

Homework Habits

Should students be given homework? Does homework matter? There has been frequent debate about the value of homework. Students, teachers and parents often have strong beliefs about homework, whether they support or oppose the practice. Controversy may be especially intense when homework for high ability students is discussed. Gifted students usually need fewer repetitions to master a concept or skill so homework that is designed to reinforce new learning may be regarded as a misuse of students' time, especially by the students themselves.

A number of research studies have explored the practice of homework to try to determine the best approach; however much of this research is inconclusive. It should be noted that most research in this area applies to a broad range of students without consideration for the specific needs of students with high intellectual abilities, students who achieve high academic results and students who are gifted and have learning disabilities.

To add to the complexities of the debate, many high ability students find it easy to learn and have been able to complete homework assignments with little effort, especially during the early stages of their education and are lulled into a state of complacency. As a result, students may not develop the study skills (including time management, organisation, learning strategies and exam preparation skills) required to achieve at secondary level. After reviewing the available research literature and based upon considerable experience with high ability students in school and clinical settings, I believe that regular homework is essential if high ability students are to achieve academic excellence.

Neuroscience has demonstrated the importance of routine and habit formation in effecting cognitive growth and academic skills. Gifted students may not require the same level of repetition as other students to master material but they do require *some* repetition of concepts and skills outside of the classroom. To be relevant and effective, homework should be differentiated to meet the individual student's needs. Homework can incorporate high level challenges, processes and the development of advanced skills with an emphasis upon completion of a few more challenging items to engage and test the student's knowledge rather than a large number of less demanding items. Specific areas might be targeted to develop a student's skills to an optimum level.

Assignments designed to be completed over a longer period of time enable students to develop a range of research, planning, writing, editing and evaluation skills along with essential project management skills that will be invaluable throughout all levels of education. Independent skills developed by regularly completing homework can lead to academic achievement and career success. It seems that to achieve at a high level, homework *does* matter.