

Homework is harmful

Education



Sometimes, I feel as if I have been doing homework my entire life. As a child growing up, I moved from worksheets, dioramas and book reports to essays, major projects and term papers. When I began teaching, I had lessons to prepare and my students' homework became my homework for grading. (And, on occasion, it was quite obvious that I was putting a bit more effort into MY homework than they put into theirs!) As my children reached school age, “ Mom’s rules” on homework included: homework comes first, don’t wait until the last minute on a project, etc.

But somehow their homework still bled over into my life... So, how important is this icon of education? Is homework helpful or harmful? Is it something that, as many students claim, just eats up their time and energy for no real purpose? Do we, as educators, need new practices that move away from homework or are we simply afraid to change, stuck on those famous eight words, “ But, we’ve never done it that way before...”?

In support of the view of homework as helpful, many educators stress that specifically aligning homework to the learning task is part of the strategy for building understanding. The website Focus on Effectiveness cites several studies showing that in elementary school, homework helps build learning and study habits (Cooper, 1989; Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998; Gorges & Elliot, 1999). Also noted is the point that 30 minutes of daily homework in high school can increase a student’s GPA up to half a point (Keith 1992).

Many students need time and experience to develop the study habits that support learning, and homework can provide that as well as the ability to cope with mistakes and difficulty (Bempechat, 2004). Those teachers who

take the time to add instructive comments to their feedback to homework get the greatest return on their efforts in after-school work. (Walberg, 1999). But what about the students who are doing it wrong and then have to “unlearn” incorrect information?

When considering the view that homework is harmful, author and speaker Alfie Kohn states that there is no real evidence showing homework to be beneficial to elementary students. In anEdWeek article, he writes that he found no correlation between homework and improved standardized assessment scores.