

INTRODUCTION

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Psychologists and educators, fascinated with the beauty, grace, and sheer brilliance of extraordinary performers, share many words to describe their interest in outstanding production and performance. Some use the terms *gifted* and *talented*, particularly pertaining to children and adolescents. When high-performing adults get thrown into the mix, the terms *expert* and *eminent* are also used. We devote this volume to exploring what these terms mean, as well as their interrelationships, and address questions that increase our understanding of high performance. As part of this endeavor, we also identify significant gaps in research and practice that we hope will be filled before a revision of this volume comes out.

Texts on giftedness and talent development tend to address what is known about identification, counseling, parenting, curriculum, or teacher preparation in a generic form—not how talent is manifested developmentally in domains. Certainly, focusing on advanced and brilliant young people with

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high grade point averages and what can be done to support their continued growth is important. Eventually, however, as individuals move into adolescence and adulthood, the label of *gifted* is no longer meaningful unless applied to advanced achievement and creativity in domains, fields, or professions.

Our work and that of our collaborating authors builds on studies developed and led by University of Chicago psychologist Benjamin Bloom (1985), entitled *Developing Talent in Young People*, that explored similarities and differences in development between and among the domains of sport (tennis and swimming), arts (sculpture and piano performance), and academics (mathematics and neurology). Bloom's book continues to be frequently cited in academic and educational circles. However, there has not been an update in over 30 years.

Both academic and general audiences are fascinated with high performance and what is involved in its manifestation, including the major role of mental skills (also referred to as *psychosocial skills*). Much can be learned from domains in which psychological science and practice are deeply embedded, such as in sport or business, and applied to less developed fields. In the following chapters, we illustrate these points through discussion of five key domains: sport, the professions, academics, performing arts, and producing arts. Each domain section is composed of chapters on two representative fields, which incorporate a summary of current research in psychological science, with a special focus on developmental trajectories from potential to creative productivity. Each section also includes one or more interviews with *gatekeepers*—experts in a field whose professional judgment determines whether individuals meet the necessary benchmarks to move to the next level in talent development (i.e., from potential to achievement, from achievement to expertise, and beyond). In their interviews, the gatekeepers identify abilities essential for talent development in that domain and factors and parameters that make investment in instruction and coaching worthwhile.

Part I focuses on the domain of sport, with a chapter on a solo sport, golf, as well as a chapter on team sport. Jay Hogue, a gymnastics coach, shares his views as a gatekeeper on what it takes to be a successful gymnast and the increasingly early specialization in the sport.

Part II covers the professions. It has a chapter on talent development in medicine and software engineering and a chapter on talent development in team performance. Both medicine and software engineering can be individual or group-based activities, although the focus in the chapter is on the former. The team-based chapter asks how one makes a team of experts into an expert team. A gatekeeper interview was conducted with Michael Reed, a Google software engineer.

Part III focuses on the academic domain, contrasting early engagement with late engagement. Mathematics represents the former and psychology

the latter. Gatekeeper interviews were conducted with Israeli mathematician Professor Avi Berman, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the Technion—Israel Institute of Technology, who is also actively involved in talent development, and Professor Robert Sternberg, an eminent psychologist who has served as an editor for many books and several journals in the field.

Part IV addresses art performance, specifically acting and dance, two fields of performance that have received considerably less attention than that given to music. Both are quite similar in that they involve the use of the body to convey meaning to an audience, but they are also different in that the actor uses both voice and body to embody a character, whereas the dancer rarely speaks but uses only the body, typically in conjunction with music. The gatekeepers interviewed in this section include David Black, a producer, director, actor, teacher, and author of several books on acting, and Stephen Pier, a dancer, choreographer, teacher, and current director of the Dance Division at the Hartt School at the University of Hartford.

Part V turns the focus from art performance to art production, a domain that is probably one of the most understudied in the talent development literature. The contrasting fields in this domain are drawing and the culinary arts. In the latter domain, recent television shows have highlighted the creativity and competence required for success. Both these domains involve creating a tangible product, although in drawing, the work “lives on,” whereas in the culinary arts, the product is consumed shortly after creation. An interview with a retired gatekeeper highlights changes in the curriculum of visual arts institutions (e.g., not requiring drawing) that may result in a loss of a skill that was previously considered foundational.

All chapter authors were asked to include a summary of current research, with a special focus on psychological science, and to explicate developmental trajectories from potential to creative productivity. The culminating chapter consists of a synthesis of important themes, highlighting similarities and differences across domains and gaps in the knowledge base and providing some suggestions for future research on the psychology of high performance. By unveiling some of the magic behind great performance and creative productivity, we hope this book will provide readers with a deeper appreciation for the psychology of high performance and for the talented individuals we describe. Our goal is also to inspire applications of performance psychology to more domains and to broaden support for developing potential into high performance among children and youth.

REFERENCE

- Bloom, B. S. (Ed.). (1985). *Developing talent in young people*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.