The Homework Conundrum: How to Stop the Dog From Eating Homework (2024) by *Jovita M. Castelino* Teacher CPD Academy

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Content	Do This
1: Why Should We Talk About Homework? Image problem: busy work, encroaching on family time, forcing work out of school. Metanalyses; positive effect in secondary (age 11 – 18) less in primary (age 5 – 10), too much is counterproductive, must be appropriate length. Cyclical effect: students who believe they can learn then use homework effectively, do well academically and repeat. Hattie: Key factors to consider: teacher self-efficacy/purpose and type of homework/recognition and feedback/discussing self-regulatory behaviour in classroom/student self-motivation and belief.	
2: How Do We Learn? Model of learning: information →working memory (WM) for processing ↔ encoding/retrieving into long term memory (LTM). 'What you attend to is what you learn' (Peps McCrea), 'Learning is a change to LTM' (Kirschner, Sweller, Clark), forgetting (Ebbinghaus) part of learning (offset by adding meaning), knowledge organized into 'schema' (Bartlett), 'Most important factor is what the student already knows' (Ausubel), 'generative learning' (Fiorella and Mayer) strategies, 'novices are not little experts'/'expertise reversal effect', problem solving before instruction can be helpful, 'difficulties should be desirable ' (Bjork & Bjork), retrieval practice, spacing and interleaving super effective strategies, mindful of element interactivity: Adam Boxer: $$\text{Challenge} = \frac{\text{task quantity}+\text{abstraction}}{\text{prior knowledge}+\text{external supports}}$$	
3. Making Homework Effective: Types of homework: Retrieval Practice or Preparation (pre-reading, flipped, experts only)/ Extension (experts only)/ Generative learning/ Research Projects (experts only). Computer based – neutral effects, could save time. Student choice – irrelevant choice works. Doing it well: • Before: consider purpose, design, environment students have to do it, resources, access (physical and mental). • During consider: time, thinking (not mindless), support (do they need it, can they get it), self-regulation. • After consider: feedback (sustainable + useful to you and them, responsive (informs teaching - homework data and completion practice can inform future teaching and homework tasks), accountability (praise and sanctions).	
4. Motivating Students Through Homework: Self-determination theory (SDT) People need autonomy, competence, relatedness to feel motivated. Motivation spectrum: those who feel they will never achieve despite working hard → feel can succeed plus work beyond. 5 core drivers: consistent routines, securing success, nudging norms, building belonging, boosting buy in. (McCrea). Build culture where doing homework well (i.e. with a lot of thought) is the 'norm'.	
5. The Role of Home in Successful Homework: Attitudes: 'habitus' = dispositions, attitudes, behaviours that result from upbringing/social class/experience, which may or may not align with school expectations re. homework. Parent roles vary, as may assistance. • Helpful if parents: have an overview, understand the purpose/ routine/metacognitive strategies involved (self-regulation, time-management), help by chunking to aid access, support with questioning.	

• Helpful if schools: make all homework effective (Ch3), ensure access to the task + instructions are clear, communicate the approach and rationale, give feedback about students' progress.	
6. Supporting Students with Homework: Two key factors: habits and beliefs – good habits produce success which fuels belief. Habits that teachers and parents can support students to build: organize time (make timetables, complete early), find suitable place to work (desk without distractions), access the homework (find the work seek help if needed), do what's needed (follow instructions carefully, check), think while doing it (focus on task), submission (submit on time, contact teacher if necessary). Schools can also: use online organisation effectively (Google Classroom etc.), provide planners or help with planning, cross-curricular policies - make sure they don't get too much on one night, provide access to support/support sessions.	
7. Rewards and sanctions: Ideally rewards = positive reinforcement, create positive + motivating environment, recognize + value student efforts, can boost self- esteem + promote positive classroom culture. Most effective when unexpected, rewards for expected behaviour desensitizing. • Homework *rewards* should: acknowledge completion, recognize student efforts, explicitly link completion to classroom success, give extrinsic reward. • Homework *sanctions* should: deter, be proportionate/considerate, show there are consequences. Only sanction if all support already provided, reflect misbehaviour, followed up with further support, identify barriers. Expect all do everything to a high standard.	
8. Building a Homework Culture: Aim for culture in which: Teachers think about what they are setting/ value information from it, all staff value purpose, students value homework & know it benefits them, as do parents. Cohesion across school essential with shared understanding, clarity ESSENTIAL – needs detail to ensure consistency. Perceptions can differ even with the 'same' policies, need eliciting, Implementation can vary, needs monitoring in spirit of openness and trust. Ideally school leaders can use knowledge to anticipate, respond, interact to resolve issue.	
9. Examples: Core principles, staff continuing professional development, communication with parents, assembly structure, department specific policy, effective homework.	

10. Frequently Asked Questions:

How do I get a staff member to set homework regularly? Elicit reason: workload/ issues, disagreement/ don't see the point, support importance and benefit to students.

One of my students is a young carer, how can I support them with homework? Arrange for shorter tasks to be done in the day or even exemption depending on circumstances, focus on long term learning and lifelong habits.

How do I get my students to do homework when they just don't do it? Discuss with parents/ careers as well as student lesson and ellicit issues office support, build confidence with basic tasks to build success and motivation.

How do I get parents on board if they're not supportive? Try information event to get to get collective support, provide examples of success in class as a result of homework.

How can we avoid cheating in homework? Ensure consistency of sanctions for deterrence, ask questions about homework in class on many white boards, one to one honest conversations, use sanctions if necessary.

Should we accept the inevitability of use of AI etc. for homework? Use of AI systems will be detrimental, discuss that with students, explain how learning works, have clear sanctions for plagiarism.

How do we make sure students are putting in effort while doing homework? Show how successful homework will benefit them, break down each part of the homework to show how it helps learning e.g. a quiet environment to reduce distraction, reviewing before submitting to eliminate errors.

Should we pre plan homework tasks? Benefits: leaves more time for planning, non specialist supported, no issues if teacher absent, consistency. Drawbacks: less responsive to need for more practice, could go too fast, not have sufficient support.