

NOTEBOOK

Homework is not fluff

BY ROBERT GERVER

There is much noise on the educational front about eliminating homework. Books are claiming that research shows homework does no good. Parents are asking, "How can my kid *parlez-vous Français*, address Gettysburg, integrate calculus and slay Caesar tonight? We have three travel games when he comes home from play rehearsal after Key Club, Glee Club and his job at Starbucks."

Homework is the scapegoat, when in fact we need to educate parents about what is a healthy schedule for their child, which has to include some much-needed downtime.

Do you think the kid who is playing basketball in a tin-man suit so he can make it to the "Wizard of Oz" rehearsal on time is a tip-off to how overextended our kids are? Does anyone think it makes sense that kids who have three Advanced Placement courses also are taking six days of dance lessons and playing on the softball team?

Everyone has "crazy" days once in a while. Today's kids have made it a ritual. So what do we complain about? Homework!

Homework allows students to practice skills, extend knowledge, reflect, explore original thoughts. Most important, it is a barometer of what students can do on their own. Do you remember saying, or hearing, "I know it when the teacher does it, but..." Translation: You don't know it.

If students don't do some work on their own, the first time they will be fending for themselves will be on a test. That's like putting on a play with no rehearsals.

Think of the repetition in sports, drama or music. The only way to get something polished is to practice. I loved every moment of hearing my daughter plod through "Für Elise" on the piano. Repeating every measure was necessary to reach the goal. She succeeded because she did her music homework.

It was just as necessary as homework in

calculus — a subject she didn't love — but she is well schooled in the value of solo practice. My son's gold glove is a result of baseball homework — the thousands of grounders and fly balls his dad and his coaches hit to him.

Homework is not fluff or busy work. It allows students to gain confidence, be creative, efficient, and to formulate specific questions as to what they don't understand. The problem in students' crowded schedules is not homework, it's extracurricular excess.

People engage in extra activities because they like them. Why do people over-engage? To try to impress someone — a college? A parent? To keep up with the Mantles? Because Kelly is doing it? Because everybody is doing it?

I wonder if college admissions personnel are perplexed by the kid who is in 37 clubs, the band, the play, on nine sports teams, the math team and the science Olympics. Do they question the wisdom of committing to so many activities when there are only 24 hours in a day? Would they rather a student focus on fewer activities and be loyal, dedicated and active in those few endeavors? Call any local college. Ask them.

What price do we pay for being so busy? Are our kids mortgaging their childhoods?

Students will have to make choices in life. Some things will be sacrificed. When do we teach this? When do we teach balance, priorities, choice and discretion? Success in school is rewarding. Homework helps achieve that end. Having no homework is more than a handicap — it's sabotage.

On a positive note, there will be plenty of downtime when homework ceases to be. After all, if the virtues of homework are rubbish, then I guess we won't need sports practices, either. Kids can just show up for the games. The orchestra? Show up on concert night — we'll wing it. Dance recital? Watch your instructor do it; that's enough.

There'll be plenty of free time in the homework-less world. I wonder what everyone will do with all of it?



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