



Essentials of Effective Teaching

with Robyn Burlew

Lesson 4: Meaningful Assignments

Outline:

Planning Assignments

- Plan what you want the students to do **both** inside and outside of class.
- Be sure to not overburden students outside of class.
- There are invaluable things outside of schoolwork that students need like rest, contemplation, and play.
- Homework amount does not determine the rigor/robustness of education. Depth of thought is what makes a rigorous/robust education.

Rules and Reasons for Giving Homework

- Homework should be practice, reading, and synthesis (writing papers and preparing speeches).
- Always consider if there is a better way to achieve the same goal with less work for the student.
- Survey for the time students spend on your assignments, but be mindful that there will be huge differences.
- Be sure you are sending students home practicing the right way – check if they get it so they do not do the wrong thing over and over.
- With synthesis assignments, be very clear on your expectations and instructions along with a direct, clear, and concise prompt.
- Know what is reasonable – only give students work that you have prepared them to do ahead of time.
- For essays, meaningful intermediate deadlines (outline, rough draft, peer review, etc.) are helpful and allow you to help the students hone their points ahead of time.
- If you correct the students before the final draft they will be more likely to absorb the correction.
- Be clear on your expectations for the grading of the assignment.
- Give a clear rubric (with specific descriptions and categories rather than numbers) well before the assignment is due.
- Give students opportunities to self-assess with the rubric.

How to Approach Major Projects

- Projects have a bad reputation for being a giant family commitment.
- Be sure to keep your goals in mind before assigning one – do not assign a project just to fill time.



- Send out clear details to parents explaining time commitments and what sort of family involvement is good and what is too much.
- Be sure it is student-driven.
- Line out expectations far ahead of time.
- Assignments along the way ought to be formative and assess the students for the summative assessment so you have an idea of their progress.