

2011

Homework : burden or benefit?

Mandy Glawe
University of Northern Iowa

Copyright ©2011 Mandy Glawe

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Recommended Citation

Glawe, Mandy, "Homework : burden or benefit?" (2011). *Graduate Research Papers*. 169.
<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/169>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Homework : burden or benefit?

Abstract

Homework has been a controversial topic in the education world since the 1880's. Researchers and educators argue whether the burdens of homework outweigh the benefits it offers. With the No Child Left Behind Act in place and the amount of pressure it is putting on schools and teachers, it is imperative that teachers find the best practices for helping students achieve academic success. This paper describes the benefits and burdens of homework. Also, it explains the importance of a strong parent-teacher relationship, differentiating homework, how technology is changing traditional homework, alternatives to traditional homework, and options for how to assess homework. The paper finishes with conclusions and recommendations for choosing the best homework practices.

**University of Northern Iowa
Instructional Resources
& Tech Svcs - SEC 222
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614-0609**

HOMEWORK: BURDEN OR BENEFIT?

A Graduate Review

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Mandy Glawe

July 2011

This Review by: Mandy Glawe

Titled: Homework: Burden or Benefit?

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts.

July 26, 2011
Date Approved

July 27, 2011
Date Approved

7-27-11
Date Approved

Lynn Nielsen

Graduate Faculty Reader

Sarah E. Montgomery

Graduate Faculty Reader

Jill M. Uhlenberg

Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Background of Homework.....	5
Definition of Homework	5
History of Homework	6
Significance of the Review	8
Methodology	8
Literature Review.....	9
Benefits of Homework	9
Burdens of Homework	11
Homework and Parents.....	14
Differentiation	15
Homework and Technology.....	17
Assessment of Homework	20
Alternatives to Traditional Homework.....	21
Conclusion and Recommendations	23
Summary/Analysis	23
Recommendations	25
Future Research	26
References	29

Abstract

Homework has been a controversial topic in the education world since the 1880's. Researchers and educators argue whether the burdens of homework outweigh the benefits it offers. With the No Child Left Behind Act in place and the amount of pressure it is putting on schools and teachers, it is imperative that teachers find the best practices for helping students achieve academic success. This paper describes the benefits and burdens of homework. Also, it explains the importance of a strong parent-teacher relationship, differentiating homework, how technology is changing traditional homework, alternatives to traditional homework, and options for how to assess homework. The paper finishes with conclusions and recommendations for choosing the best homework practices.

Introduction

The topic of homework is a very controversial and important issue in the world of education no matter what age group you teach. Teachers across the country and around the world give homework to students every day expecting them to complete it at home so they can practice the skills they learned that day in class or skills they had previously learned. However, is completing homework at home really beneficial to students' academic growth? If it is, what is an appropriate amount of time to expect students and their families to put aside for homework each night? Is having students complete practice activities in the classroom with the teacher present a better teaching strategy than sending work home and asking parents to help if their child does not understand the skill? Furthermore, as schools begin to integrate more technology into their curriculum, the homework assigned to students is also going to require students to use technology outside of school. What benefits will this bring? At the same time, does it create yet another burden for students who do not have access to computers and internet in their homes? As educators we need to find out if the homework we are assigning now is actually helping to make students successful learners. If not, we must search to find a new way to help students reach their highest potential which may call for a revision to homework.

Background of Homework

Definition of homework. The word homework was first used around the year 1683 (Merriam-Webster). Since then, homework has become a common word in the school setting. The Merriam-Webster dictionary provides three definitions for the term homework. They are

1. piecework done at home for pay
2. an assignment given to a student to be completed outside the regular class period

3. preparatory reading or research (as for a discussion or a debate) (Merriam-Webster)

Out of the definitions given, the homework American students are familiar with are the second and third definitions. Students are not monetarily compensated for the work they complete; however their homework is evaluated, and students are compensated by being given a grade that matches how well the student fulfilled the teacher's expectations.

History of homework. The homework debate is not new. In the United States, historical records show evidence of disagreement over homework as early as the 1880's (Marshall, 2002, ¶ 73). Back then students were required to recite information in front of the class so their homework consisted of countless hours memorizing information chosen by the teacher. Often times students spent hours on their weekends working on their memorizations. This caused many problems because children were expected to also help their parents work and earn a living. As a result of such high expectations from both home and school, many children dropped out of school after they had completed the fifth grade so they could devote their time to helping their families (Marshall, ¶ 75).

Concern also grew after an incident that occurred in DeWitt, Texas in 1887. Here a student refused to do his homework two nights in a row so his teacher began to whip him as a punishment. During the whipping, the student pulled out a knife and stabbed his teacher in the shoulder and the leg (Kralovec, 2007, p. 9). Many people became worried that this same type of occurrence could take place in their own communities.

Then, at the turn of the 20th Century, many parents became concerned that their children were being overworked with the amount of homework that was assigned, which in turn was detrimental to their children's health. This began a progressive movement that worked to put an

end to the hours-long task of rote memorization. Edward Bok, editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, wrote in 1900,

The merest novice in mental science knows that the last work given the brain to do often continues to exercise it during sleep. And yet there are thousands of mothers and fathers throughout this enlightened land of ours who wonder why their children toss themselves about in bed, why they mumble and talk in their sleep, why they are frightened by their dreams, and why they are so afraid of the dark. Now, all these are simply the results of unsettled nervous conditions. Is it any wonder that children have to be called over and over again in the morning, and that they at length rise unrefreshed and without appetites for their breakfasts?

When are parents going to open their eyes to this fearful evil? Are they as blind as bats, that they do not see what is being wrought by this crowning folly of night study? Is all the book-learning in the world worth this inevitable weakening of the physical and mental powers? (Marshall, 2002, ¶ 80-81)

After Bok's publication, many major cities in the United States such as Los Angeles and San Francisco began abolishing homework for lower grades and limiting homework to an hour a night for the upper grades. In just one year, forty out of sixty-two school districts surveyed were limiting homework assigned to their students (Marshall, 2002, ¶ 83).

For fifty years, there was a continual battle over whether or not homework should be abolished. Then, after the Russians launched the satellite Sputnik, the United States became worried that they were falling behind in international competition. As a result, both educators and parents began supporting a more rigorous academic curriculum which included more homework. Although it was recommended by the National Education Association to assign no more than one hour of homework to elementary students and an hour-and-a-half for high school students, schools went hours-beyond their recommendations (Marshall, 2002, ¶ 84-86).

The push for a more rigorous curriculum again increased in 1983 when the United States found itself struggling with Japan and other countries in the international markets. This is when the National Commission of Excellence in Education created its "Nation at Risk" report. The

“Nation at Risk” report called for higher standards and more homework to be implemented into the schools immediately. Furthermore, this report has resulted in the creation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which uses standardized tests to measure students’ academic achievement (Marshall, 2002, ¶ 87-88). NCLB continues to create controversy because of the stress it creates for students, teachers, and school districts. However, it does also call for more accountability in students’ education and pushes schools to help their students achieve higher test scores. Many times this results in requiring students to complete homework outside of school so a wide range of content can be covered during the school year.

Significance of the Review

The purpose of this paper is to use a review of literature to evaluate whether homework benefits students in the way it is meant to or if it imposes a burden on students and their families. As educators it is our responsibility to reflect on our teaching practices and determine how to best help our students reach their greatest potential. At the same time, we are being held accountable by our nation and school districts to meet required state and national expectations. Furthermore, with the ever-changing technology enveloping our students and taking over our classrooms, we must evaluate if our traditional teaching practices such as assigning homework need to be revised, just as our classrooms are, to meet the required expectations set for both us and our students.

Methodology

Because homework continues to be a controversial topic in education, it was not difficult to find up-to-date information on the topic. The majority of research was conducted online. I searched the UNI Rod Library’s website and was able to access full-text books and journals with the internet. The Interlibrary Loan program allowed me to obtain books from the UNI Rod

Library and other libraries in Iowa. Also, I used Google Scholar to locate additional scholarly writings and journal articles. Most of the journals that were used were peer-reviewed and analyzed according to the date of publication, relevancy to my topics, and the value of the information they provided. Furthermore, I attended an A.P.L., a name created by the founders, workshop which addressed recommendations for assigning and assessing homework. This workshop was conducted by the founders of A.P.L., Jean T. Anastasio, Ph.D. and David J. Perry. Some of the resources provided the bulk of the information for this paper, but all of the resources found helped to create a better overall understanding of the benefits and burdens of the practice of homework.

Literature Review

Benefits of Homework

In *Taking Sides* (2010), Skinner explains how homework has shown to increase standardized test scores. Skinner states that homework has proven to be most beneficial to students in high school and junior high (Noll, 2010). However, there has been a large increase in the amount of homework that has been assigned to students in elementary school, and they are not benefitting from it (Noll, 2010). Skinner recommends that teachers evaluate the amount of homework that is appropriate and beneficial to their specific grade level (Noll, 2010). Furthermore, “Homework comprised of short regular assignments is probably the most effective” (p. 318). In conclusion, homework is proven to produce positive results as long as the duration and amount are appropriate to the grade level of the student.

Further research shows there are more benefits to homework. *The Battle Over Homework: Common Ground for Administrators, Teachers, and Parents* groups the benefits of homework into four categories: “immediate academic effects, long-term academic effects,

nonacademic effects, and parental involvement effects” (Cooper, 2007, p. 8). The first three benefits of homework are ones that affect primarily the student. Immediate academic effects of homework include retaining the information that is taught in class, giving the students time to practice the skills so the students better understand it, and providing enrichment in the school’s curriculum (Cooper, 2007). Students who are older and have better study skills tend to benefit more from these immediate academic effects.

Cooper goes on to explain that homework has four long-term academic effects:

“promotes better critical-thinking and information-processing skills, encourages students to learn during their leisure time, improves students’ attitudes toward school, and improves students’ study habits and skills” (p. 8). These long-term academic effects are best produced when homework “gives children choices, allows them to pursue their deepest interests, and permits them to work at their own pace” (Crain, 2007, p. 40). Students are able to grasp and learn new concepts when they are given the opportunity to experiment with their own interests and curiosities. Therefore, differentiating homework and offering students a variety of choices is an absolute must.

Furthermore, some nonacademic effects include developing better self-discipline, allowing students to learn time management skills, and promoting independent problem solving strategies (Cooper, 2007). Again, these nonacademic effects are best obtained when students are allowed to experiment with their own interests and curiosities. Assigning rote memorization or activities that drill the skills taught in the classroom may have the opposite effect if they do not capture the students’ attention.

The final benefit of homework Cooper lists is the parental involvement effects. He and other researchers believe homework is the link between school and home life. Mary Russo,

principal of Samuel Mason Elementary School in Roxbury, Massachusetts, stresses the importance of homework to the parents at her school and states that homework should consist of interactive assignments that the student can complete with a parent or an older sibling. The school has even gone so far as to rename homework to “homelinks.” In addition, the school provides workshops for the parents to attend so they know how to best assist their child(ren) with their “homelink” (Family Education, 2009, ¶ 9-12).

The idea the Massachusetts elementary school uses is also used in many other schools. Using homework as a link between school and home life benefits students whose parents are involved in helping with the homework. Therefore, students whose parents have higher educational backgrounds and have availability to necessary resources improve their academic skills by regularly completing homework. Students who have this parental support and resource availability tend to be from families of higher incomes (Ronning, 2011). So although using homework as a link between home and school benefits some students, it is not necessarily beneficial to all students.

Burdens of Homework

Despite the benefits researchers have associated with homework, there are many critics who believe that homework serves only as a nuisance to both the students and their families, promotes negative attitudes toward school, prevents students from having time to participate in after-school activities, takes away from critical family time, and can have harmful effects on students’ mental and physical well-being (Galloway & Pope, 2007; Kohn, 2006; Noll, 2010; Winerip, 1999).

One of the most negative effects of homework is it takes away from the time children have to be children. “A national survey by the Institute for Social Research at the University of

Michigan showed that in 1981 6- to 8-year-olds spent an average of 44 minutes a week on homework (about 9 minutes a school night). By 1997, homework for first to third graders had nearly tripled, to 123 minutes a week (or 25 minutes a night)." (Winerip, 1999, ¶ 8) Winerip's (1999) New York Times' article continues,

Martin Burne, the principal of Deerfield, [in Millburn, New Jersey] said the school really has no choice -- it must assign homework. "There's a feeling that somehow all of this extra work and early discipline builds up to give us an edge in standardized testing." But there is a trade-off, he acknowledged. "To do this, we are taking away some of the years of adolescence and childhood." (¶11)

Another negative effect of homework is the time it takes away from families and the stress it creates. Many children are unable to complete their assignments independently, especially when they are younger, and this forces parents to serve as homework monitors at night. "One professor of education, Gary Natriello at Columbia University, believed in the value of homework until his 'own children started bringing home assignments in elementary school.'" (Kohn, 2006, ¶12) If an educator feels that homework disrupts his own family life, it would be easy to see how parents with no background in the field of education easily become frustrated with the routine of homework.

Furthermore, if a child is resistant to complete their homework, it often creates a battle between parents and children. Waldman (2005) wrote an online article entitled *Homework Hell*. In the article she writes,

I hate homework. I hate it more now than I did when I was the one lugging textbooks and binders back and forth from school. The hour my children are seated at the kitchen table, their books spread out before them, the crumbs of their after-school snack littering the table, is without a doubt the worst hour of my day. (¶4)

If parents describe homework hour at their home as the worst part of their day, it is probably not a pleasant time for the students who are completing their homework either. Waldman goes on to say, "The only skills my children are learning are procrastination and panic" (¶ 19).

Also, Mollie Galloway and Denise Pope, Ph. D. conducted a survey of 496 high school students from two upper middle class suburban high schools. The results of the survey showed that homework and schoolwork were the primary stressors for the students. In addition, more than half of the students reported experiencing stress-related physical problems such as headaches, sleeping difficulties, exhaustion, and/or weight loss or gain. The more time students spent on homework, the greater the physical problems were. Some students even dropped extracurricular activities they enjoyed because of the amount of stress they were encountering. Along with physical problems, mental problems, such as anxiety and depression, were also reported (Galloway & Pope, 2007).

Furthermore, in *Taking Sides* by Noll (2010), Kralovec and Buell (2010) wrote *End Homework Now*. Buell's research found that homework was a major contribution in students' decisions to drop out of school. Kralovec and Buell wrote, "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" (p. 310 – 311). It is not fair to discriminate against students because of their socioeconomic status. Instead, these are the students we should be concerned about staying in school so they can increase their likelihood of graduating from high school and finding a successful lifestyle for themselves. We should be working to help students break out of the lower socioeconomic status.

In *The Myth about Homework*, Kohn (2006) states the reason there are so many negative effects of homework is because teachers are not using homework in a way that is beneficial to the students.

Homework isn't limited to those times when it seems appropriate and important... Rather, the point of departure seems to be, "We've decided ahead of time that students will have *something* every night (or several times a week). Later on we'll figure out what to make them do." (p. 4)

According to Kohn, this approach to homework, which many American schools use, does not promote positive outcomes to students or their families.

Finally, Kohn also makes a claim that research is unable to prove that homework improves learning. There are many variables which complicate the analysis of the effects of homework being beneficial or not, such as the kind of homework assigned, the age of the student, the class the homework was assigned for, how interested the students were in the assignment, and if the students actually completed the assigned work. “When you take into account all of these variables, the bottom line remains that no definite conclusion can be reached, and that is itself a significant conclusion” (Kohn, 2006, p. 26). Kohn goes on to say, “The fact that there isn’t anything close to unanimity among experts belies the widespread assumption that homework helps” (p. 26).

Homework and Parents

Although some of the burdens of homework included the stress that parents experience from their children’s homework, it is important to look at what the parents’ intended role is meant to be. Homework is intended to be a link between school and home, and teachers do need parental support in order to help students be successful. However, many parents do not feel that they have any input in the parent-teacher relationship. A mother of a fifth grader from Brooklyn, New York said,

To me a good relationship is where people decide something together, where both parties have a say. But, with respect to homework, I don’t have a say. The teacher has decided what my child will do. If I want something different for her, I have to go through multiple emails and sound like a bitch and even then I don’t really have a say. (Bennett, 2007, p. 25-26)

It should not be a surprise that parents feel this way when teachers are expecting parents to check younger students’ folder and book bags at night and provide older students with an

environment and the materials needed to complete their assignments. Furthermore, students will many times need their parents' help in completing the assigned tasks. Also, some teachers have created assignments that specifically involve parents in completing the task. Again, parents have little to no say in these family-activities (Bennett, 2007).

In order to create a true parent-teacher relationship, teachers need to accept input from the parents. Each of the two parties needs to have an equal say in the education of the students.

Bennett (2007) offers the following recommendations:

1. Parents and teachers should either be on a first name basis or a Mr./Ms. basis, but the teacher shouldn't be the only one with the honorific.
2. At parent-teacher meetings, the teacher should not be sitting behind the desk, but should arrange the seating in a more egalitarian manner.
3. And, just as the teacher has expectations and requirements, the parents should be allowed, even encouraged, to voice their own expectations and requirements. Then, they can discuss, negotiate, compromise, and, finally, reach an agreement that works for the parents, the student, and the teacher (p. 28).

If these suggestions are followed, all students may not receive the same amount of work every day, and homework may need to be decreased or even eliminated for some students. Although this greatly differs from the traditional parent-teacher relationship and homework practices, creating a strong home-school relationship where students have support from both places, they will be more academically successful.

Differentiation

Just like teachers have different teaching styles, each student also has their own learning style that works best for them. However, many times teachers assign one assignment to the

entire class. This is not the most beneficial way to use homework (Tomlinson, 2000). Instead, it is imperative that teachers determine students' learning styles, help students learn about their specific learning style, and then differentiate the work they assign to best meet each student's personal learning style. Lauria (2010) states, "Many researchers and practitioners have examined the relationship of students' learning styles and study strategies. Dunn, Deckinger et al. (1990) found that students who studied according to their learning styles achieved statistically higher achievement-test scores than peers who were not provided homework prescriptions" (¶ 11).

There are many suggestions for differentiating to help students with their unique learning styles. First, is helping students determine what environmental setting is most appropriate for their studying style (Lauria, 2010; Tomlinson, 2000). Some students learn best sitting at a desk, with bright light, and complete silence. On the other hand, some students have an easier time focusing on their work if there is background noise, dimmer lighting, and are sitting in a more comfortable position. Of course, there are many students who learn with any combination of these environmental factors. Teachers can help by providing different settings in their classroom so students can find what works best for them. From there, teachers can share these recommendations with parents, and hopefully, these settings can be carried on into the home to help the student improve their learning.

Students also learn best at different times of the day (Lauria, 2010). Some students are ready to go right away in the morning and can focus early in the day. Other students may learn best after lunch or later in the evening. Once students are able to determine the time of day that is best for their learning, they should utilize that time to really focus on their studies and complete their school work.

In addition, students do not master content skills at the same time. As a result of this, teachers should be differentiating the homework assignments that are given to students (Tomlinson, 2000). Some students will be reviewing and practicing skills while others are moving on to new skills. Also, teachers may differentiate the level of reading material that is assigned. Furthermore, for students who have learning disabilities, teachers may need to provide texts recorded on tape or allow other technologies to be used to complete the assignment (Tomlinson, 2000). There are countless ways that homework content can be differentiated. It is up to the teacher to get to know their students on a level that allows them to differentiate the work so it best fits their students' needs.

Finally, students need to be allowed some choice in the homework they complete, and all students cannot be expected to complete the same homework (Tomlinson, 2000). If teachers want students to be responsible for their own learning, they need to empower them to differentiate their own learning in a style that is best for them (Lauria, 2010). Once students understand that everyone in their class has their own learning style, they will be able to accept that not everyone in the class will complete the same work in the same exact way. However, everyone should still be held to high expectations and learn the information that is required to be taught by the teacher.

Homework and Technology

With technology rapidly changing our world, it is no wonder that students feel so comfortable sitting at a computer or using an iPod. Today's students are growing up in a digital world so it only makes sense to incorporate more technology into the classroom (Spires, et al., 2008). When technology is used correctly, it provides a source of motivation for students. There

are many web-based homework programs that schools and teachers are beginning to use instead of traditional paper and pencil homework.

Web-based homework programs do have some benefits. One of the biggest advantages is that students receive immediate feedback. Instead of turning in their homework and waiting for the teacher to correct it, make comments, and return it, web-based programs provide immediate feedback after each question or set of questions. This keeps students motivated and reassures them they are completing the work correctly or helps them figure out how to correctly complete the work instead of completing the whole assignment incorrectly (Mendicino, et al, 2009).

Another benefit is that some web-based programs are able to create differentiated assignments for the students. There are programs that ask for a student's individual learning style and then create an assignment to fit their learning style (Lauria, 2010). When students have homework that has been differentiated for them, it can motivate them and improve their attitude toward the assignment. Likewise, differentiated homework has been proven to help improve academic achievement (Lauria, 2010).

In addition, research has shown that web-based homework programs have increased students' retention rates and improved success rates, especially in the upper grades and the college level (Richards-Babb, 2011). The main reason for this is because students tend to take the online homework more seriously because they know that their scores are being recorded and submitted to their teachers (Mendicino, et al, 2009). The automatic grading serves as another form of motivation for the students.

Another benefit is for the teachers. Web-based homework programs correct the students' problems as they go and record the scores for the teachers (Mendicino, et al, 2009). This eliminates the hours of time teachers spend with their red pens correcting students' work.

Teachers can then use their time to create differentiated lesson plans and activities for their students based on their homework scores.

Although there are some great benefits to using web-based homework programs, there are also some drawbacks. One of the biggest problems is the availability of the internet for all students. All students do not have access to the internet in their homes and may have difficulty accessing a library or other public facility where the internet is available. To help eliminate this issue, many schools are purchasing computers for students to use and take home. Ideally schools will have one-to-one computer access, but making this a reality is a very expensive goal (Mendicino, et al, 2009).

Another major disadvantage is that web-based homework programs only require students to enter an answer. This can be a problem in subjects such as math and science. When students use math to solve problems, teachers study the students' work to see how they computed their answers (Spires, et al., 2008). Web-based homework programs eliminate this step so teachers are not able to view the work students used to get their final answer. "Teachers may be less able to figure out exactly where students are having difficulties without seeing their work" (Mendicino, et al, 2009, ¶8). As a result, teachers are unable to help students fix the steps they are struggling with, and instead have to work through the entire problem with the students to see where help is needed.

A final disadvantage is that students may be more likely to cheat using web-based homework programs (Mendicino, et al, 2009). Because students can complete the work on any computer and do not have to show their work, they may copy answers from their friends or work on assignments together instead of individually. Students working together or cheating do not give an adequate picture of what students know. In order to eliminate this disadvantage, teachers

need to be careful of what web-based homework they assign and should consider that, like paper and pencil homework, any work completed outside of school may not be the students' own independent work.

Assessment of Homework

When students complete their homework, teachers find themselves trying to find the most appropriate way to give the students credit or a grade for their work. However, assessing homework has many complications. Most teachers weight their students' homework to be part of their overall grade in a subject area. Determining the appropriate weight can be a difficult task. Because the homework was completed outside of school, it is impossible to know if the student cheated or copied another student's work. In addition, parents help many of their children with their homework so it is difficult to know if the work is actually what the student can complete independently or if it is just what their parents are capable of producing.

David Perry (personal communication, February 2009), founder of A.P.L., a workshop that teaches educators and administrators instructional skills and behavior management, shared his recommendations for assessing homework at a professional workshop. He said that if teachers are going to assign homework to students, then they need to be willing to go over every problem that was assigned with the students the day the assignment is due. Likewise, value needs to be given to the homework to show students that completing the homework is important. This does not mean that the teacher needs to grade every assignment each student completes, but they do need to make note that the assignment was completed and effort was put into it. Most homework is assigned to help students practice the content that was covered in class. Susan Christopher (2008), a middle school Spanish teacher, shares her thoughts on the role of homework,

To help students and parents understand my expectations for homework, I equate it with practice in a sports or music setting. Top-level athletes need to practice regularly to be successful. Athletes are not given their final evaluation on the practice field, but at the important game or race. Students need homework as practice so that they can perform well on their summative assessments. (§4)

Therefore, educators should not expect students to get every problem correct the first couple of times the students practice the skill. Mastery of the skill can be graded through testing or another type of assessment.

Next, Perry suggests that homework should never hurt a student's grade. Instead, if a student continually completes his or her homework, it could be the little booster needed to bump up the student's grade (personal communication, February 2009). If students know that their homework is valued but cannot harm their grade, they are more likely to feel less pressure in getting every answer correct and less likely to cheat or copy another student's work.

"Surprisingly, the number of students actually completing and turning in assignments has increased since I stopped counting homework for points and started using it solely for practice" (Christopher, 2008, § 6).

Furthermore, once teachers are confident students are completing their own homework, it can be used as a formative assessment. This may be the most important component of assigning homework. When teachers see what the students are capable of completing independently, they are able to modify their lesson plans and differentiate instruction to better meet the needs of their students. Homework is a good indicator of whether information needs re-teaching or if the teacher can move on and continue with the next skill (Christopher, 2008, § 1).

Alternatives to Traditional Homework

One alternative to traditional homework would be to have students complete practice problems during the school day in the classroom. A major benefit to this alternative is that the

teacher is readily available to help students who have questions or struggle with the concepts being practiced. Similarly, while students complete the work, the teacher can monitor their work and make sure they are completing it correctly. Also, requiring students to complete work in class allows the teacher to control if students work with others or are working independently. Furthermore, teacher monitoring reduces the probability of students cheating. Finally, this alternative should create a positive attitude among students because they will no longer need to worry about completing the work when they get home from school.

An additional alternative to traditional homework is to only assign homework if the students ask for it or if they are excited about a project and want to continue working on it at home. This homework strategy is used at Bellwether School in Williston, Virginia. “Marta Beede, the school’s top administrator said, ‘We encourage children to read at home—books they have selected’” (Kohn, 2006, ¶ 19). She then goes on with, “[Kids] work really hard when they’re at school. To then say that they’re going to have to work more when they get home doesn’t seem to honor how much energy they were expending during the day” (¶ 19).

Another suggestion has been to modernize homework. “‘We can’t keep assigning homework like the homework we had in the 60s and 70s,’ asserts Patricia Caspary, a 4th grade teacher at Franklin Elementary School in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin” (Family Education, 2009, ¶ 6). She recommends that teachers only assign homework that relates to real life and is an activity that extends the learning that occurred during the school day. For example, instead of assigning a worksheet of fraction multiplication facts, a teacher should have students go home and triple a recipe for a batch of cookies and then bring the cookies to school to share with the class (¶ 7). Caspary believes that homework relative to the students’ lives is acceptable and the most beneficial. The activities do not need to be as time consuming as baking cookies, but they

should be tasks that are practical in real-life and something that students will view as useful in their own lives.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary/Analysis

Because many teachers have been students themselves, it is common practice for them to carry over teaching practices they experienced as a student, including assigning homework. They assume that they received a well-rounded education and continue using traditional teaching strategies that will provide that same kind of education to their students. However, even though there appears to be some agreement that the practice of homework needs to be revised, there are opposing views as to how this should be done: keep homework practices that prove to be effective or abolish homework completely.

Cooper, author of *The Battle Over Homework: Common Ground for Administrators, Teachers, and Parents* (2007), and Skinner, author of *The Homework Wars*, have the strongest evidence that homework is beneficial to students, and they believe it is a practice that should continue to be used by teachers. Cooper groups the benefits of homework into four categories: “immediate academic effects, long-term academic effects, nonacademic effects, and parental involvement effects” (p. 8). Also, Skinner explains that homework has proven to increase standardized tests scores, especially in high school and junior high students (Noll, 2010). These two authors are able to convince educators that as long as homework is being assigned appropriately for the grade level, it will continue to be beneficial to students, their families, teachers, and the school district.

On the other hand, Kohn (2006), author of *The Myth about Homework*, provides the strongest evidence in opposition to the benefits of homework. He is quoted by many other critics

of the traditional practice. Kohn argues that teachers are not using homework in a way that is beneficial to students. In addition, there is not solid evidence that proves that the practice of homework increases standardized test scores because there are too many underlying factors that affect test scores (Kohn, 2006).

Furthermore, if teachers truly want parents involved in their children's education, they need to allow parents to have some input in the practices taking place in the classroom, including assigning homework. They need to be able to communicate with each other on a basis both are comfortable with. Most importantly, they need to remember that they are both working to make their children and students successful. There is a great need in education to make this parent-teacher connection. "The reason: a healthy parent-school partnership fosters student success," (Bennett, 2007, p. 25).

In addition, there are many alternatives to assigning traditional homework. Using differentiation to help students take advantage of their own personal learning style has shown to have great benefits for the students and their academic achievement. Also, one of the fastest growing options is using web-based homework programs. While this option has its benefits and disadvantages, both the teacher and student could greatly benefit from it if it is used properly. Another alternative to traditional homework is assigning homework that students ask for and is based off of their own personal interests and curiosities. Similarly, teachers can assign homework that is real-world related such as cooking something, helping plan a family event, reading to a sibling or neighbor, calculating how many miles per gallon the car got, mapping out the most direct route from their house to their grandparents' house, or making something they can use in their everyday lives.

Finally, teachers must decide the best way to assess students' homework. It should not count as a major part of their grade. Some teachers may choose to make it a lower weight of their overall grade, and others may choose to use it to only benefit their students' final grades. Students should not be punished for completing their homework by having it lower their overall grade (Christopher, 2008; Perry, personal communication, 2009). Either way, teachers need to remember that homework is practice of the skills covered in class. Homework should not be the main indicator of whether or not students have mastered the content they are learning.

Recommendations

After all of my research, I am somewhat in agreement with the radical proposal that Kohn gives. He wants "a no-homework policy to become the default, with exceptions for tasks like interviewing parents on family history, kitchen chemistry and family reading" (Wallis, 2006, p. 2). I believe that students should be able to complete most of their assigned homework at school where the teachers are readily available to help and answer questions the students have. Cooper is well-known for his ten-minute homework rule: "It suggests about 10 minutes of homework per grade per night" (Marshall, 2002, ¶36). However, I do not believe teachers should assign work to fulfill this time recommendation. Instead teachers should focus on assigning meaningful homework that actually benefits the students. They should allow students some choice in what they do for their homework and differentiate assignments so that students are able to utilize their own learning style and make the homework more meaningful to them. Also, I think students can be expected to spend some time leisure reading, studying for tests, and completing long-term projects at home. For the most part, these are activities that students can complete independently, and long-term projects give students plenty of time to complete the work and, in turn, learn about time management and responsibility.

Furthermore, I do not believe students should receive homework assigned to them on Friday that is due the following Monday. In addition, homework is not acceptable over holiday vacations. Weekends and vacations are supposed to provide a break for the students and expecting students to complete school work during this time is counter-productive. Leslie Frothingham, a high school teacher, has two children who struggle with enormous quantities of homework in middle school. “The value of it never seemed clear to her. ‘What other ‘job’ is there where you work all day, come home, have dinner, then work all night, unless you’re some type A attorney? It’s not a good way to live one’s life. You miss out on self-reflection, community’” (Kohn, 2006, ¶ 21). It is imperative that we, as teachers, are providing an adequate amount of time for students to interact with their families and enjoy being a child, especially on weekends and vacations.

Finally, I have learned from my own personal experience that informing students that their homework will be graded based on completeness and effort and cannot harm their grade, increased the amount of homework that was completed. I believe this relieves students of stress and motivates them to at least try the skill on their own. Students are capable of showing that they have mastered the skills taught after a few days of practice by taking a quiz, test, or completing a project.

Future Research

As students continue to change, so should our policies on homework. As teachers, we need to be willing to adapt and change our practices with our goal of helping students be successful in mind. Because technology is becoming a bigger part of students’ lives, I think research needs to be completed to see how it can best be used to help students in their academic

lives. We need to discover how to best use technology to motivate our students and help them learn more about their own interests.

Also, because No Child Left Behind has put such a strong emphasis on standardized testing, more studies need to be completed to determine whether or not alternatives to traditional homework help to improve students' standardized test scores. It may be possible that traditional homework is not the best option for the situation our country is in, in respect to the international educational race. In addition, it would be interesting to see how incorporating more web-based homework influences students' scores. Could using a more advanced form of homework actually decrease students' scores because the standardized tests consist of a traditional format?

Finally, I believe more research should be conducted in a setting where parents and teachers are truly working together for the benefit of the student. Research has already shown that a strong parent-teacher relationship increases student academic achievement, but would these results still be as typical for students in all types of families? It would also be beneficial to know if there is some type of parent-teacher policy schools could create that the parents, teachers, and students could agree to at the beginning of the school year. Overall, the main goal is to help students be successful and increase student academic achievement. It is up to educators to determine whether the homework they assign is benefitting or burdening their students.

References

- Anastasio, J. T. & Perry, D. J. A.P.L. Associates. (February 2009). Personal communication.
- Bennett, S. (2007). A parent's perspective on homework. *Encounter*, 20(4), 24-29. Retrieved June 26, 2011 from http://people.hofstra.edu/Esther_Fusco/ENC204view.pdf#page=8
- Chaika, G. (2006). *Help! Homework is wrecking my life!* Retrieved October 10, 2009 from http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin182.shtml
- Christoper, S. (2008, December-January). Homework: A few practice arrows. *Educational Leadership*, 65(4), 74-75. Retrieved June 27, 2011 from <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/ehost/detail?sid=8675e5d1-54c2-49ce-b413-fda06aa45b2b%40sessionmgr110&vid=1&hid=119&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=afh&AN=27984951>
- Cooper, H. (2007). *The battle over homework: Common ground for administrators, teachers, and parents* (3 rd ed.). Thousands Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Crain, W. (2007). Homework and the freedom to think: A piagetian perspective. *Encounter*, 20(4), 30-42. Retrieved June 26, 2011 from http://people.hofstra.edu/Esther_Fusco/ENC204view.pdf#page=8
- Dudley-Marling, C. (2003, March). *How school troubles come home: The impact of homework on families of struggling learners*. Retrieved October 10, 2009 from <http://cie.asu.edu/volume6/number4/>
- England, D. A. & Flatley, J. K. (1985). *Homework – and why*. Retrieved October 10, 2009 from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED260052&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED260052

- Family Education. (2009). *The benefits of homework*. Retrieved October 10, 2009 from <http://school.familyeducation.com/homework/experimental-education/38533.html?detoured=1>
- Galloway, M. K. & Pope, D. (2007). Hazardous homework? The relationship between homework, goal orientation, and well-being in adolescence. *Encounter*, 20(4), 55-69. Retrieved June 26, 2011 from http://people.hofstra.edu/Esther_Fusco/ENC204view.pdf#page=8
- Kohn, A. (2006, September). Down with homework! *Scholastic*. Retrieved October 10, 2009 from [http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=7376&FullBreadCrumb=<a+href=\"/browse/search.jsp?query=homework&c1=CONTENT30&c17=7&c2=false">All+Results+](http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=7376&FullBreadCrumb=<a+href=\)
- Kohn, A. (2007, January/February). Rethinking homework. *Principal*. Retrieved October 10, 2009 from <http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/rethinkinghomework.htm>
- Kohn, A. (2006). *The homework myth: Why our kids get too much of a bad thing*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Kralovec, E. (2007). A brief history of homework. *Encounter*, 20(4), 8-12. Retrieved June 26, 2011 from http://people.hofstra.edu/Esther_Fusco/ENC204view.pdf#page=8
- Lauria, J. (2010). Differentiation through learning-style responsive strategies: With homework and study strategies differentiated to meet individual learning styles, elementary and middle school students are empowered to teach themselves. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 24. Retrieved July 7, 2011 from

http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/hww/results/getResults.jhtml?_DARG_S=/hww/results/results_common.jhtml.35

Marshall, P. (2002). Homework debate. *CQ Researcher*, 12(42), 993-1012. Retrieved June 26, 2011 from

<http://library.cqpress.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrre2002120600&PHPSESSID=ci30moob8t054t8169oqa1cje0>

McColm, G. *What is homework good for, anyway?* Retrieved October 10, 2009 from

<http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~mccolm/pedagogy/HWgood.html>

Mendicino, M., Razzaq, L., & Heffernan, N. (2009). A comparison of traditional homework to computer-supported homework. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 41(3), 331. Retrieved June 28, 2011 from

http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/gtx/infomark.do?action=interpret&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&type=retrieve&prodId=AONE&docId=A197722644&source=null&version=1.0&userGroupName=uni_rodit&finalAuth=true

Merriam-Webster dictionary. Retrieved June 26, 2011 from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

Noll, J. W. (2010). *Taking sides: Clashing views on educational issues* (15 th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Richards-Babb, M., Drelick, J. , Henry, Z. , & Robertson-Honecker, J. (2011). Online

homework, help or hindrance? What students think and how they perform. *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 40(4), 81. Retrieved June 28, 2011 from

http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/gtx/infomark.do?action=interpret&source=null&prodId=AONE&userGroupName=uni_rodit&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&docId=A252634463&type=retrieve&version=1.0

- Ronning, M. (2011). Who benefits from homework assignments? *Economics of Education Review*, 30(1), 55. Retrieved June 27, 2011 from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S027277571000083X>
- Spires, H. A., Lee, J. K., Turner, K. A. (2008). Having our say: Middle grade student perspectives on school, technologies, and academic achievement. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 40(4), 497-515. Retrieved July 13, 2011 from <http://www.unc.edu/world/having-our-say-middle-grade-student-perspectives-on-school-technologies-and-academic-engagement.pdf>
- Tomlinson, T. A. (2000, August). Differentiation of instruction in the elementary grades. *ERIC Digest*. Retrieved July 13, 2011 from <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/eecearchive/digests/2000/tomlin00.pdf>
- Waldman, A. (2005, October). *Homework hell*. Retrieved October 10, 2009 from <http://dir.salon.com/story/mwt/col/waldman/2005/10/22/homework/index.html>
- Wallis, C. (2006, August 29). The myth about homework. *Time*. Retrieved October 10, 2009 from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1376208,00.html>
- Winerip, M. (1999, January). Homework bound. *The New York Times (NY)*. Retrieved October 10, 2009 from <http://www.nytimes.com/library/national/010399-edlife-homework.html>