

## Chapter 5: Changing Student Actions

### **A Change in Perspective When Dealing With Late Work**

*... requires the teacher to look at students as the nucleus of their learning and see their frustrating behaviour as a teachable offence, especially when they hand work in late.*

### **From “Work Is Late, Deduct Marks” To “Work Is Late, Why?”**

**B**efore teachers can approach the issue of lateness in student work, they must reflect on their role in the student - teacher partnership. The positive student learning that maintains the dignity and self-worth of the students referred to previously is only attainable when the teacher becomes a catalyst for all learning opportunities. Dealing with late work is one such opportunity. This becomes a teachable incident that can enhance the students’ learning skills.

It requires teachers to look at this issue using another lens. It is necessary to create a paradigm shift from punitive to productive.

“My experience as a teacher is the students who hand in late assignments will do so even with late penalties in place. This is not solving the students’ problem but is only appeasing the teachers’ since they can now walk with their heads high, having ‘fairly’ dealt with the late problem.”  
(B. Picillo)

This shift in perspective creates a new paradigm for such teachers as Bruno Picillo – learning is student-centered, but teacher-driven. The frustrating behaviour of students, such as late work submission, should be a catalyst for an alternate form of teaching: lessons for life-long learning.

The ‘why?’ factor is critical in determining how teachers will deal with deadline challenged students. Teachers may presume that students did not do the work because they were lazy, rebellious, oppositional or disorganized, but these negative excuses are not always the case. There are several factors that impact the work ethic of students, the foundational precursor to getting work in on time.

One of the most significant factors of lateness, whether adult, student or personal, is procrastination. A web search finds 187,030 sites on this personal flaw. They include strategies and models to overcome, conquer, control and stop this “thief of opportunity”, “bad habit”, “verge of a nervous breakdown” and “virus”.

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The sites have a plethora of information, including research, support groups, studies, coaches, scales, tests, manuals, books and “tips to toppling” that are written in English, French and Spanish, as well as an abundance of mechanisms for defeating this demon. It is obviously a less desirable trait that has made a prominent impact on the behavior of many.

“Adolescents are still learning appropriate time management strategies. They are typically more emotional than rational and may prioritize the demands of their lives based on the impulse or feeling of the moment rather than on the reality of organizing their school obligations.” (Costello and McKillop)

Students who already struggle with balancing a full lifestyle are often further burdened with this very common personality flaw. It is one of the most prevalent reasons why students do not get work done and in on time. For the struggling AWOL (Avoids Work, Often Late) students, it becomes an immense barrier to their organizational skill building and time management skills.

“Procrastination can be both the cause and the result of academic stress for many students... The reasons for this behavior as well as the forms it takes are almost as varied as the students themselves. “  
(Fleet, Goodchild, Zajchowski)

In their book, *Learning for Success*, these authors cite symptoms and explanations for procrastination that are valuable for students and teachers.

In dealing with late work, teachers can not overlook the very real impact that procrastination has on the work ethic of their students. While some more focused students rarely experience this condition, others are plagued by it. While teachers may be aware of such symptoms as feelings of inertia, being swamped and guilt and confusion that procrastination may carry for their students (and possibly for themselves), they may not be aware of the underlying reasons that produce procrastination.

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