

Suzuki Violin and Excellent Teaching: A Case Study of Michele George

by

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

As a student, I have had over one hundred teachers. They have been entertainers, academics, disciplinarians, comedians, artists, and a few of them have been life-changers. Teachers have the power to lift up or squash a student with something as subtle as a wink or a head nod. Some teachers have mastered these subtleties while at times it seems like others do not realize they exist. The art of being an excellent teacher is something that is difficult to define, and something that has interested me.

As a Music Education major, I have been studying how to become a better music teacher. I started teaching private violin using the Suzuki method after taking a Suzuki pedagogy course during the summer of 2005. Every summer since then, I have taken a week of Suzuki pedagogy classes with teacher-trainer Michele George. While observing Michele, I noticed how well students responded to her teaching style. I took many notes and was part of many discussions with Suzuki teachers and students regarding her behavior in the classroom. It was obvious to everyone studying pedagogy with her that she was an excellent teacher, but we all had different ideas about what specifically made her teaching methods so effective.

Research Goal

My goal in this study is to create an in-depth and accurate description of the teaching style of Michele George. I will describe and analyze my own observations as well as observations made by Suzuki pedagogy students about the teaching style of Michele. I will use

my personal experience with Michele, observations made by other Suzuki pedagogy students, as well as insights from Michele to help direct this case study.

Methodology

Method

In this case study of Michele George, a qualitative method was used to gather data. Interviews of Michele and her Suzuki pedagogy students were used to add multiple perspectives to the study. I used a grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 p.62) to approach my research. Grounded theory is appropriate when working in an area where little theory has been developed, and it is particularly useful in applied professional fields where the major purpose of the research is to improve professional practice through gaining a better understanding of the subject being studied (Darkenwood, 1980 p.77). Relying on the investigator as the primary instrument of data collection, grounded theory uses fieldwork rather than deductive approaches. This is especially appropriate in light of my long association with Michele and her pedagogy students. The primary outcome of grounded theory research is a set of categories along with a description of the properties of those categories. Tentative hypotheses are then formulated regarding the relationships among categories and properties. The results provide a conceptual tool that can guide their practice (Cranton & Carusetta 2004 p. 12).

Participants and Interview Process

In 2005, during San Diego's Strings by the Sea Suzuki Institute I met Michele for the first time as a pedagogy student in her Suzuki Violin Volume One teacher training course. The institute runs concurrent sessions for young beginner Suzuki students as well as adult teacher-

trainees (herein referred to as “pedagogy students”). During the training course, I was able to observe Michele teach children of all ages and participate in discussions about different aspects of her teaching style.

Throughout the past four years, I have taken Suzuki teacher training with Michele for Violin Volumes One, Two, Three, and Four. Because of the consistent training in San Diego over the past four years, I have been able to cultivate a relationship with Michele and the other pedagogy students who have participated. Many of the pedagogy students in the original Volume One training have also taken multiple training courses with Michele.

I began this project in April 2008 by sending out a letter to the pedagogy students who I knew were enrolled in Volume Four Suzuki training course at Strings by the Sea Suzuki Institute asking if they would participate in a qualitative study of Michele George. Seven of these pedagogy students agreed to participate and be interviewed about the training course. Six of the pedagogy students were female and one of them was male. Six of the pedagogy students interviewed had already taken previous training from Michele and one of them took group lessons with Michele as a child. At the beginning of the institute, I had the participating pedagogy students sign up for an interview time which took place in August 2008 at Point Loma Nazarene University, all interviews were audio-taped. During the Strings by the Sea Institute, I was unable to interview Michele George due to her busy schedule. It was not until February 2009 that I was able to interview her. Michele’s interview was also at Point Loma Nazarene University and was audio-taped. All of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed for commonalities, themes, and categories. During the interviews, I was able to get insights from

each of the pedagogy students and from Michele about Michele's teaching methods.

Pseudonyms were given to each of the pedagogy students interviewed to insure confidentiality.

Data Interpretation

After transcribing and studying all of the interviews, it was apparent that the pedagogy students had many of the same observations and ideas regarding Michele's teaching. From this, I was able to form categories using the topics discussed during the interviews. Related literature as well as extracted quotes from the interviews helped to define and explain the themes and categories. After sorting all of the quotations, I analyzed Michele's interview and found direct quotes from her addressing each of the categories.

The Suzuki Method

Violinist and teacher Shinichi Suzuki developed what is known today as the "Suzuki Method" after he realized the implications of the fact that children all over world learn to speak their native tongue effortlessly. He began to apply the basic concepts of language development to the learning of music and named his method Talent Education. Suzuki believed that "musical ability is not an inborn talent but an ability which can be developed. Any child who is properly trained can develop musical ability, just as all children develop the ability to speak their mother tongue. The potential of every child is unlimited" (Suzuki, 1983, p.1). In his autobiography "Nurtured by Love," Suzuki tells about his discovery.

Oh-why, Japanese children can all speak Japanese! The thought suddenly struck me with amazement. In fact, all children throughout the world speak their native tongues with the utmost fluency. Any and every Japanese child-all speak Japanese without difficulty. Does that not show a startling talent? How, by what means, does this come about? I had to control an impulse to shout my joy over this discovery (Suzuki, 1983, p.1).

There are a few key components to the method that help with such a task. The belief that “the fate of a child is in the hands of his parents” (Suzuki, 1969, p. 56) is key to the foundations of the Suzuki method. From the day the child is born, it is the parent’s responsibility to create an environment that adds to the nurturing of the child. Applied to music teaching, this means that parents attend lessons and act as the child’s “home teacher.” It is also common for one parent to learn the basics of the instrument in order to better assist their child.

Starting the child’s music education at an early age is also very beneficial to acquiring the language of music. Suzuki wrote, “The reason for beginning with very small children has above all to do with the prodigious learning capability they exhibit at this early age—chiefly from the age of three” (Sterinschaden & Zehetmair, 1982, p.7). It is suggested that the child start listening to music at birth and begin formal training around the age of three. Suzuki also believed that “it is at this stage that the fundamental values which can provide the child with help and stability throughout life should be imparted” (Sterinschaden & Zehetmair, 1982, p.7).

Other components to the Suzuki method include repetition and reviewing previously learned material as part of a student’s listening and practice, learning not only in private lessons but in group lessons with other children, and delaying note reading. Just as children learn to read words after they have a strong foundation in the spoken language, young musicians should learn music reading after they have developed a basic technical competence of their instrument.

It is through constant praise and encouragement that this method is most successful. Although Suzuki believed that every child can learn and develop, he believed that every child learns at their own rate. Breaking down learning into small steps that can be mastered by the child helps build their confidence. In an interview with Michele George she stated, “One of the

big components of Suzuki's success was he really wanted children to feel good about what they did. To feel good about it, you actually have to be able to do it with some proficiency." Suzuki wrote, "these abilities should accord the child the joy, strength, and self confidence necessary to actively shape his or her life and future happiness" (Sterinschaden & Zehetmair, 1982, p. 7).

Suzuki was also very interested in not only educating musicians but more importantly nurturing the child's heart. In his autobiography he wrote, "I want to make good citizens. If a child hears fine music from the day of his birth and learns to play it himself, he develops sensitivity, discipline and endurance. He gets a beautiful heart" (Suzuki, 1983, p. 55).

Chapter II

CASE STUDY

History

Michele George serves as a violin teacher and teacher-trainer for the Suzuki Association of the Americas. She started her musical training with Juanita Cummins in Southern California on violin and piano. She received her Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Southern California in 1977 where she also received her initial training in Suzuki pedagogy. Her first goal as a teacher was to educate herself as much as possible. In 1980, Michele moved to Matsumoto, Japan to study at the Talent Education Institute with Dr. Suzuki. She graduated from the teacher-training program there in 1982 and returned to the U.S. where she worked with children for the next twenty years. She later became more interested in educating other teachers about how to teach the violin.

The farther I went into my career the more I started to realize that the amount of time that I physically had to teach was limited and so even though I was teaching 60 or 70 students a week, that's all I could reach was those families. Then I became more interested in working with teachers so that I could actually impact more people. By educating teachers, each one of the teachers goes out and has a studio of 20 or 30 families. (Michele interview, 2009)

In 1986, Michele joined the faculty at The Cleveland Institute of Music where she was the Director of Suzuki Studies and started a Master of Music degree program in violin performance and Suzuki pedagogy. She “developed a program for people who had a very high level of playing ability to be able to go into teaching” (Michele interview, 2009). In more recent years, Michele has been “taking a broader vision and trying to take the Suzuki method into places where it typically isn't” (Michele interview, 2009). She has started and worked with

programs in underserved communities in the United States as well as abroad including, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Costa Rica, and Puerto Rico. Currently, Michele is teaching ninth grade strings in Hartford, Connecticut.

Background

As a teacher, it is natural to want to encourage and activate a student's progress. But, it is important that the ultimate goal is not just to see a student learn a new piece or graduate from a book. A teacher's ultimate goal according to Suzuki, is to nurture the growth of a child. As a result of sorting through interviews and extracting direct quotations, five different categories or prominent points were formed in regards to Michele's ability to successfully teach using Suzuki's approach to nurturing the growth of a child through music education. Although many other points and ideas were discussed in the interviews with Michele and the pedagogy students, these five themes were the most frequently referenced during the interviewing process. This case study includes a definition as well as a discussion of each category followed by appropriate and supportive quotations from both Michele and the pedagogy students.

Categories

Positivity and Enjoyment

Michele could be described as a positive person or as an optimist. Throughout the interviews, it was pointed out that Michele was "a happy person" or "always smiling." She has a very light-hearted attitude and always seems to see the positive in every situation. After watching her teach student after student I cannot help but wonder if she has ever been frustrated or discouraged while teaching. If she has, I do not think that she would ever allow a student to see her negative feelings.

While teaching, Michele structures a lesson in a very methodical fashion. She will have the students play what they are working on and as soon as they are done playing, she will compliment them on something that they did well. She will always find something concrete to praise them for. After reinforcing a student's accomplishment, she will pick one thing for the student to work on for the remainder of the lesson. She will reaffirm the student after every attempt. Instead of pointing out what he or she messed up or needs to fix, she reinforces what he or she is already doing correctly. This is a technique that she undoubtedly learned during her time observing Dr. Suzuki.

In a lesson from a beginning three-year-old, Suzuki was heard to say 'umai' (good) after every effort the child made. He never said, "No, that is not good enough", but only "Good. Can you do this better? Let's try again." He urges the mother also to praise the child at every step. Many mothers withhold praise if the child does badly thinking that if they then praise the child, he will not know when he is doing well and when he isn't. Suzuki explains that there can be degrees of praise and that it is better to be silent than to be critical. In most cases, the ingenious mother can find something worthwhile to call to the child's attention. "That tone was better." "You remembered all the notes." "You held your violin higher." "Your bow hold was good." If the teacher and mother are guiding the child properly they need not worry about a little underserved praise. "Very good. Can you do better?" is the basic Suzuki formula. (Starr, 2000, p. 9)

Michele's use of very specific and positive feedback helps make her teaching more effective. This is supported in related literature. For example, in Shepard's "comprehensive review of feedback, it was found that positive learning outcomes were more likely when feedback focused on features of the task and emphasized learning goals instead of lavishing nonspecific praise or making comparisons" (Shepard, 1997, p. 68).

Michele is aware of the fact that she is a positive person, in fact, her positive attitude is a conscious decision and something that she describes as "an ongoing process." She also knows

from her own life experiences that being positive is just something that “psychologically works.” It is her happy spirit and personality that brings a special energy and a satisfying amount of enjoyment to her classroom. It is obvious that she enjoys her classes and wants her students to enjoy them as well. Part of that pleasure comes from the students reciprocating her positive attitude. Michele embraces Langer’s theory that “virtually any task can be made pleasurable if we approach it with a different attitude” (Langer, 1997, p. 59). Through creating a fun and positive environment, Michele motivates and lifts up her students, this proves to be a key element to her success as a teacher.

Quotes from Michele:

“Being positive is an ongoing process. But it is just something I know psychologically works. I know that I want to be around people who treat me in a positive way, I know that I don’t like being around people that criticize everything that I do. I know it from exercise classes; I know it from whatever experiences I have in life. Banking, I always go to the teller that treats me nicely, if I’m at the checkout line at the grocery store. It is the way to get the best response.”

“So, in terms of music teaching, it’s a practiced art. In terms of parents, it’s a hugely unpracticed skill. Parents are used to saying no to their kids a lot more than they are used to being positive or nurturing because that’s the way you help raise your child to be alive past the age of two. You have to say “no” when they doing something dangerous. But I think that positivity has become a part of my nature and personality the more that I practice it. Whatever you practice is sort of what you become. I know this is more effective.”

“I know it is more effective for me to tell a child what they are doing well and correctly so that they can keep doing that.”

“So the student plays and they have a little finger that’s tucked underneath the fingerboard. They are not playing forth finger yet, so really at this moment it doesn’t really matter that much, but if they get that habit, it’s going to be bad. So, the way to get at the positive is always to source back from the problem. So the problem is not that the pinky is under there it has been caused by something else which might be that the third finger is weak and that’s what’s making it strong. So, maybe the instrument is not being held well. What I’m going to do in the first place is to try and identify all the things that are good and are going well. So I see the pinky, it’s not that I don’t see the pinky, but the first thing that I’m going to say when that child stops playing is not

“Your pinky’s underneath the fingerboard in the palm of your hand and that’s not a good thing.” The first thing that I’m going to say is, “You really seem like you love that piece.” And actually find things that they are doing that I want them to keep. “What a great straight bow.” Maybe that’s what they have been working on. So, in working on the straight bow, the teacher hasn’t mentioned the left pinky.”

“On the other hand, if you see things that need correction, you know just being positive and saying that everything is great is not serving the child well. You are there to teach, it’s the way you go about it. So, you know, if someone says to you, whatever it is in a positive way, it makes you feel willing to hear everything they say. Whereas if someone says something negative to you, immediately you really don’t listen beyond that point. It’s just saying something in a positive way even if it’s a correction. So it’s just opening that door to learning.”

Quotes from Pedagogy Students:

“The first thing Michele says is specific and positive and the second is specific but positively worded something that could be improved upon. It’s always good to hear the positive. And from a learning point of view, it’s good to hear something positive first.” Amanda

“She will never say, “You are doing it wrong” or “That’s not right.” This morning, instead of saying “Who doesn’t know this song,” she said “Touch your nose quickly if you know this song.” The wording is getting the same message across, but in a positive spin.” Sophia

“You don’t hear a lot of negative comments and you don’t hear a lot of singling out.” Rachel

“She has a positive aura. You feel like she is on your team when you are around her.” Rachel

“She would always affirm first. She would say something like, “Very good. Now can you try this?” Rachel

“The first thing Michele would do is always praise them for something that was good because I think with kids if you immediately jump to something that they did wrong, they immediately shut down. So she always says something positive.” Sarah

“I think she looks for something tangible. Not just like, ‘Oh, that was great.’ Something like, ‘Your tone was really nice’ and ‘your bow hold is really great’ or ‘you had really good posture.’ Something that is actually measurable, not just an opinion.” Sarah

“She gives little compliments. In class, one girl didn’t know a song so she just didn’t play and Michele said, “I like how you followed directions. I told you at the beginning of class, if you don’t know a song, just wait in rest position. I really like that you listened intently.” And she got everyone to see that the girl followed directions so that she did not feel bad about not being able to play. She brings out the positive side of things!” Steve

“Every time she teaches a private lesson Michele will always say one nice thing she really likes that the kid did. And I think as a result they automatically become more comfortable and confident with her. And even if they make a mistake she does not react at all. You know how some people if you hit a bad note or something they naturally cringe or react? She doesn’t do that at all. She’s good at getting them more relaxed when they play. As a result their playing improves tremendously in a matter of like a half an hour.” Steve

“First reaction as soon as they put down their violin is some positive comment. And then asks them to do something, whatever was the thing that needed to be corrected. She uses specific, true points of praise.” Katie

“She is fun. I was actually just having lunch with a student and I asked him what his favorite part of the day was and he said “Michele’s class.” So, the children are enjoying.” Sophia

“You come in the classroom and she is smiling. She is always happy to be there.” Sarah

“The kids are always laughing and smiling, she knows how to get that out of kids.” Steve

“I think she is very personable. And she has a good sense of humor. She’s always laughing or smiling or positive about everything. I’ve never seen her in a bad mood or frustrated about anything.” Steve

Nonverbal Communication

I would consider non-verbal communication Michele’s secret weapon and signature technique. She uses non-verbal communication in almost all situations and it is very effective. Opening a class in silence, demonstrating posture and positioning, as well as occasionally using a modified version of non-verbal communication by speaking in a very soft voice are just a few of the ways that Michele utilizes this somewhat mysterious and unique teaching style.

After lunch on a warm summer day during a Suzuki Institute, kids are ready for a nap and not exactly excited to be in Volume Four repertoire class. Or, early in the morning on the first day of the institute, the kids are running around the classroom hyper and filled with anticipation. Regardless of the current state of the group, Michele seems to have mastered the art of capturing

the class's attention and engaging the students in an activity from the moment she enters the room. Often times, she will start the class without even saying a single word. This method has proven to be especially effective with a rowdy group of kids. Michele explained, "If I go in and the kids are really hyper and wild and being noisy and sword fighting with their bows, then I would tend to not talk. I would tend to be silent to get their attention and just do things." One of the pedagogy students shared this experience with me in amazement during her interview.

Yesterday she opened the class wordlessly. Without saying any words all the kids were arrayed in rows neatly all in really good playing position and all playing with her in unison. And their attention was riveted on her and they were getting good sound and doing exactly what she wanted. I looked up and all of this had happened with zero words on her part. There was this laser-like attention on what she was doing and what she wanted from them. And she adjusted something about her bowing and they matched it.

The first time I witnessed Michele start a class in this manner, I was baffled. I had never seen such a simple transition into a lesson. She often walks into a classroom, takes out her violin, turns to the kids and starts playing a familiar piece. This is called "modeling" and has been studied and shown to be a successful teaching tool. She does this in beautiful playing position and with a full tone that is immediately mimicked by her students. By taking away words, Michele removes the initial step in classroom management that so many teachers have difficulty executing. It is often times tempting to just yell at a rowdy group of students without hesitation, "be quiet please!" Or, to a very organized and polite group of students who are already focused, it is very easy to start into a long-winded explanation of the activity. By doing so, a teacher has the potential of losing their attention and focus. Michele very wisely takes away this initial step, giving the students no opportunity or reason to disengage.

Michele also uses non-verbal communication as a way to instruct a student. She seems very aware of her body and understands that what she does with her body has the potential to inform her student's performance. This is most obvious in her posture. Anytime she demonstrates something in a lesson, she uses the exact posture that she wants her students to emulate. If she has a student who forgets to watch their bow while playing, Michele does not say to the student, "Watch your bow!" instead she will demonstrate playing and exaggerate the fact that she is watching only her bow. This gives the student an opportunity to discover the correction on his own. Not only is this use of non-verbal communication time effective, it also allows the students to be more responsible and aware of their own playing.

One modification of non-verbal communication that was discussed by many of the pedagogy students was how Michele often speaks in a very soft voice. I realize that whispering would not normally fall into the category "non-verbal communication" but for this study, I believe that whispering is used by Michele with the same intention and purpose as her other silent cues. By speaking at a very low volume, Michele requires her students to pay close attention and focus in on what she is saying. The softness of her voice helps to transform her classroom into a very peaceful and controlled environment. She uses the whisper as a method to get her students' attention. At times it seems like she is about to tell the students a secret and they are on the edge of their seats, anticipating what she is about to say.

Quotes from Michele:

"If I go in and the kids are really hyper and wild and being noisy and sword fighting with their bows, then I would tend to not talk. I would tend to be silent to get their attention and just do things. I try to have them play immediately. So if they are scattered all over the room, I just start an introduction to a twinkle variation and they automatically start playing. Then while they are playing, I can get them organized into lines or whatever. I can tune after."

“I would generally try to have them start playing first to get everybody’s attention. Instead of saying hurry, be quiet!”

“Sometimes the natural inclination is that if there is noise in the room, to talk over it. The usually more effective way is to just cease all noise so that it’s really obvious when somebody is making inappropriate noise.”

Quotes from Pedagogy Students:

“Michele uses a lot of nonverbal communication and when she seems to be establishing some kind of common ground, she speaks in a way they really understand her.” Amanda

I don’t think all teachers actively engage students the right away. Instead of discussing things, Michele just starts playing and will get the students attention right away and everybody will start playing together. Instead of discussing what you are going to do, just do it.” Sophia

“Michele just kind of demands their eyes and demands their respect and they get it after a while. I really like that she doesn’t use verbal instruction because it makes such a difference in just the amount of sound going on in the room.” Rachel

“When disciplining, she doesn’t always use words. She will just go and take up a bow or take a violin away. And, that seems like kind of a neutral thing. It’s not like saying ‘I’m going to take your violin away now because you have been bad’, but they know that they have done something inappropriate or wrong.” Rachel

“Kids are used to being nagged with words all the time.” Rachel

“I think words are like the sword. You really can make a point positive or negative with them. Actions, if she’s not speaking it, if she just does something, it’s not as biting but it’s still just as clear. And it’s not obvious to everyone else in the room except for the person that needs correcting.” Rachel

“Michele just has a quiet respectfulness.” Sarah

“Yesterday Michele opened the class wordlessly. Without saying any words all the kids were arrayed in rows neatly, all in really good playing position, and all playing with her in unison. Their attention was riveted on her and they were getting good sound and doing exactly what she wanted to. All of this happened with zero words on her part. There was this laser-like attention on what she was doing and what she wanted from them. And she adjusted something about her bowing and they matched it.” Katie

“I think Michele has a very commanding personality. There is something in the way that she carries herself that draws attention to her.” Amanda

“I had seen her in another class do something with her body language where she does some abrupt movement in the front of the room-like clicking her heels together or something. She does something real abrupt and pulls herself up in this military way looks really- I mean it’s not scary to the kids or anything but she telegraphs to the group, ‘I want your attention now.’ She looks really kind of fierce and they are all right with her. Something like that- it’s just body language.”
Katie

“I’ve seen her do different corrective things. She picked up her violin and motion to somebody. She would play a high 2 and then go shake her head and play a low 2 and nod her head.” Katie

Scaffolding

According to Michele, “it is important to let our students experience success at every lesson.” To accomplish success, the teacher must always know exactly what the student is or is not capable of. In an interview Michele said, “I don’t want to ask them to do things before I know they can do them. It’s that idea that you are going to build success.” At the same time, it is important that our students are constantly given opportunities to grow and learn new things. This structured way of helping students succeed at new tasks is an example of what is called “scaffolding.”

Shepard defines scaffolding as “supports that teachers provide to the learner during problem solving-in the form of reminders, hints, and encouragement-to ensure the successful completion of a task” (Shepard, 2005, p. 66). For example, if a young child was assigned to set the table for dinner, to ensure a successful completion of the task, the parent could step in and assist with the most difficult part, like taking the breakable glasses down from the top shelf. This same concept is seen in the way Michele teaches violin. If a student is working on intonation or left hand position, often times Michele will take the bow and play the rhythm for them while the student only uses the left hand. She is ensuring success by taking away the right hand. By doing

so, she is “controlling the elements that are beyond the learner’s capacity” (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976, p. 90).

Quotes from Michele:

“I try to always ask them to do things that I know they can do. If I want someone to be able to do a bow rhythm with their hand on their arm, I’ll have them on my lap and actually have my hand over their hand and I’ll be doing it with them. I can tell at the point when they are actually doing it themselves and my hand is just there. And then I can ask them to do it alone after I know that they can do it alone. I don’t want to ask them to do things before I know they can do them. So, it’s building success. It’s that idea that you are going to build success.”

“There is no reason to test knowledge. That is why the parent is there. The parent is there to ensure the success and the magic of Suzuki method is that you are always ensuring the success. You are not trying to see, ‘ok, are they going to get it right or are they going to get it wrong.’ Because 50% of the time, they are going to get it wrong, and that’s terrible. And then they are afraid to try it. There has to be this confidence that she’s not going to ask me to do something until I’m ready to do it. She is going to show me how to do it, and show me how to do it, and show me how to do it, and after a point when I can do it, then I’ll do it. But it’s not a test. It’s not, ‘Can you do it by yourself? Oh, no, you can’t? Oh, well sorry.’”

“One of the big components of Suzuki’s success was he really wanted children to feel good about what they did. To feel good about it, you actually have to be able to do it with some proficiency.”

Quotes from Pedagogy Students:

“I just remember that in her group classes I was never struggling beyond my skill level. The material was obviously new, but the struggle was more, oh, I missed that note, I’ll get it next time. She always picked pieces that all the violins could play with care.” Emily

“She breaks [music] down into very rudimentary steps where it’s really basic. She doesn’t lay it on and say ‘here are the 18 things you have to do achieve this,’ because that would overwhelm kids. She breaks it down and simplifies it or takes it back to an earlier piece to work on it and reviews it so they remember it.” Sarah

“She uses a lot of old pieces to supplement what they are learning. I don’t think she would do what a lot of traditional teaches would and have them sight read the whole page and say ‘learn this for next week’. I think she would break it down into sections and really analyzes technical points in each section. And she would probably assign for homework old pieces to go with that new section.” Steve

“From Michele I have learned a lot about breaking down and simplifying pieces.” Steve

Making Corrections

This category discusses how Michele would help approach a specific problem that a student might have throughout a lesson. I asked each of the pedagogy students the question, “What would Michele do if a Volume One student was consistently playing a high two when they needed to be playing a low two?” I also asked Michele the same question during my interview with her. The quotations in this chapter are in response to that question. Many of the pedagogy students had very consistent ideas about the proposed situation.

After watching Michele teach and taking classes with her, it is obvious that she is not seeking a quick fix during a lesson. She tries to find the reason why the student is making the mistake as opposed to just identifying the mistake. In Michele’s interview, she pointed out that the first thing she would do is figure out if the reason for the wrong fingering was physical or aural. Michele would use this information to direct how she would go about making the correction. Although none of the pedagogy students brought up Michele’s point of distinguishing between physical and aural issues, they all came up with multiple ways that she would make the correction. One pedagogy student discussed Michele’s desire to not just hastily fix a problem in saying, “She never tells them ‘change that note.’ She is very good at looking at what the bigger problem is” (Pedagogy Student interview).

Quotes from Michele:

“First would be to figure out if the reason why they are doing that is physiological or aural. So, can they not play the second finger low enough or high enough because of what they are doing physically? In which case you have to fix the physical. Let’s say the instrument is not being held

with the head, it's being held with the left hand so they can't move the second finger to the right place, then you have to address that."

"If I play it both ways and they don't react or respond and I know it's because they don't hear it, then that is a different way of correcting it. Which would be to have them listen to it. Often times, they have just gotten used to hearing it their way more than the correct way so they just actually hear that way as correct."

Quotes from Pedagogy Students:

"I noticed a couple times when she has been working with a student who would consistently play a low 2 instead of a high 2 she will ignore that while she is working on whatever the task is."

Amanda

"A criticism I hear about the Suzuki method is that 'not all kids learn orally, some of them learn visually.' I can understand that argument but, I think what she does to help put aside that argument is that she does come at correcting things from different angles. So when kids go back to their own practice room I think they have a couple of different ways to think about whatever it is she did that day." Amanda

"In Book One class, there was this girl that came in who was playing Happy Farmer and she kept playing f natural, and instead of just saying play the f sharp, Michele had her play the D major scale and then after the D major scale, the student played the piece right." Emily

"Michele never really tells them, 'Change that note.' She is very good at looking at what the bigger problem is." Emily

"Michele would probably play it correctly and have the child copy her. Not say, "You are doing it wrong." Not negative. Just say, "Listen to the way I am doing it" or "Listen to this song" or "Copy what I do." And, Michele would play it and then the child would copy and then if it doesn't get across, I would guess they would probably play it together. Or Michele would play the harmony and usually the children will fix it hearing the harmony." Sophia

"Michele would have them play that note on a "taka-taka stop-stop" and then she would change it. Either she would play it, the kid would copy, then she would play the right note and the kid would copy. And, the child would probably have no idea what exactly Michele was working on. But, she put their ears in-tune and then she would put it in the context of that piece. But it wouldn't be a "You played this note wrong." Although, at some points Michele does point it out but her word choice is specific when she does it." Rachel

"Michele will play it for them and she will break it down. If they were playing a low 2 instead of a high 2, she might have them play A, 1, 2 in the regular major finger pattern and then in the

minor finger pattern just to feel how the fingers make it different. Or she will play the bow for them while they do the fingers so they can just think about their finger position.” Sarah

“Most teachers would probably just say, ‘That should be a high 2. Now play it again with a high 2.’ But what Michele does, is, if they have a problem with the piece, she will go back to previous pieces that they already know and maybe it’s a different key, but she will have them play it trying a low 2. Or maybe she will do some ear training. Have them play a few notes by ear. Call and response. She plays, they play. Then she will add in a low 2 so they can really hear it. Then she will bring that into the piece.” Steve

The Suzuki/Us Method

Michele is a very accomplished teacher, and as one pedagogy student pointed out has probably worked with thousands of students. However, she isn’t dogmatic or boastful about her teaching methods, but is always looking to make changes and try new things with her students. Michele believes in the foundations of the Suzuki method but also believes that part of being a “Suzuki Teacher” is the commitment to learning and growing. During a pedagogy class with Michele, she told us that every fall her students expect her to come back from teaching at institutes with some new and innovative technique to try with them. Jarvis calls this kind of teacher “authentic.” Someone who “can learn and grow together with their students” (Jarvis, 1992, p. 114). Part of this learning and growing can be seen in how Michele views the Suzuki method. She often talks about how we are not teaching the “Suzuki Method” we are teaching the “Suzuki/Us Method.” Michele believes that teachers should not just emulate Suzuki’s teaching, it was his desire to learn and experiment with new ideas that led to the development of Talent Education in the first place. By using the “Suzuki/Us Method,” Michele means that not only are Suzuki’s concepts used but every teacher offers their own thoughts and developments to the method and is receptive and interested in the ideas of other teachers and students. In committing

to a lifestyle of learning, Michele believes that “you are not always going to have all of the answers but maybe you will be able to develop some of the questions.”

Quotes from Michele

“Teaching is an evolved, evolving process. Initially, my goal was to educate myself as much as possible.”

“Learning to teach or mastering that art is never finished. The more that you learn, the more you will know that you don’t know. And so it’s a beginning of a process and only by practicing it with real live children and failing and succeeding and adjusting will you get better at it. So you can know something in your head, it doesn’t mean you can do it. If you can do it with this child successfully, it doesn’t mean you can do it with that one. And, that’s the biggest part of Suzuki teacher training, it’s a commitment to learning and it’s a commitment to continuing to learn. It could be in a class format, it could be through watching your students and what’s going right and what’s not, or what could be better. It’s the knowledge that there isn’t one way to do it. You’re not going to have all the answers. But maybe you will start to develop some of the questions.”

Quotes from Pedagogy Students

“She is full of ideas. She knows what she is doing very, very well but she is not dogmatic about it.” Amanda

“It’s an evolving process. She says what we are teaching is the “Suzuki/Us method.” She certainly has really well developed ideas about how she teaches things but she’s receptive to changing those. Which is like what she said today about how she goes back every fall to teach and the kids know that she is going to have some new idea that she wants to try out.” Amanda

“She is an excellent teacher. A lot of people that have come here over the years are good musicians or just good in their subject areas but they are not always great teachers. They have to be excited about the material that they are teaching. A lot of people get bored. They have to be excited about it and they have to be willing to, not only teach, but be willing to learn themselves.” Emily

“She is confident with grace. There is room for learning; there is room for different ideas.” Rachel

Chapter III

CONCLUSION

Closing Statement

In completing this project, I was able to create a description of Michele George's teaching style. Five broad categories or concepts regarding Michele's teaching emerged from the analysis of interviews of Michele and her pedagogy students. I still believe that the art of being an excellent teacher is very difficult to define, and differs from one teacher to another. However, by studying Michele, it is possible to now understand the perceived ideals that make her an excellent teacher.

Michele is just one of the many teachers who could be considered excellent, and I believe that if this same project was repeated with a different, but equally successful teacher, the final categories would not be the same. Although Michele very clearly embraces positivity, non-verbal communication, scaffolding, a unique way of making corrections, and believes in the "Suzuki/Us" method, these ideals are not simply a recipe to excellent teaching. In the words of Palmer, "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (Palmer, 1998, p. 10). Although learning through watching and analyzing different teachers is beneficial, I believe that becoming an excellent teacher is something that comes through the understanding of one's personal calling and is a process that is never finished.

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Running head: HOMEWORK PARTNERSHIPS

Homework Partnerships: Exploring the impact of student, parent and teacher partnerships within a grounded theory design

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Abstract

Teachers, parents and student have different perceptions of their roles in regard to school and home partnerships that support academic reinforcement. Due to the diverse interpretation and practice of homework, there is a need to understand community perspectives regarding the concept, value and practice of homework and the systemic needs of supportive partnerships. There is resounding research regarding the use of homework to support student learning, but there is a gap in student perspectives. This study examined studied teacher, parent and student perspectives about what constitutes homework and the practice of school and family partnerships that support homework. The study was conducted by triangulating individual journal and interview transcript data from two lower elementary teacher/parent/student partnerships, and eight online survey participants. Utilizing open coding, axial and selective coding within grounded theory design, six emergent categories were identified as (a) learn, (b) growth, (c) bridge, (d) foundation, (e) environment and (f) direction. The core category, *student learning*, was identified using constant comparative analysis and a coding paradigm was created to visually explain how each category related to *student learning*. With (a) student learning at the centre of the coding paradigm, (b) learner growth was positioned as the beneficial consequence of student learning, (c) partnership bridging as a strategy to support learner growth, (d) foundation concepts and task authenticity surfaced as the causal conditions influencing student learning, (e) home environment as the contextual condition, and (f) school direction as the intervening condition. Finally a theory was composed to discuss the interrelated characteristics of supportive homework partnerships illuminated within the coding paradigm and grounded in data collected throughout the study.

Homework Partnerships: Exploring the Impact of
School, Family and Community Partnerships
Within a Grounded Theory Design

With each consecutive step toward the stage, the sound of music grows louder. Smiling, I duck through the throngs of excited parents and continue down the south wing of the Winspear concert hall. Housed in their separate studios, pianos tinkle, flutes trill, violins and violas pluck, cellos contemplate, double basses clear their throats, and guitars strum. Music teachers animatedly play alongside their students, and the sounds of “Twinkle,” “I’se the Bye,” and “Star Wars” overlap in a symphony of sounds.

Thinking back over 19 years, I still get goose bumps when I hear our students sing and play. As I look up into the hall burgeoning with proud parents who eagerly anticipate the concert ahead, I could not help but reflect on how far our school has come in such a short time. The experiment of applying a uniquely musical approach to an academic setting began with a dream. Although it began with one person’s quest, a growing community soon began to share the journey. Challenges abounded, but with strong teamwork (supportive alignment) among teachers, parents, and students, we continued to grow from a kindergarten class of 8 students to a K-6 school of 242. Without strong school, family, and community partnerships, our dream school would never have actualized.

As we have grown, so too has our community. As we continue to evolve, adding new students, parents, and staff to the ever-expanding community, I was interested in understanding how our community perceives school, family, and community partnerships. More specifically, I wanted to explore the partnerships between parents and teachers that support student homework, or “learning at home.” Do the espoused values of teachers and parents match their enacted

values? Finally, I hoped to use this research to initiate an action plan to guide future partnership initiatives to make a difference for students within our community.

My research project addressed the need to understand the partnerships that influence student learning at home, and I have made recommendations to guide future participatory action research (PAR) in a K-6 school context. Although many have expressed their concerns from varying perspectives, a common problem seems to be emerging within our school community. Parents and teachers are seeking more defined roles and responsibilities in the school, home, and community partnerships with regard to parents' involvement in students' personal and academic development. If I were to use a metaphor for partnerships, I would select a triangle with the student, parent, and teacher situated at each vertex. In the role of administrator, I am often caught searching for the centroid of this triangle—the point at which students', parents', and teachers' concerns become aligned with the same purpose. One such centroid has been emerging in the area of school, family, and community partnerships. There is a buzz in the air about the partnership triangle because teachers and parents feel that, because we have grown exponentially larger within a short time, our focus on school, family, and community partnerships requires reexamination and refinement to best support student learning at home and align with our school's philosophical mandate. This synergy could then be used to move the students and/or the organization in the direction of positive future change.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research project was to explore community perspectives on what constitutes learning at home and the impact of school, family, and community partnerships on homework. The research project proposal served as the first component of a larger study of school, family, and community partnerships. Based on the initial research, I wanted to work with

an action team to thoughtfully craft a strategic plan to improve school, family, and community partnerships within Epstein's (2001) six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

Although in the initial research I sought broad information from everyone involved, I narrowed the scope of the research project to focus on the impact of partnerships on student learning at home.

In planning this study I made two key assumptions: that school, family, and community partnerships support student learning at home and that learning at home is beneficial for student academic development.

Gaps in the research suggest the importance of gathering students' perspectives. By surveying and interviewing students, I have added to the current research.

In addition to its external importance, I hoped that my project would result in foundational understandings to guide action research on community partnerships to support student learning. Although the educational approach of my school is to encourage students' daily instrument practice to reinforce musical concepts, not all students engage in daily homework to reinforce academic concepts. Teachers, parents, and students have different perceptions of their roles in school and home partnerships that support academic reinforcement. Because of the various interpretations of homework, it is important to understand the community's perspectives on the concept, the value and practice of homework, and the systemic need supportive partnerships.

By choosing a research question that was purposeful and meaningful within the context of my school, I hoped to influence the practice of parents, administrators, and teachers to support student development.

Research Question and Subquestions

In my study I addressed the following main research question: “What are the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers with regard to school, family, and community partnerships that support student learning at home?” To answer my main research question, I asked the following subquestions: (a) “What are the perceptions of student, parents, and teachers with regard to what constitutes ‘learning at home’?” and (b) “What characteristics of school, family, and community partnerships support student learning at home?”

Definitions of Terms

Although I could have defined *homework*, I wished to explore the concept of homework as the community involved in my research project perceived it. A concept that requires explanation is *community*. I could not have expressed it with more clarity than Sergiovanni (1996) did:

Collections of people bonded together by mutual commitments and special relationships, who together are bound to a set of shared ideas and values that they believe in, and feel compelled to follow. This bonding and binding help them to become members of a tightly knit web of meaningful relationships and moral overtones. In communities of this kind, people belong, people care, people help each other, people make and keep commitments, people feel responsible for themselves and responsible to others. (p. 100)

Methodology

Research Approach

As Given (2009) stated at the AISI Site-Based Research Symposium, “Ask a question and it will lead you to an appropriate method”. My research question lent itself well to qualitative research methods because I was interested in exploring community members’

perspectives and their unique interpretations. Using qualitative research methods, I gathered rich narratives about homework partnership experiences to guide future action research within my school community (Creswell, 2008). By researching a limited number of student-parent-teacher triads, I gathered a depth of detailed information from my research site from the participants' personal perspectives (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Qualitative research also mirrors my underlying research purpose to understand the individuals and organization and become a more effective change agent within my organization (Donmoyer, 2006).

Although my long-term goal was to use my research as the first step or pilot for a broader PAR project, the current research was well suited to a case study. I wanted to investigate multiple perspectives on the issue of school and home partnerships to support homework, and intracase analysis seemed a better fit than PAR (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because I conducted a case study, the data that I collected and analyzed helped to initiate dialogue on school-home partnerships and the concept of homework and served as a pilot project to refine my research methods and focus. Additionally, Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) explained that case studies include many of the data-collection mediums that I used, such as open-ended questions in questionnaires and individual interviews, including testimonials and stories (p. 1). The findings, the final step in my case study, will initiate future PAR to support home and school homework partnerships. Miles and Huberman (1994) concurred:

In the evaluation studies, analysts are often called upon to move from conclusions to recommendations for improving programs and policies. The recommendations should fit with the findings and with the analysts' understanding of the context or milieu of the study. It is often useful to bring in stakeholders at the point of "translating" analytic conclusions to implications for action. (p. 12)

Site

The location was an urban public elementary school with a population of 242 student and 35 staff members. The school differs from other sites because of its uniquely musical mandate and specific foundational philosophy. The socioeconomic status varies in that the parents come from a variety of backgrounds and areas within the urban center. The concept of partnerships to support student learning is an espoused value in the school's educational philosophy, and working closely with parents to meet the needs of each student is a key principle of the school's approach.

Participants

I asked the secretary/treasurer to serve as a third-party research assistant to collect and retain school documents to ensure their confidentiality and to remove any sense of participant coercion. To conduct my research I utilized random and purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2008, pp. 213-214). First, in an introductory letter with attached consent and assent forms, I invited all community members, including students, parents, and teachers, to complete a cross-sectional online survey (Appendices A, B, and C). The information form that I sent to the teachers and parents included the online address. If the teachers and parents wanted to participate, their entering the survey Web site implied their consent. However, student consent/assent was not implied, and only after the parents submitted their sons' or daughters' participation consent/assent forms to the third party did this third party give the students the survey's URL.

Second, in an introductory letter to all of the teachers I invited them to participate in interviews and attached a consent form. Those who were interested completed the consent form and left it in a drop box in the office of the third party before the predetermined deadline. The third party then safeguarded the consent forms by locking the drop box each evening. On the day

after the deadline, the third party randomly drew two consent forms from teachers from the drop box and gave them to me. She then sealed the remaining forms in an envelope and locked them in her filing cabinet. Following this, I used purposeful sampling to send introductory letters with attached consent and assent forms to invite parent-student pairs from each of the two teachers' classes to participate in the interview component of the research. Using a similar process, I asked the third party to collect the consent and assent forms in a drop box in her office. On the day after the deadline the third party randomly drew consent/assent forms from the drop box until I had selected one parent-student pair from each of the two classes.

To gather perspectives on homework and the school-home partnership involved in the study, I individually interviewed the members of two teacher-parent-student triads—Mary, Katherine, and Brittany; and Tami, Jane, and Adam. I allowed each interview participant to select his/her own pseudonym, which I have used throughout this research paper. Mary and Tami both teach in a lower elementary grade; Mary has over 15 years of experience in a variety of elementary and junior high settings, and Tami has three years of experience in her current elementary school. Brittany, an avid reader in Mary's class, has a sparkly bright smile and loves music and adventure. Her mother, Katherine, had recently left the workforce to follow her dream of becoming a teacher. She was currently a full-time student at a local university. Tami's student, Adam, is a studious sports advocate. Adam's mother, Jane, works full-time in the community. Both Brittany and Adam take music lessons and are involved in additional extracurricular activities.

In addition to the individual interviewees, eight people participated in the online homework survey. Six parents were involved, and the students, one male and five females,

ranged from kindergarten to Grade 5. One lower elementary teacher and one lower elementary student also completed the online survey.

The Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana, and Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta reviewed the plan for this study for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved it.

Data-Collection Methods

Stringer (1996) explained that,

as people struggle to realize a collective vision/version of their world, they will discover perspectives that reveal new possibilities for resolving their problems. These collective visions may involve minor adjustments to people's own perspectives or may result in transformations that dramatically alter their worldviews. At best, this activity is liberating, enabling people to master their world as they see it in a different way—a tangible process of enlightenment. (p. 59)

First, I conducted a qualitative survey that I tailored to three different groups: students, teachers, and parents. During the pre-interview activity I asked the participants to complete a homework journal. Second, I used a digital tape recorder to record 30- to 45-minute one-on-one interviews with two student-parent-teacher triads to explore the concept of homework partnerships (see Appendices A, B and C for sample survey, journal, and interview questions). I transcribed the interviews and allowed the participants to review the transcripts and make any revisions required to clarify their responses. In addition, throughout the process I kept a reflective researcher journal to document my understandings and feelings throughout the process (see Appendix D for the reflective questions). Given (2009) called this “layering” to build deep stories about the research.

Open- and closed-ended responses to questions on a survey are well suited to qualitative research (Ellis, 2009). Creswell (2008) explained that

closed-ended responses can net useful information to support theories and concepts in the literature. The open-ended responses . . . permit you to explore reasons for the closed-ended responses and identify any comments people might have that are beyond the responses to the closed-ended questions. (p. 228)

The survey information and homework journals were helpful in collecting the data. According to Creswell, “These sources provide valuable information helping researchers understand central phenomena in qualitative studies” (pp. 230-231). I collected data from the surveys, preinterview homework journals, and interviews and examined my own reflective researcher journal. As Schmuck (2006) stated:

Traditional researchers look at what their subjects do and try not to become personally involved with them. Action researchers look at what they themselves are or should be doing, reflect on what they are thinking and feeling, and seek creative ways to improve how they are behaving. In other words, you conduct action research to improve your practices and the lives of your student. (p. 21)

Interviews are a valid method of data collection in qualitative research studies. Stringer (1996) noted that “interviews enable participants to describe their situation. The interview process not only provides a record of their views and perspectives, but also symbolically recognizes the legitimacy of their points of view” (p. 62). Interviews reflect espoused values, and observations allow researchers to explore enacted values (Sagor, 2005). See Appendices A, B, and C for the interview questions for the students, parents, and teachers.

By using a reflective researcher journal, I hoped to minimize my bias and increase my understanding of my preconceptions and perceptions (Schmuck, 2006). Patton (1999) explained that this adds emphatic neutrality, which is the “stance in which the researcher or evaluator is perceived as caring about and being interested in the people under study, but as being neutral about the findings” (p. 1204).

Limitations and Delimitations

Because of the nature of my research site, my study was limited to students who were enrolled in elementary school, the parents of these students, and the teachers who worked with these parents and students.

To make my research project manageable, I chose to delimit it in the following ways: (a) by focusing on the area of *learning at home* within the larger scope of school, family, and community partnerships; and (b) by conducting one-on-one interviews with the two elementary teachers and one parent/teacher pair from each of the two classes who had consented to participate in the study.

Findings

Data Analysis

To add credibility, I triangulated the data by using a variety of data-collection tools—individual-journal and interview transcript data from two lower elementary teacher-parent-student partnerships and eight online survey participants—and gathering the diverse perspectives of the homework partners. Sagor (2005) described triangulation as

the strategy used by trial lawyers to prove a case beyond a reasonable doubt. In planning their cases, lawyers strive to have corroboration for every bit of testimony or evidence. Corroboration is accomplished by presenting addition independent pieces of evidence

that lead to the same conclusion. While any single bit of evidence might be flawed or so imprecise that it could and should raise suspicion, when enough separate and independent pieces of data all point in the same direction, the credibility of the conclusion becomes apparent. (p. 93)

Ellis (2009) advised researchers to use diverse conceptual frameworks and related literature studies as lenses through which to view the information. With this in mind, I chose a grounded theory design that allowed me to view the data in different but related categories throughout the process. Grounded theory design is also well suited to studying a process or associations among people and events related to a topic (Creswell, 2008, p. 432). Therefore, utilizing a grounded theory design worked well for my qualitative research study because it focused on the interactive partnerships amongst teachers, parents, and students that support learning at home. To develop a theory grounded in data, I rigorously and systematically followed three coding phases, open, axial, and selective, to illuminate category clusters within the data. I then identified the core category and created a coding paradigm or visual diagram of how the categories related to the core phenomenon. Finally, I developed a homework-partnership theory using the coding paradigm as a framework for discussion (p. 434).

Open Coding

In the first coding phase I developed initial categories for all of the data. During repeated readings of the data, I jotted down representational key words or the main idea of the passage in the margin (see Appendix E). For example, beside “I think I realized that when I came to school there was an expectation for homework,” I wrote “school expectation.”

Using these key phrases and words, Sowell’s (2001) constant comparative analysis and the computer application Wordle helped me to explore emerging categories from the interview

responses. I selected, copied, and pasted all of the generated memos and key words (Appendix E) for each interview question into Wordle. I then generated a visual representation of the most commonly reoccurring words from the data from each interview question. The larger the word within the visual image, the more often it recurred within the data. I further refined my Wordle image by deleting all of the common words such as *and* and *the* and adjusting the data by grouping words with a common root such as *parent* and *parents*. Although many categories related in a variety of ways, Wordle highlighted prominent concepts in the responses from the students, parents, and teachers to each interview question. For example, in “What is the role of the parents within the homework partnership?” the most commonly occurring words were *help*, *student*, and *learn*.

Using constant comparative data analysis, I added categories that emerged from the data. I generated and connected the categories by comparing key words in the data to other key words, key words to categories, and categories to other categories to “ground” (Creswell, 2008, p. 443) the categories in the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) reiterated the importance of comparative data analysis within qualitative research: “Part of what distinguishes qualitative analysis is a loop-like pattern of multiple rounds of revisiting the data as additional questions emerge, new connections are unearthed, and more complex formulations develop along with a deepening understanding of the material” (p. 1).

Once I was satisfied that I had achieved saturation of categories, I printed the keywords on colored paper to identify the source of the data (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). On red paper I printed the categories generated from the constant comparative analysis of all of the survey, pre-interview, and interview data. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that researchers follow up on surprises, and I therefore printed the categories that I considered unexpected or

surprising on green paper. On yellow paper I wrote the categories that emerged from my reflective research journal entries and highlighted my awareness of my personal bias as a researcher. I used blue paper for the Wordle-generated categories and orange for related musical terms to use in the future to describe the categories within a music analogy.

Ellis (2009) recommended that researchers use diverse conceptual frameworks and related literature studies as lenses to view the information. With this in mind, I arranged and rearranged concept clusters until I felt satisfied that I had explored all of the potential conceptual relationships among the groupings and that I had grouped all of the related categories together. Appendix F lists all of the coded categories and their sources. The categories included (a) learn, (b) growth, (c) foundation, (d) bridge, (e) environment, and (f) direction.

By breaking down the open coding categories into subcategories with dimensional examples, I was able to identify foundational themes to guide the development of an axial-coding paradigm. Within the framework of each overarching category, I noted several associated subcategories or properties that connected to the category and described the elements of each category. For example, in the environment category, three related properties, *structure*, *pace*, and *time*, provided more detail about the perceived ideal home environment. Using these subcategorical properties as a foundation, I then denoted specific examples to represent each property on a continuum and further define each property. For example, under the bridge category, I generated examples for the property *interact* on a continuum that ranged from *working on homework in isolation* to *interactive learning at home* (Creswell, 2008, p. 434). Table 1 lists the six categories, as well as their properties and dimensions.

Table 1

Open Coding of Homework Partnerships

Categories	Properties	Dimensionalized	examples
Learn	Active	Not participate	Active participate
	Review	No, minimal or sporadic review	Daily review
	Practice	No, minimal or sporadic practice	Daily practice
Growth	Build	No foundation	Strong foundation
	Support	No support	Support
	Evolution	No change	Evolution
	Help	Parent is doing	Child is doing
Bridge	Interact	Isolated	Interactive
	Monitor	No monitor	Monitor
	Alignment	Misaligned/in opposition	Supportive alignment
	Bond/connect	Disconnect	Connect/bond
Direct	Assign	Minimal direction	Clarified direction
	Expectations	Minimal expectations	Clarified expectations
	Communicate	Minimal ambiguous communication	Clear communication
Environment	Structure	Unstructured	Structured/routine
	Time	Time constraint	Scheduled time
	Pace	Rushed	Leisure/needs
	Schedule/org'n	Overscheduled	Moderation
Foundation	Meaning	Meaningless	Meaningful
	Prepare	Unconscious/unplanned	Purposeful/planned
	Support	Mistrust at core	Trust at core
	Responsive	Not meet/aware of needs	Meet needs/aware

Description of open-coding categories. The following sections describe the categories that I generated in the open-coding process using terms that I drew directly from the data. I will discuss the properties of each category as well as the dimensions of each property .

The first category, *learn*, refers to student learning. Although the need for homework is under debate and some families staunchly refuse to allow their children to engage in it, all of the participants in my study did homework daily. The teachers and parents also identified review and

practice as important components of homework learning; however, depending on the amount of time that parents have, the consistency ranges from sporadic to regular daily review and practice.

Tami used the metaphor *bridge* to describe the connections between home and school to support student learning. Jane, a parent, reported that she felt that the interactions with the teacher helped her to understand homework assignments and expectations. The teachers and parents considered monitoring homework assignments and ensuring student and parent understanding of assignment expectations to be within the realm of the teachers' role. Adding to the complexity of partnership bridging, the properties of supportive alignment and positive bonds among the partners, including supporting strong bonds between parent and child, were important foundational beliefs of the participants that support homework partnerships.

Growth refers to the goal of the parents, students, and teachers. The students had a strong perception of this concept. They concurred that doing homework is beneficial and used the words *getting better* to explain why homework was important. Jane thought that homework practice is more about personal growth than perfection. The four properties within this category include the building of a strong foundation, support for growth, evolution, and help provided. The parents and teachers in the study noted that a strong foundation for learning needs to be established to promote success. As well, the parents and teachers identified the parents' role as one of a support or catalyst for change, while at the same time encouraging student independence and autonomy within the process.

The parents and teachers described the fourth category, *foundation*, as the groundwork or essential skills needed to complete more complex tasks and activities in the future. Much of the discussion touched on dimensionalized examples, such as the importance of meaningful assignments versus those that have no personal meaning, purposeful and carefully planned tasks

versus those that demonstrate little preparation, the supportive trust that is at the core of effective relationships versus mistrust, and the conscious responsiveness of homework to meet the needs of individual student learners.

Environment is the home environment in which the students and parents complete the homework. The parents and teachers perceived it as the parents' role to provide a home environment conducive to the completion of homework, and their views on what constitutes a supportive environment for learning at home were similar; they included daily routines, scheduled time, a pace that meets students' needs, and moderation. Time constraints, rushing, and overscheduling emerged as factors in the busy lives of students and parents that impact the home environment. As a parent, Katherine also thought that completing homework helps students to keep current concepts at the "front of mind."

The students, parents, and teachers identified the last category, *direction*, as the teacher's role: directing homework with clear assignments, expectations, and communication.

Reflective journaling. Following the open coding, I continued to journal my research biases by following Seidman's (1998) reflective questions to isolate and understand my inherent perceptions of the data. Sample questions are included in Appendix D. Patton (1999) explained that "the principle is to report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis and interpretation either negatively or positively in the minds of users of the findings" (p. 1198) and described "emphatic neutrality" as the "stance in which the researcher or evaluator is perceived as caring about and being interested in the people under study, but as being neutral about the findings" (p. 1204). This impartiality requires transparency of the process and the researcher's background, which validates the trustworthiness and competence of the researcher. Knowing who I am as a researcher, who I am within the context of

the research site, and the potential for the complexity of cross influence was important throughout the research process. I hoped that my journaling as the research progressed would bring credibility and validity to the process.

Axial Coding

The second coding phase involves identifying a central idea or phenomenon and developing an axial coding paradigm to visually represent the relationships among the open-coding categories. The model is comprised of six areas: (a) the core category; (b) strategies that include specific actions or interactions that result from the core category; (c) causal conditions, which are categories of conditions that influence the core category; (d) the context, which includes specific conditions that impact the strategies; (e) intervening conditions, which are general contextual conditions that influence strategies, and (f) consequences, which are outcomes of the strategic actions (Creswell, 2008, p. 437).

I used the computer application Wordle as a tool to identify a core phenomenon from all of the open-coding categories. Pasting key phrases and words from the open-coding phase into Wordle revealed the most commonly recurring word in the data: *Learn* was the most prominent concept. I found this interesting because, although student learning is an inherent phenomenon in homework partnerships, *learn* was not a category that initially emerged in the key-word generation phase.

With the main theme identified, I explored the relationships of the categories to the core category learn and began to develop the axial-coding paradigm to visually represent the connections. I looked for patterns but also explored negative cases that involved categories that did not seem to relate. As Patton (1999) affirmed that “finding inconsistencies . . . offer[s] opportunities for deeper insight into the relationship between inquiry approach and the

phenomenon under study” (p. 1193). To explain the interrelated characteristics of supportive homework partnerships, using constant comparative data analysis, I placed *learn* at the centre of the coding paradigm (Sowell, 2001). With *learn* at the centre, I related all other categories to this core phenomenon as (a) causal conditions that influence student learning, (b) strategies actioned in response to student learning, (c) contextual and intervening conditions that influence the strategies, and (d) consequences that result from using the strategies (Creswell, 2008, p. 434). Before finalizing the axial-coding paradigm, I returned to the research participants to discuss the reasonableness and accuracy of the categories and their relationships within the coding paradigm. LeCompte (2000) cautioned that,

to create good research findings, analysis also must yield results that are meaningful to the people for whom they are intended and described in language they understand. Unless this is done, results can not be used to improve programs and practice or solve problems in which participants are interested. Creating meaningful results involves validity, or whether or not research findings seem accurate or reasonable to the people who were studied. (p. 152)

The categories and coding paradigm made logical sense to the teachers, Tami and Mary, and the parents, Katherine and Jane. Because of the age of the student participants and the abstract nature of the axial-coding paradigm, I did not seek feedback from the students. Figure 1 shows the axial coding paradigm. At the core of the coding paradigm is learning. The participants perceived that meaningful, responsive, and supportive work impacts learning at home. They all agreed that the environmental context influences learning at home and that regularly scheduled time for homework is important. The intervening conditions include the school’s philosophy with regard to homework and the clarity of the teacher’s direction with

regard to assignments, expectations, and communication. The consequences or benefits of using school and home partnerships as a strategy to support learning are clustered under the word *growth*.

Selective Coding

In the third phase of coding a theory is developed to explain how categories are connected and propositions are generated to explicitly explain the abstract model. Creswell (2008) explained that “in selective coding the grounded theorist writes a theory from the interrelationship of the categories in the axial coding paradigm. At a basic level, this theory provides an abstract explanation for the process being studied in the research” (p. 437). In the key findings section I will discuss the participants’ perspectives on the dynamics of this generated conceptual theory.

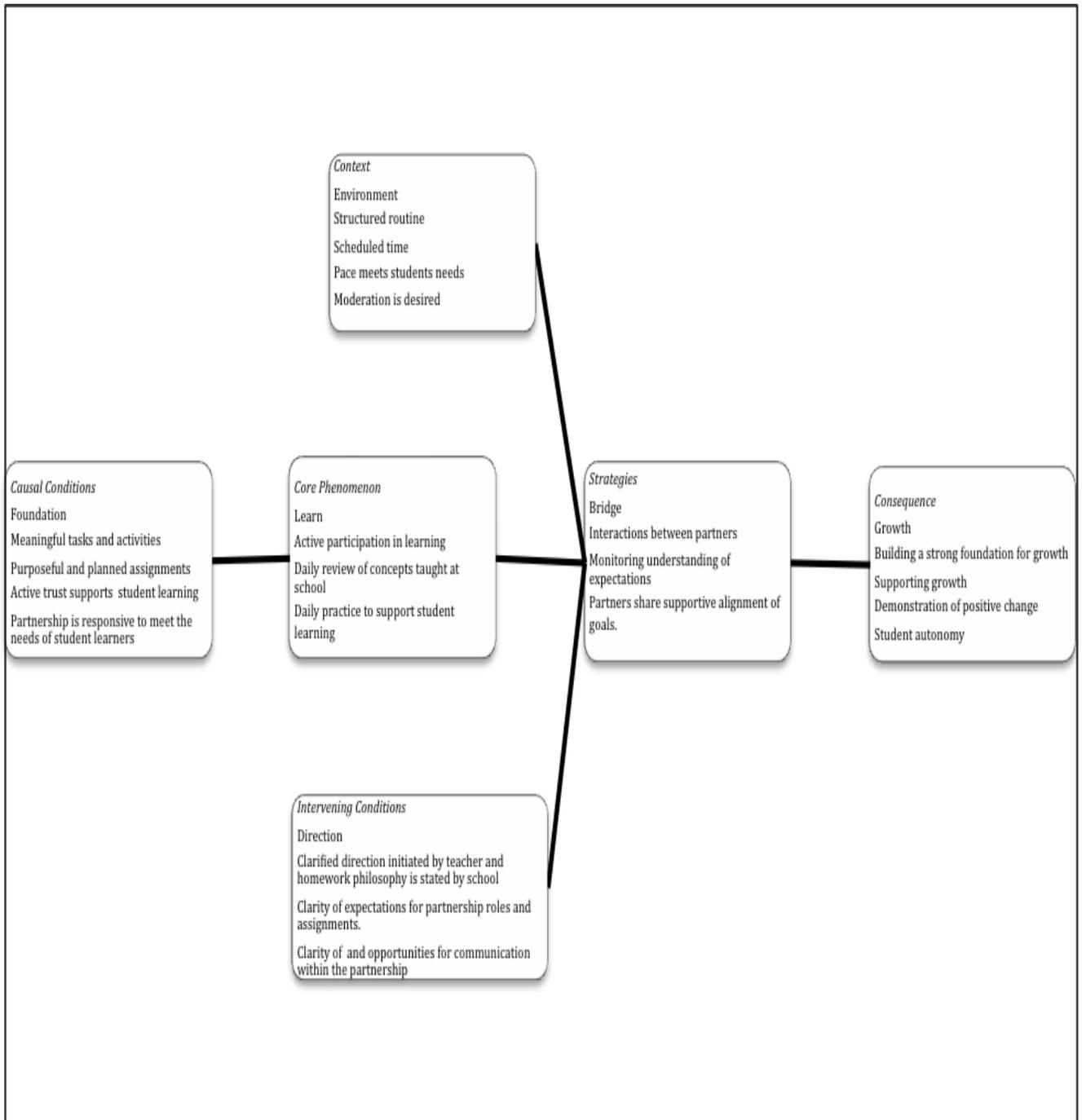


Figure 1. Axial coding: paradigm of homework partnerships.

Key Findings

In this section I will describe how the categories interconnect within the theory and discuss in detail the interview transcripts, homework journals, and survey responses to ground the theory in data. I will conclude this section with propositions that summarize key points about the theory. LeCompte (2000) stated:

The task of analysis, which makes interpretation possible, requires researchers first to determine how to organize their data and use it to construct an intact portrait of the original phenomenon under study and second, to tell readers what that portrait means.

(p. 147)

Theory

The following sections describe the complex relationships among the students, parents, and teachers in the homework partnerships. The theory section includes a discussion of the (a) core phenomenon: student learning, (b) strategies: partnership bridging, (c) consequences: learner growth, (d) causal conditions: authentic and autonomous tasks, (e) context (specific conditions): home environment, and (f) intervening conditions (general conditions): school direction.

Core phenomenon: student learning. The fundamental action in homework partnerships is student learning. In her interview, reflecting on the benefits of homework, Brittany's mother, Katherine, stated:

I think that it is valuable to have time together to do our homework. . . . It reinforced what she was doing at school, . . . yet she got to do it in the environment of her own home, which I think helps her in the long term to learn.

Teacher, parent and student experiences with homework ranged from not participating in homework to active and routine participation. Both teachers, Mary and Tami, described childhood experiences of minimal homework; and the parents, Katherine and Jane, spoke of the grueling and dreaded process of sitting at the kitchen table to do homework. For the individuals who were actively engaged in homework, the frequency of reviewing current class material as well as practicing the learning processes such as reading varied from minimal or sporadic practice to daily practice. All of the participants believed in the daily practice of class work, and both students, Brittany and Marcus, practiced an instrument for an additional 30 minutes per day.

Strategies: partnership bridging. Tami used the metaphor of a bridge to describe the partnership strategies that support connections between school and home to impact student learning. When I asked about the role of the teacher in the partnership, both Katherine and Jane paused significantly before answering. This unexpected silence underlined the separation that parents and teachers see between home and school with regard to homework. Both Katherine and Jane perceived the teacher as the individual who assigns homework and the parent as the one who must ensure that the homework is done. Tami and Mary, however, viewed it as a more interactive process. In talking about her role as a teacher, Mary stated, “I think that falls back to . . . really bridging the gap between the child and their parent. . . . I think my role is a mediator role.” The participants reported a diversity of experiences, from completing homework in isolation to interactive engagement. In her homework journal Jane wrote:

My parents were never involved with school related things, including homework. Their lack of involvement in my homework was due to mostly two reasons—their limited English speaking/reading skills and their working schedules. . . . Any difficulties I had with homework projects I had to tackle on my own or ask my teacher.

All of the participants voiced the idea of monitoring and checking to ensure that the homework is correct and completed. Some also considered the concept of supportive alignment as important. When I asked about what kind of help he received with his homework, Adam replied, “[My mom] just corrects me if I get a word wrong”; and Brittany explained, “[My mom] tells me what note I missed on that bar.” One surprising bridge category was the bond between parent and child or among teacher, parent, and child that develops throughout the partnership process. In her interview Katherine identified the benefits of homework: “I really do feel that it is a bonding time. Reading together is always joyful, so that’s something we have always enjoyed doing together since she was just a little baby.”

Consequences: learner growth. The participants perceived learner growth as beneficial. Parents and teachers stated that homework partnerships support student learning and build on a foundation of experiences and knowledge that differ from one learner to another. How each learner is supported in the school and home partnership also differs in the amount of support that parents provide and the kind of help that it is. Brittany reported that her mother gives her clues to learn spelling, and Adam stated, “My mom helps me learn piano. I closed my eyes and she played the notes. I just listen, and I do it.” Situations range from parents’ being overinvolved in their children’s homework to assisting them in becoming autonomous learners. Mary spoke of the parents’ role in the homework partnership:

I don’t want my [students] to go home thinking, “Here is a new assignment for you, Mom. What are you going to make me?” because that is not at all what the purpose is. . . . I try to remind them that their role is to support and to help and to offer assistance but to maybe try to pull the ideas from them instead of feed the ideas to their children.

Causal conditions: authentic and autonomous tasks. How meaningful students, parents, and teachers perceive homework is a factor in the motivation of all of the partners in the process of learning at home as well as in how well prepared the participants perceived that they were. Both teachers, Tami and Mary, needed to provide parents with clear booklets prepared in advance. Both Jane and Katherine received help with homework from their teacher. Although Katherine and Jane were confident in their abilities to assist their children with homework, Katherine expressed her desire for more knowledge to assist her daughter with French. Jane was aware of her son's need for more advanced homework in the areas of writing and reading would have appreciated homework that was responsive to his specific needs. Mary, a teacher in the study, spoke of her childhood experience with homework:

[When I was in junior high] I was given homework assignments, and I didn't have the skills to prepare. My parents also didn't really know how to help me because that experience or groundwork had never been laid out for us. Perhaps that process would have been easier had that foundation been laid in small baby steps throughout elementary school. When I became a teacher I realized that [homework] was an important thing to incorporate, but I also knew at the same time that part of my teaching philosophy didn't just involve doing repetitious, meaningless repetitious work. I wanted learning to be meaningful so that whatever my students were doing in the classroom is something they can expand upon and enrich themselves and really prove or demonstrate their learning—not just handing in a sheet with all of the answers filled in.

Context: home environment. Specific contextual conditions that influence homework partnerships include structure, time, pace, and organization. Structure refers to the regularity of homework, from nonregular to routine. The amount of time that the parents devoted to

homework varied, and, when I asked the teachers how much time they expected students to spend doing homework, their responses differed. The teachers, Tami and Mary, expressed their desire for regular homework, but they acknowledged the challenge of overscheduling students' activities. Katherine and Jane found it challenging to fit in all of their children's scheduled activities, but they also expressed a strong desire for a more leisurely pace to enjoy and extend learning at home. Pace in the home environment is also a consideration, because some parents feel rushed on a daily basis and want their children's homework to suit their needs to make the best use of their homework time.

Intervening conditions (general conditions): school direction. General conditions that influence the effectiveness of homework partnerships include who is in control of assigning the homework, who sets the expectations for homework content and process, and how the assignments and expectations are communicated. In the online survey one parent stated, "The type of homework we do on any given day depends on what was assigned." Jane mirrored this statement in her interview: "If it is assigned, we do it for sure. I always make time for it." As Tami explained:

I think parents should be informed of what is going on in the classroom and what is expected afterwards. With the homework booklets we send home, there is one for each student that the parents are expected to read over the sheet, themselves—the requirements—and make sure that those things are done.

Propositions

Drawing from the story of homework partnerships, I present the following propositions:

1. Students, parents, and teachers need to continue to focus on student learning as the core focus of homework partnerships. Teachers need to be purposeful in assigning

- homework—content review and skills practice—to ensure that the goals for student learning are explicitly understood.
2. Because growth is the desired consequence of student learning, parents and/or teachers should monitor homework assignments to gauge their impact on the learners' growth.
 3. To facilitate strong and effective homework partnerships strategies to promote learner growth, parents, teachers, and student could benefit from informative workshops or relationship-building activities within the community and between parents and children.
 4. Clear direction and systemic support of homework partnerships need to include overarching administrative principles with regard to homework and the role of the parent and teacher within the homework partnership. As well, teachers need to encourage the bidirectional direction and communication that parents seek to ensure that both parents and students understand the assignments and expectations.
 5. Parents' concerns with overscheduling and time constraints continue to impact the home environment and therefore homework partnerships. Keeping the desire for moderation in mind, teachers need to give advance notice of assignment deadlines and make timelines flexible to recognize and reflects the current realities for students and parents.
 6. To assign authentic homework tasks, teachers need to consider giving parents opportunities to modify or extend assignments to motivate and challenge students' individual learning needs and interests.

Conclusion

In my study I addressed the following main research question: “What are the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers with regard to school, family, and community partnerships that support student learning at home?” To answer my main research question, I included the following subquestions: (a) “What are the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers with regard to what constitutes “learning at home”?” and (b) “What characteristics of school, family, and community partnerships support student learning at home?” I used a grounded theory research design for the research and have discussed these research questions within the framework of this design to best reveal the complexity and interconnectedness of the many factors that impact homework partnerships. Although my initial focus was on the learning strategy of partnership bridging, I discovered that the heart of homework partnerships is student learning and learner growth, the desired consequence of homework. Although the home-environment conditions are integral to homework partnerships, school direction is also an influence. All of the participants strongly identified student learning as a benefit of homework. Accomplishing authentic and autonomous tasks in consultation with all partners will extend and enrich students’ foundational understanding and support student growth. Mary reported that “every year it builds upon the year before,” and “I think that that is beneficial for their growth and for my growth just to see different perspectives all working together for the common goal.” Tami reiterated the value of homework: “I think building on what they’ve learned and taking it to a different context so that it is not just the classroom-based learning. It’s that they can keep learning even when they leave the classroom.” In the teacher survey one respondent suggested that the benefit of homework is that it allows students to build on previous learning. Brittany and

Adam also eloquently identified the concept of growth, and they both reported that they do homework to “get better.”

It might be interesting to further research four unexpected results in a broader PAR study: fun and bonding, parent knowledge and skill, the concept of students’ “coming home with the answers,” and the parents’ interesting pauses when I asked them about the role of the teacher in the homework partnership. Asked for a drawing of each student doing homework, they both gave me pictures of two smiling children sitting at a kitchen table with books in front of them. The idea of homework as fun and a bonding experience was not one that I had initially considered, and I found it surprising to see it emerge from the data.

Conversely, before I collected the data, and based on my own experience and observations, I expected parents’ skill and knowledge to emerge as a barrier to homework partnerships. Perhaps if I interviewed parents of older students, I would discover this perception because many parents to whom I have spoken find it challenging to coach their children through inquiry- or problem-based homework assignments, which highlight the process of arriving at the answer over getting the correct answer. Further to this is Mary’s idea of “true learning.” The concept of homework has evolved from sitting down alone at the kitchen table, as in Jane’s, Tami’s, and Katherine’s childhood experiences, to “coming home with the answers and . . . ways to offer questions to others or to demonstrate their true learning.”

I do not know why the parents similarly paused significantly following the question about the role of the teacher in the homework partnership. Moments of insight also occurred for teacher, Mary, in the study as she discussed:

Actually, the one thing I mentioned to you earlier that I found really insightful was doing this myself. I actually thought about [homework]. I hadn’t thought of where these

[homework] projects had come from or my reason or my philosophy behind it until you had asked me to sit down and think about it. It was really insightful for me to see what I do. . . . Things have become just so much a part of my own classroom culture. (Excerpt from Mary's interview)

Fostering a greater awareness of students', parents', and teachers' perceptions through a larger-scale study could illuminate the impact of purposeful strategies behind meaningful home partnership experiences. I offer this idea to others who might be interested in this area of research.

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Appendix A: Sample Survey, Journal, and Interview Questions for Teachers

Survey Questions for Teachers

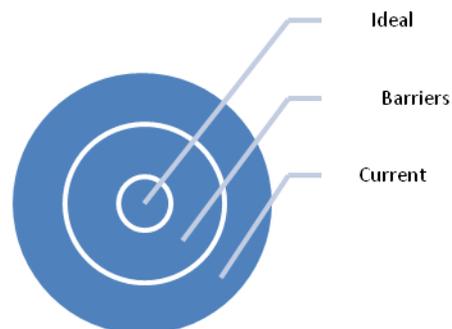
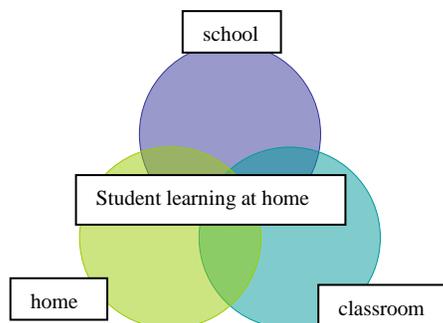
1. On what days do you assign homework to your student?
2. On these days, how long do you expect your student to work on homework?
3. What homework do you assign?
4. What do you do to help your student with homework?
5. What do you expect parents to do to support your student with homework?
6. How do you communicate your expectations to student and parents?
7. Why is homework important for your student' learning?

Homework Journal Activities and Questions for Teachers

- Pre-Journal Activity: What was your experience as a student with homework? Draw a picture to explain.
- Daily Journal Entries:
 1. What homework did you assign?
 2. How long do you expect your student to spend on this homework?
 3. How do you think about student doing homework?
 4. What do you do to support student completing this homework?
 5. What would you expect parents to do to help their student on this assignment?
 6. What was important about this homework?

Interview Activities for Teachers

- Pre-Interview Activities:
 1. Organize your thoughts around school, family and community partnerships that support your student's learning at home using the following diagrams:



- Interview Questions:
 1. Using the pre-interview picture as a starting point, tell me about your studenthood experience with homework.
 2. Using the homework journal as a starting point, I will use the following probing questions as a guide:

- Tell me more about that.
 - Give me an example of what you had in mind when..
 - What in particular are you thinking about?
 - How did you feel when that happened?
 - Tell me your reactions to how...
3. How do you think homework is beneficial to your student' learning?
 4. How skilled do you think parents are in supporting their student's learning at home?
 5. What do you think is the role of the student within the partnership for learning? Role of the Parents? Your role?
 6. In what ways could the partnership work even better to help your student' learning at home?
 7. What barriers prevent partnerships to work ideally? How could these potential barriers be overcome?
 8. Is there anything else you would like to add to the discussion?

Follow-up Phone Call to Clarify Information as needed

- Thank you for participating in the interview and sharing your experiences with homework.
- Was there anything you wanted to add to our discussion?

Appendix B: Sample Survey, Journal, and Interview Questions for Parents

Survey Questions for Parents

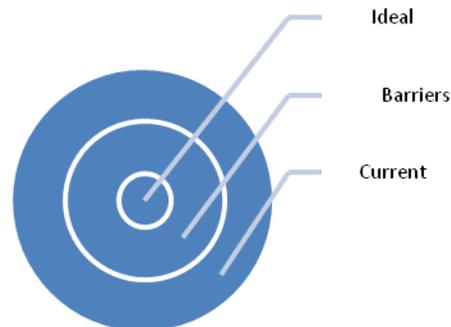
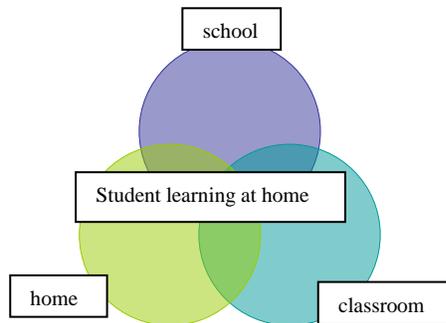
1. On what days do you help your student with homework?
2. On these days, how long do you spend helping your student with homework?
3. What homework does your student do?
4. How do you help your student with homework?
5. Why do you think homework is important for your student's learning?

Homework Journal Activities and Questions for Parents

- Pre-Journal Activity: What was your experience as a student with homework? You may draw a picture to explain.
- Daily Journal Entries: After your student finishes his/her homework, answer the following questions:
 1. What homework was assign?
 2. How long did your student spend working on homework?
 3. How long did you spend helping your student with homework?
 4. What did you do to support your student's completion of homework?
 5. How do you feel about your ability to help your student with this homework?
 6. What do you think is important about your student's homework assignment?
 7. Additional Comments:

Interview Activities for Parents

- Pre-Interview Activities:
 1. Organize your thoughts around school, family and community partnerships that support your student's learning at home using the following diagrams:



- Interview Questions:
 2. Using the pre-interview picture as a starting point, tell me about your studenthood experience with homework.
 3. Using the homework journal as a starting point, I will use the following probing questions as a guide:
 - Tell me more about that.
 - Give me an example of what you had in mind when..
 - What in particular are you thinking about?

- How did you feel when that happened?
 - Tell me your reactions to how...
4. How do you think homework is beneficial to your student's learning?
 5. How skilled do you feel in helping your student with his/her homework?
 6. What do you think is the role of your student within the partnership for learning? Your role? Role of your student's teacher?
 7. In what ways could the partnership work even better to help your student's learning at home?
 8. What barriers prevent partnerships to work ideally for you? How could these potential barriers be overcome for you?
 9. Is there anything else you would like to add to the discussion?

Follow-up Phone Call to Clarify Information as needed

- Thank you for participating in the interview on (date) and sharing your experiences with homework.
- Was there anything you wanted to add to our discussion?

Appendix C: Sample Survey, Journal, and Interview Questions for Students

Survey Questions

- On what days do you do homework?
- On these days, how long do you spend on homework?
- What homework do you do?
- Does anyone help you with your homework? If so, what kind of help do you get?
- Why is homework important for your learning?

Homework Journal Activities and Questions for Student

- Pre-Journal Activity: Draw a picture, if you wish, to explain a little bit about yourself.
- Daily Journal Entries: After you finish your homework, draw a picture, if you wish, of you doing your homework and complete the following statements:
 1. I spent _____ minutes on homework today.
 2. The kind(s) of homework I did included _____.
 3. When I did my homework I felt _____ because _____.
 4. The person (or people) who helped me do my homework was/were _____.
 5. He/She/They helped me by _____.
 6. This homework was important because _____.
 7. I would also like to say _____.

Interview Questions

- Tell me a little about yourself (using your pre-journal picture if you wish).
- Using the homework journal as a starting point, I will use the following probing questions as a guide:
 1. Tell me more about that.
 2. Give me an example of what you had in mind when..
 3. What in particular are you thinking about?
 4. How did you feel when that happened?
 5. Tell me your reactions to how...
- What homework do you do?
- Does anyone help you with your homework? If so, what kind of help do you get?
- How do you feel about doing homework?
- Why do you think homework important for your learning?
- Can you tell me about a time when someone helped you and it made your homework easier?
- Can you tell me about a time when homework was tough? What kind of help would have made it easier?

Follow-up Interview to Clarify Information as needed

- Thank you for participating in the interview and sharing your experiences with homework.
- Was there anything you wanted to add to our discussion?

Appendix D: Sample Reflective Journal Questions for Researcher

Reflective Journal Questions for Research Based on Seidman's (1998) Method

1. What do I understand now that I did not understand before I began the interviews and observations.
2. What surprises have there been? This is important to include.
3. What confirmation of previous instincts?
4. How have my interviews (derived from observation) been consistent with literature? Inconsistent?
5. How have they gone beyond?

Memoing

PROCESS Solo to Duet to Trio to Quartet (kitchen table to interactive)
 FEELINGS Minor to Major (negative to positive feelings)
 DIRECTED BY Conductor – sharing the conducting wand
 CONTENT Composer and Musical Score
 Homework: to tool for student success
 Homework: the bridge between home and school
 Homework: learning on the move – different context
 Homework: the 3 R's – repetition, review and reinforce
 Homework: from kitchen table to backseat
 Homework: quality control
 Homework: dessert, side dish, plate, appetizer or supersizing learning
 Homework: if homework provides the foundation? What kind of foundation do st need?

Appendix E: Key Word Generation by Question

What is homework?

Role	Participant	
Teacher	Mary	Categories
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M1 Own homework experience – no homework but unique projects • M1 Without any conscious forethought by teacher • M1 Autonomous • M1 Self-directed • M1 Teacher-directed • M1 Administrative expectation • M1 Match with teaching philosophy • M1 Not repetitious meaningless repetitious work • M1 Important thing to incorporate BENEFIT • M1 Expand upon what st doing in the classroom • M1 Enrich themselves not just handing in a sheet with all of the answers filled in • M2 St re-teaching at home • M2 St share what they are learning with parents • M2 St come up with family project based upon a certain topic • M2 Demonstration of St learning • M2 Routine • M2 Conceptual learning assignment based on a core subject theme • M2 Something St need to practice • M2 Preparation for tests • M3 Phonemic themes and spelling tests • M3 Practice to aid memory • M3 Intention to encourage positive feelings about assignments for parents • M4 Provide parents with study guide for spelling including expectations and philosophy about homework. • M4 Opportunity to practice and expand on spelling repertoire so St feel good about themselves as writers and spellers • M4 Input of parents within the process re: feedback and role of teacher to assist • M5 Take into account St learning needs • M6 Organized by Tchr • M6 Clear expectations • M6 Small meaningful chunks • M6 Quality better than quantity; not constantly overwhelm with piles of paper • M6 Interactive better than isolated • M6 Not muddling through alone • M6 User-friendly • M6 Parents involvement • M7 Check-in for parents perspectives • M7 Purposeful • M7 Autonomous better than parents-driven • M8 St sense of control • M9 Application of content • M9 Application of process • M10 Foundation laid in baby steps throughout elementary school • M11 Conscious and valuable • M11 St positive perspective • M11 St see themselves as learners • M11 Manageable for St • MJ2 Spelling daily review • MJ2 Preparation for test • MJ2 Corrections • MJ2 Complete project • MJ2 No more than 30 minutes • MJ2 Review daily, daily practice 15 minutes • MJ2 Reinforces the phonetic sounds • MJ2 Reinforces and enriches their spelling repertoire for varying write assignments and activities • MJ2 Expand and apply on concepts learning in class • MJ3 hands-on self directed projects to allow st to highlight and showcase their learning persp. on topic • MJ3 Continue studying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique Projects • Not Conscious • Autonomous • Self Directed • Teacher Directed • Admin Expect • Teaching phil • Not Meaningless • Incorporate • Expand • Enrich • St Reteach • St Share • St Initiate • Demonstrate • Routine • Conceptual • Practice • Prepare • Spelling • Practice Memory • Intent Positive P • Guidance • Practice Feelings • Parents Input • Assist • Student Needs • Teacher Orgn'd • Clear Expect • Meaning Small • Not Overwhelm • Interactive • Not muddle • User-friendly • Parents Involv't • Perspectives • Purposeful • Autonomous • Control • Apply • Apply • Foundation • Conscious • Positive Persp • Learners • Manageable • Review • Prepare • Corrections • Complete • Time • Review Daily • Reinforce • Enrich • Expand Apply • Hands-on SD • Cont Study

Teacher	Tami	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T1 Own homework experience – not a lot, related to class work, art-related, something fun, time spent planning, not stressful or a lot of time. • T1 Homework booklet system • T1 Phonemic sounds, review words, phonic cards • T1 Go through with parents • T1 Read over same passage as read in class. • T1 Ten minutes • T1 Supported by what's happening in the classroom and what they're learning. • T1 Extends what they've learning • T1 Not overwhelming • T1 Phonics cards, extra math worksheets • T1 Pretty much the same every day – process and type • T2 Teacher expectations for St and Parents • T2 School expectations • T2 Meaningful • T2 Every day • TJ1 Present, reinforce and review concepts in meaningful context • TJ1 Practice and review concepts learning at school with parents • TJ1 Extend and apply • TJ1 Every day practice and review • TJ2 Review phonics cards 10-15 minutes • TJ2 Review what's presented I class; repetition as needed for ind'l • TJ2 Review phonics cards and number sentences • TJ2 Read with student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art Fun Plan • Minimal • Booklet System • Review • Go Through • Bridge Support • Time • Support by Class • Extend • Manageable • Basics • Routine • Expectations • Expectations • Meaningful • Routine • Meaningful • Practice • Extend and Apply • Routine • Time • Review • Review • Read with Student
Parents	Jane	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J1 Own experience – parents not involved, do on own, independent, kitchen table, essays, dreaded, stay up for hours write, work with brother and sister. • J1 Cover stuff assign in class • J1 Extra read from our own books • J1 Instrument practice 20-30 minutes every day • J1 Light classroom homework but more now with write • J1 Teacher assign • J2 Reinforces concepts learning in class, review and repetition. • J2 Repeating it again and again – math drills and phonics cards. • JJ2 Short passage • JJ2 Assign • JJ2 Read • JJ2 7 minutes • JJ2 Review and reinforce concepts covered in class that day. • JJ2 Keeps me informed of what kinds of learning is happening in the classroom • JJ2 Booklet • JJ3 Check his answers • JJ3 Practice math drills • JJ3 I have noticed increased accuracy and speed in computation • JJ3 increased confidence • JJ4 Write sentences • JJ4 I asked him to brainstorm ideas first and I jotted them down before he transferred them to the sheet • JJ4 I asked him questions to help him get started • JJ4 Corrected spelling errors and made sure his letter formation was correct and neat • JJ4 Asked him to read what he wrote and see if there was anything he wanted to change or add • JJ4 Help • JJ5 Practice read, listen to read ask questions • JJ5 I was happy to receive a more challenging story today for read homework • JJ6 Flash cards; listen, practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent • Dreaded • Cover Assign • Extra • Practice • Light • Assign • Reinforce • Repeat • Short • Assign • Read • Time • Review • P Informed • Booklet • Check • Practice • Accuracy Speed • Confidence • Write • Coach Bridge • Ask questions • Correct • Coach • Help • Practice Ask? • Challenge • Flash Cards

Parents	Katherine	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K1 Own experience – grueling, not enjoyable, sit at the table, just do it • K1 Spelling words practice, instrument practice, French • K1 Together • K1 Fun • K2 Repetition again and reinforcing what they learning at school and bringing it home • K2 Participating with you and being active • K2 Assign homework, actual assignment • KJ1 1.25 hours per day • KJ1 Helped read out spelling words and checked them, listened to her read • KJ1 Sat with her and guided her while she practiced • KJ1 Assisted her with project including videoing her performing her experiment • KJ1 Great assistance to her • KJ1 Regular practice/repetition so that the information learning from school is kept “front of mind” • KJ1 We spend time together when she is learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grueling Do It • Practice • Together • Fun • Repetition • Participate Active • Assign • Time • Help Check Listen • Sat with GuideP • Assist • Assist • Regular PRepet • Time Together
Student	Adam	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A1 Sitting on a chair • A1 Going to get it (homework) • A1 Smile • A2 Kitchen table • A2 3 to 5 minutes • A2 Mom help • A2 Read and that’s mostly it • A2 Read these books that the school printed out • AJ1 Read 3 minutes • AJ1 Easy good • AJ3 Math, checking answers, practice • AJ3 Learning to write • AJ3 Practice I like it • AJ7 Funny story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sit on Chair • Receive • Smile • Kitchen table • Time • Help • Read • Read • Read • Easy • Check Practice • Learn • Practice Like • Funny
Student	Brittany	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B1 Book for read later • B1 Write • B1 Happy feeling • B1 Read, cello • B1 Spelling and math a little bit • B2 Fun • BJ1 Spelling, read, cello • BJ1 Felt good • BJ1 Parents gave clues; helped me 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book • Write • Happy • Read Cello • Spelling Math • Fun • Spelling Rdg Cello • Feel Good • Clues Help
Survey	Teacher	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ST1 Assign on Monday, less than 15 minutes, math and read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign Time
Survey	Parents	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly every day • 15-30; 30-60 minutes • SP1 School projects • SP2 Big homework year grade 3 • SP3 Consistent homework primarily in spelling and math. • SP3 Encourage to read • SP3 Enjoys • SP3 Could do more write at home. • SP4 Music practice is homework; could need help on any day of the week; no day is exempt • SP5 Type of homework we do on any given day depends on what was assign. • SP5 Instrument homework everyday 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routine • Time • Project • Big Homework • Consistent • Could do More • Encourage • Enjoy • Practice Routine • Assign • Routine
Survey	Student	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SS1 Thursday and Sunday, 15-30 minutes; math and write; mom help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time Help
Researcher		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 Daily practice and reinforcement of skills and content to support learning at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routine Support

What was your childhood experience with homework?

Role	Participant	
Teacher	Mary	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M1 No homework but unique projects M1 Without any conscious forethought by teacher MJ1 No assign homework MJ1 No daily assignments to prepare for MJ1 Constructivist-ish non-assign assignment MJ1 I would like to think that it was part of some great brilliant plan that my teacher felt passionate about MJ1 Time-filler MJ1 Potential for student to truly be engaged in meaningful learning was missed completed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unique Projects Meaningful No Assign No Daily Prepare Non-assign No Plan Time-filler Potential missed
Teacher	Tami	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T1 Not a lot, related to class work, art-related, something fun, time spent planning, not stressful or a lot of time TJ1 Homework was minimal for the most part TJ1 At least to my recollection TJ1 Even when there was more, it was fun and meaningful, such as art for research projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Art Related Fun Not a lot of Time Minimal Not Memorable Fun Meaningful
Parents	Jane	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> J1 Parents not involved, do on own, independent, kitchen table, essays, dreaded, stay up for hours write, work with brother and sister. JJ1 Junior high or high school memories JJ1 Don't remember doing much homework in elementary school JJ1 Preparing for tests, write up science labs, write essays JJ1 Kitchen table JJ1 No parents involvement – working limited English skills JJ1 Stressful JJ1 Any difficulties I had with homework projects I had to tackle on my own or ask my teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independent Isolated but Tog Later grades Minimal Prepare Write Kitchen Table No PInvolvement Stressful Independent AskT
Parents	Katherine	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K1 Grueling, not enjoyable, sit at the table, just do it; active; "it" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grueling Do It
Survey	Teacher	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ST1 Assign on Monday, less than 15 minutes, math and read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign Time
Survey	Parents	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly every day 15-30; 30-60 minutes SP1 School projects SP2 Big homework year grade 3 SP3 Consistent homework primarily in spelling and math. SP3 Encourage to read SP3 Enjoys SP3 Could do more write at home. SP4 Music practice is homework; could need help on any day of the week; no day is exempt SP5 Type of homework we do on any given day depends on what was assign. SP5 Instrument homework everyday 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Routine Time Projects Big Homework Consistent Encourage Enjoy Could do More Practice Routine Assign Routine
Researcher		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 Read, special projects, fun, autonomous, self-directed and driven, over the top, assign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Autonomous Assi

What are the benefits of homework?

Role	Participant	
Teacher	Mary	Categories
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M1 I didn't have the skills to prepare me, experience or groundwork never laid out for us M1 My parents didn't really know how to help me M1 Meaningful M1 Expand upon and enrich themselves (student-centred) M1 Prove or demonstrate their learning M2 Learning demonstrated best when St able to reteach concepts M2 Coming home with the answers, offer questions to others, demonstrate true learning M3 Personal growth M3 Concepts and phonetic themes are sinking in, practiced and remembered. M3 I want them all to do the best they can; achieve real learning – formative M4 Enforce positive feelings, comfortable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foundation Help Meaningful Growth Demonstrate Student DirectedD Individualized Practice Master Sink In Remember Achieve Positive Comfort

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M4 Opportunity to practice • M4 Expand spelling repertoire • M5 Groundwork – help with struggling student • M5 Every year it build upon the year before • M5 Ensure that learning is really there; not letting possible areas of struggle and/or weakness slip by us because we are not looking, checking for review, or we're not looking closely enough at how well a concept has been absorbed • M5 Beneficial in small but meaningful doses • M5 Destructive if not meaningful or overly repetitious; if not personally meaningful; isolated • M8 Sense of independence and their own strength in believing that they know what is going on • M8 Don't have to rely on someone else to tell them or lead them into that • M8 Sense of control over • M8 Self-driven • M9 Student growth; teacher growth • M9 Common goal • M9 Share tchr perspective • M10 Alleviate struggle • M10 Foundation for future study laid in baby steps in elementary school • M11 Make it easier • M11 Student driven – Friday reports if you want to do them • M11 Time to reflect as had become just part of classroom culture; here for kids • MJ1 Nurture potential • MJ1 Make learning experience personally meaningful • MJ1 Part of one's long—term learner memory • MJ2 Spelling support • MJ2 Reinforces and enriches their spelling repertoire for varying write assignments and activities • MJ2 Reinforce, enrich and EXPAND and APPLY on the concepts learning in class • MJ3 Real learning is demonstrated through hands-on self-directed projects • Allow the student to highlight and showcase their learning perspective on a given topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice • Expand • Groundwork • Build • Catch struggle • Check • Absorb • Beneficial Small • Meaningful • Independence • Not Rely • Control • Self-driven • Growth • Common Goal • Bridge Tchr Persp • Easy • Alleviate Struggle • Easy • Student driven • M Culture • Nurture Potential • Meaningful • Memory • Support • Reinforce Enrich • Expand Apply • Demonstrate SDir • Showcase Persp
Teacher	Tami	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T1 Meaningful to student • T1 Extends what student learning • T1 Help them to continue to learn • T2 Help you with read (purpose) • T2 Inform parents about what is going on in the classroom and afterwards • T2 Equip to learn the next part • T3 Makes sense; able to use word;"It's easy" • T3 Means something to them; Personal • T3 Building on what they've learning • T3 Taking it to a different context; not just classroom-based learning; learn when leave classroom • T3 Extension • T3 Help make tchr expectations clear • T4 Parents take ownership • T4 Parents realize they are part of the triangle • T4 Opportunity for parents to dialogue with teacher about st learning • TJ1 Meaningful context • TJ1 Practice and review concepts learning at school with parents • TJ1 Extends and applies • TJ1 Relevance to everyday life • TJ2 Builds foundation for understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful • Extends • Help Continue • Help • Bridge Inform • Equip to Learn • Easy • M Personal • Build • Bridge Context • Extension • Expectations • Bridge Ownership • Bridge Triangle • Bridge Talk • M Context • Practice Review P • Extend Apply • Relevance M • Foundation
Parents	Jane	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J1 It teaches discipline to sit down everyday and do some work • J1 Reinforces concepts learning in class • J1 Review and also have that repetition • J1 It is good to keep repeating it again and again; important • JJ2 Review and reinforce concepts covered in class that day • JJ2 Keeps me informed of what kinds of learning is happening in the classroom • JJ4 Practice so he can compute math sums quicker • JJ4 Increased accuracy and speed in his computation since the start of the school year • JJ4 As well, his confidence with numbers has also increased • JJ5 Practice sentence structure, printing, write 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discipline • Reinforce Conc. • Review Repetition • Repeat • Review Reinforce • Informed Bridge • Quicker • Accuracy Speed G • F G Confidence • Practice C
Parents	Katherine	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K1 Valuable to have time together; bonding time • K1 Reinforced what st was doing at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bonding Time • Reinforce

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K1 Extremely helpful • K1 St got to do it in the environment of own home • Help her in the long term to learn • Joyful; enjoyed doing together; enjoyable time; bonding time • Teach time management; • K2 Get the idea if they get to university one day; do a little every day • K2 Beneficial to know (how to study every day) • K2 Repetition is important • K2 We butt heads but we seem to work it out (Communicate/Conflict Resolution) • K2 She knows she has to do it; she takes it as if I'm really helping her • K2 Help with word meanings and not just phonetic read • KJ1 Regular practice/repetition so that information learning from school is kept front of mind • KJ1 Bonding experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help • Home Envir't • Help • JoyB • Time Management • RoutineF • Beneficial • Repetition • Problem-Solve • ResponsibilityH • ExtendG • Current Front Mind • Bonding
Student	Adam	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A3 Help me practice my read • A3 So I get better • A3 Made it easier • A3 Finish work not completed in class time • AJ1 I get better • AJ3 I got practice • AJ4 I learning how to write • AJ6 It improves my read; it is important • AJ7 It helped me read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice • Better • Easy • Finish Classwork • Better • Practice • Learn how to • G Important • Helped me Read
Student	Brittany	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B1 I like it because it is fun • B2 She help me with words that I get wrong; she help me sound them out • B2 I like doing spelling and math and I like books because you can read; it feels like you're in that world • B2 Because we can do better • B2 Get better at it • BJ1 Get better at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like Fun • Help • Read • Better • Better • Better
Survey	Teacher	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ST1 It allows them to build on previous learning • ST1 In increments, move towards success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FBuildGExtend • Stepbystep; success
Survey	Parents	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SP1 Homework is very important tool for better memorizing of class material • SP2 It serves as a support for their school learning • SP2 In the case of my gr 3 student, enables him to catch up on learning missed in class • SP3 I think a balance of homework is important. • SP3 Homework allows us as parents an opportunity to see the types of things our student is learning • SP3 where their strengths and limitations lie. • SP3 It help the kids learn discipline and responsibility. • SP3 It is probably good to have a balance of homework that the student can do independently vs with parents support • SP3 All that said, I appreciate when there is not an overwhelming amount of homework. • SP4 Reinforce learning concepts as well as support the learning process. • SP4 Teaches ownership/independence/responsibility for ones work too • SP4 I feel homework is important. It provides me a way to assess how my student is doing in class and where he might need more help. It teaches discipline. • SP5 I feel homework is important, even in the early years. I don't mind to sit down with my student to spend time doing homework. • SP5 To review/reinforce concepts learning in class. • SP5 To assist or provide extra practice in areas of weakness • SP6 To reinforce/review concepts learning in class. • SP6 To improve in areas that my student needs work in. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memorize • Support • Finish class work (balance) • Bridge • Understand • D Responsibility (balance) AE SD • AE SD • Manageable • Reinforce C&P • OwnershipAResp • Monitor • Discipline Help • Early Sit Down • Time • Reinforce/Review • GInd'lized • Reinforce/Review • GInd'lized
Survey	Student	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SS1 It is important because it gets me smarter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth Achieve
Researcher		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 Support work at school; mastery of conceptual and process understanding; parents involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFGMRRBridgeS

What is the role of the student within the homework partnership?

Role	Participant	
Teacher	Mary	Categories
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M2 Take what they are learning in the classroom and share it with their parents M2 Come up with M2 Demonstrate learning; truly learning M2 Coming home with the answers; offer questions; demonstrate learning M2 Correct and evaluate how they did on their first pre-test M2 Preparation for tests; personal growth; improvement M3 Practice and remember M3 Understand the groundwork of what they are studying M3 I want them all to do the best they can. It's not about comparisons. M4 Opportunity to practice; expand upon their spelling repertoire M4 Study M7 Feel growing sense of independence; they are capable M8 Have the ability to be in control of their little lives M7 Sense of personal control or decision-making; choice M8 They know what to do M8 Sense of independence and their own strength in believing that they know what is going on and they don't have to rely on someone else to tell them or lead them into that M8 Sense of control over what they are doing MJ1 Real learning, comes from one's own initiative to apply, expand and enrich concepts learning MJ1 Make learning experience personally meaningful MJ1 Make something that is a part of one's long-time learner memory MJ2 I expect no more than 30 minutes studying to review daily MJ3 Demonstrate hands-on self-directed projects that allow the student to highlight and showcase their learning perspective on a given topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bridge Self-directed Demonstrate AnswersD Self-Assess Prepare G P Remember F Study GA Indiv'lized PExpand Study Autonomy Autonomy Autonomy Choice Autonomy M Autonomy Self-directed Self-directed Initiative SelfD Meaningful Memorable Daily Review 30 Demonstrate SD StPerspective
Teacher	Tami	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T1 Read over class read passages we did in class; review words T1 Have to go through with parents T1 Extra math sheets T2 Do the homework T2 Equipped to learn the next part T2 If kids know how to say it then they could share T3 Keep learning when they leave the classroom T3 Know what to do T4 Ask if need help TJ1 Practice and review concepts learning at school with parents in home context TJ1 Extend and apply TJ1 Everyday practice and review TJ1 Student understands what to do TJ1 Work with parents TJ2 Build foundation for understanding words in later readers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Bridge Reinforce Responsibility PreparationF BridgeAutonomy Bridge Autonomy Ask if need help Practice Review Extend Apply Prac Review Daily Student Know Work with P Foundation
Parents	Jane	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> J2 His role is to learn J2 Be willing to do his homework J2 Try to have fun learning JJ2 Student is doing JJ2 Student is good at doing his homework without too much nagging from me 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn Willing to do Try to have fun Active Engaged SDirected
Parents	Katherine	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K2 Repetition and reinforcing what they learning at school K2 Bringing it home K2 Participating with you K2 Being active; active learner K2 Wants to do it K2 Enthusiasm KJ1 She wrote them, she read, she performed, she is learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RepetitionReinforce Bridge Inter"active" Active Learner Self-motivated Enthusiasm Active Learner
Student	Adam	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A1 Sit on chair A2 Read books; read words A3 Practice my read A3 Learn A3 Listen and do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sit Read Practice Learn Listen and do

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AJ1 PICTURE – Sit on a chair, read, smile, legs dangle off the floor, head floating above table, book to the right, table and chair giant compared to student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active F Mat'lsEnv't ?Foundation
Student	Brittany	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> B1 Write B1 Feeling happy B2 I am doing homework BJ1 PICTURE – Sit on chair, write, resources at hand, smile on face, reader is ready to go 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write Happy Active Active Resources F
Researcher		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 Do it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ResponsibilityA

What is the role of the parents within the homework partnership?

Role	Participant	
Teacher	Mary	Categories
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M2 They are welcome to do as much preparation as they want for pretests M3 Not about perfection; personal growth; improvement M3 Consistency from week to week M3 Use study guide kept at home M4 Plan for what is coming M4 If student struggling, focus on spelling series words to meet common ground M5 Read advice of teacher M5 Motivate student through activities M5 Constantly check up on things so that we are not letting possible areas of struggle and/or weakness slip by us because we are not looking M5 Review M5 Look closely at how well a concept has been absorbed M6 Help guide and support their student M6 But not to teach their student; that is my job M6 Won't leave student isolated M6 Parents involvement M7 Relax M7 They may be helping with the materials or part of the labour of it M7 But they are still remembering that it is the student's reflection of their learning M7 Not the parents perspective; student directed; not "Here's a new assignment for you, mom" M7 Learn to step back M7 Role is to support and to help and to offer assistance M7 Try to pull ideas from st; not feed ideas to student MJ2 I would expect parents to work side-by-side with their student during study sessions for both spelling and social studies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare G Consistency Teacher directed Plan ahead Indiv'lizedF Teacher directed Motivate StF Check up Awareness Review Depth of underst Guide Support Not teach Not isolate Involvement Relax Help Not PDirected Not PDirected Not PDirected Support Assist Support SDirected Side by Side Expectation
Teacher	Tami	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T2 I think parents should be informed of what is going on in the classroom T2 Informed about what is expected afterwards T2 Parents are expected to read over the requirements, themselves T2 To make sure that those things are done. T2 Check it over to see if it is done correctly T3 On board; take ownership of the learning T3 Excite the kids T3 Learning doesn't end at school T3 Know important in student's learning T3 Extend learning with support at home T4 Helping their kids with the homework TJ1 Check student's learning by ensuring homework is completed TJ1 Parents checks to ensure student finishes all requirements (do what teacher asks) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be informed Know expectatns Know expectatns Make sure done Check for correct Ownership Motivate Extend Bridge Bridge Help Check Complete Check Finished
Parents	Jane	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> J1 I always make time for it J1 Cover the stuff that was assign in class J2 Ask teacher if I ran into troubles J2 Supervise his homework J2 Find out what's happening in the classroom J2 Communicate with the teacher on a regular basis J2 Make sure st is eating healthy and sleeping well J2 Parents involvement IN the classroom J3 Having enough time to fit everything in. JJ2 I set aside time in the evening for homework completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make time Cover TDmaterial Ask tchr if trouble Supervise Be informed Bridge regularly Health st F Involvement Sch Schedule time Time Complete

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JJ2 Listen to read • JJ2 I gave my younger daughter an activity to do during my son's homework time • JJ2 Ask questions to clarify read comprehension; check for spelling ability • JJ2 Stay informed of what kinds of learning is happening in the classroom • JJ4 Review and reinforce concepts covered in class that day. • JJ4 Nag student if not doing homework • JJ4 Check his answers • JJ4 Check for accuracy and speed and feelings "confidence with numbers" growth • JJ5 Ask questions to get him started • JJ5 Corrected spelling errors and made sure his letter formation was correct and neat • JJ5 Guide – brainstorm ideas first • JJ5 Help him without imposing my own ideas and write style on him 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen • Time • Clarify Check • Informed • Review Reinforce • Nag • Check • Check Growth • Ask ? • Correct Neat • Guide process • Help not Impose
Parents	Katherine	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K2 Participate • K2 Coach; teach her anything new • K2 Helping her understand the meaning of that word • K2 Do what is assign by teacher • K3 French pronunciation model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate • Coach Teach • Help Understand • Do TDirected • ModelCorrectness
Student	Adam	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A2 She just corrects me if I get a word wrong • A2 Or she doesn't correct me. She just says you got something wrong or something. • A3 My mom help me learn piano. • A3 She played the notes. I just listened and I do it. • AJ1 She listened • AJ2 Listened • AJ3 Checking my answers • AJ4 Spelling words • AJ5 Listen • AJ6 Listening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct • Support SD • Help • PD Plays notes • Listen • Listen • Check • Spell • Listen • Listen
Student	Brittany	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B1 She gives me clues mostly like in spelling she tells me letters and in cello sometimes she tells me what note I missed on that bar • B2 Teaching me tens and ones • B2 Help me with words that I get wrong. Help me sound them out • B2 Help make easier • BJ1 She gave me clues; helped me with the notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clues Coach • Clues Coach • Teach • Help correct • Help make easier • Clues Help
Survey	Teacher	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ST1 Review concepts learning in class that day/week, as well as review previous concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review
Survey	Parents	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SP1 Organizing • SP1 Explaining • SP1 Controlling • SP2 Guidance on what to do • SP2 Monitor that it is done neatly enough such that the teacher can read it • SP3 Sometimes it is just a reminder • SP3 Sometimes encouragement • SP3 Sometimes sitting beside him to walk through each step • SP3 Depending on the level of difficulty and how tired he is! • SP4 Assistance, usually with math using concepts, visuals, etc. Spelling bees • SP5 Mainly supervision in case my student has questions • SP6 Mostly supervising in case my student has questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing • Explaining • Controlling • Guidance • Monitor • Remind • Encourage • Sit beside • Depends • Assist • Supervision • Answer questions
Survey	Student	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SS1 Explain things to me • SS1 Get me to do it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain • Motivate Presp
Researcher		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 Support and prepare to make schoolwork easier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support

What is the role of the teacher in the homework partnership?

Role	Participant	
Teacher	Mary	Categories
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M1 Incorporate homework • M1 Follow teaching philosophy • M1 Provide meaning • M2 Provide opportunities to demonstrate true learning • M2 Outline expectations; philosophy for parents • M3 Provide groundwork of what they are studying; meaningful • M3 Want student to succeed • M3 Remind student to complete assignments • M3 Make it positive and attainable/manageable • M3 Remind parents of deadlines • M4 Help make things work really well for families so they can plan ahead • M4 Preplanning • M4 Prepare families so no surprises advance notice • M5 Support st common ground at grade level achievement • M5 Provide parents with helpful tools and tips • M5 Amuse parents with tips • M5 Provide suggestions because every student learns differently • M5 Provide advice • M5 Provide suggestions to keep parents motivated and st motivated • M5 My responsibility as a teacher to ensure that learning is really there • M5 Check up to not let possible areas of struggle or weakness slip by • M5 Look • M6 Give homework • M6 Grade homework • M6 Organized Clear expectations • M6 Prepare for a quiz • M6 Teach the student; that is what my job is • M6 Provide user-friendly parents resources • M7 I often do a midpoint check-in with particular parents to ensure stD; refocus on stD • M7 Monitor and keep a close eye on how those projects are perceived and interpreted • M7 Ensure consistency in type of learning occurring; purpose is maintained • M7 Help parents help their student • M7 Remind parents of their role • M7 Provide strategies or some possible mediations • M7 Make it easier for parents • M8 Clarity of assignment; routine • M8 Planning ahead; organizing; knowing goals • M8 Bridging the gap between student and their parents by communicating • M8 Make sure we are all on the same track • M8 Mediator • M8 Liaison between what the student is going home and telling their parents and hoping to hear from me • M8 Making sure that communication is going all in the same direction • M8 Make sure no one is misunderstanding responsibilities • M9 Not focus on pleasing parents but helping student • M10 Provide tasks that are completely manageable and within their reason • MJ1 Develop ideas for conceptual learning assignments • MJ2 Assign • MJ2 Set expectations • MJ2 Provide a variety of study strategies that may work well for a variety of learners; booklet • MJ2 List a numbers of strategies for parents to try if they feel that they need fresh or motivating ideas • MJ2 Craft homework assignments that support learning at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TDirected • Philosophy • Meaing • Op to Demo • Expectations Phil • FM • Succeed • Remind • ManageableF • Remind • Prepare • Prepare • Prepare • Support F • Tools Tips • FComm Tips • Individ'lized • Advise • Suggest MotivSP • Responsibility TD • Monitor Vigilant • Awareness • Assign • Grade • Organize Expect • Prepare • Teach • Resource • Monitor • Monitor • Monitor • Support parents • Remind • Resource • SupportE • Clarity Routine • Prepare Goals M • Bridge Commun • Bridge Monitor • Mediator • Liaison • Monitor • Monitor • StFocused • EAssign • Develop it • Assign • Expectations • Strategies S • Strategies P • Dev to Support
Teacher	Tami	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T1 Classes are on a homework booklet system • T1 Each week • T1 Support homework at school • T2 Lay out my expectations • T2 Follow expectations of school • T2 Checking up to see if they've done their homework • T2 Correcting homework • T2 Inform parents of what is going on in the classroom and what is expected afterwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System • Routine • Support • Expectations • Philosophy Sch • Monitor • Correct • ComExpectations

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T2 Mark homework T2 Laying out the expectations T2 Assigning meaningful homework T2 Supporting the homework with ongoing learning in the classroom. T2 Communication T3 Repeat what is in the homework booklet so that the kids can tell their parents T3 Clarify expectations T4 Help parents if they are unclear TJ1 Present, reinforce and review concepts in meaningful context in a way that considers learning styles TJ1 Communicate homework expectations to parents in variety of ways TJ1 Presents concepts in interactive ways that show student their relevance to everyday life TJ1 Meaningful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Correct Expectations AssignM Support Homewrk Communicate Support St SDA Clarify expect Help p Clarify Present Communicate Relevance Meaningful
Parents	Jane	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> J1 Assign J2 (pause) after asked the question J2 Follow the curriculum J2 Find different ways to challenge different student based on their levels J2 Communicate with parents J3 Based on curriculum JJ1 Clarify or help if needed JJ2 Assign; booklet JJ2 Suit student's needs "homework so far has been very light on weekdays JJ6 I was happy to receive a more challenging story today for rdg homework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign (pause)?? Curriculum Challenge Communicate Curriculum Clarify Help Assign Suitable Indiv'l Suitable Indiv'l
Parents	Katherine	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K2 (pause) after asked the question K2 Provide them new information that I wouldn't think of doing K2 With some structure K2 Give them the basics K2 Allow them to practice that information at home K2 Assign homework K2 Each night K3 It's the little things ... so that is we don't know something, they can give you a little more instruction on how you can help your student. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (pause)?? Support PDirected Structure Teach Op to practice Assign Routine Resource
Student	Adam	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A1 School printed out the books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign
Student	Brittany	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NA
Survey	Teacher	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ST1 Cover concepts ST1 Reinforce them in class before ST1 Assigning as homework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach Prepare Assign
Survey	Parents	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NA
Survey	Student	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NA
Researcher		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 Plan implement support communicate clearly not monitor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare Support Communicate Not monitor

What is the ideal partnership between school and home to support learning at home?

Role	Participant	
Teacher	Mary	Categories
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M8 Bridging the gap M8 Going in the same direction M8 Clear understanding M8 Responsibilities M8 State of evolution; always room for improvement and for change and growth M9 Involvement in the classroom to support learning at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bridge Alignment Clarity Responsibilities Growth Classroom Inv

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M9 Processes • M9 Continued growth • M9 Stay true to ed phil • MJ1 Real learning comes from one's own initiative to apply, expand and enrich upon concepts that have been learning and to make that particular learning experience personally meaningful and something that is a part of one's long-time learner memory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes • Growth • Philosophy • Initiative • Meaningful • Memory
Teacher	Tami	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T2 Ongoing communication • T2 Consistency • T2 Communicate if too hard or too much • T3 Confident and capable st learners • T3 Learning is personal and it means something to them • T4 Parents ownership • TJ1 Present, reinforce and review concepts in meaningful context in a way that considers learning styles • TJ1 Communicate homework expectations to parents in variety of ways • TJ1 Presents concepts in interactive ways that show student their relevance to everyday life • TJ1 Meaningful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Consistency • Bridge Com • F Capable • St Meaningful • P Ownership • Present • Communicate • Relevance • Meaningful
Parents	Jane	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J1 Challenge student with quantity and quality • J2 Positive • J2 Be in the classroom more • J3 Time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chal St Abilities • FPositive • Involvement Sch • Time
Parents	Katherine	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K3 If we weren't so crunched for time all the time; not in a rush; leisurely pace; time constraint • K3 Enjoyable • K3 Instruction for parents • K3 St interested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Enjoyment • Instruction • Motivation
Researcher		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 Triangle bridge good communication daily review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership • Bridge • Communication • Daily • Review

What are the barriers to the ideal partnership?

Role	Participant	
Teacher	Mary	Categories
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M4 Student struggling • M4 Parents don't know what to do • M5 Parents and st motivation • M6 Clarity of expectations • M6 Parents anxiety • M7 Parents directed not student directed • M7 Overscheduling • M9 Time constraint for teachers • M9 Some families don't see the value of certain assignments • M9 Some families don't see the value of the homework process • M9 Parents who say there is not enough homework • M9 Parents who have a different perspective of what homework is • M9 Teacher not being flexible • M9 To meet parents needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student str • Parents str • Motivation • Clarity Exp • Parents anxiety • PDirected • Overscheduling • Time Tchr • Perspective • Perspective • Perspective • Perspectives • Flexibility • Responsive to P
Teacher	Tami	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T2 (pause) • T2 Environment to support the learning process • T2 Not completing homework • T2 Parents not checking homework • T2 Time to complete • T2 Too many other activities going on • T3 Clarity of expectations • T3 Confusion; ambiguity • TJ1 Schedules too full (student) • TJ1 Language of parents/family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (pause) • Environment • Completing • Checking • Time • Overscheduling • Clarity of Expect • Clarity • Schedule • Language

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TJ1 Student's health TJ1 Learning disabilities TJ1 Frustration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health Disabilities Frustration
Parents	Jane	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> J3 Not enough time. Time is big J3 Many outside interests J3 Having enough time to fit everything in J3 Fitting it in is a challenge J3 In terms of extended learning...more rdg that we could be doing. We don't have time for that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time Overscheduling Time Time Time
Parents	Katherine	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K3 If we weren't so crunched for time all the time K3 In a rush; busy lives, quickly do... K3 Cram it all in K3 Being able to do it in less constrained time K3 Knowledge of a subject to support coaching role K3 Little more instruction on how you can help your student KJ1 "At this point, I feel very confident that I'm able to be of great assistance to her. We'll see what happens in a few years." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time Time Overscheduling Time Knowledge Guidance
Survey	Parents	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SP2 Daily homework more than 15 min seems to be too much - it is a battle to get the student to do it and creates more stress than I think an elementary student needs; too much stress for the parents too when there are a lot of other activities SP3 Student need to be taught skills of time management and productive learning tools at school and home. i.e. how to avoid/manage the mental block/road block/frustration/spinning wheels in order to make learning effective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amount Battle Overscheduling Time mment skills Learning tools How to -barriers
Researcher		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 Skill level of parents Communication Education importance of repetition for mastery Discipline learn how to study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents Knowledge Communication Phil Discipline Habit

How could the barriers be overcome?

Role	Participant	
Teacher	Mary	Categories
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M9 Common goal M9 Value of activity and process M9 Teacher responsive to parents need M10 Take time to reflect and make conscious and meaningful M10 Purposeful – who is doing the doing M10 Manageable tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alignment Shared values Responsive Reflection M Purposeful Manageable Prep
Teacher	Tami	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T2 Environment supports the learning process T2 Complete homework T2 Parents check homework T2 Time to do homework T3 Communication T3 Finding that the learning is personal and it means something to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Env't Complete Check Time Communication Meaningful Pers'l
Parents	Jane	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NA
Parents	Katherine	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K3 Teacher could provide some instructions on how you can help your student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tchr support
Researcher		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 Communication; subject area and process knowledge; workshops; stronger partnerships; opportunities to communicate; clarity of expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Knowledge Support Partnerships Clarity of Expect

Appendix F: Open Coding Categories and Sources

Categories	Sources
Learn	
• Active	M1,2,6,7,11; MJ2,3; T1; TJ1,2; J1,2; JJ1,2,3,4,5,6; K1,2*; KJ1; A2; AJ1; B; BJ1; ST1,3,4,5
• Review	M2,3; MJ2, T1; TJ1, 2; J2; JJ2,6; K1,2; KJ1; AJ3; RQ1
• Practice	M2,4,MJ2; TJ1; J1; JJ3,5; K1,2; KJ1; SP4; RQ1; TJ1; JJ4,5
Growth	
• Build	M2,4,5*,8,9; MJ2; T1;3*; ST1*; SS1
• Support	M4,5,6,7,9; T1,2; R1; SP3; RQ1; MJ2; A2; K2,3
• Evolution	RM1
• Help	M1,4; JJ4; KJ1; A2; SS1; T1,2,4; K1; AJ7; B2
Bridge	
• Interact	M2,5, 6*; TJ1*; K2; J2; KJ1
• Monitor	MJ2; JJ2,3,4,5; KJ1; A2; AJ3; M5*7,8; SP2,4; T2; K3; TJ1
• Alignment	RQ1; M5,7,8*9*; MJ1; T2,3,4*; JJ2; TJ1; K3; RQ1
• Bond/Connect	K1*; KJ1*; AJ3; B1; SP3; M4; T3
Direct	
• Assign	M1,6; J1; JJ2; K2; ST1; SP5; MJ1,2
• Expectations	M1,6; T2,3; MJ2, RQ1
• Communicate	T2,3; TJ1; M6,7; JJ2,4; MJ1,2; J2; K3; RQ1
Environment	
• Structure	MJ2; T1,2; TJ1; KJ1; PS; RQ1; K2*,3; M8,9
• Time	MJ1,2; T1; SS; M1; T1,2; ST1; J1,2; JJ2; K3; SP2
• Pace	JJ3,4; J3
• Schedule/Org'n	SP3; J1*, J3*, M3,6,7,8; T1,2; TJ1*
Foundation	
• Meaning	M1,2,6,7; T1,2,3; TJ1; MJ1
• Prepare	M1*,2,3,4,5,6,10*, MJ2; T2; TJ2*
• Support	M4,5,6,7,9; T1,2*; R1; SP3; RQ1; MJ2; A2; K2,3; J2*
• Responsive	M3,5,9; J1; JJ5; TJ1; T3

KEY	
<i>Letter#</i>	Interview Transcript (Mary =M, Jane=J, Tami=T, Adam=A, Brittany=B, Katherine=K)
<i>LetterJ#</i>	Homework Journal
RM#	Reflective Researcher Memo
<i>LetterJ#</i>	Pre-Interview Questions/Diagrams
RQ#	Reflective Researcher Questions
<i>SLetter#</i>	Survey (Teacher=T, Student=S, Parent=P)
#	Page Number

Getting Fit: Criteria String Teachers Use for
Choosing Shoulder Rests and Chin Rests

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Abstract

Previous literature documents the importance of evaluating chin rests and shoulder rests when fitting students and finds that tension in the neck and jaw pressure are reduced when attention is given to chin rest and shoulder pad fit (Okner, 1997). However, it is not clear whether string teachers consider various types of shoulder rests and chin rests when fitting students. The purpose of this study is to examine criteria string teachers use when choosing chin rests and shoulder rests for themselves and their violin and viola students. The research question is: What criteria do string teachers use when evaluating students for chin rests and shoulder rests? Sub-questions are: What physical criteria of the student are considered? How do teachers prioritize physical criteria? What training have teachers had in regards to fitting students for chin rests and shoulder rests? How do teachers rate the comfort of their own chin and shoulder rest fit on their instrument? A purposeful sample of private studio teachers and public school string teachers from Pennsylvania was surveyed using a questionnaire. Results indicated that teachers consider neck length the primary physical characteristic for choosing shoulder rests and chin rests for students. Results also indicated little time is spent in undergraduate or post-undergraduate/graduate training addressing comfort. Finally, teachers rated their personal comfort on shoulder rests and chin rests higher than the perceived personal comfort of their students on shoulder rests and chin rests.

Getting Fit: Criteria String Teachers use for
Choosing Shoulder Rests and Chin Rests

It is an ongoing challenge for string teachers to find the right combination of chin rest and shoulder rest support for their students when playing the violin or viola. The shoulder rest and chin rest support, when properly fitted should result in relaxed performance that benefits the health of the musician. The physical construction and shape of the violin or viola leads to a question of how players appropriately support their instruments and strive for comfort. Further, as the violin or viola player advances to perform increasingly harder repertoire, the greater challenge, or task constraint, becomes how to perform more difficult repertoire while dealing with the difficulties of physical construction of the instrument. Ergonomics is defined as the fitting of the materials to the worker, that is, fitting the violin to the performer. While the science of ergonomics has crossed into fields such as computing and sports, ergonomics is less often addressed in string pedagogy.

Articles in teaching journals such as the *American String Teacher (AST)* and *American Suzuki Journal (ASJ)* reflect many opinions on the issue of shoulder rest and chin rest fit for violin and viola players. The general consensus is that players of all ages and levels should be comfortable, although this concept of comfort is difficult to operationalize. That is, one's individual notion of comfort may differ from other individual's. In formal research literature it is not evidenced to what extent string teachers consider various physical characteristics, previous experience, or lesson settings such as applied private lessons or public school string class when fitting students for shoulder rests and chin rests on the violin and viola. Further, hundreds of styles of shoulder rests

and chin rests exist equaling thousands of potential combinations of fit. And, teachers may chose to fit students with a shoulder rest or a chin rest, or both. This problem is compounded by the fact that most instruments are sold with a chin rest, but not a shoulder rest or shoulder pad. And, that chin rest may or may not be appropriate for the player.

The purpose of this study is to examine criteria string teachers use when choosing chin rests and shoulder rests for themselves and their violin and viola students in order to further understand how teachers conceptualize comfort for themselves and their students in the field of string pedagogy. Literature is mainly in the form of AST and ASJ articles, and a few formal research projects. Several of the AST and ASJ articles suggest theoretical ideas based on practice.

In examining the literature, particularly the theoretical or pedagogical articles in AST and ASJ, three themes emerged that may guide string teachers to correctly fit their students. These themes are: combined fit of shoulder rest and chin rest, the importance of balance in the body while playing, and articles which targeted specific physical factors in either the chin rest or shoulder rest comfort.

The first theme that emerged from the literature was on the importance of the chin rest and shoulder rest working together to support the instrument. Freymuth (2002) suggested that students would have greater comfort from careful fitting of shoulder and chin rest apparatuses. Okner (1997) found that the task constraint (challenge) of violin construction is a significant issue in comfort and fit for the violin that can be mediated by choice of chin rest and shoulder rest. In a unique approach, Okner used a sensor mat to measure peak pressure and force while participants performed different repertoire and

measured for chin rest pressure. Okner found that chin pressure was increased with both poor ergonomics of shoulder pad and chin rest and harder repertoire.

The second theme, the importance of playing violin and viola with a balanced body, was also present in the literature. McCullough (1996) established the balance of head, neck and back comfort is difficult for string players to achieve. McCullough suggests in trying to find balance, violinists and violists build up the height of the chin rest or shoulder rest to the point of immobilization in the search for comfort, but that this approach is physically detrimental to the player. Perkins (1995) also discusses the importance of a balanced body as found in the work of Kato Havas and Paul Rolland, two notable violin pedagogues of the 20th century.

Noted violinist and composer Louis Spohr invented the chinrest ca. 1820 (Nemet, 2004) in response to increasingly difficult repertoire that called for freedom of the left hand. According to Nemet, Spohr reasoned that with harder repertoire, a solid base of support on the left side would allow for the left hand to be flexible to tackle harder repertoire. Nemet goes on to suggest that students be fitted for chin rests, but also states that “many dealers and teachers alike suggest trying as many chin rests as possible, and focusing on how each one feels with your instrument and shoulder rest.”

Finally, several articles suggested specific physical characteristics or considerations when choosing shoulder rests and chin rests. For example, Bossuat (2005) suggested measuring eye dominance and considering a student’s eye dominance when fitting for a shoulder rest or chin rest. Bossuat advocated for use of the center chin rest over the left sided shoulder rest for left-eye dominant players. This is different from the standard left sided chin rest and shoulder rest combination.

Regarding shoulder rest fit, Ward (2009) stated, "The right rest for you is the one that feels comfortable and natural." The article, written for teenage string players for *Teen Strings Magazine* advises students to try several different shoulder rests for the best possible fit. It also suggests that not using a shoulder rest can cause the player to lift the left shoulder, leading to muscle strain. Ward concluded, "if you're like many other players, you'll develop a collection of shoulder rests over the years, switching from time to time as your physical needs or playing style changes." This seems to be the only article that addressed the possibility that players may need several fittings and that perhaps the definition of comfort may change over time.

An overview of the literature shows mainly theoretical or pedagogy articles and few research articles relating to shoulder rest and chin rest fit for violin and viola players. While most researchers and practitioners of string pedagogy are able to come to the conclusion that comfort is of primary importance when choosing shoulder rests and chin rests, what does it mean to be comfortable?

Due to the lack of understanding regarding the existing practice of fitting violin and viola players for shoulder rests and chin rests, the following research questions were developed to guide the present investigation: What criteria do string teachers use when evaluating students for chin rests and shoulder rests? Sub-questions are: What physical criteria of the student are considered? How do teachers prioritize physical criteria? What training have teachers been exposed to regarding fitting students for chin rests and shoulder rests? How do teachers rate the comfort of their own chin and shoulder rest fit on their instrument?

Method

Participants

The participants consisted of a sample of private studio teachers and public school string teachers from Pennsylvania invited to complete the questionnaire. Participants were identified as either members of the American String Teachers Association (ASTA), Greater Philadelphia Suzuki Association (GPSA), or Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) who indicated a primary teaching assignment of strings. These participants were invited because of their affiliation with the professional organizations.

Materials and Data Collection Tools

The 160 participants were sent a 12-question survey that was written by the author to address the research questions. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. First, basic demographic information was collected including: primary instrument (violin, viola, cello, or bass), lesson setting (public school, private studio or both), ages the participants work with, and format of lessons taught (individual lessons, small groups of 8 or less, large group of 9-16 students, or large group ensemble greater than 16 students). Finally, participants were asked what type of shoulder and chin rests they use when playing the violin or viola. Nationally recognized chin rests and shoulder rests were listed along with a text response box for participants who used a different type. In part two of the survey, participants rated fit criteria on a Likert scale. This included physical criteria such as neck length, shoulder length, eye dominance, and hand dominance, and statements about comfort, fit, and undergraduate and graduate training regarding shoulder rest and chin rest comfort. In the third part of the survey, open-ended

response, participants were given space to comment broadly on the topic of shoulder rest and chin rest fit.

In order to more fully understand how teachers perceive fit criteria in part two of the questionnaire, part two of the questionnaire was subdivided into four main areas: comfort of the teachers and their estimated ratings of student comfort, rankings of physical characteristics to consider when measuring for shoulder rest and chin rest fit, undergraduate and post-undergraduate/graduate training, and subjective ratings of “natural feel” of playing the violin or viola. This section listed statements such as “Shoulder rest and chin rest fit was something addressed in my undergraduate training” and participants ranked the statements on a 5-point Likert scale. The following rankings were available: Extremely Important, Very Important, Moderately Important, Barely Important and Not Important at All as well as a Not Applicable category.

The final section of the survey allowed for an open text response from participants to voice any additional concerns or opinions regarding shoulder rest and chin rest fit. This section was included because many teachers are passionate about the issue of shoulder rest and chin rest fit.

The survey was then uploaded to the data collection website www.surveymonkey.com to be accessed by the invited participants. The identified teachers were sent an introductory email including a personalized link to the online survey. After one week of collection, a reminder email was sent to invitees who had not completed the questionnaire. The survey was closed one month after the invitation was sent.

Results

A total of 354 public school and private studio teachers were identified as potential participants through membership in ASTA, PMEA and GPSA. Of these, 160 participants answered the survey of which 157 resulted in usable data (n=157, a 44.3% response rate). The remaining responses were incomplete. Of the respondents, 72% identified their primary instrument as violin, 17.2% identified primary instrument as viola, and the remaining portion identified primary instrument as cello, bass, or other.

Participants rated a list of physical characteristics on an ascending scale of 1 to 5 regarding which characteristics were most important when fitting a student. The participants ranked neck length (58.1% = Extremely Important) as the most important physical characteristic in fitting students (mean=4.46). The dominant hand was ranked lowest with 45.5% of respondents choosing the Not Important at All category (mean=1.76). (See Figure 1)

When asked about personal comfort while playing the violin or viola with their current shoulder rest and chin rest combination, the participants responded that they are, overall, comfortable, with 48% of respondents choosing Very Comfortable. A total of % of respondents choose comfortable for their current shoulder rest and chin rest combination. The teachers' perceptions of comfort for their students, however, were significantly lower (See Figure 2).

Also included in part two of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to rate statements concerning their experience with shoulder rest and chin rest fit and comfort. Because the Likert scale was rated 5 for Extremely Comfortable or Extremely Agree, the higher means show participants agreeing with the statement, while the lower means show dissent. Teachers rated "Playing my instrument feels natural to me" (mean=4.53) and

“Playing my instrument would not feel natural to me if I took off the shoulder rest and chin rest” (mean=4.48). And, teachers rated “Chin rest and shoulder rest fit was something addressed during my undergraduate training” (mean=2.09) and “Chin rest and shoulder rest fit was something addressed during my graduate or post-undergraduate training” (mean=2.31). Finally “I believe that even adult string players need to consistently re-evaluate shoulder rest and chin rest fit” rated a mean of 4.13.

At the end of the survey, the open-ended response invited teachers to comment on any other issues, concerns, or questions regarding the comfort and fit problem. Of the 157 respondents, 50 replied with additional insights ranging from a paragraph to two or more pages per participant. Responses ranged from broad statements about how the participants were taught as students themselves, to very specific prescriptions for the right fit for all players. A few responses were selected that represented typical comments made by participants for the results section of this study:

“I felt first hand the importance of the correct chin rest for me. I got a new violin and after the first week of teaching with it I had back and shoulder pain. It was an over the tailpiece chin rest and I believe it forced me to twist my neck in an unnatural way. I changed chin rests after trying a few the next week and never had another problem. I teach and play nearly every day with this violin now and along with my Kun, it is very comfortable.”

“Unfortunately, teaching in a public school, many of my students are restricted to using what the rental vendors give them. Many times the instruments are not set up properly and comfortably for the student.”

“The goal is always to have an instrument that is comfortably supported that enables relaxed tension free music making. Something that helped me was the adjustability of shoulder rest. Every body is shaped different[ly] and requires different things for personal support of the instrument. Maybe something moldable, like the dentist uses for retainers.”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the criteria string teachers use when choosing shoulder rest and chin rests for their students, and to better understand the abstract nature of comfort in violin and viola playing. Given the ambiguous nature of the criteria as suggested by the literature, variables of physical characteristics, undergraduate and post-undergraduate/graduate training, and subjective ratings of “feeling natural” were examined.

Responses regarding two questions were particularly striking. While the chin rest, and particularly, the shoulder rest are relatively new to the history of violin and viola playing, there were an overwhelming number of respondents who would not feel natural without these apparati. Further research should be done in this area to ascertain why violin and viola players feel that string playing is more natural with the addition of the shoulder rest and chin rest.

At the same time, respondents reported a low mean for undergraduate and graduate training received regarding shoulder rest and chin rest fit. Although string teachers consider the shoulder rest and chin rest fit essential, it appears that little time is devoted to thorough examination of the topic at the university training level.

Based on the findings of this study, it is apparent that string teachers most strongly consider the physical characteristics of neck length, head placement and shoulder shape when fitting students, and pay less attention to hand and eye dominance and finger length (see figure 1). However, since teachers rate student comfort as only moderately comfortable, perhaps teachers should reconsider the breadth and scope of physical characteristics when working with fitting children.

One limitation of this study was that it did not directly analyze the data for public school and private studio teachers separately, comments echoed through the open-response answer concerning the lack of time public school teachers have to properly fit children, the demands of teaching in the urban school environment, and the financial burden of providing each child with properly fitted shoulder rests and chin rests. It is recommended that further research address these problems.

The concept of comfort when playing the violin or viola can be considered in greater detail by examining several criteria string teachers consider when fitting students. Evidenced in the breadth of open-ended responses, teachers feel very strongly about the topics of fit and comfort. Or, in the words of one of the respondents “Children come in all shapes and sizes. It's a hard job to fit them all.” Through better understanding of physical characteristics, training, “natural feel” of the instrument, and subjective ratings of teachers’ personal comfort and estimations of their students’ comfort, it could be possible to better operationalize comfort for confident fittings by teachers for students and for teachers, themselves.

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Figure Caption

Figure 1. Mean ratings of teachers' rankings for physical characteristics when measuring students for shoulder rests and chin rests.



Figure 2. Teachers' rankings of personal comfort and fit on their current shoulder rests and chin rests compared to teachers' rankings of perceived comfort and fit for their students.

