

RUNNING HEAD: THE HOMEWORK REVOLUTION

The Homework Revolution: Breaking Away From Traditional Paper and Pencil  
Homework in the Elementary Classroom.

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I dedicate this research to all my students; past, present and future. May all your  
homework experiences be untraditional!

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### **Abstract**

Around the time of the cold war homework began increasing in the lives of American children in hopes that we could academically compete with other cultures. However it has been proven that homework at the elementary level has no real academic benefits. Why then are teachers assigning homework day after day, month after month and year after year? In order to make more meaningful experiences for students, I tackled the issue of monotonous paper and pencil homework and accused the practice of being antiquated and impractical. Best practices indicate that we differentiate lessons, modify activities and teach to students' learning styles. Therefore, this research was conducted in order to provide students with academic experiences at home that are more meaningful than their experiences before. Parents and students in a second grade classroom were interviewed and surveyed in order to gain information that could change the way parents, students and teachers perceive the validity of homework. Results showed that given the opportunity, students and parents both preferred a variety of activities to be completed at home. The majority of parents suggested homework occurs 3 times a week rather than the traditional four to five times a week. The research dictated a new homework routine that explored differentiated assignments that steered away from the traditional paper and pencil routines that students, teachers and parents have become so accustomed to.

### **Question in Context**

#### **Who is Homework For?**

Each new school year brings a new set of challenges and success stories. New families, new children to inspire, and new and more efficient ways of teaching and reaching your students. In the years that I have been teaching, I have recounted stories that could entertain a crowd, or if published could climb the charts on the NY Times Best Sellers List. One of the unique perks about teaching is that each day new stories unfold but some of the themes are reoccurring. Homework is something that we talk about often. It is brought up during Back to School Night, conferences, and meetings with parents. We remind the students of our expectations about homework but there is a disconnect. Homework assignments come back to me in parents' handwriting, assignments are returned completely incorrect, and homework pads are not signed. I often questioned the type of homework I am giving and why I am giving it. We have no control over the environment that the students are working in at home. Who is helping the students complete homework, if anyone? Are they helping too much or too little? If the homework comes back wrong how much class time are we supposed to dedicate to correcting homework, and whose mistakes are we correcting? Is homework just an antiquated part of the educational world? Have we just fallen into a comfortable relationship where parents have come to expect homework so we give it? With all the changes in education over the years why is it that homework has been excluded from the eminent changes in education? So, who is homework for? Is it the parents, the students or the teachers? I have often asked myself this when grading endless papers at home that I know are not authentic representations of my students' abilities.

**Wayside School's<sup>1</sup> Homework Ideals are Falling Down**

Wayside School is one of four elementary schools in the town I teach in. Our school is different in that it only houses grades K-2 and is the only school in our district to do so. We have a tight knit teaching community and generally supportive parents and families. I teach second grade in a class of 22 students that are part of a school that educates about 241 students. The families in the community are mainly middle class to upper middle class families with the estimated yearly median household income of \$103,200. The student population is 95% white, 2% Hispanic, 1% Asian, 1% Pacific Islander, and 0% African American or Black. Student's who have IEP's make up 20.7% of the student population.

This is my eighth year teaching second grade at Wayside School. I previously taught in another district as a class aide in a self-contained special education classroom. This year, thirteen of my students are female and nine are male. I have seven students that have IEP's and an in-class support teacher who assists our students for one hour and twenty minutes each day. Two of my students are communication impaired and one student is legally blind.

Because I teach in an upper-middle class district, the parents are generally involved with their child's education. But in a town where there is much academic success, I wonder how much competition there is amongst the parents and how that affects students' success and their homework routine. In my experience many of the parents enable their children by completing tasks for them, that otherwise could have

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<sup>1</sup> All names and places are pseudonyms in order to ensure anonymity.

been attempted and worked out by the students themselves. These observations, along with others, need to be further studied and questioned as part of my teacher research.

### **Questioning the Question**

My question has evolved in the short time that I have been studying teacher research. In EDUC 501, I was inspired by a fellow teacher's research that we reviewed. I always questioned homework and its purpose in my classroom but 501 had really deepened my curiosity on the validity of homework. As I began molding my question, I came up with, what does meaningful homework look like in a second grade classroom? After reflecting on this question I felt that the way it was stated actually implied that homework was meaningful, and I am not sure that it is. So I rephrased my question to, what benefits/drawbacks are there to traditional homework assignments at the elementary level? I feel that the answers to this research question will be most likely to shape my teaching in the future.

Many other questions have been circling my mind. If parents are doing homework for their kids, then how much do they really value homework? What are parents' perceptions about homework and how do they correlate to students, teachers and administrators' perceptions about homework?

With families becoming more and more involved in extra curricular activities how much time is appropriate to dedicate to homework before it becomes a negative experience? Does homework interfere with important social learning experiences by hindering students from participating due to the lack of time?

Why is it that homework has relatively remained unchanged in policy and procedure for decades? Have we become complacent in the homework aspect of

education? Are there academic benefits to homework at this age? Are their drawbacks academically? As a teacher it is my goal to provide meaningful learning experiences for my students. If homework is not as effective as we thought it was, then teachers could dedicate more of their time to creating lessons and experiences to reach every learner. There would be more time to differentiate and personalize learning. There would be more time for teacher research and implementing successful teaching methods. Themes of parents/school connections and academic success have emerged from questions and sub-questions. My goal was to gather enough research to subjectively look at the validity of homework at the elementary level. I hoped that I would come away from this project with a new perspective regarding homework and its place in the world of elementary education.

### **Literature Review**

Each day brings new adventures in the field of teaching, but one entity has remained the same for years - the idea of homework. Homework is assigned by teachers to be completed by their students, but once they leave our rooms, we have no influence as to the type of experience they have. Some students experience trepidation over homework, some accept its place in their daily schedules. Several parents dread homework more than their children, and there have even been studies focusing on the disruption that homework causes within families. Some parents do homework for their kids or offer assistance in a way that is not helpful or productive. Certain parents do not ensure its completion or offer help to their struggling children for various reasons.

According to Kralovec & Buell (2009), homework often disrupts family life, hinders parents from teaching children lessons of their choice and punishes students in

poverty for being underprivileged. Also, they state increasingly uncomfortable reports from teachers who do not feel it is appropriate to ask parents to be responsible for teaching or reviewing academic skills that they are ultimately responsible for. In a 2012 press conference, President Hollande of France proposed a homework ban stating that homework causes inequalities in education. It favors the rich and academically stellar students (Strauss 2012). Others call for policies to ensure homework's stability. These debates in the world of homework are commonly referred to as the homework wars.

Have the homework routines in education remained unchanged due to our obsession with standardized tests? As long as paper and pencil standardized tests remain at the forefront of measuring academic ability, the age-old practice of paper and pencil homework could very well remain unchanged. Mindless worksheets and antiquated assignments will make their way into the students' backpacks and cut its way into the unrelenting, overscheduled lives of our students. Could students be participating in more beneficial social and academic activities if they were not spending their time on their daily homework responsibilities?

There are many questions surrounding the debate on homework. Questions that have lingered in my mind and have caused me to question these unchanged practices. My goal was to question the usual defenses of homework and to ascertain methods of providing homework experiences that are more meaningful than the ones provided in the last century.

### **Parent Involvement**

Students have mixed emotions on the topic of parental involvement. Some state that their parents help them understand the assignment better and some report that parents

confuse them even more. Yet, studies on homework's impact on student achievement often fail to show positive results. It has been shown that the time parents spent helping their children with homework is unrelated to children's academic performance (Chen & Stevenson, 1989).

Tam (2009) reports that parental support of students' independence and autonomy is associated with academic efficacy at higher grade levels. While children of younger ages rely more on the emotional support of their parents than the academic support. Chen et al. (1989) reports that 66% of first graders and 78% of fifth graders received assistance with their homework activities. The amount of time parents spent helping their children with their homework tended to be negatively related to children's achievement. Tam (2009) adds that the emotionally supportive relationship had a more positive affect on student motivation and learning. As children progress academically, their reliance on parents diminishes as the learning materials become more difficult for parents to handle. Parental involvement holds less validity at this stage in a student's academic career as they turn to peers and other means of support.

When determining how to guide my research and future practices I took into account the fact that parental involvement mostly had a negative affect on student outcome. Therefore, I aimed to provide assignments where academically students can complete the assignment free from parental remediation. This meant providing more differentiated homework.

I feel that assistance from parents can come in the form of support with directions, but not with skill. Perhaps providing online tutorials would help in this matter or changing the identity of my homework assignments. Maybe homework should be less

about the paper-pencil review and more about observing examples and scenarios. I was eager to see if the internet could support this type of learning as my students would be able to watch a variety of tutorials, listen to an array of songs, view a collection of collages, etcetera, that reinforce skills. There would be no right or wrong way to complete this kind of assignment and parental judgment on student behaviors could be diminished. I wondered, if their judgment would be displaced onto me for these unusual homework assignments.

### **Perceptions**

Students, teachers and parents alike, have their perceptions of homework assignments and the role these activities play in their lives. Mendicino (2009) explains that some advantages of assigning technology-based homework are immediate feedback to students and automatic grading and recording of grades for instructors. Automatic grading saves time for teachers who would like to grade homework carefully, but do not have time. In turn, this can prompt students to take homework more seriously. Patall, Cooper & Wynn (2010) state that when students received a choice of homework they reported higher intrinsic motivation to do homework, felt more competent regarding the homework and had better overall perceptions of their homework experience.

As educators we must also take into account how the students themselves perceive their performances during their daily homework routines. The literature showed that levels of achievement and gender played roles in student perceptions. Hong, Wan, & Peng (2011) report that students' self-ratings on their homework experiences were more negative than teachers' ratings of those same students and that male perceptions were lower than their female counterparts. The researchers stated the importance of family

being involved in setting up a home environment that is supportive and conducive to learning in order to increase student's perceptions about their homework experiences. In male households, families should pay special attention to distractions and organization of work and time to assist in homework completion. In addition, Bempechat, Neier, Gillis, & Holloway (2011) report higher achievers were engaged in their tasks and expressed a desire to learn, whereas their lower achieving peers were detached and avoidant. Despite very different beliefs and approaches to homework, both higher and lower achievers communicated their need for support in their learning. I believed this support should come from an updated and modernized approach to homework that allows for student choice.

Cooper & Patall (2006) reported in a synthesis of homework research that the relationship between homework and school achievement is stronger in grades 7–12 than in K–6. Why then, has our convictions of homework's place in education remained unchallenged? Each party has such strong thoughts about where their loyalties lie when claiming their allegiance in the war on homework. However, it seems this fight is turning into a tug-of-war. Each side, claims more stake, and then relents some. When will there be reform?

Through my research I hoped to help students regain, or spark, their passion for learning, increase students perceptions on their homework experiences and prove that their at-home learning experiences can be more meaningful and more successful. My goal was to offer a variety of updated homework assignments and to measure student and parents' perceptions of said assignments.

### **Types of Homework**

It has been over a century that the education system has stood by its policy on homework and its processes have remained relatively unchanged. Why not provide students with more meaningful learning experiences? What is it that we as educators and policy makers are holding on to? Menotti (2005) states that not meeting a student's individual academic needs is a potentially devastating situation.

Some researchers understood this notion, as online homework has been growing in popularity with the widespread use of the Internet. The World Wide Web has changed the face of education and how teachers, students and lifelong learners access information. According to Richards-Babb (2011), using technology-based homework proved to increase time on tasks and homework attitudes were generally positive, with a large majority of students viewing the online homework favorably. Students felt that work completed at home, and online, was work that was worth their effort and relevant to their learning experiences.

Mendicino (2009) stated that students learn significantly more when given computer feedback rather than traditional paper and pencil homework. Through a series of pre and post-tests, research showed that students learned significantly more with Web-based homework. However, researchers noted that decision makers might not be quick to support its implementation due to cost of adding technological equipment to districts. Children were exceedingly proficient at discerning their own distinct strengths and recognizing their own struggles. Providing homework to support their learning styles made for optimal learning experiences. Combining classroom instruction with traditional study strategies was proven not to be an effective teaching strategy. Matching quality

individual learning styles with complementary instructional methods consistently demonstrated positive results. (Minotti 2005)

### **Conclusion**

The literature confirmed the idea that homework for early elementary grades does not hold the value it once did. It reported that academic gains are limited, and therefore, are probably not worth the drawbacks. I then questioned how I could increase the perceptions of homework so that student motivation was greater, parental involvement was limited and success would be the horizon?

After considering the research I was left thinking about the idea of valuable homework at the second grade level. The type of homework assignment must change to meet the needs of our learners. We must put aside the needs of everyone else and focus on what is most important, the reason we educate, our students.

Because homework is completed in an uncontrolled environment I wanted to limit extraneous variables as much as possible while maintaining the integrity of the assignment. What about kinesthetic homework? Internet-based homework, where students are asked to search for information, observe data and come to class fueled with knowledge? Let's decrease the amount of stress that is put on students during their already overscheduled lives and alleviate parents from the responsibility of having to reteach our lessons. Homework reform is on the horizon, at least in my class it is.

### **Methodology**

As a reflective practitioner, I am always looking to better myself as a teacher. We have an epic responsibility to the youth in the community to provide meaningful learning opportunities. We must give them the tools to become efficient members of society and

the strength, courage and ability to become the best versions of themselves. We also have a responsibility to ourselves as teachers, providers of knowledge, to remain current with best practices and to give our hearts and our best efforts so we can be professionally content. Lastly, we have a responsibility to our profession to give back to our learning community and to use research to guide our practices and participate in research in order to direct our instruction.

For most of my profession, I have questioned the validity of homework and examined the many facets that make up the common homework experience. I have questioned the worth of the assignments we are allocating, the time that it takes students to complete such assignments, parental involvement, and types of assignments to provide, just to name a few. After thoroughly researching these topics, I have come to understand that homework at the elementary level really does not have a positive impact on students' achievement. However, as educators we are still assigning it day after day. Spending countless hours creating these assignments, making copies, grading and finally commenting on tasks that have proved meaningless. As a teacher, I am limited as to what I can and cannot do. At this point in my career, I cannot do away with homework completely, so my aim was to provide students with a variety of personalized activities, different from the traditional paper and pencil activities, which have been assigned for over a century. My hope was to improve student and parent perceptions of homework because it has been modernized and personalized.

### **Study Setting**

Wayside school is one of four elementary schools in the town I teach in. Our school is different in that it only houses grades K-2 and is the only school in our district

to do so. We have a tight knit teaching community and generally supportive parents and families. I teach second grade in a class of 22 students that are part of a school that educates about 241 students. The families in the community are mainly middle class to upper middle class families. I have introduced new and different ideas, such as Edmodo, a modified homework routine and modern aspects of technology in the classroom. So far, the parents have been supportive of the changes and have responded positively.

As a district we announced that one of our school and district goals is personalized learning. Through this admission, I hoped to have the support of my administrators and colleagues as my new homework routine aimed to personalize learning and provide assignments for the right amount of time so that it will progressively increase parents' and students' perceptions of homework. My goal was to make a more meaningful homework experience for all parties involved.

### **Data Sources and Collection**

Through my teacher research I collected data in a variety ways. Initially, I surveyed the parents of my students. (See Appendix B) I posed a variety of questions relating to their child's experiences with homework in my classroom. Most of the questions were multiple choices and reflected a modified Likert Scale in order to measure the attitudes of parents and students. One question allowed them to choose multiple answers. The question that allowed multiple answers asked parents to identify which activities they thought their student would most benefit from. Because homework in my classroom was not static, I allowed for a variety of responses. Consequently I was able to better assess my teaching practices.

Students were interviewed in school using a semi-structured interview protocol. (See Appendix A) Some questions had answers that reflected the Likert Scale and some were open-ended questions. The location of the interview was important as to eliminate parental influence and other unknown variables that could present themselves in the home. They were interviewed once during the traditional homework assignments and again during the nontraditional assignments.

Students also wrote reflectively throughout the data collection period. They had the opportunity to write freely about their assignments in order to convey what they liked or didn't like about the activity, what they wished they could have done and how they thought they learned. Minotti (2005) states that children are exceedingly proficient at discerning their own distinct strengths and recognizing their own struggles. Providing homework to support their learning styles makes for optimal learning experiences. I used this as inspiration during my data collection phase as I gave students the opportunity to choose assignments and comment on them. Student journals were kept so that I could use the Grounded Theory approach and efficiently code them. In doing so I was able to find common themes. Journals were completed in school so that the variable of parental influence would be eliminated. In addition, students answered questions in the format of a poll. I used an online networking site called Edmodo that allowed me to create polls for students to weigh in on. This resource aided in the data collection process.

Students participated in a scheduled homework routine that allowed them to experience a variety of homework assignments. Traditional homework methods were explored for 2 weeks. Parents and students reflected on their experiences through the surveys and journal entries. A journal was kept in order to collect data from spontaneous

interviews of students. The next day, while homework tasks were still fresh in mind, I sporadically asked students about their homework experience. I then was able to code the information received through the spontaneous interviews.

Using a priori themes I was able to identify themes that were surfacing in my data such as stress, time, importance and obstacles in completing homework. Themes were induced from the empirical data that was collected during my teacher research

Finally, I was able implement the new homework routine. This included non-traditional types of homework, including kinesthetic, technological, audio and visual based homework. (See Appendix D) These were explored for 2 weeks each. During this time journaling commenced. At the end of the new homework routine I distributed Parent Survey 2. (See Appendix C )This survey was very similar to the first survey with minor changes to reflect the new homework routine. I also interviewed students again and compared their answers.

### **Ethics Review**

I requested approval form my principal in order to conduct my teacher research. A letter was distributed to parents asking for their support in this process and as well as permission for their students to participate in the study. Data collection instruments were stated in this letter so that parents knew what to expect in the weeks that followed. Parents had a choice to have their child opt out of the interview and survey process and I notified them that pseudonyms would be used in place of students' real names in order to keep the data anonymous.

### **Conclusion**

Through this teacher research I hoped to have gained enough information to change my homework routine so that students and parents have more positive feelings about tasks to be completed at home. I collected and analyzed the various types of data and used my findings to create more meaningful homework experiences. As an educator, I am constantly looking to fine-tune my practice so that I am able to reach as many students as possible. I have always felt that the traditional methods of assigning homework have been outdated and wasteful in nature. Wasteful for the students who have to spend time on assignments that do not improve their academic success, wasteful for teachers to have to assign and then grade the said homework and wasteful for families to have to indulge in such an invasive process with insufficient positive outcomes.

This research enabled me to fine-tune my practice, motivate students and personalize learning. I am thankful to have been able to implement this research in order to make positive changes in my classroom and in the educational experience of my students. Through this research I changed the face of homework in my classroom and made it more meaningful to students, parents and myself.

### **Findings**

Teachers, parents and students alike have opinions and perceptions on the role that homework plays in the academic setting. Results from the Parent Survey 1 indicated 72.7 percent (n=16) of the parents polled (N=22), reported they believed that homework was beneficial to their child's academic success. In comparison, 27.3 percent (n=6) stated that it was not as important as other academic experiences. I dove deeper into the research in order to analyze the common themes that appeared in my data.

### **Differentiation**

Meeting the needs of our students is one of the highest priorities teachers have. During the day teachers have the resources and the face time in order to differentiate and carry through their lessons. It is more difficult to do so for homework, where there are a variety of variables that students cannot control and that teachers have even less control over. Therefore, paper and pencil worksheets have dominated the homework world. With this in mind, results indicated 63.6 percent (n=14) of the parents polled (N=22), reported they believed that their child's needs were well met with traditional paper and pencil assignments.. In addition, 36.4 percent (n=8) stated that their child's needs were somewhat met. It is important to note that zero percent of parents felt their child's need were not met at all. After changing our homework routine to include choices that addressed the kinesthetic, audio, visual and technological learners, 90.9 percent (n=20) of the parents polled (N=22), stated their students' needs were well met. This increase in the parents' perceptions of the meaningfulness of the activities validates the new homework routine. I believe the percentage of parents who stated their students' needs were met increased because parents have never experienced an alternate kind of homework. They didn't know there was any other way or perhaps they could not see the value in an alternate style of homework.

A pole completed by my students solidified their beliefs about the new homework routine. Results from the poll indicate 100% percent (n=22) of the students polled (N=22), reported they would prefer the new homework routine as opposed to our previous one. When analyzing some of the student's journals data was deduced indicating that the some of the reasons they enjoyed the new homework routine better was because there were choices and because there were different kinds of activities.

**Stress**

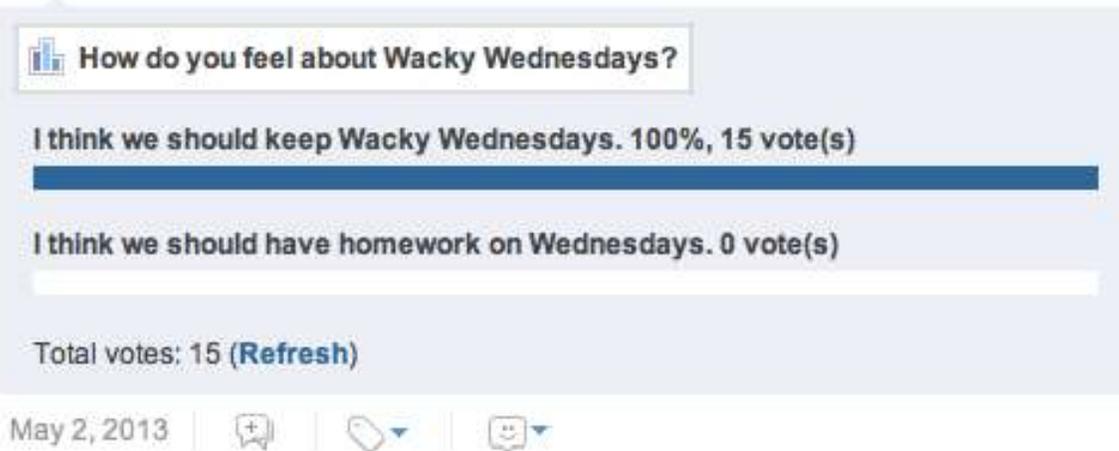
Today's families have more obligations than ever. With more and more social responsibilities than ever before, families struggle to keep up with their overscheduled lives. At home there are many variables that students must compete with. Half (n=11) of the parents polled (N=22), conveyed they experienced some stress while completing homework citing reasons such as overscheduled social responsibilities, not being able to teach their child the concepts, not understanding what is required of their student and busy households. In comparison the post survey revealed that 18.2 percent (n=4) of the parents polled (N=22), reported they experienced stress during the homework routine. The decrease in stress reported is important to note as I felt this was a major success in assigning activities to be completed at home.

Even though families stated they experienced a fair amount of stress at home during the traditional homework routines, the majority still believed that students should be assigned homework most days of the school week. 72.7 percent (n=16) of the parents polled (N=22), conveyed they believed homework should be assigned four to five times a week and 22.7 percent (n=5) thought homework should occur 3 times a week. Subsequently, parents' perceptions of the occurrence of homework changed drastically. In the post survey 68.2 percent (n=15) reported they thought homework should be assigned 3 or less times a week.

**Frequency**

In order to better meet the needs of my students and their families I questioned parents about the frequency of homework. In past experiences having a day off from homework was a privilege. Cheers could be heard down many hallways across the

nations' schools when teachers announce the very precious words, "No homework!" An echo of those same cheers could be heard when the students arrive at home and relay that same info to their parents! Instead of being a privilege I pondered the idea of making it a routine. When surveyed \_ percent (n= 12) believed students should receive homework four or five days out of the week. 54.5 percent (n=7) out of the parents polled (N=22) explained that they would prefer homework be given 3 times during the week. These parents stated that they felt homework was not as important as other academic experiences. In order to explore this theory and to address the stress levels that families were experiencing at home, I changed my homework routine and gave students Wednesdays off. My post survey revealed that 81.8 percent (n=18) of parents would prefer to have homework 3 days out of the week. These findings were surprising to me being that the majority of parents thought homework should be given four or five days out of the week. Future research would have to be explored in order to specify if their perceptions about the importance of homework changed or if they just enjoyed the time away from homework on their day off. Students weighed in on this topic as well and 100 percent (n=15) of the students surveyed (N=15), said they preferred having no homework on Wednesdays. See the table below.

**Me to 2012-2013 Students****Time**

It is commonly believed that homework at the elementary level should take no more than ten minutes per grade level. I was currently giving my students one paper and pencil worksheet for Math and Spelling respectively. 90.9 percent (n=20) felt their students received the right amount of homework. Therefore, I felt there was no need to change the amount of homework in order to better meet their needs. Another aspect of time that needs to be considered is the time that it takes families to assist their children. Because paper and pencil worksheets reach so few students' learning styles, parents must spend time helping them read directions, interpret examples and even helping them through the entire process. This could be due to a variety of obstacles, which I mention further on in this section. 36.3 percent (n=8) of parents said their students regularly required assistance with their homework and 50 percent (n=11) reported their child very little or no assistance at all. Once engaged in the new homework routine 13.6 percent (n=3) required assistance and 77.2 percent (n=17) needed very little or none at all. The reasons for the student's greater independence is because the students knew what was expected of them and had more tools available to them via the internet. Also, there were

less traditional recording sheets, which meant less help with putting their ideas in paper and more engagement in the actual practice of the skill at home through a variety of activities. The directions of the activities did not change throughout the week, only the content for which they needed to practice. Because students were working at home more similar to the way they work in class, a multi-sensory approach, students were better prepared to complete their homework assignments. In addition, there were less recording sheets so students could complete tasks at their own pace rather than doing each line item with the help of parents or with parents looming over their shoulders. I feel these assignments empowered students to take charge of their learning and of their responsibilities. After all, parents were not writing in colored sugar in order to practice their students spelling words, whereas I did have parents writing answers in on their children's homework in previous experiences.

My theory is supported by two emails that I received from parents. In both emails, parents took it upon themselves to share with me their thoughts and the thoughts of their children regarding our new homework routine. While analyzing their notes I realized certain themes saturated their writings. They thanked me for beginning this journey and stated they experienced increased motivation, less stress and felt that the new activities were more meaningful.

### **Motivation**

The time is 2:15 and second graders are completing a relay in which they must organize groups of numbers in a cohesive number sentence. They cannot advance in the relay until they complete the task at hand. Most students are engaged because they know their teammates can “phone a friend” so they must be ready at any time. Cheers explode

as both teams arrive at the finish line having completed their number sentences. Then we take a look at their products and realize that although both teams had the same numbers, their problems differ from one another. We break out into a team discussion that explores the associative property of addition. At 2:40 students report home where they must complete their homework before they can play. They have just been in school for 6 hours plus, but they must do more work before their parents feel they deserve some time to themselves. And so, about 45 minutes after our math game, students sit down to review the associative property of addition, a skill they just completed minutes ago. When surveying parents about obstacles they faced during their homework routine one theme saturated the data abundantly. Motivation was reported as an obstacle 59 percent (n=13) of the time. After the new homework routine motivation was not mentioned once. See the table below, which supports the data that choice increases motivation in students.



## Perceptions

Change is scary. Both parents and students alike experience a sense of nervousness or anxiety when faced with change. There are new expectations, new rules

and fear of the unknown. That's why when parents were asked what type of homework they thought would benefit their children the most, 81.8 (n=18) of the parents questioned (n=22) felt that traditional paper and pencil activities would be most beneficial. I also think that some parents truly don't know what kind of learners their kids are. It is hard for parents to put aside their own schema and expectations of what homework should look like. I was enthralled to see that the post survey revealed another story. 27.2 percent (n=6) believe that paper and pencil is still the best method where as the rest of the field chose assignments that were kinesthetically, audio, visually and technologically based.

In closing, the findings validate my thoughts as a teacher and the conclusions of the research. This information provided me legitimacy in the journey of homework reforms and guided my practices as a teacher. I now know how to better meet my students needs and will continue to use these methods of data collection to better understand the students and parents that I teach each year.

### **Implications**

I was truly inspired by data that I collected during my teacher research. I now understand what I had assumed for so long, that homework has very little effect, if any, on academics. So, why do so many teachers assign homework and so many parents and students expect it? Although homework has been a long-standing tradition in the education system that does not mean we should stand by it. Now that I know with certainty there are no academic benefits I plan to reform the way I assign homework. With expectations from administration I don't think it is possible to do away with homework so I am looking forward to making it my own.

Through my research and implementation of an updated homework experience, I explored a variety of technological tools to reach the variety of learning needs in my classroom. As Mendicino (2009) states, students receive immediate feedback regarding their progress and therefore have a more meaningful and beneficial learning experience. I am currently putting together a presentation to be given at the end of this school year to motivate teachers to rethink the way they present material to their students. I will give another presentation at the beginning of the new school year. My hope is that other teachers will find value in the research that has changed the way that I teach and prepare my homework activities.

While looking for exciting and meaningful homework experiences the tools that I was able to engage in and utilize were so effective that I began using them during the day as I introduced content and assessed my children. These tools have transformed the way that my students learn and I feel that I am allowing them to have real life experiences using the technology.

Kralovec & Buell (2009) reported that as the homework load increases many family priorities are neglected and the time and effort that it takes to complete these meaningless assignments causes a great deal of stress in the home. It is important to note that the levels of stress in the homes of my students went down dramatically with the new homework routine and the importance of this discovery will mold the future on homework in my classroom.

Using Bloom's Taxonomy I developed many activities where my students were asked to create instead of just repeat. I motivated them to inspire rather than memorize. This philosophy has spilled into every aspect and it has helped to refine all aspects of my

teaching. It is important to give students choice and a voice. A voice to guide their learning experience and let them know that their wants and needs are valued.

It is important to report that the majority of students enjoyed the new homework routine and with such a positive response from parents I plan to refine this routine for the upcoming school year. Towards the end of the data collection process I allowed students to fill up their Spelling Menus. I did not give them a new menu each week so that I could see which activities if any were not being picked. I will take those items off the menu and replace them with other motivating and meaningful experiences.

The social atmosphere of my classroom was greatly improved with the introduction of Edmodo. This social learning site where I posted my new and improved homework assignments, videos, songs, tutorials and more, proved to be an invaluable tool. I was able to use it during my data collection process and to create a positive classroom community where students felt safe to share their ideas and have their beliefs and opinions be heard. I plan to attend online workshops provided by Edmodo in order to refine the way I use this tool in my classroom.

This research has inspired me to generate more creative ways to have my students practice math at home. I found this to be more challenging than the spelling homework in many ways. For spelling, the students would just input their words into whatever activity they chose. For math we explore different skills every day and therefore the activity would not be stagnant. It will be my challenge to see if I can construct a math homework routine that mirrors the ideas I used for spelling and allows students choice, differentiation and optimal learning experiences.

There are still many unknowns when researching the great homework debate. Why hasn't there been a large reform regarding homework practices? Why does administration still require teachers to assign homework when the data reveals it is not academically beneficial at the elementary level?

### **Obstacles**

Student interviews proved to be difficult as I wondered how much honesty the students were answering with. I felt like some were still telling me what I wanted to hear and when they gave me an answer they didn't think I would like, they answered in a shy diminished voice as they looked down or away as if to hide their embarrassment.

I also wonder how well my students were able to articulate their feelings during the interview. My students are seven and eight years old and I don't think some of them are developmentally ready to reflect on their experiences and answer accordingly. I believe that some answered in a way that reflected what they have heard from their parents or possibly in a way that they think I wanted them to answer.

Changing routines can be a challenge at this age. Some students thrive on routine and the safety that procedures and repetitive practices provide. Changing expectations in the middle of the year did prove to cause a bit of anxiety for some students. As the teacher I had to provide reassurance and security to those who needed it. Also, class time had to be taken in order to explain the new routine and model the new expectations and activities. Time was also reserved for students to journal and respond to poles that were administered by the teacher. These activities took time away from teaching curriculum.

Another obstacle I faced as a teacher researcher was formulating a new homework routine that reflected best practices. The routine needed to be research based and

thoughtful of activities that reached a variety of learning styles. The challenge was to try and reach as many learners as possible through the new activities.

Because the majority of the assignments were not paper and pencil based, I needed to provide explanation to students and parents as to how to complete said assignments. It was a challenge to create a document that explained every new assignment in a way that would be clear and concise and not leave room for interpretation. It also was a challenge to do this in a timely manner as this was in addition to my regular teaching responsibilities.

At this point and time it was not feasible for me to differentiate all homework. With the time constraints, I focused on creating new spelling homework activities but a future challenge for me is to be able to create math homework activities that allow my students the same choice and experience that best matches their learning styles. It was difficult to come to terms with the fact that I could not do as much as I would have liked to do. I hope to refine my practices for next year's class and to start the year off putting my research into practice.

Pleasing everyone is something that is nearly impossible. As teachers we have to answer to administration, to parents, to students and to yourself as you reflect on your daily decisions and lessons. However our biggest responsibility is to our students. During this research I had to defend my choices and my practices to a few parents along the way. To reiterate, parents have definite and strong perceptions about homework. They use their past experience to guide their opinions and expectations as to what their children should be experiences. Working with these perceptions was difficult at times because I had to

defend my philosophies and back them up with research. I had to convince some parents that the new homework routine would benefit their students in a variety of ways.

Another drawback to surveying the parents in my class was that I don't really know how they perceived the questions in the questionnaire. Did they understand clearly what I meant? Did they misread or misunderstand my questions. Did they devote enough time and thought to this process in order to answer efficiently and honestly. I previously mentioned that students sometimes answer in a pleasing manner, however, I am sure that some parents are afraid of being judged or putting the "wrong answer" even though it was anonymous

Being involved in graduate courses during the school year provides its own obstacles. Although each class is geared to molding a more competent and successful teacher, the time that it takes to travel to class, attend these classes and complete the necessary work is time taken from my ability to plan and create lessons for my students.

Collecting data and recording their choices every day was time consuming and again took time away from my responsibilities as a teacher, a mother, a wife and from the many other roles I play in my life. With that being said, the importance of teacher research is something I have experienced first hand and plan to continue as my quest to reform homework remains is still a slightly unfulfilled journey. I have yet to "perfect" this craft but I hope to do so in the near future.

### **Emerging Questions**

This process is largely spent gathering answers to our burning questions in the world of education. Just as you collect and analyze the multitude of answers and findings, a new question emerges stirring up feelings and emotions you didn't know you

previously had. I must admit this is one of the frustrations I have with teaching. There is no end to the work that we do. There could always be a better lesson, a different assessment, a more meaningful connection a clever way to differentiate or a challenging way to enrich. As with teaching, research has similar challenges. There is no end to the questions that surface during a research mission.

What are administrations' perceptions about homework in my district? I would be curious to see how my principal would respond if given a modified version of the parental survey, and then again how the superintendent would respond. What will my colleagues think when I present this data to them at the faculty meetings and grade group meetings? Will anyone be willing to join me on my journey of reform? Furthermore, who will be so set in their ways that they will not accept my research as effective means of teaching content?

As I continue my career in education there are many changes that will be occurring. My current principal probably only has a few more year at our school. That is why I am trying to do as much as possible while I still have her support, expertise and guidance. When she leaves, will her replacement accept my research and my new plans and valid points of view and methods of teaching?

### **Conclusion**

I am more than pleased with the journey that this research has taken me on. I began questioning the validity of homework and scrutinizing my own reasons for assigning activities to be completed at home as well as the type of activities and experiences my students were receiving. The research provided me with a clear picture of homework's history in the educational atmosphere and I felt that I was validated. What

I had suspected, that homework does not hold the value it is perceived to hold, was confirmed.

The research inspired me to look closely at student motivation, perceptions, types of homework and parental involvement. After analyzing the literature I created a new homework routine that was meant to inspire students and give them opportunities that addressed their strengths and learning styles. A routine that decreased parental involvement and stresses put on the family. My new philosophies created my own personal homework reform.

In order to measure the changes in perceptions and student motivation I collected data from students and parents alike. With the overwhelmingly positive response to the new homework routine I knew I had succeeded in creating something special, something that would guide my teaching for years to come. I hope that my research will inspire teachers in my educational community. I also feel that this experience is the start of a reflective practice that will motivate me to research additional themes in the future.

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### **Subjectivity**

It turns out that my research topic in itself was subjective. I chose it because it was important to me as a teacher and it was something I felt strongly about.

During this process I needed to sell this new idea of changing homework to my students. I think the way that I present things to my students affects the way they perceive the information. I was excited about the new homework and I wanted it to work because I truly believed it was a better experience for them. Therefore when I presented it I was excited, motivated and tried to inspire them. I think that my delivery in turn convinced some of the students that this was a good idea. When working with students it is hard sometimes not to influence their ideas. They want so badly to please their teachers that I think my ideas inadvertently become theirs.

Completing the interview with students proved to be a bit difficult for me as I tend to be very animated when I speak to them. One way that I forced myself to audit my subjectivity was to present the information and questions in a way that allowed them to determine meaning on their own. I tried to be as neutral as possible. As a result I wonder how that affected my students since I surely was not conversing with them as I normally do.

My own past experiences with homework guided my research and the questions I chose to include in the survey with the parents and the interview with the students. I grew up with some of my only experiences of homework being paper and pencil worksheets. The monotony of the homework assignments were enough to squash any creativity I had or passion I could have had on the subject. Write your words 5 times, do the even

numbered math problems in the text, read and answer the comprehension questions at the end of the social studies text. No homework was differentiated, my needs were not met. They weren't even considered. My experience with homework planted the seeds of many feelings regarding homework.

I recorded notes in my journal regarding conversations my students had, or questions or comments my parents made, so that I could analyze and code accordingly. I wonder how much actually made it into the journal and which types of conversations I remembered versus which did I forget and therefore could not record. As I recorded, did I inadvertently skew the meanings of students' comments or did I perceive them differently than the way they were meant to be? In order to manage subjectivity here, I conducted informal interviews with my in-class support teacher and my class aide. They reported any ideas or concerns and comments our students made in their presence and I cross-examined them with my own comments. However, who is to say their comments were not subjective to them?

Everything we do depends on our past experiences. We teach students to use their schema in order to problem solve and to help them to understand the world around them. It is hard to not follow your own advice and to try to leave behind your emotions, beliefs and passions.

My personality screams blue with an undertone of orange. I am an emotional person therefore I stood by my topic and defended it when questions arose from parents and administration. The orange in me is what allowed me to question homework and its importance. My orange tendencies gave me strength to inquire and stir the pot. It allowed me to forge ahead in the new adventures of homework in second grade.

I feel most comfortable talking with people. I believe that is why I chose a semi-structured interview for part of my data collection process. Also, my perception of the students' emotional levels lead me to this type of data collection. I wasn't convinced that the students would be able to answer the interview questions in a reflective way. My concern was that they would answer how they believed I wanted them to answer. Therefore I was partial to the interview so that I could talk them through the process and see where their thoughts were going.

One student was very resistant to the new types of homework. He insisted that his favorite homework was the paper and pencil homework. He is a rule follower, a question asker, and teacher pleaser. During all the initial poles he answered that he didn't want other options and that it didn't matter what the new options were, he would always choose the paper and pencil. When we spoke about this in front of the class I would find myself trying to convince him that he may enjoy the new options and that he wouldn't know what he liked best until he tried the new experiences. Also, I explained that he didn't know anything else, therefore it was safe for him to pick what he knows. As I look back at this conversation and my journal entries about my discussions with students and experiences in the classroom, I realize that my partiality was coming through here. I wanted the kids to want the new homework. I wanted them to see the possibilities they could have while learning and experiencing homework. I feel that I should have just let his comments go and not responded the way that I did. It might have seemed that I was trying to talk him into changing his mind about the topic.

As I conclude my thoughts on subjectivity, I realize that having an outside researcher would probably eliminate a lot of subjectivity. I can't imagine that a teacher

who is currently teaching in his or her classroom that picks their own research project would be able to successfully eliminate the subjectivity they would have in their research. While you are teaching the stakes are high and your emotions are turned up. I can't imagine a classroom with a passionless teacher and I feel that same noted passion would create some bias.

### **Implementation**

As my research culminates I look forward to sharing my findings with colleagues and the teaching community. I will be sharing my research at the first faculty meeting of the new 2013-2014 school year. This presentation will include my research project as well as a technological piece that will inform my colleagues of the programs that I used this year in order to motivate students and differentiate learning experiences.

I plan on meeting with my principal to see what she will allow me to do and not do when assigning homework. Because I teach in a public school I cannot make online homework mandatory. Therefore, I will be stay consistent with the routine I used this year where students have a choice in their homework assignment.

This process has changed the way I look at math homework. Rather than practicing that exact skill for the day, I would like to come up with a variety of core activities that can be practiced throughout the year to support the new core curriculum. The majority of these activities would address number sense and operations and can be practiced repeatedly in order to achieve automaticity.

Another forum to circulate the findings of my research would be at a grade group meeting in the 2013 school year. I am excited to share my process with my fellow colleagues because I know my experiences and my knowledge will directly relate to them

as they teach the same grade. They would be able to use any of my ideas right away whereas other grade levels would have to differentiate and modify to their liking.

Edmodo, a social forum for teachers and students, will be where I post my homework routines and creative assignments. I have invited my colleagues to join Edmodo as well as other teachers in the district. This allows me to post directly to them or for them to follow my page where they can see all my new ideas.

Lastly, I will disclose this newfound information with the parents of my next class. During back to school night I will propose my research and new homework plan with the families that I will be teaching. My hope is that they will be excited about the new ideas as we move forward in the journey that explores homework options and farther away from the traditional boring homework routine.

**Appendix A**

## Student Interview

1. How do you feel about homework?
  
2. What kind of homework assignments do you like the best?
  - Paper/pencil
  - tech
  - kinesthetic/tactile
  - audio/visual
  
3. What obstacles do you face when you go home to do homework?
  
4. Is there anything about homework that you like?
  
5. Is there anything about homework that you don't like?
  
6. How many times a week would you prefer to do homework?
  - Everyday (Monday -Friday)
  - Most days
  - Some days
  - None of the days
  
7. Do you think the amount of time that you do homework a night is too long, too short, or about right?
  - Much too long
  - too long
  - About right
  - too short
  - Much too short

**Appendix B**

## Parent Homework Survey – 1

Please complete this survey regarding our traditional paper and pencil homework routine.

1. How motivated do you feel your child is to do homework?

- Very motivated
- Somewhat motivated
- Not very motivated

2. How much assistance does your child need in order to complete homework on a daily basis?

- A great deal of assistance
- Some assistance
- Very little assistance
- No assistance at all

3. How beneficial do you feel homework is to your child's academic success?

- Extremely beneficial to my child's academics
- Beneficial to my child's academics
- Not as important as other academic experiences
- I have no opinion on this matter

4. Is your child required to do too much, too little, or about the right amount of homework?

- too much
- too little
- just about right

5. How well do you think traditional paper pencil homework meets your child's academic needs?

- My child's needs are well met
- My child's needs are somewhat met
- My child's needs are not met

6. How much stress do you, your child, or your family encounter while completing paper and pencil homework?

- A lot of stress
- A moderate amount of stress
- Very little stress
- No stress at all

7. How well does traditional paper and pencil homework consider the individual learning styles of your child?

- Extremely well
- Very well
- Moderately well
- Slightly well
- Not at all well

\*8. What obstacles, if any, do you and your child face during their homework routine?

9. What type of homework activity/activities do you think would benefit your child the most?

- traditional paper & pencil
- kinesthetic/tactile based
- technology based
- visual/auditory based

10. How many nights a week do you feel homework should be assigned?

- Every night of the week (Monday-Friday)
- 3 times a week
- Less than 3 times a week

**Appendix C**

## Parent Homework Survey – 2

Please complete this survey with answers that reflect your experiences during our new homework routine. Please keep in mind our Spelling Menu and the other new activities that your child experiences in the past few weeks.

1. How motivated do you feel your child was during our new homework routine?
  - Very motivated
  - Somewhat motivated
  - Not very motivated
  
2. How much assistance did your child need in order to complete homework on a daily basis?
  - A great deal of assistance
  - Some assistance
  - Very little assistance
  - No assistance at all
  
3. How beneficial do you feel homework is to your child's academic success?
  - Extremely beneficial to my child's academics
  - Beneficial to my child's academics
  - Not as important as other academic experiences
  - I have no opinion on this matter
  
4. Was your child required to do too much, too little, or about the right amount of homework?
  - too much
  - too little
  - just about right
  
5. How well did you think traditional paper pencil homework meets your child's academic needs?
  - My child's needs were well met
  - My child's needs were somewhat met
  - My child's needs were not met
  
6. How much stress do you, your child, or your family encounter while completing paper and pencil homework?
  - A lot of stress
  - A moderate amount of stress
  - Very little stress
  - No stress at all

7. How well did our new homework routine consider the individual learning styles of your child?

- Extremely well
- Very well
- Moderately well
- Slightly well
- Not at all well

\*8. What obstacles, if any, do you and your child face during the new homework routine?

9. After experience a variety of homework activities, what type of homework activity/activities do you think would benefit your child the most?

- traditional paper & pencil
- kinesthetic/tactile based
- technology based
- visual/auditory based

10. How many nights a week do you feel homework should be assigned?

- Every night of the week (Monday-Friday)
- 3 times a week
- Less than 3 times a week

**Appendix D**

Spelling Menu

<b>KINETHETIC/HANDS ON HW</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>INITIAL</b>	<b>AUDIO/VISUAL HW</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>INITIAL</b>
Sugar/Sand Writing			Spelling Memory		
Body Spelling			ABC Order		
Surface Spelling			Spelling Word Search		
Type It			Spelling Scramble		
Act It			Word Slap		
Sidewalk Spelling			Edmodo - Videos of the week		
Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes			Vocaroo		
Clap it Out			Word Ladders		
Tour the House			Flash Cards		
Mystery Spelling			Highlight It		
<b>TECHNOLOGY HW</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>INITIAL</b>	<b>PAPER AND PENCIL HW</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>INITIAL</b>
Word Safari			Rainbow Words		
Spelling City			Color Splash		
AAA Spell			Ring the Vowel		
Big IQ Kids			Vowel or Consonant		
Look, Cover, Write, Check			Three Times the Fun		
ABCya Letter Magnets			Clap it Out		
Spelling Central			Crayon Box Colors		
Spelling Test app			Somewhere Over the Rainbow		
Drawing or Painting app			What's My Word		
Type app			Punctuation Practice		

Directions for Spelling Homework Assignments.

All Internet based games have directions on how to get to the page. All Internet pages are on Edmodo as well.

**Sugar/Sand Writing** – Get a cookie pan or other shallow pan. Pour in some sand or sugar. Write your words in the sugar/sand. Shake slightly to erase. Variation – layer construction paper in different colors on the bottom. When you write in the sugar you will see a rainbow of words come through!

**Body Spelling** - Spell your words with different parts of your body. Be creative!

**Surface Spelling** – Walk around your house finding different textures and surfaces to write on. Use your finger to spell your spelling words. Try your left hand too!

**Type It** – Type your spelling words. You may change fonts and colors. Email me or print your list.

**Act It** – Grab a family member or a friend to be your audience. Tell them your word and then act it out. Variation – Act out your word and see if they can guess it!

**Sidewalk Spelling** – Use chalk to write your words on the driveway or sidewalk.

**Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes** – Spell your words using this pattern. Remember to cross your hands when you touch your shoulders and toes.

**Clap it Out** – Clap your spelling words as you spell them out loud. Clap low for consonants and high above your head for vowels.

**Tour the House** – Walk around the house as you spell your words. Every step you take is a letter that you spell out loud.

**Spelling Memory** – Write your spelling words on index cards. You will need 2 sets. Shuffle all cards and place face down. Play a game of memory. When you make a match spell the word out loud.

**ABC Order** – Write your words on index cards. Place them in ABC order by rearranging the cards. When completed, read your list of words out loud. Variation - Spell them out loud.

**Spelling Word Search** - (Internet Search: Scholastic Word Wizard) Enter your list and print the word search. Complete and hand in.

**Spelling Scramble** - (Internet Search: Scholastic Word Wizard) Enter your list and print the word scramble. Complete and hand in.

**Word Safari** – (Internet Search: Word Safari) Type your words in a list and collect the letters that make up your word.

**Word Slap** – Write your words on index cards. Read a word and slap the card and add to the discard pile. Repeat multiple times. Variations – Slap with a spatula, a fly swatter, popsicle stick, ruler etc.

**Edmodo** – Each week I will post videos or lessons having to do with our spelling rule of the week. Watch at least 2 of the videos.

**Vocaroo** – ([www.vocaroo.com](http://www.vocaroo.com)) (Internet Search: vocaroo) Hit the record button and read your spelling word then spell it. Read and spell 5 words and then stop the recording.

Listen to your recording. Repeat this process until you complete all your words.

**Word Ladders** – Complete in your HW pad. Write your spelling word one letter at a time. Start on a new line every time.

L

Lo

Lov

love

**Flash Cards** – Create your own flash cards. Read each word and spell it out loud. Repeat this process a few times.

**Highlight It** – Open to your spelling list. Use a highlighter to highlight each letter as you spell the word out loud. Rewrite your list and repeat if you wish.

**Spelling City** – ([www.spellingcity.com](http://www.spellingcity.com)) Click batch entry. Type in your word list and play any of the free games.

**AAA Spell** – ([www.aaaspell.com](http://www.aaaspell.com)) Type your list and do any of the activities in the practice column.

**Big IQ Kids** – ([www.bigiqkids.com/SpellingVocabulary/Lessons/wordlist.html](http://www.bigiqkids.com/SpellingVocabulary/Lessons/wordlist.html)) (Internet Search: big IQ kids custom list) Make sure your volume is working. It will take you through the process step by step.

**Look, Cover, Write, Check** –

([www.amblesideprimary.com/ambleweb/lookcover/lookcover.html](http://www.amblesideprimary.com/ambleweb/lookcover/lookcover.html)) (Internet Search: look cover write spell) Type your words, practice them and then when they are covered, see if you can spell them.

**ABCya Letter Magnets** – ([www.abcya.com/alphabet\\_number\\_magnets.htm](http://www.abcya.com/alphabet_number_magnets.htm)) (Internet search: abcya letter magnets) Drag the letter magnets onto the fridge and spell all of your spelling words.

**Spelling Central** – (<http://mrnussbaum.com/spelling-play/>) (Internet Search: Spelling Central) Type your word list and choose from a word search, ABC order, mixed words or missing letter activities.

**Spelling Test app** – Any app on any phone or tablet that allows students to practice their spelling words. If there is an option to “share” their work, please email it to me. Some suggestions for Apple users: A+ Spelling Test, Spelling Test Free, Spelling Test.

**Drawing or Painting app** – Any app on any phone or tablet that allows students to practice their spelling words by drawing the letters with their fingers or with a stylus. If there is an option to “share” their work, please email it to me. Some suggestions for Apple users: KidsDoodle, Paint Sparkles

**Type app** – Any app on any phone or tablet that allows students to practice their spelling words by typing their spelling words. If there is an option to “share” their work, please email it to me. Some suggestions for Apple users: SWYPE.