

**Artistic Talent Development
for Urban Youth:
The Promise and the Challenge**

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INTRODUCTION

While the nation calls for recognition of outstanding talent and high achievement among its youth, little information about the development of artistic talent, especially among economically disadvantaged students from diverse cultural backgrounds, actually exists. Most existing models of talent development are based on studies of people who were born into a family that both valued their talents and had the means to support its development. With retrospective studies and memoirs of successful artists, we already know the outcome and can look back at the factors—parents, teachers, personal characteristics, lucky breaks—that made their success possible.

But what about young people with interests, aspirations, and talents in the arts who do not have the support or financial resources to develop their talents? What about students who do not aspire to a career in the arts but are committed to serious study of them? What effect does arts instruction have on the development of students' identity, work habits, attitudes toward school, future opportunities, and the choices they make? And what can arts education institutions and programs do to help students succeed despite the obstacles they face?

This report describes the findings of a study, funded by the *Champions of Change* program of the GE Fund, that followed current and former students of a performing arts program in the New York City Public Schools. Young Talent, a program developed and implemented by ArtsConnection, a not-for-profit arts in education organization, has been in existence for 20 years, providing the researchers with a unique opportunity to examine the conditions, experiences, and realities of talent development for a diverse spectrum of urban students over an extended period of time.

The study, conducted by researchers from the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, followed 23 children and young adults, aged 10-26, in three different stages of talent development in music

and dance: elementary school; intermediate school; and high school, college, professional or semi-professional careers. A high percentage of the students in the program come from economically disadvantaged circumstances and attend or attended schools with no arts specialists. Over half of them had, at one time, been labeled as at-risk for school failure due to poor grades, absences, behavioral or family issues. The effect of sustained study in an art form on these talented young people provides powerful evidence for the crucial role of arts education in helping students achieve their educational and personal potential.

The study made use of extended interviews with the students, their parents and families, arts instructors, and current and former academic teachers; observations in both school and professional settings; and the collection of academic data. Researchers found that common elements emerged across ages and stages of development. While the basic factors of parental support, instructional opportunities, and personal commitment corroborate the essential findings of previous studies of talented teenagers in a variety of fields by Bloom (1985) and Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen (1995), this study highlights important differences in the nature and impact of those factors as it relates to diverse, economically disadvantaged, urban populations.

The researchers were interested in uncovering and clarifying relationships between factors in three areas: 1) obstacles faced by economically disadvantaged, urban students in pursuit of talent development in the arts; 2) external support and internal characteristics that helped students overcome those obstacles; and 3) the impact of serious arts involvement over an extended period of time on students' lives and capacities. To investigate these questions, the study focused on children and young adults at significant stages of committed learning in the arts.

We hope that what we have discovered about these young artists can deepen our understanding of and appreciation for the challenges they face and the potential for artistic involvement to affect their lives.

From a practical perspective, we feel that there is a great deal that schools, cultural institutions, community organizations, and parents can learn from these examples that can help them design programs to help young people who have talent and drive but few opportunities to pursue their dreams.

Intervention

The students in the study are current or former participants in the Young Talent Program, provided by ArtsConnection in their elementary schools. The program, begun in 1979, currently serves approximately 400 students in grades three through six in eight New York City public elementary schools by providing instruction in dance, music, or theater. All of the cases in the study were drawn from the dance or music components of the program. The Young Talent Program offers introductory experiences for all students and more rigorous instruction for students who have been identified as potentially talented.

The basic talent development program consists of weekly classes for 25 weeks between October and May for students in grades four, five, and six, taught by a team of two professional teaching artists. Student ensembles perform for their schools and communities, and an alumni program is offered for students graduating the elementary school program at ArtsConnection's Center in midtown Manhattan. Advanced students also attend five to ten classes per year at professional studios and cultural institutions around the city. The curriculum is designed to be challenging and broad in scope, to give students opportunities to learn a variety of styles and techniques, and to develop their skills to prepare them for further study in the art form.

The talent identification process, developed through a Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented grant from the United States Department of Education (Talent Beyond Words, US Department of Education grant # R206A00148) was designed to be equitable to students who have no previous arts instruction and come from diverse cultural backgrounds. The central purpose of the program is not to develop professional

artists. Rather, the program strives to raise awareness and appreciation of the artistic abilities of all students and to recognize and develop the outstanding talents of many students who would not be identified as gifted and talented through academic tests or other traditional means.

In addition to artistic instruction, support services offered through the Young Talent Program include staff development workshops for classroom teachers and small group, after-school assistance to students who are struggling academically. A site coordinator maintains contact with teachers and supervises the school program, maintains contact with parents and provides information about other instructional opportunities.

Sample

The students were selected for the study from a pool of 400 current students, and more than 1500 program graduates. A total of 32 students deemed potentially successful in their talent area were originally recommended. Out of these, 23 were selected for the study based on sampling procedures that differed for each cohort according to the special circumstances and status criteria existing at each level. Overall, the sample consisted of 12 females and 11 males, and it involved 16 African Americans, 5 Latinos, and 2 Caucasians. Income information was not available for all families. As an indicator, approximately 19 of the 23 students were or had been eligible for free lunch in school.

To obtain a developmental understanding of how talent is nurtured and evolves, three cohorts of students were chosen, identified by age and grade level. The elementary (11 students, age 10-12, grade 4-6), intermediate (6 students age 13-16, grade 7-9) and high school/adult (6 students, age 17-26, sophomore through post-scholastic) cohorts were distinguished by the type and level of arts instruction available to them. Elementary school students were provided with weekly Young Talent Program classes at their school and occasional classes in professional studios during and after the school day. Intermediate school students had fewer instructional opportunities at school and had to

travel to ArtsConnection on their own on Saturdays to continue lessons. At high school level and beyond, arts instruction was completely voluntary and required a personal commitment of time and money.

While the cohorts were defined by age, individuals within each cohort represented three major stages of talent development in a progression from novice to emerger to expert. These phases, recognized both by cognitive psychologists (Bruer, 1993; Newell & Simon, 1972) and by developmental psychologists (Bloom, 1985; Csikzentmihalyi & Robinson, 1986; Feldman, 1986; Gardner, 1993) are defined by skills, motivation, and readiness for more advanced and challenging instruction and opportunities. In the arts, distinctions between stages are particularly fluid and cannot be generalized to all students of a particular age or experience level. Some fifth and sixth grade students in the study, for example, attended classes at professional dance studios and were invited to perform with a dult companies. These students were more advanced in their skills and motivation than some of the intermediate or senior high school students. Thus, while most students in each cohort fit the developmental profile of elementary-novice, intermediate-emerger, or high school/adult-expert, the students' age and stage do not necessarily correspond.

Methodology

In this longitudinal multiple-case study approach, a variety of data were collected over the course of the two-year study. These multiple perspectives allowed for triangulation of data that could confirm or reject hypotheses (Moon, 1991). Available data varied for each cohort, but all cases included in-depth structured and semi-structured interviews with the students and their families, academic teachers, arts instructors, and members of the ArtsConnection staff who regularly interacted with the students and their families.

A second method of data collection was field observations. The project researchers and outside experts observed the students on repeated occasions during talent identification auditions, talent develop-

ment lessons, and performances. A third method included systematic collection of standardized achievement test scores and arts progress evaluations. In addition to these ratings, many of the students completed self-concept and self-efficacy scales. A fourth method included examination of records and awards and ratings used in talent development and scholarship auditions. Student focus groups and questionnaires were other sources of data.

Profiles of Talent Development

The following profiles introduce a student from each age and grade-level cohort, and provide a glimpse into the different stages of talent development. The young people on this journey, whether starting in the arts or maintaining their study as adults, face numerous obstacles. They find support and assistance from family, friends, arts mentors and classroom teachers, and they are deeply affected by their artistic involvement. The stories are representative of the rich data upon which the cross-case analyses were based. At the start of the study, Carmela was 11, in fifth grade and a participant in the Young Talent Program. Gloria was 14, an eighth grade program graduate, and Tony was a 22-year old professional dancer. In the two years of the study, Carmela moved to middle school and was making high school plans, Gloria moved into high school, and Tony continued his career.

Carmela

In the cramped hallway of the Martha Graham School on East 63rd Street in Manhattan, dancers of all ages squeeze past each other on the way to and from the dressing rooms. Carmela 12, sits alone on a bench doing her homework. Several times a week she leaves school in Queens at 2:30, gets to the studio at 3:00 and does her homework until 4:00, then warms up to get ready for class at 4:30. "Then I take my class. I come back, I pick up my stuff, pick out a book on the train and start reviewing all the stuff. It's really hard for me."

When Carmela arrived in the Bronx from Caracas four years ago, she was the only Venezuelan in her

school. She knew little English and had trouble communicating with the other Latino (primarily Puerto Rican) students in Spanish. She had few friends and missed her large family in Venezuela. When her father abandoned the family, her mother was forced to take a job as a live-in domestic on Long Island, leaving Carmela, her 19 year-old sister Carmen and 17 year-old brother Juan on their own during the week. They shared chores, cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Carmen and Juan helped Carmela with homework.

While adjusting to a new country and language, three new schools and the difficult living arrangements, Carmela danced. She had never taken a dance class in Venezuela, but was fascinated when she started watching dance on TV. "I watched a piece by Martha Graham on Channel 13," she remembers. It was Clytemnestra or something. It was great. I was like, 'Yeah, I want to do this!' I loved it. I said, 'Mommy, I want to be in dancing.' But we didn't know where the dance schools were at or anything." In third grade she was selected to be part of the Young Talent Program in her school, and by fifth grade she had received a scholarship to the Graham school. Carmela dreams of a career in dance but recognizes the difficulties she will face:

It's very tough because my Mom doesn't have a lot of money. I don't know how to think about that. I don't know what I would do when I get to that point. My mom, she's my role model. I just have to keep on going, try my best. Even though my mom is not home, I still have to keep on studying and going to school and being responsible to myself. We came to this county to start a new life and to accomplish our goals, and that's what we are trying to do. I am just challenging myself to do the best I can do, to reach out to the goal that I want. Say we go back to Venezuela, I want to be a very successful person so they can look up to me.

Gloria

Gloria is a large girl with an imposing presence. Her fourth grade classmates described her as tough.

Her teachers described her as a bully, with very low self-esteem and an aggressive attitude. When she started the ArtsConnection music program Gloria had already repeated third grade, was in the lowest reading group, and her teacher worried that she might need to repeat fourth grade, "I feel Gloria has the potential, but her mind seems to be on other things", the teacher said. She has a problem focusing attention and getting her work done." There was plenty to distract her. Gloria once told a teacher that she would "probably end up becoming a drug addict like my mother." Because of her mother's frequent illnesses, Gloria was shuttled between her grandmother and mother and missed a significant amount of school.

In third grade, Gloria became part of the Young Talent music program. Her music teacher saw through her sometimes sullen looks and impatient behavior to her positive potential. "She could be brutal at times, but I saw an energy for leadership," he remembers. He gave her responsibilities and leadership roles within the music group, and he constantly pushed her to open up and to achieve. In fifth grade, Gloria's academic performance improved dramatically. "She went from the bottom reading group in the fourth grade to the top in grade five," her fourth grade teacher explained. "She seemed to feel better about herself. Somehow she got the message that she was special and a good person. I honestly don't think this would have happened if it weren't for the music program." She also began to have a group of friends for the first time in her life. She said, "When I first met Jasmine and Simone in second grade we hated each other. Then Simone became my best friend. When we started with ArtsConnection we just became friends, because we knew we had something in common."

As her talent developed, Gloria was placed in more demanding situations. She became part of the student performing ensemble, which performed regularly at school, in the community and at events around the city. The highlight for Gloria was a performance at President Clinton's 1992 Inauguration. "After getting a standing ovation for our performance in Washington, D.C., I

really began to think of myself as a musician”, she said. We even had a press conference. That was really fun. It made us feel like we were real famous.”

Gloria’s grades continued to improve during intermediate school, where she was placed in the top academic classes, was consistently on the academic honor roll and was valedictorian of her intermediate school class. Gloria remembers her grandmother’s edict, “You also have got to do good in school. So if you want to go to ArtsConnection, you’ve got to do your schoolwork, too.” Gloria doesn’t think she wants to pursue a career in music. She says, “I feel that if I go to school for music and be involved in ArtsConnection and [the performing group], music’s going to become a bore. I don’t want to have music all the time. I could do other things, you know. I don’t only know how to play music.” She is currently studying fashion design as well as music at a New York City arts magnet high school.

Tony

“They say it takes a village to raise a child. Well, it surely took this village to raise this child,” said Tony’s mother. As a single parent, she worked as a cook at a community center while raising seven children. As she thinks back on the development of her youngest son, Tony, now 24, a member of the internationally renowned Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, she says, “Out of the hundreds, literally hundreds, of people that helped, if just one wasn’t there, I think maybe Tony wouldn’t be here. You know, because each role they played was very important. If you eliminate just one of them, he might not have come this far.” When Tony started dance as a second grader in East Harlem neither he nor his mother had ever heard of Alvin Ailey. Tony was the only member of the family who was interested in pursuing the arts.

Tony was seven when the Young Talent Program came to his school in 1979. At that time, all classes were held at the Ailey school. “I really didn’t know what was going on,” Tony remembered. “I just knew it was dance, and it was movement, and I wanted to audition. I really didn’t know what I was getting into; it was just a lot of

fun.” His fourth grade teacher recommended removing him from the dance program because of problems in math. However, the assistant principal, recognizing Tony’s talent and the opportunity he had at the Ailey school, intervened and arranged for a Columbia University student to tutor Tony two mornings a week in math. His grades improved, and he was able to continue in the dance program.

After sixth grade, ArtsConnection and the Ailey school provided a scholarship so that Tony could attend classes four days a week in the demanding and competitive environment of a professional dance studio. He traveled downtown to Ailey from his intermediate school, but his mother would not let him come home alone after dark. “After work I used to have to come downtown on the bus (from 101st Street in Harlem to 45th Street) and sit and wait in the lobby with the security man until six,” she recalls. Tony credits his mother’s dedication to his talent as one of the major reasons he continued to pursue dance. “I didn’t have a lot of material things like other kids had, but I did have my mother. She wasn’t a stage mother; she was just easy, and she knew which direction I was going in. She’s followed me and supported me as opposed to leading me to where I wanted to go.”

After junior high school Tony and his mother disagreed about his high school choices. She wanted to him to attend a business oriented school with a strong math and computer program. Tony wanted to go the High School of Performing Arts. After satisfying herself that Performing Arts had a strong academic program as well as dance, his mother relented. As a senior, Tony earned a National Foundation of the Arts Award. In 1991, Tony entered the elite corps of the Ailey Company. “I grew up within eight months of touring,” he said of his experience. “It made me stronger. It made me become the man I am.” As a featured dancer for the Ailey Company, Tony has now traveled all over the world on grueling ten-week tours.

Recently he has begun to work with students in the communities and institutions that helped him develop his own talent and follow his dream. He has performed

many local lecture-demonstrations and taught workshops for the Ailey Repertory Ensemble. “It’s funny, I remember as though it were yesterday, [when] I was auditioning for a workshop at the school, and now here I am giving one,” he reflected. He also returns to his community to talk to young dancers about his career and his influences. “I hope I inspire the kids,” he said. “I want them to get an understanding that dance, or any art they concentrate on, is a part of life. And also to have fun—not in a silly joking way, just enjoying dance, enjoying life and learning things”.

These talented young artists clearly have the drive and the talent to succeed. Perhaps, if they had never been exposed to dance or music, they would have found something else on which to focus their energies. But that is far from certain. The sacrifices they and their families have made are fueled by a passion for their art. All of the students have faced serious obstacles that could have kept them from ever discovering their talents or pursuing their dreams.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

I. Impact of Talent Development

The large majority of students in the study have achieved a high level of success in the arts, in school and in their career choices. Success in this study was defined in three dimensions: 1) the degree to which they were able to develop their talent, 2) their academic progress and aspirations, and 3) evidence of personal development that can help them in other areas of their lives. Success in talent development was measured by continued involvement in training both in and outside of school, instructor evaluations, awards, scholarships, and performing experience. Academic progress was defined as good grades in school, or completion of high school and engagement in post-secondary education. Personal development involved the application of individual talent in career or personal life and the discipline and motivation in pursuing interests and responsibilities.

Of the six students in the high school/adult cohort, all are still involved in dance or other artistic pursuits—two as professional dancers, two taking dance in college and two in high school (one theater, one fashion design). One went directly into a professional dance career after high school; one is pursuing a dance career after college; two are in college (majoring in dance therapy and psychology); and two are high school students planning to go to college. Five of the six in the intermediate cohort are making good progress in school and planning to attend college immediately after high school. All six are still involved in music. Outcomes for the elementary cohort are incomplete. Nine of the 11 students received positive evaluations from their instructors and were recommended to continue in the Young Talent Program or Alumni program (for graduates of the in-school program).

This study poignantly reveals how the development of artistic talents can positively effect the personal qualities shown in the literature to be critical to becoming psychologically healthy and productive adults. While the artistic, academic, and professional outcomes were different for each individual, many of the personal qualities and behavioral indicators that seemed to directly contribute to the students’ success were common across cases and age groups. These qualities were: resilience, self-regulation, identity and the ability to experience flow. Clearly, these characteristics are correlated and interact reciprocally, each having the effect of strengthening the other.

Flow

The students participating in the program became committed to their art because they loved it. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) uses the term “flow” to describe a state of total absorption, when people are so completely involved in an activity that they lose track of time; they are unaware of fatigue, hunger, distractions, or anything but the activity itself. Ultimately the state of flow in the arts—the creative state of mind, the demanding physical exertion, and the clear goal of performing, communicating, and

sharing themselves with an audience—was a unique experience. For many, the arts became the focus of daily existence and the central driving force behind their commitment to talent development. The time they spent in arts classes, rehearsals and performances appeared to give them a satisfaction unsurpassed by other pursuits and aspects of their lives.

It's like I became addicted to dance.

Elementary student

Think, think dance. I don't think classroom at all—I think dance. I think that I am on the stage and I don't look in the mirror, I look beyond the mirror and I put the music right through my body and just let it settle and move like water. Movement is not only a way of thinking, it is a way of understanding—how, when, where..

Adult dancer

They seem to be in their own world; when they are performing they are lost in their music; they are totally focused.

Parent

Self-regulation

The students were aware of the self-regulatory behaviors they used to be successful in the arts. Students in all three cohorts commented on both the specific processes and learning strategies, as well as the general habits of practice, focus, and discipline that helped them progress in demanding instruction. Current learning theory emphasizes the importance of self-regulation for succeeding in any endeavor. Students are self-regulated when they are aware of their own learning processes and select useful strategies to complete a task (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1996). Research has shown that when students are engaged in challenging activities that accentuate their talents, they demonstrate extraordinary ability to regulate their own learning (Baum, Owen, & Oreck, 1997; Baum, Renzulli, & Hebert, 1995). Because the pursuit of the arts was so intrinsically rewarding for these students, hard work was embraced eagerly. They acknowledged that they were pushed physically and

mentally, learning their limits and testing their responses to hard work. As the students moved through the stages of talent development, they became increasingly able to apply their successful self-regulatory behaviors to other areas of their personal and academic lives. For the most part, these students achieved in school, set goals for their future, and assumed responsibility for their actions.

I think you call it mind over movement. You have to really listen to the song and while you're playing you still have to listen to make sure you're in the right key. So you use your mind to tell you the part of the song, and you use movement to keep playing it and doing what you're doing. The mind over movement has helped me listen and take notes at the same time.

Intermediate student

When someone pushes you and you find that you improve, you learn to practice. Because you know if you practice it, you get it. So they gave us that start-off push. You didn't want to. You were tired. And then the next class, you didn't need the push anymore. Then you know that 'if I can do this with my body, then I must be able to do this with my mind. I may not be perfect, but I am getting better.' So it does help when you see it physically.

High school student

Identity

As students reach adolescence, their identity is often contingent upon being accepted by peers. The students began to see themselves as professional artists. They developed a strong bond with similarly talented peers and formed their own support group. Together they worked toward reaching shared goals and reinforced values modeled by their arts instructors. Erikson (1963, 1980) would define this process as successful resolution of the identity crisis typical of the adolescent years. During adolescence, identity and emotional health are closely tied to the perception of cognitive strengths. In this way, students are able to visualize how they may fit into the adult world (Reilly, 1992).

It's a big part of the music knowing that you have somebody that shares something with you. I think it's mostly the music, knowing that you have people there who know what you know, and you can play the music with them and you understand them. When you talk what they call "music talk," they understand you. I don't think that anybody else would understand you and them in a conversation. It's like you're connected through your mind. It's like this telepathic thing, you know?

Intermediate student

Resilience

Resilience describes the ability that some individuals display to bounce back from adverse experiences (Beaudry, 1989; Rutter, 1987). All of the students in the study faced adversity and individual challenges. Some faced situations that could have sent them down a path of underachievement and helplessness where they might have felt they had no control over their lives. Yet in spite of these circumstances most were able to overcome some of the potential obstacles through external support and their strong desire to excel. According to Ford (1994), resilience is strengthened and nurtured when children have positive and strong relations with peers, family, and community, where they can find both emotional and physical support.

Without [the group] I'd have no real friends who love music the way I do. School is awful and nothing is right. My uncle was killed, there's no music at school, and no opportunities for me. But my Mom keeps asking me the same question over and over and over again. When are you going to play music again?

Intermediate student

It gave me another world. You have reality and then you have Saturdays when you went and danced...you were creating a story so that was another outlet. I was able to go forget for those couple of hours and just dance and have fun.. that was always my natural high. No school. No thinking. Nothing.

High school student

II. Obstacles of Talent Development

Researchers examined issues that had the potential to inhibit or undermine the development of the students' artistic talents. Clearly, the same obstacles could block a child's pursuit of any talent or interest, but the arts pose some special problems that are exacerbated for families lacking available time and disposable income. The task of finding and maintaining appropriate instruction, acquiring necessary equipment and instruments, and finding time for practicing and rehearsing, stop many children from ever beginning to study the arts. Personal, family, and peer issues combine to challenge the young artist at each step of the way. One can rarely point to a single reason that a student decides, or is forced, to abandon artistic talent development.

Interestingly, in the course of the interviews, many situations that appeared to be serious obstacles were not perceived as such by the students and their families. It was clear, however, that a combination of these and other factors could and sometimes did derail the student's progress at various stages in the process.

Family Circumstances

Of the 23 students in the study, 13 lived in single-parent households. Many lived with other family members who contributed to the family income, but in all cases the mothers worked as much as they were able, and most of the students were eligible for free lunch. In the elementary cohort, 4 of the 11 families resided in the U.S. for fewer than 5 years. Parents who had professional positions in their native countries could find no comparable positions in New York and had to take whatever jobs they could. Within the first three years of arriving in New York, all of the parents of immigrant families in the study had either divorced or separated, leaving the children in the custody of their mothers. This dissolution placed each household in emotional and financial turmoil and had a direct effect on the students' ability to pursue talent development opportunities.

In Venezuela we always had our whole family there, so you would feel more comfortable, so you could do anything you want. But we got here and there was only us, us four on our own. Elementary student

Without the ArtsConnection program Simone would not have developed any of these talents. All the children in the program were blessed that this program came along. I could never afford to give her this kind of lessons. Parent of adult dancer

Safety Concerns

The parents of elementary school students expressed serious concerns about allowing their children to participate in afterschool, evening, or weekend activities if they could not personally accompany them. While none of the schools are in the city's most crime-ridden neighborhoods, the issues of safety from older children and gangs, traffic, and the police (particularly for the boys) were foremost in parents' thinking.

I don't let my children out alone. There's too much going on. I really feel bad because when I was growing up I was able to go out and play because there wasn't going on in the neighborhood what's going on now. It's a bad neighborhood. You hear gunshots and you don't know. I have a friend who lost all three of her sons who were killed on the streets. Parent of intermediate student

Lack of affordable or appropriate instructional opportunities

ArtsConnection works in schools that tend to be deficient in arts programs and are located in communities that are underserved by cultural institutions. Even in neighborhoods where affordable and appropriate opportunities do exist, limited financial resources or lack of awareness regarding such programs often keep students from participating. In the East Harlem, South Bronx, and Brooklyn neighborhoods in which the Young Talent Program schools are located, many free or low-cost arts programs in churches, boys and girls clubs, YMCAs, and settlement houses have been cut back or reconfigured as social service programs in recent years.

Peer resentment and social stigma

Negative peer pressure and social stigma for high achieving students increased as the students progressed, apparently reaching a peak in intermediate school. In elementary school, the selection process for the advanced group led to some jealousies among certain students who were not in the advanced group. Overall, however, the Young Talent students felt supported by their elementary school friends, and their accomplishments were a source of pride for the schools. In intermediate school, many of the students felt that they had to hide their artistic interests to be accepted. By high school, those who had maintained their artistic interests felt more comfortable demonstrating their talents and pursuing them actively both in and outside of school. The stigma of participation in dance for boys began in late elementary school, when over half of the boys left the dance program. There were many reasons for this drop-off in male participation, including negative perceptions about male dancers from friends and parents and competition from sports and other interests.

You can never tell who will be supportive or who will 'catch the attitude' that, you know, she thinks she's more special and stuff like that. High school student

Who do you think you are—better than us because you do gigs? Intermediate student

It's tough being a good student in my high school. Most of my friends from before don't know why I'm taking hard academic courses. They tease me about 'acting White' and being a show-off. It makes me feel bad but I'll have the last laugh when they see me getting both a Regents diploma and a regular diploma at graduation. High school student

Personal dreams versus practical realities

During high school, the conflict between dreams and realities became a serious obstacle. Most of the high school/adult cohort had already made the decision to move towards serious study and expert status by the time they reached eighth grade, as signaled by their application to magnet arts schools. Once in high school, students faced decisions about pursuing college and had to consider the potential costs and financial sacrifices of continuing their involvement in the arts. Parents raised concerns and challenged students' commitment to further training.

My father said, 'Oh, it's the young thing to do, go to dance class and this and that, and now it's time to get serious.' I was in college and he was asking how my computer classes were going, and I said, 'What are you talking about? I'm a dancer, don't you realize that by now? Like, this is my job.' And he was like: 'So how's the psychology [class] going?'

High school student

III. Success Factors

Four major factors emerged as key to the students' continued pursuit of arts training in the face of obstacles: family support; instructional opportunities; community, peer and school support; and innate personal considerations and motivation. The interaction among these factors helped fuel the students' progress in talent development.

Family support

As in other studies examining talent development (Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Feldman, 1986; Olszweski, Kulieke, & Buesher, 1987), support of the family was critical for these students. Many personal and financial sacrifices had to be made, not just on the part of parents, but by siblings, grandparents, and the entire extended family. Parents made major adjustments in their schedules, and some changed jobs to enable their children to participate in the arts program.

I just knew how important this program was for her. I had to find a better way to be there for Gloria. I quit my job and took in children to watch. The money is not good but I fought the courts for welfare assistance and finally won. Now however, I'm losing my tenants. I don't know how I will continue to make ends meet. Grandmother of intermediate student

High quality instructional opportunities

A crucial factor in the students' success was their introduction to the arts in elementary school. Their talents were recognized through a fair, systematic system of talent identification, and they had the chance to work with highly trained professionals who provided ongoing, rigorous arts instruction both in their schools and in professional environments. Without a special program such as Young Talent, funded by public and private sources outside of the New York City Board of Education, which has removed most performing arts specialists from the schools in the last 20 years, it is clear that most of these students would not have had their talents identified or nurtured. One of the most important aspects in the successful development of talent, according to Bloom (1985), is the transition from a student's first teacher to the next teacher who provides greater challenges and expertise. The professional artist instructors in the Young Talent Program were able to provide both levels of instruction, with the nurturing attitude of a beginning teacher and the advanced skills to continue challenging the developing artists.

While many of the students had shown early interest in the arts, few had the opportunity for formal instruction. Lacking instruction, neither the students nor their parents or teachers were aware of the extent of their talent and consequently, potential (Baum, Owen & Oreck, 1996). In one school in 1990, for example, of the 24 third-grade students originally identified as talented in music, 18 continued in the advanced performing ensemble through sixth grade and attended Saturday classes during seventh and eighth grade. The six highly talented musicians in the

intermediate group who now play as a semi-professional ensemble all came from the original 24 selected from four classrooms. It is startling to imagine the talent that is being missed in schools without such a talent identification process.

I think that if ArtsConnection wasn't there, I wouldn't have pursued it on my own. I really don't.
High school student

You must have a professional artist coming into the school. What they bring is their commitment to the art, their own gifts, their drive to create good art, their immersion in the art world, their commitment to excellence. That gets translated to the students and to the teachers who are observing. So an artist brings something into a school that a teacher just can't maintain for six hours a day. The artist brings the outside in, in a way that can open up worlds to students and to teachers. Classroom teacher

Are you sure you have the right Jason? He is so shy. I know he likes music, but I never thought he was any good at it. Mother of intermediate student

...some kids are truly very, very talented, and that talent would never come out unless they were auditioned. But when you come in and audition a whole class for a specific talent, and you have professionals who were listening, not just a teacher, then you could pick out kids that had the talent. And a lot of those kids who were picked would have been lost, never discovered, lost by the wayside. Principal

As part of the Young Talent Program, ArtsConnection provided classes for students at cultural institutions around the city. Students were bussed to the classes and received information about weekend, after-school, and summer programs and scholarship opportunities. Students and their families were informed of and encouraged to attend auditions to continue their training outside of school. The experience of attending classes in the professional environment had a powerful impact on the students.

They became aware of opportunities outside of their own neighborhoods. They were expected to act like professionals and to learn a new code of behavior that applies to the studio. They experienced the expectations and demands of the professional. As part of the classes, students had the opportunity to see both older students and professionals at work.

The arts instructors served as professional role models whether or not the students aspired to a professional career in the arts. The instructor was seen as someone who had "made it" and was making a living through their talent and creativity. Many of the students in the study said that the rigorous demands of the teaching artists challenged and motivated them to higher levels of mastery. The sense of purpose and professionalism of the artist was apparent whether the classes were held in the school gymnasium or in a professional studio.

Over the three years of study in the Young Talent Program, elementary students built powerful relationships with their arts instructors. This kind of relationship has been found to be vital to talent development (Bloom, 1985; Csikzentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Feldman, 1986), especially with talented youngsters at risk (Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1995; Emerick, 1992; Hébert, 1993; Richert, 1992). Meaningful relationships formed with an adult who believes in the student's abilities can provide the emotional support needed to overcome feelings of insecurity and frustration. In all cases, the instructors were seen by the students as role models and served as an inspiration to them to continue on their journey in talent development.

If I wasn't in ArtsConnection I wouldn't have the chance to audition for Disney and I wouldn't have had the chance to go to meet other new people.
Intermediate student

A lot of other girls knew who he was, but I didn't. 'That's Baryshnikov!' We heard everybody whispering his name. I was standing right next to him and I turned around and just smiled and said 'hi'. He said 'Hello.' He was nice. He didn't really act uppity.

We sat right next to him and kept watching him stretch. The man was standing right next to me and I didn't know who he was. High school student

We try to do our best never to let him down because he would never let us down. Intermediate student

He really cares about us and makes us feel special. At times he's hard on us and won't let us stop until we perform up to his high expectations. We give our supreme effort to him because he gives to us, too. Intermediate student

First of all, I love to see my Black sisters and brothers talk so strongly about us. She always was talking about discipline and how if we ever wanted to be somebody or do something, we had to go in the right direction. She was always giving a positive message. High school student

Community and School Support

Despite incidents of negative peer response, most of the students in the study reported that they received mostly positive support from their classmates and teachers, particularly in elementary school. The involvement of the entire school in the Young Talent Program stimulated interest and raised appreciation for the students' artistic talents on the part of peers and classroom teachers. The positive feedback and encouragement served to validate and support the students' efforts and accomplishments.

A vital facet of the Young Talent Program was the adult supervision provided by ArtsConnection. Many of the parents said that they would not have allowed their children to participate in after-school rehearsals and special performances if there had not been a trusted adult available to supervise them and get them home safely.

For the talented youngsters in this study, the advanced music and dance classes provided an appropriate and natural support group. The students formed close relationships in a context where they

were able to be themselves and feel accepted and valued. Participation in such a group was especially important after the students left elementary school.

My friends made me feel a little bit superior because of their compliments. Intermediate student

Having Mrs. H. (ArtsConnection site coordinator) was gorgeous. With Mrs. H. there, I can trust that my son is in good hands. Parent of Intermediate student

I wouldn't say [we're like] a family. It's like we are one. We would not be as close without the group. We have family bonds. We help each other, and we learn from each other. Intermediate student

Personalological Characteristics and Motivation

The support structures described above were essential in creating the conditions which allowed the students to follow their interests and proceed with their talent development. But without the student's desire or motivation to embark upon this journey, the support systems would have no foundation. Analysis of the primary motivations for the students uncovered three major themes: 1) an early interest in music or dance; 2) a family who valued the arts; and 3) the development of an identity as a professional.

When I was a little girl I said, 'I want to be a ballerina.' I knew I didn't really want to be a ballerina, but I wanted to dance. Like a White-skinned beauty, she can be a ballerina if she wants to, but I could never be a ballerina. There was really nowhere to go. My parents don't really understand, you know, they think you will grow out of it eventually. High school student

Cultural values and family background

The majority of the students from all three cohorts came from families and cultures who appreciate the arts—especially dance and music. In many cases, family members had extensive experiences in dance and music.

Sense of professionalism through challenge

As the students progressed, they began to see themselves as professional dancers or musicians. They displayed a growing confidence in their own abilities, especially as they mastered increasingly complex pieces and performed before a variety of audiences and with professional musicians or dancers. They seemed to thrive when challenged and to set ever higher goals. Indeed, as the curriculum became more challenging they exerted more effort. Their love of performing, both for themselves and in front of an audience, further energized them to act like professional artists.

There is always singing and dancing of some kind when our family gets together. Intermediate student

I wanted to quit when I was in high school and the dance wasn't advanced as I thought it would be or could be. I was more advanced. I needed a challenge.

Adult dancer

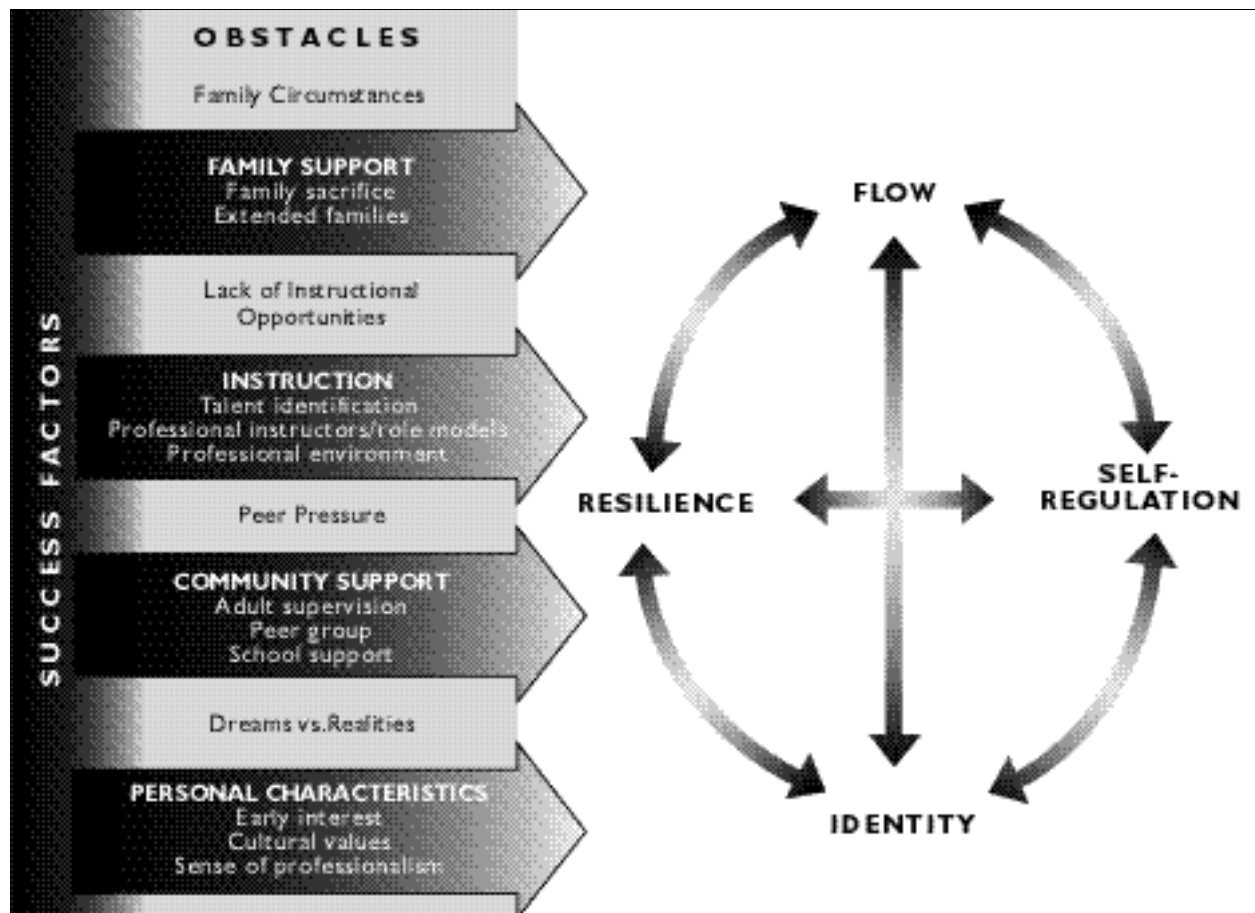
When the audience compliments me about how well we did, I feel like a musician. It makes me want to try something new—go beyond my limits.

Intermediate student

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings from the three research questions revealed a set of interrelated factors and outcomes that were common across cultural groups and socio-economic levels in the study. Figure 1 shows how the

Figure 1. Model of obstacles, success factors and outcomes



factors interact to help the students develop their personal capacities and to achieve success in their talent area.

As can be seen in the interlocking model, the success factors contributed directly to the students' abilities to overcome the obstacles. The success factors are grouped according to their primary impact on the obstacles, but a one-to-one relationship between obstacle and success factor would be overly simplified. Each obstacle was surmounted by support systems that varied in nature, depending on the age or stage of development, as well as the talents, values, and motivation of each individual.

This model uses a broadened definition of support. For example, the type and level of parental support for the students' artistic development contradicts many common stereotypes about lack of involvement on the part of economically disadvantaged, single working parents. While the inability of parents to attend meetings, school events, and arts performances could be construed as a lack of support, further investigation revealed that family support extended to brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and neighbors. When parents and primary care-givers were unable to be present personally, they made often highly complex arrangements for their child to attend classes, performances, and events after school, on weekends, and in the summer. The parents' primary concern for their children's academic achievement rarely interfered with their encouragement of artistic talent development.

The arts have clearly occupied a central place in the education and identity of these students, whether or not they were working towards an artistic career. It seems clear from this study that the most crucial external success factor was the existence of a school-based program that identified and developed students' artistic talents and interests. The typical comment from students and parents was, "I never would have started (dance or music) if it hadn't been for the Young Talent Program in my school."

It is equally clear that programs in economically disadvantaged communities with few arts resources

and in schools that are underserved by arts specialists must include the sort of support components that are routinely available to more advantaged children. Beyond direct school-based instruction, the Young Talent Program provided students and their families with information about further training opportunities and scholarships, arranged visits and auditions to magnet arts schools, made travel arrangements and provided chaperones, organized summer training, supplied equipment and instruments, and created a communication network among program families. These opportunities were cited again and again as key to the students' ability to continue in the arts and achieve success.

The arts do pose particular challenges that are different from other areas of talent development. Confirming ArtsConnection's previous research on artistic talent development, these data show that many artistically talented students are poorly served by the traditional instruction and testing methods in school (Baum, Owen & Oreck, 1997). In fact, some of the qualities that are most appreciated in the arts get students into trouble in school. In some schools, poor grades or other academic deficiencies disqualify students from arts activities. School arts programs are rarely challenging enough for talented students, and professional instruction is expensive. In contrast to sports, or outside interests such as chess, computers, debate, or science, many parents and teachers do not recognize or appreciate the importance of arts study or its relevance to success in school and future opportunities.

These students provide powerful examples of the benefits of artistic talent development. All children deserve and need arts instruction in school, and for some the arts will become a central part of their life. The stories told throughout this study remind us of what the arts can do to help overcome the challenges students and families face. For some, dance or music was their anchor amidst family turmoil. For recent immigrants and families who moved frequently, the arts were a primary means of assimilation into the culture of the school and the city. The arts group became a model

for friendships and a source of confidence for students entering new schools and new situations. Performances were a source of immense pride for students, families, and whole communities. For many, classes at studios and trips to theaters were unusual experiences outside of their immediate neighborhoods and provided a glimpse of the larger professional world of the arts and culture. Ultimately the skills and discipline students gained, the bonds they formed with peers and adults, and the rewards they received through instruction and performing fueled their talent development journey and helped most achieve success both in and outside of school.

These 23 young people and the more than 2,000 Young Talent Program graduates were fortunate enough to discover and have the chance to develop their artistic talents. Unfortunately, they come from just 10 schools out of over 1,000 schools in New York City.

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