

Did You Do Your Homework?

I have always had mixed feelings about homework. As a kid I hated homework. Hanging out with friends is where my desire was, but homework was meant to improve my grades, and I liked that! From the parent point of view homework was a window into my children's day at school, but it was a source of friction between me and my children at home. Nagging questions were constantly flying from my mouth, "Did you do your homework? Why did you wait to the last minute to do that project?" Professionally, I thought that assigning homework would lead the children to a better understanding of the material, but I really did not like hearing the children grumble about having homework and I didn't like asking the children, "Did you do your homework? Why didn't you do your homework?"

These mixed feelings inspired me to do some homework myself. I researched the pros and cons of homework. I found that at the elementary level there is no data that supports the positive effects of homework. Harris Cooper, a Duke University psychology professor, compiled six studies that were conducted between 1987 and 2003 in his book, The Battle Over Homework. He states that for elementary school children, "the average correlation between time spent on homework and achievement...hovered somewhere around zero." After reading that study I went in search of data that would support the positive effects of homework for elementary students. I thought I was on to something when I revisited a book that I read a while back called, Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement by Robert Marzano, Debra Pickering and Jane Pollock. This book cited five sources that stated the benefits of homework. However, as I continued my search I read, The Homework Myth by Alfie Kohn and realized that Kohn tracked down each of those studies and noticed that the data included in the Marzano et. al. book was misleading and incorrect. Kohn states, "I was frankly stunned by the extent of misrepresentation here. It wasn't just that one or two of the cited studies offered weak support for the proposition. Rather, none of them offered *any* support." I was not able to find any research that proved that there was a correlation between homework and academic achievement in the elementary grades.

In wrapping up my "homework" my feelings changed. I now wonder since there is no data to support the positive effects of homework should children in elementary school be given homework on very limited basis? In elementary school, should it be the exception not the rule? What do you think?

I must note that the findings are a bit different once children enter middle school. Mr. Miller will share his view with you in two weeks.