

The Great Misunderstanding of Talent

- If talent exists, and it may, research shows that it does not seem to matter.
- Consider how important, or not, this concept is to you.
- Consider the evidence, consider your teaching and see if you come to the same conclusion, as this is very important. As Colvin writes,

If it turns out that we're all wrong about talent-and I will offer a lot more evidence that we are-that's a big problem. If we believe that people without a particular natural talent for some activity will never be very good at it, or at least will never be competitive with those who possess that talent, then we'll direct them away from that activity. We'll tell them they shouldn't even think about it. We'll steer our kids away from particular studies whether they're art, tennis, economics or Chinese because we think we've seen signs that they have no talent in those realms . . . most insidiously, in our own lives, we will try something new, and finding that it isn't easy for us conclude that we have no talent for it, and so we never pursue it. Thus, our views about talent, which are extremely deeply held, are extraordinarily important for the future of our lives, our children's lives, our companies and the people in them. Understanding the reality of talent is worth a great deal.

- (p. 20)
- The Role of Practice in the Development of Performing Musicians. (Sloboda, Davidson, Howe, & Moore, 2011)

A sample of 257 young people aged between eight and 18 who had undertaken individual instrumental tuition were interviewed in depth about their performing history from the start of playing. A subset of 94 of these individuals also kept a practice diary for a 42-week period. The data collected allowed estimates to be calculated of the amount of time devoted to various types of practice and other activities. The sample was selected in order to encompass a wide range of levels of musical achievement, from pupils at a highly selective specialist music school through to individuals who had abandoned instrumental study after less than a year of formal instruction. Data about formal examination successes confirmed the very wide range of achievement in the sample. It was discovered that there was a strong relationship between musical achievement and the amount of formal practice undertaken. Weaker relationships were discovered between achievement

and amount of informal playing. There was no evidence that high achievers were able to gain a given level of examination success on less practice than low achievers. High achievers tended to be more consistent in their pattern of practice from week to week, and tended to concentrate technical practice in the mornings. These data lend strong support to the theory that formal effortful practice is a principal determinant of musical achievement. (p. 1647)

- Mozart and Tiger Woods explained (Colvin, 2010).
 - Children of motivated master teachers.
 - Put in thousands of hours of guided practice starting at a very early age.
 - The Rochlitz letter
 - There is no magic here other than the unusually young age they started focused, guided, serious work with excellent coaching.
- The misunderstanding of talent can happen right under our noses, and not be noticed. **Yo-Yo Ma's** ma. Despite enormous environmental prompts and advantages she has no idea from where he got his capacity to learn music. (Shenk, 2010)
- My Twinkle story.
- IQ, short of developmental disability, does not seem to matter.
 - High achieving populations were studied and their IQ scores were similar to lesser achieving populations. What is more is that the higher achieving population was slightly lower on average, though they do show up more at both the upper and lower extremes. Many elite jobs held by the high achievers hold a minimum threshold of an IQ of 103, while for those in lower achieving populations that threshold it is above 110. (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011).
 - James Flynn and his population IQ research. How can IQ across populations reliably rise whenever an area becomes industrialized if it is a fixed factor? IQ, short of developmental disability, does not seem to matter, and you can build it.
- Are kids encouraged because they are talented or talented because they are encouraged?
- It can even be detrimental to believe in talent. (Dweck, 2006)
 - *The Dangers of Believing That Talent Is Innate.* "A study of academia shows how being convinced of intrinsic ability may lead to bias and unwillingness to change." (Gopnik, 2015). Changing/making corrections is an indispensable part of learning.

. .child achievers are frequently hobbled by the psychology of their own success. Children who grow up surrounded by praise for being technically proficient at a specific task often develop a natural aversion to stepping outside their comfort zone. Instead of falling into a pattern of taking risks and regularly pushing themselves just beyond their limit, they develop a terrible fear of new challenges and of any sort of flaw or failure. Ironically, this leads them away from the very building blocks of adult success. "Prodigies [can] become frozen into expertise," say Ellen Winner. "this is particularly a problem for those whose work has become public and has won them acclaim, such as musical performers, painters, or children who have been publicized as 'whiz kids'. . .It is difficult to break away form 'technical' expertise and take the kinds of risks required to be creative." (Shenk, 2006, p. 75)

- At least10 years and over 10,000 hours to become world class in any complex domain, and that number is rising.
- The point is not to do 10 years 10,000, but to take the same steps as one would if one were to follow that process however many hours they may work to improve.
- There is always a way to improve whatever it is that is keeping you from improving. Becoming great is just solving the problem in front of you thousands of times, and becoming better is just solving the one in front of

you at any given time. Thank goodness there are teachers to help with that, otherwise it would take a lot longer to figure out how to fix those problems.

• The more problems we within a domain fix the better we get at fixing them in that domain (learning how to learn), and the quicker we get better at whatever it is we are trying to do.

Helpful reading

Talent Is Overrated by Geoff Colvin - highly recommended

The Genius In All Of Us by David Shenk - how we've misunderstood the idea of heritability, and

even much more obvious indicators that we our skill development is under out control.

Outliers Malcom Gladwell – Light on science, and sometimes misrepresents it (the 10,000 hour rule is not really a thing). An entertaining read that is a good and compelling introduction. *The Talent Code* by Daniel Coyle – Myelin and skill development.

Baumeister, R. F., & Tierney, J. (2011). *Willpower*. New York, NY: Penguin. Colvin, G. (2010). *Talent is overrated*. New York, NY: Penguin.

Coyle, D. *The talent code*. (2009). New York, NY: Bantam; Random House. Dweck, C. – I'm beginning to think this book is more about applying the learning process than the role of myelin, but it is something to consider.

Mindset. (2006). New York, NY: Random House.

Gladwell, M. (2008). Outliers. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.

Sloboda, J. A., Davidson, J. W., Howe, M. J. A., Moore, D. G. (2011). The role of practice in the development of performing musicians. *British Journal of Psychology*, 333, 1647-1651. Shenk, D. (2010). *The genius in all of* us. New York, NY: Anchor Books; Random House.