Classroom Problems: *What Can I Do Right Away?*
A Learning Supports Practice Series for Teachers*

Homework Avoidance

What can I do when students don't do their homework?

Many students complain that homework is too hard or too boring or that it takes too much time.

Think about what to do from a motivational perspective (i.e., conceive homework as *motivated practice*). Generally, people are motivated to do things they value and expect to succeed at with a reasonable amount of effort. If the work is perceived as too hard or the task isn't seen as worth doing or as just another teacher demand, students usually would prefer not to do it. (Intrinsic motivation theory suggests that when students are assigned such tasks it threatens their sense of well-being and produces "psychological reactance," motivating negative feelings and behavior.)

Increasing students' engagement in homework calls for activity that taps into their intrinsic motivation. The way to do this is to move away from one size fits all to a more personalized approach. Here are four strategies to try:

(1) Offer various ways to practice what is being learned and work with those avoidant students to help each (a) understand why it is worth doing and (b) choose a process that best matches personal interests, needs, and capabilities. (In this age of technology, think about computers, simulations, social networking.) Be certain students understand the value, how to do the work, and how it can be accomplished with appropriate (not inordinate) effort.

(2) When appropriate, encourage avoidant students to do their homework with classmates who regularly do their homework.

(3) Some students need additional support and guidance to be successful; assist them in identifying and connecting with helpers (e.g., peer tutors, specific family members). Be certain the helpers are provided guidelines about the do's and don't's of helping with homework and of treating students with respect.

(4) Feedback needs to focus on enhancing intrinsic motivation (rather than over-relying on extrinsic rewards) by highlighting why the homework was of personal value to the student and worth the effort and that future homework will be as well.

(cont.)

Some schools provide after school or "study hall" homework help that allows students to complete the work before going home. Such help might be provided as a PTA project, by recruiting college student volunteers, senior citizens, service clubs, etc.

If the problem continues, talk with the student and try to find out what's wrong. Sometimes there are problems at home, including parents who are unable to provide homework help or are working in counterproductive ways around homework. As feasible, involve the parents in the problem solving process and be certain that their role is positive and proactive rather than punitive.

For More on This Topic:

See the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds on

>*Homework –* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/qfhomework.htm

>Motivation – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm

For students who use or can be taught to use a computer, there are many internet sites that provide access to resources for both homework and schoolwork. Here are a few examples:

- *Dr. Internet.* The Dr. Internet Web site, part of the Internet Public Library, helps students with science and math homework or projects. Provides an extensive listing of Internet links divided into Language Art, Science, Social Studies, Homework Help, and so forth. http://promo.net/drnet/

- *Kidz-Net.* Links to places to find homework help. Homework help links offered range from "Ask Dr. Math," Roget's Thesaurus, and a White House contact http://www.worldvillage.com/kidz/homework.htm

- *Kidsurfer: For Kids and Teens.* The site, from the National Children's Coalition, includes a Homework/Reference section for many subjects, including science, geography, music, history, and language arts. http://www.youthandchildren.net/4kids2.htm

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Often the best way to learn is by addressing a specific concern that needs an immediate response.

With this in mind, the Center is producing a series of resources focused on daily classroom dilemmas teachers experience and some initial ways to deal with such concerns. The emphasis is on engaging and re-engaging students in classroom learning.

As a school moves to develop a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports, this series can help augment professional development by providing a stimulus for discussion by teachers and other staff.

What can I do right away?

To date, this learning supports practice series for teachers includes the following topics:

>*Bullying* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/bullypn.pdf
>*Disengaged Students* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/disengpn.pdf
>*Fidgety Students* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fidgetypn.pdf
>*Homework Avoidance* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/homeworkpn.pdf
>*Students in Distress* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/distresspn.pdf
>*Minimizing Referrals out of the Classroom* –
     http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/referralspn.pdf
>*Addressing Neighborhood Problems that Affect the School* –
     http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/neighpn.pdf

See the complete series and other resources for professional development at
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu
(Click on Resources/Publications)

Feel free to email similar concerns to the Center for discussion as part of our weekly community of practice listserv. See
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mhpractitioner/practitioner.pdf

Send comments to ltaylor@ucla.edu