

TALENT DEVELOPMENT AND THE CREATIVE WRITING PROCESS: A STUDY OF HIGH-ABILITY AND GIFTED TEENAGERS

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ABSTRACT

Talent development is a complex process, particularly in the field of creative writing. During the past the past 30 years, federal legislation has stressed the value of talent development over psychometric testing. As a result, programs like the College of William & Mary Talent Search Writing Program have developed and flourished in recent years. This study focused on students who had won awards in The Talent Search Writing Program, and included student and parent perspectives on the talent development process.

This qualitative study examined the creative writing talent development in award winning writers from a myriad of perspectives, including parents and students. In Phase I of the project, the researcher conceptualized questionnaires using Gagne's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (1995) as a model, and mailed them to all the Talent Search Writing Program winners during the years 1999-2001. When the questionnaires were returned, the researcher assessed the information and examined triangulations and differences in perspectives between parents and students.

In Phase II of the project, the researcher selected young writers and their parents to interview. The researcher interviewed five participants and parents in detail, and conducted cross-case and within-case analyses of the data. Analysis within-case yielded emergent themes; analyses across cases yielded patterns and themes that contributed to the talent development literature base. The researcher triangulated the data, looking for emergent themes and patterns and analyzing differences in perspectives.

Findings from this study indicated common themes about the creative writing talent development process. From an early age, students worked systematically on their craft, applying themselves with intrinsic motivation. Parents acted as facilitators, supporting their children by providing resources such as extracurricular activities and critiques of writing. The Talent Search Writing Program was a critical environmental event in students' lives, providing feedback, a peer group, and the chance to see writing as a profession, rather than as a hobby. Students had slightly different perceptions than parents in several areas, however. From the student perspective, the support of peers and teachers was critical to the talent development process, while parents did not perceive these two factors to be as important. This result yielded a valuable insight into the Gagne Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (1995) because it allowed the researcher to see that the talent development process appears to have slight differences between parent and student perspectives. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher conceptualized a Preliminary Model for Talent Development, based on the findings of the study, the Gagne Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (1995), and the works of Bloom (1995) and VanTassel-Baska (1995). Implications for interventions and additional research provide deeper insight into the workings of talent search research, policy, and practice.