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HOMEWORK AT THE ENGLISH LESSONS AT THE HIGHER SCHOOL: WAYS OF CHECKING

Homework can be defined as any task assigned by schoolteachers intended for students to carry out during non-school hours [2, p. 83]. This definition explicitly excludes in-school guided study; home study courses delivered through the mail, television, audio or videocassette, or the Internet; and extracurricular activities such as sports and participation in clubs. The phrase «intended for students to carry out during non-school hours» [4, p. 1–62] is used because students may complete homework assignments during study hall, library time, or even during subsequent classes.

The purposes of homework assignments can be divided into instructional and non-instructional objectives [5, p. 181–193]. The most common instructional purpose of homework is to provide the student with an opportunity to practice or review material that has already been presented in class [1, p. 85–102].

The amount of homework assigned can be defined in two ways: the frequency with which homework is assigned, and the length of the assignments [3, p. 74]. The scientists R. A. Paschal, T. Weinstein, and H. J. Walberg found that daily homework produced more effective results than homework that was assigned sporadically [8, p. 97–104].

H. Cooper found such positive effects of homework: better retention of factual knowledge; increased understanding; better critical thinking, concept formation, and information processing; encouragement of learning during leisure time; improved attitude toward higher school; better study habits and skills; greater self-direction and self-discipline; better time management; more inquisitiveness and independent problem solving [3, p. 74].

Related to the issue of time spent on homework is the important question concerning the optimum amount of homework. H. Cooper found nine studies that allowed for a charting of academic performance as a function of homework time.

For high school students, the line-of-progress continued to go up through the highest point on the measured scales, more than 2 hours [2, p. 10–11].

The *purpose* of this research is to study the ways of checking homework at the lesson. Very often homework correction in the class is a chore. Below are given some ideas how to make it more of an active challenge. The given suggestions are specifically geared to be used when correcting exercises set from a workbook or worksheet as homework but some ideas may also be used when giving feedback for tasks set in class.

The teacher should prepare a grid that includes the question numbers for the various exercises that are to be corrected to ensure that all students participate in the correction process. It's necessary to leave a space next to each question number. At the beginning of the lesson, get students to put their name down to answer the various questions. The teacher should tell students that, even if they did not do the homework they can still try to answer a question of their choice but do not force students to put their names down. When all the students who wish to participate have put their names down for at least one question, a teacher should take the list in and use it to call on the students to answer the questions in turn [6].

This ensures that the students called upon will answer questions they feel confident about (or else questions for which they would prefer individual feedback). If this process is repeated over several lessons, it also gives the teacher a chance to see whether there are students who repeatedly prefer not to be involved in the homework correction process. These students and their individual problems regarding homework can then be dealt with on a one-to-one basis.

The second way of checking homework is to ask the class to do a quick survey in groups ranking exercises from the most to least difficult, the most to least interesting, the most to least useful etc. The teacher may use student feedback to decide which exercise to correct together first and then give exercises ranked by the majority as the least interesting/difficult on power point as above to speed up the correction process. This ensures that students will be more alert during the correction of what they perceived to be the most problematic areas of their homework.

Homework ranking tasks also provide important feedback to the teacher who may use the data provided to check on the cause of problems areas at a later date. Students may perceive certain exercises as difficult for different reasons – length, typology, unclear instructions, vocabulary density of exercise, grammatical problems, uninteresting topic etc. A further analysis of

these issues may help the teacher to decide which exercises to set or dedicate more time to in the future. The teacher shouldn't forget to check the students' ranking of difficult exercises after correction – what students may have originally perceived as problematic may not actually correspond to their own performance. This may be something that can be discussed and analyzed further at a later date [6].

The third way of checking homework is to get students to check through answers in pairs by photocopying the key (readymade or produced by the teacher) or displaying answers on a projector. It's necessary to get aside time at the end of the lesson for individual students to discuss problem areas or organize a tutorial session where students can come and discuss problems individually with the teacher while the group works on another task/project work.

The teacher can change the time of the lesson in which homework is corrected. Most students expect homework corrections to come right at the beginning of a lesson and it's not the best or most enjoyable way to start off. The teacher may try checking homework as a way of 'calming down' after a boisterous group-work session or leave it till the end of the lesson. Incidentally, this also works with setting homework. It would be useful to try varying the point of the lesson at which homework is set to ensure that all the students are paying attention.

One more way of checking homework is to use photocopies or a projector. The teacher may create a multiple choice answer key for a few exercises where three possible answers to each question are provided, only one of which is correct. Students then compare their own answers with the alternatives given. They choose the answer that they consider correct (which may or may not correspond with their own original answer). This activity gives students a chance to rethink their own answers before the teacher finally provides the key. It also gives less confident students and those who may not have completed the task an opportunity to take part in the correction process [6].

If the students had to do at home a listening task (or reading task), the teacher may allow the students to read (or read while they listen again) and find / mark the passages in the listening where the answers are. Following this, the students can compare their answers and, should be able to explain why the answer they've chosen is correct. A variation of this is to give the students the correct answers and have the students use the text / tapescript to explain why the answers are correct.

One more way of checking homework is a snake game. The teacher should put numbers of questions on board in rows and/or columns. It's possible to put the numbers randomly. The students work in teams. This time, the goal of the game is for each team to have the longest 'snake'. So, for example, in the first round a team answers number 1 correctly. In the next round, if they answered number 2 or 6 or 7 correctly (the snake can only move 1 space vertically or diagonally) then these two numbers would be connected. This game is nice with competitive groups as a bit of strategy is involved in blocking the other teams' movement, etc. The problem is often keeping track of which snake belongs to which team. Either different color markers or assigning a different shape (circle, square, triangle) to each team helps keep everything clear. The teacher should encourage the students to use English when they're talking in their groups.

The homework to be an effective tool in English learning. English teachers are clearly convinced that it is an essential component of successful language learning. The homework is not harmful to students; it ensures the continued use of homework in English classes. The teachers should use different ways of checking homework at the lessons to make it more interesting and interactive.

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