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**SOLVING THE** //  
**HOMEWORK PROBLEM BY**  
**FLIPPING**  
//////////////////////////////////// **THE LEARNING**

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# 01

## — CHAPTER 1

# THE CASE FOR FLIPPED HOMEWORK

Homework! The word strikes fear and trepidation in students. It truly is the “H” word. Parents have a love-hate relationship with homework. They want what is best for their kids, and many think it is the way for their children to succeed, but they fear that they may not be able to help their children. Teachers feel an obligation to assign homework because of outside pressure, internal motivation, or simply because we have always done it this way. What is the value of homework? Does it help students, hinder students, or is it an instrument of control teachers hold over students? As a teacher, I have assigned a lot of homework. Some homework assignments have been meaningful and effective, while other assignments have merely been busywork that did not help my students. And as a parent of three children, I have spent countless hours working with my kids. I have sometimes seen how homework benefits my children and

other times seen how it hinders their education. With each of my three children, there have been moments of tears when I questioned the value and purpose of a homework assignment.

According to the National Center for Family Literacy, in 2013 (Scoon, 2013) 50 percent of parents say they have trouble helping their kids with homework. The reasons they gave were:

- They don't understand the material (46.5 percent).
- Their kids don't want help (31.6 percent).
- They are too busy (21.9 percent).

I received this e-mail from Barbra Sterns (2016, personal correspondence), a corporate trainer and frustrated parent:

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*As far as I am concerned, the "H" word is the biggest advantage of the flipped classroom. When my kids were in school, six or seven different teachers would each lecture for an hour and then send the kids home to do the homework, which was almost always application and practice of the concepts from class that day.*

*But my kids didn't come straight home; they went to day care until I was back from work. I dropped them off at day care at 7:30 a.m. and picked them up at 5:30–6:00 p.m. The day care didn't have willing or trained helpers for homework. Even after-school programs at the school used their time for activity and fun, not to extend the school day. Then in the three hours between the time we got home and the time they went to bed, we fit in meals, baths, martial arts, birthdays, etc. Homework was always a battle; they couldn't always remember well enough to apply and when I tried to help they said, "That's not what my teacher told me."*

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## THE PROBLEM WITH HOMEWORK

From my lens as both a career teacher and a father, I see several problems with homework in today's educational climate:

- Homework that seemingly has little meaning and usefulness
- Assignments that take too long to complete
- Assignments that many students don't complete
- Teachers sending students home with assignments that they are ill-prepared to complete
- Ineffective homework assignments

Denise Pope, PhD, a researcher at Stanford University, surveyed more than 4,300 students at high-achieving secondary schools and found that only 20 to 30 percent of students found their homework to be useful and meaningful (Pope, 2013). Homework, in many cases, does not help students achieve, does not help students develop curiosity, and may be an exercise in compliance and control. Assignments are often given without context, are either too easy or too difficult, or are irrelevant to the course.

As a parent, I have watched my children work late into the night, and even into the wee hours of the morning, to complete homework. It feels as if some teachers equate the amount of homework with rigor. But in reality, all their homework accomplishes is teaching students to resent and sabotage the love of learning.

### The Educator's Dilemma

For a variety of reasons, students often come to class without having completed the necessary prework. Should teachers fight this, or should they give up and not assign any homework? If our goal is compliance instead of learning, then we educators have missed the point of homework. On the flip side, hard work and perseverance are elements of learning. Not every student is interested in everything that is taught, and many may lack the internal motivation to complete all assignments.

## A Recipe for Failure

I am the first to confess that I sent students home with assignments that some *could not* complete. I sent them home with work they were incapable of completing with the limited background I had given them. Maybe they did not have the cognitive framework, maybe they did not have adequate support at home, or maybe they were simply too busy with the demands of their home life. Some students came to class with incomplete work because they saw no value to the assignment and chose not to complete it. Others had been inundated with senseless homework over many years and rejected homework as a whole on principle. Much of the time, students didn't complete homework assignments because they lacked the necessary background knowledge and gave up. Then these same students came to class and professed not to care about school and often became discipline problems. In my experience, students who are discipline problems are getting negative attention for behavior to mask feelings of inadequacy and a sense of failure. It is easier to struggle and disregard the value of school than to struggle, continue to care, and feel like a failure.

## The Great Debate

There is quite a debate among educators, parents, and communities about the value of homework. On one side are the proponents of homework, who feel that students need to have time to practice what they have learned in class. And on the other side are those who think homework is a waste of time or harmful for children. Some parents believe that schools should not assign *any* homework. To those parents, school is for learning and home is for family. They feel that school is infringing on the homelife of families and want academic work to be restricted to the school day. I sympathize with these parents because, as a parent myself, I too have seen the dark side of homework, wherein my children are lost, frustrated, or have been given so much homework that sleep is sacrificed.