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**TALENT, PERFORMANCE AND SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS OF  
MUSIC – A QUALITATIVE APPROACH**

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***Abstract***

To meet the personal development needs of young performers in the music field requires a real and profound knowledge of these. Developing an educational program to supporting artistic performance in which each talented student wishes to be successful is a long-term goal for us. A first step in this direction involves first of all a common vision (researcher - developer of curriculum - talented student) on the main concepts, in this case: talent, performance and succes. Therefore, the present study is a beginning of this ample project and aims to investigate the vision of students with musical talent on the concepts of giftedness and talent, performance, success. In this direction we initiated a series of semi-structured interviews with students whose performance in music is proven by the outstanding results at various specialized competitions and which were recommended by their teachers from "George Enescu" National University of Arts. By analyzing the content of transcripts of interviews we have obtained data that lead us to a way of operationalizing the concepts of talent / being talented, performance / being performant, success / having success by identifying and enumerating behaviors by young talented students themselves. They also find ways in which the intersection of talent and performance in the musical field can be increased through educational intervention, and so their professional and personal success can be increased.

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**Keywords:** Talent, performance, success, music field, educational intervention.



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## 1. Introduction

Providing a comprehensive definition regarding superior giftedness, Dai (2009), argues that this is “the excellence demonstrated by achieving standards according to age and exceptional performance, authentic or potential for excellence demonstrated through aptitude tests, interviews and clinical observations of behaviour and of performance” (p. 41). This will be the meaning that I will adopt in this paper in regards to giftedness or talent.

The theoretical models are valid in their usefulness for the society and science (Davidson, 2009), and in this case their relevance is related to the study of the artistic talent. The literature reviews of the psycho-pedagogy of excellence focused on understanding the phenomenon of giftedness and talent (Feldhusen, 2005; Tanenbaum, 2000; Heller & Perleth, 2004, 2005; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005; Ziegler, 2005) have allowed us to synthesize a definition for the concept of “artistic talent”. We consider it to be the expression of the superior endowment in different areas of the arts field, the demonstrated excellence through outstanding performances in this area, or the potential for excellence, proved by the results in various forms of evaluation (an extended study on this issue is Anghel, (2016).

As a sum of the contemporary theoretical models referring to the persons with superior aptitudes above the average, we have from the field of Romanian pedagogical research a complex, very comprehensive model, serving both as a practical guide in the elaboration of the educational programs specific to the population in question as well as a “step towards a global evaluation of individual excellence” (Crețu, 1997, p. 54). The model demonstrates the uniqueness of each person, particularly of those with superior aptitudes, above the average. The basic concept, the global success one, is “a reflection of personal achievement, of the ontological peaks on an individual-human scale, of what the individual has more valuable as a hyper-complex and unique entity at a time on his ontogenetic path” (Crețu, 1997, p. 54). Highly complex, the global success has five features attributed to it that I will present synthetically:

- multidetermination - given by the multiple determination of the human personality (cosmic, hereditary, socio-cultural, educational);
- multidimensionality - given by the variety of forms of manifestation of success (leaving the list open, the author of this model recommends six criteria for their classification, by: the nature of the abilities, the areas of social expression, the predominance of certain psychic processes and of the aptitude development factors, the nature of aspirations, the style);
- multilevelness - given by the different development of the dispositional abilities that lead to different levels of expression of performance in different areas of human expression (that can be accepted or not as satisfactory for each individual);
- individuality - given by the uniqueness of each individual;
- multifunctionality - given by the multiple roles that success can have, not only global but also sequential, in the life of each individual.

High intellectual giftedness and talent gain, in terms of the characteristics of the general success noted by the author, a holistic and evolutionary evaluation that will configure the theoretical and philosophical basis of differentiated educational assistance addressed to the above-average gifted persons. It starts from the appreciation on two coordinates: a) talent and giftedness, understood by Gagne’s

differentiated model - of the three basic characteristics of the gifted behaviour; b) after the Renzulli model: over-average aptitudes, high levels of motivation and creativity (Crețu, 1997).

This complex is located in two integrated contexts: the outside world, which includes family, school and friends, and the inner world that comprises attitudinal vectors, emotional development and self-image. In this way, are obtained four population segments with similar traits that can suggest differentiated educational paths up to individualization: those of highly gifted persons (positive talent and superior giftedness T + and G +), those of unaccomplished individuals (T-, G +), those of persons with a hidden talent or superior giftedness (T-, G-) and those of the persons false positive gifted (T +, G-).

In addition to the operationalizing opportunities in this direction, the global success model brings a stronger emphasis on the concept of an individual with superior aptitudes above average.

Since in the definition that to be used in the present paper for the concept of giftedness also enters the one of “performance”, I consider necessary to highlight the information from the specialized literature which explains this concept: human performance. In customary language, the concept of “performance” is largely associated with academic, artistic (Iusca, 2014), sporting, technical achievements, etc., with those successes that can lead an individual, as well as a company or product, to the top of the best hierarchies, the best.

This meaning is also the one given by the dictionary: “a special achievement in any field of activity” (Small Academic Dictionary, 2003, p. 1002) or “a prestigious result obtained by an athlete or a team, a special achievement in a field of practical activity; the best result given by a technical system.” (Small Encyclopaedic Dictionary, 2005, p. 1053).

The dictionary definitions strengthen the idea that the concept of performance has a double dimension: a state one, represented by a quantitative result - obtained by reporting the results at success levels and can determine classifications and hierarchies - and another one of valorisation, represented by the evaluation of the qualitative meanings - these are related to the social relevance of the results obtained, to the extent to which the results hereby obtained contribute creatively and usefully to the professional life. Researchers’ positions concerning the concept of performance, although they regard both dimensions at the same time, are predominantly balanced on either the dimension of the status, either on the one of valorisation.

In the specialized literature, there are some important papers signed by Vitalie Belous, a researcher from the academic field from Iași, devoted to understanding the concept of performance in its complexity. Belous defines performance as “the result of human action, superior to the known results” (Belous, & Plahteanu, 1995, p.5). Depending on the result, another concept (individual performance, group performance, academic performance, sport performance, etc.) will be introduced. Performance is a reality connected to competence. It is the materialization of competence, it is the transformation of the possible into real. This transformation is mediated by three sets of factors in Belous’s opinion: efficient use of information, motivation, inspiration. Information determines competence and competence determines performance that in turn enriches information with new data (Belous & Plahteanu 1995).

## **2. Problem Statement**

Over the last two years, my concern as a researcher has been to investigate how talent in the musical field manifests itself. Discussing spontaneously with talented students, both with those who have outstanding performances as well as with those who don't have outstanding performances, equally with those who expressed that they are successful and with those who didn't enjoy this state of affairs, I noticed that the presence, respectively the absence of particular performances in the musical field as well as the presence or the absence of the state of success are responsible for certain competences that lay in the socio-emotional area.

Searching in specialized studies in the related literature to clarify my observations, I found that this aspect is sporadically handled. It would be particularly useful in the personal development of talented young people in the field of arts to know which socio-emotional competences are useful for their talent to become performing and successful and specially to learn how to activate these inner resources.

## **3. Research Questions**

The fundamental question that, at present, guides my field of interest is how to increase the intersectional area between three constructs that define an accomplished artist: superior giftedness manifested through artistic talent; performance in the field of art; success.

Intermediate questions that will guide my exploratory direction and to which the present study attempts to respond are related to students' perception regarding this idea: to what extent the students' vision on talent, performance, success overlaps with the scientific significance of these concepts? how is the relationship between the three concepts seen by talented young people?; beyond professional competences, what other abilities should be developed for talent to become performance and success?; to what extent is the educational intervention in order to support the development of these competences seen as appropriate by young talented artists?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

I have taken into account two objectives: on the one hand, probing the vision of talented students on the concepts of musical talent, performance, success; and, on the other hand, identifying their training and progress requests towards supporting talent and performance.

## **5. Research Methods**

In order to achieve the stated objectives, I have chosen the semi-structured interview as a working method. The interview is an instrument that allows to investigate, in this case, the world of talented young students at music by studying it through their eyes in order to understand their development needs to succeed.

The participants to these interviews were 6 young students in bachelor studies, with performances in the musical arts field. They were selected through previous spontaneous observations or interviews and through the recommendations given by the music specialists with who they worked: A. (flute, 19 years old, female), B. (vocal music, 21 years old, female), C (canto, 24, female), D (piano, 22, female), E (musicology, 20 years, female), F (jazz composition, 20 years old, male).

The interviewed students were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided and agreed to use pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Interviews took place in the places chosen by them, audio recorded and then transcribed. The shortest interview lasted 20 minutes and the longest 43 minutes.

I have chosen as a method of interpretation the analysis of phenomenological data because of its ability to explore the “personal perceptions of an object or phenomenon described by the participants” (Băban, 2002, p. 99), in our case the perceptions of the students with performances in the musical field regarding the state of being talented, being performing, having success.

## 6. Findings

The thematic analysis, a specific method of the phenomenological analysis, involves going through an interpretative process in several stages. Smith, Jarman, and Osborn (1999, as cited in Baban, 2002, p. 102) specify the work steps that are general milestones in the thematic analysis. Following these steps, firstly I repeatedly read the transcripts of the interviews, making associations, interpretations, preliminary syntheses, then I proceeded to coding (first a broaden, initial encoding, identifying the topics and subtopics which stood out, without omitting any, then I searched for relations between them by building thematic clusters), in the next phase I identified common issues and discrepancies and then analyzed the major topics. In the following table I will display the thematic image highlighted by our analysis:

**Table 01.** Thematic image

<b>Talent between innate and acquired</b>	<b>Performance - high level of expression of talent</b>	<b>Success - a relative concept</b>	<b>Intersection Area: Talent -Performance – Success</b>
Behaviours that reveal the musical talent	Different levels of manifestation of performance	Success as recognition from outside and as a state of well-being	Support from outside
External supporters of the talent manifestation	Determining factors of performance	Building success	Support from inside
Internal supporters of the talent manifestation	Management of emotions and performance	Professional success report - personal/family success	Development through educational intervention
	The “work– talent” report in achieving performance		

The undertaken analysis has identified four major themes, to each being attached a variable number of sub-topics.

For the participants in our study to be talented equals to be gifted, to be endowed, to be born with special qualities. Among these, the most often referred to be “that sparkle” that helps one reach a certain level of performance easier, faster than in the case of less gifted colleagues. However, the innate qualities (rhythm sensitivity, ear for music, the “sparkle” that differentiates one from others) become goods to the bearer only if they are sustained with work; in the absence of work the talent remains latent, and not activated for a long time it will be lost.

Among the external factors that allow talent to become manifest, all participants acknowledge the special role of the family environment in childhood and the one of the mentors, mentors who accompany the refinement of musical talent all the way through evolution. Of course, any external intervention is potentiated from inside. Thus, consciousness of one's own value and awareness of the fact that without consistent, concentrated work the evolution of talent is not possible, determines the awakening/activation of perseverance, ambition, will, motivation, etc.

The key word that links talent to performance is "work". Performance is considered to be considered a superior level of manifestation in a field (in this case music) which is necessarily publicly acknowledged, either in shows more or less trained audiences or in competitions by specialists. Performance is the one to which every talented person aspires, being discussed on several levels of public recognition (outstanding results at local, national, international level). Even if it is somehow more accessible to those persons who are talented and conscious of the work they have to invest, it can be reached by less gifted people willing to work even harder:

"I've heard extraordinary voices, it was a pleasure to hear them, but technically it was not the right thing. They didn't phrase well ... they didn't have a polished voice ... and others came and didn't have an extraordinary voice, out of common but with extraordinary technique and managed to transmit so much. This is how hard work and then talent matters. Talent helps you move forward and differentiate yourself from others. If they spend three hours solving a passage, to a talented man it takes half an hour. I was often saved my talent. But I didn't take credit for this because I know that much work is needed." (A., flute).

Musical performance, an environment that participants perceive to be highly competitive, often comes with emotional management issues. Interpreters report frequent somatization of the responsibility they think they have to provide in an excellent representation, of the pressure they feel in demonstrating performance. Anxiety can be so great that issues related to it, such as stage fever, nausea, insomnia, irritation of the hearing system appear. All are aware of the effect of emotions on the physical level and are searching for solutions: some find inner resources, others ask advice from their colleagues, others admit that emotion management training would help.

"I talk to myself very much, I tell stories to myself, explain, speak in the mirror, encourage myself. I often discourage myself, and then I realize that if I do not appreciate myself first and for the first time, I can't expect others to appreciate me. I have to give the others confidence that I am good in what I do." (C., canto);

"I had some problems on the stage and I talked to people who had the same problem and overcome them. I'm chatting, I see how they approached these things, with their bodies, with their minds. Yes, but more like." (F, composition);

"Then (when I was little) I did not have so many thoughts and I did not see so many problems ... now ... Yes, I would really come to a personal development course. It would help me a lot ... how to master the emotions, how to speak ... "(A. flute).

In terms of success, it is regarded, on the one hand, as an inner state or an external state. In the first situation, it is understood as satisfaction for personal achievements (take bachelor's degree with 10, get a scholarship, earn money, be a professor behind a performing child) and in the second version as a recognition of performance by the public. The second condition is correlated to each one's aspirations and

may be presented ascending. Thus, a perfect recital can be considered a total success in front of colleagues and teachers, or a prize obtained at a national or international specialty competition or the presence on media and television channels, etc.

A problem that occurs with recurrence in the answers given by the interviewees is the ratio between the professional and personal success and participants refer to the quality of the personal and family relationships. Of course, everyone considers that the perfect state is the balance between the two, but this is difficult to obtain in the highly competitive environment of music, where a high level of artistic performance is required for success, which I have discovered it requires a maximum degree of involvement and work, often taken to the extreme. The interviewed students aspire to such a balance state between professional and personal life, recalling many situations where these imbalances led to failure on long term on both sides.

“Wanting to perform as professionally as possible, the desire to ascend, it becomes a mad desire. It’s enough that it affects your personal life so much that it influences the professional one and you can’t work just as hard. And that’s a two-part failure. And it happens often... unfortunately. Because, indeed, people do not know how to manage all these, to make a balance between personal life and what happens next. They allow job to steal their minds and how they think and eventually... We are often in situations that force us and torture us somehow. To get there, to do that, to do that and... you go with the wave and no longer ... the most important thing is not necessarily knowing how to have success, but how to make a balance between professional success and the other. If they support one another... they both progresses.” (E., musicology)

Some of the participants remember a potential success and the steps they took in this direction. In this context, they discuss the obstacles encountered along the way, some of a material nature (absence of a high-quality instrument, funds to support promotional clips), others of a human nature (exacerbated competitive environment, unfair competition, personal weaknesses).

Observing the participants’ perceptions of the obstacles they face in front of success, one can identify the needs for the development of this special population and outline strategies to support their talent. Besides, they themselves offer suggestions as to how a possible personal development workshop could be outlined around the idea of increasing the intersection area between talent, performance and success, even though at first they presented reluctance to a classical course. Valuable suggestions are provided about the format of the workshop and about possible topics that could be of interest and of practical use to them. These include, first of all, aspects of emotion management, then management of inter-human relationships and career management.

These will come to fill out the external resources that young people seek in order to support the nurturing of the talent, such as important people, sponsors, models (idols in the music industry). The workshops are seen by participants as possible ways to strengthen the inner resources of each talented young person and to increase the artistic performances and acknowledge how to build the road to success, to that success that brings satisfaction.

## 7. Conclusion

The phenomenological analysis implies going through a meticulously and chronophagous process but it offers great satisfaction through the access to the inner world of the participants, in this case revealing their development needs in the direction of the blossoming of the musical talent. Of course, I recognize and accept the limits set by the absence of a second researcher, who could have presented a second opinion regarding the sedimentation of the topics and sub-topics, and this is one of my aspirations for a possible direction in my future research on this topic of interest.

While researching for the present study I started the analysis in a deductive manner. The literature on giftedness and talent being very rich, I also wanted to explore how people with musical talent understand concepts such as talent, performance, success, and thus get closer to a universal vision for a researcher – a curriculum developer - recipient of educational services. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the young participants in the interview understand and explain the three concepts in a very mature and close to the scientific meanings.

As I expect, the concepts of talent, performance and success are seen as interconnected. During the interviews, a dynamic image of the three concepts was sketched: I can imagine three circles that intersect, there is an area in which talent and performance meet, an area where performance and success meet, an area in which success and talent meet and an area where all three of them have a common space. The intersection areas are variable in size for each individual and can be increased also through educational intervention.

Through the present study, I began to explore the possibilities of increasing these areas, giving valuable suggestions for setting up a potential personal development workshop, and another direction of future research being precisely that of working towards a curriculum development. I consider that the instrumentation of talented young people with socio-emotional competences in order to help them perform at their best can generate independence and autonomy and implicitly, to trigger success.

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