Homework

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Abstract **– The objective of homework is to assist and improve learning and to strengthen skills and understandings gained in the classroom. Homework is a valuable tool in the learning process; it is a natural extension of class work created and designed by the teacher. Research shows that homework increases student achievement. It offers teachers, parents and students the opportunity to be involved in and support the learning process outside of school. Assigning homework serves various educational needs . It serves as an intellectual discipline, establishes study habits, eases time constraints on the amount of circular material that can be covered in class, and supplements and reinforces work done in school. Homework has been the focus of considerable research. This paper will seek to review relevant aspects of the research, explore the issues which it raises and seek to indicate how it may help us to devise and implement an effective policy and practice in schools.**

Keywords – Homework, skills, achievement, school, students

INTRODUCTION

Currently and over the past few decades the issues related to Homework have been a lively subject of debate and discussion. Some call for more homework, to prepare and equip children for the rigorous of a competitive world. Some want less or no homework, because they want to use that other time for young people's involvement in other extra-curricular activities to broaden their horizons or give them another kind of edge in life. More homework is given by some because the overcrowded school curriculum is otherwise unmanageable in school hours. Others seek less or no homework because that overcrowded curriculum should not spill over into family time or come to dominate children's lives in ways that may contribute to exhaustion or anxiety. Homework can be very broadly described as "work set by teachers that pupils are expected to complete out of school hours"[1]. A more complex definition which also attempts to be universally encompassing, describes homework as "the time students spend outside the classroom in assigned activities to practice, reinforce or apply newly-acquired skills and knowledge and to learn necessary skills of independent study"[2].

PURPOSE OF HOMEWORK

Professor Joyce Epstein observes that "homework is considered one of the most important practices for establishing a successful academic environment in school"[3]. Through a review of the literature, Epstein has developed a ten-point typology of the reasons that homework is assigned to students, which she categorizes as The Ten P's. These are:-

- **Practice** – Homework which is intended to enable students to practice skills learned in class, increase the ease with which these skills can be used; and increase their understanding of how and when to use those skills.
- **Preparation** – Homework which is intended to ensure student readiness for the next class, most commonly by completing assignments or activities which have been started in class and need to be completed as the basis to move on in the next activity.
- **Participation** – Homework which is intended to increase the individual participation of students in the learning process: in class some students may seem to be involved but may in fact be passive onlookers to the process. Homework can require each individual to participate actively and continually, to work through the process for themselves, and to take control of their learning and thinking.
- **Personal Development** – Homework helps students to take personal responsibility for their schoolwork, to build their range and competency levels of study skills, ability to follow directions, complete tasks on time, and to achieve a feeling of self-confidence and personal accomplishment. This also includes opportunities for development of talents and skills and providing extension and enrichment activities.
- **Peer Interactions** – Homework can be designed to encourage collaborative learning on assignments or projects, enhancing their teamwork skills and opportunities to learn from each other or to combine their talents to achieve mutual benefits.
- **Parent-Child Relations** – Homework provides opportunity for students and parents to develop positive communication on the importance of learning, exchange information, facts, attitudes and expectations about school; it can show how aspects

of schoolwork apply to real-life situations, as well as encouraging positive feedback from the parents.

- **Parent-Teacher Communications** – Homework also allows teachers to communicate with parents, to involve them in the learning process and inform them about what and how the students are learning and how their skills are progressing.
- **Public Relations** – Homework can sometimes be motivated by the felt or assumed need of the school or the teacher to demonstrate to the families of their community that the school has rigorous standards for serious work; such extra work is assigned to fulfill the publics expectation of high student achievement.
- **Policy** – Homework may be assigned to comply with district or school policy that directs a certain amount to be given to all students on certain days.
- **Punishment** – Homework can be given to students to punish them for lack of attention or poor behavior: it may include writing "lines" or essays on appropriate behavior or school standards. There are no studies about effects on students, but punishment is generally seen as inappropriate as a purpose for homework, an exercise of teacher power to use up students time, with a negative focus on behavior rather than learning.

ADVANTAGES AND BENEFITS OF HOMEWORK

Homework can have immediate benefits for students such as improving their grades, performance at school, and attitude towards learning, as well as long lasting benefits such as time management and problem solving skills that can assist them not only in their tertiary study but also later in life. Cooper in Homework Research and Policy: A Review of the Literature (1994), found that benefits from homework can include immediate achievement and learning, involving "better retention of factual knowledge, increased understanding, better critical thinking, concept formations, information processing and curriculum enrichment."[4] It can also provide long term academic benefits such as "encouraged learning in leisure time, an improved attitude towards school, and better study habits and skills", as well as nonacademic benefits including greater "self direction, self discipline, time organization, inquisitiveness, independent problem solving and parental appreciation of and involvement in schooling."

DISADVANTAGES AND DOWNSIDES OF HOMEWORK

Homework has been found to contribute to physical and emotional exhaustion and allows little or no time to spend on leisure and family activities. Some of the negative effects of homework found by Cooper (1994) include "loss of interest in academic material, physical and emotional fatigue, denial of access to leisure time and community activities, parental interference, pressure to complete and perform well, and confusion of instructional techniques."[4] In the article The

Truth About Homework (2006), Kohn believes that homework has many negative effects, including frustration, stress, loss of time for other activities, family conflict and a reduction of interest in learning[5]. He states that the idea that homework creates long term non academic benefits for children, and teaches good work habits or develops traits such as self discipline and independence, can be described as an urban myth as there is no hard evidence to support these beliefs. The pressure to complete homework can also lead to students cheating by copying from other students or obtaining help other than tutoring.

ATTRIBUTES OF A STANDARD HOMEWORK

1. Each homework assignment shall have a stated purpose (objective).
2. Each homework assignment shall have an estimated time of study and completion.
3. Each homework assignment shall be differentiated to challenge each student according to their academic capabilities.
4. Each homework assignment shall be designated as one or more of the following:

- **Practice**: This type of homework is designed for students to reach a level of self-sufficiency in performing a learned skill previously introduced through previous instruction.
- **Preparation**: This type of homework is designed for students to access prior knowledge and experiences about a topic to be learned or expanded upon.
- **Elaboration/Extension/Enrichment**: This type of homework is designed to require students to conduct research, compare items, support a position or develop a graphic organizer of information.
- **Reading**: This homework is designed for students to spend time reading to increase fluency and comprehension while preparing for discussions or key writing assignments.
- **Study**: This homework is designed to require students to review material in notes and assignments to commit key information, ideas and concepts to long term memory and to enhance understanding of a subject.
- **Creativity/Authenticity**: This homework is designed for students to integrate and apply many skills and concepts learned in various disciplines.

SOUND HOMEWORK POLICIES : TIME

Although a small amount of homework may be good for learning, overloading children with hours of homework can actually decrease achievement.[6] So we need to set reasonable homework time limits. Students need to have a limit to how much mental work they can accomplish in a day's time, before the brain needs downtime.[7]

SOUND HOMEWORK POLICIES : GRADING AND SUPPORT

 When homework is not completed, teachers should attempt to diagnose why and provide help. Lack of homework completion may stem from academic problems such as task difficulty, learning gaps, working speed, or learning style. Homework should not cause students to fail. Concerned with the high failure rate from homework, many schools are limiting the percentage homework may count in a student's grade to 10 percent or less. If homework counts too heavily in a student's grade, they may fail even though they have demonstrated mastery on tests and in-class assignments. The failing grade is then not an accurate reflection of learning. The focus of homework should be to check for understanding and for formative feedback, not cumulative grading.

CONCLUSION

When homework assignments are connected to specific important learning objectives and of a reasonable length, and when meaningful feedback is provided in a timely manner, homework can be an effective strategy for improving student learning.

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