



HOMEWORK and Research

In 2008, we published a 'Frequently Asked Questions About Homework' pamphlet for parents. It stated our expectations and suggested what parents could do to support their child.

NZ researcher, John Hattie has, from time to time, been prominent in the news for a book he wrote about approaches to teaching and how each approach affected measurable achievement. His views on homework and reducing class size were headline grabbers. Here are a few notes I wrote after reading his book and some other points about homework from researcher Robert J. Marzano.

John Hattie, in his book 'Visible Learning' said...

"The overall effects(of homework) are positive, but there are some important moderators."

In his book he stated the following about homework:

- One researcher argued that the elder the student, the more useful the homework.
- Increasing the amount of homework did not lead to greater achievement.
- Parent support for homework has a positive effect on achievement, whereas direct instruction by parents can have the opposite.
- Task oriented homework, such as the rehearsal of basic skills, had higher effects than homework requiring deep learning or problem solving. Effects were also higher when homework was not complex, or when it had a novelty aspect.
- Projects were one of the least effective forms of homework.
- A large amount of homework or lack of monitoring tends to lower student achievement. For many students homework reinforces the fact that they cannot learn by themselves and cannot do schoolwork.
- Effects are higher when involving rote learning, practice or rehearsal of subject matter.

Effect size = 0.15 (Elementary schools); 0.64 (High schools)

Hattie, who says that anything below 0.4 effect size does not have a significantly positive effect, suggests that this difference between younger/elder may be because:

- a. Younger children are less able to ignore relevant material or stimulation in their environment.
- b. They have less effective study habits.
- c. They may receive little support from teachers or parents.

Robert Marzano says.....

“Homework is a strategy that provides students with opportunities to deepen their understanding of content and gain proficiency with their skills. It also gives students a chance to practise and review what they have learned.”

There are generalisations about homework:

- 1) The amount of homework assigned to students should be different from elementary to high school.
- 2) Parental involvement should be kept to a minimum.
- 3) The purpose of homework should be identified and articulated.
- 4) If homework is assigned, it should be commented on.

His recommendations are:

- a. Establish and communicate a ‘homework policy’.
This should communicate the purpose of homework, the amount likely to be assigned, consequences for non-completion and acceptable levels of parental help. At HVS, our pamphlet for parents includes these points.
- b. Design homework assignments that clearly articulate the purpose and outcome.
Make sure students understand the purpose of the homework – to practise skills, apply skills, find new information, create something, elaborate things covered in class etc.
- c. Vary the approaches to providing feedback.
Specific, timely feedback is important. However it is not always feasible for teachers to comment on every assignment. Having a mix of teacher feedback, student feedback, self assessment, sharing with a buddy, sharing with the class, comparison to success criteria, as ways of providing feedback.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR Houghton Valley School?

- 1) Juniors and seniors should not be expected to do the same amount of homework.
- 2) Teachers should not give too much homework. We have agreed on guidelines for this.
- 3) The tasks may need basic parent support and encouragement, but parents shouldn’t be expected to be teachers. The homework should be relatively easy, but not too easy.
- 4) Homework can be used to practise and apply skills learnt at school – and therefore be useful in the sense that practice of a sport or musical instrument is useful.
- 5) ‘Projects’ should be rarely given out as homework, although ‘novelty’ homework that is a change from the norm may promote engagement.
- 6) Feedback about the homework tasks is important. This may be related to learning intentions and success criteria. It could be linked to achievement in other areas. Reward effort.
- 7) If homework causes problems for a child, teachers should find a way to assist e.g. modify it, lessen the amount, provide direct assistance, chat to parents.
- 8) If for any reason a parent communicates that his/her child is unable to do homework(e.g. sick, tired, parents don’t feel homework is useful, too busy, need a break), teachers should go with the parent’s wishes and excuse the child from doing the homework.
- 9) Teachers should chat to their students about how to approach completing the homework tasks and offer support for those who need guidance or do not have encouragement at home.

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