

Is homework useful for kids? If so, what age should it start?

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"I think of homework as extending and expanding the conversations of the classroom, with space for students to exercise their own creativity and agency in exploring those ideas along the lines of their choosing," says Brian Gravel.

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A tricky aspect of being a professor of education with school-aged children is that I am frequently asked to comment on issues of pedagogy and policy.

One of my favorite topics involves the myriad questions around [homework](#). When should kids get it? Are kids getting enough? Are they getting too much? What's the point?

Researchers have explored various aspects of homework for decades, asking questions about its efficacy in raising achievement scores and measuring forms of engagement, and if it can support certain kinds of learning goals.

Across the board, the educational community has consistently shown that the positive impacts of homework—in its present forms—are minimal at best.

Some [middle school](#) and [high school students](#) might score higher on achievement tests when they do homework. But we can't find evidence that it supports elementary school learning, and we have ample evidence of its harmful impact, like contributing to children's exhaustion, reducing time for play, and contributing to overall disinterest in school.

My 10-year-old son believes the purpose of homework is "to bore you." When asked for a more thoughtful response the question of its purpose, he says "I don't really know. Maybe to remember what you've been

doing at school?"

Let me be clear—I do not believe homework in its current forms should exist at the elementary level, and I have deep skepticism of its utility at the middle and high school levels as well. This is more than opinion—it's the product of having studied how people learn, [personal experience](#), and reading research on the topic. (See Alfie Kohn's [writings on homework](#)—they offer much to consider.)

Homework tends to be the place where the most rote, dull, and uninspired kinds of schooling tasks flourish: memorizing, repetition, reproduction. These contribute to what Ira Shor, notable educational philosopher and collaborator of Paulo Freire, called the great "endullment"—the "dulling of students' minds as a result of their nonparticipation."

If we believe education can empower students to be critical examiners of their worlds, to build ideas and connections, and to gain facility with communicating their thinking, then we must rethink "homework."

I would love it if we could shift the conversation away from whether homework "works" or whether students should be assigned homework, toward what homework could be. That's because, while we can remove it from elementary schools (and we should), it is likely not going away.

We should ask questions like "Why homework?" and "What could we ask students to explore at home?" And, "How could home be a place to further explore ideas, histories, and relationships that surface in conversations at school?" Or—here's a radical idea—we could ask students themselves what kind of work at home would feel engaging and meaningful to them.

Homework could invite students to continue thinking, reflecting, and

building relationships among experiences in school and in other places in their lives. In fact, students are doing this kind of work already—making sense of what they encounter in school, in whatever forms that took.

I think of homework as extending and expanding the conversations of the classroom, with space for students to exercise their own creativity and agency in exploring those ideas along the lines of their choosing. Homework could be one way students bring their stories, histories, cultures, and identities into the classroom space to support their learning and participation.

The very notion of "homework" creates a somewhat false distinction in how learning and relationships transcend the spaces of one's life—school might feel different for students if it were a place to make sense of things happening in their lives.

A conversation about homework also allows us to question the nature of the learning environments in school. If the classroom work is rote, discrete, and shallow—then the thinking that students are doing outside of class might be along the lines of "why are we doing this work?" The teachers I work with are eager for more creative freedom in their classrooms, and perhaps questions about homework might provide opportunities for that.

I would be thrilled if we could collectively explore these dynamics of homework—what opportunities it provides, what harms it enacts—and what new possibilities could be imagined for work at home that supports the project of making schooling a meaningful experience for students.

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