

Ethical Situation: Students handing in parents' work

Students had been given a writing assignment and asked to complete the draft for homework. Upon return the next day one student handed in a draft that was beyond his level of ability shown in class. The draft was in the student's handwriting but it was suspected that the actual author was the parent. The student claimed that the draft was his own work. This was a reoccurring problem that consisted of the student not completing work in class, being unable to produce quality writing pieces in class time, but consistently returning homework of superior quality.

Players: Student, parent, teacher, fellow-students

Steps to Resolution:

Route 1:

1. Speak to the whole class and address the issue of "parent help". Clarify what is help and what is having parents "do it for you".
2. Send home a letter that reviews the class discussion and includes a list of prompting questions that empower parents to aid in their child's learning.

Route 2:

1. Ask student if this is his own work. Talk to him about what constitutes your own work. Also let him know how his peers might view the situation, it is unfair to get more "help" than the rest of the class. Talk about the impact on his learning when work is done for him.
2. Consult with principal and make sure you are in agreement about possible solutions to this problem.
3. Talk with parent in person and review the previous discussion with the student (both the student and the parent should be present). Stress the need for the student to be able to complete his writing process *independently* in order to be able to fully meet expectations. To help this student reach this goal the conversation (with both the parent and the student) should focus on how/where the student will best be empowered to complete their work independently – ie. less distracting environment, parent being aware of how to help and guide, time after school can be arranged if necessary – discussion should also reflect interest in the student's work environment and work habits when completing work at home.

Perspective 1: Student

Situation: Why should I do my work in class when it's more fun to chat or doodle. I know I can always do it for homework and my parents will even help me do a better job if I wait till I get home.

Resolution (Route 1): I'm not worried, I know my Mum will still help me. I can still just do my work at home like always.

Resolution (Route 2): I appreciate that my teacher was interested in learning about why I do better work at home.

Perspective 2: Parent

Situation: I want to help my child learn the most they can and get the best possible marks. I know that this is important for their self-esteem. Parents should help their children with homework and be as involved as possible in their child's schooling.

Resolution (Route 1): These are good suggestions, maybe I could try a few. It's going to take so much more time though.

Resolution (Route 2): I appreciate that the teacher didn't accuse me of anything but was interested in creating a more productive learning environment. I'm going to have to be more careful about how I help from him now on.

Perspective 3: Teacher

Situation: I'm concerned that this student is not gaining the most he can from the learning experience because he is not doing the work himself. Parent's should be supportive and help proofread and catch errors but not re-write an assignment.

Resolution (Route 1): I like this route because it is non-confrontational and parents are being given skills to effectively help and advance their child's learning.

Resolution (Route 2): I'm still wondering what change there will be in the student's work that he brings from home. I hope that the parent has a clear understanding of how to help and guide their child's learning now. Time will tell.

Perspective 4: Fellow-students

Situation: Why does he always get to do it for homework, it is not fair because we all know his parents help him with it way more than the teacher would? I do my work in class and my parents don't have time to do my homework for me, let alone help me with it. Some of us have parents that help us with our homework but they are not expert writers and they don't re-write our assignments.

Resolution (Route 1): This is great, I didn't know it was okay with my teacher that my parents help me with my projects. I hope my parents will feel more capable to help me now that they've read the letter.

Resolution (Route 2): I notice that he seems to be getting better at doing his work at school. I heard that his marks aren't as high as before, maybe his parents aren't helping him as much.

Rational: It would be unethical to not try to resolve the situation because the child's learning experience is suffering and he is not building the skills necessary to fully meet grade level expectations independently. In the interest of his peers it would be unfair to not resolve the issue, since this student is being given an unfair advantage for homework, but is unable to contribute at the same level when put to his own devices. In this scenario we would begin with Route 1 and if the problem continued we would proceed to Route 2. Route 2 directly approaches the parent and child so that there is a factor of accountability. If we were to only address the class as a whole and not send home a letter or approach parents in conversation it would be left up to the student's self-discipline and own values to decide to follow-through with the admonition or not.

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We feel our steps are in accordance with the BC College of Teachers Conduct Standards. Our potential discussion with the parent and student reflects our willingness to put the needs of student first and gain a better understanding of how they learn. By not using accusatory language both the parent and student were treated with respect and dignity. This is also reflected in our approach to the problem with the class as a whole instead of singling students out or releasing information to other students or parents about why the letter was sent home. Furthermore we maintained professionalism in our communications with all parents and students regarding this issue.