

BLOWING THE WHISTLE ON CORRUPTION IN THE WORKPLACE



This sequence of lessons has potential for many links with other areas of character education: justice, resilience, stress, why good people do bad things – or let bad things happen.

SESSION 1

- * Students to discuss experiences of corruption.
- * High profile public cases could also be discussed/ be discussed instead.
- * Students to define 'corruption'. Guide them to think of the differing arenas in which 'corruption' can take place. How does 'corruption' relate to failure in the virtue of justice?
- * Ensure students understand all of the differing types of corruption – this could be a good research exercise.
- * Look at high profile cases of corruption. How much anger do they incite in the students? Discuss ways in which students might want to use their anger, if they were in those situations.
- * Students to research a high profile case of corruption. Steer the students towards relating the nature of the corruption to the virtue of justice, or any other virtues involved in the issue.

SESSION 2

- * This session explores educational corruption in more detail. YouTube includes footage of allegations of examination board corruption.
N.B. You may wish the reflection in this Session to establish and agree as a class, a Golden Mean for procedures and policies relating to levels of teacher help in coursework, or during controlled assessments.
- * Give each group one Case Study. Give them time to digest the salient points.
- * Students to report back on the issues.

SESSION 3

- * Students to gather information, analyse and evaluate the issues involved with famous whistle blowers. This could be done as small group work.
- * There are plenty of materials on Edward Snowden available online.
- * Students to choose 2 quotations that they think are worth living by – come what may...



'Do whatever it takes'?

Summary of the Problem

You want pupils to do well in exams, helping them wherever you can. But there is a point where over-zealous assistance becomes cheating?

In China, exams matter; to such an extent that teachers often move beyond the realms of pupil assistance into the murky world of cheating. Each year, the make-or-break "gaokao" exams determine the future of 10 million university hopefuls. And each year, details surface of teachers leaking exam papers or falsifying candidates' marks in a bid to get ahead. Teachers risk jail sentences of between six months and three years for illegally obtaining "state secrets."

Nothing on this scale happens in the UK. But there is evidence that an increasing number of teachers, under huge pressure to perform, assist their pupils too much, often to the point of cheating. In a bid to move up the league tables and meet Ofsted's exacting standards, they feel torn between wanting to ensure their pupils are marked accurately and not wanting to put them at a disadvantage. That tension, sometimes fanned by senior members of staff who need to deliver results, can lead to over-zealous "assistance."

"I feel a tension between wanting to be rigorous and not wanting to put my pupils at a disadvantage when competing against other candidates whose teachers are not so scrupulous," a sixth form teacher from Wiltshire told a survey conducted by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, last year. Some teachers don't even realise they are overstepping the mark, especially when it comes to coursework.

More than two-thirds of teachers admitted to helping pupils more than they should in a Teacher Support Network survey in 2007. One anonymous respondent from Leeds admitted that pre-prepared exam answers were kept in a filing cabinet at school. They would be slipped into the papers of borderline pupils to ensure they passed, she said. She would also write suggestions of how pupils' work could be improved on sticky labels during the exam, which could be removed easily before they were handed in.

Another teacher, based in Bradford, told pupils to "think again" if he spotted stupid mistakes on their exam papers. "I do admit that this is something I should not have done, but I felt pressured (to do it)," he said.

Exams: When teaching assistance becomes cheating

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By: Hannah Frankel

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CASE STUDY 1: Too much help for pupils from invigilators

The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) confirmed this year that invigilators are “over-aiding” pupils in maths, science and English tests. The overall number of complaints about cheating for 11 and 14-year-olds has fallen, it stated in a report in March, but there was a 14 per cent increase in reported cases of cheating inside the exam hall for 11-year-olds, from 305 to 348. Eighteen per cent of these involved invigilators helping pupils too much, compared with 12 per cent of pupils cheating themselves.

Ofqual, the new exam regulator, insists that these incidents are rare and usually backfire. Candidates found to be cheating in any way - be it surreptitiously texting during an exam or being told the answer by a teacher - can be disqualified and lose their grade in that subject. Teachers who subvert the system in any way could face disciplinary action by their school and the General Teaching Council, Ofqual says.

Despite the seriousness of these penalties, teachers are still falling foul of the rules. Eric Tessier-Lavigne, a French teacher, is one of the latest to have his reputation damaged following allegations that he coached pupils on set phrases prior to their French oral exams. Gordonstoun School in Moray, an exclusive public school that educated the Prince of Wales, suspended Mr Tessier-Lavigne in May. He insists he misunderstood the exam guidance and did nothing wrong.

It is not the only “royal” school to come under the spotlight. Sarah Forsyth, an art teacher at Eton College, Berkshire, accused her head of department of forcing her to complete some of Prince Harry’s written AS art work to help him pass. She failed to convince the subsequent tribunal in 2005 that her account was accurate, but cases like these do happen in schools.

Paul, a secondary school teacher, came under just this sort of pressure. “When, as head of department, I needed to get results, my deputy head said, “Do whatever it takes,” he remembers. “When I asked for clarification he said, “Write their coursework for them if you have to.” One member of his department had pupils back several days a week to provide them with essay frames and step-by-step instructions, Paul says. She had the best results in the department.

A BBC investigation in 2007 found that cheating or over-aiding among teachers is commonplace. Teaching Taboo uncovered cases of teachers filling in gaps in pupils’ coursework without their knowledge, pointing over pupils’ shoulders when they made mistakes in exams, and turning a blind eye to obvious cases of parental or tutor input. The conclusion? Everyone knows about cheating but nobody wants to speak out.

Mick Brookes, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, has a degree of sympathy for teachers who are tempted to over- help their pupils. “Of course I don’t condone cheating in any way, but I totally understand why some do.”

Many teachers do not want to take Year 6 classes due to the enormous pressure on them to do well in their key stage 2 SATs, he says. “They feel the burden of the reputation of the whole school on their shoulders. Even with a supportive senior management team, that’s a tough thing hanging over you.”

In his view, it is not the teachers who are at fault, it is the system. “Four years of work is judged over the course of a 45-minute test,” Mr Brookes says. “If a teacher sees a child ruining their chances of an accurate grade by making a stupid mistake, the temptation must be very strong for them to intervene or point a finger at the right answer.”

Under the workload agreement, teachers should not be invigilating exams. But children of 10 or 11 need that security of a known face during exams, argues Mr Brookes, so their teachers are often on hand, making it tempting to help out.

Plain cheating is one thing - it’s clear there’s something wrong with handing out pre-prepared answers during a test - but many teachers give their pupils an unfair advantage in other ways, often without realising. A QCDA survey last year found that the average primary school spent about 10 hours a week coaching pupils in the four months prior to key stage 2 tests - nearly half the teaching time available. So where should the line be drawn?

“Endless rehearsing of tests is on the margins of test manipulation, but I understand why they do it,” says Mr Brookes. “There’s so much pressure on schools to raise their results, they have to teach to the test to a certain extent. It’s ridiculous.”





CASE STUDY 2: Varying acceptable guidance levels

The situation is made more confusing for teachers because different subjects have different rules about how much legitimate guidance they can give. Inexperienced teachers in particular may not know that the level of help they are giving is excessive.

“Some subjects allow for teachers to help pupils draft their coursework,” says Sue Kirkham, a retired headteacher from Stafford, who has reported to the QCDA about how schools should authenticate coursework. “Other subjects or boards don’t allow this. Parents then complain that one teacher isn’t being as helpful to their child as another.”

One anonymous teacher admits that cheating and excessive assistance is rife in her school when it comes to coursework. “We give the kids detailed guidance and the chance to improve their coursework several times before final marking,” she says. “By the time they have finished it does tend to feel like we’ve done it for them.”

As long as there remains pressure to produce results, teachers and pupils will opt for subjects with a higher degree of coursework, says Nick, a secondary school teacher. He says most of the courses with high levels of coursework - such as child care, design and technology and IT - have higher pass rates at his school, regardless of the quality of teaching.

He has swapped to exam boards that allow him to mark the work before it is externally moderated. “I have also picked a board with the highest level of coursework input I can currently find (40 per cent),” he says. “I expect better results in the near future.”

More exam-based assessments will cut excessive teacher assistance, but the Government must be prepared to see a national levelling of grades as a result, he argues. In the meantime, teachers will continue to jump through whatever hoops they can to get their pupils better grades. Nick insists he works within the law, but admits to being on the margins of what is allowed.

“I will help my pupils maximise their coursework marks, just as I often rote teach to get them through the exam questions,” he says. “This is not cheating in my view.”

This temptation to play the system has dealt coursework a fatal blow, argues Mrs Kirkham. As well as excessive teacher assistance, parents often step in, completing their child’s homework or coursework for them. Some pupils even copy an older sibling’s coursework that was completed a few years earlier. But not all families will be able to take advantage of this help. “Some get a disproportionate amount of help from their parents or family, while others won’t even have access to the internet at home,” says Mrs Kirkham.

Whether help comes from teachers, friends or parents, it is likely to backfire in the long term. Pupils who are helped too much will struggle to stand on their own two feet at university. But without the cheating, the conspirators may argue, they may not be able to access further education in the first place. “There’s a widespread feeling that we need a fairer system,” says Mrs Kirkham. “Coursework simply provides too many opportunities for cheating.”

CASE STUDY 3: Over-Marking Coursework

Fiona Miller, writing *The Guardian*, Monday 9th September, 2013

If I were a head who did everything strictly by the book, I think one of the things that I would resent more than anything else is the worry that others might be less scrupulous.

There is no doubt that many schools do an excellent job of building and sustaining improvement over time. But some have improvement paths that look almost too sensational to be true.

On closer examination – and credit is due to the government for making such comprehensive school-level data available – these stellar achievements often coincide with a change in intake or, more likely, a change in curriculum. This is one reason why the use of GCSE results from some academy chains to justify primary school forced academisation is so flawed. The same quick fix simply isn’t available.





Regrettably, now, I think we must also accept that some schools are cheating. This past year has seen a steady stream of allegations from teachers and pupils, evidence of malpractice leading to grades being awarded by the exam boards and even annulment of test results. In the past week alone, one exam board has called for an end to coursework inclusion in final grades, claiming it is open to abuse. And a research project for the British Educational Research Association suggested teachers are under pressure to inflate marks in science coursework.

When Ofqual reported last year that teachers felt under pressure to “overmark” in GCSE English coursework, its chief executive, Glenys Stacey, appeared careful not to use the word cheating. But in a recent report, the whistleblowing charity Public Concern at Work said it had received a dramatic increase in claims from teachers, particularly those working in academy schools, alleging they are under pressure from school leaders to do just that.

A recent Guardian request for information brought forward similar concerns and dismay about practices staff were being asked to follow. Some of these claims relate to poor invigilation and exam-hall practices, others to falsified progress scores in advance of Ofsted inspections, but in most cases to the use and abuse of coursework and controlled assessment, to ensure that the C/D borderline students are indeed well across that border before the final exam.

In one set of GCSE 2013 English grades seen by the Guardian, the discrepancies between the coursework and exam marks of a significant minority of students are so obvious that it almost beggars belief that the exam boards do not order their own investigations. Ofqual’s sudden decision to abolish the speaking and listening element of the English GCSE coursework last week with immediate effect comes as no surprise.

There was an outcry when the exams regulator first made its claims. Understandably so. The vast majority of heads and teachers are honourable. But schools are under unsustainable pressure to show year-on-year improvements. The special status awarded to academies means that, for them, the stakes are even higher. Success equals national adulation. Failure inevitably leads to a disproportionate and ghoulish interest in their demise.

But there can be no denying that there is a problem and no one really knows its extent. All the allegations that have surfaced relate to whistleblowers. Unfair practices don’t become fair when no one complains or speaks out.

The consequences of malpractice can’t be ignored. It is unfair on other schools that are playing by the rules, but, more important, it disadvantages, rather than benefits, pupils progressing to further education on a false premise.

Since many of these allegations revolve around controlled assessments and coursework, the proposed qualifications reforms may help to eradicate this. But at what cost? Reducing everything to a final exam ushers in a host of other problems, not least for pupils with special needs. In the meantime coursework is still with us, so schools should be held to account more rigorously after the final results are in, especially if there are obvious discrepancies between coursework and exam performance.

At the heart of the problem is the continuing reliance on the threshold five A*-C measures and the inevitable focus on the C/D borderline pupils. This doesn’t just mean other groups get sidelined; it also makes it easier to discreetly manipulate outcomes for schools that are so inclined. New accountability measures proposed by the government are a valid attempt to rectify this. A threshold measure of A*-C in just English and maths will be balanced with a point score and a value-added measure in “best eight” subjects. But the threshold measure is still likely to trump the rest.

Last month, the think tank Centre Forum – whose report *Measuring What Matters* is a must-read on this issue – strongly recommended that the government drop the threshold measure and concentrate solely on progress as the key indicator so that all pupils count equally. This proposal was strongly backed by the chair of the Commons Education Select Committee, Graham Stuart.

I think both are right. No system will be perfect, but integrity seems to drain out of the current one on a daily basis and something radical is needed now.



CASE STUDY 4: Controlled Assessments

Controlled assessments will form the cornerstone of this new system. The assessments, which will be introduced to Year 10s this September, will allow pupils to research tasks for most subjects in their own time, before writing them up under supervision.

Examples provided by the QCDA include a history project that combines eight hours of research using the internet, group discussions and museum visits, with four hours of planning and writing up in the classroom.

Some subjects will only be assessed externally, such as maths, which dropped coursework in 2007. Science GCSE will also remain unchanged following a revamp in 2006. But in most other subjects, controlled assessments will account for between 25 to 60 per cent of the qualification.

Teachers could still offer too much help in both the research and the write-up stages, but the awarding bodies have taken this into account. While the external exams will assess content and knowledge, the controlled assessment tasks are designed to test pupils' analytical and research skills - more personalised skills that will be harder to copy or mimic.

"Marks will be awarded for original thought and research," says Mrs Kirkham. "Re-hashing their textbooks or teachers won't get them the top grades."

Heads have already voiced concern about how manageable the assessments will be in terms of finding the time, space and teachers needed to supervise. But Ofqual hopes the controlled assessments will preserve the best elements of coursework, such as detailed research, without the scope for cheating.

For it to work, both pupils and teachers will need to improve their research skills and what does and does not constitute cheating, says Diana Baker, a business studies teacher at Emmanuel College in Durham. "Most pupils think that research is about finding out the one 'right' answer," she says.

"We should spend more time on researching skills and referencing at key stage 3, looking for a number of writers who agree or disagree on a topic, rather than just asking pupils to find facts or definitions."

This should minimize the scope for teachers simply "giving" pupils stock answers and facts. It should also help counter the rise of so-called "Wikipedia kids" - a phrase coined by a recent Canadian report to describe young people who know how to cut and paste but little about how to read, think or put information into a wider context.

A better approach would be to encourage independent thought through better teacher questioning, says Vicky Tuck, principal of Cheltenham Ladies' College, an independent school in Gloucestershire. The information pupils uncover can then develop, not replace, their own ideas.

"The ability to have an idea will be so much more useful in the real world than simply regurgitating facts," she says.

Critics argue that the current system - with its emphasis on exams, improvement and tangible success - does not lend itself to these kind of thinking skills; it is more important to pass the tests. Yet Ed Balls, [the then] Schools Secretary, insisted that they are here to stay. "They are essential to giving parents, teachers and the public the information they need about the progress of every primary-age child and every primary school," he announced in October.

But with such a skewed over-reliance on these results, is it any wonder that teachers are tempted to give too much of a helping hand? "If the Government trusted teacher assessment more, we wouldn't need to be so reliant on tests," says Mr Brookes. Ironically, it is the tests themselves that are making some teachers less trustworthy, as they help pupils achieve the results they need.

