

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

The Homework Trap:

How to Save the Sanity of Parents, Students & Teachers

by Kenneth Goldberg

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Reviewed by

Bliss Hanson

Woodlawn Learning Centre

Within this relatively brief book, *The Homework Trap: How to Save the Sanity of Parents, Students and Teachers*, author Kenneth Goldberg, PhD, presents the problem of a homework-trapped student through an exploration of the history of homework in California, referencing books both for and against the value of homework. He also applies personal experience in regard to his own reading speed as it was affected by a childhood heart operation, and his experience as a parent of three children with their homework difficulties, combined with his professional experiences as a general psychologist.

This eight-chapter book begins with a chapter titled “The Core Problem.” This chapter explains that when teachers assign homework and the child does only partial or no homework, it is the parents who feel responsible for this behaviour. The situation then worsens as the child progresses through elementary, middle, and high school and more professionals become involved. The end result is that the relationship between parents and child is negatively affected.

In Chapter 2, “The Myth of Motivation,” the author addresses the falsehood that being lazy and lacking motivation are reasons for homework noncompliance. He contends that noncompliance arises from the ongoing and constant building of pressure that homework causes. Chapter 3 is titled “Behavioral Factors,” and as Goldberg states, it is a mini-course on behavioural psychology, as he presents how this approach fails and tends to add to the problem.

“Modeling and Maturation,” Chapter 4, covers two areas that Goldberg explains get overlooked when addressing homework problems. The developmental stages of children, as they learn from social modelling and as they grow up and mature into young adults, must be considered in addressing homework issues.

Goldberg explains the components of “The Systems Effect” in Chapter 5, in regard to the school structure and how this structure causes parents to behave in a pattern that can negatively affect the parents’ authority with their own child.

The sixth chapter, “The Learning Problem,” reviews the concept of processing speed, male and female differences in learning styles, working memory, and how these can all be “in the way” of getting homework completed. Included is also the consideration of children who are inattentive and hyperactive.

In Chapter 7, “What to Do,” Goldberg focuses on the parents and what to do in the home, what they can do with the school, and finally how to approach the issue with the community at large. Chapter 8 summarizes the book and clearly states that its overall purpose is to be a starting point for thinking about homework problems in very different ways.

The Homework Trap is an enjoyable read from various perspectives, including the parent, the professional, and the community member. Goldberg brings the homework-trapped student to the centre of the stage and examines him/her from many angles, enabling the reader to feel empathy for the student as well as the parent. He also starts the ball rolling for parents, educators, and communities in the 21st century to think about homework problems in a new and refreshing way.

During the past 14 years that I have been a teacher at and principal of an alternative high school, daily homework has not been assigned to our population due to the high concentration of students who were already at risk of leaving school, and students who had already struggled with issues like homework, academic expectations, appropriate behaviour, and regular attendance. The teachers at our learning centre found other ways to be productive in terms of students reflecting on their learning, such as having short, deliberate discussions with another person about what they were doing in school that particular day. Once the positive effects of not assigning homework were felt by all (students, parents, and teachers), then hope was rekindled in the individual student’s self-belief.

The positive relationships between student–teacher and child–parent are vital for a positive educational experience. This book enables parents, students, and teachers to structure and support resiliency in youths by providing direction for the homework-trapped student. This issue is a significant problem that needs to be brought to the attention of everyone involved.