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February 2022
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The Homework Debate

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Every school day brings something new, but there is one status quo most parents expect: homework. The old **adage** that *practice makes perfect* seems to make sense when it comes to schoolwork. But, while hunkering down after dinner among books and worksheets might seem like a natural part of childhood, there's more research now than ever suggesting that it shouldn't be so.

Many in the education field today are looking for evidence to support the case for homework, but are coming up empty-handed. "*Homework is all pain and no gain*," says author Allie Kohn. In his book *The Homework Myth*, Kohn points out that no study has ever found a correlation between homework and academic achievement in elementary school, and there is little reason to believe that homework is necessary in high school. In fact, it may even diminish interest in learning, says Kohn.

If you've ever had a late night argument with your child about completing homework, you probably know first hand that homework can be a strain on families. In an effort to reduce that stress, a growing number of schools are **banning** homework.

Mary Jane Cera is the academic administrator for the Kino School, a private, nonprofit K-12 school in Tucson, Arizona, which maintains a no-homework policy across all grades. The purpose of the policy is to make sure learning remains a joy for students, not a second shift of work that impedes social time and creative activity. Cera says that when new students are told there will be no homework assignments, they breathe a sigh of relief.

Many proponents of homework argue that life is filled with things we don't like to do, and that homework teaches self-discipline, time management and other nonacademic life **skills**. Kohn challenges this popular notion: If kids have no choice in the matter of homework, they're not really exercising judgment, and are instead losing their sense of autonomy.

At the Kino school, Cera says children often choose to take their favorite parts of school home. "A lot of what we see kids doing is continuing to write in journals, practicing music with their friends, and taking experiments home to show their parents," she says. Anecdotal information from Kino graduates suggests that the early control over their education continues to serve them well into college; they feel better equipped to manage their time and approach professors with questions.

Standardized Testing

One of the reasons that we continue to dole out mountains of homework, Kohn says, is our obsession with standardized tests. This concern is especially relevant with the latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results placing American students 25th in math and 21st in science. "The standards and accountability craze that has our students in its grip argues for getting tougher with children, making them do more mindless worksheets at earlier ages so that we can score higher in international assessments," Kohn says. "It's not about learning; it's about winning."

Even if we can agree on the importance of kids doing better on tests like PISA, Kohn says, there is no research to suggest that homework is our ticket to success. Our "competitors" in the global marketplace are coming up with the same conclusions about homework. A recent comparative study of kids in China, Japan and two U.S. cities shows there is no correlation between time spent on studying and academic achievement.

How much is too much?

So, what's the solution? The National Parent Teacher Association suggests children in kindergarten through second grade should do homework for no more than 10 to 20 minutes a day, and for third through sixth graders the limit is 30-60 minutes a day. Kohn says the question isn't just, "How much homework is

too much?" Many parents would be delighted if teachers reduced the amount their children are getting, but he says the quality of those assignments needs to be addressed as well. "Some of this stuff isn't worth two minutes of their children's time," he says.

Kohn believes that the "default" setting for schools should be no homework, but that if evening work was assigned on occasion, it better be for a good reason. That means repetitive practice problems from 500-page textbooks get **tossed out** the window. Instead, Kohn says parents should be asking two fundamental questions:

1. Does this assignment make kids more excited about the topic and learning in general?
2. Does this assignment help kids to think more deeply about questions that matter?

What you can do

For parents who want to probe deeper into the quality of homework their child is getting, Kohn says the first step is to check the school's policy. In the case where poorly designed homework is being given, it's time to talk to the teacher, sit down with the principal, write a letter to the editor, and/or speak up at the next school board meeting. "It makes sense to do this with other parents," he says. "Ten parents saying that homework does more harm than good are hard to ignore."

Wherever the homework debate goes next, be it the front pages or on the back burner, it's worth taking a moment to examine if we're asking the right questions about our children's education. The good news is, it's never too late to start.

For more information on Alfie Kohn and his latest book, *The Homework Myth*, visit www.alfiekohn.org

The Homework Debate

1. Read the text and find:

The article source -

A book mentioned

The name of a school

A kind of test -

2. What type of text do you think this is? Support your answer.

Narrative _____ Expository _____ Argumentative _____

Why?

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3. Use the words in **bold** to complete the chart. Are they synonyms or antonyms?

	WORD FROM TEXT	SYNONYM OR ANTONYM?
Maxim, axiom		
Inability, incompetence		
Homework, tasks		
Throw away, launch		
Include, permit		

4. Decide if the following sentences are TRUE, FALSE or NOT GIVEN.

- a) Kolin thinks that no homework should be given unless there is a good reason for it. _____
- b) There is a correlation between homework and academic achievement. _____
- c) Having to do homework cannot produce stress on families. _____
- d) Research shows that more than 50% of the given homework are of low quality. _____
- e) Graduates from Kino school have early control over their education. _____

5. Complete the chart: Sending Homework ...

PROS (+)	CONS (-)

6. Make a summary using the graphic organizer.

Details:

Details:

Details:

MAIN IDEA:

Details:

Details:

Details:

Conclusion:

7. Compare this 2 phrases and give your opinion:

"Practice makes perfect", "Homework is all pain and no gain"

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February 2022 (2)

Robot Teachers

If you think of the jobs robots could never do, you would probably put doctors and teachers at the top of the list. It's easy to imagine robot cleaners and factory workers, but some jobs need human connection and **creativity**. But are we **underestimating** what robots can do? In some cases, they already perform better than doctors at **diagnosing** illness. Also, some patients might feel more comfortable sharing personal information with a machine than a person. Could there be a place for robots in education after all?

British education expert Anthony Seldon thinks so. And he even has a date for the robot **takeover** of the classroom: 2027. He predicts robots will do the main job of transferring information and teachers will be like assistants. Intelligent robots will read students' faces, movements and maybe even brain signals. Then they will **adapt** the information to each student. It's not a popular opinion and it's unlikely robots will ever have **empathy** and the ability to really connect with humans like another human can.

One thing is certain, though. A robot teacher is better than no teacher at all. In some parts of the world, there aren't enough teachers and 9-16 per cent of children under the age of 14 don't go to school. That problem could be partly solved by robots because they can teach anywhere and won't get stressed, or tired, or move somewhere for an easier, higher-paid job.

Those negative aspects of teaching are something everyone agrees on. Teachers all over the world are leaving because it is a difficult job and they feel overworked. Perhaps the question is not 'Will robots replace teachers?' but 'How can robots help teachers?' Office workers can use software to do things like organize and answer emails, arrange meetings and update calendars. Teachers waste a lot of time doing non-teaching work, including more than 11 hours a week marking homework. If robots could cut the time teachers spend marking homework and writing reports, teachers would have more time and energy for the parts of the job humans do best.

1) Match the definitions (a-f) with the vocabulary (1-6).

Vocabulary

1. a takeover
2. to adapt
3. to underestimate
4. empathy
5. to diagnose
6. creative

Definitions

- a. the ability to think of new ideas
- b. to think something is less than it is
- c. to work out what kind of illness someone has
- d. when someone takes control of something, like a job or a place
- e. to change something so that it fits better
- f. the ability to deeply understand someone's situation or feelings

2) Are the sentences true or false?

1. Most jobs seem as if they can be done by robots or computers.
2. Robots are always better at diagnosing illness than doctors.
3. Many experts agree robots will replace teachers by 2027.
4. One advantage of robot teachers is that they don't need to rest.
5. Robot assistants could help teachers by marking homework.
6. Some teachers use robots to reduce their time answering emails and marking homework.

3) Choose the best answer.

1. It's easy to think robots ...
 - a. will replace people even if we don't like the idea.
 - b. are more capable than people and it's true.
 - c. can do less than people but it's not always true.
2. Anthony Seldon thinks teachers in the future will ...
 - a. help robots in class.
 - b. teach knowledge to students.
 - c. no longer exist.
3. Robots will probably never ...
 - a. have human understanding of emotions.
 - b. be a popular choice for teachers.
 - c. be intelligent enough to work in education.

4. Some parts of the world ...

- a. pay robots to teach.
b. already use robots in teaching jobs.
c. have a shortage of teachers

5. Teachers ...

- work harder than office workers.
- have less help than office workers.
- leave their jobs to become office workers.

6. Robots could ...

- a. empathize with students.
- b. mark homework.
- c. prepare lessons

4) What's your opinion about having robot teachers in the classroom? Can you think of some advantages and/or disadvantages?

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