

Homework and Study Support in Year 7

Diane Wilson, Megan Elliott & Kieron Burke,
Sarah Bonnell School, Newham,
London

Aim

To identify ways in which teachers can enhance student learning through homework, by examining homework, perceptions of it in Year 7, and support systems both in school and at home.

Dimensions of this Case Study

The research was undertaken in Year 7 during the Autumn and Spring terms of the 1997/98 academic year. Methods included questionnaires to all Year 7 students and their parents, the completion of homework logs by selected students in each class and follow up interviews. Four Year 7 tutors were also interviewed.

A total of 202 Year 7 students completed the homework questionnaire. 70 parents completed the parental questionnaire. 24 students, representing 3 broad ability bands and the range of ethnic backgrounds in the school, were interviewed after they had kept a homework log for one week. Analysis of attendance registers was undertaken. This included details of work undertaken by students at the Study Support Centre.

Summary of Findings for this Case Study

- Despite overwhelming support for homework from parents, teachers and pupils in this school and considerable support at home for homework completion, parents in this school needed guidance from teachers to increase their support of their children's learning out of school.
- Specific aspects of the homework set influenced student motivation and achievement and the amount of support parents and others could give.
- Students experiencing conflicting demands in their family life found the Study Support Centre played a valuable role in providing peer and teacher support and facilities for developing independent learning skills.
- No evidence was found in this school that completing homework to music or television, was detrimental to the quality of work produced and may actually enhance enjoyment of some tasks.
- Motivation and confidence to undertake homework tasks was maximised in this school when they were carefully explained, when examples were provided and when sufficient time was allowed for details to be written in student planners.
- Homework overload in this school was caused by a failure to adhere to homework timetables.
- The most able in this school were likely to spend the least time on homework and were most likely to be able to access support systems in school.

The Study

Interest in homework and its value in raising achievement has attracted considerable attention. Guidelines have been issued by the DfEE and considerable extension of provision of out of hours learning facilities to support students in their learning is being planned.

The study arose out of an interest in exploring student, parent and teacher perceptions of homework and the types of homework set. The relationship between the extent of support outside school for homework completion and the use of the school's Prince's Trust Study Support Centre was to be a key focus.

Main findings

Findings from this study support those of Her Majesty's Inspectors (1995) in respect of students' enjoyment of homework tasks set. They enjoyed tasks which had a longer timespan, required independent study and could be presented in a variety of ways for the chosen audience. They particularly enjoyed tasks that enabled them to work together. Students were more likely to enjoy homework set for subjects that they are good at and enjoy. In Year 7, motivation to complete homework well was found to be largely intrinsic and linked to the particular task and subject.

There was overwhelming support for homework from parents, students and teachers. It was perceived as an important vehicle in enhancing achievement, ensuring coverage of the curriculum and in providing opportunities for the development of independent learning skills. Parents valued homework for the discipline it required and the work habits that it encouraged. Findings from this study indicated that it is incumbent on schools to ensure that parents are provided with the information and guidance they need to actively support their children's out of hours learning.

'It is important that children learn to work independently and to develop self discipline'.

Parent, Year 7 student.

Interestingly, parents and students had different perceptions of support given for homework by members of the family. Student responses indicated

by a considerable majority that they received most support from their mothers, whereas parents indicated that both mother and father supported their daughters in almost equal numbers. The possible reasons for this are discussed in the main report but are outside the remit of this study.

The evidence suggests that students in disadvantaged areas take advantage of out of hours study support facilities which provide the environment, resources, support, and time many of them need for the completion of homework and study. Importantly, such facilities provide valuable opportunity to work collaboratively. This study has revealed that many students do experience considerable time constraints due to family and religious responsibilities and many lack a suitable space in which to work.

'It helps me when I have a lot of homework and I know I won't be able to get it all done at home'.

Year 7 student.

The overwhelming majority of students in this study used the school's Prince's Trust Study Support Centre to complete homework and take advantage of the teacher and other support provided. A significant number of students attended to read.

A minority of students considered that they were given too much homework and for a significant number, homework deadlines of the following day, represented a considerable constraint.

This study suggests a number of ways in which teachers and schools might enhance the quality of students' learning from homework.

Schools

For schools, these include:

- adherence to homework timetables to avoid potential overload;
- collaboration across the curriculum in order that more open ended homework tasks, which involve more than one subject, and which support collaborative learning are encouraged, especially in Year 7;
- provision of out of hours supported study facilities;
- provision of workshops and guidance for parents to support out of hours learning.

Teachers

For teachers these include:

- setting homework at an appropriate juncture during the lesson, not at the end,
- ensuring that students have correctly written homework tasks down in their planners,
- providing wall size versions of homework planner sheets for group completion and display in the form room,
- where appropriate, providing opportunities for commencement of tasks in class,
- providing exemplars and writing frames which guide and motivate students to greater achievement,
- setting tasks which encourage collaborative learning,
- differentiating tasks, especially for the most able and ensuring that the least able have manageable amounts of work to undertake outside school,
- providing opportunities for students to undertake work which gives them recourse to parents and other family members,
- setting realistic deadlines for the completion of homework, not the next day.

Further Reading

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Contact

Diane Wilson, Sarah Bonnell School, Deanery Rd, Newham, London E15 4LP
Tel: 0181 534 6791