



ALICE KEELER

Ditch That Homework with Alice Keeler

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Alice's book, "[50 Things You Can Do with Google Classroom](#)"

Alice's book, "[50 Things to Go Further with Google Classroom: A Student-Centered Approach](#)"

Updates on Ditch That Homework, Matt and Alice's upcoming book: DitchThatHomework.com

"It's a little like you ask people to stop breathing when you talk about homework because it's so embedded in what we do."

It's based on our own experiences, what we've done. When people talk about homework, there's a lot of "I feel ...". Sometimes, our feelings are not based on or backed up by research.

There's no research that shows that homework teaches responsibility. Ultimately, what we're teaching is kids. We're not teaching responsibility. Ultimately, at the end of the day, I'm an algebra teacher and I'm supposed to be teaching algebra.

"I get excited when kids are working on things outside of class, but I get more excited when kids are working on things outside of class that I didn't ask them to do. ... They're excited about it and they want to do it. That, to me, is the ultimate compliment."

Alice struggled with math. She would avoid turning in math homework. Her parents tried to help, but she ended up repeating the fourth grade. She wasn't able to pass her timed math tests. Now, she has a degree in math, she likes making spreadsheets and she codes for fun.

She never knew that she was supposed to give homework as a teacher but started doing it out of habit. On lesson plan templates, they said "independent practice." They didn't necessarily say homework.

How do I get kids to want to learn, to understand, to feel like they can be successful?

"It doesn't matter what I assign. Some kids will do it. Some kids won't." I very rarely see homework being differentiated. It's hard to do that. Should we be giving the same homework to everybody?

“Why am I doing this? I’m spending so much energy around homework, hassling kids. ... My number one job as an educator is to build relationships with kids. We’re talking about homework; we’re not talking about learning. ... How much of my energy am I spending on homework and not about kids and learning?”

We don’t have conversations about, “How can we help kids better understand? What can we do to make kids more comfortable?” Instead, we dismiss those conversations by saying, “Well, they’re not doing their homework.”

When you don’t feel confident, when you don’t feel like you’re going to be successful -- especially with kids with low self-efficacy -- they just shut down. They would rather do nothing than feel dumb.

“I just stopped assigning it. The only people who are doing it are the ones that don’t need it, so let’s just stop doing it. My only consequence was less detention. I stopped having negative interactions with students.”

When I’m having more positive relationships and helping kids, I’m able to reach them better.

Technology allows me to capture more time in class. The most valuable thing I can do is to sit down next to a kid.

When the kids don’t understand the homework and we spend 15 minutes going over the homework and I go over it the same way that I taught it, how effective is that? Could I be using my time in better ways?

Sometimes, kids spend a lot more time on homework than we realize.

If I don’t talk about homework, if I don’t go over homework, if I don’t collect homework, if I don’t do anything with homework, that’s a lot of classroom time that I just captured back to do the independent practice, because independent practice is important.

As a mom, I see my kids crying. A lot of times, the instructions are poor and we spend a lot of time together trying to figure it out. I have a college degree. I understand how this stuff works. I think about, “How many of my kids’ parents can’t?” It’s an equity issue.

Example: Commutative and associative property. My students go to a school with lots of free and reduced lunch and lots of native Spanish speakers. How many of the other 29 parents can help their kids? Many parents, even teachers, don’t remember it. We’re putting parents in a situation where they potentially just feel helpless and they can’t help their kid even if they want to. My son will argue with me because the teacher does it a different way.

Research on homework

Homework research is tricky. A lot is correlational. Correlation does not mean causation. Example: The kids that did their homework did better on the test. Does that mean that homework was the cause? When I stopped giving homework, the same kids did better on the test. There are a lot of qualities and reasons that go into that. I'm very skeptical of causal research.

Even with cause and effect research, the effect of difference (the percent) is very low -- about 2 percent. Elementary: really no difference, middle and high school there's some difference. What the research leaves out is the stress, the fighting, the dropout rate. There is a correlation with homework completion and kids dropping out of school. Just doing homework doesn't always increase learning.

Is 2 percent worth the time, the fighting, etc.? Test scores, etc. are not the end all be all. What else is important? Sleep and going to bed on time. Being well rested. Eating breakfast.

(Matt: If we tie everything back to test scores, what exactly are we measuring? If it's standardized test scores, I have a lot of doubts about standardized tests. What they measure, their effectiveness. Are we measuring the right thing. Like trying to weigh a cow and use a tape measure to weigh a cow (not a good analogy). The end goal for me is to have kids turn into good, well rounded human beings, not necessarily being able to bubble in their answers on a standardized test.)

Does homework inspire kids to love learning? Homework causes kids to hate school. That feels like the opposite of my job.

When homework assignments have errors or typos, if it's in class, the teacher can regroup and try something different. When it's sent home, there's nothing they can do. Even if some are able to figure it out, it's not clear to everybody.

Homework causes stress and family fighting, and you just have to take a quick look at Facebook to prove that. Most parents have horror stories about how homework has affected their families.

What percent of what an adult works should kids be doing?

Practical strategies and solutions to reducing/eliminating homework

Alice: Let's call it independent practice instead of homework. Independent practice is important. If you watch someone do something, you won't learn as much. You learn more when you teach someone. I'm super into peer evaluation. If we get that practice in during class, it's done. If it's called homework, it assumes it needs to be done at home as if it's magical. The location doesn't make it magical.

Matt: Rethink the way that we get our practice in. Often, we make photocopies of worksheets. When students come back the next day, they may have practiced incorrectly and created bad

habits. After we do a handful of questions correctly, we're doing unnecessary repetition. It seems like it's an inefficient way to get that practice in. Come up with more structured practice that gives better feedback. Use formative assessment tools online (i.e. Kahoot!, Quizizz). With Quizizz, put a question up in a Kahoot! Game. Students answer. When done, answer goes up on the screen. Teacher can see instant feedback from students and provide feedback on what's incorrect and correct. Once they're done with that game, they can take it again and see if it sunk in. That's the kind of meaningful, right in time that we can get when kids are still wrestling with those problems. If you give a homework assignment, that's almost 48 hours from the time that it's assigned to the time that the feedback is given. That's entirely too long.

Alice: The mental idea that you're done with something, you're not going to get as much. If they're still mentally struggling, they will. When they're done with question 2 and are working on question 3, they don't want to go back to question 2. As soon as they think "I'm done with my homework," they're shutting down their learning. Not getting as much bang for your buck as getting one on one feedback.

If the computer can grade it, it should. Kids should get immediate feedback per question as much as possible. If you have 150 students, how high of quality feedback can you give if you give one minute of feedback for 150 students? Use technology to offload some of that responsibility.

Matt: What are the ways we can be more effective and efficient so that we don't need homework? The time that we put into homework but we only get so much out of it, it's not a good return on investment for the time we put in. If we're putting all of this effort in but are getting minimal gains, if a business was working under that same premise, that business would quit that practice or would be out of business pretty quickly.

Alice: The student-centered classroom. Why do we have teacher-centered environments? Kids access information differently now. When you're in a social situation, you look things up. We're accessing information in different ways. Google Home: does it make worksheets obsolete? Name one kid who hasn't looked up stuff on the Internet.

I don't have to give kids procedural steps for a math problem. I use my words to encourage students and increase critical thinking. Start with the student. What is the student doing? I won't focus lesson plans on "Teacher is ...".

Copying down notes: students aren't thinking. Going over homework: students aren't thinking. Guided practice: students are doing a little thinking. I'm doing most of the thinking for them. I like having students work in small groups. Each student is actively engaged the whole time. They should be thinking, doing, making decisions the whole time. What decision is the student going to make? What information is the student going to look up?

Matt: Trying to teach as if Google and YouTube don't exist. They're in our pockets. They're not going away. They can reach out into the atmosphere and grab an answer to a question.

Alice: Machine learning and Google Drive search prediction ... the rote activities can be automated. How does that reality impact what kids are doing in class? Jobs are the future aren't working in factories. It's solving problems.

When your technology is working, "yes!" It's an opportunity to troubleshoot and to think. Open up opportunities for kids to be thinking instead of be remembering.

How technology can make us more effective and efficient

Feedback, especially peer feedback. Tech allows me to share it to more students in the class. Get all students in a Google Slides presentation with each student on a different slide. Have each student do a task in their own slides. As a teacher, Alice scans the room, checks in with students, gives feedback verbally (sometimes a little too loud so others hear it). She inserts a comment into a couple students' work. To do this for everyone there isn't enough time. She scans, works with students again, gives feedback and encouragement ... repeat. Everybody sees everybody else's feedback comments because we're all working in the same file.

Have students give high quality feedback in comments digitally ... and you have to teach them how to do it. (It's not intuitive.)

Tools to give immediate feedback: Nearpod, Kahoot, Formative, Quizizz

Peer feedback: Don't turn anything in until you get some peer feedback. Lets the teacher focus on critical thinking.

How many minutes is each individual student talking? A question to the class gets answers from one, two or three students ... and it's the same students every time. Ask a question digitally through Google Classroom. Give them time to think first ... wait time. Then let students answer. And you hear from everybody rather than one or two students.