

# Programme 10

# After school – homework



# Programme 10: After school – homework

Note for trainer: This module discusses homework. Homework is very common in many education systems around the world. However, not everyone agrees that homework is useful or necessary, especially for younger learners.

You should decide which parts of this programme to use, based on your local situation and attitudes towards homework. If your schools do not routinely set homework, then you may feel that it is better to omit the activities that look at homework and just use the activity that focuses on parental involvement in inclusive education.

However, if homework is an entrenched part of your education system, you could use this module to help teachers think more critically about what homework they give and how they arrange it. In the longer term, this may lead to a more fundamental rethink of the role of homework in teaching and learning. In the short term, it should help your teachers to avoid some of the inclusion problems that homework can cause.

## Key points to cover during this session

Whether you run a full-day training session or just a very short discussion, try to include these key points:

- Homework is common in education systems around the world, as a way to supplement the learning in class. However, opinion is divided about whether homework is a good thing or not.
- Inclusive teachers need to think carefully about whether or not to use homework as one of their teaching and learning approaches.
- If teachers give homework, there are lots of things they can do to ensure that homework does not exclude or become a problem for some learners.
- Parents play a vital role in children's education, far beyond simply making sure children do their homework. Inclusive teachers work with parents to help parents provide effective support for learning at home.

**Watch the video and then facilitate your preferred selection from the following activities.**

# A

## Basic workshop activities

### Activity 10.1 – Is homework useful and inclusive?

🕒 90 minutes

#### Main purpose of this activity

To encourage teachers to think critically about homework in their school: whether they need to give homework, and how to ensure any homework they give does not exclude any child from participating and achieving.

Present the following:

It is very common to give school children homework. Around the world, it is even becoming increasingly common to give homework to young primary school children as well as to older children. However, opinion is divided about whether homework is a good thing, especially for younger children for whom a full day at school may already be mentally and physically exhausting.

Many people argue that rather than helping children to learn more, homework can act as a barrier to inclusion in education. In some places, teachers, parents and other education experts suggest we should not give children homework at all. Homework is one of those elements of our education system that we may take for granted. However, we need to think more critically about it, and how homework links with inclusive education.

Give participants the following instructions:

- In pairs, brainstorm a list of the different tasks that are often given as homework. Think about the homework tasks you were given when you were at school as well as the tasks you give your class now.
- Next, brainstorm a list of pros and cons relating to homework. What do you think is good about homework, and what problems might it cause? In creating the lists, think back to your own experiences, or the experiences of your own children, as well as the experiences of the children you teach.

After about 20–30 minutes, ask the pairs to share their pros and cons lists with the whole group. Each pair should try to share 2 pros and 2 cons, without repeating something that has already been said.

Invite the whole group to think about the pros and cons list to debate the question: should we give homework to children?

Depending on where your teachers work, you may want to ask a more specific question, such as: should we give homework to primary school children; should we give homework to secondary school children?

## Possible answers to expect from participants

Use this list to add ideas to the lists presented by participants. In particular, you may need to help fill gaps in the cons list, if teachers have not previously thought much on the issue of homework.

Homework pros	Homework cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps children to revise and practise what they learned in class</li> <li>• Gives them opportunities to do independent learning or research a topic for themselves</li> <li>• Some children can concentrate better if they are on their own, without distractions</li> <li>• Can help children learn responsibility, self-discipline, and time management</li> <li>• Can give children something useful to do in the evenings, which may be important in some contexts where children spend too much time watching TV, playing computer games or causing trouble in the community</li> <li>• Gives parents a chance to see what work their children are doing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can put unnecessary pressure on children</li> <li>• Some children struggle to learn on their own and need help. They can become demotivated and upset when left to do homework on their own</li> <li>• Some homework is not useful – it has been given to keep children busy but does not really help their learning</li> <li>• The same homework is often given to every child, even though each child has different learning needs. Some children can be very disadvantaged by homework</li> <li>• Children can be left having to make a difficult decision between doing homework or helping the family with chores</li> <li>• Too much homework can lead to children not sleeping enough</li> <li>• It can prevent children doing other activities in the evenings or weekends that help them relax or learn life skills in different ways (e.g. attending sports or other clubs)</li> <li>• Can lead to conflict between parents and children</li> <li>• Can prevent children spending valuable time with their parents and other family members</li> <li>• Can lead to children studying for hours in unsuitable places (e.g. in poorly lit homes, without a proper chair or desk) which may not be good for their health or wellbeing</li> <li>• Some children may become very resentful that homework is stopping them joining in other activities with their family and community. This may even ‘switch them off’ education completely.</li> </ul>

The next part of this activity focuses on how to make sure homework is more inclusive. This discussion may be particularly useful if your teachers work in a situation where they are compelled to give children homework (perhaps because of government policy), so they cannot easily choose to stop giving homework.

The activity involves quite a lot of statement cards (Handout 10a). You may want to reduce the number of cards depending on the time available, or pick cards that seem more relevant to your context. Make sure you choose a balance of inclusive and non-inclusive statements though.

Give participants these instructions.

- Work in small groups.
- Each group will be given a set of cards (cut out from Handout 10a and mixed up).
- On the cards are statements from teachers about how they deal with homework.
- You need to discuss the statements and put them into 2 piles: approaches to homework that may help children feel more included; and approaches to homework that may make children feel excluded. If you are not sure about some cards, you can put them in a third pile: 'don't know'.

Give groups 20–30 minutes to discuss and organise the cards. Then as a whole group, ask someone to read out one card and say which pile they put it in. Invite other participants to say if they agree or not, and why. Continue until all the cards have been discussed (if you have time).

If you feel the participants have put a card in the wrong pile, don't tell them they have got it wrong, but offer them an alternative view. You can use the notes in Handout 10b and invite them to discuss that view. You may decide to give participants Handout 10b after the discussion.

As a final task, give these instructions:

- In your groups, look at the pile of cards showing what you think are more inclusive approaches to homework.
- Do you already do any of these things? If so, share some of your experiences (say what works well or less well).
- Which of the approaches would you like to try, and why?

# B

## Important theoretical issues to discuss

### Activity 10.2 – The important role of parents and families

🕒 60–90 minutes

#### Main purpose of this activity

To highlight to teachers the many ways in which parents can support the development of more inclusive education.

Present the following:

Parents or other family members often help children with homework, or supervise to make sure they do their homework. It is very important that parents take an interest in their children's education. This role, of course, extends beyond simply monitoring or helping with homework.

Parents can play a vital role in supporting improvements in their children's school and lobbying for wider changes to education policy and practice, as well as pushing for the right support for their individual children. In other words, parents can contribute to the twin-track approach to inclusive education; meeting individual needs and making systemic changes.

We have seen in previous programmes that collaboration is essential for inclusive education. As teachers, we need to work with other teachers, other school staff, people from other organisations and government departments, and with parents, family members and the children themselves. So, let's focus here on our collaboration with parents.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Work in small groups.
- Draw a quick sketch of parents in the middle of a sheet of paper.
- Brainstorm all the ways in which parents help and support the inclusive education of children in your school. And then think of all the ways they hinder or do not sufficiently support education in your school. Write each answer on a sticky note or card.
- Think also about whether the support or hindrance is from mothers or fathers (or other female or male relatives). See the sample drawing in Handout 10c for an idea of how to organise your answers.

- On each sticky note or card, indicate whether the supportive actions are contributing to system-level changes or helping to meet individual needs. You could just write S or I on them. Remember, some actions might contribute to changes on both tracks.

## Possible answers to expect from participants

The answers will vary depending on context. However, the following are quite common:

### Parental/family support for inclusion in education

- Ensuring girls and boys have uniform, materials, etc, as much as is possible for the family
- Providing the child with encouragement and incentives to try hard and achieve to the best of their ability
- Pushing the school or other authorities for support or adjustments to help their child attend, participate and achieve
- Contributing to parent-teacher associations and other school improvement committees
- Hands-on help, e.g. as classroom assistants/volunteers; helping with infrastructure projects; helping to run clubs, sport activities and special events
- Giving advice and support to other parents; sharing experiences on how to support their child's education, especially if they have children with disabilities or other specific needs
- Helping with homework; doing educational yet fun activities at home; helping to gather materials that can be used in class
- Meeting regularly with teachers to find out about their child's progress, how they can help learning at home, give teachers advice about the child
- Joining campaign groups with other parents to campaign for systemic changes.

### Parental/family hindrance to inclusion in education

- Not providing financial support to children; may in particular choose not to support girls and children with disabilities
- Setting unrealistic expectations for achievement and putting children under immense pressure; or conversely having low expectations for some children and therefore not encouraging them enough
- Not engaging with teachers; not attending meetings; showing disinterest in how their child is getting on
- Not doing any educational activities at home; believing that education is entirely the responsibility of the teacher/school
- Punishing children for poor grades
- Ignoring signs or advice that their child has specific needs that require extra attention; denying that their child has a disability or special need.

After about 30 minutes, stick all the charts on the walls and ask groups to circulate to look at each other's answers. You may also want to hold a plenary discussion.

Then give the following instructions:

- Look at the answers you gave for how parents hinder educational inclusion.
- Discuss in your groups why this might happen.
- Try to answer these questions:
  - As teachers, how could you help to change this?
  - What activities could you do, or what information could you provide, that might help parents become more supportive?
  - How could you collaborate more with parents, so that they become more supportive of, and involved in, the process of inclusive education?
- Write your answers on the same charts.
- Think about the answers you gave for how parents support educational inclusion.
- How could you expand on this? How could you encourage and support more parents to do these things, or motivate parents to continue with their positive, supportive roles?



## **C** Digging deeper into specific issues

You may want to focus on some of the specific issues raised in Programme 10. A key issue is:

- Homework clubs

Note for trainer: As with homework in general, opinion is divided about whether homework clubs are a good thing or not. You will need to decide if this session is appropriate for your teachers. If they already run homework clubs then it may be useful for them to think critically about how to ensure the clubs operate inclusively and promote inclusion among the children. If they don't already run homework clubs, then this session may not be relevant. Or you may offer the session to help the teachers decide if a homework club would help or hinder children's inclusion in education in their context; or to help them work out the most inclusive way to design a homework club.

### **Activity 10.3 – Homework clubs**

 **60 minutes**

#### **Main purpose of this activity**

To encourage teachers to think critically about homework clubs and the pros and cons of these clubs in supporting children's participation and achievement in education.

Present the following:

As with homework in general, opinion is divided about whether homework clubs are a good thing or not. Homework clubs can be useful, if they are well run and if children are not forced to attend if they do not want to, and if they are free or affordable for all children. Such clubs can also have a wider purpose than simply helping children do more studying. If run creatively, they can help children be more included in education and in social activities in the community. However, depending on how they are run, homework clubs can also have negative impacts on children. We'll look at both sides of the argument in this session.

Give participants the following instructions:

- As a whole group, brainstorm the ways in which homework clubs might help diverse groups of children to participate and achieve in education.

## Possible answers to expect from participants

You may need to use some of the ideas listed here to help stimulate the discussions or fill gaps.

### **Homework clubs could help support children's participation and achievement in education in the following ways:**

- A homework club may provide a safe, quiet, suitable place for children to do more studying or reading-for-fun, with access to basic books or materials they may not have at home.
- Homework clubs may enable children to do community-focused group and project learning activities that cannot be done entirely in class.
- They may give children opportunities to ask friends or adults for help if they have problems understanding a homework task or something that was covered in class. There might even be adults from the community who volunteer to help with homework clubs, who can bring real-life knowledge and skills to the subjects.
- Homework clubs may be another opportunity to provide drinks or snacks, especially for children who may not have enough food at home.
- They can offer opportunities for diverse children to get to know each other and develop social skills, in a less busy, noisy or intimidating environment than the playground at break time or a sport or play environment outside school.
- Homework clubs do not have to be run in the school, and in fact may be more relevant if they are not. For example, they could be run in the community for small groups of children who live near to each other, using someone's house or another local building, like a community room or local library. This can help build community involvement in education, as well as helping to link education with real-life so that it becomes more relevant for children.
- Homework clubs could be linked with other activities such as sports, so that there is not a rigid division between learning and playing.
- For some children whose parents work long hours, homework clubs and other after-school clubs may ensure children are in a safe place, rather than being at home without adult supervision.

Then ask the whole group to brainstorm the potential negative impacts of homework clubs.

## Possible answers to expect from participants

### **Homework clubs may have a negative impact on children in the following ways:**

- They can keep children away from their home and family activities for longer.
- If the homework club is not a community-based initiative, it may mean parents are less involved in their children's education because they don't have so many opportunities to help with learning at home.
- If a homework club is compulsory or attendance is expected, then it simply becomes an extension of formal school. This may be too much for some children who already struggle to cope with the physical or mental demands of the school

day.

- Homework clubs may be run just like extra formal lessons, instead of being an opportunity for children to learn in a different, more collaborative and investigative way.
- Homework clubs may be run or supervised by people who are not teachers or who do not know how to support learning, especially for children who have additional needs. Learning in a homework club may therefore become more frustrating and demotivating than learning in class or at home with parents.
- There may be stigma attached to attending a homework club. For example, it may be assumed that children who attend these clubs are slow learners who need more help, or that they are too poor to have the facilities to do homework at home, and so on.

Finally, give participants the following instructions:

- Work in small groups?
- Does your school run a homework club?
- If you do already have a homework club, think critically about how it operates.
  - Does it help to support improved inclusion in education for children who have difficulty participating and achieving?
  - If not, what could be changed so that it performs this role better?
- If there is not a homework club, do you think it would be appropriate to start one. Think about all the pros and cons in your context.

After 20–30 minutes, invite groups to share their ideas with everyone.

# Programme 10 transcript

## After school – homework

What happens at the end of the school day can affect children's inclusion in education.

Around the world, children are often given homework, to supplement the activities and learning that has happened in class.

Homework can cause problems for some children.

Children may have to do their homework in a difficult environment.

They may not have a suitable table to work at ....

They may not have good lighting at night .....

Or they may have to do their homework in a busy or noisy place.

Children often do homework on their own, so if they do not understand or remember the assignment, they cannot ask anyone for help.

This can discourage them from learning.

## What can you do?

You can plan homework activities that suit different children's interests and abilities – just like you plan differentiated lesson activities.

You can encourage peer learning, so that friends or siblings work together to help each other with learning at home.

You could help to run a homework club at school or somewhere else in the community.

This helps children who do not have a suitable place to study at home. It also gives them a chance to ask an adult or friend for help.

You can encourage parents to help their children with learning at home, and give parents advice on how to do this effectively.

It is very important that you read or mark children's homework, so that they feel their hard work in the evenings was worthwhile.

## Handout 10a

<p>Sometimes I ask the children to design their own homework tasks, based on what we have just learned in the lesson. They work in small groups to design a task that they all want to do, and they set themselves a maximum time limit so that they don't spend too long doing homework. Then they give feedback on each other's work later in the week.</p>	<p>I use a book of homework tasks to guide me. I don't have time to create activities myself, but the book gives me options and I just pick an activity that matches as closely as possible to the lessons we have had.</p>
<p>For every piece of homework I give children 3 options. They can choose to do an activity on their own, or an activity that involves learning with a friend, or an activity that they do with a family member.</p>	<p>I give children homework when we haven't been able to finish the activities I planned in class. It's the only way to get through everything in the curriculum.</p>
<p>I punish children who do not complete their homework, or who complete it late.</p>	<p>I always find out about the home lives of the children in my class because I don't want to give any child a task to do if they will find it impossible to do at home.</p>
<p>Every term I have a 'home learning' meeting with each child's parents. We discuss the best ways for the parents and other family members to support learning at home. I then plan homework activities based on what we have discussed, so that parents/families get involved in the homework tasks.</p>	<p>My golden rule is that all homework tasks must link with home or the community in some way. E.g. I recently created a vocabulary and spelling homework task based on the lists of ingredients children find on common food packages at home.</p>
<p>I expect every parent to spend several hours a week helping children with their homework. I believe it is their duty as a parent.</p>	<p>I have worked with my colleagues to create a homework plan so that we make sure we don't all give the same classes homework on the same days.</p>
<p>Some days I give homework. Other days I don't. I only give homework if I think it's going to be useful/relevant for the children and they have enough time to do it.</p>	<p>I tell the children that they must do their homework totally on their own. I think if their parents or friends help them, that is cheating.</p>
<p>Most of the homework I give to children is in the form of tests. I want to see if they remembered the lesson.</p>	<p>I insist that all children in my class do homework every night. They need to learn that life is not easy.</p>
<p>I plan homework tasks just like I plan a lesson. I create different levels and types of activities for different children depending on their abilities and interests.</p>	<p>When children tell me they have too much homework, I tell them they should learn to organise their time better.</p>

# Handout 10b

Approach	Reflections on this approach
<b><i>Approaches to homework that may help children feel more included</i></b>	
Some days I give homework. Other days I don't. I only give homework if I think it's going to be useful and relevant for the children and they have enough time to do it.	Homework should add value to learning, not just be given to keep children busy. They usually have other things they can do after school; they probably don't need to be kept busy.
I have worked with my colleagues to create a homework plan so that we make sure we don't all give the same classes homework on the same days.	If you must give homework, it is important to ensure that children are not being overloaded. Many children will be unable to cope if they receive too much homework. This won't help them participate or achieve.
My golden rule is that all homework tasks must link with home or the community in some way. E.g. I recently created a vocabulary and spelling homework task based on the lists of ingredients children find on common food packages at home.	Homework can be a useful way of making connections between education and real life in the home or community. Children may participate better in learning if they see the relevance to real life.
I always find out about the home lives of the children in my class because I don't want to give any child a task to do if they will find it impossible to do at home.	Children can easily be excluded from learning if homework tasks require facilities or materials that are not available in their home. It is unfair to set such tasks.
I plan homework tasks just like I plan a lesson. I create different levels and types of activities for different children depending on their abilities and interests.	Children need to be able to participate in and achieve something from a homework task just like they do with a lesson, so this requires differentiation of tasks.
For every piece of homework, I give children 3 options. They can choose to do an activity on their own, or an activity that involves learning with a friend, or an activity that they do with a family member.	Children may feel more included in the learning process if they are given opportunities to make decisions about how they participate in certain tasks.
Every term I have a 'home learning' meeting with each child's parents. We discuss the best ways for the parents and other family members to support learning at home. I then plan homework activities based on what we have discussed, so that parents/families get involved in the homework tasks.	Homework that is designed with inputs from parents may be more relevant for the children, and parents may feel more motivated to support learning at home.
Sometimes I ask the children to design their own homework tasks, based on	Self-assessment and peer assessment are useful approaches in inclusive

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Reflections on this approach</b>
<p>what we have just learned in the lesson. They work in small groups to design a task that they all want to do, and they set themselves a maximum time limit so that they don't spend too long doing homework. Then they give feedback on each other's work later in the week.</p>	<p>education. This approach to homework promotes collaborative learning, as well as problem solving.</p>
<b><i>Approaches to homework that may make children feel excluded</i></b>	
<p>Most of the homework I give to children is in the form of tests. I want to see if they remembered the lesson.</p>	<p>Homework tests may put many children under too much pressure at home. There are more effective ways to test learning rather than setting tests for homework.</p>
<p>I give children homework when we haven't been able to finish the activities I planned in class. It's the only way to get through everything in the curriculum.</p>	<p>If the subject content has not been covered in class, it may be unfair to expect children to learn it on their own at home. Many children will struggle to learn new content if they don't have someone (teacher or friend) to help explain it or answer questions. They may be considered to have failed to learn that content, whereas the reality is that the teacher has failed to teach it.</p>
<p>I expect every parent to spend several hours a week helping children with their homework. I believe it is their duty as a parent.</p>	<p>Parents have a responsibility to take an active role in their children's education, but expectations need to be realistic. Many parents work long hours and have other children or relatives to care for, so they cannot always do as much as they might want to.</p>
<p>I insist that all children in my class do homework every night. They need to learn that life is not easy.</p>	<p>Most children are aware of the realities of life in their community. They may already be experiencing hard work helping their families. They probably do not need lots of homework to show them that life is not easy.</p>
<p>I use a book of homework tasks to guide me. I don't have time to create activities myself, but the book gives me options and I just pick an activity that matches as closely as possible to the lessons we have had.</p>	<p>This approach is likely to result in homework tasks that do not accurately match with children's abilities and existing levels of understanding of a topic. Many children may struggle to complete such tasks and be unfairly labelled as having failed the task.</p>
<p>When children tell me they have too much homework, I tell them they should learn to organise their time better.</p>	<p>Most children want to do well and want to complete the tasks set for them. We should listen to them when they tell us that the amount or type of homework they receive is too much for them, and</p>

Approach	Reflections on this approach
	we should make changes.
I tell the children that they must do their homework totally on their own. I think if their parents or friends help them, that is cheating.	Collaborative learning is an important way of helping children to be included in education. Many children need more support to learn, and this support is needed whether they are learning in a classroom or at home.
I punish children who do not complete their homework, or who complete it late.	There are so many reasons why children may not complete a homework task properly. It may rarely be due to bad behaviour, but is more likely due to having difficulty with the task or having a problem at home that stopped them doing their homework. Punishing them for this won't help them improve their participation and achievement.



# Handout 10c

**Ways in which parents and family support children's inclusion in education in our school**

Mothers / female relatives

Both

Fathers / male relatives



**Ways in which parents and family hinder or do not support children's inclusion in education in our school**