

Abstract

Deliberate Practice

In Humanities, there is a tendency to put emphasis on oral learning activities in the classroom, even when examinations take the form of written assignments. The effect is that the students do not develop their writing abilities effectively, despite that most of them will need good writing abilities no matter what job position they eventually obtain. I consider two underlying reasons why students are not taught how to write well:

- 1) Many teachers do not write well themselves.
- 2) Many teachers do not know how to teach writing in their field.

With the aim of overcoming these weaknesses, I developed a course last semester that integrated the traditional content of a history course and learning activities related to writing history.

When it comes to teaching writing, I have been inspired by the concept of “deliberate practice” developed by the Swedish professor in psychology, K. Anders Ericsson. Ericsson studied the training techniques of violinists that had been accepted into the prestigious symphony orchestra, Berliner Philharmoniker. He found that it was not the amount of training that determined who would enter the orchestra or not, but rather how they trained, and called this “deliberate practice”.

Deliberate practice is about getting the highest effect out of ones training. Therefore, the students systematically identify their weaknesses, and develop strategies for overcoming them. Furthermore, problems are solved through slowing down the pace, breaking up the tasks into minor parts and patiently solving them one by one. In this process, experimentation is important, which requires a culture open for error. Evaluation of the performance is key, both by the students themselves, but also by qualified teachers who offers supervision and feedback. The students are part of a group in which they are inspired, challenged and pushed forward, but also work with their individual objectives. The aim is to keep the student in the learning zone (in which one train skills that one do not possess but can obtain), to avoid that the student slides back into their comfort zone (in which one train skills that one already master), and avoid ending in the panic zone (in which one trains skills that one cannot yet master). When the student reaches a climax, deliberate practice requires them to deconstruct their own talent and rebuild it.

Teaching according to the principles of deliberate practice in an academic environment requires that the teacher becomes less of a lecturer and more of coach. Focus is on detailed instructions, feedback and training, but the learning activities can only be successful if each student’s academic level in the classroom is identified, differentiated teaching takes place, and the students themselves take ownership of their learning processes.

In my presentation, I will explain the concept of deliberate practice, how I utilized it in an academic environment, and summarize my experiences using it.

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