

WHAT EVERY HEAD TEACHER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HOMEWORK

**HOMEWORK HELPS RAISE
STUDENTS' ATTAINMENT
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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Learning Data

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is the technology division of **The Examcraft Group**. It provides schools with a homework and learning resource management system which ensures that young people and their parents are aware of the homework which has been assigned on a daily basis regardless of whether or not they are in class.



INTRODUCTION

This paper examines research on the effectiveness of homework. The key takeaways from this research are:

- 1. Homework has a positive effect on student achievement at second level**
- 2. Assigning homework frequently and consistently will have a greater effect on student achievement than sporadic assignment of large chunks of homework.**
- 3.** Homework assigned should encompass a balance between task orientated rote learning, pre-learning exercises, revision, and choice orientated homework that allows for students to have choice and authority over their own learning.
- 4. Parent expectations are a critical contributor to student success.**
Expectations should be high yet achievable and aligned with the expectations of the school and the teacher.
- 5.** Parents should create an environment of support within the home, however, **parents should not take on a surveillance role in relation to homework and they should not do the homework for their child.**
This reduces the young person's academic autonomy; it may damage their self-confidence and can be counter-productive.
- 6. Parents should always reward effort rather than results** with comments like 'well you attempted to solve the problem three different ways, and that to me a very good, well done'. **Parents should comment positively on a young person being hard-working rather than they being 'intelligent' as 'intelligence' can grow with work and effort.**

While research suggests that homework has an overall positive effect on enhancing student achievement, and improving student autonomy, there are some important factors to consider in order for homework to have the intended positive effects including the suitability of homework to the student's age range, homework length, frequency, parental involvement, the expectations of parents and teachers, and

the type of homework tasks set. Poorly designed homework that is too complex, too open, or too poorly communicated can cause students to lose motivation and self-confidence in their own abilities.



HOMEWORK AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Hattie (2009) describes a study which analysed 161 separate studies involving over 100,000 students. He found that typically homework has an overall positive effect, on student achievement.

The use of homework was associated with advancing student achievement by approximately one year with positive effects being most notable at in secondary school students.

The effectiveness of homework depends on many contributing factors and its effectiveness depends on interactions between school management, teacher, student, and parents.



PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND EXPECTATIONS

The research suggests that parents should be supporting their children, but not too greatly, involved in their child's homework (Blazer, 2009). **Parents can most greatly influence student achievement through conveying high yet achievable expectations and aspirations for their child. Student achievement has a far stronger link to parental expectations than to homework supervision, surveillance, or assistance (Hattie, 2009).**

When effectively communicated and aligned between home and school, the beliefs and expectations of adults in the home are far more powerful than

many other home influences such as involvement in homework, involvement in school life, familial structure, or socio-economic status of the family (Hattie, 2009; Jeynes, 2007; Rosenzweig, 2000). Thus, it is highly important that parental expectations for their child's achievement are high, yet achievable, and parallel with the teacher's, and the school's expectations. In order for parents to be able to hold high yet achievable expectations for their child's achievement, there should be clear and open communication between home and school through which parents are educated in the language of schooling so that they fully understand any feedback provided on their child's progress, and so that home and school expectations become shared expectations.

There are risks in encouraging parents to assist children with homework. Parents can confuse children by using different instructional techniques to the teacher, or can even undermine their child's sense of academic autonomy (Cooper & Valentine, 2001). Autonomy when doing homework is one of the most important variables in the success homework can have on positively impacting student achievement (Fernández-Alonso, Suárez-Álvarez, and Muñiz, 2015).



TIME DEVOTED TO HOMEWORK

A recent study of homework by Fernández-Alonso, Suárez-Álvarez, and Muñiz (2015) examined the effects of time spent on homework, effort made, and the frequency of homework on student achievement. The study found that, once background factors are controlled, frequency of homework assigned by teachers and student autonomy when completing homework are the variables that impact most on the effect homework has in relation to student achievement.

The study found that **the frequency with which homework is assigned has more of an effect on student achievement than the amount of time spent on homework each evening. This instils good work habits and promotes student autonomy and self-directed learning.**

The evidence above suggests that having a strong homework policy aimed at the frequency and stability of homework would help increase the positive relationship between homework and student achievement.



HOMEWORK TYPE

Homework should not be too complex or open as to allow students to become overwhelmed or confused, causing them to lose confidence in their ability.

The lack of teacher presence when homework is completed makes task orientated homework that either builds on concepts learnt in the previous lesson, or acts as a pre-learning activity in preparation for the next lesson, a the generally preferred option as it requires less teacher involvement and frees lesson time up for building a deeper understanding of more complex concepts, teacher-facilitated discussions, and discovery.

A study conducted on the importance of choice in the classroom (Patall, Cooper, and Wynn, 2010), found that providing students with choices in what activities and tasks to complete for homework increased student interest, engagement and learning; enhancing motivational and academic outcomes. Results revealed that when students received a choice of homework they reported higher intrinsic motivation to do homework, felt more confident in their ability to complete the homework, and performed better on the unit test compared with when they did not have a choice. In addition, a trend suggested that having choices enhanced homework completion rates compared with when no choices were given.

Giving options on how to present homework or different tasks to complete that cover different levels of complexity through use of a rubric or choice board, provides students with choice, giving greater opportunity of students to express their ideas and creativity within a framework that is structured enough to achieve teacher created outcomes, develop autonomy, and ensure that students are not too overwhelmed by an open ended assignment (Pattall, Cooper, and Wynn, 2010; Hattie, 2009). Examples of choice based homework include choices board menus (Westphal, 2007), Cubing activities using Blooms Taxonomy (Wormeli, 2006), Challenge lists (Wesphal, 2007), 2-5-8 (Westphal, 2007), RAFT(S) (Wormeli, 2009), and tic tac toe menus (Wormeli, 2006).

Overall, considering the type of homework best suited for all students in a class is a complex challenge as some students will respond better to choice and creativity, some will respond to task orientated work, and most will be at different levels of understanding of the topics covered in class. So, like everything homework should be a well-balanced diet, a well varied combination of simple tasks to consolidate and extend learning and creative choices to express ideas.

IN CONCLUSION...

Overall the research on homework sends a clear message: homework can have a strong positive effect on the educational progress of secondary school students.

Regular assignment of varied homework tasks from rote learning to differentiated choice boards, when combined with high expectations for achievement that are aligned and modelled by the school, the teacher, and in the home, can have a powerfully positive effect on student achievement and autonomy.

Research suggests that it is not necessary to assign huge quantities of homework, but it is important that assignment be systematic and regular (Fernández-Alonso, Suárez-Álarez, and Muñiz, 2015), with the aim of promoting autonomous, self-directed learning (Hattie, 2009).

Homework should not exclusively aim for repetition or revision of content. On the contrary, homework should present an opportunity for creativity and choice, to express understanding in a way that is meaningful to the individual (Patall, Cooper, and Wynn, 2010).



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