



# Montessori Homework

## Allowing Students to Find their Own Motivation

The article "After years of teachers piling it on, there's a new movement to [...] abolish homework" by Vicki Haddock (Insight, Oct. 8, 2006) resonated with me as a Montessorian educator. While the concept of abolishing formal homework may be new to Haddock and teacher Phil Lyons of Palo Alto, the concept is a cornerstone of the 100-year-old Montessori movement. As quoted in the article, a growing group of educators and researchers assert that what homework does "...is rob children of childhood, play havoc with family life and asphyxiate their natural curiosity. Learning becomes a mind-numbing grind rather than an engaging adventure."

For the purpose of this discussion, we need to differentiate between "homework" and "assignments." The homework referenced in this article is more accurately described as a series of assignments, that is to say, teacher-directed activity. Assignments of this nature actually limit the possibilities for exploration, substituting mere completion of task for the joy of discovery and personal understanding. Haddock rightly states that debate about quantity ignores the question of quality, "not all assignments are created equal – some busy work, others inspired." Montessori educators encourage and expect children to write their own problems, design their own follow-up activities, and determine for themselves what they need to do to experience success and comprehension. Homework in a Montessori sense is work that the child does at home as an extension of his/her own interests. Furthermore, the work should be meaningful and of high interest to the child – it should have a purpose. Assignments, whether they include the use of textbooks, workbooks, or worksheets for schoolwork or homework, or particular teacher-directed activity after a lesson should be avoided.

So what does Montessori homework look like? Homework runs a gamut of "real life" activities including chores, and using everyday activities as opportunities for learning skills and stimulating curiosity. Dr. Maria Montessori believed that children should be so inspired and enthused by school activity and presentations and that their interest will naturally carry over to after school hours. Given the opportunity, children will naturally create their own projects and challenge themselves. The Montessori approach is to provide a few well-placed suggestions for a variety of follow-up experiences, to different small groups of children and opportunities for learning, contributing to exciting and meaningful occupation in the classroom workplace. It is essential for educators to trust that children will create their own meaningful work without being compelled by teachers to complete assignments.

Gunn High School senior Akila Subramanian, as quoted by Haddock, summed the situation up perfectly, "It all comes down to whether adults trust us to learn. Having no homework lets you find your own motivations." Rather than just focusing on academic developments, Montessori advocated aiding the overall development of each child as a human being. The more freedom children have to make up their own problems and choose their own work, the more they will challenge themselves and the better able they will become at evaluating themselves. What you believe about a child is exactly what the child will believe about himself or herself – and that is one of the most important factors in school success.

Are we up to the challenge?