

Interactive homework for home-school partnership

Research finds that students, parents and teachers have concerns about current homework practice, specifically the high quantity and low quality of activities, as well as a lack of guidance for parents about how to help. Parents expect homework to be meaningful as well as helping students to develop a good work ethic.

However, a specific kind of homework, interactive homework, is found to positively impact parental involvement and student attitudes as well as student achievement. Students report that they like this kind of homework, that it leads to greater levels of family involvement in their school work generally, and that they feel more able to talk about their schoolwork at home. Students hand in more homework and complete it more accurately, while parents report feeling more confident to help their children. It is also likely that students become more motivated by sharing ideas and getting family support in school subjects on a regular basis, while opportunities to explain and talk about their knowledge and their schoolwork may aid their comprehension and memory.

What is interactive homework?

Interactive homework is homework that requires discussions and interactions with families. It includes directions to the student for involving family members in homework by directing questions to family members or engaging in activities that require their involvement. It supports students in discussing their learning with families and gives students responsibility for family involvement. Families gain a better awareness of their child's current school work and an understanding of how to get involved in appropriate ways with their children's homework.

Key differences from usual homework practice:

- It may be assigned less regularly (once or twice a month)
- Students and their families are given several days to complete (to allow for family commitments)
- At certain points in the activity, students are prompted to involve family members with specific questions, conversations or interactions
- Parents provide feedback on the effectiveness of the activity
- Detailed instructions are included

Some examples include:

Student and parent compile a list of ten ways in which they use maths in everyday life.
Student demonstrates a new skill to a family member, and they discuss the use of the skill in everyday life.
Student and parent complete an interactive writing task involving the use of household props or toys.
Student and parent view a YouTube clip that introduces a new topic, and discuss it.
Student retells a story they have been reading in class.
Student conducts a simple home experiment using liquids of different thicknesses, and discusses the results and real-world applications with a family member.
Student asks family members for their shoe size and height and works out averages.
Student interviews family members about a particular topic, such as popular hairstyles when they were at school, writes up the interview as a newspaper item, and reads it to the family.
Student and parent play maths games from the nzmaths.co.nz website.
Student and parent work on a reading assignment together.
Student writes in a journal, and shares some of what they've written with a family member.
Teacher sends home a weekly homework folder which details a 15 minute activity for the parent and student to complete every night.

Tips for introducing interactive homework

- Give interactive homework on a set day each week/month, and allow an extended time for completion, so that families know when to expect the homework and can fit its completion around their other scheduled activities.
- Provide detailed instructions detailing the student's and family member's roles.
- Provide students with instructions about when and how to involve family members as they complete the homework.
- Ensure all questions are designed so that parents can answer them without formal education or a detailed knowledge of the topic, to avoid embarrassing parents. Focus questions on what the students are learning, not what the parent knows.
- Allow a space for the family member to write a comment, feedback or question about the activity or skill/content.
- Offer additional prompts and questions that families might like to use to engage their children in conversations about current learning. Ensure that the homework and discussion prompts given position the parent or family member in a role in which they should encourage, listen, guide, react and discuss rather than teach.
- Get a parent to sign off each activity.
- Be careful to coordinate interactive homework activities where students have several teachers.

Other homework tips

- Rethink 'homework' to mean work that links schoolwork to real life.
- Use and promote a homework policy to clearly define and jointly agree the roles and responsibilities of each party in regard to homework. For example, a homework policy might state that students are entitled to engaging, challenging and achievable homework which feeds into and enhances what they are learning in the classroom. It might add that students should know well in advance what they have to do and why, and receive feedback on completed work, and that parents should receive similar kinds of information, and, in addition, advice on how to support their children, how and where to get help.
- Offer summer learning packets or activity bags.

References & Further Reading

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