

# LOOKING FOR ARTISTRY

*Barry Oreck*

As with many people, my career path retraces my own childhood. I was one of those squirmy kids in school. My interests bounced around; I got good grades in the subjects I liked, lousy ones in things I didn't. I had trouble sitting still; lived for recess and arts classes. In high school, I arrived before 7 a.m. for choir rehearsal and stayed most nights until at least 8 p.m., after whatever team practice or play rehearsal I was involved in ended. I was editor of the school newspaper and started an underground film series. Thankfully my mother didn't pull me out of those activities because of my dismal grade point average—perhaps she knew that was why I was even a little interested in school. My success in “extra”curricular activities didn't impress my teachers, however. The theme running through all of my report cards was: “Barry has a lot of potential but is not self-motivated. He always needs to be pushed.” Even then that seemed ironic.

Now after a career built, to a great extent, on my artistic interests and ability to collaborate on complex group projects, those comments seem particularly paradoxical. I greatly appreciate the quality academic foundation I received at my progressive private school—writing and math (and certainly science, social studies, and history) have been extremely important in my life and career. But the fact that my teachers were unaware, unwilling, or unable



**Barry Oreck, Ph.D.**, directs professional development in the Schoolwide Enrichment Model and teaches at Long Island University Brooklyn and SUNY Buffalo. From 1983–2001, he directed ArtsConnection's arts-in-education programs in more than 150 New York City public schools and has consulted in curriculum, assessment, and program development for the Ohio Department of Education, the Mississippi School of the Arts, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Young Playwrights Theatre, Lincoln Center Theatre, the Metropolitan Opera Guild, and Young Audiences, among many others. His research on artistic talent, self-regulation, and professional development has been published in the Champions of Change research compendium, *Arts Education Policy Review*, *Journal of Teacher Education*, and *Teaching Artist Journal*, among other publications. His own work as a dancer and choreographer in the duo Nicoll + Oreck has been produced in New York and around the country.

to connect my intense interests and deep motivation in the arts, sports, journalism, and film to anything that was going on in the classroom is a telling commentary. I was extremely fortunate to go to a school that offered an outstanding arts and sports program. If I hadn't had those, I'm really not sure I would have made it through high school. For students in schools with shrinking or nonexistent arts programs, limitations on involvement in extracurricular activities, and narrowing curricula driven by high-stakes standardized testing, opportunities to find their strengths and passions are severely limited. My history and my concern for students like myself in schools around the country led me into the world of the arts and the field of the education of the gifted and talented—an intersection of two marginalized areas of education focused on identifying and developing the strengths and interests of students who often don't excel on tests and may struggle with the linear, sequential, strictly verbal rules of the typical game of school.

Perhaps predictably, I cycled through seven different majors in my 4 (or 6, depending on how you count it) undergraduate years of college. I continued to act and dance (hundred of hours for each credit) but had not found a way to merge my interests in a single field. Finally working with my dance mentor, Gerrie Glover, an accomplished multidisciplinary artist (dancer/choreographer, concert pianist and organist, and painter), I began to teach, choreograph, and run a dance company. I was thrown into teaching like many of my contemporaries in the heyday of arts education—we had the National Education Association (NEA) Dance Touring and Artist in the Schools programs and other grants to actually pay dancers to dance and teach. Gerrie's approach in all art forms was deeply creative, aesthetic, and often overlapping. Her interests in dance/theatre and in teaching were scientific and somatic (30 years before the term was applied to dance), psychological, and political. As I learned to teach by doing, with a range of students from young children to university students, and performed with and recruited dancers for our dance company, New Mexico DanceWorks, I found a question that fascinated me.

What makes certain performers extraordinary? I could see in dance that the difference between very capable, technically proficient performers and those working at the deepest levels of artistry was small but obvious. It had little to do with specific skills or physical characteristics such as flexibility or strength, body type, or physique. There was something else—something about the ways in which the charismatic performer communicates, the level of focus, a connectedness to an emotional source, a sense of calm amidst great effort—that made specific dancers stand out to experts and untrained audience members alike. These are aspects of creativity, communicated abso-

---

## Organic Creativity in the Arts

lutely clearly, without words. What were the physical manifestations? What was happening just before the movement, during it, and during the learning process?

Trying to uncover some of these subtle differences, I started a master's degree in neuromuscular physiology to study physical and emotional responses of dancers as they learned and performed movement. This was the 1970s and, unfortunately, the technology to capture movement in real time was very primitive. The bundles of wires protruding from my subjects prevented them from moving freely and me from measuring subtle differences. The experience did shape my thinking, however, about the nature of artistic ability and creativity. I observed ways we teach that can either nurture the characteristics of the most outstanding dancers or that can ignore or even deaden these aspects of artistic development in a daily routine of repetitive, imitative training activities. How do exceptional artists like Mikhail Baryshnikov, Judith Jamison, or Gregory Hines endure and thrive in a demanding training regimen and emerge with their own style and personality intact? Are there things we as teachers can do to nurture the artistry in all of our students?

## Finding Artists

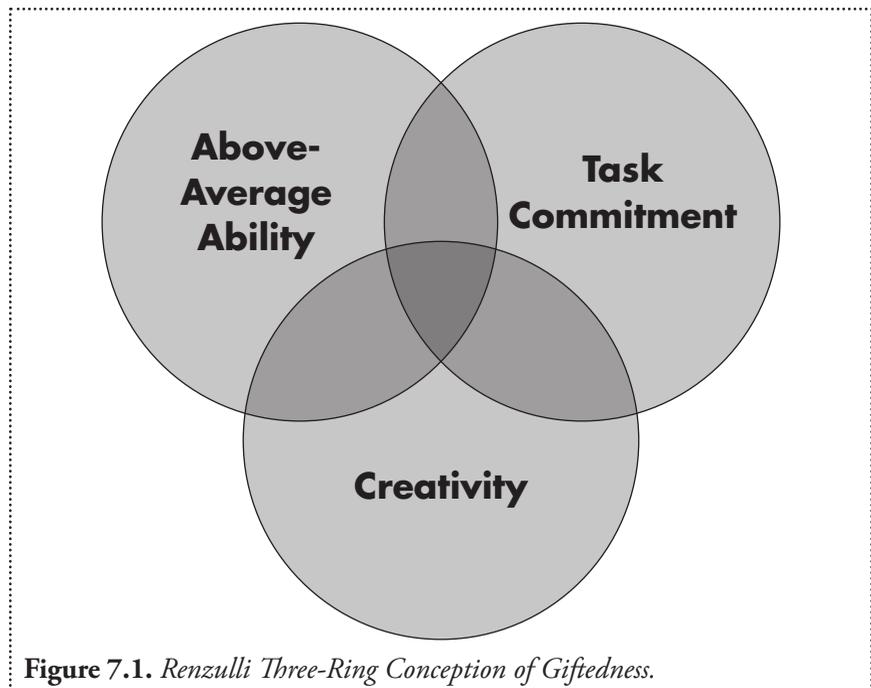
My move to New York City to pursue a dance career was hastened by the sudden end of the arts education boom upon the election of Ronald Reagan. I quickly altered plans (by luck and coincidence) to take a job at a remarkable arts-in-education organization, ArtsConnection, where I was to stay for the next 19 years. I directed a program called the Young Talent Program, which sent professional artists into elementary schools to identify students for advanced instruction in dance, music, circus, and theatre at professional studios such as the Alvin Ailey Center, Manhattan Theatre Club, and the Big Apple Circus. A panel of artists would see each third-grade class for one period, then confer and select students for arts classes in school and in professional studios. Time after time, classroom teachers who witnessed the audition but had no role in the selection process, when presented with the final list, would say, "You've picked all my worst kids." Virtually every time, in all sorts of schools, in all parts of the city, in all art forms, the talents of students who appeared to the teaching artists to be the most creative, smart, expressive, and cooperative were not recognized by their teachers or were seen in a negative light. In fact, we consistently selected a number of the top aca-

demographic students as well as the lowest achieving, but those struggling students were the ones who stood out most to the teachers.

It was clear that we were seeing a distinct and important target group: students with outstanding artistic ability whose talents were not only not recognized in school but often got them into trouble. Many of the same talent characteristics most appreciated by the artists made some of these students playground leaders among their peers, for better or worse. In the mostly low-income neighborhoods and underserved schools in which we worked, many of those playground leaders were labeled highly at-risk and our program was funded in part by the Department of Juvenile Justice in the years when they still had a focus on prevention over incarceration.

In 1990, the U.S. Department of Education awarded ArtsConnection the first of two 3-year Javits grants to study this group of students and the phenomenon of gifted underachievement we had observed. We designed the Talent Beyond Words program to create a systematic process to identify potentially talented elementary school students who had little or no prior instruction in dance, music, and theatre. The new process involved the classroom teachers in the assessment to see if greater direct awareness of artistic behaviors would alter their perspective on their students' abilities.

First we brought together panels of artist/teachers in each discipline (dance, music, and theatre), representing a wide range of styles and techniques<sup>90</sup>, to develop selection criteria. We asked the artists to describe the behaviors of the most successful students they had taught and the situations or activities in which they might see those behaviors. The criteria each panel developed independently fit into three general categories—Skills, Creativity, and Motivation. Although the arts experts were not versed in the field of the education of the gifted and talented, the categories they'd identified clearly matched Renzulli's Three Ring Conception of Giftedness—Above Average Ability, Creativity, and Task Commitment (see Figure 7.1).<sup>91</sup> I pressed the experts to define underlying natural abilities that were more important than the rest (e.g., a strong speaking voice for an actor; flexibility, balance, good feet, or posture for a dancer; strong rhythm or hand-eye coordination for a musician), but the panelists consistently resisted these seemingly obvious prerequisites, saying that all of these areas could be developed with motivation, creativity, and practice, and citing numerous examples of outstanding artists initially or permanently lacking these characteristics. The artists were convinced that no single category could be deemed essential or most important, but rather that talent was defined by the totality of the behaviors or, as Renzulli put it, the overlap of the rings.



**Figure 7.1.** *Renzulli Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness.*

## The Talent Assessment Process in Dance, Music and Theatre (D/M/T/ TAP)

The process we developed, called the Talent Assessment Process in Dance, Music and Theatre (D/M/T TAP), is described in detail elsewhere.<sup>92</sup> Many things distinguish D/M/T TAP from a typical assessment or audition. Two arts instructors (alternating leading and watching) and a classroom teacher observed students in a variety of activities over five class sessions. Many of the experiences involved group work and problem solving in a safe, fun atmosphere with lots of interaction with teachers and peers. In order to see creativity, imagination, and sensitivity at work, we wanted to see students deeply engaged in artistically authentic and satisfying experiences, not put on the spot to perform under pressure. Because motivation characteristics take time to emerge, we offered students challenging tasks that take some perseverance to master while trying not to discourage them. The creativity and motivation criteria (some of which could easily overlap, such as the ability to focus) proved to be vital information in the selection process and were a central feature of student evaluations throughout the 3-year program.

That creativity and motivation were considered essential to artistic ability and success is not at all surprising. When discussing the roots of their own success and that of their most promising students, accomplished artists often mention attitude—of curiosity, openness, risk-taking—as key to their development. Many professional artists with whom I have spoken over the years have readily admitted that growing up they were far from the most “talented” person they knew but either (a) worked harder, (b) came up with their own way of doing things, (c) found a teacher/mentor who inspired them to persevere, or (d) some of all of the above.

Two stories will help illuminate this idea. On the first day of the third-grade music assessment process, Jason struggled. He seemed uncomfortable and was slow to pick up on the call and response clapping rhythm games led by the instructor. The second session was not much better as the students sang and learned a simple tune on the recorder. Things began to change when percussion instruments were introduced, and Jason had the chance to play a part on the bass drum. As other students had trouble staying with their parts, Jason stubbornly kept on the beat, holding the entire ensemble together. His concentration and determination were clear in his face and body. He had the simplest but most important part to play, and he was rock solid. When his mother was informed that Jason had been selected to be part of the advanced group, she asked, “Are you sure you picked the right Jason?” (There was another Jason in the class.) She had not recognized musical talent in her son but was excited for him. Throughout the 3 years of the advanced instructional program, his determination to improve, along with his concentration, listening skills, and teamwork, made him a key member of the group.

Tiffany was a large 9-year-old girl with an imposing presence. She looked glum for the first three quarters of the initial dance assessment workshop. Toward the end of the class, students were given the chance to go across the floor with their own dance. She exploded with power and focus, moving fully, her face showing her pleasure in the movement and music. Her classmates and teacher watched with surprise and delight. As one of her classmates bluntly said, “Tiffany’s fat but she sure can dance.” Her teacher did not previously know of her abilities or interests in dance or music. Selected for the advanced dance program, Tiffany later got a role singing and dancing in an off-Broadway play.

Who else in school is specifically looking for creative, expressive, kinesthetic, spatial, or nonverbal abilities in students? Possibly the art or music teachers (if they see students frequently enough). But art and music teachers rarely work alongside the classroom teacher, so discussions about individual

---

**Organic Creativity in the Arts**

students and detailed observations are rare. It's safe to say that Jason and Tiffany would not have been identified in a one-time assessment. They would have been unlikely candidates for a selective arts program. They might not have been noticed if there were not a variety of activities reflecting different styles and cultures. They needed to be in a setting where their expressiveness, interest, and creative risk-taking could be observed.

My initial question about charismatic performers came back to me in a new form—what is it about certain people, in this case, children with no prior arts training, that makes them stand out as artists? If it is not a specific characteristic, physical attribute, or recognized interest, then what is it?

## **The Existence of Artistry (A)**

Among the most accomplished performers, where everyone is trained to their physical limits, almost all of the difference between people is considered artistry. We can see and hear it most easily at a high level of performance. But artistry is also obvious in untrained children working in the arts, as in people in every walk of life and activity. An artistic attitude, emotional connection, and aesthetic appreciation signal the artist at work. The charismatic performers I was interested in so many years ago may have greater access than others to their artistry, but I believe it is something everyone is born with and something that can be tapped into in innumerable ways at any time in one's life.

This is not to say there are no differences in specific talent characteristics or appropriate physical attributes needed to excel in a given domain. Maslow calls these differences “special talent” creativity.<sup>93</sup> To pass the domain's gatekeepers, a specific attribute such as a powerful tenor voice, extreme size in sports, or striking good looks in theatre can overcome limitations in creativity or motivation. Just as we look at “Big C” and “little c” creativity,<sup>94</sup> a continuum exists from specifically prized characteristics of a domain to general artistry that can exist in any domain. We might refer to this general artistry as an *A factor*—a range of abilities and attitudes that can explain and predict outstanding performance in a variety of artistic experiences and settings. It is crucial to recognize that *A* is equally important at both ends of the continuum—from Carnegie Hall to the gym at P.S. 130.

## A and Creativity

Clearly *A* is deeply interconnected with creativity. It is almost impossible to imagine an aspect of artistry that would not be considered creative. *A* encompasses ways of being and learning, artistic attitudes and curiosity, appreciation of beauty and qualities of things, a need or drive for expression, an emotional connection. Perhaps the most accurate definition of *A* would be *access*: access to one's inner voice, to the intuitive, subconscious, connected self. *A* is also integration in the sense of connecting the physical, emotional, cognitive aspects of our being. Lev Vygotsky described the artistic act as a synthesis, essential for catharsis and emotional integration. "Art is the social technique of emotion," he said.<sup>95</sup>

The idea of a general construct of artistic talent would likely seem natural and obvious in cultures where dance, music, theatre, and visual art are woven into daily life and ritual, as opposed to within Eurocentric systems featuring separate domains and training programs. I'm not suggesting that the arts are interchangeable or that any one art form can stand in for the others. People are drawn to their preferred form, style, or technique by a host of factors. I do believe, however, that the characteristics of *A* are similar across artistic endeavors; artists bring many of the same qualities to their art in whatever form it is in. John Dewey described art as a quality of doing and what is done.<sup>96</sup>

## Bringing D/M/T TAP to Ohio

In New York City, each school we worked with had the assessment and advanced classes in only one art form. After 3 years of testing and expansion into 10 New York City public schools, we had the chance to export the program to Ohio where a new law had required the inclusion of the arts in gifted and talented identification and the Ohio Department of Education and Ohio Arts Council wanted to use the D/M/T TAP. A Javits grant gave us the chance to recruit and train teaching artists, work with school-based music and art teachers, and devise a visual art component that relied on a portfolio, a drawing test,<sup>97</sup> and work created in a workshop setting.<sup>98</sup>

In a small town and large urban district in Ohio, we were able for the first time to compare the same students across the four art forms. Many of the students excelled in more than one art form, which was not terribly surprising. What was striking was the magnitude of the statistical correlation among the art forms—almost perfect across the three performing arts and

just a bit lower when visual art was added in. The statistics provide further empirical evidence<sup>99</sup> for the idea of a general talent in the arts, or artisticness, or artistry, or *A*.

## Developing A In School

One of the most striking outcomes of both the New City and Ohio projects was a change in the cultures of the schools. Academic classroom teachers, parents, and family members were all essential participants, along with artists, students, and arts programming staff. Together, each community developed greater awareness and appreciation for artistic abilities and increased opportunities and outlets for students, both in and outside of school. The unusual longevity of the Young Talent Program (1978–present) has given us an excellent vantage point to study the impact of this culture-shift on students who previously had few opportunities to find or develop their artistic abilities and interests.

The most direct and immediate result was the response of classroom teachers involved in the observational assessment process. Teachers don't usually get a chance to see their students work in the arts, which normally happens during their preparation periods. In this carefully orchestrated observation process, they saw new abilities in all of their students, *whether they were identified as ready for advanced instruction or not*. Teachers were excellent observers of artistic behaviors when given clear criteria. Their comments in the postworkshop discussions (a key feature of the process) consistently highlighted surprises and new awareness.

The students who *were* identified, particularly those struggling in school or on tests, made significant and, in some cases, striking improvement in the classrooms of teachers who had participated in the assessment process.<sup>100</sup> Teachers also participated in professional development workshops, which gave them new insights about the artistic process and some arts-based teaching strategies. In my 2004 study of classroom teachers' use of the arts in their teaching practice,<sup>101</sup> the strongest motivator for teachers to use the arts in the classroom was their awareness that they have students who need it—who learn best that way, who need to move, act, draw, sing, to learn. It didn't matter whether teachers had had any formal arts instruction in their own background. Those who used arts strategies the most tended to think of themselves as creative people. Their own artistry in teaching allowed them to

learn and use arts strategies in their practice and better connect to the artistic abilities of their students.

More than 15 years after the end of my U.S. Department of Education-funded research, I still get calls and e-mails saying, “I hear you have research showing the arts can improve test scores.” “Yes,” I say, “we did have evidence of that, but it’s a much, much more complicated story.”

## A in the Classroom

I don’t see much convincing evidence for a direct correlation between arts instruction and academic improvement (i.e., music training improves math performance or visual art affects spatial reasoning, etc.). Students’ successes in our studies grew from a web of factors, starting with high quality, challenging arts instruction; without that, it is unlikely the other outcomes would have followed. They were pushed to work hard for something they cared about. Looking back at her elementary school experiences in the Young Talent Program, Angela, a high school student, recalled,

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 . . . when you actually see it physically happening, . . . 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.<sup>102</sup>

## How Intuition Helps Learning

When my coresearcher Susan Baum and I watched students in their arts classes, we were struck by the effectiveness of their intuitive learning behaviors: They found personal strategies to learn and remember new material, practiced on their own, worked well together, and took and used feedback to improve. We wanted to look more closely at these self-regulatory behaviors to see if they could help students academically as well.<sup>103</sup>

Watching the same students in their academic classrooms, we saw little opportunity for this type of self-regulation. We realized that the pedagogy of the arts classes provided the model for the students’ success. In the arts,

---

## Organic Creativity in the Arts

students were physically active. They often saw or experienced new material *before* discussion or explanation. Teachers encouraged students' questions and even their odd-sounding ideas. Students, knowing that everyone was expected to demonstrate new skills frequently, asked clarifying questions and practiced in and outside of class rather than avoiding or delaying the task. In the arts, self-evaluation, peer feedback, and shared goal-setting with the teacher were common. Students often moved to another part of the room to see or hear better or to avoid distractions, and we saw them complete tasks or practice on their own, even when the teacher wasn't looking.

The structure and pedagogy we saw in typical academic classrooms neither encouraged nor allowed most of those behaviors and, in fact, student creativity was most evident in off-task activities. Although students may have been aware of some of their successful learning strategies, they were unable to apply them in the classroom. When asked how she remembered a long, complicated dance phrase, fourth grader Maria replied,

When you learn a new dance you learn the first four counts, then the next four and then you go back and do the first and second fours together. Then you learn the next four and it just keeps going like that—adding and going back to the beginning.

We asked if it worked like that in math and she quickly responded, “No—in math if you miss the first step, you're lost forever.” If she didn't know something in dance, Maria said she'd asked her friends to work on it with her at lunchtime or in the playground. In math, she said, “My friends are probably as confused as me so I don't ask them.”<sup>104</sup>

## MAGIC (Merging Artistic Gifts Into the Classroom)

For students to apply their arts-based learning behaviors in the classroom, we realized two things had to change: Students had to become conscious of their successful strategies *and* teachers had to provide opportunities for the students to apply them. Teachers began working with teaching artists to create and teach arts-infused academic units. The lessons succeeded not only in increasing students' self-regulatory behaviors but also improved their writing and science and social studies understanding.<sup>105</sup> When teachers saw typically disengaged students take leadership roles and excel in class, they were motivated to continue using the arts. Although most students enjoyed

the arts-infused lessons, the identified students made the most improvement in writing and content understanding.

To further help academically struggling students, we created MAGIC (Merging Artistic Gifts Into the Classroom)—weekly, small-group sessions to help students apply arts learning strategies to specific academic challenges. A MAGIC teacher recruited from each school worked with students to adapt a range of strategies—including drawing and visualization for sequencing and problem solving, rhythm and song as mnemonic devices, physicalizing and dramatizing events and characters from books, and creating mental pictures and movement games to estimate and calculate math problems—that called on students’ particular abilities and learning preferences. During MAGIC, students also wrote in journals and reflected on their strengths, building metacognition and confidence to apply their abilities in new settings. Probably most important was the MAGIC teacher herself, who supported and positively reinforced students’ efforts and became an advocate within the school and with parents.

## Developing A

The academic improvements, while impressive, were not the motor for this project; sustaining students’ successful artistic development throughout elementary and into middle and high school was our central goal. In the New York City communities in which we worked, elementary school arts programs had steadily declined, most middle schools had cut back or suspended band and orchestra programs, and few had dance or theatre teachers. Many former community-based arts programs had changed their focus to academic assistance or other services. And for our students and their families, New York City’s wealth of high-level arts training and educational resources were tantalizingly out of reach.

## Stories From the Young Talent Program

The Young Talent Program students we followed in our study had to be highly creative and resilient. Maintaining arts training through middle school and high school required the support of parents, family members, and others in the community. As Elnora Powell, the mother of one YTP student, Troy Powell, who had an illustrious career with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre and is now the director of the Ailey II company, reflected on

## Organic Creativity in the Arts

Troy's time in the program, "It took *this* village, to raise *this* child. Out of the hundreds of people that helped, if just one wasn't there, I think maybe Troy wouldn't be here."<sup>106</sup>

Young Talent Program students received scholarships to attend the Martha Graham School, Alvin Ailey Dance Center, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Harlem School of the Arts, the Juilliard School Saturday Program, the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music, the Walt Disney Youth Orchestra, and many other local arts organizations. The arts organizations enthusiastically welcomed and supported these students from across the city, but without transportation or supervision, none of these connections could have been established or maintained. Groups of family members, organized by an ArtsConnection parent liaison, accompanied students to performances and auditions, arranged for afternoon travel and pick-ups at studios, and spread information about arts magnet schools, summer opportunities, and scholarship applications. The school-based family groups provided the safety and familiarity essential for students' continued arts involvement.

The students knew all too well how difficult and challenging a career in the arts could be. The idea of waiting tables and auditioning was not an appealing (or feasible) career aspiration for most. Even though Simone wanted to become a singer, she knew that she needed to choose a career that would enable her to have a more secure life. "We have a lot of money problems—money, it's all about money." But she explained,

Music is a part of me. I can't not do it. I don't think that I could ever lose touch with music . . . Even if I don't end up as a performer, I can always encourage my own children to play music. Or I could be a music teacher and encourage children to want to play music. I want to give them the feeling that I had that made me want to play music.<sup>107</sup>

Despite financial hardships, most families were highly supportive of their children's artistic development for its own value. As middle school student David's mother said,

My two kids were good at academics, but the music and singing were such an important part of their lives that they couldn't function without it. I feel that it helped them express themselves and look outside of the academics and get an understanding of life.<sup>108</sup>

Life for many of these students now included taking classes in a professional studio outside their immediate neighborhood and alongside other motivated students from a range of backgrounds. Suddenly, arts professionals and older peers were part of their world. Angela remembers performing in a celebration honoring Martha Graham at Lincoln Center, “Just being there, just being in the Metropolitan [Opera House] was something I never thought I would do in my entire life and to actually perform there was like big time for me.”<sup>109</sup>

Virtually every student in our study faced some combination of family hardship, immigration issues, or housing displacement, and contended with their parents’ very real concerns about their safety. Most had responsibilities in their homes and cared for younger siblings. But their resilience and creativity was fed by their artistic involvement. Carmela had a scholarship to dance 3–4 days a week after school at the Martha Graham School. In her first 5 years after moving to New York from Venezuela, she and her sisters relocated repeatedly from borough to borough and school to school with her single mother. As her mother described,

Dance has given her the emotional stability that she needed. Because Carmela now, after everything that we’ve been through, is more peaceful. Her self-esteem is greater and she is a happier child. Because she’s so in tune with dance and that’s all she wants to do. If it were up to her she would do it all the time.<sup>110</sup>

Randall, studying design in college at the Fashion Institute of Technology, had been a struggling student, considered highly at risk for failure when he first entered the Young Talent Program in third grade. He attributes his current work habits and dedication to his involvement in the arts:

If ArtsConnection never came into my life . . . I don’t know. I’m still pretty much trying to pick out where I would be today. Like what would I be doing to kill all this empty time that I would have if I wasn’t dancing?<sup>111</sup>

## Still Looking for A

It's odd to look back at my life and be able to trace such a direct trajectory of interests and pursuits, from middle school onward. At the time, it never felt direct; each turn opened up new questions. Although my situation was very different from that of the students in YTP, I feel a kinship in having had artistic interests and skills that went unappreciated when I was viewed through a narrow academic lens. My own subsequent path—trying to wire up outstanding artists to see what makes them special, then assessing artistic behaviors carefully with many sets of eyes and points of view, and then using those insights to try to open up arts and educational opportunities for young artists—makes an interesting kind of sense now.

When we see qualities of ourselves in others, our empathy is heightened and we are moved to action. In a meeting with almost 100 teaching artists at ArtsConnection, I once asked, "What or who inspired you to become an artist?" The most common answer was that there had been someone in their lives who noticed and inspired them—who saw their talent and pushed them to pursue it further. To the question "Why do you teach?" the most frequent response was, "I want to be that person for someone else."

I have tried hard to reconcile my conviction that *A* is a universal quality of all people with my observation that some people display it, or have access to it, more readily and more often. All students need and deserve the arts in their education. But for some, art will be a primary force in their lives—the way they learn, a key part of their identity, and a necessary means of expression—if they know it is there. With music and art teachers spread ever thinner in U.S. schools, most of whom lack even basic dance or theatre instruction, the creative and artistic abilities and interests of many will never be uncovered. This problem is most acute in underserved schools and economically disadvantaged communities where out-of-school arts instruction is often unattainable and success in school is critical for future educational and career opportunities. We need to change the culture of schools to value artistic abilities as highly as the narrow range of abilities currently prized and tested. It seems obvious that recognizing and developing artistry should be a central goal of all education.

# REFERENCES

- ArtsConnection. (1997). *New horizons. Report to the Jacob Javits gifted and talented students education program, United States Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement*. New York, NY: Author.
- Baum, S., Owen, S., & Oreck, B. (1997). Transferring individual self-regulation processes from arts to academics. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 98(4), 32–39.
- Clark, G. (1993). Judging children's drawings as measure of art abilities. *Studies in Art Education*, 34(2), 72-81.
- Dewey, J. (1934), *Art as experience*, London: Penguin.
- Maslow, A.H. (1971). *The further reaches of human nature*. New York: Penguin.
- Ohio Department of Education. (2004). *Project START ID: Statewide arts talent identification and development project*. Columbus. Author.
- Oreck, B. (2005). A powerful conversation: Teachers and artists collaborate in performance-based assessment. *Teaching Artist Journal*, 3(4), 220-227.
- Oreck, B. (2004) Assessment of Potential Theater Arts Talent in Young People: The development of a new research-based assessment process, *Youth Theater Journal*, 18, 146-163
- Oreck, B.A., Baum, S.M., & McCartney, H. (2001). *Artistic talent development for urban youth: The promise and the challenge*, Storrs: CT: National Research Center for the Gifted and Talented, p. 31.
- Oreck, B, Owen, S, & Baum, S. (2003). Validity, reliability and equity issues in an observational talent assessment process in the performing arts. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 27 (1), 62-94
- Renzulli, J. S. (1978). What makes giftedness? Reexamining a definition. *Phi Delta Kappan* 60, 180-184, 261.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1971). *The psychology of art*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

## Endnotes

90 Dance included specialists in modern, West African, ballet, creative movement, Flamenco, and jazz. Music included vocal, percussion, classical, Caribbean/West African, Or, and Kodaly. eater included improvisation, storytelling, classical, and other text-based theater.

91 See Renzulli, 1978.

92 See Oreck, 2004, 2005. See Oreck, Owen, & Baum, 2003.

93 See Maslow, 1971.

94 See Csikszentmihalyi, 1997.

95 See Vygotsky, 1971, p. 256.

96 See Dewey, 1934.

97 See Clark, 1993.

98 See Ohio Department of Education, 2004.

99 e most powerful statistical result came from the factor analysis, which looked at the relationship between the separate art forms and a larger construct called artistic talent. The three performing arts formed a single construct with the virtually perfect statistical correlation of 1. Adding visual art lowered the fit equation to .93, but is still a strong correlation.

100 More than 65% of identified students scored below grade level in reading and/or math and fully 25% of students were in the lowest reading or math quartiles and considered at risk for school failure. The profile of students selected for advanced instruction generally mirrored the school populations as a whole including representatives from special education and self-contained bilingual classrooms.

101 See Oreck, 2004.

102 See Oreck, Baum, & McCartney, 2001, pp. 58–59.

103 See Baum, Owen, & Oreck, 1997.

104 Personal communication, April 16, 1993.

105 See ArtsConnection, 1997.

106 See Oreck et al, 2001, p. 31.

107 Ibid, p. 68.

108 Ibid, p. 76.

109 Ibid, p. 96.

110 Ibid, p. 25.

111 Ibid, p. 104.