

Technology and Talk—Bringing Purpose, Accountability, and Understanding to Homework

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Students in Erin Mayer's classroom at Eubank Elementary recently began their mathematics lesson by coming to the floor for a quick review of their division homework, which was projected on the Promethean Board. As they sat on the floor with their papers, they turned to their neighbor and asked, "What questions did you have about last night's homework?" Each night as students do their homework, they circle the problems that they have questions about so they are prepared for their class discussion. This practice also supports students' metacognitive awareness in identifying whether they are at an independent level with a concept or still need support. As they began talking, some partners compared answers, others helped their partner with a question they didn't know how to do, and still others grabbed cubes to check their work together.

While students were doing this, the teacher was circulating, quickly checking in with different students to see how they had done. This gave her formative assessment information on the problems she wanted to make sure the class reviewed together. It also told her that the homework review was going to take a few more minutes than usual. Division was a new concept for them this week, and they still needed additional support.

After about five minutes, the teacher pulled the class together, covering all but one problem on the page with a rectangle using the Promethean tools so students could easily focus on the problem at hand. They read the first problem aloud together. As they talked through the problem, Erin did a quick sketch as a model for students. She then asked, "How many of you were able to do this problem independently at home?" "How many of you needed to talk with someone here?"

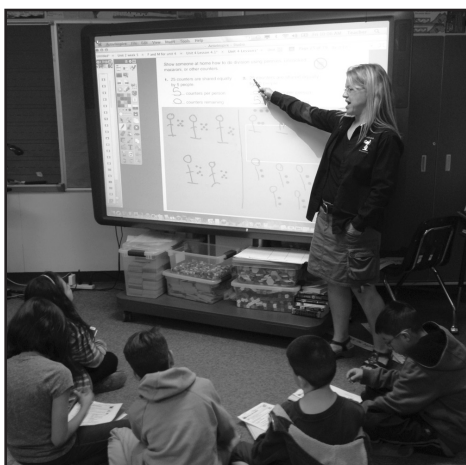
When they were ready to continue, she cleared the writing on the screen, moved the box to show a different problem, and checked to see if the students needed to review it, saying, "Let's read the problem together. How many of you have questions on this problem?" "If there were no questions, 'Let's see how you did.'" She wrote the answer and then checked in with students. "Show me with your thumbs. How many

of you got that on your own (thumbs up)? How many needed some help (sideways thumb)? How many of you weren't sure what to do (thumbs down)?"

They didn't solve all of the problems as a group. Some were worked all the way through; others were checked only for the answer, and some weren't addressed at all. This was determined by input from the students and the teacher's observations during the partner sharing at the beginning of the lesson.



Students at Eubank Elementary review their homework together in preparation for a class discussion.



Using the Promethean Board, Erin Mayer scaffolds a problem with students.

On days when the students need less support, the homework check can be as simple as students talking together and then checking their answers as they are revealed on the Promethean Board. Erin then quickly checks the homework to inform her small group guided mathematics instruction. On days like today, the review is more in-depth as they go through specific problems, discussing answers and modeling how students can show their work.

The Promethean Board is a great resource to support student learning, but using it in conjunction with partner interactions, manipulatives, and class discussions is essential. Otherwise, it is easy to slip into traditional instruction with the teacher talking and individual students responding. Reviewing homework as described here establishes for students a purpose for the homework and accountability both for getting it done and for self-monitoring their understanding. Students want to be prepared to share out to the group and see how they did. They also connect the homework directly to what they are studying in class—and see that the effort they put in at home impacts their learning during class.

