Teachers' Perceptions of Homework's Effects on English Learners

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Teachers’ Perceptions of Homework’s Effects on English Learners

A Dissertation by

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Irvine, California
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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership
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ABSTRACT

Teachers’ Perceptions of Homework’s Effects on English Learners

by Peggy Smith

Purpose: Homework is an educational practice that has been implemented for many years. Research has shown that homework can have stringent effects on the well-being of students. To date, much of the research discusses the students’ and parents’ point of view on homework’s effects. Although teachers are the practitioners that develop and implement this practice, there is a dearth of research on teacher’s perspectives of homework’s effects on the well-being of students. Even less research has been carried out on teachers’ perspectives of homework’s effects on the well-being of English Learner Students. Since the goal of education is to provide all students with a quality education, it is imperative that teachers reflect on and utilize educational practices that promote positive outcomes for English Learners as well as mainstream students. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe and explain elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners.

Methodology: This phenomenological qualitative study utilized in-depth interviews and artifacts to discover teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on English Learners. Thirteen elementary school teachers in the South San Joaquin Valley of California were selected to participate in the study via purposeful sampling. An interview script derived from the research questions was used to draw out the teachers’ perceptions. The participants were digitally recorded and given transcripts to review for accuracy.
Triangulation was achieved through analyzing data from interview transcripts and artifacts.

**Findings:** Major findings include emotional effects such as frustration, inadequacy, and tension between family members. Some positive effects attributed to English Learner students with high academic language and parental support are feelings of accomplishment and a higher confidence level.

**Conclusions:** Many conclusions were drawn based on the major findings. From these findings a list of implications for action were created. One implication for action is to provide teacher development classes on homework including the history of homework and how this educational practice affects all students.

**Recommendations:** Recommendations for further research are described in Chapter V, including studies that search out the effects of homework from the students’ and parents’ perspective.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Educational practitioners and the public have consistently promoted the belief that homework was a good thing and more homework was even better (B. Gill & Schlossman, 2003). The public supposed that homework boosted the academic achievement of students (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 1986). However, research has shown that this is not necessarily the case (Kohn, 2006). According to Cooper, Robinson, and Patall (2006), there is no correlation between the amount of homework sent home and achievement in elementary school students. In addition to a lack of academic benefits, homework has been shown to have negative effects on the well-being of students (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; DeNisco, 2013; Kohn, 2006).

Conventional homework practices have resulted in negative consequences for many students (Kohn, 2006). Oftentimes homework consists of worksheets and meaningless busy work (DeNisco, 2013). Researchers have found that repetitive, methodical homework can discourage and disinterest students (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; DeNisco, 2013). Kalish (2009) reported that extensive homework had harmful effects such as: (a) increased headaches, (b) stomach aches, (c) sleep problems, and (d) depression. Homework can also be disadvantageous if the students do not understand a concept fully. Without a solid understanding of the concept, the students may practice the problem incorrectly and memorize incorrect procedures (Beers, 2003; Simplicio, 2005). Homework has also been tied to creating unwarranted stress in families due to the amount of homework given, the parents’ ability to help, and language or cultural barriers (Pressman et al., 2015). In addition, the homework that correlates with the new state mandated curriculum, Common Core, is often confusing and difficult to understand.
(Shanahan, 2013). Bennett and Kalish (2006) contend that teachers frequently send home large amounts of homework hoping that extra practice will result in better comprehension of difficult concepts. This usually results in frustration and anxiety for the students as well as the parents without the benefit of raising test scores (Kohn, 2006).

Traditional homework practices often evoke additional frustration and anxiety for a specific segment of the population - English Learners (Rudman, 2014). English Learners are people who are in the process of learning English; English is not their first language (Hakuta, 2000). Often, English Learners do not have the resources or family support that many mainstream students may have (E. Kralovec & Buell, 2000). In addition, with the Common Core, English Learners are required to comprehend abstract concepts that native English speakers often have difficulty understanding (Felton-Koestler, M. D., 2016). English Learners are in the position of having to learn difficult academic subjects and the English language at the same time (Rudman, 2014). Thus, English Learners often fall behind native English speaking students in academic success (C. Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). Falling behind in academic success has led to negative effects on English Learners self-esteem and overall well-being (Pressman et al., 2015). Since educational platforms focus on promoting all students’ academic achievement and student well-being, new scholastic practices are needed to improve the educational dilemma of English Learners (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; USDE, 2002).

According to Zeichner (2008), teachers need to reflect and become aware of how educational policies are affecting all students in order to help the students overcome academic challenges. Feiman-Nemser and Beasley (2007) contend that reflection and
awareness can help teachers develop and implement methods that are most conducive to student success. Experts in the field noted that modification of educational practices such as homework is one way to help address academic downfalls and promote the educational success and well-being of all students, particularly English Learners (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; E. Kralovec & Buell, 2001; Vatterott, 2009).

**Background**

This section discusses the impact of homework on the well-being of students in the United States. Initially, a brief historical background is presented to portray the trends of conventional homework policies throughout the past century. Next, homework’s effects on the well-being of students in the United States are examined utilizing the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy. Finally, the specific effects of homework on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners are reviewed.

**Role of Homework in U.S. Education**

Attitudes toward homework have changed intermittently throughout the last century. At the beginning of the last century, brain research led society to believe that the brain could be developed with practice, so homework was viewed in a positive light (Strandberg, 2013; Toper, 2005). In the 1940s homework began to lose a lot of its support. The public wanted to get away from rote learning and focus on creative problem solving. John Dewey, a noted educator, supported a no-homework policy because he felt it was detrimental to the development of problem-solving abilities (Toper, 2005). In 1957 with the Russian launch of Sputnik, the public was afraid that the country was academically lagging behind so homework was again promoted (H. Cooper, 1989; Wahlberg, Paschal & Weinstein, 1985). In the 1960s many people were apprehensive
that homework was undermining social experiences (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Thus, homework was again considered an unnecessary and detrimental practice. This attitude continued throughout the 1970s as the public continued to focus on family, creativity, and social activities (B. Gill & Schlossman, 2003; Vatterott, 2009). In the 1980s after the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983) homework was seen as a way to regain the academic rigor that seemed to have slowed down. Homework was strongly supported until the end of the 20th century when parents began to complain that homework was too stressful for students and their families (Ratnesar, 1999). Therefore, it seems that attitudes toward homework have been affected by public trends rather than research (Strandberg, 2013). The peaks and valleys of homework’s popularity and implementation throughout the century indicate that there is an unclear vision of homework’s value or purpose (Rudman, 2014; Vatterott, 2009).

**Purpose of homework for elementary students.** Various rationales have been proposed for the purpose of homework for elementary students. Palardy (1988) determined that teachers had four major purposes for assigning homework. The first reason presented was that teachers felt that homework taught children character building traits such as: (a) responsibility, (b) independence, and (c) self-discipline. According to Palardy, 88% of the teachers felt that this was an important enough reason to carry on the practice. Palardy stated that the second reason teachers supported homework was that they believed it increased student achievement. The third reason teachers implemented homework policies was that they thought it was expected by the parents and the school district. Palardy asserted that the fourth reason teachers sent homework was that it
allowed the students to work on or practice skills that they did not have time to cover in class.

Some of Palardy’s (1988) findings have been questioned by various researchers. Vatterott (2009) refuted Palardy’s assertion that homework builds responsibility by saying that rather than building responsibility, the practice of homework was promoting the trait of obedience. Vatterott expounded that teachers want the students to follow directions and be obedient to authority. Furthermore, Vatterott asserted that true responsibility wasn’t forced, but developed by the students’ taking power and ownership of tasks. Palardy’s finding that homework promotes academic achievement was also called into question by H. Cooper’s (1989) study, which showed that there was no correlation between the amount of homework sent home and improvement in student achievement in the elementary grades.

Theoretical Framework

P. Freire’s (1970) framework of critical pedagogy can be used to raise awareness and question commonly accepted educational practices such as the implementation of homework assignments (Dheram, 2007; E. Kralovec & Buell, 2000). In addition to becoming aware of specific practices, critical pedagogy promotes the importance of taking positive action (P. Freire, 1970). Similarly, Wink (2000) put forth that critical pedagogy “seeks to take actions to improve teaching and learning in schools and life” (p. 23). Zimmerman (2009) stated that critical pedagogy explores knowledge and examines what comprises effective educational practices and rigorous schooling. Supporting the value of critical pedagogy, Morey (2000) contended that critical pedagogy aided teachers
in using different types of teaching methods to support learning and encourage academic achievement.

In order to support learning, critical pedagogy proclaims that it is important to raise the awareness of current conditions and then make changes that are deemed necessary (P. Freire, 1970). Thus, as teachers reflect on and become more aware of the impact of their educational practices, they can modify or enhance current policies to improve the impact of their instruction (Hatzipanagos & Lygo-Baker, 2006; J. Morton, 2009). Specifically addressing the needs of the marginalized segment of society, Bourassa (2010) stated that teachers needed to understand how critical pedagogy supports minority students so that they can help this population thrive.

Using a political lens, critical pedagogy critically examines domination and power in society (A. Darder, 1995; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011; Hooks, 2003; McLaren, 2016). Critical pedagogy also searches out the hidden curriculum that underpins common educational practices (Giroux, 2011). Accordingly, in this study, critical pedagogy will be used as a lens to analyze how educational practices affect all students and its specific effects on English Learners. As awareness is raised and educational modifications are made in correlation with the needs of the students, overall well-being can be promoted (Freire, 1970).

**Emotional well-being of students.** There are strong social, emotional, and academic aspects of the educational process (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Learning is often a social process carried out with peers, teachers, and families. Emotions that evolve during that process can help or thwart students’ academic engagement, commitment, and academic achievement (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki,
Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Elias (2006) further expounded that since emotional processes affect the learning process, educators must address the affective domain of education for the betterment of all.

**Role of educators in promoting emotional well-being of students.** Many educators agree that the educational system should produce students who are proficient academically, socially adept at working with people from diverse backgrounds, responsible, and respectful (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2007; Greenberg et al., 2003). Developmental research shows that emotional well-being is also positively correlated with academic achievement whereas a lack in this area can lead to academic or social problems (Eisenberg, 2006; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). According to Guerra and Bradshaw (2008), school is an important avenue of not only promoting academic achievement, but also promoting students’ emotional and social development.

**Physical well-being of students.** In addition to emotional well-being, physical well-being has a positive impact on students’ academic success and general well-being (Ruthig, Marrone, Hladkyi, & Robinson-Epp, 2011). Parker-Pope (2008) put forth that exercise magnifies mental energy and increases mental performance. Also, when correctly taught, physical activity can help improve social skills and promote academic achievement (Bailey, 2006; Sallis et al., 1999; Tomporowski, Davis, Miller, & Naglieri, 2008).

**Role of educators in promoting the physical well-being of students.** Sedentary lifestyles of students are causing childhood obesity to rise at a significant rate in the United States (Beaulieu, Butterfield, Mason, & Loovis, 2012; Krishnamoorthy, Hart, &
Jelalian, 2006). Teachers need to be aware of these facts and encourage their students to practice a healthy lifestyle so that this trend can decline (Guimarães & Ciolac, 2014; Senne, 2013). Students who develop good physical health habits during elementary school will more likely follow them later in life (Meyler, 2009). Ross (1994) contends that by developing these habits, the overweight and obesity rates could be decreased as well as those diseases such as diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular problems that are associated with people who live a sedentary lifestyle. Based on the work of Meyler (2009) and Ross (1994), teachers can play an integral role in promoting the present and future physical well-being of students by encouraging health conscious behavior.

**Homework Policies’ Effects on Well-Being of Elementary Students**

Although teachers play an integral role in promoting the overall well-being of students, there are some educational practices that are counterproductive to this goal. Kalish (2009) and Kohn (2006) assert that conventional homework practices can actually be detrimental to the emotional and physical health of students. Kalish recounted that extensive homework caused problems such as headaches, stomach aches, sleep disorders and depression. In addition, DeNisco (2013) put forth that busy work often caused boredom and decreased the students’ enthusiasm to learn. Homework can also be a problem if the students do not understand a concept completely. The students may practice the problems incorrectly and memorize incorrect procedures because of an unclear conception of the assignment (Beers, 2003; Simplicio, 2005).

An additional concern with homework is unpredictability which also induces stress (Vatterott, 2009). Many schools do not have homework policies established across grade levels or schools (Rudman, 2014). Some teachers send a large quantity of
homework while others send a small amount (Pressman et al., 2015; Rudman, 2014). In addition, many teachers do not grade the homework so the students are not worried about accuracy (Simplicio, 2005). Rudman (2014) declares that society has an “absence of shared vision about the core purpose of homework for children of this age” (p. 25). The unpredictability of homework practices has specifically caused uncertainty and distress in a specific elementary student group – English Learners (Brock, Lapp, Flood, Douglas, & Keonghee, 2007).

**English Learners**

English Learners comprise a large segment of the elementary students in California. Currently, there are 1.4 million English Learners in California (Hill, Weston, & Hayes, 2014). Seventy three percent of these English Learners are enrolled in elementary school - Kindergarten through sixth grade (California Department of Education [CDE], 2015). Brock et al. (2007) put forth that the number of English Learner students has more than doubled during the last decade. Furthermore, Brock et al. contended that English Learners will make up 40% of the student population by the year 2030.

The current statistics regarding English Learners show the challenging situation many of these learners face. Eighty five percent of English Learners reside in low-income households (The Education Trust-West, 2014). English Learners are also often in the low-performing academic group (Hakuta, 2000). Large numbers of elementary English Learners and their overrepresentation in low-performing academic groups indicate that there is a need to take action to help ameliorate their current situation (Vera et al., 2012).
Impact of homework on English Learners. English Learners face specific challenges with educational practices such as homework. Martinez (2011) points out that English Learners often feel a disassociation with the academic curriculum. They frequently do not see the relevance of the curriculum in their lives. Thus, English Learners often do not exert the effort to learn the material or do the accompanying homework that the teachers assign. Schecter (2012) corroborates the difficulties that ELs have with homework practices. Schecter described the frustration that many families experience when trying to work through homework problems with their children. The parents lament that the students do not really have a grasp of the content when it is being taught in the classroom. Then, to exacerbate the issue, parents often do not have a strong enough command of the language or understanding of the content to help the children at home (Schecter, 2012). An interview with a second language parent exemplified the need to change practices so that the burden of homework would not be placed on the family. The parent bemoaned, “… sometimes the kids come home from school with the work and they do not understand sometimes how to do the work and then the parents have a hard time of what is expected” (Schecter, 2012, p. 320).

English Learner students often have a hard time understanding the real purpose or point of homework. J. Xu and Corno (1998) reported that English Learners often did homework just to please their parents and teachers. This correlates with Warton’s (2001) study, which showed that most of the students did homework so that they would not get into trouble. English Learners often consider homework a duty and do not really perceive it as a meaningful, relevant learning experience (Warton, 2001).
Homework help for English Learners. A study by Brock et al. (2007) discussed some measures that teachers took to scaffold English Learner students’ abilities to do homework and subsequently supported their emotional and physical well-being. Brock et al. reported that many teachers implemented adaptations such as: (a) assigning less homework, (b) varying the reading level of the book according to the students’ abilities, (c) using different spelling lists, and (d) assigning different math homework depending on the students’ strong points and weaknesses. Various teachers opened up their classrooms before and after school to provide extra assistance to the students. These practices helped to increase completion of homework assignments.

Although Brock et al. (2007) offered various methods to help scaffold the homework process, the researchers also postulated that people may need to question the nature and effectiveness of homework in general. Brock et al. put forth that teachers often gave homework to please the parents or fulfill district requirements. Furthermore, Brock et al. stated that studies have shown that homework is not useful for elementary students in general and can be harmful to their attitudes toward school. E. Kralovec and Buell (2001) corroborated Brock et al.’s study by questioning the practice of commonplace homework routines that have not improved test scores and have even had harmful effects on the students’ attitudes. Additionally, Brock et al. encouraged teachers to question and challenge overall educational practices and specifically homework policies.

E. Kralovec and Buell (2001) corroborated Brock et al.’s (2007) assertion that the public needs to begin questioning age-old practices such as homework. E. Kralovec and Buell discussed the plight of low income students and English Learners whom homework
practices often adversely affect. E. Kralovec and Buel elaborated that society is different now as there are more working mothers, more single parent families, and longer work hours for parents. The researchers added that since society was changing, educational practices needed to be modified to meet the new demands.

Utilizing the critical pedagogy theory, E. Kralovec and Buell (2000) further asserted that homework strengthens the social inequalities in the imbalanced portioning of resources in America. E. Kralovec and Buell elaborated that some students have the luxury of having well-educated parents and resources such as advanced technology waiting for them at home. Linguistically and economically diverse students often do not have the educational resources to help support their academic endeavors in the home (Martinez, 2011). These marginalized students often have family responsibilities and household duties when they get home because their parents frequently work late (E. Kralovec & Buell, 2001).

Substantiating Brock et al.’s (2007) study, E. Kralovec and Buel (2001) commented that some principals said they were making adaptations for English Learners and students in poverty by not sending homework home with these students. E. Kralovec and Buel retorted that this adaptation called for a reevaluation of homework practices. Either homework is not that significant, which calls into question why anyone is doing it - or it is demonstrating unequal educational practices. If the administration feels that homework is valuable, then excluding it from a segment of the population is depriving them educationally because of their linguistic or economic backgrounds (E. Kralovec & Buell, 2001).
**Genuine Reform**

E. Kralovec and Buel (2001) contend that giving extra homework and touting its effectiveness is less expensive and less politically chancy than taking steps to initiate deep-seated educational reform. An achievement study by Grissmer, Flanagan, Kawata, & Williamson (2000) compared 1993-1996 state test scores and found that the states with the highest scores carried out educational change by promoting smaller class sizes, more pre-K classes, and more teacher resources. E. Kralovec and Buell supported this type of reform by calling for changes such as: (a) adequate school funding, (b) eight-hour workdays for students and teachers, (c) more professional development classes, and (d) afterschool programs supervised by highly qualified teachers. Researchers concur that these policies can help to get at the real root of educational difficulties and truly support the emotional and physical well-being of all students (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; E. Kralovec & Buell, 2001; Vatterott, 2009).

**Gap in Research**

There is much research that addresses the relationship between the amount of homework and achievement in the general population (H. Cooper, 1989; H. Cooper et al., 2006). There is also a substantial amount of research on the perceptions of students and parents about homework (H. Cooper, 1989; Warton, 2001; J. Xu & Corno, 2005). However, there is a lack of research dealing with teachers’ perspectives about the effect of homework on students (Bang, 2009; J. Epstein & Voorhis, 2001; Thomas, 2008). The ability or inability of ELs’ parents to help their children with homework is also an area that needs more scrutiny (Vera et al., 2012). According to Kohn (2006), a final factor that needs to be considered is that most of the research about homework has been carried
out in high schools. This indicates that there is a need to research the effects of homework practices on other levels of education such as elementary school.

Statement of the Research Problem

Homework is a practice that has been implemented for many years. It is a policy that has been questioned intermittently throughout the century, but has usually been carried out as a matter of course (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). It was believed that large amounts of homework increased academic achievement (Knorr, 1981). However, many students, parents, and teachers are now questioning this belief (Kohn, 2006). Presently the effects of abundant amounts of homework in elementary schools are being examined (Kalish, 2009). Many researchers contend that the negative effects of homework in elementary school can outweigh the benefits (Lacina-Gifford, & Gifford, 2004). A segment of the student population that has been particularly impacted by homework practices is English Learners (Rudman, 2014).

In many cases English Learners do not have the same resources or family support that mainstream students have to successfully complete homework assignments (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). This has led to negative effects on the English Learners’ academic achievement and self-esteem (Pressman et al., 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) (1986) and Guerra and Bradshaw (2008), the foundation of education is to promote all students’ academic achievement and well-being. Guerra and Bradshaw asserted that modifying educational practices such as homework can help improve the academic achievement and well-being of all students - particularly English Learners.
Hill, Weston, and Hayes (2014) reported that there were 1.4 million English Learners in California. The California Department of Education (CDE) (2015) declared that 73% of these English Learners were enrolled in elementary school. Current statistics show that this large portion of the student population faces specific challenges in education. The Education Trust-West (2014) reported that 85% of English Learners live in low-income households. According to Hakuta (2000) English Learners are also in the low performing academic group. Vera et al. (2012) declared that large numbers of elementary English Learners served in the educational system as well as their overrepresentation in low-performing academic groups indicated that there was a need to take action to ameliorate their situation. Bang (2009) pointed out that since teachers implement instructional practices to promote academic success, they play an integral role in helping enhance the education of all students. Guerra and Bradshaw (2008) added that in addition to promoting academic achievement, teachers play an important role in supporting the students’ well-being.

Gallo (2015) reported that there was a gap in research regarding the ways teachers perceive homework’s effects on the well-being of students. According to Epstein and Voorhis (2001) and Gallo teachers often design and implement homework, but their perspectives have been largely overlooked in the research. Furthermore, J. Xu and Corno (2005) and Bang (2009) noted that there was a profusion of research about students’ and parents’ perceptions of homework, but a dearth of research about teachers’ perceptions. Bang added that there has been a lack of research on teachers’ perceptions about the impact of homework on the well-being of English Learner students - the fastest growing student population in the United States. Guerra and Bradshaw (2008) asserted that
teachers are responsible for implementing educational practices that promote the academic success and well-being of all students; therefore studies are needed that will review teachers’ perceptions of how homework affects the well-being of a large portion of the student population – English Learners.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand and explain elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners.

**Central Question**

What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners?

**Sub-Questions**

1. What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional well-being of English Learners?

2. What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the physical well-being of English Learners?

**Significance of the Problem**

The public’s opinion of homework has risen and plummeted throughout the century (Strandberg, 2013). Currently, the public’s beliefs about homework’s benefits are now being weighed against the detrimental emotional and physical effects it can have on the students’ well-being (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Homework has been found to particularly affect the well-being of a specific segment of the student population – English Learners (Rudman, 2014). English Learner students are the fastest growing
academic group in the United States (Bang, 2009). Many English Learners live in low-income housing and are overrepresented in the low performing academic groups (The Education Trust-West, 2014; Hakuta, 2000). English Learners’ large representation in the school system as well as their overrepresentation in low performing academic groups indicate a need to implement educational practices to help ameliorate their situation (Vera et al., 2012).

As noted previously in the research, teachers implement educational practices to promote academic success, and thus play an integral role in enhancing the education of all students (Bang, 2009). Guerra and Bradshaw (2008) added that in addition to promoting academic success, teachers play an important role in supporting students’ well-being. Thus, the teachers’ perspectives of educational practices and their effects on students are important components of promoting positive outcomes for all students (Zeichner, 2008). Many researchers have explored the perceptions of homework policies from the perspectives of English Learner students as well as their parents (J. Xu & Corno, 2005). However, research regarding teachers’ perspectives of homework has been sparse (Bang, 2009). Although the teachers create and implement homework policies, their perceptions and voices have been largely overlooked in the research (Thomas, 2008).

This study will provide a new dimension to the field of research on homework. First, it will focus on the narrowly covered topic of teachers’ perceptions about the effects of homework on elementary students (Bang, 2009). Second, the study will add new insight concerning teachers’ perceptions of the specific effects homework has on English Learners - a group that is predominant in our educational system and vastly overrepresented in the low academic achievement category (Hakuta, 2000). Third, a new
outcome from this study may include changes in the current homework system that will strive to better meet the academic needs and promote the well-being of all students.

Overall, this study affords teachers the opportunity to reflect on and analyze the educational practice of homework. The data garnered from this study can help educational practitioners gain a better understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of teachers about homework’s effects on all students and particularly English Learners. Teachers can use the findings from this study to develop and implement instructional practices that will promote positive outcomes for all students.

**Definitions**

Definitions of key terms will be offered to provide an equitable understanding of the meaning and nuances of the terms used in this study. Following is a list of the significant terms used in this study with the corresponding definitions.

*California State Standards (Common Core).* “A set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA). These learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

*Critical Pedagogy.* “Critical pedagogy examines and questions competing visions of what legitimate knowledge is and what constitutes good education and serious schooling” (Zimmerman, 2009, p. 46).

*English Learners.* English Learners are students whose home language survey indicates that their primary language is one other than English. These students are in the process of acquiring English as a second language (Hakuta, 2000).
Homework. Duties assigned to be done after instructional time. Usually these duties are finished outside of school (H. M. Cooper, 2007).

Student Achievement. Knowledge or skills in an academic area as measured in a pretest to posttest assessment (Healy, 1995).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to kindergarten through sixth grade elementary school teachers who have at least 5-10 English Learners in their classrooms. The study was also delimited to teachers that work in the South San Joaquin region of California’s Central Valley.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of this study is organized into four additional chapters, followed by references and appendices. Chapter II presents a review of literature that encompasses the history of homework, the role of homework for elementary students, homework policies’ effects on elementary students and finally homework policies’ effects on English Learners. Chapter III delineates the research design and methodology used in this study. In addition, the chapter includes a description of the population, sample, and data collecting procedures, and an explanation of the procedures used to analyze the data. Chapter IV summarizes the data and provides a discussion of the study’s findings. Chapter V gives a detailed account of the findings, conclusions, and future recommendations. Chapter V is followed by references and appendices.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will present an in-depth review of homework’s trends throughout the past century. Following this historical perspective, the purpose of homework in elementary schools will be discussed. Subsequently, homework’s effects on elementary students will be analyzed using critical pedagogy as a theoretical lens. Finally, this chapter will focus on the specific effects of homework on the well-being of English Learners as well as educational practices that can help to enhance English Learner’s scholastic experiences. All of these focal areas are encompassed in a literature matrix that was developed to organize the major topics in this literature review (see Appendix A). The literature matrix facilitated the synthesis and evaluation of the different focus areas. This literature review as well as the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy (P. Freire, 1970) will serve as a foundation for the study which follows.

Homework History

The more things change, the more they stay the same

-Les Guêpes, 1849

The quote from Les Guêpes epitomizes the practice of homework which has been a constant in society in various forms since the 1800s (Healy, 1995). In the 1800s American society viewed the brain as a muscle that needed to be exercised (Strandberg, 2013). Schools started focusing on rote memorization and drill to help the students increase their mental capacity (Vatterott, 2009). Accordingly, educational practitioners sent schoolwork home for the students to continue exercising and developing their minds.
The controversial nature of homework has also been around since the 1800s (E. Kralovec & Buell, 2000). In 1842, Britain brought up the practice of homework for debate in the British educational foundation (Healy, 1995). In the late 1800s the Cyclopaedia of Education mandated that children younger than nine years old should not be assigned “new work” to do at home (as cited in Foyle, 1988). Coinciding with Britain’s homework debate, the American educational system has also been subject to homework disputes since the early 1900s. In 1913 the Ladies Home Journal published the findings from a survey of administrators, doctors, and parents concerning homework (as cited in Vatterott, 2009). This study revealed that the participants believed homework had negative effects on the social and psychological well-being of students and should not be implemented as an educational practice. From 1913 through World War I, there was a sharp debate about the negative mental and physical effects believed to be caused by homework (E. Kralovec & Buell, 2000). In 1919 Breed noted severe mental and physical fatigue caused by more than one hour of homework nightly (as cited in Foyle, 1988).

In the early 1900s one of the complaints about homework was that its negative effects were exacerbated by a poor home environment. Brooks studied this situation in 1916 and the concept of study hall was developed to help offset the inequality of home resources (as cited in Healy, 1995). Healy also cited a study by Montgomery (1933) which showed that there was no correlation between homework and positive outcomes on test scores for students from low income families. This led to minimal homework being sent home in the 1930s.
In the 1940s, society’s negative attitudes toward homework increased (Vatterott, 2009). Families were concerned about the lack of private time experienced by the students. As opposed to rote memorization and drill, problem solving skills were being promoted. Society as a whole wanted to focus on student initiative and a joy of learning. At this time there was a “life adjustment movement” which disdained the infringement of homework on a student’s private time (H. Cooper, 1989).

The anti-homework sentiment continued until the 1950s. When the Russians launched Sputnik in 1957, Americans began to worry about being left behind in the space race (Kohn, 2006). The American public stepped up the movements to establish more rigorous educational programs which included more homework (Gill & Schlossman, 1996). The public thought more homework would increase academic achievement. According to H. Cooper (1989) “Sputnik precipitated a greater emphasis on knowledge of subject matter, and homework was viewed as a means for accelerating the pace of knowledge acquisition” (p. 4).

Society’s focus changed in the 1960s and 1970s. Researchers asserted that homework was putting too much pressure on students and families (Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998). Politics played a role in downplaying homework as the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movements ignited a new focus for society (Wright, 2010). A counter-culture erupted that questioned the status quo in all areas of society including homework (Vatterott, 2009). Gill and Schlossman (2003) expounded that another reason for the new societal focus was that public schools expanded after the baby boom. Gill and Schlossman explained that society was not as worried about homework at this point as they were about encouraging the students to have consistent attendance,
focus on the teacher, and take their studies seriously. During the late 1960s major educational organizations opposed excessive homework stating: “Whenever homework crowds out social experience, outdoor recreation, and creative activities, and whenever it usurps time that should be devoted to sleep, it is not meeting the basic needs of children and adolescents” (Wildman, 1968, p. 204). Thus, the anti-homework sentiment was intense and strongly resembled the anti-homework attitudes during the early 1900s.

Following the customary cycle, the pendulum swung back in favor of homework during the 1980s (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). The government published “A Nation at Risk” when they felt that American schools and education were lagging (USDE, 1983). According to Kohn (2006), the success of the Japanese manufacturing boom ignited the fear that the American education system was falling behind other nations. The publication A Nation at Risk discussed the mediocrity that our educational system was producing. In addition, the publication pointed to poor test scores, low academic achievement, failing literacy rates, and low standards of educational institutions as evidence of America’s academic shortcomings. Education was blamed for a poor economy, violence among the youth, and military weaknesses (Wright, 2010). The USDE subsequently published a pamphlet titled What Works which touted homework as one means of improving our educational system (USDE, 1986). The pro-homework attitude continued into the early 1990s. Increased homework was seen as an avenue of raising America’s academic standards (Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

In direct opposition to popular beliefs, a leading researcher in the field of homework, H. Cooper (1989), conducted a study which revealed that homework had no correlation to academic achievement in elementary age children. This study was not
highly recognized or given much credence at the time (Kohn, 2006). Then in 1998 H. Cooper published his latest research which attracted more public attention and support. Following this momentum, more publications came out in favor of homework reform. The article, *The Homework That Ate my Family* (Ratnesar, 1999) began attracting more attention to the issue of homework. The article discussed the added stress that abundant homework added to an already over-stressed two career family. At that point, the article incited public attention and evoked feelings of empathy for the overworked students and parents (Kohn, 2006).

Thus, throughout the centuries, attitudes toward homework have spiraled in a cyclical fashion. Vatterott (2009) notes that currently “the pendulum is swinging both ways at the same time” (p. 25). Vatterott explains that at one end of the continuum is the “New Mass Hysteria” (p. 18) in which the parents are being swayed by the press to support heavy homework demands in hopes that it will prepare their children for the competitive world. At the polar end of the continuum Vatterott discusses the “Balance Movement” which erupted in opposition to the Mass Hysteria. In the Balance Movement, parents are taking a more relaxed stance and slowing down the urgent race to get ahead. The parents are seeking an opportunity for their children to have a balance in their life—time to play and enjoy life as well as study. Vatterott asserts that the Balance Movement advocates for a child’s right not to have longer than an eight hour work day. Thus, the current Mass Hysteria and the Balance Movement exemplify the polar extremes of society’s attitudes toward homework as an educational practice. The diverse attitudes toward homework prompt the need for a critical look at the practice of homework, its
effectiveness as an educational tool, and its purpose in education (Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

**Purpose of Homework for Elementary Students**

According to L. Corno (2000), teachers assign homework for both academic and non-academic (character building) purposes. Vatterott (2009) asserts that teachers give homework because of long standing beliefs about homework’s benefits that have been inculcated into society’s culture. Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) identified 10 general purposes of homework:

- practice
- preparation
- participation
- personal development
- parent-child relations
- parent-teacher communications
- peer interactions
- policy
- public relations
- punishment

To illuminate the teacher’s role in the homework process, a brief review of teacher’s goals in assigning homework will be presented.

**Academic Purposes**

Schools are accountable for promoting the success of all students, including English Learners and students with disabilities (Carter & Kennedy, 2006). Often,
teachers think that homework will promote academic success by providing extra practice and the opportunity to review content (H. Cooper et al., 2006). Cooper et al. (2006) also assert that homework has had a positive effect on tests and classroom grades. The researchers elaborated that time spent on academic tasks increases academic achievement. In contrast, Kohn (2006) rebuts that homework may raise classroom grades, but there is no correlation between homework and scores on state achievement tests. Other researchers have added their support to Kohn’s assertion that the academic benefits of rote homework assignments in elementary school are dubious at best (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Kralovec & Buell, 2000; Vatterott, 2009). Kralovec and Buell (2001) question the academic benefits of homework because teachers do not know who is doing the homework. Kralovec and Buell subsequently called homework the “Black Hole” (p. 40) because the actual source of the completed work is an unknown; the homework may have been completed by parents, grandparents, or friends. The researchers also question homework’s effectiveness as an academic tool since the teacher is not present during its completion to note the students’ strengths or weaknesses in the subject matter.

**Practice**

In addition to academic purposes, researchers have put forth that the opportunity to practice skills taught in class is another goal of homework (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) added that practice will help the students to increase speed, gain mastery, maintain skills, reflect on their work, and study for tests. Garner (1978) found that approximately 30 minutes of math homework each day would increase practice time for math by more than three and a half years. A caveat to this purpose is
that if the students do not understand the concept fully, he/she may practice the problem incorrectly and memorize incorrect procedures (Beers, 2003; Simplicio, 2005).

**Preparation**

At times teachers assign homework to help the students prepare for the next day’s lesson (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). The researchers add that preparatory assignments may include class assignments or activities that had not been completed in class. Muhlenbrook, Cooper, Nye, and Lindsay (2000) put forth that homework may also include assignments that will help the students study and internalize the material they had been taught in class so that they will be more prepared for the subsequent lesson. Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) explain that homework may also be used to stimulate thought about an upcoming assignment such as writing out an outline for an essay to be completed in class the next day.

**Participation**

Homework can be used to enhance student participation by affording them the opportunity to apply acquired knowledge and giving them time to work on projects (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). The researchers expound that students sometimes feel hesitant to participate in class. Thus, homework will give them the opportunity to become actively engaged in the learning process. L. Corno (2000) stipulates that homework can help students to become active learners through carrying out science experiments, penning essays, writing a book review, or carrying out other projects.

**Personal Development**

Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) touted personal development as another reason that teachers implement the practice of homework. The researchers explained that
homework would help the students develop traits such as time management, responsibility, and perseverance. Cooper, Lindsay, and Nye (2000) contend that homework would also help the students learn how to deal with distractions they encounter at home. Bempechat (2008) posits that rote, methodical homework will help the students develop tenacity and the ability to stick with and complete unpleasant tasks. Vatterott (2009) refuted homework’s claims of promoting personal development stating that there are methods of developing responsibility other than doing hours of rote homework nightly. Vatterott continued that rather than developing responsibility, homework was building the trait of compliance and obedience. Guskey and Anderman (2008) asserted that responsibility would be more effectively developed by such tasks as involving the students in the decision making aspect of learning, guiding students in self-assessment, permitting students to develop the learning activities, or letting students manage classroom materials.

**Parent-Child Relations**

Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) submit that homework can be used to promote communication and interaction between parents and their children. Epstein and Van Voorhis explain that the conversations that are promoted through parental involvement in homework can help reinforce homework’s value and give children insight into how school concepts can be implemented in real life circumstances. Balli (1998) posits that homework can also promote conversations between family members, allowing the family to become more involved and knowledgeable about what is happening in the classroom. Van Voorhis (2000) discovered that when students and parents were excited about science homework, the students did more of the homework and earned more credit for
accuracy than students and parents who were not as enthusiastic. Kralovec and Buell (2000) dispute the purpose of parent-child relations, asserting that not all parents have the background, knowledge, language, or time to be involved in their child’s homework activities. Bennet and Kalish (2006) add that the stress of not being able to help exacerbates an already stressful situation in a family that lacks the educational background or resources.

**Parent-Teacher Communications**

Homework has been used by teachers to maintain contact and inform parents about what is happening in the classroom (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). According to Epstein and Becker (1982), homework helps families know what’s being taught, how their children are doing academically, how to support their child educationally, and how to contact the teacher. The researchers added that sometimes the teacher will require parents to sign homework agendas or the student’s work. Epstein and Becker elaborated that sometimes homework was even designed for parents to give extra help to the students in areas of weakness. Leher and Shumow (1997) contend that in cases where the parents are required to help, they should be provided training so that they can be successful in their tutoring roles. Kralovec and Buell (2001) rebut that homework is not a fair way to engage families in their child’s education. The researchers contend that some parents are willing, but unable to help because of economic or linguistic barriers. So, Kralovec and Buell put forth that sending homework home for the parents to assist only magnifies the inequalities in the families’ abilities to help. Some children go home to advanced technological resources and parents that have the background and time to help. Other children go home to take care of family responsibilities while their parents are
working late. In addition, some families have very few educational resources upon which to rely (Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

**Peer Interactions**

Homework may be designed to promote interaction between classmates, giving students the opportunity to learn from each other (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) explain that the homework assignments can be formal with partners being assigned or informal with students calling their friends or inviting them over. L. Corno (2000) contends that homework gives students an opportunity to work together by motivating them to work with friends on short and long term assignments or studying for tests. Azmitia and Cooper (2001) found that when students help each other with homework assignments, they have higher math and English grades on their report card. Kralovec and Buell (2000) caution that peer assistance could be a flawed purpose as the teacher does not really know who is completing the homework.

**Policy**

Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) stated that teachers often send homework because it is a school or district policy. Zernike (2000) explained that the teachers, principals, staff, superintendent, or parent-teacher organizations may designate a certain amount of homework that needs to be completed each night or weekly. Connors and Epstein (1994) related that homework policies should correlate with a family’s schedule. For example, the researchers found that parents indicated they could help their children complete homework on weekends, but schools only sent homework home on weekdays. Therefore, parents were not able to be involved in this educational opportunity due to scheduling issues.
Public Relations

Schools sometimes assign abundant amounts of homework to convey the image of having a rigorous curriculum (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Researchers have put forth that assigning copious amounts of homework was an indication of a dedicated, serious, and rigorous school (L. Corno, 1996). According to Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore (1982) good schools give homework. Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, and Ouston, (1979) declare that good students actually do the homework. Additionally, L. Corno (1996) asserted that good teachers assign more homework. In rebuttal, Vatterott (2001) asserts that a lot of homework does not equal rigor. Vatterott cautions that society should not just accept the inherent goodness of homework without analyzing the type and meaningfulness of the assignments. In addition, Vatterott contends that it is not fair to ascertain that students are not dedicated because they may not have the same resources to complete the assignments at home.

Punishment

Teachers have sometimes used homework to manage student conduct or productivity (Epstein & Voorhis, 2001). However, Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) decry that this is not a valid purpose. Kohn (2006) rebuts that homework in itself is a punitive activity, especially assignments that are long, tedious, or irrelevant.

Thus, various rationales for the use of homework have been presented. Reviewing the purposes underlying the implementation of homework lends insight to the teacher’s role in the homework process (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Looking into the impact of homework practices can help put the purpose of homework into perspective (Kralovec & Buell, 2000).
Homework’s Impact on Elementary Students

As aforementioned, homework has often been used to raise academic achievement and instill positive character traits in students (Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000). In contrast to these goals, researchers have found that homework has had a negative impact on the well-being of students without the benefit of improving achievement scores (Bennet & Kalish, 2006). According to current research, homework has been found to have specific effects on the emotional and physical well-being of students (Kohn, 2006, Vatterott, 2009).

Homework’s Impact on Emotional Well Being

Homework has had adverse effects on various aspects of students’ emotional well-being (Bennet & Kalish, 2006). According to DeNisco (2013), homework often diminished a student’s motivation to learn. Commenting on the effect of diminished motivation, Rudman (2014) put forth that as students become less motivated, they expend less effort and their academic achievement declines. Rudman elaborates that if unmotivated students constantly fail assignments, their self-esteem will be weakened and they may develop a poor attitude toward school.

With the increased pressures put on by academia and homework, Bennet and Kalish (2006) report that there are more cases than ever of students with mental health problems. The researchers related that according to studies carried out at the Stanford University School of Medicine, 3.2 million students were being treated for depression—a number of cases that more than doubled from 1995 to 2002. In conjunction with the Stanford study, a 1999 Surgeon General’s report discovered that 13% of students from ages 9 to 17 were diagnosed with anxiety disorders (Bennet & Kalish, 2006). Bennet and
Kalish also referenced an online poll of 900 students by KidsHealth.com which reported that 9 to 13 year olds were more stressed out by academic issues than peer pressure, bullying, or family difficulties. Ginsberg (2007) adds that the stress and anxiety experienced by the students is contributing to the students’ elevated depression rates. Louv (2005) concurs that students are experiencing high levels of stress and depression due to academic demands. Louv proclaims that homework takes up the students’ evening hours, preventing the students from enjoying free time outside. Louv calls what the children are experiencing a “Nature Deficit Disorder” which often results in depression and attention deficit disorder. Vatterott (2009) relates that the stress is so intense that schools are now offering meditation and yoga classes for elementary school students.

Excessive homework demands often affect students’ amount of sleep, exercise, and stress levels (Bennet & Kalish, 2006). Medina (2009) contends that these factors significantly impact a student’s well-being. Medina explains that lack of sleep and exercise raises stress levels and can make the brain not only less functional, but dysfunctional. Levine (2008) maintains that as students strive to finish all their homework and spend time on extracurricular activities such as family, sports, and work that unhealthy stress is produced. Levine elaborates that stress decreases a student’s motivation to learn. According to Stipek and Seal (2001), the stress that the students are experiencing with homework is negatively affecting the students’ health and overall well-being.

Pope (2001) cautions that in a driven society, parents are often unwitting conspirators in their children’s elevated stress levels. Luthar and Becker (2002) discuss how upwardly mobile communities often instill a desire in their children to gain entrance
to prestigious colleges. Thus, the children not only feel the need to do well academically, but to also participate in many extracurricular activities. Luthar and Becker explain that this stress has contributed to symptoms of depression especially in suburban adolescent girls. Another study by Luther, Shoum, and Brown (2006) reported that the stress accrued by overscheduling was most often incited by the parents’ attitudes toward achievement. Levine (2008) adds that school stress and the quest for perfection are significantly related to depression and suicide. Kohn (2006) corroborates these findings stating that the push for society’s definition of success often leads to deleterious effects on students’ emotional well-being.

**Homework’s Impact on Physical Well Being**

In addition to having an impact on students’ emotional well-being, researchers have found that homework has adverse effects on students’ physical well-being (Bennet & Kalish, 2006). According to Vatterott (2009), the customary practice of sending textbooks home in every subject for homework has weighed down students’ backpacks and contributed to physical health problems. Galley (2001) concurs that the weight of the students’ backpack has been a significant concern as students are experiencing an increased amount of back pain. According to the American Physical Therapy Association, the American Chiropractic Association, and the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, the weight of a backpack should not exceed 15% of the student’s body weight (Moore, White, & Moore, 2007). However, in a study of students from fifth to eighth grade, more than half the students related that they carried backpacks that were heavier than 15% of their body weight and about one-third experienced back pain (Galley, 2001). In 2005, the American Occupational Therapy Association was so
concerned about the repercussions of heavy backpacks on the students’ physical well-being that they sponsored National School Backpack Awareness Day each September. To help ameliorate the negative effect on the students’ physical health, researchers are recommending that schools reconsider the practice of sending home text books for homework (Moore et al., 2007). Lambert (2003) suggested ways to minimize the stress of backpacks by encouraging children to do back strengthening exercises or to buy backpacks with padded shoulder straps. In rebuttal, Kohn (2006) asserts that society needs to get at the root of the problem and question what is weighing down the backpacks, why it is there, and who put it there.

Bennet and Kalish (2006) corroborate the negative physical effects of abundant homework assignments by discussing the correlation between excessive homework and weight gain. According to a survey conducted by the University of Michigan, the time children spend on homework has increased 51% since 1980 (Bennet & Kalish, 2006). Concurrently, another Michigan study found that since 1981, time spent on sports and physical exercise has decreased in children from six to 17 years of age (Bennet & Kalish, 2006). The Center for Disease Control (CDC) (2016) stipulated that since 1980 the number of overweight students in the United States has tripled. In conjunction with the rise in the number of overweight students, the American Diabetes Association reported that during the years from 2002-2005, the number of children from ages 10 to 14 with type two diabetes rose 106%. The CDC reported that approximately one in three children born in the year 2000 will become diabetic. Bennet and Kalish (2006) assert that in addition to unhealthy eating habits and watching television, the sedentary lifestyle promoted by abundant homework is contributing to childhood obesity.
Thus, researchers have shown that homework practices have a potent impact on the well-being of students. Homework has had a marked effect on the emotional and physical well-being of elementary age students. Although there are significant repercussions for the general student population, homework has been shown to have stringent effects on a particular segment of the population – English Learners.

**English Learners**

According to the CDE (2015), an English Learner is a student whose primary language is one other than English as noted in the Home Language Survey. In addition, the CDE states that English Learners lack the English literacy skills to attain success in the school’s regular curricular instruction according to state approved assessments. This section will discuss the specific impact of homework on English Learners. Then a brief history of the education of English Learners will be presented. Subsequently current English Learner demographics will be discussed as well as academic challenges often faced by English Learners.

**Homework’s Impact on English Learners**

English Learners encounter specific challenges with the educational practice of homework. For example, J. Xu and Corno (1998) reported that oftentimes English Learners do not perceive that homework has any intrinsic value; the students simply do it to gain the approval of their parents and teachers. Warton’s (2001) study corroborated these findings stating that a study of second grade English Learners showed that they did homework just so they would not get into trouble.

Martinez (2011) reported that a significant challenge English Learners faced with homework was not being able to receive help from parents. The students noted that the
parents wanted to help but were unable to do so because of issues such as unfamiliarity with the subject matter, inadequate educational background, or language barriers (Martinez, 2011). Martinez expounded that the parents often helped in other ways such as giving emotional support and encouragement. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) conducted a qualitative study to search out the attitudes and experiences of English Learner parents. In that study one parent explained, 

I cannot help with homework because I don’t speak English. I can help my little daughter with numbers and her ABCs. I can help my fourth grader with some of the math. But I tell them that they just have to ask the teacher other times. (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001, p. 88).

Research has shown that home life also has an impact on an English Learner’s ability to complete homework. Fuligni, Tseng, and Lam (1999) found that English Learner students have more family obligations than non-English Learner students. Many English Learners stated that they often could not complete homework assignments because they had to take care of siblings before and after school until their parents returned from work (Kralovec & Buell, 2001). Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hilland (2004) add that family life for English Learners is often more stressful because the children are asked to take on the roles of caretaker, translator, and negotiator. The researchers elaborated that this stress can also decrease the students’ ability or enthusiasm for doing homework.

In addition to a challenging home life, the English Learner’s ability to successfully carry out homework assignments is affected by their social economic status. English Learners are over represented in low income groups in society (Education Trust-
West, 2014). The family’s economic status often affects the student’s ability to complete homework assignments because of repercussions such as: (a) having to work to help supplement family income, (b) a lack of parental support due to long work hours, or (c) a lack of educational resources in the home (Bang, 2011).

August and Hakuta (1997) put forth that limited English proficiency also affects the English Learner’s ability to complete homework successfully. Without a solid grasp of the language, it is very difficult for these students to understand and carry out the assignments. August and Hakuta elaborated that English Learners with interrupted formal education also have more challenges because they lack the academic skills needed to complete the homework assignments independently.

Contrary to the research that reports the negative impact that homework can have on English Learners, Cooper, Harris, Nye, and Barbara (1994) put forth that being motivated to do homework can instill character traits such as self-discipline, responsibility, and independence in students. The researchers asserted that these traits are transferable and would help the students in other areas of their lives. Rudman (2014) rebutted this logic by positing the question - wouldn’t the opposite be true in poorly motivated students? Rudman asserted that continually failing to complete homework assignments could have a cumulatively negative effect on the students’ self-esteem and adversely affect their attitude toward school.

Thus, various aspects of homework’s effects on English Learners have been discussed. The aforementioned research has shown that English Learners have specific challenges with this educational practice. To put educational practices dealing with
English Learners into perspective, a brief history of the education of English Learners will be presented.

**Historical Background**

Nicholls (2012) noted that the education of English Learners dates back to 1607 when the pilgrims first landed at Plymouth Harbor in America. When the pilgrims first arrived they began settling into communities with others from their native region. Part of the educational practice was to teach in the language of the community. As the communities grew and increased, immigrants began searching for a way to unite the different groups. It was decided that a common language, English, would serve the purpose of uniting communities and promoting solidarity. Subsequently, immigrants were encouraged to learn English to help unify the communities which would eventually become colonies and finally states (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1990).

The debate of how best to teach English Learners occurred at the onset of education in America (Laosa, 1983). As there was a large number of immigrants arriving from southern and Eastern Europe between 1820 and 1920, many residents became resentful that teachers continued to teach in the immigrant’s native language. Many groups saw teaching in the students’ native language as being un-American or a threat to national unity (Dicker, 2000). A large faction of the population wanted to establish English as the national language and was therefore against the educational practice of teaching in the primary language (Tse, 2001). According to Estrada (1979) the Horace Mann’s Common School movement strove to socialize immigrant children to become a mainstream part of American society. Therefore, the practice of primary language teaching was frowned upon and English was seen as the language of instruction in public
schools (Downs, 1974). After the U.S. joined World War I in 1917, teaching in a language other than English was unacceptable as the public became concerned that speaking another language was a threat to national security (Casanova & Arias, 1993; McCarty, 2004). Subsequently, in 1921 congress began national immigration quotas (Laosa, 1983). In 1924 the National Origin Act limited immigration to 150,000 Europeans a year, quotas on other nations, and prohibited immigration from Japan completely (Piatt, 1990).

Strict limits on immigration that began in the early 1900s ended with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 (McCarty, 2004). This led to social and political unrest as immigrants began pouring into the United States. The rate of immigrants doubled, with 8 million immigrants arriving from Latin America, The Caribbean, and Southeast Asia between 1960 and 1980 compared to the four million immigrants that had come to the United States during the previous 40 years from 1920 to 1960 (CDE, 2015). Large numbers of non-English speaking immigrants settled in communities throughout the United States sparking concern as many of these settlers were slow to assimilate into the American culture (Schlossman, 1983). Schlossman (1983) elaborated that the established residents and immigrants began experiencing conflict as they competed for available jobs. Concern grew again over the immigrant’s use of their primary language and a resurgence of support for English as the national language erupted (Kloss, 1998). Subsequently congress passed the Immigration reform and Control Act which required English proficiency as a basis for citizenship.

Education faced a crucial turning point in 1957 when Russia launched the satellite Sputnik. As aforementioned, the launch of Sputnik caused Americans to become fearful
that America was lagging behind in math and science. The National Defense Education Act was passed in 1958 which focused on improving math and science instruction. However, teachers were now facing an added challenge. Because of the new open immigration laws, teachers were working with a large group of students who were not proficient in English. At that point teachers were not prepared to help these students reach proficiency levels that were being required in the pursuit of higher academic standards (Nicholls, 2012).

Educational reform sought to promote academic achievement and equity among all members of society with the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954 and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision overturned the Plessy v. Ferguson legislation which had declared that it was constitutional to have separate but equal access to housing, jobs, public accommodations, and schools (Gonzalez, 2010). The Brown v. Board of Education case declared that separate facilities were inherently unequal (Laosa, 1983). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandated the desegregation of schools and denounced discrimination on the grounds of race, color, or national origin (Gonzalez, 2001). Meager academic achievement of low income, ethnic minorities, and English Learners were seen as an outcome of unequal educational opportunities in American schools (Weise & Garcia, 1998). To help address the issues of unequal opportunities, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Bill into legislation (Nicholls, 2012).

The federal government became involved in education to help insure equality in educational opportunities (Fullan, 2001). In 1965 the government instituted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This act strove to overcome many of
the inequalities in education by providing funding for programs to help schools with an abundance of low-income students (Secada, 1990). These students were considered at-risk academically because of their low social economic status (Erickson, 1986). Many of the students did not speak English, the language of instruction, which hindered their ability to succeed. The ESEA did not address this issue. Subsequently, the government established the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) in 1968 to provide funding for schools to develop programs to help English Learners overcome challenges in a classroom where English was the language of instruction (Laosa, 1983). Laosa (1983) elaborated that because many of the English Learners were also from low income families, the BEA would fall under the auspices of an anti-poverty program.

In the late 1990s anti-bilingual attitudes and policies emerged. In 1996 the House of Representatives passed a bill making English the official language of the United States (Nieto, 2009). The senate however did not pass the bill. Although it did not pass, it provided the impetus for the first English Only group in the United States, *U.S. English*, and paved the way for language restriction programs that purported to provide policies that would best serve English Learners (Crawford, 2004). Then, in 1998 Ron Unz, a multi-millionaire, promoted and successfully passed proposition 227 which effectively terminated bilingual programs in California. Other propositions which prevented instruction in languages other than English were established in Arizona in the year 2000 and in Colorado in 2001 (Crawford, 2004). By the year 2000, at least 24 states had passed English-only bills that prevented the use of any language other than English in government venues (Garcia, 2009).
The summit of the anti-bilingual movement occurred in 2002 with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (Nieto, 2009). This act was actually a reauthorization of the ESEA. It did not prohibit bilingual programs, but the high stakes testing inherent in the act necessitated the use of English instruction. In addition, all references to bilingual education were eradicated from the new statute (Crawford, 2004). Berriz (2005) and Bartolome (2008) contend that the anti-bilingual laws incited feelings of rejection and inadequacy in English Learners and groomed them for a less significant role in society.

In sum, the history of English Learners in the United States portrays some of the struggles and challenges that English Learners have faced in the educational system. This challenging background and the goal of our educational system to ensure that all students receive a quality education depict the need to implement educational practices that will support and promote the academic success and well-being of English Learners (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008). The large numbers of English Learners that comprise American society also validate the need to employ educational practices that promote positive educational outcomes for this demographic (Vera et al., 2012).

**English Learner Demographics**

The United States leads the world in linguistically and culturally diverse populations (McCarty, 2004). McCarty (2004) expounds that at the end of the 20th century people of color comprised 28% of the nation’s population. The U.S. Bureau of Census predicts that this population will grow to almost 50% of the nation’s population in 2050 (Banks, 2001). According to the Migration Policy Institute (2011) the highest concentrations of English Learners are located in six states - California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey. California had approximately 6.9 million
residents in 2010 that accounted for 27% of the total English Learners population in the United States.

Approximately 1.392 million English Learners attended California public schools in the 2014-15 school year (CDE, 2015). These English Learners comprise 22.3% of the total enrollment of public schools in California. Furthermore, a total of 2,672,128 students speak a language other than English in the home.

Current statistics show that the large English Learner population faces specific challenges that affect their academic achievement. One challenge this demographic faces is that they are overrepresented in society’s low income group. According to Education Trust West (2014), 85% of California English Learners live in low income housing - twice the number of non-English Learners. A disproportionate number of English Learners live in poverty and qualify for free and reduced lunch at school (Education Trust West, 2014). According to the CDE (2015), 73% of the English Learners are enrolled in kindergarten through sixth grade elementary schools. The remaining 27% are enrolled in secondary or non-graded categories. Therefore, English Learners comprise a large portion of the school age children in California and the United States. This large demographic, overrepresented in the low income group is also in the lowest academic performing group (Hakuta, 2000). Educational practices to date have not been able to overcome the achievement gap between English Learners and native speakers (Linquanti, 2014).

**Achievement Gap**

Linquanti (2014) reported that English Learners continue to trail behind native English speakers on state assessments. Linquanti explained that with the previous testing
system, English Learners were narrowing the achievement gap. However, after the implementation of the state’s Smarter Balance Assessment System, the gap widened again. The Smarter Balance test results for the 2015-16 school year showed that English Learners were in the lowest performing group along with students with disabilities (Ed Data, 2016) (see Table 1). In addition, the testing results showed that 64% of non-English Learner students either met or exceeded grade level proficiency.

Table 1

*California 2016 ELA SBAC Proficiency Comparison Table*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance levels</th>
<th>English Learner Student</th>
<th>Non-English Learner Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard Exceeded</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Met</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Nearly Met</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard not met</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from “California 2016 ELA SBAC Proficiency Comparison Table,” by California Department of Education. Retrieved from http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) utilize high level academic language that even causes proficient students to have difficulties (Felton-Koestler, M.D., 2016). The Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test required the use of higher level reasoning and inferential skills as well as a command of high academic vocabulary. English Learners struggled to meet proficiency in this test due to lack of prior knowledge often resulting from language and economic barriers (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010). The SBAC format along with the linguistic and economic barriers faced by English Learners has contributed to the low academic performance of English Learners (Felton-Koestler, 2016).
In sum, the factors surrounding English Learners such as academic challenges, low social economic status, and the high number of English Learners in the United States indicate a need to support and ameliorate their situation. As aforementioned, educational practices dealing with English Learners in the past have been erratic, often changing with the political or social climate (Laosa, 1983). English Learners’ perpetual overrepresentation in the low achievement group suggests a need to reflect on and address educational practices that are affecting the academic achievement of this demographic. An educational practice that has been shown to have significant negative effects on English Learners is the implementation of homework (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). In an effort to address the effects of this scholastic practice, teachers need to reflect on and make changes that will improve the educational experience of English Learners and all students (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2000). A theoretical framework that promotes reflective educational practices and positive educational change efforts for all students is Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Wink, 2011).

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical Pedagogy is a theoretical framework that can help teachers reflect on and critically look at educational practices that have been routinely implemented (Freire, 1970). Wink (2011) asserts that “Critical pedagogy is teaching and learning that transforms us and our world for the better…Critical Pedagogy challenges us to question our long held assumptions” (p. 12). P. Freire and Macedo (1987) assert that critical pedagogy challenges us to name the problem or situation, reflect critically about this issue, and then to take positive action. These reflective and action oriented practices can be helpful in addressing homework issues (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Once teachers
reflect on and become more aware of the effects of educational practices such as homework, positive changes can be enacted to promote the academic success and well-being of all students (P. Freire & Ramos, 1970; Zimmerman, 2009). Wink (2000) corroborated critical pedagogy’s power as a change agent by stating that it “seeks to take actions to improve teaching and learning in schools and life” (p. 23). Reflecting on equitable educational practices, Bourassa (2010) asserted that teachers need to understand how critical pedagogy specifically supports minority students so that English Learners as well as mainstream students can thrive in the educational system. Critical pedagogy can help teachers understand the impact of educational practices as it elucidates the unequal balance of power in society (P. Freire & Ramos, 1970; Giroux, 2011). Kralovec and Buell (2000) utilize the theory of critical pedagogy as they assert that homework intensifies the social inequality and unbalanced distribution of resources in America. The researchers expound that not everyone has the human or material resources to successfully complete homework. To help the reader picture the disparity of homework experiences in different households, two true stories of students from diverse backgrounds will be shared:

Maria’s homework experience: Maria often does not do her homework. She comes home immediately after school three days a week to care for her younger siblings so her single mother can go to work. The other two days, Maria works part-time after school to supplement her mother’s paycheck. Even when she has time, circumstances make it difficult for her to complete homework. There is no quiet place in the house to study, and there is no computer. Maria’s mother has only a 6th grade education and does not speak English very well, so it is hard for
her to help Maria with homework. The family budget has no money for materials for homework projects. Even if money were available, the family has no car for the trip to the store. It is not safe to walk to the public library (Vatterott, 2009, p. 39).

David’s homework experience: David arrives home after tennis practice. His mother asks how his day was and if he has any tough homework. David tells her about the U.S. History assignment. As they eat, she talks to him about FDR and Clinton. In the course of the conversation, they discuss an appropriate thesis for his paper. David goes to his room and turns on his computer. He discovers that he has left his textbook at school. He goes downstairs to the family room to ask his dad about books that might be helpful to him. His dad begins to pull books off the family bookshelves: an encyclopedia, a book by Howard Zinn, and a Time-Life book about the thirties. David returns to his room and begins again.

(Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 66-67)

Thus, these diverse experiences portray the inequities inherent in homework as an educational practice. Critical pedagogy can help teachers to become more aware of these disparities, reflect on action that can be taken to address the situation, and finally to take positive steps to promote a fair and flourishing education for all children (McLaren, 2016). Darder (2002) declares that after awareness is raised and modifications are made to meet the needs of all students, overall well-being and academic achievement can be promoted.
Teacher’s Role

Teachers play an integral role in promoting the academic achievement and well-being of all students through choosing and implementing equitable educational practices (Kralovec & Buell, 2001). Wink (2000) asserts that it is imperative for teachers to reflect critically on their practices in order to ascertain which practices are effective and which practices need to be changed or discontinued. Wink expounds that critical reflection involves more than reflecting on lessons or methodology, it is reflecting on the relevance, meaningfulness, and cultural implications of what is being taught. Specifically addressing the educational practice of homework, Kohn (2006) asserts that reflective practices are enhanced through asking meaningful questions. Kohn elaborates that teachers need to ask deep-seated questions about homework. Instead of asking incidental questions such as how or when homework should be carried out, Kohn declares that teachers should ask whether the practices should be done at all. Vatterott (2009) correspondingly asserts that teachers need to rethink the educational policy of homework to better comprehend its effects on the entire student population. Wink (2000) avows that positive outcomes will be promoted for all students as teachers make the effort to critically reflect on their educational practices and take positive action based on their new knowledge.

Thus, researchers attest that teachers play an integral role in choosing and implementing educational practices that will be beneficial for all students (Kohn, 2006; Vatterott, 2009; Wink, 2000). Although teachers are responsible for the development and implementation of homework, little research has been done on teachers’ perspectives of this practice (Gallo, 2015, Thomas, 2008; Toper, 2005). Even less research has been
carried out on teacher’s perspectives of homework’s effects on a specific student population – English Learners (H. J. Bang, 2009; Pierre, 2007). As research is conducted to attain teachers’ perspectives of homework’s effects on English Learners, a body of research can be developed that will guide teachers’ educational practices. Teachers can use the findings from this study to develop and implement instructional practices that will promote positive outcomes for all students and specifically improve the situation of English Learners. Therefore, this study will seek to enrich educational practices and promote equitable outcomes by searching out and examining teachers’ perceptions of homework and its particular effects on the well-being of English Learners.

Summary

In sum, this review of literature examined homework’s role as an educational practice throughout time. Initially, the literature review revealed that the popularity of homework has waxed and waned in the public eye as social and political climates have changed (Vatterott, 2009). When economic hardships or discord have erupted in society, education was often blamed and homework was viewed as a way to resolve the situation. Researchers noted that promoting homework as a way to increase academic achievement was less expensive and less politically risky than true educational reform which would call for changes such as smaller class sizes, more professional development and resources for teachers, and more pre-kindergarten classes (Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

The literature review also illuminated the different purposes ascribed to homework by educational practitioners. Many of homework’s purposes sprang from notions that have been inculcated into society throughout the ages (Vatterott, 2009). Although many teachers have assigned homework believing it would increase academic
achievement, research has shown that there is no correlation between homework and academic achievement especially in elementary school students. In addition to not correlating with increasing academic achievement, homework has been shown to have negative effects on the emotional and physical well-being of students (Kohn, 2006). The review indicated that homework practices particularly affected a specific segment of the student population - English Learners (Rudman, 2014).

English Learners are stringently affected by homework practices often because of language, cultural, or economic barriers. Many times English Learners do not have the human or material resources to be able to complete homework assignments. Researchers have asserted that English Learners are often derogated for a lack of ambition or drive for not completing homework assignments when in fact they often do not have the same educational resources that many native English speaking students have. English Learners’ inability to complete assignments can often lead to poor self-esteem and a diminished enthusiasm for school or learning (Rudman, 2014). Thus, homework can have stringent outcomes for this segment of society.

Finally, the literature review focused on the teacher’s role in designing and implementing educational practices that can promote the academic success of all students. The theory of Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970) was used as a guide to illuminate the need for teachers to reflect on current educational practices and enhance or modify these practices as needed to support the learning and well-being of all students. In addition, the review of literature showed that there was a gap in literature concerning the teacher’s perspective of homework’s effects on elementary students and specifically English Learners. Thus, this study was conducted to give teachers the opportunity to
reflect on and evaluate current educational policies such as homework and its effect on the well-being of students. The data gleaned from this study can add to the body of research on homework and help promote educational practices that will support the success and well-being of all students.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter III delineates the methodology used to carry out this study. The chapter begins with a review of the study’s purpose and research questions. This is followed by a description of the research design. Subsequently, the study’s population is described as well as the method of sample selection. A discussion of the instrumentation ensues with an examination of the reliability and validity of the study. The data collection process is then discussed along with an explanation of how the data were scored and evaluated. Finally, the chapter examines the study’s limitations and provides a comprehensive summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand and explain elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners.

Central Question

What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners?

Sub-Questions

1. What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional well-being of English Learners?

2. What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the physical well-being of English Learners?
Research Design

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach to describe elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners. A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because the goal was to explore the feelings, attitudes, and thoughts of the participants (Patten, 2012). The framework of phenomenology was selected to help the researcher better understand the shared experience of the participants (Patton, 2015).

According to Creswell (2013) qualitative research begins with assumptions that are used as a basis to search out the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to social or human experiences. Creswell elaborates that in a qualitative approach, data is collected in a natural setting and subsequently analyzed to discover common patterns or themes. According to Patton (2015), “Qualitative inquiry studies, documents, analyzes, and interprets how human beings construct and attach meanings to their experiences” (p. 13). A qualitative approach correlated well with this study as the study sought to explore the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of elementary school teachers about homework’s effects on English Learner students. Using a qualitative approach in this study helped to promote a deeper understanding of homework’s effects through searching out the teacher’s point of view.

The specific qualitative framework utilized for this study was phenomenology. Patton (2015) states that phenomenology strives to understand the meaning of our everyday experiences. According to Patton, the core question of phenomenology is: “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (p. 98). Furthermore, Patton asserts that a defining
characteristic of phenomenology is the essence of a shared experience. In a phenomenological study, the researcher describes people’s experiences and how they experience the phenomenon being explored (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In this study, the phenomenon being explored was teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on elementary English Learner students. The phenomenological framework aligned with the purpose of the study as it explored teachers’ perceptions of the effects of a commonly experienced phenomenon - homework.

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained that a population is “a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (p. 129). McMillan and Schumacher elaborated that the specific population being examined is referred to as the target population. The population for this study was elementary school teachers in California. According to the California Department of Education (CDE), (2017) there are 131,029 elementary school teachers in California. Furthermore, CDE specifies that there are 5,868 elementary schools situated within the 1,024 school districts located in California. CDE elaborates that there are 960,000 English Learners that attend these kindergarten through sixth grade California elementary schools.

Target Population

A target population for a study is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study data are to be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings are meant to be generalized. It is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of research study
(McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is typically not feasible, due to time or cost constraints to study large groups; therefore, the researcher selected a target population from within the larger group. The target population for this study was identified as kindergarten through sixth grade elementary school teachers of English Learners in the South San Joaquin region of California’s Central Valley. The South San Joaquin region encompasses Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, and Kern counties. There are 43 school districts located in this area. This study specifically focused on gathering data from six of these districts: Woodlake, Dinuba, Visalia, Tulare, Farmersville, and Earlimart Unified. There are approximately 1,200 elementary school teachers working within these six districts. The teachers selected for the study were general education teachers that have at least 5-10 English Learners in their classroom.

Sample

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described a sample as “the group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected” (p. 129). The sample for this study included 13 elementary school teachers of English Learners students from Woodlake, Dinuba, Visalia, Tulare, Farmersville, and Earlimart Unified School Districts in the Southern San Joaquin region of the Central Valley of California. Choosing the suitable sample size for qualitative research differs from the approach used for quantitative research. Quantitative research strives to select a large enough sample of the population to determine statistical significance (Patten, 2012). In contrast, qualitative research strives to select the quantity of participants based on the number of information rich cases available that address the purpose of the study and research questions (Patton, 2015). Therefore sample size varies in qualitative research as the researcher collects as much
data as possible until a redundancy of responses occur which results in “saturation” (Patton, 2015, p. 271). According to Morse (2000), 6 to 10 participants are an adequate sample size when the interviews consist of in-depth probing questions that yield rich meaningful data. Accordingly, this study utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews with relevant follow up questions that yielded a plethora of deep, thoughtful responses. Thus, using Morse’s study as a guide to select the sample size, the researcher set a minimum target sample size of 13.

For the purposes of this study the 13 teachers in the target sample were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Five or more years of teaching experience at the elementary level
2. Five or more years teaching English Learner students
3. Recommended by the principal as an exemplary teacher
4. Has participated in professional development specific to English Learner students
5. Has at least 5-10 English Learner students in the class

The sampling method used for this study was purposeful sampling. Patton (2015) explains that purposeful sampling selects “information rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (p. 264). In this study, the purposeful sample comprised elementary school teachers within the South San Joaquin Valley of California with at least 5-10 English Learners in their classrooms. Purposeful sampling was utilized to find the necessary number of participants that mirrored the sample criteria. The researcher selected the purposeful
sample through recommendations from elementary school principals and assuring that the teachers met the sample criteria.

**Instrumentation**

When piloting qualitative research, the researcher is known as the instrument (Patten, 2012, Patton, 2015). Due to the researcher being the instrument in a qualitative study, Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012) contended that the unique personality, characteristics, and interview techniques of the researcher may influence how the data is collected. As a result, the study may contain some biases based on how the researcher influenced the interviewee during the qualitative interview sessions. To minimize researcher bias, the researcher will assure that the interview questions are non-leading and that they are administered in a neutral, non-evaluative manner. The researcher will also bracket any personal biases in the margins of the interview script during the interview process. This will illuminate any possible influence the researcher may have on the data and contribute to the transparency and authenticity of the study.

For this study, the researcher utilized semi-structured, in-depth interviews and artifacts to gather the data. The review of literature indicated that there was a need to study the teacher’s perceptions of homework’s effects on English Learners. Much research has been conducted about homework’s effects through the students’ and parents’ perspectives, but the teachers’ point of view has been lacking. Subsequently, one instrument the researcher used to search out the teacher’s perspective on homework’s effects was semi-structured, in-depth interview questions. The questions developed for the semi-structured interview were designed based on the literature review and presented in the synthesis matrix (see appendix B). The semi-structured, in-depth interviews
allowed the participants to respond to open ended questions and provide insightful information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The researcher also gathered artifacts such as professional correspondence, observational notes, or sample homework papers from the participants that addressed and supported the participants’ perceptions of homework’s effects on English Learners. Both instruments helped to provide data that would address the purpose and research questions of the research study.

**Interviews**

This study utilized semi-structured, in-depth interviews to collect data pertinent to the research purpose and questions. The semi-structured interviews comprised a list of pre-determined open-ended questions that were administered in the same order to all of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Conducting interviews with consistent questions that are administered in the same order makes it easier for the researcher to compare responses and organize data (Yin, 2011).

The researcher generated a scripted interview of eight questions to address the study’s purpose and research questions. Follow-up questions were also utilized to delve deeper into the responses and promote thoughtful insights (Patton, 2015). The interview questions were founded on the study’s theoretical framework of critical pedagogy (P. Freire, 2000) and the literature review. The information gleaned from these sources served as a guide in formulating the most appropriate questions to ask the participants (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Critical pedagogy was utilized as a theoretical filter to develop relevant, meaningful questions for the study.
Artifacts

Artifacts were collected to add depth to the qualitative study and aid in the triangulation of data (Patton, 2015). The use of more than one type of data in a research study is referred to as triangulation (Creswell, 2013). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), artifacts can take several forms such as personal documents, organizational documents, or relics that make meaning of the participant’s lived experience. The artifacts collected in this study consisted of items such as journal entries, observational notes, and sample homework papers. These documents were used to compare and substantiate the validity of the findings.

Validity

In qualitative research, the term validity means “…the degree to which the interpretations have mutual meanings between the participants and the researcher. Thus, the researcher and participants agree on the description or composition of events and especially on the meaning of those events” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 330). Validity of this research study was evidenced by participant language, a pilot test of the interview, and recorded interviews.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), using participant language means that the terms used in the interview are easily understood. In addition, participant language denotes that participants will receive a list of the words and definitions used in the interview to assure a common understanding of meanings. Before conducting the interviews with the sample population, a pilot test was conducted in which the researcher conducted practice interviews with one individual that closely matched the sample population. A pilot test helps the researcher to gather feedback from the interviewees in
terms of question clarity or intent (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher also used the pilot test to note the participants’ reactions to the interview questions and make the necessary revisions (Patton, 2015). The researcher used a peer researcher familiar with qualitative methods as an observer in the piloting process to provide feedback. The interview Feedback protocol was used to formalize the feedback process (see Appendix C). The interviews in this study were all audio-recorded and transcribed to substantiate accurate reporting of the participants’ statements (Patten, 2012). Upon completion of the transcription, the researcher provided the participants with a copy of the transcript to peruse and comment on the accuracy of the data or point out items they would like modified. The researcher took note of the participants’ feedback and made the necessary adjustments (Patton, 2015).

**Reliability**

Patten (2012) asserted that reliability was defined as consistent results that are garnered through standardized data collection. In addition, Golafshani (2003) asserted that reliability could be correlated to credibility. In this study, internal reliability was strengthened as the researcher personally interviewed all the participants with the same standardized scripted questions and audio-recorded the responses (Creswell, 2013). As aforementioned, the participants were also provided with definitions of the terms used in the interview to preclude misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the interviewer’s questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

In order to support the reliability of the study, the researcher collected and compared multiple data sources. This approach is referred to as triangulation of data (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) asserts that a benefit of using multiple methods of data
collection is being able to test for consistency. The researcher followed triangulation guidelines put forth by Patton by carrying out directives such as: (a) comparing observations with interviews, (b) checking for consistency of what people said about the same thing over time, and (c) checking interviews against artifacts to determine consistency. Thus, both in-depth, semi-structured interviews and artifacts were analyzed and compared as a means to substantiate consistency across findings.

**Inter-coder reliability.** According to Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2004), inter-coder reliability entails the assistance of objective individuals to review, analyze and discover themes within data. The degree to which the inter-coder’s themes corroborate the researcher’s themes indicates the degree of the finding’s reliability. Lombard et al. assert that inter-coder reliability is necessary for analysis to support the validity of the study.

It is very important to “calculate and report inter-coder reliability” (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracker, 2004, p. 3). The external inter-coder chosen for this study was a university professor who held a doctorate in the field of education. After the inter-coder agreed to participate, the inter-coder reliability process commenced. This process included: (a) identifying indices that the inter-coder used to analyze the data, (b) determining consistency through an agreed upon percentage of correlation between the researcher and inter-coder, (c) carrying out a pilot test, and finally, (d) making sure that all the findings were accurately and transparently reported (Lombard et al., 2004).

**Human Subjects Consideration**

Prior to embarking on the study, the researcher successfully completed all required coursework and earned the National Institute of Health Clearance certificate to
carry out research with a human subject (see Appendix D). The study’s design and interview script were approved by Brandman University’s Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) before the researcher initiated the data collection process. These steps were taken to protect the rights of human subjects (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

**Data Collection**

The implementation of semi-structured, in-depth interviews was the primary method used to collect data for this study. Patton (2015) asserts “The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind to gather their stories” (p. 426). The purpose of this study was to understand and explain elementary school teacher’s perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to delve more deeply into teacher’s perceptions of this phenomenon. Thus, the method of data collection aligned with the purpose of the study as it served to search out the perceptions of teachers and prompted them to share their stories. The stories and insights shared by the teachers provided rich meaningful data that specifically addressed the research questions.

**Data Collection Process**

This study collected multiple sources of data to aid in the triangulation of the findings (Patton, 2015). Patton elaborates that consistency of findings across a variety of data sources supports the validity of the patterns and themes that emerge. Before the data collection process, the researcher completed the mandatory coursework and earned the National Institutes of Health Clearance certificate to conduct research on a human
Once the researcher obtained Institutional Review (IRB) approval, the following data collection process was carried out:

1. The researcher identified a target sample based on sample criteria and recommendations from elementary school principals.

2. The researcher gathered contact information of the potential participants from the school district’s websites.

3. The researcher sent an email to the potential participants with an introduction and a request to schedule an interview (see Appendix E). The email contained confidentiality assurances and a consent form (see Appendix F). Furthermore, the email requested permission to collect documents to help triangulate the data garnered from the interviews.

4. The researcher contacted the participants through email or telephone to arrange an interview time and location. An informed consent form was signed prior to the administration of the interview. Each participant was also given a participant Bill of Rights (see Appendix G).

5. The researcher confirmed the interview time and location with the participants three days before the interview.

6. The researcher administered in-depth, semi-structured interviews either in person or by telephone. Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and consent was provided (see Appendix H). The researcher requested copies of documents that would help triangulate the data from the interviews. The documents were given to the researcher in person or through email. Artifacts included items such as
professional correspondence, anecdotal notes, sample homework papers, or journal entries that pertain to the topic (see Appendix I).

7. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher shared the transcriptions with the participants to verify that the transcription accurately reflected the responses given at the interview.

8. The researcher analyzed and coded the transcriptions guided by themes that correlated with the research questions. The artifacts were also analyzed and coded to help substantiate the themes that emerged from the interviews.

9. Upon completion of the coding process, the researcher engaged a peer researcher (an inter-coder) in reviewing the coding analysis to support the reliability of the analysis. The researcher and inter-coder read data from each respondent and coded independently. Subsequently the results were compared and analyzed to determine if there was an 80% match between the researcher and independent coder. A minimum of an 80% match was determined to be the minimum percentage needed to substantiate the reliability of the findings.

10. The results were transparently reported and made available for future reference.

Thus, the method of data collection aligned with the purpose of the study as it served to search out the perceptions of teachers and prompted them to share their stories. The stories, insights, and artifacts shared by the teachers provided rich meaningful data that specifically addressed the research questions.
Data Analysis

Inductive analysis, a commonly used form of analysis in qualitative research, was utilized for this study (Creswell, 2013). According to Patton (2015), inductive analysis assists researchers in the “discovering of patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data” (p. 542). Inductive analysis is very relevant when searching out new themes in areas that lack research such as this study’s focus on teacher’s perceptions of homework’s effects on English Learners. In contrast to deductive analysis which collects data to prove or disprove a hypothesis, inductive analysis uses the data to discover common themes or patterns that emerge (Creswell, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Accordingly, in this qualitative study, the data gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and artifacts were reviewed and analyzed in terms of the research questions to discover patterns and themes that emerged.

Prior to analysis, the researcher made sure that the data had been collected and documented correctly. According to Creswell (2013) a common method of data collection among researchers needs to be followed to promote consistency. Patton (2015) asserts that the common procedure utilized in qualitative research starts with the accurate gathering and documenting of data. Following this, the data needs to be coded and categorized. Subsequently, the researcher and inter-coder identify themes and patterns that emerge. Finally the results need to be reported in a clear and transparent manner.

In this study the data was gathered from in-depth interviews and pertinent artifacts. Analysis of data began after the transcripts were reviewed and substantiated as accurate by the participants. Patton (2015) asserts that the first step of analysis is developing a classification system to organize the data. Thus, the responses from the
interviews conducted in this research study were reviewed, analyzed, and classified into various themes. The researcher and inter-coder organized the identified themes. An inter-coder reviewed the interview transcripts and substantiated the themes that were identified by the researcher. The study’s purpose and research questions were used as a guide for the interviews and therefore the ensuing responses specifically addressed the research topics. Chapter IV will discuss the findings that resulted from the data analysis.

**Limitations**

Qualitative research strives to illuminate relevant data pursuant to a study’s purpose and research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This qualitative study sought to align with the aforementioned qualitative purpose. Nevertheless, to establish openness and transparency, it is necessary to discuss some limitations that were inherent in this study. To that end, the following limitations were identified:

1. In a qualitative design fashion, this study had a relatively small sample size that was not randomly selected, thus the findings cannot necessarily be generalized to the general population (Patton, 2015).
2. Researcher bias had to be addressed because the researcher had some preconceived notions about the outcome (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
3. Human bias was an issue because of the interview format. The participants may have withheld information or provided inaccurate details (Patton, 2015).

Concerted efforts were made by the researcher to address the limitations and strengthen the study’s credibility. Following are some of the safeguards incorporated into the study:
1. The sample population met the criteria that reflected the general population being studied.

2. Administering multiple, meaningful, in-depth interview questions to garner information rich data validated the use of a smaller sample size (Morse, 2000).

3. The researcher bracketed biases during the interview process and ensured that the interview questions were not leading or biased.

4. Assurance of confidentiality prior to the interviews aided in reducing human bias.

**Summary**

The study’s methodology and design were presented in this chapter. First, the purpose statement and research questions were reviewed to provide a background and foundation for the study. Subsequently, the study described how the research design chosen by the researcher was the most suitable method to explore teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on English Learners. Following this, the study’s design was discussed along with the population and sample. Finally, the procedures for data collection and analysis were discussed as well as the limitations and safeguards of the study. Chapter IV presents the data gathered in the research study.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This chapter provides an analysis of the data collected from the study which examined elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners. To carry out this study, the researcher interviewed and gathered artifacts from 13 elementary school teachers in the South San Joaquin Valley of California. Chapter IV reviews the purpose of this study, research questions, methodology, population, and sample. The chapter then culminates in the presentation of data, organized according to the research questions with a summary of the findings.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand and explain elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners.

Research Question

The study was guided by one central research question and two sub-questions that were used as a foundation to address the purpose of the study.

Central Question

What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners?

Sub-Questions

1. What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional well-being of English Learners?
2. What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the physical well-being of English Learners?

**Methodology**

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach to understand and explain elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners. A qualitative approach correlated well with this study because the goal was to explore the feelings, attitudes, and thoughts of the participants about homework’s effects on English Learner students (Patten, 2012). The framework of phenomenology was chosen to help the researcher better understand the shared experience of the participants about a commonly experienced phenomenon - homework (Patton, 2015). The insight acquired from this study can help teachers to become more aware of the effects of educational practices such as homework and adjust practices as deemed necessary to better meet the needs of all students.

The researcher took appropriate measures to ensure that the study would produce reliable and credible data (Golafashani, 2003). One step the researcher took was to carefully align the interview questions with the research questions and purpose of the study. The interview protocol consisted of eight in-depth, semi-structured interview questions that searched out the experiences and perceptions of elementary school teachers about homework’s effects on English Learners. The researcher generated questions that were meaningful to the participants and directly correlated with the research questions. The researcher also avoided the use of biased language in the interview questions. To prepare for the implementation of interviews, the researcher sent an email to the potential participants with an introduction and a request to schedule an interview. The email
contained confidentiality assurances and a consent form. In addition, the email requested permission to gather documents such as journal entries or homework samples to triangulate the data gathered in the interviews. The researcher contacted the participants through email or telephone to arrange an interview time and location. An informed consent form was signed prior to the administration of the interview. The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants, with the participants selecting the time and location of each interview. Each in-depth, semi-structured interview was audio recorded and transcribed. Following the transcription process, the participants were given the opportunity to review the transcribed interview and verify that the transcription accurately reflected the responses given. Following participant approval of the transcripts, the researcher began the process of analyzing the data to search out emergent themes that addressed the research questions.

The researcher took specific measures to strengthen the reliability and credibility of the study. Internal reliability was strengthened as the researcher personally interviewed all the participants with the same standardized scripted questions and audio-recorded the responses. Another step taken to support the reliability of the study was the collection of data from multiple data sources which served to triangulate the data. Patton (2015) asserts that a benefit of using multiple methods of data collection is being able to test for consistency. Thus, both in-depth, semi-structured interviews and artifacts were analyzed and compared as a means to substantiate consistency across findings.

To further strengthen the reliability and credibility of the study, the researcher carried out a systematic procedure which included performing a field test before collecting the data, triangulating the data, and utilizing inter-coder reliability.
conducting the interviews, a field test was conducted in which the researcher implemented a practice interview with one individual that closely matched the sample population. The researcher used the field test to note the participant’s reactions to the interview questions and make the necessary revisions (Patton, 2015). The researcher used a peer researcher familiar with qualitative methods as an observer in the piloting process to provide feedback. Triangulation of data was secured as the researcher compared responses from interviews with artifacts such as journal entries and homework samples to determine common themes and consistency across findings. Inter-coder reliability was established as the researcher engaged a peer researcher in reviewing the coding analysis. The researcher and inter-coder read data from each respondent and coded independently. Results were then compared and analyzed to determine if there was at least an 80% match. This level of consistency was determined to be sufficient to substantiate the reliability of the findings.

The validity of the study correlated directly to the methodology, integrity, and consideration of the researcher. Since the researcher serves as the instrument in qualitative studies, researcher bias can prove to be a major threat to its validity. Therefore, the researcher took steps such as bracketing areas of bias in the margins of the interview page and remaining neutral in tone of speech and body language as the interview was being conducted. Accurately documenting all procedures, maintaining neutrality, and enlisting participants that matched the required criteria all played a role in supporting the study’s validity.
Population and Sample

The population for this study was elementary school teachers in California. This population included 131,029 elementary school teachers working within the 1,024 school districts located in California. There are 43 school districts located in the South San Joaquin Valley of California. The target population consisted of 1,200 teachers employed by six of these districts. The six districts included in this study are Tulare, Farmersville, Visalia, Dinuba, Woodlake, and Earlimart Unified. It is typically not feasible, due to time or cost constraints to study large groups; therefore, the researcher selected a target population from within the larger group (McMillan & Schumacher (2010). From the target population, a sample of 13 participants was selected using the purposeful sampling method.

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants that met the sample criteria requirements. The sample criteria included: five or more years of teaching experience at the elementary level, five or more years teaching English Learner students, recommended by the principal as an exemplary teacher, has participated in professional development specific to English Learner students, and has at least five English Learner students in the class. Patton (2015) explains that purposeful sampling selects “information rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (p. 264). In this study, the purposeful sample comprised elementary school teachers within the South San Joaquin Valley of California. The researcher selected the purposeful sample through recommendations from elementary school principals with assurances that the teachers met the sample criteria. The study targeted schools in the
South San Joaquin Valley because there is a high population of English Learners enrolled in its elementary school system.

The researcher began the study by using the Data Quest website to pinpoint elementary schools within the South San Joaquin Valley that have high numbers of English Learners. The researcher then contacted the principals of schools within the six districts selected to inform them of the study and request recommendations of teachers that met the sample criteria and may want to participate in this research study. With the principals’ assistance, 13 teachers were selected to participate in the study. Pursuant to confidentiality assurances, the researcher took care to maintain the anonymity of the participants. Therefore, names, employers, and other identifying information have been omitted in this presentation of findings. The 13 participants were numerically identified in the findings by numerals from 1 to 13 (i.e. Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc.) (see Table 2).

Table 2

Teacher Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Number of ELs in Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Visalia</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tulare</td>
<td>Upper elementary</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Farmersville</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Visalia</td>
<td>Upper elementary</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Woodlake</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Visalia</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dinuba</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dinuba</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continue)
Table 2

*Teacher Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Number of ELs in Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Earlimart</td>
<td>Upper elementary</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Visalia</td>
<td>Upper elementary</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Visalia</td>
<td>Upper elementary</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tulare</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Visalia</td>
<td>Upper elementary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Primary = Kindergarten through third grade; Upper elementary = 4-6th grade; ELs = English Learners.

Presentation of Data

**Research Sub-Question 1**

The first sub-question of this study sought to answer: *What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional well-being of English Learners?* Six themes were identified among 13 participants, ranging from a frequency of 6 to 27. Following are the major themes with the correlating data and research support.

*Frustration because parents cannot help.* In this study, a theme that emerged concerning homework’s effects on English Learner students was the frustration that teachers sensed from their students about not having parental support at home. This theme was voiced by all 13 participants and had the highest frequency count. Triangulation of data was evident as the theme was referenced 19 times in 13 interviews and 8 times in 6 artifacts. The teachers explained the repercussions of students not
having parental support while trying to accomplish homework assignments. In a journal entry, Teacher 6 described it thusly,

> When I put together the homework packets, what I envisioned was that students that need a bit more practice would get one to one attention by a parent that would sit with their child and help them. However, that was not what was happening year after year. Instead what I was seeing was a lot of families getting frustrated because of the homework.

Teacher 1 concurred with this sentiment by commenting “*My English Learners, their parents don’t speak English obviously because they are English Learners, and they might be working long hours, so when the child goes home he doesn’t have support for homework and it becomes very frustrating.*” Teacher 11 discussed the responses of students who lacked parental support for homework. The teacher elaborated that the students would say things such as, “*I just couldn’t finish it. My mom could not help me. She couldn’t read the instructions.*” Teacher 11 noted that it was “crushing” to the students to say that “*even their mom couldn’t do it.*” All participants concurred that lack of parental support for homework negatively impacted the emotional well-being of the English Learners students. This theme is substantiated by the body of research that asserts that parental involvement strongly relates to the student’s affect and attitude (Vera et al., 2012; Pressman et al., 2015; Rudman, 2014).

**Stressful.** A prevalent theme that emerged from the study was the feeling of stress caused by homework assignments. Seven of the participants discussed the high level of stress displayed by English Learner students because of homework. This theme had a frequency count of 17. Triangulation of data occurred as this theme was referenced 10
times in seven interviews and seven times in five artifacts. Teacher 2 noted that stress was often caused by a fear of disappointing family members, explaining “So, during parent-teacher conferences I can see the disappointment in the student’s face because he knows he’s disappointing mom. Mom is sitting, and he’s sitting, and I’m sitting. I can see how upset he is that he disappointed Mom.”

Teachers also noted that fear of bad grades, getting into trouble, or not winning an award because of incomplete homework caused stress. Teacher 12 phrased it thusly,

Sometimes the students don’t have a full grasp on the math problems being sent home. If I send it home, they come back the next day and they’re a mess because they’re afraid they’re going to lose points because they didn’t know what to do.

Correspondingly, Teacher 3 related, “I think it’s probably just frustrating because I collect their homework every Friday. A lot of them don’t get all their problems completed because they don’t understand how to do it and they’re worried.”

Furthermore Teacher 6 observed,

When I was sending home homework packets a lot of the time they weren’t completing it. So that probably stressed them out knowing that on Friday when they had to turn it in, they weren’t going to get the star, weren’t going to get the gummy bear…

In addition, Teacher 9 succinctly put forth that “Homework causes emotional stress---undue emotional stress because they want so much to achieve and often they can’t. They’re a nervous wreck more or less.” Teacher 2 discussed the pitfalls of sending homework that the English Learners were unable to do independently, decrying the plight of English Learners who might not be able to access vocabulary as readily—
I can imagine the amount of stress that would cause those children, and the anxiety. And for them to bring that back into the classroom where they don’t feel prepared to contribute; they don’t feel confident in their skills as a student. I imagine they would be more worried about that than what they’re currently trying to practice in class. That would probably overwhelm their ability to think clearly. Thus, the responses of the teachers portray the stressful effects that homework can have on children. Correspondingly, the body of research supports this finding asserting that homework often causes feelings of stress because children are worried about failing and disappointing others (Bennet & Kalish, 2006; Kralovec & Buell; 2000, Vatterott, 2009).

**Feelings of inadequacy.** An emergent theme discussed by 8 of the participants was the feelings of inadequacy that can arise when students are not able to complete homework assignments. There was a frequency count of 16 for this theme. Triangulation was evident as this theme was noted ten times in eight interviews and six times in five artifacts. The feelings of inadequacy that occur when students can’t complete homework such as craft based projects were described in a journal entry by Teacher 1 in the following way:

Other forms of homework like home projects also proved to be less than successful for the EL students. Many students could not afford the project kits and would use homemade materials. They often would feel inadequate when comparing their project to the one purchased at the hobby shop. Their self-esteem would always be hurt.
The teachers also discussed the ramifications of sending homework that students can’t do. Teacher 13 explained, “The negative effects are that the students are going to feel defeated. They’re not coming to school eagerly to learn because they know they’re going to get homework at the end of the day that they can’t do.” Teacher 4 correspondingly commented,

Any time I give them work that’s at a level above them, it’s not going to come back complete. It negatively impacts the students because they feel defeated and when they’re in that kind of mode they will write down random things.

Teacher 2 corroborated the other participant’s views by explaining, “I think that sending homework home that the EL’s can’t do independently would be unfair and damage their self-confidence.” In addition, Teacher-11 discussed the negative effects of correlating homework completion with being a good student by declaring,

So I think if you’re going to associate homework completion with being a good student, it can definitely negatively affect EL students - especially since they’re already struggling so much with academic language and just understanding what you’re saying sometimes. And then to add the burden of ‘Wow you’re really not a good student because you don’t do your homework,’ I think that’s devastating.

The responses indicate that sending homework that English Learners cannot do independently would lower their self-esteem and exacerbate feelings of inadequacy. The research corroborates this theme showing that English Learners often exhibit feelings of inadequacy because they are unable to successfully complete homework assignments due to language or cultural barriers (Pressman et al., 2015; Kralovec & Buell, 2001; Martinez, 2011).
Creates tension between family members. Four participants discussed the theme of tension that often erupts between family members due to homework assignments. This theme had a frequency count of six. Triangulation was evidenced as the theme was noted four times in four interviews and twice in two artifacts. Discussing the effects of homework on family life, Teacher 11 related, “I had parents who told me, ‘I just fight with them and fight with them about their homework! I keep telling them they’re going to get it done!’ That kind of strife can’t be good for the family.” Teacher 12 discussed a conversation with a parent that portrayed homework’s effect on family life: “I remember a mom calling about a math homework assignment. She said she couldn’t help her child because she couldn’t read English. The mother also confided that they were fighting and arguing about it because they were both confused.” Teacher 2 corroborates these sentiments in a journal entry by remarking,

I’m not sure what to do. I see the kids tense up in class about certain assignments. If that’s happening at home, and parents aren’t equipped to help them deal with the task, what can they do? I have had parents come back with ‘We don’t know how to help them. We are tired of fighting and arguing about it.’ They’re in tears, you know, homework becomes something that is an area of strife in their home and that all relates to feelings back at school.

Thus the experiences and sentiments shared by the participants depict the hardship that homework can impose on family life. The body of research substantiates this theme noting that the family life of English Learners is often disrupted because of contention stemming from parents’ inability to assist with homework assignments (Martinez, 2011; Smrekar & Vogel, 2001).
Feeling of accomplishment. Seven of the participants mentioned how their higher level English Learners or English Learners with parental support often feel a sense of accomplishment upon completing their homework. This theme had a frequency count of 19. Triangulation of data was evident as the theme was observed ten times in four interviews and nine times in five artifacts. Expounding on the feelings of accomplishment experienced by children that could complete homework assignments, Teacher 12 commented,

If I give them something they’re capable of doing they come back the next day like shining bright and excited to talk about it. They had parents at home who were able to work through the problem with them. They just beamed and were excited about that experience.

Correspondingly, Teacher 9 related,

Positive effects I would think are the students who actually are more English proficient and they can understand. They may have older siblings who could help them and they are able to get it done. They come back and feel good about getting it done. It helped their self-esteem.

Teacher 11 likewise shared,

You know high level ELs who are just gung ho, like they pull out all the stops and they’re going to do that homework. They are motivated. They’ll say, ‘I got 5 out of 5’ or ‘I got 10 out of 10!’ They are so happy. They want that sense of accomplishment. Their parents are supporting them.

Some teachers commented on the limited number of English Learner students in their class who are able to achieve that feeling of accomplishment. Accordingly Teacher
3 stated, “I think that the small percentage of my English Learners that can do it on their own—are able to do it and it’s a positive for them.” Similarly, Teacher 4 shared, “I have about 3 out of 13 EL students that positively thrive; they get excited about homework. They like meeting their goals. Whereas the other students who are about four grade levels behind, it’s very negative for them.” The responses indicate that English Learners who are at a higher language proficiency level and have support in the home most commonly achieve a sense of accomplishment from homework completion.

**Builds confidence.** Four of the participants discussed how homework helps build confidence in English Learners. This theme had a frequency of 12. Triangulation occurred as this response was noted five times in four interviews and seven times in four artifacts. Shedding light on the feelings of confidence that can be acquired through successful homework completion, Teacher 11 remarked,

> It’s important for them to see that they can work independently and they can do things by themselves. They come back the next day and we’re grading math homework, they’re like, ‘Oh my goodness, I got all five of them right.’ I think when they see that they went home and did it by themselves that it makes them feel wonderful.

Similarly discussing the positive effects of successfully completing homework, Teacher-12 expounded,

> I’ve given a math problem that was simpler but a review. It was practice on addition and I remember the kids coming back the next day and super excited to talk about STAR which was taking apart this word problem because they were
confident in their answer and it was practice. They just beamed and were excited about that experience. Teacher 2 summed it up thusly, “*Homework is a chance for them to grow in confidence in specific skills and for them to feel that feeling of satisfaction that they were able to complete a task independently.*” The teachers’ responses show that confidence can be increased when the students are able to complete homework independently. This finding is substantiated by research which asserts that students’ feelings of self-efficacy are enhanced when they are able to complete homework independently (Brock et al., 2007; Rudman, 2014; Katz et al., 2012).

Table 3 displays the identified themes with reference and frequency counts of homework’s effects on the emotional well-being of English Learners.

Table 3

*Homework’s Effects on the Emotional Well-being of English Learners*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frustration because parents cannot help</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressful</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel inadequate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates tension between family members</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A feeling of accomplishment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builds confidence</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Table sorted from negative to positive effects.

**Research Sub-Question 2**

The second sub question of this study sought to answer: *What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the physical well-being of English*
Learners? Three themes were identified among the 13 participants, ranging from a frequency of 9 to 14. Following are the three themes with correlating data and research support.

**Draining and exhausting.** Five of the participants described the strenuous effects of homework on the English Learners’ physical well-being. This theme had a frequency of 14. Triangulation was evident as the theme was observed 8 times in 6 interviews and 6 times in 5 artifacts. Describing the physical hardship generated by homework, Teacher 10 commented,

Homework is draining for a student, especially for an English Learner because they have to focus more during the day to try to pick up on the key points of the curriculum. They need some down time. They need some time that they’re not going home and having to spend a couple more hours doing homework.

Corroborating this view, Teacher 7 stated, “I just don’t think homework would have a positive effect. I think they would be more tired and probably more resentful in wanting to come to school because it won’t be a fun, positive experience.” Participants also noted that students were often exhausted because they were not getting enough sleep due to homework demands. Teacher 8 decried,

I wouldn’t want my kids staying up past a time that they should be in bed asleep.

If they’re not getting enough help at the afterschool program, and are having to stay up late waiting for someone to help them, that’s simply damaging.

Accordingly, Teacher 6 remarked, “Some students had after school activities and would wait to do the homework packet at the last minute on Thursday night and come to school tired because they had stayed up late.” Likewise, Teacher 11 related,
Some parents are like ‘You will not go to sleep until your homework is finished.’ I know that cannot make them feel good physically to have someone over you—‘You need to finish this!’ ‘You’re not going to bed till you finish this! I’ve heard this too, ‘My mom made me wake up this morning early to finish my homework.’ That’s not good, that’s not right.

The responses indicate that homework drains and exhausts students by overtaxing their physical capabilities. This theme correlates with the research that explains the exhausting effects of homework on students due to lack of sleep or time demands due to extra-curricular activities (Bennet & Kalish, 2006; Kohn, 2006). Also concurring with the theme of this study, researchers assert that homework has specifically exhausting effects on English Learner students because of the extra effort often expended trying to comprehend the language and deal with the added responsibilities of demanding home life (August & Hakuta, 1997; Bang, 2011; Suzarez-Orozaco & Qin-Hilland, 2004).

**Inadequate time to exercise.** Five teachers referenced the theme, inadequate time to exercise, as a negative consequence of homework. This theme had a frequency count of 9. Triangulation of data occurred as this theme was noted 5 times in 3 interviews and 4 times in 4 artifacts. Teacher 9 explained, “I feel when they have an overload of homework they don’t have time to actually play and exercise. That affects them physically. That’s why some kids are a little overweight—because they don’t get enough exercise.” Teacher 10 concurred that students need exercise, saying,

When kids get to be kids and get to play more and get to explore, I think physically that helps them to be more alert the next day—to be ready to look at
the curriculum the next day. If they’re doing homework a couple of hours a night, 
they’re not going to be at their best the next day.

Substantiating the need for exercise, Teacher 8 explained “It would be negative if they’re 
trying to stay up late to try to figure things out and they’re not getting a chance to go 
outside and play if they are home. They need time to be kids.” Teacher 6 expounded on 
the importance of physical activity by stating in a journal entry,

At the end of the day what we want is that our students grow up to be lifelong 
learners that are happy, responsible adults that get along and are empathetic 
toward others—all things that children learn best outside playing in sports or 
local parks, not in a homework packet.

These responses show that students would benefit more from adequate time to 
exercise as opposed to doing homework packets or worksheets. This theme is 
substantiated by the body of literature which discusses the adverse effects of physical 
inactivity such as weight gain, depression, and attention deficit disorder (Ginsberg, 2007; 
Louv, 2005; Vatterott, 2009).

**Physical problems caused by stress.** Four participants addressed the theme of 
physical problems caused by stress. This theme had a frequency count of 9. 
Triangulation of data was evident as the theme was noted five times in four interviews 
and four times in four artifacts. Elaborating on the physical repercussions caused by 
stress, Teacher-1 explained, “The parental support cannot always be there for them and 
physically it’s stressful for them and taxes them throughout the year on their body.” 
Teacher-2 addressed the issue by saying, “The last thing you want is your child to go 
home with homework and be in tears or depressed or emotionally unbalanced, or
stomachaches because we’re sending too much homework or sending things that they can’t accomplish at home.” Teacher 10 corroborated this statement by declaring,

Again, I think their physical well-being is just being overwhelmed and taxed.

Our emotions affect our physical and so I think by them being overwhelmed and just overstretched on what they’re capable of doing I think we’re trying to demand too much of them.

Addressing the connection of physical and emotional well-being, Teacher 11 asserted, “If the parent is saying they are fighting with their child—that cannot be physically positive. Kids will not react physically well to that. The emotional problems lead to physical problems.” The body of research corroborates these findings by stipulating that the stress the students are experiencing with homework negatively impacts their physical well-being by causing problems such as headaches, stomach aches, nervous disorders, and ulcers (Bennet & Kalish, 2006; Louv, 2005; Stipek & Seal, 2001).

Table 4 displays the identified themes with reference and frequency counts of homework’s effects on the physical well-being of English Learners.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Draining and exhausting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate time to exercise</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical problems caused by stress</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most Frequent Codes

Table 5 reviews the top three most frequent codes that emerged from the study. The table contains the theme, frequency count, and correlated research questions.

Table 5

*Top Three Most Frequent Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frustration because parents cannot help</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>RSQ1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A feeling of accomplishment</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>RSQ1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressful</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>RSQ1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* RSQ = Research Sub Question.

In this study, the theme frustration because parents cannot help was most frequently described by teachers as an effect that homework has on the emotional well-being of English Learners. This theme had a frequency count of 27. Following the theme frustration because parents cannot help, a feeling of accomplishment had the next highest frequency count with a total of 19. The respondents clarified this response with the admonition that this perception was based on English Learners with high language proficiency and parental support. The third most popular code was stressful with a frequency count of 17. Participants explained that fear of repercussions such as bad grades, disappointing loved ones, and not being successful were the main causes of homework stress.
Summary

This chapter presented the data and findings of this qualitative phenomenological study. The study sought to understand and explain elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners. The population consisted of elementary school teachers in California. A total of 13 elementary school teachers from six districts (Woodlake, Dinuba, Visalia, Tulare, Farmersville, and Earlimart) in the South San Joaquin Valley participated in this study.

One central research question guided this study by asking: *What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effect on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners?* Two sub-questions helped to further understand the lived experience of elementary school teachers as they strive to reflect on and utilize educational practices that will promote the well-being of English Learners as well as mainstream students. An interview protocol was developed with eight questions that directly related to each sub research question. Each participant engaged in an in-depth, in-person interview which was recorded and transcribed. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. The verbatim transcriptions were subsequently delivered to the participants to peruse and verify that the transcription accurately depicted the meaning of their responses. After verification of the transcripts took place, the data was coded. In addition, artifacts were gathered that pertained to the research questions of this study. The transcripts and artifacts were then coded for common themes. Using two types of data helped to serve with the triangulation process which examined all data to verify consistency across findings. To increase reliability of the study, the researcher enlisted the assistance of an inter-coder to help review the data, search for common themes, and
assign codes to the most frequently used themes. Both the researcher and the peer researcher (a university professor with a doctorate) examined the data, collaborated, and determined appropriate themes and codes.

Findings of the study showed several emerging themes in teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on English Learners. The most frequent theme of homework’s effects described by participants was the frustration felt by the students because parents cannot help. The participants explained that English Learners often have difficulty with homework because they may not understand the concept as it is being taught in class. Then, taking it home to parents who cannot help because they don’t speak the language or have limited academic experience exacerbates the student’s feelings of frustration.

Another salient perception of homework’s effects on English Learners was a feeling of accomplishment. The participants noted the pride and happiness the students felt upon completing an assignment independently. However, the participants also noted that the English Learners who often felt this sense of accomplishment had high levels of language proficiency and strong parental support. Thus, the participants related that this sense of accomplishment is most commonly achieved by English Learners with more resources and is not experienced by all of the English Learners in their classes.

In addition to the emotional effects, the participants noted significant effects of homework on the physical well-being of English Learners. The theme most frequently described by the participants about homework’s physical effects was that it was draining and exhausting. The participants mentioned that the students were already exhausted from trying to comprehend the subject matter in class. Then taking it home to do more hours of study on the same subject was overstretches the demands on their energy and
time. The participants also declared how they could see evidence of lack of sleep from students who stayed up late trying to complete homework assignments after participating in extra-curricular activities. None of the participants mentioned any positive physical effects from homework.

Artifacts in this study included journal entries, homework samples, and observational notes.

Chapter V of this study will present conclusions based on the findings. In addition, Chapter V will set forth recommendations for further research on this topic.
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative phenomenological study sought to understand and explain elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners. The study was guided by the following central question: *What are elementary school teacher’s perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners?* Two research sub-questions were developed to specifically search out the lived experience of elementary school teachers as they reflect on the effects that educational practices such as homework have on the well-being of English Learners.

This study used qualitative methodology to examine the experiences of elementary school teachers who work with English Learner students. Their stories emerged through in-depth, structured interviews. In addition, the researcher gathered artifacts from the participants to compare with interview responses to check for consistency across findings. Using both types of data served to triangulate the data. The target population was elementary school teachers in California. Thirteen elementary school teachers from the South San Joaquin Valley of California served as the sample for this study. The major findings, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for future research are included in this chapter.

**Major Findings**

The major findings of this qualitative research study are organized according to each research sub-question.
Research Sub-Question 1

Research Sub-Question 1 queried: *What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional well-being of English Learners?* The six emerging themes from this research question included frustration because parents can’t help (13 out of 13), stressful (7 out of 13), feel inadequate (8 out of 13), creates tension between family members (4 out of 13), a feeling of accomplishment (7 out of 13), and builds confidence (4 out of 13). All of these were perceived to be the most salient effects of homework on the emotional well-being of English Learners. Following are the major findings with the corresponding data and research support.

**Finding 1: English Learners often felt frustrated because parents were unable to help.** All 13 teachers in this study indicated that English Learners often felt frustrated because of a lack of parental support. The teachers put forth that often the homework necessitated higher level language skills than the English Learner students or the parents possessed. The parents wanted to help but were unable to because of language or academic barriers. According to the teachers this would lead to a feeling of defeat and frustration for their English Learners. This finding is corroborated by Martinez (2011) and Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) who assert that both English Learner parents and students are frustrated by the predicament of not being able to complete assignments successfully.

**Finding 2: Homework often causes feelings of stress in English Learners.** The results of this study indicated that stress was often a repercussion of homework assignments. Over half of the teachers in this study named fear of getting into trouble, disappointing loved ones, and sadness about not getting a reward as the main sources of
stress surrounding homework. The teachers shared that the stress induced by the fear of negative consequences probably overrode the concern for learning. The findings in this study correlate with the research which shows that English Learners often demonstrate signs of stress because of the inability to successfully complete homework (Kralovec & Buell, 2001; Rudman, 2014; Warton, 2001).

**Findings 3: Homework often produces feelings of inadequacy in English Learners.** Teachers in this study noted that when English Learners compared their homework projects such as dioramas or solar system models to others in the classroom that could afford to buy ready-made kits or had parent that would do it for them, the English Learners would feel inadequate and their self-esteem would be hurt. Also, the teachers noted that feelings of inadequacy would arise in their English Learners students when they sent homework which was above their level. This finding correlates with the body of research which indicates that a sense of inadequacy arises when English Learners feel unable to meet the challenges of homework in the same manner as mainstream students (Bang, 2011; Martinez, 2011).

**Findings 4: Homework negatively impacts family dynamics.** In this study, the teachers related stories of how homework assignments often caused fights and contention in the English Learner’s home. These combative family scenes, it was revealed, often occurred because the parents were over-zealous for their English Learner child to succeed and the child often felt unable to successfully carry out an assignment. The teachers mentioned that often the English Learner child feels overwhelmed and defeated, and subsequently shuts down. One of the teachers mentioned that it is important to communicate with the parents and let them know it is all right to use their discretion to
end a homework assignment if they see that their child is overwhelmed. In conjunction with these findings, the body of research asserts that homework is often a source of contention in the home of English Learners (Bennet & Kalish, DeNisco, 2013, Suzarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilland, 2004).

Findings 5: Homework promotes a sense of accomplishment in some English Learners. Seven teachers in this study mentioned that a sense of accomplishment was a significant effect of homework for some English Learners. The teachers related how the English Learners “beamed” and were “shining bright after they successfully completed their homework independently.” However, the teachers did reveal that this sense of accomplishment was not attained by all English Learners. An observation made was that the English Learners who did gain that sense of accomplishment were usually highly proficient in English and had very supportive parents. There was a gap in the literature in this area. The majority of research focused on English Learners as a group and did not really differentiate on homework’s effects between the different levels within this group. More research in the area of different effects of homework within the group of English Learners would be beneficial (Ramirez & Carpenter, 2009).

Findings 6: Homework can build a sense of confidence. The teachers in this study remarked that being able to complete homework tasks independently builds the English Learners’ self-confidence and promotes feelings of excitement and satisfaction. An observation made by the teachers however is that the positive feelings are predicated on the assumption that the English Learners can do the assignment independently. Thus, according to the teachers, homework assignments that promote the emotional well-being of English Learners are those assignments that can be successfully completed by the
English Learners autonomously. This finding correlates with the research which notes that differentiation of homework is important and that homework should correlate with the English Learner’s ability level (Brock et al., 2007; Rudman, 2014).

Research Sub-Question 2

Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *What are elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the physical well-being of English Learners?*

Three themes were identified among the 13 participants including draining and exhausting (5 out of 13), inadequate time to exercise (5 out of 13), and physical problems caused by stress (4 out of 13).

Finding 1: Homework is often draining and exhausting for English Learners.

A factor mentioned by the teachers as a cause of fatigue was that the English Learner students became drained after exerting so much effort trying to comprehend the academic language during the school day. The teachers related that giving them more work at the end of the day to complete at night was overtaxing their physical threshold. In addition, the teachers mentioned that another cause of their fatigue was that the English Learner students often stayed up late trying to finish difficult or lengthy homework assignments. Then, the situation was exacerbated when the English Learner students had extracurricular activities to attend after completing homework. The teachers agreed that rather than spending countless hours doing homework, the English Learner students would benefit more from having down time in the evening and having the opportunity to refresh their minds and bodies for the next day. This finding is corroborated by the research which delineates the need to take a break from excessive homework demands by
getting enough sleep, exercise, and recreation (Bennet & Kalish, 2006; Levine, 2008; Medina, 2009).

**Finding 2: Homework demands thwart the socialization opportunities.** The teachers concurred that the English Learners needed time “to be kids.” In addition, the teachers put forth that the socialization and conversations that the students have while participating in physical activities were especially crucial for English Learners. They mentioned that the English Learner students need this time to interact with other children to practice their oral language skills. This finding is substantiated in the body of literature as researchers attest that the socialization that occurs during sports, exercising or playing in the park supports the overall well-being of English Learners (Kohn, 2006; Kralovec & Buell, 2001; Vatterott, 2009).

**Finding 3: Excessive homework contributes to unhealthy weight gain.** This study put forth that giving English Learners the opportunity to exercise may help to alleviate the weight issues that more children are currently facing. The teachers noted that childhood obesity is a rising problem and that providing more time to exercise can help to alleviate that problem. Accordingly, the CDC (2016) stipulated that since 1980 the number of overweight students in the United States has tripled. The CDC also reported that approximately one in three children born in the year 2000 will become diabetic. The researchers Bennet and Kalish (2006) asserted that in addition to unhealthy eating habits and watching television, the sedentary lifestyle promoted by abundant homework is contributing to childhood obesity. Thus, research substantiates the findings that homework is correlated to unhealthy weight gain.
Finding 4: Homework stress can contribute to physical ailments. The teachers in this study noted the connection between emotional and physical health, asserting that the emotional strain of homework demands often caused physical problems such as stomach aches, headaches, or sleep disorders in English Learners. They also noted that these stressed students were absent more often due to colds and flu. Furthermore the teachers specified that when the English Learner students are overtaxed emotionally from the stress often associated with homework that it takes a physical toll on their bodies. Several teachers observed that a notable amount of anxiety arose in English Learners when they were stressed by homework demands. The interconnection of emotional and physical health was substantiated by the body of literature. According to Medina (2009) lack of sleep and exercise raises stress levels and can make the brain not only less functional, but dysfunctional. Ginsberg (2007) reported that the stress and anxiety experienced by English Learners currently is contributing to the students’ elevated depression rates. Kalish (2009) supports the current research also by reporting that physical maladies such as headaches and sleeplessness have been associated with homework stress. Thus, the current study and the existing body of research concur that stress can have adverse effects on the physical health of English Learners.

Unexpected Findings

Various findings surfaced during this study although they were not specifically sought out. One finding that came to light was that teachers felt that poverty trumped language as far as challenging students’ abilities to succeed in academic tasks. The teachers elaborated that the children from lower social economic status families had the same amount of difficulties with homework assignments that the English Learners had.
The teachers explained that both of these demographics needed the same amount of scaffolding and support to complete homework assignments successfully.

Another unexpected finding was that some teachers did not think that language or cultural background was a challenge for English Learners. The teachers asserted that the English Learners felt it was a benefit to speak two languages. In addition, the teachers also did not notice that the students were struggling at all with homework or academics. The teachers did not mention if these specific students were high English Proficiency students but did mention that they had a lot of parental support.

Furthermore, an additional unexpected finding was the slight number of teachers that noticed physical effects from homework. The theme of physical effects had much fewer references and frequencies than the theme of emotional effects. Even when the interview question asked about the physical effects of homework on students, the teachers often referred back to the emotional effects. This result conflicted with the review of literature which discussed a plethora of physical effects as a result of homework practices.

**Conclusions**

This research study was designed to understand and explain elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners. As a qualitative phenomenological study, unstructured in-depth interviews were used to discover the emergent themes and capture the stories of teachers’ experiences with the phenomenon of homework. The artifacts of journal entries, observational notes, and sample homework papers proved useful in triangulating the data
and substantiating consistency across findings. The following conclusions are based on the findings of this research study.

**Conclusion 1: Conflict in the Home**

Based on the findings in this study and supported by the literature, it is concluded that the combination of the English Learners stress over homework and the parents’ inability to assist can lead to conflict in the home. This study found that homework can have a negative impact on family relationships. The English Learner parents and students in this study were reported to fight, argue, and battle over homework assignments. This correlates with the existing body of research which substantiates that English Learner home life can suffer as a result of homework practices (Bennett, Kalish, Kralovec, & Buell, 2001; Kohn, 2006; Vatterott, 2009). Accordingly, Schecter (2012) put forth that family stress for English Learners was exacerbated by the parents’ inability to help the students with their homework assignments because of language or cultural barriers. Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hiland (2004) put forth that homework adds unwarranted stress on EL families because the children already have so many auxiliary roles to fulfill such as caretaker, translator, and negotiator. Correspondingly, Fulgni, Tsent, and Lam (1999) found that English Learners often had more family obligations than non-English Learner students and adding another stressor such as abundant or difficult homework often increased the family tension levels. Thus this study and the existing research conclude that commonly implemented homework assignments can negatively affect the home-life of English Learner students.
Conclusion 2: Homework Stress and Attitudes toward Learning

Based on the findings in this study and supported by literature, it is concluded that homework can diminish the English Learners’ enthusiasm for school and learning. The teachers in this study reported that homework stress often caused English Learner students to “shut down” and feel “defeated.” The English Learners were not as excited about coming to school because they knew it would involve homework assignments that they could not complete. This is substantiated by literature which attests that continually failing to complete homework assignments could have a cumulatively negative effect on the English Learners’ self-esteem and adversely affect their attitude toward school (Rudman, 2014). Correspondingly, DeNisco (2013) and Levine (2008) reported that the stress involved with homework can lead to diminished enthusiasm for school and motivation to learn. Martinez (2011) points out that English Learners often feel that homework does not have any relevance in their lives; therefore English Learners develop a disassociation with the academic curriculum and do not exert the effort to learn. Thus, current homework practices can have damaging effects on English Learner students’ interest in learning and school.

Conclusion 3: Homework and Physical Maladies

Based on the findings in this study, and supported by previous research, it is concluded that homework stress can contribute to the development of physical maladies in English Learner students. This study showed that English Learner students often developed physical problems such as headaches, stomach aches, and depression as a result of homework stress. This study also indicated that spending time on homework instead of exercise leads to inordinate weight gain. The conclusion was corroborated by
the body of research. Bennet and Kalish (2006) assert that the sedentary lifestyle impelled by abundant homework often contributes to the problem of weight gain and associated physical problems such as diabetes. Kohn (2006) accordingly put forth that homework stress often contributed to physical problems such as headaches, stomach aches, and sleep disorders. Levine (2008) maintains that homework stress leads to an unhealthy stress produced in the body. This stress often leads to physical problems such as ulcers, depression, and sleep disorders. Thus, this study and the body of research concur that homework can lead to negative effects on the physical health of English Learners.

**Conclusion 4: Homework Stress and Classroom Behavior**

Based on the findings of this study and supported by literature, it is concluded that homework stress can affect the English Learners behavior in class. This study showed that English Learner students often act out as a result of not completing homework. Teachers in this study commented that the students grade their homework every morning when school begins. The teachers noticed that the English Learner students who did not complete the homework exhibited stress and “acted out” during this time by tapping pencils, distracting others, and blurting out. This is substantiated by the body of research which asserts that stress caused by the embarrassment of not having completed homework assignments can lead to aberrant behaviors in the class (Kohn, 2006; Rudman, 2014; Vatterott, 2009). Correspondingly, according to Martinez (2011) English Learner students often feel disenfranchised by not being able to complete homework assignments and consequently manifest inappropriate behaviors in the classroom.
Implications for Action

Implications for action were aligned with the conclusions drawn from the major findings of this study. The following actions need to be considered by teachers, administrators, school boards, and state legislatures to promote educational practices that will support all students.

Implication 1: Homework Support during the School Day

Teachers need to provide classroom time for English Learner students to complete homework at school. The teacher can pick the most convenient time during the school day to give English Learner students time to work on homework assignments. Working on the assignments in class will ensure that students have the support of the teacher, books, technology, and peers. Doing the work in class will also give the teacher the opportunity to see that the English Learner student is actually doing the work and note the strengths and weaknesses of the student in the subject matter.

Implication 2: Extend Regular School Day

Extend the school day to include time to work on “homework” assignments. Of course, this would have to be agreed upon by the school board, teacher’s union, administrators, and faculty. It is recommended that the student school year be extended by 10 days and that the school day be extended three days per week for 45 minutes.

Implication 3: After School Homework Support

Provide after-school homework support programs for English Learner students to attend. The programs can be held at the school or at a community center. The program will offer the support of qualified staff and educational materials to help students successfully complete homework assignments. English Learner students that need extra
support will attend study sessions and get assistance with concepts that are difficult for them. The programs can be implemented through partnerships with community groups such as Boys and Girls clubs or the YMCA.

**Implication 4: Teacher Development on Homework**

Provide teacher development classes on homework including the history of homework and how this educational practice affects English Learner students. The classes will be taught by trained personnel who have researched homework’s effects on English Learner students. In addition, the classes will provide teachers with the opportunity to reflect on current homework practices, contemplate the purpose of homework, and evaluate homework’s effectiveness for English Learner students.

**Implication 5: Differentiate Homework Assignments**

Teachers need to differentiate assignments to meet English Learner students’ needs and resources. Teachers need to take into consideration the different ability levels and amount of resources English Learner students have. If homework needs to be assigned because of school or district policies, the teachers will ensure that the homework sent home will be independently and successfully carried out by the English Learner student. According to Rudman (2014), differentiating homework to meet learning styles is an effective strategy. Rudman commented that homework had to have the right amount of complexity; students needed sufficient time to do homework; and the students should receive feedback. He also emphasized the importance of being in touch with each school’s social and cultural needs when assigning homework. Thus, the research supports that differentiating homework to accommodate the English Learner students’
abilities and needs will help to promote student success in completing homework assignments.

**Implication 6: Involve School Board**

Homework policies need to be discussed with the school board. School board members need to be apprised of the effects of homework on all students. After discussing the situation with the board, they need to be encouraged to change policies that are detrimental to students. A positive precedent for garnering school board support was set in Canada. Kalish (2009) related that one parent, Frank Bruni, petitioned the Toronto School Board to change homework policies. He was motivated to do this when a doctor recommended more exercise for his son. With all the homework that had been sent home, there was no time to fit exercise into the family’s schedule. Bruni petitioned for a special meeting and brought research that reflected the negative effects of homework to the School Board. The Board mandated limiting homework to reading in elementary school, no homework during the holidays, and presented an official proclamation about the importance of family life. That policy affected 300,000 students. Thus, following this model, teacher and parent advocates for change should petition the school board for a meeting, bring in relevant research, and request that the board enact positive change in homework policies.

**Implication 7: Work for True Educational Reform**

At the state level, instead of focusing on homework as a way to improve education—work for true educational reform such as smaller class sizes, more pre-k classes, and more resources for teachers. These changes will involve lobbying and
becoming politically active, but as Kralovec and Buell (2001) assert, these changes will help to bring about genuine reform that will help improve student outcomes.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The following recommendations were made for further research based on the findings and conclusions of this study.

**Recommendation 1: Parents’ Perspective**

It is recommended that this study be replicated to discover homework’s effect on the emotional and physical well-being of elementary age English Learner students from the parents’ perspective. Parents can share first-hand experiences of how homework affects family life. This perspective can add depth to homework’s impact on family dynamics. Understanding the impact of homework on families can help instructors to adjust educational practices to promote positive outcomes for English Learner students.

**Recommendation 2: Students’ Perspective**

It is recommended that this study be replicated to discover homework’s effect on the emotional and physical well-being of elementary age English Learner students from the students’ perspective. Conducting this study from the student’s point of view can enlighten educators about the lived experience of students as they strive to complete homework assignments. Understanding how the students feel and react to various homework assignments can help teachers to modify homework practices to promote positive emotional effects in English Learner students.

**Recommendation 3: Compare Homework Policies**

It is suggested that a quantitative study be conducted comparing the academic success of elementary English Learner students from schools that have a no-homework
policy to those English Learners in schools that have a standard homework policy.

Analyzing the academic achievement of English Learners from two similar schools with different homework policies can shed light on the importance of homework in the academic success of English Learners.

**Recommendation 4: Lower Social Economic Status**

It is suggested that a phenomenological study be conducted to discover homework’s effects on the well-being of students from a lower social economic status. Exploring the effects of homework on this segment of society can help educators to implement educational practices that can meet the needs of all members of society.

**Recommendation 5: Compare effects on well-being of English Learner and Mainstream Students**

It is recommended that a correlational study be conducted that compares elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional well-being of English Learners and its effects on the emotional well-being of mainstream students. This study can clarify the similarities and differences of homework’s effects on both groups. Gaining that knowledge can help educators to better understand the educational needs of their students and differentiate homework assignments accordingly.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

I am an elementary school teacher and have mainly taught English Learners throughout my career. Therefore, I am very interested in how various educational practices affect this segment of the population. In this study, I sought to discover how the educational practice of homework specifically affected English Learners. Correlating with the review of literature, I found that homework often causes emotional difficulties
such as frustration, stress, and feelings of inadequacy in English Learners. In searching out the physical effects of homework on English Learners, I found that the results were similarly negative with teachers citing observations of exhaustion, inadequate time to exercise, and physical problems caused by stress for these students. These findings showed that homework can have stringent effects on English Learners. Becoming aware of these effects helped me as an educator to adjust my educational practices. The findings prompted me to evaluate whether the positive effects of homework for a select group of English Learners outweighs the negative effects experienced by a majority of these students. Instead of questioning how to implement homework, or how much to send home, the findings helped me to question whether homework is an educational practice that should be carried out at all.

In contrast to the negative consequences of homework, the study also revealed that homework could promote feelings of accomplishment and build confidence in English Learners. A disclaimer, however, put forth by the participants was that the positive effects were mainly achieved by English Learners with high language skills and lots of parental support. Thus only select groups of the English Learners were garnering the positive effects of homework. This finding helped to elucidate the disparity of resources possessed by English Learners families. It clarified the need to take the time to know my students and initiate educational practices that best suit their individual needs.

Implementing this study helped me to reflect on and evaluate the educational practice of homework. It showed me the importance of thinking about instructional practices and not just carrying them out routinely. Previously I had implemented homework as a matter of course because it was just standard procedure. After conducting
the research and carrying out this study, I see the significance of reflecting on commonly implemented educational practices such as homework. I see the importance of becoming aware of the individual students’ situations and adjusting educational practices to better meet their needs. This study strengthened my resolve to reflect on my educational practices, to evaluate and analyze the need for the practice, and be aware of how the practice affects all of my students. Moreover, this study helped me to see the importance of taking action after awareness is raised. After developing an awareness of the effects of educational practices such as homework, this study has motivated me to take action to modify these practices in a manner that can promote positive outcomes and more effectively meet the needs of all my students.
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## Synthesis Matrix

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APPENDIX B

Interview Script and Interview Questions

Hello, my name is Peggy Smith and I am a doctoral student studying Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. I would like to begin by thanking you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I realize that your time is valuable and I appreciate your efforts in contributing to the body of knowledge in this research study.

Prior to the interview, we will review the steps that led to this occasion. First, an e-mail letter was sent to you that outlined the processes involved in a research study interview. An informed consent affidavit was included in the letter that needs to be signed before the interview process begins. The letter also informed you that you may stop the interview at any time. As mentioned in the letter, the interview will be recorded with your consent. After the interview has been transcribed, you can review the transcription to verify that the interview was accurately recorded. Upon verification of the transcription’s accuracy, the audio tape will be destroyed. All records dealing with the interview will be strictly confidential.

In my dissertation, I am exploring elementary school teacher’s perceptions of homework’s effects on English Learners. A possible benefit of this study is generating new insights concerning teachers’ perceptions of the specific effects homework has on English Learners. An outcome of this study may include changes in the current homework system that will strive to meet the academic needs and promote the well-being of all students.

Do you have any questions before we begin? (Address any questions that are posed and then begin the interview)

Interview Questions

1. In your experience what are the effects of homework on the well-being of English Learners? Can you tell me about a time when you observed or experienced this?

2. How would you describe the positive effects of homework on the emotional well-being of English Learners? Can you give me an example?

3. Conversely, how would you describe the negative effects of homework on the emotional well-being of English Learners? Can you give me an example of this?

4. What homework practices do you believe best support the emotional/physical well-being of English Learners? Can you share some experiences about this?
5. Conversely, what homework practices do you believe negatively impact the emotional/physical well-being of English Learners? Can you give an example of this?

6. How would you describe the positive effects of homework on the physical well-being of English Learners? Can you share some experiences or observations about this?

7. In contrast, how would you describe the negative effects of homework on the physical well-being of English Learners? Can you share an observation of this?

8. Can you share any stories/experiences of English Learner students’ reactions to homework?
APPENDIX C

Field Test Interviewee Feedback Questions

While conducting the interview you should take notes of their clarification request or comments about not being clear about the question. After you complete the interview ask your field test interviewee the following clarifying questions. Try not to make it another interview; just have a friendly conversation. Either script or record their feedback so you can compare with the other two members of your team to develop your feedback report on how to improve the interview questions.

Before the brief post interview discussion, give the interviewee a copy of the interview protocol as you review the following feedback questions. If their answers imply that some kind of improvement is necessary seek their clarification.

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you do as a leader when working with your team or staff?

2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?

3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked? If the interviewee indicates some uncertainty, be sure to find out where in the interview it occurred.

4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?

5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview… (I’m pretty new at this)?

Remember, the key is to use common, conversational language and very user friendly approach. Put that Emotional Intelligence to work 😊

NOTE: Red font is for your eyes and support info only
APPENDIX D

National Institute of Health Clearance Certificate

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Peggy Smith successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 05/14/2016.

Certification Number: 2072483.
Participant Invitation Letter for Research Study

Date:

Dear Potential Study Participant,

My name is Peggy Smith and I am a doctoral candidate in Brandman University’s Organizational Leadership program. For my dissertation, I am researching elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on the emotional and physical well-being of English Learners. In addition to homework’s effects, the study will also explore the teachers’ perspective on homework practices that support or adversely impact English Learner Students.

The purpose of this letter is to ask if you would be willing to participate in this study to provide the perspective of elementary teachers with English Learners in the classroom. You can provide assistance with this study by participating in an interview that will last from 30 to 60 minutes. I would also appreciate any documents you could provide such as professional correspondence, anecdotal notes, or observations that pertain to the topic. Upon agreement, the interview will be set up at a time that fits your schedule.

If you agree to participate, be assured that the interview will be absolutely confidential. The use of a coding system will allow the interview notes, recordings or transcripts to be labeled anonymously. The interview will be recorded and the audio tape will be destroyed after the transcripts have been delivered and accepted as valid by the participant. The interview records will be kept in locked files that will only be accessible to the researcher. You are free to stop or withdraw from the interview at any time.

I am available to discuss this research by e-mail or phone. In addition, my dissertation chair will be available to answer any questions you may have. The dissertation chair’s contact information is as follows: Dr. Guadalupe Solis; e-mail gsolis@tcoe.org

I would be honored to hear your experiences and perspectives concerning the effects of homework on English Learner students. I realize that your time is valuable and appreciate your efforts to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Peggy Smith
Doctoral Candidate, Brandman University
E-mail: psmith10@mail.brandman.edu
Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
APPENDIX F

Informed Consent

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE: Teachers’ Perceptions of Homework’s Effects on English Learners

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Peggy Smith

PURPOSE OF STUDY: This study is being conducted for a dissertation in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe elementary school teachers’ perceptions of homework’s effects on English Learners in the Central San Joaquin Valley of California.

PROCEDURES: In participating in this study, I agree to participate in an interview which will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded (separate privacy statement attached).

I understand that

a) The possible risks of this study are minimal. However, there may be some discomfort as a result of participating in the interview. I understand that I do not need to answer any interview questions that cause discomfort.

b) I will not be paid for my participation in this study. A possible benefit of this study is generating new insights concerning teachers’ perceptions of the specific effects homework has on English Learners. An outcome from this study may include changes in the current homework system that will strive to meet the academic needs and promote the well-being of all students. The findings and recommendations from this study will be made available to all participants.

c) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Peggy Smith, available by e-mail at psmith10@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx. Questions may also be answered by the dissertation chairperson: Dr. Guadalupe Solis at gsolis@tcoe.org

d) I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.
e) I also understand that no information that identifies me will be published without my consent and that all identifiable information will be fully protected. If the research design or the use of the data is to be modified, I will be informed and my consent re-attained. I understand that if I have any concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.

I have read the above and understand it. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in the study.

__________________________________________

Printed Name of Participant

__________________________________________

Signature of Participant

__________________________________________

Signature of Principal Investigator

__________________________________________

Date
APPENDIX G

Bill of Rights

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Brandman University IRB
Adopted November 2013
APPENDIX H
Audio Recording Consent

Privacy Act Statement and Consent Agreement for Audio Recording

I give my consent to permit audio recording during the interview, and for those records to be reviewed by participants in the study. I understand that all information will be confidential and will be reported with anonymous identifiers. I understand that the recording will be erased following the transcription of the interview. I understand that I may choose to receive a copy of the transcript of the recording so that I may review and correct as necessary. In addition, I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time without penalty.

__________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

__________________________________________
Signature of Participant

☐ Please provide a copy of the transcript for my review at the following address:

__________________________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator

__________________________________________
Date
APPENDIX I

Artifacts

Observational Notes

During the last twelve years, I have had the opportunity to teach third grade students. Third grade students are children who are independent learners, but they still need some guidance and encouragement to be successful. In the classroom setting, I as a teacher can control the environment for optimum learning, but when the student goes home, that may not always be the case. I teach in a school with many EL students and many economically disadvantaged students. When it came to giving homework, students in these situations suffered for many reasons. Many went home to empty houses waiting for a parent to get off work. Some could not depend on their parents because of language barriers. Situations such as these cause added stress to the student. Other forms of homework like home projects also proved to be less than successful for the student. I found that when I sent a solar system project home to be completed, the parents usually took over and did it themselves. Many students could not afford the project kits and would use homemade materials. They often would feel inadequate when comparing their project to the one purchased at the hobby shop. Their self-esteem would always be hurt. Overall, I have found homework to be more negative for the student than positive. I feel the student would be better off spending quality time with family and friends after school. This builds better family ties and keeps the student from being stressed about school.

Third Grade Teacher
Journal Entry

My teaching partner and I spent about 2 hours a week putting together, copying, and correcting weekly homework packets. We also assigned 20 minutes of reading. The problem was that some students never read because they spent so much time completing the homework packet, some students had after school activities and would wait to do the packet at the last minute on Thursday night and come to school tired, because they had stayed up late or they would turn in an incomplete packet.

When I put together the packets, what I envisioned was that students that need a bit more practice would get one to one attention by a parent that would sit with their child and give them that one on one attention that they needed. However that was not what was happening year after year. Instead what I was seeing was a lot of families getting frustrated because of the homework. I actually felt bad too when parents would tell me that their child was tired because they had activities during the week and had to complete the whole packet the night before. I would tell the parents that in the future, they could turn in the packet the following Monday, because I knew that their child was actually learning more from dance, baseball, football, swimming, etc.

I also felt bad when parents would use homework as punishment. I had one parent that her child would spend up to three hours a day finishing the daily assignments. My partner and I would assign about twenty minutes of daily work along with twenty minutes of reading. The mom shared with me that he would sit at the kitchen table while she was busy cooking dinner. He would spend the whole time getting distracted. She would have to redirect him, and it would take her longer to finish making dinner. His younger sisters would finish their work and were able to go outside and play. This particular child was later diagnosed with ADD. This child would have probably benefitted more from being able to go outside and play, instead of spending three hours writing his sight words three times each.
I also felt bad for the children who were not on grade level, because the homework packets contained things that we were working on in class. Kids that were not on grade level or second language learners could not complete assignments in class without extra support from my teaching partner or I, yet we were sending home packets and expecting them to complete them independently. I say independently because these children for whatever reason had no extra support at home. Either parents worked late, parents spoke a different language, or were too busy to help their child with the homework packet. During parent/teacher conferences I would ask the parents why their child was not turning in their homework and I would have parents that would tell me that their child could not do it by themselves, but they were not able to help them because they didn’t know how to do it either. I remember one parent telling me that she would have to walk over to the neighbor’s house so that an older child could help her daughter.

On Friday, I would reward the children that completed the homework packet with a gummy bear and would feel bad for the ones that did not get a gummy bear. I finally started to change my mind about homework, when we got a new kindergarten teacher. My partner shared that the new kindergarten teacher’s daughter had not turned in a homework packet all year. I was stumped. I knew she was a great teacher and a very responsible parent. What was going on? She shared that they were busy with after school activities every day of the week. Those activities were more important than a homework packet. Besides her daughter read every night and loved books. At the end of the day what we want is that our students grow up to be lifelong learners that are happy, responsible adults that get along and are empathic towards others—all things that children learn best outside playing in sports or local parks not in a homework packet.
Journal Entry

In my experience homework has not been beneficial to the students. I work at a school that is predominately ELL’s and homework is rarely completed because no parental support at home. The parents don’t understand the directions so child becomes anxious about turning in homework half-finished or not completed at all. I have heard about their confusion with homework during parent conferences in more than one occasion. Also, the students who are on grade level are on grade level regardless of homework. The students who are struggling and below grade level continue to struggle and be below grade level. The only benefit I’ve seen is when they read at home. Especially in 1st grade because they are still learning strategies so the more practice they have the better they become. There are times when ELL parents don’t have them read because they don’t understand what they are reading. I still encourage them to listen to their child just so they get practice or have an older sibling listen to them. I’ve also seen students below grade level do all their homework but they still continue to struggle in school.

Another example of homework not being helpful was when we were giving spelling test. We gave students a list of words on Monday and they were tested on Friday and every day they had a spelling activity to do. Most of students who did their spelling activities still failed their spelling tests. This was a common complaint with all the teachers as well. We finally decided as a grade level to stop giving the spelling homework. In my experience as a teacher I’ve Seen little benefits to homework for students.
Sample Homework

Solar System Project

Dear Parents and Students,

We are currently studying the solar system. We will be learning many important facts about each planet. We are completing a book in class that the students will be able to take home in May.

I am requiring any student who wishes to get a 4 in science to make a display of the solar system. This is a project that will be done at home. They may use a purchased kit from Michael's craft store or they can use their imagination by using craft items from home. This project can be as simple or as complex as they make it.

**Must include:** the Sun and all nine planets in the correct order with planets in appropriate proportion (example: Pluto should be the smallest and Jupiter the largest planet).

Please fill out the form below to indicate that you and your child will or will not be doing this project at home. It will be due on Wednesday, March 5, 2008.

Thank you,

[Signature]

___Yes, we will be doing this project at home. I know that it is due on March 5, 2008.

___No, we will not be doing this project at home. I realize that my child's grade in science cannot be a 4 without this project.

Parent signature________________________Date____________________
Child's signature________________________Date____________________
Sample Homework

Spelling words: ABC Order

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
Observational Notes

I think sending home anything that would be considered unfair for them to be able to do independently would just really damage their self-confidence as far as homework goes. I’m not going to send home a huge written essay—I expect you to come back with a multi-page written essay if they don’t have the support with family members or people around them to help them at home. So basically they need to be able to access the language. They need to be able to access the task independently and if they can’t do that, according to their language acquisition level then I can just imagine that their feelings toward school would start to become very negative. And the idea if I go to school I’m going to go home and I’m not going to be able to do what the teacher’s asking me to do, are going to become very disenfranchised. As a teacher we need to be aware of the struggles the students are facing at home, we can’t just assume—some students can get their work done with the support of their families, other students can’t do that. You need to get to know your families.
Journal Entry

It’s hard for me to speak to homework because they’re attempting it at home. But what I witness in class, if I give a task that they feel underprepared for or they feel that they don’t know where to start, I can see the anxiety. I can see the nervousness. You can physically see some of your kids tense up and get anxious about— I’m not sure what to do, what do I do now? If that’s happening at home, and parents aren’t equipped to help them deal with that task— -I have had parents come back with, “We don’t know how to help them.’ We don’t want to fight, We don’t want to argue. They’re in tears. Homework becomes something that is an area of strife in their home and that all relates to feelings back at school. So as a teacher, we have to partner with our families. We have to help our parents be equipped to help their children at home. Because the last thing you want is your children to go home with homework and be physically in tears or depressed or emotionally unbalanced, stomachaches….because we’re sending too much or sending things that they can’t accomplish at home.
Observational Note

I definitely have seen many negative effects from homework. I sent home an article before thinking it was ok they could kind of work their way through it and give me a response to it. I remember some of my struggling readers couldn’t make it through and they only had Spanish speaking parents at home so they had not had that support at home. I remember them coming to school and not wanting to talk about homework and they had their heads down, no eye contact, because they were afraid. They weren’t supported, they weren’t prepared and they were afraid to share anything they thought and afraid it would be incorrect, so it definitely hurt them.
Journal Entry

A negative effect of homework is when I meet with the parents at conference and they’re very disappointed because it’s their children, and they can’t understand why their child’s not making growth. But the students are also unable to have that encouragement or behavior from the adults at home that foster it because they’re not proficient in the language themselves so I think the children are discouraged – I’m talking to a 12 year old telling them to be responsible but I think that’s something that all students and teachers face-- if they don’t have that support it’s very difficult to meet the demands so it is a negative experience.
Journal Entry

What do you do with students that come to school without their homework? I have to do something to make them accountable, but deep down I know that it is not their fault. They are not independent in class and need extra support in class to complete assignments. Yet, I send them home with homework. My EL students often tell me that they didn’t know how to do it and couldn’t ask parents because their parents only speak Spanish and didn’t understand. They show up the next day not prepared.

While the rest of the class is correcting homework those students get off task because they don’t have anything to do. They don’t like that they are being excluded and not participating with the rest of the class. They start tapping on their desk with their pencils, getting into their desk, bothering the other students. The ones that want to do well and bring it halfway done because they at least tried to do what they could do by themselves, hold up the rest of the class. They are trying to finish it while we are correcting it, so a ten minute activity turns into a 20 or 30 minute activity because I have to stop and help them complete it. While I’m helping those students the rest of the class gets restless and impatient because they’re just sitting there waiting.

I have tried keeping them in for recess to make them accountable. I’m punishing them because they have no one at home to help them or make them accountable. Keeping them in is helpful for some of my students but some get resentful that they are not going out to recess with the rest of the class and tell me they don’t like school, or worse they shut down and refuse to do anything.