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Parents' view on homework

Homework as an aspect of school

Bachelor's project in Grunnskolelærerutdanning 1.-7- trinn
Supervisor: Armend Tahirsylai & Marthe Sofie Pande-Rolfesen
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English summary

The theme of this study is homework with a main focus on elementary schools. The perspective will be of parents with children in elementary school and their views on this aspect of school. The goal of the study is to educate myself and others further on this topic which is in constant debate in media and otherwise.

The research question is: *“What is the difference in how the ‘everyday-parents’ and parents whose opinions are presented in the media view the homework aspect of school?”* A survey was given to parents with children in elementary school. Through inductive reasoning and qualitative research, the questions of the survey were created and analyzed. The research question is comparing and contrasting the survey answers and letters written to newspapers about homework by parents with children in elementary school. Two letters to newspapers have been included and analyzed - retrieved from two major online newspapers in Norway, *VG* and *Aftenposten*. The theories presented look at the value of homework, different types of homework assignments, positives and negatives of homework, and who may benefit from homework. The theories are written by Cooper, Robinson, and Patall (2006) and Rønning (2008 & 2010), among others. The analysis of the survey and letters to the newspapers will be the main focus of the discussion with anchoring in the literature presented. Both the theory and analysis conclude that there is both potential negatives and potential positive effects of homework. Finally, there is a conclusion of this paper including all the material presented.

Norsk sammendrag

Temaet i denne studien er lekser med hovedfokus på grunnskolen. Perspektivet vil være fra foreldre med barn i grunnskolen og deres syn på dette aspektet av skolen. Målet med studien er å utdanne meg selv og andre videre på dette emnet, som er i konstant debatt i media og ellers.

Forskningsspørsmålet er: *"Hva er forskjellen på hvordan 'hverdagens foreldre' og foreldre med sine meninger presentert i media, ser på lekse aspektet i skolen?"* En undersøkelse ble gitt til foreldre med barn i grunnskolen. Gjennom induktivt resonnement og kvalitativ forskning ble spørsmålene i undersøkelsen opprettet og analysert. Forskningsspørsmålet sammenligner og kontrasterer undersøkelsens svar og brev skrevet til aviser om lekser av foreldre med barn i grunnskolen. To brev til aviser er tatt med og analysert - hentet fra to store nettaviser i Norge, *VG* og *Aftenposten*. Teoriene som presenteres, ser på verdien av lekser, ulike typer lekser, positive og negative sider ved lekser, og hvem som kan ha nytte av lekser. Teoriene er skrevet av blant annet Cooper, Robinson og Patall (2006) og Rønning (2008 og 2010). Analysen av undersøkelsen og brevene til avisene vil være hovedfokus for diskusjonen med forankring i den presenterte litteraturen. Både teorien og analysen konkluderer med at det er både potensielle negative og potensielle positive effekter av lekser. Til slutt er det en konklusjon av dette arbeidet, alt materialet presentert er inkludert der.

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1. Introduction

Homework in school is constantly discussed in society by teachers, parents, students, and the media. As homework often affects both students and their close surroundings, the theme is of relevance for a wide group of people. Any frustration the student might experience while doing homework, will naturally affect those helping them. Most schools in Norway have chosen homework as a tool to improve learning, although there is no registered number of exactly how many schools have implemented this practice. Originally, homework was assigned to practice obtained knowledge or learn new knowledge. It would have been either a priest or a teacher who determined whether students had or had not obtained the knowledge needed for later life. Today, on the other hand, homework has the perception of improving the students' learning outcomes – make them better students and achieve better results (Rønning, 2010; Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006). However, research show more complex and conflicting results (Rønning, 2010; Cooper, 1989).

So, what is the real reason for homework today? What values and benefits does homework provide? I find these questions very interesting. Both in my personal experience as a former elementary student and my current experience with children in close family in elementary school. As a teacher in training, I am eager to understand the complexity around homework, as most students and parents have opinions on the subject.

Because of restrictions concerning approval and permits, the study of this paper focuses on parents rather than the students. The research question for this paper is as follows: *“What is the difference in how the ‘everyday-parents’ and parents whose opinions are presented in the media view the homework aspect of school?”* Is there a value to homework? Defining value here will be important - to determine what we define value to be. What does value mean in this context? What does it mean in terms of homework? The research question is quite broad, so in this paper I have created a survey and had parents with children in the 4th grade in one elementary school in Norway complete it. The survey answers will then be compared and contrasted to two letters written to two of the major online newspapers in Norway by parents. This will set some of the groundwork on how the letters to the newspapers and survey answers are interpreted within the theory.

The introduction is supposed to shed light on the reasoning behind choosing this research question and what to expect while reading. Theories will be presented first – for the purpose of the research question. The research question will be brought into the discussion in the end after having analyzed the survey answers and the letters to the newspapers written by parents. Before the analysis, however, I will present the method used in the process of writing this thesis. The analysis will then follow and will be the biggest and most elaborate part written as theories presented earlier are based on this. Lastly, I will sum up the data collected, theories presented and analysis of the contrasts and comparison of this material while being objective.

2. Theory

This section will present the theory that will be framing the research question and analysis of said research question: *“What is the difference in how the ‘everyday-parents’ and parents whose opinions are presented in the media view the homework aspect of school?”* The first part will be about defining homework to make it clear what I mean when writing ‘homework’. As mentioned in the introduction, while looking onto homework defining ‘value’ and what it means in this context. To further the examination of the research question defining the ‘value of homework’ will provide greater understanding as theories and the analysis is presented. Looking at both the positives and negatives of homework I will look into how homework can create differences. This is based on analysis of surveys and letters to the newspapers.

2.1 Homework definition and value

‘An assignment which students do at home, or do not work on during school hours’ is the most common definition of homework (Wall & Karlefjård, 2016). The classic definition by Harris Cooper (1989) is as follow: “assigned to students by schoolteachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours.” This definition does not include work that are carried out in free-periods in-between classes or tasks and other activities in no correlation to school, like soccer practice or theater lessons.

Defining the value of homework, one has to look into the reason behind the concept ‘homework’ and see what that means for the students’ learning. Defining the term ‘homework’ may be less problematic than the term ‘learning’. The students’ achievements may be seen as the biggest reasoning behind the research of homework. An achievement can be measured in

three ways, writes Wall and Karlefjård (2016): the students' results on standardized tests, students' results on tests designed by the same teacher that has given students' their homework, and grades set by the same teacher who gave the students' homework. The most common way to measure an achievement is still to see the amount of homework as a starting point and see this in reference to results on standardized tests.

2.2 Education Act on homework

There is no direct authority for giving homework in the Education Act for neither public schools nor private schools (Udir, 2014). However, homework has become a part of the school's ordinary activity. The Education Act does not regulate all tasks related to education because a big part of the daily school life is not enshrined in the regulations. The school itself decides whether their students receive homework or not. The majority of schools in Norway have chosen to include homework as a regular activity. A school can choose to organize their education without giving students homework. The education, training, and learning is to be set so that it is suitable for the students to reach the competence goals in the curriculum.

Students have an obligation to participate actively in the education (Opplæringslova, §2-3 fourth paragraph & §3-4 second paragraph). Homework must be in correlation to the competence goals in the student's education and the implementation of this, thus the function of the students' learning becomes important. The competence goals are stated in the curriculum *Kunnskapsløftet*. The competence goals are clearly formulated, and the students' competence is assessed based on their achievement of the goals.

Udir (2014) points out that homework can have an important function in the collaboration between school and home. Homework creates the opportunity for parents to take part in the students' education. Parents are responsible for the children doing homework, but the school cannot assume that professional help is given at home (Udir, 2014).

2.3 Types of homework assignments

Unequivocally, research does not support the notion that more homework necessarily means improved achievement Lee and Pruitt (1979) writes, it is therefore more important for teachers to give clear guidelines for prescribing and utilizing homework as a teaching tool. All homework assignments given are not designed to meet the same instructional purpose. It is

necessary to determine the purpose behind making a homework assignment to obtain maximum benefit from it, and then allow the purpose of the assignment to determine the homework policy. Lee and Pruitt (1979) classifies assignments into four types. (1) *Practice*, which is the most common and simple type. It is to help students with specific skills and should, in Lee and Pruitt's (1979) opinion be limited to material presented in class. (2) *Preparation*, which are given to prepare students to gain the most benefits from subsequent lessons. (3) *Extension*, which are to determine if the students can use a previously learnt skill or concept and transfer it to a new situation. Extension require more abstract thinking than practice assignments. (4) *Creative*, which require student to integrate many skills and concepts to the problem-solving process – this type of assignment normally take more time to complete than the other three types.

2.4 Positives and negatives of homework

Cooper, Robinson, and Patall (2006) grouped the positive effects of homework into four categories: 1) immediate achievement and learning, 2) long-term academic, 3) nonacademic and 4) parental and family benefits. The most frequent rationale for homework is the immediate effect. Such as, increasing the time students spend on academic tasks and increasing instructional time of students engaged in home study. The long-term benefits of homework are rather the establishment of general practices that facilitate learning than enhancements to achievement in particular academic domains. Encouraging students to learn during their leisure time; improve students' attitudes toward school; and, improve students' study habits and skills are what homework is expected to accomplish (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006, p. 6). Generalizing homework to other domains, other than just academic pursuits, developing personal attributes in children, to promote positive behaviors. To increase parents' appreciation of and involvement in schooling, teachers can use homework. This being another of the positive effects of homework, in the fourth category by Cooper, Robinson, and Patall (2006). There are negative effects attributed to homework, which Cooper, Robinson, and Patall (2006) write about, that contradict the suggested positive effects they previously mentioned.

Cooper et al. (2006) mention saturation as one of the potential negative effects of homework, which can lead to the students experiencing a loss of interest in the academics, as well as being overexposed to tasks – thus the students can experience both physical and emotional exhaustion. The attitudes the students then acquire towards school will hence contribute in a

way of bad influence. Organized leisure activities can give students important knowledge and skills so homework may restrict their access to free time – arguing that school is not the only place where learning can take place. According to Cooper et al. (2006), parent involvement can have a negative impact on the students. Some parents may put a lot of pressure on the student to do their homework or implement it in an unrealistically rigorous manner. Another negative side of parental involvement is how the parents may get involved too much and, in this way, go beyond being a supervisor or assistant. Furthermore, by having parental assistance on homework may lead students to have excessive confidence that they will receive constant help with their homework meaning they do not have to do it alone and therefore may not really learn anything hence leading students to cheat and write off others' homework. Studies indicate that high-performing students come from families with good education and good income, they also receive appropriate support from their parents with homework. Therefore, another negative effect of homework is that it increases the differences between high- and low-performing students, especially when achievement differences are linked to the students' economic differences as well. Cooper et al. (2006) writes a reasoning for students from families with spacious economic background are the high-performing students might be because they have better access to resources which can help students perform better.

In short, homework has both positive and negative consequences according to Cooper, Robinson, and Patall (2006). With the exact same homework, the positive and negative consequences can both occur but in different ways based on which student is executing them.

2.5 Who benefits from homework assignments?

Rønning (2008) asks the question 'who benefits' from homework. Assigning homework in elementary school is to enhance their performance, Rønning (2008) writes. Further she writes that this statement has not been confirmed because results and opinions on the effectiveness of homework are contradictory in education literature. Rønning reference Cooper (1989b & 2006) saying his conclusion of the effects of homework on achievement for elementary school students is negligible and might even be non-existent. As a young student, they have less well-developed study habits and therefore have trouble ignoring irrelevant information in their home-environment. To what extent they receive help from their parents/guardians can determine how well they learn from homework. It varies from home to home on time spent on child care but socioeconomic-background is said to positively correlate to this (Rønning, 2008,

p. 3). Higher educated mothers spend more time with their children than lower educated mothers says two early empirical studies on this topic by Leibowitz (1974) and Hill and Stafford (1974) (referenced in Rønning, 2008). These studies do not include or consider educational child care, this is including homework assignments, only later studies do this. Then more specifically the findings show that higher educated parents spend more time on educational child care, like homework assignments, than lower educated parents. Students from advantaged family backgrounds may learn more from their homework assignments than students from disadvantaged family backgrounds if the effectiveness of assigning homework to young learns depends on parental input (Rønning, 2008, p. 4).

Rønning (2008) writes she has found that there is more of a difference between high and low achievers in classes where everybody gets homework rather than in classes where nobody gets homework. Students belonging to the upper part of the socioeconomic status scale gain from homework assignments while students from the lowest part has no change or do not gain as much by homework. This is consistent with home inputs and homework assignment and an interaction effect between them, Rønning (2008) writes more precisely. Pointing out that before students enter first grade there are already significant differences among them in verbal and mathematical competence (Rønning, 2008, p. 5). On average it is students who get homework who perform worse than students who do not get homework. 12 percent of a standard deviation to be exact (Rønning, 2008, p. 17). Rønning writes what homework is usually given to classes with weaker students, therefore its effect cannot be given a causal interpretation. Furthermore, she confirms that correlation with both individual and class characteristic are present and there is need for more elaborated strategies to identify the effects of homework. Comparing students within schools and grades is only one strategy Rønning (2008) mentioned. She later confirms her previous statement with provided data, saying that weaker students are unaffected by homework. These are the students in the lower part of the distribution which coincide in homework and non-homework classes. On the other side, the upper part of the distribution in homework-classes is confirmed to benefit from homework.

As mentioned, students come into first grade with differences and Rønning (2008) informs that her findings proves an early source of inequality. From a very early age, before they start school even, students from disadvantage backgrounds fall behind. It is therefore important to know about potential sources that create these inequalities. The ability or availability to follow up instructions from schools, teachers, and principals by parents of children from disadvantaged

background may be less present. If giving parents more responsibility for their children's learning is the schools' aim, unintentionally it increases the education differences between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Rønning's (2008) paper focuses on how giving homework to children in elementary school does not improve achievement level for all students and the one's who do see improvements are students from advantaged family backgrounds.

From Rønning's (2010) analysis it appears time spent on completion of homework differs in students. A student with a low socioeconomic background spends no time on homework compared to a student with high socioeconomic background. Variations within the student's motivation, knowledge, and learning conditions in the home are factors which may affect this difference (Rønning, 2010). High socioeconomic background students might not need more time on their homework because they do not struggle or find it more difficult than students from a low socioeconomic background, Rønning (2010) suggests. Having to spend longer on homework can cause frustration, low motivation, or lack of concentration hence homework becoming a negative experience for low achievers. Different from high achievers, performers who have higher ambitions when it comes to school and homework thus, they spend more time on homework, regardless of the socioeconomic background. Furthermore, the opinion that homework increases students' school achievements has become society norm, but Rønning's findings show that homework has a weak positive effect on the students' average. However, it is important to take note that this does not apply to all students. Receiving a lot of homework when a student comes from a low socioeconomic background will perform poorer at school than students with similar socioeconomic background who are given little homework, according to Rønning (2010). Consequently, students with a low socioeconomic background will perform better at school without homework.

The negative connection between homework and the student's performance has no clear reason, according to Rønning (2010). The homework reducing students' motivation, which therefore can indirectly affect the students' school performance. The teacher giving students new and unexplained homework tasks when they should actually be taught and reviewed at school so that homework acts as a substitute for learning at school could be another part of the explanation of the negative connection between performance and homework. Combining this with a possible poor home environment to do the homework increasing this negative connection. Rønning (2010) also shows that students with a low socioeconomic background learn on

average more at school than at home, and if homework becomes a substitute for learning at school, this could have a negative impact on these students' school performance, as they learn best at school. It would also be reasonable to believe that students from a low socioeconomic background get less help with schoolwork at home. Low socioeconomic background often comes in correlation with low education and language barriers. Lack of professional knowledge for the subject in general and language challenges when students are taught in a second language, will affect the help received with homework.

3. Method

In this chapter I will give a clear description of how I have worked and chosen to do the parts of the research process and furthermore explain the choices I have made. This will make the process from the beginning of planning to the preparation to be able to highlight the issue that is the research question: *“What is the difference in how the ‘everyday-parents’ and parents whose opinions are presented in the media view the homework aspect of school?”* To start I will be introducing my approach which is most referred to as inductive reasoning. Afterwards I will move into qualitative research with mention of quantitative research as it is relevant to my research process. In conclusion, mentioning the survey participants and method of choosing the letters from parents written to newspapers on homework.

3.1 Inductive reasoning and qualitative research

Inductive reasoning also known as “bottom up” approach. This approach is the opposite of deductive reasoning, which is the “top-down” approach and most commonly used. Inductive reasoning works the other way around in which one is moving from specific observation, or in this case from data collected from survey answers, to broader generalizations and theories. While this approach is primarily associated with qualitative research and deductive reasoning usually associated with quantitative research, both research perspectives have been used (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The main focus however will be on the qualitative research of the questionnaire since this will be the main premise of analyzing with the news letters from parents in the media. Inductive reasoning, as mentioned, works from the bottom and up. This means starting out with observations or questionnaires before finding a pattern within them and then connecting the findings to a tentative hypothesis. The theory will be the last step, in contrast with deductive reasoning in which this would be the first step, which will establish the

tentative hypotheses and theories notional link. The qualitative research method contains a smaller sample of participants with rich descriptions which also makes it less generalizable to populations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). One has to understand and interpret human perspectives within the data and having selection of procedures to establish trust in the findings. This is also what makes this thesis an inductive reasoning paper since the work is based on the analysis of the findings and results of the questionnaire before theory and discussion and connections between these two parts.

Qualitative content analysis has three approaches, but this paper has focus on one of them which is inductive reasoning (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The study starts with observation or questionnaires before timing of defining codes or keywords which are defined during data analysis. The source of the codes or keywords are derived from data, so this method of content analysis is conventional content analysis which will be referred to as inductive reasoning in this paper.

I felt it was appropriate to choose qualitative method since this method is suitable when the researcher wants a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon, as well as a deeper understanding of human experiences, thoughts, and action (Esterberg, 2002; Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2015; Thagaard, 2009). The goal of qualitative research method is to gain access to the research participant's way of life/living, as well as their opinions, thoughts, and attitudes. Another characteristic of the qualitative method is that qualitative researchers often intend to study everyday life – what one might take for granted – then to understand it in new ways (Esterberg, 2002). With regards to the topic of this study something normal like homework makes it natural to choose the qualitative method for research purposes.

Participants of the survey were 22 parents from my practice class in 4th grade elementary school in Norway. The survey was sent out with 50 students, but only 22 came back. The survey is a combination of standardized and unstandardized/unstructured questions. Standardized questionnaires are linked and used primarily in quantitative research because the questions and responses are fixed. Unstandardized or unstructured questionnaires contains open responses with no fixed answers. This model is used in qualitative research. Since the survey used in this thesis is a combination of the two models it is called a semi-standardized questionnaire.

Method of collecting and choosing letters to the newspaper about homework written by parents with children in elementary school to analyze with the survey answers, were to look into only major online newspaper such as *VG*, *Dagbladet*, *Aftenposten*, and *Adressa*, since they have more reach. To narrow the search further I chose to focus on the question; “*how do media address homework from 2016-2019?*” There was not a focus on an educational perspective or wheatear they were negative or positive – they only had to be written by parents or guardians with children in elementary school in Norway.

4. Analysis

4.1 Analysis of the survey answers

The findings and results are from a survey created for parents of students in one elementary school in Norway. The survey was sent out to approximately 50 students, resulting in 22 surveys returning completed. The survey included two questions where the participant would answer according to the five alternatives listed. Question number three the participants where to select the alternatives that were accurate for their child. The last question was an open question where the participants could write down a statement which more clearly reflected their views. This question was the one, out of the 22 surveys, some chose not to answer. This might be because they did not wish to express their views, found it time consuming, or others.

The first question 10 parents/guardians answered that their child spend 1-2 hours on homework in a week, making this the majority. The others were divided with 4 each between saying their child spend 2-3 or 3-4 hours on the homework in a week. The other two alternatives had two parents/guardians each saying their child spend less than an hour and more than 4 hours, making this the minority answer.

The second question the majority answer is equally divided with 6 parents/guardians saying they spend either 1-2 days or 3-4 days a week helping their child with their homework. 5 parents/guardians answered they spend more than 4 days assisting their child with homework. Only two parents/guardians said they never help their child. Since there was no follow up question to this it will be unclear what the reason for this is. The child might be perfectly fine on their own, therefore the parents do not need to help, or maybe the homework is too easy or there is not enough. Here it would be interesting to analyze the survey to the parents/guardian

saying they never assist their child and see what the answered in the final question to see if there is a link there.

The third question presented the parents with six statements and they were to choose however many they believed to be true about their child. The first statement stated that the 'homework is hard for my child to do' which five parents chose. Five parents also chose the statement saying, 'my child does not like to do homework', although it was not all the same parents who chose both. The statement the fewest chose was believing 'too much time go towards homework'. The second statement presented was 'the homework is too easy for my child' which six parents said to be true about their child. Furthermore, ten parents chose the statement saying, 'the amount of homework is fine'. The statement most parents chose to fit their child in regards of homework was 'my child finds the homework okay to do' and eighteen parents said this.

The final question is where the parents/guardians got to express themselves more freely without a set alternative. There were many different answers, yet many also contained the same message. Some found it hard to help out, but also expressed that they thought homework was good for them as parents so they could follow the curriculum with the students and see exactly what they do in school. But this also meant some of them wanted clearer structures and information of both work in school and homework. Sometimes they found it hard to help because they did not understand the homework either because instructions given were either not given or unclear. Some expressed that they would prefer longer school days so the students got through more of the curriculum at school rather than taking it home since everyday life can be hectic. Do the teachers need to clarify why they give homework? Are there any benefits? Is it about the purpose of the homework (the "why" do this) or is it about the quality of the homework (the "what")? One parent/guardian expressed the concern of the homework creating a negative association with school and studying even further on in life, this would be very interesting to look into. The homework seemed too easy for some students, so in the survey some wrote how the level should fit every student at their learning level and be meaningful to them. This is perhaps related to differentiated learning.

The original thought of research question was to look into the difference of parents/guardians' thoughts of homework to those with kids in practice compared to those who chose to share their views in the media. The last question in the survey reflects the research question more because

the parents got the chance to express themselves freely while still being anonymous. In media parents are the face of their case, but that may also mean that they truly believe in the dilemmas they are speaking up about. However, since the survey is anonymous there is no way of knowing who answered it and how this affects the study.

4.2 Letters to the newspaper

Dora Thorhallsdottir, who is a parent first and foremost, has written a letter to a newspaper about how she hates homework. Her letter has been posted to several different online newspaper, among one of the most read; *VG*. She continues in her letter to ask why we still have homework in 2018 when we know how many parents and children end up in conflicts because parents are forced into the role as teacher - which gets tiresome for both parts at the end of the night, she reflects. She furthers her statement/question with explaining how so many parents are unable to continue the role as private teacher after the 5th grade because they do not have the knowledge to aid their children with the homework given. She believes giving homework is outdated. She again asks a question and comparing the life of a student to the life of a working adult. An employee would not accept their boss telling them to work hours unpaid from home after you are already done with the mandatory hours at the actual office. For students the office becomes the school and the boss becomes the teacher – homework is just work all together (Thorhallsdottir, 2018).

Homework originated in Norway because the teachers traveled around bigger areas of the country, so the children only had school certain days a week (not every day) and so they did homework on the days the teacher was not present (Thorhallsdottir, 2018). Thorhallsdottir (2018) explains her children goes to a school where nearly 40 percent of the students are not ethnic Norwegian. A lot of the children are bilingual, whereas one or both of the parents barely know Norwegian. These are especially the parents with children who sit night after night and feel frustrated because they do not get the help they need at home, Thorhallsdottir (2018) writes. Furthermore, she mentions how multiple times it has been proven homework has no real use or value. She references to a school in Hawaii where her children have gone to school and how they found it ‘interesting’ how her children were used to homework because they have never had that there. They told her: “no one benefits from homework” (Thorhallsdottir, 2018). Thorhallsdottir (2018) also refers to when she herself lived in Malaysia and went to school, 4th

and 5th grade, in a good and renown international school. There they laughed when her parents wondered if they had homework. To them it was ‘old school’ and ‘very 1800s’.

“Why do we continue with this (homework)” Thorhallsdottir (2018) asks. She says it does not work. Just look online and you will find a lot of research on it, she writes. She says students feel stupid night after night, during a time their identities are being formed - and this feeling will stick. She says parents hate the role as teacher trying to get their child to do something they do not know themselves or have surplus to. She says a lot of people she talks to as a therapist tells her school taught them, they were unintelligent, and this is something they still struggle with. She says: “when we have a prime minister with dyslexia and struggled with the exact same things in school, how can we still continue with this?” (Thorhallsdottir (2018). “Why do we not change something that is not working?” Thorhallsdottir (2018) asks. She makes the point that Norway uses Finland as an example for a school system that work, but they do not have homework – because homework as no value. Thorhallsdottir is frustrated because she does not understand this since neither parents nor children gets joy out of it. She believes many parent-child relationships gets damaged by this. “STOP. HOMEWORK. PERIOD.” – this is the last statement Dora Thorhallsdottir (2018) makes in her letter.

Runhild Dammen is a mother of a girl in 3rd grade and has written a letter to a newspaper on her thoughts on homework as well. Her letter has also been published in several online newspapers; another Norwegian well-known paper *Dagbladet*. Her headline/title is: “Stay away from our free time.” Dammen (2018) is speaking directly to parents in the beginning of her letter saying they need to stand up for their rights and demand that their school obtain their permission to keep this practice called ‘homework’. She does state that many parents do find that homework is a good arrangement. Furthermore, how one of the arguments for homework is reading practice. She then follows with another argument others use fore homework; being repetition of school material. These being the major arguments for homework, according to Dammen (2018).

Many believe having longer schooldays would be the alternative to homework, but this includes more resources, she points out. Introduction to 10 years of school, 21 years ago, applied these extra resources. Adding another year later on, the teachers still had pressure of what should be taught, and what the students needed to have obtained and mastered by then grew – pushing the boundaries yet again (Dammen, 2018). Originally, reading lessons were not supposed to start

before 2nd grade, but this did not stick for very long, says Dammen (2018). Today even 1st graders get homework, even though the first year of school was supposed to be meant as more of a pre-school year. Dammen (2018) argues that theoretical/professional discussion does not belong in the home but in the children's 'work hours' (school day) and parents is not supposed to meddle in/with this. Her free time, on the other hand, Dammen (2018) says belongs to only her. Homework is not statutory, argues Dammen (2018). Only the parents can impose work in their children's spare time, but she says it does not work like this in practice. She further argues: "Working towards a homework-free school is like working towards a right we already have." (Dammen, 2018). Each county/school have their own right to deviate from homework if they may choose to do so. Dammen (2018) writes she now demands that the school needs to obtain permission from parents to give students homework. She says some parents will say 'yes' and others will say 'no', but the school needs to deal with both. With all the demands and pressure that is put onto the school system Dammen (2018) does understand schools see parents as the extra resource that can help keep them on track with reaching all determined goals (in the curriculum) but she writes that parents are not this resource because they have their own small and big goals/projects they work on and need time after school/work hours. Dammen (2018) points out that the school already have the majority access to their child's time, while they are awake, compared to the time each child spends with their family.

The way things work now, there is a huge difference in how often or well parents assist their children and Dammen (2018) believes this leads to differences in the classroom of the students learning and mastery/motivation. Therefore, Dammen (2018) writes that her theory is that homework leads to an increase of differences that are already present in the classroom. Dammen (2018) believes the challenge is the demands the school experience and obligations that are put onto teachers and students, but also parents who have to be assistants/private teachers after school-hours, she adds. She says the answer is to lower the level of ambition. There is a new curriculum coming in 2020 and Dammen (2018) says *Utdanningsdirektoratet* needs to take into account that Norway is homework-free, and they need to adjust the curriculum's progress and content after this fact. Dammen (2018) argues that it is up to the school to work within the framework they have available and the free time after school-hours is not available as a resource. Both parents and children are entitled to free time and therefore it is not up to the school to decide how parents or children use their free time/after school-hours. Dammen (2018) wants to make notice that *FAU* at a school cannot vote you down or demand reconciliation because this is not a democratic decision. Only the parents or guardians have the power over

their own child. The same way a teacher/school cannot demand your child to do homework, you as a parent cannot demand that the kid next door does or does not do their homework. The parents of the kid next door get to make that decision. If a boss were to tell his employees to work, one-hour overtime without pay everyday it would not take very long before the unions had been contacted. So Dammen (2018) asks; “why do not we (the parents) and our child have this protection?” She proceeds to say how strange it is to her how adults receive better protection through the *Working Environment Act* than children. In addition, she writes that there is a lot of things she wishes her child to learn which she cannot learn in school. She expects her free time to be a time for peace and quiet and a time of her own to do what she wishes.

5. Discussion

In this section I use the findings from the survey and the letters written to the online newspapers to highlight the research question: “*What is the difference in how the ‘everyday-parents’ and parents whose opinions are presented in the media view the homework aspect of school?*” Based in this and theories presented earlier in this paper I will compare and contrast, looking at differences and similarities, between the parents from my practice and the parents in the media while basing it on relevant theory.

5.1 Parental assistance

Udir states that homework can create the opportunity for parents to take part in the students’ education. Parents from my practice who participated in the survey does support this claim: (1) “Homework is good for the parents to follow the work the kids do in school.”, (2) “[...] Good for parents to keep track on what the kids learn and use it in everyday life at home. [...]”, (3) “Would prefer that the homework would be done in school (longer days), but good to see what the kids do in school [...]” and, (4) “Good for the parents to have insight of what the students work on and their level. Create good discussions around the dinner table. [...]”

Parents who participated in the survey do see some good value with homework when it comes to parents having the opportunity from them to involve themselves in their children’s education. Although they see the positive side, they do not mention their involvement with the homework other than the work being done and level their child is on. One of the questions on their survey

asked; ‘how often in a week they helped their child with homework’, and all the parents/guardian quoted above answered differently on this – meaning that I do not see a correlation between the two. Cooper et al. (2006) has mentioned both positives and negatives towards parental involvement with homework. The pressure to complete and perform well can accrue, as well as confusion of techniques if the students have learnt it differently at school – this possibly affecting negatively on the students’ performance and achievement. On the other hand, the positives are bigger in this aspect, according to Cooper et al. (2006). The parent’s appreciation and involvement in school, and as some parents mentioned; school can be discussed at home and applied to their everyday life. Furthermore, parental interest in their child’s academic progress creating positive associations to school hence the students become aware of the connection between home and school.

5.2 Homework creating differences

This alternation supports further statements from Udir (2014) that parents are responsible for their children doing homework, but the school cannot assume that professional help is given at home. One of the letters written to the newspapers by Dammen (2018) she argues that her free-time outside of her work belongs to her and that homework belongs to the school hours of her child and therefore not something she should meddle in. An important notion to consider is that as a parent you have a responsibility for your child, almost like a ‘second job’ and school is not responsible for raising that child. School is there for educational purposes and as mentioned Udir (2014) does point out that as a parent/guardian of a child you have a responsibility of making sure they take part in their education, which includes homework in most schools.

Thorhallsdottir (2018) makes the point of the necessity of having to help out with homework creates conflict in their home. Furthermore, she continues to say that after 5th grade most parents do not possess the knowledge needed to take on the role as private teacher. This supports the statement the parent from the survey say about homework – that many students are dependent on assistance and some parents might not be able to provide this: “Important to have reading as homework to get in practice. Other than that, it is preferred that they do so in school, because then the kids do not need to be depended on the parents and their knowledge (small or big) to be able to do their homework.” Rønning (2010) writes many students need tasks to be explained in school to be able to do them, so if their home environment is poor and they do not receive the assistance needed, homework becomes a substitute for learning in school it will have a

negative effect. Rønning's research from 2008 does suggest that homework unintentionally increase the education differences between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. As Thorhallsdottir (2018) mentions multiple times; she sees no real value of homework. This statement is supported by Rønning (2008) who writes that the achievement level of students in elementary schools does not improve with homework – the students that do show improvement are students from families with high socioeconomic backgrounds and therefore has advantaged other students do not. Dammen (2018) also point out in her letter that there are a lot of other things she wishes to teach her children when they are not in school, and homework (again) takes away from that time. However, according to the Education Act students have an obligation to participate actively in the education (Opplæringslova, §2-3 fourth paragraph & §3-4 second paragraph). Nonetheless, Cooper at al. (2006) does mention that a negative aspect of homework is that schools does not seem to recognize that school is not the only place learning take place. The parents who participated in my survey did have similar concerns: "Homework does not take into account psychological/social problems, the family's everyday life (activities after school, etc.). Should be more curriculum done in school to avoid negative associations to learning/studying later in life."

As mentioned, Lee and Pruitt (1979) categorized different homework assignment and the reasoning behind the type of assignment, but as Cooper at. al. (2006) points out; overexposure to material using homework can cause loss of academic interest, which the students would possibly still possess if the material was constricted to strictly school settings. However, Cooper at. al. (2006) does say a long-term positive effect can be improved attitudes towards school. Low motivation, or lack of concentration can accrue if students have to spend longer on their homework, writes Rønning (2010). It has become a society norm that homework increase students' school achievements but in fact according to Rønning's findings homework has a weak positive effect on the students' average – students will perform better as school without homework, especially those who come from a low socioeconomic background.

5.3 Value of homework

7 out of the 19 parents/guardians who answered the last question on the survey; "*what is your opinion as a parent/guardian of homework?*", said that homework is good and/or that it needed to be more homework. On the other side some parents pointed out that they felt the homework needed to be more 'meaningful' and that they do not always see if the children get anything out

if it because their ‘thoughts can be elsewhere’. As Lee and Pruitt (1979) writes, it is important for the teachers to give homework with the guidelines for prescribing and utilizing it as a teaching tool. One of the participants of the survey wrote something interesting about this: “Homework with a goal and a purpose is fine. Our experience is that the homework that promote learning is good, but not every homework given is good.”

This supports what Lee and Pruitt (1979) writes, about homework given and the different assignments for utilizing this tool in a good manner. Like mentioned earlier, Cooper et al. (2006) said that confusion about how to do the homework assignment is one of the negatives for this aspect of school and it furthers on what Lee and Pruitt (1979) said and what parents of the students in my practice, as well as the letters to the newspapers like Thorhallsdottir saying she sees no value in homework and it always becomes a conflict in their home because of it. Rønning (2008) mentions that young students have less well-developed study habits, and this may be a reason for homework, as to practice but if the homework provided does not promote learning the home-environment may become a distraction. Socioeconomic background is said to positively correlate to time spend on child care, which means the extent of how well they learn from homework differs – which becomes another negative since there are already significant differences among students in verbal and mathematical competence even before they start school.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of homework in general and parents views on this aspect of school since this topic is very discussed and therefore relevant for my teacher training process: *“What is the difference in how the ‘everyday-parents’ and parents whose opinions are presented in the media view the homework aspect of school?”* This was researched through inductive reasoning with a questionnaire containing both quantitative and qualitative questions and two letters to online newspapers written by parents published in major online newspapers. The answers on the qualitative question is the main focus of the research paper because it correlates to the letters written to newspapers and the analyzation of them.

Research gives multiple answers when it comes to the effects of homework. Some studies suggest that students learn from doing homework, other studies question this. Theories

presented in this paper like Cooper, Robinson and Patall (2006) and Rønning (2008 & 2010) advocate for both the positives and the negatives. Disagreements on the benefits of homework can emerge from different views on methodology, but also variation factors emphasized in the conclusions, this in addition to students' achievement improvements. Based on the research recommendation can be given: 'Teachers should think through and reflect on how homework should be used in school'. Important questions to answer considering this:

- Why do we have homework – the main purpose?
- What does the amount of homework look like?
- What conditions do the students have to do their homework (parental assistant)?
- How is the homework designed?

Throughout this paper several potential research questions have come up, with the potential for further research. Questions like: "Do the teachers need to clarify why they give homework? Are there any benefits? Is it about the purpose of the homework (the "why" do this) or is it about the quality of the homework (the "what")? Udir (2014) says parents are not teachers but need to make sure the homework gets done – supervise – but teacher might need to explain homework clearer (what has to be done, how should it been done) so students do not necessarily need assistance. This raises the potential research question of 'differentiated learning'. Parents who cannot help because of minority/language skills only make the difference in students more apparent. This also seen highlighted in Rønning's (2010) research of socioeconomic backgrounds. If parents cannot assist and the students do not understand the homework provided, how is the homework promoting learning? The teacher's role also needs to be apparent so that there is a goal and purpose for the extra work provided, as one of the parents in my survey mentioned.

To conclude, the research question in focus has been discussed briefly as there are still many points to be drawn from this material. There are also potential questions that could be interesting to pursue for further research since this topic will always be relevant for the teacher profession. There are lots of opinions on the relevance of homework but unlikely that an agreement to cut homework will be made in all Norwegian schools anytime soon. As a coming teacher I see the importance of giving clear instructions and guidance on homework, as well as introducing the tasks in a way that makes sense to the students and their parents. Like any good leader, teachers should strive to motivate their students by giving homework that feels meaningful and

encourages learning and motivation. Difficult yes, but hopefully not impossible for an enthusiastic leader.

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