



Homework Years 3 - 6: Friend or Foe?



PART A: What Happens Now

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the often vexed issue of homework and to provide a way forward. In late 2003 we canvassed our school parent/caregiver community about homework. It seems that it is appropriate to air the subject of homework again, with the purpose being to remind ourselves about the discussion that took place in 2003 and to make some changes.

Homework: Background

Homework has been around almost as long as schools have existed and, as long as there has been homework, concerns have been expressed by parents and educators alike. Homework in the primary school setting is, arguably, a relatively recent phenomenon that seems to have grown enormously in recent years with content and amounts of homework based on teacher and perceived parental expectations. Sometimes these expectations have coincided and sometimes they have collided.

When Homework Is Good



When homework is good it can be very, very good. Homework can have a number of benefits, typically, providing students with the opportunity to:

- Practise skills taught at school with the intention being to ‘embed’ these in the student’s repertoire and saving valuable school time for further learning. (Learning basic facts is a good example of this).
- Undertake their own research to come up with answers to questions that have either been posed for them or they have posed themselves.
- Share what they are doing with parents and caregivers, thereby assisting to develop a partnership between home and school. This can also see useful family discussion taking place.
- Develop a sense of pride and satisfaction, while working with increased independence.
- Develop intrinsic motivation (motivation from within).
- Develop more skills, thereby enhancing the student’s self-image.
- Read.

When Homework Turns Bad



When homework turns bad it can be very, very bad. Homework can have a number of downsides, typically:

- The development of a sense of frustration and anger by students who find the tasks too difficult.
- When time does not permit homework to be completed by students.
- When parents or caregivers get angry at the amount of homework being set with resulting tensions at home and between home and school and vice versa.
- When homework gets in the way of students reading recreationally.
- When homework is 'too easy' for some and 'too difficult' for others.

Commentary

At first blush it might seem to be a straight forward task to set homework that meets the needs of individual students. While this can be done with relative ease in terms of reading and basic facts, it is far more challenging in other curriculum areas such as mathematics, research and written language (including grammar) given the wide diversity of levels of needs amongst students in the classroom. For the teacher to individualise homework in terms of setting and marking (other than for reading and basic facts) would result in the teacher spending so much time on these activities that other areas of school would undoubtedly suffer.

In our increasingly diverse and busy society there are numerous demands on students (and their families) after school. It seems that after school hours, (and weekends), can be taken up with activities such as dance and music lessons and practices, an ever increasing range of sport's practice and games, not to mention the lure of television, and other competing forms of entertainment provided for by parents in and out of the home and, of course, simply spending time as a family doing 'family things.'

In summary, what goes on at school during school time can very largely be controlled by the teacher. When students go home it is a very different story as the students are, (quite rightly!) in the care of their parents/caregivers. As has been commented on above, this leads to a variety of circumstances that are often 'student specific.'

The Result

Following consultation with our parent/caregiver community, it was decided that the homework regime would be as follows:

- Homework to run from Friday to Thursday, thereby allowing greater flexibility for families by providing the weekend to do homework.
- Homework to be set for a maximum average of 20 minutes per five nights of school over a week.
- Homework to consist of reading and basic facts (when appropriate.) Note: Basic facts are very important and take time to learn. They are best learnt at home in the student's homework time.
- The 'athon each year would replace this homework for 2 – 3 weeks each year.
- Reading to be encouraged at all times in the home.

Conclusion

Homework is designed to complement rather than consume family time, as the homework tasks should be manageable in time, while the homework will be appropriate to the needs of students and will reflect class programmes.

Homework largely comprises of basic facts. These fall under two headings; maths and spelling. Maths basic facts reflect the level that your child is working at in the Numeracy Project. They are items of knowledge that need to have instant, accurate recall, and constant reinforcement. In the main they will not be new items of knowledge, but they will require practice. Year 3 - 6 students will usually read a fiction or non fiction book selected during the weekly class library lesson. When children are learning to read, the book that they bring home is usually familiar to them, and we would regard 90% accuracy as being at an instructional level. The same rule of thumb will apply to mathematical basic facts.

Spelling basic facts are generated from word lists. Your child will have been tested on a random sample of these words, and placed accordingly. There may also be words that your child does not consistently spell correctly in their written work. Therefore, although they may appear to be able to spell them, practice is important.

PART B What Will Happen from 2 June

1. Homework has now been further standardised throughout the school so that it reflects our standard assessments and is set specifically to support school wide programmes. It does not involve research or new learning. Homework will be set from Friday to the following Thursday.

- a. Homework will consist of up to ten spelling and a number of basic maths facts. These are based on standard assessments in school and ongoing assessments of students needs. Facts that are not used consistently correctly in class in the context of everyday work may need repeating. These will include times tables at the correctly identified time.
- b. When children have reached a degree of fluency and basic facts are no longer appropriate children will be given extended knowledge that needs to be learned and reinforced.
- c. The following table shows the basic facts that a stage 5 student needs to know, and includes an example that they may be given.

Basic Facts	Week 1
Say the number 100 more	$34 + 100 = 134$
Say the number 10 less	$94 - 10 = 84$
Say the number 100 less	$467 - 100 = 367$
Skip count forwards and backwards in 3's	3,6,9,12,15
Know addition facts to 20	$11 + 9 = 20$
Know multiples of 100 that add to 1000	$500 + 500 = 1000$
Know multiplication and division facts for x2, x5 and x10	$5 \times 2 = 10$
Know multiplication and division facts for x2, x5 and x10	$9 \times 2 = 18$
Know multiplication and division facts for x2, x5 and x10	$6 \times 2 = 12$
Know multiplication and division facts for x2, x5 and x10	$4 \times 2 = 8$
Know multiplication and division facts for all tables to 12	

When children have reached a degree of fluency and basic facts are no longer appropriate children will be given extended knowledge that needs to be learned and reinforced. The following is an example of knowledge that a student beyond stage 5 would benefit from knowing. They will be expected to learn the correct terminology and definition as well as completing the exercise.

1
Prime Number A whole number which has only two factors. These are 1 and the number itself. No other numbers will divide exactly into a prime number. The first few prime numbers are: 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 19, 23, 29 Note that 1 is not a prime number and that 2 is the only even prime number. *Find the prime numbers to 50 *Are these prime numbers? 71 , 79, 83, 67, 87, 103, 153, 177, 93



Extra Homework Programme (From 2 June 2006)

2. For those parents who would like extra homework, a new programme will commence immediately after the conclusion of the Mapathon. (The 'Extra Homework Programme'.) This is designed to provide additional homework for students in Years 4 – 6. Children will access this programme at the discretion of their parents. Here is how it will work.

- Every Friday at lunchtime in the school library the new homework sheet from the Extra Homework Programme will be available.
- The sheet is to be returned to the library on the following Friday at lunchtime. The sheet will then be marked by the child. Answers can be discussed with the principal, who will be in the library every Friday lunchtime to help implement the programme.
- As the homework sheets will contain questions of varying degrees of difficulty, parents will need to closely monitor (a) the questions their children answer and (b) the amount of assistance they, as parents, give their children.
- In the context that the questions will be of varying degrees of difficulty, there is no need (and, indeed, no expectation) for all questions to be answered.
- Questions will cover a wide spectrum of topics including current events, geography, history, maths, science and some 'oddities.' Please note, that each homework sheet will not include all these areas.
- Should your child participate in the Extra Homework Programme it is important that parents understand the important role they have to play by monitoring their child's work, as described above.