

Allyson Jacob | Education doesn't end in the classroom

Do your homework

I know a nasty little secret about high school. Very few, if any, high school students do homework on a regular basis. What's worse is that many teachers don't expect them to do it anyway.

I observed this "homework is not required" phenomenon over the last four years in at least two different schools — one in the Cincinnati Public School district and the other in a suburban district in Northern Kentucky. My mentors in each school thought they were leveling with me when they told me that I could assign homework, but that I shouldn't expect my students to do it.

I questioned why high school students these days aren't doing homework. Ten years ago, when I myself was a high school student, homework wasn't optional. You did it, or you failed — either for lack of participation or lack of mastering the concept. When did it become OK for students to opt out of homework? When did "but I have to work," or a huge load of extracurricular commitments become acceptable excuses? I believe that students, parents and educators all share some responsibility for this growing attitude problem.

Let's look at where the students are coming from. In



my experience (with a few notable exceptions), a student's general preference tends toward getting away with doing the least amount of work possible and still earning whatever grade he or she has decided is worth striving for in the class. It would be nice if students saw the value of their education as more than simply chapters of facts to memorize, novels to wade through or endless lists of equations to solve. As I explained to Katie, a student in my homeroom this year, the value of chemistry to me, an English teacher, does not come so much from memorizing the periodic table or successfully balancing a list of chemical equations. Rather, the value of chemistry is the use of the scientific method. If you think of each subject area as training in a different way of problem solving, you begin to value the process over the product. Then, the collection of processes you obtain in your schooling becomes a toolbox full of ways to solve different problems you might encounter

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might be able to answer the question, "Why do we hafta learn this?" with something more than, "Because it's a graduation requirement."

I did say that we all share responsibility in making this attitude change happen. The student has the responsibility to open his or her eyes and try to see the process behind the problem. The student also needs to realize that most teachers these days don't give homework as punishment or busywork. Some still do, but hopefully these individuals are close to retirement. Homework is therefore valuable and needs to be completed.

When we, as parents and educators, together begin to expect homework and other assignments to be completed, when we begin to examine why we teach what we do, and when we share those reasons with our students, then our students might begin to live up to our expectations. But if we expect too little, complain too much and explain even less, we can expect little change in our students' attitudes. They won't do the work, and they won't see the value of their education.

Allyson Jacob has taught high school in Greater Cincinnati for the past four years.

in college or in "the real world."

Katie bought it and sauntered off to chemistry with a different attitude. But that change only happened because I took the time to explain the "why" behind chemistry to her. As parents and educators, it is our job to help our students see the thinking process that exists behind the subject being taught. Students are not always mature (or awake) enough to make that connection themselves. For some of us, this "burden" of explaining why might make us reevaluate our own teaching or parenting methods. Self-evaluation can be a scary process, but if we invest our time into this worthwhile reflection, we