



HOMework

Establishing homework as an effective teaching and learning tool

OUR INITIAL POSITION

- Homework was identified by staff as a concern.
- Many students had a negative attitude to Homework.
- Homework was a daily cause of conflict in class.
- Third strand of SSE.
- Homework chosen as the project for the TL21 two year programme organized by Kildare Education Centre in conjunction with Maynooth University and other schools in North Kildare.

TL21 HOMEWORK GROUP

OUR AIMS:

1. To gather data about homework in our school which would help us in establishing parameters and targets for our initiative.
2. To promote the link between good Homework and successful learning and to promote good Homework habits.
3. To foster a more positive attitude to Homework and to encourage more students to complete Homework to a high standard.
4. To encourage greater parental involvement in their child's Homework.
5. To emphasise that learning and revision are an essential part of Homework.
6. To inform and consult staff at a very early stage and seek to embed any initiatives with their co-operation and support.

EASY TO INTRODUCE INITIATIVES

- Students to have journals on desks at all times (2)
- Write Homework on the board (2,6)
- Check that students take down Homework (2,6)
- If Homework is incomplete write a note to parents in Journal (the HW Journal was redesigned to accommodate this) (3,6)
- Homework as 25% of students' grade in each subject for JC and LC October Assessments (3,5,6)
- Homework section of report cards to be filled in by all teachers (3,4,5,6)
- Homework initiative to be on the agenda of all staff meetings and subject department meetings (6)

NO SANCTIONS (2,3,4,5)

- **No sanctions** (such as detention, extra work etc) for students who don't do homework.
- Instead, parents should be informed via the Homework Journal. Repeated no homework may require a phonecall home.
- Students would still be expected to complete the homework for the following class (at teachers' discretion if the late homework would be corrected).
- The rationale behind this decision is that Homework should not be associated with negativity and punitive measures but instead promoted as a valuable learning tool.

GATHERING DATA (1)

Teachers' Survey

- All teachers surveyed
- Variation regarding the quantity of Homework given to students
- Main problem was that a sizeable proportion of students were not doing their homework to an acceptable standard

Students' Survey

- 5th Year students surveyed
- Imbalance in the quantity of Homework given across subjects
- Students want to spend less time on Homework and more on study

Initiatives to address
QUANTITY of
Homework



QUANTITY of Homework (2,3,4,5,6)

1. Teacher co-operation and consideration of the demands on students' time
2. Homework app
3. Study timetables

Homework App (Schoolbag) (2,4,6)

- This app tracks the amount of homework given each night to students and a maximum amount can be set so that a situation can't arise where a student has several hours of homework to do in one night.
- The teacher inputs the homework and time allotted into the app and this can be accessed via the app by students and parents. If too much homework has already been set, the teacher can assign the homework for another night.

Study Timetables (2,3,5)

- We identified that the issue of quantity of homework is also linked to students' **organisation and study skills** i.e. if a student is given homework to do over several evenings but leaves it to the very last minute they may feel that they have too much homework to do that night.
- Consequently, when planning for next year's homework journal a section will be included for several study timetables.
- Yearheads work with the Guidance teachers in helping students to create, maintain and follow study timetables.
- Subject teachers to offer advice on how best to study their subject.

Initiatives to address
QUALITY of
Homework



QUALITY of Homework (2,3,4,5,6)

1. First Year Information Evening
2. Homework Matters booklet
3. Peer Assessment
4. Differentiation
5. Reflective practices

1. FIRST YEAR INFORMATION EVENING (4)

- New format.
- Parents divided into their child's tutor group.
- Smaller groups meet their child's tutor- encourages a more relaxed and open meeting.
- The tutor focuses on the importance of homework as a learning tool that must be supported by parents at home.
- Tutor explains the Homework policy, Homework Journal and Homework Matters booklet.

2. HOMEWORK MATTERS BOOKLET (2,4,6)

- Tutors introduce and follow the Homework Matters booklet during SPHE over the course of the first 10 weeks in school.
- Each new section involves the student, teacher and parent.
- The booklet helps to foster good, simple homework habits such as organisational skills, the importance of the right study space, the value of learning homework, having the right equipment etc.

3. DIFFERENTIATION (3,5,6)

“Teachers must first create quality homework, tasks must then be differentiated and meet individual needs” (Cathy Vatterott)

- Differentiation is very important as students vary hugely in pace, skills and ability.
- Most students are eager to achieve and succeed once the difficulty and amount of work is reasonable (success leads to motivation)

“It’s better to give no homework to anyone than the same homework to everyone” (Alfie Kohn)

Methods of Differentiation

- Difficulty (to enhance student achievement)
- Amount of work (do not overload!)
- Time
- Amount of structures or scaffolding provided to assist the completion of homework
- Expectations of students (ours and theirs)
- Learning style
- Needs of the student
- Interest of the student

Examples of differentiation

- **Easter Revision Homework**

- What is the point in giving everyone in the class a full exam paper to complete over Easter?
- Forcing students to spend time on assignments that they can already complete to a high standard is a waste of their time and can breed negativity towards the purpose of homework.

- **Time**

- Who is the 20 minute guideline aimed at?
- Instead answer as many questions as possible in 20 minutes, then draw a line under it and continue to reflect your ambition - (demonstrates understanding and working speed).

4. PEER ASSESSMENT (2,3,6)

- Peer assessment is when students evaluate, assess and/or grade the work of other students in their class based on clearly outlined guidelines from their teacher.
- Peer assessment helps students to learn the features of quality work in two ways.
- Firstly, they develop a clear understanding of assignments and questions by adhering to their teacher's clear benchmarks.
- Secondly, by assessing the work of their peer they learn to identify mistakes, but more importantly the strengths of their peer's work and also their own.
- Students provide constructive feedback to each other thus underlining to them that learning is a process that takes time and effort.

The Benefits of Peer Assessment

- **Active** rather than passive participation in their learning.
- A **clearer and deeper understanding** of their subject as well as the assessment criteria for assignments and exams.
- An understanding of the purpose and **learning outcomes** of Homework.
- More **relevant feedback** to students as it is generated by their peers.
- Students **work harder** to impress their peers.
- Students can better identify the progress they are making in their own learning.

The Benefits of Peer Assessment contd.

- Students **reflect more** on their peer's corrections and comments thus encouraging them to critically reflect more on their own work.
- The **transfer of learning between students**.
- An enhanced **learning experience**.
- An elimination of the **mystery** that often surrounds the assessment process.
- Increases students' **responsibility, autonomy and confidence** in their learning.

5. REFLECTIVE PRACTICES (2,3,5,6)

- *Powerful learners are reflective. They are able to step back and take stock of progress. They are able to mull over their actions and consider how they might have done things differently. Good learners are self aware, able to contemplate their actions to continually 'grow' their learning power."* Guy Claxton, from "What's the Point of School?"
- Students often do homework in a vacuum, failing to draw links with their established knowledge or course content.
- Homework is often treated as a standalone task to be completed to keep the teacher happy rather than an integral part of the student's learning process.
- Often students repeat the same mistakes again and again, remaining in a state of learning stasis.
- *'It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations that allow new situations to be tackled effectively.'*
(Gibbs 1988)

Embedding Reflective Practices

- Regular reflective activities are essential to foster reflective students who think critically about their own knowledge and learning.
- **Ongoing throughout the year-** Reflective Journals and Portfolios
- **At the end of a learning unit/topic-** structured reflective assignments, worksheets that prompt reflective thinking
- **On completion of an assignment-** reflective worksheets
- **Prior to beginning a new topic or assignment-** reflect on knowledge and skills already learned
- Objective of the reflective assignment should be clearly stated by the teacher and understood by the student
- Enhances observational skills, exploring ideas, connecting knowledge, assessing progress and learning.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE



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- Revisit and re-emphasise the actions to improve Quality HW, in particular Reflective Practices.
- Clearly explain the HW initiative to students and parents in a formal manner.
- Learning outcomes of HW to be clearly explained to students allowing them to see the value of every assignment given.
- Focus on quality feedback to students.
- Decide on methods to measure success of the HW initiative.

CHALLENGES



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- Time and workload!
- ASTI industrial action and the withdrawal from CP hours meant it was impossible to include Homework as part of staff meetings.
- New JC has contributed to a feeling of being “overloaded” with new curricula, teaching methodologies, planning etc.
- Urgency of other issues to be addressed by management and staff.
- Lack of regular CPD both informal and formal.
- No Special Duties posts.
- Yearhead workload- unable to adequately focus on promoting the importance of learning and revision HW. No adequate time to have constructive meetings with students who are not doing HW and support them in changing their attitudes and work ethic

OPPORTUNITIES



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- Hour long classes- these lend themselves to engaging in practices that support better Homework such as peer assessment, differentiation, scaffolding, constructive feedback by the teacher to students, reflection etc.
- The value of Homework in improving students' attitudes to their learning ability could be emphasised in the new Wellbeing programme at Junior Cycle.
- PASS attitudinal surveys to be utilised when identifying students who have problems with Homework.

REFLECTION



REFLECTION

- Overall, we feel that the TL21 Homework Project has been a success but there is still much work to do to fully and effectively embed Homework as an important tool in Teaching and Learning in our school.
- Homework revealed itself to be a much more complex issue than we had originally envisaged and one that is linked to many other parts of school life such as active teaching and learning methodologies, reflective teaching and learning, pastoral care, student tracking, testing and assessments etc.
- Consequently, it is a long term project that demands a whole school and consistent approach and input from staff, students and parents alike.

REFLECTION

- The implementation of a constructive Homework policy faces many ongoing challenges that can at times seem insurmountable, considering the scale of the never ending demands on teachers' time but engaging in the TL21 HW Project has opened a valuable dialogue about Homework in our school and focused our minds on its importance in our teaching and learning.
- Finally, it has been invaluable to have the opportunity to learn from our colleagues, not just in our own school but in other schools in our locality and this has enriched our experience of working on our project.