



Study finds homework has limited value

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New research has found that homework is of little value to primary school children, and students are regularly given too much.

Australian academics Richard Walker and Mike Horsley's new book *Reforming Homework* says homework for young primary school children is of little or no value when it comes to academic achievement.

The book reviews international research on the subject and concludes that the quality of the homework that is set is more important than the quantity.

Associate Professor Walker, of the University of Sydney, admits that homework can be a touchy subject.

"There's a lot of disagreement, I have to say. But the consensus findings would essentially be homework's not very beneficial for primary school kids, very limited benefits for junior high school kids, and reasonable benefits for senior high school kids," he said.

He says another point that emerged from the research was the effect of the involvement of parents in homework.

"Where parents are over-controlling or interfering in their student's homework activities, then that's been shown pretty clearly to not be beneficial," he said.

"But where parents support their children's autonomy and essentially try to provide guidance and assistance rather than being interfering and controlling, that's beneficial for students."

Despite the research showing overall that homework was of limited value for younger children, that was for academic outcomes only.

It did not discount the value of homework in children developing skills such as managing their time and setting and completing tasks.

'Too much homework'

Professor Horsley, from Central Queensland University, says the book's most important finding is that the quality of the homework that is set is more important than the quantity.

"There's probably too much homework and that most of this homework is of a drill or consolidation nature," he said.

"In other words, we think that there's probably too much worksheet-based homework.

"We think that there's probably too much homework which is practice basically."

Professor Horsley says the book is aimed at teachers and parents as well as students.

"What we're proposing in our book is that teachers develop a homework curriculum," he said.

"That is when the teachers are planning their unit of work they should probably plan homework at that time.

"Homework is often an add-on.

"So one of the things [is] to try and get the planning of homework to be more sophisticated and nuanced and much more structured and organised."

Associate Professor Walker says the book also suggests other new approaches to homework.

He says homework should be more of a social experience.

"Homework tends to be seen as being an individual activity," he said.

"But if you see homework as being social and cultural in nature, then that means that you're going to set different types of homework for students.

"You're probably going to emphasise more collaborative learning.

"You're probably going to emphasise the fact that students need some assistance with their homework from parents and other people, rather than just the idea of students sitting at home, in isolation, doing their homework."

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