

The Great Homework Debate

The topic of homework definitely causes debate between educators around the world. It can also trigger conflict between parents and children.

As students, we've all had to do it. We have all argued with our parents, stalled about completing it, made excuses and even created some very original ones.

Most of us as a student, parent or teacher have asked the question **"Is it really worth it?"**

Debate about homework and its effectiveness has continued for more than a decade.

There have been more than 130 published studies related to the subject and they have all reached different, contradictory conclusions.

It is not possible to state from the available data, an unequivocal statement about the overall effectiveness of homework, and the impact of existing student learning.

Most of the studies that have been conducted deal with either USA or European schools. Only limited research has been undertaken in Australia.

Research by two Australians academic ***Professors Richard Walker*** and ***Michael Horsley*** (2012) argue not only the academic benefits of homework but also that it helps young students develop important study and management skills. It also provides parents with a chance to engage in their child's learning.

On the other side of the debate, they feel that "It creates unnecessary pressure on students for limited or disputed benefits, robs children of time to develop other life skills and places pressure on families."

Professor Walker from Sydney University (2012) states that the current research on homework tends to focus on three things:

- Student learning & achievement;
- Development of student learning skills and
- Parent involvement.

The research, at present, is too sparse and too problematic to be able to justify the drawing of any strong conclusions.

Students are more likely to complete homework if they know the teachers are keeping track and giving effective feedback. Professor Walker also stated that it's not easy to provide every student with targeted feedback about their homework.

Professor John Hattie states that "Homework in primary school has an effect of around zero."

He added that homework does make a bigger difference in high school mainly because tasks are often around reinforcing or giving students another chance to practice what they have learnt.

“The worst thing you can do is to give projects, the best thing you can do is to reinforce something you have already learnt ” Professor Hattie stated.

OECD data shows that the average Australian fifteen year olds are set six hours of homework a week, higher than the OECD average of 4.9 hours.

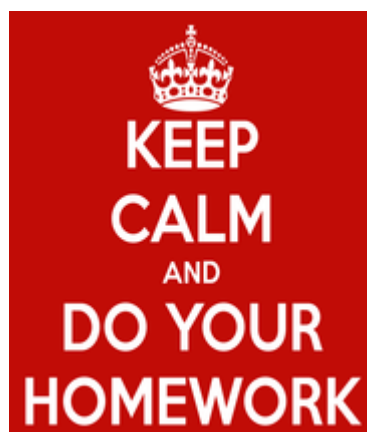
Professor Hattie urges that all schools look at the outcomes for students as their primary focus. His work focuses on “Visible Learning.” This is a comprehensive program that many schools, including Blackwell, have begun to implement.

Academics do say homework has more impact in maths because maths tasks are about “deliberate practice.”

And so, the debate continues.

To summarise current research on homework indicates that:

- Timely feedback on homework is crucial;
- Teachers may lack the ability to identify and seek quality homework;
- Homework reduces time spend on other pursuits that may have greater long term value;
- There is strong evidence that homework at the primary school level has little impact on academic performance and
- Measuring homework by time spent is imprecise and inadequate.



Some useful links

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/primary-school-homework-debate-leading-some-parents-to-opt-out-20150314-1442q9.html>

<https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2017/feb/07/homework-is-it-worth-the-hassle>

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/lifematters/the-dog-ate-my-homework:-why-justin-coulson-banned-homework/8373162>

<http://time.com/4466390/homework-debate-research/>