Does Homework help or hinder?

Jane Healy – June 2015

The debate on whether homework helps or hinders a student’s ability to succeed academically is a hot topic of conversation, however, a conversation which is not entirely new. According to some research gathered during this inquiry based activity this is debate that has been going on for the last century and one of which is discussed in every country. For some students and educational systems homework is an essential part of exam success. For others it is seen as a burden that affects the health of children and hinders on defining social divides more than is already there. This report simple looks at the question does Homework Help or Hinder?

History of Homework:

Before looking at statistics and reports, it would be good to know where homework originates from and what its original purpose was. Homework for the past century has changed due to the relevance of the era or the attitudes at the time, along with the new educational theories that came about. However, the purpose of homework always was the same and that was to reinforce work that had been done that day in class, to strengthen that knowledge and skill to make sure they are practiced to develop them.

Trends:

The BBC News conducted a survey at the end of last year during the dispute of homework; its finding is very interesting and in fact does not show any real pattern that either side favours another. The report highlights that there is a no common trend when it comes to homework and the achievement of high grades. This report looks at counties in the world that have topped performance in international test for years and how they run their homework policy. The report has found that Finland, a country that is seen as a top educational system which year after year manages to achieve high school grades, however, it is one of the countries that gives their students the lowest amount of homework hours. This is seen again in South Korea, which is another top performer in international tests, however it also has one of the lowest levels of homework. This piece of evidence suggests that homework is not needed for high grades to be obtained. However, the report also highlights how again there is still no trend as countries such as Singapore and Shanghai, two countries that are seen as top five educational systems in the world for the last few years, give the longest amount of homework hours. Which contradicts the above as it suggest that less homework means higher grades. This is also backed up with the statement from the University Of London Institute Of Education “More homework doesn’t mean better,

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1 Coughlan, 2014, “Long homework hours’ for UK families”
2 Coughlan, 2014 “Long homework hours’ for UK families”
there comes a point where it no longer has a benefit”. So with no common trend to follow or help with the understanding of homework helping or hindering, what should a school look at to guide them in their homework policy ways?

Opinions:

According to Barkers article “Is it time to scrap homework?” she finds that homework is a trend and due to Ofstead scrutiny and competitive league tables, that at this day and age in the educational system that it is all the “rage” and change may soon follow. This has already come with Michael Gove asking that the time of set homework be reduced. However, not everyone believes this, one such person is Kieran Larkin, principal of ARK Kings Academy, Birmingham, who believes that if homework is planned and purposeful that the student will learn. They will recap knowledge developed in the classroom and also learn skills for later life such as research skills. Along with this homework according to Larkin will provided a challenge and it allows the student to demonstrate understanding in an uninterrupted time period. However, not everyone is convinced especially the youngsters that have to do it. Claudia Vulliamy a year 9 student simple thinks that due to homework she has no time to do think that she “enjoys” as there is “too much homework”. Another such group that believes that homework hinders is The Parents Outloud Charity, the charity warns that homework can lead to “rebellion and burnout”.

Social Background:

As we continue the debate whether it helps and hinders there seems to be one trend and opinion that goes in the same point and that is that students from different backgrounds seem to be affected differently by homework. For students in the middle to higher social class homework does not seem to burden on their lives. Perhaps it is simple because they have all the necessary facilities, desk, books or computer. But unfortunately not every child has the means to these facilities so is missing out and thus becomes demotivated when their grades lag behind other student s grades. As well we are in an era where many focuses of work is technology driven, therefore many homework assignments are technology based. But again for the small partition in society a media device with internet is not at home therefore homework can simply not be done. Again another report highlights that homework is simply hindering those of a poorer social background, the report also focuses on those children from a better economic background show that the parents are actually doing the homework for them as they themselves have been educated. Again students from a lower economic background have fewer resources and that included parents, as

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3 Baker, 2013 “Is it time to scrap homework”
4 Baker, 2013 “Is it time to scrap homework”
5 The Independent 2013 “Is it time we banished homework”
6 The Independent 2013 “Is it time we banished homework”
7 Baker, 2103 “Is it time to scrap homework”
8 Backer, 2013 “Is it time to scrap homework”
9 Coughlan 2014, “Long homework hours’ for UK families”
looking at trends those from lower economic backgrounds are less educated, therefore less motivated to motivate and help their children with homework tasks. This is interesting, as should the government be worried about homework and if it help or hindering, bare in mind homework has been around for many years and did not seem to do any past educational students any harm or should the government look at the social divides in education and try render these?

Solution:

So what is the solution do we ban it? Do we continue on the way we are going or do we segregate students by their social backgrounds and only give homework to students of on a higher social ladder as they are the only ones who seemingly benefit from it? An article written by Henry suggests that perhaps we should take a chapter out of the Americans attitude to homework, and that homework should simply be banned as it disrupts families and overburdens students. Research in the states show that there is a link between high school drop outs and homework and that many of these drop outs blamed homework for their end departure as it was a huge demotivater. However, Dr Harris Copper a professor in psychology at the University of Missouri, suggests that homework gives older children an edge. Research that is food for thought, should we ban homework on a primary level and then reintroduce for older exam year students? One such country that decided to take the leap was France and since 2013 they have declared an end to homework in primary schools. However, this was not because of research into younger or older student benefitting from homework, but there education advisors believed that independent learning should take place at the end of the school day on school premises. Denmark have also introduced a “homework-free” school pilot, and results have already recorded a fall in the dropout rates and a rise in overall grades. Again another solution that gives food for thought and a solution that would put any debate to homework favouring different economic backgrounds, independent learning on school premises would simply stamp out the social inequality. However, with many new ideas and process this leads to other debates down the line, such as more work for teacher to supervise, longer school premises open hours and the commute at longer days.

The debate on homework helping or hindering is one that will probably continue on for another century. However, I have found that will writing this report that my eyes were not opened to the debate of homework but rather the one of social division. It is still very evident that social gaps are still very evident but if a school is clever in the way it works its policies, it can narrow this gap. Evidence in Denmark shows this, with their pilot scheme, by

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keeping the students on the premises to do their homework means that every student has been given the same resources to let them strive. However, as stated above this could lead to other problems and discussions about homework. It is an on-going discussion and one that still leads to questions still to be asked and answered.

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