Examining the Importance of Homework in Upper Elementary Grades

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Rationale for Inquiry

I believe that the purpose of education is to create thoughtful citizens. Students need the essential tools to be active, engaged, and questioning members of society. They need to have a safe place to practice these skills. I don't want them to sit at home for hours poring over homework that doesn't make sense to them. I want them to go and experience the world first-hand. I want my research to guide me on how to create short, but powerful homework assignments. I do not want my students to have strained relationships with their parents or feel hopeless because they don't have parents at home to help them with their homework. I hope to learn how to find the balance between pushing students to struggle with their learning and when to allow them to explore on their own.

What is Homework?

Homework is any task assigned by teachers intended to be carried out by students during non-school hours. Tasks include, but are not limited to: in-school guided study, home assignments, courses, and extracurricular activities (Urachi & Tanno, 2022).

Inquiry Questions

- Is there value in students completing homework?
  - If so, how can teachers create effective assignments?
- Does the age of the student affect how valuable homework is?

Research

Parents seem split regarding the importance of homework in elementary grades (Davidovitch and Yavich, 2017). Some reported believing that "homework indicates a students’ success at school," while others believe that "homework is given mainly to keep (students) busy with no real (academic) significance" (Davidovitch and Yavich, 2017). However, according to O’Donnell (1985), “students who like to talk about school and homework with a parent … have higher reading and math scores,” which indicates that they are more likely to excel academically when students have positive parental involvement.

The addition or subtraction of homework had a significant role in middle and high school grades but “did not affect achievement” for elementary grades (Cooper, 1994). In elementary school, students learn how to express themselves, regulate their emotions, work collaboratively with others, and build practical study skills for the future.

Urachi & Tanno (2022) found that teachers’ bias towards homework affects their regular implementation of it. If a teacher believes that homework has beneficial effects, they are more likely to assign homework. However, if a teacher believes that homework has detrimental effects, they are less likely to assign homework.

Some homework assignments are created to extend the classroom and provide more practice. Dolean & Lervag (2021) found that “increasing the amount of homework has a significant immediate effect on writing skills” and found that additional writing skills practice benefited most students. The critical aspect of the homework was that the homework “provided an opportunity for the consolidation of skills they have already learned” (Dolean & Lervag, 2021).

It has been found that “interactive homework” is the most beneficial to students from all backgrounds and abilities (Epstein et al., 2001). Interactive homework “encourages students to share what they are learning in class with family members” and promotes strong parent-student and parent-teacher relationships (Epstein et al., 2001). Epstein et al. (2001) suggested using The Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) process when designing homework for elementary students.

There needs to be a balance of homework. Homework can help increase scores and confidence levels when done well, but it can have lifelong adverse effects if done incorrectly.

Effects of Homework

Immediate increase: achievement & learning, understanding, fact retention
Long-term academic: Improved attitude towards school, better study habits
Parental involvement: frequency, positivity
Satiation: Loss of interest, physical & emotional fatigue
Denial of access to leisure time
Cheating
Increased difference: high & low achievers.

Frequency & Duration

K-3: two assignments, no more than 15 mins
4-6: three assignments, no more than 45 mins

Action

Based on this inquiry project, I have changed my outlook on the importance and use of homework in the upper elementary grades. Homework will encourage students to practice new skills, take risks, and engage with their families. It will foster hands-on learning that allows students to explore the environment around them. Homework will not be a mindless and confusing task but instead will be used when needed to help all students achieve academic success.

Theory

Two different theories arose regarding homework: McClelland's theory of achievement motivation and Wenger's theory of social context (Landers, 2013). According to Bempechat (2010), “homework plays a critical role in developing children’s achievement motivation” and argues that homework is highly beneficial. However, Landers (2013) argues that “students learn how adults value homework as a part of academic success” and then form their identity around it. Therefore, suggesting that homework can be destructive.

Recommended Homework Policy

Homework will include mandatory & optional aspects.
Topics will appear in class before being assigned & will not include complex skills.
Homework will not be used as an assessment.
Homework will engage parents/guardians.

Table adapted from Copper (1994)

<table>
<thead>
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Use this QR code to be part of my word cloud!

What is one word you associate with homework?

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