

Book Study

Prepared by the

Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) Project

Rethinking Homework: Best Practices That Support Diverse Needs

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Book Description: *This book examines the role homework has played in American culture and education throughout our country's history. It acknowledges that the best way to address the pro- and anti-homework debate is to adapt a "new homework paradigm" that focuses on the following features: designing quality homework tasks, differentiating those tasks, deemphasizing grading of homework, improving homework completion, and providing support programs.*

Target Audience:

- **Structuring Teams**
- **Implementing Teams**
- **Behavior**
- **Academic (math or reading)**
- **General Staff**
- **Leadership**
- **Empowering Culture**
- **Elementary Team**
- **Secondary Team**

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Chapter 1: The Cult(ure) of Homework

Brief Overview: The homework debate is not new to American culture. The pro- and anti-homework movement each has been the accepted practice of mainstream American culture. The pendulum continues to swing as a result of diverse cultures, parenting styles, political climate, and economic indicators.

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe your personal experience with homework from the perception of a student, of a teacher, and of a parent (if applicable). How are your experiences similar to and different from others in your group?
2. From a historical point of view, what has influenced the pro- and anti- homework movements?
3. What are the five cultural beliefs about homework? Do you agree with all five beliefs? Why or Why not?
4. Discuss the “balance movement”.

Chapter 2: Homework in the Context of the New Family

Brief Overview: The structure, culture, beliefs, and economic reality of the 21st century American family are very diverse. As a result, the relationship between schools and parents must be redefined including the practice of homework.

Discussion Questions:

1. Diversity of parenting styles is communicated as one reason homework completion is difficult. Do you accept this belief? Provide examples from your professional and personal life that support your view.
2. A continuum of parental involvement in homework is explored in this chapter. Is your school or district in agreement about the “right level” of homework involvement? How has it been communicated to parents? What are you doing to support parents that are unable to be involved in their child’s homework due to lack of content knowledge? How does the system ensure student grades are not negatively impacted by parent beliefs or home necessities that put them at a disadvantage (e.g., taking child on a trip for several days, student required to work after school and on weekends to supplement family income)?
3. Do you agree with the author’s description detailing “the erosion of the absolute authority of the school?” Why or why not?
4. Do you think the seven suggestions outlined in this chapter to forge a true partnership with parents will be beneficial? Are there any you disagree with? Are there others you would add?

Chapter 3: Homework Research and Common Sense

Brief Overview: Homework research is not definitive for a number of reasons. Both sides of the homework debate can find data to support their stance. Educators must be savvy consumers and rely on the research as well as their classroom experience and common sense to direct their practice with respect to homework.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the four general findings on homework outlined on pp. 59-63. Which surprised you? How do the findings either support or conflict with your personal practices?
2. Explain how the ten tenets regarding student learning are routinely practiced within your classroom. What type of support do you need to ensure they are a part of your professional repertoire?

Chapter 4: Effective Homework Practices

Brief Overview: The new homework paradigm elements outlined in this chapter focus on designing quality homework tasks, differentiating those tasks, and deemphasizing grading.

Discussion Questions:

1. The author raised a good question regarding grades when she wrote, “What do those Ds and Fs represent – a lack of learning or a lack of compliance” as a result of students having incomplete homework. If you were personally asked this question by an administrator, colleague, parent, and student how would you answer? Would your answer change depending on the person asking the question? Why?
2. As a team, discuss the “homework trap” identified on pp. 92-94. What experiences have you had in your career that support this notion or refute it?
3. What steps have you or the school taken toward creating a new paradigm for homework? Of the concepts presented in this section, which will be the easiest for you to accept and why? Likewise, which will be the hardest for you to accept and why?

Chapter 5: Homework Completion Strategies and Support Programs

Brief Overview: The new homework paradigm is further explained in this chapter to include the features of implementation of homework completion strategies and providing homework support programs.

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe a time when you were able to diagnose homework completion problems for a student. What data did you need and how did you obtain it? What was your diagnosis and appropriate action plan to support the student? How did you feel? How did the student feel? What impact did it have on your relationship with the student?
2. Identify a student that you believe could benefit from the prioritizing concepts, tasks, and subjects strategy. How do you envision applying it and what might be the outcome?
3. Review and discuss the classroom strategies for homework completion outlined on pp. 133-135. Each participant should select one strategy that he or she agrees to implement between now and a designated date. Bring back information to share at the next meeting about the effect of that strategy. Between meeting times, each participant should check in with another group member to inquire about the process and provide encouragement.
4. Discuss the considerations that must be addressed before establishing a homework support program? How could a program as described in this chapter benefit your school?

Extension Idea:

If individuals want to make a commitment to implement any ideas in the book, have them work on creating SMART goals for themselves (specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, time-bound) or set goals collectively as a group. Participants should write down a specific goal, the results they hope to see, how they will measure those results, and create a time by which they hope to implement it.