

## Purposeful Practice

My post on Guru's was the first in a series on Training and what works/what matters. <http://www.langmaidpractice.com/blog/guru-schmuru/>

I have now been developing courses and teaching them for 4 years and I have access to all the feedback from the hundreds of people who have attended them.

This has enabled me, together with my reading of the empirical evidence, to create a platform for my training methods. *The essence of that platform is the idea of 'Purposeful Practice'.*

The thing about purposeful practice is that it is **transformational**, and that's so whether your thing is tennis, football, swimming, chess, mathematics, insight work or journalism – you name it.

Why isn't this more widely known? Well, for years evidence has been coming through to dispel such myths as childhood genius. In his book 'Genius Explained' psychologist Michael Howe refutes the common belief that 'genius is born, not made'. He demonstrates that genius is the result of circumstances which always feature practice, focus and commitment at a level that most of us rarely show.

Howe's focus is upon great scientists like Darwin and Einstein, but another example of the 'gift' of genius is the young Mozart, who wrote his first piano concertos at the age of eleven. If you look into Mozart's work more closely though, it transpires that these first efforts were largely copies of other composers' work and contained no original material. Mozart's first work, today regarded as a masterpiece is Piano Concerto No 1, written when he was 21. That's young for sure, but not a child. Many other musicians who have created sublime, inspiring music did so before the age of 25. Dare I mention the Beatles?

Another factor was Mozart's domineering, pedagogic father Leopold, who started his son on an intensive training in composition and performing **aged 3**.

So, why do these myths persist? To explore that I think we need to embrace Alfred Alder's notion of the Inferiority Complex together with Freud's idea of a 'secondary gain'.

An inferiority complex occurs when feelings of inferiority are intensified through discouragement or failure. Those who are at risk for developing a complex include people who show signs of low self-esteem or self-worth, are of ethnic minority, have low socioeconomic status, or have a history of depression symptoms. Children reared in households who were constantly criticized or did not live up to parents expectations may also develop this.

Now, while most of us do not have experiences that are sufficiently disabling to develop a full-blown inferiority complex, at the same time we all have feelings of failure, failing to do as well as we

could, together with occasions when laziness or distraction led us to avoid doing the amount of work needed to ensure genius-level success. We settled for good enough results rather than best ever results. Our intensely competitive educational system makes these feelings inevitable for us all during the all important years when our characters are formed.

**So why did we dodge that work?** Freud's idea of secondary gain refers to the direct or indirect advantages of avoiding things. Secondary gain is *an interpersonal or social advantage gained as a consequence of avoiding a commitment* – in this case the amount of work or study needed to excel. Examples of such gains might be getting a new romance through spending more time socialising than studying (remember that?), feeling more part of the group where the group has a cynical or dismissive attitude towards work, feeling more normal, less 'geeky', etc.

The gain is achieved by avoiding a particular activity that is unpleasant to the individual: and which of us can really say that working intensively to practice any discipline does not have its unpleasant side?

If you would like a pdf of this post it is here: