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80-20 It

In 1906 Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian economist, discovered that 80 percent of the wealth was controlled by 20 percent of the people. Dr. Joseph Juran later went on to popularize this finding and called it the Pareto Principle. The principle has been tested in a wide variety of fields, and it held up to scrutiny. It seems to be pretty accurate although various people will claim the actual ratio to range from 90/10 to 70/30.

So what does the mean? The significance of the Pareto Principle is to look for these cause-and-affect relationships where a small percentage of the input produces an unexpectedly large result.

Applied to teaching, it means that 20 percent of your teaching activities results in 80 percent of the learning outcomes. Or looking at it the other way around, 80 percent of what you do while teaching will account for only 20 percent of the learning outcomes.

The numbers are not as important as the concept. Some things that you do have a greater influence on the outcomes than other things. The challenge is to identify and then do the things that have a large influence on the outcomes you desire and to not do things that have little effect on those outcomes.

Another way to put this principle into practice is to look constantly for ways to optimize what you do and how you do it. Fortunately, teaching is a field that replete with opportunities to maximize its effectiveness. Longtime instructors notice that's every run of the same course is a different experience. No two student groups are exactly the same. Those who teach for success realize this and make

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constant adjustments to their teaching to optimize the results of each class. Look for the 80-20 relationships in your teaching context to enjoy better results.

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