

Can Talent be taught and learned ?

There is a strong desire in all of us to be really good at something that we inspire to venture in such as arts, academics, music or sports. In this essay Daniel Coyle explores the characteristics of the people that have achieved the ultimate height that we all long for.

Daniel Coyle argues that talented or gifted that we attribute to such people is not so much of the innate abilities of doing things exceptionally well but rather of the methods that help these people achieving excellency.

The author began his quest for uncovering what lie beneath all these extraordinaries in the “nine hotbeds” ; the unlikely places that people least expect to achieve any signficance or greatness, the places that don't have the comforts, the tools, the conveniences, the supports of the modern world for incubating greatness, the places that the author's friend named them “chicken-wire Harvards.”

After observing the performances of these people in those places, the author came to the conclusion that talent only contributes to only half of the success, the other half is their own effort; “moments of slow, fitful struggle”.

The author argues that by increasing their “learning velocity” that Brazil has been able to turn out many great players over the years. He names this new learning method: “deep practice”.

According to the author, “deep practice” involves the process of problem solving activities, “you stopped, you stumbled , then figure it out”, he cited examples of trying to recall a list of words with missing characters or trying to recall someone's name. By allowing ourselves to make mistakes, to stumble and make errors that we can eventually achieve our goals. According to the author , “one real encounter is far more useful than several hundred observations”. That is when the active learning process happening, the brain generates impulses that create scaffolds in our brain, the “scaffolding” helps faster learning (“velocity learning”).

Another concept that the author advocates is trying to find the “sweet spot”. The sweet spot is the gap between your actual abilities and the goal you try to reach. Once we can realize this spot and target our struggle to that spot, then we are on our way to success.

The author also argues that “deep practice” creates talent, contrary to popular belief. Another concept springing from “deep practice”, that is it is turning mistakes into skills. Taking an example from the Brazilian soccer players, the author argues that environment factors alone are not enough to propel Brazil to world cup titles. He argues that only until 1950s Brazilian players “have trained in a particular way, with a particular tool” that would help them to be World Cup Title holders. What these tools are, the author named them “learning velocity” or “deep practice”.

He cited the two examples to make his point. One is the practice of the Brazilian players and the other is the Link's trainer. In both cases by improvising the methods of learning new skills (deep practice) that the people had overcome their obstacles spectacularly. By creating the “futsal” the Brazilian have trained generations of players effectively. By creating the Link Aviation Trainer Edwin Link had helped training thousands of Air Corps pilots.

Thus through the process of “deep practice” , these people had discovered their “sweet spot” and achieved success.

I found Daniel Coyle’s article very is very intuitive and fascinating. It could be a pavestone toward deeper understanding of how talents formed. Can we create talents or are they innate abilities ?. What is more important , nature or nurture ?. Can the concepts of “deep practice” and “sweet spot” be applied to all endeavours such as writing a novel or painting ?.

Citations

Daniel Coyle, “The Sweet Spot”