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By Shamsah Raheem Dhanani



Homework, according to many educators bridges the gap between the school and home environment. The exercise was made to help students revise what they learned in the classroom. But too much homework is also known to induce burnout and fatigue in children.

It is a well-conceived idea in schools that homework develops a sense of responsibility in a child for completing a task and bringing it back the next day to show to the teacher. However, there is no evidence that an elementary school child achieves academic success by completing loads of assignments at home. Bannitt and Kalish (2006) assert that homework in huge quantity robs children of sleep, play and exercise time, which they need for proper physical, emotional and neurological development. Research proves that too much work leaves our young children with lesser achievements and a misbalanced academic move.

It has often been noticed that children spend hours and hours on the projects given to them as homework leading to parents cutting down their evening activities in order to monitor their homework.

There exists a school of thought that homework keeps children connected to their subjects along with deviating them from unnecessary pastimes including watching too much television and spending hours on the Internet. But does all that homework add to the children's learning and academic success?

As child psychologist Dan Kindlon, a Harvard professor and author of several books, including *Tough Times, Strong Children*, mentions, "The issue of too much homework comes up whenever I talk to parent groups, and the truth is, there's no good research justification for it. The analyses out there just doesn't make a connection between homework and success.

Every parent, teacher and school administrator has a common agenda that children should remain happy, healthy and competitive and above all they should love learning but the current pile-it-on approach of giving homework proves as counter-productive and who's to blame for this state of affairs? Our kids, our educators, our parents or our schooling system?

The issue can be addressed if the amount of homework is replaced by the quality and nature of the given assignments. There have been many studies conducted over the years to show that student achievement improves with homework, with the lowest amount of improvement from a study by Cooper in 1989 showing only eight per cent of improvement to the greatest amount in Walberg's study in 1999, showing a 31 per cent increase. But again, the question arises as what should be given as homework to a child which proves to be an added learning assignment and not merely a practice of what has already been taught and understood in the classroom as it is already a known fact now that most parents help their children in doing their homework to such an extent that it cannot be said whether it has been done by the parents or the child. The consequences have to be suffered by the child during surprise class tests and evaluations.

It can be in the great interest of the child, teachers and ultimately the parents if certain effective policies are designed by the school authorities in consultation with the parents. For example, students can be asked for tasks such as interviewing people regarding careers, watch educational television programmes associated with school themes, do research within the community, volunteer service to the community, or play educational games with family members.

There are many enjoyable experiences and games that involve reasoning, problem-solving and logic that may be valuable learning resources. The routine work which is required to make a child understand the syllabi and contents of the prescribed books can be done as an extended quality class-work. Schools need to promote academic programmes to reflect quality which certainly is not the rote, meaningless, irrelevant busy work that students currently receive in many of our schools.

If school administrators, board members and teachers re-evaluate their curriculum and add meaningful, purposeful tasks to the learning experience, quality work will emerge and students will be more willing to buy into a programme where quality work is the norm, not an exception. Once quality work becomes a commitment and is established in the schools, students will be more likely to adhere to non-compulsory learning experiences that can be accomplished at home.

Currently, most students do homework because they are supposed to, not because they want to or consider the work meaningful or relevant to their experience. Compulsory homework promotes a climate in which students, parents and teachers lose respect for the educational system. Coercive approaches to gain compliance generally spike, and the opportunity to promote quality work is undermined. Therefore, it is high time for teachers, educators and school administrators to re-evaluate the homework policy and re-design it in such a way that it develops the students' skills and competencies, making them independent learners so that they can consolidate and extend their existing skills rather than forcing them to drag heavy bag packs full of copies to be filled in without even understanding why it is to be done.