

# Homework

(Research Starters)

Homework-the system of assigning study-related tasks to school students to be completed during non-school hours-goes back to the 19th Century. Although the issue of homework has remained a hot topic of debate through the 20th and into the 21st Centuries, in its earliest days, it wasn't frowned upon so much. Today, the value and purpose of homework continue to be debated, though studies do show a positive correlation between homework and academic success. Teachers can make use of a variety of homework models, and many students can benefit from the structure of an after-school homework program, as well as from internet-based resources like Live Homework Help.

Keywords Assessment Tools; After-School Programs; Homework; Homework Menu; Homework Motivation and Preference; Live Homework Help (LHH); Parental Involvement; Progressive Education; Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)

## Overview

Homework-the system of assigning study-related tasks to school students to be completed during non-school hours-goes back to the 19th Century. Although the issue of homework has remained a hot topic of debate through the 20th and into the 21st Centuries, in its earliest days, it wasn't frowned upon so much. Economy was one of the reasons behind such relative non-resistance to homework. Since a majority of the youth population focused on working at jobs to increase family income as opposed to attending high school in the 19th century, homework wasn't much of an issue for most students.

The real criticism of homework began in the early decades of the 20th Century, when these tasks began to be seen as posing challenges to children's physical and mental health. Such apprehensions were further corroborated by the American Child Health Association. In 1930, the Association cited homework, along with child labor as being the main causes leading to the high death rates from tuberculosis and heart ailments among adolescents. This perception received a boost from the progressive education movement that began in the late 19th Century and continued until the first half of the 20th Century. Begun by education psychologist John Dewey, the movement emphasized overall growth of children and encouraged individualism. Members of this school of thought believed homework encroached upon children's play time and was thus a roadblock in the way of their holistic development. The movement's cornerstone was its accent on educating a child in entirety. Schools were expected to not only aid students' intellectual growth, but also their physical and emotional well-being.

In 1901, the anti-homework movement that had gained momentum at the turn of the 20th Century saw a tangible result. In a landmark move, the state of California legally abolished homework in grades 1 to 8 in that year (Gill & Schlossman, 2003).

In the second half of the 20th Century, perceptions about homework began to change. It was now recognized as an important educational tool. As the progressive education movement gave way to an academic excellence movement in the 1950's, the accent switched to achieving distinction in education through a scrupulous instruction methodology. With the start of the Cold War, homework was seen as integral and essential to the mission of producing a crop of high caliber students, ready to match Soviet military and technological capabilities. This stress on homework and its completion gained solid ground in the years following the launch of the Sputnik spacecraft by the Soviet Union. Support for homework continued through the last two decades of

the 20th Century.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, set up by the U.S. Department of Education, presented a report on the quality of education in the country. "A Nation at Risk" emphasized the academic excellence issue and advocated more homework for high school students (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Homework continued to find official endorsement as the U.S. Department of Education strongly vouched for assigning homework and went on to provide particular guidelines for it to school authorities. The practice of assigning non-school-hours tasks remains a mainstay of U.S. schools to this day. However, in this age of information and technology, homework patterns are undergoing profound changes as use of the Internet and technology grows.

## **Applications**

### **Purposes**

An analysis of different studies and surveys involving teachers shows there are broadly 10 purposes homework fulfills. These are: "practice, preparation, participation, personal development, parent-child relations, parent-teacher communications, peer interactions, policy, public relations, and punishment" (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001).

What is interesting to note is that at different academic levels, teachers use homework toward different results. According to a 2000 survey by Muhlenbruck, Cooper, Nye, & Lindsey, while teachers at both elementary and secondary levels said they assigned homework to instill better study and time-management skills, elementary school teachers strongly felt the value of giving homework so as to enable children to develop a knack for using their time smartly (as cited in Bempechat, 2004).

Although the validity of homework is acknowledged by the majority of parents and teachers as well as students, the perceived purposes differ for adults and children (Xu & Corno, 1998). This difference of perception is the most pronounced for children attending elementary and junior school. Whereas teachers and parents see homework as an activity that influences children's long-term development by way of inculcating time management skills and a sense of responsibility alongside strengthening the classroom learning, children themselves perceive homework as a means to help them with their immediate academic concerns. Students of higher grades, though, are able to identify the practical benefits of homework, such as its use by teachers to finish the syllabus. There is only so much time to cover a particular topic at school.

Available empirical research data shows that there is a positive correlation between homework and academic results. One study by Keith and Cool found that time spent on homework is directly proportionate to the academic achievements of students (as cited in Bempechat, 2004). This was found to be true for most students, despite the differences in calibers and skill sets. Another study by Cooper, Valentine, Nye, and Lindsey on the benefits of homework suggests that students of higher grades stand to gain more through homework assignments than their junior counterparts (as cited in Bempechat, 2004). Interestingly, this study also found that in the lower grades, homework completion was inversely proportionate to actual grades received. The Gevirtz Homework Project, conducted in 2001, highlights the connection between homework completion and academic achievements. The subjects were fourth grade students. These children were found to have benefited from skills picked up by working on home assignments even after two years (as cited in Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, & Brown, 2004).

### **After-School Programs**

Studies conducted through the 1990's and later suggest the efficacy of homework is strongly linked to the availability of suitable conditions and attitudes for completion of homework assignments. One such study by

Beck evaluated after-school programs in urban areas and found that students finished homework better when provided with well-organized space and parental support (as cited in Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, & Brown, 2004). Furthermore, the non-threatening and potentially enjoyable atmosphere that after-school programs provide helps students gain self-confidence, which in turn leads to better grades. Halpern's qualitative evaluation of an after-school program reveals the confidence children gained by joining the program helped them to forge better relationships with adults (as cited in Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, & Brown, 2004).

Apart from fostering desirable social and personality skills, after-school homework programs also serve other purposes. The multicultural milieu in U.S. society has students whose parents are not well-conversant in English. Providing homework assistance at home is a real challenge for these parents. Similarly, low-income or less educated parents might find after-school assistance programs a good resource to help their children with their education. The structured learning atmosphere these programs provide enable students to pick up crucial study skills while working with peers and under suitable teaching guidance.

On an average, parents have been supportive of homework throughout the 20th Century and later. Parents are positive about homework since it gives them an opportunity to keep abreast of their children's development and activities in school. It also helps them gauge the teaching processes adopted by different teachers.

## Homework Models

Over the years, several programs have been developed to make homework more interesting and less tedious for students. Notable among these is TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork), which seeks to integrate family members in the homework process. In the TIPS approach, homework questions are framed in such a way that necessitates interaction with older family members. Such innovative methods not only help children get through with their homework, but also engender better parent-child relationships, while bringing the students and their parents on the same page with regard to classroom teachings. It is a well-established fact that positive...

(The entire section is 4,246 words.)

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