

Why Is Homework Important?

Homework is an integral part of learning, yet students and parents both often feel as though too much homework is being assigned or that the work assigned is not benefitting the student's learning experience. However, the majority of research shows that completing homework assignments contributes to academic achievement and helps develop self-discipline, time-management, organizational skills, responsibility, independence and positive study habits (Cooper et al. 2006; Buijs & Admiraal 2013; Hampshire et al. 2014). Having said that, in earlier grades completing homework does not necessarily generate higher academic achievement. Rather homework in early grades is proven to be more useful in establishing routine and creating a foundation of good work habits for the future.

HOMEWORK AND STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

In particular, students with learning disabilities can benefit from completing homework. Students with LDs are known to have difficulties with motivation to complete homework and managing their time and organization (Walker et al. 2014; Hampshire et al. 2014). Research shows that students with LDs who regularly complete homework can improve their abilities in self-regulating their behavior and successfully staying on-task (Lynch et al. 2009; Hampshire et al. 2014). If homework assignments are planned well, students with learning disabilities can develop life skills while completing their homework. Skills such as setting goals, figuring out the steps to reach their goals and problem solving throughout the process can be exercised through regularly completing homework assignments (Hampshire et al. 2014).

It is true that sometimes teachers may assign too much homework to students with learning disabilities, and in those cases it is important for parents to get involved and advise teachers to limit the amount of work so that their child will actually be able to complete the assigned work. Research shows that students with learning disabilities benefit from experiencing task completion and therefore completing homework is an important part of their education (Marzano & Pickering 2007; Buijs & Admiraal 2013; Hampshire et al. 2014). The amount of homework may need to be adjusted to accommodate the learning needs of the student, but it is important for students with learning disabilities to develop their learning capacity by *completing* homework assignments. The amount of homework may need to be reduced at first, but as the student continues to show progress, the amount of homework can be gradually increased. It is important for teachers and parents to work together to help the student achieve their highest potential and be able to develop positive study habits through homework completion.

Parental involvement greatly assists students in homework completion, especially at younger ages (Axelrod et al. 2009; Lynch et al. 2009; Allison et al. 2014; Xu 2010). As grades increase, students become more independent and can complete their homework on their own. Students with learning disabilities may require support from parents in later grades as well, but this support tends to be more about providing structure (prompting, creating homework plans, and monitoring homework completion). Parents have an essential role in creating a productive workspace for their children to learn at home. Parents can enhance the homework process by eliminating distractions, keeping their children on task, and positively reinforcing their children through words of encouragement (Cooper et al. 2000; Hampshire et al. 2014).

WHAT DO PARENTS HAVE TO SAY?

A Canadian study which surveyed more than 1000 parents' observations regarding their children's homework showed that there is significant variation between the average amount of homework completed by students in the same grades (Cameron & Bartel 2008). The majority of survey respondents were from Ontario, which makes the results of the study especially compelling for parents in Ontario. The study found that the main issue of concern for parents is the amount of homework being assigned to their child, which most parents felt was much more than it should be (Cameron & Bartel 2008). Results from the survey showed that a significant amount of children in kindergarten and grade one were being assigned homework. As well, it was reported that over 50% of grade two students were completing more than 20 minutes of homework everyday (Cameron & Bartel 2008). Although parents recognized that

homework promotes good study habits and gives them the opportunity to be involved with their children's education, they felt that the sheer volume of homework was becoming disruptive to their child's life (Cameron & Bartel 2008). Parents expressed that homework reduced family time, created stress and affected family relationships. As well, the need for large amounts of homework for students in younger grades was questioned because parents were skeptical of how much homework influenced high academic achievement when students are in elementary school (Cameron & Bartel 2008).

DIFFERENT GRADE LEVELS

There is significant variation in the average amount of time institutions outline for children in different grade levels to complete their homework. In the GTA some schools and school boards leave time guidelines for homework completion up to the discretion of teachers. Given this variability, it is important for parents to monitor the amount of homework their child is required to complete and how long it takes. If parents notice that teachers are assigning too much homework or that their child is taking a long time to complete homework, then they should bring this to the teacher's attention. In most if not all school homework policies parents are encouraged to discuss homework concerns with teachers openly.

As mentioned before, there is more research supporting the positive effects of homework on academic achievement in higher-grade levels. Yet, research supports the claim that homework in early grades is strongly related to building a foundation of positive study habits that help establish necessary academic skills for children's future (Hampshire et al. 2014; Lynch et al. 2009). It is important to remember that homework has different purposes at different grade levels. In early grades homework cultivates positive attitudes, while in upper elementary grades it improves achievement (Cooper et al. 2006). Finally in sixth grade onward homework improves grades and even standardized test scores (Cooper et al. 2006). Since homework at early grades does contribute to instilling educational values in young students, eliminating homework completely would not benefit children. It is best to monitor elementary school students and make sure they are completing an appropriate amount of homework. Receiving too much homework can decrease its effectiveness and can be counterproductive (Good & Brophy 2003). So it is important to strike a balance and ensure students are reviewing and practicing skills without being overburdened.

IMPROVING HOMEWORK PRACTICES

Homework is a vital aspect of education, but the debate regarding its value is a healthy one. Some criticisms towards current homework practices carry weight. For example, homework that students hand in for a completion mark is often considered less helpful than an assignment that engages the student's critical thinking skills. As well, the dominant type of homework in elementary school tends to be "drill and practice" homework (Cameron & Bartel 2008), which is useful up to a point. For instance, math homework assignments consisting of thirty or forty math problems do not benefit all students. In early grades five math problems assigned for homework are enough to show whether a student understands a math concept or not (Bennett and Kalish 2007). As well, if students do not understand the concept and continue to complete multiple math problems incorrectly, this can reinforce the incorrect method, which students will have to unlearn (Bennett and Kalish 2007).

Therefore, monitoring how much homework your child is receiving and how long it takes for them to complete the homework each day is useful. Knowing whether they are receiving enough homework to establish study skills or whether they are becoming overworked is important. As well, parents can ask their children questions about what they are learning to ensure that children understand what is being taught in school (Marzano & Pickering 2007). It is also important for parents to identify when their child may need extra support and talk to teachers when students have trouble with homework. Lastly, for parents of students with learning disabilities creating a homework plan with their child can often be beneficial (Hampshire et al. 2014). Homework plans help to provide a visual structure for setting homework goals and can be as comprehensive as needed for the student. Since students with learning disabilities often need extra prompting to complete homework, writing down what needs to get done can

be helpful to motivate children so that they can finish their homework and move on with other fun activities at home.

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