

THE PEDAGOGICAL MANAGEMENT OF HOMEWORK

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Abstract: *The paper aims to approach, in a critical way, but according to the pedagogical principles, the phenomenon of homework premises have regulatory role in ordering the ideas of this paper. Adapted to a qualitative investigation paradigm, the paper positions it's necessity in quantitative confirmed realities: the negative image that homework gets as students advance to the school "career", the altered meaning and functions that teachers give to homework. The blended analyse covered diverse aspects of homework phenomenon: its' status in lessons' design, implicit in school learning management, its' essential and authentic functions, the pedagogical evaluation and capitalization.*

Key words: *homework management, learning, teaching, lesson.*

1. Introduction

In one of Cerghit's reference works, there are mentioned the landmark moments which, starting with J.A. Comenius have associated the lesson with „school time well delimited up to the detailed schedule, to the hour – class (the lesson). Thus it has been established the organization system of the teaching process into classes and lessons” (Cerghit, 1983, p. 10). In the same work, some of the lesson's definitions are updated: Urbanczyk (1975), Dancsuly, Ionescu, Radu and Salade (1979), Oprea (1979), Nicola (1980) and others. The lesson's „portrait” is the one well known today by all the theoreticians and practitioners, becoming an authentic paradigm: „A form of organization of the teaching process (...), functional didactic unit (teaching unit), focused on content, yet on action and time as well, or all these elements taken together” (Cerghit, 1983, p. 13).

From the managerial perspective, the lesson may be analysed with reference to a key-interrogation: why (lesson)? Which is a lesson's reason? Surely the given answers would be spontaneous and rather convergent. The lesson constitutes the context of some dynamic teaching – learning – evaluating experiences. A lesson takes place for the teacher to teach and the student to learn! And a simultaneous evaluation.

Why do we teach? To trigger learning, of course. The teaching's justification is learning. This is also the purpose of a curriculum centred on the child/pupil; a curriculum centred on learning. It is also called curriculum centred on competence. The return to the initial interrogation („The lesson? Why?”) is associated with an answer: a lesson's reason is to produce learning.

At the lesson's level, these challenges should target specific units of the directly targeted

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competencies and are rendered as set expectancies, therefore, depending on that „already – there” something and the principle of proximal development zone (Vâgotski). Set for the lesson, these goals consist of sets of new behaviour which the pupil will access; they anticipate the pupil’s performances. Behaviour should to be concretized. The solution: the operational objectives. The lesson may be defined as a motivated functional unit, meant to produce the performances indicated by the operational objectives. It is a definition which confers lucidity regarding an aspect which generates confusion: the need for operational objectives in a curriculum centred on competencies (some of the theoreticians and practitioners consider the presence of such goals in the curricular present to be anachronistic, as one has abandoned the frame and reference objectives).

As the culture has changed, and as schools and families have changed, homework has become problematic for more and more students, parents, and teachers. The Internet and bookstores are crowded with books offering parents advice on how to get children to do homework. Frequently, the advice for parents is to “remain positive,” yet only a handful of books suggest that parents should have the right to question the amount of homework or the value of the task itself. Teachers, overwhelmed by an already glutted curriculum and pressures related to standardized tests, assign homework in an attempt to develop students’ skills and to extend learning time. At the same time, they are left frustrated when the students who most need more time to learn seem the least likely to complete homework. Teachers “are afraid not to give homework, for fear of being perceived as easy” (Vatterott, 2009, pp.1-2).

Although many people remain staunchly in favour of homework, a growing number of teachers and parents alike are beginning to question the practice. These critics are re-examining the beliefs behind the practice, the wisdom of assigning hours of homework, the absurdly heavy backpack, and the failure that can result when some students don’t complete homework. There’s a growing suspicion that something is wrong with homework. (Vatterott, 2009). When teachers design homework to meet specific purposes and goals, more students “complete their homework and benefit from the results” (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001, p. 191).

There are frequent learning situations in the classroom when, because the „school programme is running” and the time necessary for reflectivity is compressed, the speed necessary for acquiring is amplified, the frequency of challenge exposing is increased (and of the learning tasks implicitly), the teacher is forced to keep up, the students do not manage to maintain the rhythm needed for a spontaneous decoding of the messages. The reality we have mentioned disagrees with the individual learning style and rhythm, hindering the teacher’s expectations: not only a spontaneous, but a simultaneous decoding as well! That is why many lag behind. And an understanding of homework as part of the learning process started in the classroom represents a solution. A good lesson management should position homework as a complementary event to learning in the classroom. Conclusions? The lesson is not limited within the boundaries of a school class. Homework has generally been viewed as a positive practice and accepted without question as part of the student routine (Petre, 2015).

2. Objectives

As intention, the proposed approach tries to setup a repertoire of ideas with prescriptive value, materialized in lucid scenarios for the praxis of teaching and student learning.

3. Material and Methods

Adapted to a qualitative investigation paradigm, the paper positions its necessity in quantitative confirmed realities: the negative image that homework gets as students advance to the school „career”, the altered meaning and functions that teachers give to homework. Instead of an investigation, either by interview or questionnaire, were used two other methods: focus groups and free composition. The motivation of using the first method is its' capacity to provide a conceptual space dynamic, productive, interactive. The second method has been utilized because it permits a large set of specific information, even the character of freedom offered to students' answers generated difficulties for data processing.

The questionnaire was organized around four items: How pleasant is doing homework, The importance of homework, The importance of doing homework, and Do students their homework? The answers are organized in a Licker scale: strong disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strong agree.

The total number of students was 80: 15 students from second, fourth, fifth and seven grade and 20 students from eight grade. The selection was random: two schools, one rural, one urban. In each school was choose, random, a class of each presented level. From each class, the students were selected after the „rule”:

- Rural school: seven students from 2th, 4th, 5th, 7th class, and ten students from 8th class,

- Urban school: eight students from 2th, 4th, 5th, 7th class, and ten students from 8th class.

The criterion for choosing the students from 2th, 4th, 5th, 7th class was the position in class register: two students from pages 2, 5 and 8 and one student (for rural) or two students (for urban) on page 9. The criterion for choosing the students from 8th class was the position in class register: three students from pages 2, 5 and 8 and one student on page 9.

4. Results

Two types of results were generated. On the one hand, a picture of students' different levels of classes about personal meaning on homework, and on the other hand, an analysis pedagogically designed to resize homework management.

The main results obtained: mean value of responses decreases with increasing class for all questions. In other words, the students from superior class express an unfavourable attitude on homework. The results are captured in table 1.

The means values for items

Table 1

item \ class	2nd	4th	5th	7th	8th
Doing homework is pleasant	4.20	4.00	2.40	1.86	1.80
Homework is important	5.00	4.66	3.93	4.00	3.45
Doing homework is important	4.93	4.60	3.60	3.33	2.30
I do my homeworks	4.00	3.93	3.53	2.60	1.90

Because the results of the questionnaire only serve to confirm the hidden hypothesis, it was performed a selection of information obtained. To the item *Doing homework is pleasant*, the answers of the 80 students generated few observation. Second graders have expressed confirmations: homework is an enjoyable activity. There was not any neutral or negative response. At fourth grade students appear neutral (20%) and even negative responses

(13.3%). Starting with fifth grade students, the answers are predominantly negative (55.7%); there are neutral answers (33.3%) and only 13.3% are positive (at level agree, no answer at level strong agree!). 7th and 8th students express an express a strong dissatisfaction associated to homework: 80% (7th) and 75% (8th). These data are shown in figure 1

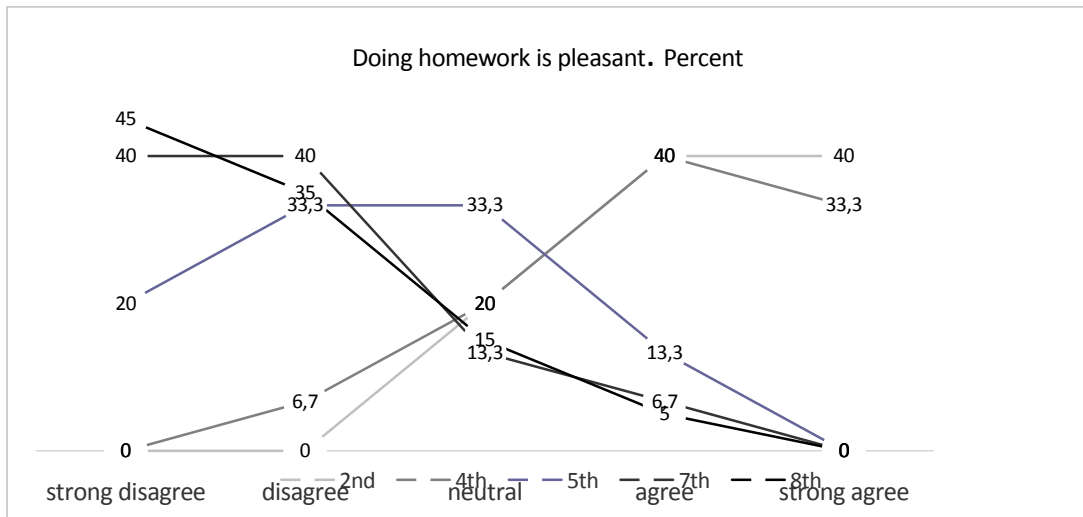


Fig. 1. Distribution the answer at item *Doing homework is pleasant*

The same trend is found in the students' answers and for the rest of items. An interesting item is *Homework is important*. It can be noticed that the importance of the homework is recognized even by pupils in seventh and eighth grades (fig. 2).

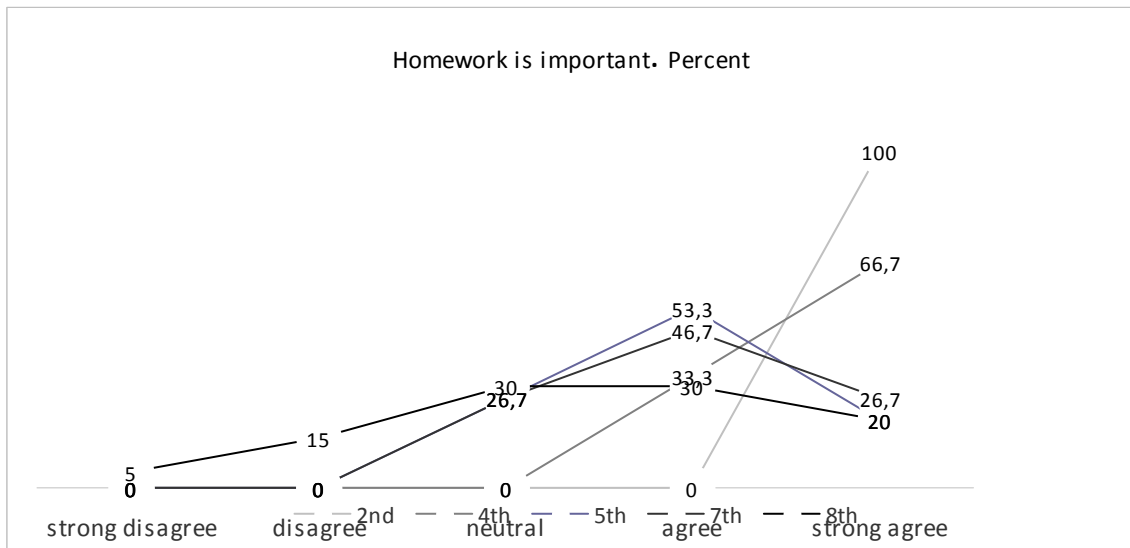


Fig. 2. Distribution the answer at item *Homework is important*

At theoretical level, the result of analyse can be compressed in next idea, a framework that offer a new approach.

Homework is an extension of the classroom which allows students to internalize information that has been presented in class. It bridges the gap between lessons, so that the students can continue to work. Homework is, therefore, a cornerstone of students' learning process (Painter, 2003)

Homework is a kind of out-of-school learning that has not yet received the serious attention that it merits in the research literature. Learning at school and at home are similar in several ways. The student's ability to learn does not change. The same level of intellectual ability is used to learn at home and at school. Overall motivation to learn is probably highly similar in both settings. The teacher determines what is to be learned both at home and at school. Learning at school and at home are also different in several ways. In school learning is affected by variables not found in the out-of-school learning situation: The quality of the teacher-learner interaction, the dynamics of the classroom group, and other characteristics of the school in which learning takes place. Similarly, out-of-school learning at home is affected by a myriad of additional and unique factors not found in school: The characteristics of the home environment; the influence of parents, siblings, and friends; and the existence of other activities that compete for the children's time, attention, and effort (Hong & Milgram, 2000).

But the key element that provides common identity of the two efforts is the set of superordinated finalities: the lesson objectives.

The major difference between learning at school and at home is that the learner has choices not only about whether to do the homework at all, but also about the circumstances and surroundings in which to do it. There are different kinds of homework. Some homework is designed to assure that students review, practice, and drill material that has been learned at school. Other homework assignments are intended to provide students with the opportunity to amplify, elaborate, and enrich previously learned information. Homework is also sometimes used to prepare, in advance, material to be learned in the following classes (Hong & Milgram, 2000).

A very useful meta-analysis is carried out by Cooper, Robinson and Patall (2006), on the studies performed during 1987-2003. Some ideas of the analysis Cooper et al., (2006):

a. Public attitudes toward homework have been cyclical (Gill & Schlossman, 1996, 2004). Prior to the 20th century, homework was believed to be an important means for disciplining children's minds (Reese, 1995). By the 1940s, a reaction against homework had set in (Nash, 1930; Otto, 1941).

b. Homework likely has a significant impact on students' educational trajectories. Most educators believe that homework can be an important supplement to in-school academic activities (Henderson, 1996).

c. Homework is often a source of friction between home and school. Accounts of conflicts between parents and educators appear often in the popular press (e.g., Coutts, 2004; Kralovec & Buell, 2000; Loveless, 2003).

d. Students protest about the time that homework takes away from leisure activities (Coutts, 2004; Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Many students consider homework the chief source of stress in their lives (Kouzma & Kennedy, 2002).

e. Homework may have positive effects on parents and families (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Teachers can use homework to increase parents' appreciation of and involvement in schooling (Balli, 1998; Balli, Wedman, & Demo, 1998, Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Van Voorhis, 2003).

A search of ERIC, PsycINFO, Sociological Abstracts, and Dissertation Abstracts between January 1987 (when the search for the earlier synthesis ended) and December 2003 indicated that over 4,000 documents with homework as a keyword had been added to these reference databases. Nearly 900 documents refer to empirical studies (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006).

Bembenutty (2011) found that a positive relationship exists between homework activities and self-efficacy, responsibility for learning, and delay of gratification. “Homework assignments can enhance the development of self-regulation processes and self-efficacy beliefs, as well as goal setting, time management, managing the environment, and maintaining attention” (Bembenutty, 2011, p. 449). Self-regulatory skills can be taught and develop over time with repeated practice. “Evidence from experimental studies shows that students can be trained to develop self-regulation skills during homework activities” (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011, p. 195).

Effects of homework are positive and negative (Cooper, 1989). Positive effects:

a. Immediate achievement and learning: a better retention of factual knowledge, increased understanding, better critical thinking, concept formation, information processing, curriculum enrichment,

b. Long-term academic effects, willingness to learn during leisure time, improved attitude toward school, better study habits and skills,

c. Non-academic effects: greater self-direction, greater self-discipline, better time organization, more inquisitiveness, more independent problem solving, greater parental appreciation of involvement in schooling

Negative effects

a. Satiation: loss of interest in academic material, physical and emotional fatigue,

b. Denial of access to leisure-time and perform well

c. Parental interference: pressure to complete assignments and perform well, confusion of instructional techniques,

d. Cheating: copying from other students, help beyond tutoring

e. Increased differences between high and low achievers.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

For the teacher, the lesson starts with the finalization of the operational objectives set. In other words, before entering the classroom. Before the bell „rings”. For the student, the lesson starts when he familiarizes with the duty – performances. In other words, after the bell „rings” the beginning of the class. When does the lesson end? Pedagogical (according to a pedagogical logic) the lesson lasts as long as it takes to accomplish the performances. One shouldn't forget that the performances are manifestations of the learning process, they represent acquisitions and quantitative and qualitative amplifications of the competence units. And the learning experiences of the students regarding these competence units do not take place only during the direct interaction with the teacher. An interaction limited between two bell rings.

To understand the culture of homework and how it developed over the last 100 years, it is necessary to dissect the dogma, which can best be summarized by five largely unexamined beliefs about children and learning (Vatterott, 2009):

Belief #1: The role of the school is to extend learning beyond the classroom.

Belief #2: Intellectual activity is intrinsically more valuable than non-intellectual activity.

Belief #3: Homework teaches responsibility.

Belief #4: Lots of homework is a sign of a rigorous curriculum.

Belief #5: Good teachers give homework; good students do their homework.

So: homework? Is it not possible that the learning in the classroom (during the lesson) continues with another learning, the one from home? The learning experiences more or less transparently insinuated inside the homework represent prolongations (continuations) of the learning experiences during the school lesson. Many of us have only grasped at home the messages of speciality received in the classroom. By reviewing the exercises solved in the classroom, many have only discovered at home the sense of the operations involved in solving the different problem – situations. The homework is the opportunity provided to access student independent learning skills. For teacher, the homework represents the opportunity to manage students' independent learning effort.

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