variety of skills. Proponents argue younger children learn responsibility and good study skills for future learning while older students are able to review and learn in greater detail the subject matter at hand. The amount of time students are spending in extracurricular activities outside a normal school day has been on the rise over the last twenty to thirty years. Perhaps the increase in participation is a red flag for why students are not completing homework sent home by teachers every day. Is it possible to have too many extracurricular activities crowding a student's schedule? In the article, *The Effects of Homework Programs and After-School Activities on School Success*, the authors suggest students can be overwhelmed by too much participation in afterschool activities. They reveal there is in fact a "curvilinear relationship between extracurricular activities, such

that levels of outside activity can be too high to allow students to also focus on their schoolwork" (Cosden et al., 2004, p. 223).

Most studies showing positive relationships between extracurricular involvement and school success have been done with the upper grades. Participation in activities outside of school time allows children to improve their social skills and gives them time for self-improvement. Harrison and Narayan found in their research of students from grades six, nine, and twelve that all students benefited from extracurricular activities: "This statewide student survey revealed that participants in any type of extracurricular activity were significantly more likely than nonparticipants to exercise and consume nutritious foods, to like school, and do homework" (2003, p. 118).

Students should be encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities due to the numerous benefits of participation. Students labeled "latchkey kids" have opportunities to participate in safe, supervised activities until parents get off work and are able to arrive home. For students who are struggling in school, these activities provide an avenue for them to show their nonacademic talents and be praised for them. The activities can also be an encouragement to these students to keep their grades up since many school related after-school activities require a minimum grade point average to participate. The benefit all students share in participation of these activities is the positive self-esteem and positive relationships they build amongst their teammates. The positive self-esteem and relationships often positively affect students' grades in school.

The danger with focusing purely on the benefits of engaging students in extracurricular activities is driving students to participate in too many activities.

Unstructured play is an important part of child development (Schroeder, 2007, p. 73). The more time a child is scheduled for extracurricular activity with the added responsibility of homework reduces his opportunities for imaginative play. David Elkind, a child psychologist, comments, “Let children slow down and reach within their own imaginations to just plain have fun, they urge; today's children are overscheduled, overstressed, and over stimulated (“The overscheduled child?”, 2007, p. B4).

As educators and parents it is important to encourage students to participate in extracurricular activities. Through these programs students are able to improve both academically and personally. Care should be taken however in just how much the child is scheduled for each night; parents should help their children find a healthy balance between extracurricular activities, homework, and free time.

Conclusion

The case for children doing something physical every day is growing. The leading brain researchers suggest the benefits associated with movement and learning. For example, procedural memory activates when a student participates in physical movement, sports, dance, games, theater, and role-play because this type of memory requires very little review; in fact, this implicit memory is often referred to as motor memory, body learning, or habit memory because it involves memories of learned skills (Jensen, 2005, pp. 135-136). Riding a bike is one example of procedural memory. Even if a teenager has not ridden for years, he can usually do it again without practice. This has profound implications for learning in an educational setting. Since the body and brain are part of the same system, what happens to the body happens to the brain. Physical activities, like

role-playing, doing a hands-on science experiment, or creating a project in an art class are highly likely to be recalled. A child's life is full of actions that require standing, riding, moving, playing, building, or running, and "these activities create a wider, more complex, and overall greater source of sensory input to the brain than mere cognitive activity" (Jensen, 2005, pp. 136). Therefore, hands-on learning creates the most memorable classroom experiences. In relation to extracurricular activities, youth who participate in physical activity and activate procedural memory experience a healthy integration of mind and body (Jensen, 2005, p. 65). In his book, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, Eric Jensen notes several studies in support for recess, play, and physical education. For example, researcher Terrence Dwyer found that exercise improves classroom behavior and academic performance (Jensen, 2005, p. 63). Dwyer's research further revealed that social skills improved in the groups who exercised more. Other research has found that "students who are engaged in daily physical education programs consistently show not just superior motor fitness, but better academic performance and a better attitude toward school than their students who do not participate in daily P.E." (Jensen, 2005, p. 63). Additionally, Jenny Seham of the National Dance Institute (NDI) in New York City has observed for years the measurable academic and social results of schoolchildren who study dance. She notes the positive changes in self-discipline, grades, and sense of purpose in life that her students demonstrate (Jensen, 2005, p. 65). Truly, movement and physical activity, components of most extracurricular activities, can be effective in strengthening learning, improving memory, and enhancing students' motivation and morale.

Clearly, there is increasing interest in the way young people spend their time and the effects it has on academic achievement. More and more students are participating in extracurricular activities, and the main point of concern revolves around the time devoted to these activities and how it impacts homework performance. Researchers have thoroughly explored the impact of extracurricular activities on child development. Yet, more research needs to explore the relationship between extracurricular involvement and homework performance. This will provide valuable information for parents, teachers, and students. If extracurricular activities are keeping students from completing beneficial homework assignments, then students may need to consider reducing their involvement.

Chapter 3

Methods and Procedures

Subjects of the Study

The sample size included thirty-three third grade students. The subjects' ages ranged from eight to nine years old. The subjects of this study included students from one public elementary school and one private elementary school in East Tennessee. About half of the student population at the public elementary school qualified for free or reduced lunch. Four subjects from the public elementary school had Individualized Education Plans. The students from the private elementary school came from middle to upper-class homes. Only one student from the private elementary school had an Individualized Education Plan. The remaining participants from both schools ranged from average to above average in their academic performance. Subjects came from a variety of living situations in which they resided with both parents, a single parent, grandparents, foster parents, adopted parents, or other guardians.

Research Timeline

The researchers carried out this study over four consecutive weeks. At the beginning of the four weeks, each student was given a survey to be completed by a parent or guardian. Each Friday, the researchers recorded the students' homework performance by averaging the students' homework grades for the week. At the end of the four weeks, the researchers compiled their data into one comprehensive chart for statistical analysis.

Survey Procedures

At the beginning of the four week study, a survey was given to students to take home for a parent or guardian to complete and return to school. The data received from the survey showed the extent of student involvement in extracurricular activities. The parent or guardian checked all of the activities their child was involved in during the four week study. The parent or guardian reported the weekly time commitment in number of hours per week for each activity as well as the involvement start date and end date.

Homework Recording Procedures

At the end of each week, the researchers recorded each student's homework performance in a cumulative chart. The data in this chart consisted of the average grade for each student's weekly assignments. The researchers recorded the grades for two to three homework assignments per week. For the first two weeks of the study, math homework assignment scores were recorded. For the last two weeks of the study, language arts homework scores were recorded. At the end of the four week study, the researchers averaged each student's grades from the four week period to calculate his/her overall homework performance.

Statistical Analysis

The researchers calculated a Pearson correlation test to determine whether a correlation existed between extracurricular activities and homework performance. The Pearson correlation can be used to measure the consistency of the relationship,

independent of its form. Based on this statistical analysis, the researchers were able to determine the degree and direction of the correlation. The researchers expected the data to show a curvilinear relationship.

Chapter 4

Results

Analysis of the Data

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a relationship existed between extracurricular involvement and homework performance. Data was collected in two third grade classes at two schools. At the beginning of the four week study, the researchers sent home a survey with students for a parent or guardian to complete. The data received from the survey provided the researchers with each student's weekly time commitment to extracurricular activities. Additionally, the researchers measured homework performance over a four week period. Each week, two to three homework assignments assessed students' knowledge of content being taught in the classroom. For the first two weeks, math homework scores were recorded, and the second two weeks, language arts homework scores were recorded.

Class Statistics

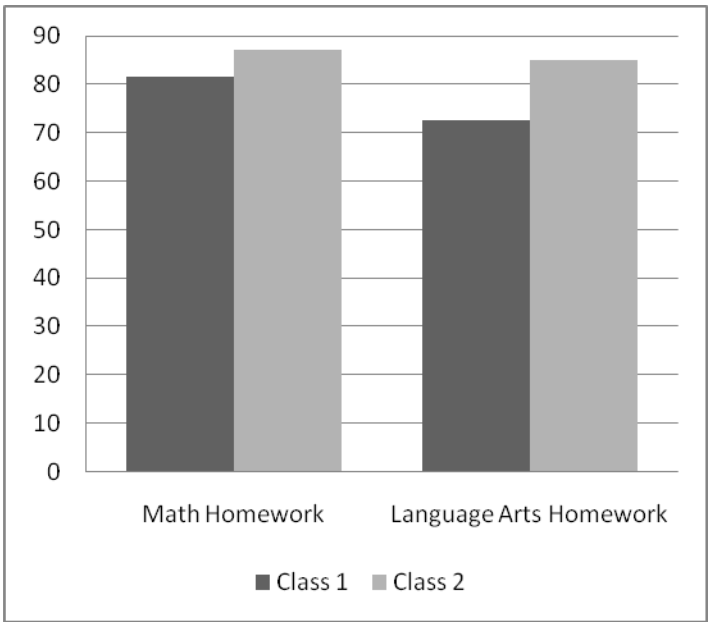
Overall, the two classes spent approximately the same amount of time in extracurricular activities and were of similar academic ability.

An independent sample T-test using the students' hours of participation suggested students' average time commitments to extracurricular activities at the first school ($M = 6.05$, $SD = 5.08$) were somewhat equivalent to the average time commitments at the second school ($M = 6.86$, $SD = 4.26$). Therefore, the mean difference between the two schools was not significant, $t(33) = -1.46$, $p > .05$, $d = .16$.

An independent sample T-test using the students' math homework scores suggested the average math homework scores at the first school (M = 81.57, SD = 19.12) were somewhat equivalent to the average math homework scores at the second school (M = 87.14, SD = 14.02). Therefore, the mean difference between the two schools was not significant, $t(33) = -.79$, $p > .05$, $d = .44$.

An independent sample T-test using the students' language arts homework scores suggested the average language arts scores at the first school (M = 72.68, SD = 25.38) were somewhat equivalent to the average language arts homework scores at the second school (M = 84.92, SD = 18.49). Therefore, the mean difference between the two schools was not significant, $t(33) = -1.26$, $p > .05$, $d = .22$.

Figure 1. Math and Language Arts Homework Averages



This data about extracurricular involvement and homework performance from the two classes was combined before a Pearson correlation test was used to determine

whether a relationship existed between students' commitment to extracurricular activities and their homework performance.

Table 1

Extracurricular Involvement and Homework Scores for Combined Classes

	Weekly Time Commitment (in hours)	Math Homework Average	Language Arts Homework Average
N	33	33	33
Mean	6.39	83.93	77.88
Std. Deviation	4.70	17.12	23.21

Parametric Correlation

The researchers formulated one hypothesis. H_1: Extracurricular involvement is positively correlated to homework performance. In order to establish if a correlation existed between the number of hours spent in extracurricular activities and homework performance, the researchers performed one Pearson correlation test.

Table 2

Correlation of Extracurricular Involvement and Homework Scores

Measure	1	2	3
1. Weekly Time Commitment (in hours)	_	-.25	-.31*
2. Math Homework Average		_	.41**
3. Langauge Arts Homework Average			_

Note. *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

A correlation for the data revealed the number of hours spent in extracurricular activities and language arts homework performance were significantly related, r = -.31, n

= 33, p = .04, one tail. The researchers found a significant relationship between extracurricular involvement and homework performance, but the correlation went a different direction than the researchers hypothesized. A positive correlation between extracurricular involvement and homework performance was not found. Instead, the results of the Pearson correlation indicated a negative correlation between weekly time commitment and language arts homework. These findings led to the rejection of the researchers' proposed hypothesis.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Summary

This study was designed by the researchers to examine the relationship between students' extracurricular involvement and their homework performance. Two third grade classrooms in East Tennessee were used in this study. The first classroom was located in a local county school and the second in a local private school. The researchers obtained permission from the parents of thirty-three student participants. Thus, the sample size for this study was small and not random.

The researchers first sent home a survey for parents or guardians to complete. The survey indicated the types of students' extracurricular activities and the weekly time commitment to each. Next, the researchers recorded students' homework grades for the next four weeks in both math and language arts content areas. The researchers analyzed the data using a Pearson correlation test. In assessing the results, the researchers found a significant negative relationship between students' extracurricular involvement and homework performance in language arts and thus rejected their hypothesis. The researchers also discovered if students were successful in one subject area, math, they were also successful in the other, language arts.

Conclusions

The results of this study revealed several noteworthy points for educators to consider. First of all, a significant correlation between math homework scores and language arts homework scores indicated the students in this study generally performed

the same in both subject areas. Educators should be aware of those students who struggle in language arts because their abilities to read, for example, may influence their abilities to perform in math. A student from one of the classes in this study can read a limited amount on his own. However, as long as math assignments and tests are read aloud to him, the student displays very high math ability. Identifying students' areas of weakness and providing the necessary support should be an important practice for teachers.

Additionally, the researchers found a negative correlation between extracurricular involvement and homework performance in language arts. This resulted from a student in one of the classes with an extremely high level of involvement in extracurricular activities. The student participated in five activities per week, resulting in a twenty-four hour time commitment per week during the study. The student's data was included in the study because of his full participation. However, if this student had been removed from the study, then the data would have revealed that the students' extracurricular involvement and homework performance were not significantly related, $r = -.06$, $n = 32$, $p = .38$, one tail. Evidently, students who excessively participate in extracurricular activities may struggle in one or more academic areas, yet further research is necessary to determine the extent to which excessive extracurricular participation may negatively influence academic performance.

Recommendations

Despite the limitations, the researchers found a significant relationship between homework performance and students' time spent in extracurricular activities. These results revealed a negative influence of time spent in extracurricular activities on student language arts homework performance. However, the researchers were not able to find a

significant correlation between math homework performance and student extracurricular participation.

Within this study, two students had weekly extracurricular time commitments exceeding fifteen hours per week. The most extreme time commitment of twenty-four hours per week had a major influence on the findings. The researchers suggest further research be done on this population of students who participate in extracurricular activities excessively. While research has suggested only a small percentage of students make up this population, more research needs to be conducted to determine if excessive participation in extracurricular activities consistently results in lower academic performance and, if so, what factors contribute to a decrease in academics when extracurricular involvement is high. Additionally, the researchers suggest further studies examine the excessively time committed students specifically. Studies could focus on other academic areas or the students' family and peer relationships to determine if excessive participation affects these aspects of students' lives and to what degree.

Simply attending an extracurricular activity may not be sufficient for obtaining the benefits of involvement (Bohnert, Fredericks, & Randall, 2010, p. 593). Therefore, the researchers suggest future studies explore students' level of engagement in extracurricular activities. Exploring children's effort, concentration, attendance, enjoyment, interest, and/or obedience in following the rules may provide a richer characterization of children's experience and development in such activities.

The researchers suggest studies of a larger, more controlled sample to produce more valuable results. Also, collecting data during different times of the year would be beneficial since many extracurricular activities are seasonal and involvement varies

depending on the time of year. In addition, the researchers suggest including a wider selection of students from varying age groups such as middle school, high school, and college-age youth. The opportunities for extracurricular involvement as well as the expectations for these activities vary between each group. The homework requirements at each level also vary. By studying each age group independently, researchers may find significant correlations linking extracurricular involvement and homework performance. Controlled longitudinal studies on a larger scale may show such patterns more clearly.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Knox County Approval Letter

KNOX COUNTY SCHOOLS
ANDREW JOHNSON BUILDING

Dr. James P. McIntyre, Jr., Superintendent

October 18, 2010

Dr. Chris Templar
Johnson Bible College
7900 Johnson Drive
Knoxville, TN 37998

Dr. Templar:

You are granted permission for your students to conduct their Action Research projects.

In all research studies names of individuals, groups, or schools may not appear in the text of the study unless specific permission has been granted through this office. The principal researcher is required to furnish this office with one copy of the completed research document.

Good luck with your studies. Do not hesitate to contact me at 865-594-1735 if you need further assistance or clarification of the research policies of Knox County Schools.

Yours truly,

John Beckett
Supervisor
Research and Evaluation

Project Number: 1011018

/pl

P.O. Box 2188 • 912 South Gay Street • Knoxville, Tennessee 37901-2188 • Telephone (865) 594-1800

Appendix B
Parent Permission Letter Form 1

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I have enjoyed my experience with your child at Bonny Kate Elementary School. In case I have not had the opportunity to meet you, I am the intern working with Mrs. Howard and her class this year. As I work toward achieving my Master's Degree, I must complete an action research project. With your permission, I would love to include your child in my study. To ease any apprehension you might have about your child's participation in the study, I want you to know each student will remain completely anonymous. I will collect various data to help me study the relationship between your child's involvement in extracurricular activities and his/her homework completion and accuracy. I need your permission to survey the number of hours your child participates in extracurricular activities and to record your child's homework completion and grades. In its final form, the study will not list any of the names of the students from Bonny Kate Elementary School. I appreciate your consideration for allowing your child to participate in my study. If you have any questions about me or the nature of my research, please feel free to contact me at Bonny Kate Elementary School, 579-2108.

Thank you,

_____
Rachel Johnson

_____
Mrs. Howard

_____
Mrs. Norris

I give my child, _____, permission to participate in Miss Johnson's study about the relationship between extracurricular involvement and homework completion. I understand my child's data will be used for academic research and will be kept anonymous.

_____ _____
Parent/Guardian Signature Date

Appendix C
Parent Permission Letter Form 2

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I have enjoyed my experience with your child at the Christian Academy of Knoxville. In case I have not had the opportunity to meet you, I am the intern working with Mrs. Giordano and her class this year. As I work toward achieving my Master's Degree, I must complete an action research project. With your permission, I would love to include your child in my study. To ease any apprehension you might have about your child's participation in the study, I want you to know each student will remain completely anonymous. I will collect various data to help me study the relationship between your child's involvement in extracurricular activities and his/her homework completion and accuracy. I need your permission to survey the number of hours your child participates in extracurricular activities and to record your child's homework completion and grades. In its final form, the study will not list any of the names of the students from the Christian Academy of Knoxville. I appreciate your consideration for allowing your child to participate in my study. If you have any questions about me or the nature of my research, please feel free to contact me at the Christian Academy of Knoxville, 690-4721.

Thank you,

_____
Ryan Moulden

_____
Mrs. Giordano

_____
Mr. McFalls

I give my child, _____, permission to participate in Mr. Moulden's study about the relationship between extracurricular involvement and homework completion. I understand my child's data will be used for academic research and will be kept anonymous.

_____ _____
Parent/Guardian Signature Date

Appendix D
Extracurricular Involvement Survey

Name: _____ **Please Return by Feb. 8, 2011**

Extracurricular Involvement Survey

Please fill in the chart below by marking each extracurricular activity in which your child currently participates (or will participate in **during the next four weeks.)** Please note the start and end dates for each activity. Thank you so much for your help in this study.

(Check all that apply)	**Extracurricular Activities**	**Weekly Time Commitment (# of Hours)**	**Involvement Start Date and End Date**
	Basketball		
	Baseball		
	Soccer		
	Cheerleading		
	Gymnastics		
	Swimming		
	Martial Arts		
	After-School Program / Club		
	Music Lessons		
	Religious Activities		
	Art / Drama Group		
	Dance / Ballet Lessons		
	Boy Scouts / Girl Scouts		
	Community / Volunteer Service		
	Other: _____		

Student Homework Performance Record

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Student Name	**Average Grade**	**Average Grade**	**Average Grade**	**Average Grade**