

Walberg and Colleagues Reply: Effective Schools Use Homework Effectively

Homework issues are complex and often qualitative, but we ignore at our students' peril the ways homework can support learning.

Barber criticizes our article for synthesizing research that goes beyond the four studies that contrasted the effect of homework versus no homework on achievement. But the first sentence of our article in the *Journal of Educational Research* (to which he actually refers) states our purpose: "This paper synthesizes empirical studies of homework and of various homework strategies on academic achievement and attitude (Paschal, Weinstein, and Walberg 1984, p. 98, emphasis added). As the titles of the 15 articles indicate, 9 concerned achievement and several others concerned other cognitive outcomes. Some of the studies concerned multiple outcomes, including attitudes that we think are important to consider.

Although Barber may wish we would have restricted ourselves to the single question of the effect of homework versus no homework on achievement, such a distinction would equate five minutes of homework in front of a television set now and then with larger, regular amounts of serious, concerted effort with careful adult feedback. In our view, it is important to examine the amount, frequency, nature, conditions, and other characteristics of homework. In short, we want to know as much as possible about the amount and quality of homework on multiple outcomes of education.

Barber refers—as did we—to studies with mixed results. Nonetheless, 85 percent of the 81 detailed comparisons of various groups and conditions in the 15 studies favored groups with larger amounts and better quality homework. By exemplary contrast,

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only 60 percent of some 600 comparisons in another synthesis favored small over large class sizes (Walberg 1986).

Barber says he finds himself left with little information about the effects of homework in subjects other than mathematics. However, our article shows that 21 comparisons were made in subjects other than mathematics, and all of them showed larger average effects than those concerning mathematics (Paschal, Weinstein, and Walberg 1984, p. 100).

Instead of homework—or before it is tried—Barber suggests adaptive learning and serious study in school, access and freedom, and new technologies. Like Barber, we think schools can be improved and have compiled evidence from several thousand studies that shows the relative effectiveness of specific programs, including adaptive education and technologies (Walberg 1984, Waxman et al. 1985). We would be glad to hear about any research, review, or reasoning that Barber may be doing in Oshkosh that supports his suggestions.

On the other hand, the power of schools by themselves has often been overstated. When the "effective schools" claims began, one of us

wrote an article for *Educational Leadership* entitled "Schools Alone Are Insufficient" (Scott and Walberg 1979) because parents and students—as well as educators—are all important for student success. On this point, more evidence is now available (Walberg 1984, 1986). A good example is the case in question—homework. If parents or educators or students fail, little effect might take place, but if all three work together to do their part, much might be accomplished. □

References

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