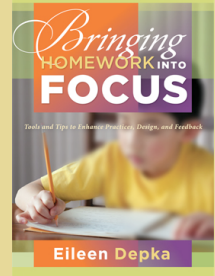




THE MAIN IDEA

current education book summaries



File: Homework

Bringing Homework into Focus: Tools and Tips to Enhance Practices, Design, and Feedback

By Eileen Depka (Solution Tree Press, 2015)

S.O.S. (A Summary of the Summary)

The main ideas of the book are:

- ~ Homework is taken for granted. It is assigned more out of habit than as a thoughtful assignment.
- ~ Research shows homework *can* impact student performance, but only if it is designed well.

Why I chose this book:

As educators, we are always scrambling for more time to boost student learning. One way to do this that is commonly overlooked, is to improve the quality and use of homework.

Teachers are programmed to automatically give homework, but research shows that a lot of assigned homework does *not* improve student learning. I like that this book helps us take a new look at a resource we already have – homework – and provides suggestions for how we can improve it to have more of an impact on student learning.

The Scoop (In this summary you will learn...)

- ✓ How homework can be used for four distinct purposes: diagnostic, introductory, formative, and summative.
- ✓ How teachers can design quality homework assignments by taking into consideration four key components:
1. Purpose 2. Relevance 3. Doability 4. Quantity
- ✓ How to create and evaluate quality homework assignments
- ✓ How to decide whether or not to give homework
- ✓ How to use effective grading and feedback practices with homework
- ✓ How to involve teams of teachers in discussions about effective homework practices
- ✓ *The Main Idea's* professional development suggestions for helping your teachers implement more effective homework practices

Some research shows that homework has benefits. Other research shows that homework has little to no impact on student learning. How effective homework is depends on the age of the students, the time spent on the homework, the content of the assignment, and the quality of the feedback given. The truth is that homework is ubiquitous in most of our schools. If we are going to continue to assign homework, the suggestions in this book will help teachers turn homework into a practice that improves student learning.

Chapter 1 – Types of Homework Assignments and Their Purposes

The majority of teachers assign homework out of habit. However, many do not carefully think through the purpose of the homework they are assigning. The problem is that the term “homework” is as generic a word as *good* or *nice*. The only thing that unifies all homework assignments is that they are done *at home*. We define the location, but not the *purpose*. This chapter divides homework into four types of student work to help teachers give each assignment a purpose:

1. Diagnostic
2. Introductory
3. Formative
4. Summative

1. Diagnostic Homework Assignments

Teachers can assign homework for diagnostic purposes. Before a unit, teachers can use student responses from a diagnostic homework assignment to gauge how much background knowledge and skill students have on the topic. They can then look at their students’ strengths and weaknesses and use this in designing a unit that will better meet student needs. By deciding to use homework as a preassessment, teachers can uncover both student knowledge and gaps in understanding. This type of preassessment need not be long. Even a brief diagnostic homework assignment can clarify which students have little or no background knowledge and which students have a more developed one. Below is an example that includes just four questions:

Respond to the following questions with information that you *already know* or *think you know* about the American Revolution. Please do not look up or research information in order to respond.

1. List people who were important in the American Revolution.
2. List some of the causes of the American Revolution.
3. List some of the key events during the American Revolution.
4. List some of the key effects of the American Revolution.

Part of why defining the *purpose* of the assignment is so important is that, in this case, students need to be told *not* to look up additional information and limit themselves to sharing only what they know or think they know. This assignment would look different if the purpose were to have students research new information, as will be described in the next section.

2. Introductory Homework Assignments

Homework can be a great way for teachers to have their students acquire introductory information or acquire new skills. Teachers can provide students with resources for them to view, listen to, or read, or students can gather the resources themselves. By having students do this learning at home, they can delve deeper into the material, develop a greater understanding, and build the background knowledge they need for a unit. Given that throughout the year different students will have different knowledge bases for each unit taught, assigning homework to help students build their background knowledge is a way to ensure that all students have a common level of understanding before diving into a new topic. When giving a homework assignment for introductory purposes, it is important to be clear so students know they are *not* supposed to answer questions with just their current level of knowledge. Instead they need to do additional research to build their background knowledge.

Flipped Teaching

A current example of how teachers use homework assignments to help students develop their background knowledge is through *flipped teaching*. With flipped teaching, students get their “lecture” at home, usually by watching a video of a teacher introducing a topic. Then, they apply what they’ve learned from this material to problems or activities *in class* that they normally would do at home. By having students learn the content at home, class time can be used for students to complete tasks that will increase their understanding with the benefit of a teacher present – a resource the student must do without when the tasks are completed at home. Of course teachers must take into consideration whether students have access to a computer and the Internet at home, and how much time they have. Furthermore, teachers need to be clear about the purpose of the lesson. Below is a template teachers can use in designing a flipped assignment with an example of how a teacher might fill it out:

FLIPPED TEACHING PLANNING TEMPLATE

Topic: Understanding and calculating area and perimeter of triangles and rectangles

Standards addressed: Geometry strand of CCSS

As a result of the video, students will know and be able to do the following: Know the difference between area and perimeter and be able to calculate area and perimeter of rectangles and triangles.

How will students be assessed on this content? In class they will need to calculate area and perimeter for 3 triangles and 3 rectangles and will need to apply this to a real-world task.

In addition to watching the video, students will be asked the following question to process what they have learned: Where in real life is it important to know how to determine the area and perimeter of various shapes?

Length of time student needs to watch the video and complete any related assignment: 18-20 minutes

3. Formative Homework Assignments

Formative assessment allows students to demonstrate the concepts and skills they are *in the process* of learning. When homework is used formatively, teachers can gather evidence of the progress of student learning and use it to make decisions about next steps in instruction. Furthermore, students *also* have responsibility for using formative assessment results to better understand their own learning and progress. To support this process, teachers should provide opportunities for students to self-reflect and determine what they need to do to further their understanding of the material. After giving a homework assignment, teachers can ask students to answer a brief set of questions (as few as three) to help them assess their errors and create a plan to improve the next time.

4. Summative Homework Assignments

Once students have had sufficient time to practice skills and apply them, summative assignments can be used to have students provide evidence of their mastery of the material. Summative homework assignments are used as culminating assessments in which students demonstrate their understanding. Teachers use these results to determine whether students have reached the targets initially set for them. Many summative assessments – like quizzes or tests – are given during class time. But summative assignments completed at home can take the form of projects or performances which require more time.

The important point in this chapter is that what is significant about an assignment is not *where* it is completed (home, school, or elsewhere), but rather the *purpose* of the assignment. Is it given to assess a student's background knowledge? Is it given to help students expand that background knowledge? Is it given to assess how students are progressing in the middle of a unit? Or is it given to verify the skills and knowledge a student has learned at the end of a designated period? Student work should be categorized by work, not location.

Below, and at the end of each chapter, are some questions teachers can discuss in teams.

Collaborative Team Discussion Questions

1. Why is it beneficial to identify the *purpose* of homework before designing and implementing it?
2. Why is it important for students to understand the purpose of their homework?
3. How do you know when students have had enough practice and are ready for a summative homework assignment?
4. What are the benefits and drawbacks of flipped teaching?

Chapter 2 – Four Components to Ensure Quality Homework

While students who are successful often have positive experiences with homework, the truth is that homework elicits a range of emotions on the topic. A number of students have negative feelings about homework. They may be confused by the assignment or have little confidence that they can complete it. Some see it as a waste of time or even a punishment. Failing to complete homework may lead to punishments by teachers or even parents. When students spend significant amounts of their out-of-school time on extracurricular activities – from sports to music – too much homework can seem like a strain on their time. Homework can pose a particular obstacle for students facing poverty and for English learners because research has shown that lack of resources, background knowledge, and limited access to technology inhibit students' ability to successfully complete homework.

Furthermore, teachers have often received little guidance about homework from teacher education courses or from their schools. Most of what informs a teacher's approach to homework may simply come from the experiences she had when she was a student. In addition, homework may be frustrating for teachers as well, given the amount of time spent on collecting and correcting it and dealing with students who do not complete it. To help with the above issues, this chapter outlines how teachers can design quality homework assignments by taking into consideration four components:

1. Purpose
2. Relevance
3. Doability
4. Quantity

1. Purpose

Students often fail to understand the connection between an assignment and its academic purpose. While that connection may be crystal clear to teachers, students may not understand the benefits. For this reason, it is up to us to make that connection explicit. While many teachers may post learning targets or objectives for the class to see, we need to clearly state the connection between the learning goals and the homework assignment *and* ask students to describe the connection before they complete the assignment. When students understand the purpose of their homework, they are more willing to do the work. Make sure to clarify how the work is connected to *standards*, the *next steps in the curriculum*, the *real world*, and *future success in college and career*. Students must see homework as something that will benefit *them* – not something they should do just for the teacher.

2. Relevance

As adults, we rarely engage in activities that are not relevant or interesting to our lives. If there is no purpose, then why do it? Students think the same way. To make the assignment relevant, we must connect it to real-world learning or make sure students are engaged in meaningful tasks. Another way to make homework relevant is to have students set their own goals and track their own success. For example, if a student gets four out of ten correct on a homework assignment, the teacher can give him time to set a goal to improve (such as eight correct on a homework assignment). Then he would track the next six assignments with a graph and reflect after each homework assignment as to why he made the mistakes he did, and how to improve the next time.

3. Doability

Sometimes when teachers run out of time in class, they assign the rest of the work for homework to keep the class on track. However, when this is the case, students often haven't learned enough to successfully complete the homework. When teachers don't fully prepare students for the work they need to do outside of the classroom, they haven't considered *doability*. This does not mean that homework can never be an opportunity to learn new skills or apply skills in new situations, but if the goal is to have students practice what they have already learned, teachers need to make sure that students leave the classroom with enough skills and confidence to successfully complete the assignment. How do they do this? By using formative assessment techniques in class to assess whether students are ready for the homework. However, when teachers use these techniques, they often find that some students are ready for the homework, while others are not. If this is the case, then a differentiated homework assignment is needed.

Another issue with doability has to do with *time*. Teachers need to be sensitive to the time constraints students face outside of school. Whether students have enrichment activities, family responsibilities, or work commitments, teachers cannot assume that students have the entire night to devote to their homework. To deal with this issue, some teachers place time limits on homework. For example, a teacher might say that students only need to spend thirty minutes on an assignment, and then they can stop. However, if they don't complete it, they need to be prepared to ask questions about what was confusing.

One more factor that influences doability is resources. Inevitably, some students get stuck on their homework because they get confused. Who can your students call? Is there a school website? Is there any type of before- or after-school homework club? These are some of the factors to take into account when considering if a homework assignment is doable.

4. Quantity

The fourth factor to consider in assigning homework is how much to assign. The goal is to find that magic balance between time and need. How much does a student need to do to demonstrate evidence of understanding? Does she need twenty-five math problems or will five suffice? Can you skip the factual questions and assign three that focus on deeper understanding? Perhaps it is possible to limit the quantity if the students are given good quality questions. It's a tricky matter to find the amount that is just right.

Collaborative Team Discussion Questions

1. In what ways are students in your class informed of the connection between the lesson's purpose and the homework assigned?
2. In what ways do you make homework relevant to your students? How might you increase relevance?
3. What steps do you take to ensure the doability of homework?
4. What support systems do you have in place if students are confused by homework?
5. How do you determine the quantity of homework you assign?

Chapter 3 – Quality Design of Homework

No teachers enjoy correcting homework that is poorly or incorrectly done. In addition, students find it a waste of time to complete assignments that have no clear purpose. Furthermore, research shows that homework *can* impact student performance, but only if it is designed well. Teachers can address these problems by taking time to carefully plan *quality* homework for students. This chapter outlines some of the features of a well-designed homework assignment. These features include the use of assignment evaluation, Bloom's taxonomy, Webb's Depth of Knowledge, and providing options for students.

Ensuring Homework Assignments are Rigorous

Consider the following nonsense homework assignment. Students need to read the passage below and answer some questions about it:

In order to concreate transpondilates, one needs to bracter sliphausen. Bractering sliphausen allows gorphlex to be produced. Gorphlex is a key ingredient used in the concreation process. Etc.

Even though this is a nonsense paragraph, students could answer homework questions about it correctly without having any understanding:

1. What is needed in order to concreate transpondilates? (Answer: *In order to concreate transpondilates you need to bracter sliphausen.*)
 2. What is produced when bractering sliphausen? (Answer: *Gorphlex is produced when bractering sliphausen.*)
- Etc.

In this example, the student has completed the assignment correctly without coming away with a deeper understanding of the topic. So how do we ensure that homework leads students to truly demonstrate their understanding and think critically? One way to regularly incorporate critical thinking into homework assignments is to use **Bloom's Taxonomy** and **Webb's Depth of Knowledge** in designing assignments. For example, below is a homework assignment for an art class that includes questions at all of the levels in Bloom's Taxonomy:

Bloom's Taxonomy Levels	Sample Homework Assignment at all Levels
Remembering	1. List three techniques the artist uses.
Understanding	2. Describe how the artist uses color to create mood.
Applying	3. Make a connection between the techniques this artist uses and those an artist of your choice uses.
Analyzing	4. Compare and contrast two works by the artist.
Evaluating	5. Recommend a change that the artist might make to one of the works in order to enhance it in some way. Why would this be an enhancement?
Creating	6. Produce your own work of art using the style of this artist.

To include critical thinking and rigor in homework assignments, teachers can also use Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) which includes four levels of thinking. Below are some examples of assignments at the different levels:

<p>Webb's Level 1: Recall</p> <p><i>Examples for a homework assignment:</i> Memorize the facts, know the formula, recall the dates, underline the nouns, list the characters</p>	<p>Webb's Level 2: Skills and Concepts</p> <p><i>Examples for a homework assignment:</i> Organize the data, predict the story, compare the characters, use context clues, identify patterns in causes of historical conflict</p>
<p>Webb's Level 3: Strategic Thinking</p> <p><i>Examples for a homework assignment:</i> Argue your point and provide reasons, look at data and draw conclusions, apply math to real-world situations</p>	<p>Webb's Level 4: Extended Thinking</p> <p><i>Examples for a homework assignment:</i> Critique an experiment's results – are results transferable? Use knowledge of past wars to make conjectures about the future, prove your solution is valid and reliable</p>

Giving Students Choices

In addition to planning for rigor, if teachers also design homework assignments that give students choices, this will improve the quality of student work. Because there are a variety of different learners in every class, adding an element of choice to a homework assignment will make it more enjoyable and engaging. However, this does not mean that the content or the standards are different; it simply means that the students' methods of demonstrating their understanding will differ. Students could choose five out of six questions or they could choose from a list of different projects or performances to complete. The important thing is to keep the focus on the understanding – for example, that students understand the causes of the American Revolution. Whether they do a video presentation or write a paper, they must demonstrate this understanding.

Chapter 2 introduced four issues to consider in designing quality homework: (1) purpose, (2) relevance, (3) doability, and (4) quantity. Below are some useful questions to ensure that teachers take these four into consideration, along with rigor and choice, when designing a quality assignment:

Quality Design	Questions to Help Design a Quality Homework Assignment
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the knowledge, skills, and applications needed to complete the work been identified? • Is the purpose clear to the teacher and the students?
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the assignment have meaning beyond the classroom (real world)?
Doability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do students have the background knowledge and tools to complete the work independently? • Is the length of the assignment just right (enough to understand without repetition)?
Quantity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the quantity of work appropriate given the students' ages, commitments outside of school, and need to demonstrate understanding?
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there variety or choice to accommodate different learners? • Are there higher-order thinking opportunities in the assignment (see Webb and Bloom frameworks)? • If students are successful with the assignment, does it mean they truly understand the content?

Since most of us are familiar with fairy tales, take a look at the assignment below and evaluate whether you think this would be considered a "quality" assignment, given the questions in the chart above:

1. In your own words, define **characterization**.
2. Give three characteristics of Little Red Riding Hood and three characteristics of the Big Bad Wolf.
3. Share two ways these characters are similar and two ways they are different.
4. Compare and contrast the characters in *Little Red Riding Hood* to those in *Goldilocks*.
5. Give *Little Red Riding Hood* a new character trait and tell how that would change the story.

Evaluation of Student Work for Quality

The final component in ensuring that work done at home is quality work involves the *evaluation* of that work after it has been completed by students. Some teachers only check if homework is complete, but not whether the student has successfully demonstrated understanding. However, if an assignment is a quality assignment and is worth giving, then it must be worth evaluating. This requires planning on the part of the teacher. The teacher must decide what a successful homework response will look like and how he or she

will evaluate it. Some teachers may choose to use rubrics or checklists that outline the criteria necessary for successful completion of the assignment. Sharing this criteria ahead of time not only helps students know what is expected of them, but it also allows the students to evaluate their own or their peers' homework. Evaluating student homework is also important for one final component of high-quality design: to produce formative assessment results teachers can use to guide next steps in instruction. Teachers can use a simple sheet of paper with the rubric's criteria listed across the top and students' names along the side. With a quick look, teachers can see which of the rubric's criteria students struggled most with (got 1s and 2s for example) and which criteria students mastered. However, all of the elements of quality homework design introduced in this chapter require careful planning on the part of the teacher.

Collaborative Team Discussion Questions

1. When designing homework, what is done to ensure that students will demonstrate understanding in their work?
2. All team members bring and share two recent homework assignments. Look through the assignments for examples of the quality components discussed in this chapter and provide feedback to each other.

Chapter 4 – Homework: To Give or Not to Give, That Is the Question!

Teachers are so programmed to give homework that they rarely consider whether the homework will add any value to their students' learning. Education author Alfie Kohn says that teachers should make a case-by-case decision as to whether the concepts being taught in class require additional time at home or not, rather than simply assigning homework automatically. Remember that some studies show that homework is beneficial and others conclude that homework has little to no impact. Some studies suggest that homework is less appropriate in early elementary school except to build a school-home connection and to begin to introduce study habits. It also gives parents and children an opportunity to work together. For older students, the effectiveness of homework is connected to the concepts introduced earlier – purpose, relevance, doability, and quantity. This chapter introduces some issues to consider in deciding whether or not to give homework: (1) student needs inside and outside of the classroom, (2) teacher capacity, and (3) student capacity.

1. Student Needs Inside and Outside of School

Many teachers have known a student like Gilbert. It seemed like Gilbert took no responsibility for his learning because he rarely completed his homework. But upon closer inspection, the truth is that he had no parent around afterschool and had to remain in a dark garage where he couldn't see his homework. While this might be an unusual case, the point is that if we are going to assign homework, then it's our responsibility to know our students, our families, and our communities. While we can't control everything outside of the classroom (like no lights in the garage), we can do our best to make sure our students have the skills to complete the homework, basic supplies, and even offer the school as a quiet place to work. How can we possibly know all of our students' needs? One idea is to create a survey – for the parents of younger students and for the older students themselves – to help us learn about our students' homework habits. Questions might ask how much time homework usually takes, whether the child has access to a computer and the Internet, and whether someone is available if the child gets stuck while doing homework.

2. Teacher Capacity

Part of the consideration about how frequently to give homework has to do with teacher capacity to evaluate the homework and give feedback. Teachers have the tricky task of balancing the work they assign, the feedback they give, and their schedules. Feedback is vital. When teachers assign homework and simply check for completion, *neither* the student nor the teacher will know if the student learned the material. When this is the case, students do not know how well they are performing and may be practicing an incorrect skill over and over. If an assignment is so unwieldy that a teacher cannot give feedback, then either the *assignment* or the *form of feedback* needs to be adjusted. For example, instead of a teacher giving a tremendous amount of written feedback, she can hold conferences with students, use rubrics, use checklists, or employ peer feedback. Some of these forms may cut down on time. Not only do rubrics and checklists save time (you don't have to write the *same* comment on paper after paper), but students can use these tools to track their own data and see how they are improving over time. Another benefit is that a student can use a checklist *while* he is doing his homework and can also fill out a checklist for a peer – several ways to save the teacher time on feedback. Considering teacher capacity to provide feedback, given the staggering amount of student work that gets produced, can help teachers make informed decisions about when and how much homework to give.

3. Student Capacity

In addition to taking teacher capacity into consideration when assigning homework, teachers must also consider *student* capacity. In the elementary grades this is easier as there is usually one primary teacher assigning homework. Teachers often depend on the ten-minute rule for assigning homework – they give no more than ten minutes of work multiplied by the student's current grade (a fifth grader, for example, would be assigned 50 minutes of homework, while a ninth grader would be assigned 90 minutes). One way to ensure teachers don't overload students would be to equally divide the total number of minutes allotted by the number of teachers. If a fifth grade student has five teachers, then each teacher would only be allowed to assign ten minutes of homework a night. Another approach is to create a rotating schedule in which only certain teachers could assign homework on a certain night of the week. This allows teachers to give longer assignments, but it cuts down on flexibility because a teacher cannot always decide to assign homework just because students could use some extra practice with the learning done that day.

In any case, the goal is to find a balance between the standards the students must master and the understanding they must develop while not overwhelming students or teachers at the same time.

Collaborative Team Discussion Questions

1. What are the benefits of a student or parent survey about homework?
2. Prior to giving homework assignments, how do you ensure that you have the capacity to provide timely feedback to students?
3. What would the impact be on your classroom if you eliminated homework?

Chapter 5 – Homework: Giving Grades and Giving Feedback

Educators have often wondered: should homework be graded or not? This chapter focuses on some of the issues surrounding the grading of homework, the importance of feedback, how record keeping is distinct from grading, and communicating homework expectations to students. All of these issues affect whether homework positively impacts student achievement.

Grading

When teachers ask themselves whether or not to grade homework, they are asking the wrong question. The issue shouldn't be whether to grade work that is done at *home*, but whether the work is formative or summative. When homework is summative – that is, when homework serves as an opportunity for students to demonstrate what they have already learned – then it should be graded. However, when homework is given for students to practice skills they are still in the process of mastering, then it serves as *formative* work. Therefore it would not only be premature to grade this work, but it would distort the final grade. Students need plenty of practice before they should be graded on what they have learned. This does *not* mean that formative homework should *not* be checked. “Checking” and “grading” work are not the same thing. In fact, it is vital for teachers to “check” formative homework in order to gather the evidence they need to decide how to adjust instruction to better meet student needs. Furthermore, when students are involved in “checking” their own work, they develop a better sense of their own progress, which in turn helps to fuel their motivation. In addition to “checking” formative homework, it is essential that teachers give students *feedback* on this work as well. There will be more on giving feedback later in this chapter.

If I Don't Grade It, They Won't Do It!

When deciding whether or not to grade homework, teachers often make this comment, “If I don't grade it, they won't do it!” It presents a difficult situation when students are used to receiving grades on *everything*. Instead, we need to take a different approach. First, students often view their homework as something they do for their *teachers*. We need to help them imagine their preferred future (success in college, career, etc.) and help them to see that the skills and knowledge they are gaining from homework is leading them toward their desired path. Then, we need to make sure that the assignments we give them provide them with an increased level of skill to move them toward their preferred future. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in the book, we need to ensure that our assignments are meaningful to students. If we can do this, students will see that they are working for *themselves*, not the teacher. Below are three steps to help students keep up their motivation to do homework, even if it isn't graded:

Step 1: Connect the homework assignments students are doing with a clear set of learning targets and standards. Make sure the homework reinforces the learning students have done, challenges them, and meets their needs.

Step 2: Provide homework that is meaningful to students – connect it to the real world, the 21st century, and to the students' futures and careers.

Step 3: Provide feedback on *all* homework that is assigned. A letter or number grade is *not* feedback. Students must know how their performance compares to the standards. See the suggestions about checklists and rubrics in previous chapters, including peer feedback, to help make the quantity of feedback manageable.

In addition to these three steps, an incentive program can help encourage students to regularly complete homework. However, make sure such a program is not counterproductive by making some students feel they are punished (if, for example, pizza is given to those who complete the work but others are unable to complete it due to challenging home circumstances). Instead, you might set up a system in which each student receives a raffle ticket each time she completes a homework assignment, and then monthly drawings provide an opportunity for anyone to win a small prize. In addition, couple this with various opportunities for homework help at school – either peer tutoring or extra teacher help before school – to ensure everyone can participate in the incentive program.

Does Late Matter?

The answer to the question as to whether it matters if homework is turned in late is both *yes* and *no*.

Of course no teacher wants his or her students to turn in homework late. This can get in the way of student learning. However, teachers need to explore the reasons *why* the homework is late. If homework is done late due to procrastination, that is an entirely different case than if the homework is too difficult to complete.

If the lateness is due to behavioral reasons – like procrastination – then there should be *behavioral*, not academic consequences. This means that the grade should not be lowered. Instead, an appropriate response might be a phone call home, time spent after school, or missing a recess. If a student can demonstrate the knowledge or skills necessary, that student should receive an A for the homework assignment. An F should show that the student has *not* mastered these skills, not that the student has behavioral issues. Instead, there can be a separate reporting system for behaviors such as a grade for *life skills, behavior, or work ethic*.

If the homework is not completed because it is too difficult or confusing – academic reasons -- the teacher must consider whether some students did not have sufficient background knowledge to complete the homework and need extra help. *Or*, if the majority of the class had trouble with the assignment, then perhaps the homework was given prematurely and the teacher needs to adjust instruction.

This is why a conversation with students is necessary when there is late or missing homework to determine whether the issue is a behavioral or academic one. Overall, it is important to remember that if we want to prepare *all* of our students to be college and career ready, they must all eventually get their homework done regardless of the reason they initially failed to complete the assignment. The goal is to ensure that all of our students have the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful, so they need to complete all of their work. So, *yes*, late or missing homework matters because it inhibits student learning, but *no*, late or missing homework should not matter when determining an academic grade.

The Crucial Nature of Feedback

Although the book has touched on the topic of feedback throughout, this chapter provides a reminder of how important it is and how to ensure you provide quality feedback. The whole point of feedback is for students to grow from the response. Quality feedback should impact a student’s *future* work. However, in order for feedback to provide this role, it must honestly present students with what was correct and incorrect in their work, and what they can do to adjust their performance to improve it. For example, “good job,” “nice work,” or a grade of a “B” are not feedback because these responses do not help the student understand her current performance in comparison to the targeted performance. In addition, feedback must be timely. A student may need feedback on Monday’s math homework in order to perform better on Tuesday’s assignment, so feedback must be delivered as soon as possible. Furthermore, students must be given time to implement the feedback to improve their performance. As was stated before, while consistently giving students feedback requires a great deal of a teacher’s time, teachers can use several tools to help minimize some of that time – such as rubrics, checklists, and peer- and self-evaluation of homework. If students regularly reflect on their homework performance alone or with a peer, this can increase the timeliness of feedback and help students engage more in the work. Even a simple form such as the one below, can help with this process:

What I did well	What I struggled with	What I need your help with

Feedback is so essential when giving a homework assignment, that if teachers cannot find the time for feedback for a particular assignment, they should consider not giving the assignment at all.

Record Keeping is not Grading

While information from both formative and summative results should be kept in written form, this does *not* mean that they should both be graded. Grading is *not* the same thing as record keeping. Records of summative work will be used toward a final grade, but records of formative work can be used to help teachers know which students need what kind of support. It is important to use a system to record information from formative homework assignments. Below is an example of a simple way to record formative results for a writing assignment. Keep in mind that the shaded cells indicate the student has NOT demonstrated proficiency for that criterion:

	Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	Fluency	Conventions
Student 1					
Student 2					
Student 3					
Etc.					

If you want to record formative and summative homework on the *same* template, you can use one like the table below. Students get several formative trials (T) before they have a summative assignment (S) which will count for a grade:

	Ideas				Organization				Word Choice				Etc.
	T1	T2	T3	S	T1	T2	T3	S	T1	T2	T3	S	
Student 1													
Student 2													
Student 3													
Etc.													

Overall, to maximize the learning that takes place, both formative and summative homework need to be recorded and tracked so teachers can make informed decisions about the next steps in instruction for each student.

Communicating Expectations

To make the best use of homework, it is helpful to communicate your expectations about homework to both students and parents at the beginning of the year. Obviously the type and frequency of the communication will vary depending on the grade of the students, but even when students are older, it is important to convey your expectations. In sending out an initial communication to parents, consider including responses to the following questions:

- When will homework be given (daily? weekends?) and about how long should assignments take?
- Do families understand the different types of homework to be given (diagnostic, introductory, formative, summative)?
- What tools will be needed for homework completion (computer, the Internet, etc.)?
- Do parents understand what will be needed for flipped teaching?
- Are parents expected to assist?
- What options are available if the student needs assistance?
- How will parents be made aware of student performance?

Soliciting parent support can increase the impact of homework. Research shows there are benefits when students reflect on and share their learning with their parents. Furthermore, parents control the learning environment at home so it can help to make suggestions for parents to create a positive atmosphere for students to do their homework – a designated place for homework, a calendar to record long-term assignments, an organized backpack, and a positive attitude about school work. Keep in mind that all homes are different, but creating suggestions like these can help parents positively impact what their children gain from homework.

Collaborative Team Discussion Questions

1. How do the grading structures in your classroom support students? Do any inhibit student learning?
2. What practices do you use to deal with late homework? How could you deal with late homework so it doesn't impact the academic grade but addresses the behavior?
3. Share any methods you use to help students take their work seriously whether or not it is graded. What else could you do?
4. Review the importance of feedback and have each member of the team share one way s/he provides feedback to students.

Chapter 6 – Implementing Improved Homework Practices

The previous chapters introduced a number of practices that will increase the impact homework has on student learning. Now comes the hard part – implementing those practices. This chapter provides a simple process to help implement these new ideas:

1. Identify the desired state.
2. Evaluate current practices.
3. Implement practices to close the gap.
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of new practices.

Steps 1 and 2: Identify the Desired State and Evaluate Current Practices

The book has already laid out the “desired state” by outlining key factors necessary to implement ideal homework practices. The chart below (from pages 100-101 in the book) contains key components from the book – not all – along with a column to evaluate whether you use these practices on a regular basis. Feel free to adapt the components to your needs and evaluate your current practice:

	Desired State	How regularly do you do this?
Chapter 1: Types of HW & Purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of the homework is identified. • With diagnostic or formative HW, feedback is given but the result is not used as part of a report card grade. • Summative homework is given after sufficient time for students to practice, and influences grades. 	
Chapter 2: 4 Components of Quality HW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose is clear to the teacher and students. • Homework is relevant and students understand the relevance. • Homework is doable and students have the tools to complete it. • The quantity of HW is just right: enough to demonstrate understanding while not being overwhelming. 	
Chapter 3: Quality Design of HW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HW design takes into consideration the 4 components above (purpose, relevance, doability, quantity). • HW is rigorous and results in student understanding and application of knowledge and skills. • Students are given choices within the homework assignment. 	
Chapter 4: HW – To Give or Not to Give?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework assignment takes into consideration students' commitments outside of school. • When HW is given, teachers have the capacity to provide timely feedback. • Homework is given so that students have the capacity to successfully complete the assignment (about 10 minutes per grade – e.g., 50 minutes for 5th grade). 	
Chapter 5: Grading and Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether or not to grade HW depends on whether the assignment is formative or summative. • Late HW is addressed with behavioral consequences, not academic ones. • Feedback clearly shows students how well they performed compared to the target and provides next steps. • Record keeping is done for both formative and summative HW and is kept separate from grading. 	

Step 3: Implement Practices to Close the Gap

Now is the time to take action. Before taking action, be aware of whether your staff need any professional development on the ideas introduced in this book. Do they have enough of an understanding of feedback, assessment, and effective homework practices? When staff members are ready, have them review the practices they need to start implementing from the chart above, and create a written plan, with dates for implementing each practice. Next to each practice they plan to implement, they should also list any support they will need for successful implementation.

Step 4: Evaluate the Effectiveness of New Practices

Finally, staff should plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the new practices they are implementing. Consider evaluating these practices after the first month, semester, and year since the practices began. Use a combination of questions to teachers and questions to students to determine whether these practices are effective. Questions to teachers might include:

- Does clarifying the *purpose* of the homework help you better understand whether to include results in a report card grade?
- How have students reacted to an increase in feedback?
- Does implementing behavioral consequences lessen or eliminate students turning in late homework?
- Which feedback tools have worked well?
- How has the inclusion of more rigorous questions for homework impacted students' understanding?
- How has it impacted your teaching to record the results of homework for formative purposes?

Students can also be questioned to determine how changes in homework practices have affected their work habits as well as their levels of learning. Once responses to these questions have been compiled, teachers can tweak their homework practices to make sure they better fit students' needs and boost student learning.

Collaborative Team Discussion Questions

- Which homework practices will we ensure are consistent across the team?
- How will we ensure we implement new homework practices?
- How will we support each other throughout the implementation process?

THE MAIN IDEA's PD suggestions for Improving Homework Practices

⇒⇒⇒ Facilitator's Agenda

I. Opening Discussion Questions

To get teachers thinking about their homework practices, have them discuss the following in a large group or small groups. There are also questions for school leaders to discuss:

- What are some of your biggest concerns when it comes to homework?
- What has informed what you know and what you do in your homework practices (teacher ed class, your own experiences, expectations from your school or district)?
- Have you changed your homework practices over time?
- In your ideal situation, how would homework be viewed and used in your class?

For administrators or leadership teams

- What are the school's policies and practices concerning homework?
- What homework practices are consistent throughout the school, departments/grade level teams, and the district? What is left for each teacher to decide?
- How much do you think homework is contributing to students' overall level of achievement/learning?

II. Self-Evaluation of Homework Practices

12 Practices that Influence the Impact of Homework on Student Learning

Give teachers time to read through the descriptions below and have them rate how frequently or how well they accomplish each practice on a scale of 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).

		Chapter	Description of High-Impact HW Practice	Self-Rating
The HW Assignment	1. Purpose	Chapter 1	I identify the purpose of the HW (diagnostic, introductory, formative, or summative) and clearly communicate it to the students.	
	2. Relevance	Chapter 2	HW is connected to standards, next steps in the curriculum, the real world, or future success in college and career.	
	3. Doability	Chapter 2	I make sure the students have enough background knowledge, time, and resources to complete the HW.	
	4. Quantity	Chapter 2	I take into account the amount of HW assigned (about 10 min per grade, e.g., 50 minutes for a 5 th grader).	
	5. Rigor	Chapter 3	I ensure homework challenges students with different levels of thinking (Bloom's Taxonomy, Webb's Depth of Knowledge).	
	6. Options	Chapter 3	I provide students with options without compromising standards.	
Responding to Homework	7. Grading	Chapter 5	I only grade homework that is summative, not formative.	
	8. Late HW	Chapter 5	I address late homework with behavioral consequences, <i>not</i> by lowering a grade. My grades are purely reflective of student learning, not behavior.	
	9. Feedback	Chapter 5	If my HW is worth giving, then it is worth providing feedback for, so students receive feedback on <i>all</i> homework (either from me, themselves, or a peer).	
	10. Record Keeping	Chapter 5	I keep records of student performance on HW to help me adjust instruction and this is separate from my grades.	
Assigning HW	11. Student Capacity	Chapter 4	In assigning HW, I take into account student jobs, family commitments, extra-curriculars, availability of HW help, and resources (computer, Internet).	
	12. Teacher Capacity	Chapter 4	In assigning HW, I take into account the time needed to provide feedback, do the necessary grading, and record student progress.	

III. Discussion of Self-Evaluation Results

Discussion questions for teachers:

- Highlight which of the 12 practices above you gave yourself the highest ratings for (4-5). In small groups, share your effective homework practices so colleagues can learn from you and you can learn from them.
- The book (as well as a lot of other research) highlights two issues: the importance of **feedback** and the importance of **not including behavioral issues** in academic grades. These approaches to homework may be new to you, so discuss them. With colleagues, discuss what you think of the following points from the book:
 - ⇒ "If an assignment is worth giving, it must be worth evaluating." (p. 46)
 - ⇒ "When teachers just check homework in without correcting it, neither the teacher nor the student has an understanding of its accuracy." (p.56)
 - ⇒ "Some reasons for not completing homework are the result of a behavior [like procrastination]... Behaviors should result in behavioral consequences, not academic consequences. Do not lower the grade or reduce assignment points." (p.76)
- Now look at the 12 areas in the chart above that you gave yourself the lowest self-ratings for (1-3). With a partner, discuss these areas and choose the ones you would like to improve.

For administrators or leadership teams

- Does the school have school-wide practices and policies concerning homework for the issues below, and if not, discuss these questions as a team and decide if there *should* be a policy for the following:
 - ⇒ Should late homework impact an academic grade?
 - ⇒ How much homework should students receive overall at each grade level?
 - ⇒ How and how frequently should teachers communicate with families about homework?
 - ⇒ Are there expectations for teachers concerning checking homework for completion, giving feedback on homework, giving grades for homework, and keeping records for mastery of learning targets in homework?
- In listening to teachers discuss their strengths, weaknesses, and concerns about homework, what commonalities do you notice? Are there certain homework practices you might need to address with professional development?

IV. Implementing Best HW Practices

After teachers have identified which of the 12 practices they would like to address to increase the impact of homework, have them follow the implementation process outlined in the book by completing the chart below:

- Step 1: Identify the desired state* – Make sure teachers understand the reason why the HW practice they wish to implement is beneficial *and* what the ideal homework practice should look like. You may need to copy a chapter from the book or help to clarify any misconceptions.
- Step 2: Evaluate current practices* – This is what teachers did with their ratings in the self-evaluation earlier.
- Step 3: Implement practices* – Teachers begin to implement the new practices or approaches.
- Step 4: Evaluate the effectiveness of new practices* – Teachers should fill in the chart below for evaluation.

New Homework Practice(s) I Plan to Implement:		
What I plan to do:	When:	Support and/or resources needed:
Evaluation of New Practices		
How fully am I implementing the new practices (Rate from 1-5)?	Rating and Notes:	
<i>Am I seeing improvement in any of the following areas (if yes, cite examples or evidence):</i>		
A. Student learning/achievement	A. Evidence and notes about improvement:	
B. HW completion rates	B. Evidence and notes about improvement:	
C. Student attitudes about and engagement with HW	C. Evidence and notes about improvement:	
D. Teacher use of HW results to inform instruction	D. Evidence and notes about improvement:	
E. Student use of feedback on HW	E. Evidence and notes about improvement:	
Which HW practices do I still need to improve?	HW practices to continue to improve:	

*** Extra – The Flipped Teaching Challenge

The book introduced one of the most up-to-date HW practices to help increase the impact of homework – flipped teaching. Invite teachers to a meeting who have never tried flipped teaching, but would like to try.

- A. Introduce the concept of “flipped teaching” (see Chapter 1 or p.1 of the summary) and discuss it.
- B. Introduce a tool to help teachers plan a video for students to watch at home. Have teachers watch this 6-minute video from eduCanon – a free service that lets teachers build flipped lessons by compiling videos from TeacherTube, Vimeo, etc. and creating questions for them: <http://bit.ly/1138cld>
- C. Then have teachers create 1 flipped lesson by: 1) choosing a video for their students to watch at home, 2) writing questions students will answer while watching, 3) outlining a lesson for the next day based on the video and the questions. Consider having teachers work in pairs since this is their first time.
- D. For their own “HW,” have teachers plan more thoroughly for a flipped lesson with the book’s template:

FLIPPED TEACHING PLANNING TEMPLATE (Sample already filled out)
Topic: Understanding and calculating area and perimeter of triangles and rectangles
Standards addressed: Geometry strand of CCSS
As a result of the video, students will know and be able to do the following: Know the difference between area and perimeter and be able to calculate area and perimeter of rectangles and triangles.
How will students be assessed on this content? In class they will need to calculate area and perimeter for 3 triangles and 3 rectangles and will need to apply this to a real-world task.
In addition to watching the video, students will be asked the following question to process what they have learned: Where in real life is it important to know how to determine the area and perimeter of various shapes?
Length of time student needs to watch the video and complete any related assignment: 18-20 minutes