

Case Example: Students Grading One Another's Work

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In addition to serving daily chores, evaluation standards should help us address questions and issues about which there are substantial disagreements among well-intentioned, articulate, and dedicated educators. For example, the question, "Should teachers have students correct one another's papers?" reached the U.S. Supreme Court in 2002.

Certainly, the question of legality is a major determiner of educational practice. Yet most of education is determined not in the courtrooms but in teachers' classrooms. As we are well aware, many practices that are legal are not necessarily appropriate or educationally sound.

Here we invite your analysis of students correcting one another's papers. This activity is both a component of curricular programs and a student evaluation activity in many schools. Our tools for analysis purposes are the Joint Committee's (1994, 2003) evaluation standards. Through the analysis we hope to both introduce these standards and show the important role they can play in serving educational programs and practices. We will use two sets of evaluation standards, program and student, to show that both draw you toward the same conclusions but provide unique insights in doing so.

As the Court's ruling shows, the Court based its decision on narrow technical grounds and the probable burden on teachers if the practice were ruled illegal. The National Education Association (NEA) found the matter to be of sufficient import to bring the ruling to the attention of its members, but it has not taken sides. Its article presented in *NEA Today*, for example, provided both pro and con perspectives on this matter. It is worth taking an additional look at the matter from the perspective of evaluation standards. *For the purposes of this session, we will set the table a bit more broadly but address only one of the many pertinent standards.*

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that students correcting other students' papers does not violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 (*Owasso Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 1011 V. Falvo*, 2002). In declaring that the practice is legal, Justice Kennedy presented the Court's opinion and began his statement as follows: "Teachers sometimes ask students, including respondent's children, to score each other's tests, papers, and assignments as the teachers explain the correct answers to the entire class." Regarding the plaintiff's claims he stated, "Respondent claimed the peer grading embarrassed her children. She asked the school district to adopt a uniform policy banning peer grading and requiring teachers either to grade assignments themselves or at least to forbid students from grading papers other than their own." In finding for the school, the court addressed several points but ultimately based its ruling on a narrow point:

For these reasons, even assuming a teacher's grade book is an education record, the Court of Appeals erred, for in all events the grades on students' papers would not be covered under FERPA at least until the teacher has collected them and recorded them in his or her grade book. We limit our holding to this narrow point, and do not decide the broader question whether the grades on individual student assignments, once they are turned in to teachers, are protected by the Act.

Before arriving at that conclusion, Justice Kennedy seems to border on addressing issues of appropriate instruction and evaluation at a couple of points. For example, he makes a preliminary statement:

Correcting a classmate’s work can be as much a part of the assignment as taking the test itself. It is a way to teach material again in a new context, and it helps show students how to assist and respect fellow pupils.

That statement might be interpreted to suggest the technique is educationally sound. Also, he stated,

It would force all instructors to take time, which otherwise could be spent teaching and in preparation, to correct an assortment of daily student assignments. Respondent’s view would make it much more difficult for teachers to give students immediate guidance. The interpretation respondent urges would force teachers to abandon other customary practices, such as group grading of team assignments.

This latter statement both alludes to this practice as common and suggests that employing students to score other students’ work reduces the evaluation burden with potential attendant instructional benefits. Those two points touch issues related to propriety and feasibility of evaluations.

NEA Today (Riggins & Erikson, 2002) presented pro and con positions regarding the use of students to correct one another’s papers. The table below presents the main points of the two teachers’ position statements, as they relate to the four categories of standards (with the exception of Accuracy, which neither teacher addressed).

Yes Janine Riggins	No Harvey Erikson
Propriety	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ “This is a natural part of learning process” \$ Students like the process. \$ It should be confined to in-class work or homework, not tests. \$ It doesn’t have to embarrass students who don’t do well; learning is about taking chances. \$ Teachers and students alike should “openly admit that we all have weaknesses.” \$ “[Students] know who is on top and who isn’t whether, they see each other’s mistakes on paper or not.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping poor students’ work private helps these students maintain their sense of self-worth immensely. • “Students view the quality of their schoolwork as a measure of their worth.” • The mark on students’ papers makes the standing of students more “official” and moves their status from being an opinion to fact. “The problem is multiplied when it becomes public.” • Teachers can use this as an opportunity to teach respect, but students carry the information outside the classroom and use it in inappropriate ways (e.g., on the playground).

Utility	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ It can help increase student achievement. \$ “Being involved in evaluation helps students synthesize and take ownership of their learning.” \$ Students mentally confirm their own learning during this process. \$ “Students benefit from immediate, specific feedback.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...exchanging papers and correcting serves as a good immediate review, but can have negative consequences (e.g., teasing). • “It is far more effective to have kids correct their own work.”
Feasibility	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is more expeditious than having students correct their own work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Teachers must make the final judgment as to whether the time they save is worth eroding the self-concept of those students who are always looking up.”

The *NEA Today* article was intended to cause reflection, and the space provided was certainly not sufficiently lengthy for a comprehensive presentation of the issue. If you were to read both the Supreme Court decision and the *NEA Today* article in full, you would see that the two teachers’ statements go beyond the arguments of Justice Kennedy and broach the usefulness of the practice in addition to matters of propriety and utility. Neither teacher touches matters of accuracy, for example, whether such a practice produces reliable or valid results. Neither did they address whether student work, corrected in this way, is or should be recorded for grading purposes. These and other matters are likely to impact the appropriateness of students correcting one another’s papers.

The Task

Please open either *The Program Evaluation Standards* or *The Student Evaluation Standards* to Standard P1. Read both the standard and its guidelines.

1. Decide how this standard impacts your own thinking on the question of “Should teachers have students correct one another’s papers?”
2. Compare your conclusions with those of others who from read the same Standards book.
3. Discuss your conclusions with those who read from the other Standards book.
4. Consider which other standards are likely to raise other facets important to this question.

Take about 20 minutes for this, and then we will discuss as a group these standards and their impact on the question.

References

Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. (1994). *The program evaluation standards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. (2003). *The student evaluation standards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Riggins, J & Erikson, H. (2002, October). Should teachers have students correct each other's papers? *NEA Today*, 20.

U.S. Supreme Court

Topic: Civil Rights, Education Law

Title: OWASSO INDEP. SCH. DIST. NO. I011 v. FALVO

Date: 02/19/02

Case Number: 00-1073

Summary: Peer grading, or allowing students to grade one another's tests, papers, and assignments while teachers explain the correct answers to the entire class does not violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), since student papers are not "maintained" under Section 1232g(a)(4)(A) of FERPA at the time students perform peer grading, nor do student graders constitute people who are "acting for" an educational institution under the statute.