When Homework is not Home Work: After-School Programs for Homework Assistance

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Review of article by
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“Home work does not always occur at home”

• With the perceived demand for higher academic performance has come and increase in the amount and complexity of assigned homework. This article examines the potential of after-school homework assistance programs within the larger context of after-school programs in general.
Increase in Demand

• The past ten years have seen a sharp increase in homework demand, particularly from schools serving students from middle- and upper-class socioeconomic backgrounds (Ratner, 1999)

• In part this has come in response to the perception than there is greater competition for college admissions, and that students need to work harder to qualify for the college of their choice.
Cultural Homework Contrast

• By contrast, low-income urban schools report larger numbers of students unable to complete even minor homework assignments because of competing demands for their time from family and work (Morse, 1999).
• Homework can serve a variety of academic functions:
  – Drill and mastery of basic skills
  – Expansion and elaboration of concepts introduced in the classroom
  – To fulfill administrative directives
  – To provide parents with information about curriculum
  – To punish students (Epstein, 1998)
How children spend their time in after school programs

- After-school programs vary considerably in terms of the goals they set for attendees and the outcomes they expect and achieve.
Programs can serve four major functions:

a) increase safety and supervision
b) enhance cultural and community identification and appreciation
c) develop social skills and increased competency
d) improve academic achievement

Programs typically address one or more of these functions, with the focus varying by design and because of students and community needs.
Safety and Supersision

Safety and supervision are basic components of most after-school programs. Due to the increase in both single-parents and dual-employed families, children are spending more of their after-school time in unsupervised care.
Safety and Supervision

• For many inner city children in inner-city neighborhoods, safety is an important component of after-school care due to the poverty, community violence, and family distress they otherwise face.
Promotion of Cultural Identity

Another important role assumed by after-school programs have been the promotion of cultural and community identification, appreciation, and responsibility. Many after-school programs, particularly those that serve children from ethnic minority, low-income, urban neighborhoods incorporate cultural and community activities as part of their curriculum (Beck 1999.)
Rationale for Cultural Programming

• One rationale for including these components in after-school programs is that pride in one’s culture and community, along with acceptance of other cultures, is a necessary component in the development of self-esteem.

• A second rationale is that inclusion of the community is after-school programming helps to strengthen support systems that can encourage and reinforce the child’s coping efforts both in and out of school.
Results of excluding culture

Conversely, after-school programs that do not take into account the values of the community and the culture may find success harder to achieve. In Hamovitch’s (1999) evaluation of an after-school program serving African American and minority youth, the author criticized the program’s focus on teaching European American, middle class values of achievement. The author attributed the drop in grades to a lack of cultural sensitivity in the program and to the fact that racism, in both the school environment and society as a whole, was ignored or dismissed by program instructors.
Academic Assistance

- Academic support varies widely in terms of type of activities and the amount of time and effort allotted.

- Two programs are examined:
  - Those that assist with homework assigned by teachers and connected to classroom curriculum
  - Those that provided academic enrichment and skill building not associated with class work
Programs that offer home-work assistance

- The homework-intervention components that were viewed as integral to the success of the program were the provision of:
  a. Time
  b. A structured setting for homework completion, and
  c. Instructional support for students
The Beck and Halpern studies

• The Beck (1999) study, provided indications of the dynamics behind implementation of a successful homework based intervention program. Similarly, Halpern (1992) described some challenges of the home-work portion of after-school programs for inner-city Chicago children.
Homework Challenges:

- Students not bringing their home-work to the center
- Importance of providing additional tutorial support needed to complete assignments

Despite these challenges, qualitative information suggested that provisions of after-school structured routines was beneficial for students in terms of their development of a norm of participation and experience of positive adult attachment.
Beck Study

• The Beck study highlights the importance of homework completion as a mediator of nonacademic outcomes such as self-esteem and confidence in academic abilities. Other mediating factors that relate to homework completion are the development of personal responsibility, the reinforcement of school attachment and belonging, improvement of study skills and cognitive strategies and motivation.
Tucker Study

- The Tucker study contributes to a more complex way of understanding the role that after-school academic assistance can play in student schooling outcomes.

- In a study of low-achieving and low-income African American students the author found there was no significant increase in grades for students in the treatment group; however, the control group showed a significant decrease in their math grades.
Protective Factor

• These findings suggest that the after-school program served as a protective factor for children who participated; that is, the program arrested a negative trajectory of school performance for students who received the tutoring.
Conclusion

• Considering program implementation as a form of “protection” or resilience enhancement reframes the thinking about appropriate outcomes for after-school intervention programs. That is, educators often consider improvements in outcomes (whether academic or personal-social) as their primary goal. Equally important is the resilience these programs offer participants.