

## BACKGROUND: Understanding GrapeSEED The powerful concept of deliberate practice

K. Anders Ericsson is a Swedish psychologist and Professor of Psychology at Florida State University. He is an expert on human performance. Based on decades of research, Ericsson says that for people to improve at anything, they must engage in what he calls “deliberate practice”. But not just any old practice, or mindless practice, or practice for the sake of practice. Instead they must engage in what Ericsson calls *deliberate practice*. Ericsson explains that deliberate practice, not talent, is the real key to success.

So, what exactly is deliberate practice? Deliberate practice is performing exercises that were specifically designed by experts. Deliberate practice is assigned and monitored by a teacher or coach to help you continually improve in a particular area. Ericsson distinguishes between purposeful practice (in which a person tries very hard to push him or herself to improve) and practice that is both purposeful and *informed*. In other words, deliberate practice is purposeful practice that knows where it is going and how to get there.

The value of deliberate practice most applies to fields where it takes substantial time to become proficient if not expert. In his most notable work, Ericsson looked at musical studies (students studying violin at the elite Music Academy of West Berlin) and found those most diligent with deliberate practice excelled the most.

Deliberate practice applies most to fields of study “where the training is cumulative, with the successful performance of one skill often depending on having previously mastered other skills”. It also applies to fields where it is important to “develop a good foundation and then gradually build on that foundation to create the skills expected in that field.”

Ericsson’s research can be directly applied to the unique experience of learning a language. Language acquisition is a complex, intricate and multi-faceted endeavor. As with learning a musical instrument, a proper foundation is paramount in language learning. Moreover, the learning must be carefully structured and progressive in nature if one is to achieve proficiency, if not mastery. In other words, successful language learning requires deliberate practice.

Thankfully, the concept of deliberate practice highlighted by Ericsson’s work has been embedded in GrapeSEED from the very beginning. Deliberate practice is woven into the very design of the curriculum. The designers of GrapeSEED appreciated the in the field, they also understood there is a sure and certain pathway to excellence, a roadmap to proficiency in the language.

Deliberate practice in GrapeSEED is known as Repeated Exposure and Practice (REP). A foundational pillar of GrapeSEED, REP reinforces and expands on teacher instruction. Its inclusion provides a solution to issues frequently encountered in second language acquisition: lack of sufficient study time, underdeveloped aural skills, lack of varied and contextual exposure, and uninteresting study materials. REP proactively overcomes these issues by way of *deliberate practice*.

The amount of time it takes to become proficient in a language is extensive. But again, this is where deliberate practice comes to the rescue. Through additional repeated exposure to the vocabulary and language functions embedded in the teaching materials, students can acquire language more quickly and accurately, leading to earlier fluency and greater proficiency.

The content of REP in GrapeSEED has been carefully prepared consistent with Ericsson's research that "deliberate practice nearly always involves building or modifying previously acquired skills by focusing on particular aspects of those skills and working to improve them specifically". GrapeSEED REP follows a progression of learning. Each day is a new experience with new challenges and new growth for students. This allows the student to become more familiar with the components over time in a way that is gradual, beneficial and certain.

Because it is deliberate practice, REP is valuable and necessary for each student. Students who need more time to learn the given objectives can and should spend extra time in REP. If a student is underachieving, additional time with REP will help him reach the objectives independently. For the overachiever, REP allows more opportunity to practice and improve communication ability within the objectives. Every student, no matter their ability, will gain additional skills when they invest in deliberate practice.

What is the implication for GrapeSEED parents and schools? Encourage REP whenever and wherever possible! Deliberate practice is an essential component, a foundational pillar of the curriculum and can be done at home or school. REP reinforces the learning objectives while providing the child with greater exposure to English on a daily basis. As such, it secures, strengthens, and expands student learning in a *deliberate practice* fashion.

Parents and teachers can be confident that REP practice in GrapeSEED will always be both purposeful and informed. The destination is proficiency in English and GrapeSEED will get the next generation of successful leaders there. GrapeSEED REP is deliberate practice at its finest with clear benefits for every student.