

**HOMEWORK:**

**TEDIOUS TRADITION OR ENTERPRISING  
LEARNING ENDEAVOUR**

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Master of Education in Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Education at  
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## **DECLARATION**

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Date: March 2020

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## ABSTRACT

During the last decade there has been increasing interest in and debate about the topic of homework and the many challenges associated with this traditional educational practice. The focus of this research is to explore the relevance of homework to the learning process of high school learners in the 21st century. The concept of learning in the 21st century also comes under scrutiny as does the kind of homework required to foster a love of learning among adolescents in today's world. The interpretivist paradigm was used in this study, the defining assumptions of which are that individuals construct their social world by means of their subjective experiences. Hence, it is the subjective knowledge and experience of homework by the participants that constitute the basis of this research and the findings. The study was conducted as a qualitative study with a multiple phenomenological case study research design. Data collection was performed by means of semi-structured interviews and the data was analysed thematically. Findings of this study indicated that whilst homework was still regarded to be a relevant educational practice, the current practice was in dire need of review, particularly with regard to the nature of homework assignments given to learners and the need for 21st century skills to be fostered in this process. Parent and learner stress were found to be significant factors in causing personal physical and emotional ill health in addition to the disruption of family life. Recommendations for homework reform included more time for students to complete homework tasks with the benefit of teacher facilitation, increased collaboration amongst subject teachers when assigning homework tasks and mindfulness on the part of teachers when designing homework.

**Key words:** homework, learning, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, socio-economic influences, stress, homework reform

## OPSOMMING

Die afgelope dekade was daar toenemende belangstelling in en debatvoering oor die onderwerp van huiswerk en die vele uitdagings verbonde aan hierdie tradisionele onderwyspraktyk. Die fokus van hierdie navorsing is om die relevansie van huiswerk vir die leerproses van hoërskoolleerders in die 21ste eeu te verleen. Die konsep van leer in die 21ste eeu word ook onder die loep geneem, asook die soort huiswerk wat benodig word om 'n liefde vir leer by jongmense in die hedendaagse wêreld te bevorder. Die interpretivistiese paradigma is in hierdie studie gebruik, waarvan die aannames is dat individue hul sosiale wêreld konstrueer deur middel van hul subjektiewe ervarings. Gevolglik is dit die subjektiewe kennis en ervaring van huiswerk deur die deelnemers wat die basis van hierdie navorsing en die bevindings daarvan vorm. Die studie is uitgevoer as 'n kwalitatiewe studie met 'n meervoudige fenomenologiese gevallestudie-navorsingsontwerp. Data-insameling is gedoen deur middel van semigestruktureerde onderhoude en die data is tematies geanaliseer. Uit hierdie studie is bevind dat huiswerk nogsteeds as 'n toepaslike opvoedkundige praktyk beskou word, maar die huidige praktyk moet indringend hersien word, veral met betrekking tot die aard van huiswerkopdragte wat aan leerders gegee word, en die behoefte aan 21ste eeuse vaardighede wat in die proses gekweek word. Daar is bevind dat ouer- en leerderstres 'n beduidende faktor is in die oorsaak van liggaamlike en emosionele ongesteldhede, benewens die ontwrigting van die gesinslewe. Aanbevelings vir die hervorming van huiswerk het meer tyd ingesluit vir leerders om huiswerktake af te handel met die voordeel van onderwyserfasilitering, verhoogde samewerking tussen vakonderwysers by die toekenning van huiswerktake en 'n bewustheid aan die kant van onderwysers wanneer dit by die beplanning van huiswerk kom.

**Slutelwoorde:** huiswerk, leer, 21<sup>ste</sup> eeuse vaardighede, sosio-ekonomiese invloed, spanning, huiswerkhervorming

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Soli Deo Gloria!

## **DEDICATION**

To my parents, Aubrey and Jean de Villiers, for encouraging me to learn and grow beyond  
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## CONCEPTUALISATION OF CHAPTER 1

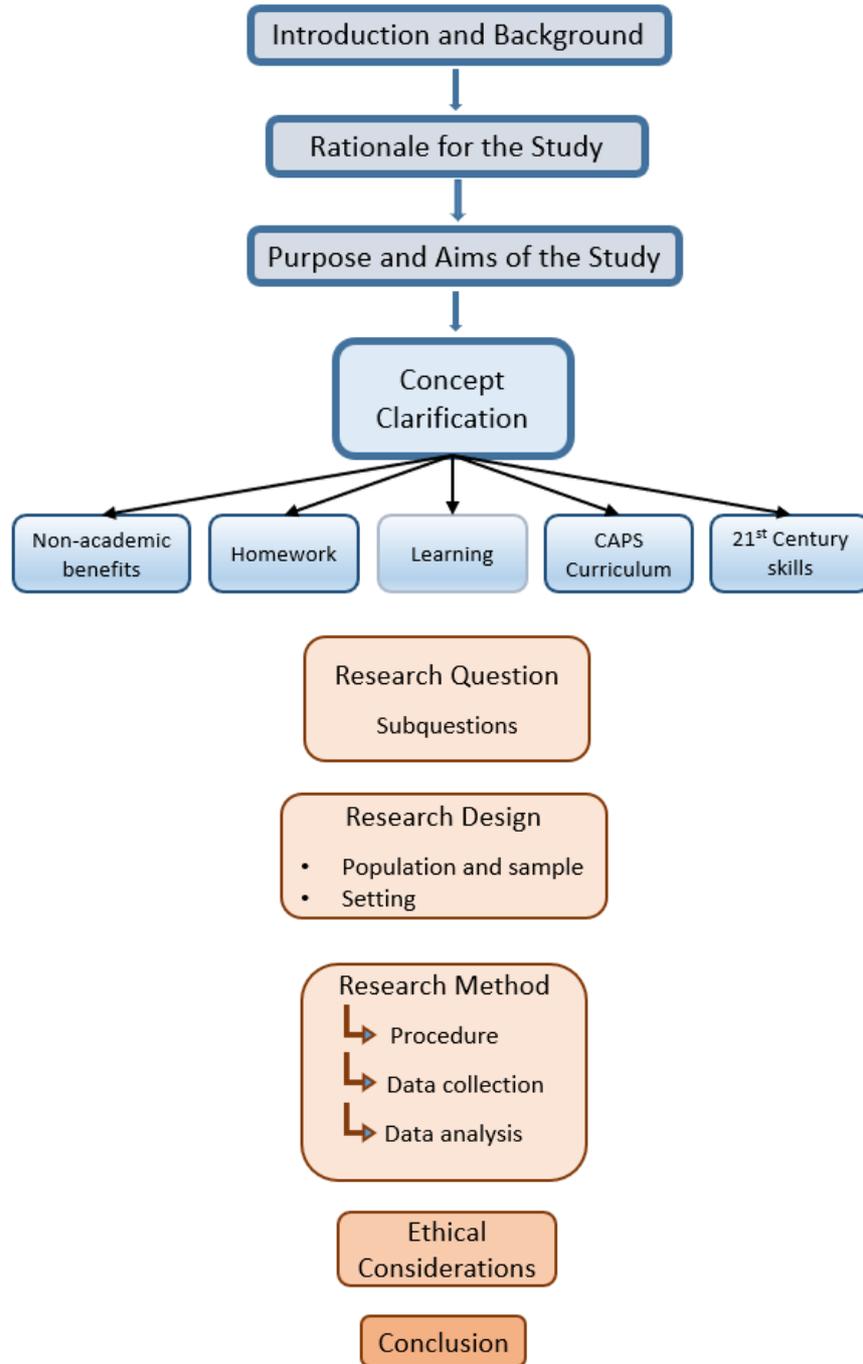


Figure 1.1 Conceptualisation of Chapter 1

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction and background

Over the last few years there has been increasing interest in and debate about the topic of homework and the many challenges associated with this traditional educational practice. This debate is not new. Much research has been done on various aspects of this traditional practice, ranging from its correlation with academic achievement (Maltese, Tai, & Fan, 2012), its contribution to the education of learners (Heitzmann, 2007), the nature of parental involvement (Kim & Fong, 2013), the time spent on homework (Gu & Krisstofferson, 2015), and the non-academic effects of homework (Galloway, Conner, & Pope, 2013). Potential beneficial non-academic effects of homework, according to Xu and Yuan (2003) may include achievement motivation, the ability to cope with mistakes, the building of a personal sense of responsibility and study skills. Conversely, Xu and Yuan (2003) found that learners' and parents' experiences with homework tended to be negative and charged with emotion. Examples of negative non-academic effects of homework on learners may include physical symptoms such as headaches, in addition to depressive symptoms and anxiety (Cheung & Leung-Ngai, 1992), and reduced time for family activities, social life, and cultural or religious activities (Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

Ever since the mid-19th century, children have been required to add to their in-school learning by doing homework (Gill & Schlossman, 2004). Whereas some research indicates that doing homework may be linked with developing attitudes and skills that contribute to effective learning (Hong, Milgram, & Rowell, 2004), other findings have highlighted a significant correlation between homework and learner and parental stress (Katz, Buzukashvili, & Feingold, 2012).

Stress-related factors may include time pressure, the pressure on learners to achieve academically, fear of falling behind with work, relationship stress between parents and their children, due to interpersonal conflict regarding daily homework, especially when parents feel ill equipped to help their children with homework tasks, and when children fail to see the value in the homework tasks that they are required to do.

From many parents' point of view, the negative impact of homework on their relationship with their children is becoming an increasingly significant casualty of homework assignments, as parents take responsibility for supervising or completing homework rather than spending significant family time with their children. Pressman, Sugarman, Nemon, Desjarlais, Owens and Schettini-Evans (2015) report that many parents have difficulty balancing extra-mural activities with homework requirements, while some also battle to assist their children with completing their homework. Kralovec and Buell (2000) refer to the conflict between school and home and Bennett and Kalish (2006) expand on this point by reporting that this conflict is often due to homework demands as parents assume the roles of taskmaster, supervising homework and releasing their children from household chores or other family activities due to the burden of homework. Ndebele (2015) reported on the difficulties facing urban and peri-urban parents of primary school children in Johannesburg regarding homework. Due to parents working long hours and returning home late, they were often unable to support their children with homework or had to do so much later into the evening. Pomerantz, Moorman and Litwack (2007) reported conflicting results from their study on parental involvement in the academic lives of their children. On the one hand there was evidence to suggest that parental involvement in the home with regard to intellectual enrichment, for example, reading the newspaper with their children

and taking them to the library, resulted in enhanced academic achievement. However, research on parental involvement in the home directly related to school activities, did not always appear to have such benefits.

This chapter sets out a detailed plan for researching the practice of homework in high schools. Focus areas of the research were its relevance to the learning process of high school learners, and the role this traditional practice plays in preparing learners for study and work in the 21st century. The term “learners” is used throughout this thesis in preference to the term “students”.

There is much debate surrounding the role of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in current education systems and practices (Anagun, 2018). According to Palfrey and Gasser (2008), 21<sup>st</sup> century learners are digital learners and independent thinkers who require educational practices to take cognisance of these factors and adjust current, sometimes antiquated didactic practices to embrace 21<sup>st</sup> century learners and learning.

Consequently, if homework is believed to be a key educational practice, homework tasks need to be mindfully set incorporating 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and trends regarding the nature of learners and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **1.2 Rationale for the study**

My interest in researching homework was sparked by two factors: firstly, a decision taken by a Cape Town principal of a primary school to do away with all homework in his school midway through 2015, and, secondly, my own observations regarding the negative impact of homework on many of the learners I teach. The contextual circumstances prompting the decision by the Cape Town principal to do away with homework were explained in an interview with him on Cape Talk Radio six months after the momentous decision was taken (Ramphela, 2017). The principal related that the school’s educational theme for 2015 was to “re-think the function of schooling”. The principal and his education team asked themselves the question: “What is the

value of homework?" After discussion and debate they concluded that there was no real value to homework and made the decision to do away with this age-old educational tradition mid-way through the school year. In conversation with the director of academics at the school in the first semester of my Master's degree, I learned that parents reported that this decision allowed learners time for activities they wanted to engage in and for the very important activity of reading for pleasure. Family time was enhanced due to more time being available in the evenings for parents and children to spend together around the dinner table. In the absence of the stress of cajoling and pleading with children to complete homework tasks, parents and children could chat about events of the day and simply spend time engaging in meaningful communication (Vivier, 2018).

In the article by Vivier (2018), the principal reported that by doing away with the task of homework, the school has seen a significant increase in academic results and the reading skills of children have improved, because they have more time to sit and enjoy a good book. He confirmed that the school library has never been busier.

The second factor which sparked my interest to research homework was the marked negative impact of homework on high school learners which I have observed over many years. In the independent high school where I have taught for over a decade, I have noticed an increase in learner anxiety and stress, often resulting in physical illness and a decline in wellbeing, as a result of the increased academic demands on them, often fuelled by excessive amounts of homework and assessments each day. As a high school teacher, I have observed learners battle to sustain high academic standards whilst juggling homework, extra-curricular activities and sport commitments, family time, as well trying to engage in a meaningful and relevant social life.

The media coverage and the debate amongst educators concerning the unconventional move of banning homework discussed in the previous section, led me to think about the validity of homework and its benefits to high school learners in the 21st century. I wondered whether a decision to do away with homework at high school level would be a viable option. As a career

guidance counsellor, I also became interested in what role, if any, homework was playing in equipping learners with the relevant skills required for career and educational success in the 21st century.

Kohn (2006) contends that the positive effects of homework are largely illusionary, and that research has shown that there is no evidence of any academic benefit from assigning homework up to middle school; for younger learners, even less correlation exists between how much homework children do and academic achievement. He continues by saying that the negative effects of homework are well known and include children's frustration and fatigue, lack of time for other enjoyable activities, and the potential loss of interest in learning.

If homework is to continue to be part of the daily afterhours activity of all high school learners, then it is my contention that it should enhance the learning process, it should foster or, at the very least, sustain an interest in and enthusiasm for the subject at hand and play a significant role in equipping and preparing school leavers with skills and knowledge to take them into the world of tertiary education and for the world of work. Simplicio (2005) writes that very often the intended outcome of homework in terms of developing critical and cognitive thinking skills is in fact ruined by homework itself. This is because these difficult homework assignments are often completed by parents who take pity on their children because of the pressure they are under and complete the task for them to just get it done. This study drew on the opinions and experiences of high school teachers, learners and parents to determine whether this is perceived to be the case.

Considering the ongoing and largely unresolved homework debate, together with the inconsistent and, at times, conflicting research findings, it is not surprising, that the topic of homework is controversial, and the overall benefits are being questioned.

A preliminary review of literature indicates that there is a limited amount of research on the relevance of homework as part of the learning process regarding the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Kralovec (2007b) contends that "there is a lack of research on the effects of different types of homework on student achievement." Maltese et al. (2012) argue that even

with the longstanding historical debate over the advantages of homework, there are noteworthy disparities in the research record regarding its benefits to learners.

The limited research available within the South African context concerning the relevance of homework to the learning process, together with the tendency of available South African research to focus on the Foundation Phase, contributed to the academic rationale for this study. Taking into consideration the reported negative effects of homework in the literature, together with my personal observations and experience, I firmly believe that the topic of homework and the assumptions made regarding its practice and benefits need to be reconsidered. I would like to further explore the topic of homework from the perspective of high school learners, teachers, and parents. Furthermore, I would like to delve into the aforementioned assumption that homework tasks are doing little to encourage or facilitate the development of crucial 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and competencies required for tertiary studies and/or the world of work.

### **1.3 Purpose and aims of the study**

The focus of my research was to explore the relevance of homework to the learning process of high school learners, and the role this traditional practice plays in preparing learners for study and for work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Adjacent to this focus area is the consideration and exploration into the type of homework given to learners and whether it may be regarded by them as worthwhile and relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century education. Malone (2009) makes a plea to build a 21<sup>st</sup> century education system in public schools in the United States of America incorporating key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, for example, critical thinking, problem solving, strong communication, agility and adaptability, entrepreneurialism, the ability to analyse data, and imagination. The Institute of Museum and Library Services in Washington published an article on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in 2009 in which collaboration and communication were explored as key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Strong communication skills were considered to include the ability to articulate thoughts effectively orally, in written form and using non-verbal communication skills. Additionally, effective listening skills and the ability to use communication for a range of purposes in diverse environments, were also highly sought-after skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A significant question to be asked, therefore, is whether the homework that our learners are engaging in is engendering a love of learning and empowering our young people to take their place confidently in the world for which our education system should be preparing them (Prensky, 2005).

To summarise, the scope of the research was limited to high school learners, teachers and parents from two high schools: one an independent girls' school and the other a co-educational state school. The focus was on the nature and relevance of homework given to learners. I explored whether skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century were being incorporated into homework tasks or whether teachers were assigning "busy work" (Cameron & Bartell, 2010) instead of homework fostering the abovementioned transferable skills and helping to equip young people for life in the world after school. The term "busy work" is often used in the literature to refer to work that is set just for the sake of keeping learners busy after school hours because homework is a general requirement in most schools, and not because there is necessarily an educational value associated with it. I believed this perspective on homework to be a gap in the current research, and relevant to the research topic.

The assumption was that often homework tasks are assigned as a mechanical exercise to fulfil a traditional educational requirement instead of enhancing the learning experience and developing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. There is no doubt that the practising of subject content and the practical application of work taught in class through exercises and repetition has a place in the learning process at school. However, it may be argued that such work could be done in class where the teacher is available to facilitate and support learners and where collaboration with other learners may add value to the learning process by reducing the boredom of repetitious tasks alone at home.

This study illuminated the views of a group of South African educators, parents and learners regarding the purpose and relevance of homework to the learning process of high school learners. My definition of learning in this instance is not simply the traditional academic perspective on learning but includes a much broader perspective impacting on the holistic

development of the learner. Edwards (2015) refers to the ongoing debate about the concept of learning and argues from a post-humanistic perspective that education may support a range of practices, including diverse forms of learning. He continues by saying that “such multiplicity is not easy as there remain the normative questions as to what constitutes learning” (p. 114).

According to Pedersen (2016) education has traditionally been viewed as a humanist activity *par excellence*. She contends that education policy and practice have concentrated on knowledge development and meaning making concerning the human individual, however, the move towards post humanist thinking in education profoundly revises these preconceptions.

Referring to the posthuman child, Moss (2019) contends that posthumanism questions traditional humanistic conceptions of the child, including the ‘developmental’ child (p. 148) developing according to general universal natural laws, and ‘the social child’ (p. 149), contextualised in a particular environment and socially constructed. In terms of a post humanistic perspective, the traditional child-centred focus upon the child’s individuality and their developing self-directed agency, runs completely against the task of appreciating that no-one stands or acts alone and that all human lives are inextricably enmeshed with others, be they human or more-than-humans, and that all human actions are implicated with and have implications for others, including non-human others (Taylor, 2013). Taylor (2013) makes the point that the 21<sup>st</sup> century child needs relational and collective dispositions rather than individualistic ones, in order to equip them for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is apparent from the literature that the traditional humanistic philosophical approach to child development and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is under examination, and the traditional perspectives on the nature of the learner and learning are being interrogated. These developments have profound implications for schools and teachers who collectively share the responsibility of preparing learners to be global citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The nature of learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a central question of this study. However, due to the limitations of time and duration of this study, it is a question that may only receive cursory, yet significant, attention now.

## **1.4 Concept clarification**

For this study, it is necessary to clarify several terms and concepts pertaining to the research questions that guided the study. Such concepts include “homework”, “learning”, “curriculum”, “21<sup>st</sup> century skills” and “non-academic benefits”. By expounding upon the implications of these terms specific to this study, I hope to explore the significance of these concepts which were chosen as the central themes of the research questions and the study in general.

### **1.4.1 Homework**

For this study, the term “homework” will refer to what Kohn (2006) refers to as the default policy in almost all schools – giving children something to take home. This ensures that learners usually have schoolwork to do at home. Corno and Xu (2014) discussed homework as “the quintessential job of childhood” (p. 227). They add that homework is usually not optional and it is an activity that is assigned in accordance with the teacher’s requirements and schedule in mind, often after minimal initial training for learners and little supervision. Olympia, Sheridan and Jenson (1994) state that homework can fulfil several purposes such as drill and repetition, preparation for work to be covered in class, application of what has already been learnt in class and the creative generation of original assignments.

### **1.4.2 Learning**

According to the National Qualifications Framework Act of the Republic of South Africa, 2008, “learning refers to the acquisition of knowledge, understanding, values, skill, competence or experience”. This is the context in which “learning” will be discussed in this study. The theoretical lens through which the topic of learning will be viewed in this study is Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of cognitive development, according to which individuals acquire knowledge from societies through their interaction with others.

### 1.4.3 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills

Rotherham and Willingham (2010) contend that an increasing number of leaders in the business world, politicians and teachers are united around the idea that learners need “21<sup>st</sup> century skills” to be successful today. These include skills such as critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, communicating, collaborating, self-direction, creativity, and innovation. There is little doubt that attempting to define success in today’s world would be difficult due to the many variations and ideas about the term.

One of the most widespread viewpoints being that each person defines success for themselves. Considering the link between social and emotional learning, and academic learning presented by Zins, Weissberg, Wang and Walberg’s (2004) in their book *Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning – What does the research say?*, my perspective of success aligns with their premise that social and emotional learning can enhance academic success as well as success in the life of learners. Central to Vygotsy’s socio-cultural theory of cognitive development is the incorporation of the idea that all knowledge is embedded in a social situation, in order for meaningful and lasting learning to take place (Macdonald & Pinheiro, 2012).

Whilst some current homework practices may be incorporating 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to a greater or lesser extent, depending on individual teachers and learning contexts, it may be argued that there is a great need for increased awareness and widespread focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills by educators in general, so that all learners may be adequately equipped to take their place in the world of work or study after school. Reference to key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills will play an integral role in answering the research questions of this study.

### 1.4.4 Curriculum

According to the South African Department of Basic Education’s *Dictionary of Education Concepts and Terms*, “curriculum” refers to a statement of intended outcomes to be attained, an explanation of what knowledge is to be acquired, which abilities and skills are to be developed,

and the levels of performance that are expected from learners in each of the grades (2010). It specifies what teachers must teach and what learners must learn and determines what is to be assessed. It decides the kind of learning programme that must be put in place to facilitate teaching, learning, and assessment. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Education, 2011), gives teachers detailed guidelines of what to teach and assess on a grade-by-grade and subject-by-subject basis, providing detailed week-by-week planning for teachers to follow. This ensures consistency and guidance for all teachers.

#### **1.4.5 Non-academic benefits**

Kohn (2006) provides examples of the dubious and unsubstantiated “non-academic benefits” of homework such as “independence”, “time-management” and “taking responsibility”, to name but a few. During this study, reference will be made to the “non-academic” consequences - positive or negative - of the assigning of homework to learners’ daily tasks.

### **1.5 Research question and sub-questions**

Primary research question:

- To what extent is the assigning of homework still relevant to the learning process of high school learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Secondary research questions:

- What kind of homework should be given to learners in high school to foster a love of learning and sustain an interest in the general curriculum?
- What does the concept of “learning” look like in today’s world?
- To what extent is homework playing a significant role in fostering key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and, in so doing, preparing learners to take their place in the world of work and/or higher education?

## 1.6 Research design

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007) a research design is a plan or approach which moves from the fundamental philosophical assumptions to stipulating the selection of participants, the data gathering techniques to be used, and the data analysis to be done. My decision to use a qualitative research design for my research is based on the conceptual underpinnings of this research paradigm, namely, the nature of reality (ontology), the relationship between the knower and the known (epistemology), and assumptions about methodology (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). This is in contrast with the traditional “scientific method” (positivism) underpinning quantitative research for the greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). A significant aspect of the nature of reality, in my view, is based on constructivist principles whereby people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. With reference to my research, it is my participants’ experience of homework and their personal reflections that forms the basis of my study. Young and Collin (2003) discuss social constructivism in terms of knowledge and meaning which are historically and culturally constructed through social processes and action. Similarly, the knowledge and meaning regarding the traditional practice of homework constructed through social interaction within the school and family environments are central to this study.

Qualitative research focuses on explaining and understanding phenomena within their natural occurring context (called naturalistic context) within the purpose of developing an understanding of the meaning(s) conveyed by the respondents – a “seeing through the eyes of the participants”. It is within the parameters of the interpretivist perspective that my research was undertaken.

This study was a case study targeting parents, teachers, and learners from two high schools in Cape Town. Bromley (1990, as cited in Maree et al., 2007) refers to case study research as a “systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain

the phenomenon of interest”. Case study research is designed to gain greater insight into and comprehension of the dynamics of a specific situation (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

It is for this reason that I chose to study the phenomenon of “homework” by means of a qualitative case study, as I regard this method to be a good fit for my research. The tools used to collect data included semi-structured interviews with a pupil, a teacher and a parent from each of the two participating schools. I believe that a case study drawing on the experiences of the various stakeholders within the high school context was the best way of providing information-rich data from which to answer my research questions.

### **1.6.1 Research population and sample**

The participants targeted for generating the data for my research were one teacher, one learner and one parent from an independent girls’ school and from a co-educational state school. The decision to choose these participants was based on my desire to gain information from the major stakeholders involved in traditional “homework” practice. The method of purposive sampling was employed. This method is regarded by Maree et al. (2007) to be one of the two general sampling methods usually employed in qualitative research. The aim of this type of sampling is to select participants because of some crucial feature that makes them holders of data needed for the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). According to Patton (2002, as cited in Suri, 2011) the reasoning and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting knowledge-rich cases for study. Knowledge-rich cases are those which can convey a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the investigation, thus the term purposeful sampling. Each of the three categories of participants selected for my study possess a unique and valuable perspective and experience about the practice of “homework”. From the teacher’s perspective, homework may be regarded as an expected and necessary part of the teaching and learning process. From the learner’s perspective, homework may be a time-wasting and mechanical exercise which may not have the desired or expected positive contribution to the learning process. From a parent’s perspective, homework may be a source of conflict in the home.

## **1.6.2 Setting**

The two educational contexts that I have chosen for this study are extremely different in that the one is an independent girls' school and the other a co-educational state school. The social composition of the sample group was diverse in terms of language, cultural background, school culture, and socio-economic affordances.

The data was collected from teachers, learners and parents at two high schools in the southern suburbs in Cape Town in the Western Cape. The interviews were conducted with teachers, learners and parents from the two schools in the school setting or in their individual homes, at a time convenient to them, to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity.

## **1.7 Research Method**

### **1.7.1 Procedure**

This study was a qualitative study where data about the opinions and experiences of learners, teachers, and parents regarding the assignment of homework and the relevance to learning of homework tasks was collected. Equal priority was assigned to the data collected from each sample group. For my research, I relied on the different perspectives of my research participants and their subjective experiences shaping their realities to collect data, identify recurrent themes, and answer the research questions. To recruit participants, I began by making an appointment with the principals of the two schools involved in the study to gain their permission to recruit participants from their school community. The principals as well as the subject teachers concerned were requested to give informed consent and sign consent forms.

After recruitment of the participants I scheduled dates, times, and locations for the interviews to be conducted at their convenience. Prior to the interview, I asked participants to sign the consent forms (Appendices E, H and I).

### 1.7.2 Data collection strategy

Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2014) state that qualitative researchers want to understand feelings, experiences, social situations, or events as they occur in the real world, and consequently want to study them in their natural setting. This is particularly true for those who approach qualitative research from an interpretative perspective. Terre Blanche et al. (2014) suggest that interpretive research might favour first-hand accounts of actual experiences. It is with this in mind that the data for my research was collected by means of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (refer to Appendices J, K and L for the interview schedules). Semi-structured interviews are often used in research projects (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). This method of interviewing usually requires the participant to answer a set of predetermined questions. It does allow for probing and clarification of answers. This method of data collection enabled me to capture the participants' perspectives on the relevance of homework and its role in the learning process of high school learners today. Semi-structured interviews imposed overall structure but gave participants enough flexibility to allow their own thoughts and ideas to permeate the structural boundaries of the interview. The interviews were approximately an hour to one and a half hours in length, depending on the responses received in each case. If I needed more information, I asked the participants if they would mind if we continued the interview for a little longer to elicit more information. I recorded the interviews and then the interviews were transcribed verbatim to analyse the data. The recordings were done on a voice recorder and saved electronically on my computer which was password protected.

Access to the transcriptions was limited to me and my thesis editor, who was also the transcriber of the interviews. She had signed a confidentiality agreement prior to the commencement of the transcription process. The typed transcripts were stored in a secure place (refer to Appendix L).

Establishing interpretive validity and data trustworthiness was facilitated by means of triangulation. According to Stake (2000) triangulation is considered to be a procedure whereby numerous perceptions are used to clarify meaning. Whilst semi-structured interviews were the only method of data collection in this study, six interviews were conducted across a diverse range of participants, thus providing rich data emerging from multiple perspectives and generating integrative perspectives for analysis. In addition, I used a method referred to as disconfirming evidence (Miles & Huberman, 1995, in Creswell & Miller, 2000). This method is similar to triangulation and it is a procedure whereby researchers first establish the initial themes or categories in a study, and then examine the data for proof that is consistent with or disconfirms these themes. Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007) refer to crystallisation in qualitative research in order to ensure internal validity. One of the other methods to establish internal validity is peer examination in order to solicit the opinions of colleagues. During my data analysis I conferred with a fellow Master's colleague to test my growing insights from my semi-structured interviews with my participants. Her reflections and probing questions were extremely valuable in establishing internal validity.

### **1.7.3 Data analysis**

I analysed the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, dividing the data into themes, subthemes and codes. After the data was analysed and interpreted, the findings were used to generate theories about the relevance of homework to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

Inducing themes also forms a significant part of interpretive data analysis. According to Terre Blanche et al. (2014), induction means inferring general rules or classes from specific instances and looking at the material and trying to work out what the organising principles are that "naturally" underly the material. Themes should ideally evolve naturally from the data, but simultaneously, they should also have a connection to the research question. With reference to my research question regarding the relevance of homework to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, I was curious to discover whether similar themes would re-occur within the two diverse educational contexts and within corresponding participant groups. It was clear that there were such repetitive

themes, for example, the time-consuming nature of homework, the stress associated with it, the effect on the family dynamic in the home, amongst many others. The repetitive occurrence of certain themes across both contexts proved to be major contributing factors to answering my research questions.

## **1.8 Ethical considerations**

Terre Blanche et al. (2014) suggest that there are four widely accepted philosophical principles that are applied in various ways to determine whether research is ethical. These are: (i) autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons, (ii) Non-maleficence, (iii) Beneficence and (iv) Justice. The following considerations were taken into account in this regard:

- Full disclosure: As a researcher, I must be transparent and truthful with participants about all aspects of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). I fully disclosed the purpose of the research and the implications of the involvement of the participants.
- Voluntary participation: This means that participants cannot be forced, manipulated, or expected to participate (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). None of the participants in my study were coerced in any way to participate in my research.
- Informed consent: This means that a researcher must provide potential participants with lucid, in-depth information about the study, the methodology to be used, its risks and benefits, along with guarantees of the voluntary nature of involvement, and the liberty to withdraw or refuse without consequences. (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Each participant was provided with a clear and in-depth explanation regarding the study.
- No harm: The researcher ensures that the participants will suffer no harm as a direct or indirect consequence of the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
- Beneficence: The researcher attempts to make the most of the benefits that the research will offer the participants in the research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

- Justice: The researcher treats the participants with fairness and impartiality throughout the research process.
- Confidentiality: The participants were assured that all transcripts of interviews and recordings will be safeguarded and used for the sole purpose of the research.
- Anonymity: Participants' names were not disclosed, and the names of the participating schools were kept anonymous.
- Privacy: The interviews were conducted in a private space chosen by the participants without the presence of others.

In order to avoid bias, as a few of the participants were selected from my place of employment, I did not discuss the research questions prior to conducting the interviews with them, neither did I canvass their views on homework prior to their selection as participants.

To comply with ethical practice in research, permission to conduct this research was obtained from the Western Cape Department of Education, the University of Stellenbosch Ethics Committee, and the principal of each school (see Appendices A, B and E). All participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendices F, E and I) containing my contact details and those of my supervisor, should they require more information. The consent form advised them of their right to confidentiality and anonymity, and of their right to terminate their participation at any stage and to refrain from answering any questions during the interview, should they wish to do so. Participants' names were not associated with anything they said during the interview, and audio-recordings were deleted at the end of the project. No names of schools were used in the study. During the data analysis process, participants were identified by means of numbers such as 1 and 2, and so on.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

This chapter provided an outline of the study through the introduction and rationale for the study, its purpose and aims, the research questions and the clarification of important concepts.

The research design and methodology, data collection and analysis, as well as relevant ethical considerations, were also explained. The key research question outlined in this chapter focuses on the exploration into the relevance of homework to the learning process of high school learners and the role this traditional practice plays in preparing learners for study and/or work in the 21st century. It is with this in mind that the following chapter will focus on an overview of homework in high schools in South Africa and beyond and consider whether this traditional practice is still relevant to learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## CONCEPTUALISATION OF CHAPTER 2

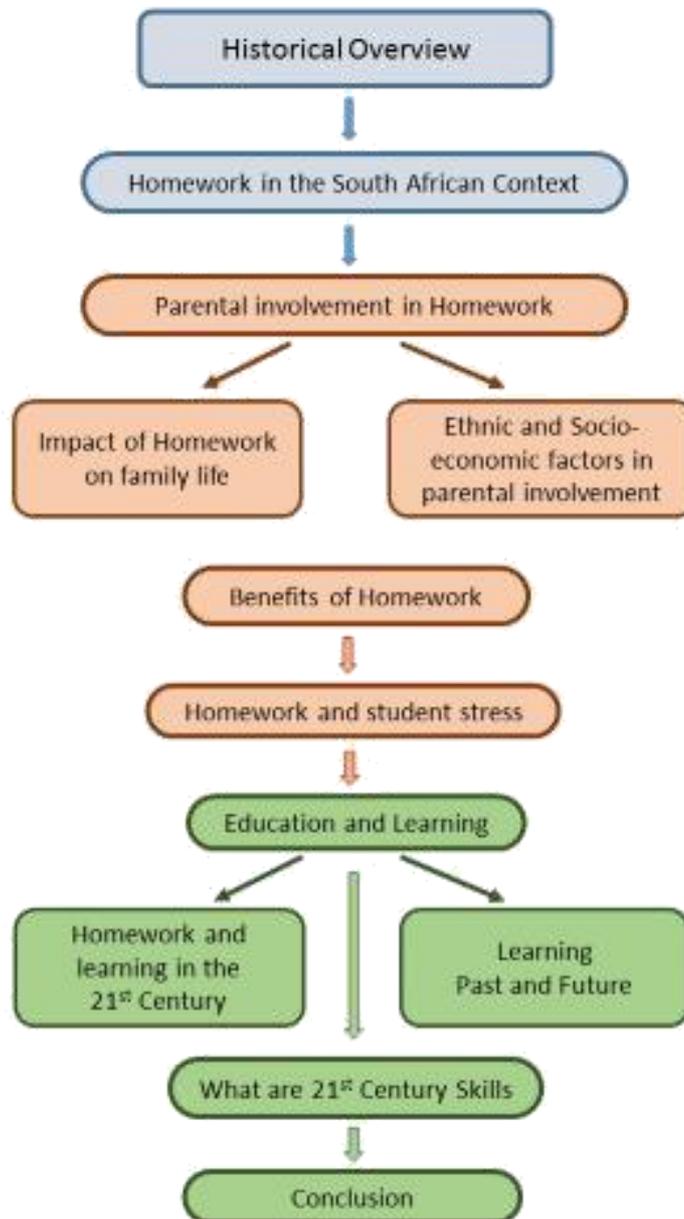


Figure 2.1 Conceptualisation of Chapter 2

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

The great ‘homework’ debate has spanned many decades and continues to occupy the minds of learners, educators, politicians, and parents alike. Mannak (2018) observes that whilst homework is often seen as a necessary tool to help children develop academically, expand their knowledge and deepen their understanding of material covered in class, the validity and functionality of this time-consuming after school activity is in the spotlight once again.

The primary focus of this research study was to explore the relevance of homework to learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Secondary focus areas included an exploration into the concept of learning and an investigation into the nature and inclusion of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in homework tasks of high school learners today. In order to shed light on the dialogue in the literature and gain an understanding and perspective of key issues in the debate surrounding this traditional educational practice, a review of the literature was conducted. An overview of the literature to date on this topic, both locally and internationally, indicates that there is still much controversy regarding this practice. It should be noted that most of the literature reviewed for inclusion in this chapter reports on studies conducted abroad. Whilst some South African studies have been included, there appears to be a gap in terms of local research on this topic.

Historical review indicates that there appears to have been an ebb and flow in terms of increasing and decreasing the amount of homework deemed necessary for children, depending on the educational policies and the political environment of the time. For example, Gill and Schlossman (2004) reported that after Sputnik, when the Russians beat the Americans in the race to the moon, there was a marked increase in the amount of homework given to high school students in America in an attempt to boost academic performance, specifically in Maths and Science. Perusal of the literature reveals that there have always been those in favour of

homework, citing positive correlation between homework and higher levels of student academic achievement (Simplicio, 2005), and those fiercely opposing this mainstay of education (Kohn, 2006). Recurrent themes emerging in the literature on homework include parent involvement (Locke, Kavanagh, & Campbell, 2016), the overall well-being of learners and the amount of time learners spend on this activity (Schrobsdorff, 2016) and the educational value of homework (La Conte, 1981).

This review will serve to explore the homework debate from an historical point of view, endeavour to discuss key issues, reveal common themes and identify potential research gaps, particularly within the South African context. Finally, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills will be identified and discussed and the relationship between homework and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century examined.

## **2.2 Theoretical framework**

### **2.2.1 The constructivist approach: Vygotsky's social-cultural theory**

A fundamental part of constructivism is the idea that knowledge is actively and continuously constructed, rather than passively received (Donald, Lazarus, & Moolla, 2015). Within a constructivist approach “active learning and engagement in authentic activities takes place in the social culture of practice” (Brown, 1998, p. 11). Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (2012) explains constructivism as follows:

“There are two main branches of constructive theory. These branches are similar in that both perspectives hold firmly to the postmodern idea that knowledge and reality is subjective. Constructivists, like Vygotsky, believe knowledge and reality are constructed within individuals. In contrast, social constructionists like Berger, believe knowledge and reality are constructed through discourse or conversation. Constructivists focus on what's happening within the minds or brains of individuals; social constructionists focus on what's happening between people as they join together to create realities.”

Guterman (2006) described these two perspectives:

“Although both constructivism and social constructionism endorse a subjectivist view of knowledge, the former emphasizes individuals’ biological and cognitive processes, whereas the latter places knowledge in the domain of social interchange” (p. 13).

Vygotsky’s social constructivist ideology espouses the role of the social collective in individual learning and development (Liu & Matthews, 2005). The social world as defined by Vygotsky considers the interactive relationship between the teacher and learner, or learner and peers as well the wider socio-cultural and historical influences on learning and the learning environment (Alpay, 2003). It is through this additional lens of social constructivism that my research phenomenon of homework will be examined. The educational implications of Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory have relevance to the discussion of homework in this research study because learners are able to construct knowledge through the activity of homework.

The next section will discuss active agency, language discourse, Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, scaffolding and collaborative learning. By actively engaging in the homework process, learners demonstrate active agency by personally taking initiative and control of their learning. Furthermore, the learner’s active agency is mediated by the teacher, parents and any other whose external engagement and influence mediate the learning within the learner.

A further significant concept in constructivist terms is metacognition. When learners have an awareness of their own thought processes and critically evaluate these, learn from others and adapt and refine their ideas, they will be able to engage with their own thinking at a higher level in their process of constructing knowledge (Donald et al., 2015). The learners’ construction of knowledge may take place through the use of a number of cognitive tools developed over time in order to adapt to the world. The medium of language (i.e. the discourse), is one such powerful tool whereby humans actively shape and reflect on their experiences and create a representation of the world in their minds. Language as a tool of cognition is arguably one of the most

important factors in the teaching and learning process. According to Kausar (2010), Vygotsky proposed that through language the child was afforded far greater freedom of thought which led to further cognitive development. Furthermore, Vygotsky's account of the teaching and learning process incorporates the idea that teaching can be an intervention in cognitive development, because, instruction (via language) can result in a child's intellectual development and, in turn, bring about a series of developmental processes not possible without instruction (Kausar, 2010). Additionally, Vygotsky emphasises the power of language as the primary tool for transferring socio-cultural influences on the child (Alpay, 2003). Vygotsky believed that the environment in which children grow up played a critical role in influencing how they think and what they think about and he made the assumption that cognitive development varies across cultures. Vygotsky, therefore, contends that cognitive functions are socio-culturally determined due to being influenced by the beliefs, values and tools of intellectual adaptation of the culture in which a person develops. The tools of intellectual adaptation, therefore, vary from culture to culture - as in the memory example.

Further constructivist principles pertinent to the role of homework in the teaching and learning process include active learning, moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar, guided discovery and scaffolding. The central role of the teacher in the practical application of these principles in the process of teaching and learning is of critical consideration as is the role of the teacher-learner relationship in learning. With reference to the phenomenon of homework and the abovementioned constructivist principles in the process of teaching and learning, the importance of active learning and engagement by the learner has already been addressed in the previous paragraph.

The issue of connecting the familiar to the unfamiliar is one of the most basic principles of practice in Vygotsky's socio-cultural cognitive development theory. Vygotsky's renowned zone of proximal development (ZPD) describes how the learner can move from a position of doing something without help to being able to achieve something new with the guidance of a skilled

partner. With reference to homework, the learner is being challenged to know and apply new knowledge and skills by being given tasks which incorporate the new knowledge and/or skills to be acquired. In current homework practice, the learner is often left to do these tasks at home without any guidance or assistance. In accordance with the Vygotskian principle of the ZPD, the learner would benefit from facilitation in the process of moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Unfortunately, this is habitually not an opportunity afforded to most learners.

The next principle is guided discovery. This means that teachers need to guide learners to key areas of discovery (Donald et al., 2015). The implications for homework are that learners often need to search for things and try things out in terms of solving problems that teachers have set (Donald et al., 2015). Examples of such homework tasks may include research tasks where learners need to acquire new knowledge and apply that knowledge to solving a particular problem.

During the process of acquiring new knowledge, moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar and problem solving, the concept of scaffolding is a critical principle in the teaching and learning process. Scaffolding is akin to Vygotsky's notion of mediation. Key to the social constructivist theory is the idea of the individual's internal learning process being mediated by external assistance of others. In similar fashion, the teacher (mediator) may initially model key knowledge structures or strategies for the learner until the learner himself or herself begins to master this understanding and actively internalise it (Donald et al., 2015). Regarding the phenomenon of homework, the teacher may provide scaffolding by identifying key knowledge structures in class, connect the familiar to the unfamiliar, complete easier examples and questions with the learners during class time before moving to more difficult ones, facilitate new methods and discuss solutions in class, before requiring learners to attempt the homework tasks alone at home.

### 2.3 Historical overview

Cooper (1989) defines homework as “tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours” (p. 86). Gill and Schlossman (2003) refer to the California *Civil Code* of 1901 which stipulated that no pupil under the age of 15 years in any grammar school was required to do any home study. Similarly, Edward Bok, an anti-homework lobbyist in 1900 and editor of the *Ladies Home Journal*, used his magazine to attack the homework practice, calling it “the most barbarous part of the whole [schooling] system” (Gill & Schlossman, 1996, p. 33).

According to Kralovec (2007a), the arguments against homework at the turn of the century focused largely on the issues of school domination and the health hazards of homework. By the 1930s the anti-homework arguments broadened to include the value of free play and free time, which were limited due to the daily homework demands (Kralovec, 2007a). Further criticisms of the demands of homework were highlighted by Kralovec (2007a); these included the impact on family life and the focus on a recitation type of learning, which was contrary to the progressive education of the time which valued experience over learning facts at the expense of understanding what was being taught (Kennedy, 2019). Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of human learning which described learning as a social process was exemplified in the progressive education movement, which also emphasized ‘learning by doing’.

By the 1960s the anti-homework movement in the United States of America gained momentum once again. This time the focus was on the problems associated with homework, the practice of which had been increased post-Sputnik in 1957. The Americans, having been “beaten” into space by the Russians, began to view homework as the means to increase the time spent on Maths and Science (Kralovec, 2007a).

According to Vatterott (2009), two prominent educational bodies in the United States were recorded as opposing excessive homework in the 1960s. The American Educational Research

Association and The National Education Association both went on record expressing concern about the negative impact of homework on children and provided recommendations for limited amounts of homework, particularly in the upper elementary and junior high years. The former's concerns were expressed using a statement by Wildman (1968 quoted in Vatterott 2009) saying that when excessive amounts of homework cause children to forfeit social experience, outdoor recreational activities and sleep, it is not serving the basic needs of children and adolescents.

By the 1980s, the publication in the USA of "*A Nation at Risk*", the 1983 report of American President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education, drew attention to the plight of the American education system. The "No Child Left Behind" policy contained therein saw homework gain extensive support as a way of increasing academic achievement (Kralovec, 2007a).

#### **2.4 Homework in the South African context**

In 2005 the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) sent out a circular to all schools containing guidelines for the management of homework, the intention of which was to guide schools regarding the amount of and nature of homework within the then outcomes-based curriculum framework (OBE). This circular placed homework firmly within the realm of teaching and learning activities in schooling and noted that effective management of this activity was required by educators, principals, parents and learners (Department of Education, 2005). The rationale of homework was presented as tasks that may help to support and strengthen classroom learning, nurture good life-long learning and study routines and provide the opportunity for learners to be accountable for their own learning. The guideline document expressed the tenet that homework can strengthen the link between home and school by involving parents, however, it cautioned that homework should not prevent children from taking part in out-of-school activities that further their extra-curricular skills and interests. This guideline document clearly supported the homework practice in all South African schools and encouraged the development

of a homework policy in every school in consultation with the staff, school governing bodies (SGBs) and the representative council of learners (RCL). It is important to note that this homework guidelines document referred to in this section has not been updated since 2005. Additionally, this policy was written for a now defunct OBE education policy, with one of the main intentions being to prevent homework overload for learners. However, the introduction of CAPS in 2012, has created a number of challenges for teachers, learners and parents alike, in respect of the inflexible curriculum, the number of assessments required under the new dispensation and the attendant increase in homework demands. Swanepoel (2015) surveyed parents on News24 asking them how they felt about homework. What was clear from the comments received, was that the burden of homework had increased since the introduction of CAPS and that children as young as grades 1 and 2 were spending hours doing homework every day. Similarly, a report in the Daily News in Durban in 2018 about a Cape Town private school who adopted a no-homework policy, met with an overwhelming response from parents who believed that their children were too busy doing homework to run around and make childhood memories (Rall, 2018). In response to the parents' reaction a Department of Education (DOE) spokesperson said that homework was part and parcel of the learning process and it was here to stay. He added that parents had to become involved and play a critical role in their children's education. Felix, Dornbrack and Scheckle (2008) explored the relationship between parents, homework and socio-economic class and found that parents from a school positioned in a more prosperous area were perceived to have the means and ability to assist their children at home, whereas parents from poorer socio-economic groups were positioned as disinterested and unable to assist their children.

Ndebele (2015) conducted a study on homework in the Foundation Phase in a number of Johannesburg schools and reported that parents from lower-income environments considered homework to be important, as did their higher-income counterparts, but poorer parents were less involved in their children's homework. Visser, Juan and Feza (2015) reported on the 2011 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) data to determine the resources

and factors that influence South African learners' performance in mathematics. Their findings indicated that both the school and the home play significant roles in learners' mathematics performance. Therefore, it may be suggested that learners' mathematics performance is not only impacted by socio-economic factors but also by the higher levels of parental education. Further socio-economic factors influencing parental involvement in homework will be discussed in the next section.

The South African Schools Act of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996a), provided for school governing bodies (SGBs) to adopt and assist in the enforcement of a learner code of conduct to maintain discipline effectively (Mestry & Khumalo, 2011). This development impacted radically on the authority placed in the hands of the SGBs in conjunction with principals, school management and educators. In 2015 a public primary school in the Western Cape Province adopted a no-homework policy, despite the WCED's homework guidelines policy of 2005. This decision has created much controversy and debate amongst the various stakeholders in the education system as well as in the political arena. Pfeiffer (2018) conducted a study to determine whether a no-homework policy would benefit South African schools. The findings of this study indicated that a no-homework policy has left a more positive effect on learners, however, postulated that no homework would be a disadvantage in the future.

The last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have recorded a mix of arguments both for and against the value of homework. An increasingly significant argument against the practice has come from parents who have spoken out regarding the impact of daily homework on family life and the attendant frustrations associated with this time-consuming task. This sentiment is mirrored by Locke, Kavanagh and Campbell (2016, p. 1) referring to homework as "the student's task, but everyone's responsibility."

## **2.5 Parental involvement in homework**

McNeal (2014) reports that parental involvement has been the ongoing focus of a great deal of academic research, policy review and formulation, and public debate. He broadly defines

parental involvement as “any action taken by a parent that can theoretically be expected to improve student performance or behaviour” (McNeal, 2014, p. 565). He explains that parents expect that their involvement will result in a noticeable return. More specifically, this may include improved educational prospects, increased accomplishment, or a strengthened relationship with school personnel or other parents (McNeal, 2014). Gonida and Cortina (2015) refer to parental involvement in homework as a form of involvement in children’s education which is based in the home and which, according to theory and research, may be of an advantage to the learning process and academic achievement under certain conditions and for particular groups of learners. They continue by saying that several factors have been reported in the literature as critical ones. These include the type of homework involvement such as autonomy, support and interference, the grade level, elementary versus middle school learners, the ability of the learner, and the subject matter.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) pointed out a number of factors which motivate parents to become involved in homework tasks. These may include self-efficacy for helping children succeed in school and perceived parental time and energy for involvement. Further research (Pomerantz & Eaton, 2001) has focused on the transactional processes between a child’s achievement and parental practices in homework, indicating that when parents’ prior academic performance has been poor, this results in increased use of intrusive parental support practices such as monitoring and helping when children do not ask for assistance. These parental practices in turn may influence the child’s subsequent performance, depending on a number of variables. These variables may include the parents themselves (e.g., parents’ emotions during homework), or the learners themselves (e.g., success or failure).

Wang, Haertel and Walberg (1993) considered the power of proximal factors on school learning and found that, in general, proximal variables such as emotional, instructional, and home environment, are more influential on learning than distal variables such as demographic, policy, and organisational factors. The proximal variables embodied by the home environment include not only the educational characteristics of the home but also parent

activities and attitudes that support learning, including homework support (Wang et al., 1993).

With reference to the correlation with and/or consequences of parental involvement in homework, the research findings are still inconclusive (Gonida & Cortina, 2015). However, the various factors highlighted in the research provide relevant food for thought and discussion when considering the current debate and concerns about the impact of homework on learner stress, family life, and the relationship between parents and their children.

For younger learners, especially in the elementary phase, it may be considered an acceptable, even necessary, practice for parents to assist with homework tasks. Bennett (2007) writes that homework in kindergarten in the USA has become the national norm. Children are spending many hours after school on schoolwork and many parents are frustrated and confused about what their children bring home every night. It may be argued, however, that senior learners should be expected to complete homework tasks without significant or any help from their parents. Walker and Hoover-Dempsey (2008, as cited in Locke, Kavanagh, & Campbell, 2016) contend, however, that a high level of parental involvement in a child's school experience is widely considered to be an essential requirement for optimal child and adolescent academic success.

Walker and Hoover-Dempsey (2008, as cited in Locke, Kavanagh, & Campbell, 2016) reference to parental involvement as an 'essential requirement' for optimal academic success of their children, is further explored by Kim and Fong's (2013) study on parental involvement. Their study explored parental assistance of children and adolescents in 10 Chinese families. Most parents in the study had not completed their high school education; however, they expected their children to finish university. Whilst these parents were unable to provide academic assistance to their children, and thus impact their skills development, they focused on their children's levels of motivation. By focusing on aspects like the importance of education, watching their children study and offering food, these parents played a significant role in supporting their children,

despite their own lack of education to teach the skills their children needed in their quest for upward mobility.

However, Kim and Fong (2013) reported that help with homework is especially characterised as an activity that is fundamentally influential and that can improve or hamper the parent-child relationship. With reference to negative parental input such as criticizing and blaming, participants in Kim and Fong's (2013) study described how these kinds of negative strategies had a detrimental effect on their academic performance. Similarly, McNeal (2014) presented the perspective that extremely high levels of parental involvement might not be beneficial for children's academic performance.

The nature of parental involvement may be characterised as positive or negative. For example, mothers using homework help as a means of building connectedness with their children is likely to have a positive effect on the parent-child relationship. Alternatively, mothers engaging negatively with their children by exerting pressure on them or passing on negative messages about their children's academic ability, could potentially harm the parent-child relationship.

Pomerantz et al. (2007) identify two subtypes of home involvement in the United States, firstly, helping children with school-related tasks such as homework, and, secondly, intellectual enrichment, which may or may not include school-related work per se. Such activities may include reading books with them or taking them to museums (Pomerantz et al., 2007). McNeal (2014) identifies parent-child discussion and parental monitoring as two of the more predominant conceptualisations of parental involvement. Kackar, Shumow, Schmidt, and Grzetich (2011) report on their findings regarding companionship and the homework experience for adolescents. Their study revealed that high school learners were happier when doing homework with parents than doing homework alone. Whilst this finding is based on the subjective experience of adolescents involved in this study and therefore should be interpreted with caution, it may suggest that parents can play a supportive role in the homework experience of adolescents.

It is evident from a perusal of the literature concerning parental involvement in homework and other types of home involvement in schoolwork, that there are varied opinions as to the nature, effectiveness, or necessity of such involvement. However, there appears to be conclusive evidence that many parents do become involved at some level with their children's schoolwork done at home. Whilst there does not appear to be a consistent set of research outcomes to support or refute the case for parental involvement, there does appear to be consensus about the fact that homework has an impact on family life.

### **2.5.1 Impact of homework on family life**

Goldberg (2007) contends that homework is an incongruity that crosses the boundary between family and school. He argues that homework has become an extension of the school's legal obligation, and, as such, exerts control over what happens in the home. He suggests that a re-affirming of the natural boundaries that exist between the family and the school would go a long way to remove the frustrations that exist between parents and teachers. Kohn (2006) refers to the frustration, confusion, and even anger experienced by parents about homework. He questions the assumption that homework must be given, despite the previously documented misgivings expressed by many role players in the historical homework debate. Kralovec (2007a) reports on parent outrage at the instructions from federal government via the school regarding the publication of "*General Homework Tips for Parents*" and the consequent impact on their home lives. Kralovec and Buell (2001) invite parents to question the supposition that if children spend more time on homework the outcome will be greater academic accomplishment.

### **2.5.2 Socio-economic factors in parental involvement**

Whilst there may be a discrepancy in the research outcomes regarding the correlation between the types of parental involvement and academic success of learners, the evidence of parental involvement at some level and in some way is widespread. In an interview with William Crain in 2007, Kohn refers to the issue of the socio-economic status of learners and academic

success in the school system. He contends that the education system in the USA is driven by the desired outcomes of preparing learners to take their place in the economic system and to frame all of this in terms of competitiveness. He claims that from birth, children from low income families are fundamentally disadvantaged simply because the education system relies on high-stakes standardised testing and high volumes of homework as means to achieve academic success. This educational environment jeopardises children from low socio-economic backgrounds right from the outset (Kohn, 2006). Elsasser (2007) supports Kohn's viewpoint by adding that the extra-curricular commitments of children from less affluent environments cause them to be at far greater risk for academic failure than their more affluent peers. These children may have jobs to earn an income to supplement parental income, they may care for younger siblings in order to help working parent(s) and may not have a safe and quiet place to learn. The associated potential high levels of anxiety and feelings of hopelessness among these learners simply add to the already long list of factors stacking the academic odds against them. Elsasser (2007) concludes by remarking that at its most sinister level, homework is making sure that under-resourced children remain worlds apart from their more affluent peers purely because of the different contexts into which they have been born.

Alongside the issue of the socio-economic status of learners and academic success is the impact of socio-economic factors on parental involvement in homework. Ndebele (2015) examined the socio-economic factors influencing parental involvement in homework in the Foundation Phase in eight Johannesburg public primary schools. Whilst the focus of the research for this thesis is on high school learners, it may be interesting to note Ndebele's findings and explore whether extrapolation of the findings to adolescents may be possible and/or relevant. Also, as most research in the field of homework has been done outside of South Africa, the opportunity to examine local research findings is extremely valuable.

Emerging from Ndebele's research are the findings that the socio-economic environment influenced parental involvement in the Foundation Phase learner's homework. There were a number of significant issues arising from these findings such as the homework setting,

homework supervision, and support for learner literacy in different socio-economic environments (Ndebele, 2015). Ndebele (2015) reported that parents in poorer socio-economic conditions such as townships provided less supportive home environments for homework than those in wealthier, upmarket suburbs. Additionally, Ndebele (2015) found that most parents who did not supervise their children's homework were in the city centre or surrounding urban and township areas. Those parents who did supervise homework were only able to do so in the evenings, in comparison to the parents in higher socio-economic settings. Of further significance is the finding that parents from lower socio-economic environments are not as actively promoting reading and literacy skills among their children, in comparison with parents in higher socio-economic settings. Galindo and Sheldon (2012) considered Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework emphasising the ecological theory and Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence, to examine school and family connections and their relationships to family involvement and learners' achievement gains. The findings support the theoretical assumptions directing the study that the collaboration of people across the home and school contexts help explain children's increased achievement in reading and mathematics through pre-school, hence confirming the importance of parental involvement in early childhood development, with specific regard to long-term academic progress in reading and mathematics.

Of further relevance to the South African context is Ndebele's (2015) definition of "parents". He refers to Amoateng, Richter, Makiwane, and Rama (2004) and their synopsis of South African family structures. They identify nuclear families, extended families, child-headed households, single-parent families, and multigenerational families as constituting the main classifications in South Africa. The concept of "parents" in South Africa is, therefore, becoming progressively more complex, as South African society becomes more multicultural, multiracial, and transformed (Amoateng & Richter, 2007).

Mestry (2006) provides evidence that most parents in South African schools do not participate significantly in their children's education. Mestry (2006) provides further evidence of

parental non-involvement by citing “lack of interest in learners’ schoolwork and homework”, amongst other things. Dwyer and Hecht (1992) explored the main reasons for the lack of parental involvement in their children’s education, citing lack of experience in involvement, negativity towards becoming involved, lack of time to be involved, as well as parental belief that it is the school’s responsibility alone to educate their children. However, a different group of researchers such as Heystek (2003), and Mmotlane, Winnaar and Wa Kivilu (2009), argue that the socio-economic standing of families is a primary factor in explaining parental involvement (or lack thereof). One of the theoretical frameworks underpinning Ndebele’s (2015) research into socio-economic factors affecting parents’ involvement in homework includes Bandura’s (1977) theory of Social Learning. This theory reveals the important role and responsibility of parents to model positive attitudes and behaviours towards school. According to this theory, people learn behaviours through influence and example, either intentionally or unintentionally. Thus, in the context of parental involvement in homework, when parents display an interest in their children’s schoolwork, are prepared to assist them with homework, and hold them responsible for completion of homework assignments, children are more likely to apply themselves and perform better at school (Ndebele, 2015). In addition, Ndebele’s (2015) further findings indicated that the majority of parents who did not supervise their children’s homework were in the city centre or surrounding urban and township areas, worked long hours, spent many hours travelling, and had little or no time to participate in their child’s homework. Whilst it is noted by this researcher that primary school children need more homework assistance than high school children, the research documents the positive effects of parental involvement. Thus, the abovementioned socio-economic factors inhibiting such involvement may have significant implications for children’s long-term educational success.

Guryan, Hurst, and Kearney (2008) found that parents who were the recipients of a good education themselves, spent more time on educational childcare than less educated parents. With this in mind, Rønning (2011) argues that if the usefulness of giving homework to young learners depends on parental input, learners from privileged families may learn more from their

homework assignments than pupils from disadvantaged family circumstances. Findings of this study indicated that parental help with homework differed substantially across learners from different socio-economic backgrounds. A significant reason for this was parental educational levels.

Whilst the focus of this thesis is on high school learners, the link between the socio-economic background of parents and their ability to support their children with homework warrants further exploration. If research evidence thus far acknowledges the relevance, at least to some extent, of parental involvement in homework, and further research evidence suggests that in the South African context there is significant parental non-involvement, it seems that the practice and benefit of homework in the South African context warrants further in-depth scrutiny, evaluation and review.

## **2.6 Benefits of homework**

According to Gill and Schlossman (2003), homework has been espoused for building academic competencies and personal character amongst learners and for promoting America's international competitiveness. Additionally, it is suggested that homework can and should perform a variety of important functions in the educational process, especially when it is mindfully devised and put into practice (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). Homework can serve to inculcate habits of self-discipline and independent study (Goldstein, 1960), help inform parents about and stimulate their interest in the educational agenda of the school (Gill & Schlossman, 1996), develop beliefs about achievement and study habits that are helpful for learning, (Bempechat, 2004) and invite the development of collaborative communities (Corno, 2011 as cited in Johnson & Moulden, 2011).

## 2.7 Homework and learner stress

Kouzma and Kennedy (2007, as cited in Galloway & Pope, 2007) have explored the links between homework and wellbeing. Whilst research about the link between homework and wellbeing is limited, the association between the approach to learning, of which homework is a significant factor, and the wellbeing of learners has been the focus of more recent research. A learner's approach to learning, also known as goal orientation, has been significantly linked to their wellbeing. Galloway and Pope (2007) refer to research which shows evidence that when learners adopt a "mastery" goal orientation, which involves seeking to learn and improve, they develop feelings of hope and pride in their work. Adopting a "performance" goal orientation, which involves learners seeking to outperform others, can also be associated with feelings of pride (Pekrun, Elliot, & Maier, 2009). However, in suburban schools, the pressure to excel and gain admission to highly selective universities may particularly heighten a learner's fear of failure. This fear, in turn, may lead to their attempts to avoid looking like they cannot do the work, thereby developing a performance avoidance goal orientation pride (Pekrun et al., 2009). The above-mentioned studies highlight the need for understanding the relationship between homework, wellbeing, goal orientation, and achievement.

Galloway and Pope (2007) found that the majority of learners involved in their study reported schoolwork, homework, and tests to be responsible for the most stress in their lives. The majority of learners also reported having experienced various stress-related physical symptoms such as headaches, difficulty sleeping, and/or fatigue. Most learners reported that they had stopped an activity or pastime that they enjoyed because schoolwork demanded too much of their time, this in spite of Larson's (2000) findings that there are significant benefits for learners who engage in extra-curricular activities (Galloway & Pope, 2007). The findings of Galloway and Pope (2007) highlighted that when learners did not feel competent to perform certain tasks or

activities, their performance avoidance goal orientation was most strongly linked with academic worries and problems associated with mental health (Galloway & Pope, 2007).

A further interesting and relevant finding reported by Galloway and Pope (2007) was the association between the usefulness of homework and mental and physical wellbeing. Besides quantity of homework, the perceived usefulness of homework tasks on the part of the learners was found to be pertinent to the learners' mental and physical wellbeing. This correlates with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) model of achievement motivation. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argues that when an individual experiences a positive feeling while engaging in a particular activity, they will be motivated to choose this activity again in order to reproduce that positive feeling. He continues by saying that these positive affective experiences are optimal for human learning and growth, particularly when they occur in situations that require effort. Furthermore, as one continues to engage in an activity because it is both challenging and enjoyable, the skills associated with that activity improve.

Todd and Mason (2005) concur with Csikszentmihalyi (1990) with regards to the importance of learner motivation and academic achievement. They found that the three individual aptitudinal factors of ability, development, and motivation were indeed strongly correlated with learning achievement and suggested that while the former two are more difficult to alter, motivation could well be increased by efforts on the part of schools and parents. This could be a significant factor when considering the role of teachers in setting homework tasks that foster positive motivation in their learners and the supportive role of parents in terms of their children's academic achievement. Additionally, Todd and Mason (2005) support the findings of Hattie (1999, as cited in Todd & Mason, 2005), regarding a strong correlation between learning achievement and reinforcement and corrective feedback, tutoring and lessons based on and adapted to diagnosed individual needs, cooperative learning, homework, and high teacher expectations, amongst others.

Hattie (1999 as cited in Todd & Mason, 2005) found that feedback provided to learners proved to be the single most powerful factor that enhances learning achievement. Hattie (1992, p.9, as cited in Todd & Mason, 2005) says that the “simplest prescription for improving education” is “dollops of feedback”. He reminds us that feedback includes reinforcement, corrective feedback, remediation feedback and diagnostic feedback (Todd & Mason, 2005). Effective feedback, according to Hattie (1999, p. 9, as cited in Todd & Mason, 2005) “means providing information how and why the child understands and misunderstands, and what directions the student must take to improve”. This implies that a good teacher will attempt to evaluate what the learner understands in order to insure that the next step in the teaching process aligns with the learners current level of understanding (Todd & Mason, 2005). Whilst this feedback refers to any form of learning within the classroom or outside the classroom, it is particularly relevant to homework tasks, which often go unassessed and evaluated by the teacher, thus providing no benefit to learning at all.

## **2.8 Education and learning**

Shuell (1986) reminds us that whilst people agree that learning is important, a universally accepted definition of learning itself is still under debate. Schunk (2014), however, identified three criteria for learning, namely, that learning involves *change, it endures over time, and that it occurs through experience*. Given that the context of “learning” in this research thesis takes place within the school system and focuses on high school learners, it is important to consider the learning approaches of learners and the teaching practices of educators responsible for teaching them how to learn within this specific environment.

Taking cognizance of Vygotsky’s sociocultural perspective of cognitive development, learning is thought to occur through interaction, negotiation, and collaboration. Additionally, consideration is also given to the dialogue, norms, and practices associated with the particular communities in which learners find themselves. The purpose of instruction is to encourage learners to engage in the learning activities in a way that aligns with the practices of the

community to which learners are being introduced, for example, scientists, historians, mathematicians. Teachers and learners are co-investigators, but with teachers mediating among learners' personal meanings, the meanings emerging from the process of collaboration between learners, and the culturally established (scientific, mathematical, historical, literary) meanings of the wider society (Scott & Palincsar, 2013)

It is the contention of this researcher that homework has a fundamental role to play in the learning process at school and, therefore, educators should take cognizance of the key theoretical and practical aspects of the learning process in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in order to integrate these when assigning homework tasks.

## **2.9 Homework and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Trilling and Fadel (2009) ask how 21<sup>st</sup> century learning is different from learning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and what 21<sup>st</sup> century learning really looks like? For this researcher, this is one of the key questions for consideration and exploration. It is the contention of this researcher that if schools are places of learning and preparation for young people to take their place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and if homework is part of the practice of learning and equipping of learners, then it follows that homework should be a meaningful educational practice adding value to the aforementioned outcomes. However, the value of homework to learning has been widely debated and the practice has been found to be wanting in many instances according to documented research.

La Conte (1981) provided an overview of the usefulness of homework as a learning experience and reported that most of the work in this area of research has focused on the field of mathematics, generally aiming at high school and college students. He refers to Austin (1979) who found that for mathematics, homework appears to be preferable compared to non-homework. Additionally, the effects of homework may be cumulative, and that drill homework may not be effective. Parris (1976, as cited in La Conte, 1979) conducted a comparative study on the effects of drill homework versus no homework and the attitudes in achievement in mathematics and found that the required drill homework *did* improve the mathematics grades

without producing negative effects on learner attitudes. However, La Conte (1979) refers to studies by Dadas (1976), Dyer (1976), and Matthes (1978), all of which reported finding no measurable link between homework assignments and improved mathematics performance. Given the lack of consistent findings regarding the benefits of homework to learning and academic performance regarding only one aspect of the required school curriculum, mathematics, the overall effectiveness of homework to learning across the curriculum may be justifiably under scrutiny.

## **2.10 Learning past and future**

Trilling and Fadel (2009) based their book, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills – Learning for Life in Our Times*, on the premise that due to significant change in the world over the last few decades, the roles of learning and education have also changed. The authors contend that whilst many skills required in centuries past, such as critical thinking and problem solving, are even more relevant today, it is *how* these skills are learned and practiced in everyday life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that is rapidly changing. In addition, there are some new skills to master, such as digital media literacy, that weren't even imagined 50 years ago. Investigation into what this means for schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is of critical importance. The nature of learning and the role of education in the “Knowledge Age” referred to by Trilling and Fadel (2009) is rapidly evolving. It is, therefore, incumbent on educators, policy makers, and educational institutions to rise to the challenge of preparing learners both theoretically and functionally to contribute to the world of work and civic life, play their part in helping solve society's collective problems, and understand that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, lifelong learning is here to stay.

## **2.11 What are 21<sup>st</sup> century skills?**

Anagun (2018) refers to the fierce debate taking place in education during the last decade concerning the role of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in improving the quality of education. Researchers and educators may differ on exact definitions of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills; however, there appears to be general consensus that these skills are required by learners to cope with the realities and conditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and encompass basic skills such as critical thinking, problem

solving, creativity, communication, collaboration, teamwork, decision making, leadership, knowledge application, self-direction and learning how to learn (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2009).

According to Palfrey and Gasser (2008), 21<sup>st</sup> century learners are digital learners and independent thinkers and, accordingly, they require education systems to change their practices to accommodate the change in the nature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner. Darling-Hammond (1999) emphasises research findings which state that educational experience for learners is significantly dependent on the quality and effectiveness of teachers, more than any changeable factor. Therefore, teachers' core competencies and knowledge of teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are of paramount importance in fostering the most constructive learning experience and outcome for learners of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From the literature presented in this chapter and the findings of my study, which will be presented in Chapter 4, the role of the teacher has emerged as an extremely significant factor in the homework experience and practice. Whilst the research presented in this section on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills has not targeted homework per se, it is clear that teachers and the teaching environment are key components of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Therefore, if homework is considered to be integral to the learning process, then the influence of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills should be evident in this time-honoured educational practice as well.

Trilling and Fadel (2009) write about redesigning and re-creating the education systems that will support 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. In my view, this process of recreation and renewal will be obliged to extend towards and encompass the traditional practice of homework, in order to embrace the rigor and relevance of 21<sup>st</sup> century education.

## **2.12 Conclusion**

The focus of this study has been to explore the relevance of homework to high school learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Concurrent areas of interest were the topics of learning and the importance of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in educational practice, including homework, in high schools today. The literature emphasised and revealed the controversial nature of the topic of homework spanning many decades and included discussion of the positive and negative aspects of this time-honoured tradition, as well as proposing alternatives for the improvement of this traditional practice.

This chapter also outlined an historical overview of homework and included a discussion of homework in the South African context. The issue of parental involvement in homework was examined and the socioeconomic factors associated with parental involvement in their children's homework was explored. The impact of homework on learner stress and family life was emphasised, and the chapter was concluded with a look at the nature of learning and identification of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

In the following chapter, the theoretical framework developed in this chapter will be used to discuss the research methodology employed in this study in order to explore and answer the research questions set out in Chapter 1.

## CONCEPTUALISATION OF CHAPTER 3

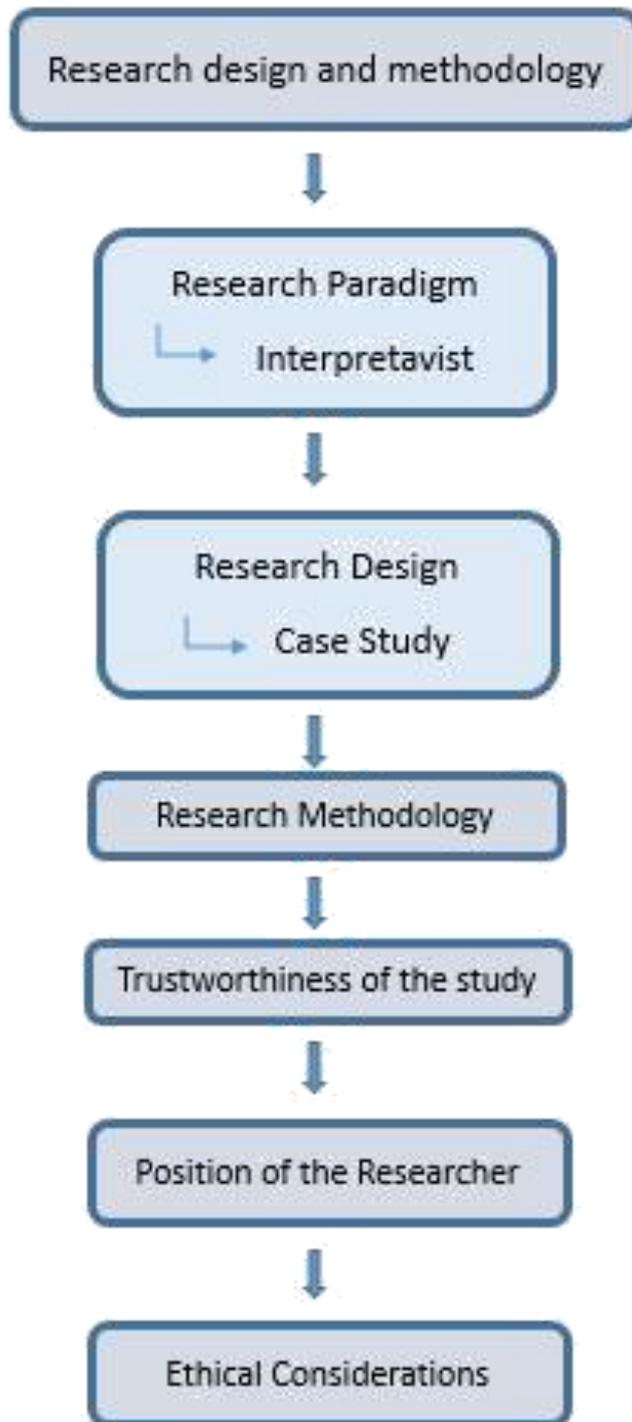


Figure 3.1 Conceptualisation of Chapter 3

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter a detailed account of the literature related to homework and the experiences of various role players regarding this time-honoured educational tradition, was presented.

This chapter is concerned with describing the overarching paradigm under which the research was undertaken, the philosophical assumptions that informed the paradigm, the research design and methodology according to which the research was done, including the methods used to collect and analyse the data as well as the ethical considerations pertinent to this study. My position as the researcher will also be discussed.

#### 3.2 Research paradigm

Terre Blanche et al. (2014) contend that all research accounts are based on empirical data; however, only a limited understanding of the world may be obtained by referring to the facts. They believe that it is important to consider the contextual knowledge which adds to the authenticity of the evidence presented. They explain that contextual knowledge informs us about what exists, how to comprehend it, and how to study it. In social sciences, the various forms of background knowledge or contextual elements are called paradigms (Terre Blanche et al., 2014). According to Mertens (2015), “a paradigm is a way of looking at the world and is composed of certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action” (p.8).

There are a few philosophical assumptions that inform the paradigm and that lead to a researcher’s choice of qualitative research, namely, **ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodological** assumptions (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2015).

**Ontological** assumptions refer to the nature of reality and its characteristics and the stance taken by the researcher regarding this assumption. Berger and Luckmann (1996, as cited in Sale,

Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002) point out that there are multiple realities or multiple truths based on one's construction of reality. They elaborate by saying that reality is socially constructed and, therefore, is constantly changing. In fact, for researchers who conduct qualitative research there are multiple realities (Creswell, 2007) as there are for the individuals being studied, and the readers of the qualitative study (Berger & Luckmann, 1996, as cited in Sale et al., 2002).

Considerations of how the researchers know what they know is referred to as *epistemology*. Epistemological assumptions specific to a qualitative study maintain that for the researcher to know and understand the lived reality of the participants, it is necessary to get close to them and to collaborate with them (Creswell, 2007). Mertens (2015) elaborates by writing that “the inquirer and the inquired-into are interlocked in an interactive process; each influences the other” (p.19). In this study, for me to interact with and get close to my participants, I spent time with them in their contexts of school and home, interviewing them and trying to get as close to their lived reality as possible.

The role of values in research, *axiology*, refers to the values that the researcher brings to the study and the ethical considerations playing a significant role in the research. Mertens (2015) explains axiology in research as the ethical aspect of research. Under Section 3.5 (ethical considerations), I will provide a clear explanation of the specific nature of my values regarding the study.

Finally, the procedural or *methodological* aspect of qualitative research, according to Creswell (2007), is characterised as “inductive, emerging and shaped by the researcher's experience and insight in collecting and analysing the data” (p.19).

### 3.2.1 The interpretivist paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm was used in this study. Le Roux (2005) writes that qualitative research is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm which holds the following views:

Human beings are not mechanistic, and they have multiple realities, which need to be understood in context. The social world cannot be described without investigating how people use language, symbols and meaning to construct social practice. No social practice is complete unless it adequately describes the role of meaning in human actions. (p.4)

In addition, Maree (2007) defines assumptions of the interpretivist perspective in the following way:

- **Human life can only be understood from within.** Therefore, interpretivism focuses on people's subjective experiences and the way in which each individual "constructs" the social world by sharing meanings and interpersonal interactions.
- **Social life is a distinctively human product.** Interpretivists believe that the unique situations/contexts that people find themselves in are crucial to the understanding and interpretation of their meanings which are constructed.
- **The human mind is the purposive source or origin of meaning.** By unearthing in what way humans construct meaning, we can become aware of these meanings and thereby improve our understanding of the whole.
- **Human behaviour is affected by knowledge of the social world.** Interpretivists contend that there is not one single reality, rather multiple realities which exist across time and place.
- **The social world does not "exist" independently of human knowledge.** A researcher's own knowledge and experiences of phenomena influence how he or she conducts research. In addition, the research process is informed and even directed by his or her humanness and prior knowledge.

In using the interpretivist paradigm in research, I considered that my participants' knowledge about homework is socially constructed and that I as the researcher should attempt "to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 2002 as cited in Mertens, 2015). Donald et al., (2015) explain that social constructivists like Vygotsky, recognise that social relationships influence the individual's construction of their world of experience. Thus, as learners engage in social interaction with key role players like teachers, peers and parents concerning homework, they mentally construct their world of experience regarding homework through social encounters and cognitive processes (Young & Collin, 2003). This philosophical stance resonates with me and it is for this reason that I chose this paradigm to explore and appreciate my participants lived experience regarding homework in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By analysing their perspectives, I gained deeper insight into this particular phenomenon, and was able to use this rich data for interpretation and the formulation of answers to the research questions. In addition, I believe that human beings experience life in many contexts and, as such, experience multiple realities which can only be understood within the contexts in which they arise. For this reason, I chose participants who represented the learners, teachers, and parents within the high school context.

In summary then, the interpretivist paradigm is concerned with the lived experience and subjective reality of the participants, and this constituted the basis of my research.

Using the interpretivist paradigm with its underlying philosophical assumptions, it was clear that to answer the research questions regarding homework in the 21st century, this study had to be qualitative in nature, shaping the research design and guiding the way in which data were collected, observed and analysed. Details of the methodology and research design will be presented in the following section.

### 3.3 Research design

Within the interpretivist paradigm informing my worldview, the current study was conducted as a qualitative study with a case study research design. As I began to make decisions about the purpose and focus of my study, I realised that the nature of my proposed research fell within the qualitative framework, because “at its simplest level, qualitative research is concerned with levels of meaning and developing explanations of social phenomena” (Le Roux, 2005, p. 3). Qualitative research fitted because I wanted to know and appreciate the meaning that the activity of the social phenomenon of homework has for the participants (teachers, parents and learners).

#### 3.3.1 Case study

Terre Blanche et al. (2014) define a research design as “a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research” (p.34).

The research design chosen for this study is a multiple phenomenological case study. Creswell (2007) explains that a “collective or multiple case study” is an inquiry of one issue or concern as reflected in multiple cases to show different perspectives on the issue. Creswell (2007) highlights the following procedures according to Stake’s (1995) approach to conducting a case study:

- **Researchers must determine the appropriateness of the choice of a case study for their research.** I decided on a case study approach for my research because I had identifiable cases within which to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question.
- **Researchers need to identify their case or cases.** I was able to easily identify potential cases available to me that could yield different perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation. The opportunity for purposive sampling and accessible cases supported my decision to undergo a case study investigation.

- **The data collection in case study research is typically extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information.** I was able to draw on interviews with learners, teachers and parents within different contexts and different perspectives and experiences as part of my research methodology.
- **The type of analysis of these data can be a *holistic* analysis of the entire case or an *embedded* analysis of a specific aspect of the case** (Yin, 2007, as cited in Creswell, 2007). I chose to do a holistic analysis of each, providing a detailed description of each case (*within-case analysis*) followed by a thematic analysis across cases (*cross-case analysis*), as well as interpretation of the meaning of each case.
- **In the final interpretive phase, the researcher reports the meaning of the case.**  
After all the data had been collected and analysed, the final interpretation of the primary issue of the case was interpreted.

Wertz (2005, as cited in Mertens, 2015), explains that phenomenological research emphasises the individual's subjective experience. According to Mertens (2015), it is precisely because the subjective experience is at the centre of inquiry that distinguishes phenomenological research from other qualitative research approaches. It was the specific subjective experiences of the parents, teachers and learners in my study that was central to my research and that I was keenly interested to explore. I wanted to understand the meaning an activity (homework) has for my participants and the way in which they interpreted the world and life around them.

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007), "from an interpretivist perspective, the typical characteristic of case studies is that they strive towards a comprehensive (holistic) understanding of how participants relate and interact with each other in a specific situation and how they make meaning of the phenomenon under study" (p. 75). Creswell (2007) adds to the above definition of case study research by referring to the "bounded system" within which the research is conducted. In other words, the research occurs within a specific setting or context.

The participants in my study were chosen from three different groups of people (parents, teachers and learners), who interacted with one another daily concerning the phenomenon of homework, within their contexts of school and home. An exploration and interpretation of the rich data generated from these interactions formed the basis of my research.

Nieuwenhuis (2007) emphasises that in case study research, the unit of analysis is a critical factor. According to Mertens (2015), a case study may be based on any number of units of analysis from an individual to a group of individuals, a particular setting or an event. In my study the primary unit of analysis is the group of individuals experiencing ‘homework’ in different contexts and from different perspectives. Secondary units of analysis include the nature of learning and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

### 3.3.2 Research Methodology

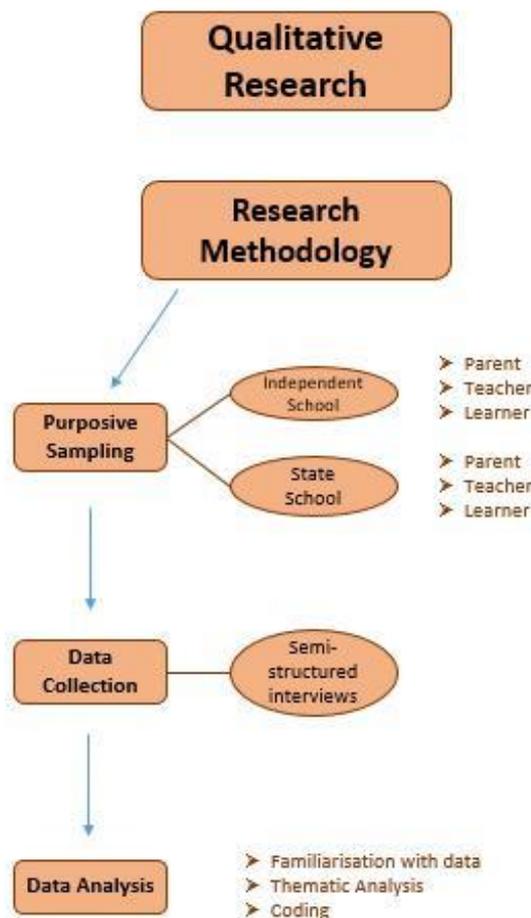


Figure 3.2 The Research Methodology

In terms of the methodological procedures of qualitative research, Creswell (2007) characterises the methodology as “inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analysing the data” (p. 19). He adds that the researcher aims to develop an understanding of the research question from the participants’ perspective and context. In applying these principles to my methodological procedures, I used the detail of the participants’ subjective experience, as reflected in their own words during the interview process, to construct meaning and find answers to the research question.

By interacting with participants who experience homework from different perspectives, namely, parents, teachers, and learners, I attempted to obtain multiple perspectives that yielded rich interpretations of meaning. These perspectives were then compared and contrasted to gain deeper, sometimes conflicting, knowledge about participants’ responses to the research question.

As already stated, the research was undertaken using a qualitative methodology, specifically case study design.

### **3.3.2.1 Participants in the study**

Terre Blanche et al. (2014) emphasise that the main concern of sampling is representativeness. It is important to select a sample that will be representative of the population about which the researcher aims to draw conclusions.

Participants in my study were chosen by means of purposive sampling. The purposive sampling method decided on for this study was that I specifically chose representatives from both an independent and a state high school in Cape Town. The schools were in different geographical locations and the participants were from different socio-economic backgrounds. One of the high schools is an independent girls’ school and the other is a co-educational state school. I wanted to compare participants’ experience of homework in the two different educational and social contexts. I had ease of access to both high schools chosen for this research.

I chose participants from three different groups, namely, teachers, learners, and parents. The reason for choosing participants from these three groups was because all three participant groups experienced the phenomenon of homework in various contexts and from multiple perspectives. “An important strategy for choosing a sample is to determine the dimensions of diversity that are important to that particular study” (Mertens 2015, p. 327). In this interpretive study of limited scope, I focused on the personal experiences of two teachers, two learners, and two parents at two different high schools in Cape Town. The criteria for inclusion in the sample were:

- experience of homework from different perspectives, for example, participants who *gave* the homework (teachers), participants who *did* the homework (learners), and participants who *supervised/became involved in* the homework process in the home (parents)
- representation from both an independent and a state mainstream school offering the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) CAPS curriculum
- high school learners in Grades 10 and 11
- volunteering to participate in the study.

The process of selecting the participants evolved as follows: I began by contacting the principals of the two schools I had earmarked for inclusion in my study, via email. The reason I chose these specific high schools in Cape Town was due to ease of access. I had prior contact with the state school because of outreach activities by the school at which I was employed. The independent school chosen for my research was the school at which I am currently employed. In my email to the principals of the two schools, I introduced myself and explained that I am a master’s student at the University of Stellenbosch and that I am completing my thesis as part of my degree programme. I requested a meeting and set up an appointment to see each of them in person, at a time that was convenient to them. I met with the principals during school hours and gave them information about the purpose and process of my proposed study. During our meeting

I explained that participation in my research was completely voluntary and that the principals were free to ask any questions or express any concerns they might have concerning my request to involve learners, teachers and parents associated with their school. I asked the principals for written informed consent at the end of our meeting.

The participants from the state school were chosen on the recommendation of the principal who indicated their potential suitability for inclusion. The participants from the independent school were identified by me as potential suitable participants. Once I had decided on who the potential participants would be, I emailed each of them, introduced myself, explained the nature and purpose of my research, and requested that they consider volunteering to be part of the study.

### **3.3.2.2 Data collection**

Mertens (2015) states that “typically, qualitative researchers use three main methods for collecting data: participant observation, interviews, and documents and records review” (p.253). In my research I used semi-structured interviews aimed at exploring individuals’ lived experience within their various meaning-making contexts.

This study began with the primary research question, namely, “Is the assigning of homework still relevant to the learning of high school learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?” I wanted to explore this question from the perspective of parents, teachers, and learners within the high school context. One of the reasons for this was that although there has been a fair amount of research and media attention on this topic within the primary school setting, I noticed a gap in this research and media attention about the high school context, with specific focus on the relevance to learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I wanted to gain an understanding of the perspectives and meaning attached by parents, teachers, and learners to homework and its relevance to learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Secondary questions explored various issues relating to homework practice, such as the kind of homework required for learners to foster a love of learning and an exploration of the nature of learning and the role of homework in fostering 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

### 3.3.2.3 Semi-structured interviews

Upon receiving a positive response from each of the participants I had contacted to take part in my study, I arranged a date and time convenient to them to meet with them in person and to conduct an interview. Five of the interviews - with two parents, one teacher, and two learners - were conducted in the participants' homes; and the interview with the second teacher was conducted at the school where the participant worked.

In qualitative research, the use of interviews is often one of the key methods of data collection. Interviews can be open-ended, semi-structured or structured and the aim of qualitative interviews is to see the world through the eyes of the participant (Maree et al., 2007). Individual semi-structured interviews were used to collect data for this study. I chose this method of data collection because I wanted to establish a line of inquiry into the phenomenon of homework as experienced by each participant (Maree et al., 2007), whilst keeping the opportunity open for further probing and identification of emerging lines of inquiry related to the research questions.

I began each interview by introducing myself, thanking the participant for their willingness to participate in my research, summarising once again the purpose of the study and explaining that their participation was completely voluntary, and that they had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. I explained that I would be recording each interview and that the recorded interview would be saved in a digital file on my computer, which was password protected. Each participant who was a minor was asked to sign an informed assent form and their parents were asked to sign a permission form allowing their children to participate in the study (refer to Appendices F and G). The adult participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (refer to Appendix H and I), before the actual interview commenced.

Before beginning each interview, I had prepared a few guiding questions to establish a line of inquiry into my participants' perceptions about homework and its relevance to learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (refer to Appendices J, K and L). The content of the questions explored various aspects of homework identified by me as relevant to the debate about this daily school activity. In summary, the focus areas that were explored by the questions were about the time that was spent on homework on a daily basis, the contribution (if any) of homework to the learning process, the opinions of the participants about homework, the potential effect on family life, the type of homework given, and the relevance to preparation for study and/or work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I paid keen attention to the responses of my participants during the interviews so that I could identify and pursue new lines of inquiry as they emerged. During each interview my participants brought new avenues to explore because of their individual lived realities, perspectives, and perceptions about homework. I was able to use these to explore new areas for discussion, gain deeper insight into their lived realities, and acquire rich data for analysis and interpretation.

After recording the six interviews on a voice recorder, they were transcribed verbatim by my thesis editor, who had signed a confidentiality agreement prior to transcribing the recorded interviews (refer to Appendix M). After the transcriptions were completed, I listened to the recordings again and checked them against the transcriptions to ensure accuracy. The raw data gained from the interviews was then ready for in-depth analysis and interpretation.

#### **3.3.2.4 Data analysis**

“Qualitative researchers collect data in the form of written or spoken language and analyse the data by identifying and categorising themes” (Terre Blanche et al., p. 47).

Once I had obtained all the data by means of semi-structured interviews, I began the process of analysing said data. Taking cognisance of Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure for thematic analysis, I began the first step in the process of analysis by familiarising myself extensively with the data. I did this by listening to the recording of each interview whilst viewing

each written transcript (see Appendix M as per example). As I did so, I highlighted key words and phrases on the transcripts and made notes about my thoughts concerning what I was hearing and reading. My notes took the form of questions about meanings, potential links between other data in the interview, important quotes that I didn't want to lose track of and noting particular ideas that emerged. This process helped me to become thoroughly immersed in the data and to familiarise myself extensively with the content of each interview. This procedure also assisted me in gaining a deeper understanding of the perspectives on and experiences of homework for each of my participants.

The second step in the analysis was the production of initial codes from the data. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004, p. 411 as cited in Le Roux, 2005) described coding as “the process of describing themes and ideas in chunks or segments of text in the data and assigning labels to them.” I began the coding process by conducting a preliminary analysis of the ideas and patterns identified in each interview during the preliminary overview and analysis of the data in step one outlined in the previous paragraph. I tentatively identified, named, and categorised the data contained in each individual interview using ‘post-it’ notes to identify codes and match them with specific data extracts. During categorising and coding the data, I used my insights to begin to draw out interpretations from the codes (see Appendix N as per example).

Once I had undertaken the above-mentioned process for each individual interview, I moved on to the third phase of the analysis, namely, searching for themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 82), “a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.” Following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) procedure for this phase, I began sorting the codes across the complete data set into potential themes and collated the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. I also began to tentatively arrange the themes into main themes and sub-themes.

I began the fourth step in the thematic analysis by reviewing and refining my themes within each interview and across the whole data set. During this phase, I searched through the data for evidence to confirm or disconfirm themes that I had tentatively established. This process involved rethinking my thematic categories, at times collapsing separate themes into one and eliminating others. Once I had a satisfactory outline of my data and themes, I began the next phase of the analysis by analysing the specific data within each theme, determining what each was about, why it was interesting, and how it related to the research questions. This process helped me to piece together the overall story that I was trying to tell about my data in relation to the research questions.

The sixth and last phase of my thematic analysis involved the final in-depth analysis of the themes and findings. This will be explored and discussed in Chapter Four.

### **3.3.3 Trustworthiness of the study**

Creswell and Miller (2000), in their discourse about validity in qualitative inquiry, contend that, despite the multiple perspectives on the issue, there appears to be consensus that qualitative inquirers need to demonstrate that their studies are credible. Several authors have offered procedural guidelines to this end, notably Guba (1981), who offers four criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, namely, **credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability**. I will explain these criteria with reference to my study to establish its trustworthiness according to Guba's (1981) four criteria:

- **Credibility:** How can I be confident in the “truth” of my findings with reference to my participants and within the contexts in which the inquiry was carried out?
- **Transferability:** How can I determine whether my findings can be applied to other contexts and other participants, for example in different school contexts with different participants?

- **Dependability:** Are the findings of my study consistent and, if repeated with the same (or similar) participants, within the same (or similar) contexts, will they yield the same results?
- **Confirmability:** How can I determine whether the findings of my study are exclusively a function of my participants and their contexts, and not influenced by my own biases, motivations, interests, and perspectives.

Anney (2014) explores Guba's (1981) criteria for establishing trustworthiness and describes several techniques to establish **credibility** in qualitative research. The latter includes **prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, triangulation, thick description, and researcher reflexivity.**

During my research, I spent time with my participants establishing a rapport and building a trust relationship between us. I took time to try to gain an understanding of their contexts, their perspectives, and their experiences by talking, asking questions, listening, and reflecting on their lived realities as revealed in my interviews with them.

During my research process, I sought the guidance of a Master's postgraduate colleague who had completed her dissertation in the field of educational psychology and who was an experienced researcher. During our discussions I was able to explore and clarify my research design and methodology, test my growing insights from my semi-structured interviews with my participants, reflect on her probing questions and on her feedback. In so doing, I was able to improve the quality of my inquiry and my findings and add value to the credibility of my study.

Referring to the technique of triangulation as one of the methods of establishing the credibility of a qualitative study, I used a method known as disconfirming evidence (Miles & Huberman, 1995, as cited in Creswell & Miller, 2000). This method is closely related to triangulation and it is a process whereby investigators first establish the preliminary themes or categories in a study, and then search through the data for evidence that is consistent with

or disconfirms these themes. Creswell and Miller (2000) emphasise that the disconfirming evidence should not outweigh the confirming evidence. This procedure of disconfirming evidence helped me to refine my thematic analysis and identify the themes that were supported by consistent evidence and those that contained rich data for further exploration and analysis.

Creswell and Miller (2000) expand on “thick, rich description” (p. 128) as a measure of establishing credibility by emphasising that it is a process whereby the setting, the participants, and the themes of the qualitative study are described in rich detail. As I listened to the transcriptions of my interviews and read the transcripts repeatedly to immerse myself in the raw data, I did my best to describe the feelings, experiences, events, and contexts of my participants in depth and in detail. I often extracted snippets of original dialogue from my interviews to reveal the actual voices of my participants. In so doing, I provided explicit detail to describe the lived experiences of my participants, support my interpretations of the data, and provide a plausible and truthful account of their lived experiences.

The final validity procedure that I would like to discuss is that of researcher reflexivity (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This procedure involves the self-disclosure of my beliefs, biases, values, and assumptions that may shape my inquiry. I have discussed this under a separate heading in the next section, “Position of the researcher”.

By employing methods which are generally accepted as trustworthy qualitative techniques, as outlined in the above paragraphs, I hope to fulfil the criteria of conducting a trustworthy qualitative study.

### **3.4 Position of the researcher**

The significance of the researcher as the instrument that collects data in qualitative research studies is addressed by Mertens (2015). She emphasises that the researcher fulfils this role by observing, interviewing, and analysing documents of various kinds. It is therefore important to note who the researcher is and what values, assumptions, beliefs, and biases he or

she brings to the study (p. 261). Taking cognisance of this significant aspect of data collection in qualitative research and its relevance in establishing the credibility of my study, my position as researcher will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

In undertaking this study, it became necessary for me, in my role as researcher, to reflect upon my own background and context as a high school teacher for many years, and on my stance concerning homework during my years in the classroom setting. This reflection allowed me to better understand my own position concerning the role of homework in the learning process of high school learners, and to reflect on its relevance to 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. To me, homework had always been a compulsory component of school life, the purpose of which was to reinforce classroom learning and provide learners with the opportunity to apply learned knowledge on their own at home.

As a career guidance counsellor for the past 10 years, I have become increasingly interested in career development and the world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I began to reflect on the link between the school curriculum and its relevance in preparing learners to take their place in either tertiary institutions or the employment sector, after completing Grade 12. Thus, my own experience of multiple realities in various contexts over time has helped to shape my stance on homework and its relevance to learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and influence my role as a researcher in this study.

Whilst conducting my research, I have had to be continually mindful of my inherent beliefs, assumptions, and biases concerning homework and consistently monitor these as the study progressed, to limit their impact on the study's data and interpretations. I achieved this by continuous reflexivity, awareness of the potential impact on the study, and a committed intent to hear the voices of my participants alone, and to interpret data accurately and truthfully from the perspectives of my participants to the exclusion of my own view and experiences.

The axiological assumption characterising this research acknowledges the value-laden nature of this study. As indicated in the previous paragraph, my own biases, such as thoughts concerning the tedious nature of homework, experiences, such as the stress-inducing nature of this activity for learners and for me as a teacher having to check and follow up on the work each day, as well as my values and beliefs about homework, for example, questioning whether this activity is still relevant to learning in schools nowadays, were active in the “researcher-researched relationship” (Mertens, 2015, p. 18). However, despite my own value-laden participation in this study, I, as the researcher, undertook to apply the rigour of trustworthiness and authenticity within the framework for ethical practice of qualitative research. As indicated in the previous paragraph, my own biases, experiences, values, and beliefs were active in the “researcher-researched relationship”. They included my thoughts on the tedious nature of homework, the stress-inducing nature of homework for learners and for teachers having to check and follow up on the work each day, and my questioning whether homework is still relevant to learning in schools today.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

The issue of ethical research practice is of critical importance for every researcher. As Clegg and Slife (2009) as cited in Mertens (2015) make clear, ethics is something that needs to guide the entire process of planning, conducting, and using research. Therefore, as the researcher, I was responsible for conducting myself in an ethical manner from the initial planning and throughout the implementation of this study. There were four guiding philosophical principles highlighted by Terre Blanche et, al. (2014) that guided my research. These were **respect for persons, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice.**

Throughout the process of planning and conducting my research, **dignity and respect** for my participants were in the forefront of my mind. Before commencing my interviews with my participants, I took great care to explain the details of what would be required of them and

emphasised that their participation was entirely voluntary. I emphasised that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage in the research process. I received informed assent and consent from all participants prior to the commencement of the research. The interviews were conducted in private and within an environment chosen by my participants where they felt comfortable. In the writing up of my research, I was careful to protect the individual and institutional identity of all participants.

In keeping with the philosophical principle of **beneficence**, during the planning and execution of my research, I carefully weighed up the risk/benefit factors to determine any potential risks to my participants. I concluded that there were minimal potential risk factors and that the benefits of the research would be increased knowledge and understanding of the topic in question.

In line with the **nonmaleficence** principle, I ensured that my participants were not placed in direct or indirect harm because of their participation in my study. As a precaution, I arranged for a psychologist to be available for counselling and support should any of my participants have experienced any emotional distress due to their participation in my research. Whilst this was ultimately not required, I made provision for this prior to my interviews with them (see Appendix D).

Following the **justice** principle, all my participants were treated with equity and fairness during all stages of the research. With reference to the outcomes of my study and potential benefits to my participants, I undertook to make the results of my study available to all participants for use in any future interventions regarding homework within their specific contexts.

To comply with ethical practice in research, permission to conduct this research was obtained from the University of Stellenbosch Ethics Committee, the Western Cape Department of Education, and the principal of each school (refer to Appendices B, A and E).

In conducting my study according to the above-mentioned ethical principles, I endeavoured to undertake my research with ethical sensitivity, dignity, and respect for the welfare and rights of my research participants, and in keeping with the ethical parameters of social sciences research.

In the next chapter, the findings of my research will be presented after an in-depth thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews with my participants. Using the data obtained from my participants I will examine possible answers to the primary and secondary research questions of this research concerning homework and its relevance to learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, learning per se, and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS OF THE STUDY

#### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused primarily on an explanation of my research paradigm, research methodologies, data collection strategies, the process of data analysis, and the ethical considerations integral to this study. In this chapter, the results of the study will be presented after the completion of a thorough thematic analysis gleaned from the participants' verbatim interview transcriptions, in order to explore the primary research question, namely:

- Is the assigning of homework still relevant to the learning process of high school pupils in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Secondary questions of interest in this study were:

- What kind of homework should be given to pupils in senior school to foster a love of learning and sustain an interest in the curriculum?
- What does the concept of “learning” look like in today’s world?
- Is homework playing a significant role in fostering key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and, in so doing, preparing pupils to take their place in the world of work or higher education?

During the presentation of my findings, the voices of the participants will be clearly heard in the verbatim transcriptions of the interviews conducted with them. I have stayed true to the language, vocabulary and terminology presented by each participant. The personal narrative of each participant generates an informal style of language use. The regular use of the first-person pronoun “I” characterises each participant’s personal voice and contributes to the engaging style of narrative employed in this qualitative study.

In the paragraphs which follow, I will present the results of this study by highlighting and discussing the major themes, subthemes, and categories which stemmed from each individual interview conducted. In order to obtain a diverse set of opinions about homework in the 21<sup>st</sup>

century, I interviewed two learners, two parents, and two teachers from an independent and a state school in Cape Town. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I begin the explanation of findings from each participant with a table about each participant, wherein I present their personal information, school context, and home language. In the presentation of the data, participants have been anonymised in order to protect their identities. At the beginning of each section I present a diagrammatic conceptualisation of the major themes and subthemes derived from each interview.

#### 4.2 Learner 1

Table 4.1

*Personal information for Learner 1*

<b>Learner 1</b>	Female, Grade 12
<b>School context</b>	A state school situated in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. The learners at this school generally come from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. However, despite this, the school is known for its progressive leadership, sound academic ethos, and good results.
<b>Home Language</b>	English and isiXhosa

## LEARNER 1

A summary of main themes, subthemes and categories:

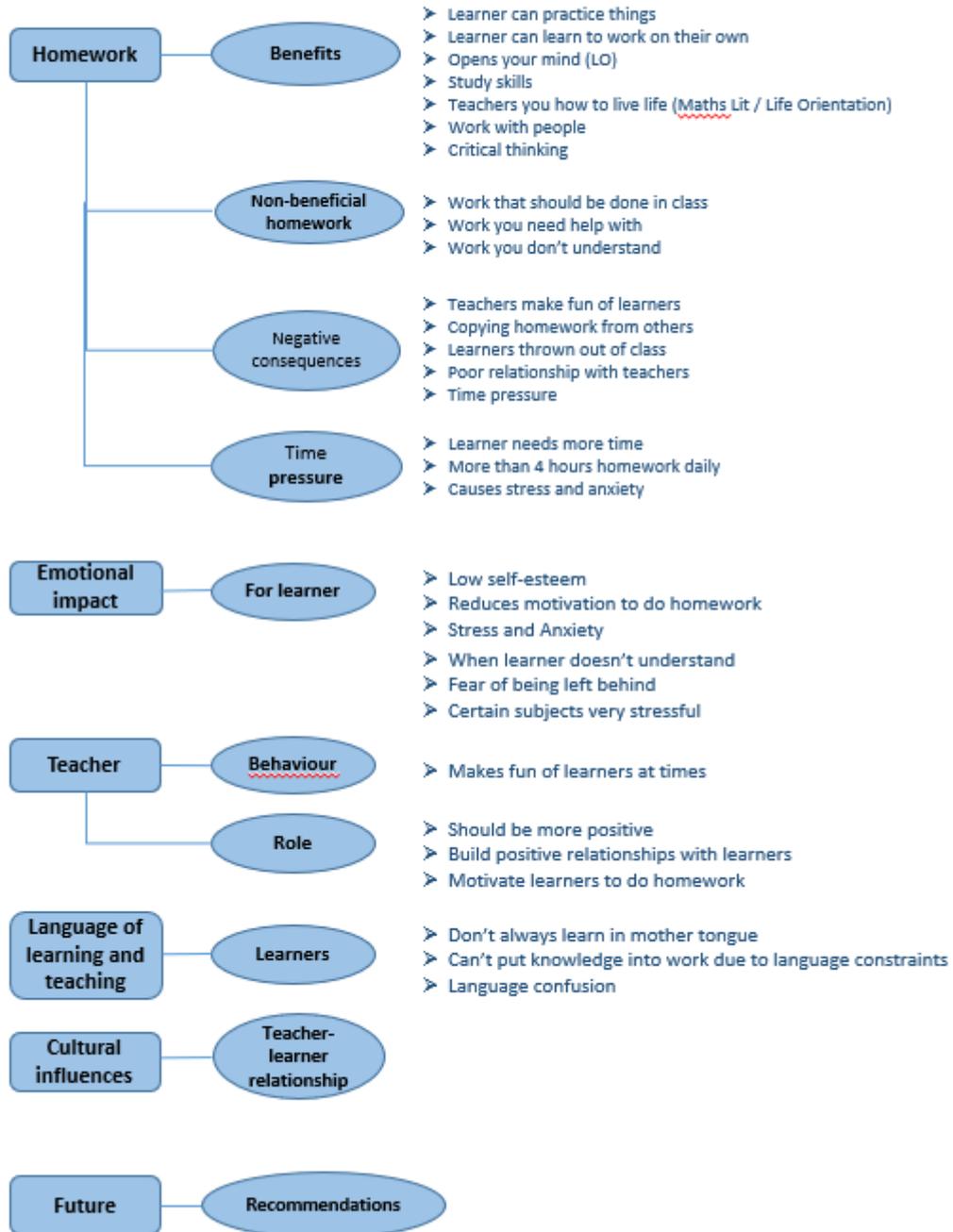


Figure 4.1: Learner 1: Main Themes and Subthemes

#### 4.2.1 Theme 1: Homework

The theme is one of the main recurring themes across all the participants in this study. It incorporates the prevailing personal beliefs and attitudes about homework and serves to shed light on the primary research question, namely, “Is the assigning of homework still relevant to the learning process of high school pupils in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?” The corresponding subthemes of beneficial and non-beneficial homework, stress, emotional impact of homework, and cultural influences, add depth and substance to the discussion. They also provide valuable insight into the secondary research questions outlined in the introduction to this chapter.

##### 4.2.1.1 Subtheme 1: Benefits

When asked her opinion of homework at the outset of the interview, Learner 1 said, “*I think homework can help you, like it helps you to practise things and like get them in your head.*” She indicated that at times she needed to ask for help with her homework and that this could be beneficial and contribute to her learning outside of the classroom: “*Yes, because it helps me like . . . OK, let’s take an example – Xhosa. Say there is a phrase that I don’t understand in Xhosa, then I come home, I ask my aunt what does this mean? Then she explains it to me, then I understand it. So, the next time I see it or hear it, then I will understand it better.*”

##### 4.2.1.2 Subtheme 2: Non-beneficial homework

Learner 1 contrasted beneficial homework with non-beneficial homework and pointed out that homework, “*should be something you can do on your own, in your own time, something without a due date, but something that you can do like when you feel like doing it.*” However, she went on to say that certain work should not be given as homework: “. . . *but then again, some exercises shouldn’t be used as homework, they should actually be done in class. Because the teachers, they like to give homework that you are supposed to do in class as homework, which I don’t think is actually good, because then you don’t know what you are doing.*” Reflecting further on non-beneficial homework, Learner 1 expressed extreme

frustration about the times that she is given homework that she doesn't understand: *“No, because if I don't understand what they are talking about - even if I don't understand my aunt, there is no point in doing this because I don't understand it. So, I don't see why I must do this homework because there is no point doing it if I don't understand it. Like, how can I answer it?”*

#### **4.2.1.3 Subtheme 3: Negative consequences**

Learner 1 highlighted numerous negative consequences for learners who did not complete their homework. She revealed that, at times, teachers made fun of learners for not completing their homework: *“Because also if you don't do homework then some teachers also make fun of you.”* She went on to say that learners were also thrown out of class when they did not complete their homework: *“. . . or throw you out of class”*. Consequently, most learners resorted to copying homework from other learners, to avoid the negative consequences under discussion in this paragraph: *“You see, that's why most people resort to copying homework.”* Additionally, Learner 1 mentioned the poor relationship that learners had with teachers as a result of the negative actions and attitudes surrounding homework.

#### **4.2.1.4 Subtheme 4: Time pressure**

Learner 1 spoke about the time pressure that learners are under resulting from daily homework. She felt that there should be more time allocated for the completion of homework and that learners should not be given just 24 hours to complete a homework task: *“Because if you give it like homework today and then you want it tomorrow, it's going to put so much pressure on the person, on the child, because then they have probably another million things to do, then they must still go and do homework.”* Learner 1 noted that she has in excess of four hours homework daily: *“For me it is more than four hours.”* This time pressure adds to the stress and anxiety experienced by high school learners: *“. . . they don't have that thing where they are so relaxed and where they are contented themselves and they feel fine”*.

#### 4.2.1.5 Subtheme 5: Positive aspects of homework

A number of positive aspects regarding homework were emphasised by Learner 1. She described in detail how homework in certain subjects like Life Orientation and Mathematical Literacy was extremely beneficial. For example, *“Like if it’s like Life Orientation, sometimes, that will open your mind.”* or *“And Maths Literacy. Because Maths Literacy like teaches you about how to live life”* and *“(Maths Literacy), that will actually help you in the real world.”*

Learner 1 also mentioned that she thought that homework could teach you, *“... the skill to study”*.

She added that by asking for help when she didn’t know something could assist her with her learning: *“Yes, because it helps me like . . . OK, let’s take an example – Xhosa. Say there is a phrase that I don’t understand in Xhosa, then I come home, I ask my aunt what does this mean? Then she explains it to me, then I understand it. So, the next time I see it or hear it, then I will understand it better. I know what they are talking about.”*

#### 4.2.2 Theme 2: Emotional impact

##### 4.2.2.1 Subtheme 1: For the learner

Learner 1 spoke about the negative emotional impact associated with homework. She identified low self-esteem and stress as the two main areas of concern.

Learner 1 related stories of teachers making fun of learners who did not complete their homework, calling them “stupid” in front of the whole class, resulting in these learners becoming the laughing stock of the rest of the class: *“Because also if you don’t do homework then some teachers also make fun of you. And they say that you are stupid, you didn’t do the homework. Then those people maybe if they have a low self-esteem, then if the teacher calls them stupid and the whole class laughs.”*

A further emotional impact related to homework is the lack of motivation that learners feel to complete homework tasks. Learner 1 said, *“... like, if you are not motivated to do something,*

*you are not going to do it because all your energy and all your. . .*” and *“I don’t see why I must do this homework because there is no point doing it if I don’t understand it. Like, how can I answer it?”*

#### **4.2.2.2 Subtheme 2: Stress and anxiety**

Learner 1 discussed the stressful nature of homework with particular emphasis on specific subjects which are especially stressful when it comes to homework: *“For me, it is Geography, Life Sciences and Maths, . . . and Xhosa.”*

Learner 1 expanded on the reasons for the stressful nature of these subjects by highlighting a lack of understanding: *“Geography – I never truly understood it.”* and a fear of being left behind. *“And Maths - sometimes I don’t understand the teacher when the teacher is teaching but I don’t have a choice, I have to listen, and I have to do my homework. Because I can’t be left behind.”*

#### **4.2.3 Theme 3: The teacher**

##### **4.2.3.1 Subtheme 1: Behaviour of the teacher**

As already indicated in the section concerning the emotional impact of homework on the learner, certain teachers were reported by Learner 1 to make fun of learners in the classroom when they have not completed their homework. In such instances, the behaviour of the teacher has an extremely negative impact on the learners as well as their attitude and motivation to do homework and to learn.

##### **4.2.3.2 Subtheme 2: Role of the teacher**

Learner 1 expressed her desire for, *“. . . the teachers to be more patient because they can’t just expect you to know the work”*.

Learner 1 felt strongly that a positive relationship between learner and teacher would motivate learners to do the work set by that teacher: *“Yes! If you and your teacher get along, you will do that teacher’s work because that teacher will be easier for you to talk to.”* and *“Like,*

*if you come in the classroom with a smile and you joke, and you like . . . not that negative person who comes in with a . . . get out your books. You understand. Like a teacher that has that thing – I don't know how to call it – that thing.”*

#### **4.2.4 Theme 4: The language of teaching and learning (LOLT)**

Learner 1 addressed a very significant aspect of teaching and learning in South Africa today, namely, the *language* of teaching and learning and the diverse make-up of learners in the classroom.

##### **4.2.4.1 Subtheme 1: Learners**

She pointed out that not all learners in her school speak isiXhosa as a home language (HL) or even a second language, yet all learners at her school are required to take isiXhosa HL: *“And Xhosa. Xhosa is difficult because I – as you can see, no one here speaks Xhosa”*.

English is taken as a first additional language (FAL). Although Learner 1 speaks both isiXhosa and English at home, she points out that the isiXhosa spoken in the urban areas today is not pure isiXhosa: *“So, people are moving from the rural areas to the cities because they find that life in the cities is much more easier than in the rural areas sometimes. And they don't speak that Xhosa anymore. Even if you go to any of the townships now in South Africa, like in Cape Town, you find that they don't speak proper Xhosa. They speak township Xhosa where they mix it with Tsotsi”*.

There are a number of implications of this language phenomenon for teaching, learning, and homework. These include the following:

- Both mother tongue and non-mother tongue speakers of isiXhosa struggle to learn isiXhosa and complete homework tasks for isiXhosa HL. *“Then the teachers expect us to know everything. But we don't know everything. Because most of us we don't even go home to the Eastern Cape because most of our families don't even have homes in the Eastern Cape anymore, because everything now is so modern.”*

- Due to the fact that urban speakers of isiXhosa mix the language with other languages, learners no longer understand isiXhosa at the level expected by their teachers. *“And the same like in Manenberg and in (indistinct), they will mix Xhosa and Afrikaans, but in Gugulethu, they will just like . . . they will make up words.”*

Given the fact that isiXhosa HL is compulsory at this school and that learners experience the difficulties mentioned above, completing homework tasks alone at home without assistance is extremely challenging and demotivating at times.

Learner 1 mentioned that she experiences difficulty putting her knowledge into words in English: *“I am clever, but I don’t know to put my things into words. So sometimes like when I want to talk about Life Sciences, like when I am writing my answers, and then there will be like a particular question, then I wouldn’t know how to put it into words, then I will get confused and won’t understand it.”*

By her own admission, Learner 1 is cognitively able to do the academic work set in Life Sciences, for example; however, due to her possible language confusion and lack of ability in English, her academic output is compromised. This must also impact on her ability to complete homework tasks without assistance.

#### **4.2.5 Theme 5: Cultural influences in the classroom**

##### **4.2.5.1 Subtheme 1: Teacher-learner relationships**

Linked to the language issues discussed in the previous paragraphs are the cultural influences on teachers and the effect this has on the teacher-learner relationship. Learner 1 highlighted the effect of traditional attitudes and expectations of teachers who come from a traditional isiXhosa background. She emphasised that the traditional attitude of some teachers does not allow freedom of expression in class: *“Me, I speak my mind. If I don’t like what you are doing, I will tell you, I don’t care how old you are, how young. I will tell you I don’t think what you are doing is good. They don’t understand it at my school because they think a girl should be quiet. It’s not 1980s, it’s not 1643 - it’s 2018”*. Referring to the importance of the

learner-teacher relationship mentioned previously in this chapter, this aspect of cultural influence on the teacher-learner relationship has potential negative implications for motivating learners to learn and complete homework tasks set by such teachers.

#### **4.2.6 Theme 6: The future of homework**

##### **4.2.6.1 Subtheme 1: Learner 1 recommendations**

When asked her opinion regarding the future of homework, Learner 1 indicated that she thought that the concept of homework should be altered: *“Like maybe instead of giving the due date for tomorrow and maybe if the homework is given to us on a Monday, you should at least get a week to do it. Or do it in your own time. Like, maybe if you want to like . . . let’s say, do Maths or like something that - actually gives you homework that you actually have to sit down and think about it. Like maybe Xhosa home language. Like if the teacher gives you a book to read, you can’t read it on your own because like what if you don’t understand it, like me? Like maybe you should read it in class - and yes, we do read it in class, but we read it in class and then she looks at us and she’s like, no, you must read this book, you are in school.”* Adjusting the time frame required for the completion of the work, and having more assistance with homework during class time, would significantly change the experience of homework for learners. Learner 1 expressed the desire to have more “thinking” homework: *“. . . let’s say, do Maths or like something that - actually gives you homework that you actually have to sit down and think about it”*. Finally, Learner 1 felt that an improved interpersonal relationship with her teachers, and the opportunity to do most of her homework during class time, would significantly change and improve the experience of doing homework: *“Like, the teacher should let down her guard more and be more friendly with the students. Like, talk, maybe if she gives you homework, then we should all do it in class because homework doesn’t have to be homework, it can be any just . . . remove homework, practice work, not homework”*.

### 4.3 Learner 2

Table 4.2

*Personal information for Learner 2*

<b>Learner 2</b>	Female, Grade 12
<b>School context</b>	An independent school situated in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. The learners in this school generally come from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds. Many of the learners come from affluent families. The school is one of the top performing schools in the Western Cape.
<b>Home Language</b>	English

## LEARNER 2

A summary of main themes, subthemes and categories:

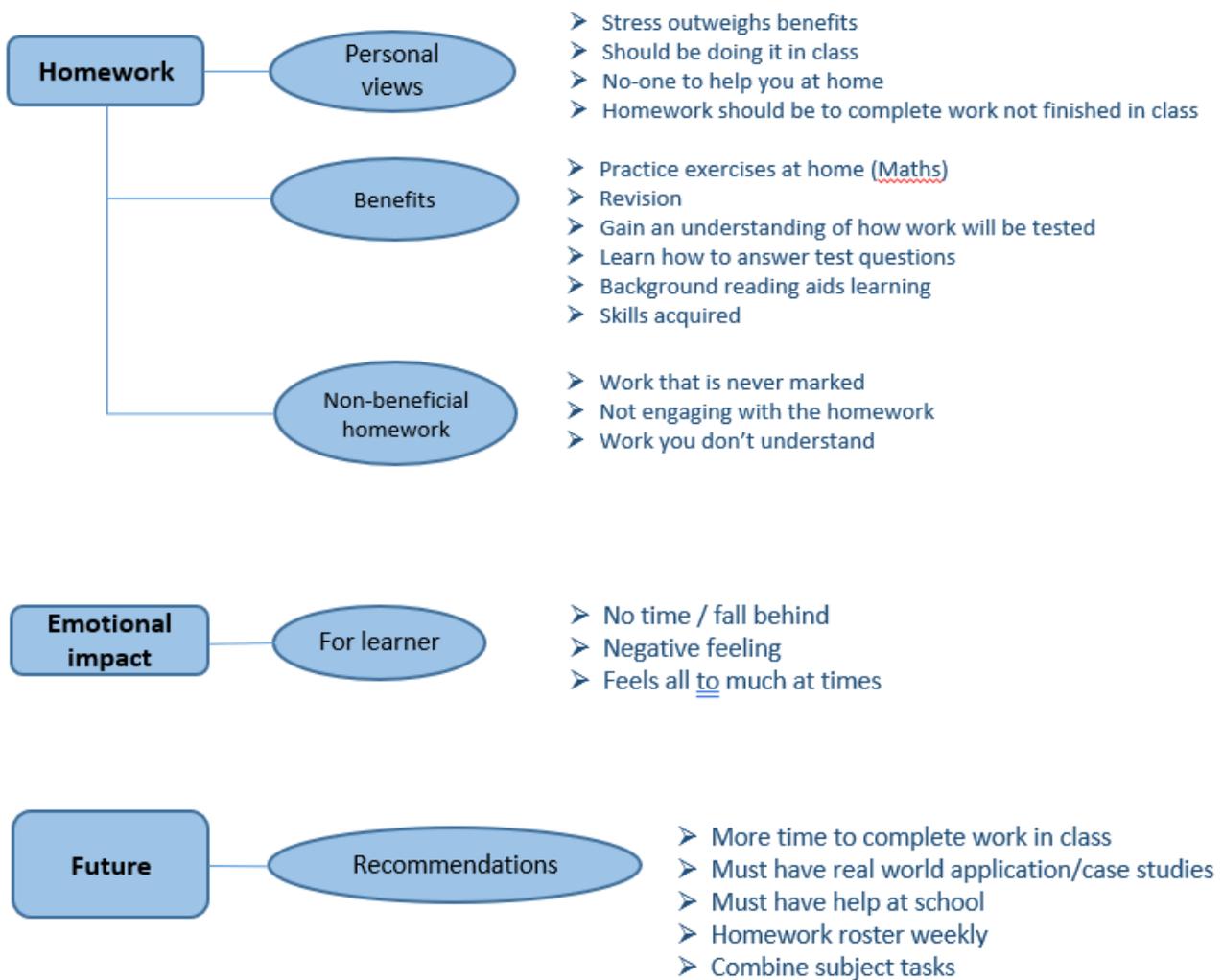


Figure 4.2: Learner 2: Main Themes and Subthemes

### **4.3.1 Theme 1: Homework**

#### **4.3.1.1 Subtheme 1: Personal thoughts**

As with Learner 1, the major theme running through my interview with Learner 2 was that of homework and her thoughts about the current practice and ideas about how it could be done differently. Right from the outset, Learner 2 expressed the view that the stress of homework outweighed the benefits: *“Um, that sometimes it can be more stressful than it is beneficial”* (Appendix M – p. 163). She felt strongly that learners should be doing exercises in class rather than at home, since there is no one to help learners with homework at home: *“. . . and that we are supposed to be doing exercises in class, often it is not helpful to do it at home, especially if you have no one to ask if you get stuck with a problem”* (Appendix M – p.163). She proposed that homework should be for work that you don’t complete in class to take home and complete, not for new additional work: *“. . . so, if you can’t complete what you could have in class, then like take a tiny bit home”* (Appendix M – p. 168).

#### **4.3.1.2 Subtheme 2: Benefits of homework**

Learner 2 conceded that there were some benefits to homework, for example, to practise Maths examples. Although this learner had recently changed to Mathematical Literacy at the start of her Grade 11 year, she recalls that when she did pure Maths, it was beneficial to practise examples, whether at home or at school: *“Well, it does help if you do your Maths homework but obviously it would be better if you could do it in class and have help. But definitely, if it is in class or at home to do that kind of practising”* (Appendix M – p. 164). Learner 2 went on to say that she thought that homework was also beneficial for the purposes of revision: *“Yes, revision. Particularly for Maths you need that”* (Appendix M – p. 168).

#### **4.3.1.3 Subtheme 3: Non-beneficial homework**

Learner 2 discussed in detail the non-beneficial aspects of homework that is either never marked by the teacher, or that learners are required to mark themselves at home from a

memorandum that they have been given: *“So, for quite a few classes, they will give you the answers and you mark it at home and then if you have a problem you can ask your teacher - that has to be within the lessons, so there is no allocated time to kind of work through that problem. So, let’s say for Maths, they will start the new lesson, the new topic, and then if you have time to do questions in that period, then you go with your question. And then you are kind of not doing the other work, so it is . . . ya. But in other times where homework hasn’t been marked, then it’s just quite a mess because you can’t learn if you have made mistakes or not”* (Appendix M – p. 165).

Further comments from this learner emphasised the problem of not being able to engage with the homework allocated due to the heavy commitments to other things. She reiterated that under these circumstances the homework was of no benefit at all: *“I think I said this before, but just when you can’t fully engage with the homework is quite a big thing because it is not beneficial at all and that will happen if you have too many other things to do”* (Appendix M – p. 166).

#### **4.3.1.4 Subtheme 4: Positive aspects of homework**

Learner 2 acknowledged that there were positive sides to homework, namely, gaining an understanding of how work will be tested, *“Yes, I think an understanding of the way they ask questions in tests because ultimately I guess you learn so you can be tested! So that definitely helps you understand how to like to understand what information to like put into the answer.”* (Appendix M – p. 166) and learning how to answer test questions. *“So, it is like really great to work through those questions and know how to answer them”* (Appendix M – p. 166).

A further interesting positive aspect to homework was highlighted by this learner. She referred to History and English homework and indicated that she felt that homework in those subjects was particularly beneficial, from the perspective of background reading which she said added to her general knowledge. She added that the process of putting pen to paper in the form

of written homework was also beneficial to cement knowledge: *“And in classes like English or History, it is also really beneficial to have a discussion sometimes with other people. But I also think putting like pen to paper, like in exercise, it kind of cements the work”* (Appendix M – p. 165).

#### **4.3.1.5 Subtheme 5: Skills acquired**

Learner 2 mentioned a number of skills which she thought could be obtained through the process of doing homework, for example, creativity, group work, interpersonal skills, problem solving, collaboration, and people skills. However, she pointed out that the development of the aforementioned 21<sup>st</sup> century skills was dependent on the type of homework that was set: *“Um, I think often the homework questions that I have been given are more base level, the kind of factual questions”* (Appendix M – p. 167). *I think projects can be . . . like, can kind of like grow your creativity in the way you have to present them and if it is a group project, if it is a homework group project, um, I guess it does teach you how to cope with other people who don't work, so I guess it can build on your interpersonal skills, whether it was a negative or positive experience”* (Appendix M – p. 167). *“With problem solving, I guess if you are stuck on a question, it can prompt you to like to have to think harder without asking for help, but I think if you have eventually been on that question for hours, and you can't understand it, then you kind of feel deflated”* (Appendix M – p. 167). This learner added that homework could provide learners with the opportunity to discover how to manage their time better, *“In a certain way, maybe about managing time, could be useful”* (Appendix M – p. 167), and work independently, *“That kind of navigating like a whole task on your own, it makes sense”* (Appendix M – p. 167).

### 4.3.2 Theme 2: Emotional impact

#### 4.3.2.1 Subtheme 1: Stress on the learner

The first comment made by Learner 2 was that she found homework to be more stressful than it was worth, most of the time. The first stressful aspect indicated was that of time pressure: *“Yes, if you don’t have time to actually complete it and then because of something you have to do at home and not in class and you fall behind.”* (Appendix M – p. 163). Learner 2 addressed the negative feeling that she feels when she doesn’t understand the homework that she has been given: *“If you are not understanding it, it is definitely not a good feeling because you kind of go back to class with that negative feeling, and yes . . . whereas if it were all sorted out in class on the same day, it could give you a different mindset going into the next lesson”* (Appendix M – p. 167). She added that at times she simply felt overwhelmed by all the homework: *“So, sometimes it is all just too much, you don’t know where to divide your attention and what is most important.”* (Appendix M – p. 166).

#### 4.3.3 Theme 3: New thinking about homework

During my conversation with this learner, she often made suggestions about how homework could be done differently and in a way that would be more beneficial to learners and to learning. One of these suggestions was extra help to be made available during class time. So, a teacher would limit her teaching time in class so that learners had more time in class to do the work: *“. . . let’s say a teacher were to explain something in class but then limit their time, like explanation time, so that you could do your work, learners would know how to do the work. Learners who perhaps didn’t understand the work could use this time to finish the work in class”* (Appendix M – p. 164).

Further suggestions of new ways of setting homework concerned suggestions for the type of homework being set in order to make it relevant to the learners and have real world application: *“I think case studies and real-life scenarios. So, for example in Biology, if you were*

*looking at somebody with that disease and then like other factors in their life then you could understand what caused and yes . . . how it actually applies in the real world”* (Appendix M – p. 168). Learner 2 offered two final suggestions as to how to change the current homework process. Firstly, consider linking subjects that could be grouped together and setting combined work to alleviate overloading learners: *“I think for like Grade 8 and 9, they do Social Sciences, that is History and Geography. I think it is quite easy to link those two in a project”* (Appendix M – p. 169). Secondly, having a homework schedule with set days for certain subjects could be beneficial, she thought: *“So, like on a Monday only English . . . and then on a Tuesday like Afrikaans . . . so not everyone can give homework on a certain day. I think it could be quite clever”* (Appendix M – p. 169).

#### 4.4 Parent 1

Table 4.3

*Personal information for Parent 1*

<b>Parent 1</b>	Female
<b>School context</b>	She is the parent of Learner 1. They live in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. She is deputy chairperson of the governing body of her daughter’s school.
<b>Home language</b>	English and isiXhosa

## PARENT 1

A summary of main themes, subthemes and categories:

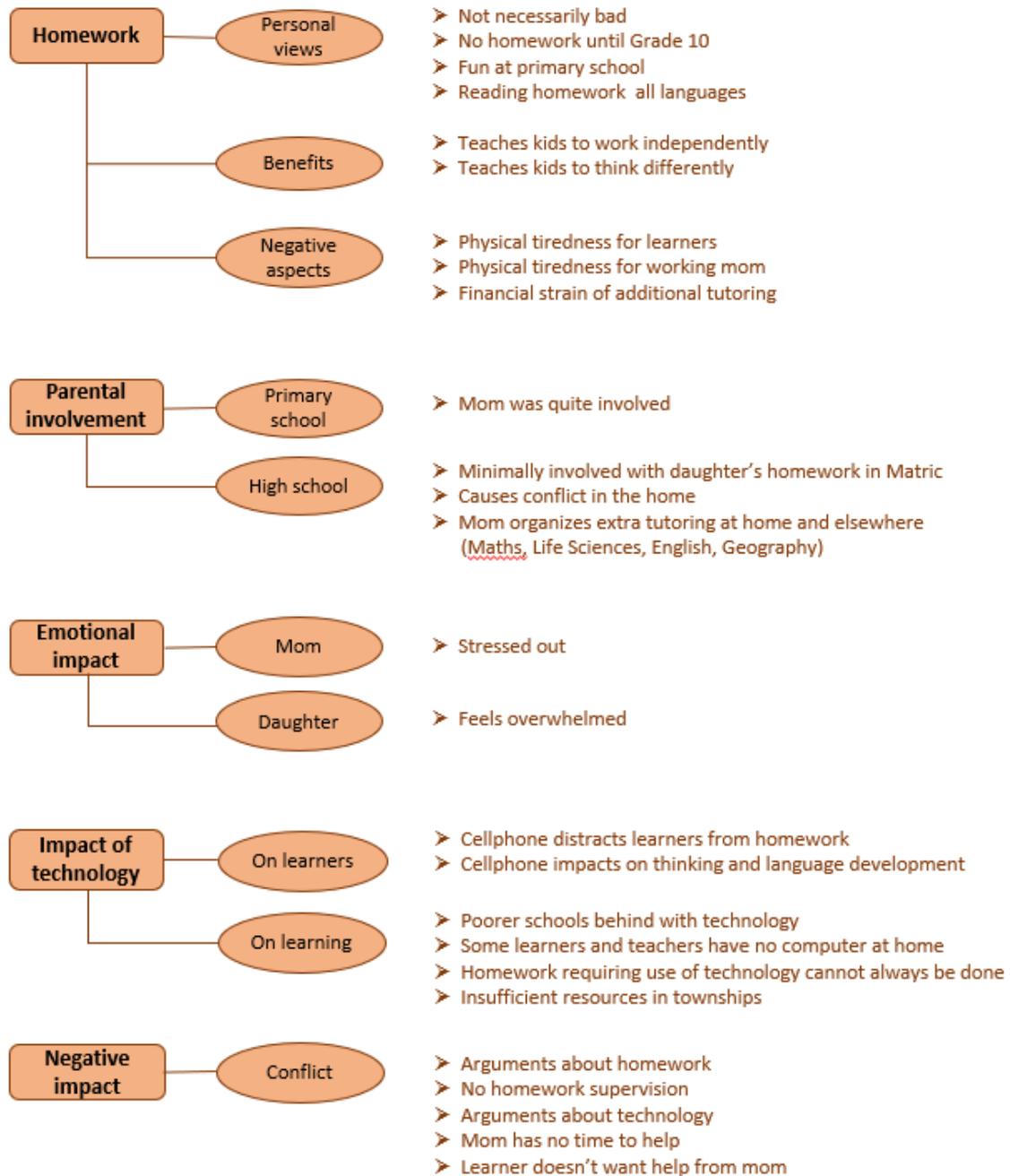


Figure 4.3: Parent 1: Main Themes and Subthemes

#### 4.4.1 Theme 1: Homework

##### 4.4.1.1 Subtheme 1: Personal view

Parent 1 is of the opinion that not everything about homework is necessarily bad: *“I don’t think it is necessarily bad.”* However, she expressed the opinion that it was fun at primary school: *“But where it was good and fun was when we did the practical science stuff at primary school level. When we had to build volcanoes and those kind of things.”* In terms of high school, however, she expressed the view that there should be no homework until Grade 10: *“I would say there should be no homework up until Grade 10. After that, I don’t know.”* Parent 1 expressed the strong opinion that reading was definitely homework that she considered to be meaningful and an absolute necessity: *“Reading homework. They must read.”*

##### 4.4.1.2 Subtheme 2: Benefits of homework

Parent 1 mentioned only one possible benefit of homework, which was teaching learners to work independently: *“I think at some point it can teach the kids to work on their own, independently of school.”*

##### 4.4.1.3 Subtheme 3: Negative aspects of homework

Parent 1 expressed her concerns about the physical toll that homework takes on both her and her daughter. Parent 1 is a single parent who is employed outside the home and sometimes has to work long hours. She spoke about the difficulty she experiences when coming home after a long day, feeling tired, and then having to assist her daughter with her homework: *“For me . . . it is hard for me to work then to assist with a tired child. And I’m tired.”*

Due to the difficulties she is experiencing when trying to assist her daughter with homework, namely her own fatigue and her daughter’s unwillingness at times to ask for or accept her help, Parent 1 addressed the financial strain of having to pay for extra tutoring off the school campus: *“So, I am stepping back a bit for my own sanity! Quite frankly. And handing it over to other people, but at a financial cost. So, she is not ever going to turn around and say to*

*me, you did not help me.*” According to Parent 1, this additional tutoring is imperative for her daughter to catch up work that she hasn’t understood in class and to focus on those subjects she found most challenging.

#### **4.4.2 Theme 2: Parental involvement**

##### **4.4.2.1 Subtheme 1: Primary school**

In the previous paragraph it became clear that Parent 1 was involved with her daughter’s learning process and homework at high school. At the beginning of our interview, Parent 1 mentioned that she was very involved with her daughter’s homework at primary school level. She noted that it was even fun to build things with her daughter: *“When we had to build volcanoes and those kind of things.”*

##### **4.4.2.2 Subtheme 2: High school**

Parent 1 noted that she had become less involved with her daughter’s homework when she reached high school. Explaining why she had chosen this course of action, Parent 1 said, *“A, because she doesn’t want me to, B because some of the stuff I don’t have time and I don’t like starting homework so late at night. But if I have to, I have to, I’ll do what I can. But I would feel that she is in that year where she is going to stand or fall by what she does.”* Parent 1 added that the issue of homework was a source of great conflict between her and her daughter: *“But the thing that annoys me is she comes at like 10 o’clock at night and says can I help her. That’s when I want to die.”*

#### **4.4.3 Theme 3: Emotional impact**

##### **4.4.3.1 Subtheme 1: Mom**

Another source of conflict expressed by Parent 1 was the issue of technology and her daughter’s apparent addiction to her cell phone. Parent 1 expressed extreme frustration at her daughter’s apparent addiction to her cell phone and experienced a feeling of loss of control when her daughter “hid” in her room: *“I don’t know. She actually hides in the bedroom a lot.*

*So, I don't know if she is doing homework or not. That is a big thing with us, that I think she is addicted to her phone and she splits her focus when she does her homework or assignment or whatever it is."*

#### **4.4.3.2 Subtheme 2: Daughter**

Parent 1 expressed the view that although she thought that homework could teach learners to work independently, especially in matric, there are times when they are overwhelmed by the homework: *"Yes, yes. And that is what I think homework can teach them. But I think there are . . . sometimes they are overwhelmed by homework, you know."*

### **4.4.4 Theme 4: Impact of technology**

#### **4.4.4.1 Subtheme 1: On learners**

Parent 1 expressed strong views about both the positive and negative impact of technology on her daughter's learning and homework. From a negative perspective, she expressed frustration at her daughter's distractibility as a result of her cell phone: *"She is always on the stupid phone. So, it has impacted on her thinking and the way she thinks and the development of the language, the English language."*

Parent 1 mentioned previously that her daughter's level of physical tiredness was a contributing factor to the negative aspects of homework. Later in our interview she added to that by referring to the time her daughter spends on her cell phone late at night: *". . . the tiredness also relates to her being late at night on her phone. Let me just qualify that. I find it extremely annoying that she allows the phone to rule her life like that, especially stupid things like Face Book and Instagram."*

#### **4.4.4.2 Subtheme 2: On learning**

Parent 1 referred to the impact of technology on the learning process in the classroom. She acknowledged that technology could have a positive role to play in the learning process; however, for poorer schools such as her daughter's school, it was difficult for them to keep up

due to financial constraints: *“And I do know that at some of the schools, particularly the high schools, they are utilising the phone to assist with the learning experience, but in the poorer schools, and I suppose . . . is one of the poorer schools, even if it is classified as a Quantile 5 school - they are only now getting their technology stuff in place in the school.”* And *“Yes, with the help of the WCED and you know . . . but they need at least one (indistinct) computer lab but they do have internet I think in all the classrooms and stuff like that. But it’s you know . . . so, ya.”*

When I asked her whether the learners were required to use computers and other technology to complete homework tasks, she said that this was not possible at her daughter’s school due to lack of access to computers by learners at home: *“No! At . . .’s school they don’t give homework where you need a computer at home. Because they can’t. Because half the school population is not going to be able to, you know”* She also said: *“Because one thing I did learn – not from . . . but my other work – is that for example the cell phone in the townships, the black townships, where the African children live, is that they . . . a group of friends will get together, they will have one phone and they will share it. Every day then one person will have the phone. So, on a Monday so-and-so will have it and so it gets passed around. So, if you will make (indistinct) a question, but you may not get the time or whatever.”*

Another issue that emerged during our interview was that many of the teachers don’t have computer access at home either: *“I don’t know how many of those teachers have access to computers at home. And maybe only part-time access.”* It became clear from this interview that the lack of technological resources in poorer schools certainly has a detrimental impact on the learning of school children as well as the potential homework tasks that teachers can set.

#### 4.4.5 Theme 5: Family dynamic

##### 4.4.5.1 Subtheme 1: Conflict

Parent 1 spent quite some time speaking about the impact of homework on the family dynamic in the home: *“Because sometimes it actually turned ugly, the arguments we have around doing homework and the importance and why.”* An example of a conflict situation that she gave referred to a situation where she offers her daughter help with her homework, but her daughter doesn’t want her to help: *“I don’t know what I’m doing. You can’t help me. I said, but you won’t let me! You know. And even if I say, but we have access to the internet, we can go find out. I don’t want to! You can’t help me! I’m tired!”*

Parent 1 highlighted, once again, the fact that she works long hours and very often cannot supervise her daughter’s homework: *“And last year, until February this year, I actually worked full-time. It was the first time I had to for a long time. And it impacted on her. She was left to her own devices because often I would work until 7 o’clock at night, even 8 o’clock before I got home and stuff.”*

Another source of major conflict in the home indicated by Parent 1 is the time that Parent 1’s daughter spends on her cell phone. This aspect was discussed in the section under the impact of technology in a previous paragraph.

#### 4.5 Parent 2

Table 4.4

*Personal information for Parent 2*

<b>Parent 2</b>	Female
<b>School context</b>	She is the parent of Learner 2. They live in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. She is employed as an English teacher in an independent school.
<b>Home language</b>	English

## PARENT 2

A summary of main themes, subthemes and categories:

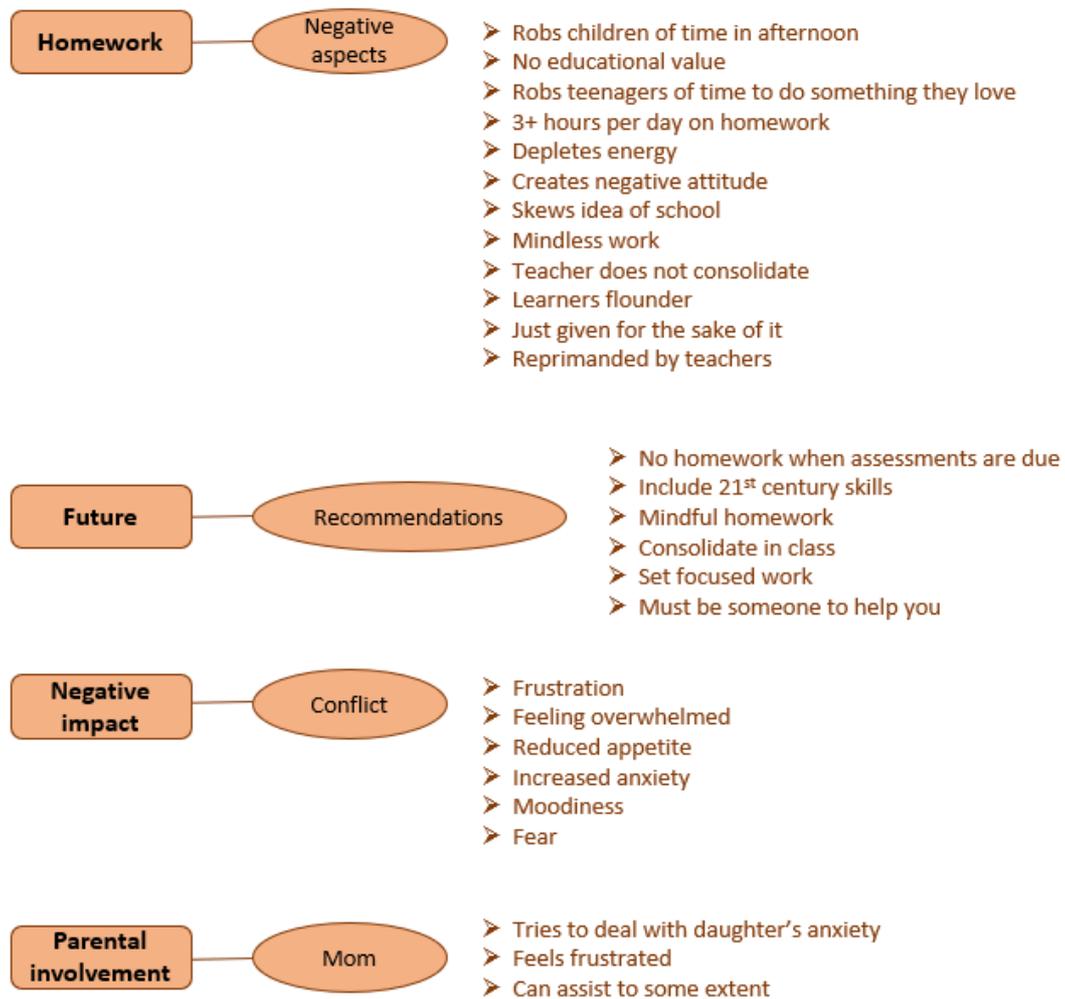


Figure 4.4: Parent 2: Main Themes and Subthemes

#### 4.5.1 Theme 1: Homework

##### 4.5.1.1 Subtheme 1: Negative aspects of homework

Parent 2 began her comments on homework by saying that she felt homework robbed young children of time in the afternoon and robbed teenagers of the space to do something they love after school hours: *“Just that it seems to rob my children of the time in the afternoon after sport of just having a little bit of time just to play when they were little. And when they were teenagers, just to find the space to do something that they love. Rather than sitting until midnight and after midnight.”*

She added that homework depletes the energy of her daughter and as a result, the development of a negative attitude occurs: *“That just depletes their energy and I think that a lot of the negativity that sort of slips in as a result of it and skews their idea of what school is about.”* She added that this negativity not only affected her daughter’s attitude towards school, but also towards certain subjects. This, not because her daughter necessarily dislikes those subjects per se, but when a long day at school is continued late into the afternoon and evening, then comments like, *“I hate this subject and I hate that subject”* are expressed.

One of the strongest views expressed by Parent 2 (who is a teacher herself) concerned the lack of educational value of a lot of the homework tasks set by her daughter’s teachers. She expressed frustration at her daughter’s inability to complete some of her homework tasks due to lack of understanding and consolidation in class: *“I often felt quite frustrated when my children were doing homework . . . would be doing homework and she got stuck and she didn’t know the answers and I felt that that needed to be consolidated in class as opposed to making it such a challenge . . . that is not what the challenge should be.”* Further reference was made to the lack of consolidation in class by certain subject teachers when Parent 2 reported that very often the homework was not properly addressed in class the following day. She said that frequently teachers were too quick to move on to the next section of work and not leave enough time to

ensure that learners had understood the work that they had completed at home on their own:

*“And then very often the pupil will go back to school the very next day and the teacher will move on to the next section and the last section wasn’t consolidated. And then they will be reprimanded for not having finished their homework but in fact it was just impossible.”*

Parent 2 continued to say that when her daughter got stuck at a certain point in her homework, she was unable to continue and felt that she was floundering as a result: *“I can’t do this so that means I can’t do the rest of my homework and then I flounder.”* Continuing her concerns about the lack of educational value of certain homework tasks, Parent 2 addressed the volume of homework that her daughter comes home with every day: *“... it is also the amount of homework and the amount of subjects that give homework on the same day... then I don’t really understand the educational value”* and *“I think that it is possibly about two to three hours’ worth of homework.”*

Parent 2 also referred to the *“mindless homework, just for the sake of giving homework”*. In her opinion, this type of homework was like *“rote learning, it is that kind of... it is valueless”*.

#### **4.5.1.2 Subtheme 2: Suggestions**

One of Parent 2’s main suggestions for improving the current way homework is handled at school is to focus on consolidation in class: *“I feel that if the consolidation had been done in class, then the pupil might have felt, I grasped this, I understand this, or if you don’t understand there is someone right there to just say to me, but hang on, you didn’t look at it like this - but you don’t have this at home.”*

The fact that there is someone in the class to assist the learners with their understanding of what they have done at home would assist learners greatly.

A further suggestion to combat the “mindless” work referred to by Parent 2 previously, is to set focused work: *“I am hoping that it will be a bit more focused, when homework is given. I am really hoping that.”*

Parent 2 also considered the impact that homework has on her daughter during the time of the term when there are many assessments to prepare for.

She expressed the view that there should be no homework during assessment time: *“They might have assessments, that’s also the other problem. They will have an incredibly loaded two weeks of assessments, and that is also the thing – like homework, if you have to study for an enormous subject-loaded or a content-driven subject, how difficult that is to absorb that information and still have the mental energy left to do anything else. That is what I could never fathom.”*

Part of my discussion with Parent 2 centred on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and I asked whether she felt that these were being included in the homework tasks that her daughter was doing. Her response was: *“No, they don’t. They don’t. Because there is no thought going into it. So, in other words, if you have to learn five pages of a second language vocabulary, you are going to learn them off by heart and you will never ever . . . those words will never be cemented into . . . like they will also remain abstract. They only become concrete, in fact homework information can only become concrete once you have used it and you have understood it.”* She offered an example of how she thought rote learning could be replaced to include 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as creativity, communication and critical thinking: *“So instead of giving 50 pages of words, you could say ‘create a lovely conversation between yourself and your best friend using the vocabulary that you have at the moment. It doesn’t matter how jagged and how bitty your conversation is’. But . . . so it empowers the child first of all, allows them to be sort of in charge of their own work and it also fosters critical thinking.”*

## 4.5.2 Theme 2: Family dynamic

### 4.5.2.1 Subtheme 1: Negative impact

Parent 2 described a number of emotions that both she and her daughter felt regarding the impact of homework on their time together at home. Of extreme frustration to Parent 2 was when her daughter got stuck on an aspect of the homework that she was unable to resolve on her own: *“I often felt quite frustrated when my children were doing homework; . . . would be doing homework and she got stuck and she didn’t know the answer.”* She explained that her daughter isolates herself from the rest of the family by being stuck in the study doing homework. So much so that she often has to be forced to join the rest of the family for a meal together: *“It isolates her because what she will do is that she will go into her study and you know, you will arrive home after sport and then suddenly like at 11 o’clock . . . or you have to like pull her out of the study to come and have supper and supper’s like gulped down.”* Parent 2 expressed concern about the physical health of her daughter as a result of these erratic eating habits.

She went on to say that her daughter often feels overwhelmed and that her daughter developed anxiety as a result. Parent 2 spoke of her own distress at discovering that her daughter had received a medical diagnosis of anxiety. She reported that her daughter often says, *“I can’t eat, I am too anxious.”* *“And that realisation, when the doctor said to her, there is nothing wrong with your stomach, there’s nothing wrong with this, you have anxiety, it was like a bomb dropping for her.”*

Parent 2 tries to assist her daughter to deal with her anxiety: *“But it was such a horrible realisation for her that she has anxiety.”*

Parent 2 also reported that her daughter has become very moody as a result of the heavy workload: *“I think it does affect the family because . . . she will get moody.”*

### 4.5.3 Theme 3: Parental involvement

#### 4.5.3.1 Subtheme 1: Mom's involvement

Parent 2 is an English teacher and considers her daughter to be fortunate that she is able to ask her mom for help with certain homework tasks: *“I do, but I think that is possibly due to my profession, so she is very fortunate.”* That being said, Parent 2 acknowledges that she is only able to assist her daughter up to a point, and this is a cause of great frustration to Parent 2: *“But there are certain subjects where I can't help her, and then I feel terribly frustrated.”* Parent 2 tries to assist her daughter by regulating the amount of time her daughter spends on homework. She says, *“I hope I have been a sort of good influence where that is concerned, where I have said to her no, you can't sit here all day and do homework.”*

### 4.6 Teacher 1

Table 4.5

*Personal information for Teacher 1*

<b>Teacher 1</b>	Male
<b>School context</b>	A state school situated in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. Head of academics. Teaches Science.  The learners at this school generally come from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. However, despite this, the school is known for its progressive leadership, sound academic ethos, and good results.
<b>Home language</b>	English and isiXhosa

## TEACHER 1

A summary of main themes, subthemes and categories:

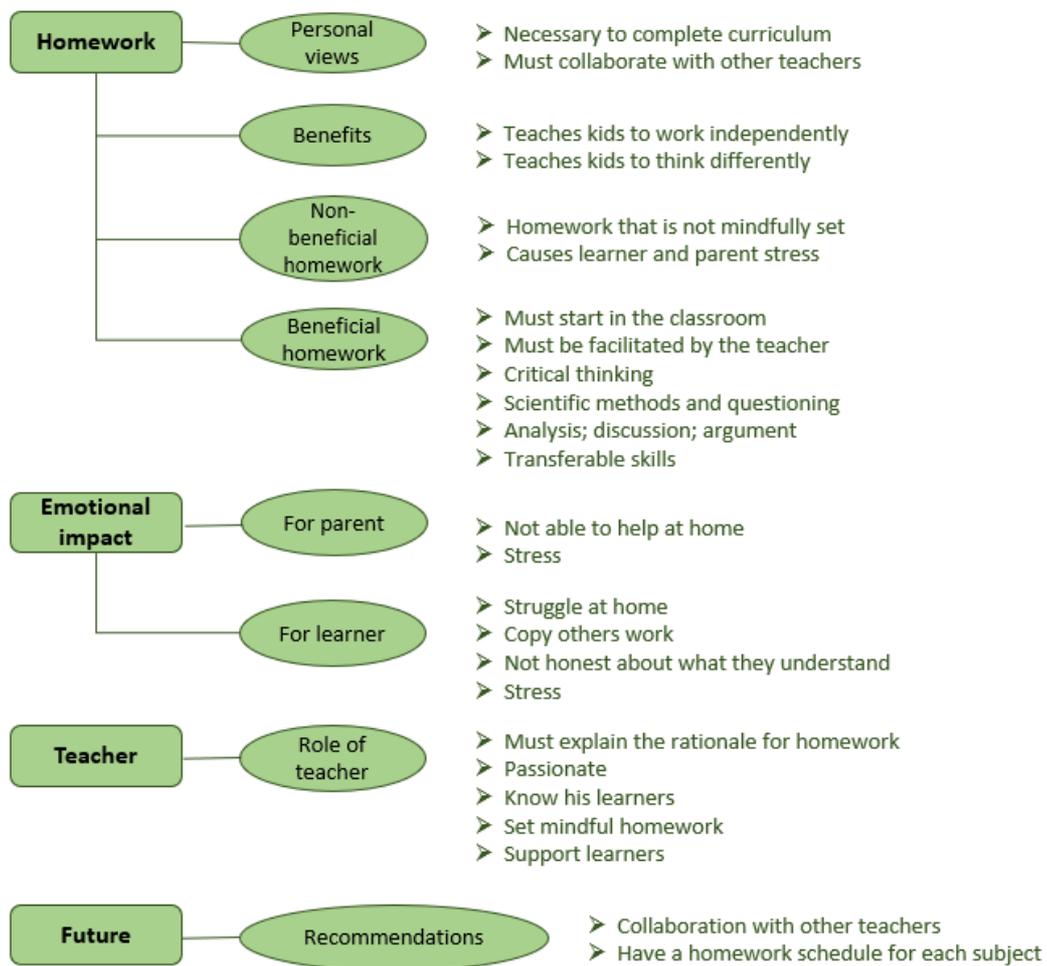


Figure 4.5: Teacher 1: Main Themes and Subthemes

#### 4.6.1 Theme 1: Homework

##### 4.6.1.1 Subtheme 1: Personal views

Teacher 1 expressed the view that homework is necessary in order to complete the curriculum requirements: *“I promise you, I wouldn’t be able to fit all and to do justice to the learners. You know, I have to give projects. I have to teach scientific method, scientific reporting, you know, all those. We prepare learners for tertiary institutions as well as . . . all those skills, so I wouldn’t be able to fit all in one year. So hence I assign my (indistinct) hence I assign my homework. So, my homework will be projects, my homework would be – it wouldn’t be something I wouldn’t be able to use. It should help the learners, either in their formal assessments, whatever skill I want to, you know, get from them, get out of them. So that’s my take.”*

Commenting on the negative aspects of homework, Teacher 1 referred to the amount of homework that learners have each day when all subject teachers assign homework on one day: *“Because at times you know, learners . . . probably they have got all . . . they do about seven or eight subjects, they get . . . with our school, they get home maybe late, maybe 6, some 7 o’clock. They have seven different homeworks.”*

##### 4.6.1.2 Subtheme 2: Benefits of homework

Teacher 1 discussed the development of important skills that learners could benefit from through the homework process. He mentioned critical thinking in particular, as well as the ability to discuss, argue, analyse, and make decisions: *“You know, your critical thinking as well as, you know . . . remember I’m doing physical sciences – that is my subject – so your scientific methods, they must be able to question things. Can you see? They must be able to analyse, they must be able to measure, they must be able to discuss, they must be able to, you know, decide, you know, argue as well. These skills are very critical.”* Teacher 1 also referred to the importance of preparing learners for tertiary education, not only the completion of the school curriculum: *“We*

*prepare learners for tertiary institutions.*” The transferable skills he referred to above were considered important benefits of homework tasks that he set.

#### **4.6.1.3 Subtheme 3: Non-beneficial homework**

Teacher 1 expressed the opinion that there were a number of reasons why homework was often not beneficial to learners. He referred to the importance for teachers to think about what homework they were giving learners: *“Negative aspects, yes. In a sense, there are many. Some teachers, as I am saying, if you don’t think about it, you just give a lot of homework to learners.”* Following on from this point, Teacher 1 discussed parental stress as a consequence of the amount of homework that their children arrive home with each day: *“I mean, even the parents get stressed because some parents are going to be at home, they need to help those kids with . . . .”*

#### **4.6.1.4 Subtheme 4: Beneficial homework**

Teacher 1 was adamant that homework had to start in the classroom in order for it to be beneficial in any way to the learners: *“So, my homework –it starts even in the classroom, during the last few minutes of my lesson, I will start my homework so as to ensure that they do it at home.”*

Teacher 1 reiterated the importance of the development of transferable skills highlighted at the beginning of this section.

### **4.6.2 Theme 2: Stress**

#### **4.6.2.1 Subtheme 1: Parent stress**

Teacher 1 discussed parental stress by referring to the concerns that parents have when they need to help their children with their homework or cannot afford to pay for tutors to assist them: *“I mean, even the parents get stressed because some parents are going to be at home, they need to help those kids with . . . .”* and *“Some of those kids they don’t have the luxury of private tutoring, they don’t have it because some of them they can’t even pay school fees.”*

#### 4.6.2.2 Subtheme 2: Learner stress

Teacher 1 addressed learner stress by highlighting how learners may struggle at home to complete their homework if they do not understand what the teacher expects from them:

*“You know, if you don’t know your learners, you know, and they don’t know what they expect from you, it can definitely stress them because, remember, some they are going to struggle at home. Maybe there is nobody going to help them, they are going to struggle.”*

He went on to say that learners may resort to copying work from others because they want to get the work right: *“They want to get this right, they come in the morning, they even copy without even knowing – because that is a problem.”* Continuing with this issue, Teacher 1 expressed the desire for learners to be honest with him and with themselves about what they know, so as to reduce their stress levels regarding homework: *“Rather than fooling me and thinking that . . . so you must be honest. So, some learners who do not understand what’s the reason for homework, the rationale behind the homework, they get stressed because they want to impress either their friends or their teacher.”*

#### 4.6.3 Theme 3: The teacher

##### 4.6.3.1 Subtheme 1: The role of the teacher

Teacher 1 believed that the role of the teacher is crucial in the learner’s handling of the homework tasks. Teacher 1 was completely committed to providing clarity, facilitation, and support regarding homework. He believed that as a teacher he needs to know the context of his learners: *“Because at times, you know, learners . . . probably they have got all . . . they do about seven or eight subjects, they get . . . with our school, they get home maybe late, maybe 6, some 7 o’clock. They have seven different homeworks. So, to fit all that in, so I must be able to think, to know the context of my learners as well. So that’s what I do first – know my learners, know the context.”* He emphasised the need for the teacher to be the facilitator and a support base for learners when they are doing their homework: *“So, I am going to be a facilitator. I am merely there whenever they are struggling, I am there.”*

Teacher 1 expressed the view that he had to be mindful about the homework that he set for his learners, to ensure that it was beneficial to their learning: *“I cannot just willy-nilly give the homework. No, no, no. That would be a waste of time. It should be something that is going to help them. Definitely, I think about my homework.”*

Teacher 1 was completely committed to assisting his learners with their homework and ensuring that they understood what was required of them and supporting them after school hours. He created a WhatsApp group for all his learners and was available to them after hours and on the weekend to assist them with their homework: *“What I have done in my classes, I create - with technology now - a WhatsApp group. So, in case at home you struggle, we teachers are 24/7 . . . 24/7! That’s my call. I am passionate with what I do, unfortunately! My work . . . 24/7. And they know that.”*

Another way that Teacher 1 provides support for his learners with their homework is by being available early in the morning before school to assist them with their queries: *“Because every day at school we start with a morning session. Because we know our kids. Without that extra tuition, going an extra mile, they wouldn’t be able to succeed.”*

#### **4.6.4 Theme 4: Homework revised**

##### **4.6.4.1 Subtheme 1: New approach**

Teacher 1 felt strongly that teachers should collaborate with one another to alleviate the pressure from learners concerning homework: *“There must be some integration, collaboration, coming together and thinking how to do this for it to work.”* He suggested that a homework schedule be considered so that certain subjects may set homework on certain days only. Additionally, he proposed an integration of tasks between subjects where this could be appropriate: *“Between teachers, and obviously some subjects integrate, can you see? We look at ‘those, you see, we are saying Physical Sciences and Applied Mathematics. They can come together. And try to . . . maybe we choose . . . maybe Monday we know it is Maths and Science. Tuesday. . . .”*

**4.7 Teacher 2**

Table 4.6

*Personal information for Teacher 2*

<b>Teacher 2</b>	Female
<b>School context</b>	<p>Teaches English at an independent school situated in the southern suburbs of Cape Town.</p> <p>The learners in this school generally come from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds.</p> <p>Many of the learners come from affluent families. The school is one of the top performing schools in the Western Cape.</p>
<b>Home language</b>	English

## TEACHER 2

A summary of main themes, subthemes and categories:

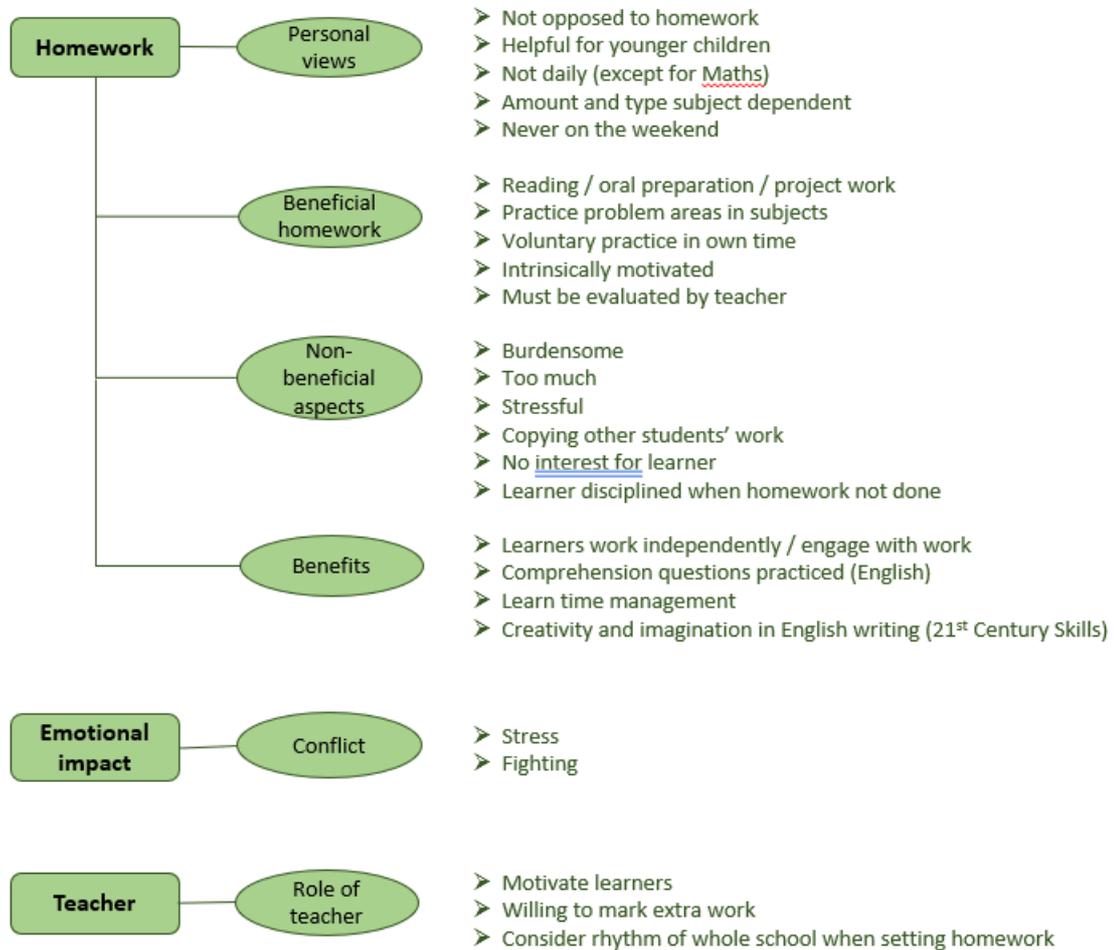


Figure 4.6: Teacher 2: Main Themes and Subthemes

#### 4.7.1 Theme 1: Homework

##### 4.7.1.1 Subtheme 1: Personal views

Teacher 2 expressed mixed views regarding homework. On the one hand she thought that homework was helpful, particularly for younger children who needed to read and consolidate work that they had done at school: *“You see, I have mixed views. I do think that homework, particularly for younger children, is helpful in that it consolidates what they have done at school.”*

However, she felt that when homework became too burdensome and learners had no time for anything else, then that was not helpful: *“... but I think when homework becomes a burden to the point that children are not spending any time ... there has to be a balance”*. In essence, however, she was not opposed to the idea of homework: *“But even problem solving and certain critical thinking, I do think in terms of time management and organising your life, that is key to solving problems ... and I think that girls do benefit from that in homework. I am not opposed to homework per se, I definitely think that there is a place for it.”*

Teacher 2 added that she thought that the nature of homework and the amount of homework set is largely subject dependent. For example, Maths is a subject for which she advocated for homework on a daily basis because she thought that practice is essential to learning for this subject: *“But I also do think it depends on the subject. So, I think for example in Maths, I think it is essential to their learning. I am not one to talk about Maths, because I don't know. But I do think that it is essential to their learning that they practise on a daily basis.”*

Despite her mixed views about homework, Teacher 2 strongly opposed any homework on weekends: *“I would never, ever give homework over the weekend. I think weekends should be kept sacred.”*

Teacher 2 also recommended that homework be negotiated between learners and teachers in order to manage time and stress factors.

#### 4.7.1.2 Subtheme 2: Beneficial homework

The most beneficial type of homework suggested by Teacher 2 was reading: *“But I want them to read. So, I give them reading.”* As an English teacher, there were times when she gave them oral work or project work for homework, but there was always time in class to work on these tasks, and collaboration and communication between her learners and herself regarding the best process: *“But even that, I try to give them time in class to do prep for the oral, and always with – if it’s writing that doesn’t have to be done in test conditions, I ask them ‘would you rather do it in class or would you rather do it at home?’”*

Teacher 2 gave an example of one of her learners who voluntarily did extra comprehension tests at home in order to practise this aspect of English which was problematic for her. This learner was intrinsically motivated, and her efforts were supported by her teacher who willingly marked her extra work. She was rewarded by a significant increase in her marks: *“So, she does extra worksheets that are optional. She does them, and she brings them to me to be marked. And she does extra comprehensions that are optional, and she brings them to me to be marked. So, there is a benefit to it.”*

#### 4.7.1.3 Subtheme 3: Non-beneficial aspects of homework

When homework becomes burdensome and learners have no time for other activities or interests, then Teacher 2 was not in favour of this onerous aspect of homework: *“I think it is hard for them. But I don’t think it needs to be a lot. I think that is the important thing, that it is not a lot.”* She discussed the problem of learners copying each other’s homework in order to avoid punishment from teachers. When this happens, she expressed the view that there was no benefit to that homework at all: *“Where I do find homework to be completely not helpful in the least is I see the girls frantically copying each other, getting a worksheet finished, so that they can have the homework done so they can go into class and present the worksheet to the teacher. To me, that is just a complete waste of time.”* This copying of homework is also a

result of learners having no interest in the homework that was set, which is also not beneficial according to Teacher 2: “. . . and some of them are not interested in the worksheet.”

#### **4.7.1.4 Subtheme 4: Positive aspects**

Teacher 2 advocated for independent reading, “*So, in Advanced Program English, then I want them to do it independently*” homework done in the learner’s own time and being intrinsically motivated, “*and she has been doing extra work every day on her English and her marks have gone up in just one term by 10%*” and for learners to have the time and space to work independently: “*Beautiful essays. If she is given the time and space to do it on her own.*” Teacher 2 felt that the abovementioned guidelines would create many positive aspects to the homework experience.

#### **4.7.1.5 Subtheme 5: Stress**

Teacher 2 highlighted peak stress points for learners during periods in the school term where there were many assessments scheduled on the academic calendar. The added stress of homework during these times is extremely stressful for learners: “*I think that there are times in the school calendar when – particularly at the end of the first term – there is a rush of assessments and then I think people feel this overwhelming burden of homework. But I really do think that varies.*”

The stress associated with parents fighting with their children about homework will be discussed in the next paragraph.

### **4.7.2 Theme 2: Family dynamic**

#### **4.7.2.1 Subtheme 1: Effects of homework**

Teacher 2 related her own experience of how homework was the cause of intense stress in her family: “. . .but I want to give you an example that I thought of in terms of the effect of homework on a family and how you negotiate with the family. My two children were two years apart. So not dissimilar sort of age groups in primary school. My daughter had mountains of homework every day and it was very stressful and there was lots of fighting! My son’s school, he

*had every single afternoon activities at the school – sporting activities. He was very involved. They had a prep time after school. At a school like . . . I would imagine that would be a brilliant thing. And it was not long because it was primary school - 45 minutes. Supervised prep time, but not facilitated, if I can put it that way.”*

### **4.7.3 Theme 3: The teacher**

#### **4.7.3.1 Subtheme 1: The role of the teacher**

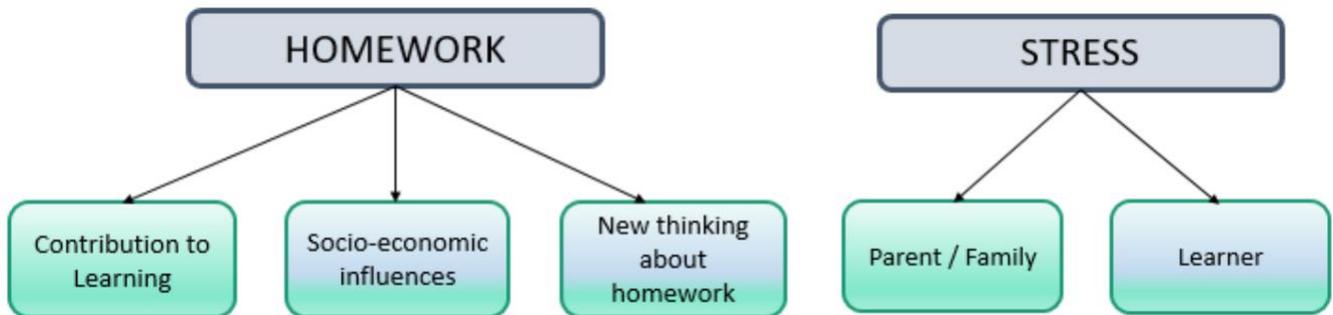
During our interview, the role of the teacher in the homework and learning experience of learners was highlighted. Teacher 2 related how she motivated and assisted her learners who were struggling by marking extra work they submitted to her. Of significant importance was the role of the teachers in collaborating with each other and taking cognisance of the rhythm of the school and reduce homework and learner stress during peak assessment times and during times when there are other extra-curricular activities demanding attention from learners: *“I do think that like when there is a production on, you know . . . at a boys’ school, when there is a major match coming up and they are distracted . . . those things need to be taken into account.”*

Teacher 2 was not in favour of a set homework schedule for each subject, however: *“So, I do think that a collaborative . . . but I don’t think it is necessary to say half an hour Geography on Monday, half an hour History on Tuesday. That I don’t think is helpful.”*

## **4.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented the main themes and subthemes as identified by means of the thematic analysis of the interviews conducted with my participants in order to provide answers to the research questions. I made extensive use of my participants’ actual words as reflected in their interviews, in order to maintain authenticity and retain the richness of the detail of their lived experiences.

## CONCEPTUALISATION OF FINAL RESULTS TO BE DISCUSSED IN CHAPTER 5



In Chapter 5, I will discuss the findings of my research which will be presented and discussed in terms of the existing literature and within the context of the interpretivist paradigm outlined in chapter 3. In addition, the strengths and limitations of the study will be discussed, conclusions will be drawn and recommendations for further investigation will be made. Finally, reflections concerning this study will be presented.

## CONCEPTUALISATION OF CHAPTER 5

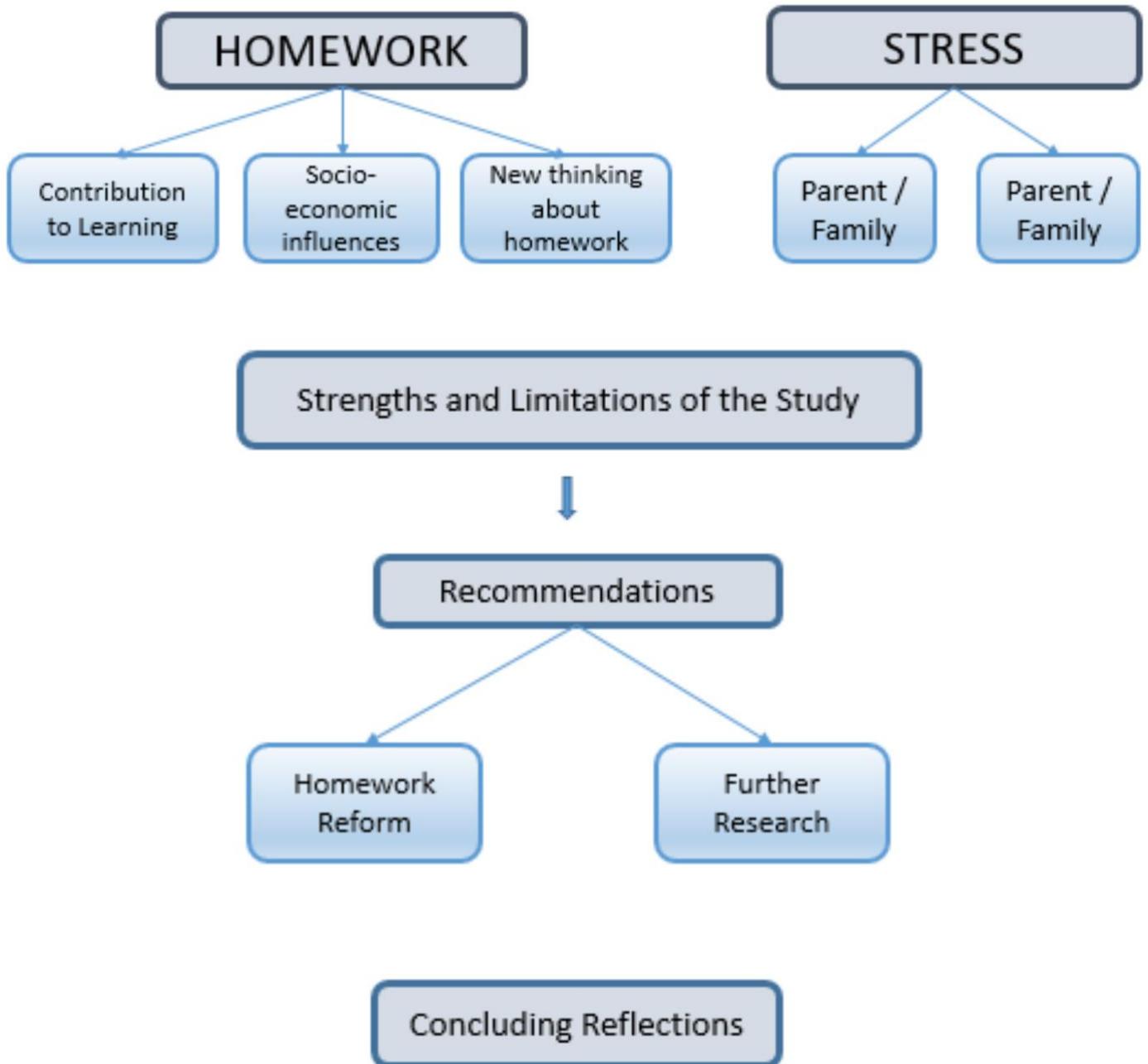


Figure 5.1 Conceptualisation of Chapter 5

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The study's primary aim was to explore the relevance of homework to learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Additionally, I wanted to study the concept of learning and explore the nature and inclusion of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in homework tasks of high school learners. In order to answer the study's research questions, the data that was gathered was interpreted within a constructivist theoretical framework and more specifically Vygotsky's social-cultural theory.

With regards to methodology, this qualitative research study used a case study research design. The recruitment of participants was done with purposive sampling and interviews were conducted with teachers, learners and parents to gather data. The subsequent data-analysis was undertaken as a thematic analysis guided by the work of Braun and Clarke (2006). After I immersed myself in the data I generated an initial list of ideas about what was interesting and pertinent to the study and began producing initial codes from the data. The data was coded through an iterative and reflective process, which generated multiple codes. Thematic analysis allowed these codes to be grouped into themes (generated by the researcher). The themes were identified in terms of their importance to answering the research questions.

This chapter will discuss the findings of my research into the relevance of homework for high school learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and will also offer the strengths and limitations of the study as well as recommendations regarding homework reform and further research. Finally, reflections on my research journey will be presented and concluding remarks will be made.

#### 5.2 Discussion

The process of interviewing six relevant, albeit diverse, role players involved in the homework experience has generated valuable insight regarding this age-old debate. All six participants discussed their individual opinions about homework in the context of their daily

lived reality. For teachers this involved the daily setting of homework tasks, for learners it was the daily responsibility of understanding and completing homework tasks, and for parents, their lived reality included various forms of cajoling, supervising, supporting and often disciplining children regarding homework tasks. My findings from these interviews will be discussed in this chapter under two overarching themes, namely, *Homework* and *Stress*. These primary themes and their related subthemes, namely, *relevance to learning*, *socio-economic influences*, *new thinking about homework*, *parent/learner stress* and *the impact on the family*, appeared as repetitive themes across all participants.

## **5.2.1 Homework**

### **5.2.1.1 Contribution to learning**

Participants interviewed for this research presented a diverse range of ideas and experiences regarding homework within their unique contexts. Participants were recruited from two very different contexts, namely an independent girls school and a co-educational state school in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. The benefits of homework and its positive contribution to learning were discussed and the negative aspects of homework presented as well.

Regarding the benefits of homework, self-efficacy (Learner 1), practice exercises (Learner 2), reading (Teacher 2), transferable skills and scientific reporting (Teacher 1), and independence (Parent 1), were offered as positive aspects of the homework process.

There was general consensus amongst all participants that rote learning and repetitive exercises were not the kind of homework that stimulated learners and fostered personal motivation and a love of learning. It was not homework per se, rather the usefulness or lack of perceived usefulness on the part of the learners that was the point of concern, often resulting in negativity associated with homework tasks. This finding correlates with Galloway and Pope (2007), referred to in the literature review in Chapter 2, whose research found that there was relevant association between the usefulness of homework and the mental and physical wellbeing

of learners. Additionally, Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) model of achievement motivation reinforced the importance of positive emotion whilst engaging in an activity, and the likelihood of this activity being repeated as a result. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) reiterated that these positive affective experiences were optimal for human learning and growth, particularly in situations that require effort. The findings of this study indicated that when learners were not able to understand the relevance of the homework tasks set for them, their motivation to do the tasks was significantly affected, as was their attitude towards the task. Both Learner 1 and Learner 2 reported that they often lacked motivation to complete homework tasks, and regularly completed homework simply to avoid getting into trouble at school. As Simplicio (2005) remarks, "Students quickly learn that turning in poor work is better than not turning in any assignment at all" (p.140). Following on from Galloway and Pope's (2007) reference to the importance for learners to understand the relevance of homework before engaging in the task, Teacher 1 highlighted the importance of helping learners to understand the rationale for the homework prior to being given the homework. Todd and Mason (2005) reported on the correlation between ability, aptitude, and motivation and learning achievement, focusing on the role of the school and parents in this regard. Teacher 1's perspective speaks to the motivational aspect of setting homework tasks, the purpose of which is to be understood by the learners and to foster positive motivation and engagement as a result.

There was an overall consensus from participants that the role of the teacher is crucial to homework and learning. Mindfulness on the part of the teachers regarding the type of homework that they set for their learners was considered crucial to the levels of motivation of learners and to the learning process in general. This referred to teachers putting thought into the nature and purpose of their homework tasks, rather than setting homework just for the sake of giving the learners something to do at home. The importance of setting homework tasks which had real world application, and which included 21<sup>st</sup> century transferable skills, was emphasised.

Additionally, Teachers 1 and 2, as well as Learners 1 and 2, referred to the significance of learners receiving assistance with homework in the classroom, both before and after homework tasks were set. This practice was considered critical in generating a feeling of competency and self confidence in learners regarding their ability to complete their homework. Teacher 1 in particular reported on how his homework tasks began in the classroom before learners attempted the tasks at home on their own. He revealed that he was available on WhatsApp after hours to assist learners while they were doing homework at home and he was also available at school early in the mornings to assist learners who were struggling with the homework from the night before. Parent 2 and Learner 2 reported on their frequent experiences where homework tasks were not checked by the teacher who set the task, and there was often no time allocated in class the next day for feedback and explanation of the homework. Hattie (1999, as reported in Todd & Mason, 2005) found that feedback provided to learners proved to be the single most powerful factor that enhances learning achievement. This feedback could take the form of corrective and diagnostic feedback, reinforcement, and remediation. This means that learners need to be told where they have gone wrong, what the problem areas are that they should be aware of, they should be affirmed regarding the things that they do understand and are doing well in and be provided with strategies to improve on problem areas. According to Hattie (1999, in Todd & Mason, 2005) effective feedback involves providing the learner with information as to why he or she understands or misunderstands the work, and what measures should be put in place for the learner to improve. Consequently, if the lack of feedback to learners concerning their homework tasks is a regular occurrence, it could be argued that homework under these circumstances is of no relevance to learning at all. In fact, such practice may only serve to generate increased anxiety and frustration for learners and decrease motivation for homework in particular and learning in general. Regarding the crucial role of teachers in the learning experience, Badenhorst (2005) suggested that the traditional classroom cannot stay the same and that teachers need to

introduce a blend of delivery methods that complement the learning material and the learner's involvement. The context of this discussion was within the exploration of a learning management system to guide tertiary learners through the learning process via a web-based platform. However, the phenomenon of change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century highlighted in this article provides food for thought regarding the need for change in classroom activities when a learner-centred approach is followed. Learner centred teaching focuses on the learner at the centre of the learning. This changes the traditional dynamic of the teacher-learner relationship by making the learner responsible for their learning while the teacher is responsible for facilitating the learning. Berge (2000, as cited in Badenhorst, 2005) tabulated some roles that are prevalent in classes. He reported that tertiary learners are no longer the passive receivers of knowledge but are actively involved in activities where they construct and reflect on their own knowledge (Berge, 2000, as cited in Badenhorst, 2005). Similarly, instead of learning to pass a test, they collaborate with other learners and discuss the learning material or completing assignments. Why, then, should these self-same 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of collaboration, teamwork, and communication not play a role in the homework process? If learners need active engagement in their learning (Khan, Egbue, Palkie & Madden, 2017) and if positive affect increases motivation when learners are engaged in meaningful learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), then the crucial role of the teacher in facilitating activities that generate these opportunities, emphasised by the aforementioned research, is acknowledged and confirmed by the findings of this study.

#### **5.2.1.2 Socio-economic influences**

Parents interviewed in this study were either personally engaging with their children and their homework or were covering the financial costs of providing additional assistance with homework and learning. However, part of the discussion with Teacher 1, who works in a school which is considered to be within a poorer socio-economic context, included reference to a situation where learners commonly returned home to find that parents were not available to assist them with homework. Although not all learners from Teacher 1's school

found themselves in this position, it was the case for many. Ndebele (2015) found that socio-economic factors influenced parental involvement in homework in the Foundation Phase in eight South African public schools. Parents either worked long hours or were financially or educationally ill equipped to assist their children with their homework and learning. This situation was highlighted by Elsasser (2007) who said that homework ensured that under-resourced children remain worlds apart from their more affluent peers, simply because of the differences into which they happened to be born. Ndebele's (2015) research underscored the relevance of parental involvement in homework by reporting that, in primary school, when parents showed an interest in their children's schoolwork, assisted them with homework and held their children accountable to complete homework tasks, children were more likely to apply themselves and perform better at school. Whilst Ndebele's (2015) research focused on primary school learners, Walker and Hoover-Dempsey (2008, in Locke et al., 2016) found that a high level of parental involvement in a child's and adolescent's school experience is a requirement of optimal academic success.

An additional factor for optimum learner academic success is, arguably, access to technological resources such as computers and the internet. This aspect of education and learning was raised in discussion with Parent 1. She pointed out that in many instances even teachers did not have access to personal computers and the internet at home; however, funding had been arranged to supply these technologies at school. Parent 1 recounted the story of many learners in the township areas sharing a single cell phone and data for internet access. This was done on a rotational basis. Findings of this study indicated that technological deficits among learners in a poorer socio-economic context certainly affected the type of homework tasks that teachers could set. For example, the general lack of access by teachers and learners to computers and the internet after school hours in one of the schools participating in this study, certainly limited the kind of homework tasks that teachers could set. Tasks requiring research on the internet, for example, could not be part of the homework

repertoire due to this technological deficit. Thoutenhoofd (2018) reflects on the perception that education is becoming an information-driven venture. He contends that data technologies permeate all levels of the education system. Hopmann (2008, as cited in Thoutenhoofd, 2018) added that with today's education systems becoming more and more data-driven, the increased predominance of data is becoming part of how educational concepts are understood. In addition, bearing in mind that the use of technology is considered to be a necessary 21<sup>st</sup> century skill and that the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills is considered to be a one of the key components of the current education system, learners and teachers who do not have access to such technology will most certainly have compromised opportunities for optimal learning offerings and experiences.

### **5.2.1.3 New thinking about homework**

Simplicio (2005) explored the controversy about homework and acknowledged parents' and educators' pleas for a radical rethink of the use of homework based on concerns about the wellbeing of children, the general decline in the love of learning amongst learners, and the negative impact on family life. Similar sentiments were revealed during the interviews with participants in this study and numerous suggestions were offered as to how to improve the current status quo concerning homework.

A recurring proposal was that homework should start in the classroom, facilitated by the teacher, and that the learners only complete at home what they were unable to complete in the classroom, where help was available to them (Parent 1, Learners 1 and 2, Teachers 1 and 2).

Learner 2 presented an argument in favour of shortening the teaching time in class in order to make more time available for teacher facilitation of homework during class time. Simplicio (2005) supported this strategy to increase the facilitation of homework during the school day and argued that rather than deterring from the learning process by taking away classroom time,

learners will in fact learn more by working closely with teachers to better understand and reinforce the lessons taught that day.

Teacher 2 recalled her own personal experience with her son who took advantage of homework facilitation at school at the end of the day. She applauded this opportunity and spoke about the enormous difference this made in building a positive relationship with her son at home. Her daughter, on the other hand, was not afforded the same opportunity at her school and Teacher 2 referred to the many fights which arose between her daughter and herself as a result of homework stress. Simplicio (2005) explained the value of setting aside time at the end of the school day for homework by emphasising that the homework is more likely to be completed properly under such conditions, and teachers will be better able to monitor the skill levels and progress of learners on an individual basis. Moreover, the opportunity for peer tutoring in this type of setting is excellent, allowing learners the time to help each other.

Recognising that some of the data in this study revealed that many learners went home to minimal adult supervision and assistance with homework, the idea of supervised homework sessions at school, alluded to by Teacher 2's account of her experiences with her son and supported by Simplicio's (2005) research, also finds credence in Sanacore's (1999) article. This article advocated for the setting up of homework clinics for struggling learners who lacked parental supervision and consistently available resources to help with homework assignments. The benefits of such clinics presented by Sanacore (1999) include providing learners with a safe environment within which to extend school-related learning in a well-resourced, caring, and stimulating environment.

An additional recommendation emerging from my research was that subject teachers collaborate more with one another in order to set combined homework tasks (Teacher 1, Learner 2). Teacher 2 also referred to her practice of collaborating with her learners to mutually plan and discuss their homework tasks. This issue of collaboration between teachers and learners

was raised in Simplicio (2005) where the possibility of a multi-disciplinary approach to homework was discussed. This article made a plea for increased coordination between teachers when designing homework tasks which would work to reinforce classroom lessons by providing creative more in-depth, thought-provoking assignments. This sentiment was echoed by Parent 2 who felt strongly that teachers should be more mindful of the homework tasks they set, and these should include creativity and critical thinking. Learner 1 made a request for “thinking homework” whilst Learner 2 asked for “case studies and more real-world application” in homework tasks. Parent 1 was adamant that all learners should have reading homework and Parent 2 suggested 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as critical thinking and creativity be included in homework assignments.

Simplicio (2005) also made a strong appeal for collaboration between teachers about the amount of homework given on a daily basis. Teacher 1 and Learner 2 supported this form of collaboration by suggesting that there be a homework roster each week whereby certain subjects could set homework on certain days. In this way the time spent on homework each day could be reduced. In addition, learner and parent stress, and feelings of being overwhelmed at times, may be alleviated as a result.

## **5.2.2 Stress**

### **5.2.2.1 Learner stress**

A further pervasive theme emerging throughout this study was the impact of homework on the stress levels of parents and learners as well as the negative impact of homework on family life. Both Learner 1 and Learner 2 spoke about the stress induced by time pressure and the fear of falling behind with their work. Learner 1 addressed the issue of lack of motivation to do homework when there was no understanding of how to do the task. Learner 2 spoke about frequently feeling that it was all just too much. Pekrun et al. (2009) gave an account of the pressure on learners in suburban schools to excel and gain admission to highly selective

universities, which may heighten a learner's fear of failure. Taking cognisance of Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) model of achievement motivation which reinforced the importance of positive emotion whilst engaging in an activity, fear of failure whilst engaging in any form of learning experience, homework included, is likely to inhibit real learning and reduce motivation and self-regulation in learners. Additionally, the freedom to make mistakes and to learn from them, which is a natural and arguably an essential part of the learning experience, may not form part of learners' individual learning process as a result of the mindset that failure is something to be avoided. Both learners interviewed for this study were from suburban schools and reported high stress levels as a result of excessive amounts of homework and the fear of falling behind with their work. Learner 1 referred to the fear of ridicule in the classroom if her homework tasks were not completed correctly. Hence, the freedom to learn by making mistakes on her homework tasks was denied her, due to her fear of ridicule and failure. Learner 2 spoke about her ongoing fear of falling behind with her work if she was unable to keep up with homework tasks. The potential cumulative effect of falling behind with her academic work could mean that her overall academic performance may not meet the standard expected from her teachers and school and could potentially have a negative impact on her applications to tertiary institutions after school.

Parent 2 also stated that homework was depriving her daughter of time to do the things that she really enjoyed, and which enhanced her personal wellbeing and creativity. Her daughter is a young woman who enjoys dancing and art and is often deprived of time to engage in these enjoyable activities as a result of copious amounts of homework in the afternoons. Parent 2 spoke of how this lack of time to engage in her preferred after school activities had a detrimental effect on her overall wellbeing, increasing her anxiety and stress levels and causing her to seek medical intervention. This sentiment was endorsed by Wildman (1968 in Vatterott, 2009) where concerns were expressed about the basic needs of children and adolescents being undermined by the forfeiture of social experience, outdoor

recreational activities, and adequate sleep, due to the excessive demands of homework. Furthermore, Simplicio (2005) addressed the hectic schedules of learners and the resultant poor quality of homework tasks handed in due to their being done in haste. This aspect of time pressure and homework was emphasised by both learners interviewed for this research. Both learners decried this aspect of their homework experience and desperately sought resolution and alternative practice.

#### **5.2.2.2 Parent and family stress**

Locke et al. (2016), referred to in Chapter 2, summarised homework as “the student’s task but everyone’s responsibility”. This sentiment certainly rang true for the parents and learners interviewed during this study. Both Parents 1 and 2 expressed deep frustration at the amount of homework their children returned home with each day. The additional frustration with their inability as parents to adequately assist their children with all homework tasks was expressed repeatedly. Parent 1 conveyed her dismay at her daughter’s unwillingness to allow her to help with homework at times, causing severe stress for both mother and daughter. In addition, Parent 1 bemoaned the distracting influence of the cell phone and social media when it came to homework. This was reportedly a constant source of conflict between her daughter and herself. Parent 1 also mentioned the considerable financial strain of paying for additional tutors for her daughter in multiple school subjects in an attempt to improve her daughter’s academic performance.

Parent 2 is a teacher herself, so she felt that she might be in a better position than some parents to assist her daughter with certain aspects of homework; however, she was still exasperated at the high levels of anxiety experienced by her daughter as a result of feeling overwhelmed by the pressure of homework. Parent 2 also commented on the disintegration of important family time when her daughter was so busy with homework in the evenings that she did not join the family for dinner. Kohn (2006) reflects on this aspect of the homework debate. He concedes there may be occasions when homework tasks may justifiably be given to learners;

however, these tasks need to facilitate meaningful learning in order to justify, in some measure, detracting from significant family time after school hours.

### **5.3 Strengths and limitations of this study**

#### **5.3.1 Strengths**

The two participating schools in this study came from two very different socio-economic contexts and represented the private and state schooling systems. The sample size was small enough to allow for in-depth and rich descriptions to be gathered, yet, simultaneously, was representative of the three focal groups engaging in the homework process. The researcher was able to gain deep insight into the experiences, perceptions, and suggestions about the current homework practice and its relevance to learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Positive aspects of homework that were reiterated by the findings of this study included independent learning and self-efficacy, reading skills and transferable 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

Awareness of key issues surrounding the status quo regarding homework and potential suggestions for improvement were highlighted and presented in this study. Relevant factors encompassed the usefulness of homework in the eyes of the learners, the role of the teacher in setting tasks perceived by the learners to be meaningful and teacher facilitation of those tasks to aid learner motivation and self-efficacy.

Cognizance of stress as a primary homework related component was explored in this study and the effect on family life highlighted. These findings may act as strong motivational factors when considering possible changes to the current homework condition.

Finally, the strong influence of socio-economic factors on learners' ability to benefit from parental assistance within the home was highlighted in this study as was the impact of the technological deficit experienced by learners from lower socio-economic contexts.

### **5.3.2 Limitations**

Although this research study garnered rich data about the lived experiences of the participants regarding homework and its relevance to learning, and the data collection method of semi-structured interviews was effectively utilised to the satisfaction of the researcher, the use of additional methods of data collection might have enhanced the study. These additional data collection methods could have included a document review of the current homework policies of the schools included in the study. Whilst it is possible that not all schools have a documented homework policy, further discussion with key role players in the schools may have served to explore afresh current policies or act as a catalyst for the development of new homework policies incorporating updated research on the topic of homework. Additionally, focus group discussions and interviews with interested participants from each school could have added depth to the homework investigation and debate.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the recommendations for homework reform and further research are discussed in the section below.

#### **5.4.1 Recommendations for homework reform**

The various suggestions put forward by the participants in this study, which have been discussed in this chapter, are summarised in the table below:

<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>
<b>Time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Learners given more time to do homework tasks at home;</li><li>● Reduction in the amount of daily homework given;</li><li>● Time in class and time at the end of the school day for homework facilitation by subject teachers;</li><li>● The possibility of setting up well-resourced clinics to support learners after school hours.</li></ul>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Collaboration among subject teachers when designing homework</li></ul>

	<p>tasks to reduce the number of assignments;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Collaboration between teachers and learners when assigning homework tasks;</li> <li>● Collaboration between teachers to determine how much homework should be set each day.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Teachers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teachers need to set mindful homework tasks encouraging 21<sup>st</sup> century skills;</li> <li>● Teachers should explain the rationale for the homework to foster learner motivation and buy-in;</li> <li>● Teachers must provide learners with constructive feedback on homework tasks;</li> <li>● Teachers must try to foster good interpersonal relationships with their learners.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The nature of homework tasks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Homework should spark interest, curiosity, and develop 21<sup>st</sup> century skills;</li> <li>● Homework tasks should encourage learner engagement, have potential real-world application, develop critical thinking skills;</li> <li>● Homework tasks should help learners develop a sense of agency and responsibility for learning.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The relevance of technology in learning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Technological deficits in poorer socio-economic contexts were shown to inhibit the teaching and learning process. Further research and interventions regarding ways to seek potential sponsorship for the provision of computers and other technological assistance and training, both in schools and for teachers at home, is recommended.</li> </ul>

#### **5.4.2 Recommendations for further research**

Since most of the research referenced in this study stemmed from studies conducted overseas, particularly in the United States of America, future directions for research on the perceptions about the nature of homework practice should be encouraged within the South African context. Apart from the study by Pfeiffer (2018) that explored a no homework policy in a primary school in the Western Cape, of particular relevance and interest might be an investigation into the existence of homework policies in schools and directives regarding such policies from the various education departments in South Africa.

Taking cognisance of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills referred to in this study, future studies could include an exploration into how these skills are being developed within and through the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) in schools in South Africa.

There appears to be a need for further research into homework practice in high schools in South Africa. Much of the research available has been conducted within the primary school setting, both locally and internationally. A further area of inquiry might be an investigation into the degree to which findings about homework and the relevance to learning in primary school can be extrapolated to the high school context as well.

This researcher expresses the hope that the findings of this research may serve to aid in some of the aforementioned endeavours in order to improve the homework condition for learners in South African schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **5.5 Concluding reflections**

My research journey began after witnessing increased stress among my learners over the past decade concerning daily homework tasks, and after reading an article in the media a few years ago about the principal of Sun Valley Primary School, Mr Gavin Keller, doing away with homework in his school. My curiosity was sparked by this courageous and unconventional act and I began to rethink homework practice in high school, with particular relevance to learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As I reach the end of my research journey, I am even more resolute regarding my initial perceptions and ideas that the traditional practice of homework needs to be revisited,

particularly considering the appeals made by participants in this study for homework which encouraged reading, sparked curiosity, creativity, communication, and problem solving and which fostered motivation among learners to actively engage in their own learning process.

Concurring with the sentiments of all participants in my study, I too believe that homework per se should not be discarded as an educational practice. However, the traditional homework convention often characterised by rote learning serving the daily agenda of teachers whilst overburdening learners and their families, should be reimagined by the transformative power of personal experience and recent educational research, in order to take its place with renewed vigour in the classrooms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## APPENDIX A

### WCED RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER



Directorate: Research

[Audrey.wyngaard@westerncape.gov.za](mailto:Audrey.wyngaard@westerncape.gov.za)

tel: +27 021 467 9272

Fax: 0865902282

Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000

wced.wcape.gov.za

**REFERENCE:** 20170913–4867

**ENQUIRIES:** Dr A T Wyngaard

Mrs Monique Nyback  
22 Gordon Place  
Gordon Road  
Kenilworth  
7708

**Dear Mrs Monique Nyback**

#### **RESEARCH PROPOSAL: HOMEWORK: TEDIOUS TRADITION OR ENTERPRISING LEARNING ENDEAVOR**

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **30 January 2018 till 27 March 2018**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:  
**The Director: Research Services  
Western Cape Education Department  
Private Bag X9114  
CAPE TOWN  
8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard

**Directorate: Research**

**DATE: 11 October 2017**

## APPENDIX B

### REC APPROVAL LETTER



#### APPROVED WITH STIPULATIONS REC Humanities New Application Form

22 January 2018

Project number: REC-2018-1479

Project title: Homework: Tedious Tradition or Enterprising Learning Endeavour

Dear Mrs Monique Nyback

Your REC Humanities New Application Form submitted on 15 January 2018 was reviewed by the REC: Humanities and approved with stipulations.

**Ethics approval period:**

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
22 January 2018	21 January 2019

#### **REC STIPULATIONS:**

**The researcher may proceed with the envisaged research provided that the following stipulations, relevant to the approval of the project are adhered to or addressed:**

The principal investigator has responded well to the REC comments in the feedback letter dated 24 October 2017. There are a few minor points for the PI's attention. They are as follows:

- 1) The risk classification of the project has not been changed on the electronic application, it currently still reads "low risk". See section 10 of the electronic application. [ACTION REQUIRED]
- 2) The consent forms for the parents should also include information that the schools and WCED will receive hard copies of the final dissertation. [RESPONSE REQUIRED]
- 3) The consent forms for the teachers should contain information about what will happen to the data should they decide to withdraw from the study. [RESPONSE REQUIRED]
- 4) The name and contact details of the counsellor should be outlined on the parent consent forms (parent ICF and the legal guardian form) as well as the teacher consent forms so that they can contact the counsellor, if needed. The PI should clearly state that this service will be offered free of charge if participants should experience any negative or uncomfortable emotions during or after the research interview. [RESPONSE REQUIRED]
- 5) In the permission letter to the principal of Thandokhulu school, the PI has responded to point 9.2 by including the following information:

*"I will request potential teacher and pupil participants to provide me with examples of typical homework tasks and assignments given and completed on a daily basis. I will analyse these documents to identify critical skills required for learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century."*

Has this information been included in the letter to the principal of Herschel school? This letter is not attached. [RESPONSE REQUIRED]

#### **HOW TO RESPOND:**

Some of these stipulations may require your response. Where a response is required, you must respond to the REC within six (6) months of the date of this letter. Your approval would expire automatically should your response not be received by the REC within

6 months of the date of this letter.

**Your response (and all changes requested) must be done directly on the electronic application form on the Infonetica system:** <https://applyethics.sun.ac.za/Project/Index/1612>

Where revision to supporting documents is required, please ensure that you replace all outdated documents on your application form with the revised versions. Please respond to the stipulations in a separate cover letter titled "Response to REC stipulations" and attach the cover letter in the section **Additional Information and Documents**.

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

**If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: Humanities, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.**

Please use your SU project number (REC-2018-1479) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

#### FOR CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary)

#### Included Documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Research Protocol/Proposal	CHAPTER1 FOR REC SUBMISSION	20/09/2017	1
Parental consent form	Appendix 6 Adult consent form	20/09/2017	1
Assent form	Appendix 7 Child Assent Form(Eng)	20/09/2017	1
Informed Consent Form	Appendix 6 Adult consent form	20/09/2017	1
Informed Consent Form	Appendix 7 Child Assent Form(Eng)	20/09/2017	1
Data collection tool	Appendix 3 Interview schedule - pupils	20/09/2017	1
Data collection tool	Appendix 4 Interview schedule - teachers	20/09/2017	1
Data collection tool	Appendix 5 Interview schedule - parents	20/09/2017	1
Data collection tool	Interviewguidelines	20/09/2017	1
Request for permission	Appendix 1 Permission letter to Thandokhulu High School	20/09/2017	1
Request for permission	Appendix 2 Permission letter to Herschel Girls School	20/09/2017	1
Default	Appendix 8 WCED RESEARCH PERMISSION FORM	20/09/2017	1
Default	Research approval letter	20/09/2017	1
Default	UPDATED CHAPTER1 FOR REC SUBMISSION_14 Jan 2018	14/01/2018	2
Default	REC RESPONSE LETTER_14 Jan 2018	14/01/2018	1
Default	Appendix 1 Permission letter to Thandokhulu High School	14/01/2018	2
Default	Appendix 6 Parent consent form	14/01/2018	2
Default	Appendix 7 Child Assent Form(Eng)	14/01/2018	2
Default	Appendix 10 - Parent permission form for child participation	14/01/2018	1
Default	Appendix 12 updated WCED permission letter	14/01/2018	2
Default	Appendix 13 - Counselling agreement	14/01/2018	1
Default	Updated Appendix 5 Interview schedule - parents	14/01/2018	2
Default	Appendix 9 - Transcriber Agreement	14/01/2018	1
Default	Appendix 11 - Teacher Consent Form	14/01/2018	2

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at [cgraham@sun.ac.za](mailto:cgraham@sun.ac.za).

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

## APPENDIX C

### TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

#### **[Homework: Tedious Tradition or Enterprising Learning Endeavour]**

[M Nyback – MEducational Psychology Thesis: 2018 ]

I, [ \_\_\_\_\_ ], agree to transcribe data for this study. I agree that I will:

1. Keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than [Monique Nyback], the researcher on this study;
2. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession. This includes:
  - using closed headphones when transcribing audio-taped interviews;
  - keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews in computer password-protected files;
  - closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer;
  - keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet; and
  - permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data;
3. Give all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the primary investigator when I have completed the research tasks;
4. Erase or destroy all research information in any form or format that is not returnable to the primary investigator (e.g., information stored on my computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

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**Signature of transcriber**

---

**Date**

---

**Signature of principal investigator**

---

**Date**

**APPENDIX D**  
**PSYCHOLOGIST'S LETTER**

**NATALIE SMITH-CHANDLER**

BA (Std); BA (Psych/Ther); PGCE (Cum Laude)(Unsw); MEd Psych (Cum Laude)(Stel)

**Educational Psychologist**

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5 January 2018

To: The Research Ethics Commission

**RE: PROPOSED MASTERS THESIS STUDY: MRS MONIQUE NYBACK, "HOMEWORK: TEDIOUS TRADITION OR ENTERPRISING LEARNING ENDEAVOUR"**

I am an Educational Psychologist, currently in private practice. I have been registered with the Health Professions Council of South African (PS 0120049) since January 2013 and have experience providing psychotherapy, counselling and support to children and adolescents of all ages. I am also GCP certified and this certification is current and up-to-date. Mrs Nyback contacted me to request that should any of the participants in her proposed study entitled "Homework: Tedious Tradition or Enterprising Learning Endeavour" experience any negative effects directly related to the study, that I be available to provide a counselling service to them. I have indicated to Mrs Nyback that I would be completely willing to provide counselling and follow up sessions to any participant in her proposed study, who may be in need of such a process.

Please feel free to contact me on: 082 3052221 should you require any additional information.

Yours sincerely

**NATALIE SMITH-CHANDLER**

Educational Psychologist

HPCSA Registration Number: PS 0120049

## APPENDIX E

### SCHOOL CONSENT FORM

#### STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

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Dear Mr.....

Your school is invited to take part in a study conducted by Monique Nyback, from the Educational Psychology Department at Stellenbosch University. You were approached as the Principal of ..... High School to participate in this study because your school meets the criteria for participants in this research process.

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore the purpose of homework to the learning process of high school pupils and the role this traditional practice plays in preparing learners for study and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The research will take the form of interviews with a pupil, parent and teacher from an independent high school and a state school in Cape Town.

#### **2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?**

If you agree to take part in this study, one learner, one parent and one teacher will be asked to take part in one semi-structured interview with the researcher (Monique Nyback). The duration of the interview will be approximately one hour at a time and place suitable for both parties.

#### **3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no foreseeable risks to your participation in this study.

#### **4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY**

There are no discernible direct benefits to you in terms of your participation in his study. However, the valuable input in terms of the personal experiences, thoughts and opinions of the participants will make a significant contribution to the current homework debate and potentially highlight crucial aspects to be considered in future studies.

#### **5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

There will be no payment for participation in this study. However, should remuneration be required for transport costs to the venue where the interview will take place, such remuneration will be made on the day of the interview.

#### **6. PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY AND IDENTITY**

Any information that is shared with me during this study and that could possibly identify your school as a participant will be protected. This will be done by making use of pseudonyms when reporting on the research findings. The schools taking part in this study will not be named. The interviews will be recorded on a voice recorder. The data obtained during the research will be stored electronically on a voice recorder and laptop, access to which is controlled by me. The recorded interviews will be transcribed by my administrative assistant, who will sign a confidentiality document prior to starting to transcribe the recorded material. The voice recording will be erased after the final thesis document has been submitted for grading. The information collected during this study will only be used for educational purposes.

## 7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

All participants can choose whether to be in this study or not. Participants may withdraw at any time without any consequence. Participants may also refuse to answer any questions they don't want to answer and remain in the study.

## 8. RESEARCHERS' CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Monique Nyback at [moniquenyback@gmail.com](mailto:moniquenyback@gmail.com) or at 0738085513 and/or the supervisor Mrs Karlien Conradie at [karlien@sun.ac.za](mailto:karlien@sun.ac.za).

## 9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [[mfouche@sun.ac.za](mailto:mfouche@sun.ac.za); 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

### DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

As the participant, I confirm that:

- I have read the above information and it is written in a language that I am comfortable with.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been answered.
- All issues related to privacy, and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide, have been explained.

By signing below, I \_\_\_\_\_ *agree* to take part in this research study, as conducted by Monique Nyback.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Participant**

**Date**

### DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

As the **principal investigator**, I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition, I would like to select the following option:

	The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.
	The conversation with the participant was conducted with the assistance of a translator (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this "Consent Form" is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Principal Investigator**

**Date**

## APPENDIX F

### CHILD ASSENT FORM

#### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND ASSENT FORM



**TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:** *Homework: Tedious tradition or enterprising learning endeavour*

**RESEARCHERS NAME(S):** Monique Nyback

**ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CONTACT NUMBER:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### ***What is RESEARCH?***

Research is something we do to find new knowledge about the way things (and people) work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about disease or illness. Research also helps us to find better ways of helping, or treating children who are sick.

#### ***What is this research project all about?***

This research project aims to explore what pupils, teachers and parents think about homework. Of particular interest to the researcher is whether these key role players in the homework tradition believe that giving and completing homework tasks significantly contributes to the learning process of pupils in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and whether this practice plays a role in preparing them to take their place in the world of work and/or tertiary education.

#### ***Why have I been invited to take part in this research project?***

You have been invited to take part in this research because you are a high school pupil who receives and completes homework tasks regularly.

#### ***Who is doing the research?***

I am a third-year Masters student currently studying to become an educational psychologist. Part of my course requirement is that I conduct research on a topic that interests me.

***What will happen to me in this study?***

Your participation in this study will involve an interview with me regarding your thoughts and experiences concerning homework. It will take approximately one hour of your time and will be at a time and place that is convenient to you.

***Can anything bad happen to me?***

Nothing bad can happen to you because of you taking part in this study.

***Can anything good happen to me?***

There is no direct benefit to you because of taking part in this study. However, your valuable information and ideas will contribute to the ongoing debate about the benefits or not of giving homework to pupils as part of their learning.

***Will anyone know I am in the study?***

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential because I will not use your real name when I write about the information gained in this research. However, after I have completed my research and analysed the information, I will meet with your teacher again for a follow up interview. During this interview, I will discuss the information obtained from you during your interview with me so that, if necessary, that information may be used to change or improve homework policy in your school. I will not use your name during the interview with the teacher. If you do not want me to use this information at all during my interview with your teacher, you may refuse to give me permission to do so.



***Who can I talk to about the study?***

If you have any questions about this study you may contact my supervisor at the University of Stellenbosch, Mrs Karlien Conradie. Her email address is [karlien@sun.ac.za](mailto:karlien@sun.ac.za).

***What if I do not want to do this?***

If you decide that you don't want to take part in this study anymore you will be allowed to stop being in the study without getting into trouble, even if your parents have given permission for you to take part. You may decide to do this at any time during the research process.

***Do you understand this research study and are you willing to take part in it?***

YES

NO

***Has the researcher answered all your questions?***

YES

NO

***Do you understand that you can pull out of the study at any time?***

The study has been described to me in a language that I understand and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions regarding the study have been answered. To ensure that I remain anonymous and my information confidential, the researcher will not share any information received from me with others, (with the exception of the teacher from my school participating in his study).

I have the right to withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and this will not affect me in any negative way. Should I decide to withdraw from this study I have the right to say whether my information from the interview may be kept as part of the study or whether I wish it to be deleted. If I wish it to be deleted, the researcher will delete it from the data base.

YES

NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Child**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## APPENDIX G

### Parent Permission for Participation of a Child in a Research Study

#### [Homework: Tedious Tradition or Enterprising Learning Endeavour]

[M Nyback - MEducational Psychology Thesis: 2018 ]

#### 1. DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH AND YOUR CHILD'S PARTICIPATION

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Monique Nyback. The purpose of this study is to explore the purpose of homework to the learning process of high school pupils and the role this traditional practice plays in preparing learners for study and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The research will take the form of interviews with a pupil, parent and teacher from an independent high school and a state school in Cape Town.

Your child's participation will involve one interview of approximately one hour in length at a time and place to be mutually agreed upon by yourself, your child and the principle researcher, Monique Nyback. During the interview, your child will be asked questions about his/her experience of and thoughts about the topic of 'homework'.

#### 2. RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no known risks associated with this research.

#### 3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS

There are no known benefits to the child that would result from the child's participation in this research. This research may, however, help us to understand pupils' opinions and experiences about 'homework' better and potentially play a role in reviewing homework policy in his/her school.

#### 4. PROTECTION OF CONFIDENTIALITY

We will do everything we can to protect your child's privacy. Your child's participation in this study will be kept confidential because I will not use his/her real name when I write about the information gained in this research. However, after I have completed my research and analyzed the information, I will meet with his/her teacher for a follow up interview. During this interview, I will discuss the information obtained from your child during his/her interview with me so that, if necessary, that information may be used to change or improve homework policy in the school. Your child will have the right to request that his/her information not be shared during this interview. All digital information obtained will be stored on a password protected laptop and hard copies of transcripts of interviews stored in a locked filing cabinet with access only by the primary researcher. After the research has been analyzed and written up, all digital and hard copy information will be destroyed.

Your child's identity will not be revealed in any publication resulting from this study.

#### 5. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to allow your child to participate or withdraw your child from the study at any time. Your child will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to allow your child to participate or to withdraw your child from this study.

## 6. CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Monique Nyback [cell number]. If you have any questions or concerns about this research or your child's rights as a research participant, please contact my supervisor:

Mrs Karlien Conradie
021 808 2037
<a href="mailto:karlien@sun.ac.za">karlien@sun.ac.za</a>

## 7. CONSENT

**I have read this parental permission form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my permission for my child to participate in this study.**

**Participant's signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Child's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

A copy of this parental permission form should be given to you.

## APPENDIX H

### TEACHER CONSENT FORM

#### STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

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You are invited to take part in a study conducted by Monique Nyback, from the Educational Psychology Department at Stellenbosch University. You were approached as a possible participant because you meet the criteria for participants in this research process.

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore the purpose of homework to the learning process of high school pupils and the role this traditional practice plays in preparing learners for study and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The research will take the form of interviews with a pupil, parent and teacher from an independent high school and a state school in Cape Town.

#### **2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?**

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to take part in one semi-structured interview with the researcher (Monique Nyback). The duration of the interview will be approximately one hour at a time and place suitable for both parties. After the completion of all the interviews and data collection from the interviews I will arrange follow up interviews with you. The purpose of this interview will be to discuss the findings relevant to your school. The duration of this session will be between 30 and 60 minutes.

#### **3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no foreseeable risks to your participation in this study.

#### **4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY**

There are no discernible direct benefits to you in terms of your participation in his study. However, your valuable input in terms of your personal experience, thoughts and opinions will make a significant contribution to the current homework debate and potentially highlight crucial aspects to be considered in future studies. In addition, the information obtained from the pupil and parent associated with your school, may shed light on current homework policy and practice in your institution. This may be beneficial for future debate and policy review within your school context.

#### **5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

There will be no payment for participation in this study. However, should remuneration be required for transport costs to the venue where the interview will take place, such remuneration will be made on the day of the interview.

#### **6. PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY AND IDENTITY**

Any information you share with me during this study and that could possibly identify you as a participant will be protected. This will be done by making use of pseudonyms when reporting on the research findings. The schools taking part in this study will not be named. The interview will be recorded on a voice recorder. The data obtained during the research will be stored electronically on a voice recorder and laptop, access to which is controlled by me. The recorded interviews will be transcribed by my administrative assistant, Mrs P Clark, who will sign a confidentiality document prior to starting to transcribe the recorded material.

Should the access to your recorded interview by a third party be problematic, you will have the option to opt-out of your information being shared. The voice recording will be erased after the final thesis document has been submitted for grading. The information collected during this study will only be used for educational

purposes. The researcher undertakes to provide each Headmaster of the participating schools with a hardcopy of the final thesis in which all identifying details of the relevant schools and participants have been anonymized. The WCED will also be provided with a copy of the final thesis.

## 7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you agree to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any consequence. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and remain in the study. If you withdraw from the study and you don't want your information gathered during the interview to be used, it will not be taken into consideration on the findings of this study.

## 8. RESEARCHERS' CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Monique Nyback at [moniquenyback@gmail.com](mailto:moniquenyback@gmail.com) or at 0738085513 and/or the supervisor Mrs Karlien Conradie at [karlien@sun.ac.za](mailto:karlien@sun.ac.za).

## 9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [[mfouche@sun.ac.za](mailto:mfouche@sun.ac.za); 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

.....

<b>DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT</b>
--------------------------------------------------

As the participant, I confirm that:

- I have read the above information and it is written in a language that I am comfortable with.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been answered.
- All issues related to privacy, and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide, have been explained.

By signing below, I \_\_\_\_\_ *agree* to take part in this research study, as conducted by Monique Nyback.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Participant**

**Date**

**DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

As the **principal investigator**, I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition, I would like to select the following option:

	The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.
	The conversation with the participant was conducted with the assistance of a translator (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this "Consent Form" is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent.

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**Signature of Principal Investigator**

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**Date**

## APPENDIX I

### PARENT CONSENT FORM

#### STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

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You are invited to take part in a study conducted by Monique Nyback, from the Educational Psychology Department at Stellenbosch University. You were approached as a possible participant because you meet the criteria for participants in this research process.

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore the purpose of homework to the learning process of high school pupils and the role this traditional practice plays in preparing learners for study and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The research will take the form of interviews with a pupil, parent and teacher from an independent high school and a state school in Cape Town.

#### **2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?**

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to take part in one semi-structured interview with the researcher (Monique Nyback). The duration of the interview will be approximately one hour at a time and place suitable for both parties.

#### **3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no foreseeable risks to your participation in this study.

#### **4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY**

There are no discernible direct benefits to you in terms of your participation in his study. However, your valuable input in terms of your personal experience, thoughts and opinions will make a significant contribution to the current homework debate and potentially highlight crucial aspects to be considered in future studies.

#### **5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

There will be no payment for participation in this study. However, should remuneration be required for transport costs to the venue where the interview will take place, such remuneration will be made on the day of the interview.

#### **6. PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY AND IDENTITY**

Any information you share with me during this study and that could possibly identify you as a participant will be protected. This will be done by making use of pseudonyms when reporting on the research findings. The schools taking part in this study will not be named. The interview will be recorded on a voice recorder. The data obtained during the research will be stored electronically on a voice recorder and laptop, access to which is controlled by me. The recorded interviews will be transcribed by my administrative assistant, Mrs P Clark, who will sign a confidentiality document prior to starting to transcribe the recorded material.

Should the access to your recorded interview by a third party be problematic, you will have the option to opt-out of your information being shared. The voice recording will be erased after the final thesis document has been submitted for grading. The information collected during this study will only be used for educational purposes.

## 7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you agree to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any consequence. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and remain in the study.

## 8. RESEARCHERS' CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Monique Nyback at [moniquenyback@gmail.com](mailto:moniquenyback@gmail.com) or at 0738085513 and/or the supervisor Mrs Karlien Conradie at [karlien@sun.ac.za](mailto:karlien@sun.ac.za).

## 9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [[mfouche@sun.ac.za](mailto:mfouche@sun.ac.za); 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

.....

### DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

As the participant, I confirm that:

- I have read the above information and it is written in a language that I am comfortable with.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been answered.
- All issues related to privacy, and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide, have been explained.

By signing below, I \_\_\_\_\_ *agree* to take part in this research study, as conducted by Monique Nyback.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Participant**

**Date**

### DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

As the **principal investigator**, I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition, I would like to select the following option:

	The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.
	The conversation with the participant was conducted with the assistance of a translator (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this "Consent Form" is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Principal Investigator**

**Date**

## APPENDIX J

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – TEACHERS

#### **Homework and its relevance to learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

- What is your opinion about homework?
- How much time do you expect your students to spend on homework per day?
- Do you evaluate the homework completed on a daily basis?
- Do you believe that doing homework positively contributes to your students' learning? If so, in what way does homework positively contribute to their learning? Give a reason/s for your answer.
- In your experience does homework have any effect on pupil school related stress?
- In your opinion, what are the positive aspects of homework?
- In your opinion, what are the negative aspects of homework?
- What skills do you think that your students acquire by doing homework?
- According to current research, the following 4 skills are key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that learners should acquire: **Collaboration and teamwork, Creativity and imagination, Critical thinking, Problem solving.** In your experience, do you think that daily homework fosters the development of these skills? Give reasons for your response and provide examples illustrating your response.
- Do you think that homework prepares your students for tertiary study or the world of work? Give reasons for your response.
- What type of homework activities do you consider to be meaningful and relevant?
- Do you think that homework should be banned at school? If so, why? If not, why not?

## APPENDIX K

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – PARENTS

#### Homework and its relevance to learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

- What is your opinion about homework?
- How much time does your son/daughter spend on homework per day?
- In what ways do you assist your child with homework/would you like to assist your child with homework?
- Do you believe that doing homework positively contributes to your son/daughter's learning? If so, in what way does homework positively contribute to their learning? Give a reason/s for your answer.
- In what ways do you think that homework could influence family interactions and dynamics?
- What are the positive aspects of homework?
- What are the negative aspects of homework?
- What skills do you think that your son/daughter acquires by doing homework?
- According to current research, the following 4 skills are key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that learners should acquire: **Collaboration and teamwork, Creativity and imagination, Critical thinking, Problem solving.** In your experience, do you think that daily homework fosters the development of these skills? Give reasons for your response and provide examples illustrating your response.
- Do you think that homework prepares your son/daughter for tertiary study or the world of work? Give reasons for your response.
- What type of homework activities do you consider to be meaningful and relevant?
- Do you think that the homework policy at your child's school should be reviewed? If so, why? If not, why not?

## APPENDIX L

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – LEARNERS

#### Homework and its relevance to learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

- What is your opinion about homework?
- How much time do you spend on homework per day?
- Does the homework you complete for each subject significantly and positively contribute to your learning? Give a reason/s for your answer.
- What are the positive aspects of doing homework?
- What are the negative aspects of doing homework?
- What skills do you think that you acquire by doing homework?
- According to current research, the following 4 skills are key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that learners should acquire: **Collaboration and teamwork, creativity and imagination, critical thinking, problem solving**. In your experience, do you think that the homework you do daily fosters the development of these skills? Give reasons for your response and provide examples illustrating your response.
- Do you think that homework prepares you for tertiary study or the world of work? Give reasons for your response.
- If you could decide on the kind of homework you are given, what type of homework activities would you find meaningful and relevant?
- Do you think that homework should be banned at school? If so, why? If not, why not?

## APPENDIX M

## EXAMPLE OF TRANSCRIBED AND CODED INTERVIEW

## Interview with Learner 2 ( February 2018)

R:	This is an interview with Learner 2 about homework. <i>Learner 2</i> , thank you so much for being willing to talk to me today. I really appreciate it and I am just going to ask you a few questions and the interview will just go and take a life of its own. Anything that you want to say, feel free, OK? So, the first and obvious question is, what is your opinion about homework as a high school student?
L2:	Um, that <b>sometimes it can be more stressful than it is beneficial</b> . And that we <b>are supposed to be doing exercises in class, often it is not helpful to do it at home especially if you have no one to ask if you get stuck with a problem</b> . Ya.
R:	So, the stressful part of homework would be partly that if you get stuck, you don't know what you can ask? Are there other things that you find stressful about having homework?
L2:	Yes, <b>if you don't have time to actually complete it</b> and then because of something you have to do at home and not in class and <b>you fall behind</b> , so if you can actually do it then you actually feel you are like <b>not on top of things</b> . And if you have sport or sometimes if you have just more than one subject for homework, <b>that all compiles and then you don't do each like piece of homework property</b> . So. it's kind of <b>just a brief overview like not proper answers, it's not useful</b> .
R:	You're not actually engaging with the subject. Are there certain subjects that are more stressful in terms of homework than others?
L2:	Yes, well, I have just changed to <b>Maths Lit this year and it's great, even though I still have homework, we actually do get time to finish in class</b> . But when I did Maths, <b>Maths homework was very stressful</b> because although there are apps that can help with you with sums, it is still something that is <b>better explained by a teacher who is obviously not at home</b> . And often if you get stuck with one question, <b>the rest of the exercise you won't know how to do either</b> .
R:	So that is interesting, because I am hearing you say quite a bit is that in class you have got help, but coming home there is nothing. So, one of my later questions which I am going to bring in now is, if you could change what homework looks like or have something as an alternative, what would that be?
L2:	To do at home?
R:	Or either the homework that are getting at the moment, that you can't do sometimes because there is no help, would there be a way of covering that work in school time? Do you think there is an alternative to say doing your maths homework at home? Obviously

your teacher wants you to do some additional work. So, is there something else that one could think about there in terms of completing that work, but in a setting at school where you could have some help available to you?

L2: Well, things like a help desk are helpful, an extra . . . I know for the older grades in Maths particularly they have sessions on a particular topic and also the time pressure of finishing the curriculum, not spending a lot of time . . . let's say a teacher were to explain something in class but then limit their time, like explanation time, so that you could do your work. Sometimes the girls may feel it wasn't covered properly, so they could get time to finish it in class.

R: So, you are a little bit stuck because you need the explanation time in class, but you also need the time where you can work on problems and have help available to you. What are those apps that you were talking about? You said there were apps that could help you.

L2: I think there is one called Photo Map. You can take a photo of the sum and it gives you the step by step . . . like the next step to the sum, but . . .

R: Really? I've never heard of that. So, Maths is a biggie in terms of homework.

L2: Yes. I don't know what the solution is there!

R: So, are there certain subjects for which you would say you find your homework beneficial?

L2: Um, well, I actually don't get that much homework anymore. I am trying to think of all my subjects. In the younger grades I think it is particularly worse because they do all the subjects.

R: Because you are in Grade 12 now.

L2: Did I ever find homework beneficial? Besides if you have something on after school as well, sometimes you are just so tired. But let me think . . . beneficial homework . . . well, it does help if you do your Maths homework but obviously it would be better if you could do it in class and have help. But definitely if it is in class or at home to do that kind of practising.

R: Revision.

L2: Yes, revision. Particularly for Maths you need that.

R: So, there is a sense whereby you need some form of additional work on certain subjects like Maths, which require some understanding and practical application. But maybe homework is not the best way of achieving that. I think that is what I am hearing you saying. Thank you.

R:	Do you think that the homework that you do get across your subjects, um, positively impacts your general learning at all?
L2:	Um . . . it is quite hard to say because not that I'm not busy and not that I don't have work, but it is not per se homework. Like I'll use the example for my <b>History research essay which is something I am working on at home now</b> . So, I guess it could be homework. Um, what was the question, sorry?
R:	I am asking are there any is there any aspect of your homework on any subject that you do find positively is positive and impacts positively on your learning?
L2:	Well, I think maybe for <b>History and English</b> , if we have to do some <b>background reading, I think you gain more general knowledge</b> as well. Like a background . . . that could be helpful.
R:	Thank you. That is a very good point. Something that just occurred to me – this homework that you do, you take to class the next day. Does the teacher always mark it?
L2:	<b>Sometimes, it depends.</b>
R:	So sometimes you will come home, you will do the homework, you will go to class and it won't necessarily be marked?
L2:	Yes.
R:	How do you the know that the homework that you have done is correct or not?
L2:	<b>You don't.</b>
R:	You don't.
L2:	So, for quite a few classes, they will give you the answers and you mark it at home and then if you have a problem you can ask your teacher - that has to be within the lessons, <b>so there is no allocated time to kind of work through that problem</b> . So, let's say for Maths, they will start the new lesson, the new topic, and then if you have time to do questions in that period, then you go with your question. And then you are kind of not doing the other work, so it is . . . ya. But in other times where homework hasn't been marked then it's just quite a mess because you <b>can't learn if you have made a mistake or not</b> .
R:	And that goes back to my question: is the homework beneficial to your learning? Is it positively contributing to your learning, and if it is not being marked and you can't get a sense of whether you have done something right or not and if you have done something wrong, what you have done wrong, then it sounds to me like in that particular case the homework is taking up your time but is not really beneficial to your learning.

L2:	I definitely think that exercises and like additional - <b>any additional kind of working like through the content is beneficial, but not necessarily at home and alone.</b> And in classes like English or History, it is also really beneficial to have <b>a discussion sometimes with other people.</b> But I also think <b>putting like pen to paper, like in an exercise, it kinds of cements the work.</b>
R:	Right. So, there are certain aspects to extra work on subjects that are really beneficial. The question is, is it best done alone at home as homework, or in another way, whatever that might be? We have spoken a little bit about the negative aspects of homework. I am hearing very much that it is a time factor sometimes; I am hearing that sometimes you get stuck and then there isn't anyone to ask; I'm hearing that sometimes the homework is not marked and so you have no idea of how you have managed with that work. Is there anything else that comes to mind that you might think of that could be a negative outcome of having homework? Across any subjects.
L2:	I'm just thinking.
R:	Think as long as you want to.
L2:	I think I said this before, but <b>just when you can't fully engage with the homework is quite a big thing</b> because it is not beneficial at all and that will happen if you have too many other things to do. So . . . can homework also refer to projects?
R:	Yes!
L2:	So, <b>sometimes it is all just too much,</b> you don't know where to divide your attention and what is most important, so . . .
R:	It sounds to me that sometimes you feel very thinly spread and your attention needs to be scattered across quite a lot of things.
L2:	Yes.
R:	And then that perhaps is not all that helpful.
L2:	Yes.
R:	Do you feel that you acquire any positive skills by doing homework?
L2:	<b>Yes, I think an understanding of the way they ask questions in tests,</b> because ultimately I guess you learn so you can be tested! So that definitely helps you understand how to like to understand what information to like put into the answer, and I guess that is where people, you know, don't do well in comprehension or like evaluative kind of thinking questions, struggle. So it is like really great to <b>work through those questions and know how to answer them.</b>

R:	OK. Thank you. Because you are talking about evaluative kind of thinking and that kind of thing, and it kind of leads very nicely into another question that I have because part of my interest is I feel as people involved in education, we should be preparing our students for their life after school, whether it be in the world of work or whether it be at university or college or Technikon. And the research today says that the following four skills are really top 21 <sup>st</sup> century skills that we as working and studying people should have, and they are collaboration and teamwork, creativity, imagination, critical thinking and problem solving. So, in your experience, do you think that your homework tasks that you are given in any way help you to develop teamwork, creativity, imagination, critical thinking, problem solving?
L2:	Um, I think often the homework questions that I have been given are more base level, the kind of factual questions. In the test they will give you those evaluative questions which maybe should also be included in homework. I think projects can be . . . like, can kind of like grow your creativity in the way you have to present them and if it is a group project, if it is a homework group project, um, I guess it does teach you how to cope with other people who don't work, so I guess it can build on your interpersonal skills, whether it was a negative or a positive experience.
R:	Right, that's a very good point because wherever you find yourself in life, you are going to have to work with people, probably some of the time, and you are not always going to work in the same way as other people do and you are not always going to like the people that you work with. So, group work is an excellent way of developing those kinds of skills like you said - your interpersonal skills, your conflict management, and that kind of thing. So . . .
L2:	With problem solving, I guess if you are stuck on a question, it can prompt you to like to have to think harder without asking for help, but I think if you have eventually been on that question for hours, and you can't understand it, then you kind of feel deflated. So, it's a double . . .
R:	So yes, that's another thing I think about now. Are there any emotional effects that you feel? I mean emotionally in terms of the effects of homework sometimes. How does that make you feel?
L2:	If you are not understanding it, it is definitely not a good feeling because you kind of go back to class with that negative feeling, and yes . . . whereas if it were all sorted out in class on the same day, it could give you a different mindset going into the next lesson. Yes . . .
R:	It is completely understandable. . . ., do you think that homework per se prepares you for tertiary study after school wherever it might be, at university or college or Technikon?
L2:	In a certain way, maybe about managing time, could be useful. The kind of like homework where it is just a set of questions that you have to answer, like on a specific

	topic, maybe not so much. But <b>projects and bigger things</b> like that, although they are more stressful to do at home, I think that kind of thing will help you.
R:	Thank you.
L2:	That kind of <b>navigating like a whole task on your own</b> , it makes sense.
R:	Yes, it does make sense. So, if I said to you, you could decide on the kind of homework that you are given - any subject - what type of homework activities would you think you would choose that you would find meaningful and relevant to your learning overall?
L2:	Um, can you give me examples?
R:	So, if . . . you've just said to me that you find some of the homework is very factual and it is very basic and that you know when you get to the tests or the exams, then maybe the more abstract or higher order questioning starts coming out. So I'm saying, hmmm, if that is the kind of skill development that we are looking for, the problem solving, the creativity, the analytical thinking, that you seem to get questioned on in the exam situation – if we took homework tasks and said OK, what would homework look like in order for it to be developing beneficial skills and not just parrot fashion answering of facts? What might an example of homework task be? It might be, as you said, projects and group work. Although they are painful, it does sometimes help you to develop certain skills. So, what might homework look like differently?
L2:	<b>I think case studies and real-life scenarios</b> . So, for example in biology, if you were looking at somebody with that disease and then like other factors in their life then you could understand what caused and yes . . . <b>how it actually applies in the real world</b> .
R:	That is a wonderful example, thank you.
R:	Do you think homework should be banned at school?
L2:	<b>I think it should be avoided</b> , but if I don't think . . . I think maybe time . . . but classes could fall behind if let's say the girls are given time in class to complete a task, and then they don't and then if you were to give them another lesson and another lesson, then like you could fall behind, <b>so if you can't complete what you could have in class, then like take a tiny bit home</b> .
R:	Right, so that is also what research has shown. Homework was supposed to be, originally, to complete something at home that you were not able to finish in class, which is exactly what you are saying. But more and more, we are finding that students are being given work to study at home for the first time, for example, and to do a whole lot of additional stuff at home on their own that hasn't been dealt with in class before. And that becomes – or it can become – quite problematic. So, you are saying, Ja, homework is OK if it can be done just to complete what you could have done in class but didn't get down to, perhaps.

So, then the whole class doesn't fall behind waiting for everyone to finish. Am I understanding you correctly?

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- L2: Yes. But in general, I really do think that homework is a bigger issue in junior school. I know this is a high school study but particularly grade 8, 9 and even 10. But Grade 8 and 9, just purely due to the fact that there are so many subjects. And one subject doesn't know what the other one has given and then it is just a crisis!
- R: Now that is an interesting point as well. Because if we were asking this question that we have just been on, about how could homework look differently, and you are saying that the one person doesn't know what the other person is giving, perhaps a possibility would be to have more communication between the subject teachers? And possibly tasks could be combined, or half the amount of work could be given, because there could be a sharing of the tasks to get certain marks for different skills that could be applied.
- L2: I think for like Grade 8 and 9, they do social sciences, that is history and geography. I think it is quite easy to link those two in a project.
- R: Right. So that might be a creative way of saying, we are reducing the amount of homework because we can use one task and get a couple of assessments out of it. I am just thinking now from what you said . . . So, the last question, the skills that we spoke about in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, like creativity, imagination, teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving and so on = if those skills are not being generated in the homework tasks, where in your learning in school are you learning those skills? Or are you not?
- R: I think class discussion is number one and it actually doesn't matter what subject. I don't know, for me maybe it is just that I learn better from listening. But yes, I find any class discussion where people are giving input and being kind of . . . I guess that could be a way of working with people, seeing their perspective as well as if they have suggested something that is maybe incorrect for more factual subjects, like looking through their suggestion, like problem solving . . . yes.
- R: So, what you are talking about here is this collaborative work. You are saying that working in a social situation, in a group of people, is going to help you to develop those skills in the school environment, perhaps more so than sitting at home doing that homework on your own.
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- L2: Definitely, especially for History and even Biology. Maybe Maths. But yes, when are you just discussing something I think . . .
- R: OK. Thank you ..... Is there anything else you would like to add that has come to mind about homework?
- 
- L2: Actually, today when I went up to my mom's class, one or two of her students were there and they had like a formula for homework that is actually so funny, as to how it should be
-

	done. So, like on a Monday only English and 9, 5 and 4 can give homework, and then on a Tuesday like Afrikaans and 6 and 7 . . . so <b>not everyone can give homework on a certain day. I think it could be quite clever.</b>
R:	OK! Very interesting. So, the homework is going to be given but it is going to be spread out over certain days.
L2:	Yes, you can never have . . . not the two subjects, that is already too much, but there wouldn't be so much.
R:	So that is a possible way that homework could be changed to look slightly different to what it looks now, but still manageable. I like that! Thank you. Thank you .....
L2:	I don't know why it is hard for me think. I am so dizzy! But do I have homework?

## APPENDIX N

### EXAMPLE OF CODING

#### Summary of coding for Learner 2

##### Opinion about homework (p163)

- Stress outweighs benefits (p163)
- Should be doing exercises in class (p163)
- Not at home because no one to help if you get stuck with a problem (p163)

##### Homework stress p163-p164

- No time to complete it (p163)
- Fall behind (p163)
- Not on top of things (p163)
- Overload with sport and other subjects (p163)
- Not done properly (p163)
- Not useful (p163)
- Specific subjects more stressful, eg. Maths; (p164)
- Better explained by the teacher who is not at home/can't manage alone (p164)
- Get stuck on a question (p164)
- Less stressful subjects, eg. Maths Lit, get time to finish in class (p164)

##### New ways of doing homework p164, p165

- Extra help available at school eg, help desk (p164)
- Limit teaching/explanation time in class to get help with homework (p165)

##### Beneficial homework p. 164, p165, p166, p167, p168

- Maths homework (at school or home) (p164)
- for practising (p165)
- revision (p166)
- additional work is helpful but no work that you have to work through alone/not necessarily at home (p167); (p168)
- discussion work (p168)
- written work (p168)

##### Homework and the learning process p165

- History and English homework beneficial for learning (p165)
- Background reading adds to general knowledge (p165)

##### Non-beneficial homework p166, p167, p168

- Homework that is not marked (p166)
- Don't know if it is correct or not (p167)
- No allocated time to work through work in class that you struggled with at home (p167)
- Unmarked homework you can't learn from your mistakes/don't know if you have made mistakes (p167)

- When you can't fully engage with the homework due to not understanding or time constraints (p168)

#### **Emotional effects of homework** p. 167, p168, p169

- Sometimes it's all just too much (p166)
- Not a good feeling (p167)
- Go back to class with a negative feeling (p167)

#### **Positive skills acquired through homework** p166

- An understanding of how work will be tested (p166)
- Learn how to answer test questions (p166)

#### **Development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills** (p167)

- Homework questions often factual and base level (p167)
- Project work can be more creative (p167)
- Group work (p167)
- Helps you cope with people (p167)
- Helps you with interpersonal skills (p167)
- Problem solving sometimes positive and sometimes negative experiences wrt homework (p167)
- Class discussions (p167)
- Hearing people's perspectives, problem-solving (p)167
- Collaborative work (p167)

#### **Homework and preparation for tertiary studies** p167

- Time management (p167)
- Projects and 'bigger things' you do at home help prepare you (p171, L 186)
- Navigating a whole task on your own (p171, L 190)

#### **New thinking about homework** p168

- Case studies and real-life scenarios (p168)
- How it actually applies in the real world (p168)
- Link subjects, especially in Gr 8 and 9 and combine tasks, eg, Social Studies (History and Geography) (p168)
- Homework roster for all subjects (p169)

#### **Should homework be banned?** p168

- It should be avoided (p168)
- If you can't complete in class then a tiny bit at home (p168)
  - Homework is more problematic in junior school and Gr 8 and 9 (p 169)

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