

# The misuse of homework



Homework: Perhaps the most touchy education subject of them all. Teachers say it greatly improves test scores, but students hate it. But even more important, research today shows that the amount of homework given is very counterproductive to the learning process. While homework may reinforce the things taught in class, too much becomes busy work, and doesn't benefit the child much at all in the long run. If homework assignments do not see a reform, the American people will begin to see international test scores dip, which would be the last thing that this once proud nation would want to happen.

While homework does benefit a kid, too much before they are mentally ready for it is detrimental to their mental development. There are many reports and finding that expose the true effect the homework load is having on students. " In the recent Associated Press-AOL poll, elementary school students reported an average of 78 minutes of homework each school night, and middle-schoolers reported 99 minutes, says The Case Against Homework coauthor Bennett.

That's a far bigger homework load than children would have if teachers were following the so-called 10-minutes-per-grade rule of thumb endorsed by groups like the National Education Association and the National Parent Teacher Association, Bennett points out" (Clemitt 9). Although 78 minutes may not sound like a lot to older kids, that is far to much to ask of an elementary level student. Just imagine how inflated the homework is for a sophomore in high school.

A school specializing in dealing with dropouts had interviews with 45 of their enrolled students, and found that they all constantly mentioned their

homework difficulties (Noll 329). Not only are elementary school students overloaded with homework, but so are high schoolers. This is such a big problem that it pushes them to the point at which they feel that they have to drop out. Also, Beth Teitell said in the Boston Globe that “ A Highlights magazine survey last year asking kids to name their ‘ biggest problem right now’ found that homework and studying for tests far outpaced every other difficulty...” (1).

Teachers take this as kids not wanting to work, but if so many children are complaining about it, then it must be a serious problem, not just another gripe about school. “‘ The amount of homework is and has been just ridiculous--my child can't have a real life,’ one parent complained in a school district survey. ‘ There have been nights where we have been up until 12 or 1 a. m. because my child is still working on some school assignment. ’” (Rado 4). Not only do students and experts complain about the workload, but now, even parents are complaining about it.

The homework load is clearly an issue that needs to be resolved. The causes of this “ homework overload” actually come from a good place, but have nasty end results. James Wm. Noll, author of *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Educational Issues* states that “...homework supporters ask us to take on faith the notion that homework can instill desirable character traits” (331). Although homework can help young students learn how to manage time and complete work in allotted time, too much overloads students, and cause them to grow up to hate school.

This massive load of homework is not only the fault of the teachers. Parents may also contribute to students feeling pressured by homework. “ William R.

Fitzsimmons, Harvard University's dean of admissions and financial aid, attributes the rising parental anxiety in part to uncertain economic times and, with it, parents' increasing eagerness for their children to get a solid education" (Bell 1). Parents hope nothing but the best for their children, but it seems that their hopes are actually hurting their children.

Parents have to now be enforcers of school's grand scheme, telling their children that they aren't allowed to do extracurricular activities until they finish their homework (Bell 2). This actually bad for kids, because it turns out that exercise, play, and family dinner, the very things that homework are taking away, are closely related to cognitive development and achievement (Clemitt 24). Clearly, if homework supporters want to benefit the children, they will regulate homework, and make other activities possible. James Wm.

Noll, author of *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Educational Issues* called it a myth that doing homework will help international test scores (331) and went on to say that the Japanese do less homework and still have high scores because their school days are longer, cherish class time, and don't allow interruptions (332). Although it's nice that Americans care about school, they still fail to give it the attention that it deserves. The causes for this insane homework load are for good reasons, but the results. Many people say that all of this homework is beneficial to academic achievement, but in reality, this is not true.

It negatively affects the overall academic experience. " Excessive homework has caused some low-income students to drop out of school, according to Etta Kralovec... The more hectic family lives and greater responsibilities of many lower-income students, along with a lack of the Internet and other

learning tools at home have led some to give up on school altogether, Kralovec said” (Clemitt 10). One would think that causing students to drop out would be very counterproductive to helping test scores, but that is exactly what educators are doing.

Educators need to jump on this problem quickly before the international test scores drop even more. As mentioned earlier, schools are not staying true to the 10-minutes-per-grade rule suggested by education groups. “ When schools push beyond them [mental limits], many children, including teens, are developmentally unable to cope. They react by misbehaving, becoming anxious, burning out, and eventually coming to hate school” (Clemitt 24). This is very detrimental to academic achievement. If a student misbehaves, this detracts from other students being able to learn, because they will distract others with disruptive behavior.

Also, this will potentially cause legal problems outside of school if students are misbehaving. Probably the worst effect of homework is that students’ personal lives are ruined by homework. “... we found that homework often disrupts family life, interferes with what parents want to teach their children, and punishes students in poverty for being poor” (Noll 330). Homework gives students an extra responsibility, and puts the other, potentially more important responsibilities on hold. This would also cause parent-child confrontations relating to slacking on responsibilities, which ultimately destroys a child’s will to learn.

What can cure this black hole of homework? More meaningful and effective classes would be the first solution. “ After close to 20 years of school reform measures, we now have some proven practices for increasing academic

success... Smaller class size, more pre-K education, and more resources for teachers” (Noll 332). By decreasing class sizes, students can get more hands-on help, instead of a generalized lesson for the whole class to follow with little help. With pre-K education, a child can be exposed to a classroom setting, and become prepared for all of the information to come in the later years.

Lastly, if the teachers have more education resources, they can create a more effective learning environment and provide some spice to the drudgery that students despise so much. Another solution would be to provide better after-school programs. “ Education leaders should work to ensure that after-school programs are academically rigorous and work closely with the community organizations that provide after-school services. ” (Noll 332). By providing after-school programs, students could stay focused on achieving in school rather than going home and getting on the computer or playing the Xbox.

The gross misuse of homework is becoming more and more apparent to the Americans of today. From kindergarteners to seniors in high school, students are overloaded by homework. High schoolers are dropping out, misbehaving, and losing their grip on their personal lives. If schools make classes more meaningful and effective, and provide meaningful after-school programs, then the U. S of A will once again be the leaders of education. Students truly are given too much homework, and it needs to be immediately addressed.