

Action Research Proposal: Using Student Accountability Forms To Promote Increased

Homework Completion Rates

Riley Germanis

Seattle Pacific University

Action Research Proposal: Using Student Accountability Forms To Promote Increased

Introduction

Teacher assigned homework is a controversial topic in current times. Some sources associate assigned homework as a positive correlation with student achievement, while other sources claim homework can be detrimental to student's mental health (Costley, 2013). Research shows that return on investment for homework time diminishes exponentially after about 90 minutes with an optimal benefit for those who spent 60-70 minutes each night (Green, 2015). At the school where I work, I assign homework daily and expect completion by the start of the next class. Generally homework assignments are reinforcement tools and extensions of classroom learning. Some students strive to complete homework on-time daily while others are content not completing homework (homework accounts for only 10% of a student's overall class grade). From observation alone (no formal analysis), I have noticed that many students who regularly complete homework also score well on formal assessments (which account for 70% of a student's overall class grade). While some students who do not complete homework also score well on assessments, many of the students who score the lowest on assessments fail to complete homework on-time, if at all.

Research shows that students who engage in academic activities are more likely to retain content information (Borich, 2014). This paper will document the work of an action research project designed to answer the question, "Does the implementation of student responsibility surveys impact homework completion rates?" The treatment will be the implementation of a

Student Responsibility Survey which will be given to students who do not fully complete

homework on time at the time of regular homework collection. This survey will help the teacher document reasons for students not completing homework. I expect the treatment to improve homework completion rates overall. This research document will record the change in homework completion rates to classes where this treatment is implemented and will document qualitative feedback from the Student Responsibility Surveys as to why students are not completing their homework.

Literature Review

Several researchers have conducted controversial and often time contradictory arguments for or against the assignment of homework (Green, 2015). Diane Briars, the President of the National Council of Teacher of Mathematics, claims, in mathematics, there is a misconception that assigning hundreds of math exercises each week is effective. Rather, she claims that students should complete homework systemically and regularly where teachers provide the opportunity for the students to problem solve, rather than listen to a lecturer (Green, 2015).

Homework Assigning Strategies

Conclusions on the effectiveness of research is mixed however perhaps because of the different types of students and types of homework assigned (Fisher, Lapp & Fey, 2011). Strategies for assigning homework are about as mixed as those assigning it. Some teachers use homework as an after thought to the task while others use it as an extension of classroom learning (Fisher, Lapp & Fey, 2011). A study conducted by MetLife concluded that 77 percent and more than 80 percent of teachers and students agree that homework is important or very

important, although 90 percent claim that homework causes added stress (Costley, 2013). Some of the stress can be attributed to the nature of the homework. Pushback for assigning homework come from those who believe that homework is associated with busy work, some of which is easily understandable by students, and a majority of which confuses students at home (Costley, 2013; Fisher, Lapp & Fey, 2011). Both younger and older students need time to play and explore the implications of homework outside of the classroom, over burdening students with time consuming busy work causes stress for some and is unattainable by others. Costly (2013) suggests that the best teachers vary homework assignments to fit the needs of the learning objectives accomplished in class and is appropriate if used to improve understanding or establish good study habits in contrast to assigning tedious tasks.

Strategies for Improving Homework Completion

Studies regarding strategies for improving homework completion are limited and primarily focus on elementary school children and special education students. However, many of the same problems exist for students in general education classrooms including motivation, access to content, suitable working environment, language barriers and memory deficits (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Most consistently, the strategy for improving homework completion is assigning level appropriate homework which either connects to the in-class lesson or extends students understanding beyond the classroom (Bryan & Burstein, 2004; Costley, 2013; Green, 2015).

Hartensteiner & Marek-Schroer (1992) conducted a comparison study between two different homework strategies in the same school. In one class, students were given two

additional days after the due date to turn in and receive credit for an assignment. In another class, students received zero points if homework was not handed in when it was due. Between the two studies, the policy with more severe consequences for late homework improved student completion.

Elementary School Strategies. Among elementary school students, another study attempted four strategies to improve homework completion, first was a Positive Behavior, Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Strategy that rewarded students who completed homework with additional recess time (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Another strategy explored was having students complete a color chart of their homework progress; green if completed, yellow if late and red if missing (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Students would present their homework progress chart to their parents during student-parent-teacher conferences. One group of teachers supported students with homework planners to help students track homework and other life events (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Of these strategies, homework charting and use of planners were the most effective.

Undergraduate Strategies. Solomon (1979) conducted a “two-point system” with undergraduate students by rewarding students who read the voluntary material and gives no consequences to those who did not. This study found that classes with this system resulted in more positive conversations in class, but did not significantly impact final exam scores. Students in this study were asked to write about the connections found between the class discussion and the reading. “85% of the students read the assigned material before coming to class...the class discussion in the two-point group were superior and the students preferred this method of

accountability” (Vandsburger & Duncan-Daston, 2011, pp. 9). Given that there are few studies around rewards and penalties for secondary school students (and even fewer for high school students), it is supported that students who complete more work and are actively engaged with materials will retain more information (Borich, 2014).

Methodology

The proposed intervention to impact homework completion rates among the students in the classroom is a Student Responsibility Survey. The current method of homework collection is for the teacher to circulate to all students during the class period during independent/group work time and check the student’s homework notebook for understanding of the homework tasks. For the teacher, this time is used as a formative assessment of student understanding and will guide some aspect of the lesson. The teacher marks a) 5 points for completion, b) “I” - Incomplete work or incomplete understanding, or c) “M” - Missing work/Did not complete. Currently, students who receive an “I” may turn in work again for up-to full credit if the work was not complete because of misunderstanding, students who receive an “M” are only eligible for 50% credit. Students who receive 5 points or “I” usually get feedback and have a brief conversation with the teacher about small improvements to understand the concept better. Students who earn an “M” receive no feedback from the teacher and the response is generally, “You don’t have your homework, okay, that’s your choice.” This current system does not provide much feedback for the teacher as to the student’s level of understanding.

Student Responsibility Survey’s (SRS’s) will be given to students who traditionally would receive an “M” or “I” because there was some reason students were unable to access the

material. The SRS will be printed or brightly colored paper and will be given directly to students in their seat to return to the teacher by the end of class. The SRS will ask students why they were unable to complete the homework (see Figure 1).

Student Responsibility Survey

Name: _____ Date: _____

Grade book designation:
 Incomplete (some work finished)
 Missing (no work completed)

I do not have my homework today because: (Check all that apply)

I did the assigned homework, but did not bring it to class.
 I chose not to do my homework
 I forgot to do my homework
 I did not have the appropriate materials
 I did not understand the task assigned

Please explain more of your circumstances from above (i.e. How will you remember to bring your homework next time? Why is it okay not to complete homework? What materials do you need to obtain? Why did you not ask for help?):

Student Signature: _____

Figure 1

The work of Bryan and Burstein (2004) supports this method of improving student homework completion. Requiring students to complete a task, similarly to how they required elementary school children to color in their homework chart, hold the student accountable for their own work. Additionally, the student must then explain why they were unable to complete the assigned task. The teacher will collect and record student responses to these questions as a type of formative assessment to improve instruction and become more familiar with student needs. SRS's are suggested as a classroom management procedure for teachers to record student behavior over time and help students stay accountable for their actions (Wong & Wong, 2009, DVD).

The implementation of this classroom management, instructional intervention will last for two weeks. In support of the standing literature, the teacher will ensure that the homework is relevant to the topics covered in class or extend classroom learning outside of the classroom. This will ensure that students who complete the assigned homework will benefit from the work completed outside of class.

This study will strategically collect two pieces of information. Since a lot of data has already been collected without this treatment, the teacher will compare the homework completion rates for students before the implementation of the SRS and after the implementation of the SRS. The data collected will be binary, “1” indicated turned in homework (even if late) and “0” indicates did not turn in homework (including work missed from absences).

A second piece of information will be collected through qualitative means. Students will indicate a reason for not completing homework by checking boxes for reasons and then will provide more detail in written form. Each check box on the form will be tallied and rates will be compared over time. The teacher will code the qualitative response to find patterns of behavior for individual students or groups of students. The presentation of results and conclusion will highlight not only trends in behavior, but also teaching strategies to further improve homework completion rates.

Borich, G. D. (2014). *Effective teaching methods: Research-based practice*. Pearson Higher Ed.

Bryan, T., & Burstein, K. (2004). Improving homework completion and academic performance: Lessons from special education. *Theory into Practice, 43*(3), 213-219.

Costley, K. C. (2013). Does Homework Really Improve Achievement?. *Online Submission*.

Fisher, D., Lapp, D., & Frey, N. (2011). Homework in Secondary Classrooms: Making It Relevant and Respectful. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 55*(1), 71-74.

Green, M. (2015, April 6). Study assigns value to math, science homework. Retrieved April 19, 2015, from http://www.columbiachronicle.com/health_and_tech/article_992577bc-da6a-11e4-a655-d7efc1f2aa4f.html

Hartensteiner, P.A., & Marek-Schroer, M.F. (1992). Two sixth grade homework policies and their effect on the prompt return of completed homework assignments. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 19*(4), 1-8.

Solomon, P. R. (1979). The two-point system: A method for encouraging students to read assigned material before class. *Teaching of Psychology, 6*, 77-79.

Vandsburger, E., & Duncan-Daston, R. (2011). Evaluating the study guide as a tool for increasing students' accountability for reading the textbook. *Journal of College Reading and Learning, 42*(1), 6-23.

Wong, H. & Wong, R. (2009) *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher*
Mountain View, CA: Harry K. Wong Publications, Inc.