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Home work in the elementary school: a study in two communities

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
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Thesis

HOME WORK IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:
A STUDY IN TWO COMMUNITIES

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to secure and analyze the opinion of parents and teachers in two communities with respect to the assignment of homework in the elementary grades. It was hoped that from this study certain conclusions might be drawn as to the role and value of home study insofar as they are validly reflected by the attitudes of parents and teachers.

The instrument used as the basis for this study was also designed to provide an opportunity for the following comparisons within and between the two communities concerned:

1. A comparison of the responses in Community A, where homework has been regularly assigned for a period of five years, with the responses in Community B, where the assignment of homework in the elementary grades has been generally prohibited.
2. A comparison of the responses of parents and teachers concerned with children at one grade level with the responses of parents and teachers concerned with children at another.
3. A comparison of the responses of parents with those of teachers concerned with children at the same level.

The interest indicated here with respect to the matter of home study is representative of the ever increasing concern, public and professional, with the total progress and development of public school education. For the past decade this concern, often taking

the form of highly articulate protest and criticism, has been directed diffusely at the entire scene of American educational policy and philosophy. More recently this concern has begun to crystallize into a concerted demand for a more intensive and challenging school program. Russian achievements in science and the subsequent publicity devoted to the disciplines of Russian schools have resulted in rapid and significant changes in our science and mathematics curricula. Change in these areas has become the order of the day as schools have sought to mollify their critics by acceding to the most vocal of them despite the insistence of many educators that what is needed is a continuation of efforts to design a total curriculum that will better challenge the capacity of every child in every area.

The continuing search for methods and opportunities of better exercising the abilities of its young people and better utilizing their interests has caused the school and home alike to look beyond the limits of the classroom. Field trips, community resources, and educational television are but a few of the devices to which educators have turned in their search. It is only logical that there should simultaneously be a renewed interest in the home assignment as a medium for increased learning and achievement.

The home assignment is undoubtedly as old as schools, and teachers, and pupils themselves. Home study has customarily been as much a part of the educational process as the activities in school itself, and this is no less true of the secondary school of today than it has been for generations. And with very few exceptions the assigning of homework has also been a common pro-

cedure in the elementary schools. Here, however, although the policy has not often been changed, it has frequently been assailed. Critics of the home assignment at the elementary level have questioned both its effectiveness and its influence upon the social and physical development of the young child.

Despite its detractors, however, the home assignment is receiving renewed attention and reevaluation. From schools severely limited by time, and from homes where many parents watch their children fritter away hours uselessly, there has come a growing demand for assignments increased in quantity and improved in quality.

This study seeks to interpret the opinion of teachers in two communities with respect to home study. The conclusions presented here, in all probability, cannot be regarded as valid for any community other than those in which this study was conducted. Teacher and parental opinion with respect to such a sensitive matter as homework cannot help but differ widely from community to community, dependent in each upon a wide variety of social and economic factors. For that reason it is pertinent here to describe briefly several aspects of the communities in which this survey took place.

Community A is a community of approximately twenty thousand people located twenty miles north of Boston. It is a rapidly growing community, which has witnessed the construction of one hundred seventy-five homes annually for the past ten years. Large tracts of land have already been purchased for development suggesting even more rapid growth in the future. Partially as a

cause, partially as a result, industrial and commercial growth have followed a similar pattern.

The resulting increase in population has entailed an influx of large numbers of people from all parts of the country representing every type of business and professional activity. The new along with the older citizens of the community have watched carefully the growth and development of the school program. Parent-Teacher Associations have been rejuvenated; school committee meetings are well-attended. This concern for the welfare of the schools has been manifest in the growing preoccupation of parents with matters relating to curriculum techniques of instruction, and methods of reporting. One early outgrowth of this concern was the development several years ago of a specific policy with respect to the assignment of homework in grades two through six in the elementary schools. One of the objectives of this thesis will be to examine the reactions of parents and teachers to this policy.

Community B is a town of ten thousand people located twenty-one miles south of Boston. With the exception of one small box factory of some historical significance, the community is completely residential, a "bedroom town." In large numbers its citizens travel back and forth to Boston, not only for their livelihood, but for their art, their music, their drama.

Because the adult population is comprised almost entirely of business and professional people, a large number of whom have had post-secondary education and training, it is extremely ambitious for its children in terms of career and financial security. This

fact alone has done much to mold the pattern of the community's schools. And perhaps justifiably so, for 61 per cent of those students graduated in 1958 from the local schools entered institutions of advanced education and training. In its effort to provide better than average schools for its children Community B has assumed the highest bonded indebtedness per capita of any community in the commonwealth. That its concern goes even beyond financial considerations is illustrated by the community's Parent-Teacher Association membership of two thousand persons, comprising the largest unit in the state.

Both Community A and Community B have made their schools and the educational welfare of their children a primary concern. Among other things this has meant wide-spread parental participation in school affairs and intelligent cooperation with school officials. This has resulted in the development of a large group of parents who are informed about and sensitive to school policy as it affects their children. It would seem that the responses of such a group to questions concerning homework would be of interest and value.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature concerned with various aspects of the home assignment, particularly as it relates to the elementary school, reveals little conclusive evidence. This statement is perhaps best supported by the fact that the two most comprehensive summaries of literature devoted to homework list but seven references which report actual research in the area. On the other hand, the literature is well-punctuated with opinion and comment, and from this, one thing is clear; there is no unanimity of thought on any aspect of home study. Every possible extremity of thought is presented with equal assurance and dogmatism. Those who would recommend one hour of homework each night for the first-grade child speak just as confidently as those who would eliminate all home assignments from the elementary school program.

Teachers, parents, administrators, and psychologists, and even the students themselves have considered and reported on every phase of the problem. The quality, the quantity, the frequency, and the type of assignment; its influence upon pupils, teachers, and the home; its effectiveness or its lack of it have all been discussed in detail. The very profusion of opinion has resulted in contradiction and confusion. Although in a minority, some writers doubt that homework of any kind at the elementary level results in any substantial educational benefit. Semans, for instance, maintains that "homework, as a general practice,

nets fewer values than many of its supporters would have us believe." He notes that the conscientious students do their assignments faithfully while the less interested either copy their assignments or fail to do them at all. This practice, he believes, "only serves to widen the gap between the poorest and the best students."¹ More common, however, is the opinion of Ludeman, who maintains that the belief that school is the only place to do schoolwork is an outmoded attitude:

Whether or not a pupil should do schoolwork at home has gone through several eras of approval and disapproval in the past two or three decades. Since the arrival of what is termed the modern or progressive period in public education, teachers have caught the idea that children should not do tasks at home, but that school is the place for all study and schoolwork. It is urgent that the elementary and secondary staffs begin working on the theory that there are other places for children to learn than only within the four walls of a schoolroom.²

Ludeman is supported in these convictions by Wheeler, who comments:

Although the type of homework given, and the amount of time devoted to it will vary with the grade, the assignment of homestudy is the responsibility of the school and should be provided at all grade levels.³

In general the principal concern seems to be not so much whether homework is of value, but rather "the amount of homework assigned, the manner of assigning it, and the way in which the

¹Hubert E. Semans, "Realism and Homework," American School Board Journal, 106:35, May, 1943.

²Walter Ludeman, "Homework - New Style," American School Board Journal, 105:14, December, 1942.

³Arville Wheeler, "Homework, the Responsibility of the School," American School Board Journal, 105:26, May, 1943.

teacher evaluates it."⁴

Surveys of present practices in the assignment of homework reveal wide variations, particularly with respect to the length and frequency of assignments. One of the most careful and widely representative studies of this aspect of the problem is described in the Chamberlain⁵ thesis. In this investigation three hundred Massachusetts teachers were asked to report their estimate of the number of minutes required to complete the homework they were currently assigning. When summarized, this study shows that 65 per cent of seventy-five primary grade teachers were assigning home lessons that required up to fifteen minutes for satisfactory completion. Twenty-five per cent of those polled stated that their assignments could be completed in not less than thirty minutes. The remaining 10 per cent reported that they did not assign homework.

At the fourth and fifth grade levels 68 per cent and 63 per cent, respectively, of the responding teachers stated that they were assigning homework requiring thirty minutes for completion. At the sixth grade level the figures are strangely inconsistent with those of the two previous grade levels, for here, as in the primary grades, a decided majority, or 59 per cent of the teachers reporting, stated that they were assigning work requiring not more than fifteen minutes for completion, and only 36 per cent

⁴Sister M. Theopleane, "Is Homework Valuable," Clearing House, 32:28, September, 1957.

⁵Carlton Chamberlain, Francis Trainor, and Charles Weymouth, "Trends in the Amount and Kind of Homework Assigned to Pupils in the Elementary Grades," (unpublished Master's thesis, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, 1954), p. 38.

felt that their assignments would require longer periods of study.

The often considerable difference between theory and practice is illustrated by a comparison of these figures with those provided by two opinion polls conducted by the educational periodical, Nation's Schools. The first of these polls reported in October, 1944, describes the response of five hundred school superintendents and an equal number of parents to an inquiry as to what they considered the maximum amount of daily homework that should be assigned to pupils in the elementary grades.⁶

A summary of the results indicates that at the first grade level 93 per cent of the administrators and 94 per cent of the parents favored no homework. Five per cent of the administrators and 6 per cent of the parents favored thirty minutes each day.

At the second grade level 83 per cent of the administrators and 94 per cent of the parents favored no homework. Ten per cent of the administrators and 6 per cent of the parents favored thirty minutes each day.

At the third grade level 73 per cent of the administrators and 94 per cent of the parents favored no homework. Seventeen per cent of the administrators and 6 per cent of the parents favored thirty minutes a day.

At the fourth grade level 56 per cent of the administrators and 50 per cent of the parents favored no homework. Thirty-three per cent of the administrators and 50 per cent of the parents favored from thirty to forty-five minutes of homework each day.

⁶Charles Skidmore, "What About Homework, An Opinion Poll," Nation's Schools, 34:32, October, 1944.

At the fifth grade level 38 per cent of the administrators and 40 per cent of the parents favored no homework. Thirty-three per cent of the administrators and 53 per cent of the parents favored from thirty to forty-five minutes of homework each day.

At the sixth grade level 34 per cent of the administrators and 30 per cent of the parents favored no homework. Thirty-six per cent of the administrators and 47 per cent of the parents favored from thirty to forty-five minutes of homework. Twenty-one per cent of the administrators and 23 per cent of the parents favored one hour of homework each day.

An analysis of these figures indicates that at the primary level both school administrators and parents look with disfavor upon the regular assignment of homework. At all the intermediate grades 50 per cent or more of both administrators and parents favor some homework with parents favoring somewhat longer periods of home study than do school administrators.

Fourteen years later this same magazine conducted another poll in which school administrators were asked their opinion with respect to the value of homework at both the lower and upper elementary school grades. Thirty-one per cent of the school administrators indicated that they favored homework assignments at the lower elementary grades while 68 per cent indicated their disapproval. In the upper elementary grades 79 per cent of those polled expressed their approval while only 20 per cent registered opposition. On the basis of this evidence the magazine concluded:

Homework should not be expected of the school child in the lower grades, but should be required in increasing amounts from children beyond the third grade. The number of

minutes required will vary with local conditions and educational aims.⁷

An almost identical poll appears in the Chamberlain⁸ thesis. The results reported here show that 61 per cent of 185 teachers polled approve of homework assignments in the primary grades. Eighty-six per cent of 123 teachers polled approve of homework assignments in the intermediate grades.

A careful comparison of the results of these surveys reveal sharp contrasts in opinion and in practice. The Massachusetts teachers included in the Chamberlain study favor larger amounts of homework at an earlier level than either parents or administrators polled by Nation's Schools. It is interesting to note that a larger percentage of the Massachusetts teachers are assigning homework than record themselves in favor of the practice.

The conflict that such a situation can and does produce is evidenced by the experience of the schools in Wayne Township, North Carolina. In this community, as a result of parental complaints about the unreasonable length of assignments, a committee was appointed to study the problem and make specific recommendations which might serve as a guide for the schools' administrators. The suggestions of this committee included the following proposals relevant to time devoted to home study:

Grades Kindergarten to four - No assigned homework except by special arrangement between parents and teachers. This homework should be of the practice type only. Children should be encouraged to take home library books and easy

⁷"Homework, Scheduled Study Time and Longer School Day, An Opinion Poll," Nation's Schools, 61:51, March, 1958.

⁸Chamberlain, op. cit., p. 37.

reading materials. They should be encouraged to play outdoors as much as possible.

Grades five and six - Not more than one-half hour of assigned homework should be given to children at these levels. Children are encouraged in addition to do voluntary homework. Emphasis on outdoor activities should be continued.⁹

It is obvious from the experience of the Wayne community that the matter of "how much homework" is inseparable from the question of "what kind of homework." In a discussion of this aspect of the problem one writer comments:

Some homework is sensible and educative; some is not. This much is clear: extensive home drill and homestudy in the elementary school does not justify by itself what is learned. The lazy and thoughtless assignment of pages in a book is on the way out. On the other hand, as a child grows older the introduction of homework, if its demands are reasonable and gradual, assists a child's growth and learning.¹⁰

Daly expresses the same point of view when he asks and then answers the following questions:

Is homework necessary? Should formal assignment of lessons for home consumption ever be given to elementary school children? If by homework we mean the old fashioned page assignment routine, the answer must be a decided negative. There is no evidence that such homework results in improved achievement.¹¹

Obviously what these writers are saying is that the kind of homework assigned is fully as important as the amount of time spent on it, and that the values to be achieved through homework determine both the kind and the amount. The home assignment must

⁹Kenneth A. Woolf, "Homework in the Wayne Township Public Schools," American School Board Journal, 118:36, March, 1949.

¹⁰Hans Froelicher, "Fresh Slant on Homework," Parents' Magazine, 20:20, February, 1945.

¹¹Ronald Daly, "When Homework Works," Education Digest, 16:19, November, 1950.

be of such a quality as to produce measurable results; it can no longer be accepted indiscriminately.

In present practice there is little standardization of practice even within the individual school system in the assignment of homework. Home study tasks range from the most mechanical exercises assigned to all students to the most creative individual projects. Written work is often required, probably because it constitutes evidence that the student has done the work. Assignments are often vague. Some teachers still do not acquaint students with the specific skills a given assignment requires. Such practices as these have had the very logical reaction of causing both distaste and resentment.¹² Commenting upon pupil reaction to the usual home assignment, Schiller reports that some children enjoy homework because in their experience they have been able to achieve the mastery necessary for good grades. She continues:

Other children and undoubtedly a majority dislike homework intensely and regard it as a drudge and a bore. These children report that they are frequently assigned homework which is either difficult to understand; or too simple and mechanical to be effective; or more extreme still, primarily punitive.¹³

Apparently the students described in Schiller's article are not the only ones concerned about the kind of home assignment they are required to complete.

¹²Ruth Strang, "Guided Study and Homework," What Research Says Series, Department of Classroom Teachers, American Educational Research Association of the National Education Association, No. 4, p. 26.

¹³Belle Schiller, "Homework, A Burning Issue," Grade Teacher, 75:20, March, 1958.

Ahrens¹⁴ reports the results of a study in which students were asked by investigators to indicate on a checklist their attitudes toward home study. Analysis of their responses suggests several areas of agreement:

1. Some homework is necessary.
2. Homework should be related directly to classwork.
3. One assignment should not require too much time.
4. Homework should be sufficiently discussed at time of assignment to enable the pupil to understand what is expected of him.
5. Homework should include assignments for those who find it easier to work with their hands than with their heads.
6. Homework should never be assigned as busy work or as means of punishment.

Research, where it is available, indicates that parents, too, have positive if diversified opinion concerning homework. Langdon and Stout, on the basis of interviews in nine hundred homes, found that parents regard homework as a vital line of communication between the school and the home. They emphasize that parents like to help, for in so doing they feel they are playing an important role in their child's education. Parents, they say, want homework to be "reasonable in amount and geared to the child's abilities, sensitive to the responsibilities of family living, and of direct and measurable value."¹⁵

One of the most widely debated facets of the problems resulting from the assignment of homework concerns the role of the

¹⁴Carsten Ahrens, "What Students Think About Homework," National Education Association Journal, 46:373, September, 1957.

¹⁵Grace Langdon and Irving W. Stout, "What Parents Think About Homework," National Education Association Journal, 46:376, September, 1957.

parent. This is an area in which it is difficult to generalize. Rules are difficult to arrive at and even more difficult to enforce. There needs to be discovered a middle ground somewhere between the often caricatured parent who practically completes the assignment and the equally numerous parents who are not even aware of it. Langdon and Stout¹⁶ believe that parents can best help by providing a time and place for studying, by placing importance on its being done thoroughly, by serving as a resource person insofar as they are able, and by being sincerely interested in the finished product. More detailed recommendations to the parent are offered by McKay who suggests the following:

1. Parents must first understand the viewpoint of the teacher or the school on the matter of homework and the extent to which they are invited to help.
2. Parents should help the child to understand that it is not merely a matter of doing his work, but of doing it well.
3. Parents should honestly answer the child's questions and cluster many meanings around a single idea so that the child will be motivated to participate and learn.
4. It is the responsibility of the parents to provide a quiet, comfortable, well-lighted room.
5. Parents must not only listen with understanding but also magnify the importance of the activity. There is nothing more discouraging to a child than to have a parent imply indifference or disapproval.¹⁷

In a sense this matter of parental help is not too far removed from the problem of pupil dishonesty in completing assignments. This consideration alone has been sufficient to cause

¹⁶Langdon and Stout, loc. cit.

¹⁷James McKay, "Ways That Parents May Help With Homework," Instructor, 41:11, December, 1959.

teachers to assume a negative attitude toward the assignment of homework. Strang indicates one reason for dishonesty in its usual form of copying when she says:

When homework assignments are the same for all pupils in the class, and when they consist of mechanical exercises requiring no originality and little initiative, conditions are just right for copying another's homework. And many pupils do.¹⁸

Although its results are difficult to classify, one of the most comprehensive reports in the homework literature describes a survey taken in various school systems throughout the country. Parents and teachers were queried in such widely separated areas as Denver, Colorado, Great Neck, New York, and Dade County, Florida.

In Denver it was found that 58 per cent of the parents opposed the "no homework" policy of the schools in that city. As a result of this poll, the problem was referred to a committee whose purpose was to study and redefine the policy. This committee surveyed the present practices in that community and checked on parent reactions through interviews and a questionnaire. From the data thus gathered the committee was able to derive the following conclusions:

1. Parents favor homework based on individual needs.
2. Teacher-parent planning is necessary for successful homework.
3. Some means other than homework should be found for informing the parents of the instructional program.
4. In the development of any policy, serious consideration

¹⁸ Strang, op. cit., p. 16.

should be given to physical and emotional factors.¹⁹

In response to a questionnaire distributed to parents and children in Dade County, Florida,²⁰ parents complained that teachers were often inconsistent in assigning homework, requiring large amounts one evening and virtually none the next. Students reported that homework assignments were often excessive. This is in obvious contrast to the situation in the New Lincoln School in New York City²¹ where parents and school authorities have established a homework policy designed to create a closer bond between the school and the home. In this school five to ten minute assignments are permitted in grades one through four and thirty minute assignments in grades five and six.

In Great Neck, New York, the study was primarily concerned with an investigation of teacher and parent opinion for the purpose of finding common agreement on what constituted acceptable basic techniques in the administration and conduct of successful home study. From a large number of suggestions were derived the following recommendations which served as a foundation for the establishment of a homework policy:

1. Students should copy assignments into a notebook.
2. Students should assemble all necessary materials prior to beginning work.

¹⁹A. Louise McNiff, "What's Happening in Denver," National Education Association Journal, 46:367, September, 1957.

²⁰Joe Hall, "What's Happening in Dade County," National Education Association Journal, 46:369, September, 1957.

²¹Charles Sanders, "What's Happening in New York City," National Education Association Journal, 46:370, September, 1957.

3. Homework should be done at a regular time.
4. The place in which studying is to be done should be quiet.²²

Obviously there remains a clear cut need for basic research in the entire area of homework, research that will cut through the vast amount of opinion and conjecture that surrounds the problem. Up to this time, however, the many intangible factors involved have prevented exact and consistent measurement. Certainly if reliable evidence could be presented to indicate that the right kind of homework would bring about desirable changes in student achievement, much of the disagreement reported here could be resolved. Strang describes this need definitively:

There is a need for well-planned and carefully controlled experiments in which various kinds of learning in different subjects are studied; the groups are equated with respect to more of the factors that influence learning; the setting and the nature of homework are described in detail, and the results are more precisely measured and interpreted. There is also need for more systematic and accurate observation and analysis by teachers of how individual pupils learn under different conditions of home and school study.²³

The evidence at hand provides only a few answers to the many questions which have been posed by the conflicting comments in the literature we have reviewed. It seems essential, however, that an attempt be made to draw together the significant statements in the many sources cited here for purposes of summary and condensation. On the basis of this material, the following conclusions seem justified:

1. Homework in the form of compulsory assignments of tasks

²²Helen Flynn, "What's Happening in Great Neck," National Education Association Journal, 46:370, September, 1957.

²³Strang, op. cit., p. 30.

to be written or so many pages to be read, in general, does not appear to make much difference in pupil achievement. Homework that grows out of stimulating school experiences and student initiative and choice may be expected to be a valuable learning experience and therefore a worthwhile use of after-school time.

2. Some groups which have been assigned home study benefit more than comparable groups which have not had homework. Homework which provides freedom with responsibility produces growth in self-reliance and independence. Slow learning pupils may be lost without homework. It appears that there are individual differences in the effectiveness of different kinds of homework with different kinds of pupils.

3. Parents, teachers, and pupils favor the assignment of homework in varying amounts. In general, school personnel favor less homework than parents and are less convinced of its effectiveness. All children object to cut-and-dried assignments and busy work. The more ambitious slow-learners and the academically gifted students want a reasonable amount of properly assigned home study.

4. Teachers are currently assigning homework in amounts that increase with the grade of their students. Present assignment practices are frequently questioned by pupils, parents, and school administrators.

5. There is an increasing revival of interest in the status and potential of the home assignment as an aid to learning.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to secure and analyze parent and teacher opinion in two communities with respect to the assignment of homework in the elementary school. It was hoped that from this study certain conclusions might be derived in terms of the role and value of home study in these communities insofar as they are validly reflected by the attitudes of parents and teachers.

The conclusions submitted here in all probability cannot be regarded as valid in any measurable sense for communities other than those in which this study was conducted; therefore, it was not intended to present them as representative of teacher and parental opinion in general. Conversely, even were it available, literature resulting from similar surveys in other communities would have no certain implications for the two communities with which this study is concerned.

Justification for this study may be found in the almost complete lack of research evidence pertaining to the subject of elementary school homework. Of the two hundred eighty titles listed in the Education Index during the period from 1928 to 1958 only seventeen are original reports of experimental research, and of these only seven concern the elementary school.¹ The small number

¹Avram Goldstein, "Does Homework Help? A Review of Research," The Elementary School Journal, 60:212, January, 1960.

of research studies which have been conducted have either dealt with comparatively small populations or have produced results that are poorly classified. It would appear, therefore, that the collection and analysis of a substantial body of opinion dealing with such basic considerations as the length and frequency of the assignment, methods of grading it, and the role of the parent in overseeing it would constitute a contribution of positive value to the research literature in elementary school homework.

Once the broad outlines of this study had been determined, and approval for its execution secured from the educational authorities in both communities, the next step was the selection of an instrument for securing efficiently the desired body of opinion. Study and consideration resulted in the selection of the questionnaire as the medium best designed to achieve this preliminary objective. Further consideration brought about the identification of four distinct populations to which the questionnaire would be submitted: (1) parents in Community A; (2) teachers in Community A; (3) parents in Community B; (4) teachers in Community B. From the outset it became apparent that one of the valuable and unique features of this study would be the comparison of opinion in Community A where homework had been regularly assigned for a period of five years with that in Community B where homework had been generally prohibited. It was, therefore, considered essential that the questionnaires distributed to parents and teachers in both communities be identical or as nearly similar as possible.

The items drafted for inclusion in the questionnaire proceeded from an identification of certain basic aspects involved

in the administration of the home assignment. The length and frequency of the assignment, considerations in grading it, and methods of providing for it in the home were defined as fundamental and served as a basis for the construction of the instrument.

The first item was designed to secure an expression of opinion with respect to the general desirability of assigning homework in the elementary school. Only parents and teachers answering yes to this item were invited to complete the questionnaire. This provision resulted from the conviction that parents and teachers opposed to homework in principle could not be expected to respond constructively to the remaining items.

Item number two was concerned with what has been the most controversial of all aspects of the home assignment: the amount of time required to complete it. Parents and teachers were asked to indicate their opinion as to the amount of time the school should expect the pupil to devote to home study on any given day. A large number of choices were offered in this item to provide for the wide range of responses anticipated at the various grade levels.

One of the frequent charges leveled at present practice in the assignment of homework has been that it usually proceeds from a blanket policy which makes no provision for individual needs. The purpose of item three was to ascertain the attitudes of parents and teachers toward methods of assignment other than that of a regular requirement imposed upon all children.

One of the most persistent problems associated with the assignment of homework has been the lack of success in attempts to

define the role of the parent who concerns himself with overseeing the assignment's execution. Item four seeks to determine what, in the opinion of teachers and parents, is the proper role for the parent, where his obligations, if any, begin and where they end.

Any decision as to how much time should be devoted to home study during a given period of time is clearly dependent upon the frequency and length of the assignments. This facet of the problem is dealt with in question five which suggests three alternatives and asks parents and teachers to indicate which type and method of assignment they consider most valuable.

Item six involves a consideration of the various methods of evaluating the completed assignment. Both this and the final item of the instrument dealing with the teacher's treatment of uncompleted assignments involve matters of school policy that have often proved to be stumbling blocks in the administration of the homework assignment.

This instrument, then, includes seven questions of which six are multiple choice items; the remaining question requires only a yes or no response. It covers four basic aspects of the area and can be thoughtfully completed in less than ten minutes. Its primary purpose is to produce opinion in a form that can be easily tabulated without loss of meaning or significance.

The original draft of this questionnaire was submitted to the Boston University School of Education Seminar in Elementary School Administration for discussion and comment. On the basis of advice from this group several changes were made. The revised instrument

along with an accompanying letter of explanation was then submitted to Dr. W. Linwood Chase, Director of the Seminar, for final comment and criticism.

The questionnaire in its approved form is reproduced below. The questionnaire appearing here was distributed to parents in Community B. Where words or phrases were adjusted in the other three forms to accommodate the local situation, they are indicated by underlining and a raised numeral. The exact wording of these changes is specified at the bottom of each page.

Grade Level 5

In completing this questionnaire please answer only with respect to the grade level of the child who brought it to your home.¹

This grade level is noted in the upper right corner. Indicate your response to the following items by placing a check mark in the parentheses beside the choice which best represents your opinion. Parents having more than one child in the elementary grades may receive more than one questionnaire. We hope you will wish to complete and return each of them.²

1. Do you feel that regularly scheduled home assignments would be of value in the educational development of your child?³

() Yes

() No

If your answer to the above question is Yes, please respond to the following items:

¹Appears as you teach in teacher's questionnaire in both communities.

²Omitted completely from teacher's questionnaire in both communities.

³Appears as pupils in teacher's questionnaire in both communities.

2. What is the maximum number of minutes you feel the school should expect your child¹ to devote to home study on a given day?
- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 30 | <input type="checkbox"/> 60 | <input type="checkbox"/> 120 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30 | <input type="checkbox"/> 75 | <input type="checkbox"/> More than 120 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 45 | <input type="checkbox"/> 90 | |
3. Do you feel that completion of homework assignments should be
- ☐ required regularly of all children?
 - ☐ required only of children doing unsatisfactory work in the classroom?
 - ☐ required only of the more capable students?
4. In your opinion what should be the role of the parent with respect to his child's homework?
- ☐ Give assistance where needed.
 - ☐ Perform the function of a "teacher at home."
 - ☐ Render no assistance whatever.
 - ☐ See only that the assignment is completed.
5. Which type of homework assignments do you feel would be of greatest value to your child?²
- ☐ Short assignments given frequently.
 - ☐ Longer assignments given less frequently.
 - ☐ Assignments made sufficiently flexible so that the child need not complete them on any given day.
6. In your opinion how should home assignments be evaluated by the teacher?
- ☐ Checked for neatness, completeness, and accuracy, but not graded.
 - ☐ Graded but not included in term marks.
 - ☐ Graded and included in term marks.
7. What do you think should be the policy of the school with respect to assignments not completed within the specified time?
- ☐ Accept a written note of explanation from home.
 - ☐ Enforce a "no exception unless ill" policy.
 - ☐ Give credit for work completed, but not penalize for that which is not.

¹Appears as pupils in teacher's questionnaire in both communities.

²Appears as pupils in teacher's questionnaire in both communities.

The method of distributing the instrument was similar in both communities. Quantities of the parent and teacher questionnaires, sufficient for the number of parents and teachers asked to participate at each grade level, were distributed to the building principals, who in turn distributed them to the classroom teachers. Pupils were then asked to deliver the questionnaires to their parents with the request that they be completed and returned to school for collection.

In the earliest discussion of this project it had been decided to base the analysis of the study on a minimum of one thousand parent responses, a number considerably exceeding that of any survey reported in the literature. This completely arbitrary figure gave way, however, to a number based on the enrollments of the classes involved in the study. In Community A where homework had been regularly assigned for five years in grades two through six, it was decided to poll parents and teachers at each of these five levels. In Community B, however, the school administration was unwilling to consider the possibility of assigning homework below grade three and therefore preferred that only parents and teachers of children in grades three or above be contacted. It is for this reason that the results reported for Community A include statistical statements for the grade two level which are not available from Community B.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data analyzed in this chapter deal primarily with four aspects of home study: (1) its length, (2) its frequency, (3) its evaluation, and (4) parental assistance in the home. These data were secured by four questionnaires distributed to parents and teachers in the two communities with which this study is concerned.

It was originally intended that the data should be presented in tables designed to emphasize the similarities and differences in opinion of parents and teachers both within and between Communities A and B. However, since only a limited number of teachers were available at each grade level, and because only those answering yes to the first item were invited to complete the questionnaire, the resulting quantity of teacher opinion was far too small to equate logically with that of a much larger number of parent responses. For this reason parent answers are presented in tabular form, and, with the exception of Tables I and II, the response of teachers is analyzed only in the accompanying commentary.

Because of the large population to be surveyed, a basic consideration in the construction of the questionnaire was the development of an instrument which, when completed and returned, could be easily tabulated. One of the weaknesses of

the multiple choice item was clearly indicated, however, when large numbers of parents and some teachers wrote comments of considerable length in addition to their responses to the items. The nature of these comments often indicated a vital interest in the subject, and it is unfortunate that they cannot be summarized and presented in such a fashion as to contribute to the data which comprise this chapter.

TABLE I

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF RETURNS OF QUESTIONNAIRES
DISTRIBUTED TO PARENTS AND TEACHERS IN COMMUNITIES A AND B

| Parents of: | Community A | | | Community B | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| | No. Dis- tributed | No. Re- turned | % Re- turned | No. Dis- tributed | No. Re- turned | % Re- turned |
| Grade 3 | 105 | 95 | 90.5 | 240 | 207 | 86.3 |
| Grade 4 | 119 | 111 | 92.3 | 232 | 198 | 85.3 |
| Grade 5 | 76 | 72 | 93.1 | 202 | 180 | 88.9 |
| Grade 6 | 64 | 64 | 100.0 | 223 | 190 | 85.2 |
| Parent Totals | 364 | 342 | 94.2 | 897 | 775 | 86.4 |
| Teacher Totals | 46 | 46 | 100.0 | 30 | 30 | 100.0 |

A total of 1,267 parent questionnaires were distributed in the two communities; of this number 1,117 were completed and returned. This represented a return of 88.6 per cent.

The lower percentage of returns indicated in the table for Community B may be directly attributed to the large number of pupil absences, 14.7 per cent, on the day on which the questionnaires were distributed.

A total of 76 teacher questionnaires were distributed in

the two communities; of this number 76 were returned. This represented a return of 100 per cent.

The percentage of parent questionnaires returned in Community A increased proportionately with the increase in grade level. Returns in Community B were relatively constant for each grade.

TABLE II

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF PARENT AND TEACHER ANSWERS
TO THE QUESTION:

Do you feel that regularly scheduled home assignments are¹
of value in the educational development of your child?

| Parents of: | Community A | | | | Community B | | | |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----|-------------|
| | Yes | | No | | Yes | | No | |
| | No. | Per Cent | No. | Per Cent | No. | Per Cent | No. | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 95 | 97.2 | 3 | 2.7 | 170 | 82.1 | 37 | 17.9 |
| Grade 4 | 111 | 98.1 | 2 | 1.8 | 162 | 81.9 | 36 | 18.2 |
| Grade 5 | 70 | 98.6 | 1 | 1.4 | 158 | 87.9 | 22 | 12.1 |
| Grade 6 | 63 | 98.4 | 1 | 1.5 | 176 | 92.6 | 14 | 7.3 |
| Teachers Grades 3-6 | 43 | 93.5 | 3 | 6.5 | 18 | 60.0 | 12 | 40.0 |

¹Appears as would be in parent and teacher questionnaires
in Community B.

Table II reports comparative data which reveal that parents in Community A, where homework has been regularly assigned, approved of homework in higher percentages than did the parents of Community B, where it has not. The percentage of those favoring homework in Community A increases with the grade level; in Community B the percentage remains practically constant for all grades.

While the opinion of teachers in Community A coincided with that expressed by parents, only 60 per cent, or eighteen of the thirty teachers reporting in Community B, responded affirmatively to the question. A further analysis of data not shown on the tables reveals that in Community B homework was advocated by a majority of teachers only in grades five and six.

As noted in the introductory comments to this chapter only those teachers and parents answering yes to this question were invited to complete the questionnaire. This provision reduced the number of teacher responses to the remaining items to a maximum of eighteen in Community B. Because this number was too small to equate logically with the large number of parent responses, the data for teachers appear in tabular form only in Tables I and II. Subsequent teacher data are presented in the accompanying commentary.

TABLE III

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF PARENT ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

What is the maximum number of minutes you feel the school should expect your child¹ to devote to home study on any given day?

| | | Less Than 30 Min. | | 30 Min. | | 45 Min. | | 60 Min. | | 75 Min. | | 90 Min. | |
|-----------|-----|----------------------|------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|-----|---------|-----|
| Community | | A | B | A | B | A | B | A | B | A | B | A | B |
| Grade 3 | % | 14.4 | 22.4 | 51.5 | 51.1 | 16.2 | 12.6 | 14.6 | 13.8 | 2.4 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| | No. | 14 | 39 | 51 | 89 | 15 | 22 | 13 | 24 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Grade 4 | % | 4.5 | 9.5 | 55.0 | 45.2 | 14.4 | 17.1 | 21.6 | 28.0 | 0.9 | 0.0 | 0.9 | 0.0 |
| | No. | 5 | 15 | 60 | 71 | 16 | 27 | 24 | 44 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Grade 5 | % | 2.8 | 7.5 | 31.0 | 32.9 | 15.5 | 23.4 | 45.0 | 27.8 | 4.2 | 2.5 | 1.4 | 4.4 |
| | No. | 2 | 12 | 22 | 52 | 11 | 37 | 32 | 44 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 7 |
| Grade 6 | % | 0.0 | 1.7 | 10.9 | 22.8 | 15.6 | 19.8 | 51.5 | 43.2 | 1.5 | 4.6 | 17.1 | 5.8 |
| | No. | 0 | 3 | 7 | 39 | 10 | 34 | 33 | 74 | 1 | 8 | 11 | 10 |

¹Appears as pupils in teacher's questionnaire in both Community A and Community B.

Table III reports the response of parents when asked to indicate the maximum number of minutes they felt their children should devote to home study on any given day. The pattern of response indicated by this table is clear, although not always consistent, with parents in both communities favoring longer periods of home study with each increase in grade level. In general, parents in Community A, where homework has been regularly assigned, favored longer periods of home study than did the parents in Community B, where it has not.

In all four forms of the questionnaire two additional choices were offered, the response to which is not presented in this table. Because only five of the more than eleven hundred parents reporting favored assignments requiring more than ninety minutes, their distribution and percentages have been omitted from the table in the interests of simplification.

Teacher opinion in both communities generally supports that expressed by parents. The only divergence is found in the smaller percentage of teachers favoring amounts of more than thirty minutes at grades five and six. At grade six 51 per cent of the parents in Community A preferred sixty minute assignments while only four of forty-two teachers, or 9.2 per cent, favored assignments of this length.

TABLE IV

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF PARENT ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

Do you feel that completion of homework assignments should be:

| 1. regularly required of all children? | | | | |
|--|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| | Community A | | Community B | |
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 86 | 93.5 | 145 | 85.9 |
| Grade 4 | 96 | 88.9 | 146 | 90.6 |
| Grade 5 | 69 | 97.1 | 149 | 94.3 |
| Grade 6 | 61 | 96.8 | 154 | 88.5 |
| 2. required only of children doing unsatisfactory work in the classroom? | | | | |
| | Community A | | Community B | |
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 6 | 6.5 | 21 | 12.3 |
| Grade 4 | 12 | 11.1 | 11 | 6.8 |
| Grade 5 | 2 | 2.9 | 4 | 2.5 |
| Grade 6 | 2 | 3.2 | 18 | 10.3 |
| 3. required only of the more capable students? | | | | |
| | Community A | | Community B | |
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 1.7 |
| Grade 4 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 2.5 |
| Grade 5 | 0 | 0.0 | 5 | 3.1 |
| Grade 6 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 1.1 |

Table IV reports the preference of parents when asked to indicate whether the completion of assignments should be required of all children, children doing superior work, or only of children doing unsatisfactory work. The table reveals little difference in the response of parents in the two communities. Furthermore, the judgments of parents do not appear to have been substantially affected by differences in grade level.

The one significant fact revealed by this table is that at least 85 per cent of the parents at each grade level preferred that home study be required of all children rather than of a particular group.

In an area which has been decidedly controversial, it is singular that forty-two, or 100 per cent, of the teachers responding to this item in Community A, where homework has been regularly assigned, preferred that assignments "be required regularly of all children." In Community B, where the assignment of homework has been prohibited, fifteen of eighteen teachers reporting expressed a similar opinion.

TABLE V

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF PARENT ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

In your opinion what should be the role of the parent with respect to his child's homework assignment?

1. Give assistance only where needed.

| | Community A | | Community B | |
|---------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 76 | 83.5 | 130 | 82.2 |
| Grade 4 | 93 | 83.8 | 135 | 89.4 |
| Grade 5 | 63 | 88.7 | 116 | 81.7 |
| Grade 6 | 57 | 89.0 | 147 | 85.0 |

2. Perform the function of a "teacher at home."

| | Community A | | Community B | |
|---------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 13 | 14.3 | 7 | 4.4 |
| Grade 4 | 13 | 11.7 | 10 | 6.7 |
| Grade 5 | 4 | 5.6 | 10 | 7.0 |
| Grade 6 | 5 | 7.8 | 5 | 2.9 |

TABLE V (Concluded)

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF PARENT ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

In your opinion what should be the role of the parent with respect to his child's homework assignment?

| 3. Render no assistance whatever. | | | | |
|--|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| | Community A | | Community B | |
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 1.4 |
| Grade 4 | 1 | 0.9 | 1 | 0.7 |
| Grade 5 | 1 | 1.4 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Grade 6 | 1 | 1.6 | 1 | 0.5 |
| 4. See only that assignment is completed. | | | | |
| | Community A | | Community B | |
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 2 | 2.2 | 19 | 12.0 |
| Grade 4 | 4 | 3.6 | 5 | 3.4 |
| Grade 5 | 3 | 4.2 | 16 | 11.3 |
| Grade 6 | 1 | 1.6 | 16 | 9.2 |

Table V compares the response of parents in Communities A and B in regard to the role of the parent with respect to his child's assignment. Little difference is noted in the response of these two groups. Neither do the answers seem to have been affected by differences in grade level. At least 80 per cent of the parents in both communities felt that parents should "give assistance where needed." Only seven of the more than eleven hundred reporting felt that they should "render no assistance whatever." This would seem to indicate that parents wish to participate in a limited fashion without assuming the functions of the teacher.

Teachers in Community A, where homework has been regu-

larly assigned, supported the position of parents in almost identical percentages. In Community B, where it has not, however, only 44 per cent of the teachers felt that parents should "give assistance where needed." Thirty-nine per cent believed that parents should either "render no assistance," or "see only that the assignment is completed."

TABLE VI

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF PARENT ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

Which type of homework assignments do you feel would be of greatest value to your child?¹

1. Short assignments given frequently.

| | Community A | | Community B | |
|---------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 90 | 96.8 | 158 | 92.9 |
| Grade 4 | 93 | 93.9 | 140 | 86.4 |
| Grade 5 | 69 | 95.8 | 114 | 78.6 |
| Grade 6 | 57 | 89.1 | 146 | 84.3 |

2. Longer assignments given less frequently.

| | Community A | | Community B | |
|---------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Grade 4 | 1 | 1.0 | 2 | 1.2 |
| Grade 5 | 1 | 1.4 | 7 | 4.8 |
| Grade 6 | 1 | 1.6 | 8 | 4.6 |

3. Assignments made sufficiently flexible so that the child need not complete them on any specific day.

| | Community A | | Community B | |
|---------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 3 | 3.2 | 11 | 6.9 |
| Grade 4 | 5 | 5.1 | 21 | 12.9 |
| Grade 5 | 2 | 2.8 | 24 | 16.6 |
| Grade 6 | 6 | 9.4 | 19 | 10.9 |

¹Appears as pupils in teacher's questionnaire in Community A and Community B.

Table VI compares the reaction of parents to three types of assignments: short assignments given frequently, longer assignments given less frequently, and assignments made sufficiently flexible so that the child need not complete them on any specific day. Somewhat larger percentages of parents in Community A, where homework has been regularly assigned, preferred short assignments than did parents in Community B, where it has not. Conversely, more parents in Community B favored the "flexible assignment" than did parents in Community A. The response was apparently not affected by a difference in grade level.

The response of teachers to this item was almost identical with that of parents. Ninety-one per cent of the forty-three teachers responding in Community A and 77.8 per cent of the twelve teachers responding in Community B felt that "short assignments given frequently" constituted the most desirable form of home study.

TABLE VII

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF PARENT ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

In your opinion how should home assignments be evaluated by the teacher?

| 1. Checked for neatness, completeness, and accuracy, but not graded. | | | | |
|--|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| | Community A | | Community B | |
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 37 | 41.1 | 60 | 35.7 |
| Grade 4 | 28 | 30.4 | 36 | 22.6 |
| Grade 5 | 21 | 28.8 | 29 | 19.4 |
| Grade 6 | 15 | 23.4 | 42 | 25.2 |

TABLE VII (Concluded)

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF PARENT ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

In your opinion how should home assignments be evaluated by the teacher?

2. Graded, but not included in term marks.

| | Community A | | Community B | |
|---------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 24 | 26.7 | 54 | 32.1 |
| Grade 4 | 16 | 17.4 | 48 | 30.2 |
| Grade 5 | 16 | 21.9 | 52 | 34.9 |
| Grade 6 | 12 | 18.8 | 37 | 22.2 |

3. Graded and included in term marks.

| | Community A | | Community B | |
|---------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 29 | 32.2 | 54 | 32.1 |
| Grade 4 | 48 | 52.2 | 75 | 47.2 |
| Grade 5 | 36 | 49.3 | 68 | 45.7 |
| Grade 6 | 37 | 57.8 | 88 | 52.7 |

Table VII reports the response of parents with respect to the evaluation of the assignment by the teacher. There is a more pronounced division of opinion with respect to this item than is the case with any previous question in the instrument. A plurality of parents in both communities prefer that assignments be graded and included in term marks. With the exception of grade five parents in Community B, this preference reflects each increase in grade level and is substantially greater at grade six than at grade three.

Teacher opinion as reflected by Table VII is much more decisive than that of parents. Sixty-nine per cent of forty-three teachers reporting in Community A, where homework has

been regularly assigned, and 61 per cent of eighteen teachers in Community B, where it has not, preferred that assignments not be graded. Teachers of grade six in the latter community were the only group who concurred with the preference of parents that assignments be weighted in arriving at term marks. The contrast in the attitudes of parents and teachers with regard to this item represents the first major difference of opinion as revealed by this survey.

The available data indicate that this is a topic of considerable controversy. They also suggest the premium which many parents place upon grades, despite the insistence of educators that the achievement of grades must not be regarded as the objective of teaching and learning.

TABLE VIII

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF PARENT ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

What do you think should be the policy of the school with respect to assignments not completed within the specified time?

| | | | | |
|--|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| 1. Accept a written note of explanation from home. | | | | |
| | Community A | | Community B | |
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 35 | 39.3 | 49 | 29.6 |
| Grade 4 | 39 | 41.5 | 45 | 30.0 |
| Grade 5 | 21 | 30.0 | 48 | 32.2 |
| Grade 6 | 20 | 30.8 | 50 | 29.0 |

TABLE VIII (Concluded)

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF PARENT ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

What do you think should be the policy of the school with respect to assignments not completed within the specified time?

| 2. Enforce a "no exception unless ill" policy. | | | | |
|--|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| | Community A | | Community B | |
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 38 | 42.7 | 69 | 41.6 |
| Grade 4 | 41 | 43.6 | 64 | 42.7 |
| Grade 5 | 37 | 52.9 | 79 | 53.0 |
| Grade 6 | 36 | 55.4 | 82 | 47.7 |
| 3. Give credit for work completed, but not penalize for that which is not. | | | | |
| | Community A | | Community B | |
| | Number | Per Cent | Number | Per Cent |
| Grade 3 | 16 | 18.0 | 48 | 28.9 |
| Grade 4 | 14 | 14.9 | 41 | 27.3 |
| Grade 5 | 12 | 17.1 | 22 | 14.1 |
| Grade 6 | 9 | 13.8 | 40 | 23.3 |

Table VIII compares parent opinion as it pertains to school policy in regard to assignments not completed within a specified time. The data in this table reveal a wide distribution of responses to the three choices available in the item. Parents in both communities favored the enforcement of a "no exception unless ill" policy. This preference increases with each increase in grade level.

The opinion of forty of the forty-three reporting teachers in Community A, where homework has been assigned regularly, is divided evenly between accepting a written note of explanation from the parent and enforcing a "no exception unless ill"

policy. This pattern of response is similar to that of the teachers in Community B, where the assignment of homework has been prohibited, with the only variation being the preference of five, or 27.8 per cent of the teachers, for "giving credit for work completed, but not penalizing for that which is not."

In addition to the returns tabulated in Tables I through VIII, data were received from sixty-six questionnaires completed and returned by parents of second grade children in Community A. These sixty-six questionnaires represented a return of 95.7 per cent of the sixty-nine questionnaires distributed. The data contained in these returns are not included in the preceding tables because comparable data were not available from second grade parents in Community B.

Ninety-four per cent of these second grade parents felt that homework was of value for grade two pupils. This figure coincides substantially with the data supplied by parents of children at other grade levels.

With respect to the number of minutes to be devoted to home study 27 per cent of the reporting parents preferred less than thirty minute assignments; 42 per cent preferred thirty minute assignments; and 25 per cent preferred amounts ranging from forty-five to seventy-five minutes.

In response to the questions dealing with homework requirements, the role of the parent, and the length and frequency of assignments, the opinion of grade two parents in Community A was again markedly similar to that of parents at other levels, with a variation of no more than 5 per cent from

the average of figures supplied in Tables IV, V, and VI.

In regard to the evaluation of the assignment second grade parents in Community A, where homework has been regularly assigned, responded more decisively than did parents at any other grade level. Forty-two per cent preferred that homework be graded and included in term marks. Thirty-three per cent preferred that they be graded without inclusion in term marks, and 21 per cent preferred that assignments only be checked for neatness, completeness, and accuracy.

In response to the final question dealing with the policy of the school in regard to assignments not completed within a specified time, 31 per cent of the parents felt that a written note of explanation from home should be accepted in the lieu of the completed assignment. Forty-two per cent preferred a "no exception unless ill" policy, and 22.4 per cent preferred that credit should be given for work completed without penalty for that which is not.

A summary of the total response of grade two parents in Community B indicates no consistent divergence from the opinion of parents of children in grades three, four, five, and six of the same community.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to secure and analyze the opinion of parents and teachers in two communities with respect to the assignment of homework in the elementary grades. It was hoped that from this study certain conclusions might be derived as to the role and value of home study insofar as they are validly reflected by the attitudes of parents and teachers.

The instrument used as the basis for this study was particularly designed to provide an opportunity for the following comparisons within and between the two communities concerned:

1. A comparison of the responses of parents and teachers concerned with children at one grade level with the response of parents and teachers concerned with children at another.
2. A comparison of the responses of parents with those of teachers concerned with children at the same grade level.
3. A comparison of the responses of parents and teachers in Community A, where homework has been regularly assigned, with the responses of parents and teachers in Community B, where it has not.

The extent to which this study achieved these objectives was dependent upon both the validity of the assumptions that

initiated it and the quality of the instrument that provided the necessary data. A basic premise in the formulation of this study was the assumption that the response of a large number of parents and teachers with regard to certain aspects of home study would provide one index for appraising both its role and value. It was further assumed that since the execution of the home assignment takes place outside of school, a knowledge of parental opinion with respect to homework would provide valuable intelligence for establishing standards of kind and quantity. Finally it was assumed that a comparison of parent and teacher attitudes would suggest approaches to the development of effective interaction between the home and school.

Each of these assumptions contributed to the development of the questionnaire employed in the survey. The comparisons they entailed determined that the four questionnaire forms should be as nearly identical as possible and designed not merely to obtain information but to secure responses that could be compared with some degree of validity. The multiple-choice item was selected as the type of item which would best elicit the controlled response necessary for this purpose. Despite the care exercised in the selection of individual items, the process of tabulating more than eleven hundred copies of the instrument revealed several weaknesses in its construction. Approximately 15 per cent of the parents and teachers responding indicated varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the questionnaire by either altering the items or

qualifying their answers with lengthy comments. In all probability the use of a check-list or the inclusion of several open-end items would have provided a less inhibited body of opinion.

One of the more constructive features of this study is inherent in the large amount of opinion which it samples. The number of responses available for analysis exceeds that of any survey of homework reported in the literature. While the mere weight of numbers in itself means little, the more than eleven hundred responses do represent a large proportion of the elementary school parents and teachers in Community A and Community B and must be regarded as indicative of opinion in these two communities as it relates to the home assignment.

The conclusions submitted in this chapter, in all probability, cannot be regarded as valid, in any measurable sense, for communities other than the two in which this study was conducted. Teacher and parent attitudes with respect to such a controversial topic as homework will vary from community to community, dependent in each upon a variety of social and economic factors. Thus, conclusions based on surveys in one or several communities can have no certain implications for situations in another.

On the basis of available evidence the following conclusions appear justified with respect to parent opinion in Community A and Community B:

1. Parents in Community A, where homework has been regu-

larly assigned, approve of its assignment in greater numbers than do the parents of Community B, where it has not. The percentage of parents favoring homework in Community A is on the average 10 per cent greater at each grade level than in Community B.

2. Parents in Community A favor longer periods of home study than do parents in Community B. More than 50 per cent of the parents in Community A favor thirty minute assignments for pupils in grades three and four and sixty minute assignments for pupils in grades five and six. In Community B parents favor assignments of more than thirty minutes only in grade six.
3. In percentages ranging from 85 to 97 per cent parents in both communities advocate that assignments be required of all children rather than only of those of a particular group or classification. This judgment remains constant at each grade level.
4. At least 80 per cent of the parents in both communities prefer that the parent render assistance only where needed in supervising his child's home assignment. This preference is not affected by changes in grade level.
5. A minimum of 84 per cent of the parents in both communities prefer short, frequent assignments at all grade levels.
6. The attitude of parents in both communities toward the

evaluation of the home assignment by the teacher is more varied than is the case with any other aspect of home study. A plurality of the parents in both communities prefer that assignments be graded and included in term marks at all grade levels with the exception of grade three. At this level parents prefer that assignments be checked for neatness, accuracy, and completeness but not included in term marks.

7. Parents in both communities recommend that the school enforce a "no exception unless ill" policy with respect to assignments not completed within a specified time. This preference increases proportionately with each increase in grade level with the exception of grade six in Community B where the percentage of parents favoring this policy unaccountably declines.

On the basis of available evidence the following conclusions appear justified with respect to teacher opinion in Community A and Community B:

1. Teachers in Community A approve of homework in larger percentages at every grade level than do the teachers of Community B. Only at grades five and six do a majority of the teachers in Community B favor regularly scheduled home assignments.
2. Teacher opinion is substantially the same in both communities with respect to the amount of time the school should expect the child to devote to home study. The

preferred number of minutes as indicated by a majority of the teachers is thirty minutes or less at grade three increasing to sixty minutes at grade six.

3. One hundred per cent of the teachers in Community A and 83 per cent of the teachers in Community B prefer that, if assigned, homework should be regularly required of all pupils. This judgment remains constant at each grade level.
4. Eighty-six per cent of the teachers in Community A and a plurality or 44 per cent of the teachers in Community B prefer that parents render assistance only where it is needed. This preference remains constant at all grade levels.
5. Ninety-one per cent of the teachers in Community A and 78 per cent of those in Community B prefer short, frequent assignments at each grade level to any other type of assignment.
6. Between 60 and 70 per cent of the teachers in both communities advocate that assignments be checked for neatness, completeness, and accuracy and graded. They do not, however, wish these grades to be included in term marks. This judgment remains constant at each grade level.
7. Teacher opinion with respect to the disposition of assignments not completed within a specified time is evenly divided in both communities between accepting a written note of explanation from home and enforcing a

"no exception unless ill" policy. This division of opinion persists at each grade level.

One of the significant aspects of this study may well be the sharp contrast of its data with that proceeding from similar surveys in other communities as reported in the literature. In a poll conducted by Nation's Schools¹ with nationwide samplings, neither parents nor school administrators favored the regular assignment of homework in the primary grades. In the Chamberlain thesis² a majority of the three hundred teachers reporting from widely selected communities in Massachusetts disapproved of regularly scheduled home assignments below grade four. The same contrast exists with respect to survey data from other communities regarding the amount of time teachers and parents expect pupils to devote to home study. Parents in both Community A and Community B recommend periods of study ranging from thirty minutes at grade three to sixty minutes at grade six. In Wayne Township, Maryland,³ and in the communities sampled by the Chamberlain study,⁴ parents and teachers generally favor periods of home study ranging

¹Charles Skidmore, "What About Homework, An Opinion Poll," Nation's Schools, 34:32, October, 1944.

²Carlton Chamberlain, Francis Trainor, and Charles Weymouth, "Trends in the Amount and Kind of Homework Assigned to Pupils in the Elementary Grades," (unpublished Master's thesis, Boston University, Boston, 1954), p. 37.

³Kenneth A. Woolf, "School Homework in the Wayne Township Public Schools," American School Board Journal, 118:36, March, 1949.

⁴Chamberlain, loc. cit.

from fifteen minutes at grade four to a maximum of forty-five minutes at grade six. The more strenuous program of homework advocated by parents in Communities A and B may, of course, be due to any one of the social and economic factors operating in these communities. More probable, however, is the possibility that it is a reflection of the stress of our times and the feeling of insecurity that characterizes so many parents in today's society.

In conclusion, this much at least has been done. The opinion of more than eleven hundred parents and seventy-six teachers has been secured and analyzed. The subsequent data have been used as a basis for comparisons within and between the two communities concerned. From these comparisons conclusions, both general and specific, have been drawn which it is hoped will have served, not only to accomplish the objectives of this present study, but to contribute to a better understanding of an important educational problem.

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