

HOMEWORK

Two articles with suggestions and research about the critical topic of homework:

HOMEWORK ARTICLE #1

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Practice means students are engaged in applying new learning, often repeatedly. The goal of practice is for students to get as close to mastery as possible. Research on homework and practice answers important questions: When should students time their practice? How many skills should students practice at once? How can teachers ensure a strong connection between memorization and understanding? How much practice is necessary for mastery? Effective student practice is key to student achievement.

Key Research Findings

- Grade level is important when teachers assign homework. Impact of homework on achievement increases as students move through the grades (Cooper, 1989, a, b). At the high school level, for every 30 additional minutes of homework completed daily, a student's GPA can increase up to half a point (Keith, 1992). ...
- Teachers should assign appropriate homework at instructional levels that match students' skills and provide positive consequences for homework completion (Rademacher, Deshler, Schumacher, & Lenz, 1998; Rosenberg, 1989).
- A survey of teachers of students with learning disabilities found that 80 percent of teachers regularly assigned homework, but few matched the tasks to students' skills and provided feedback or positive consequences for homework performance (Salend & Schliff, 1989).
- Students should receive feedback on their homework. Student achievement can vary based on the kind of feedback provided by the teacher (Walberg, 1999). Grading homework is helpful, but homework in which a teacher has embedded instructive comments has the greatest effect on learning.
- Homework assignments provide the time and experience students need to develop study habits that support learning. They experience the results of their effort as well as the ability to cope with mistakes and difficulty (Bempechat, 2004).
- Mastery requires focused practice over days or weeks. After only four practice sessions students reach a halfway point to mastery. It takes more than 24 more practice sessions before students reach 80 percent mastery. And this practice must occur over a span of days or weeks, and cannot be rushed (Anderson, 1995; Newell & Rosenbloom, 1981).
- Teachers in the United States tend to compress many skills into practice sessions and instructional units. Students learn more when allowed to practice fewer skills or concepts, but at a deeper level (Healy, 1990).
- Complex processes should be broken down into smaller bits, or skills, which should be taught with time allotted for student practice and adaptation (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).
- Parent involvement in homework can hinder student learning (Balli, 1998; Balli, Demo, & Wedman, 1997, 1998; Perkins & Milgram, 1996). Appropriate parental involvement facilitates homework completion.

Appropriate homework and well-designed student practice will increase student learning. A few key changes in practice may make a significant difference in student achievement by increasing the positive effects. Research suggests ideas for planning homework and activities to support practice:

1. Understand the four types of homework. Know when and why to have students practice:
 - a. Memorization of basic rules, algorithms, or laws so the skill becomes rote.
 - b. Increase in skill speed, used for improving students' abilities to apply these skills in more complex problem solving.

- c. Deepening understanding of a concept—providing students time to read further, elaborating on a new idea and expanding their understanding.
 - d. Preparation for the following day's learning, such as an advance organizer or cue to increase readiness for new information.
2. Match the right type to the goal. Assign the appropriate homework type to meet the learning goal to make homework a more focused learning experience.
 3. Assign the right level of homework. Homework assignments should be at the instructional level that matches students' skills.
 4. Assign the right amount of homework time. A good rule of thumb is to multiply the grade x 10 to approximate the right amount of minutes per night for students.
 5. Apply consistent consequences. Provide positive recognition for homework completion, and appropriate consequences for lack of completion.
 6. Recognize student uniqueness. Students need time to adapt and shape what they are learning as they practice. As they practice, given time, they will incorporate the new skill into a knowledge base of their own, deepening understanding.
 7. Provide clear homework policies. Create and communicate a homework policy at the school level. Policies developed in individual classrooms may communicate a mixed message to parents, and create confusion and frustration. Include expectations, consequences, guidelines, and helpful tips in school homework policies.
 8. Ask parents to facilitate homework completion, not teach content. Communicate ways that families can support homework. Parents should provide a consistent time and place in the home for children to complete homework. Help parents understand that they are not expected to be content experts. If a student needs help with content, that's a sign that the homework assignment may be too difficult.
 9. Homework should serve a clear purpose. Make the goal of a homework assignment explicit and clear to everyone, including students.
 10. Provide appropriate feedback. Effective feedback corrects misunderstanding, validates process, and highlights errors in thinking.
 11. Provide timely feedback. Student learning improves with timely feedback. It's best to provide constructive feedback within hours or a day after students complete an assignment.
 12. Create support structures for homework. Journals, trackers, and other tools help students organize assignments and support communication between student, teacher, and parents.

HOMEWORK ARTICLE #2

Homework Guidelines

June 1, 2004

Davis School District in Utah designed the following Homework Guidelines. They appear to be reasonable and well thought out and applicable to our situation as well.

Research

1. Common themes noted in the educational literature include the following:
2. The amount and purposes of homework should suit the ability level of the student.
3. Homework should provide an extension to in-class learning.
4. Teachers need to respond to homework and/or use homework during in-class activities so that students see a connection between class work and homework.
5. Homework should never be assigned as a punishment nor should it be removed as a reward.
6. At the secondary level, teacher communication and coordination is required to adhere to time guidelines, and avoid duplication of assignments. Students should neither be overwhelmed by homework nor exempted from homework.
7. Homework can be a strong communication tool with parents.
8. Homework can provide a way for parents to be involved in their children's learning.
9. Homework is not be assigned during off-track sessions at year-round schools.
10. Assigned homework should be at a student's independent learning level.
11. Professional development is required to share research methods and to support teachers as they develop, assign, and evaluate homework.

12. Homework serves to develop individual study skills and responsibility while reinforcing skills and concepts.
13. Homework is a cost effective instructional technique for reinforcing learning.
14. Student achievement can be raised when homework is applied properly and tied appropriately to research findings.

Student performance is enhanced by five types of homework:

1. **Study skills and habits:** Homework assignments designed to improve skills such as concentration, discipline, note taking, reading for understanding and reading for pleasure, time management, and organizational skills.
2. **Practice and review:** Homework assignments designed to reinforce material presented in class and/or mastery of previously introduced skills.
3. **Preparation:** Homework assignments designed to introduce material that will be helpful in understanding future instruction.
4. **Skill integration:** Homework assignments designed to combine separately learned skills and concepts into an integrated product such as science projects, book reports, etc.
5. **Extension:** Homework assignments designed to transfer previously learned skills and concepts into new or more complex situations, including real world applications.

Students with Disabilities

All students, including students with disabilities, need to participate in appropriate homework activities. The teacher must adhere to the accommodations and modifications that have been agreed upon for the student by the student's 504 or SPED/Individual Education (IEP) team.

Responsibilities and Guidelines for Teachers

There is substantial evidence that both the quality of homework assigned and teacher response to homework improves student success. While it is neither practical nor necessary to give in-depth feedback on every homework assignment, it is important to understand and use strategies for assigning and evaluating homework that will maximize the effectiveness of the work assigned. Homework should be an extension of what the student is learning in the classroom.

The following are recommended guidelines for teachers:

1. Design the homework with one of the above five types of homework in mind.
2. Design homework so that it can be accomplished independently by the student.
3. Clearly communicate to the student the purpose, directions, and expectations for all assignments.
4. Contact parents early if the student begins to develop a pattern of late or incomplete work.
5. Communicate the purpose and expectations for homework to parents, and encourage feedback regarding quantity and difficulty of assignments. The teacher may consider communication methods such as homework hotlines, assignments on line, etc.
6. Provide timely and appropriate feedback to students and parents using strategies that will acknowledge receipt of homework and monitor for completeness and accuracy.
7. Ask students to indicate how long it took them to complete a homework assignment. The student who takes much longer than expected may not know how to do it, may have difficulties with attention, etc. This method of monitoring may help refine assignments.
8. When appropriate, provide some student choice in assignments to meet the individual interests, abilities, and needs of students.
9. Understand that the effectiveness of homework in improving student performance increases with the age of the child.
10. The quantity and type of homework assigned must be grade level and ability appropriate.

Tips for Assigning Homework

- Make sure the students can complete the homework assignment.
- Write the assignment on the board.
- Explain the assignment clearly.
- Remind students of due dates periodically.
- Assign homework in small units.
- Coordinate with other teachers to prevent homework overload.

- Make sure students and parents have information regarding your policy on missed and late assignments, extra credit, and available adaptations. Establish a set routine at the beginning of the year.
- For any of these strategies to work, the homework assignment must be appropriate and meaningful. If the homework assignment is too hard, is perceived as busy work, or takes too long to complete, there is a risk of students tuning out and resisting it.

Responsibilities and Guidelines for Students and Parents appear in the Student Handbook for the first time this year.