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English 4910

The Place of Procrastination

Abstract:

Understanding a student's writing process can help to diffuse some confusion between the tutor and the student. Sometimes in a student's process, they procrastinate due to hesitation from past experience with writing. Knowing how to address this can help further the student's confidence in their own future writing.

Keywords:

anxiety, procrastination, confidence, empathy

The Place of Procrastination

Procrastination may not be the villain that most of us make it out to be. Most college students have encountered the dreaded procrastination in some form. It can often be mistaken for laziness and prevents a person from moving forward with any given assignment. As a tutor you'll often see students come in at the last minute before an essay is due, or even with little to show due to procrastination. Despite how frustrating it may seem, it's not as inevitable as people make it out to be. When tutoring it's beneficial to understand how students think when approaching their writing in order to help them through the process. Understanding this connection can give insight allowing for the tutor to also help restore a student's confidence in writing. A student's background is sometimes tied to what they write about and how they approach their writing. It's important to consider where they are coming from when they write to make the session better fit the student. Oftentimes procrastination and anxiety have a reason and place in some students' writing process.

It's odd I know, it's been drilled into our heads that procrastination is bad. Although each student has their own writing process. Some people may have to eat bagels while wearing their favorite fuzzy socks, or others may wait till the last conceivable moment even if they are sick with the worst cold. We've all been told that procrastination is bad, but everyone has done it at some point in their lives. Procrastination has two reactions, some people can use it as motivation to get work done and other times the deadline can be overwhelming. It is common to see it both in our own writing and in those we tutor, and we can rely on those experiences to help a student work through what may be preventing them. Other times it's due to students placing personal value in their work and can lead to "non-cognitive factors [that] may strongly impact writers' self-regulatory processes" (Hawkins 2). Often it is indicative of situational factors that cause

them to put off their assignment. As a tutor you can help them figure out what snags are in their way or understand what makes them think. Otherwise as a tutor you can fall victim to misunderstanding a student, and have misguided understandings of what they may need from the session.

I'll try not to get too deep in the psychology of it, but just to address the surface level aspects to understanding a student's thought process. I've had a few sessions where the students have said, "I hate writing." For some they get a bit angry with their given task, and wonder if this assignment is really important. This causes them to put off the assignment as it is something they are not familiar with. Those who have tutored even a little have experienced students like these. Often these students will have "little interest in academic writing" and/or "scant confidence in their writing abilities," which leads to some students to be overly detached in their sessions (Fanning 2). This can sometimes be a bit hard to get the student to participate in the session. It's good to let them tell you a bit about what they like about their essay, this allows them to focus on some of their strengths in writing. Tutors are in a unique role to understand how a writer can become vulnerable and anxious with their work.

In a session that I have observed, a student was particularly ruffled by a small part of the assignment. He got fed up and would not let the tutor move on. However the tutor handled it well, and was calm and listened but also kept the session moving along. It's good to let them vent and explain some of their thought processes, but to turn some of that frustration into motivation. He didn't work on the assignment prior to the session for similar reasons, and the tutor was able to allow for the student to reduce his anxieties of the assignment. If he hadn't the student's fears and hatred for writing would have gotten the student nowhere. "Empathy doesn't mean making the tutee happy; happiness isn't always the best antidote for fear" (*Hotson*). It is

good to relieve some of their concerns that might be preventing them from working while also pushing them forward in their writing.

For some it's due to their vulnerability when they write. Brian Hotson, Director of Academic Learning Services at Saint Mary's University, finds that "writing makes the writer vulnerable," and due to this, "tutoring is an intimate relationship with the writer and their content" (Hotson). I've seen this in the sessions that I have tutored. This vulnerability is often shown at the start of many tutoring sessions, when students are apprehensive about sharing their writing with their tutor. They worry about their tutor becoming judgmental. They view their work as an extension of themselves, and place a lot of value in that perception. It's our place as a tutor to ease the tension and allow them room to explain their ideas. This can help reduce stress that may be causing them to not work on a given assignment. During the process of listening to the student, you can often ask how they approach their writing.

In doing so you can see how the student starts working on their assignment. That way you know how to better help the student. Even if they are more resistant or distant it's good to have them work through the positives of what they have accomplished. Understanding this connection can give insight allowing for the tutor to also help restore a student's confidence in writing. Writing makes a person vulnerable and this is hard for many students, but allowing them a safe place for their writing can ease that. As frustrating as writing can become for many students, it's good to try to understand their hesitations about writing to better aid in instruction and growth.

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