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YOU'RE CONFUSED ABOUT ASSIGNING HOMEWORK

IF THIS HAPPENS

Homework: a dirty word to most students, a dreaded word for many parents, and often a confusing word for teachers. Teachers struggle with how much homework they should assign, what types of homework they should assign, how they can get their students to actually *do* the homework, and whether it's even beneficial. If you look into research on homework, you will find conflicting conclusions. Some swear by it, and others swear against it. But most will agree that students should not be overloaded with it. And no one really knows the magic number of minutes students should spend doing homework after school each day. What we do know, however, is that overloading students with too much homework leads to many students simply refusing to do it. Others do it, but it involves a daily struggle with their parents. Some don't understand the assignments, leaving them feeling frustrated and inadequate. And yes, some students breeze right through it. That doesn't mean they enjoy it. In fact, students who already understand a concept often resent having to do more of what they already know how to do.

In an attempt to clarify some of the confusion, let's look at the real purpose of homework. The real purpose of homework should be to provide more practice for what has already been learned in the classroom. It stands to reason that practicing a new skill helps to promote improvement and, ultimately, mastery. So a legitimate reason to assign homework is for the

purpose of practicing skills the students are learning in class. You, the teacher, are hoping that the students will return tomorrow a little more adept at a new skill than they were when they left your class today.

So where have we gone wrong? We've missed the boat when we assign homework that is too time-consuming, when assignments are confusing to students, when assignments require students to teach themselves something that has not been taught at all or at least not taught thoroughly, and when students don't see the assignment as relevant. Consider that if a student doesn't understand a concept and begins practicing a skill incorrectly, we then have to undo the damage when he returns to school. All of these reasons provide insight into why homework has become a dreaded word.

So how do you know if the homework you're assigning is appropriate and beneficial?

TRY THIS

The following should be considered when assigning homework: Does the assignment serve to provide more practice for what has been taught in class? Is the assignment quick, relevant, and doable? Will you *use* the homework results to provide remediation to students who don't understand, to provide enrichment to those who do, and to guide your teaching? Is homework affecting student grades? A word of caution about this one: student grades in a particular subject should reflect their knowledge and skills based on evaluations. Can they perform this skill or not when they are tested? Yet some students receive failing grades for not turning in homework, which in turn affects their final grade in that subject. In such a case, the final grade is not an accurate representation of what the student knows and can do. It has been tainted by the fact that he failed to turn in a homework assignment or two.

When assigning homework, also consider that some students are receiving homework from several other teachers. Always assume that your assignment is not their only assignment. If you are the students' only teacher, just take care not to assign too much homework in too many subjects. Pick and choose what you feel is most important for your students to go home and

practice. And make sure that that practice time is minimal. Kids need time to be kids.

Each time you are considering assigning homework, ask yourself, What is the purpose of this assignment? The answer to that question will help you determine what to assign and whether to assign it at all.

DON'T FORGET

- Homework should be for the purpose of practicing what has been learned in class.
- Homework should be seen by students as quick, attainable, and meaningful.
- Please be cautious about allowing homework to affect a student's final grade, because the final grade should represent what the student knows and can do, not how many homework assignments he missed or how he scored while he was practicing.
- Some teachers choose to assign a consequence for students failing to turn in homework assignments. That is the teacher's choice. But it's not the same thing as allowing the missed assignment to affect the student's final grade.
- Keep homework to a minimum. And don't assign it every day. Remember that students spend long hours each day at school. They deserve some time to themselves.