Can implementing 5 organizational strategies affect student’s motivation to complete homework?

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Can implementing 5 organizational strategies affect student's motivation to complete homework?

Abstract
Throughout my years teaching at the middle school level I have found for many students, getting them to complete homework is a difficult task. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) has setup goals that students should meet in each grade level. One area that middle school students should be able to attain is to communicate mathematically. According to NCTM Standards students need the ability to read, write, listen, think creatively and communicate about problems they encounter in our society (NCTM, 1998). To do this students must be able to communicate mathematically by discussing mathematical ideas and make convincing arguments. One way students can achieve this is through practice and homework. Students need to be able to communicate how they arrived at an answer and why they are confident of their answer. As a teacher, I am not the sole influence on my students. Parents have a great deal of influence in their child’s life. Parent involvement in their child's education is related to the parent's own efficacy, or belief in one's own ability. According to Grusec, parents with a positive sense of self spend more time with their children and take more interest in what their children are doing (1994). Parents who spend more time with their children have more opportunities to help their children with school related tasks such as projects and homework. For the past two years I have worked at a small rural school teaching mathematics on the seventh grade team. During this time I have begun to understand the community and become involved in more activities both within the school and those that reach out to the community. I have become acquainted with many of the families in the area and continue to get to know families as I have their children in my classroom. I have also experiences first hand the struggle that the students have with completing their homework. As a result of my experiences, I am looking to answer the question "Can implementing 5 different intervention strategies affect students motivation to complete homework?".

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Can implementing 5 organizational strategies affect student’s motivation to complete homework?

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Throughout my years teaching at the middle school level I have found for many students, getting them to complete homework is a difficult task. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) has set up goals that students should meet in each grade level. One area that middle school students should be able to attain is to communicate mathematically. According to NCTM Standards students need the ability to read, write, listen, think creatively and communicate about problems they encounter in our society (NCTM, 1998). To do this students must be able to communicate mathematically by discussing mathematical ideas and make convincing arguments. One way students can achieve this is through practice and homework. Students need to be able to communicate how they arrived at an answer and why they are confident of their answer.

As a teacher, I am not the sole influence on my students. Parents have a great deal of influence in their child’s life. Parent involvement in their child’s education is related to the parent’s own efficacy, or belief in one’s own ability. According to Grusec, parents with a positive sense of self spend more time with their children and take more interest in what their children are doing (1994). Parents who spend more time with their children have more opportunities to help their children with school related tasks such as projects and homework.

Although I am now a successful student, early in my schooling I struggled and did not do well. During the middle of my fourth grade year, my family moved and I had to start at a new school a few weeks before Christmas break. My parents and new teacher pushed me to work harder and kept encouraging me. Throughout the year and the years following, I continued to work hard, implemented different organizational strategies and saw steady improvement. By the
time I was a junior in high school, I was among the top ten in my class. I am so proud of my accomplishments and thankful for the difference that my parents and fourth grade teacher made in my life. I wanted to help others the way I was helped, so I become a teacher.

I found math to be among the easiest subjects for me to learn in high school because there are steps to follow and I could come to a final right or wrong answer. If I studied, did my homework and learned the processes, I could apply them later on other questions. Without the practice that came from doing homework, I would not have learned the processes to solving problems and would not have been successful in math. I enjoyed math, especially Algebra, and want to help those who struggle with school with math to succeed and do well. I love watching students make a connection and demonstrate a deeper understanding of the concepts being taught. Watching their confidence level and mathematical abilities increase is rewarding and encouragement to continue helping students learn and succeed.

For the past two years I have worked at a small rural school teaching mathematics on the seventh grade team. During this time I have begun to understand the community and become involved in more activities both within the school and those that reach out to the community. I have become acquainted with many of the families in the area and continue to get to know families as I have their children in my classroom. I have also experiences firsthand the struggle that the students have with completing their homework. As a result of my experiences, I am looking to answer the question “Can implementing 5 different intervention strategies affect student’s motivation to complete homework?”. 
Chapter 2
A Review of the Literature

The literature has much to say concerning homework. For many students, homework is not something they want to do. Several strategies will be discussed to see if the significant percentage of students who do not do their homework can be encouraged and motivated to do their homework (Heitzmann, 1998). The strategies discussed in this review include parent training, use of a teacher website, after school homework club, teaching students specific organizational skills and strategies, and in class incentives.

Benefits of Homework

Every student in school deals with the issue of homework. A significant percentage of students do not do their homework (Heitzmann, 1998). Some subjects, such as reading and math, require lots of extra practice, and the home is the best place for it (ED 452 530). Homework that students are asked to do should be meaningful to the child (Anonymous, 1998). If students see the meaningfulness of homework then they will see that homework is valuable and will contribute to learning (Heitzmann, 1998). Many studies have been done on homework on a wide range of issues. Some studies on homework have found, in general, that it can have a positive benefit on pupil’s learning (Alexander, 2002). One benefit is that homework can make a significant contribution to student achievement in the areas of knowledge, skills, and acquisition of values (Heitzmann, 1998). Homework helps a student achieve mastery by practicing new skills, and parents should be prepared to participate in it (Anonymous, 1998). Schools and parents need to work together to help students learn and grow. As Robin Fabros states, schools and parents are not islands unto themselves. They are necessarily united to educate students and train them towards adulthood (1999). Schools cannot meet their goals of educating students
alone. Parent involvement is vital. Students benefit by enjoying open communication and shared expectations (Young, 2001).

**Parent Involvement**

When questioned, students have said they were most attentive to homework when completing it with a parent rather than a peer or on their own (Corno & Xu, 2003). Many parents want to help their children, but are unsure how to. For many parents, guidance in how to provide homework help is needed (Bay-Williams & Meyer, 2003).

Websites can also be used to assist students in completing homework. Parents and students can download forgotten worksheets or email a teacher (Brown, 2003). Using the Internet is a way for parents and teachers to stay connected in their efforts to help the students learn. Teachers can use incentives in school or they can be used at home. There are several techniques that can be implemented at home or school to motivate children to complete assignments and maintain enthusiasm (Rose, 1999).

Many parents feel they should or can support their children's development, but they simply do not know how to do so (Gallimore & Tharp, 1988). Research clearly indicates that student achievement is maximized through parent involvement (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). When parents are involved with their child's education, the child benefits. Parental involvement helps children learn more effectively (Anderson, 2000). There is strong evidence indicating that parental involvement in education greatly increases student success in both achievement and social behavior (Fabros, 1999). When surveyed, 8 in 10 parents (83%) say the most important role they can play is checking homework and encouraging their children to learn (Anonymous, 1999). Teachers also feel parents should be involved in their child's education. Seven out of eight teachers believe parents should either help children do their homework or at least check to
see that the work was done and done correctly (Anonymous, 1999). Though teachers believe parents should be involved to this extent, only 16% of teachers believe that parents reach this level of involvement (Anonymous, 1999). One reason for this is the material students are studying. When parents examine their children's homework, they often find themselves on unfamiliar ground (Gilliland, 2002). Mathematics has become more problem based than ten years ago and parents are often not familiar with the way students are asked to use several concepts to solve the question.

Parents may not be comfortable helping students with some types of homework assignments. The subject matter the assignment is in may not be a subject area where the parent has a good deal of background and feels a sense of self-efficacy. Bandura states that parents with a low sense of efficacy tend to avoid helping their children because they do not want to face their own inadequacies, or they assume that their involvement will not produce positive results (Bandura, 1989). On the other hand, parents with a positive sense of self spend more time with their children and take more interest in what their children are doing (Grusec, 1994). Parents have different resources available to them as they raise their children. Parents from lower socioeconomic status homes are less likely to have time, training, or access to resources necessary for becoming more involved (McKinney, Shepard, & Trimberger, 1999).

As students grow and get further along in their education, the work they are asked to do becomes more academic. Some students may go further than their parents did in school. As a result, a decline in parent involvement is also influenced by the high level of academic work required at the secondary level and by parents uncertainties about their ability to help their children academically (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). To counter this, school programs need to be developed around the parents' needs. Since homework constitutes one of the most immediate
and frequent contacts between families and the school (Gilliland, 2002), programs need to be centered around teaching parents how to assist their children academically (Fabros, 1999).

There are many reasons to create partnerships with parents, but the main reason is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life (Epstein, 1995). One way schools can help to establish these partnerships is through “parent share” conferences where parents tell the teachers about their kids strengths, needs, learning styles and their hopes for the year (Million, 2003). If teachers knew this early in the school year they could work to address students needs earlier. Schools can also send newsletters home on a regular basis to help keep parents informed of what’s happening at school (Smar, 2002). The more parents know about events and activities at school, the more opportunities they have to get involved. Schools should also provide information to parents about materials that support learning at home, such as resource books, websites, or computer software (Fabros, 1999). This can also be done through an informational night where teachers are able to share ways parents can help their child. Parents can be given suggestions like checking to see if homework was completed, checking to see what teachers assigned homework, and spending time reviewing concepts from past homework assignments (Fabros, 1999). As parents’ sense of efficacy increases they will be able to help their child more.

**Teacher Websites**

Parental involvement in schools improves student achievement, school programs and the learning environment as a whole (Nixon, 2002). Although parents would like to be involved in their child’s school, their work schedule does not allow them to be. In a survey conducted 64% of the 1735 parents interviewed would like to use the Internet to strengthen communication between the school and home (Brooks-Young, 2001). When they are working together, parents and teachers can use the Internet to communicate, advise and inform, propelling student
Strategies for Improving Homework Achievement to the Next Level (Nixon, 2002). Communication between the school and home is not the only reason parents would like to use the Internet. When surveyed 56% of the 1735 parents interviewed said they would like to use the Internet to view children’s schoolwork online (Brooks-Young, 2001). Parents work schedules do not always allow for time to come to school and meet with teachers concerning their child’s progress. The Internet has emerged as one of the most effective ways for “[parents]” to engage in their child’s educational progress from the home or office (Nixon, 2002).

Teachers can use their website for a variety of things. Posting information on the webpage keeps parents aware of what is happening in their children’s classes (Crippen & Brooks, 1999). For a child who has been absent and needs to make up work, or especially when children are behind, parents find the website helpful (Crippen & Brooks, 1999). Individual teachers can also post homework assignments so parents can know what their children are supposed to be doing and when it is due (Brooks-Young, 2001). If students have misplaced papers or left an assignment at school, parents and students can download forgotten worksheets, or email a teacher (Brown, 2003). As a result, students may no longer be able to fall back on the age-old excuses for not doing homework (Anonymous, 1999).

Not all households have access to the Internet. For parents without Internet access, teachers should have a list of available computer resources on hand so parents can be informed of where they can get online, preferably at no cost (Nixon, 2002). For students without a computer at home, teachers can open their school’s facilities for use after school or identify public libraries with computer access in the evenings (Solomon, 1998).

When setting up a webpage, a teacher needs to determine the primary focus for creating it (Weinstein, 1997). As a teacher, the primary focus should be on the students and their needs
Strategies for Improving Homework 9

should be considered when setting up the site (Washenberger, 2001). When setting up a website, a teacher should reflect their personality, teaching style, curriculum, and age level of the students taught (Crippen & Brooks, 1999). A good teacher’s site should contain general class information including a syllabus, goals, objectives, a grading scale, and disciplinary procedures (Crippen & Brooks, 1999). When designing a webpage, a variety of purposes must be kept in mind. Teachers should provide a general description of the classroom, a general outline and timeline of the units covered, and specific information about individual units or projects (Johnson, 2000). Providing information to parents via the Internet will encourage parent involvement.

Homework Clubs

Students learn both in school and outside of school. The learning that occurs in school usually needs reinforcement at home (Sanacore, 2002). For many students, there is not someone at home to help them. An after school homework club can provide the type of setting that supports the schools instructional priorities (Sanacore, 2002). There are different reasons why students are referred to a homework club, but most students who struggle with learning are usually referred to a homework club by a classroom teacher (Sanacore, 2002). At a homework club, these struggling learners profit from a well-stocked resource center because they have immediate access to print and not-print materials that might not be available in their homes (Sanacore, 2002). Homework clubs help students in many ways. One way in which homework clubs help students is to respond personally to assignments, increasing their interest and engagement (Sanacore, 2002). These clubs also offer students a safe place to go after school. Students are given the opportunity to experience positive relationships with other students and adults, and opportunities for active learning beyond the classroom (Kugler, 2001). Homework clubs allow the students to receive more individualized attention then may be possible in the
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classroom. As a result of the attention homework helpers give students, there is a rise in
student's self-esteem as well as improved interpersonal skills (Mediavilla & Minkel, 2003).

Homework clubs can be used for more than just completing homework. Homework
clubs are also designed to prevent school dropouts (Kugler, 2001). Students who are involved
and successful are less likely to drop out of school. For a homework club to be effective it must
be used. Good publicity is imperative for a homework club to attract potential users (Mediavilla
& Minkel, 2003). The program must also have consistent volunteers. Successful programs are
often staffed by people who have worked in them for many years, and the turn over in any year is
zero (Mediavilla & Minkel, 2003).

Incentive Strategies

Not all students need homework clubs. Some students can be motivated to complete their
homework within the class. One way a teacher can motivate is through enthusiasm (Belcher &
Macari, 1999). Teachers need to get to know students by name as quickly as possible and to
know some personal thing about each student (Belcher & Macari, 1999). By getting to know the
students a teacher can relate questions to different things students are interested in. There are
several aspects of motivating teachers. They expect students to be successful learners, give fair
tests, challenge and stimulate students, give grades that are informative, they are empathetic, and
they use humor (Belcher & Macari, 1999). These aspects alone may not be enough to motivate
some students. It can be difficult to motivate students with low self-esteem. (Belcher & Macari,
1999).

Several different strategies could be used to motivate students to complete homework and
study. One such strategy is a weekly test. If students are motivated to study in order to do well,
then weekly tests should result in greater learning (Tuckman & Trimble, 1997). A second
Strategy is skip-a-quiz/test (Belcher & Macari, 1999). Students do not know who will be chosen, so everyone must study. Students could also be given a homework pass where they get a night off from homework (Rose, 1999). Author Mary Rose also suggests using a special chair and allowing students to eat lunch in a special place (1999). Student respond differently to different motivators; it is up to the teacher to find what will motivate a student to complete their homework.

Organizational Skills

Many students lack organizational skills. The lack of organization leads to frustration and causes the students to turn their backs on learning (Martin, Powers, Ward & Webb, 2000). As a result of being unorganized, many students live in a chaotic environment. Students do not function well in a chaotic environment because they need structure and routine (Burke, 1992). Students do not usually become organized by themselves. They need to be taught skills such as listening, note taking, and time management (Natale, 1996). These skills need to be implemented consistently to be effective. Students also need to be shown how to organize a notebook with a place for personal notes, a place for teacher handouts, and a place for assignments and tests (ED 452 530). This skill should be shown early in life. Students should be encouraged to save anything that might help you on a future test, including graded assignments and quizzes (Masikiewicz, 2000). Several strategies have been suggested throughout the years including, writing notes with different colored pens to making up songs to help with memorization, or taking a 15 minute study break when a project is finished (Anonymous, 1999).

Students are often assigned large projects and many need help in completing them. Organizational experts agree that the best way to get big projects done is to break them down,
with mini deadlines that you set yourself (Masikiewicz, 2000). Students need to be shown how to break down their homework into manageable pieces (ED 452 530).

There are several strategies students can use to get organized. Students can use a student planner or assignment book where they record all the events in their life (Masikiewicz, 2000). When studying students need to create a set homework spot, where supplies are within reach including pencils, paper, and erasers, and to keep it quiet (Pitino, 2003). Time management is also a struggle. Students need to manage their time wisely and be establishing priorities (Masikiewicz, 2000). One way to establish priorities is through the use of lists. Parents or teachers can have students list what they intend to work on the next day and then cross each item off the list as it is accomplished (Masikiewicz, 2000). Whatever is implemented, it should be done so consistently.

Several strategies have been discusses to motivate students to complete their homework. The benefits of homework have been discussed that show that homework is good for students. To help parents in their efforts to help their child with homework, strategies like teaching parents how to help their child and the use of a teacher web site for worksheets and the assignments were discusses. In the classroom different strategies can be implemented and students can be referred to a homework club for individualized attention and extra help with their homework. Not all students are motivated to do their homework with the same things; it is up to the teacher to find what will motivate a student to do their homework.
Chapter 3
Methodology

There are several components that will make up this study. I will discuss some background on the school, the students participating in the study, and the timeline for the study. Data will be collected on the topics of parent training, teacher website use, homework clubs, incentives, and organizational skills. Methods that will be used to collect data will also be discussed.

The School

I will conduct my research in a small, rural school district outside of Rochester, New York. Most of the families in the district are farmers and 50% live near the poverty level. There are also middle class families and millionaires in the district. There are 1665 students in the district and of these 93% graduate, and 63% go on to a 2 or 4 year college after graduating. There are 377 students in the middle school where I will be doing my research.

The Participants

The middle school encompasses students in grades six through eight, and I will be conducting my research on ten seventh grade students. Students will be chosen based on the number of homework assignments they have completed before the study begins. Students who regularly complete their homework were excluded from the being chosen as were students with severe disabilities. Students who are chosen have the ability to complete their homework, but do not complete their homework 60% of the time.
The Timeline

The study will take place from January 6, 2004 to January 29, 2004. Students will be returning from Christmas Break and will be resuming their study of fractions and beginning to look at ratios. At the beginning of the study, I will have a parent training night where parents will be given suggestions and ways to help their child in completing homework. At the end of the night, parents will be asked to fill out a survey/questionnaire about the night and the information given. Parents will then be interviewed at a later date. Students will be notified about a teacher webpage and reminders will be posted around the room. Students will participate in a homework club after school during the activity period, where they will have time with the teacher to work on homework. The time will be during the activity period so students will have a way to get home at the end of the homework club. One of the periods will be devoted to organizing the students' notebooks and assignment notebook/agenda, and different incentives for completing homework will be implemented during class. The incentives will include homework passes, skip-a-quiz jar, and food of their choosing. Students will be interviewed at the beginning of the study and at the end of the study. I will also keep a reflective journal throughout the study to record things that happen.

Data Analysis

At the end of the study, I will compile all the information from the surveys, interviews, student work, and field notes and then analyze the information. I will be looking at comparing:

- The students' number of completed assignments with the number of assignments completed at the beginning of the study.
- What I did differently—being proactive versus reactive
- Comparing parent involvement at the onset of the study versus at the end of the study
• The students views of parental involvement at onset of the study verses at the end of the study
• Parents views of parental involvements at the onset of the study verses at the end of the study
• Whether students are more organized at the end of the study than at the beginning
• Students views of the usefulness of the homework clubs
Student Questionnaire #1

1. How involved are your parents with helping you with your homework?

1 2 3 4 5
Not Involved Somewhat Help Frequently

Explain

2. Would a webpage be helpful in completing homework assignments?

1 2 3 4 5
No Somewhat Very

Explain

3. Would learning organizational strategies be helpful in completing homework?

1 2 3 4 5
No Somewhat Very

Explain

4. Would different incentives in class help you complete homework?

1 2 3 4 5
No Somewhat Very

Explain

5. How helpful would a set time with help be in completing homework?

1 2 3 4 5
No Somewhat Very

Explain
Student Questionnaire #2

1. How many times did you use the teacher webpage? __________
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not All  Occasionally  Frequently

   Explain ________________________________________________________

2. For what purposes did you use the webpage?

   Explain ________________________________________________________

3. Was the homework club helpful in completing your homework?
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   No  Somewhat  Very

   Explain ________________________________________________________

4. Were the incentives helpful in completing homework assignments?
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   No  Somewhat  Very

   Explain ________________________________________________________

5. Was organizing binders, folders and locker helpful in completing homework assignments?
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   No  Somewhat  Very

   Explain ________________________________________________________
Parent Questionnaire #1

Name ___________________________
Child's Name _______________________

1. Was the information presented clearly and understandably?

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Explain __________________________

2. Were all your questions answered clearly?

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Explain __________________________

3. Are the suggestions reasonable and useful?

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<td>Somewhat</td>
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Explain __________________________

4. Are you planning to implement any strategies and if so which ones?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Parent Questionnaire #2

Name_________________________
Child’s Name_________________

1. Have you had the opportunity to implement any strategies from the parent night?
   
   1 2 3 4 5
   No Somewhat Very

   Explain ____________________________________________________

2. Do you feel the suggestions used have made any improvement?

   1 2 3 4 5
   No Somewhat Very

   Explain ____________________________________________________

3. Were the suggestions able to be implemented?

   1 2 3 4 5
   No Somewhat Very

   Explain ____________________________________________________

4. Which strategies were implemented?

   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
References


