

There are five principles that implement a coherent homework policy.

# Homework Implementation: Covering the Bases

by Dr. Harvey C. Foyle and Dr. Gerald D. Bailey

The baseball World Series is finished, and winter baseball has started. Can spring training be far behind? One of the key ingredients in successful baseball is that the runner touch all the bases and the fielders cover the bases after the ball is hit. Numerous national reports have called for more homework in the public schools. Administrators, supervisors, and teachers face the necessity of implementing homework. The baseball manager does not allow each team member to play the game without overall guidance. Likewise, administrators need to give overall guidance to the implementation of homework procedures and practices.

Homework has numerous aspects but there are five principles that implement a coherent homework policy. Administrators can leave the details of individual homework assignments to individual teachers, but, like baseball managers, administrators must set up the principles for a uniform district homework policy. Based on our teaching experiences and our homework research, the following homework bases were developed and applied in a classroom homework experiment.

**1. Homework should be regularly assigned** (Leonard, 1965). Homework does produce higher student achievement when assigned about three times per week in a high school subject area. During the 1983-84 school year, the current researchers conducted a classroom homework experiment in tenth-grade American History. At Emporia High School, Emporia, Kansas, six intact classes (131 students) were divided into three groups: (1) preparation homework, (2) practice homework, and (3) no homework. Two instructors, Ann North and Harvey Foyle, taught the classes in the usual manner with the exception of the homework assignments mentioned. The researcher used an analysis of covar-

iance to hold student ability and previous course knowledge constant. The researcher found that (a) factual content homework increased the students' achievement when compared to the students who were not assigned homework, (b) either preparation homework or practice homework can be assigned to students since both types of homework raise students' achievement when compared to the students who were not assigned homework, and (c) females and males achieved the same regardless of the type of homework assigned to them.

The length of homework assignments must be carefully considered. At the high school level, a daily maximum of thirty minutes per homework assignment given three times a week leads to one and a half hours of homework per week in one subject area. Thus, in a high school with six daily subjects there is a maximum of three hours per day of homework, and a minimum of no homework at all since every teacher might choose not to assign homework on that day. Hence, an individual teacher needs to know what other teachers are assigning for homework, or a school might need a staggered system of homework for each course on specified days, or student might need to inform the teacher of heavy homework evenings. Junior high schools need to have less homework than high schools. At the elementary level forty-five minute of homework per night for grades one through three and sixty minutes of homework per night for grades four through six would be a maximum ("Information", 1981). However, the current researchers feel that no homework should be given in grades one through three, and only classwork not finished during school time should be given in grades four through six. Student achievement does increase when homework is regularly assigned.

**2. Homework should be clearly stated** (Foyle, 1984). If the teacher expects students to complete a certain assignment, writing the assignment on the board is appropriate. However, a clearly written homework instruction sheet which states the assignment is better. Students often mis-copy assignments written on the board or even forget to write the assignment down. Students can write their responses on the instruction sheet. The assignment is clearly stated and accurately placed in the hands of the student. Thus, all homework assignments should be in writing and handed to the student.

**3. Homework should be regularly collected** (Shockley, 1964). Encouraging students to do voluntary homework does work with motivated students. However, with less-motivated students, required homework must be collected or students will not complete the assignment. When homework is collected from students, the teacher shows the student that homework is important.

**4. Homework should be promptly graded.** Teachers who assign a grade to homework indicate to the student that the homework is important. However, the whole assignment does not need to be read or graded. The teacher may select a section of the assignment for grading. Spot checking of homework assignments produces similar student achievement results when compared to complete checking of homework. (Austin, 1974). Likewise, comments do not need to be made on each homework assignment or about each part of the homework assignment (Austin, 1976).

**5. Homework should be promptly returned.** Immediate feedback increases student achievement (Vitale and Hebler, 1978; Cardelle and Corno, 1981; Ghandoura, 1982). Homework can and should be returned during the next class period or day. Spot checking and limited comments will speed the grading and returning of homework papers.

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During class time, the teacher should comment upon items that were misunderstood by the students.

A winning baseball team has variety in its plays. If the batters always bunted, the opposition not only figures out what you are doing but will beat you. Teachers can bring variety to homework assignments. There are four basic types of homework that can provide variety (Lee and Pruitt, 1979; LaConte, 1981). Teachers need to touch these four bases just like a runner in a baseball game; preparation homework, practice homework, extension homework, and creativity homework.

**1. Preparation homework.** One of the most common types of homework is preparation homework which is found in textbook reading courses. Preparation homework is getting ready *before* the classroom lesson. Usually students are assigned a section to read and questions to answer that cover the section. Then, the teacher covers the material during the classroom lesson. Preparation homework (getting ready) is commonly assigned in social studies, language arts, and science classes.

**2. Practice homework.** Another common type of homework is practice homework which is found in skill-building courses. Practice homework is doing something again *after* the concept or skill was taught. The teacher covers a concept or skill during classroom lesson. Students practice the concept or skill during class time or as homework in order to do the concept or skill once again. Practice homework (doing again) is often found in mathematics, typing, and shorthand.

**3. Extension homework.** This form of homework is assigned in order to observe whether a student can transfer an idea or skill to a new or different situation. A teacher can assign extension homework which indicates whether or not a student can go beyond basic facts or skills. The use of story problems in mathematics is an example of extension homework. The use of business letters in typing is another example. In social studies and language arts, students write a newspaper story about the Great Depression of the 1930s or the recession of the 1980s. Extension homework (going beyond) is often found in the high school debate research class or the elementary school "Dear Mr. President" letter.

**4. Creativity homework.** Probably the least-used form of homework is creativity homework which is found at all grade levels and subject areas. Creativity homework is putting together concepts and skills in new and different ways. Usually, creativity homework takes longer to complete than preparation, practice, or extension homework. At the elementary level, a student could build a wooden, motorized model airplane which would incorporate reading about airplanes (history), building the airplane (mathematics), painting the airplane (art), explaining the process to the class (language arts), and flying the airplane (physical education). At the high school level a research report or project lends itself to this type of homework. Students can be creative in topic choice and demonstration of the knowledge or skill.

Creativity homework (putting together) is a way in which students can integrate many skills and concepts.

Thus, teachers need to touch the bases, the four types of homework, in order to provide variety. Our homework research, research experiment, and teaching experience substantiate the use of the five homework principles and the four homework types. Administrators, just like winning baseball managers, can implement a uniform and coherent homework policy which leads to a successful season. Now is the time to start training with a district homework committee ("Information," 1981) so that your 1985-86 staff team will be a World Series winner. "Play ball!"

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