

Is The Homework Myth Popular with Students? Well, Sure. What's Your Point?

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By Alfie Kohn

*“Boy, I’ll bet you’re real popular with kids!” is one of the more common responses I’ve heard from reporters after having done more than 90 TV, radio, and print interviews to discuss *The Homework Myth*. I begin by admitting that he has indeed received a number of fan letters from those not old enough to vote, but then point out that a lot of parents and teachers have a similar reaction to the book’s thesis; the realization that most homework is not particularly useful is by no means limited to the people who are compelled to do it.*

But look a little deeper and ask what is implied by this remark about children’s reactions. Many adults miss (or dismiss) the significance of the fact that the vast majority of students dislike homework, regarding their reaction as predictable and therefore not worth taking seriously. The obvious question would seem to be, If most kids see homework as (at best) something to be gotten over with as quickly as

possible, how could we expect that it would benefit them? What assumptions about the nature of learning underlie the belief that the learner's attitude about what he or she is doing has no bearing on the outcome?

*It's been gratifying to hear that educators – from Lake County, Ohio, to Glade Spring, Virginia – are reading the book together and reexamining their practices and assumptions. Some individual teachers, meanwhile, have decided to call a moratorium on homework, if only to see what happens. One teacher, in Falmouth, Massachusetts, mentioned the role of *The Homework Myth* to her fifth- and sixth-graders in helping her realize it was time to change. As one of her students subsequently explained, "My teacher said that if we understand what we are doing we should not get homework" but "if we do not [understand] she will help us understand." (One of her classmates plans to recommend the book to another teacher who "gives way too much homework," "gives us homework that we don't understand," and "does not care what we say about it.")*

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