

Cons of the current homework system in america

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The current homework system is becoming more prevalently negative. Educators and parents alike can see the negative consequences of the current homework model. Students are receiving far more homework than they are able to effectively handle. Based on The National Education Association's suggested 10-minutes per grade per night rule students are receiving anywhere from two to three times the effective, recommended amount of homework (Wallace). When students are unable to complete this excessive amount of work teachers penalize the students with failing grades or deducting points for late homework in an effort to promote completion of the assignment (Vatterott). This method is often addressing the wrong problem and therefore fails to carry the intended impact. Teachers often approach incomplete homework under the assumption that students are not motivated to do their work or are in compliant, while the real issue is they are incapable of completing all of the homework they are assigned along with whatever duties they may have at home. From a behaviorist point of view homework is a negatively punishing loop. If students continually get bad grades on homework after trying to do well they will eventually avoid this negative experience resulting in further failing grades without the actual problem being addressed.

Most students want to do well in school, and put the effort forth to do so. However, in some cases their effort goes unrewarded as the students still receive failing grades. One reason students are failing after putting forth effort is the work is beyond their understanding, which as Cathy Vatterott proposed has negative consequences, " When students are given homework that is beyond their comprehension level or that is too lengthy and are

penalized with failing grades for incorrect work the experience is frustrating and demotivating” (Vatterott). Carl Rogers purposed the concept of self-actualization along with one’s self being split between an ideal-self and a real-self, and at any given time these two aspects can be congruent or incongruent. When a person experiences incongruence between their ideal-self and real-self they often experience distress and a sense of anxiety (Rogers). When a student wants to do well but continuously fails their homework because they simply are unable to complete it they experience incongruence between their ideal-self and actual-self resulting in psychological distress.

Today more children are being found to have psychological issues linked to such an incongruency. In 2015 The National Alliance on Medical Illness found that 8% of youths, ages 13-18, had an anxiety disorder (Hong et. al.). Cognitive dissonance is the incongruence between one’s beliefs and what actually happens in the environment, such cognitive dissonance is what occurs when a student believes they can do well and continually fails (Festinger). Cognitive dissonance produces mental stress or anxiety and a person will likely change their beliefs to reduce this mental stress (Festinger). This means students who believe they want to and can do well on homework and continually fail will eventually align their beliefs to reduce their anxiety, no longer believing they can or want to do well. According to Rogers’s theory the best way to solve this growing epidemic of psychological illness in young children is to help them align their ideal-self and real-self or in other words reach self-actualization (Rogers). To do this would mean

revamping the homework system to help reduce cognitive dissonance in children.

The best way to solve the problems associated with homework is to completely rethink the way homework is given and graded. Two assumptions come with the current model of homework: all students are able to complete the assignment and all students have time to complete the assignment. The problem is not all of them can do it and not all of them have time to do it (Vatterott). The first step to solving the homework problem is for teachers to understand and accept more is not always better. Teachers should try to understand the reasons a child fails to complete their homework assignments rather than viewing all reasons as excuses. Failing is an aversive experience for most students, and for those who do not care about school failing and repeating should be more aversive than homework, and students will naturally try to avoid aversive situations so often there will be a good reason for incomplete homework.

The second step in this homework reform is to move from grading for correctness to grading for completeness and effort. Homework is intended to reinforce and refresh the materials learned that day in class, but when a student learns incorrectly and they are graded on correctness even if he or she completes their homework they will likely fail. This is essentially failing the student for a miscommunication between the teacher and the student. If a student fails even after completing their assignment they are likely to be demoralized and less likely complete further assignments. Contrary if graded on completeness the student will still be rewarded for doing their homework

and more likely to continue completing it, allowing the teacher to see where the students need to improve and address the issues before the exam.

The third contingency of this reform is to spend time going over the homework. This aspect is often neglected as homework tends to be given out, graded, and then never addressed further. Therefore the full three step reform to homework being proposed is: give less homework in order to not overwhelm students and allow proper attention to each assignment, grade for completeness rather than correctness, and finally evaluate students' answers and explain the rationale behind correct answers.

This reform is based off of the understanding that too much homework can be daunting to students and can result in them avoiding to do it all together. Giving less quantity of homework could promote more frequent completion by framing it to be an easier task while being able to increase the quality of the homework. When less homework is given students can have more time to allocate to each assignment they are given. This is beneficial because when proper amounts of attention are able to be given to each assignment the student can get more out of less work. Giving a student one hundred math problems a night while there are only twenty different styles is just as effective as giving them twenty math problems each a different style, however the former is five times the work and takes precious time from other assignments.

Exams test comprehension and application of the materials; therefore homework does not need to also be graded for correctness. Homework should refresh and refine knowledge and is an opportunity for teachers to

gauge the efficiency of each students learning. Is a student does his or her best to complete the homework but get the wrong answers they still put effort forth to complete the assignment and their grade should reflect this. Furthermore, is the student is still rewarded for trying and the teacher is able to elaborate on why an answer is wrong in a more positive manner than simply grading for correctness they promote correct learning of the material rather than just penalizing effort.

Further benefits of this reform include benefiting the psychological health and development of students. During adolescence children form their identity and “ self” as a product of their environment and natural tendencies. A major component of the development of their “ self” is social interactions with other children where they learn what their peers expect of them (Chagnon). When homework takes up all or most of the time students have outside of school they lose out on this key feature of development and it can negatively impact their future lives.

Along with this when homework is weighted heavily and graded for correctness the student can become very stressed out. When the student wants to do well and is overwhelmed with homework to the extent that they cannot complete everything or cannot correctly complete everything it is psychologically detrimental due to the cognitive dissonance experienced (Festinger). The current system of homework restricts self-actualization in students who want to do well by physically cannot. A reform to homework is, hopefully, clearly required. While my proposal may only be the first steps

towards such a reform they are still steps in the right direction to benefit teachers and students on multiple accounts.