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Writing Philosophy

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Writing Philosophy

Sarah Iuli

He raised the tip of his brush, but paused before allowing the color to saturate the paper. Looking over his shoulder at his professor, he asked, “What do you think? The blue, or the violet?” The professor bent down next to the student’s work, studied it for a minute, then said, “What feeling do you want to convey? Think back to when we studied Monet’s use of color in his paintings- how did he use tone to change the feeling of his painting?” The student looked back at the half completed painting in front of him, dipped his brush back into the deep blue, and swiped it across the page.

Writing is a form of art, and like any form of artistry, it involves interaction, communication, and studying the work of others. It is a way of expressing one’s ideas through the communication of words on paper-- ideas that stem from an individual’s interaction between his or her surrounding world and the reaction to the work of others. Where then, do tutors and the methods that we use to tutor students fit into the idea of the writer and her writing represented as an artist and her artwork? It is difficult to know where to begin when attempting to teach writing. Who is to say how it should be taught or learned? It often seems as if the methods that have been adopted for tutoring are either too invasive or not invasive enough. However, I have found that it is possible to merge tutoring methods with this idea of artistry in an effective way, such that the writer’s journey as an artist is both guided and fulfilling.

Upon first glance, using directive and nondirective methods, as described by Peter Carino, in tutoring sessions might not seem to align with the artistry of writing; they deal directly with issues of power and authority in the writing center. If a tutor takes too much power, then

how will the writer be able to fully explore the artistry of writing? If a tutor gives all the power to the student, then how will the writer learn the founding principles of writing as a form of art? However, as Steven J. Corbett suggests, "...if we keep our pedagogy flexible and attuned to one writer at a time, we may better anticipate when to urge a closer rethinking of content or claim, when to pay attention to conventions and mechanics, and how and when to do both" (153). In adopting this flexible mentality, students will both gain the foundations they need as writers and be given the opportunity to fully evolve as artists.

As I have found to be the case in my tutoring sessions, I would argue that with less experienced writers, a more directive approach is necessary. For example, in any introductory level art class, the focus is usually centered around studying and imitating the styles and methods of experienced artists. This gives students direction, an opportunity to do in-depth studies of required skills, and yet still allows for some creativity and self-expression. On the other hand, with more experienced writers, a more nondirective approach can be used. Experienced writers already have the foundation they needed to be successful. Only once a solid foundation is formed can the writer truly begin to explore writing as a form of art.

Writing is a form of artistry, and while the methods that are used to teach writing might not always seem conducive to fostering artistic development, it is helpful to remember that evolving artists require many different levels of guidance. As tutors, we must have an open mind and be able to adjust according to the situation. In doing so, we will hopefully help to mold more perceptive and successful writers.