

[Recording starts 0:00:00]

### How can we make homework worth it? Episode 74.

*The Ten-minute Teacher podcast with Vicki Davis. Every week day you'll learn powerful practical ways to be a more remarkable teacher today.*

VICKI: Happy Thought Leader Thursday. Today we have with us Matt Miller [@jmattmiller](https://twitter.com/jmattmiller) author of Ditch That Textbook. <http://amzn.to/2pnjNyO> And he has a new book, Ditch That Homework. We'll tell you at the end of the show how you can win for yourself a copy of his new book coming out in June.

So Matt, there's so much discussion about homework and I know in France they've even banned it. <http://www.npr.org/2012/12/02/166193594/pencils-down-french-plan-would-end-homework> What's the deal in homework? I mean, it's always been around. Do we need to rethink it and why?

MATT: I don't know. But if they ban homework in France I think that gives me extra reason to go there. When I think back to my own time as a student I remember that I would put just like the bare minimum effort into my homework assignments. I was just basically trying to get them done and many of them were stimulating activities or really got me to think critically or anything like that.

And so I after I became a teacher I started to think, you know, I wonder what kind of return on investment we're getting on homework. Because we spend all of these hours. Students spend hours and hours and hours of time doing this homework. But how much are we actually getting out of it? What do we really get in return because I like to think that if we spend all of those hours we would be – it's almost like thinking about being paid, that we would be paid fairly instead of below minimum wage? I think that's one of my biggest issues with that.

VICKI: So what does the research say?

MATT: Well, it's interesting because if you want to find research that says that homework is effective, you can find it. And if you want to find research is ineffective and doesn't work, you can find it.

[00:02:00]

So, really, there's research all over the board. Part of the problem with the research that we found is that a lot of it is correlational instead of causational, it doesn't show causation. So basically what that means is that a lot of this research is pairing completion of homework. So actually doing your homework with test scores. And so it's basically asking, if kids do homework, will their test scores go up?

And you and I know as well as anybody else that there are so many factors that go into what a kids test scores are. And we also know that it's usually the kids

who are the stronger academic students that are doing the homework anyway. So even if we really dig into this research, there's still a lot of issues but there are a couple of absolutes no matter what you see.

You look at John Hattie's research on best practices which are based on his statistical model of what works in school. His big thing is – he says, homework in the primary grades has an effect size of zero. <https://visible-learning.org/2014/09/john-hattie-interview-bbc-radio-4/> As in, it doesn't have any sort of effect on students. Now, it seems like the research also shows us that there's one silver bullet when it comes to work at home and that is reading. That reading at home especially self-directed reading, like parents reading to kids, kids reading stuff that they're interested in, that's the one big thing that really has the games at home.

VICKI: But it sounds like, Matt, it depends on the homework, right? I mean, it's kind of like the research on technology. Technology can improve or not improve learning based on how it's used. I mean, there is definitely pointless homework out there but sometimes there are meaningful things. Is it just you think that maybe we don't have as many meaningful homework assignments as maybe we should?

MATT: You know, I think that's part of it. But I think part of it also has to do with the time factor. What we ask kids to do is we'll have them come in at 8:00 and leave at 3:00.

[00:04:00]

And during that whole seven hour work day, so to speak, they're giving us their 100%. And they are actively working. And we all know that brainwork sometimes can be just as hard on our bodies as physical work. And so what we're almost asking them to do is if that's a seven-hour work day times five, we're asking kids to 35-hour work days and then come home and spend an additional hour or 30 minutes or 2 hours or whatever doing the same stuff that they did.

And I always thinking about – with the teachers that I work with I think, okay, if you are asked to do all of this work and then you were mandated to go home and do two hours' worth of work that either isn't that interesting to you or doesn't allow you to explore your passions or whatever, I have a big issue with that. And so I kind of feel like that time at home should give kids the opportunity to explore. Especially, younger kids, to be able to play and get dirty and go outside and ride their bikes. Or with older kids to be able to pursue what they're passionate about.

VICKI: Well, and I think a lot of teachers are [giving it]. It's called pointless paperwork that nobody reads. And a lot of the kids feel the same about homework, don't they?

MATT: Yes, ma'am. They absolutely do.

VICKI: So where are you with homework? I mean, given the choice, are you going to assign to assign or not?

MATT: I don't know that there is necessarily a clear cut answer for everyone. And I know in my own class, being a high school Spanish teacher for more than a decade I just started assigning less and less and less because I wasn't getting the results that I needed. And I know everybody's situation is different and every teacher knows their kids the best. But I kind of feel like – and this is sort of the premise of our book is that with the best practices that we know about today and technology and a lot of the things that we can do, we can become more effective and more efficient in the classroom. And if we can leverage that to do better learning in class we become less and less reliant on homework outside the class.

[00:06:00]

And so I think maybe that's the big focus, is, what can we do in class? What can we do more efficiently and effectively in class to become less reliant on it? And I think everybody can agree that if were less reliant on homework that's a good thing.

VICKI: It is. I guess the only thing that ever worries me is I think that some people have the view that kids should just be able to go to school for however long they go to school, we handle everything at school and there's never any requirement outside of school. And I mean, I guess as a farm girl, I've always been taught and believe that if you work hard at worth doing, you can get god results. Now, if you work hard at wasted work then it is a waste. But work worth doing.

I guess I struggle with being torn between my worth ethic and getting rid of it all together, right?

MATT: Right. And I think your example is a perfect one. You're a farm girl, I live on 25 acres here in the middle of nowhere here in Indiana so I can very much sympathize with that. And there was a lot of work to do at your place. But that's something that I think that we miss out on when we just focus on academics. Imagine if you have kid who's in a similar situation where there's work to be done at home but they're sent home with two hours of homework every night. And then if you throw in basketball practice, choir performances and all the other stuff, then basically, they're missing out on that important thing.

And so what I think is whenever we reduce the amount of homework, reduce the work that's going on at home now kids are getting a much richer picture, a much richer education because they're getting some of those lessons that they wouldn't get at school instead of having all of that same stuff that we just did at school hammered into them over and over again when they get home.

VICKI: Yeah. It always makes me nervous to talk about personal experience because I did do the two or three hours and did the farm stuff. But I know families who just let those kids play on iPads all the time.

[00:08:00]

MATT: Right.

VICKI: I guess I'm torn out, I do have to admit, Matt, I don't assign homework. I'm defending homework but I don't assign it because I teach computer science and to me I want to be right there when they're working on it. Now, do they go home and build their apps, they do. They go home and if they love it and they need to then they do it. But I don't assign homework because for me and for what I teach, I just want [them] to be there in front of me. So I guess I'm arguing against what I'm saying, huh?

MATT: And you know what, Vicki, I think whenever you can inspire kids with what you do in the classroom so much that they want to go home and work on it. When you've really lit that fire of passion and then they can go home then I think that's the best kind of homework that there is. It's the kid that kids are wanting to do, they're wanting to go and learn that. And that's the kind of stuff that I think can shake their lives.

VICKI: So we've had a conversation, not necessarily answers but some incredible research. And Matt Miller, the book is Ditch That Homework. Please check the show notes. I'll give you links for how you can enter to win his book, Ditch That Homework. And when it comes out, he'll be sending you a copy if you win. So thank you so much for listening to this conversation. It's going to be really interesting, Matt, to see the comments on Facebook and on the blog, on this on because I'm sure we're going to get lots of opinions.

MATT: Yes, I'm interested in it too.

VICKI: Hello Remarkable Teachers, would you please help me do something? I'm trying to help more people find out about the Ten Minute Teacher Show. To do that, if you just could take some time to go to iTunes or to Stitcher or to leave a review. It really does help. Thank you so much.

*Thank you for listening to the Ten-minute Teacher Podcast. You can download the show notes and see the archive at [coolcatteacher.com/podcast](http://coolcatteacher.com/podcast). Never stop learning.*

[End of Audio 0:10:02]

***[Transcription created by [tranzify.com](http://tranzify.com). Some additional editing has been done to add grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. Every attempt has been made to correct spelling. For permissions, please email [lisa@coolcatteacher.com](mailto:lisa@coolcatteacher.com)]***