Core Function: Classroom Instruction

Effective Practice

Use sound homework practices and communicate with parents

Overview: Sound instructional practice includes regular use of effective homework practices to reinforce and extend learning, and teacher-parent communication that fosters parents’ understanding of their child’s academic progress. To be effective, homework should be purposeful and engaging where possible to build student interest, assigned in the appropriate amounts and at the appropriate level of difficulty, and promote parent involvement when possible. Teachers should be aware of their students’ home environment and potential barriers to completing homework, and help students develop the metacognitive skills necessary to work independently. Teachers must systematically inform parents of their children’s progress towards mastery of objectives and standards, and provide ways for parents to access, understand, and take action based on their child’s progress data. Teachers should also record all communications with parents for record-keeping and accountability purposes.

Evaluate Your Practice: Does your school have a consistent and age-appropriate homework policy implemented by all teachers? Have parents received training or information on how to support their child’s successful homework completion? Do all teachers teach the metacognitive skills that build students’ self-regulation so that they can complete homework assignments independently? What school support structures are in place that help struggling students complete their homework? What, if any, expectations are set regarding teachers’ assignment of interactive homework? How do teachers record students’ progress toward standards-based objectives? Is this information reported to parents and if so, in what manner and how often? Does the school provide parent training to help with understanding their child’s progress data? Is there a common format and schedule for reporting across the school? Is the information discussed at parent-teacher conferences? How does the school connect families with resources based on their child’s academic progress? Does the school require all teachers to use a method of documentation of their communications with parents?

Introduction

Classroom instruction can be reinforced and complemented by assigning homework that reinforces and extends student learning, and teacher-parent communication that builds parents’ capacity to support their child’s learning at home. Homework, when implemented effectively, can serve as an important point of connection between the school and the home; parents must understand both what is expected of their child and their role in monitoring and supporting their child’s completion of homework (Redding, 2007). Positive two-way communication between home and school, which involves listening as well as informing, sets the stage for developing a relationship built on trust and respect (Byrk & Schneider, 2003; Hiatt-Michael, 2010). Effective teachers regularly communicate with parents to keep them up to date on their child’s progress, and assign homework that reinforces classroom learning and regularly involves parent-child interaction around what is learned in school. This brief will summarize research related to the use of sound homework practices and teachers’ use of effective communication with parents regarding their child’s progress.

How can homework be used to effectively reinforce, complement, and extend classroom learning?

Research has demonstrated that homework, when used effectively, generally contributes to positive student achievement, study habit and skills, time management, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and stronger school-parent connections (Bembenutty, 2011; Carr, 2013; Cooper, 1989; Cooper, Robinson, & Patell, 2006; Hattie, 2017; Marzano & Pickering,
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should be taught, through teacher modeling and scaffolding, the necessary metacognitive skills such as goal setting, selecting appropriate learning strategies, progress monitoring, and self-evaluation, so that they can self-regulate their independent learning outside the classroom (Xu, 2009; Bembenutty, 2011). For example, teachers can model for students how to use planners for time management and also reinforce students’ use within the classroom (Carr, 2013).

• Involving parents in appropriate ways: Parents should provide support for homework by creating an environment conducive to learning (e.g., providing a specific time/place for homework and a distraction-free environment) (Redding, 2000, 2006). Interactive homework, in which parents receive clear guidelines on their expected roles and ask questions that can help their child summarize, clarify, or extend what they have learned, has been shown to enhance the effectiveness of homework (Van Voorhis, 2003, 2011a, 2011b). Interactive homework should not require the parent to teach content, but should include engaging assignments that stimulate student interest and are appealing to parents whose children are excited to share their learning with them. Examples include parent-child science experiments, sharing ideas and getting parent feedback on written work, and surveys and interviews of parents’ experiences and memories (Van Voorhis, 2010).

Teachers should consider that many students face barriers and inequities when completing homework, such as lack of technology at home or lack of supervision due to parents working multiple jobs; extending time for completion can convey the message that all students are held accountable for a high quality of work, rather than a compliance message of “just get it done” (Carr, 2013).

How can teachers communicate effectively with parents regarding their children’s progress?

Research has demonstrated that schools can improve their students’ learning by engaging parents in ways that directly relate to their children’s academic progress; sustained family engagement in students’ learning is associated with higher achievement, better grades, increased motivation, and college enrollment (Weiss, Buffard, Bridgall, & Gordon, 2009). Schools at all levels should make parents aware of benchmarks and learning standards mastered by their child, from early childhood through
the school years to allow them to track their child’s progress and stay on track for graduation and college/career readiness (Weiss & Lopez, 2011). Teachers and schools can share progress data effectively by promoting the following (see Weiss & Lopez, 2011):

1. **Access:** Timely and relevant data on academic progress and performance, attendance and behavior can be shared through teacher-parent conferences, and in many cases through electronic sources. However, schools should be aware of families’ internet/computer access, and provide supports as necessary (e.g., extending computer lab hours or working with community partners to set up computer kiosks).

2. **Understanding:** Understanding student data requires time and regular training. Schools should help parents understand educational terminology and student data within a standards-based framework by providing face-to-face training. This training can include developing parent knowledge about what their child should be able to know and do for each of the skill areas being assessed. Parent-teacher conferences can serve as the setting to share student progress data. For example, Academic Parent-Teacher Teams involve teachers explaining standards, goals, and aggregate classroom progress for reading and math to parents in a group setting, along with sharing individual student data for each parent to allow for easy interpretation (Paredes, 2010, 2011).

3. **Action:** Data shared should be actionable; once they understand their child’s data, parents need clear guidance and resources to allow them to take action to help their child overcome challenges and further enhance their strengths. Teachers and schools can provide parents with recommended home activities and link them with community resources (e.g., museums and after-school programs), for example, that can foster their child’s progress towards learning objectives and standards.

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<th>Indicators to Support the Effective Practice</th>
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<tr>
<td>All teachers maintain a file of communication with parents.</td>
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<td>All teachers regularly assign homework (4 or more days a week).</td>
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<td>All teachers check, mark, and return homework.</td>
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<td>All teachers systematically report to parents the student’s mastery of specific standards-based objectives.</td>
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<td>All teachers regularly make “interactive” assignments that encourage parent-child interaction relative to school learning.</td>
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**References**


