

May I have 12 minutes?

- The 80/20 rule applied to parent involvement

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It was the conclusion of what I thought was an outstanding lesson with one of my brightest students. My student, 14, is a bright young man that has the world at his feet. He comes from a comfortable, supportive and nurturing environment that will prove to be to his benefit in the future. However, direct challenge isn't something that he is accustomed to encountering. So, when struggles began to surface there was resistance almost immediately. Even though he was excelling in many areas, the growth that he was experiencing presented new challenges that required him to climb the internal mountains of his mind. A person grows multi-dimensionally if they stimulate this growth from within. That's why this time for my student was both exciting and invigorating for me to watch as a teacher but can be frustrating for the student. As our lesson came to a tension filled close I gave him some words of advice and encouragement before leaving the piano bench.

As a ritual, I meet with the parent(s) after each lesson to fill them in, in detail, on the progress their child is making, areas they are struggling with and the next plan of action. I structure my briefing with the parent in this way: New material covered. Review material covered. Challenge areas. Strategies of challenge areas. Assignments. Areas of excellence. The reason I structure my briefing in this way is because I want to start and end with a positive tone, sandwiching the struggles in the middle as to not leave the parent thinking the student is always struggling. If the student is practicing, and has sound instruction, you can always find areas of excellence to highlight. This briefing wasn't structured any differently. I went through all the steps in order to inform the parent of what a great job he was doing and some of the challenges he was

encountering. When we got to the challenge portion, the parent wanted to know how much she needed to be involved during the week in order to help him in these challenge areas.

This was a good question, considering that, in this time, very few parents are involved during the practice times the student spends during the week. If they are age seven and above, the parent seems to let the child practice on their own trusting that they are doing the homework they were assigned. So when she asked this poignant question regarding her involvement, I immediately applied the 80/20 rule to the situation. If you aren't familiar with the 80/20 rule, it is defined in the following manner: The Pareto principle (also known as the 80–20 rule, the law of the vital few, and the principle of factor sparsity) states that, events are constructed in where roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. Therefore, in this case I asked her how much time does she currently involve herself with her son's practice time. Her answer spoke volumes; none. "Here is the problem," I thought to myself quietly.

Consequently, I realized that approval and recognition had been the main challenges my student had been encountering. He felt that, even though his parents were massively supportive, that they weren't always approving, leaving him to feel as though he wasn't good enough - when we was growing by leaps and bound. The answer was clear, she needed to spend 20% more time with her son in order for him to get past these internal woes. More directly, she needed to spend time listening and praising him constructively in order to inform him of her acknowledgement of his growth. This would dispel any idea of "babying" him or "looking over his shoulder". By simply spending 20% more time with her son during his practice time he would be able to know approval without feeling smothered. So my next step was direct, I simply said spend about 10-15mins with your son during the last part of his practicing(he practices 60mins a day, for you math nerds). This will ensure that he is warmed up and rehearse before you are there, giving him confidence and security in his own abilities. I also went on to tell her that she should tell him that she is going start participating in his practice sessions. This will also boost his confidence and showcase the recognition he has been looking for.

The result: ten-fold. By the end of the month he was smiling more and performing with more energy. Also a wonderful side effect was a closer mother-son bond, which is extremely valuable amongst today's teens. In conclusion, I wish I had asked about her involvement sooner, in order to gain more insight. Nevertheless, the time my student spend stewing in a negative mindset was quickly relieved by the 80/20 rule, or as little as 12 minutes of a mother's approving attention.