



**Except from Sean Slaikeu thesis paper:  
How does homework impact student learning**

Cathy Vatterott is a professor of education at the University of St. Louis-Missouri. After she presented at several educational conferences, participants of the conferences began referring to her as the "homework lady." In her article *Five hallmarks of Good Homework*, she explains that homework needs to exhibit the following five key elements for it to help enforce learning: 1) Purpose 2) Efficiency 3) Ownership 4) Competence 5) Aesthetic Appeal ~ slightly more complex than described by Merriam-Webster.

Vatterott, a seasoned middle school and high school teacher and someone with years of principal experience, explains the five elements of *Good Homework* and the qualifications of each element. First, she states that to have purpose in the homework, “*the homework should provide feedback to teachers about students understanding, and enable the teachers to adjust instruction and when necessary, reteach concepts BEFORE assigning practice. Assigning practice prematurely can cause student frustration and confusion.*” For efficiency, “*the task efficiently demonstrates student learning.*” Vatterott tells her reader to ask the question: “does homework need to take long in order to achieve the desired results?” Promote ownership, “*by offering choices and being personally relevant.*” For competence, “*the task instills a sense of*

*competence; the student can successfully complete it without help.*” And finally, the task is aesthetically pleasing as in *“it appears enjoyable and interesting.”*

Vatterott’s factors help us define what homework should look like, but she also opens the door to many additional questions. Does the homework in the traditional school setting actually meet her criteria? Are teachers reviewing homework and using assignments as evidence of students meeting learning objectives and standards? Are adjustments being made when a teacher discovers an area of difficulty (not meeting standards)? Do teachers know the general amount of time students are spending on homework per day or week? Are homework policies the same across the board or are they personally tailored from one teacher to the next? Or from one student to another in accordance with their learning styles or their learning needs? Are the homework assignments able to be completed by each student individually without additional support (i.e., parents, older siblings, tutors)? And how do we find the balance between homework that is positively perceived by students while also increasing their skills? And, even if homework is everything Vatterott defines it to be, will that ever be a guarantee that students will actually do it? All these questions compel us to take a deeper look into what is often perceived as a simple word, that work being homework.

Is homework true evidence of what students know and can do? Or is it something else entirely? Something outdated?

Read Cathy Vatterotts Full article: <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/five-hallmarks-of-good-homework>

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