Abusing Research: The Study of Homework and Other Examples
Excessive reliance
Perhaps homework "should" have such an effect, but Cooper knows there's no evidence that it does. What he and a group of educators who have challenged the conventional wisdom in order to propose a different way of thinking about the practice of assigning home assignments believe is that homework may indeed have some benefits, but they are not the ones that have been traditionally claimed.

Public officials, however, are not the only people who use research selectively. Disturbing as it is to acknowledge, there are times when politicians, educators, and other public figures seem to be so committed to a given agenda that they ignore, or at least minimize the importance of, what their investigations reveal.

In the second kind of study, course grades are used to determine whether homework made a difference. Apart from their simplicity, the main advantage of this type of research is that it is much easier to carry out. But is the available research being cited and summarized fairly even in those instances where scientific results are particularly strong?

Insufficient reliance
This is an area that we need to be mindful of because the present study suggests that in some cases, the evidence may be insufficient to support the conclusions being drawn. The study's authors, Cooper and his colleagues, noted that "virtually no good research has evaluated the impact of homework on student achievement".

By relying too much on the findings of others, we may be overlooking the need to conduct our own research or to critically evaluate the findings of others. If we do not critically evaluate the research we cite, we may be perpetuating the belief that homework is necessary when there is no evidence to support it.

Selective reliance
Homework researchers have turned up if it wasn't the outcome they seem to have been hoping for. Their conclusions and prescriptions, in other words, are sometimes strikingly at odds with their results. Their selective reliance on research has led to the mistaken belief that homework is a crucial component of the educational process.

Selective reliance on research can be harmful not only to the students being taught but also to the researchers themselves. By failing to critically evaluate the research they cite, educators and policy makers may be perpetuating the belief that homework is necessary when there is no evidence to support it.

Respect for research (and for science more generally) ought to include a recognition of its limits. While there are many benefits to be gained from research, it is important to remember that research is not infallible. The findings of research can change over time, and new evidence may emerge that challenges the conclusions of previous studies.

In the first kind of study, samples of student achievement test scores are used to determine whether homework made a difference. Apart from their simplicity, the main advantage of this type of research is that it is much easier to carry out. But is the available research being cited and summarized fairly even in those instances where scientific results are particularly strong?

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