

# Contents

---

<b>Preface</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>PART I. REALISE THE PURPOSE</b>	<b>1</b>
1. What Is So Important About Homework?	2
2. What Is the Rationale for Homework?	8
3. What Do the Experts Say About Homework?	15
4. How Does Changing Homework Impact Your Practice?	26
<b>PART II. ASSEMBLE THE PLAN</b>	<b>37</b>
5. How Can You Design Meaningful Homework?	38
6. How Can You Put Meaningful Homework Into Action?	54
<b>PART III. EXAMINE THE POSSIBILITIES</b>	<b>63</b>
7. How Can Meaningful Homework Look in the Early Primary Year Levels?	65
8. How Can Meaningful Homework Look in the Upper Primary Year Levels?	76
9. How Can Meaningful Homework Look in the Middle Years?	87
10. How Can Meaningful Homework Look in Secondary School?	98
11. Still Not Convinced?	110
<b>Appendix A: Completed Homework Design Planning Form</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Appendix B: Early Primary Data Collection Tools</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Appendix C: Upper Primary Data Collection Tools</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Appendix D: Middle Years Data Collection Tools</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>Appendix E: Secondary School Data Collection Tools</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>A Guide to Your Professional Learning</b>	<b>169</b>



# What Is So Important About Homework?

**D**espite the current craze for standards, testing and the need to learn more in order to be prepared for life, many students are less than excited about school and are not achieving at higher levels. Even high achievers often appear to be just “doing school” – a term used to describe a school system in which success depends more on going through the correct motions than on learning and engagement (Pope, 2001). Too often, what students are asked to do is neither memorable nor meaningful. One reason is that they find no purpose in what they are being asked to do – they see no relevant connection to their lives. To exacerbate the problem, teachers often abandon exciting and successful units that are not strictly aligned to the standards and assessments.

An important but often overlooked component of the learning cycle is homework. It has been the source of heated debate among educational researchers and practitioners (not to mention parents and students) for decades, but we are convinced that “homework done right” holds enormous promise for helping teachers and students address some of education’s most pressing challenges. Our classrooms and students are living proof of what is possible.

Now, we can almost hear you say, “You must be kidding!” We, too, had a litany of frustrations and often felt trapped given the pressures that bubbled up from multiple fronts regarding homework, which in most school systems seems to be viewed as a necessary evil rather than a valuable curriculum component.

Which of our former frustrations are you currently facing?

## **THAT’S ME!**

As a classroom teacher, do any of these scenarios mirror your experiences? If so, we hope this book will motivate you to take steps toward the alleviation of your homework frustrations. Highlight the responses that make you shout, “That’s me!”

---

---

*I seem to get inundated with homework to check, so I find myself assigning work that I correct during meetings, or when I'm chilling on the couch after dinner, or that can be corrected by a volunteer.*

*With the increased pressure from new standards and the enormous push to cover content, I find myself simply asking students to do at home what we don't complete at school. New content and new skills end up being the norm.*

*I get so frustrated with the 50 per cent who do not bother to hand in their homework – and often fail the course because of it. I feel like a failure.*

*I'm overwhelmed. I have to give homework that will keep us on track with other classes. If I do something different, I'll get behind.*

*I'm sick of the email questions and complaints from parents about the assignments. You'd think I'd asked them to do the homework.*

*I forgot it; the dog ate it; my mum forgot to wake me up so I could do it; it's at my Dad's house – the list of excuses goes on and on. Why bother trying to get these kids to live up to my expectations? They simply don't care!*

*The principal is a stickler about assigning 20 minutes of homework a night for year ones, an hour for year sixes, etc. It's become a real headache. I admit I do not put a lot of time into figuring out the tasks I assign. I base my assignments on the time I think they will take to complete.*

*I have to give homework that connects to our mandated learning programs. I need to make sure that students are getting practice with the concepts in our maths, science, social studies and literacy programs or else they might not do well on the tests.*

*I'm pretty sure there are certain cliques that do their homework "cooperatively". With their high-tech savvy, it is so easy.*

*My students don't know how to do assignments that require learning skills. They don't know how to collect data or ask good interview questions. They and their families need assignments that are very structured or else they won't complete them.*

*We can have a perfectly engaging class discussion, but the minute I shift to giving the nightly homework assignment, the eyes roll, the nasty whispers begin and the books slam shut. It's really deflating.*

*I don't feel confident enough to design assignments that are different from our packaged learning curriculum. I need more experience with those units before I can create more meaningful assignments that feel more risky.*

*Parents complain that they don't see how their kids can ace all the tests, yet get failing marks on their end-of-term reports because of the poor showing on homework. They simply don't get it!*

*I suspect there's a group of parents who do the homework for their kids and simply have the answers recopied.*

---

---

## MEANINGFUL HOMEWORK

We define *meaningful homework* as tasks that enrich the in-school curriculum by challenging students to think deeply about important questions, apply their knowledge and skills toward solving genuine problems and create authentic products that will be used in meaningful ways. Furthermore, out-of-school learning opportunities, which we refer to as *homework*, complement what goes on at school by exploiting

# 5

---

## How Can You Design Meaningful Homework?

**T**he purposes of this chapter are to provide you with general factors to consider in designing homework, including inquiry skills that are necessary for the successful completion of meaningful assignments, and a guide for planning your own meaningful homework assignments.

### DESIGN FACTORS

Our position on homework activities has been influenced by the work of John Dewey, Hilda Taba, Ralph Tyler and other major curricular theorists, and by the research conducted by Brophy and Alleman (1991). For example, Zais (1976) stated that the

#### Primary Principles

- Goal Relevance
- Appropriate Level of Difficulty
- Feasible
- Cost-Effective

primary standard for selection of learning activities should be how well the activities contribute to students' attainment of curricular goals. Other criteria for good activities are that they provide for the attainment of multiple goals, engage students in active forms of learning, help them develop values and critical-thinking capacities, are built around important content and are well matched to students' abilities and interests.